
Now I'm a
DEMON LORD!
Happily Ever After with
Monster Girls
in My **DUNGEON**



Author: Ryuyu

Illustrator: Daburyu

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Prologue: Form

Zaien—En—scrutinized her hands intently in silence. No matter how often she inspected her human form, it never failed to intrigue her. These things that looked like hands were temporary. Unlike her master, they weren't real.

Like her, Shii, a slime, had merely transformed herself such that she took on a human form. Yet En suspected that her body was more akin to the dolls the wraith girls possessed. The only difference was that hers appeared much more realistic.

However, temporary though her vessel was, she felt warmth whenever she touched others. The sensation filled her heart, leaving her feeling nice and warm. For example, when she held hands with her master. Through her palm, she undoubtedly experienced something more than just the information a normal sense of touch would communicate. It went beyond mere physical contact.

Another example was when she played with the children here until she grew tired. At the end of such days, an indescribable feeling of satisfaction combined with the tiredness enveloping her whole body.

She could say the same of food as well. There was no real need for her to consume anything, but she experienced such supreme bliss when she ate the ovine young woman's cooking that she felt as if she would float straight up to heaven.

It made En quite happy that even a puppet body like hers could provide such wonderful sensations, different from the powerful sense of satisfaction she felt when her master used her as his sword and allowed her to demonstrate what she thought of as her reason for existence. She found it very intriguing indeed.

According to her master, people used their brains to think, judge, and experience. But in addition to her original form being completely different from a person's, she would be classified as an inorganic substance as well. Thus, the fact that she could do the same things as people indicated that, at the very

least, her brain wasn't the sole center of her senses.

In short, it was likely a matter of how the mind worked. For living beings, the vessels themselves mattered far less than what they contained: the ability to judge based on the intelligence and spirit within. Or so she theorized, anyway.

Phrased another way, it was the soul that mattered. The soul was something all life-forms possessed. Despite the vast physical differences between creatures, there was a strong possibility that the structure of the soul itself was surprisingly similar for all of them.

This thought was particularly strong for En when she looked at Shii and the wraith sisters. She wondered if that could be applied to Rir and the other pets too. They all had an organ corresponding to a brain, but since they looked so different from anthropoid species, it was hard to believe that they sensed things with just their brains. After all, they were still able to laugh, enjoy themselves, and be affected by emotions in the same way as people.

She had suddenly broached this very topic with her master once. When she had, he'd smiled ruefully and gently patted the head of her doll-like body.

"You've sure got a lot on your mind, huh, En?"

Do I really? Hmm. Perhaps I do. All she could do in her original form was think, so thinking had probably become a habit for her over time.

"I'm not smart like you, En, so I don't really get difficult stuff like that. But I think *you* can solve that mystery yourself eventually. I feel like you've definitely got the makings of a researcher already."

"Like...Leila?"

"Yup, exactly like her. The way you see the world is a little different from the way people see it, so who knows, you might become one of those outstanding scholars who leaves her mark on history. Even if you don't, I bet you'd still be interested in that kind of research, right?"

"I...don't know."

He roared with laughter upon hearing her response.

"Ha ha ha! I should've known you'd say that. Well, regardless of what the

future holds, En, all you have to do is live your life the way you want to, doing the things you like.”

“I...want to be with you, Master.”

“Yeah, me too. But it’s absolutely okay to have a lot of dreams too. There’s a whole lotta stuff in this world, and you don’t have to rush thinking about your future while you learn about all those things. You’ve got all the time in the world, y’know.”

Many things in the world. She knew how big this world was and the fact that it contained a variety of things. She had experienced it firsthand. Or...perhaps not. Because it hadn’t been very long since she became able to walk on her own two feet, there was still so much she didn’t know about compared to others.

I wonder how big the world really is, then.

“Lefifi...?”

“Hmm? What is it, En?”

The lazing dragon girl replied to her question in a gentle tone.

“How big...is the world?”

En had asked her because out of everyone living in this labyrinth, she would be the most likely to know. The girl considered her words thoughtfully.

“Mm. A difficult question indeed. Not only is it difficult to describe in words, but I am certain the answer will change depending on who you ask as well.”

With that preface, she began to give a proper response.

“How best to answer... Well, I have seen much in my days alone. But as immense as the world is, to the me of that time, it was narrow and gray. I could not help feeling constrained. Thus, I first truly felt the expanse of the world after coming here. As tiny as it is, to me, this place represents the big, wide world itself, stretching endlessly.”

“Wide...and narrow, narrow and wide.”

Words like a riddle. Yet for some exceedingly strange reason, En understood what she wanted to say. When she had been nothing more than a cursed magic

blade, only despair colored her world. However, every day now felt vivid. Compared to her life then, her world now overflowed with so many different colorful shades.

“I...know how you feel.”

“Gah ha! I see, I see. In that case, you, too, should be able to perceive how vast this world is now, En. As long as you are aware of that knowledge, you can do anything.”

“Any...thing?”

“Indeed. Anything. I know very well how much you cherish being able to attain your greatest ambition as a weapon. Even so, through your own will, you have finally achieved that form, which allows you to stand on two legs. It is for that reason that you should consider what deeds you can accomplish using your feet. The road ahead is endless. Learn and feel as much as you can.”

The dragon girl wore a broad smile as she said all that. It was the kind of smile that made En think, *This is what a mother must be like.*

Things I can do using my feet.

After reflecting in silence for a bit, En responded.

“I want...to walk while eating yummy food.”

Lefi's eyes widened momentarily before she let out a merry laugh.

“Gah ha ha! Is that so? Walking and eating, eh? What a superb notion. It does indeed sound sublime to wander the world and sample its many flavors. Since it is you we are talking about, I am confident such a feat can be accomplished.”

“You...should come with me, Lefifi.”

“Heh heh. I must admit, the idea is appealing. We shall enjoy a multitude of cuisines together, then instruct Leila on how to cook them.”

“Yes... That sounds wonderful. Leila will make them taste even yummiier.”

“Indeed, for her genius knows no bounds. Upon further consideration, however, we need not do things in such a roundabout way. It will be much faster if we take her and everyone else along on our travels.”

“That...will be so much fun. I can't wait.”

“I, too, am looking forward to it. We must consider our plans carefully after discussing this with the others.”

Their conversation on the topic continued for a long time.

Live my life the way I want to, doing the things I like.

En realized that she might have been overthinking things a bit. There had been no need for her to brood so deeply when she'd known all along that living with her master and everyone else was the answer. It was what she wanted to do, what she liked, and what made her the happiest. If she could do that, she didn't need anything else.

Maybe, just maybe, everyone in the dungeon was of the same mind. They influenced each other, connected, and resonated. Perhaps the harmony created by their bonds was the true essence of comfort.

Or maybe, on the contrary, they were like the pieces of a puzzle. Though each took on a different form, they all joined together neatly to make a complete picture. The beauty of that image might have been what she felt resounding in her heart.

Whatever the case, she understood clearly that the differences between vessels had little to do with connecting with others. What was inside mattered the most. That was the reason everyone here could live together so peacefully despite being so outwardly diverse.

This thing called life is so wondrous and intriguing. Such a thought flashed unbidden through her mind.

Chapter 1: To the Dungeon

One day, not long after Nell and Ilyr had gone back to the royal capital, Iluna was teaching me how to use the Spirit Magic that the Spirit Emperor had bestowed upon me.

“Uhhh... Spin around me, please.”

The pale, floating orbs of light surrounding me—the spirits I’d summoned—acted to obey my command. They immediately lined up in an orderly fashion and started moving like a unified organism, spinning around me.

“Yes! That’s it! Amazing, Yukiki! I can’t believe how fast you’re learning!”

“It’s all ’cause I have such a great teacher. Thanks to you, even an idiot like me can pick it up easily.”

“Hee hee hee. You reeeally think so?”

Iluna smiled bashfully at me. *How precious.*

So, the spirits could do a bunch of different things. First, their most fundamental ability lay in determining whether a target was good or evil. They had apparently acquired it as a means of survival since spirits were a weak species. For as long as I’d known her, Iluna had always seemed to know if she was in danger or not, and as it turned out, the reason she could make that judgment was because she borrowed the spirits’ power.

Next, there were different spirit classifications, which determined the magic that could be used. Simply put, just like regular magic, spirits had attributes—Fire Spirits could use fire magic, Water Spirits could use water magic, and so on. As a result, their environment affected their abilities. Like, while Fire Spirits couldn’t demonstrate their powers in a watery environment, they could show them off to their full extent in a volcano.

One of the advantages of using spirits to release magic was that it let you utilize all magical attributes. To use myself as an example, the very first time I’d tried to use fire magic, I’d ended up scorching some of my hair. To this day, I

could barely produce a bigger flame than you'd get from a match, so there was no way I was using fire magic in combat. But by enlisting a Fire Spirit's aid, it was possible for me to unleash fire magic with solid offensive capabilities.

To put it another way, spirits made you an all-rounder, regardless of your strength or weakness with any of the magical affinities. The power of this magic depended on the spirits' magical energy. Except the spirits themselves didn't possess that much magical energy, so they couldn't release any kind of astonishingly strong magic on their own. The only way they could do so was by using external magical energy, meaning that you had to transfer your own into them.

"Okay, I need to think of a good name... Got it. Ifrita, come forth."

At my command, a few of the Fire Spirits gathered together after accepting my magical energy and coalesced into a blaze resembling a woman. *Ooooh. Pretty dang good for my first try.*



The humanoid blaze I'd dubbed Ifrita floated there as naturally as she pleased. She didn't even check her own appearance despite having been brought into creation for the first time in this form. The number of Fire Spirits that had combined to make her exist was proportional to the amount of magical energy I'd given them.

Fusion robots probably made for the closest analogy. Those had multiple parts that combined to form a single, powerful robot, and the same thing happened here, just with spirits. This particular fusion spirit consisted only of Fire Spirits since they were the ones I'd given the command to.

Speaking of fusion robots—no, sorry, fusion *spirits*. On that subject, just like with elemental magic, the form the fusion spirit could take depended on the user's imagination and the amount of magical energy transferred. The spirits and I had had a telepathic conversation about it.

"Can you look like this?" I'd asked them.

"We can!" they'd responded.

And that was how Ifrita'd ended up with her current appearance. The term "Ifrita" had immediately popped into my head when I'd thought about spirits of fire just as a general thing. I hated to admit it, but that might've been a sign that my mind had been poisoned... Well, regardless, the important thing was choosing something easy to understand and imagine. I'd stick to Ifrita's image from now on whenever I fused the Fire Spirits.

Also, a fusion would fail if the amount of energy I gave to the spirits wasn't enough to create what I was visualizing. Iluna had said that it was difficult to get the knack for measuring the right amount, so the best spirit users were supposedly the ones who could pass their powers to the spirits consistently and manipulate them however they wanted.

She herself had apparently failed at fusing spirits plenty of times. That made sense to me, though, seeing as she was still a kid. The amount of magical energy she possessed was appropriate for someone so young, so she couldn't transfer much of it to the spirits in the first place. I was pretty sure that as she grew up, her ability to control the spirits would naturally improve.

“Ifrita. Can you face that way and try out an attack?”

The Fused Fire Spirit Ifrita nodded and turned toward the empty part of the meadow area I was pointing at. She thrust out both arms, and in the next moment, a fireball made a booming sound as it flew off at a tremendous speed. Then, it suddenly burst in midair, leaving behind an explosive roar.

“Whoooa... What a shocker. I did *not* expect the attack to be so powerful...”

“That surprised me too!”

For some reason, the exploding flames had looked quite lovely to me. Almost like fireworks. When I praised her, Ifrita smiled happily and spun around cheerfully. *These spirits are so cute, just like little kids.*

The nice thing about her was that she attacked automatically. I didn’t have to tell her what to do; I just set the target and she took care of the rest. In other words, if I created several fusion spirits in advance, I could use several kinds of magic at once. Plus, Ifrita had just shown that she had some major offensive strength. Thinking of her as a self-supporting mobile turret meant a huge increase in power.

Seriously appreciate the nice gift, Spirit Emperor. Then, I thanked the spirits and told them they were free to leave for the day. They danced around me as if saying, “Call on us again soon!” before vanishing into thin air.

“What do you think, Yukiki? The spirits are cute, huh?!”

“Yup, they sure are.”

It hadn’t been long since I’d thought of them as kids, but it might’ve been more accurate to describe them as innocent or pure because they listened to me without giving off even a hint of distrust. Having said that, though, it seemed that spirits lacked basically any will of their own. As beings who existed through the medium of magic, the only thing that mattered to them was whether or not their habitat was comfortable. Given that their users provided the abundant magical power they used as energy to live, it made sense that they obeyed orders so docilely.

The Spirit Emperor, who used to be an ordinary spirit, was capable of speech just like other races. But considering that old man’s Calamity-level designation,

his existence might as well have been in a league of its own.

That reminded me that the dungeon had leveled up thanks to the Spirit Emperor, meaning my stats had changed too. They looked like this now:

Name: Yuki

Race: Demon Lord

Class: Demon Dragon King of Judgment

Level: 152

HP: 26,714 / 26,714

MP: 31,061 / 31,061

Strength: 3,391

Stamina: 4,290

Agility: 3,904

Magic: 5,173

Dexterity: 5,594

Luck: 92

Ability Points: 18

Special Abilities: Demon Eyes, Polyglot, Flight, Indomitability, Ruler's Might, Spirit Magic

Abilities: Inventory, Analysis 10, Unarmed Combat 6, Elemental Magic 7, Stealth 6, Scout 6, Swordsmanship 5, Weapon Enhancement 6, Sorcerer's Grant 10, Traps 4, Greatswordsmanship 7, Camouflage 5, Danger Detection 6, Dance 3, Awareness Priming 1

Titles: The Demon Lord from Another World, The Supreme Dragon's Owner, The Adjudicator, Enemy of Humanity, One Who Defies Death, Demon King of Dragonkind, The Supreme Dragon's Consort, One Acknowledged by the Spirit Emperor

Dungeon Points (DP): 160,840

Compared to before, I leveled up at a much slower rate now. I'd reached the point where it took quite a bit of time to go from one level to the next. But considering that I was only a year and several months old, my leveling speed was insanely high. And despite the fact that my level hadn't increased too much, my stats themselves had gone up a good deal, which was probably because the Spirit Emperor had shared power with me.

That said, on closer inspection, I didn't see much of a difference in my current stats versus my previous ones. I had enough self-awareness to realize how numb I was growing to the numbers as they went up over time. It wasn't like they even mattered since they were still nowhere close to Lefi's. Every last one was insignificant compared to hers. So, with that in mind, I didn't give two shits about my current stat values.

I did have one new special ability in the form of Spirit Magic. Y'know, the thing I'd used earlier. It made me happy whenever I gained a special ability.

The same went for normal abilities. I'd gotten Awareness Priming as a drop when I'd had Nell do those loot rolls. I wanted to test it out as soon as possible.

An additional title had been added too: One Acknowledged by the Spirit Emperor. I guessed that whatever system was responsible for titles recognized it because I'd been given the power to handle spirits.

"All right, now that I'm done learning the gist of spirit magic and its capabilities..."

There was only one thing for me to do after gaining new abilities. Drumroll, please... Monster hunting!



"Okay, lookin' good, everyone! Surround it, just like that!"

Obeying my instructions, my pets maintained a careful distance while positioning themselves around our opponent—a bear with a thick, spiked carapace covering its whole body, kinda like how a human would wear protective gear. It was called a Panzer Ursa.

Though it was twice my height, there were plenty of monsters in the Demonic Forest way bigger than this one, so you could call a creature its size the norm here. After all, size equaled strength in these parts. Never mind the fact lots of small, powerful monsters existed in the Forest as well.

Among the monsters inhabiting the western area, it was faster to count a Panzer Ursa from the bottom of the hierarchy in terms of stats. But it was still incredibly strong by nature. Anyone who underestimated it would wind up dead.

Mr. Bear watched my pets with an intense, wary gaze as they surrounded him. *Too bad your real enemy is me.*

“Sorry for ruining your little chill sesh, Mr. Bear. Just think of this as bad luck and give up. Leviathan, come forth!”

In response to my shout, numerous spirits gathered together in one spot after accepting the huge amount of magic I gave to them. Then, finally, what appeared was a massive “dragon” with fins and scales like a fish. It resembled the water dragons I always used, its snakelike body similar to that of an eastern dragon. But unlike my water dragons sporting their singular shade of blue, this one was incomparably large and boasted a variety of colors. In short, it looked a whole lot like a real dragon.

“Mwa ha ha ha! Meet Leviathan, born of my Transcendental Spirit Fusion technique!”

Explanation time! The Transcendental Spirit Fusion technique involved assembling many spirits together, pouring a generous amount of demon lord magic into the formation, and creating a powerful fusion spirit made up of a composite of elemental attributes!

To no one’s surprise, “water” was my strongest elemental affinity, which explained why Water Spirits attached themselves to me in greater numbers than any other type did. My affinity was also the reason more of my magical energy ended up going to Water Spirits too. Essentially, water was my fundamental attribute.

However! Because Leviathan was a combination of several spirit types, including fire, earth, wind, and dark, the magic it could use wasn’t limited to

water magic alone! Meaning it could unleash numerous attacks! Thanks to that, though, it took half of my magical energy. Not that I was bothered at all!

“Keh keh keh! Whaddya think of *this*, ya wild beast?! Be afraid! Be very afraid of my magnificent— Bwaaah?!”

Once it'd figured out that I was the one controlling the fusion spirit, the bear moved in a very shrewd, unbearlike way to attack me, cutting off my speech halfway through. I rushed to dodge it in response. The spot where I'd been standing only seconds earlier ended up smashed apart by the asshole bear's savage punch.

“Goddammit! It's not fair to cut a dude off while he's warming up his monologue!”

Okay, to be fair, fairness wasn't really the issue here. It was only natural that the monster had attacked me while I'd been spouting off nonsense in my excitement. Still, my irrational anger seeped into my voice as I ordered the fusion spirit, like I was a certain princess commanding a giant, rotten soldier against a swarm of attacking insects.

“Mow it down!”

Obviously, it wasn't as powerful as Lefi's Dragon Roar, but the breath Leviathan unleashed was strong enough to change the nearby terrain. Just like the villain monster from a monster movie, it destroyed its surroundings while repeatedly firing its breath attack. Then, it proceeded to go wild, its huge body felling trees as it continued to launch super heavy attacks at the damn bear. A relentless barrage of attacks.

Except Leviathan's opponent was a monster from the western part of the Forest. It'd gotten its left arm blown off from one of the attacks landed by my fusion spirit, but that was the only substantive hit. All the others had only scratched it. Having lost none of its fighting spirit, the monster snapped its jaws ferociously at Leviathan, counterattacking with its thick muscles. But it didn't see *me* coming.

“En!”

“Yes!”

I cut around it and swung En down toward its neck. By the time it finally noticed us and tried to evade with its sharp reflexes, it was already too late. I felt a moment of resistance when her blade made contact with its armored skin, but I bore down with all my might and forced it through, causing its head to fall off with a dramatic spray of blood. The headless body landed on the ground with a heavy *thud*, then it went motionless.

“Its HP is down to zero too. Very nice. Excellent work.”

I nodded in satisfaction as I stared down at the dead monster while shaking off the gore clinging to En.

The monsters in the western part of the Forest were no joke. No matter how many simultaneous attacks you unleashed or how many invisible attacks you mixed in, they detected them, avoided them all, and even counterattacked. Despite this reality, there was a good reason the shithead bear hadn't noticed me until right before I'd sent it off to the next world: my skillful combo use of Stealth and Awareness Priming, the new ability I'd acquired not long ago.

With the latter, I'd forced its attention away from me for a moment, then taken that opening to activate Stealth so I could sneak up on it. Since I'd had Leviathan with me this time around, my fusion spirit had wound up attracting most of the damn bear's attention. So even at level 1, Awareness Priming worked well enough for me to successfully remove my existence from its consciousness.

Heh heh heh. I'm one step closer to becoming a ninja in this other world. Someday soon, I'll plant the fear of ninjutsu into the residents here and make them scream in terror, "Ahhh! A ninja?! A ninja, you say?!"

“Ahhh...shoot and damn. Not everything's gonna go my way, huh?”

Though Leviathan had taken half my total magic, it must've consumed a good amount of it solely on maintaining its enormous size, because as far as I could tell, the spirits had started returning to their original forms one by one on account of running out of my magic in this battle alone. The fusion spirit was unmistakably powerful, but it was also unstable when used like this. While I liked how flashy it was, I wasn't a fan of its terrible fuel consumption rate.

I needed to come up with a better way to make it a viable asset usable in

successive battles in the Demonic Forest instead of just against one opponent. Maybe downsizing it? In any case, I was happy about having added yet another ace up my sleeve to my arsenal. It undoubtedly strengthened my hand.

“Mmkay, on to the next monst— Wait, what? Did you...change a little?”

My gaze was focused on one of my pets—the giant, bloodred serpent, Orochi. At my words, he smiled ruefully, as if saying, “Oh, you didn’t realize, hm?” Well, saying “smiled ruefully” was more a figure of speech than anything else. There wasn’t much change in his facial expression on account of him being a snake.

“Whoa, hold up. Orochi, you *evolved!*”

I’d only just realized. When before, Orochi’s race had been Giant Blood Serpent, it was now Crimson Evil Serpent King. Race evolution. Based on what I could see of his data, while he hadn’t learned any new skills, his skill *levels* had sure increased. His stats were way up too.

W-Well, he definitely has new parts on his body. What looked to be a coxcomb and a bunch of spikes. Plus his bloodred coloring seemed much deeper too. *But, like, when the heck did this even happen?* I basically let Rir manage the pets, so I’d never even noticed until now.

“Grr...”

“N-No, I mean, I definitely saw the coxcomb, but I just figured he was in that phase of life where he wanted to be stylish or something...”

Rir shook his head in exasperation like he was saying, “Really? You can’t be serious...”

Y-You can’t blame me for thinking that, though. The monsters in the Demonic Forest could easily camouflage themselves or change their appearances. I’d just kinda assumed that even Orochi could grow himself a coxcomb if he tried hard enough.

“Ahem... I-I see. Well, I’m happy for you, Orochi. You look really cool like that. Right, then. You’re the only one who’s evolved racially as of now, huh?”

I glossed over my idiocy by patting Orochi’s body. While I spoke, I checked my other pets’—Yata, Byaku, and Seimi—info as they drew closer and surrounded

me. I was right. Though they'd grown too, Orochi was the only one who'd undergone race evolution. In hindsight, it made sense, considering his job as the main tank in combat. Since he faced off against opponents directly, he would level up a lot faster than the other three.

However, according to Rir, the others would also evolve soon enough. *That's exciting.* I decided that I'd celebrate all four of them at once when the time came.

"Hell yeah! This is what I'm talking about! Keep up the great work, guys! Evolve into sinister, powerful underlings fit for a demon lord!"

After that, we'd devoted ourselves to monster hunting for a while. I'd headed home right around the time it'd started getting dark.

"Yuki... You are an adult, are you not? Pray tell, then, why you return covered in mud even though you were not playing with the children."

"Jeez, chill, I'm sorry."

I apologized meekly to Lefi, who stared at my mud-covered frame in exasperation. There wasn't anything else I could do because she'd been helping with the household chores for some time now.

"B-But listen. Getting some dirt and stuff on me was inevitable, y'know? A natural consequence of fighting to the death against the monsters of the Demonic Forest."

"Yes, I understand that. However, that is not the issue. When I see my husband come home looking like...well, like a small child plastered with mud, the sight rouses complicated feelings within me."

She smiled wryly before continuing.

"In any case, go and take a bath first, Yuki."

"Yes, ma'am. Oh, you wanna tag along too, En?"

My sword girl had changed into her human form, silently telling me she wanted to take a bath too. So I took her with me. We grabbed a change of clothes, and just as we were about to head to the inn, Lefi suddenly called out

to me again.

“Um... Shall I wash your back for you today?”

“Huh? Wh-Why? Wh-Where’s *this* coming from?”

My reply was flustered. It wasn’t uncommon for us to bathe together, but this was definitely the first time *she’d* offered to wash *my* back. More often than not, she ordered me to wash hers.

“No particular reason, really. We have some time until dinner, so I thought I would extend the offer. As well, I deemed it appropriate to reward you for your efforts today since you seem tired.”

“Oh, yeah? Thanks. Now tell me the *real* reason.”

“I wish to eat unusual confections.”

Phew. Glad to know you’re the same as always. You’ll get your goods after bath time.



In the meadow area.

“Ready or not, here I come, Lefiii!!!”

“I am *always* ready, Yukiii!!!”

I postured dramatically, then, with that roar, swung my arm using all the strength my demon lord body could muster. It moved flexibly like a whip as I threw the object in my hand: a ball. Lefi opened her eyes wide to keep her attention squarely on the round thing racing toward her in a straight, laser-like arc.

“Take this!”

She swung the bat she held with both hands in a magnificent display of power. To say that it sliced through the air was an understatement. The tremendous force of her swing reminded me of a vacuum wave attack from a certain battle monster series. There was just one small issue, though. She whiffed.

Her timing and positioning had been so off that the bat had never even

touched the ball. I couldn't help being impressed by how spectacularly she'd missed her mark.

"Wh-What?! How is this possible?! As I have such keen eyesight, I should have struck it perfectly!"

"Pffft. C'mon, now, Mrs. Lefi. I heard you shout, 'Take this!' didn't I? So how come you didn't even graze the ball? What gives?"

"S-Silence!"

Cheeks pink, she shouted at me.

I had no doubt her eyes were good enough to have seen the seams on the ball as it'd hurtled toward her. That was a big plus on her end. But seeing a ball and being able to hit it with a bat were two very different issues!

"Cheese Louise. I guess the only thing you've got goin' for ya is your power, huh?"

"Wha— Grr... I shall wipe off that insufferable expression from your face! Just you watch!"

Rir, our ball boy, picked up the ball with his mouth and brought it back to me. I took it from him while taunting Lefi with a shit-eating grin.

Speaking of my buddy Rir, I could tell by the look on his face that he had a lot of thoughts on the current situation. But the way his tail wagged energetically made it clear that he wasn't exactly displeased by his job of fetching the ball, so I knew I was in the clear. For now, anyway.

I had to say, it felt damn freaking good to see Lefi so pissed off. I'd invited her to play baseball with me because I was bored, but who'da thunk things would turn out so well for me?

"Hmph! One more time! This thing you call baseball, it is a best of three contest, yes?"

"Yeah, I guess. I'll make the calls since you can't."

I wouldn't be able to make the right calls anyway because I'd never actually played baseball myself. This was why the balls I threw were straight down the middle. I wasn't skilled enough to execute any of the fancy throws or change

the course of the ball either, so we'd just have a do-over for any bad pitches I made.

"Good luck, Lady Lefifi!"

"Good luck!"

We had a number of spectators watching this game. There were Iluna and Shii, who were cheering as loud as they could, and the wraith sisters, who were raising the hands of the dolls they possessed high in the air in a show of support since they couldn't speak. En would usually be here too, but she'd wanted to play shogi with Leila, so she'd decided to stay in the real throne room today.

"Watch what is to come next closely, wee lasses! I shall transform this imbecile's sneer into tears!"

"Oh, reeeally?! I'ma hold you to that, then! Can't wait!"

With that, I took up a pitcher's stance and threw the ball as hard as I could. *The way I am now, I know for a fact that my pitches are much faster than ones thrown by the best major leaguers of all time.*

Lefi opened her eyes wide again, staring fixedly at the ball. This time, she swung at the right moment—and set off my Danger Detection!

"Nuuuooooo?!"

Her bat made a beautiful cracking sound as it met the ball. Incidentally, the hit sent it flying straight toward my head. Thanks to my ability reacting, I was just barely, by the skin of my goddamn teeth, able to move my body in time to catch the lightning-fast ball right in front of my face. The impact on my palm was so ridiculously heavy that it felt like I'd been hit by a cannonball. I wouldn't have been surprised if it'd blasted right through the mitt I was wearing. By digging both my heels into the ground and bracing myself, I somehow succeeded in stopping the ball's insane momentum.

"Ngh! If I recall the rules correctly, you catching the ball means I am 'out,' yes? Which makes this my loss?"

"Y-Yeah... Yeah, that's right. I win."

"Grrraahhh!"

She howled in frustration at my reply. I agreed with her assessment while concealing my pounding heart.

H-Holy hell! I damn near shit my pants! Jokes aside, I'd legit thought I was gonna die. Like, wouldn't the ball have totally smashed my skull open, spraying my brains everywhere if I hadn't caught it? *Possible. Definitely possible.* I saw the ball's scorch marks as I stared down at my mitt. Pretty sure I only needed to catch that caliber of ball nine more times to burn a hole through it.

"Dude... Your comebacker is enough to cause casualties..."

I unconsciously uttered those words with cold sweat trickling down my back at the state she'd left my mitt in.

"Comeback-ur?"

"It means hitting the ball back to the pitch—to the person who throws it."

"Oho, I see. Be at ease, Yuki. On the off chance I had indeed smashed your skull to pieces, I would have put it back together perfectly and healed you to your original state."

"How the hell am I supposed to 'be at ease' after hearing that?!"

Had she expected me to say something like, "Oh, okay, then I guess I have nothing to worry about"? If she really thought I had the guts to just take that, she had another thing coming. The woman needed to give me a break and stop putting me on the brink of death during normal playtime every time, jeez.

On another note, she'd hit the ball on just her second try, hadn't she? And it'd been one heck of a hit too. *That's...scary as hell.* A clear demonstration of the Supreme Dragon's power if I'd ever seen one.

"More importantly, I demand another round! Another round, you hear?! You should also take into consideration that this is my first experience with this thing you call 'baseball.'"

"Y-Yeah, sure. Of course. I'm a generous guy, so I don't mind takin' it easy on ya for another round. Besides, we both know I'm gonna win no matter how many times we play, right?"

"Ha! We shall see about that! I will have you know that I am in top form right

now. The next ball is mine! Wait and you shall see!”

I’d come off cool as a cucumber when I’d said those words to Lefi. In all honesty, though, things weren’t looking good. Real talk, I was feeling anything *but* cool.

Lefi had managed to learn how to hit a ball back on her second try. That was an indisputable fact. She had a solid chance of finding the sweet spot on the next pitch and hitting a home run.

O-Okay. Maybe it’s time for me to bust out the secret weapon I prepared just for fun.

My trickle of cold sweat turned into a torrent at the thought of the threat she posed. Even so, I smirked like nothing was wrong. I gripped the ball and positioned myself in the set for just a little bit longer than before. Then, I wound up and threw the third pitch.

It startled me how fast it zoomed forward, and perfectly within the strike zone too. But Lefi had already figured out the trick to batting. After judging the timing, she swung the bat at the right moment to hit the ball cleanly.

“Dwah?! Wh-What?!”

Or so she would’ve if it hadn’t curved unnaturally at the last second, causing her to bat at the air instead.

“Wh-What is the meaning of this?! I should have struck it flawlessly! So how?!”

“Keh keh keh... Mwaaa ha ha! Didja see that, Lefi?! This is the culmination of my true power, my demon miracle ball! I call it my ‘no one blocks my way to the top’ secret weapon!”

“‘N-No one blocks my way to the top’?!”

Dumbstruck, Lefi repeated the words as I pointed triumphantly at her. *Man, I really love this about her.*

Naaaturally, I couldn’t throw curveballs on account of the fact that I lacked the talent. My pitching repertoire consisted of fastballs only. How, then, did the trajectory of the ball change? The answer was simple: it was a trick ball. It had

lead inside, so when it was thrown, it would swerve around in unpredictable, erratic ways, bewildering both the batter and the pitcher. In other words, I couldn't predict its path either.

Remember how I'd been chilling in the set position for longer than usual earlier? Well, that was because I'd been futzing around in Inventory. I'd made the rift small enough to fit in the palm of my hand to avoid her noticing, then slipped my hand inside and swapped the normal ball out for my trick ball.

Keh keh keh. A baseball noob like Lefi definitely wouldn't be able to pick up on my little trick. It was the perfect crime. *As I always say, it's only cheating if you get caught!*

"I wanna see you try to break through my balls now, Lefi!"

No way will she be able to!

"Fine. I shall tear through them, and you will watch as I do! For the true thrill of battle lies in employing my power as the Supreme Dragon, the one who stands atop the world, to conquer you!"

"Heh. I expected nothing less of my wife! I accept your resolve and will use the entirety of my soul to be a worthy contender!"

Despite the cool lines I'd tossed out, if my cover was blown, she'd find out that it was a trick ball at the end of the day. But I shut my eyes completely to the truth and settled in for the windup.

"Taaake!!! This, Lefiii!!!"

"Come, Yukiii!!!"

I whipped my arm and released the ball from my fingers. Unlike before, when it'd curved just as it'd reached Lefi, this time around, it curved as soon as it left my grip. The ball's trajectory went so wild that no one could predict where it would go next. My (trick) demon miracle ball whizzed around in such a crazy pattern that it almost looked like it'd split into clones as it sped toward her.

"Yes!!! I see it!!!"

"Wha— Dwaah?!"

Though the ball had no fixed course, Lefi still hit it perfectly with her bat and

sent it flying. And it was another comebacker to boot. Thanks to Danger Detection warning me of the projectile zooming straight toward my face, I managed to catch it again—except this ball had lead inside, which made it much heavier than the other one. I couldn't get a firm grip on it because of that, so it broke out of the mitt and slammed right into my cheek.

“Hrngh?!”

“Ah.”

The weight of the ball lifted me into the air and lightly blasted me backward. I crashed headfirst into the ground.

“Y-You destroyed my precious d-demon miracle ball...”

The last thing I saw before dramatically blacking out was Lefi rushing toward me.

As I always say, cheaters never win!



“Ugh...”

“Oh. You are awake, Yuki?”

Shaking my head lightly, I sat up. The first thing I saw was Lefi sitting next to me.

“This is...the dungeon, huh? Ah, did you carry me here?”

The last thing I remembered was catching the ball Lefi'd hit with my face. But the fact that I was in my futon right now clearly meant that someone had carried me here.

“Well, Rir carried you for the first half.”

She shrugged as she replied. Did that mean she'd taken over for the second half?

“I see... Then, thanks, I guess. For healing me too.”

When I touched my cheek, I didn't feel any pain or swelling. No matter how tough my demon lord body was, there was no way in hell I'd come out unscathed after taking a blow to the face like that. Hence, I figured she must've

healed me.

Sheesh... Totally put her through the wringer taking care of me, huh?

“’Twas the least I could do considering I was the one who struck the ball. That aside, this leaves our standings at one win and one loss each, yes?”

“Hwuh?”

Upon hearing that idiotic sound come out of my mouth, my wife grinned saucily at me and continued talking.

“You caught one and I hit one, which puts us at a draw, does it not? We shall switch roles in the next round so that I can throw the ball—”

“No, I lost. Forgive me.”

I executed a perfectly gorgeous dogeza on top of my futon. Lefi burst out laughing hysterically in response. Then, she slapped her thighs, stood up, and ruffled my hair.

“In that case, I shall exercise my right as the winner and have you pour drinks for me tonight.”

“Yes, yes, as you wish. I shall serve you libations to your heart’s content, my liege.”

“Hmm. I do not think that form of address suits me for a number of reasons.”

She smiled wryly as I rubbed my hands together evilly like some second-rate villain.

After the little girls had gone to sleep.

“Come hither, Yuki! Pour me another!”

“O-Okay, okay, chill. Here.”

“Whoa. Lady Lefi’s three sheets to the wind, huh, my lord?”

Lefi pulled aggressively on my arm, demanding I pour her another round, and I obliged. Lew sat next to us, watching the spectacle with a somewhat astounded smile on her face.

“Yeah. She sobers up pretty fast, but she can’t hold her liquor worth a damn.”

“Ah ha ha... That just makes her even cuter, though, don’t you think?”

“Leeew! Youuu dring ash well!”

“Yes, yes, my lady. I’m drink— Uh, Lady Lefi?”

The room went silent for a second.

“Nnn...”

“She’s...asleep, isn’t she?”

“She sure is.”

Up until now, she’d been pretty normal—okay, well, not *normal*, exactly. She’d been drunk, but she’d still managed to carry on a conversation. It’d only taken her a second to fall asleep, though, and now, she was breathing softly while using my lap as a pillow. *Seriously, woman, you need to get a hold of yourself.*

Chuckling softly, Lew and I exchanged knowing glances at the sight of her.

“But wow, Lew, you’ve got a pretty strong tolerance for alcohol, huh?”

“I’m surprised too, honestly. I had no idea since I never really had the chance to drink before. You’re no slouch yourself, my lord.”

“Nah. It may not look like it, but I’m actually at my limit. I’m just glad she gave in to the booze first.”

Though Lefi had forced Lew to drink with her, I didn’t pick up on so much as a hint of drunkenness from her. She looked completely unfazed by all the liquor she’d downed. In comparison, while I was definitely a stronger drinker than Lefi, I was well aware of how drunk I was by now. If Lefi had kept on forcing me to drink with her instead of hitting the hay, I would’ve blacked out and lost all memories of the night. That was how dire the situation was.

“Mmm! Haah... I’m starting to feel a bit overheated from drinking so much.”

So saying, Lew deliberately unbuttoned the top of her maid uniform and started fanning her face with her hands.

“Uhhh, Miss Lew? I hate to break this to you, but you’re kinda overdoing it

with the drunk act.”

“Hee hee hee. Are you *suuure* about that, my lord? You don’t feel *anything* at all?”

“Nope. Nothing. I actually think it’s hilarious how bad you are at it.”

“Hilarious?!”

Shock bloomed on Lew’s face at my words.

“Y-You’re joking, right? L-Look, my lord, cleavage. The thing all men absolutely, positively *love* to look at.”

Apparently frustrated by my lack of reaction, she undid a few more buttons to expose more of her chest, then nestled flirtatiously into me.

“When you say ‘cleavage,’ Leila’s the one who comes to mind. You don’t have the boobs for it, Lew.”

“How can you say such vulgar things so smoothly?!”

Miss Lew, it’s time for me to be totally honest. You’re kinda not sexy.

With a cute, angry growl, Lew started punching me. I dodged her while laughing, the whole time trying to tell her I was kidding.

“Grr... Gosh, you’re so rude! Besides, I *do* have something in the chest department, okay?! And anyway, what kind of husband reacts like this when his super-duper-cute wife is trying so hard to seduce him?!”

“You know this is my way of showing love ’cause I can’t get enough of bullying you.”

“Ugh, fine! I know what a contrarian you are, my lord, and my heart is big enough to forgive even a rude master like you.”

“I sure am happy to hear that. Thanks much.”

I patted her on the head with a laugh. In response, she twitched her ears and tail in satisfaction before letting her body relax into mine. It was cute how easy she was to read.

By the way, Leila was here with us too. But she’d just been drinking at her own pace, her usual enigmatic smile on her face as she watched us. My

assumption that she was also a strong drinker had turned out to be wrong, because on closer inspection, her snow-white cheeks were now flushed. It didn't seem like she was drunk—nope, scratch that.

“Um, Miss Leila? Can I ask you when the heck you managed to drink all this?”

“HmMMM? Is soomething the maaatter?”

She was stretching out her words way more than usual, and she looked drowsy too. It was kinda sexy. While I'd been busy first dealing with Lefi and then teasing Lew, Leila had been busy with the wine. I hadn't noticed how many empty bottles were lying around her until now. As a rough guess, she'd gone through about twice as many as we had. *Whoa, she drank all that by herself?*

“H-Hey, don't you think you're drinking too much? Are you sure you're okay?”

“Yeeesss, I'm fine. Juuuust fiiine.”

Her beaming smile never wavered as she replied. And then, she suddenly went down, her back hitting the floor with a *thud*.

“L-Leila?!”

I panicked for a moment before I heard the soft breaths coming from her—the telltale sounds of sleep. She'd gone the same route as Lefi. The moment I realized that, I let out a rueful laugh. Clearly, she hadn't been fine at all.

“Huh. I wonder if she's in pain, considering she hit the floor headfirst.”

“I'm pretty sure her sense of pain is asleep too, my lord.”

Yeah, Lew was probably right. I could totally see her waking up the next day and being confused, like, “What in the world? When did I get this bruise?”

“Leila's totally unguarded right now, considering she's completely out of it. If you're going to rub her boobs, my lord, now's your chance.”

“Like hell am I gonna do that.”

What the hell kinda scumbag does this brat take me for?

“Huh? But you were the one talking about her cleavage.”

“Only as an object of comparison, okay? Besides, I'm a thigh man.”

“Are you going to rub her thighs, then?”

“...No.”

“Aha! You paused! That means you were thinking about it, weren't you?!”

“Sh-Shut up.”

Can you blame me, though? I mean, Miss Leila has the best body in the dungeon. Any man would be shaking violently in their fight against temptation if they were in my shoes right now.

Lew smirked, clearly entertained at my discomfort. Then, she looked a bit sad as she spoke again.

“I... I wish Nell was here with us too.”

“Yeah, same... Ah!”

“Huh? What is it?”

She tilted her head, clearly puzzled by how my voice had just gone up without warning.

“You just reminded me that I gave Nell a Communication Orb: Revamped.”

I'd completely forgotten that I had a way to talk to her whenever the urge hit me. I gently moved Lefi off my lap and onto the floor, then thought back to the last time she'd contacted us, trying to remember where I'd put my half of the Comm Orb pair. I knew it wasn't in Inventory, which meant it had to be on my workbench. I walked over there, picked it up, and brought it back.

“What is this?”

“It's a cell—no, that's not gonna make sense to you. If you activate this using your magic, you can talk to whoever has the other half, no matter how far away they are. In short, you can talk to Nell.”

“What?! That sounds amazing! And convenient!”

“But it consumes a lot of magic. If you use it, Lew, your magical energy will run out in probably about a minute.”

“Then...it doesn't sound very useful to me...”

“Well, this time around, a demon lord and hero are going to open the line of communication. I think I can make it work for at least an hour.”

I poured my magic into my Comm Orb: Revamped and activated it while giving Lew a bare-bones explanation of how it worked.

“Hello, hello. Good evening. Can you hear me?”

“Eek! Wh-What in the world?!”

“Ooh! It worked! Yo, Nell. Can you talk right now?”

“Oh, um, y-yes, but... Mr. Yuki, is that really you?”

Nell sounded nervous as she spoke to me through the crystal.

“Yes, ma’am. In the, uh, voice. How are you, Mrs. Nell?”

“Ah, it’s this crystal, huh? Hmm, I’m fine. Just really starting to miss the bathtub back home. I don’t get a lot of chances to bathe here.”

Oh, yeah. I vaguely remembered her saying something about baths being few and far between. That must’ve been super rough for Nell, considering how much she loved bath time.

“Anyway, is something wrong, Mr. Yuki? For you to be calling like this...”

“No, nothing like that. We got to talking about you and it made us wanna hear your voice.”

“Nell, how are you?! You better be eating and sleeping properly!”

“That was...Lew, right? Tee hee. Yup, I’m eating properly, even though I’m missing Leila’s cooking a lot.”

“Make sure you’re eating well-balanced meals, okay?! You have to put in the effort every day if you want to become an attractive woman!”

“You’re right. I’ll be more diligent. And I could say the same to you, Lew. Don’t hole up with Lefi and eat a ton of sweets, got it? Her body composition is different from ours, so if you eat her portion sizes, it won’t be long before you get fat!”

“Urk! I-I totally know that. Of course I do.”

Lew's eyes abruptly slid away from the Comm Orb: Revamped as she replied.

Yeah right. You've totally been eating sweets with Lefi, haven't you?

Lefi never gained a single ounce despite the stupidly huge amount of food she ate. But the same almost certainly wasn't true for Lew. Clearly, the lazy dragon sleeping like a log next to me had lured my maid-wife into joining in on her shenanigans, and if Lew kept pace with Lefi, she'd fatten up in the blink of an eye.

Wait, maybe not, though. Anytime Lefi was on the verge of overeating to an extreme degree, I warned her to stop 'cause I didn't want the little girls to copy her. She always listened, meaning she at least ate sweets and stuff in moderation for the most part.

"A-Anyway! Any interesting stories from there on your end, Nell?"

"Oh, hmm... Like the time we caught the mysterious underwear thief?"

"Uhhh, if you caught them, wouldn't that mean the mystery's solved?"

"I agree, my lord. At this point, they're just a run-of-the-mill underwear thief."

Totally agree.

"No, no. Let me explain. So, at first, we opened the investigation on the assumption that the various misdeeds were merely a pervert's doing. But the more we dug into it, the more we realized things weren't so simple. The criminal was using the stolen underwear to create summoning circles, you see—"

Using underwear to create summoning circles? What the actual fuck?

And so, we spent the night chatting with Nell, who was far away from us.



"Oh? Did something happen, Nell? You seem to be in an awfully good mood."

Smiling, Nell replied to her superior, the lady knight commander, who looked at her with a puzzled expression. They walked side by side in a church located in Arsil, the capital of the Kingdom of Alisia.

"Yes, something wonderful happened last night."

"You don't say? Let me guess. You and your beau waxed poetic about each

other?”

“Geh. H-How did you know?!”

“Actually, I was joking.”

Carlotta, her boss, smiled wryly as the young hero’s cheeks flushed scarlet. Then, the lady knight cleared her throat and continued speaking.

“Heed me well, Nell. I know you’re happy, but keep in mind that this is an incredibly important strategy meeting. I need you to focus.”

“Y-Yes, ma’am!”

Carlotta nodded, pleased by the girl’s serious transformation.

“Very good. Now, we’re almost to the conference room. I do believe the others will be there soon as well.”

A dozen or so knights were gathered in the conference room.

“I see everyone is here. Excellent. Then I’ll explain the mission details!”

As the one leading the meeting, Carlotta stood in front of her subordinates and spoke, her voice ringing clearly in the space.

“This time, we have been given the task of conquering a labyrinth that threatens the coastal regions. In short, we will be defeating its demon lord.”

Her words made Nell’s heart pound for a moment. Once she allowed her superior’s mention of “coastal regions” to sink in, however, she rubbed her chest in relief. *Thank goodness. Mr. Yuki’s dungeon is nowhere near the ocean.*

“‘Coastal regions’? Does that mean we’ll be heading to the district of Rhone?”

Carlotta nodded affirmatively in response to the question posed by one of the knights.

“That’s right. The labyrinth is located approximately four hours from the Port of Powza in the Rhone district.”

“Four hours, you say? That’s surprisingly close. Why has it taken so long to subdue the demon lord?”

“Well, until now, a host of adventurers has been tasked with capturing the labyrinth. But it seems they’re yet to reach the stage of their plan that involves defeating the demon lord.”

“Hmm... If their plan of attack is proceeding well and there aren’t any foreseeable problems, why is our involvement being requested? In a dungeon conquest, no less.”

That question came from another knight. The knights’ primary duties revolved around maintaining public order in their parishes, cooperating with the military to apprehend criminals, and protecting important individuals. Simply put, it was very unusual for them to be assigned to missions that took them outside the towns and cities they were stationed in—missions like dungeon conquests. The fact that a job outside their jurisdiction had suddenly come to them had to have meant that the circumstances there were quite serious.

“Right, about that. As it turns out, the adventurers who set out to defeat the demon lord returned after failing their task. The demon lord evidently poses quite a threat, so naturally, defeating him is a matter of urgency. But the adventurers capable of subduing him can’t take on the mission right now due to other obligations. Unlike the military, we knights aren’t bound by constraints, and we’re all relatively powerful as individuals, which is why we’ve been selected for this task. At least, that’s the official pretext.”

At this point, Carlotta paused for a moment. Then, with an annoyed expression, she resumed speaking.

“Do you remember the two cardinals we apprehended before? Well, the fact that there was a quarrel among the Church’s leadership came to light within the general public, leading the people to lose trust in us. In order to win it back, the Church wants to put on a display of its power to protect the masses. In short, politics.”

She snorted derisively.

“What I’d truly love to do is shove my foot up their asses and send them flying for presenting us with such a useless demand. Unfortunately, there’s no denying that our capture of those idiots partially caused this situation in the first place. And seeing a job through to the end is part of a proper adult’s duty.

Unlike certain doddering old fools who are so obsessed with political warfare that they can't even fulfill their own duties, we must prove ourselves to be of sound character to the people."

Laughter filled the room at her sharp, sarcastic words.

"And there you have it. Now, it's time for us to make our preparations to raid the labyrinth. There's just one problem."

The laughing knights immediately quieted upon hearing this.

"As you're all already aware, a selection ritual will be held soon to choose new cardinals. More than half of us here will be assigned as protection detail when the time comes. Therefore, it's inevitable that we'll have to challenge the dungeon the adventurers failed to take with a smaller force of our own. For that reason, in order to take all possible precautions, I'd like to request aid from outside our organization... Nell."

"Huh? Oh! Y-Yes, ma'am!"

Nell was befuddled for a moment because she hadn't expected to be roped into the conversation. But she quickly regrouped and answered Carlotta in a rush.

"About this aid..."



"Dungeon!"

"Dun-jun!"

"Conquest!"

"Conk-west!"

"Make a killing!"

"A killing!"

Shii copied me and pumped her little fists into the air. *Too damn cute.* Preeetty sure she didn't understand what I was saying, though. She had a habit of parroting people's words without really thinking about them.

"What is all this? Did you not settle down to fiddle with your magical tools?"

Lefi sounded puzzled as she peeked in at us.



“Nell contacted me and said, ‘We’re being sent off on a dungeon conquest, so would you accompany us, Mr. Yuki?’ And I’m thinking I’d like to go with them. My goal in going is to make a killing.”

“I-I see— Wait a moment. This means defeating a demon lord, yes? You are not troubled by the prospect of subjugating one of your own brethren?”

“‘Brethren’? Ha ha ha. What a weird thing to say, Lefi. Lemme tell ya a secret. There are only two categories of people for demon lords: enemies and allies.”

My allies consisted of everyone here, Nell, and a few others. Everyone else was either an enemy or someone I didn’t give a rat’s ass about.

“Ah, well... If you are not bothered, then so be it, I suppose.”

I’d always wanted to see another demon lord’s dungeon anyway, and now, I finally had the chance. After all, people were always telling me that demon lords were all arrogant enemies of mankind with the worst reputations and crap like that. No surprise, then, that I was curious about what another demon lord was actually like. If he really was the scum of the earth, I’d have no problem killing him.

We’ll just ignore the little matter of me having the very demon-lord-like title of Enemy of Humanity! Though I’d like to think humanity and I have been getting along pretty well lately, so I’m hoping for a more positive title next time.

“You will be away for some time, then?”

“Yeah. Gonna have me some fun, but I’ll be back before you know it. I don’t think I’ll be gone nearly as long as I was during my trip to the royal capital, though. And since we’re heading to a coastal area, I’ll bring back some delicious seafood as souvenirs.”

“See-food!”

“Yup, yup. Seafood. It’s veery tasty, Shii!”

While I chatted with the beaming Shii, I started getting ready for my outing.



“Maaan, I’ve gotten used to this town too, huh?”

Alfiro, the frontier town closest to the Demonic Forest, stretched out before me. Nell'd told me that it was the rendezvous spot this time around as well. We'd board a pair of stagecoaches from here and head to the region where the dungeon was located. Never would've expected to have ended up coming to this town so often. Though with the door I'd installed being connected to here, I was sure lots more opportunities to visit would be popping up in the future too.

As I headed toward the gate to enter Alfiro, I spotted a group of people wearing armor with a familiar design gathered right outside the town.

"Oh, Mr. Wye!"

One of them noticed me and waved—a lightly armored girl. Otherwise known as Nell.

"Yo, Nell. You're lookin' chipper. I know it hasn't been all that long since I heard your voice, but damn, it really does make me happy to see your face again up close and personal."

"I-I'm happy as well. But, um... Mr. Wye, everyone else is here too, so maybe you could tell me that in private later..."

When I went to pat her head, the embarrassed Nell sneakily peeked around her. My bet was that she was worried about what the other holy knights must've been thinking as they watched us. It was good to know that the bashful side of her I found incredibly cute hadn't changed.

"You got it, babe. We'll do this all over again later. In fact, I'll take it up a notch and make you even more embarrassed."

"No, please. Anything but that..."

She looked both exasperated and excited as she responded.

"This young man is the masked champion?"

The voice chiming in from next to us suddenly made me realize my screwup. I quickly turned around, pulled my mask out of Inventory, and shoved it onto my face before facing forward again.

"'Young man'? Ha ha! I have no idea what you're talking about. I'm a shady masked guy of unknown age, okay? It's not nice to make assumptions about

people, y'know."

"Mr. Wye... It's too late to talk your way out of it at this point. If anything, don't you think wearing a mask makes you *more* conspicuous?"

Huh. She's right. I'd deadass just forgotten about the whole mask thing until now. But Nell made a fair point.

"Mask. Ever the same, eh?"

A wry smile accompanied Carlotta's comment. I shrugged in response while taking off my beloved clown mask.

"More importantly, how about introducing your friends to me?"

"An excellent idea. Let me start from the left—"

The holy knights and I exchanged brief introductions. Not including Nell and Carlotta, there were seven of them. One woman, six men. Stats-wise, they were nowhere near Nell's level or even Carlotta's, but they were twice as strong as normal fighters.

"Are you *sure* this is enough people for a dungeon conquest?"

"We received another request, so we had to split up our forces, unfortunately. That's one reason for our small group, but I also decided that you, Nell, and I would be enough to make up for the shortfall. So, frankly speaking, I appreciate your participation."

"Like I'd turn down a request from my wife. Besides, the idea of conquering a dungeon tickles my pickle. Is the demon lord you're after really that strong?"

"By all accounts, yes. The special party of adventurers formed to defeat him retreated after failing to accomplish the task on their initial foray. That is why I have no doubt he's the sort of opponent we must remain on guard against at all times."

Ooh, really? I'm starting to get excited now.

"Wait. Mr. Wye, where's En? You didn't bring her with you?"

"Nope. I asked her to stay behind this time."

Yup, you heard right. In an unusual turn of events, En wasn't with me on this

trip. Nell'd told me in advance that the enemy's dungeon wasn't very spacious, so I'd decided not to take her with me.

Though En was my super strong, super cute, ultimate weapon, sadly, she was also super long. Longer than I was tall. Meaning I couldn't just swing her around to my heart's content because of the tight confines of the dungeon we were storming, plus the fact that there were other holy knights on this expedition too. Because of that, I'd been forced to make the heartbreaking decision to leave her behind.

"Who is En?"

Nell answered Carlotta's question.

"That's the name of Mr. Wye's sword. You must have seen it yourself during the trouble at the royal capital. His long sword with the curved blade?"

"Ahhh... Yes, he was indeed in possession of such a weapon."

Oh, yeah. I'd just realized that Carlotta hadn't met En on our last trip to the capital a while back.

"I guess I should tell you that En is her pet name and her real name is Zaien. She's the cutest little thing you'll ever meet. An absolute angel. No, an archangel. If we get the chance, I'll definitely let you meet her."

"An...angel?"

"No. Archangel."

"Your...sword is?"

"My sword is."

"I... I see? Well, there are all kinds of people in this world, each with their own pastimes, eh?"

C'mon, Miss Carlotta. Please don't look at me like that. I speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

I really needed her to stop staring at me like I was some kind of perverted freak for doting on an inorganic object I loved so much that I'd gone as far as naming it. I knew she wouldn't look so suspicious or uptight once she met En.

She'd definitely fall in love with her at first sight just like the rest of us had. No doubt in my mind.

"Ahem... In any case, we have everyone we need, so I'd like to depart right away. I hope you're amenable?"

"Hell yeah. Ready when you are."

As soon as I'd heard about the dungeon conquest, I'd grabbed basically anything I thought would come in handy. And by "anything" I meant a buttload of items.

Keh keh keh. Just wait for me and shake in your boots, demon lord I don't know.

"Understood. The rest of you, prepare the coaches."

"Yes, ma'am!"

The holy knights responded to her in unison, then moved as a unit toward the waiting vehicles. They were pretty magnificent, with both of them having the same crest engraved on the side as the one the knights had on their armor.

"Mask, I want you to board the carriage in front. We're heading out!"



"Oh, yeah, I wanted to ask you something. What made you decide to invite me specifically?"

Inside the rocking carriage, I asked that question to Carlotta, who was staring at her hand of cards with a frown. Sure, I was part of Nell's family and had joined forces with Carlotta a bunch of times before, but as far as the holy knights were concerned, I was still an outsider. Even if they needed extra help, why would they ask someone like that for it?

"Ah, yes, about that. I probably shouldn't say this, but we originally had no plans ourselves to request aid from someone outside our organization. For whatever reason, though, I received an official notice from the brass to rely on you, Mask. And since I knew what you were capable of, I saw no reason to defy their order."

I couldn't get a full read on her attitude as she answered me, but I got the gist

of things from her words. It was him. The old man—the former Minister of Military Affairs. He'd used his influence behind the scenes to force the Church to rope me in.

“I guess it's his way of telling me that this is part of my job to protect her, huh?”

Obviously, I'd do whatever it took for Nell's sake, but still, I really wished he would kick the bucket ASAP.

“Is something the matter, Mr. Wye?”

“Nope. Not a thing. Don't worry about it. Anyway, Carlotta, it's your turn.”

“Hrm. Hmmmm... All right, how about— Guh?!”

“Ma'am, you really need to work on your poker face. I can pretty much tell what you pulled.”

“Aha ha ha... I've never seen such an expression on your face, Miss Carlotta.”

Nell smiled ruefully at her commander's reaction.

By the way, we were playing old maid right now. My dungeon's residents knew all the numbers and suits in a deck, so we could play all kinds of card games together. Not the case with Carlotta, though, which was why we'd picked old maid, since the rules were easy to understand. And after several turns, she ended up losing.

“The game seems simple on the surface but is actually quite deep beneath... Right, well, I believe I've memorized all the designs and numbers.”

“Wait, for real?”

Even though we only played a single round?

“You trounced me soundly in this match, so I'll have to make certain I repay the favor now.”

“Okay, then...what's this?”

“Eleven.”

Carlotta replied immediately when I showed her the joker in my hand.

No freaking way! What kind of superpowered brain does this lady knight have?! On second thought, maybe this was normal for someone in charge of an entire order of knights.

“All right, fine. Challenge accepted. Carlotta, get ready for a lesson from yours truly on the harsh world of card games!”

Including Nell, everyone in my dungeon family played all sorts of games all the time. Except they weren't *just* games. The people of this other world were way more competitive and skilled than humans back on Earth since they could read their opponents' smallest tells, sense their heartbeats, and analyze their expressions to predict the cards they had in their hands. That was pretty much how most of my games with Lefi went. Then again, she was weak considering how quickly her face gave away her secrets.

This lady knight was also from this other world, but I'd let her know that she wouldn't win so easily against us, who also know how to compete here!

“Oho. Something to look forward to, eh? Please do show me the essence of these games!”

Carlotta grinned like the Cheshire cat, and thus began our next battle!

Not much had happened after that. The stagecoaches had rolled along, we'd spent the night at an inn town, and it was now the next day. Ahead of us stretched a vast, blue sea shimmering in the sunlight and a harbor town formed by an inlet. A few dozen ships floated on the water's surface, while several others were in the process of either entering or leaving the port.

All in all, the place was pretty dang big. I wondered if this port city was one of the country's more prominent ones.

“Woow! This is amazing!”

Nell spoke to me as she watched me marveling over the sight in front of us.

“Oh, Mr. Wye, could this be your first time seeing the ocean?”

“No, it isn't. I just get really excited whenever I visit it is all.”

“Hmm... I think I understand what you mean.”

The sea extended deep into the Demonic Forest too. I could sometimes see it over the horizon when I flew. But back home, the waters were only accessible from two locations: all the way in the western part of the forest, and to the north where Lefi'd lived way back when. Both of those spots were pretty difficult to reach, so I couldn't just stroll there whenever I had the urge to see the ocean. I needed to gear up hard-core and be prepared for a three-night trek.

In short, this was the first time since arriving in this world that I'd come so close to the sea.

While I savored the scenery before me, Carlotta interjected from next to us.

"This is the port city of Powza. We'll be using it as our base of operations for the dungeon conquest. First, however, I need to greet the lord of the city. Mask, I apologize, but I'm going to have to ask you to accompany me."

"You can count on me, boss!"

"I...don't have any plans to be your boss..."

"Miss Carlotta, he's always like this, so you're fine just ignoring him."

"Too bad, considering my first impression of you was that you were quite a serious individual."

Carlotta smiled dryly.

How rude! I'll have you know that I live my life with the utmost seriousness, thank you very much.

Ah, right, totally unrelated, but she'd beaten my ass six ways to Sunday at cards after that first game. Just because I talked a lot of smack didn't mean I was a pro gambler or anything! Besides, I was nothing but a chump compared to Carlotta, a bigwig who strategized every day for a living! So it only made sense that a normal person—no, a normal demon lord like me had lost to her!

Lately, I felt like Nell had been getting a lot better at playing cards too... *Damn it. I really need to stop underestimating this other world's residents.*

While those silly thoughts ran through my mind, our coach continued rumbling forward until we finally arrived in front of the gate to the port city.

The holy knight acting as our coachman, whose name I was pretty sure was Sello, exchanged a few words with the guards stationed at the gate, and the carriage started moving again. Apparently, we'd received permission to enter the city.

Most of the folks walking through the streets were tanned and wore light clothing, which made sense given that this was a seaside town. And, well, I wouldn't go into any details because I felt like Nell was keeping a real close eye on me, but let me just say for the record that it was a city that made men happy to look around. C'pisce?

A few minutes later, a huge residence came into sight. I was guessing it was the lord's house. Someone had to have sent word ahead because a few servants were waiting outside for us. The stagecoach slowed down gradually before coming to a complete stop in front of the building. Then, we disembarked. Our other carriage behind us stopped too, and the rest of the holy knights got off.

Once he saw all of us gathered in front of them, one of the servants, a fairly young butler, bowed his head.

"You must be the holy knights, yes? Allow me to guide you to my lord. Are you comfortable leaving the carriages in our care?"

"That's fine. Sello, Nazul, help them. Please lead the way."

"It's a pleasure to meet ya. My name is Abel Rebliard and I'm the lord o' this city. I'm lookin' forward to getting to know all o' ya."

"Man of the sea." Those words perfectly described the man who'd welcomed us. He had short, close-cropped hair, a big, brawny build, and darkly tanned skin covered with tattoos. If we hadn't met him for this little chat in his residence, he could've easily been mistaken for the head of some gang.

"Carlotta Demeyere. My sentiments are the same."

They introduced themselves and shook hands. Everyone else, including me, hung back a step, watching their exchange.

"Lemme get straight to the point— Ah, can I ask ya something b'fore we

start?”

“What is it?”

“Who’s he? I thought only holy knights were s’posed to be comin’.”

The lord of the city—Abel—posed this question to the lady knight as he stared at me in my masked form like his Spidey-Sense was tingling.

“Oh, him. He’s helping us. His name is Wye. We asked for his cooperation with the dungeon conquest on account of his proven abilities.”

“Nice to meetcha.”

I wiggled my fingers lazily at him with my response. I’d put on the mask after Carlotta’d asked me to. Since I’d worked super hard in this country for Nell’s sake on multiple occasions, the commander had figured that people would know me as long as I had my mask on.

As it turned out, she was right, because this brawny old man who would’ve fit right in with a bunch of blue-collar workers realized who I was too. Just like my wife had said yesterday as well, this mask I’d originally used to hide my face had, in fact, made me quite famous.

“Is that right? So, this man is...”

For a moment, the brawny old man stared hard at me, eyes narrowed, like he was trying to get a read on me. Then, almost immediately, the corners of his mouth curled up in a smile and he continued talking.

“I’ll be honest with ya. When I first heard that the Church would be sendin’ holy knights down here on official business, I was suspicious of what you lot would be up to. Looks like I underestimated ya, huh?”

“Lord Abel, the rumors were true. You certainly don’t mince your words, hm?”

Abel shrugged in response to Carlotta’s bitter smile.

“Sorry, but that’s just how we men o’ the sea are. We all share the same destiny when we’re on a boat, ya hear? The most important thing for us is trust. Ain’t no way in hell we can board one with anybody we can’t trust, which means we gotta find out b’forehand what people are like.”

“Hmm... I see. Does this mean you find us worthy of sharing a boat with, then?”

“Seein’ as ya brought not only the hero but that man too, I can tell yer dead serious ’bout taking down the demon lord. In that case, we gotta treat ya with the same attitude. So, allow me to formally welcome y’all to the Port of Powza as our precious brethren.”



“Huh. Never woulda thought the Church would put their backs into this business.”

Abel muttered that comment after the group of holy knights had left his residence.

“You’re right, Chief. I was surprised to see the hero with them.”

Responding to his master’s words, the young butler spoke in a relaxed manner, dropping his earlier formality completely.

“Yeah, the hero girlie sure was a shock. But the Sword Princess and the renowned Mask too? Blow me down to see the Church sendin’ over its strongest assets.”

“The masked man isn’t officially with the Church, though, right? He wasn’t even wearing the same armor as the holy knights.”

“That ain’t important. Him working ’longside the Church’s people is all the proof I need he’s their ally. Actually, y’know what? Ya might have a point there. Raises a whole lotta questions if the holy knights brought ’long someone who ain’t even affiliated with the Church.”

The young butler ruminated in silence for a while before speaking again.

“Then...I wonder what their true goal is.”

“Beats me. Their official reason for comin’ down here is conquerin’ the dungeon, innit? I’d be more’n happy just as long as they get that job done. Either way, though, the Church’d be a pain in the arse to have as an enemy. Even if that ain’t the case, I hear that Sword Princess’s a smooth operator, so we’re better off gettin’ along with her. Make sure ya tell the townsfolk to be

friendly since I did tell her that she and her people were welcome here.”

“You got it, Chief.”

“And another thing. Stop callin’ me ‘Chief,’ ya hear? Right now, I’m yer highfalutin, fancy lord mayor.”

“Yes, my lord. I apologize sincerely for my impropriety.”

Abel howled with laughter at the sudden—and deliberate—return of his subordinate’s serious attitude and formal speech.

“For now, we’ll wait and keep an eye on ’em. I got no doubt they’re strong, so I wanna see ’em use that strength to defeat the demon lord.”

With that, the mayor of Powza leaned back in his chair and stared out the window in the direction the knights had gone when they’d left. Their figures had long since vanished into the distance.

Side Story 1: The Tragic Heroine: A One-Act Play

The little girl wailed inconsolably.

“Hey... Hic— Why... Whyyy...”

“...”

“Please... Please, open your eyes!”

She shook *it* in front of her—the young man’s lifeless, unresponsive body, now merely a thing. But there was not even a twitch from his form.

“Why? Why won’t you say anything? Brother, say something! Brother, please!”

The little girl clung to the young man’s body as she continued sobbing hysterically.

“What...are you doing?”

“It’s *The Tragic Heroine: A One-Act Play.*”

When Iluna and I responded in unison, albeit with Iluna having thrown in a “Lady Lefifi!” at the end, Lefi looked exasperated.

“Haah... I will never understand why you all cannot simply engage in normal pastimes. And pray tell what Shii’s role in this play is?”

“I’m ’posed to watch over my sad friend from behind her!”

“Hmm... I am not sure you should be smiling so much, then.”

“That’s ’cause the story gets too sad when everyone look sad! So I’m smilin’ instead!”

“Oh, I-I see...”

Though Lefi’s expression made it clear that she had a lot of thoughts on Shii’s cheerful answer, she held back and contented herself with just that comment. *Yeah, just give it up, Lefi. You already know Shii’s the biggest airhead of us all. And that’s sayin’ something, considering how many we have in the first place.*

Our common sense wasn't *her* common sense.

"Lady Lefifi, you should join us too!"

"Wha—"

Beaming happily, Iluna grabbed Lefi's hand and invited her to act with us.

"Now you're part of *The Tragic Heroine: A One-Act Play!*"

"Okay, let's do another take since Lefi's a cast member now too."

"Let's do it!"

"N-No... Um, I did not agree to this, did I?"

The little girl wailed inconsolably.

"Why... Whyyy..."

"W-Woof woof!"

"..."

"Please... Please, open your eyes!"

"Whiiine... Woof woof!"

She shook *it* in front of her—the young man's lifeless, unresponsive body, now merely a thing. But there was not even a twitch from his form.

"Hic— Ngh... J-Just one more time. Let me hear your voice one last time, brother!"

"Woof woof!"

Lefi paused for a second before suddenly interjecting.

"Hold on a moment."

"Sup, Lefi?"

"Do not 'sup' me! Why is there a dog in a tragic play about a heroine?!"

When the dog—er, Lefi wearing dog ears and a dog nose—growled angrily at me, I replied nonchalantly.

"Because the young man has a pet dog. That's the scenario I created. It's a

dumb dog who hasn't realized that its owner is dead yet, so it just keeps being dumb and begging for treats.”

“How did you even conjure up such a bizarrely specific scenario?!”

Lefi looked astonished as she shot back at me. I had a theory that my reason for living was just to see that particular expression on her face.

“Okay, let's change it up a bit, then. The dog is a faithful dog now instead of a dumb dog. So faithful that it realizes its owner is dead and falls into despa—”

“No. Stop. Just stop. I humbly seek your pardon, so please, *please* allow me to play a part other than that of a dog.”

“Sheesh, you sure are picky. Theeen... Hey, you two. Sorry to ask you this since Lefi's the one being a selfish diva, but would one of you mind swapping roles with her?”

“I swap, Master! I be the dog next!”

“Okay! You can be the tragic heroine next, Lady Lefifi! And I'll be the friend watching over from behind!”

“Fab. I'll keep playing the corpse as usual. Right, take three.”

“Urk... Clearly, my luck ran out when I unthinkingly interrupted you fools' amusement!”

It sure did, ma'am.

The young girl wailed inconsolably.

“Oh, uhhh... Ahem. Ohhh, youth. Such a shame you are dead.”

“Pfft.”

The young man made a choking sound, as if trying to hold back his laughter.

“You... Are you not supposed to be dead?”

“Yukiki, dead people don't talk! Okay?!”

“Okay?!”

“S-Sorry, sorry. That just caught me by surprise. I'll be a good corpse now, I

swear.”

The young man’s cadaver lay unmoving on the floor. As it did, the young woman pressed her hand once more to his cheek. His flesh was cold—well, technically, it was pretty warm, but for the sake of the play, it was cold. She stroked his cheek gently with her fingers, perhaps trying to find an outlet for her grief.

“Ohhh, why? How did such a thing come to pass? All four limbs torn off, your entrails ripped out of your body, your heart torn from your chest and devoured... What... What an utterly wretched way to die...”

“Gah ha—”

The young let out a gasp of laughter before quickly stifling it.

A moment of silence. Then.

“Yuki. You accused me of being ‘picky’ or what have you, but clearly, you are incapable of performing your own role, no?”

“B-But it’s not my fault! You just keep adding unnecessary stuff into the scenario without my say-so and it blindsides me, okay?! And why are your details so gory?!”

Now, the young man himself wanted to know the circumstances leading to his gruesome death.

“Ha! Casting stones, are we? When you yourself added unnecessary details to the dog’s role? Hmph. Wait. The dog is completely unnecessary. Is it not best to eliminate that part entirely?”

“Nooo! I like the dog! I wanna be the dog!”

“Shii, be honest. You merely wanted to wear those ears and that nose, did you not?”

“Ack... You gotted me!”

Shii giggled bashfully. *Her cuteness is the drill that will pierce the heavens.*

“All right, I’ve got it. You’re gonna play the young man’s corpse next, and I’ll be the tragic heroine.”

“Hmm... You as the heroine, eh? Very well.”

“Since we’re all in agreement, it’s time for take four!”

The young girl—no, the young man wailed inconsolably.

“Ahhh, why? Why did this happen?”

“...”

“Woof woooof!”

“Please, just one more time. Let me hear your voice one last ti— Oh, hey, this is a dead body right now, isn’t it?”

“Eek?!”

I slid my hand along the dead girl’s corpse and it flinched in response.

“Oh? Ohhh? That’s weird. Did the dead body just move?”

“Y-You...!”

“Lady Lefifi, dead people don’t move! Okay?!”

“Okay?!”

“Grr...”

The young girl growled in her throat after being admonished by the young man’s friend in the background and his dog. Then, resigned to her fate, she returned to her lifeless state once more.

“Ahhh! Ahhh, I’m devastated... To see my beloved, the one person who means everything to me, like this...”

“Guh... Ngh...!”

Muffled gasps and pants escaped from the dead girl’s lips on account of being on the receiving end of the young man’s blatant sexual harassment. Even so, she did her best to stifle her voice as she continued her performance as a corpse.

“I-I still can’t believe you’re dead... My sadness is so overwhelming that I want to draw on your face with this permanent marker...”

“Nh...? Y-Yuki! Do not! Do not use that on me! I know that ink does not disappear!”

That was the last straw, and she could no longer keep quiet at this point. Shouting angrily, the dead girl’s corpse bolted upright as she used her hands to cover her face and ward off the young man’s shenanigans.

“Ooh, you remembered, huh? You are correct, madame. This does not, in fact, come off, no matter how hard you wash.”

“You are not as funny as you think, you imbecile! Bah, you already managed to write a few things on me! How dare you take advantage of the fact that I could not move?! How will you repent for this insult?!”

“Relax, all right? I swore to myself that I’d love you forever regardless of your looks!”

“I know full well that you are attempting to trick me with such pretty words!”

The young man and the dead girl started screaming at each other. Next to them, the little girl playing the friend murmured quietly.

“Oh, dear... I guess this means the play’s over, huh?”

“Yeah, I think so... Iluna, let’s play outside!”

“Good idea!”

The little girl who played the friend and the little girl who played the dog—Iluna and Shii, respectively—left the quarreling duo behind in the real throne room and went out to the meadow area to play.

Chapter 2: Dungeon Conquest

“Right, then. All that’s left to do is visit the adventurers’ guild. This is good enough for today, so we can rest now.”

After we left the mayor’s residence, one of his servants guided us to a luxurious inn, where they handled the paperwork for us. Carlotta said those words to us while they finished up.

“Are you certain, Commander?”

She nodded in response to the knight who asked that question.

“Yes. Rest is also important. We have been traveling by carriage for two days. Sello and Nazul are in the most need of rest, as they acted as our drivers. Besides, there are some among us who rarely get to meet.”

Upon seeing the smirk on Carlotta’s face, the rest of the knights seemed to realize something, because they suddenly started grinning knowingly too. Each of them excused themselves while still grinning, leaving me and Nell alone.

Jeez. Could they be any more obvious? I smiled wryly while Nell, looking embarrassed, muttered, “Darn them all...” at the holy knights’ teasing thoughtfulness. Then I spoke to her.

“Nell, you have anything you wanna do or anywhere you wanna go?”

“Mm, not really.”

“Good. Then let’s have some fun.”

“Huh? Oh, sure, but where?”

What are you supposed to do when you make a trip to the ocean? That’s right! Play on the beach!



Is he actually an idiot? I’d had the thought countless times before, but now, I was fairly certain he was.

“Hmm. Yes, yes... Yes.”

No, not “yes.” I scowled at my beau even as my cheeks flushed with embarrassment because of the way he tilted his head this way and that while inspecting my body. His attitude oozed satisfaction.



“Mr. Yuki, what *are* these undergarments? I wore them since it’s just the two of us here, but...”

He had given me a pair of undergarments when he’d brought me to this deserted stretch of the beach. It consisted of a top and bottom. The design was cute, which made me happy, but the fabric itself covered an extremely small amount of skin. I’d obliged his request to wear the outfit since my Scout ability and honed skill as a hero to sense others’ presence had informed me we were the only two in the vicinity. But...

“That’s not an undergarment. It’s called a swimsuit. You wear it when you wanna go swimming in a river or the ocean.”

“I...don’t think that’s correct. I’m almost positive a swimsuit looks more like actual clothing, yes? I’ve never seen something with such little fabric...”

I’d seen sailors wear swimsuits during their training regimen and there was no way these scraps of cloth could ever be mistaken for one. The women’s clothes in the city were certainly more revealing than others I’d seen, perhaps due to the locale, but they were still properly dressed. I couldn’t really say the same about myself, though, since I was definitely in an extremely revealing outfit at the moment.

“Chill out, will ya? It looks amazing on you. Trust me. Anyone who sees you won’t be able to take their eyes off you! Well, if any man besides me sees you right now, I’m ready and more than willing to rip his eyeballs out of his head.”

“Oh my goodness, no. Don’t do that.”

A rueful laugh escaped my lips.

By the way, he was wearing a swimsuit too. It resembled knee-length shorts. That was all he wore, so his torso was naked. He wasn’t brawny by any means, but his lean, lightly muscled frame was quite my type, if I was being honest. The faint outline of his firm abdominal muscles also made me aware of his masculinity. *Tee hee hee.*

“Hngyah?! Wh-What the heck, Nell?!”

“Huh? Oh, um, I-I’m sorry.”

I had unthinkingly reached out to stroke the abs that were begging to be touched, then hurriedly withdrawn my fingers at his startled exclamation. *Oh, shoot.* My hand had moved automatically the moment I'd seen those defined abs.

“Wait a second. Why *shouldn't* I touch you? I *am* your wife, after all, Mr. Yuki. Which means your abdominal muscles belong to me.”

“Last I checked they belong to me?!”

My partner's retort incited me to be resolute with my next words.

“But, Mr. Yuki, aren't you always touching Lew's ears or Lefi's horns with the justification, 'You're my wife, so they belong to me!'? So, by that logic, your abs belong to me. And since Lew's ears and Lefi's horns belong to you, they belong to me as well!”

“Holy smokes! You're making some wild arguments there, aren't ya?! I-I do remember saying something like that, but— Hyoaaah?!”

When I started jabbing him aggressively in his sides, he let out a high-pitched sound he'd normally never have made.

“Anyway! There you have it, Mr. Yuki! Now be a good boy and show me your belly!”

“H-Hey— Hee hee hee! Stop it! That tickles!”

“Aha ha ha ha! Wait! Come back!”

Laughing gleefully, I chased after him as he fled. All the while, a warmth bloomed steadily within my chest.



The next day, early in the morning.

“Well, well. Seeing how tanned you both are, I assume you enjoyed your time in the sun, eh?”

“We sure did.”

“I-I'm sorry. I know we aren't here for leisure, but I admit that I thoroughly enjoyed myself...”

Carlotta looked slightly bemused as she spoke to us. I'd responded with an aggressive thumbs-up, while Nell'd sounded apologetic.

Yesterday, we'd decided not to hang out at the beach for too long because we hadn't wanted to be tired the next day, so we'd only spent an hour or so frolicking there before we'd changed into our regular clothes and wandered around the city for a while. We'd eaten dinner at a seaside restaurant, then headed back to the inn.

I'd had an absolute blast. I'd laughed and relaxed to my heart's content, making the day one of the best I'd ever had. Honestly, I wouldn't've minded just calling it a trip now and heading home, as happy as I felt. Deadass had just played tourist so far and nothing else.

"You have nothing to apologize for. I was the one who suggested we all rest. Besides, I have no reason to concern myself with how you choose to spend your free time. Heh heh, I am glad to hear you're both well rested, however."

Carlotta smiled cheerfully at us. Then, she cleared her throat, and her expression became more serious as she continued.

"Right, then. I'd like to head to the adventurers' guild now. Are you both ready?"

"Yup. What are we doing there, though?"

"They're in charge of the dungeon we will be infiltrating on this expedition. As we are holy knights and not adventurers, we must inform them in advance of our plans. We can also request the assistance of several folks there familiar with the dungeon's interior."

"Oh, I get it. We're securing guides for ourselves, right?"

Yeah, definitely better to have a few with us considering that we were outsiders without any information on the dungeon or how it worked.

"We're ready, Commander. We made all our preparations before leaving our room."

"Excellent. Then let's head out."

“Good morning. How may I help you today?”

“I believe you should have already received a missive, but we are from the Holy Order of Faldienne. Might you summon the guild master for us?”

“Oh, yes, the holy knights. Please wait a moment.”

The lady manning the reception desk reacted immediately to Carlotta’s request and walked quickly to the area of the building behind her. A short time later, she came back with a slender young man.

“You must be the holy knights. I’m Jay, the guild master here. Lord Abel has told me everything. I appreciate you accepting our request for assistance and coming all the way out here.”

“Please, think nothing of it. We have our own reasons for being here as well. It just so happened that the interests of the Church and the guild lined up on this occasion.”

“Well, that certainly takes a load off my shoulders. Thank you. We’ll end the formalities there, so let me introduce you to the people who will be supporting you. Griff, Lulour, and Reyes.”

“At your service.”

“Howdy.”

“Goodness, you two really need to work on your manners... Yes, sir, Guild Master.”

A party of three responded to the guild master’s summons. It looked like they’d been waiting in the tavern attached to the guild headquarters. First, there was the man named Griff. He was properly equipped for his role with a one-handed sword and shield. He seemed to be the party leader. The woman, Lulour, wore a robe, so I figured she was a conjurer. Last, the man named Reyes was dressed in light armor and had a bow. Each introduced themselves to us.

As a refresher, adventurers were split into seven ranks: Bronze, Iron, Silver, Gold, Mythril, Adamantite, and Orichalcum. This trio was apparently Mythril-class, meaning they were considered pretty high up in the adventurer hierarchy. A look at their stats attested to their ranks too. They were on par with the holy

knights that weren't Nell and Carlotta.

"Oho. They certainly assigned us the cream of the crop, hm?"

I heard Carlotta murmur those words. She must've figured out they were relatively skilled too.

"Among the parties who went to defeat the demon lord, these three were the only ones who returned unscathed after a direct confrontation. I think you'll find them useful."

"That is indeed a feat in itself. I expect you won't disappoint us, then."

"Ugh. Guild Master, will you cut it out? Frankly, you should probably manage your expectations. We got cocky a while back in the Demonic Forest and almost paid for it with our lives, so we've just been extra careful ever since. That's probably why we made it back alive."

Smiling ruefully, Griff, the party leader, spoke humbly. *Ooh, they've been to the Demonic Forest? Maybe some of the adventurers who visit the outer reaches to collect rare materials every now and then?*

"Now, now. No need to be so modest. Besides, if you don't produce results for us, the guild will lose face. So work hard and make us look good."

"Well... We'll do what we can, of course."

Chided by the guild master, Griff responded in a fairly lackluster way. *Oh, wait, I think I get it. Maybe they're just acting as guides for the sake of the guild?*

If this expedition succeeded in defeating the demon lord, the Church could proudly declare that it had used its power, through the holy knights, to accomplish the task. But by including adventurers in our group, the adventurers' guild could do the same thing. Based on the fact that Carlotta said nothing, I figured the bigwigs must've already discussed all this behind the scenes.

That reminded me. I was technically an adventurer myself, even though I'd only accepted that one job. The time Lefi and I had registered with a guild branch to obtain IDs. Mine was still sleeping in Inventory. It was probably...not

something I should mention to them. Especially because the name I'd registered was Yuki and not Wye.

I probably wouldn't need to explain myself if Carlotta found out my real name. Then again, she still called me "Mask" and Nell was remembering to refer to me as "Mr. Wye," so better just to keep things as is, considering it hadn't really been an issue so far anyway. If the chance came up to reveal my real name to her at some point, I'd take it.

After that, Carlotta took care of a bunch of paperwork and whatnot, then we headed out. Our destination turned out to be a seaside wharf.

"Ooh! Is this how we're going traveling?!"

I couldn't contain my excitement as I stared at the massive sailing vessel floating in front of us. I had no idea what they called it in this world, but back on Earth, it would've definitely been categorized as a galleon. I could see a bunch of sailors hard at work loading cargo and other things on too. Based on that, I figured out the ship needed a fairly large crew to operate.

It was the first time in my life I'd seen a real live sailing vessel. No surprise, then, that just looking at it made me giddy as hell. I'd ridden on cheap tour boats back in my old life, but a beast like this one, an honest-to-Satan sailing ship, was another story entirely. One of the many manly dreams men have.

"Wait. Hold on. I know it's too late to be asking at this point, but why are we going by ship?"

Nell answered me as I failed to grasp the most fundamental reason for the ship.

"Oh, right, we haven't told you yet, Mr. Wye. Well, the truth is, the dungeon we're about to infiltrate is actually out on the sea."

"It's on the what now?"

Like, was there an entrance to a grotto floating around out there or something? No, that would've just made it a small, isolated island, so it couldn't have been that. While an imaginary question mark floated over my head, Nell stared at me with an expression I could only describe as a grimace.

“Hmm? What is it? You look just like Iluna when she sees green peppers in her food.”

“Hats off to you for the very imaginative analogy.”

Nell giggled for a moment before continuing.

“To put it correctly, the dungeon is a phantom ship floating on the sea.”

“A phantom ship?”

She went on to give me all the details. As of some time ago, there'd been tons of sightings of ghoulish-type monsters like wraiths and skeletons in the waters surrounding this port. An investigation had been launched to identify the source, which ended up being a phantom ship floating on the sea.

At first, it'd been mistaken for an abandoned ship just drifting along, so the group that had initially discovered it had tried to undertake rescue efforts. But a relentless stream of monsters had greeted them when they'd boarded. They'd rushed out and managed to escape, after which many more investigations had been conducted to determine exactly what the phantom ship was. The final conclusion was that the ship had transformed into a dungeon and was birthing monsters.

The reason our own sailing vessel was so large had to do with the phantom ship we were about to invade. Seeing as it was out on the water, we needed our ship to serve as our headquarters. Ours also needed to be able to carry a ton of supplies since we could potentially be there for a while, which was another reason for its size.

Magical storage like my Inventory may have existed in this world, but that didn't mean everyone and their mothers could use it. And even if they could, there was still a storage limit to worry about.

“You gonna be all right on a ghost ship, Nell? What with you being a scaredy-cat and all.”

She's a first-class scaredy-cat. But that's what makes her cute, so it's totes fine.

“Urk... I can't even deny that since I'm well aware of my timidity... Well, it

isn't as if I have a choice considering this is work..."

A faraway look in her eyes, Nell replied philosophically.

Huh. Work. Work, huh? Well, I could understand that. It didn't matter how much you hated something, if it was your job, you had to do it, right?

"Ugh... When I first heard about the mission, they only told me it was a dungeon conquest, so I took it without really asking any more questions. I never imagined it would be a phantom ship... Haaaah..."

My wife let out a huge exhale that was very unlike her. I smiled ruefully and patted her head in an attempt to cheer her up.

"Eh, don't worry. It's not like you're going in alone. Plus, I'll protect you no matter what happens anyway. The only thing I can't help you with is your fear. You're on your own there."

"Mr. Wye... If only you hadn't said those last bits. Then you could have ended on a cool line."

"Sorry not sorry. Lately, I'm so head over heels for you that teasing you has become one of my reasons for living!"

"I have to tell you, I'm actually shocked by how *unhappy* your confession makes me!"

I laughed at Nell as she puffed out her cheeks angrily next to me. Still chuckling, I walked across the gangway and boarded the galleon along with the holy knights. Not too long after, the sailors finished loading everything onto our ship, and a big man who seemed to be the captain called out in a booming voice.

"Hoist the sails!"

"Hoist the sails!" his crew chanted back to him.

They cast off the mooring lines, and several sailors set each of the numerous masts to sail. With that, the galleon slowly cut through the water.



"And then, the captain heard it. He didn't know how it was possible, but a

voice called out his name.”

Reyes, one of the adventurers, was spinning us a tale in an eerie tone.

“All of his comrades had retreated to the ship by that point. Only he remained, so there shouldn’t have been anyone left who knew his name to call out to him. It made no sense. With an unholy chill snaking down his spine, the captain turned around fearfully...”

Gulp. The sound of someone swallowing the spit pooling in their mouth. No one interrupted Reyes’s storytelling.

“...and found a smiling skeleton there. It continued repeating his name, its bones rattling as it cackled.”

Silence took over. I could see a few holy knights rubbing their arms up and down like they were trying to get rid of their goose bumps.

“Renowned for his daring, the captain screamed in terror and fled. Which brings us to now. Be careful. Though the captain and his crew returned safely, the same cannot be said of the ones inhabiting the phantom ship. Cursed by the gods, they can never again set foot on land, forced to wander the oceans for eternity. So they attack the living out of envy and hatred. At least, that’s how the story goes.”

“Who... Who told you they were cursed by the gods?”

One of the holy knights questioned Reyes.

“It’s a local legend passed down among mariners in these parts. A phantom ship is the fate of those cursed by the gods for ridiculing them.”

Oh, snap. It was the Soaring Dutchman. Were we really about to board the Soaring Dutchman? *I guess you can find the same stories anywhere, huh?*

Except back on Earth, that was just a legend, whereas here, it actually existed as a dungeon. So in terms of threat level, the two couldn’t even be compared given the danger this one posed. Honestly, I found it scary to learn that ghost stories could actually be real here. Not to mention the possibility that the skeleton in the story was a monster possessing Analysis or some other ability. When I thought about it like that, the situation sounded less and less like a

man's dream.

"Oh, dear... Everyone, I would *strongly* suggest you take his words with a grain of salt. He's only repeating what he heard from drunkards in a tavern."

Lulour, the robed woman who was probably their party's conjurer, made that comment while glaring at Reyes.

"Come now, Lulour. The fact that we don't know if stories like these are truth or tall tales is exactly what makes them interesting."

"Have you already forgotten what happened to you the other day when you believed one of those cock-and-bull stories?"

Reyes winced like she'd hit the bull's-eye on a painful experience.

"Whoa, what's going on in here? Looks like you're having fun, huh?"

"Mm, it pleases me to see you all deepening your bonds with each other."

Griff, the leader of the trio's party, and Carlotta appeared from one of the interior rooms of the ship. They'd gone off to discuss something or other and were now back to join us. They commented on the holy knights laughing and chatting with the other two adventurers.

"Ah, our mighty leader and the most esteemed lady knight."

Reyes spoke to them when he saw them.

"Three, four... Good. It seems most of you are already on deck, so let's host a meeting right here and now. The rest of you, to us!"

The sound of Carlotta's voice had the other holy knights not near us rushing to her instantly.

"This is everyone, eh? All right, let's start the meeting. First things first, Lord Griff, as you have experience in the dungeon, would you kindly advise us on everything we should be aware of?"

"Uhhh..."

Griff looked like a deer in headlights upon hearing Carlotta's request. He scratched his head for a few moments before opening his mouth.

"By your leave, then, here are a few pointers. First off, there's something you

should watch out for before we even board: the sea itself.”

“The sea?”

The holy knights who asked that sounded confused.

“If you try to get close to the ghost ship, the monsters around it will attack. There aren’t just flying ones but sea-dwelling ones too. During the initial investigation, a serpent-type monster appeared beneath one of the boats and crushed it between its jaws. So be careful.”

Made sense to me. After all, it was pretty hard to see below the water’s surface. I didn’t think I’d make a mistake like that so easily on account of having the Scout ability, but it definitely wasn’t gonna hurt to be cautious anyway.

“Next up is the interior of the ghost ship itself. You’ll understand once you actually see it for yourselves, but it’s massively complicated inside. Be extra vigilant around corners and hidden places so nothing catches you off guard. Also, the layout of the interior changes, meaning there’s a real concern we won’t know what’s happening. Be aware of your surroundings at all times.”

“You’re sure about the layout changing?”

Griff nodded affirmatively in response to my question.

“Yeah, I am. Apparently, the structure switches at regular intervals. I’ve had to update the map I drew a few times. If it weren’t for the constant changes, we would have been able to raid it at a much faster pace.”

He waved the stack of parchment he was holding, rustling the pages of the hand-drawn map.

Hmm, okay. Sounded like he was describing actual physical changes. Very different from the tricks the youngest wraith triplet, Roh, played on trespassers with her mind magic. I’d had no idea dungeons were even capable of that. I made a mental note to myself to remember that little tidbit of info.

“As for the monsters on the phantom ship, I think you already know what to expect, but I’ll tell you again. They’re mostly ghoulish-type monsters like wraiths, undead, and skeletons. The demon lord is also a ghoulish-type. Well, I’m sure you holy knights are experts at eliminating those kinds of creatures, so I have high

expectations of you on that front. Sound good?”

Griff shrugged nonchalantly, and Carlotta picked up from there.

“You heard him. Our opponents are the perfect match for those of us belonging to the Church. If you make any mistakes, the brass at headquarters will dismiss you. Ah, but I suppose on this occasion, I shall make an exception for you, Nell.”

“C-Commander, I’d rather you didn’t single me out like that...”

Nell tightened her lips unhappily while the rest of us laughed.

The discussion about the dungeon continued after that as we swayed on the ship that was gliding forward. Then, one of the sailors observing through a telescope raised his voice.

“Dungeon ho!”

All of us waiting on the deck simultaneously turned in the direction he pointed. Still far off in the distance, we could see a dot floating on the ocean. The closer we got, the bigger it became, until we could see the whole shebang.

“Whoooa...”

That exclamation slipped out of my mouth at the sight before us. *This...is something else, huh?* When Nell’d first told me about the ghost ship, my imagination had come up with a vague picture of a rotting ship falling apart. But I’d been wrong.

There were, in fact, *several* ghost ships. A number of broken-down vessels piled up as one massive lump in the ocean. The scale of it all was almost indescribable. I’d try my best, though. If I were to put it into words, it felt like a ship graveyard floating on the water.

It made me insanely curious as to how it’d even gotten to the state it was in. But I was pretty sure I knew the answer already. It was most likely a function of the dungeon’s mysterious power.

Now I completely understood why we needed guides. No way would we have been able to get around without them. If we recklessly charged into a demon

lord's domain, it would take days to make our way through the collection of phantom ships. Could even take a whole month if we got really unlucky.

As soon as I started to survey our target, my Scout ability reacted, warning me of enemies nearby. My eyes confirmed the presence of fireballs, wraiths, skeletons, and more floating on top of and around the swarm of ghost ships.

Hmm... Not cute at all. My frame of reference for wraiths was the triplets—Rei, Rui, and Roh—so I'd just assumed they were all cute. Clearly, though, normal wraiths were just hideous creatures. Seeing these abominations made me realize how unique and special those girls actually were. *Super-duper glad it was them who appeared when I summoned wraiths back then and not whatever these things are.*

"Heek..."

From next to me, Nell sucked in a sharp breath even though we were still on our own ship.

"Sheesh, woman. We haven't even boarded."

"I-I'm fine. I'm totally fine."

"Yeah, you're totally not."

"I said I'm fine!"

"O-Okay, jeez. If you say you're fine, you're fine."

Nell aggressively shoved her face close to mine. Overwhelmed by the pressure rolling off her, I bent my torso away in reaction. I was pretty sure she was just trying to convince herself by being so forceful about it.

"Ser Carlotta. If we draw any closer, our ship runs the risk of being attacked and captured. I'm sorry, but you'll have to go by boat the rest of the way."

The captain spoke to her after instructing his crew to lower the sails and bring the ship to a halt.

"Yes, I understand. Then, please remain here until we return. All right, you lot. That marks the end of our pleasure cruise. Conduct your final weapons and gear checks."

The holy knights obeyed immediately and set about looking over their equipment. *I guess I should do the same thing.* And with that, I reached into Inventory.

“I see you’re not using a greatsword this time, Mr. Wye. Is that...a mace?”



“Yup. You said space would be tight, so I got myself ready with this newbie.”

Since I’d chosen not to bring En with me on this dungeon conquest, the weapon I would be using was what I liked to call a “war club.”

Goumetsu: A black war club crafted by the Demon Lord Yuki. Destroys anything that stands in its way as it extends its death grip of domination. Quality: S-.

I’d named it “Goumetsu.” Made of adamantite, it sported a fairly large head with a protrusion attached to the end of a metal rod and was about the same length as a two-handed sword. As for its weight, shockingly enough, it weighed more than En in her sword form. If I put it down carelessly on a random floor, it would definitely dent that floor. The dungeon’s floor was fine, though.

I’d installed two sorcerous circuits into the weapon, Weight Doubling and Explosion. By pouring my magic into it and striking a target, I could double the mace’s weight, then cause extra damage with the explosion.

My concept for this weapon had been “one I could use with my brain off and just rely on its power to bulldoze my opponent.” I’d had to factor in another circumstance too, which was that En let me get away with knives for bladed weapons but sulked when I made any other kinds. To get around that, I’d decided to create something that looked absolutely nothing like a sword.

There were a few things a demon lord could never win against. They were his wives, his little sisters, and his very own daughter. *Sad, ain’t it?*

“Looks like your final checks are complete, eh? Time to go, then!”

At Carlotta’s command, we made our way off the ship by climbing down rope ladders, boarding the three boats that’d been lowered onto the ocean’s surface. Each one was outfitted with a magical device on the stern where an engine would normally be. It was apparently a unique type of device that allowed the boat to move on its own without an oarsman. Naturally, this meant they were insanely expensive and rarely put into use, but the mayor of the Port of Powza had splurged on them specifically for this dungeon conquest. It just

proved how seriously he took the issue of eliminating the bevy of phantom ships.

“May the fortunes of war guide you. Salute!”

While the sailors aboard the ship saluted us, we activated the magical engines on our boats. They didn't get us moving all that fast, but they definitely had us slicing through the waves faster than an oarsman would've.

The closer we got to the swarm of decrepit ghost ships, the creepier they looked. Though I wasn't a scaredy-cat like Nell, I still shuddered at the sight. And when I actually thought about it, I realized they were made of wood. Which made them flammable, didn't it?

“...”

I opened Inventory and started fishing around inside. Sitting next to me on our boat, Nell watched me rummaging as she tried to cover up her anxiety with a brave face. Then, she spoke.

“Huh? Mr. Wye, what are you— Huh?! Mr. Wye?!”

I'd pulled out several mythril knives. She sounded shocked because she knew exactly what purpose they served—mediums to activate a special type of firepower magic. I smirked at her in response.

“Watch this. Carlotta! Can you stop the boats right there for a bit?!”

“Hmm?”

Despite the puzzled expression on her face, she nevertheless asked her subordinates to stop the boats where I wanted them. Once I'd made sure all three had stopped, I activated the sorcerous circuits in the mythril knives by pushing my magic into them, then hurled them in rapid succession at the gathering of ghost ships. Each of the mythril knives pierced the hulls of the phantom ships beautifully, and a moment later, a fantastic show of light and sound tremendous enough to destroy all five senses was set off.

The light dyed everything in its vicinity a dark, brilliant red, while the shock wave from the blast slammed into the water's surface. The heat from the explosion assaulted us, even as far away as we were.

“Whoa?!”

“Gah!”

I heard a few shouts, both surprise and fear mixed into the owners’ voices. The blast swallowing up the cluster of ghost ships created swells in the water big enough to rock our boats.

Let me tell you about what I’d just used. They were mythril knives outfitted with Explosive Roaring Blaze sorcerous circuits. That was the one I’d learned after maxing out the Sorcerer’s Grant ability by getting it to level 10. The same one that was powerful enough to exterminate an entire army.

Once the circuit was activated with my magic, it created a brutally hot explosion the second a knife stabbed into its target. That explosion melted everything it touched, not leaving even a single ash behind. Just complete annihilation. The wind from the blast burned everything it touched too, adding to the damage.

Long story short, they were knife-shaped bombs. And as with most of my gadgets, they consumed a stupid amount of magic. Right now, my MP was peanuts compared to Lefi’s, but it was still monstrously high compared to humans’. I could fire ten of those mythril knives before it was drained. But hey, it looked like they worked.

I checked our surroundings using Scout and Maps combined. With this one attack, I’d managed to reduce the number of enemy blips by a whole heckuva lot. Visually, about half of the area was still obscured by columns of water still billowing up, but based on what I could see, I’d succeeded in opening a huge gap within the cluster of phantom ships. Flames continued blazing upward here and there too. All in all, very clearly a catastrophe.

Maaan, I’ve gotten really good at throwing, huh? Past me would’ve been just fine with getting two out of five knives to hit their targets.

“Keh keh keh... Too bad for you, huh? You attracted this dem—no, *Mask’s* attention, so savor the flavor of regret— Wait, what?”

The ghost ships should have burned down to nothing more than scraps of seaweed, if that. But some kind of dungeon function was in play. Planks floating

in the gap suddenly started wriggling and squirming as the wounded areas repaired themselves. It only took a few minutes for them to recover, making it like nothing had even happened.

The fires still burned, but as far as I could see, the massive damage I'd inflicted was all gone. Actually, maybe not. I could only say this because I myself operated a dungeon, but I had no doubt that the demon lord had just spent a fat stack of Dungeon Points to carry out the repairs.

Also, though the ghost ships had reverted to their original appearances, the monsters stationed in the opening I'd created were definitely dead. Unless the demon lord deployed new subordinates to that location, it would remain an empty zone. Meaning my attack hadn't been *completely* pointless.

The question now was what to do next. Did I keep throwing mythril knives until my MP ran out? Or would it be better to think about efficiency and stick to a reliable plan of attack?

The former means a battle of endurance, doesn't it? It'd be a matter of whose MP ran out first, mine or the enemy's. Hell, even if mine did, I could just retreat and wait until it recovered.

That said, I'd come on this little jaunt for a dungeon conquest. I wanted to see with my own two eyes what kinds of dungeons other demon lords made, so maybe a frontal attack was the move?

While I considered my options, Carlotta called out to me.

"Mask, the next time you feel the need to pull off a stunt like that, would you *mind* letting me know in advance?"

Yes, ma'am. Forgive me, ma'am. I literally just thought of it a few minutes ago, so...

"Wh-What in blazes *was* that just now? Mask, my friend, you're frighteningly talented!"

I waved my hand lazily in acknowledgment at Reyes.

By the way, I'd been wearing my mask all day today. I'd put it on before we'd stopped by the adventurers' guild. Upon Carlotta's request again.

“Right, then. Mask, can you still throw more of those?”

“Yeah, I can. But I’m pretty sure the same thing’ll happen. I think I managed to chip away at the enemy’s magic supply, but considering my own, it might be better to go with a more reliable plan of attack instead.”

“Hmm, yes, it would be difficult to continue firing while maintaining that level of force... Well, you did reduce the number of enemies considerably. Asking anything more of you now would simply be greedy of me.”

Ya know, I can actually whip those knives out one after the other, though. My MP would recover quickly too since I had a few bottles of the Super Mana Potion. But it was fine. I’d call off my “Set your heart ablaze! Burning!” strategy and stick to a straightforward assault. Untold adventures still awaited me!



“Whoa. That was close.”

I jerked my foot back quickly after running it through a plank.

There’d been no counterattack from the dungeon after my initial assault with Explosive Roaring Blaze, so we’d headed for one of the half-sunken ghost ships in the cluster and boarded it. The trio of adventurers had led the way through the deck of the ship, guiding us toward the massive phantom ship enshrined at the center of the swarm. It was apparently the flagship, making it the fastest route to the demon lord.

“Hmm. Just like the reports indicated, the path is indeed treacherous. Watch your step, everyone.”

We all kept moving forward while heeding Carlotta’s warning.

The interior of the ship resembled the outside in terms of its state of decay. Traces of how it’d looked before becoming a ghost ship could be found in the wooden tankards, dishes, broken shelves, and whatnot lying around. When I accidentally placed a hand against the backrest of a wooden chair, it broke immediately even though I’d used no strength at all. *All this has been rotting for a long time, huh?*

Just like I’d expanded the space inside my dungeon, the same effect seemed

to have been applied here. I could tell from the unnaturally wide corridors and numerous rooms. From the outside, I'd assumed the inside would be relatively large, but now, I had to acknowledge that it might be even more massive than I'd suspected.

Though rays of light occasionally shone through the crumbling walls of the ghost ship, there was no other light, which made it pretty dim inside. The holy knights were using their magic to generate light so they could see properly.

"Lord Griff, did you encounter this many monsters on your last expedition here too?"

"No, there were a lot more last time. Wish we'd had such an easy go of it back then..."

Carlotta asked him that almost nonchalantly while she dismembered a skeleton in one shot. Griff responded just as casually.

As evidenced by their conversation, we weren't exactly being overwhelmed by monster attacks. Seemed my Explosive Roaring Blaze really had gotten rid of a whole bunch of them. A few skeletons and zombies attacked the group, but they mostly just wandered in instead of being part of a cohesive group. They were basically no match for us.

By the way, Nell was just fine right now. As long as no one suddenly burst out of the darkness with a "Howdy, folks!" of course. Even then, though, I felt like all she'd be was nervous instead of scared silly.

That was how the dungeon conquest had gotten off to a great start.

"Ooh... Is that a treasure chest?"

My eyes picked up a treasure chest concealed among a jumble of wooden crates and barrels in a dusty corner of what appeared to be a storage room. Two skeletons wearing armor guarded the room. Despite their stats being a level higher than the others we'd run into so far, they honestly weren't all that strong, so I bashed 'em into pieces like it was nothing using my Goumetsu, my primary weapon on this excursion.

Maaan, war clubs are nice. And this dungeon was beautifully compatible with mine.

“Mask, mate, be wary. Half the time, treasure chests are designed to trap intruders by distracting them. Makes no difference if they’re full or empty either. I also feel the need to mention that this room wasn’t here the last time.”

Reyes the adventurer gave me that warning when he noticed my gaze being drawn to the item in question.

Hrrrm... Well, he made a fair point since this wasn’t a game. I mean, I sure as hell didn’t leave anything important in my castle either. Although I had another reason for not using it as a warehouse. My demon lord castle was essentially the little-girl gang’s playground, so I made sure not to store anything breakable in there.

“Oookaaay, I’ll be super-duper extra careful. Lucky for us, I brought just the thing for situations like this.”

I knew I should listen to Reyes and let this go, but c’mon! My very first treasure chest! I *had* to open it, even if it was a trap.

I asked Carlotta for permission first, though. Just in case. She gave it with a, “Well, I suppose it shouldn’t be a problem since it’s you.” Then, I began studying the treasure chest.

My Scout ability didn’t react, so I decided it wasn’t a mimic-type monster. Next, I used my Demon Eyes to inspect it, and... *Aha, there’s something there.* I could see magic swirling in one spot inside the chest.

It also had a physical lock on the outside built into it. I needed to do something about that too if I wanted to open it up. There was just one problem: I didn’t have the advanced tech to disarm this kind of trap.

What to do, what to do... Oh, I know! I’ll use the secret gadget I brought with me especially for this dungeon conquest!

“Omigosh... Mr. Wye, what *is* that? It looks kinda sinister.”

“Oho, what do we have here? I don’t believe I’ve ever seen the like.”

The thing I’d taken out of Inventory was a hand. Its five fingers were thin and knife sharp, and the palm was constructed from a bone-like material. There were patterns all over it—right up to the fingertips—to make it easier to pour

magic through.

I called it an Evil Hand. It was part of the same golem series that my Evil Eyes and Evil Ears, the devices I'd used countless times thus far, belonged to. It was capable of undoing traps and locks, making it the perfect tool for a dungeon conquest.

As for how it worked, once I pushed my magic into it, that magic would flare from the tips of its fingers. When the magic came into contact with its target, the Evil Hand would analyze how to undo it. For example, if it was a trap, it would figure out how to disable it. If it was a lock, it would inspect the internal mechanism of the lock to open it. In either case, after the Evil Hand determined how to solve the trap or lock, I had full control of the five fingers so I could undo the obstacle.

The amount of time it took depended on the object. But as far as my experiments went, there was nothing this thing couldn't solve. I'd tested it out on an Earth lock I'd bought with DP and the damn thing had opened it in a literal second.

I would've loved to have had such a ridiculously handy item way sooner. Unfortunately for me, this particular golem hadn't even appeared in the DP Catalog until *after* the dungeon had leveled up as a result of the Spirit Emperor sharing his power with me, so it'd literally been out of my hands. A rare golem indeed.

"Do it."

I tossed the Evil Hand toward the treasure chest. Already loaded with my magic, it flexed its knifelike fingers and landed skillfully on top of the chest. Its thumb and pinky held its body upright while it used the remaining three fingers to release the magic and analyze the treasure chest.

A few moments later, it completed its analysis, then scabbled all over the chest like it was alive. It explored every nook and cranny until finally, a clicking sound came from somewhere inside the chest.

"Whoo! It's open!"

"Woow..."

Everyone behind me let out that sound of astonishment. They'd been watching the spectacle curiously this whole time. As for me, heart racing with excitement over my very first treasure chest, I lifted the lid.

So there's this movie called *Specter Ship*. It's pretty old, but it has this scene that traumatized the ever-loving snot out of me when I watched it. Two of the crewmen were eating canned food. Except what they were *actually* eating was... Anyway, that's the scene.

After watching that scene, I'd felt like throwing up *and* I'd lost my appetite for the longest time. But there was a reason I remembered that now.

"What?"

That reason was what I saw inside the treasure box. A massive. Swarm. Of wriggling. *Maggots*. The second I raised the lid, a few of them clinging to the underside crawled up my fingers and made their way to my palm.

"Ngyyyaaaaahhhhh?!?!?!"

I screamed bloody murder and jerked my hand away from the chest while I violently shook my arm to get rid of the maggots. Stumbling backward in a panic, I grabbed onto Nell out of unholy terror because she just happened to be right there next to me.

Eek! A-Are they gone?! Did I manage to shake 'em all off?!

"Whoa, t-take it easy, Mr. Wye. Ah, I see. That certainly is disgusting, hm? You're fine now. You're fine. See?"

She patted my head soothingly as she tried to comfort me. I knelt on the ground with my arms wrapped tightly around her waist. I could feel my lips trembling when I spoke.

"Nell... I'm done. I can't take this anymore. I think I'm gonna die."

"Don't worry, Mr. Wye. Nobody's ever died from being startled by maggots."

Nell's warmth and the rueful laughter I could hear in her voice managed to calm me down. Though I knew how extremely pathetic I must've looked, I remained in my kneeling position, clinging desperately to her while repeatedly taking deep breaths. Then, I finally got to my feet.

“Wah, hic... Th-That scared the shit outta me... Seriously. Like, for real. I c-c-can’t stop shaking. I almost d-d-didn’t make it out alive. Did I m-m-mention that I can’t stop sh-shaking?”

I could barely string a coherent sentence together as words temporarily abandoned me. God’s honest truth, I really was ready to call it right then and there. I still had the goose bumps to end all goose bumps to prove that.

Ngh... I’d been so excited at the prospect of discovering my very first treasure chest. All I’d needed to do was look inside after the trap was disarmed. But I never could’ve seen a trap capable of inflicting such mental agony coming.

I didn’t even get to the worst part, though. There’d been nothing else in there except the maggots! *Your ass is definitely mine now, you damned demon lord!*

“Well, boyo, you sure had your fun teasing the little miss there, but in the end, you screamed like a little girl way before she did, eh?”

“Truer words and all that. To think he’s the strongest among us by far. At least in terms of physical strength.”

Griff and Carlotta commented as they watched me in exasperation. I still stuck to Nell like glue. His party and her holy knights behind them were having a hard time holding back their laughter.

L-Let me make it perfectly clear that anybody would’ve freaked out over that! It’s not just me! I know every single one of you would’ve reacted exactly the same way, dammit! Who the hell can stay calm when they have Lucifer knows how many maggots crawling up their hand?!



“Khhiiiss!!”

“Shut the hell up, you dead piece of crap! Now go die again, you stupid eggplant!”

I slammed Goumetsu right into the giant bone lizard’s ugly mug as it tried to screech menacingly at me despite not having a throat. At the moment of impact, the two sorcerous circuits, Weight Doubling and Explosion, activated. They effectively turned my hit into a fatal one, leaving the bone lizard’s head no

choice but to burst apart. Skeleton monsters kept moving even after losing their heads, though, so I dealt another vicious blow to its body. Once I'd smashed it into pieces, the damn thing finally went completely motionless.

"Damme! Sonny, you truly killed a skeleton salamander in two blows. You *are* aware that's a War-level monster, yes?"

"My, my. Such stupendous strength."

"Aha ha ha..."

Surprise colored Reyes and Lulour's voices, while Nell replied to them with an awkward laugh.

"Yes, well, he's usually more circumspect when he fights. But even a War-level opponent isn't something for him to be wary of, so he's most likely treating it as a diversion."

"To think you defeated a skeleton salamander on a lark, essentially making a one-punch exit. I almost feel sorry for the fellow... Wait, I'm almost certain it's a stratum master."

"Huh? This thing? Are you sure?"

After suspending the sorcerous circuits, I hefted Goumetsu onto my shoulder and questioned Reyes with a puzzled expression on my face. Put simply, a stratum master was a miniboss. Rir would be one in my dungeon. Too bad for this one, it was only as strong as the monsters in the western area of the Demonic Forest. What an absolute disappointment if this thing was considered a miniboss equal to Rir.

"I understand why you're surprised. While I do think it's a mite weak to take on the role of a stratum master, the demon lord has placed packs of monsters of a similar strength in strategic locations around the dungeon. In short, unlike you, I don't think we'll have an easy time of it going through them, sonny."

Hmm, so he's basically saying the demon lord is all about quantity over quality. It was a logical course of action, considering the complicated structure of this dungeon. There seemed to be several routes to the demon lord, so stationing lots of subordinates everywhere was definitely one way to protect himself.

As I chatted with the others, the Evil Eye I'd released to go ahead of us captured images of the path beyond, filling in my Maps function.

"Tch. Looks like this might be a dead end. Though I definitely have no clue if there's a hidden door or something."

"I won't deny that I'm curious about how you know what lies ahead even though we can't see it, but if you say that's the case then so be it. I won't push you."

I just shrugged in reply to Reyes's comment. And to silently answer his question, the Evil Eye was the type capable of activating Stealth. I'd released it sneakily when we'd first boarded one of the ghost ships. Thanks to it, my map of this dungeon had grown steadily, but we'd been hitting dead ends for a while now, meaning we hadn't been making a whole lotta progress.

Turned out the route the adventurers had used on their last expedition no longer existed. It'd been transformed into something different entirely. I suspected that the demon lord might've spent DP to change it once he'd realized he was in danger. Although we'd accounted for this possibility during our initial planning, the constant dead ends left us in a bit of a pickle, so not too long ago, we'd split into two groups to continue our search.

One group consisted of Carlotta, her holy knights, and Griff, the leader of the adventurers' party. Nell, me, and the remaining two adventurers, Reyes and Lulour, made up the second group. Though our group was smaller than the other one, Nell and I together added up to a surplus of fighting prowess, so no worries on our end.

"That means we're really only left with two possibilities. Either the other group found the right path, or, like you said, Mask, there's a hidden one somewhere. Things are bound to get even more aggravating if it turns out to be the latter."

"Yeah, for real."

Given the size of this dungeon, it'd be a massive pain in the ass if we needed to factor in hidden passages on our search. Would probably take so long we'd end up skeletons ourselves.

Reyes's usual easygoing expression turned kind of serious as he carefully considered the problem facing us. Then, after a few moments, he spoke.

"And you're absolutely sure about it being a dead end up ahead?"

"Yeah. At the very least, I don't see it connecting anywhere else."

"Huh... A dead end, you say... But for whatever reason, a stratum master was guarding this place. Does that mean there's something here, then? Something the demon lord wanted to keep hidden from invaders but not at the cost of undermanning the rest of the dungeon."

"You think so?"

Reyes grinned like the cat that ate the canary and continued speaking.

"Labyrinth warfare is essentially a battle of wits between the demon lord and the invaders. Whichever side can outfox the other wins. But unlike the enemy, we have an advantage: the knowledge we adventurers have from our many years of experience. It's a huge asset."

"Ah. I think I get it."

An adventurer's know-how in conquering a dungeon, eh? As someone who managed a dungeon myself, I was *very* interested in knowing what it was.

"Just you watch, sonny. When the time comes, I'll show you how a true adventurer operates."

Seeing how suitably impressed I was by his words, Reyes gave me an enthusiastic thumbs-up. He then placed a hand against the wall and started inspecting our surroundings closely, a serious expression on his face.

Ten or so minutes later.

"I didn't find anything of note."

"Figures."

It hadn't even taken me a second to reply.

"Reyes, you're the reason stock in adventurers has plummeted."

He squirmed uneasily under Lulour's glare and rushed to explain himself.

“N-Not as if I can help it! Do you really expect things to go our way every single time?!”

“Aha... Aha ha ha... You’re absolutely right about that, Reyes. I understand all too well...”

Nell tried to back him up with an awkward smile.

“Goodness, now you have a chit younger than you helping you talk your way out of this. Could you *be* any more pathetic?”

Lulour sighed in exasperation at him. Realizing he was on the losing end of the argument, Reyes cleared his throat and attempted to change the subject.

“I-In any case! Now we know that our group isn’t going to turn up anything. Why don’t we wait for the holy knights to return?”

“We’ll leave it up to you two since Nell and I are the amateurs here.”

“Yes, I agree. Much wiser for you both to take the lead here, Miss Lulour and Mr. Reyes.”

They glanced at each other.

“Hmm... I think we should continue searching for a bit longer. We’ll be just fine should we run into any enemies.”

“‘Just fine’ is an understatement considering we’ve hardly lifted a finger yet. Not to mention that plenty of energy remains in me. Mask, Nell, can we count on you two for combat support a mite longer?”

“Roger that. We’ll be even worse thorns in the demon lord’s side— Oh, hey, looks like we’re getting the chance to do that earlier than I thought.”

While talking, I lowered Goumetsu from my shoulder and swung it in front of me.

“Nell, get ready.”

“G-Got it!”

She must’ve sensed it too because she immediately unsheathed her holy sword while wearing a grim expression.

“Is it the enemy?”

“Based on their reactions, I would say so, yes. Perhaps troublesome ones to boot.”

Reyes and Lulour eased into fighting stances too. Our postures alerted them to the abnormal change in the atmosphere.

Both Maps and Scout were warning me of a horde of hostiles. A dungeon monster attack was coming.



Most of the monsters were skeletons. I spotted a few wraiths and other undead-types, but a majority of them were bone bastards equipped with swords and shields. The enemy horde had a few dozen giant zombies mixed in too, which were as strong as the skeleton salamander I’d killed earlier.

I figured this meant the demon lord had gotten serious about eliminating the intruders—us. *You really went all out for us, huh, Mr. Demon Lord? I’m flattered. Kind of a waste of DP, though, since I’m about to dump everything you spent it on right into the garbage.*

“Mr. Wye, how many of them are there?!”

Nell asked me that question while skillfully cutting the oncoming skeletons to pieces. She could see me looking at Maps since my dungeon’s functions were visible to her.

“Around three hundred! Most of them are skeletons, but there are a few War-level monsters mixed in! Don’t drop your guard!”

Reyes, not Nell, reacted to my words.

“What?! Three hundred?! Damme! Where in hell did they even come from?!”

I turned toward Reyes and answered him as I swung Goumetsu around.

“Reyes, were you ambushed like this last time too?!”

“No! Cripes, Mask! Never a boring day with you around, eh?!”

Though he cursed me out, Reyes put the talent that’d gotten him chosen as one of the guides on this conquest on display. He nocked the arrows in his bow and loosed them successively at blinding speed. He targeted the skeletons’

cervical vertebrae since they didn't have much in the way of bodies, and the arrows pierced right through, tearing their upper halves clean off. He also used arrows to precisely stab the weak points of any enemies that came too close while he simultaneously dodged their attacks.

As for the ghoulish-type monsters, they still moved even after being decapitated. Leaving them in that state meant they couldn't get a visual confirmation of us, though, so while cutting their heads off didn't kill them, it did incapacitate them. In situations like these where you were overwhelmed by numbers, instead of forcing yourself to think of ways to destroy them, it was more effective to consider alternate solutions like these.

"Let the magic burn them! Fire Javelin!"

A step behind us, Lulour activated her fire magic and set a bunch of enemies on fire from head to toe. She was providing support for us with extremely high precision. Although I had to admit, the force of her magic wasn't very powerful. *No, wait. That might actually be on purpose.*

I just realized that she'd been focusing her attacks on enemies that showed up in our or her blind spots. Everything else, she ignored, letting us handle them instead. She was probably controlling the strength of her magic and using just enough to destroy the enemies. That way, she'd avoid both accidentally burning her allies and eating up too much of her magic, letting her keep fighting for as long as possible.

I'd had some expectations of their roles in battle based on their gear. Seeing them in action, though, I learned that Reyes was just as good of a vanguard as he was a middle guard, while Lulour was a complete rear guard. Right now, Nell and I were acting as the vanguard, but Griff probably filled that position when the three of them were together. Clearly, they were a well-balanced party.

"Damn, you guys are good!"

"Glad we impressed you! But you know what would make this old man happier, sonny? If you'd quit gawking at me and focus on fighting! What do you say?!"

Whoops. He's right. About time for me to do my job too.

As I kneaded my magic, I sent a bunch of ghouls flying with Goumetsu.

“Go.”

I unleashed my go-to trick, my water dragons, immediately after. Lately, I'd gotten even better at creating them to the point that I could fire off and control ten at a time, so I blasted just that many at the goddamn skeletons.

My dragons whirled gleefully through the air, each one sucking up enemies swarming the corridor. Then, they coiled and transformed their bodies into water prisons. The skeletons trapped inside were all slashed into a jumble of pieces by the high-speed water currents rushing within my dragons.

The final product ended up being mixed juice concoctions made up of the raw ingredients that were the bones and rotting flesh of the various monsters. They ended up being white since they consisted mostly of bones.

Holy shit. This is so disgusting. I wanna hurl my guts out. I should've gone with a different kind of magic.

“Hey, Lulour. I'm thinking they don't need us after all, eh?”

“Agreed. He alone should suffice, hm? More importantly, did you just cast your magic without chanting? I didn't even know it was possible to create so much power silently...”

The two of them chatted away in the newly empty space created by my magic wiping out all the enemies in the blink of an eye. They looked flabbergasted by what'd just happened. I felt bad for thinking this since I knew the adventurers had reason to be cautious about our conquest here, but I spent basically every day huffing and puffing as I ran away from the monsters in the Demonic Forest, so there was no way I'd be stressed out at all by these brain-dead undead-types.

If someone wanted to take me down, they were gonna need to be a Rir-level monst— *On second thought, no. Bad idea.* I would actually die if I had to face off against an opponent like that. So, yeah, I was just fine with these small fry. *No complaints here. Not a one.*

“Relax. We've still got plenty of enemies left to take down, which means plenty of chances to show us what you're made of. Hey, Nell, take care of the

wraiths for me!”

The wraiths showed up without warning, slipping through the wall. Their expressions full of hatred, they blasted us with a variety of magics. I’d yelled out to Nell while dodging their attacks.

I knew very well that wraiths could just pass through physical attacks thanks to all the time I’d spent playing with my family’s wraith sisters. And they’d glided right through my water dragons just now. The only effective way to inflict damage on wraiths was to use specialized magic like Nell’s holy magic.

“Leave it to me! Let the Lord’s light that dispels the darkness guide my sword. Enchanted Breath!”

As soon as Nell finished chanting her spell, the holy sword in her hands started glowing faintly. The wraiths judged the light to be a tremendous threat. All the ones attacking me, Reyes, and Lulour with their magic turned in unison toward Nell. They focused their attacks solely on her, unleashing their dark resentment toward the living.

“Missy, move!”

“Nell!”

Reyes and Lulour rushed to aid her. But my wife was a hero. Unbothered, she coolly dodged the flying wraiths’ attacks even as they swarmed her relentlessly. Then, she turned the tables on them, slashing them clean into two by firing light from her holy sword.

Seeing the stunned expressions on the faces of the monsters that should have been impervious to physical attacks made me jump for joy inside. Meanwhile, Nell destroyed them one after another, as they were unable to counter her magic.

“Ahhh, I see the light now... Little Miss Hero and Sonny Boy are cut from the same cloth, eh?”

“Clearly. There was no reason for us to worry, hm?”

Yes, yes. Now you two finally understand what makes my wife amazing. Behold! But, Mrs. Nell, if I could give you a bit of advice? You’d look even cooler

if you didn't flinch every time a wraith popped up out of nowhere. Once a scaredy-cat, always a scaredy-cat, I guess.

“What in blazes?!”

A new enemy appeared. A giant skeleton fucker stomping out from deep within the corridor. Analysis told me it was called an “elder skeleton” or some shit. It charged right toward Reyes with its enormous greatsword.

Right before it got him, he quickly jumped out of the way and dodged its attack. As he did, he moved fast to nock an arrow and loose it at the elder skeleton. It bounced off the monster, though, not piercing it even a little bit.

Its body looked much tougher than normal bone. The thing had to have been loaded with calcium.

“Damme!”

“Switch, Reyes!”

He reacted immediately to my words, easily evading the next slash from the monster's greatsword as he retreated and cleared the way for me to rush right in.

The elder skeleton bore down on me, who'd suddenly leaped in front of it, with its heavyweight-class attack. Well, I called it that, but it took pretty much zero effort for me to block with Goumetsu. I repelled the greatsword, then activated both of my war club's sorcerous circuits, Weight Doubling and Explosion, and instantly spun around on the spot. Using the momentum from the centrifugal force to assist me, I delivered a blow to the giant skeleton bastard.

It took the blow right to its face. Its head shattered like glass breaking, leaving the rest of its body to collapse and roll on the floor. The sight of the body flailing recklessly all over the place honestly freaked me out, but I wasn't done. I swung Goumetsu down again, pulverizing it until it stopped moving completely.



“Thanks for saving my hide, sonny!”

“You’re welcome.”

That was all I said to Reyes as he sighed in relief. I was pretty sure he could have taken it down even without my help. Earlier, right before I’d called out to him, I’d seen him draw a unique arrow from his quiver. It’d looked nothing like a normal arrow since it’d had a pattern on it that resembled a sorcerous circuit. I realized it had to be a special offensive strategy he kept reserved for particularly strong enemies. Seeing as we still had a long way to go, I wanted him to save it just in case.

And that was how the four of us continued whaling on the skeletons, smashing them to bits. We steadily annihilated the monsters overflowing from seemingly nowhere and everywhere, reducing their numbers before anyone could even blink.

“Phew! That should be the last of ’em.”

I swung Goumetsu, shaking off the bits of flesh clinging to it from the remaining undead-type I’d just turned into minced meat.

“I must admit, for a moment there, I wondered if we’d make it out alive. Tell me something, sonny. Would you consider joining our party as an adventurer? You’re more than welcome as well, missy.”

“Sorry, but I can’t stay away from home for long periods of time.”

“Tee hee. While I appreciate your offer, I must decline. I have my own job, you see. What’s more, Mr. Wye’s—no, *our* home is a bit far.”

“*Our home,*” *huh?* Hearing her say that made me deliriously happy.

Though Reyes had been mostly joking with his offer, he looked surprisingly disappointed when we rejected him.

“I see. Well, that’s just too ba— Wait, does that mean you two are living together?”

“My, my, my! You’ve certainly piqued my interest now too. Please, *do* tell me more!”

Lulour's eyes sparkled curiously. *I guess women really do like talking about stuff like that, huh?*

"Uhhh, can we actually call it living together? Since it's not just the two of us..."

"Hmm, you're right. I'm not quite sure how to explain it either."

"What? If it's not just the two of you, are you saying you have a child? At such a young age?"

Despite his puzzled expression, Reyes poked fun at me and Nell as we struggled to find the right words.

"Well, we do have kids in the mix. One I can call my daughter—no, I guess 'sword' is the right word. Two of them are like my little sisters. Actually, make that five of them. There's also the maid who lives and works in our home. Plus, I have two more wives, and a few pets as well."

Now I wondered what, exactly, the wraith triplets were to me. They weren't quite daughters, but they definitely weren't pets like Rir and the others. *Oh, I know. Partners in mischief!* Which basically made them little sisters. Yup, I'd stick with that.

"What?! Sonny, you say you have three wives?!"

"Yeah, I do."

I shrugged at Reyes, who looked stunned.

"Mask... You seem sincere, but as a matter of fact, you're a scoundrel..."

Lulour shuddered. I found it very rude that she'd called me a scoundrel since even I was still perplexed by the situation in my household.

"M-Missy, you're sure you don't mind all that? On account of he has two other wives and all..."

"Well, out of the three of us, I was the last one to meet Mr. Wye. Besides, both of them are wonderful, and we all get along really well. I have so much fun with them every day because they make things so lively."

Reyes remained frozen, mouth open and expression stupidly vacant as he

stared at the beaming Nell. Then, he suddenly moved, snapped back to reality, and focused his eyes on me.

“Sonny.”

“Sup?”

“Allow me to call you ‘Master.’”

“Hmm... The way is harsh, you know.”

“I’m more than willing and able to tread it. I-I... I want to be popular with women like you are, sonny!”

Voice full of determination, Reyes clenched his hands into fists.

“Looks like you’re serious about this. All right, I accept your resolve.”

He prostrated himself gratefully before me, and I nodded once, my expression solemn.

“Nell, I realize this is impolite to say, but I feel I must. This one here is an absolute imbecile—the dumbest among our group of friends. And yet, your Mask certainly holds his own on that front too, hm?”

“Oh. I see you’ve realized.”

After that, I heard Lulour mutter, “Why? Why are all men such idiots? Really, I don’t understand it at all...” She sounded absolutely fed up. Nell didn’t argue with her either, instead just smiling vaguely in response.



“Master! Your tea is ready!”

“Excellent.”

Though he said that, Reyes had actually just poured the cup from his flask. Still, I took it from him as he watched me expectantly, his expression reeking of sincerity. Then, I took a gulp.

“Disgusting! Do you really think you can satisfy a woman with this slop?!”

I had no idea what made tea good, but I still shouted at Reyes with a stern expression because it felt like the right thing to do as his master.

“Forgive me! Please, forgive me! I’ll devote myself diligently to the art of brewing delicious tea henceforth, Master!”

“You do that. Reflect on it deeply. For example, say a normally crass man brews a cup of tea on a moment’s notice and it turns out tasting delicious. When a woman experiences that, she’ll think to herself, ‘Oh, my, what’s this? This man’s tea is divine.’ It leaves an unexpected but lasting impression on her.”

“W-Wow! You’re absolutely right!”

Reyes sounded deeply impressed by my words.

“Does this mean you yourself have experience serving tea in such a manner, Master?!”

“Uh, w-well, I don’t really remember...”

I’d never actually brewed or served tea to anyone since I had no idea how to go about doing it.

“Mr. Wye, I distinctly remember Leila teaching you how to brew tea the right way. You got frustrated with how tedious the process is and said, ‘You know what? You can just take care of it from now on.’”

Nell whispered her reply for my ears alone. She knew damn well that I was just giving lip service here. I pretended to be deaf and cleared my throat to play it off.

“Ahem... Anyway! Reyes, what you need to learn is how to be meticulous and attentive in your daily life. Make sure you learn each task steadily and thoroughly.”

“Understood, Master!”

“Good, I’m glad. Instill these words into your mind. Every skill is sustenance, wealth, and weapon.”

“Yes, sir! I’m extremely grateful for your sage advice!”

He bowed his head reverently.

“Uhhh... I, um... I hate to interrupt, but what in the bleedin’ hell is going on here...?”

Griff mumbled those words as he watched our farce play out with an indescribable expression.

“Your head will ache if I try to explain it to you, so it’s best not to ask.”

Lulour answered him with a sigh, a wry, exasperated smile on her face. She gave off a real “big sister” kinda vibe, the way she looked after everyone. Griff might’ve been the official leader of the party, but I had a feeling she kept the two men in line.

“Well, it seems as if it’s business as usual on your end, so I’ll say I’m pleased to see that and leave it there. I do believe you lot were ambushed just like we were, yes?”

“Yup, you guessed it. Was it bad for you guys too?”

“Indeed. Many, many skeletons appeared before us. Although I have a feeling they attacked your group in far greater numbers.”

Carlotta nodded in response to my question.

Right now, we were all back together. After we’d been attacked, we’d thought that they might’ve been too, so we’d called off our search and retraced our steps back to the other group, linking up with them.

Turned out that our guess had been right on the mark. Except that their ambush had been a lot smaller than ours. Compared to the three hundred gunning for us, they’d only had a little over a hundred. They’d fought off a few War-level monsters too, but there hadn’t been many of those either.

Based on these facts, I surmised that the enemy demon lord had decided that my group posed a much greater threat. *Hmm...* Though I was currently using fudged stats for humans, it was possible that the demon lord could see right through my disguise. No, scratch that. Not “it was possible.” He *definitely* could.

Demon lords could use their dungeon’s Maps function. That meant they could check the amount of DP they’d get from a target. Naturally, in my own dungeon, my DP value was zero, but that wasn’t the case here.

First, I had no doubt that out of everyone here, I would earn him the most DP because of my true stats. Assuming he could see that number, it was

meaningless for me to hide my stats using Camouflage. If I were in his shoes and saw a mismatch between someone's stats and their DP value, I'd rely on the latter as a reference too, especially since there probably wasn't a way to cheat your own DP number.

On top of that, Nell was here too. The holy knights were pretty strong, and Carlotta was certainly talented as well, but at the end of the day, they were strong for *humans*. That explained why the demon lord had sent so many of his monsters after me and Nell in an attempt to destroy us.

"Next topic. We found nothing on our search. Did you guys fare better on how to reach the demon lord?"

"Yes, I'm almost positive we found a path."

"Oh, well, that's too— Wait, what? Really?"

I did a double take at Carlotta. Honestly, I'd thought it'd be impossible for us to find one before the day ended, so I'd been ready to hear bad news. Color me surprised to learn I was wrong.

"However, there's a problem. Or an annoyance, I suppose you could call it. Thus, I thought it best for all of us to regroup before another surprise attack."

"Heh. 'Annoyance' definitely hits the mark better than 'problem.'"

Smiling sardonically, Griff agreed with Carlotta.

"Annoyance," huh?

Carlotta glanced at me like she'd read my mind, then continued talking.

"It will be faster to show you than to explain it. Follow me."



"Mm, I see what you meant..."

I muttered those words as I stared at the sight in front of me. *Yeaah, this is definitely gonna be a pain in the ass.*

The place Carlotta had guided us to was a cemetery. Clouds obscured the dark night sky, and a thick fog drifted around us. Amid that backdrop, I could see crumbling headstones standing upright here and there in the earth.

Yup, earth. As in, solid ground.

As far as I could see, the area seemed to stretch on endlessly. I couldn't feel the swaying of the ship at all right now, which was weird since I'd been able to since the moment we'd boarded. This was a completely different space. If I had to guess, it was probably similar to the meadow area in my dungeon. It looked like this was the only location where the demon lord added a new layer—a cemetery, no less—to his dungeon.

My Demon Eyes picked up on various magical energy signatures. Though a few of them appeared to come from monsterlike beings, most of them emanated from the ground. What were the clusters of magical energy in the earth? Why, they were traps, of course. More specifically, a shitload of traps hidden in the ground, designed to blend into the darkness to avoid detection.

“Traps, huh?”

“Indeed. We managed to verify the presence of monsters and traps alike in this dim darkness. Quite a few of them too, unfortunately.”

“Yeah, I can see that...”

My Demon Eyes allowed me to see through magical traps, either because they were constructed from magic or because they used magic to attack. They didn't react to purely physical traps, like pitfalls, falling rocks, or spikes, though. I found it hard to believe that this cemetery only had traps of the magical variety in it, so in all probability, both types had been installed. It'd be best for me to operate under the assumption that there were just as many physical traps here as there were magical ones.

“Do you have any proof that the path beyond the cemetery connects to the demon lord?”

“According to Lord Griff, the marks they made on their last expedition still remain. Do I have that right, Lord Griff?”

“Yes, they're still there exactly as we left them. Although, obviously, this cemetery wasn't here last time. Back then, the path led us straight to the stratum master's room, but this time around, it's definitely possible that there'll be nothing up ahead regardless.”

With that, Griff tapped on the wall outside the door leading to the cemetery, on the side that still resembled a normal ship. There, I saw a mark drawn in what looked to be chalk. By making these notations, he and his party could distinguish the paths they'd already taken from the ones they hadn't on their previous campaign. Reyes and Lulour had done the same thing this time too, right up until we'd reached this spot.

"Oho... Master, I'm dead certain this is one of the marks we left last time on account of the stratum master up ahead. This new layer means that the damned demon lord is running scared. I reckon it's a new way to defend against intruders."

"Makes sense. So there's a good chance he's beyond it, then, huh?"

Griff spoke from next to me as Reyes and I chatted.

"Hey. Reyes. I can't keep quiet anymore. I need to know why you're calling our masked friend here 'Master.'"

"Why, no other reason except he's the master of my heart, Leader!"

"Oh, I...don't get it at all, actually."

Griff sounded exasperated in response to Reyes's enthusiastic thumbs-up.

"Urk... M-Mr. Wye, what are we g-going to do about th-this?"

Nell tugged on the hem of my T-shirt. She looked sort of terrified by the horror-movie setting we found ourselves in. Patting her head soothingly, I murmured to her while scanning the area once more.

"Hmm... I don't think there's any need for us to go out of our way to disarm the traps one by one."

"Oh, is that so? Then what do you propose we do? Perhaps you intend to use the same destructive magic you employed during our initial advance?"

Carlotta looked intrigued as she questioned me. I shook my head in reply to her.

"Nah, it's way too powerful. If I use it here, we'll probably get hit with the shock waves too. But you're gravely mistaken if you think I don't have any other tricks up my sleeve."

Time for me to show these fine folks that I don't always rely on just my stupid explosive firepower.

I grinned shamelessly, then faced forward and started working up my magic. *All right, it's time...to plow.*

"Arise."

I focused on the surrounding area, magic circulating inside me. Then, I activated it.

"Whoa!"

"Wh-What in blazes?!"

As soon as I did, the cemetery grounds began to shake with a rumbling sound. The holy knights and adventurers behind me let out startled shouts, and a few moments later, a humongous earth dragon appeared. It was big enough to swallow a human whole. Since I'd used all of the earth in a designated area to create it, headstones sporadically poked out from its body. That was also the reason I could see a number of skeletons flailing only their arms violently inside it.

Several explosions and emissions of some kind of mist occurred in the process of creating the earth dragon. But I was pretty confident those were traps caught up inside it that had spontaneously discharged.

"Devour."

The earth dragon unleashed a tremendous roar before it began gnawing ferociously through the ground like a piece of heavy machinery. It swallowed traps whole as it carved a way forward for us. *Boom. Bang.* We could hear muffled sounds of explosions coming from within its body as the traps were set off, but it didn't take any damage because it repaired itself by swallowing huge mouthfuls of dirt one after another.

My number one elemental affinity was water. And number two, earth. Despite it being inferior to my aptitude for water magic, my aptitude for earth magic was still pretty damn good, so I was confident in it. By using my own power, I could subjugate all the magical energy resting in the soil under my own and control it freely.

And so, dear reader, I present to you the final form of my Isekai-Version Bulldozer. Do you know the easy way to disable traps? Answer is...you activate them!

“Nice. Now we have a path. Wanna get a move on, folks?”

“Well, I suppose as long as we have you with us, Mr. Wye, we don’t ever have to worry about construction falling behind, hm?”

“Aw, you’re gonna make me blush. Then why don’t I start a demo—I mean, a masked lord construction company?”

“Tee hee. That sounds fun. But even if you do, it’s not as if you can build houses, right?”

“Theeen...I’ll start a masked lord plowing company instead.”

I shrugged in response to Nell, who snickered. Then, Carlotta commented, laughter in her voice as she listened to the two of us converse.

“Heh. In that case, I would most certainly like to contract your services.”

“Whaaat? From a company that can only plow land? You sure about that?”

“I would hire your company under that pretext, only to keep you occupied with the job for a very long time, leaving you unable to work for others, which would ultimately ensconce you completely within the Church’s fold. Now, now. Be at ease. I wouldn’t let your talents remain idle. You can fully expect me to drive you hard like a workhorse.”

“Nell, your boss scares the crap outta me, so I’m gonna nix the whole company idea.”

“Aha ha ha... I think that’s a wise choice.”

As Nell, Carlotta, and I started walking along the path my earth dragon created, Griff whispered to one of the holy knights as they followed behind us.

“Question. How can those three be so nonchalant in the face of magic on this huge scale? Are all of you that weird?”

“Please don’t misunderstand, Lord Griff. The only weird ones...are those three.”

“Ahhh. That actually makes sense.”

With that, Griff and the holy knight nodded emphatically to each other, their expressions conveying a feeling of solidarity.

You know I can hear you guys, right?



“Uhhh... Earth dragon, a little more to the right.”

Using the Evil Eye up ahead to verify the area, I commanded the earth dragon, which continued to create a path forward for us. It'd taken a little while because of the darkness in this layer, but I'd already discovered the door connecting to the next area. The only problem was the earth dragon's relatively slow plowing speed. By my estimate, it would take another two hours or so to actually reach the door.

This cemetery was fairly large. Maybe even twice as big as the meadow in my dungeon. Having said that, I was grateful for all the space. It gave me the chance to unleash my earth dragon, which otherwise would have been impossible in the narrow ship-like confines earlier.

I had no issues with my magical supply either on account of my Super Mana Potions. I drank them whenever I needed to recover my mana.

“Oh, Mr. Wye, a treasure chest.”

“Ugh, forget it. I don't wanna even go *near* one for a while.”

My face twisted in disgust as Nell teased me mischievously. I was almost positive I would never open another treasure chest.

“Indeed, nine times out of ten, it's a trap. The rest of you are also certain about leaving it untouched?”

Carlotta posed the question to the adventurers, and they nodded, making no objections.

“Roger dodger. Then I'll destroy it since there might be a trap inside.”

I had the earth dragon pulverize the treasure chest, which lay ever so innocuously at the edge of the path, to dust before we started walking again.

“Mask, mate, have I told you again how glad we are to have you with us? You really make our lives easier.”

Reyes and Lulour nodded in response to Griff’s comment.

“Leader, I sure do agree with you. Lulour and I learned that fact right up close and personal when we split up.”

“We honestly did. Almost makes our hardships last time seem unreal. I, for one, think it was an excellent decision on the guild master’s part to seek outside assistance this time around.”

“Although I gotta admit, I’m not sure I can be genuinely happy if our rank goes up because this conquest ends up succeeding.”

Griff’s self-deprecating mumble piqued my interest, so I questioned him.

“Ooh, rank up?”

“Yeah. We’re Mythril-class adventurers right now, but once we complete this dungeon conquest, our achievement will be enough to promote us to the Adamantite class. But...it’s not like we’ve done much this time around that *could* be counted as an achievement.”

I think I get it. This dungeon conquest is a litmus test for their promotion.

“In that case, I guess I’ll have to make you three work hard, huh?”

“Master, if you don’t mind my saying so, I felt a chill down my spine when you said that.”

“And if you don’t mind *my* saying so, you’ve got good instincts, my disciple.”

I swung Goumetsu off my shoulder and took up a fighting stance.

“Get ready, folks. A big one is coming, and it’s moving fast through the soil.”

“Hmph. He’s right. Prepare yourselves.”

At Carlotta’s command, the holy knights moved effortlessly into formation as they unsheathed their swords. Since Nell was the only one not with them, I assumed my wife’s role in this was to be the flying column.

The trio of adventurers switched gears right away as well. They took up their weapons and shifted smoothly into their own battle formation, their skill and

experience clear in their motions. And then, in the next instant, the dirt flew up with a *boom*.

“Whooooa!”

“Nh! The stratum master?!”

What appeared from within the cloud of earth was a worm roughly the same size as my earth dragon, rot covering its body.

Race: Giganto Undead Worm

Class: Cursed Corrupted Dragon

Level: 87

It went straight for my earth dragon, charging at it from directly underneath. The monster must have decided that taking it out first would be the smart move. But a combination of Scout and Maps allowed me to get a good grasp of its movements, so I was able to have the earth dragon twist its body away to avoid the worm’s attack.

“Sink your teeth into it!”

The monster had left half of its body defenseless as a result of its upward leap. My earth dragon bore down on it, snapping its jaws shut ferociously around part of the worm’s trunk.

“Graaarr!!!”

My earth dragon drove its fangs deep into the worm and coiled its body tightly around the enemy’s, restraining it so that it couldn’t escape back into the soil. The monster flailed violently, trying to shake off its opponent, but it failed because my earth dragon was much stronger. Unable to flee, the decaying insect writhed helplessly on the ground.

“Heeell yeaahhh!!! That’s it, buddy! Keep it up! Don’t lose! Tear it to pieces!”

“Get your head on straight, Mask! This ain’t the time for you to be having fun like an innocent kid making insects fight each other!”

“Give it up, Leader! Master has a few screws loose that we can’t do anything about!”

The two of them unwittingly carried on shouting about my deranged excitement over the great kaiju battle as they desperately ran away to avoid being caught up in its aftermath.

“Don’t worry, guys! My earth dragon is the strongest! No way in hell is it gonna lose to that rotting bug!”

“Th-That’s all good and well, mate, but can’t you do something to calm it down a little? The shock waves alone might kill us, ya know!”

“Not possible! Just do your best to run away!”

“Maaate?!”

Griff screamed in terror—the complete opposite of my crazed, excited cackling.

“Shield! Then attack!”

Carlotta was next to me as I manipulated my earth dragon. Following her orders, a few of the holy knights held their sturdy shields and guarded the rest of us against the rampaging worm’s tail. Then, the remaining holy knights jumped out from behind the shield wall, which had momentarily stopped the monster’s movements. Each of the knights struck hard and fast.

A reliable offensive strategy, huh? But I didn’t think they’d be able to inflict any serious damage. I did, however, come to the realization that they didn’t have much choice because of the way I was letting my earth dragon run wild.

The three adventurers were focused now too. Despite their earlier antics, they had quickly gotten down to business. Griff stood at the front to act as the tank while Reyes eliminated the oncoming rush of skeletons with his bow and arrows. As for Lulour, she was the main source of firepower, so she unleashed powerful magic against the worm.

Fascinating. When it was just Reyes and Lulour, she’d taken up a support role, but she switched to being an attacker against a massive enemy like this one.

That was good to know.

The most dangerous thing about this worm wasn't that it was a worm, but that it was an *Undead* worm. One of the most important characteristics of Undead was that they remained active even though their HP was already at zero.

You'd think, then, that it'd be easy to just force them to stay dead, right? Wrong. The Undead could be brought to life—or re-life, more like—in a few ways. One, control them with magic. Two, forcefully resurrect them with a combination of magic and the intense hatred they harbored while alive. Or three, by complete freaking chance.

I wasn't sure how this applied to dungeon-born monsters, though, and I hadn't been able to stop thinking about my wraith triplets because of that. They should've been born from the dredges of a powerful grudge, but they didn't have a hint of evil in them. This dungeon's wraiths, on the other hand, hated the living like it was their job.

In any case, despite Undead being creatures that were technically categorized as monsters, they were different from normal monsters because they had zero HP. You couldn't call them living beings either, so they were just a unique existence. And since they weren't living beings, not even having their heads and hearts blown to bits would stop them. They could keep going for an eternity—or at least until the magic in their bodies ran out.

Being the way they were, options for incapacitating the SOBs were limited. One method was overwriting their magic with your own, effectively forcing them under your command. Another was to use a special type of magic like holy magic against them. Or you could dismember them. The first two would be difficult to pull off against an enemy this huge solely because magic was complicated, so I decided the last option would be our best bet.

“Nell! I'm gonna stop the rotting bug's movements for a bit with my earth dragon! When I do, I want you to hit it hard with a gargantuan attack!”

I turned determinedly toward Nell and shouted so she'd hear me over the echoing, eardrum-shattering thuds while I continued controlling the earth dragon.

“Understood!”

Since she wasn't part of the holy knights' formation, Nell was free to act alone. She demonstrated the canniness that made her a hero by moving like she was wearing omnidirectional movement gear, slashing at the worm with her holy sword. Flying debris, the earth dragon, and the worm itself all became footholds for her during her three-dimensional assault.

Her holy sword's blade glowed faintly like it had when she'd attacked the wraiths earlier, meaning she'd already imbued it with magic. Every time she swung at the monster, sparks of light flashed in the air. She looked beyond cool.

Not only is my wife adorable, but she's awesome too. That makes her practically invincible.

“Carlotta, Griff, you heard me, right?! If you're gonna attack, hit the thing with everything you've got when it goes still!”

“Affirmative! I leave the signal to you!”

“I'm okay with that, but us old folks would really like it if you gave us the heads-up sooner rather than later!”

Carlotta responded to me resolutely, while Griff struggled to get the words out as he kept his attention on his role.

“Oh, did I hear you say later is better, Griff? In that case, you just hold down the fort for us a little longer, eh?!”

“Oy, Reyes! Your master is a goddamn sadist! Do something about him, won't ya?!”

“Leader, it pains me to inform you that the only one who can talk sense into him is his wife, the hero!”

That's the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But no more jokes. Time for me to execute my plan to take down this nasty-ass monster.

Just then, the worm let out a sickening roar that was impossible to describe using words. Its frenzied rage made it go even more out of control, and numerous horrific fangs suddenly grew from its mouth. Then, it clamped its jaw around the scruff of my earth dragon's neck. This particular spot would be a

weakness in a normal living creature thing. *Sucks to suck, 'cause just like you, worm, my homie isn't actually alive.*

“Get out of there!”

The moment I shouted my order, everything from the neck up on the earth dragon crumbled, reverting to regular clumps of earth. That was how its body extracted itself from the worm's fangs and escaped. Startled by the sudden disappearance of its prey, the worm snapped its fangs in the air and momentarily lost sight of the earth dragon.

But that moment was huge. Though my dragon was now just a headless body, a simple fact remained: it was made of earth. Because of that, it could remake itself endlessly. Almost instantly, it reformed its head and plunged its newly formed fangs straight into the worm's head from above, slamming the monster into the ground.

Pinned down, the undead worm tried rampaging again, just like it'd done before. *Do you really think I'm dumb enough to let you have your way that easily?*

“Go!”

I produced two more earth dragons, both half the size of the big one. I sent one of the smaller ones toward the worm's midsection and the other toward its tail. They sunk their teeth into the monster while also transforming into shackles to restrain it. Secured to the ground, the worm was unable to move.

“All righty, folks, our long-awaited moment of dissection has arrived! Turn that festering insect back into a corpse!”

“Aaayyyeee!!!”

Everyone moved in unison at the signal they'd been waiting for. Nell was the first to leap out.

“Hyah!”

Sword held high above her head, she jumped within reach of the worm in a single bound and slashed at it with her fiercely glowing sword. Clearly, she'd poured a ton of magic into the weapon at some point. Bits of flesh flew

everywhere like an explosion had occurred. Her blade left behind a huge gash in the worm's body.

“Eat shit!”

It was my turn next. I activated both of the sorcerous circuits in Goumetsu and whaled on the worm endlessly. While Nell's attack had been *like* an explosion, mine *literally* was. The monster's flesh burst apart violently at every impact, allowing me to mass-produce chunks of burnt meat.

“Haaaah!”

Carlotta rushed in after me. Though her attack lacked power on my and Nell's level, she made countless cuts in the span of a second, adding to the wounds the two of us had already created on the worm's body.

The remaining holy knights and the adventurer trio attacked the same spot as a group. They might not have been as powerful individually, but by concentrating their strikes, they were able to inflict considerable damage.

A storm of attacks from each of us. We didn't let this golden chance slip by as we continued our relentless group assault on the immobilized worm.



“Phew... We managed...somehow. Gotta be honest, that was a bit too much for this old man.”

Griff exhaled loudly, hands on his knees as he panted in exhaustion.

Next to us lay the dismembered remains of the motionless worm. It was dead silent now, but until a short while ago, it'd still been squirming and wriggling despite having been hacked to pieces. I couldn't think of a more disgusting sight. *This is why I hate Undead. Just stay dead, you hell-forsaken corpses. Cripes.*

“Right, then. Glad we defeated the worm, but the important thing is finding the exit to this cemetery.”

“There. That's probably it.”

I pointed at the door up ahead. Though the design was different, it was the same size and shape as the door in my real throne room. There was a good

chance this dungeon's throne room was on the other side of it.

"No doubt about it. That's the same door that connected to the demon lord's chamber."

Griff nodded, confirming my suspicion.

"Hmm. So, we have finally arrived. I suggest we take a small rest here before proceeding then."

"In this cemetery?"

"It has a certain charm, wouldn't you say?"

"Charm, huh? If it weren't for the chunks of flesh all over the place, I'd probably agree with you."

"Well, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, eh?"

I smiled ruefully at the lady knight, who'd commented nonchalantly even though I knew for a fact that there was no chance in hell she actually believed what she was saying. You could always count on the commander.

"Oh, yeah, Carlotta. About taking down the demon lord. I have a favor to ask."

"Is that right? I shall listen."

She raised an eyebrow quizzically at me, and I continued.

"I want you to let me and Nell handle it."

"Just the two of you? Hmm... Tell me why."

Her eyes narrowed, and she almost seemed to be scowling now as she stared intently at me.

"Mr. Wye...?"

Nell gazed at me with a bewildered expression. I signaled to her with my eyes to stay quiet before answering Carlotta.

"There's something I wanna do, and I don't want anyone except Nell to see it. Of course, I have no problem with the official story being that everyone here worked together to defeat him."

"In short, you're saying the two of you alone can destroy the demon lord?"

“Yeah, pretty much. I have a trump card... Yeah, I have a trump card I wanna use, and that’s what I don’t want others to know about. Plus, I hate to put it like this, but...our odds will be much better if it’s just me and Nell. Am I wrong?”

Carlotta pondered in silence for a few minutes, then harrumphed.

“No, you’re not wrong. Combat is certainly much easier when it’s just the two of you. Let me make one thing clear, though. Normally, I would have rejected this without a second thought as a foolish plan. The only reason I’m entertaining it now is because *you* are the one who suggested it. As such, failure is absolutely unacceptable. Understood?”

“*Now* who’s the one being foolish? I might’ve goofed if I were on my own, but there’s no way I’m failing if I have Nell with me.”

Carlotta’s eyes widened momentarily. Then, she grinned in amusement at me.

“Heh heh heh. Yes, I see. Fine, then! I leave the matter of the demon lord entirely to you both. I have high expectations of the power of your love.”

“Thanks. I’ll make sure not to disappoint.”

“O-Omigosh, stop it... Especially you, Miss Carlotta. I can’t believe you’re joining forces with him to tease me...”

My wife’s pout made Carlotta howl with laughter for a few minutes. Once she got a hold of herself, she suddenly looked back over at me, her expression slightly amazed.

“Nevertheless, I’m surprised to learn you still have a trump card after everything you’ve already shown us of your talents.”

She murmured those words almost absentmindedly as she surveyed the traces left behind from the battle between the worm and my earth dragon. I shrugged back at her.

“Magic tricks aren’t much fun once you know how they work, right? So I only use the special one when I absolutely need it.”

“Oho. Then please do show me how it works the next time you host a magic show. I shall certainly take my time studying your various sleights of hand.”

“Hmm... You’re the only one I *don’t* wanna invite, though.”

When I raised both hands in surrender, Carlotta laughed again in delight.

“Mr. Yuki, why did you suddenly propose that idea?”

I'd asked Carlotta and the others to retreat because I didn't know how the space would transform once we defeated the demon lord. Nell spoke after making sure they were long gone.

“Okay, first, I'm a thousand percent sure that this dungeon's demon lord knows I'm a demon lord from somewhere else. Taking into account everything we've faced so far, I figured out that he, it, whatever is an entity with a will of its own. Meaning it'll be bad if he says something like, 'Curse you, demon lord!' in the middle of battle.”

“Ahhh... You're right, that's entirely possible. Especially since we know the demon lord isn't just a run-of-the-mill monster. But, Mr. Yuki, it can't be the only reason you suggested the two of us handle him alone, right?”

“Oh? Now why would you think that?”

“All I had to do was take a look at you and I figured it out. It's clear from your expression that you're scheming.”

She squinted suspiciously at me.

“Damn, you got me.”

I smiled ruefully before continuing.

“I wouldn't exactly call it scheming, buuut...I've got a question I wanna ask.”

“Huh? A question? To ask the demon lord?”

“Yeah.”

It'd been on my mind for a long time now. The fundamental question: what exactly *is* a demon lord, and by extension, a dungeon?

After all, the existence known as a demon lord presented an extremely intriguing case. By utilizing the mysterious something-or-other that was DP, a demon lord can produce a variety of things and use them in perpetuity, not just temporarily. And the *pièce de résistance* to this system? The fact that I could

summon things from another world—my old world, Earth. As long as a demon lord had DP, they could even create things using technology that shouldn't have existed in this world.

DP was capable of so much more than that too. It allowed a demon lord to summon living beings with their own personalities and consciousnesses. Sure, they were monsters, but my point still stood. DP also meant a demon lord could add new territory under the “Stratum Addition” category. In other words, they could create entirely new worlds within their dungeon.

The dungeon's power even extended to other areas. It fed on the lives of others, which meant that killing living things in its domain made it possible to modify the demon lord's body and “change” it into a form suitable for the environment. Because the concept of leveling existed in this world, ordinary creatures could also transform, but the rate at which a demon lord, a dungeon's master, evolved was incomparably faster.

So, by definition, what do you call an entity that can change itself to its heart's content, as well as birth new worlds and creatures? A god.

“You, a god, Mr. Yuki? Well, I very much doubt there are many like you who are wholly unsuited to being a god.”

“How dare you? I can guarantee that even if you search through all the ages and places, you won't find a god as full of mercy and love as me.”

My playful response didn't produce quite the reaction I was hoping for, though, because the girl next to me looked anxious instead. I questioned her, the confusion clear in my voice.

“Nell? What's wrong?”

“Mr. Yuki, if...if it turns out you really are a god...you won't disappear eventually, will you?”

“What?”

“Because...well, gods are gods, you know? They can't reside in the same planes as people, so if you end up being one...I wondered if maybe you'll disappear from our sight one day...”

Nell spoke haltingly, struggling to find the right words. So I took both of her hands and pulled her close, staring down into her lovely face.

“Eep! Um, M-M-M-Mr. Yuki?”

“Hey, Nell.”

“Y-Yes?”

There was something I had to say to the rosy-cheeked, downcast-eyed Nell.

“You’re...kind of an idiot, aren’t you?”

“...Huh?”

She stared at me, flabbergasted by my totally unexpected reply.

“I can’t believe that’s where you were going with your train of thought. Disappear? Like hell I will. Honestly, woman, whaddya take me for? Listen up, Nell, and listen good. I am me. Nothing more, nothing less.”

“...”

That’s right, I am me. Where I am is my world. And my world is that dungeon. No way am I going anywhere else.

Demon lord, dragon king, god, whatever. No matter what I became, they were all equally unimportant. Well, okay, I was extremely fond of the demon lord moniker and the life that came with it, so actually, I’d love to keep being one. But only that, thanks very much.

“I always do what I want. Full stop, period, end of story. That’s how I’ve been living my life so far, and it ain’t gonna change moving forward. So it doesn’t matter even a little bit if I become a god or something else. The only thing I wanna do is keep living my life in that dungeon. That is everything to me.”

“O-Okay.”

Nell let her head drop onto my chest with a soft *thump*.

“Jeez. You’re always such a worrywart.”

“I can’t help it, Mr. Yuki... I have absolutely no idea what a demon lord truly is. So when you suddenly started talking about demon lords being gods, I began to wonder if you’d wind up going somewhere far away...”

Ah, I get it now. She doesn't know, which is why it makes her anxious. In hindsight, it's only natural that she'd feel like that.

“Well, I'm just talking in terms of assumptions and definitions. Purely hypothetical, y'know? I don't *actually* think I'm a god.”

“Okay. Got it.”

“But it *is* my fault that you're all worried, so, hmm... I know. I'll stay with my dear wife just like this for as long as she needs, right up until she calms down. How about that?”

“Yes. Please.”

Nell squeezed my hands tightly. We hugged for a while, her body pressed close against mine, before she raised her head from my chest and smiled up at me.

“Right! We can't do this forever, hm?! As much as I would love to, we still have work to do.”

“Personally, though, I wouldn't mind one bit. Who gives a frick about a demon lord, amirite?”

“No, no. You're wrong. Work comes first.”

Nell shook her head jokingly.

“Okay, fine. Understood, Boss. As you command.”

“Very good. Also, I understand what you want to do, Mr. Yuki, but do you really think the demon lord will be so open to answering you, an enemy demon lord?”

“Doesn't hurt to try, right? I'll beat his ass to a pulp first, then start a conversation with, ‘Yooo, so why dontcha tell me what you know about demon lords?’ and see where that gets me.”

“Yikes... That's exactly how small-time thugs operate, Mr. Yuki.”

“Eh, it's fine. Not like he made it easy to settle things amicably anyway.”

I was pretty sure I'd end up having to kill him regardless. Honestly, I calculated the probability of us even being able to have a dialogue at slim to none. But I

didn't know if or when I'd ever get another chance to raid a dungeon and question its demon lord, so I had to give this a shot. That was the *real* reason I'd asked the others to withdraw—I wanted to be able to talk to the demon lord without holding anything back.

“All righty, Nell. Once we walk through that door, I want you to take down anyone that isn't the demon lord. Other than that, well, we'll just play it by ear.”

“Tee hee. Business as usual, then, right? Understood.”

“Good. Okay, let's go.”

We opened the door in front of us and stepped inside. The room was completely different from the cemetery we'd just been in. Constructed entirely of wood, it resembled a ship's cabin. It was a lot bigger than any of the rooms we'd been in before this one.

Sitting on the throne all the way in the back was the demon lord, a skeleton with bits of flesh still stuck to it here and there who was wearing a tattered robe. Naturally, it wasn't a normal skeleton. My Demon Eyes showed me that my opponent's body harbored a massive reservoir of magical energy. With my normal eyes, I could see pale light glowing deep within its eye sockets. I could sense the violent, burning hatred in them as the demon lord—the No Life King—stared at us.



Race: Draugr

Class: No Life King

Level: 108

The demon lord's appearance matched the adventurers' description to a T.

Crap, he's strong. His Strength and Stamina values were low, but his Magic stat was insanely high. Definitely a type that excelled with magic. My stats were about twice as high as his, at least, but his were greater than Nell's. No way could we drop our guard. And then—

“Kkkkk-k-kiiiiiiiii h-h-h-huuuummmaaa-a-annsssss!!!”



“So, obviously, he’s completely lost his mind, huh?”

Despite the handful of flesh chunks clinging to him, he was mostly bone. While tearing at his skull with his bony fingers, the No Life King unleashed that steady, tremendous wail overflowing with deep resentment. Gaze blazing with a powerful grudge against humans, he glared at us with rage and hatred—no, not us, actually. He was looking elsewhere.

His fury seemed to be directed somewhere far, far away. You could for sure call him the epitome of an evil demon lord. But if I was being honest, I wondered what the hell could’ve happened to him before he’d become a draugr.

More importantly, though, the adventurers hadn’t said anything about his behavior being like this on their previous attempt to defeat him.

“Mr. Yuki, do you really think you can talk to him like that?”

“Probably not.”

No matter how good someone was at communication, I very much doubted they could hold a conversation with *that*. Here we’d come to take his ass down and homie was just straight-up ignoring us. That was just the kind of not-guy he was.

W-Well, I’ve made it this far. No guts, no glory. Might as well try to initiate a dialogue.

I cleared my throat, then made a conscious effort to smile boldly before addressing the enemy demon lord.

“Heeey, Mr. Demon Lord. You look like you’re having a lot of fun. How ’bout I join y— Wait, whaaat?!”

“Hhhuuu-u-u-uuummmaaaaaannnsss aaaaahhhh!!!”

Without so much as a “howdy do,” he sent a black fireball hurtling my way. Because I always had my Demon Eyes active, I detected the magical energy changing just in time to avoid the attack. *Shit, though. This MF really attacked me for no good goddamn reason.*

“Kkkiii-i-ill h-h-huummaaannns!!!”

“Man, what the hell?! Don’t just blast something that disgusting at me! And I ain’t even human, ya dipshit!”

He kept shooting those black fireballs at me, so I created a huge wall of water between me and him to protect us. Except the water rotted.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, *whoa!*”

I had no idea what the hell kind of magic it was, but the moment a black fireball collided with my water wall, that spot changed color in the blink of an eye and a hole appeared. The remaining fireballs whizzed through those gaps. I dodged frantically, running around to the left and right. One of them inevitably brushed against my shirt since the enemy was firing so damn many of the things.

Although it barely only grazed my shirt, just like the spots on the water wall, the point of impact on my shirt started changing color.

“Eeee?!”

I whipped my T-shirt off as fast as I could and flung it aside, knowing it would be really bad if the rot spread more. Then, I leaped backward as far as I could go. I created as much space between us as possible to make it easier for me to avoid his attacks.

“Mr. Yuki, are you all right?!”

Unlike me, Nell had done a superb job of evading each and every fireball. She shouted out to me in a panic.

I checked myself over for anywhere the rot encroached. *Nope, nothing besides the shirt.*

“I’m fine! But we definitely shouldn’t let ourselves get hit by those fireballs!”

“I agree!”

Nell replied while nimbly sidestepping another fireball.

Seemed like the demon lord’s fireballs had a corrosive effect on anything they touched. I didn’t even wanna *think* about what would happen if one came into contact with a person’s body.

If I had to guess the true nature of this magic, I'd say it was probably dark magic. He had it as one of his abilities. I could see others, like Skeleton Summoning and Wraith Summoning, but nothing except dark magic explained these black fireballs.

"Nell, what do you know about dark magic?!"

He continued to shoot us with the fireballs, so I constructed several layers of water walls since it only took an instant to destroy one. Fighting back with numbers and all that. While I kept those up, I started bashing the insane number of skeletons suddenly filling the room with Goumetsu. *Bastard must've activated his summoning ability.*

In turn, Nell dealt with the huge number of wraiths he summoned. The way we could divvy up our tasks without having to say a word gave me a nice sense of security. I knew I wouldn't feel like this with anyone else.

"I know things like liches use it often! If you're hit with dark magic, it can cause all sorts of status ailments like Rot, Insanity, and Blindness! Even one hit would be really, really bad!"

So, we're talking debuffs, are we? Yeah, that's definitely not good.

The dense magic whirling inside me was powerful enough to repel any debuff-type attacks launched by two-bit opponents, but I got the feeling that this guy's level was high enough to break through my natural defense. Rot worried me especially. Even if I tried to thwart it with magic, considering how quickly it ate through and destroyed things, there was no effective way to prevent it. This enemy's strength was in a league of its own compared to the chumps I'd dealt with so far. *Welp. I definitely don't have the time to dillydally.*

"Nell, I haven't shown you my new magic yet, right?! Now's a good chance to show you *and* him!"

I stopped thinking about stupid crap and shifted to a plan that would eliminate my opponent by activating my spirit magic.

"Leviathan!!!"

Half of my magic went straight into creating a dragon creature composed of many spirits. Though this throne room was fairly large, my Leviathan's head

grazed the high ceiling as it glared down contemptuously at the enemy demon lord. Size-wise, it was just as big as my earth dragon from earlier. The magic it contained was an order of magnitude higher, though.

“Guuuuu!!!”

Even this demon lord who was more than a few crayons short of a box could feel the power emanating from my fusion spirit, so he changed the target of his dark magic from us to Leviathan.

“Nell!!!”

“Partition! Absolute Barrier!”

She understood immediately what I meant and put a barrier up in front of Leviathan, protecting it against the enemy’s attack. Except it, too, started changing color the instant the dark magic hit it. Her barrier held out longer than my water wall, but in less than ten seconds, holes started appearing. Still, that was more than enough time for me.

“Attack! Use all your power!!!”

In the short amount of time Nell’d managed to buy us, my Leviathan gathered all of its magic in its mouth and unleashed a Breath. For a moment, a thunderous roar echoed through the chamber and a brilliant flash of light obscured my vision.

The skeletons and wraiths caught up in the blast evaporated instantly. Even though Nell and I had retreated a few steps back, the shock waves still slammed into us, a mix of air pressure and a storm of sound.

“Whoa!”

“Whaddya think, Nell?! Amazing, right?! I present to you, spirit magic!!!”

“Yes, yes, it’s amazing, but we don’t have time for your antics right now! Absolute Barrier!”

Nell activated her barrier magic again in a rush, building another wall in front of us. Seeing it stretch out in front of me made me feel her love very clearly.

Because Leviathan had attacked with all the magic I’d given it, its whole body had begun to disintegrate as soon as it’d released the Breath attack. Unable to

maintain itself, the fusion spirit reverted to its original mass of individual spirits, clearing the view in front of us.

“Still alive, huh? Why am I not surprised?”

The demon lord’s lower half had been completely annihilated. Most of his upper half was burnt to a crisp, with a few sections of it just straight-up obliterated. Another hit from Leviathan might finish him off completely.

Any way you looked at him, the No Life King was near death. But a deep hatred continued to flicker from the recesses of its dark eye sockets. It still wasn’t directed at me, who’d brought him to death’s doorstep, but toward something far away. His hatred was so intense that it burned away relentlessly in his core.

“Look, man. You’re a corpse. So why don’t you be a good little corpse and stay dead?”

How about this? I’ll remember your hatred for you instead. I’ll do what I can for you, but I’ll throw in the towel if it becomes impossible. Well, not like you have a choice. You’re already dead. There’s not much else you can do about it at this point anyway. Just die in peace like the dead are supposed to. Don’t think about anything else.

Then, I swung Goumetsu down.



“I don’t know how to say this, but that left a bad taste in my mouth. What in the world happened to turn him into *that*?”

Nell murmured those words softly, staring down at the pieces of the motionless No Life King.

“Yeah, I wonder too. Though I’m thinking the reason the monsters we encountered on the way here were filled with so much animosity was because they were affected by the parent who created them.”

All this time, I had been thinking about my wraith sisters and comparing them to the wraiths here, but only now did I realize that the resentment cloaking the monsters here came directly from the powerful hatred their master had nursed.

Just like a demon lord could sense their subordinates' wills, so too could the subordinates sense their master's.

“Oh. That makes a lot of sense, actually. Our wraiths being mischievous little girls and Shii marching to the beat of her own relaxed drum are both because of your influence, Mr. Yuki. I definitely think dungeon monsters are affected by their demon lord.”

“Ya know, when you put it like that, I don't know how I feel about it.”

“Well, I'll tell you one thing. There's no doubt that you like mischief and marching to the beat of your own drum, Mr. Yuki.”

I...couldn't deny that. I realized that continuing the conversation would be to my disadvantage, so I kept talking in an attempt to change the topic.

“A-Anyway, let's finish up our work here first. Where's the dungeon core...? Oh, this must be it.”

I opened the door installed in the throne room and found a crumbling room. It had to have originally been the ship captain's cabin. The dungeon core rested on top of the desk inside. Unlike my rainbow-colored one, this dungeon core was a dark, blackish red color.

Carlotta had told me in advance to try my best to bring it back with me because, and I quote, “Not only does it serve as proof of a successful conquest, but it will net you quite a hefty reward as well.” I reached out to pick it up with my right hand, and my palm absorbed it with a soft *whoosh*, making it disappear in a flash.

“Gah.”

Nell and I made the same exclamation in unison.

“Mr...Yuki?”

“N-No, Nell, you've got it all wrong! I didn't do that on purpose! I don't know how it happened, but it just got sucked up!”

Panicked, I opened Inventory to make sure the dungeon core hadn't ended up in there, and of course, it hadn't. Next, I opened my interface, and... *Huh?*

I saw a blip in the menu's Dungeon category. I tapped on it to check.

“Wait a sec. Is this dungeon...mine now?”

When I did, I saw that I could use all the functions related to my territory in the Demonic Forest, such as Stratum Addition and Dungeon Territory Expansion, for this ghost ship dungeon as well. *So, basically, I've become this dungeon's demon lord after slaying its original one?*

“Huh? Hold on. Mr. Yuki, are you saying this dungeon is under your control now?”

“Yeah, looks like it. Since we didn't manage to recover the dungeon core, what do you think we should do?”

“I mean, what *can* we do?”

Hmm... Yeah, I guess she's got a point. I couldn't think of anything else either.

“Well, well! Back already, eh?”

After having gotten a grasp of this dungeon's entire structure, heading back along the same path had been an absolute breeze compared to the trip here. It'd only taken us thirty minutes to walk back, and we met up with the holy knights again.

“Hmm, I don't see any wounds on either of you. I assume you were successful, then?”

“Yeah, you assume right. Scorched his ass and chopped him to pieces.”

I nodded in response to Carlotta's comment.

“I still can't believe it, mate. You two really took down the demon lord on your own...”

“Same. He was stupid strong too.”

“Mask, mate... Hard to believe ya when you say that so nonchalantly.”

I shrugged at the exasperated expression Griff directed at me.

“Oh, yeah, Griff, that reminds me. How come you guys didn't mention that he'd gone completely off his rocker?”

“Huh?”

“It was like every ounce of reason in his mind had completely disappeared. You didn’t know?”

Griff and his party had told us what’d happened on their last expedition here. Before they could gain any information on the demon lord’s magic and attack methods, they’d been forced to retreat in the face of his powerful summoning magic because they’d found themselves unable to counter it. Granted, I couldn’t really blame them in that situation for not knowing the state he’d been in, but a heads-up sure would have been nice, ya know?

“Ah, apologies. But on the whole, that’s just how demon lords are. Their lot’re absurdly arrogant, not to mention chock-full of hatred. Summat’s fundamentally broken inside most of ’em.”

“Well, that’s rude. Who the hell are you callin’ broken?”

“Uh, y-you know I wasn’t talking about *you*, mate...”

Griff rubbed his head, a confused expression on his face.

“Um, don’t worry about Mr. Wye. We all know *he’s* not completely right in the head either.”

Nell murmured from next to me while staring pointedly at me. I chose to ignore her and directed my next comment at Carlotta.

“Riiight, sooo... Carlotta, about the dungeon core. Sorry, but I think the shock waves from the battle probably broke it, so I wouldn’t be surprised if this dungeon caves in eventually.”

After Nell and I had talked it over, we’d decided to use that as our explanation to gloss things over.

In the case of a total dungeon annihilation where the demon lord was defeated and the dungeon core was destroyed, the process of dungeon collapse began with the core’s destruction. Except it wasn’t the typical process you’d think of when you defeated the enemy boss. You know, the one where the ceiling would suddenly start crumbling. No, this one was different. In the first few days, the magical energy infusing the dungeon’s interior steadily decreased. Consequently, the expanded areas returned to their original forms, and a few days later, the monsters inside the dungeon died out.

Incidentally, it was possible for me to initiate the process myself by using the dungeon's functions. Apparently, I'd unlocked the option upon taking control of this dungeon. It allowed me to destroy any dungeon under my command—with the exception of my original one, of course—and convert all the spoils to DP.

I wasn't gonna do that, though. Leaving it the way it was meant a perpetual stream of DP income. So, my plan was to find the right time to move this dungeon over near the Demonic Forest. Yeah, you heard right. After all, this ghost ship dungeon was technically still a ship. I could only guess at its sailing speed considering its massive size, but the fact remained that it *was* possible to move it.

Also, I'd already installed a door on this ghost ship connecting it to my dungeon, so I could actually come back whenever I felt like it. I'd go back home once I was finished with all the work I needed to do, and then I planned on coming here again to check out what this place was capable of.

Although I hadn't ended up being able to ask the demon lord anything about this dungeon, all things considered, having just me and Nell face him had been the right choice. That dark magic spell Rot would've made any sort of iron gear pointless, to say nothing of the battle having been in an enclosed space. It would've been a lot harder to evade and move around if there'd been more people in there. And I was pretty sure we would've suffered a few casualties too.

"Hmm, I see. If it was impossible with the two of you, then there really is nothing we can do. It pains me to let it go, but I shall give up on the core."

Yeah, except it really wasn't impossible. Besides, that's not how I wanted things to go either. I really am sorry about how it went down, so if you could please drop the knowing smile, Mrs. Nell, that'd be fantastic, thanks.

"Weeell, I *did* bring two things with me that I think might be useful for you folks. Think of them as replacements for the core and let me off the hook for screwing up."

"Oho. Did you, now?"

Carlotta looked intrigued, so I took them out of Inventory. The first item was a magnificently decorated short sword with an engraved crest, and the second

was a journal. Her eyes narrowed the instant she saw the weapon.

“This...is a ducal crest.”

“Yeah, sounds about right. My best guess is that the demon lord here was originally a noble from your country. His friend deceived him, and the intensity of his hatred transformed him into a demon lord. Everything that happened to him is in the journal.”

Just like the dungeon core, the short sword and journal had been lying carelessly on top of the desk in the office. When I'd opened the journal and read through it, I'd discovered the gist of his life up until he'd become a demon lord. Most of the pages contained bitter and wrathful words. Some even had traces of blood, probably from him having clenched his fists so hard that his nails had dug into his flesh. All of which had made it a bit difficult to figure out what'd actually happened to him.

Apparently, though, he'd been betrayed by someone he'd thought of as a close friend, and that betrayal was the reason he'd been kicked out of high society. His friend had framed him, which had led to him being stripped of his ducal title as well as the execution of his entire family. In short, the extinction of his bloodline.

Him having been cast adrift alone in the middle of this ocean had been a kind of punishment. He'd been left utterly helpless. I wondered how they'd done it. Had they tossed him into a boat with a broken rudder with no food, no nothing, and left him to starve to death, only his despair for company? Or maybe they'd thought the raging waves in this part of the ocean would toss him around willy-nilly until he was nothing but scraps of seaweed himself? But then, in a strange twist of fate, he'd been reborn as a demon lord right before he'd died.

He'd written a very tiny bit about the moment he'd become a demon lord. The atmosphere around him had suddenly changed, and before he'd realized it, the throne room had appeared. In it had been the dungeon core. That moment in time had probably been the birth of a new dungeon. Just like the Demonic Forest, this area possessed a dense concentration of mana, so it was possible under the right conditions. But I had no doubt that it having actually happened was nothing short of miraculous.

I think the reason his race had become draugr was probably the same as why I'd been reincarnated into this world as my initial race of archdemon: because the dungeon had determined that his new race would allow him to survive. Even after becoming a draugr, he seemed to have held on to his reason and sense of self for a while. But through his diary, I could feel him steadily losing both as time passed.

From the beginning, his handwriting had felt rough. Maybe it was because of his hatred. But his sentences had become cruder and his writing even worse as time had worn on. By the last few pages, his writing had just looked like meaningless scribbles.

Thus concluded the origin story of the Human Absolute Murder Man, also known as the No Life King, the incarnation of hatred and rage.

I one hundred percent get why he was so freaking pissed. If anyone killed my family, I was willing to lay down my life to destroy every last corner of this world and become a demon lord stained in hatred.

Christ. What an awful image. I don't even wanna think about it.

"Fascinating. I remember the political upheaval mentioned in this journal. It happened some time ago. The true masterminds who orchestrated it were never exposed, leaving the entire incident buried in a cloud of darkness. I do believe this will do much more for us than the dungeon core. Though I'm still astounded that a duke became a demon lord..."

"The shithead who set him up. Flush him out and exterminate his ass for me, would you? Just let me know if there's anything I can do to help."

I mean, I had told the demon lord I'd do what I could for him, y'know? And taking care of the bastard who'd ruined his life was well within reach for me. I had no problem assisting with the kill.

"Hmm... Understood. Leave it to us. This is clear evidence of wrongdoing, and I have no intention of allowing the culprit to lead a long, carefree life. Lord Griff, we shall provide generous compensation, so if you would be so kind as to maintain your silence on this matter—"

"Aye. You don't need to say another word. All we did was act as guides for the

holy knights. We heard nothing, we know nothing. Right, you two?”

“Of course. I haven’t the faintest idea what you might be referring to.”

“I sure don’t plan on dyin’ from a mysterious illness or what have ya on account o’ my own loose lips. ‘Specially not after survivin’ this nonsense. So I didn’t hear anything either.”

“I very much doubt that will happen, though...”

Carlotta smiled wryly at Reyes’s blunt words, then faced me.

“Mask. As long as Nell is here, you won’t do anything disadvantageous, will you? Silly of me to even ask, actually.”

“Damn skippy. You know me pretty well now, huh?”

I nodded matter-of-factly. In response, Carlotta raised her hands high in surrender, silently apologizing for her rudeness. The holy knights and adventurers chuckled at our exchange.

“Right, then. Since you two have returned safely, there is no need for us to linger here any longer. Withdraw at once!”

And so, our dungeon conquest ended successfully.



“Done already? I can’t quite believe it. Frankly, I thought you only came back to resupply. But I shouldn’t have expected any less of elite fighters like yourselves. As a resident of the Port of Powza myself, you have my gratitude.”

“And I am glad to hear that our assistance wasn’t for naught. Although to be honest, we didn’t expect the campaign to proceed so smoothly either. It’s all thanks to one individual who went above and beyond.”

The ship bobbed lightly on the water as we stood on its deck. Carlotta glanced at me with a meaningful smile while talking to the captain.

“Ah, the esteemed hero’s lover, eh? I must admit, he seemed a bit wet behind the ears to me, but clearly, I was wrong. Since his power is the real deal, he’s not so young, is he?”

“At the very least, I believe he’s older than Nell. Which reminds me, I never

actually asked his age. Mask, how old are you?”

“A year and a few months.”

“Huh. Well, there you have it. He is, evidently, the youngest here.”

“I see. So he does indeed wish to conceal his true identity, just as his mask would indicate. You aren’t a holy knight or an adventurer. In fact, you don’t belong to any organization. Such a tactic allows you to avoid any unnecessary solicitations.”

Strangely understanding, the captain stroked his magnificent beard thoughtfully.

I’m not lying, though. Also, I just realized that not much time has passed since I was reborn in this world. That’s crazy.

It sure *felt* like five or ten years had already gone by. What an incredibly eventful year and few months it’d been.

“Thinking back on it now, we met not long after you became a demon lord, Mr. Yuki. Wow, it’s barely been a year...”

Nell had changed out of her light armor and into a more comfortable outfit. Now, she was murmuring into my ear so that the others around us wouldn’t hear what she was saying, her tone awed.

“Yeah, pretty shocking that we’ve only known each other for such a short period of time.”

“I agree. But the more shocking thing to me is how quickly you used your seductive wiles in that same period of time. I don’t think a normal person could acquire three wives so fast.”

“Ugh, I’m begging you. Don’t say it like that. You make me sound like some kind of playboy.”

“Tee hee. Sorry, sorry. You’re a very faithful man, Mr. Yuki. Your relationships now are simply a result of you facing all of us honestly.”

“Uhhh, Mrs. Nell? That’s pretty embarrassing to hear too, so just...stop. Please.”

Scratching my cheek, I couldn't maintain eye contact with Nell as she giggled cheerfully.

Our group was back on the galleon after having left the phantom ship dungeon behind. We'd stuck around for a bit before disembarking just to make sure we'd truly conquered the cluster of ghost ships, which we'd done by observing the movements of the monsters on board. When they hadn't reacted at all even though they'd seen us, we'd determined that it was due to a lack of instructions on account of their master being dead. At that point, Carlotta had officially declared that the dungeon conquest was complete.

Of course, using my newfound control of the dungeon, I'd ordered the monsters not to attack us!

Unlike my summons, those monsters had no discernible sense of self. I couldn't sense even a hint of consciousness in them. Must've been a characteristic of ghoul types. Their general lack of response and the way they moved only when ordered made me feel like I was controlling puppets. Actually, on second thought, they *were* puppets. Puppets that were corpses without souls, bound and operated by magic.

Only the wraiths had disobeyed my commands, driven as they were by their feelings of hatred. That being the case, we'd done the sensible thing and destroyed them all before linking up with the rest of the group again. And by "we" I meant Nell. Turned out they hadn't liked the idea of their new master being a living one. Maps had clearly shown the skeletons and zombies as blue allied blips, but no matter how much time passed, the wraiths had remained red hostile dots despite me being the new pinnacle of the dungeon hierarchy.

So, I'd done what I'd needed to do. I'd used the Remote Communication feature that worked only between a demon lord and his subordinates to rile up those wraiths, drawing them toward us. Then, Nell'd slashed and sliced her way through every last one.

Those who didn't obey me were my enemies. It was as simple as that. Instead of trying to find a way to make them docile, it'd been easier and safer to just kill them off.

The situation with the wraiths had taught me that not every monster under a

demon lord's command was obedient. Was it because they were dungeon monsters captured from the enemy's control? Or was that something all dungeon monsters had in common? I was leaning toward the former, but I did still think it was important to keep the latter as a possibility in a corner of my mind. Just because my summons were submissive didn't mean they wouldn't rebel if I treated them poorly.

It went without saying that I would never behave badly toward Shii or the wraith triplets. I had no intention of treating my super-duper adorable pets badly either. *Ah, wait a sec. Now that I think about it, I have dumped a lot of work on Rir...*

I was fully aware of the fact that I'd been tossing a lot of responsibilities at him since, well, forever. But I couldn't help it. He was just such an outstanding individual, na mean? I did plan on rewarding him for his hard work, though. *Would he be happy if I bought him fancy dog food with DP?* Nah, most likely the opposite. I could easily imagine the sadness in his eyes if I did that.

"Hey, wife of mine. Need your advice. I wanna give Rir something to thank him for everything he does, but I can't think of anything. Got any ideas?"

"A reward? Hmm... Normally, I'd say you should give him something he likes, but what exactly *does* he like?"

"I...have no idea. Meat is probably a safe bet."

Dungeon monsters could live without eating anything as long as they had the dungeon's magic filling up the dungeon's territory. In that sense, food was basically an indulgence for summons. I knew that my pets just hunted whatever they wanted whenever they had a craving. The problem was that I didn't actually know what they liked. Rir was the only one I'd ever seen eat anything, and on those occasions, he'd seemed to enjoy the heck out of meat. At the very least, I knew he didn't hate it.

"How about a barbecue with Rir and everyone, then? You can grill up a whole mountain of meat and feed it to him. I think that will convey your appreciation to him."

"Hmm..."

Okay, yeah. Show my gratitude through actions, not things.

“All right, I’ve decided. We’ll have a seafood barbecue when we get home. Nell, you come with me too. Yaaay, barbecue. Bar! Be! Cuuue!”

“Oh, but...I have work...”

“Hey, Carlotta. Mind letting me borrow her for a few days?”

“O-Omigosh, Mr. Wye!”

“Hmm? Ah, yes, of course. I planned on telling everyone on this expedition to take a rest once our work here was finished, so your timing happens to be perfect. I can’t spare her for long, but a few days is fine.”

“I knew you’d get it! Hear that, Nell? We got the go-ahead. Good stuff, right?”

“Ugh...good grief. Why must you be so overbearing all the time?”

The smile lifting her cheeks undermined her exasperated sigh.

After that, Nell and I spent the next two hours on the swaying galleon, chatting and laughing with the holy knights and adventurers.

“Hmm? That’s...”

The captain was in the process of verifying our route through his binoculars when he suddenly spoke, his voice puzzled.

“Is something wrong, Captain?”

“Well, four ships are approaching us. However, they aren’t displaying any flags that indicate their affiliation.”

“An armada with an unknown affiliation must mean...”

The captain nodded, confirming whatever realization Carlotta’d had.

“Correct. Pirates.”

“Whoa! Pirates?!”

“Why do you sound so happy, Mr. Wye? You shouldn’t.”

Because! Pirates! Pirates! First a phantom ship, and now pirates! Literally the two most epic things about the sea, amirite?

They remained far off in the distance, still no more than dots on the horizon. But my enhanced demon lord vision verified that there were indeed four ships with their bows pointed in our direction. Each of the pirate ships was roughly half the size of ours, which made them a lot faster. The vessels sliced through the water, steadily gaining on us.

“Men! Prepare for battle!”

Klang. Klang. Klang. The captain rang the bell next to the rudder vigorously, and his crew immediately got to work. Though they rushed, their movements were disciplined. Everyone on board immediately went on high alert as the sailors started loading the cannons outfitted in the ship.

“Reyes, I don’t know much about the high seas, but isn’t four ships a lot for a pirate fleet?”

“Right you are, sonny. Right you are. I reckon there’s a total of a hundred to a hundred fifty across all four of ’em. Having said that, we’ve got you on our side, Master, so all I can say is...mercy be upon their doomed souls.”

My buddy Reyes didn’t look all too worried. In fact, he was staring in pity at the convoy of pirate ships heading our way. Honestly, couldn’t blame him. They were just normal opponents, not a dungeon or anything nuts like that. A few hits from my mythrill knives with their Explosive Roaring Blaze sorcerous circuits and the whole thing would end in literal burials at sea.

Besides, I literally had the advantage since we were right on the water, what with water being my strongest magic and all. Using seawater to create a few huge water dragons wouldn’t tax my magical energy supply as much. And once I set my watery beasts loose on the pirates, they’d bring an end to this chapter.

“Yo, Carlotta, you want me to crush them? I can do it once they get a little closer.”

“No, wait. Captain, we would like to assist you and your crew. What say you to seizing those ships? I think it’s very possible considering our current combat assets.”

“Well, I am of course eager to follow your plan if you truly think we can succeed...”

Though the captain's expression seemed to imply, "Are you sure we can do this?"

"Oh, I won't be the one acting. Now, then. Mask. No destruction. Hmm, as for what we do first...I say we stupefy them."

"Aye, aye, ma'am."

Carlotta grinned boldly, and I could feel an evil smirk curling my own lips behind my mask. I started drawing on my magic.

The armada continued its relentless approach. So far, we'd treated them as unknown sailing vessels, but the closer they got, the more it became obvious that they were, in fact, pirates. Heck, their crews had even suddenly raised Jolly Rogers in an attempt to terrorize us. They'd probably kept them lowered until now to fool us into mistaking them for a legitimate armada or something.

The wind carried the scoundrels' audacious howls over to us. The closer their ships drew, the tenser our galleon's crew became.

You assholes really think you're that scary? Well, I ain't no punk-ass bitch.

Sinking them to the bottom of the ocean would be a piece of cake. Our goal was to capture them alive, though, so I needed to think a little. I was seriously tempted to turn at least one ship into bits of seaweed, but I decided to refrain. That would've been a waste.

"Carlotta, what do you want out of this? The pirates or the ships?"

"The ships. As for the pirates themselves, if you can leave us at least the captain and a third of the crew, I'd be much obliged. The rest you can do with as you please."

Those callous words flowed smoothly from her lips. A cold smile accompanied them. But I wasn't exactly a saint myself, so I had every intention of going balls to the wall. Since these pirates wanted to take us down so badly, I'd have them do me a favor by dying.

"You got it. Time to grind these poor widdle piwates into chum!"

And then, I unleashed the usual attack—my water dragons. Eight of them surrounded our galleon, their bodies twice as thick as this ship's masts because

of the colossal volume of water I'd used to form them. Heads raised above the water, they glared at the pirate scum.

It was a little ridiculous how often I busted out my dragon trick, but I really couldn't help it. They were just so darn user-friendly. One, it took me almost no time at all to create them since I was so used to the magic by now. Two, their size was only limited by my will. Three, they were insanely lethal. And four, as long as I was near water, I could create powerful dragons without using much magic.

Not to toot my own horn, but I was incredibly proud of myself for having come up with such an effective spell. Also, we couldn't forget the most important thing: how cool my dragons looked.

"Wh-What the devil?!"

"B-Beasts!"

Cries of astonishment and fear came from the sailors on our side because they didn't know I'd created the water dragons.

"S-Ser Carlotta, what are these?!"

"Be at ease. This is Mask's magic."

"S-Such stupendous...dragons..."

Sweat dripping down his face, the captain stared fixedly at my creations.

"So glad you like 'em! You'll love 'em even more after I show ya what they can do!"

The instant I gave the command, my water dragons rushed forward as a group toward the pirate fleet. It didn't even take them a minute to reach their destination. The pirates froze at the sudden appearance of the attacking swarm, all of them wearing identical, stupid expressions of shock.

"Devour them!"

My water dragons went on the offensive. Two of them for each ship. They started with the pirates on the decks, opening their jaws wide and swallowing our enemies whole like they were enjoying a splendid feast of live seafood while it still moved. As usual, I'd mixed sand into their physical compositions as

an abrasive, so all the pirates inside the dragons' bodies were sliced to bits by the high-speed currents. Meaning they died instantly.

“Whaaaaat?!”

“Th-This can't be happening!”

“Fire! Fire!!!”

The pirates were slow to realize they were under attack even though they should've been the ones doing the attacking. Panicking, they finally started fighting back, using their cannons, axes, swords, and what have you against my water dragons. Alas, 'twas all in vain.

The cannonballs flew through their watery bodies, whooshing harmlessly in the wrong direction while my dragons chomped up the cannons and gunners. And naturally, the geniuses using axes and swords barely even registered on my radar. They inflicted no damage whatsoever before being devoured. I mean, come on. Physical attacks were literally meaningless against bodies made of water.

“Whale, whale, whale. The pirates have conjurers of their own, do they?”

Apparently, a few of the pirate scum had figured out that physical attacks wouldn't work either. They were trying their best to escape in a number of ways—by generating a water wall around the ship, releasing fireballs to vaporize my dragons, and moving the ships with magical gusts of wind. Too bad for them, all that was pointless too.

My water dragons were overwhelmingly superior not only in the amount of magical power they possessed, but also in their level of perfection as a spell. Dodging the fireballs was child's play for them. Hell, even if one or two hit them, they weren't particularly bothered. They also bashed through the water wall like it was nothing. In short, my dragons refused to let a single ship escape as they continued gobbling the pirates up.

This was how each duo dealt with a ship. While one “dined” on who or whatever was on the deck, its partner handled the ship's interior. Since I wasn't allowed to damage the ships themselves, I had each pair's nonfeasting dragon split its head into multiple clones. Like an eight-headed serpent, it did its job

guzzling down pirates inside the ship. Their bodies became thin enough to fit through the cannon windows on the sides of the ship, at which point they began to invade the interior, adding to the hell unfolding on the deck.

Despite the flashy bloodbath, per Carlotta's request, I tried my best not to kill *all* of the pirate scum. She'd told me to leave a third alive not out of mercy but simply out of logic. If I killed off too many of them, we wouldn't have enough people left to work the ships because the sailing vessels built in this sort of era couldn't operate without a sizable crew. I knew because I'd watched *Pirates of the Mediterranean*.

Also, I was curious about something. I had a feeling the reason our boss had said to keep the captain alive was because she was on the same wavelength as me. That was to say, she wanted information.

"Sooo, I'm guessing that's...their captain?"

Amid the agonized screams and general pandemonium, a well-built man raged relentlessly at his crew from the deck of one of the ships. *All right, we're taking him alive*. Decision made, I ordered one of my water dragons to guzzle him down its gullet.

"Nuuuooooo!!!"

"Cap'n?!"

"Ahhh! The captain's been eaten!"

Ooh, my guess was right.

Since we wanted the fucker alive, I'd dispelled the high-speed currents inside the water dragon, essentially turning it into a water jail. Then, I had the dragon whiz its way toward us on the water's surface. Halfway through, the dickhead tried to escape, but he didn't succeed since he couldn't move very well inside the watery prison. Once the dragon arrived, it spat out the pirate captain, who tumbled unceremoniously on our ship's deck.

"*Hack, cough...* I'll—kill all—of you—"

I shoved my foot into his back and squished him into the floor when he tried to unsheathe his sword. After making sure he couldn't move, I spoke to

Carlotta.

“Carlotta, this is the pirate captain.”

“Well done! Tie him up!”

“Yes, ma’am!”

Armed to the teeth, the holy knights had been on standby the whole time. Now, they moved quickly to obey her command. With practiced movements, they tied him up and gagged him. The pirate captain growled and squirmed on top of the deck. I no longer had to worry about going overboard and accidentally killing him.

“All right, we got their boss, but what about them? Want me to kill more?”

“No, I believe you’ve done enough. They should understand very well the difference in our strength—well, the difference between *your* strength and theirs. Will you withdraw your dragons temporarily?”

“You got it.”

I did as the lady knight instructed and ordered my remaining water dragons to stop attacking. Then, I had them pull back and surround the pirate fleet at a distance. Their poses indicated that they were ready to strike at a moment’s notice if the pirates insisted on resisting.

A sense of relief filled the air around the pirates when they saw the water dragons moving away. They held a discussion with each other across their ships. A short while later, they lowered their pirate flags and raised white ones of surrender.

According to the holy knights and our galleon’s crew, it’d taken about twenty minutes to incapacitate the pirate armada from the moment we made contact. Their inspections of the ships had confirmed that my water dragons had destroyed most of the railings, cannons, stairs, and furnishings... But! The keels, masts, and other important parts of the ships had remained untouched, so they’d let me off the hook.

“All righty, then, pirate scum. We’ve got *lotsa* questions for you. If you answer

them like a good little boy, I guarantee you'll live. Ah, yeah, and I recommend you don't try anything funny, 'cause we don't give a flying fuck if you live or die."

"Tch. Ye piece of shit. Ye better guarantee my men's lives too then."

The pirate captain spat those words at me, his eyes full of hatred as he glared at me. Despite his bravado, he understood that I wouldn't hesitate to kill him if he did something dumb. Might've had something to do with the fact that my water dragons were still on guard around this ship.

Only someone two bricks shy of a load would be stupid enough to continue resisting at this point. We had them in a vise based on numbers alone. Me killing off a bunch of them had flipped the situation in our favor, as our group now outnumbered the pirate survivors.

"Whoa, I'm surprised you actually care about your subordinates. All right. They'll probably end up as slaves anyway, but I swear in the name of God that I won't kill them without cause."

After a few seconds, the pirate captain finally responded.

"What do ye wanna know?"

"A few things. First of all, your timing in attacking us was impeccable. Who employed you?"

Carlotta wasn't pulling any punches.



"What in hell's the meaning o' this?!"

Abel Rebliard, the mayor of the Port of Powza, stood up from his chair when we suddenly barged into his office. He looked like he'd been taking care of paperwork at his desk. For how agitated he was, though, his attitude remained undaunted.

"Hmm. Frankly, I thought you'd be hard at work devising a means of escape. Doesn't matter. Abel Rebliard, we were told a great many things about you. Consequently, we, the knights of the Holy Order of Faldienne, will be taking you into our custody. Bind him."

Obedying their commander's order, the holy knights sprung into action and deftly snapped handcuffs onto Mayor Abel. But he maintained his brazen attitude. His expression didn't change one bit from being treated like a criminal.

"Hmph. Don't make a difference to me. Do as ya wish."

Troubled by his unexpected reaction, Carlotta couldn't contain the surprise in her voice when she spoke again.

"Seems you're prepared for what comes next. Good. That saves me the trouble."

"'Prepared,' eh? So the dungeon conquest was a pretext after all. Yer true aim in comin' here was to investigate me for the smuggling, weren't it? Let me just make somethin' clear to ya in advance, though. I don't regret nothin'. We here suffered a huge blow 'cause the idiots in government were outta control. I'd like nothing more'n to give that blasted, naive king a piece o' my—"

Carlotta raised an eyebrow at Abel, who apparently misunderstood what was happening.

"Hold on. Just...hold on. What in the world are you blathering on about?"

"Hah? Didn't ya come down here to Powza to expose the smuggling ring?"

Mayor Abel looked confused. It was clear from his expression that he wasn't trying to dupe us.

"Well. It seems we were quite off the mark, hm?"

She muttered those words quietly. *We're on the same page, lady.*

After we'd defeated the pirate armada, we'd interrogated the pirate captain and learned that they'd been hired by somebody to attack us. According to him, his employer had hidden their face and refused to reveal their name as well. He hadn't recognized their voice either, so it probably wasn't someone living in the port's "underworld."

Then, there was the biggest problem, which was that the pirate fleet had commenced its assault just as we'd been about to return to port. The timing had been way too perfect, and as it turned out, the pirate captain had been given the signal to sail by whoever'd employed him.

In short, whoever was behind all this had known our precise location and sea route. I could think of one way that was possible: the regular reports we'd sent. A magical device capable of transmitting something similar to Morse code had been on our galleon. The crew'd used it to inform the mayor's office that the dungeon conquest was complete.

Ergo, it was possible for anyone in Powza's town hall to have known our movements. That was why we'd rushed here as soon as the ship had arrived in port, to talk to Abel, the mayor of this place. Except maybe we were wrong.

While I watched the two of them out of the corner of my eye, I opened Maps to check something. There were no hostile blips in this building. As for the town itself... *A few, huh?* They were all concentrated in one district of the town, making me think it was some kind of organization. Was that where the bastards who wanted to kill us had run off to?

I wanted to get a closer look, but unfortunately for me, I couldn't see building interiors via Maps. I *could* send in an Evil Eye to verify my suspicion, though.

Just then, I noticed that someone who'd been here before wasn't anymore.

"Huh? Yo, Mayor, what happened to your young butler dude? Your assistant or whatever?"

Aside from Abel, all of the staff had been escorted to the courtyard so they could be questioned by the holy knights. But I didn't see hide nor hair of the butler who'd been managing everything the last time we'd stopped by the lord's residence.

"Hmm? You mean Kelwa? He should be here."

The mayor looked confused now.

Oho. He isn't here even though he should be, eh?

"Well, it seems we know who we should actually be searching for, then."

I could tell that Carlotta had immediately figured out the meaning of my question.



"I found it. Here."

I pretended to use some kind of ability to show Carlotta his location. Maps and my Evil Eye had actually done the work, though. We stood in front of a warehouse, part of a long line of them, in a section of the town between the slums and the wharf. Several people were working on a ship anchored nearby, probably on guard duty. But it was clear that their attention was directed at the warehouse.

“You heard him! Time for us to do our jobs. If we keep letting Mask take all the credit, we’ll never hear the end of Nell’s fond stories about her sweetheart!”

The holy knights snorted with laughter in response to Carlotta’s words, while the butt of the joke blushed furiously and pressed her lips together in annoyance. Still, she didn’t look completely dissatisfied, which made my cute goddess even cuter.

Then, the holy knights blew me away with their actions. After taking care of the lookouts, they stormed the warehouse, shields at the ready. I heard shouts of “Wh-What the hell?!” and “Who the hell are you?!” coming from the two-bit punks inside. The holy knights knocked them down too before they started subduing the rest.

They moved just like a special forces unit. *Wait, no. Back on Earth, these holy knights would actually be categorized as special forces, wouldn’t they? So no “like” here.* Said two-bit punks were no match for them, and less than ten minutes later, the holy knights had the place under their control.

Turned out that this place was being used as a base of operations for people who worked as human smugglers, also known as brokers. There were a bunch of stagecoaches bearing random aristocratic crests, a variety of identification papers, and all kinds of things like that. They were probably used to evade pursuit and mislead sentries at checkpoints.

On the floor in front of us lay the butler, both hands bound. The holy knights had found him hiding in one of the carriages, which had been readied in a rush for departure. He’d resisted when they’d forcefully dragged him out, so he’d gotten bashed in the face by one of their sword hilts, which had caused a few of his teeth to fall out. Lemme tell ya, my guy looked pathetic as hell.

Carlotta sneered derisively down at the man, whose face was horribly swollen. Then, she spoke.

“I can see you were in quite a rush, Butler. An outing, perhaps?”

“Tch... I’ll have you know that I’m an aristocrat! Lord Abel won’t keep quiet about this either! Surely you must know the consequences you’ll suffer for your actions here against me!”

“I haven’t the faintest idea, actually, so why don’t you enlighten me? Here’s a question for you. What do you think will happen to you now that you’ve been captured after abandoning your post at the town hall and contacting the brokers? Do you think someone will come to your defense?”

The butler’s face slackened in shock for an instant in response to her words. But then, he seemed to resign himself to the fact that he had no way out of this situation, so he started confessing readily enough.

“Ngh... Fine, I understand. I’ll talk, so undo these bonds, will you?”

“No. First, you talk. *Then* I’ll decide.”

“All of it... I did all of it under Lord Abel’s command. He realized his activities in the shadows had been exposed after you lot drove away the pirates and returned to port, so he forced me to devise an escape plan.”

“You’re saying he was responsible for setting the pirates upon us as well?”

“Yes. He judged it best to eliminate you all before you grew suspicious of him.”

“Is that so? I see.”

Carlotta suddenly grabbed the butler by his hair, lifted him up, and slammed him into a wall with all her might.

“Hrgh!!!”

“I’ve had enough of your farce.”

A cruel smile curved her lips, her grip tight on his hair. Blood gushed from his broken nose. She kept talking.

“He told us everything, you see. Though he himself is guilty of a number of

things, he's innocent as far as the information we're seeking. So tell me who your *true* master is."

"Grr... You're nothing but the Church's dog!"

"Which I'm fine with. Better that than falling so low as to become a shameless cur like you. Now, then. It would behoove you to answer me while you still retain all parts of your body. Personally, we don't give a fig if you're to lose all your fingers, or even your hands and feet, as long as you can talk. I have all the time in the world to be patient with you until you confess."

Then, Carlotta began her violently energetic interrogation. As she did, I whispered to Nell, who was standing next to me.

"Hey, Nell. I'm kinda scared. Got any advice?"

"A-Aha ha ha... No. Because I am as well."

My wife nodded in agreement, an awkward smile that looked more like a grimace on her face.



Apparently, Lord Abel had been engaging in trade with an embargoed country. Due to the strife in the royal capital, which I'd been deeply involved in, a part of the supply chain had been severely disrupted, and that was majorly affecting this port city, located on one of the country's borders. Seeing the steady decline of food supplies for his people, Lord Abel had realized that it was only a matter of time before they'd start dying of starvation. Thus, the answer he'd hit on was smuggling.

He'd secretly initiated trade with a certain country. The long hostile history between the Kingdom and this country meant that not only did no diplomatic relations exist between the two, but trade was also completely banned between them. Evidently, because that country was located in the south, a variety of spices grew there—the same kinds that'd been sold at high prices during the Middle Ages back on Earth. That country sold its spices for cheap, and after secretly purchasing them, Lord Abel, to avoid exposing his illegal trade, sold them wholesale in another country, charging a pretty penny for them. Then, he'd bring food supplies back to his own territory.

He had apparently thought his smuggling was the other reason we'd come to the Port of Powza. Knowing full well he was breaking the law, he'd prepared himself for the worst-case scenario, which explained his unyielding attitude. Except it just so happened that it wasn't Powza's lord who'd been the most unnerved by our arrival. Nope, it was his butler and whichever noble was operating behind the scenes.

During Carlotta's interrogation, the battered butler had said that his role had been to monitor the dungeon. Long story short, the person who'd hired the pirates to attack us was the same aristocrat who'd fucked over the draugr demon lord, aka the so-called friend who'd betrayed him.

Somehow, through a number of information channels, the bastard had managed to get his hands on conclusive proof that the dungeon's demon lord was the former duke he'd framed. That was why he'd deployed the butler to this port city as his eyes and ears—to make sure no one learned of his evil deed.

Unfortunately for him, we'd made his fears a reality by conquering the dungeon. Us having done so meant that the piece of shit was in the dark about whether or not we'd discovered his secret after confronting the demon lord. That being the case, the best thing for him to do would be to kill us. *Classic villain, this guy.*

As soon as the butler'd received notice from us that the dungeon conquest had been a success, he'd put his plan, which he'd devised ahead of time since he'd already been given orders by his master, into action. Thinking that we'd be exhausted from our dungeon campaign—even though we totally hadn't been—he'd sent the pirate fleet to attack us in order to destroy any and all evidence. They'd intended to use Lord Abel's attempts to prevent the discovery of his illegal trade as the official front to cover up their plan.

Sucked for them that they'd made a couple of miscalculations. One, our supreme commander, Carlotta, wasn't a moron or anybody's fool. No, she was an extremely capable and flexible leader. Almost *too* flexible, some would argue. And two, she had a bunch of powerful pieces under her control on the board—her holy knights, a hero, and a demon lord.

To sum it all up, she'd checkmated the MFs the minute we'd shown up at this

port. We'd beaten the pirate armada at their own game, and the butler had tried to escape to at least deliver the news of his failure to destroy the evidence. But he'd screwed that up too by being caught. Which brought us to now.

"Yo, Abel, we're taking this dipshit with us. Cool with you?"

"Yes. He ain't one o' mine anymore, so do whatever ya want with him."

The mayor of Powza spat those words as he stared at the young butler with ice-cold eyes. We had dragged his ass to the residence's courtyard.

"Ch-Chief, I..."

"Silence! I explained to ya countless times the importance o' trust, didn't I?! And ya had the gall to trample on it like it were a buncha garbage. Don't ya ever... Don't ya *ever* show yer filthy mug 'round here again!"

"Gah!"

Panting heavily, Abel sent the battered butler flying with a solid punch to the face. I thought for sure he was gonna keep pounding on the schmuck till he killed him, but instead, he silently turned around and walked back inside the town hall-slash-mayor's residence.

By the way, regarding the mayor's smuggling, Carlotta'd decided to give him a pass. Though he'd broken the law, he wasn't actually doing anything wrong because of the extenuating circumstances, which she'd taken into consideration when she'd made her judgment.

Still, though, someone as shrewd as her hadn't let him get off scot-free. She'd made him swear his complete loyalty to the Church's faction, essentially making him an ally of the Church. Actually, he was basically her pawn now. She'd told him that he'd be working on her behalf in times of emergency.

But Carlotta also knew that a one-sided agreement like this might create more problems in the future, so she'd promised to provide Powza monetary aid and food supplies. Regardless, Abel was essentially "collared," so I had no doubt he found this outcome particularly painful. Especially since having such a POS for a subordinate only added insult to injury. Even *I* felt bad for him.

Then there were the four pirate ships we'd seized. Abel'd bought them all, so each of us would receive a huge sum for the capture. I'd receive an extra reward as well for my tremendous contributions in defeating the pirates.

Due to the huge amount of money involved, it was gonna take some time to gather all the funds, so I'd asked Nell to pick it up for me. Truth be told, I planned on just letting her have it all anyway. Wasn't like I had a way to use human currency. Besides, if I ever *did* wanna earn quick cash, I could just sell off the monster corpses I collected from the Demonic Forest.

"Now that we have his permission too, you can finally be our guest."

"Hngh..."

"Take him away."

When Carlotta jerked her chin in command, the holy knights obeyed. They grabbed both of the exhausted butler's arms and hauled him to a carriage outfitted with iron bars.

"I wish I could say this is all settled, but we still have to deal with the all-important issue of the mastermind, eh?"

She spoke while watching the butler get tossed into the coach. I replied to her.

"You can handle it, though, right?"

"Indeed, as that's our job. With this much evidence in hand, all that's left to do is capture him. It would be a dereliction of duty if we let him escape at this point. We'll take care of it."

"Heard. Don't let me down."

No Life King, looks like we're gonna be able to do something about your grudge after all. Now that the ball's in Carlotta's court, I can say without a doubt that the way she'll take him down will be immensely satisfying. So be a pal and rest in peace, okay? And while you're at it, hand over your dungeon to me with a smile.

"Isn't this great, Mr. Wye? Now you can capitalize on that dungeon without any worries."

Nell whispered the second half of that.

“Damn, woman. You sure know how I think, huh?”

“Well, that’s because you’re so easy to read when you let your mind wander. Besides, I’m your wife, you know. I’d *better* be able to figure out that much!”

She smiled, looking slightly bashful.

My wife was so cute, I wanted to throw up. *What’s a man s’posed to do in this situation?*

“Ah, Guild Master. I very much appreciate you coming all the way out here. I know it must be a great inconvenience.”

Oh, yeah, I’d forgotten about him ‘cause I was too caught up in basking in the warmth cast by my wife’s heaven-piercing cuteness. Powza’s guild master had been here the whole time, watching all this go down. Only now had Carlotta addressed him.

“Oh, no, not at all. I can see you had your own troubles to deal with. At any rate, you all were a godsend as far as the demon lord campaign goes. Here’s the remuneration. Please verify that the amount is correct.”

“Hmm... Yes, indeed it is.”

“The guild is also ready at any time to purchase any monster drops obtained over the course of the campaign. Might I ask what became of the dungeon core?”

“It was destroyed during the conquest. But we do have a few items we’d like to sell.”

Carlotta and the guild master started discussing business, so I turned to the trio of adventurers waiting silently in the background.

“Sooo, does this mean you three are officially Adamantite-class adventurers now?”

“Damn right it does, Master. Which makes us a cut above most too!”

Reyes grinned at me in reply.

“Though I must say, I question whether we were even needed.”

“Aw, don’t say any more or I’ll be wallowin’ in self-pity...”

Griff shook his head sadly as he patted Lulour’s shoulder. She had a faraway look in her eyes.

“You two worry too much about the wrong thing. Just think of it as a sightseeing tour—a fun lark thanks to Master’s outrageous talent. ‘Cause a rank-up is a rank-up, hear?”

“If only I could be as carefree as you...”

Lulour replied to Reyes in an exasperated tone. At that moment, the guild master joined us, his conversation with Carlotta over.

“Wye, was it? What say you to applying to our guild? If you do so right now, I can register you as Mythril-class as a special favor.”

Griff followed up hot on his heels.

“GuilMas, Mythril would definitely be rank fraud if you’re trying to recruit my mate here. Orichalcum would make much more sense in his case.”

“The right agrees.”

“As does the left.”

“Orichalcum would require me to confer with the other guild masters and receive their approval first. If the three of you are all in agreement about his abilities, I just barely have the authority alone to register him as Adamantite. What do you think?”

I waved at the guild master lazily in response as he tried his best to recruit me.

“Sorry, dude, but I have no intention of being affiliated with any organization. Appreciate the invite, though.”

“I see. Then please don’t hesitate to let me know should you ever change your mind. Our guild will gladly welcome you when the time comes.”

The adventurer’s life, huh? I bet it’d be hella fun in its own way. Too bad I’m destined to face off against adventurers.

With my current Bronze rank, the lowest one, they wouldn’t nag me even if I

did jack shit. Adamantite, on the other hand, was second from the top, so it probably came with a ton of obligations, which would more than likely end up getting in my way. Though a part of me definitely wanted to say yes to his offer since the life of an adventurer did appeal to me.

“I reckon things would be a hell of a lot more fun if you and I worked in the same profession, Master.”

Reyes looked a bit disappointed by my rejection. Laughing, I shrugged in response.

“Hey, it’s not like this is our last goodbye. I’m sure we’ll have another opportunity to work together again in the future.”

I’d learned from this expedition that these three in particular were pretty talented. Despite them dunking on themselves by saying they hadn’t done anything, that wasn’t true at all. They’d guided us accurately and were crazy knowledgeable. I’d been seriously impressed by them during the course of the conquest considering how many times I’d thought, “Damn, they really are pros.” And since Carlotta knew them now too, I had a feeling she’d work them hard anytime a job required the aid of adventurers.

All of that made me reasonably confident we’d be meeting again sooner rather than later. Heck, there was a good chance we’d end up working together again in the same way.

“All righty, folks. Looks like we’re done discussing everything we need to discuss, yeah?”

I glanced at Nell, who nodded back at me.

“Then we’re gonna head out.”

“Hmm? At this hour? It’s quite late, so the coaches aren’t running...”

Carlotta looked puzzled by my announcement.

“Yeah. Actually, I have my own secret way home. I can go back whenever I want.”

That “secret way” was the dungeon teleportation device, which let me return home in a flash. I also *really* didn’t wanna spend another night in the

uncomfortable-ass beds here. My explanation was pretty vague since my desire to go home was as clear as could be by this point. Yet for some reason, Carlotta, the holy knights, and the trio of adventurers looked strangely convinced.

“I don’t find it particularly odd to learn that. Not when it’s you we’re talking about, Mask.”

“Master sure would have a trick like that up his sleeve, eh? Like flying or summat.”

“Or the power to instantly return home through the use of spatial magic, hm?”

Carlotta commented first, then Reyes, followed by Lulour.

You are correct, Miss Lulour.

“Understood. Then, factoring in the time it will take us to reach the royal capital... Nell, you can take a week off. Go and rest your bones properly.”

“I will. Thank you very much, Miss Carlotta!”

She nodded to Nell, then turned toward me.

“Mask, this is your portion of the reward. As far as your payment for the pirate ships, as we discussed earlier, I’ll turn it over to Nell the next time I see her.”

“Sounds good. Thanks. If you get another job again *and* it has to do with Nell, you can count me in.”

“Heh. Understood. Yes, indeed, I shall certainly commission you if or when the time comes.”

I shoved the gunnysack full of money into Inventory. And then, I spoke, facing everyone around me.

“See ya around, folks. I had fun.”

“Take care, everyone!”

“You know it! Until we meet again, Master, Miss Hero!”

“I’m very much looking forward to hearing you wax poetic about your man some more, doll.”

“Let’s have each other’s backs again on the next job, mate.”

Sent off by our new and old friends, Nell and I left the Port of Powza. We walked for a while until Maps brought us to a deserted spot. Once we got there, I took out two of the dungeon teleportation devices from Inventory.

“Nell, you remember how to use this?”

“Yup. Just activate it with my magic, right?”

“You got it. It’ll work automatically once you channel enough energy into it. Now, let’s go home.”

Our figures then disappeared, becoming one with the darkness of the night.

Chapter 3: It Feels Good to Be Home Again

“We’re hooome.”

“We’re back!”

It was pretty late by the time we got back to the real throne room, so Nell and I announced our arrival in soft whispers. Someone replied, though.

“Hmm, so you are returned? Welcome back, you two.”

It was Lefi.

The little-girl gang was already sound asleep in their futons, and I guessed the maids were in their room too since I didn’t see them here. As for Lefi, well, it was anybody’s guess whether she was a night owl or just that self-indulgent. In any case, she generally stayed up late into the night, and tonight was clearly no exception.

“Nell, is this imbecile guilty of any imbecilic actions?”

“Hmm... Maybe a little, but he did his job properly. Some might even say he did really well. So he had his cool moments too.”

“I see. In that case— Hold. You are wont to pamper him, so I find myself distrustful of your report.”

“H-Huh? Do you really think so? It’s never my intention to spoil him, though...”

“Perhaps not, but there is no doubt that, among us three, you are the most lenient with Yuki, Nell. Your attitude might be unavoidable because you are the only one who cannot see him every day, but you must nevertheless remain on your guard. If you spoil him overmuch, the man will become naught but a burden, and we cannot have that as it would teach the wee ones a poor lesson.”

“Y-You’re right. I’ll be careful moving forward.”

Nell nodded in agreement at Lefi’s words, which sounded like something a

decent parent or guardian would say.

Incidentally, while they chatted away, I silently spread out my futon. Though I had a lot I wanted to say whenever my wives had these kinds of conversations, I knew better than to butt in. I sure as hell wasn't looking to get roasted, so as always, I just kept my mouth shut.

Damn. Never thought I'd get used to this situation, but here I am. By "this situation," I meant my wives having me so totally whipped. Although to be a hundred percent honest, I didn't hate it all that much.

"Begging your pardon, my ladies, but might we avail ourselves of rest soon? It is quite late, after all, and I must admit to feeling somewhat exhausted."

"Mm, yes, it slipped my mind that you two only just returned from a job. I would like to converse more, but we can leave that for tomorrow."

"Please and thanks. Since that's settled, whaddya say to sleeping together?"

I grinned shamelessly and patted both sides of my futon in invitation. Lefi and Nell exchanged glances.

"Well...I do not mind."

"M-Me neither..."

Lefi shrugged like she was saying, "You are hopeless." And Nell, looking kinda shy, scratched her cheek. Then, they lay down on either side of me. The warmth of their bodies soothed me. The futon did feel a bit cramped with the three of us on it, but it also felt cozy for some reason.

"Retiring for the night with a wife on each side. This is literally the freaking life. The only thing that'd make it better is if Lew was here too."

"Then you should ask her tomorrow. Though your request will put her into a fine frenzy, I know she will not deny you."

"Aha ha ha. Lefi's right, Mr. Yuki. You should ask her tomorrow."

"I think I'll do just that, then."

Wrapped in supreme bliss, I fell asleep.



The next day.

“Check it out, peeps! I bought a ton of seafood!”

“See-food!”

“Yaaay!”

“Sea...food.”

Shii and Iluna threw up their hands in excitement at my words, while En nodded and mumbled to herself like she was imagining how it all tasted.

En was an unexpectedly huge glutton. I figured it had to do with the fact that she was originally an inorganic substance who hadn't known what the act of eating was until she'd anthropomorphized. *Mwa ha ha! Never a bad thing to be a foodie, though. Keep on eatin' on, kiddo. Don't stop until you've tasted everything there is to taste in this other world.* Which reminded me. She'd said once that she wanted to walk around while eating.

“Look! Gaze upon this massive school of fish! A huge parade of marine life!”

“Marine liiife!”

“Sooo many!”

“They...look yummy.”

The little girls squealed delightedly as I arranged baskets full of fish on the table.



“I do not understand why they are all so enthused.”

“My lord does look like he’s enjoying himself, huh?”

“Tee hee. I’m sure he’s just happy to be with everyone again.”

“That amount of food seems worth the effort to cook, hm?”

While the adult gang chatted away, I beckoned to Lefi.

“Lefi. Hey, Lefi.”

“What is it?”

“liit’s...an octopuuus!”

“Whaaaat?!”

“Blergh?!”

When I suddenly held the freshly caught octopus in front of her face, it startled Lefi so bad that she reflexively slapped me. She wasn’t able to control her power because of how unexpected my prank was, so her slap blasted me into the air. The force of it had me spinning like I was doing a triple axel before I slammed dramatically into the dungeon’s wall and slid to the floor, motionless.

That slap had deleted half of my HP. It was the most damage I’d taken in a *long time. Not gonna lie, for a second there, I thought I saw the light at the end of the tunnel.*

“Nnngh... Th-That huuurt.”

“Yukiki... That was your fault, you know.”

“Ah, yes, you’re right. My apologies.”

Even though I was still lying awkwardly on the floor, I apologized like it was the most natural thing in the world when Iluna calmly scolded me. I couldn’t help myself. The idea had come to me and I’d seen no reason not to do it. *Tee hee, silly me.*

“Haah, haah... Th-That is correct! You are at fault for suddenly thrusting something so sickening before my very eyes! I thought my heart would burst out of my chest!”

“I’m sorry, okay? That was my bad.”

But sorry not sorry, the shocked look on your face was so totally worth the intense pain. Though my cheek still stung, I’d recovered enough to move again. The octopus had ended up sailing with me, so I peeled the gloopy thing off my head and stood up.

“Ahem... I’m just fine, thanks! Anyway! This bountiful catch! What do you guys think we should do with it?”

“Me! Me! Pick me! I think we should play pretend and have a fish parade!”

“I be a deep-sea fish!”

“I...want to be a moray.”

“I’ll be a flounder, then!”

“Um, h-how about we host this parade another time, yeah?”

The three little girls had already started pretending to be the fish they’d each mentioned, so I tried to reel them back to reality with a rueful chuckle. But also, I was kinda baffled by their choices. Like, they could have picked some better fish, ya know?

“Do you truly intend to conduct a make-believe fish parade with them, Yuki?”

“Mm... Eventually, yeah. And when I do, you’re gonna be a fish too, Lefi. Isn’t that right, Iluna?”

“Yup! Think of a fish you want to be, Lady Yukiki!”

“Geh... Y-Yes, I shall. E-Eventually.”

Caught off guard by me and Iluna, Lefi sounded just a bit agitated when she replied to us. Meanwhile, I couldn’t stop grinning evilly at her. *Heh. That dummy.* I knew she’d initially asked me the question because she’d wanted to see me fumble for an answer, but the joke was clearly on her since I’d dragged her down with me.

When the fish parade comes to town, I’mma make sure you play a deep-sea fish along with Shii. And I’ll be a tuna or something, swimming gracefully through the stormy seas.

“Grr... Y-You made me dig my own grave, Yuki.”

“Keh keh keh. I can read you like a book, Lefi. We spend practically every day together and you think I don’t pay attention? Tsk, tsk. Anyway, we have more important things to discuss.”

Next, I spoke to everyone in the room, not just the little-girl gang.

“Listen up, folks! We’re gonna have a seafood barbecue!”



“Woow! So coool! It’s the ocean!”

“Oho. Am I correct in assuming this is the dungeon you two captured?”

Lefi asked that question while staring at the sight before her eyes.

“Sure is. Actually, it belongs to me now. Couldn’t tell you why, but it does. Which is why I installed a connecting door—so we can all come here whenever we want.”

We were currently inside the phantom ship dungeon. Specifically, we were on the deck of the least busted-up ship in the fleet. From here, the blue of the ocean stretched as far as the eye could see. Though this graveyard of ghost ships still looked like a crumbling haunted house of sorts, it was a lot better than it’d been on my first trip here since there were no wraiths that oozed loathing for the living or skeletons that attacked mechanically.

The evening hour approached as red slowly began to stain the sky. But I’d added a new light source to the inside of the dungeon, so it didn’t look all that eerie anymore. Probably. Except most of the dungeon’s interiors were still just as much of a mess as its externals, meaning I refused to let the little-girl gang or the maids wander off.

“My lord! The coals are ready, my lord!”

“Okay! Good job, Lew.”

I produced a match-sized flame on my fingertip using fire magic and set a random piece of paper I’d taken out of Inventory on fire. I shoved it into the cluster of coals on the barbecue stove, moving it around until they’d all caught.

“All right, the coals are lit. Now, as for you guys... Oh, hey, nice work.”

I'd summoned my pets to come with us on this little jaunt. When I looked in their direction, I saw Byaku, the bakeneko, activate fire magic to light the giant custom stove I'd made for them. They were all set on their end now too. Although I'd built their stove, it really wasn't a big deal. I'd just piled up bricks to build a pit and placed a wire mesh on it. Because once I'd put my mind to constructing a barbecue stove, it'd turned out to be surprisingly simple to make.

The only issue was the wooden deck. Since there was a danger of it catching fire, I'd used the dungeon's Harden function on the floor in our immediate vicinity just in case. Turned out that it increased fire resistance to a remarkable degree too. Not to mention that if I hadn't done that, the weight of Orochi and my other pets would've been too much for these floorboards to bear.

“Hmm, how should we do it for you guys? Okay, how about I just give everything a rough chop and then you can grill it however you want?”

My pets roared in delight at my words. *Man, they really make life easy by being so low-maintenance.*

“Oh, I just remembered. Here, Rir. This is for you.”

I took out huge, rough cuts of monster meat from Inventory. Today's seafood barbecue was pretty much my way of thanking him for everything he did on the daily for us, so I'd also prepared extra special meat just for him. I'd asked Nell and Leila what was considered high-class meat in this world, and when I'd found out that a few of the monsters they'd mentioned inhabited the Demonic Forest, I'd gone a-hunting, which was where the meat had come from.

“Grr.”

“Nah, man, don't even worry about it. You always do so much for us, Rir, so this is a little token of my appreciation. If you feel like sharing, you can do that too. Whatever you want, buddy.”

I patted his body cheerfully while I spoke. In return, he bowed his head at me. Though his expression remained composed, his happily wagging tail told me that my gesture made him happy. *Savor the flavor, dude.*

“All righty, then! Let's get grilling! First up are the giant Manila clams! Put

some butter on top and drizzle 'em with soy sauce!”

“Ooooh.”

The clams sizzled as a delectable aroma wafted around us. Both the adult and little-girl gangs shouted out in excitement.

“Next up, shrimp! We brush the plump meat with this special sauce and grill!”

“Wow! It changed colors!”

“So cool!”

Shii and Iluna sounded pumped as they stared at the reddening shrimp on the grill.

“But wait, there’s more! Salt-rubbed, spit-roasted sweetfish! An absolute must for any seafood barbecue!”

“Is it absolutely necessary for you to thrust a stick through it?”

“This is what we call the beauty of form. Don’t sweat the small stuff.”

Sweetfish is meant to be skewered. I will brook no objections on the matter!

Strictly speaking, though, despite it not being technically *seafood*, they’d had sweetfish for sale in the markets in Powza. I’d bought it because it’d looked tasty. *If it tastes good, it’s justified.*

“As for the rest, you can all cook whatever you want however you want!”

“No longer so eager to regale us with your culinary ability? How abrupt.”

“Look, I wanna hurry up and eat too, okay? Especially the giant Manila clams!”

“Oh, yes. We searched high and low for these, didn’t we, Mr. Yuki?”

“Yeah, 'cause I love 'em. Like, a lot. A *lot*, a lot.”

While I replied to Nell, I used my tongs to place a clam on each of their plates. I’d absolutely *loved* Manila clams back on Earth, so when Nell and I had been wandering Powza’s markets, I’d been determined to find them.

“Whaddya think? Delicious, right?”

“Hot! It’s hot! But sooo yummy!”

“Hot, hot!”

Beaming, Iluna and Shii dug into their plates, sampling a little of everything as they huffed and puffed on the hot food. *Yes, yes. A great way of eating. So please, chow the heck down.*

“We’ve still got plenty left, so don’t hold ba— Whoa, what the?! Shoot and dang. Rei, huh? Scared the bejesus outta me.”

A face had suddenly popped out of the coals. It was Rei, one of the wraith triplets. Having successfully pranked me, she grinned in satisfaction, then flew out from the wire mesh, running away from me.

Okay, so, let me tell you something that made me kinda proud of myself. For a little while now, I’d been able to tell which of the wraith sisters was which from a single glance. They each reacted differently when they pulled off their mischief. Rei, the oldest, would grin super happily. Rui, the middle sister, would get this smug look on her face like she was saying, “Ha! Got you!” Then there was Roh, the youngest. Her expression wouldn’t change at all. Instead, she’d spin around joyfully. In short, their unique personalities shone through at their moment of victory, and that was how I’d learned to tell the difference between them.

By the way, Rui and Roh were currently in their doll forms by way of possession. The two of them were chilling with the pets. Rui ruffled Rir’s ears, while Roh sat on top of Orochi’s head to enjoy the view. They were both clearly having a ball. The three little rascals were as freewheeling as ever. *Such cuties.*

“Leila, you finished making the carpaccio?”

“Yes, I am.”

She brought the plate bearing the octopus and salmon carpaccio she’d been making. *Ooh, her plating is super nice.* It looked insanely good.

“Are you...truly going to consume that?”

Lefi stared skeptically at the chopped-up octopus.

“You bet I am. Here, try a bite. I guarantee you’ll like it.”

I picked up a piece of octopus with my long cooking chopsticks and carried it

to her mouth.

“Mrh...”

“How is it?”

“Well...it has a unique texture...but it certainly is delicious.”

I grinned because she sounded annoyed about having to admit that I was right. *Mwa ha ha! Next time, I'll make you eat takoyaki too. Once you taste its out-of-this-world deliciousness, you'll never call octopus "sickening" again.*

“Ahem. More importantly, Yuki. You can leave the clams...and the meat to me. I shall make sure to roast them properly.”

“Great, thanks. But make sure you grill other stuff too. We need a good balance of food.”

If I didn't warn her, there was a very good chance that only the things she liked would find their way onto the wire mesh.

“Then why don't I take care of the vegetables?”

“Nell, he *did* tell us we are free to eat whatever we wish. Do not be so reserved.”

“B-But I'm actually quite fond of vegetables...”

Lefi stared at Nell like she was an alien or something.

“Nonsense. No one exists in this world who willingly enjoys eating those grasslike things.”

“Lefi, you need to apologize to the farmers of this world.”

“He's right, Lady Lefi. You'll spoil your beauty if you don't eat vegetables!”

Lew admonished her while chomping down happily on some cabbage. She looked kinda like a hamster.

“Lew, you look kinda like a hamster.”

“Huh? Wh-Where the heck did that come from? Should I be flattered by that comparison?”

I shrugged while replying to her.

“Well, you’re definitely as cute as a hamster, so take my words however you want.”

“My lord, you can’t fool me that easily anymore. I know you’re just making fun of me whenever you have that particular look on your face.”

Damn. She knew.

“Huh. You’re learning, Lew.”

“Hmph! Darn right I am! You won’t be able to talk circles around me forever!”

Still chewing, she folded her arms and puffed out her thin chest triumphantly. Her smug expression always looked a little dumb to me, and I freaking loved it.

“Miss Leila, what does ‘byoo-tee’ mean?”

“It means ‘pretty,’ Iluna. If you eat lots of vegetables, you’ll take in lots of nutrients, which, in turn, will make you beautiful.”

“Hmm, hmm, hmm! Then I’ll eat lots and lots of veggies!”

“Can I become boo-tee-ful too?”

“Yes, of course. I do believe... I-I do believe you can become beautiful too, Shii.”

Leila seemed to be at a loss for words, which was unusual for her, but she tried gamely to smooth things over. I could understand her dilemma in regards to Shii, though. *Could* food help the little slime girl’s looks? She was an existence that primarily survived off magical energy, after all. *A mystery for the ages.*

“Master Demon Lord, what say you concerning Shii? She can essentially eat anything, so do you believe the concept of nutrition applies to her like it does to us?”

“I wonder...”

I suddenly realized that En hadn’t said a single word this whole time, so I turned toward her.

“En, you like the food?”

“It’s...amazing.”

She nodded happily. She'd been silently devouring the clams, shrimp, fish, meat, and veggies one after another. *Good. I'm happy as long as you're happy.*

"All things considered, my lord, your labyrinth has been growing bigger and bigger, huh? At its current scale, I think it's safe to call it one of the world's leading labyrinths."

Lew surveyed the phantom ship dungeon with interest as she chewed on fresh, hot shrimp.

"Wait, seriously?"

"Your territory extends over a huge part of the Demonic Forest, and now, you have this massive labyrinth out here on the sea too. I think the two combined add up to a *lot*. Right, Leila?"

"An interesting point, Lew. Let me think a bit... There's the isolated island labyrinth, whose conquest has been ongoing for close to four hundred years now, and the volcano labyrinth, whose origins can't even be dated. Compared to those two, you're still a fairly young labyrinth ruler, Master Demon Lord. Nevertheless, I agree with Lew. It would be faster to reach your rank by counting backward from the top at this point."

"Whoooa... That actually makes me really happy to hear."

I thought about how much of the Demonic Forest was under my control as of now. Almost all of the southern area, half each of the northern and eastern regions, and a smidge of the western, where the strongest monsters lived. *Huh. Without even noticing it, I'd become a demon lord a cut above the rest. I guess you could say I'm on the fast track to moving up from a minor demon lord to something bigger.*

"On second thought, it isn't just the scale of our domain. The moment Lady Lefi moved in, I believe it became exponentially harder for your labyrinth to be conquered. I would say yours is likely the most difficult one in the world to capture now."

Leila spoke as she stared at the silver-haired girl. Lefi had taken a break from eating and was currently playing with Nell and the little girls.

“Nell! We must defend our position! Do you understand?!”

“Hey, w-wait, Lefi! Don’t shake me!”

“Whaaat?! Lady Lefifi, you can’t carry Nell on your shoulders! That’s not fair!”

“Foo-shin! They foosed!”

“Oof. That does *not* look fun to me.”

“Bwa ha ha! Gaze upon our tactical strategy and despair, lasses! Now, we have no blind spots!”

With Nell on her shoulders, Lefi bragged shamelessly to the little-girl alliance, which included the wraith triplets. Then, she lost her balance, and the two of them fell backward.

“Waaah?!”

“Dwah?!”

“Ack... Lady Lefifi, Mrs. Nell, are you okay?”

“W-We’re fine, Iluna. Thanks for worrying about us. Darn it, Lefi! I was *not* expecting that!”

“Urk... F-Forgive me.”

From what I could tell, they were playing some variation of wall ball. If the little-girl alliance hit a certain section of the wall with the ball, they won, but if Lefi and Nell blocked them, they lost. *Yeaah, I’m just gonna keep my mouth shut.*

“Well, I agree about my dungeon being the most impenetrable in the world as long as she’s around. But for some strange reason, I suddenly feel like labyrinths and demon lords are chump change. Gosh, I *wish* I knew why. Sure is a mystery.”

“A-Aha ha ha... S-Say what you will about her, but Lady Lefi always comes to the rescue when you need her most.”

Lew did her best to cover for Lefi while Leila remained silent, smiling her meaningful, enigmatic smile. Pretty sure I was thinking the same thing as them.

Our ruminations aside, Lefi and Nell got along incredibly well. *Their*

personalities must be super compatible, huh? Lefi generally took the lead and made the calls, and Nell tagged along in exasperation. All in all, the two made an excellent combo. And as their husband, it pleased me to see that they were friends.

“Ah. I just recalled one of the legends about Lady Lefi. There was a Calamity-level demon lord known as the Lord of Death. Many countries worked diligently to defeat him, resulting in countless wars. He challenged her and ended up routed himself. I wonder if there’s any truth behind it.”

“Good question. Hey, Lefi, what’s the *real* story?”

I called out to her, and she answered me while slowly sitting up from having fallen on her ass.

“Hmm? What do you speak of?”

“Some ‘Lord of Death.’ Did you take him down?”

“Lord of Death... Ahhh, yes, an imbecile from long ago. Said imbecile destroyed my roost while I was temporarily absent. His action enraged me, so I burned his entire domain to ash in retribution. He died at some point in the conflagration.”

“I see. So he didn’t actually challenge you, Lady Lefi.”

“What a miserable end for him... Every time I find out about the dipshits who’ve challenged you, I’m always amazed because I have no idea why they ever thought it was a good idea.”

Maybe because they’d wanted the title of the strongest being in this world?

“Oho, is that how you feel? On the contrary, I believe you quite understand their feelings considering *you* are the one who has picked the greatest number of fights with me, Yuki.”

“Nah, nah, nah. You’ve got it all wrong. That’s my way of showing love, y’know?”

“Hmph. I will have you know there are better ways of expressing your love.”

Lefi harrumphed in annoyance at my easygoing response.

“But, Lady Lefi, I remember you saying you really enjoyed bickering with my lord like this.”

“Lew, you dolt! Y-You— You!”

Lefi fumbled desperately for words, her cheeks flaming red thanks to Lew’s unnecessary comment. I knew this was my chance to really compound her embarrassment, so I grinned evilly as I spoke.

“Ohhh, reeeeaallyyy? Iiinteresting. So, you really enjoy it, huh? I see, I see.”

“Cease your smiling, you insufferable oaf!”

“Whaaat?! H-Hey, stop that! I’m still eating!”

Blushing furiously, Lefi’d hurled a blazing fastball at me. I’d twisted only my upper body to avoid it because I hadn’t wanted to rattle the plate in my hand. The only reason I’d managed to dodge her impromptu attack was because I’d had a feeling it was coming. Otherwise, I would’ve taken a direct hit.

“As if I care a whit! Continue stuffing your face, you imbecile!”

Lefi spat those words out angrily. Still fuming, she stomped back toward the little-girl alliance. Although funnily enough, she’d never once denied Lew’s words before doing so.

“Hmm, I never get tired of Lady Lefi’s reactions. She’s just so cute, isn’t she?”

“Yeah. Nice work, Lew. I’ve got your back if she tries to retaliate later.”

“Oh, really?! Please and thanks, my lord! But I don’t think she will, because she knows I have loads of material I can use to tease her!”

“Do you, now? Lew. Let’s make a deal. You game?”

“Geh heh heh heh. What would you like to know, my lord?”

“My, my. You two are certainly energetic, hm?”

Wry amusement tinged Leila’s smile as she watched us act out our skit.



“Haah... Feels good, huh?”

We were in the waterfall hot spring that Nell’d pulled in the loot roll a short

time before the Spirit Emperor's visit. It felt incredible, probably because it actually had the various effects touted by so-called hidden hot springs. All kinds of wonderful sensations welled up deep inside me. I could stay here for an hour or two, maybe forever. *Ahhh. Nothing beats the joy of a never-ending supply of frothing hot water right at home.*

Not to mention how it increased HP *and* MP just by submerging yourself in it. Best damn thing ever. Nell had really hit the jackpot.

"Yukiki! Yukiki, look! Look! It's an octopus!"

"Ha ha! It sure is. I bet Lefi would lose her mind if you showed it to her."

I laughed and answered Iluna, who'd twisted her towel into an octopus shape and made it float on the water's surface.

"Why does Lady Lefifi look so grossed out at the thought of Mr. Octopus? I don't get it. 'Specially 'cause it tastes so good."

"I remember now. She said something about tentacles being disgusting. That's probably why she doesn't like octopuses either."

Wasn't like I didn't understand why Lefi felt that way. Back in my old life, octopus had been a normal part of the Japanese diet, but lots of folks outside Japan had thought it was disgusting. Plus, just like me, Lefi was the type to really make a show of her overwhelming rejection of and revulsion toward any monster with a surplus of limbs or a grotesque form.

Nell, Lew, and Leila in particular didn't seem bothered by things like that at all, though. The little-girl gang was totally fine with it too. Maybe the reason was their childish innocence, but they had no problems catching bugs like centipedes on the regular. The people of this world were just too dang strong-willed.

"Are ten-ti-kuls the wiggly things?"

"Yup, they are."

Iluna wiggled her fingers as a demonstration, and I copied her in response.

"I can do the wiggy things too!"

Shii was half blob in the water when she transformed her body and grew

several tentacles.

“Wow, you really can! Wiggly, wiggly!”

“Wiggy wiggy!”

Iluna poked here and there at Shii’s tentacles, which made Shii so happy that she wiggled them gleefully around Iluna. *Has there ever before unfolded such an adorable scene centered around the repeated usage of the word “wiggly”? No, I think not. The irony.*

“Crap, En. Aren’t you hot over there?”

“Yukiki, EnEn is in the middle of her train-ning because she really likes it hot-hot!”

“Hot-hot!”

“Yes...I like waterfall meditation, so I’m fine.”

“O-Oh, yeah? All right, then.”

I couldn’t think of anything else to say in response to En, who was standing under the actual waterfall that was the source of this hot spring, so I just laughed ruefully instead.

On a related note, where the heck had she even learned the phrase “waterfall meditation”? I’d always thought of Shii as the quirkiest of the quirky little girls in our family, but lately, En had been giving her a run for her money. *Just make sure you don’t overheat and pass out, kiddo.*

As I was relaxing with the little girls, I heard a set of footsteps coming toward the hot spring from the changing room of the inn. The one making them was Lefi.

“Ahhh, crud. It’s you, huh? Wait, Lefi, aren’t you supposed to be helping with the barbecue cleanup?”

Normally, everyone helped with cleanup. But there was the issue of coal disposal this time, which came with its own dangers, so the little-girl gang had been sent ahead for bath time, leaving the adult gang to handle the cleanup. I was supposed to’ve been there cleaning up too, but the little ones had grabbed my hands and dragged me with them. They’d refused to take no for an answer,

so here I was in the bath with them.

Then why was Lefi *here* when she should've been on the ship?

“When I attempted to incinerate the coals and food scraps such that not a single ash remained, for some odd reason, the others rushed to stop me. Then, they told me they will take care of everything themselves and that I am free to bathe first. Good grief, do they truly think I do not know how to control the power of my fire?”

Lefi replied to me while cleaning herself off in the shower area I'd set up next to the waterfall hot spring pool.

Aha, they got rid of a nuisance. I totally understand. I really wanted to declare my support out loud of the other ladies' sound judgment on the matter. If they hadn't acted so quickly, Lefi's carelessness would've turned my phantom ship dungeon into ashes. That would've depressed the hell out of me seeing as I'd only just gotten my hands on it.

“More importantly, Yuki, wash my hair.”

“Yeah, yeah. I knew you were gonna say that.”

Prompting me to come over, Lefi aggressively slapped the bathing stool she'd positioned behind the one she was sitting on. I headed out of the pool and sat on it.

“Hey! No fair, Lady Lefifi! You got Yukiki to wash your hair again!”

“Tee hee hee. It fills you with envy, does it not? He is madly in love with me, so he does anything I ask of him.”

No, not “anything.” In fact, I had the distinct feeling I ignored her requests a lot more.

“Mmm, nope, not really! 'Cause he already washed my hair too!”

“Oho, did he, now? Squeaky clean, I trust?”

“Yup! Squeaky clean!”

While they chatted, I silently washed Lefi's hair.

There was just one problem, though. The water trickling down her hair as it

clung to her skin tempted my eyes to linger on her sleek body. But I forced myself to remember that there were little girls nearby and used my iron will to fix my eyes on the crown of her head. Except the texture of her hair made me want to touch it forever. If I dropped my guard for even a second, I'd get lost in its silkiness, so my mental fortitude was being seriously tested.

It didn't matter that we'd bathed together countless times. I still wasn't used to it, and I honestly doubted I would ever be. The woman was very, *very* bad for my heart.

"Nh... As always, your hands do marvelous work washing my hair. In light of your uselessness in many areas, you may be proud of this special skill."

"You, of all people, have no right to call me useless. But thanks, I guess."

While I washed Lefi's hair, Shii made her way over to us, a big grin on her face. She was still in her tentacle form.

"Lady Lefifi! Lady Lefifi! Wiggy, wiggy!"

"Bfwah?! Wh-Whatever is this thing?! Shii, is that you?!"

Then, she coiled those tentacles around Lefi's body and started messing with her.

"Y-You are Shii after all! Eek! S-Stop it! Ngh— C-Cease at once!"

Though she understood that the creature wrapped around her was Shii, Lefi couldn't hide her disgust at the feeling of the tentacles wriggling all across her body. She desperately twisted and turned this way and that in an effort to avoid the aqua-colored feelers. On top of all that, she had her eyes closed since I was washing her hair. She also knew that if she rampaged recklessly, she could hurt Shii, so these two factors combined made it almost impossible for her to move properly.

A beautiful young girl having every inch of her body molested by tentacles. What an incredibly erotic picture.

"Good job, Shii. Looks like Lefi's happy too, so keep it up!"

"Tee hee hee. Really? Okay! I do even more!"

"No! He is lying! Shii, I am not happy at all, so you must not listen to anything

that imbecile says!”

“Now, now, Lefi. Don’t be like that.”

“Now, now!”

“No! Not ‘now, now’!”

After that, Shii messed with Lefi’s body until she got bored of it. When she did, Lefi collapsed onto me in exhaustion. She just leaned limply against me while I rinsed the soap from her hair with the showerhead.

Confession time. I had actually finished ages ago. I’d just wanted to watch more of Shii toying with her body—er, no, I’d wanted to give her hair a thorough wash as thanks for everything she does for us, and that’s why it’d taken so long. Yup. No other reason.

“Good grief... To think the both of you delight in such imbecilic entertainment! Yuki, I know you took your time washing my hair on purpose!”

“No, no, no. You’re way off base, okay? I washed every strand carefully and tenderly because I wanted to express the overflowing appreciation I have for you that’s overflowing from within me.”

“Hmph. You are as glib as ever with those sweet nothings!”

I burst out laughing at her insult.

And then, silence stretched between us for a while. The only sounds in the area were the rushing of the waterfall and the little girls’ lively voices. A peaceful moment in time.

“Yuki.”

Her body still resting against mine, Lefi murmured my name.

“What’s up?”

“No. Never mind.”

“Huh? C’mon, tell me.”

A small smile curved her lips when I pushed her to spill it. Then, as if she’d suddenly thought of something good, she full-on grinned before speaking.

“It is impolite for me to be the only one receiving such treatment. Thus, I shall wash *your* hair next.”

When I heard her words, I stood up with a jerk, the stool clattering in my rush.

“Uh, I-I think I’m good. I already washed my hair, sooo, yeah. I’m good.”

“Now, now. There is no need for such reserve between you and I.”

“Woman, I said no *because* of our relationship. It hurts like a mother when you wash my hair! I thought you were gonna rip my scalp off the last time!”

“Be at ease, for I have learned how to control my strength. Now, I am sure, in all likelihood, that you will be fine. Probably.”

“How the hell can you look so confident when your assurances are the definition of vague?!”

“Simple. I seek revenge for what you instigated earlier.”

“Goddammit! Don’t think you’ll have the last laugh!”

My shout echoed around us, and we continued arguing for a while after. Business as usual, really.

Another peaceful day in the dungeon.



I was in front of the cave that connected to the meadow area.

“All right, pets, time for some monster hunting!”

Each of my pets responded to my words in their own way.

“Let’s head ou— Ope, but first, I know you guys evolved, so I got something for each of you.”

Not long ago, Orochi had evolved from a giant blood serpent into a crimson evil serpent king. The other three had followed suit not long after with evolutions of their own.

Yata had gone from noir crow to nacht king crow.

Byaku, bakeneko to great bakeneko.

And Seimi, water sprite to undine.



As far as physical changes went, Yata had doubled in size and his talons had gotten even sharper. The number of Byaku's tails had increased, and the color and luster of this summon's coat had become even more beautiful. Seimi's appearance hadn't changed all that much, but due to its evolution to undine, it could now also take on a womanly form, which it did every so often.

Well, I said "womanly form," but it looked more like a mannequin than anything. Compared to Shii, who looked and behaved like a person, it was more accurate to describe Seimi as a monster copying the human form. The magical power in its body exceeded that of the other three by a noticeable amount, so I was training it to specialize in support.

Next, their strength. Not long after I'd summoned them, they'd grown strong enough to easily defeat the monsters in the southern area in one-versus-many fights. Then, after a while, they'd become strong enough to take on the monsters in the eastern area in one-on-one battles. And now, at their current level, the four of them could win against a monster living on the outskirts of the western area as long as they worked as a team.

You could say they had grown powerful enough that I could deploy them as defensive measures anywhere in my territory and not be embarrassed by their performance. Frankly, if it wasn't for the insanely, ridiculously harsh environment of the Demonic Forest, they'd probably be bosses on some far-off island.

Nell was familiar with the workings of our family, but more importantly, the outside world as well. I'd asked her for her thoughts on them. If her country ever seriously wanted to take these four down, they would need to mobilize a huge military force to get the job done. That was how powerful they were. And she still found it hard to believe that I'd basically subordinated them as pets.

Honestly, their growth made me happy. One of my goals was to create a dungeon where the minibosses would attack you as a group the moment you stepped into it, so I guess you could say that I was halfway there. But I definitely wouldn't let them rest on their laurels, because they still had a lot more progress to make!

Though this was no time to become complacent, I couldn't deny that my pets'

efforts were the reason for their growth. That was why, today, I'd brought something I'd made for them as a way to celebrate their evolution.

"C'mere, guys."

Then, except for Seimi, I placed the accessories around their necks. For Seimi, I attached it to a water droplet. They were flexible collars I'd bought with DP and modified myself. When I'd asked them if there was anything they wanted, each and every one of them had told me they wanted a collar to match Rir's. So I'd gotten them just that.

Sure, Rir's the only one I've ever collared, but are you guys really okay with just the collars? I definitely wouldn't have minded if they'd wanted something else. But their collars clearly made them happy considering how they were gushing about them among themselves, so I decided this was the right decision.

Incidentally, I'd customized Orochi's and Seimi's collars. The former's smooth body meant any normal accessories would just slide right down. As for the latter, my hand would just plunge straight through its watery body even if I tried to stick something to it.

The design of Orochi's had it react to the wearer's magical power and stick to their body. Meanwhile, Seimi's was designed to open up and embed itself inside the wearer's body with an alteration. I'd removed the chain-like part that was supposed to go around the neck and given it just the ornament in the center.

The truth was that these two pets' collars had given me a tough time because I just hadn't been able to figure out how to make them work. Because of that, I'd kinda kept putting them off over and over again.

"Good. I'm glad you like them. Keep working hard as the keystones of my defenses!"

My pets all bowed their heads at me in response.

"Okay! Let's go all out on the hunt— Uhhh, Mrs. Lew? Mind explaining why you're there?"

"Tee...hee...hee..."

Lew's face suddenly peeked out from the cave. *When? What? How did I not*

notice her?!

“Oh, you know, just felt like I wanted to go with you, my lord. Can I?”

“Sure, why not. But let me be clear. We’re going on a hunt, so it’s gonna be dangerous and also probably boring for you.”

“Well, unlike Lady Lefi and Nell, I’m weak. That means I can’t really leave our home much, so I thought it’d be nice to experience an outing like this with you at least once, you see.”

Lew smiled bashfully at me. I was almost positive she’d meant my long-distance trips and not just my hunts in the Demonic Forest when she’d mentioned not being able to leave the dungeon. *Damn. The stuff she says always takes me by surprise and it only makes her cuter.*

“Wh-What’s wrong, my lord? You’re making an awfully strange pose right now.”

“It’s nothing. Don’t worry about it.”

You caught me totally off guard, so I wound up posing in agony like GoGo without even realizing it.

“All right, you’re tagging along with us, then? I’m not joking about it being dangerous, though, which means you absolutely *cannot* leave my side. Got it?”

“Yes, sir! Please allow me to accompany you, my lord!”

With that, we set out for the Demonic Forest.

“Huh? My lord, is that a new weapon? You’re not using En today?”

Happy that I’d let her tag along with us, Lew beamed cheerfully as we rode together on Rir. She was staring curiously at the weapon hanging from my back.

“That’s right... Master said my turn is last today.”

En, who was sitting in front of Lew, answered her question. The little sword girl sounded a teensy bit displeased.

“Y-Yeah, what she said. I wanted to try out a new prototype. En, I’ll put you to good use too, so don’t pout, okay?”

The weapon I carried on me this time around was a cannon. More specifically, a magic cannon I'd named Kaho. The underlying concept I'd gone with was a portable cannon. It was shaped like a smaller version of a standard cannon, but it had a trigger and grip attached. I'd designed it to be held at the waist when firing magic cannon balls, and it also had a cross-body strap so I could carry it on my shoulders.

To put it bluntly, I'd just made a bigger version of the magic pistol I liked to use. The main differences between the hand cannon and my magic pistol were obviously the size and power. My new weapon was mighty, able to change the terrain itself with one shot depending on how much magic I poured into it. If I dumped the maximum possible amount of magic into Kaho, it could produce an attack on the same level as my fusion spirit Leviathan's breath attack.

Having said that, I'd crafted this weapon with sustained warfare in mind, so I'd built in a mechanism to limit its power. Sure, it was *capable* of firing tremendously powerful attacks, but for all intents and purposes, it couldn't. It was an unusual move for me to make, yeah. Especially because of my Lefi-influenced, all-out, magic-blazing, one-shot, big-gun, big-ship combat doctrine. But it was for the best.

Its major downside was that I couldn't fire shots successively since it was a cannon. Well, that wasn't *quite* right. I could technically fire up to two shots in rapid succession because of the ability to split the magic poured inside, but that was about it. As good as my magical control was now, it still took me roughly thirty seconds to reload, so I needed to put some thought into the timing of firing the big-ass gun.

Another disadvantage was its fuel consumption. Despite the power-limiting mechanism I'd installed, shooting it ten times depleted my MP. Moreover, the ten-shot breakdown was based on the assumption that I'd loaded it for the first two shots in advance, so if I used the thing without prepping it, my limit was actually eight shots.

Basically, this weapon made mana potions, which I rarely used, indispensable. I was currently considering the possibility of attaching an external magic tank to further enhance its ability to operate in a drawn-out battle scenario, though. My plan was to test it out a few times to gauge its performance, then start

working on an improved version.

I wouldn't be leading the charge today. Instead, I planned on letting my pets handle the majority of the combat, with my role being support. That was why I'd initially decided to use this weapon instead of En, but then she'd looked all sad about it, so I'd ended up bringing her along too.

Who could blame me, though? She hadn't said anything out loud while pretending like it didn't bother her. Except the look on her face had told me the truth. It'd said, "Why won't you use me?" I'd had no choice but to take her with me after seeing that, so before we'd left the dungeon, I'd rushed to grab her true sword form and fastened it to Rir's side, where it now rested.

I know carrying three people and En's real body must be heavy, Rir, but do your best for me, okay, buddy? You know my weak ass can't handle my kid pouting.

And so, our gang sped toward the depths of the Demonic Forest. About an hour later, we entered the western area.

"Aha. There it is."

Ahead of us lay a chameleonlike monster with a horn on its head and spikes covering its body like a hedgehog. It raised its head sluggishly, waking up from its nap. Then, it repeatedly flicked its snakelike tongue and hissed threateningly at us, warning us not to get any closer.

Incidentally, it was as big as Rir. As far as strength went, its stats showed that it was definitely suited to live in the western area, where the most powerful monsters in the Forest dwelled. But Rir or I could solo it if we wanted to.

The question, though, was how long my other pets could hold out against it with their current abilities.

"You four are gonna fight it without us. Rir, you're on standby. Protect Lew."

"Grr."

Rir nodded in response to my instructions.

"Apologies for the inconvenience, Lord Rir!"

"What...about me?"

“You’re on standby too, En. Keep watch near Lew.”

“Okay...got it.”

“All righty, then. Attack!”

My pets commenced battle. Orochi charged in first, whipping his body toward the chameleon as fast as a bullet. But the slight distance between them allowed the monster to pick up on his attack and run to the side, escaping—unsuccessfully. Probably failed because of Byaku’s conjury. The great bakeneko must’ve cast some sort of spell to disorient it. When it tried to flee in a random direction, it instead took a direct hit from Orochi’s rush attack.

“Ooh, nice.”

“Gaaah! That would have blown me to pieces, my lord.”

“I...would have cut him into two.”

“Ha ha! Yeah, your blade is sharp enough to do that, En.”

I laughed at En, who was apparently thinking about what she would’ve done if Orochi’d attacked her instead. I ruffled her hair before turning my gaze back to the fight.

As expected of a monster from the western region, the chameleon seemed to realize it was enchanted. It moved to parry Orochi’s attack just before he made contact, minimizing the damage it sustained, but my pets completely dominated.

The monster countered immediately, swelling its body to launch needles in all directions. Except Seimi had anticipated its move and created a water barrier around them, putting the kibosh on the enemy’s attack. At that point, the monster seemed to decide that it couldn’t stay in such a disadvantageous situation, so it used some sort of magic to begin blending into the air in an attempt to disappear. But that failed too.

Yata had been up in the air, waiting for the right time to join the fight. He did a nosedive and took a huge chunk out of the chameleon’s forelegs with his beak as soon as he found it. Agitated by the unexpected assault, the monster abruptly stopped its vanishing act, exposing itself as its body returned to

normal.

Despite spraying blood everywhere, the chameleon retaliated by charging at Yata, who was trying to break away, with the thick horn on its head. That was when Orochi rushed it again.

“Hiiissss!!!”

Orochi saw that the chameleon’s attention was focused on Yata, so he went on the offensive, striking at the monster’s neck with his razor-sharp fangs. For an instant, his fangs took on a terrifying poisonous color, which made me think he’d activated his special ability, Poison Fangs. Poisoned at the critical moment of its violent attack, the chameleon gradually stopped flailing, its movements dulled by the venom. And then, it went motionless.

My pets emerged victorious.

“Woo-hoo! Great job!”

They came back to me, looking pleased with themselves. I patted each of the cuties one by one.

Yup, that fight really hadn’t given them a hard time. In his dual role as tank and pure attacker, Orochi had captured the target, while Yata had thrown the battle into chaos by catching the enemy unawares with his attack. Byaku had deceived the monster with an illusion, and Seimi had only used its defensive magic on this occasion, which was totally fine. In the undine’s case, its specialties were buffs, debuffs, and restorative magic, which it usually used in battle to gain the upper hand.

I’d originally summoned these four to make this specific dream team, and it was working out really well. There was no mistaking their power. Despite their opponent’s stats having been higher, their teamwork had allowed them to take and keep the advantage in battle. On top of that, although he hadn’t participated in the battle this time, they would normally have been joined by our family’s trusty killer wolf commando, Mr. Fluffrir.

Mwa ha ha. Well done, my pets.

I decided I’d let Rir show off next time by having him jump into the fray too.

“Let’s keep this momentum goi— Bah. Another one, huh?”

My Scout ability had reacted to a hostile presence. Whatever it was, it must’ve heard the sounds of battle. The new guy was less than two hundred meters away from us. Wouldn’t be long before it showed itself.

As usual, the Demonic Forest was just teeming with monsters. Sheesh. But it was fine since my DP would go up.

“Guys, another one’s coming. Get ready.”

Then, I heard a rustling sound. I turned in the direction it was coming from, and goose bumps erupted all over me. The feeling of oppression was so strong that it seemed like my heart was about to be torn from my chest. My body started shaking at the same time.

A black, shiny body. Long antennas and spiked limbs. Helluva lot bigger than most of the monsters I knew in the Demonic Forest, but there was no doubt about what it was. A black beast that I refused to call by its name. Humanity’s enemy often found in kitchens. The same ones that, if sent to Mars, would become bipedal and say, “Hello, George.” It was a goddamn c***roach.

“Eeeeeek!!!”

That high-pitched shriek echoed throughout the Forest. It’d come from me, by the way. I was the one who’d squealed like a little girl.

“M-My lord? Wh-What’s wrong? Is that monster really that dangerous?”

“Y-Yeah, it sure fricking is! I-It— It’s just v-very bad, okay?! Y-You four! Kill it! Kill it now! You go too, Rir!”

My pets were momentarily taken aback by the sudden change in me, but they obeyed my command immediately and sprung into action.

Wouldn’t you know it, the monster I’d codenamed “C” wasn’t actually that strong. Because of my over-the-top reaction, Rir mistakenly assumed it was a serious situation and went all out. One blow from him crushed C’s head instantly. *Squish*. Nasty-colored liquid sprayed everywhere. It’d never even gotten the chance to move.

“Eep!”

“M-My lord?! Are you okay?!”

“Master...calm down.”

I came to my senses when I felt the warmth of Lew’s and En’s hands on both of mine. *Holy balls, I deadass almost lost my mind for a sec there.* I could feel the horrific sight in front of me whittling away at my Sanity stat. I’d been *this* close to a mental breakdown.

“Gah! N-No! Stop, Rir! Don’t get any closer! Spit that out right now!”

Surprised by my panic at the monster, something that rarely ever happened, Rir had picked up C’s carcass in his mouth and tried to bring it over to soothe me. But then my words confused him even more, judging by his expression. Still, he did as I instructed and spat it out.

I couldn’t bear to look at the corpse for a second longer, so I immediately converted it into DP, completely erasing C from the vicinity.

“Whew... That was dicey as hell. Damn near broke my spirit.”

“I could tell. I’ve never heard you scream like that before, my lord.”

P-Put a sock in it. It wasn’t my fault, okay? C’s very existence was a million percent incompatible with mankind’s.

Besides, there was this one time back in my old life I’d seen something black on the floor in the hallway. When I’d gone to get a closer look, it’d suddenly buzzed to life and flown straight at me. *Urk, my head.* The stabbing pain was a reflexive reaction by my brain. It was rejecting the memory, telling me to stop while I still could.

“Master...gets like that sometimes. He has a lot of weaknesses.”

“Oh, wow. I had no idea. En, you sure know my lord really well, hm?”

Impressed, Lew patted En on the head. The adult gang often gave En, Iluna, and Shii head pats because they were the perfect height to receive them. *Wait, what? Why the hell am I even mentioning that right now? It’s completely irrelevant.*

“Listen up, pets. Moving forward, if you see any of those again, you kill them on the spot. Like you’re extermin—actually, no, not ‘like.’ That’s *exactly* what

you should do. Wipe 'em all out, because if you don't, this forest is doomed."

"S-So it really *was* that dangerous?"

"Yeah, it was. Without a doubt."

I nodded firmly at Lew, who trembled in fear.

Woe be unto anyone who underestimated their ability to reproduce. As many folks in many places must've said at many points throughout time, if you found one, you'd find thirty nearby. Not to mention the gargantuan size. Left to their own devices, the fuckers would terraform this planet to suit their kind. The worst thing, though? Knowing that they were wriggling around in the Demonic Forest. That shit made my skin crawl!

"As of this moment, Operation C Annihilation is in effect. You all need to understand that it's vital for saving the world. Show them no compassion. Kill, destroy, and erase every last one of them from this forest. And this is the most important point: hunt them where I can't see it!"

My pets nodded vigorously, overwhelmed by my bloodcurdling expression.

With the fate of the world at stake, my pets thus carried out their mission in secret. No one knew just how close mankind had come to meeting its downfall. Well, I didn't either, since I didn't actually see them at work.



"I will not tolerate any more of your tyranny, Yuki! Prepare yourself!"

"Mwa ha ha ha! Challenge accepted! A demon lord never backs down from a fight, and he always turns the tables on his opponents!"

Nell smiled wryly as Yuki and Lefi started their usual noisy shenanigans. She continued folding the laundry.

"Those two never get tired of it, hm?"

"My lord and my lady are like this pretty much every day, even when you're not here."

Lew replied from next to her. She was also folding the laundry.

“Mm, I can imagine it easily enough. What’s the win rate like now? Is it still overwhelmingly in Mr. Yuki’s favor?”

“No, actually. Lady Lefi’s gotten a little better at board games recently. I would say the ratio is seven to three now in favor of my lord.”

Nell couldn’t contain her surprise upon hearing Lew’s response.

“Wow! Really? So if I tried going up against her now, do you think I’d lose?”

“Nope. She’s still pretty bad. I’m not good enough to have ever beaten you, but I can still beat her every now and then.”

“I have had enough of your prattle as well, Lew! Once I have trounced this imbecile to within an inch of his life, I will gladly do the same to you both if you like!”

“Sounds like sour grapes to me, Lefi! The only thing you’ve got goin’ for ya is spirit! Save all that big talk for *after* you win against me!”

“Hmph! As if I need the likes of *you* to remind me! Insist on underestimating me and you will pay the price, Yuki!”

After making those declarations, the two of them sank into their own world once more. Nell and Lew exchanged knowing glances, shrugged in unison at the hopeless duo, and then burst out laughing.

“Let’s just leave them be. They’ll take a break eventually, either when Iluna and the others come back or when it’s time to eat. Goodness, Leila, your work is speedy as usual.”

When Nell suddenly glanced next to her, she saw a tower of folded laundry twice as high as hers and Lew’s in front of Leila. The folds were neat and crisp. Her hands moved so quickly and precisely that it made one wonder if she was using some sort of ability.

“Tee hee hee. Well, I *am* a maid, so I *should* be capable of this much, you see.”

“Nell, Leila bullies me because she keeps raising the bar for what a maid should be. Do you see what I have to deal with?”

“Now, now. I have never bullied anyone in my life. I simply think it would be

to your benefit if you dedicated a little more effort and diligence to your work, Lew. Is that truly so wrong?”

“Nell, I’m scared. My colleague is trying to overpower me with her smile. Help meee!”

“A-Aha ha ha...”

Nell only laughed awkwardly in an attempt to stay neutral.

“W-Well, I certainly can’t fold as neatly as Leila either. And you’ve gotten much better than before. Isn’t that a good thing? Besides, everyone has strengths and weaknesses, so I think it’s fine to focus on your strengths. You have at least one chore you’re good at too, right?”

“Huh? A chore I’m good at? Hmm... I know! I’m pretty good at shoving laundry into the washing machine!”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“Wh-Why are you *both* looking at me like that?!”



Though Lew wasn't technically wrong since the task was, in fact, related to chores, Nell and Leila nevertheless wore identical expressions of "Huh? Is that really what you think you're good at?"

"L-Lew... You can't think of *anything* else? For example, washing the dishes or cleaning."

"Well, I've gotten pretty good at washing the dishes, now that you mention it! Unlike Lady Lefi, I haven't broken any plates in a while!"

"While I won't deny that's true, the way you handle the dishware still gives me the shivers..." Leila murmured.

She looked a bit uncertain of how to handle Lew, who'd boasted about her improvement in dish washing. This exchange gave Nell a glimpse into Leila's hardships, and she unwittingly found herself placing her hand on the maid's shoulder in commiseration.

"Leila, I pledge to help you with the chores as much as I'm able to whenever I'm here. Don't hesitate to ask me for whatever you need done."

"I appreciate your consideration."

"Y-You've given up on defending me, Nell?! Urk! My lord!"

"Whoa! Wh-What's going on, Lew? Scared the crap outta me."

Upon seeing her friend and coworker conspire against her, Lew, wailing, had flung herself at Yuki from behind. He was currently playing a game of shogi against Lefi.

"It's awful! Listen to this! My friend and coworker are in cahoots and bullying me!"

"Oh, yeah? I see, I see. That's too bad. Poor baby. There, there. It's okay. Don't cry."

He began petting her with both hands in an attempt to cheer her up.

"Eek! That tickles, my lord! Ah! Hee— Hee hee! M-My lord?! How long are you gonna keep this up?!"

He started with her head, then moved to fondling her ears before stroking her

under the chin. Embarrassed now by his fervor, Lew smacked his hands away.

“Oops, my bad. I was trying to comfort my depressed wife, but I couldn’t help getting carried away by how nice you feel. Speaking of, I’m almost positive it’s even more fun to touch you now than it was before. I’m ready to admit that your softness pretty much matches Rir’s fluffiness. You can’t rest on your laurels just yet, though. Make sure you continue to improve.”

“What in the world are you even talking about?!”

Despite being pleased on the inside about Yuki’s praise, Lew decided that he wasn’t on her side either. Thus, she directed her despair at her last resort, Lefi, who sat across the board from him.

“Hic, waaahhh... Lady Lefi!”

“Lew, you are being a nuisance. Consult with me after this match has ended.”

“Do I really have no allies here?!”

Lew cried out in shock at Lefi’s blunt refusal. In response to her dramatics, everyone in the room burst out laughing.



My eyes suddenly snapped open in the middle of the night.

“...”

Still inside my futon, I blinked a few times before slowly sitting up. I felt weirdly clearheaded. Usually when I woke up like this, it was because I needed a drink, so I’d go back to sleep right after a glass of water. But the clarity of my mind right now told me that I wouldn’t be getting any more sleep tonight.

It wasn’t like anything had happened either. For whatever reason, though, my body just didn’t want to sleep for a long time. Maybe it was because I’d spent the whole day lazing around inside.

Hmm... Now what?

Everyone was still dead asleep and dawn was hours away, so I didn’t just wanna wait around. *Maybe I’ll take a night walk, then.* They were fun once in a while.

Mind made up, I slipped quietly out of my futon, making sure not to wake anyone up, and left the real throne room.

“Jeez. This castle’s gotten pretty big too, huh?”

I looked outside from the veranda on the castle’s topmost floor. By force of habit, I’d just kept on building and adding and building and adding to my demon lord castle until it’d become what it was now. Aside from the highest floor, which had a room for everyone to use as storage and the door that connected to the real throne room, the rest of the building had gotten so needlessly complicated that even *I* sometimes wondered why I’d done what I did. The castle’s structure was so labyrinthine by this point that my family absolutely *needed* to use the special door to get anywhere. Anyone else who couldn’t would probably end up wandering its corridors forever.

Technically speaking, this castle was supposed to function as my dungeon’s ultimate line of defense. Except nobody had shown up since Nell, so I sometimes forgot that was the original purpose behind the build. Obviously, it was a good thing that I didn’t get intruders, but no one could blame me for wanting to put this castle to greater use as the defense mechanism it was meant to be.

Like, seriously. The damn thing had turned into a playground for the kids ages ago. That was pretty much its only function now. A while ago, I’d thought about creating a “kill all enemies” mode, but that would’ve made it too dangerous for the little ones, so there weren’t even any traps installed.

Well, as long as my kids are happy, I guess that’s what matters.

As I tried to console myself, I suddenly heard the sound of footsteps behind me. They were coming from none other than Lefi.

“Lefi? What are you doing here? Something wrong?”

Was she having trouble sleeping too? She gave a huge yawn before replying.

“I sensed you leaving, so here I am. I wondered at your departure, thinking perhaps trouble visited. Evidently, you simply went for a stroll.”

Ahhh, I gotcha. She’d probably thought there was an intruder.

“Sorry, did I wake you up? My eyes just popped open, y’know? I didn’t feel like sleeping again, so I decided to take a walk. Figured it’d be nice for a change.”

In response, Lefi folded her arms and shook her head like she was saying, “Good grief.”

“Well, it is no wonder, considering how intemperate your way of life is. I suggest you reflect on yourself.”

“Yeah? You sure *you* wanna be saying all that?”

“I am the Supreme Dragon, thus norms do not apply to me.”

I stand corrected. Sooo sorry.

My dear wife sounded ever so composed with her casual declaration. I smiled ruefully at her as she moved to stand next to me. She leaned against the railing, her eyes taking in the sight outside.

“Seeing your castle again like this, it really has expanded a great deal.”

“It’s cool, right?”

My original goal had been to model it after Amor Londo, but somewhere down the line, things had just gotten out of hand! No big deal, though!

But actually, it was. I honestly thought I’d way overdone it. Not only was I reflecting on my actions, but I was kinda regretting them too.

“Yes, indeed. It finally suits the name ‘Castle Ruan Phionelle.’”

“Huh?”

“The castle’s name, you dolt. Its name. Do you not remember that you consulted me about it and I made such a suggestion?”

Oh, yeah. She’s right. That’s the name of this demon lord castle. Lefi named it.

I’d completely forgotten since I just called it my home or my demon lord castle.

“You...had completely forgotten, hm?”

“N-No, no, I definitely didn’t. No chance I would ever forget the super cool

name my dearly beloved, utterly cherished wife gave my castle. Not a single chance, okay?”

“I am very aware that when you use two or more adjectives in succession, such as ‘adorable,’ ‘dear,’ ‘beloved,’ et cetera, you are usually trying to deceive me.”

Shit, she knows. She totally has my number.

“Maaan, you guys have really figured out my personality by now. Maaaaan.”

Like during the seafood barbecue when I’d tried pulling the wool over Lew’s eyes but she’d known I was doing it. It sucked since both she and Mistress Supreme Dragon over here had been such easy marks before.

“Hmph. Because we are not your wives in name only. Anytime one of us learns something about you, we share the information with the others when we convene the Council of Wives.”

And there it is, the dreaded Council of Wives. The thing they always kicked me out of the real throne room to hold.

“By the way, can I ask what you three talked about at the last meeting?”

“The main topic was your inclinations. We all knew of your fondness for thighs, but we also discussed others, such as how the napes of our necks often draw your attention or the occasional glances you sneak at our waists—”

“Um, actually, Mrs. Lefi, I changed my mind. You don’t have to tell me. It was my fault for asking in the first place, so that’s enough. Please. Seriously.”

“Bah. Coward.”

I hadn’t expected to hear any of that, especially stuff I’d never even realized about myself. Anybody would’ve reacted like I did after learning how thoroughly transparent they were in the eyes of others, and doubly so if their wives had shared the information between them. *Curiosity almost killed the demon lord. Let this be a lesson to me to keep my goddamn trap shut.*

“Gah ha! There is no need to look so forlorn. Rather, you should be happy. Such is proof of our daily research into understanding our husband.”

“My dear Mrs. Lefi, I am, of course, greatly heartened to hear that. But you

know what would make me even heartened-er? If you keep what you know of my personal preferences to yourself.”

“You ask the impossible, for we have pledged to cooperate with each other when it comes to you! However, if you say you are willing to consider one of my requests, then perhaps another discussion is in order, eh? I shall give you time to think on this.”

Lefi grinned at me. I’d gotten real used to seeing the sneaky smile on her face. *Sweets. She wants sweets.* Or so I thought. Something different came out of her mouth instead.

“Not terribly long ago, you went on a trip to the beach with Nell. Then, there was your outing with Lew into the Forest. Do I have the right of it? Accordingly, it is my turn next, so you will go on, what is it called? A date? Yes, you will go on a date with me.”

My eyes widened for a moment at the totally unexpected words before a smile tugged at my lips.

“Affirmative, my lady. As you wish. I definitely thought you’d say sweets, though.”

“Confections are all well and good, but sometimes, it is necessary to act as husband and wife. Do you not agree?”

She let loose a spirited laugh before resting her head on my shoulder with a *thump* and staring up at me. I wrapped one arm around her waist to pull her in closer. Then, I replied jokingly.

“Yeah, you’re right. A married couple’s gotta do what a married couple’s gotta do. Which means that from now on, we can sleep in the same futon every night, yeah? We’ll take turns—one night in yours, the next in mine.”

“No. Yours is too narrow. I felt quite cramped when the three of us slept together.”

“But that’s the beauty of it, dontcha think?”

Lefi sighed in exasperation at me when I shrugged nonchalantly. And then, we laughed together for a while, in this space where only the two of us existed.



A sky island existed in the Demonic Forest. I had no idea of the principles behind it, but the mountainous tract of land was definitely big enough to be called an island, and it floated in the sky, circling around in a fixed orbit. It was up above the clouds, and its orbit stretched pretty far. I'd stop being able to see it from the Forest, and then a few weeks later, it would circle back, showing up again. This happened a lot.

And truth was, I'd gone to explore it once a while ago on my own. But it'd been a terrible experience. Like, absolutely awful. Long story short, the monsters there were powerful.

The thing usually circled the farthest reaches of the Demonic Forest over the northern and eastern areas. As for the monsters on it, they were as strong as the ones living in the western region of the Forest, which were the strongest monsters in the place.

That sky island had to have formed its own separate ecosystem. I hadn't even been able to make a proper landing on it last time because, in its brutal environment, I'd pretty much just run around like a headless chicken with monsters chasing me. Was screaming bloody murder the whole time too. I'd barely escaped with my life. Still, my bet was that it would be romantic and interesting to explore, and scenic to boot.

Which brought us back to the present. The sky island was back near the Demonic Forest in its fixed orbit, and from my previous trip, I knew the closest location I could fly toward it from was my place. Meaning—drumroll, please—it was time to take another stab at it!

"There you have it, Lefi, so let's go to the sky island."

I spoke to Lefi, who flew in the blue sky next to me.

"Hmm, I see. Now I understand why we have been heading toward it. I agree with you about the view from there likely being lovely. A good, what is the word? Choice. Yes, a good choice on your part."

"Right? At first, I thought about going to the human town since the door connects there, but you're not all that into shopping and stuff, are you?"

“If the purchases have to do with food, then I most certainly am.”

“Except you hardly ever cook.”

Only those who cooked regularly would say something like what she just had.

“It does not matter. My hyper-refined five senses would allow me to choose the best ingredients, which I would then give to Leila to arrange.”

Pretty sure I was the only one of us who thought she should exhibit those five senses a bit more in other situations. On second thought, though, they actually were helping. Whenever the food at home was about to go bad or it was time to eat, the first person to notice was either Lefi or Leila.

“Ya know, I kinda had a feeling you’d say something like that. Which is why I figured exploring the sky island with you would be a lot more fun. There’s the small issue of dangerous monsters, but I’m sure they’ll leave us alone once they spot you.”

“Hmm, yes, I believe this sky island would be more interesting than the human city. And should any monsters be foolish enough to attack us, rest assured I will protect you.”

“Squee! Lady Lefi, you’re sooo manly!”

“Never mind. You may deal with them on your own.”

“I apologize for making such a poor jest! Please forgive me!”

Lefi looked vaguely annoyed with me and my apology, which I’d given in less than a tenth of a second.

“You really are an insufferably glib man...”

“Awww, don’t say that! I’m just super-duper happy to be out and about with you! Not to mention the yummy bento Leila and the others made for us!”

I pulled the lunch box out of Inventory and raised it high. In response, my wife smiled in exasperation and waved her hand, signaling me to put it away.

“Fine, fine, I understand. Put it away. I do not need to see it, as I was there with you when they gave it to us. Good grief. At times, I fear you are worse than the wee lasses... Come. Get a move on, as you say. The sky island is still a fair

distance away. If we fly too leisurely, it will already be noon by the time we arrive.”

“Geh, you’re right! Okay, Lefi, we’re speeding up!”

“Ack— Cease! Haah. Good grief. I shall follow you anywhere you wish to go, so there is no need to rush in such a manner.”

Despite her words, her tone as she chased after me from behind was the same gentle one she used with the kiddos.

Half an hour later, I spied a giant shadow through the gaps in the clouds beyond the mountain range.

“Yo, I see it!”

“I do as well.”

Lefi and I flew up all at once, broke through the clouds, and shot out above them. When we did, we saw a solitary island cut off from the surface below, yet drifting placidly through the sky. The view grabbed my heart at first sight, making my chest burn with emotion. I squeezed my fist and screamed.

“This is amazing! Labuta actually exists!”

“What did you say?”

“Nothing.”

I shouldn’t have said that. Definitely should not have said that.

“Labu... Ah, is it perchance related to the story you told me some time ago?”

“Oh, snap. You remember?”

“Yes, indeed. It was quite an interesting one.”

I was a one-man missionary for the works of Studio Ghipli so you could bet your butt that everyone in my household knew the stories. And it seemed Lefi’d been paying attention too. The little-girl gang always pestered me to tell them stories, so in the beginning, I’d stuck to fairy tales I knew. But my repertoire had gradually run out.

Then, one day, I’d started telling them a Ghipli story while calling it a fairy

tale. The little-girl gang had loved it way more than I'd imagined, and ever since then, I hadn't stopped. What made the studio's stories even better was how long they were, so I could always say, "We'll stop here for today," and drag them out.

Studio Ghibli really is amazing. I mean, it'd captured the hearts of people in another world, na mean? Oh, yeah, I'd also added Disney stories and anime to my repertoire too.

"You know what's weird? Monsters attacked me right around this time last time. I guess they really are staying away because of you, Lefi."

"Heh heh heh. Have you recognized my greatness once and for all?"

"I sure have. You're just like bug spray, right?"

"Bug *what?!*"

She looked aghast at my words. *Too cute.*

"Man, I really love that expression of yours."

"Do you truly expect me to be happy to hear that after what you just said?!"

"Ha ha ha! Whaddya say we land?"

"Oy! Do not think you can play me for the fool with a laugh!"



Ever childlike this man was.

"Lefi! Lefi, check it out! It's incredible! This waterfall just flows forever! It doesn't rain on the island since half of it is above the clouds, so how the hell does it even work?!"

Yuki cried out in excitement at the waterfall rushing down from the sky island toward the surface far below them.

"Perhaps there is some kind of substance somewhere on the island that converts mana into water. An ore, or even the soil itself. Such phenomena occur often in places dense with mana."

"Whoooa! For real?! Hey! Hey, Lefi! There's a rock over here that's glowing *and* floating! Are they Floating Rocks?! Are they?!"

He stared excitedly at the waterfall, then headed toward the massive floating boulder nearby, its pale red bottom part glowing. He examined it closely from every angle. To her, he appeared just like a wee lad, his behavior scarcely any different from their household's wee lasses.

She supposed the one who resembled this husband of hers the most was...yes, it had to be Iluna. Just like him, her interests changed often. Without any sort of logical connection, she would suddenly become obsessed with something.

For example, recently, she had been speaking quite often about wanting to be a florist in the future. If that was all it was, Lefi would think of her as precocious and leave it at that. Unfortunately, however, it did not stop there. Beaming, the girl would tell her a variety of things she'd learned either from Leila or Yuki. "That flower's scientific name is ~~~!" she would exclaim. Or, "This stuff is called 'humus'! It's soft and full of nutrients!" In short, she insisted on regaling everyone with a wealth of knowledge Lefi personally found unnecessary. Instead of saying things a child would normally say, such as "What a pretty red flower!" or "This flower smells nice," specialized knowledge tumbled from her mouth, much to Lefi's surprise. She often smiled in bemusement whenever Iluna spoke to her of soil conditions.

Shii and En, too, possessed similar aspects to their personalities, though not to Iluna's degree. In the end, she could not decide if the children resembled Yuki or if Yuki himself merely had a childlike personality. She thought the former more likely, but it could have also been the case that *both* possibilities were true. When he was with them, he seemed like a typical guardian. But this was how he behaved without them.

Good grief. This husband of mine...

She wanted him to act a bit more mature. Yet she also wished for him to stay just like this—just as he was. The complicated, indescribable mix of emotions swirling around in her heart unintentionally brought a small smile to her lips.

"Yes, good. Just as I expected of a sky island. There's lots of interesting stuff down in the Demonic Forest, but there's so much I've never seen before here. Hey, Lefi, what's with that look on your face? You dreaming about our bento?"

Yeah, I would too. It looked damn good, huh?”

“I am not, you imbecile. More importantly, something is coming, Yuki.”

“What? Whoooa!”

He’d been cheerfully patting an unusual tree all over its trunk because nothing like it existed in the Forest. When he turned to look in the direction Lefi was pointing, right above the waterfall, he propelled himself backward in a rush, shocked by what he saw.

An enormous winged, quadruped beast. Though its wolflike appearance was similar to Rir’s, unlike their worrywart of a pet, this monster had two large fangs protruding from its mouth and four eyes in total, two on each side.

Based on what she saw of its strength, Lefi judged it to be this island’s master. It looked extremely ill-tempered, its eyes burning with hatred. A powerful growl rumbled out of the creature, its purpose to threaten them.

Despite the presence of the Supreme Dragon, the fact that it had come expressly to warn them away indicated they had trespassed quite deep into its territory.

“Hmm. A wolfnir, eh? A fairly strong monster.”

“I-I never even noticed it. When the heck did it get so close?”

“I believe it used some sort of magic to blend into the scenery. I am guessing it chose to reveal itself in a hurry only because we tread so far into its domain. I did think it must be somewhere, as I had felt its gaze upon us this whole time.”

“O-Oh, okay. There was no animosity since it was hiding, so no wonder Scout didn’t react... Wait, what? You *felt* its gaze?”

As he spoke, Yuki moved in front of Lefi, intending to protect her from the beast. He hadn’t brought En with him on this outing, so he opened a rift in the air and withdrew a weapon that looked like a war club. Though he always said something along the lines of “monsters won’t be a problem with you around” to her, when any actually appeared, he would thrust himself between it and her so as to defend her.

For some reason, his behavior made her feel both embarrassed and

comforted at the same time. He was the only one in this entire world who would declare his intentions to protect the Supreme Dragon. A part of her wanted to leave the battle in his hands. Regrettably, she could not, because the beast was stronger than him.

With his current abilities, Yuki would surely put up a grand fight and even stood a chance of defeating it. But he would suffer grave injuries were he to do so. She knew this without a doubt.

Never mind his readiness in the face of death when battle came upon him. This was neither the time nor place, as they had come here for leisure. Thus, Lefi decided to take care of this quickly. She extended a hand in front of her.

“You will leave.”

Then, she closed her open palm into a fist.

“G—”

A moment later, the wolf monster’s head exploded, and its body slowly spiraled down before landing motionless on the ground.

“Uhhh, care to explain what just happened, Mrs. Lefi?”

“I applied a tremendous amount of pressure to the beast’s head with my magic. Because it was relatively powerful, I ensured that I used more magic than I normally would.”

“Ohhh, okay. By the way, can I ask how *much* magic you used?”

“Mm, I would say thirty times the amount that you possess. It would not work very well on an opponent with a particularly tough shell, but as you saw, that one was quite soft.”

“Holy smokes, woman. Your absurd magic is the ultimate weapon in and of itself. Sheesh.”

“Eh, that was mere child’s play. In simple terms, I can most likely compete for the top spot in this world when it comes to total magic. Although I would lose to that old man, the Spirit Emperor.”

“Insanely overpowered as ever, aren’t ya?”

He said those words in an astonished tone before muttering something almost to himself.

“Shit. You’re still protecting me, huh?”

She chuckled in response.

“Gah ha! Be at ease. I shall remain by your side until the day comes when *you* can protect *me*. In the meantime, I will protect you.”

No matter how many decades, centuries, or millennia passed. Until her body withered away and death claimed her. She would stand by his side, supporting him evermore.

While Lefi hid her fierce vow deep in her heart, Yuki scratched his cheek idly and spoke.

“Then...wait three hundred years for me, give or take a few.”

“Very well. That is but a drop in the ocean of time for me. Right, then. Yuki, we are still in the midst of our exploration. There is much you yet wish to see, is there not?”

“Good point. Let’s fly to the top of the mountain next! I wanna see what’s going on up there.”

“Oho. I am looking forward to it.”

They both unfurled their wings simultaneously.

“Um, Mrs. Lefi? Can you maybe do something about your habit of touching my wings every time I take ‘em out?”

“Pray do not concern yourself.”

“Well, kinda hard to do that with the way you’re touching them.”

“I am aware. Think of it as my fee for waiting for you.”

His wings were sublime. She would brook no objections on the matter.

“Naaah. It’s fine.”

Yuki laughed ruefully.



“Whooooaaa... Amazing.”

“This is a wonderful view indeed.”

They were on the summit of the towering mountain situated in the center of the sky island. Neither could contain the wonder in their voices as they stared down. A sea of clouds as far as the eye could see and through its gaps was the Demonic Forest, seemingly covering all the land below in green. A little farther away, the mountain range where she used to sleep thrust through the clouds, offering a magnificent view of nature in all its majesty.

With all this before them, Yuki spoke, a hint of disappointment in his voice.

“If only I could install a door here. Then I could bring everyone else here too...”

“Is doing so impossible?”

“Yeah, 'cause this sky island is floating in the air. Any new territory I wanna annex needs to be connected directly to my dungeon's territory, and I can only install the warp door inside my territory.”

“That is indeed unfortunate. In other words, you and I are the only ones who can travel here, correct?”

“Got it in one. Our home...is probably around that mountain piercing through the clouds, I think?”

“You are close. It is the mountain next to it. My former roost is on that one.”

“Ooh, that sure brings back memories. So that's the mountain we went to together, huh?”

They enjoyed the view for some time before Yuki broke the silence.

“All righty, how about we eat lunch here? Just about that time anyway.”

“Yes, I agree. I do feel somewhat famished. We have already seen most of this island as well.”

“Wings are convenient and all, but like, flying up like this doesn't have the charm of a real mountain climb, y'know? Don't get me wrong, the view is great and it feels great, but we pretty much mapped the whole place out.”

“Perhaps because there is green on the surface of the island and only a rocky mountain up here.”

“Yeah, maybe. It was still fun, though. Wandering around, taking in the sights on this walk with you.”

Lefi’s cheeks pinkened at Yuki’s teasing grin.

“In any case, let us eat. Hurry with the spread, will you?”

“Yes, Your Majesty. Right away, Your Majesty.”

He spread the large picnic blanket over a flat area. They both took their shoes off before sitting down on top of it.

“Ahhh, that’s nice.”

Then, he lay down and shut his eyes.

“A gust of wind, strokes my cheek, before rushing away... Haah... My very existence, feels as if, it has become one, with the sky... Now, I am the wind itself... Wind Man...”

As the words “Wind Man” left his lips, Yuki sidled close to Lefi, still lying down.

“Yuki, that does not become you. Moreover, I felt a chill run down my spine as I listened to you, so you are to never recite such nonsense again.”

“Awww! Don’t be so cold, wife of mine!”

“Do not come near me while squirming like that!”

“Bwah.”

When she kicked him lightly in the torso, he rolled all the way to the edge of the picnic blanket.

“Ooowww... What a terrible wife I have. Your husband simply wanted to indulge himself in a fit of poetic creativity.”

“I would rather tear my own ears off than suffer through your pathetic utterances.”

“Oh, damn, that bad? Guess I’ll have to give up on the poetry, then. I’m sure

my fans will be devastated.”

Lefi harrumphed and Yuki chortled while sitting up. This time, he opened Inventory and took out the lunch box.

“Here ya go. Some chopsticks. Or would you prefer a fork?”

“No, the chopsticks are fine. I shall pour the tea.”

“Great, thanks. Here, hand wipe.”

“Thank you.”

It took them no time at all to set everything up. Once they had done so, each pressed their hands together.

“All right, bon appétit.”

“Bon appétit.”

The moment he opened the lid of the lunch box, a delectable aroma wafted upward from the colorful variety of food inside.

“Woow,” they said in unison.

Unable to wait any longer, they simultaneously reached for delicious-looking morsels with their chopsticks.

“This rolled omelet is freaking fantastic. I could eat these forever.”

“Yes, this fried chicken is incredibly scrumptious. Iluna always raves about it being her favorite whenever we have it.”

They often ate these dishes at home, but for whatever reason, a change in the environment made the food taste even more amazing. The same thing had happened at the barbecue they’d had not long ago. Back then, the meat had tasted like it had been elevated to a higher level of deliciousness.

Lefi kept going back for fried chicken over and over. Just as she was about to pick up another piece with her chopstick, his crashed into hers from the side, blocking them.

“What are you doing, Yuki? You are displaying poor manners by doing this.”

“Well, Mrs. Lefi, I hate to ask, but could you maybe, possibly be eating a liiittle

too much of the poor fried chicken?”

“A little too much should pose no problem, yes? What a miserly man you are.”

“Mm. I see my mistake now. Allow me to rephrase, my dear—you’re *definitely* eating more than a little too much! I’ve only eaten one piece, but we’re already almost out!”

“No, no. You are mistaken. I believe you have already eaten three pieces. Yes, that is it. I saw you eat three with my own eyes.”

“You really think you can pull a fast one on me with such a half-assed lie?! Get the *fugg* outta here!”

He ended up jabbing his chopsticks a little too hard with his retort, resulting in an ominous cracking sound coming from the pair.

“Goddammit, woman! You broke my chopsticks!”

“No, you can lay the blame on yourself for that... Fine, I have no choice. Here, say ‘Aah.’”

“Huh? Oh, uh, th-thank— Hey! You really thought I wouldn’t be able to tell the difference between fried chicken and potato?!”

“Tch...”

Yuki growled the words at her after automatically taking the bite of potato she’d fed him.

“Why are you complaining? As I recall, you once told me you quite liked potatoes. Why, then, are you dissatisfied, especially when I am feeding you so lovingly with my own hands?”

“Yeah, sure, I *do* like potatoes, but that’s not the issue here.”

“If you are happy being fed by me and I am happy eating fried chicken, would that not be a, what do you call it? A win-win situation?”

“Nope. If that were the case, then it’d obviously be better for me to just eat with my own two hands.”

Their bickering continued through lunch and even after. They never tired of it.

Several days later.

“Lefi, look! I used one of the floating rocks from the sky island to make a floating sword! I can make a bunch of them float around me, so we can pretend like we’re playing Phantasy Sun or Sword-Wielding Sword Master!”

“Is there some sort of benefit to having it float?”

“No, not really. And actually, the flying rocks are pretty soft, so the thing’s not exactly sturdy. It’ll break right away if I try to cut something with it. Pretty sure a kitchen knife would cut better.”

“...”

He really is just an imbecile, Lefi thought to herself.



One day, before evening arrived.

“Okay, I’m playing a 5 and invoking the 5 Is a Skip rule, so we’re skipping the next player. Oh, hey, that’s you, Lefi.”

“Gwaaah?! Again?! How many of those infernal 5s do you even have?! I know it must be plenty, because you are using them one after another to destroy me!”

“Ohhh, ya got me! Doesn’t matter, though. Just another tactic in my arsenal.”

“Arsenal, my behind! What you are doing is harassment! Pure and simple!”

“All right, you two. Enough of your flirting. Since it’s my turn, I’ll play a 7 and invoke the Rule of 7, which means I can also give a card I don’t need to the next person. Which is you, Lew. Here you go.”

“Urk... Why me? Boo. Okay, I’ll just play this 9 like normal.”

“Then allow me to put down my 2 to end the turn. Let’s see, I don’t want to use my Joker just yet, so...I’ll utilize the 8 Ender rule and play two 8s, followed by a 2 and the Joker, finishing off with a 6. That is the last of my hand.”

“Aw, damn, Leila’s the first to get rid of all her cards. Guess that means I’m Bankrupt.”

“Well done, Leila! Heh heh heh. Not only have you wiped the smug triumph off his face, but I am no longer the Beggar as well!”

“Lefi, I really think you should aim a *bit* higher for yourself...”

“You really are too good at this, Leila.”

“Not at all, Lew. I just happened to have a strong hand this time. Now, then, it’s time I get started on dinner.”

“Oh, snap. Already?”

When I heard her words, I automatically looked at the clock hanging on the dungeon wall. *Whoa, it really is.* Though the kids were still outside playing, it was indeed time to start cooking. Playing Daifugo was just so damn fun that I’d totally lost track of time.

“Mm, let’s end our game of Daifugo here for now so we can all help out with dinner. That way, it’ll be ready for the kiddos by the time they come back since I’m sure they’ll be starving. Sound good?”

“Oh, no. Please, you all continue. I’m perfectly fine with preparing the meal myself.”

“No, no, absolutely not. Chop-chop, ladies. Up and at ’em.”

“Understood, Mr. Yuki.”

“Roger, my lord!”

“Mrgh. I do not like to end on a losing note, but I will nevertheless assist.”

Each of the three said their piece, then put away the cards before standing up.

“Tee hee. Thank you in advance, then, everyone.”

“Aaand we’re back, folks! It’s time for another episode of Yuki’s Kitchen! Cue the theme music! La la la di la di da! Tra la la la la di la di daa!!!”

“Nell, he is behaving oddly again. Do something about him.”

“He certainly is, Lefi. Mr. Yuki, whatever are you doing?”

Her hair in a ponytail, Lefi put an apron on and spoke to Nell, who herself had been growing her hair out for a while now. She also had hers in a short ponytail and was putting on an apron.

Nell had originally kept her hair in a short bob, but when I'd told her some time ago that I preferred long hair, she'd started growing it out. She was just too good to me.

“La la la di la di da! Tra la la la la di la di daaa! Allow me to explain! Yuki's Kitchen is a TV show designed to introduce everyone to easy! Simple! Delicious! Cooking!”

“Aha, I see now. His answer is delayed because he's acting as the presenter while also performing the background music himself.”

“It seems you are correct, Nell.”

“Um, my apologies for intruding, but would you perhaps cease analyzing me so calmly?”

I cleared my throat and pulled myself together before continuing my broadcast.

“All right, ladies and gents, let me start off by introducing my assistants! Come on over, Masked Maid X, Masked Maid Y!”

“Ta-da! Masked Maid X, reporting for duty!”

“Um, M-Master? I find this mask quite mortifying, to tell you the truth...”

At my summons, Masked Maid X excitedly made her debut and struck her signature pose, while Masked Maid Y pressed her hands to her cheeks in embarrassment when she appeared.

“Now I comprehend why Yuki suddenly dragged them off before we entered the kitchen. Putting aside the matter of Lew, Leila, if you do not like something, you should say so clearly.”

“I'm ashamed to admit that he pushed through my opposition...”

Because of her mask, I didn't know what kind of expression Masked Maid Y had on her face as she stood next to me. But it sounded like she was smiling awkwardly as she spoke. I wasn't deterred, though.

“The first thing we’re making tonight is...this! Tofu with green onions! Masked Maid Y, please slice the green onions. Masked Maid X, please cheer her on.”

“Understood.”

“Roger! I’ll cheer her on real good! Wait, what? Cheer?”

I ignored Masked Maid X’s surprised double take at me as I took my place next to Masked Maid Y and started cutting the tofu into equal portions. At the same time, Masked Maid Y chopped the green onions, and she did it so skillfully that I almost fell in love with her right then and there.

“Then, we place the green onions on top of the tofu, and voilà! We have chilled tofu!”

“...”

“...”

“Hey. Hey, you guys. You know you can get a little more excited, right?”

What the heck? Why are they looking at me with those warm eyes like I’m a little kid who needs to be watched over? And why am I suddenly feeling shy?

“Well, your grandiose introduction led me to believe it would be something else. Based on the ingredients, however, I suspected it would turn out to be chilled tofu...”

“Yeah, and? What’s wrong with that? Chilled tofu is delicious.”

“I certainly cannot deny that...”

“Tofu may be simple, but it really is a great ingredient, huh? Mr. Yuki, did you use the dungeon’s function to produce this tofu?”

“I sure did.”

“You know, when you think about it, we take things like tofu for granted, but I don’t think I’d be exaggerating if I called it an incredibly premium foodstuff.”

She made a fair point. But if we went down that road, pretty much everything we ate in our household would’ve fallen into the premium foods category. Although to be honest, the wealth of food we had really was the best in the world. I wanted the little girls to eat a variety of things, y’know?

“Moving on to the next item on today’s menu of Yuki’s Kitch— Ugh, this is suddenly really annoying. I can’t do it anymore, so let’s just go back to normal now.”

“You truly are a flighty man, Yuki.”

“Does this mean the Masked Maids’ debut is over, my lord?”

“Yeah, but I might ask you to do it again soon. Especially when we play pretend with the kids.”

“Roger! Masked Maid of Justice, X, at your service!”

“Then I can remove this mask, yes?”

“Yup. Because now, it’s time for Masked Maid Y’s—no, it’s time for the woman under the mask to reveal her true identity and take over! Welcome to Leila’s Kitchen, folks! La la la la di la di da! Tra la la la la di la di daaa!”

“What in the world even *is* that distracting music?”

“The melody really stays with you, doesn’t it?”

I totally agree.

The door connecting to the outside opened with a bang.

“We’re hooome!”

“We home!”

“We...are home.”

“Welcome back. Now go wash your hands.”

“And make certain to clean out the dirt from under your fingernails as well.”

“Okaaay!” Iluna and Shii replied.

“Okay...” En said right after.

While us adults set the table and finished dinner prep, the little girls dashed off to the bathroom and came back in a flash.

“Woow! Sooo much food today! Did something good happen?”

“Nah, nothing in particular. We all worked together and just somehow ended up making more than we usually do.”

“Oh, okay. But it’s nice having lots of food. Makes me happy for some reason, Yukiki!”

“That’s right, Iluna. In the world outside, we only ever had this much for celebrations. So let’s make sure we give our thanks for being lucky enough to have something to eat every day, to the creatures that gave their lives so we could eat, and to the ones who made the food!” chimed Lew.

“Yup! I will!”

“I’s always thankful for everything!”

“Yes...I’m grateful for lots of delicious food.”

“What a nice little speech coming from the dummy who forced us to up the amount of food we were making because she measured the ingredients wrong so nothing would’ve tasted right if we didn’t.”

“H-Hey! Lady Lefi did too, so why are you only blaming me, my lord?!”

“Blast it, Lew! Shut your mouth!”

“Aha ha ha... Don’t worry, it’s totally fine. After all, we have a fantastic magical tool called a refrigerator. We’ll just put the leftovers in there if we have to.”

“Yes, we can eat them for breakfast tomorrow, Master.”

As we all chatted, each of us took our specific seats at the table. The seating arrangement had just ended up the way it did at some point in time without us ever having talked about it.

“All right, everybody good? Then...bon appétit.”

“Bon appétit,” the others said in unison.

Side Story 2: Their Feelings

They embraced passionately. She felt his warmth through her skin. His breath tickled the nape of her neck. The arms wrapped around her gave her such a deep sense of security and enveloped her in transcendent joy.

Did a minute pass? Five minutes? Or much longer? As Nell hugged him tightly, a part of her was reluctant to release him. But she also knew they couldn't remain like this forever, so she loosened her arms from around his body.

"Mmm... Thank you, Mr. Yuki."

"You got it. Didja get your fill?"

"Not exactly, no. But night would fall by the time I did, so I should stick to what I can get."

He laughed uproariously at her teasing reply before responding to her.

"Ha ha! Yeah, I suppose you have a point, because ditto. I really don't wanna hand you over to the humans."

"And I don't want you to. I'd much rather be here joking and having fun with you all every day... I'm sorry. Do you think you can wait five more years? I'll definitely find a way to quit being a hero by then."

She already had a plan in mind. The only thing she had to do was discuss the matter with her superiors.

"I'll wait forever if it means we can be together."

Though his tone sounded light, his expression seemed somewhat sad. Feeling a bit guilty, Nell twined her fingers through his.

"Hey, Mr. Yuki."

"Hmm?"

Then, she stretched up on her tiptoes to press her lips against his. Her brain melted at the contact, like she'd ingested some sort of narcotic. Both of their

hands tightened the slightest bit, their fingers still interlocked.

After savoring the heavenly sensation for some time, Nell slowly pulled her lips away.

“I love you, Mr. Yuki,” she said before falling momentarily silent. “Right, then! Try not to do anything *too* stupid while I’m gone. You’ll drive everyone crazy if you do, and that wouldn’t be good!”

“Yeah. I love you too.”

He scratched his cheek in embarrassment. Nell grinned at him, then opened the door connecting to Alfiro, the frontier town.

In the stagecoach heading to the royal capital, Nell chuckled softly to herself as she recalled his expression, her eyes on the view outside. He always teased her so nonchalantly, but it pleased her to see him acting bashful whenever she managed to catch him by surprise like that. Just being able to witness that look on his face would be enough to get her through at least a month.

Once the memory of his expression stopped being enough, she’d rely on the Communication Orb: Revamped he’d given her, the magical tool that allowed them to talk across vast distances. She planned to use every trick at her disposal to finish her work quickly. If there came a time when she couldn’t endure the separation anymore, she intended to request a leave of absence and return home.

No longer could she live without him or the comforting world surrounding him. Nell remembered what Lefi had said before when the two of them had talked: that the dragon girl wouldn’t be able to return to her old life again. And now, Nell understood exactly what she’d meant. It was proof of how fun, lively, and fulfilling life with him was.

She knew Lew must feel the same way. The maid loved to laugh and joke around, so she didn’t seem too keen on discussing heavy or overly serious topics. Granted, Lew had never talked about her deepest feelings, but Nell didn’t think she’d be able to smile in such a carefree way if she was unhappy with her situation.

“Together with everyone, huh?”

If she was being honest, all Nell wanted to do was quit being a hero and live her life as his wife. She wanted nothing more than to spend every day in that labyrinth, laughing and having fun with her friends. How amazing that would be, she mused.

However, her post as a hero was one she'd chosen for herself. Filling that role was something she wanted to do. Thus, she couldn't just leave things finished halfway and simply quit. If she tossed everything aside and ran away to the labyrinth, she would be automatically dismissed from her post in due time. She knew he would accept her unconditionally and say nothing to rebuke her choice, but her pride wouldn't allow her to take that route.

It might've been silly to get bogged down by something like that, yet there was no denying the pride that existed within her at being a hero. At the very least, she needed to carry out her responsibilities as a hero properly and leave behind noteworthy achievements. If she couldn't even speak proudly of her work, she wouldn't be able to quit with confidence.

And in order to say proudly that she wasn't a hero but his wife, Nell needed to do her utmost in this role of hero. Only then would she be able to come to terms with herself and believe herself worthy of being the demon lord's wife.

“I see you have returned, Nell. Did you enjoy your vacation?”

“Yes! Thank you so much for allowing me so much time off!”

Back at the Church's headquarters, Nell gave a small bow of her head along with her profuse thanks to her superior.

“Hmm. Based on your attitude, I can see your energy is much restored. Very good. This means I can expect you to work even harder henceforth, eh?”

“I'll definitely make up for all the days I rested! Also, I have something to discuss with you, Miss Carlotta.”

“Oh? Why so formal? Perhaps another vacation in advance of your next date with Mask?”

“N-No!”

Nell fluttered her hands in a panic, and the rest of the knights nearby laughed. Cheeks pink, she cleared her throat and collected herself, her expression much more serious than it'd been moments ago.

“I would like you to send me on more assignments dealing with monster hunts, border skirmishes, and public safety. Especially monster hunts, if possible.”

“Intriguing. I take it you want to build up your accomplishments?”

Carlotta had figured out Nell's aim right away. The young hero's wry smile in response to her superior's question seemed to say, “Why am I not surprised by your insight?” Then, Nell answered her.

“Correct. Most of my work thus far has been focused here in the capital. I understand it's because I'm still a newcomer, but moving forward, please give me more difficult tasks.”

“And that's why you wish to concentrate on monster hunts in particular?”

“Yes. Defeating strong monsters will make me well-known right away. I've heard that many things have been delayed due to the recent turmoil, including hunts.”

Monsters posed an immediate and present danger to people. If she defeated the powerful ones, it wouldn't take long for rumors of her deeds to spread far and wide, and without any effort on her part. It was the same reason that, a short time ago, the Church had embarked on its labyrinth campaign to restore its prestige. However, in order to accomplish her goal, she needed her superiors to trust in her talent enough to assign her powerful monsters to take down.

Although after discovering how bizarrely strong the monsters in the Demonic Forest were, a part of her honestly found all other monsters adorable in comparison. Of course, she knew very well that carelessness was one's greatest enemy, but even so, in terms of their stats, monsters that didn't inhabit the Forest weren't terribly powerful. She had learned this when she'd accompanied her husband on his monster hunts.

Moreover, if she managed to encounter a monster that outclassed her, she

had in her possession a number of magical tools given to her by her husband. He'd told her to use them without hesitation if she was ever in jeopardy. She did think it was a bit unfair for her to use them for the sake of her track record, but it would also be extremely irresponsible of her to leave any monsters she couldn't handle to their own devices. There was no doubt they'd inflict tremendous damage if they weren't put down one way or another.

When it concerned human life, her pride would just have to keep quiet and compromise.

"I understand your request. However, I must warn you that this path also means you'll be expected to do your part in conflicts as well, not *just* monster hunts. Do you understand?"

"I do, and I'm fine with it. Since I'm strong enough now to take control of a situation without letting anyone get hurt."

Carlotta's eyes widened in surprise at the girl's unusually confident declaration. Nell wasn't usually the type to assert herself.

"You've changed, Nell."

"Only because the things that I want to do and achieve have finally solidified in my mind."

She only smiled calmly, showing no emotional agitation. Carlotta ruminated for a while before speaking.

"I see... Right, then. I'll work you mercilessly—more than I ever have before. You're prepared to do what's necessary, yes? Since you asked for this yourself."

"Of course. I'll give it everything I have and then some!"

Though her smile didn't waver, resolution radiated from Nell as she nodded firmly.



Early morning.

"Mmm..."

Lew leisurely sat upright and covered her mouth with one hand as she

yawned. Then, she stretched her arms overhead to loosen her muscles before stepping out of her bed.

“Zzz... Zzz...”

The soft sounds of someone sleeping were coming from the bed next to hers. She turned her head in that direction and stared for a moment at Leila’s adorable sleeping face.

“Tee hee. She looks so cute asleep.”

Her colleague always had a hard time waking up. The ever-smiling, ever-capable, ultimate maid always spaced out when she first woke up. It took some time before her brain started to function in the morning. For that reason, her cute sleeping face could be considered her biggest weakness.

Giggling quietly to herself, Lew changed out of her night clothes and into her maid uniform. She then bustled about, getting ready for the day before making her way to the dungeon’s primary living area, the real throne room.

Right away, an unusual sight greeted her. Her future husband and one of his wives, the silver-haired girl, were sleeping in a bizarre position, covered only by a blanket, and far from the spot where the futons lay. The girl’s head lay on the man’s stomach, and his unconsciously pained expression, which indicated that he wasn’t sleeping well because of it, amused her.

Upon noticing the board game lying next to them, Lew realized that they must have spent another late night playing and arguing.

“These two never change, huh?”

She smiled ruefully, then knelt by his side. As she ran her fingers through his hair, she felt a measure of unease unfurl in her chest. The word “divine” perfectly captured the loveliness of the sleeping silver-haired girl’s features. On top of her beauty, she possessed incomparable power—strength enough that she could protect him unconditionally from any number of opponents.

Then there was his other wife, a young hero who had returned to her position a few days ago. She, too, was an undisputed beauty who did everything flawlessly, as well as being generally good-natured. All in all, she was the type of graceful young woman men liked.

Compared to those two, Lew thought herself extremely inferior in many ways. She was nowhere near as pretty as either of them, her chest was relatively flat, and her figure wasn't worthy of any special mention. Additionally, her clumsiness meant she couldn't even do chores well. And with the silver-haired girl around, Lew was hardly anyone's first choice of playmate.

She was lacking in many ways compared to them. Was there even a single way in which she was superior? The only thing she could think of was...her ears and tail, perhaps? No, the silver-haired girl had a tail too, so her ears were her only real advantage.

For whatever reason, this man preferred body parts that humans didn't have. Her ears and tail were characteristic of members of the werewolf race like her. And he often touched them, so she always took her time grooming herself. But maybe it wouldn't hurt if she were to go the extra mile in the future? She decided to consult Leila about the topic soon. Surely the other maid had some good tips.

Well, Lew suspected that if she told him her concerns directly, he would magically make grooming items appear on the spot. The thought didn't sit well with her, though. A woman conducted her beauty routine in private, away from the eyes of men. It embarrassed her a bit—a lot, actually—to imagine him watching her secret efforts to garner his affection.

“I never thought *this* would be the reason I'm thankful I was born a therianthrope...”

“What...are you thankful for?”

“Eep!”

Startled, she unintentionally let out a strangled shriek at the unexpected comment.

“M-My lord. Were you awake this whole time?”

“Nh... Nah. Just woke up now...”

Her master responded slowly, still lying down with his eyes half closed. His condition was proof that he spoke the truth.

“Oh, I see. I must have woken you up. Sorry about that.”

“Yeah... Yeah, it *is* your fault. So you gotta take responsibility, 'kay?”

He smirked a little before grabbing her hand and dragging her down to his chest.

“Ack! M-My lord...”

“Ahhh, yeah, that’s the stuff. You make a nice, warm blanket...”

“I-I’m not a blanket, thank you very much...”

Lew felt herself blushing furiously, wrapped up as she was in his one-armed embrace. The heat radiating from his body warmed her heart. Perhaps that was why she ended up blurting out the worries piling up inside her.

“My lord, can I ask you something?”

“Hmm? What is it?”

“I... Am I— Am I good enough to be your wife?”

“Huh? Where is this coming from?”

She opened and closed her mouth a few times, hesitating to answer. Then, finally, she spoke timidly, haltingly.

“Well, I... I’m not strong enough to protect you like Lady Lefi is, and I don’t have a huge capacity for accepting others like Nell does. I can’t even say I’m good at doing chores or cooking either, you know? Not like Leila, who’s responsible and can do anything she sets her mind to. Plus, they’re really pretty too, and I’m...not...”

The more she spoke, the more upset she became. She was on the verge of tears by the time she’d finished. Through it all, sensing her emotions, his hand had been stroking soothingly down her back.

“So... So I feel like I’m a failure...as your wife, my lord...”

He reflected silently on her words for a few minutes before speaking.

“Well, you’re definitely not strong, and you *are* a clumsy, unreliable maid.”

“Hngh...”

She was just about to fall into a serious depression when he continued with a laugh.

“But c’mon, Lew. None of that matters.”

“I think it does, though...”

“No, it really doesn’t. Because you’re not Lefi, Nell, or Leila. That’s all there is to it. End of story. Even if you’re not as good at some things as they are, it’s only because everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses.”

“But I don’t have *anything* I’m good at compared to them. Only my ears, I guess.”

“Ha ha! Yeah, your ears are fantastic. But it’s not the only thing you have going for you.”

“Then what *do* you like about me, my lord? Tell me.”

Lew stared directly into his eyes. How could she not when they were this close? His gaze never strayed from hers as he smiled gently at her, his usual playful attitude missing.

“Hmm, good question. First thing would be how you deliberately joke around and make a fool of yourself because you want everyone to smile and have fun. I love that part of you. Thanks to you, everyone in our family does just that every day. The atmosphere changes so much, in a good way, just from you being there.”

“...”

Though his straightforward words made her blush a little, she listened attentively to them.

“In more basic terms, I really love your voice and scent, not to mention how you look when you laugh. Although it’d be a *huge* help if you got a little better at chores, yeah? But I wouldn’t mind it one bit if you didn’t change at all, my unreliable maid. I’m just happy to be with you.”

“My lord...”

“Oh, yeah, one more thing, Lew. You’re pretty damn cute yourself, okay? If you say stuff like ‘I’m not pretty’ in the world outside, people will think you’re

being sarcastic, so just don't."

"D-Do you really think so?"

"Yeah, I sure do. I think you're *insanely* cute, and I'm totally head over heels for you. So much so that I think you're wasted on me as a wife. Sometimes I worry about whether it's really okay for me to have three such amazing wives, y'know? Anyway, that's how I feel. Still not good enough for you?"

Warmth exploded in her chest. The gloom that had settled within her suddenly dissipated thanks to his words. Her heart felt light and clear now.

"Heh... Heh heh heh... No, I've heard enough. If that's how you feel, my lord, then I'll believe you. I'm very, very happy."

"Good. Glad to hear it. Are all your doubts gone, then?"

"Yes, they are. Thank you, my lord. I love you."

A small smile curled his lips as he gently patted her head. Then, he spoke teasingly.

"Well, wife of mine. I'm considering falling asleep again for a while, and it sure would be nice to have you by my side. Whaddya say?"

"Tee hee. Understood. Allow me to join you."

Shortly after their soft breaths indicated they'd fallen asleep, a figure slowly rose up next to them.

"Good grief. I wish they would exchange their sweet nothings where there are no others present. Because they chose not to, I am privy to everything they discussed. What am I to do with this information?"

Lefi had woken up halfway through but had pretended to be asleep out of consideration for them. She mumbled to herself, her expression somewhat exasperated.

"Oh, my, Lew. You seem to be in a good mood, hm?"

"Tee hee hee. Something amazing happened. But! It's a secret! I'm keeping it shut away in my heart."

“Is that right? Might I wager a guess and say Master Demon Lord whispered words of love to you?”

“Huh?! H-How did you know?!”

Leila chuckled when Lew’s cheeks flamed.

“It’s only natural. I’m your friend, after all. I suspected he was the reason for your joy.”

“Urk... Leila, you’re the only one who can read me so easily!”

“No, I’m certain the others would have realized too. They should know you well enough by now too, hm?”

What she really wanted to say was, “Because you’re just that easy to understand.” However, Leila swallowed those words and simply smiled placidly at her before continuing.

“Well, as long as you’re happy, that’s what matters. Are you ready to work hard today too?”

“Yes, ma’am! I’m feeling a hundred times more energetic than usual, so bring on all the work!”

“Just make certain you don’t make any mistakes by being overly enthusiastic, hm?”

“If I do, though, I trust you to clean up after me, Leila!”

“Honestly, Lew...”

Leila huffed out an exasperated laugh at the other maid’s cheerfully shameless dependence on others.

Epilogue: The Cheerful, the Better

I sat alone on my throne. The time right now was just a bit after noon. The little girls were all outside playing, and not too long ago, Lefi and Lew had said they wanted to get some exercise in, so they'd left for the meadow area. Leila was conducting research in her room, and Nell was in the capital for work.

All of which explained why I was currently alone in the throne room. An unusual occurrence to say the least. For some reason, it felt kinda refreshing. Maybe because I'd gotten so used to being with everyone lately.

Oh, man. Really refreshing actually. Satan's honest truth, I was basically with someone or other twenty-four seven. Other than during the phantom ship dungeon campaign, En was almost always with me, whether it was here or out on our hunts in the Demonic Forest. And when it came to hunts, the pets tagged along too.

It made me realize I could no longer live on my own.

"..."

I surveyed the room. It looked way different compared to when I'd first woken up in here after reincarnating into this world. Lots of furniture, household items, and toys everywhere. It made sense seeing as we used the real throne room as our living room. Though the mismatch between the hodgepodge of stuff and the decorations made me wanna laugh, it also created a rush of emotion in me. My bet was that this was the only dungeon in the whole world being used in such a way.

I suddenly extended my arms behind the throne and opened the thick, sturdy cage there to take out the rainbow-colored orb inside. The dungeon's heart. *My heart.*

Dungeons are living beings. A type of life-form that took on a different shape from us. Despite this fact, though, I'd never sensed anything resembling consciousness coming from this thing. It had never once shown its own will to

do what it wanted, leaving me in charge of the development of the dungeon that was supposed to be its body.

I was pretty sure the only time it'd actively participated in anything was when it'd summoned me to this world. Actually, maybe that wasn't the only time. What about whenever it used Maps to warn me about powerful enemies invading my territory? Couldn't that have been considered active participation?

Whatever the case, this thing only revealed its intentions in a reserved manner, and only occasionally at that, despite being a living being. *Is that what a dungeon originally is, then? Or is this one letting me handle everything because it trusts me?*

"I hope so, 'cause that'd be really nice. At any rate, I'm super happy every day thanks to you."

If this orb hadn't summoned me here, I never would've met Lefi and the others. I wouldn't have known the colors of the world or its warmth, just met death steeped in gray. Everything for me had started with this thing.

"You know I'm grateful to you from the bottom of my heart, right? So if there's anything you want me to do, anything at all, don't hesitate to tell me. I'll do whatever I can for you."

The orb said nothing. Nada. But the rainbow light reflected a little bit more brilliantly. Or maybe that was just my imagination?

"Yuki! Are you there, Yuki?!"

Just then, the door connecting outside opened with a rattle and Lefi appeared.

"Geh. Lefi, it's you. What's wrong?"

"Well, I knew you would not be busy, so I thought that the three of us might have a match. Unless, perchance, you *were* doing something?"

"No. No, I'm free as a bird. Just thinkin' about stuff."

I put the dungeon core back where it belonged then stood up from the throne.

"Considering the racket in your right hand, I'm guessing this match you're

suggesting is badminton? Fine by me. I'll show you all my Demon Lord Divine Fist techniques!"

"How does a 'Divine Fist' have anything to do with bad-min-ton, Yuki?"

"Okay, fiiine. Demon Lord *Badminton* Fist."

"Yet the fist still remains. Therein lies the problem."

"Hmm, yeah, true. Plus, Demon Lord Badminton Fist is kind of a mouthful, so I'll just stick to Demon Lord Divine Fist."

"Yes, yes, have it your way. Just get a move on, will you? Lew is waiting for us."

We left the real throne room behind while carrying on our silly conversation.

All right. Time to enjoy today.

Special Story: Just Relaxing and Fishing

A dangling fishing line. Its slight wiggle and the sound of water rippling. The pleasantness of the shining sun and warm salt wind.

“I love being able to come to the ocean whenever I want.”

It really had been a great day when I’d acquired the phantom ship dungeon. Lefi spoke from next to me, her fishing line dangling in the water too.

“Hmm... Yes, I am inclined to agree. Though I could see the sea from afar in the old days, I hardly ever had the chance to gaze upon it from so close as now. This uniquely salty scent is not terrible either.”

“I actually don’t like the smell of the sea. But my nose will probably get used to it eventually,” Lew said, adding her two cents from my other side.

“Oh, I see. Your aversion makes sense considering your strong sense of smell, Lew.”

“But that doesn’t mean I hate the sea. I like relaxing and fishing like this!”

“I had no idea... Just let me know if it gets to be too much. We’ll take a break when it does.”

“Thanks, my lord! But really, I’m fine! The smell does bother me, but it’s honestly not that bad. Besides, my desire to fish way outweighs the smell.”

Lew didn’t look like she was forcing herself, and I figured it’d be tactless to keep pushing the issue, so I dropped it to focus on my fishing again—when a beaming Iluna called out to me.

“Yukiki! Yukiki! I caught something!”

“Ooh! Nice work, Iluna. Another one, huh? You’re a little too good at fishing, you know that?”

“Tee hee hee. Maybe. Maybe not.”

I walked over to her, took the fish off the hook, tossed it into a bucket, and

put new bait on.

“Thanks, Yukiki!”

“Sure thing. You just keep reelin’ ’em in.”

Just as I was about to go back to my spot, the other little girls called out to me.

“Master! Master! Me too! I caught one!”

“Me...too.”

In addition to Shii and En, the wraith triplets, who were sharing a pole between them, brought theirs over to me as well, silently asking me to take their catch off their line too. By the way, they were currently possessing their doll bodies since they couldn’t hold the rod in their spectral forms. It was ridiculously cute watching them pull a catch in with all their might, Rei in the middle since she could use telekinesis, and Rui and Roh flanking her.

“Ha ha ha! Caught a big one, huh? All right, ladies, I’ll get to you all one by one.”

Laughing, I set to work, taking care of the fish hooked on each of their rods. A few minutes later, I finally managed to return to my spot.

“Maaan. I caught zilch.”

My bait was gone from my hook. Something had probably eaten it while I’d been helping Iluna and the others. I reeled the line in to make sure, and yup, the hook had nothing on it.

“Well, well, well. That’s too bad, my lord.”

“It is your own fault for paying attention to everyone else’s rods.”

The bucket had a few more fish in it, so I assumed that Lefi and Lew had also caught a few in the short time I’d stepped away. Apparently, I’d picked a good location to fish at today, because they sure were biting fast and furious. Thanks to that, I had to pay constant attention to the little girls, dealing with their catches and changing their bait. It didn’t leave me a whole lotta time to tend to my own fishing pole.

I wasn't complaining, though. I was just glad the fish were biting at all. There were times you'd go fishing and catch diddly-freaking-squat, basically making the trip a way to kill several hours. Us adults could pass free time like that just fine since we understood a catch wasn't guaranteed. We could chat and chill. But the little girls were a different story. The longer they caught nothing, the more bored they got, so I'd brought a few toys just in case. Thankfully, I doubted we needed to use them considering how energetic the fish were today.

"Ahhh, I'm having such a good time. And I'm pretty happy with my haul so far too! Before living with you, my lord, I'd never even eaten fish, but I think they're very tasty now."

"The dish he calls 'sashimi' is particularly delectable. It pairs well with alcohol."

"Yeah, sashimi is amazing. I was really opposed to eating raw fish at first, but now that I know how incredible it tastes, I'll never say no to it again."

"Parasites and food poisoning are both dangers of sashimi, so you can only eat it once it's been properly prepared. Be extra careful with it, 'cause you might be in for a rough time otherwise."

If any of us got food poisoning from raw fish, I was pretty sure drinking some Super Potion would help us recover, but I honestly wasn't confident it would work on a parasite. I doubted there were any medical facilities in this world that could treat parasites either, so we needed to do everything we could to prevent that.

"Really? Well, it's amazing that the first people who ate sashimi were willing to risk getting sick like that, my lord. I could never do that, so good for them."

"Naive, Lew. Too naive. Are you not aware that no one can resist the passion of eating delicious food?"

That explained why people always tried to find ways to eat poisonous things on purpose. Whether it was by detoxifying them or by thinking up some new and bizarre method of food prep just so they could savor the flavor of weird stuff. *Because deliciousness is justice. And that's a fact, Jack.*

“Lady Lefifi is right, LewLew! Because deliciousness is justice! That means curry is the number one justice!”

“Nooo! You wrong, Iluna! True jus-tus is yakiniku! Meat is the heart of all foods, and yakiniku is the heart of meat!”

“No...you are all wrong. Real justice is Leila, the one who makes everything yummy. She is the only justice. Nobody can beat Leila.”

“Hmm! Can’t argue with that, EnEn!”

“Hmm, hmm! A point for you!”

Well, that’s that, I guess. Even the little girls understood who held the most power in our household.

And today, I learned that Shii was a meat fanatic. It was good to know. Actually, all the kids were huge gluttons, but Shii in particular wasn’t very picky with food. She really enjoyed everything she ate, so I was kinda surprised to find out just how much she loved meat. Clearly, I needed to study more when it came to the members of my family. I would repent accordingly.

“All this food talk made me hungry. Yukiki, are we gonna have a barbecue today with this fish?”

“Sorry, kiddo. Not today. Fish is tasty, but we gotta prepare it right before we can eat it. Let’s have a barbecue tomorrow. Today’s menu is whatever Ultimate Leila cooks.”

“Mm-hmm! Okay! Ul-ti-mate Miss Leila’s food is the ul-ti-mate best too! Although barbecued fish and meat are the best too... Hmm... Anyway, I’m happy today and tomorrow!”

Iluna giggled happily, her cheeks rosy with joy. *Breaking news, folks. Her cuteness has created such a tremendous inflation crisis that its effects can no longer be measured.*

“You’re so right, Iluna. I definitely think the food Leila makes is better than anything we can find in restaurants outside. Which probably explains why I end up eating so much of it...”

“You must take care not to gain weight from overeating, Lew.”

“Urk... Speaking of, I really envy you when it comes to food, Lady Lefi. You never gain weight despite how much food you eat *and* your total lack of exercise. You don’t understand my pain of having to watch what I eat every day. It’s just not fair, Lady Lefi.”

“I-I will have you know that I have been moving my body lately!”

“If you’re talking about helping with chores and playing with the kids like I do, that doesn’t count. Besides, when you’re not doing those things, aren’t you usually napping?”

“G-Grr...”

Lefi could only growl in response since she couldn’t refute Lew’s words even a little bit.

“Lew, I see you have become a smart-mouth as well...”

“Only because you and my lord trained me. These are the results of your education.”

“Hmph. I do not recall this ‘education’ you speak of.”

I burst out laughing as I watched from the sidelines. It wasn’t all that often that Lew was on the winning side against Lefi.

“Ha ha ha! Looking like you got stronger too, huh, Lew?”

“Ah! Tee hee. I’m happy to hear you say that, my lord.”

When I ruffled her ears and hair, she smiled delightedly and leaned against me.

“Good grief... I am not saying you should not canoodle, but might you do so in private?”

“What, feeling lonely? All right, all right, I’ll pamper you too!”

“Wah?! S-Stop it, you fool! This is dangerous!”

I’d pulled her into a big hug. But despite her sharp words, Lefi did nothing to push me away.

An hour later, as the fishing continued.

“Oho! I believe this is...a large one!”

Lefi stood up when she watched her rod start to bend.

“Hmph. You dare to challenge the Supreme Dragon to a contest of might?! Such temerity. Fine! I accept!”

Her enthusiasm skyrocketed in response to the surprisingly powerful tug on her pole, and she started reeling the line in aggressively.

“Lefi, I’m pretty sure you got it snagged.”

“Hmm?”

Her expression puzzled, Lefi shook the rod a few times to confirm. Then, a few seconds later, she muttered almost inaudibly.

“The hook...caught on the seabed.”

“Welp, it sure did ‘dare to challenge the Supreme Dragon to a contest of might,’ huh?!”

“Graaawwr?!”

When I parroted her words back to her with a cool expression on my face, she buried her head in her hands and screamed. I figured it was out of embarrassment.

“Lady Lefifi, what are you doing?! If you scream like that, the fish will run away!”

“Shh, Lady Lefifi!”

“Fishing...is done in an empty state of mind.”

Chided by the little girls, my wife quieted down. She did glare at me, though, her cheeks flushed. Next to us, Lew was laughing so hard that she was bent over, holding her stomach.

Alas, you poor thing. You brought this humiliation upon yourself, for you failed to check the dang line!

“Oh, snap, I got something! This one is *definitely* a big one!”

“Hmph. I wager you are stuck on the seabed as well, Yuki.”

“You’re wrong. It’s absolutely a fi— Whaaat?!”

Whatever was tugging on my line almost dragged me into the water. I hurriedly braced my legs and dug in, but I could feel my body being slowly pulled forward. My feet were making an ominous creaking sound against the deck.

Wh-What the hell is this power?! It’s totally not normal!

“L-Lefi!!!”

When I called out to my wife in a panic, she finally figured out that I wasn’t joking about my abnormal opponent. She rushed over to me without a word and gripped my rod with both hands. Instantly, my body stopped moving toward the sea, and my fishing pole, which would’ve snapped in another second or two, wasn’t budging at all now.

Looking at her hands with my Demon Eyes, I saw a tremendous amount of magic flowing out of them. She must’ve strengthened the rod so it wouldn’t break.

“Th-This is bad! I think it’s as strong as the monsters in the Demonic Forest!”

“Yuki, you *will* catch it! It is most certainly a massive one, and when you catch it, we will take it home and eat it with everyone!”

“Good luck, you two! Don’t give up!”

“Do your best, Yukiki, Lady Lefifi!”

“Wow! Wow, wow, wow! Sooo big!”

“It...will be yummy. I know it.”

In addition to Lew and the three little girls who could talk, the wraith sisters also threw in their support with the way they gestured and whirled in the air. The thing was so damn heavy that I felt like I was losing the battle of strength. Only sheer willpower had me reeling the line in.

“Nnnggghhh! Just...a little...more! Help me, Lefi!”

“Leave it to me! You need to exert yourself as well! Show us that you are a man!”

Lefi and I struggled valiantly to pull the damn thing up. It was a real fight between us. But slowly, steadily, our prey made its way toward the surface of the water. Then, with a dramatic splash, it broke through and flew into the air.

The fish resembled a tuna, except that it was insanely huge—waaay bigger than a normal tuna. The descriptor “Ruler of the Sea” would fit it perfectly. A magnificent horn jutted out from its crown, and it sported massive fins on its body, just like flying fish. Kinda seemed like maybe it *could* actually fly above the sea.

“A-A monster tuna!”

“Haaah!”

Lefi aimed a knifehand strike at the big-ass tuna rushing down from midair. When she did, something like a vacuum wave blasted from her fingers and hurtled toward the fish, slicing it precisely through the gills. Blood sprayed everywhere.

“Ngh! Ugh! What the hell?!”

Sensing that it’d been weakened by her attack, I used whatever amount of strength I had left to reel in the monster tuna. It flew in a parabola before landing on the deck behind us. *Boom. Crash.* The sound reverberated as the impact broke a part of the ghost ship we were on. It flopped and flailed on the deck, then finally stopped moving.

“Whooooaaa! Y-You two are incredible!”

“Squeeee! Wowie, sooo big!”

“A big one!”

“Really amazing... It will last us a year.”

The wraith triplets joined them in appreciation by thrusting their little fists into the air and spinning excitedly. As the others charged toward us and shrieked in delight at the fruit of battle that lay before them, Lefi and I glanced at each other, grinned, and then high-fived.



And then, after we got home.

“Ummm, how do we go about filleting this, Master Demon Lord...?”

“Good question...”

“I-I shall assist in the butchering.”

Even though we'd landed the beast of a fish, we were at a loss for what to do with it. We figured it out eventually, though. And let me give you my review. Despite the ache running through all my muscles because of the hard-fought battle, the monster tuna was so damn delicious that my eyes practically rolled into the back of my head.

Afterword

Hello, this is Ryuyu! Thank you very much for buying volume 8!

Before I go any further, let me do some advertising. Volume 3 of the comic is going on sale in April! The contents are heartwarming, even to me, the original author. I also wrote a short story for it; you can find it at the end. I hope you enjoy it!

Right. With that out of the way, let's get back to this volume. A different demon lord appeared, and Yuki expanded his dungeon's territory. I originally planned to have the demon lord retain a bit more of his consciousness so he could talk about the dungeon at length, but when I actually wrote his part, he didn't turn out quite how I'd imagined... Same story, different day with me.

I have no idea how much larger Yuki's dungeon will grow. That said, I have a feeling he'll do his absolute best to grow the little girls' playground. I'm sure he'll add all kinds of places for them, such as a campground, a swimming beach, a fishing pond, and more.

I do sometimes wonder if the direction his dungeon is going isn't a bit warped, though. At this rate, I wouldn't be surprised if we end up calling it a leisure resort instead of a dungeon.

Now, a brief word of thanks before I finish. To my editor, Daburyu, and Note Tono! To everyone else involved, and to the readers who picked this up! Thank you to you all from the bottom of my heart.

Let's meet again somewhere!



"Whoa!"

Hero
Nell

My dragon apparition, Leviathan, was constructed from a multitude of spirits. It gathered all its magic in its mouth and launched its **Breath attack!**

"That's my Spirit Magic! Incredible, isn't it?!"

The Young Man
Reborn in Another World
As a Demon Lord

Yuki

Now I'm a **DEMON LORD!**
Happily Ever After with **Monster Girls**
in My **DUNGEON**



A plentiful
seafood barbecue!

Fenrir
Fluffrir
(Pet Name: Rir)

Of the
Ovine Race
Leila

Werewolf
Lewin
(Pet Name: Lew)

Ancient Dragon
Lefisios
(Pet Name: Lefi)

Yuki's Weapon
Zaien
(Pet Name: En)

Vampire
Iluna

Healing Slime
Shii



Enjoying an intimate date together...just the two of them on a floating island!

"It was still fun, though. Wandering around, taking in the sights on this walk with you."

"In any case, let us eat. Hurry with the spread, will you?"



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Author: Ryuyu

Illustrator: Daburyu



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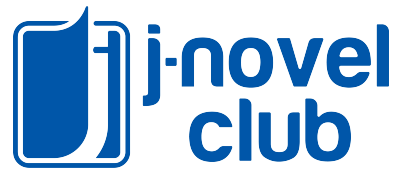
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Now I'm a Demon Lord! Happily Ever After with Monster Girls in My Dungeon:
Volume 8

by Ryuyu

Translated by Kashi Kamitoma Edited by Adam Haffen

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MAO NI NATTANODE, DUNGEON TSUKUTTE JINGAI MUSUME TO HONOBONO
SURU Vol. 8

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