

VILLAINESS LEVEL 99

I May Be the Hidden Boss
But I'm Not the Demon Lord



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Prologue

“The eldest daughter of Count Dolkness, Yumiella Dolkness. L-Level...99.”

We were gathered in the great hall of the Royal Academy, the school for the Kingdom of Valschein’s children of the aristocracy, where the entrance ceremony had just concluded. The warm, inviting atmosphere of the occasion dissipated as my level was announced, and the excitement of the teachers and upper-level students greeting the incoming students vanished as everyone stared at me, speechless.

At that moment, I came to the realization that I would already have to give up on my goal of being as inconspicuous as possible. As I accepted my fate, I began to think back on the events that led to me reaching level 99 as if to escape from my current reality...



I was five years old when I regained memories of my past life and realized that I had been reincarnated as the villainess of an otome game. It all started when I was looking in the mirror in my room and felt strange about how young I appeared.

The face reflected back at me was a doll-like face with dark black eyes. Though my eyes had been black in my past life, this was a much deeper black that seemed to consume all the surrounding light. The perfectly straight hair also complimented the other features.

If I wore a kimono, I might look like a Japanese doll.

Upon thinking about my own appearance, I realized that I knew terms that I had never heard before, like “kimono” and “Japanese doll.”

From there, my memories of my past life came back one after another—I was born during the Heisei period in Japan, I was an introverted female college student, and I probably was killed by a car that crashed into the sidewalk. In a matter of seconds, twenty-something years of memories flashed before my

eyes, and I was left gasping for air while my heart was beating out of my chest. All I could do was crouch down, close my eyes, and take deep breaths until I calmed down.

When I felt a little bit better, I thought about what I knew of my current life, only to realize that I didn't know much at all. The extent of my knowledge was that my name was Yumiella Dolkness, I was five years old, and I was an aristocrat. I had almost no memories that took place beyond the doors of my bedroom, nor any memories of meeting my parents. Though the servants did the bare minimum in caring for me, they didn't offer much in conversation—I suspected they were avoiding me—so I was left not even knowing the name of the kingdom I was living in.

Naturally, my first course of action was to bombard the maid with my arsenal of questions. She was surprised that the quiet child, who she had barely spoken to before, was suddenly so talkative, but she took the time to answer everything I asked about. Through my interrogation, I found out that I was in the Kingdom of Valschein and that I lived in the lord's mansion in the county of Dolkness, where I was the eldest daughter of the count. My parents lived in their mansion in the Royal Capital and hadn't returned to this county since before I was born.

Though the maid was hesitant, I coaxed her into spilling the reason why I was sent here alone. She said it was because my parents wanted to distance themselves from me, their black-haired child. Apparently, black hair was seen as unlucky and a symbol of evil in this kingdom, which explained why the servants around the mansion were so unfriendly. A quiet little girl with black hair *would* seem creepy. On top of that, my parents, who despised me, were their bosses. It only made sense that they'd be cautious in dealing with me.

Aside from all that, the name Yumiella Dolkness rang quite a few bells. It was the name of a character in an otome RPG that I played in my past life. She'd been the villainess, or more accurately...the hidden boss.

The title of the game was *Light Magic and the Hero*, commonly known as *LMH*. It was a world with swords and magic, and despite being a commoner, the main character could use light magic. Thus, she was allowed to attend the Royal Academy, where she worked together with her love interests to grow stronger

and eventually defeat the Demon Lord. It was a very classic story; at worst, it was predictable. The game alternated between the academy portion, where you raised the affection levels of the love interests, and the RPG portion, where you worked together with them to defeat monsters.

Yumiella was a typical villainess. She occasionally appeared during the academy portion of the gameplay to bother the main character and get in her way. However, as the story progressed, she appeared less and less, and by the time the main characters began their journey to defeat the resurrected Demon Lord, she was already forgotten. But that wasn't the end of Yumiella's story.

After the game's ending, if you went back to the Demon Lord's castle, there was a hidden boss that appeared as bonus content. Most players were probably shocked to see *her* as the hidden boss. That's right. The hidden boss was Yumiella Dolkness, also known as me!

Of course, as a hidden boss, she was much stronger than the final boss. As most players probably experienced when going up against her with a party that just barely defeated the final boss, you'd get your ass kicked and end up having to flee the scene. Wearing equipment with dark magic resistance and then using light magic to weaken the damage you take from the dark magic may have worked on the Demon Lord, but Yumiella would just hit you with a physical attack and kill your whole party. If you took the opposite strategy of defending against physical attacks, you'd only be left vulnerable to her strong dark magic.

The RPG portion of *LMH* was actually quite well-balanced for an otome game. All of the enemies had weaknesses to physical or magical attacks of various elements, and exploiting them was the key to beating the game. But Yumiella? There was no other strategy other than to level grind and beat her with brute force. She was the embodiment of unreasonableness. Players called her the Balance Breaker.

According to a member of the production team, she was only added in because they felt that the villainess didn't have enough screen time. She was built to be strong enough that grinding to the maximum level was the minimum requirement to defeat her. In contrast, players only needed to be around level 70 to defeat the Demon Lord. The developers made Yumiella detest the heroine

for getting closer to all the love interests so much that she awakened the ability to use dark magic. The reason wasn't that deep; they probably didn't put too much into it since the hidden boss was just bonus content added after the fact.

I was someone who loved level grinding in my past life, so of course, I'd beaten her once. Though I will say, Yumiella must have morphed from a villainess into an entirely different beast because she was able to hold her own against my party of four level 99 heroes.

However, it still would have been premature to say that this was indeed the universe of *LMH* just because my name and appearance matched that of Yumiella's. I had to gather more information to be sure. When I told the maid I wanted to learn how to read, a tutor was immediately hired, and my lessons began. Once I learned my new skill, I proceeded to spend all my time in the mansion's library. I read through everything, regardless of the genre, from picture books to discourse on history and politics, and found too many similarities between the game and this world. The names of the members of the royal families, detailed names of places, legends about the kingdom...the list goes on. As a result, I had no doubt that this was the world of *LMH* and that I was Yumiella Dolkness.

The realization tormented me. Yumiella was the hidden boss of this world whose purpose was to despise the main character and her companions, only to be defeated in the end. Was there any point in my existence? Was there any point in living this life? I was a hidden boss, so awful that I was the embodiment of unreasonableness.

That means I have the potential to be stronger than the final boss, more athletic than the swordsman in the main character's party, have stronger magic than the mage, and use dark magic, which is limited to enemy characters... Hold on... Isn't this kind of awesome?!

My inner gamer was ecstatic. All I had to do was not meddle with the main story of *LMH*. I could keep my distance from the main character and the love interests and let them deal with the Demon Lord. If that didn't work, I'd just have to secretly take down the Demon Lord. With Yumiella's stats, that should be an easy insta-kill.

I have to start grinding.

From then on, I would sneak out of the mansion behind the servants' backs to level grind. As expected of a hidden boss, my base stats were already quite high, and I was able to defeat monsters even as a child. I was also able to use dark magic without any issues. It seemed that hate had nothing to do with it.

Efficiency is vital to level grinding, so I bought items that increased experience by selling the magic stones that monsters dropped.

When I was no longer satisfied with the monsters that appeared near the town, I moved on to the dungeons in the mountains, where I hunted monsters endlessly. I spent roughly ten years level grinding, and when I turned fifteen, I received a letter from my father. It was the first message I received from my parents in all my years of life, and the gist of it was, "Attend the Royal Academy. While you are at the Academy, become acquainted with as many high-ranking noblemen as possible. Your future partner will marry into our family and be my successor, so he doesn't need to be the eldest of his family." I was immediately taken to the Royal Capital by carriage and promptly thrown into the Academy dormitories.

Uh...really, guys? Is this okay with you? Your own child doesn't even know what you look like.

Every noble child attended the Royal Academy for three years, starting at age fifteen. The Academy was tied to the origins of this kingdom, as it was founded by the hero and saintess who defeated the Demon Lord. Because of its history, the Academy not only focused on academic education but combat education as well. Consequently, when the kingdom was facing an emergency, aristocrats were encouraged to fight on the front lines. Though in practice, this rule seems to have become outdated.

The exterior of the Academy was gorgeous enough to believe it was the Royal Palace. Though I had seen it on-screen when I played the game, it was absolutely breathtaking in person. As for the dorms, I was, of course, provided my own room, as well as separate servants' quarters, making me very aware of my status as the daughter of a count.

Apparently, I barely made it to the Academy on time because the next day

was already the entrance ceremony. I dressed in my uniform and headed to the ceremony, but I couldn't help but feel that people were staring.

I've learned enough etiquette to not be laughed at, so it shouldn't be that. Could it be my face? I know I'm not a doe-eyed child anymore, but I don't think I look particularly evil...

After some time, I came to the realization that everyone was staring at my head. It was my black hair that was attracting all the attention. Some were very obvious about their disgust, not even trying to hide it, which made me a bit worried about my future at the Academy.

The disdain for black hair in this kingdom seemed to run very deep. It may have been because some legends said the Demon Lord had black hair, and all the villains in the fairy tales of this kingdom were always dressed in black from head to toe. It was no wonder that everyone subconsciously equated the color black to evil.

I was planning to hide my powers and act like an NPC, but I wasn't sure if I could after standing out that much on my first day.

As long as I don't interact with the main character and the love interests, I should at least be able to avoid the hidden boss route...

The entrance ceremony began and proceeded without any issues. Though I wanted to take a peek at the main character and her love interests during the headmaster's welcome speech, I remembered that the new students were supposed to introduce themselves at the end of the ceremony. With no need to find them now, I sat back in my chair with a nonchalant expression.

However, that didn't last very long. After the headmaster's speech, there was an announcement that level assessments would be conducted for new students.

Huh? No one told me about this!

I barely manage to stop myself from shooting to my feet in shock. One after another, students walked to the front and placed their hand on a crystal-like magical instrument to get their level assessed. Most were in the single digits, with only one student over level 10.

I don't know what level I am.

I had never measured my level, nor did I know what level I was when I regained the memories of my past life. A five-year-old shouldn't be able to defeat a monster on their own, so I had to be level 1 by default. I was probably only able to take down monsters because I was extremely athletic and had magic that was just potent enough.

Everyone was cheering for the level 10 student, so coming in at level 5 would most likely be my best bet to not stand out.

Level 5... I hope I'm around level 5. I would be so happy if I was around level 5.

But I had been level grinding for the last ten years. On top of that, I had been using my knowledge of video game mechanics to utilize effective items, and I'd been training in dungeons.

Of course, there was no mercy for me, and eventually, my turn came just like everyone else's. I walked up to the front but froze in front of the magical instrument. The elderly headmaster spoke kindly and reassured me that there wasn't anything embarrassing about being level 1 as a new student, but that wasn't the problem. I prepared myself for the coming result and made a selfish wish.

Please, oh magical instrument, malfunction and give me a one-digit level.

Alas, my wish went unanswered, and we now return to the beginning...

Chapter 1: The Hidden Boss Enters the Academy

The first to speak up after silence had taken over the Academy's great hall was the headmaster.

"I'm sure it just malfunctioned." He called over a member of the staff. "Have the backup magical instrument prepared for assessment."

The backup was immediately brought out, and I placed my hand on it as instructed. Unfortunately, the result hadn't changed. After a pause, the headmaster spoke again. "It seems that you are level 99, after all."

In an effort to confirm if the magical instrument was functioning properly, teachers took turns assessing their own levels. The previously silent hall began to fill with the murmuring of uneasy students, so I allowed myself to escape the discomfort by thinking back on my level grinding once more.

I was already at the max level? All that extra EXP I worked so hard for... What a waste...

Finally, the teachers concluded that the magical instrument was indeed not broken, and one teacher made their way toward me.

"Lady Yumiella, do you have any idea as to why your level is so high?"

I didn't just have ideas... I probably knew the exact reason. For a moment, I considered coming up with an excuse, but the thought of having everyone suspicious of me for three years made telling the truth sound like the better idea.

I'd rather take action now than spend my days terrified of the truth coming out.

"Yes, I can think of a few reasons why this assessment is correct."

"The magical instrument itself is working properly. You must have done something to meddle with it, did you not?"

"No, I did not. Level 99 should be my correct level..." I said tentatively.

“You may not know this, but in order to increase your level, you must defeat monsters. We’ll know if you’re lying, so just tell us the truth.”

I was telling the truth, and yet I was under suspicion for falsifying my level. *It’s a hard world out here for honest people.*

All of a sudden, the headmaster spoke up in a powerful voice that reverberated throughout the entire hall.

“Everyone, please settle down. Whether or not she speaks the truth will become clear when classes begin.” With the teachers not any closer to an explanation that would satisfy them and the students’ unease increasing, he probably felt he had to say *something*.

The headmaster turned to address me. “Lady Yumiella, finish your introduction and return to your seat.” I could see his glare in my peripheral vision. It seemed that even the headmaster was suspicious of me.

Would they believe me if I blew up the school with magic?

I gave up on trying to explain my situation with words and decided to keep my introduction short.

“I’m Yumiella Dolkness. It’s a pleasure to meet you all.” As I returned to my seat, I began to mentally prepare for the worst-case scenario.

I’ll just leave the kingdom on my own. I can probably strong-arm my way through the borderlands.

The level assessment and introductions continued in the apprehensive atmosphere. If things had progressed according to the game’s story, the main character should have stood out as the only commoner in the incoming class. However, her assessment and introduction took place with no particular attention drawn toward her, and the entrance ceremony came to an end.

Sorry about that, Miss Heroine.

It should be noted that, just like in the game, she was at level 1.

After the entrance ceremony, a buffet party was held to welcome the new students. Since I didn’t know anyone, and no one seemed to want to get to know me, I hung back in the corner of the venue.

I should start thinking about my plans for my future here.

If nothing else, I didn't want to get involved with any drama related to the revival of the Demon Lord. I would need to keep my distance from the main character and love interests to make sure that didn't happen.

I'll just wait a bit longer and then say I'm not feeling well and head back to my dorm.

Just as I was finished coming up with my escape plan, I locked eyes with someone making their way toward me.

Speak of the devil.

The clearly angry male with fiery red hair making his way toward me was one of the love interests. His name was William Ares, the swordsman of the hero's party. He had an extra strong sense of justice and a short temper—in other words, he was a hothead.

Without any sort of preamble, William loudly snapped, "You with the black hair! What kind of trick did you use? Aren't you ashamed of yourself, pulling a stunt like that?!"

"Um...are you talking about the level assessment?"

"What else would I be talking about?! I don't know if you just wanted attention or something, but don't you have any pride as an aristocrat?" William, who seemed to be a second away from taking a swing at me, was stopped by someone who came chasing after him.

"Calm down, Will. I understand how you feel, but don't cause a scene at the party!"

It was Edwin Valschein, the second prince of this kingdom and the main hero of the story, complete with his sparkly blond hair. He was a magic swordsman—proficient in magic and competent with a blade. Realizing that I was in the presence of the prince, I hastily curtsied.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Your Highness. I am Yumiella Dolkness."

"The Dolkness family. So, a pseudo-centralist," Edwin whispered to himself. He looked up to address me. "Lady Yumiella, Will has worked harder than

anyone on his swordsmanship from a young age, and he finally reached level 10 just before entering the Academy. What you did made a mockery of his efforts.”

Why does everyone keep assuming I cheated? Maybe they’ll start believing me if I go on a magic shooting spree.

“I’m sorry, but my level being 99 is the truth. As the headmaster said, I’m sure you will understand once classes begin.”

Prince Edwin was unable to hide his irritation as he spoke. “So you’re going to feign ignorance until the end, are you?”

“Are you saying that you’re stronger than me? You’re lucky I don’t have a gauntlet to throw down!” William lashed out.

Is he trying to challenge me to a duel? William, my dear, you should really cherish your life more.

As the people around us quieted to listen in on our conversation, the final love interest unsurprisingly appeared.

“Level 99 isn’t even a realistic level to be at. Were you unable to even consider such a basic fact? Well, I suppose not.” This fellow with the insulting attitude was Oswald Grimsarde, a blue-haired mage with glasses.

The three love interests were childhood friends, so close that they called each other by the nicknames of Ed, Will, and Oz—The golden, orthodox prince; the red, fiery swordsman; and the blue, cool mage. This world was full of attractive people, but these three were on another level. However, while they were all good-looking, interacting with them was quite troublesome.

Welp, all the love interests are here now. Just my luck.

This might have been exciting for a fan of the game, but I was only into the RPG portion.

“Hey, why don’t you say something?” William seemed to have gotten impatient with my silence.

“It seems that I’m unable to get you to believe me, so…” I mumbled, eager to escape.

“You’re still not fessing up?”

“Is your head completely empty?”

“Are you a compulsive liar or something?”

Jeez, do they kiss their mothers with those mouths? Don't they know that they're just characters in an otome game?

In an effort to end my conversation with them, I tried to change the subject to something that would encourage them to go to the main character.

“Wasn't there a commoner who uses light magic? She may be having trouble with...something. I think it would be best if you checked in on her.”

“Yes, that would probably be much more productive than playing along with your nonsense. I'm sure the Academy will issue a decision regarding your lies soon enough, so be prepared.” With that final remark, Prince Edwin turned and left with the other two.

Ugh... That was exhausting. I better hurry back to the dorm.

Having returned to my dorm, I had my maid Rita prepare some tea for me. Despite being a noble already, I couldn't help but be charmed by how aristocratic it felt. Having tea like this was refreshing since, back at the mansion, I only had tea as a part of etiquette classes.

“My lady, are you sure you're all right with being back so early? I believe the party is still going on.”

“It's fine. It seemed like I wasn't going to be getting friendly with anyone anyways.”

“You won't be able to find a good partner with that kind of attitude. It'll be a problem for the master as well.”

Rita was a maid working at the Dolkness mansion in the Royal Capital but was reassigned as my attendant yesterday when I entered the Academy. The Academy had a dining hall as well as specialized staff for chores such as laundry, making a maid feel unnecessary. However, there was no going against my father's orders. It had only been two days since we met, but she took every chance she got to remind me about finding a suitor—likely an order from my father. She was probably also here to supervise me so I wouldn't act out of line.

“With classes officially starting tomorrow, I’m sure you’ll meet someone great, my lady. Isn’t the second prince one of your classmates?”

I’ve already made quite a bad impression on the second prince. Wait, she doesn’t know about all the ruckus at the entrance ceremony? Well, she’s not a very good supervisor.

I was still curious about the term that Prince Edwin muttered after hearing my family name, and decided to ask Rita. “On an unrelated note, do you know what ‘pseudo-centralist’ means?”

“Someone must have called you that. Don’t worry. It’s nothing you should concern yourself with.” Just as I expected, it didn’t seem to be something good.

“I never said anyone called me that, but I suspect it’s something that describes the Dolkness family, is it not?”

“Er...” Rita seemed to give in and began to explain. “You know about central aristocrats and provincial aristocrats, right, my lady?”

“Yes, I believe the Dolknesses are provincial aristocrats, since we don’t hold any official positions at the Royal Capital or anything like that.”

“That’s correct. With regards to that, ‘pseudo-centralist’ is a derogatory name for provincial aristocrats who spend all their time in the Royal Capital without a central position.”

“I see, so basically, it refers to good-for-nothing aristocrats who leave their domain to a deputy and spend their time partying without working in the Royal Capital.”

As an employee of said good-for-nothing aristocrat, Rita kept her mouth shut and scowled. As the daughter of said good-for-nothing aristocrat, I let out a heavy sigh.



Classes officially began starting today. It seems the basic schedule was lectures during the day and practical lessons in the afternoon. I was, of course, a total loner in the classroom. No one wanted to get on the prince’s bad side by interacting with me—as a result, everyone avoided eye contact.

This could actually make things easier for me. Spending three years as decor doesn't sound too bad.

As I sat at my desk quietly, I began to listen in on all the gossip going on around me. Thanks to the sensory enhancement gained through leveling up, I was able to make out all the whispers in the classroom without any trouble. According to the other students, I was a carefree airhead who had convinced myself that I was amazing based on nothing.

Why stop at the Academy? Maybe I should blow up the entire Royal Capital to prove that I'm level 99.

Right before class began, Miss Heroine entered the classroom with her trio of love interests, the four of them having a friendly chat together.

"So light magic can heal wounds too? You're impressive, Alicia," William praised.

Oswald was impressed. "It's an element not even I can use. So, do you think you'll be able to do well at the Academy?"

"To be honest, I'm a little worried, being a commoner and all..." she replied anxiously.

"If you ever need anything, just let us know. We promise to help you," Edwin encouraged earnestly.

Isn't it too soon for them to have fallen for her? They shouldn't have even spoken to each other at this point in the game. I wonder if things are straying away from the story because of me.

The main character's name was Alicia Ehnleit. The game allowed the player to change her name, but Alicia was the default. Adorned with pink hair, she was your typical protagonist, defined by her optimistic and cheery personality. She was accepted into the Academy despite being a commoner due to the fact that light magic users were extremely rare. Light magic was so valued because it was the only weakness of the dark element, making it capable of being a secret weapon against the Demon Lord.

I would have liked to have kept my distance from her, but just like the love interests, that probably wasn't going to happen. Why? Well, in the short

moment that we made eye contact, Alicia glared at me as if I had murdered her family.



On the first day, afternoon classes started with swordsmanship. Although most of the male students were participating, there were only a handful of female students who chose to get involved, including me—most of them had opted to watch instead.

“All right, we’ll be taking turns and doing battle simulations to check everyone’s skills. First up will be...you, Level 99.”

Jeering laughter erupted from the surrounding students. Unfortunately for me, the teacher leading the swordsmanship lessons was the same teacher that had accosted me at the entrance ceremony.

First William, and now this guy... Do all swordsmen have short fuses?

“I will be her partner.” William stepped forward, which was followed by a shrill outburst of cheers from the other female students.

We were to use wooden swords for the simulation, so I randomly picked a sword out of the pile and stepped into the center of the training area. William picked what looked to be the longest and thickest wooden sword. It seemed fitting since he wielded a longsword that was about the length of himself in the game.

I mainly used magic when hunting monsters, but my physical strength was still on par with my magic. The last time I was caught off guard and a monster had gotten close to me, I kicked it away without thinking, and all that was left was a pile of dust with no resemblance to the monster it once was.

Okay, how am I gonna hold back?

“Last chance to back down.” I ignored his warning and took the pre-match bow. “I look forward to our battle.”

William sucked his teeth in disdain. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Jeez, back off. I’m busy thinking about how I’m going to not kill you. Whether you live or die depends on how careful I am.

“All right, raise your swords,” instructed the teacher.

At that moment, I realized I had no idea how to properly hold a sword. In fact, it was my first time picking one up. I was able to handle most enemies with my magic and, if needed, my bare hands, so there hadn't been an opportunity to use one until now. William looked confused as I continued to stand there without raising my sword.

“Hey, hurry up already. Or is this your way of saying you want to forfeit?”

“I'm sorry, it's just that this is my first time using a sword. Let's just begin.”

The students watching didn't even try to hide their roars of laughter, with shouts of abuse sprinkled in here and there.

William was visibly irate—his face twisted in anger. “How long are you going to keep making a fool out of me?! I'm not going to hold back just because you're a girl, so expect this to end with a broken bone or two!”

Without waiting for the starting signal, William charged at me. He was probably fast to the average person, but with my reaction time, it wasn't a problem. As William made his way toward me, I continued to think about how I could get through the lesson without hurting him. It only took a second for him to be right in front of me with his sword raised and ready to strike, but I was ready. The moment before the wooden sword swung down, I swiftly ducked to the side and positioned my wooden sword by his feet. He stumbled as his swing only struck air before William's foot got caught on my sword, forcing him to fall to the ground face first.

Sorry about that. I didn't expect you to tumble so magnificently.

Everyone fell silent, confused at what had just happened. I turned to the teacher and spoke. “Is that it? Or should I continue?” I vigorously spun the wooden sword in my hand while waiting for an answer, which created a gust of wind in the training area.

The teacher finally came to his senses and declared, “Th-The winner is Yumiella Dolkness.”

William jumped back up from his fall and objected, “No, not yet! I was just caught off guard! Pretending to be an amateur... You're a coward through and

through!”

It's hard to take you seriously when you've got blood dripping down your face...

“Graaah!” William let out a battle cry and charged at me once more.

He probably wouldn't let it go if I just dodged again.

I swung my sword to match his attack, and they collided. The crash caused the swords to resonate with an unrecognizable boom from the wood and sent William flying backward.

These wooden swords are surprisingly tough! Wait, that's not important right now. Is William okay? If something were to happen to him, would it be considered an accident? All right, if anything happens, I'll just hold the teacher responsible since they were the supervisor.

As I contemplated my liability, the training area was filled with screams like he was dead. I hurried over to check on William, only to find him unconscious, probably from hitting his head. His breathing was stable, so I was most likely in the clear. At worst, he was maybe a little less intelligent.

“Oh...should I carry him to the nurse's office?” I held William up by his collar, which caused the teacher to panic.

“No, no! That's fine. I'll take him, so just...hand him over, all right?”

What is this, a hostage negotiation?

Though I was a bit offended, I released William to the teacher.

“I'll be taking William to the nurse's office. Everyone, practice your swings on your own until I return. Do not, under any circumstances, have any matches.” With that, the teacher ran out of the training area.

Since I was new to swords and had no idea how to practice my swings, I decided to just copy the others. Upon looking around for someone to show me what to do, I realized that no one was moving. Everyone who made eye contact with me let out a small gasp, and the female students who came to watch were gone.

There's no need to be that scared...

I made sure I held back. The fact that William wasn't ground meat was proof of that. With nothing else I could do, I attempted to practice some sort of swing, making motions based on what I thought was close enough. The class passed by like that, and the teacher didn't return until the end of the lesson.

The next class was magic. The magic training area was lined with scarecrows dressed in metal armor with roofing only over the targets—similar to an archery range.

The teacher arrived right on time and took a look around at the students before saying, "Let's begin with everyone showing me their magic skills. All you must do is hit the target with at least one element." Similar to the swordsmanship class, we were to take turns performing magic in order to assess each student's skill level. There were four main elements: fire, wind, water, and earth. There were very few people who could use light or dark magic.

One by one, students stepped forward to perform their magic, but surprisingly, there were only a few students who passed. For most, their magic went flying in unintended directions or didn't reach the target. Even those who were able to hit the target could only manage to do so with up to two elements.

The targets don't seem like they're taking damage at all... I wonder if their magic just isn't potent enough.

Alicia missed the target on her turn, but people exclaimed in awe because she used very rare light magic. Oswald was able to use all four of the main elements to hit the target each time. Though his magic looked more potent than the others', the target still wouldn't budge.

That target must be really sturdy.

"Wonderful! I expected nothing less of you, Oswald. It's no wonder you're hailed as a magical genius!" the teacher enthused.

"It's only natural to be able to do this much." Oswald then turned to me. "It seems that she's the only one who hasn't shown her magic yet. I wonder what kind of amazing magic she'll perform for us." He pushed up his glasses, looking at me mockingly.

Oh, right, he didn't participate in the swordsmanship lesson. I guess he doesn't know that I sent William flying.

As I stepped forward, the students who had participated in the swordsmanship class stepped back in anticipation of something happening.

There's no need to be so cautious...

The truth was, I couldn't properly use any of the four main elements. At most, I could produce a flame as strong as a lighter or create a gentle breeze. Yes, I was the woman who allocated all her skill points to her muscles and dark magic.

"I was wondering, would it be all right to destroy the target?" I wanted to know if it was okay to destroy such sturdy school equipment, but Oswald answered in place of the teacher.

"The armor on that scarecrow has gone through a special treatment. Besides, how could you destroy something that even I couldn't?"

If you're going to speak, could you at least answer my question?

I ignored him and turned my attention to the teacher.

"Only the Court Mages are strong enough to destroy them, but if you think you can do it, go ahead." With the teacher's approval, I cast my magic.

"All right, then, *Dark Flame*." A pea-sized black flame appeared from the tip of my finger and shot straight out toward the target.

"What was that?" Oswald chortled. "I was curious as to what you would show us, but I didn't think it would be a popgun."

On the other hand, the teacher seemed to have noticed that I used dark magic and was wide-eyed with amazement. The pea-sized flame finally landed and immediately upon contact set the entire target ablaze. Now engulfed in flames, the armor began to melt into a viscous mess.

Dark Flame was a spell that I used often. Though it produced no heat, just like its name suggested, it was magic that looked like fire, even though the way it melted stone and metal looked more like acid than a fire—using it on a monster led to quite a grotesque result.

The scarecrow, once protected by the armor, had completely dissolved, and

the black flame dissipated. The training area fell silent for a few moments, but then, someone spoke up.

“Is that...dark magic?” they muttered.

“Yes, it is,” I replied without hesitation. “It seems to be the only element I’m any good at.”

“B-Brilliant work, Lady Yumiella! Oh, there have even been some Court Mages who were dark magic users, so try not to be biased toward it,” the teacher explained with a slight stutter. I hadn’t realized that dark magic had such a negative connotation.

Come to think of it, most villains in picture books had black hair and were dark magic users... Am I a villain? Oh, right, I’m the villainess and hidden boss, duh.

Oswald, who had been quiet until now, began to mutter under his breath. “That’s impossible! Something’s not right! *I’m* the genius when it comes to magic!”

I think it’s just our difference in levels, not ability.

“I-I won’t accept this, you got that?!” His dissatisfaction culminated in a scream before he fled the training area.

How out of character... What happened to being the cool glasses guy?

As I stood there, put off by Oswald’s behavior, Prince Edwin appeared with the headmaster, just barely missing his friend.

“Yumiella Dolkness, the paperwork for your expulsion has been completed. You aren’t fit for the Royal Academy.”

Prince Edwin had apparently been making preparations for my expulsion.

Huh, so that’s why I hadn’t seen him since this morning. What a busy day you’ve had, Your Highness!

“My expulsion...?”

While I reassessed my plans moving forward, the headmaster chimed in.

“Someone who would lie to a member of the royal family is not fit for the Academy, nor are they fit to be an aristocrat in Valschein. If you are expelled, it

will be quite difficult to remain at your current standing.”

“Hah, maybe a vacation would do you some good. Perhaps foreigners would treat you better,” Prince Edwin chimed in.

Is he implying that I should be exiled to a different kingdom?

Just then, the magic teacher spoke up in a panic.

“Y-Your Highness, Headmaster, please hear me out. She’s able to use the very rare dark magic and was able to destroy a target that even a Court Mage would struggle with. She may be telling the truth about being level 99. I believe that expelling her would be a loss for this kingdom.”

“But a Court Mage *could* destroy it? Then that isn’t proof of her being level 99.” His Highness turned to address me. “If you want to stay enrolled, you’ll have to convince me.”

It seemed that Prince Edwin was insistent on getting me expelled.

Wouldn’t it be a problem if a member of the royal family were to hand someone as strong as a Court Mage over to another kingdom, Your Highness? Hm... I wonder which would be better, going into exile and being harbored by another kingdom or hiding my identity and living as a commoner?

While I weighed the pros and cons of each, the magic teacher begged me to prove my innocence. “Lady Yumiella, that magic that you performed earlier wasn’t your full strength, was it? Please, show us what you can do at full power.” He seemed to be ready to prostrate himself if necessary. Perhaps it was his loyalty to his kingdom that drove him to such desperation, but I couldn’t turn down someone pleading so earnestly.

“Very well, I will launch a spell into the sky.” I turned to face the prince. “Your Highness, would it be all right if I used my magic?”

“Do as you wish. It doesn’t matter to me.”

“Are you really sure about that?”

“Stop talking and get on with it!”

“The thing is, if something were to happen, I would need someone to take responsibility...” *I don’t want to be liable, you know?*

“Why would something happen when you’re aiming for the sky? Fine, I’ll take responsibility!”

All right, gonna hold you to that, Your Highness. Pushing responsibility onto the prince is my best option, considering what’s about to happen.

“In that case, let us move to an area with no roof.” I left the training area, and the prince, the headmaster, and the magic teacher followed suit, with the other students anxiously trailing along.

Though I said I would showcase my full power, I wasn’t planning on actually going all out. I had refrained from using my full magical power since an incident in the past where I left a forest with a crater. As I had most definitely grown since then, my current full strength was beyond even my own imagination. Regardless, I decided to use the strongest dark magic spell—a spell that could only be used by the Demon Lord and myself in the game.

“Black Hole.”



In the blink of an eye, the Royal Academy was enveloped in darkness. If someone were looking in from far away, it would have looked like a black orb appeared above the Academy. It was large enough to be spotted from anywhere in the Royal Capital.

All the sunlight was completely obstructed at the Academy, making all the surroundings as dark as night. However, it only lasted for a moment before the black orb shrank before everyone's eyes. Once it had disappeared, it was quickly followed by a strong gust of wind blowing up toward the air.

Black Hole was a spell that unconditionally obliterated any matter within its range. In other words, the air above the Academy had been eradicated in an instant. This caused the atmosphere in the area to become a vacuum and pull in all the surrounding air.

Once the violent winds had subsided, I did my best to put on a kind face and addressed the prince. "How was that, Your Highness? Was it enough to prove that I am level 99?"

"Eeek!" was all he managed.

Though he was scared stiff, Prince Edwin was desperately trying to run away from me.

Goodness, there's no need to be so scared.



The day after I made a black hole appear above the academy, I was called to the Royal Palace to have an audience with His Majesty, the king. Although the orb floating in the air yesterday had quickly disappeared, many people had witnessed it, causing a bit of a stir in the Royal Capital. Knights were dispatched to the Academy to investigate the situation. Naturally, I was questioned, but of course, I made sure to emphasize that Prince Edwin was responsible for the entire situation.

Along with the prince and the headmaster, other Academy teachers and students who watched it happen were questioned as well.

When I was called to the Royal Palace, I learned that the Academy uniform

was on the same level as a military uniform, and I was able to appear as is for my audience with the king.

Not only is it comfortable, but I can wear it almost anywhere? This is great! From now on, I'm always gonna be in uniform.

The heavy doors to the audience chamber opened, and the knight who had guided me here prompted me to enter. The room was adorned with lavish furnishings and a red carpet, with a handsome, mature-looking man seated in the back. It was the king himself, and the queen was seated next to him. They were surrounded by people who looked to be prominent figures in this kingdom. I was knowledgeable about the principal aristocrats, but I couldn't put any names to the faces in front of me.

Upon seeing me, they began to whisper among themselves.

My hair? Again? This is getting old.

However, the king and queen's expressions were free of that sort of disgust—perhaps they were just good at hiding how they felt, but for now, it was reassuring. I stepped forward to the center of the audience chamber and bowed to the king and queen.

"Yumiella Dolkness, raise your head," His Majesty called out. He refrained from continuing until I lifted my head up. "I am aware of what happened at the Academy. It seems that my son and the teachers at the Academy behaved rudely. You have my apologies, Lady Yumiella."

Though it was just a small bow from the king, the audience hall echoed with gasps of shock, and I was just as surprised to be receiving an apology from the king himself.

"I-It's all right. There's no need for you to apologize, Your Majesty. I was the one who caused trouble for everyone by conducting myself abnormally, and for that, I sincerely apologize."

The king responded to my panicked apology in a kind voice. "Lady Yumiella, please raise your head. There were a variety of methods that could have been used to confirm your level, such as a physical assessment or a simple display of magic. I find it unreasonable that they made accusations based on their one-

sided assumptions. However, it is also true that many would find it hard to believe that a petite young lady such as yourself was level 99. Some of my vassals are suspicious of your level as well, which is why I would like for Adolphe to decide the truth. A decision from him should satisfy everyone.” As His Majesty spoke, a strapping man who appeared to be around the same age as the king stepped forward.

So you’re Adolphe, Commander of the Knight’s Order.

He was considered to be the strongest knight in the entire kingdom. If I remembered correctly, he was around level 60. To put that into perspective, the recommended level to take on the Demon Lord was around 60 to 70—he was definitely strong.

“In honor of your attainment of the highest level of human achievement, I will deliver a strike with my full strength.” Adolphe stood before me and unsheathed his sword, immediately swinging it sideways toward my throat.

Huh? We’re starting already?

I wasn’t sure if it was appropriate for me to counterattack, but it felt wrong to use magic without permission in front of the king.

The king didn’t say I should fight, but he also didn’t tell me to block the attack. I guess I should just dodge it.

All of my thoughts took place within a split second, allowing me to evade the attack with a curtsy. The sword had barely missed the top of my head. I raised my head to prepare for the next attack, but Commander Adolphe had already sheathed his blade, looking slightly disappointed.

“Not even members of the Knight’s Order can handle that strike,” he confessed. “On top of that, it appears you even had time to think about how you would dodge the attack. There is no doubt that you are level 99.” It was only after Commander Adolphe finished speaking that the others realized he had even swung his sword, once again filling the chamber with whispers.

“I’m sorry about that, Lady Yumiella,” Adolphe apologized. He spoke quietly, so only I could hear. “As a knight, I’m ashamed to have surprised you with an attack like that, but I can’t go against His Majesty’s orders.”

Ah, so the king had instructed him to do that in advance.

“I apologize for testing you so suddenly, Lady Yumiella. I’m glad that you weren’t harmed.”

Once Commander Adolphe had returned to his position next to the king, His Majesty asked, “Would you please show us some magic as well? You are free to use any small-scale magic right here.”

“Yes, I’ll go right ahead, then.”

I decided to cast *Shadow Lance* in an effort to use a spell that presented the least amount of danger for everyone in the room. Slowly, several black lances rose from my shadow, causing a commotion.

“Dark magic. How interesting... Court Archmage, is there anything dangerous about the element of darkness?”

An elderly man dressed in robes spoke up to answer the king’s question.

“Darkness is merely an element, just as the four main elements and the light element are. It is weak to light but strong against water, earth, wind, and fire, making it a very powerful element. It is up to the user to decide how to use it.”

“Dark magic is used by high-ranking monsters. Are you sure it’s not something evil?”

“There are also monsters that wield the four main elements. Though I cannot confirm if it is true, there are written records of monsters using the light element as well. Given that it is an element with very few users, there were probably many people whose imaginations ran wild, leading them to believe it is a negative path.”

“Hm, I see. You’re saying that people tend to fear uncommon things that they don’t understand. It may be that black hair is loathed for a similar reason.”

The king and the archmage spoke as if they were making sure their conversation was heard by everyone. This Q and A session was probably done for my sake. Seeing that dark magic and black hair seemed to have the worst reputation, I was grateful for their consideration.

The king moved his gaze back to me. “Lady Yumiella, you have reached a

height that perhaps no man ever has. Well done. I'd like to hear about your process of how you reached that point."

Ah, he wants to know how I level grinded. It's only natural for him to be curious, given that this is a matter of national strength. I don't think I'll be of much help since I didn't do anything particularly special, but there's no harm in telling him the truth.

"There wasn't anything particularly special about what I did, I merely kept taking down monsters. I was luckily able to use some magic at level 1."

"You must have had a mentor, no?"

"I did not. I am self-taught. I started with the monsters in the forest in our county, and once I got comfortable, I continued my training in a dungeon."

"I was unaware that there was a dungeon in the county of Dolkness," His Majesty mused.

"Yes, we have a dungeon nearby. It's not very popular because it's disadvantageous for the four main elements due to the considerable number of dark-type monsters that appear."

Come to think of it, I've never seen anyone else in that dungeon. In the game, it's actually a bonus stage for the light-type main character.

"So, you had no mentor... Does that mean you had no battle training?"

"That is correct. I thought I could get stronger by focusing on defeating monsters and increasing my level."

"O-Oh... I see..."

The king seemed disturbed by my response. Apparently, the standard procedure in this kingdom was to have plenty of training before taking on a monster.

"Did no one in your household try to stop you from doing something so dangerous?"

"This is a bit embarrassing to admit, but the truth is, I was sneaking out to train. No one noticed as long as I was home on the days that the tutors came by."

“Your parents didn’t... Oh, I’m sorry. You can disregard that.”

The king must have remembered that my parents never left the Royal Capital, as his expression had turned to one of pity.

Don’t feel bad, Your Majesty. It was honestly a pretty fun and fulfilling childhood. I should probably change the subject, though.

“I don’t think there was anything else I did... Oh, wait! Yes, I had an amulet of growth with me.”

“You didn’t carry an amulet of protection?!”

Amulets were a type of equipable item with various effects. The amulet of growth was an item that doubled your experience points. In the game, it was only available for purchase after defeating the Demon Lord, but in this world, it was just another item at the shops.

The amulet of protection could block one fatal strike. It wasn’t used much in the game, but it was probably very useful as a real-world item. Its price in the shops reflected that as well, as it was the only expensive item by a large margin. The only drawback was that amulets seemed to cancel each other out because carrying more than one negated their effects.

“I-I also used a monster-summoning flute... I would play it as loud as I could in the forest and dungeon.”

The monster-summoning flute was an item that would force an encounter with monsters. It was an extremely helpful item since I couldn’t just spawn enemies by walking around like in the game.

“Adolphe, would you be able to do the same?”

“I could not part with my amulet of protection, nor could I do something as frightening as playing a monster-summoning flute while alone,” he answered seriously.

The king and Commander Adolphe stared at me as if I were deranged.

All I did was try to level grind efficiently. This feels like an overreaction. I did have some near-death experiences, though...

The king cleared his throat and spoke in a rigid manner.

“Yumiella Dolkness, I hope you will employ your strength as this kingdom’s sword.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” I said, nodding. “As one of your vassals, I intend to be the Kingdom of Valschein’s shield,” I continued, having swapped the phrase “kingdom’s sword” for “kingdom’s shield” nonchalantly.

“Very well, you shall utilize your strength in the event of a national emergency.”

I was relieved to see that my intentions were understood and agreed to by the king. However, my relief was short-lived as my audience with the king didn’t seem to be over. His Majesty seemed to be sizing me up, his gaze still piercing.

“Well then, I would like to reward you for your unprecedented achievements. Feel free to speak honestly about your desires. We can arrange for you to have a title, a domain, or even a national treasure. Welcoming you into the royal family wouldn’t be out of the question either.”

The audience chamber buzzed with shock at the king’s generous words.

Ah, this must be a test. The king wants to know whether I’m seeking wealth, honor, or even the prince’s hand in marriage. Unfortunately, Your Highness, I don’t want any of those things.

“I am very fortunate and grateful for this unexpected gift. As for my desires, I wish to lead a peaceful life. If there is peace in the kingdom and my surroundings, and enough food, clothing, and shelter for all, there would be nothing else I could want for.”

“I see... Then I shall vow to strive for your peace. I must say, you are quite nonacquisitive. If you ever desire anything else, let me know, and I shall arrange what I can.” The king spoke as if he was satisfied with my answer, but there was also a hint of displeasure. I figured he was bothered by the fact that he couldn’t prepare chains to shackle me to this kingdom.

You’re right to be worried. If I ever get sick of this place, I’m outta here.

Thus ended my time with His Majesty, and I exited the audience chamber.

Glad that’s over. It was quite nerve-racking.

I was glad to find that the king was someone who could be reasoned with. I had even anticipated being unfairly assigned to the military and forced to participate in war. If it had come to that, I would have done everything I could to escape.

I followed the knight who had guided me here, excited to finally return to my dorm.

Wait... This isn't the way we came.

The knight continued to guide me farther into the depths of the palace.

“Um, we seem to be going in a different direction than the exit...”

“Yes, you have been invited to have tea with Her Majesty, Lady Yumiella.”

Darn. Looks like my time at the palace isn't over yet.

I was brought to the royal family's personal quarters deep in the palace, and taken into a room where the queen most likely awaited me.

The room had a relaxed feeling to its design, and inside awaited the queen and a maid, with tea already prepared.

“Thank you for coming, Lady Yumiella. I would have loved for His Majesty to join us, but he is a very busy man.”

The queen had a calm and mature-like quality to her, yet she maintained an air of youthfulness.

“My name is Yumiella Dolkness. Thank you very much for inviting me, Your Majesty.”

“This is unofficial business. There's no need to be so polite,” the queen said with a soft smile before glancing over at the maid. The maid finished making my tea and left the room.

“I want you to know that our conversation here won't leave this room, especially since I have some sensitive matters to discuss.”

What? This is starting to smell like trouble... I just want to go home already.

“Heh heh, there's no need to be so guarded, sweetie. The king and I both are actually quite fond of you. Your answers during your audience were brilliant. It's

a relief to know that someone like you was the one to obtain such a strong power.”

“Th-Thank you...?” I was surprised at the unexpected glowing review.

“Lady Yumiella, you consider having power to be a hassle, don’t you? Furthermore, you seem to be sharp-witted. If you had been either an ambitious or empty-headed person... The thought gives me chills.”

“Um...why do you trust me so much?”

“Well, there are many aristocrats who pretend to be nonacquisitive to get close to the royal family. Eventually, I started to be able to tell the difference. You don’t want to get involved with the royal family, do you? Unfortunately, the only people I can trust are those who feel that way.”

There was no way I was going to admit to her face that I didn’t want to get involved with the royal family, so I stayed silent.

“Let’s move on to the main topic,” the queen continued. “Keep in mind, this is information that only the royal family and very few aristocrats are privy to. In two years, the Demon Lord will be resurrected.”

I was shocked to hear the queen state it so plainly. And although I wasn’t surprised about the Demon Lord’s resurrection, I *was* surprised at how they had so accurately predicted it. In the game, without any warning, the Demon Lord resurrected as soon as the main character began her third year, which would be two years from now.

The royal family must have information on the Demon Lord that wasn’t revealed in the game.

“The Demon Lord...?”

“Yes, I would like your cooperation in taking down the Demon Lord. The military will have their hands full with holding off the army of monsters, so we need a team of a select few to defeat the Demon Lord.”

“Understood. I will, of course, help the kingdom during this crisis.”

I had already been planning to take down the Demon Lord myself, if necessary, so I accepted immediately.

“Thank you, Yumiella. There’s just one thing... I feel terrible saying this when you would be risking your life, but it wouldn’t be good for the kingdom if you were to take down the Demon Lord.”

It would be inconvenient for the kingdom if I defeated the Demon Lord?

I pondered what the queen meant by her statement, and only one answer came to mind. “Is that because it would bring to question the King’s legitimacy?”

The Kingdom of Valschein was founded by the hero and saintess who sealed the Demon Lord, and the royal family were their descendants—this fact was the reason the king ruled this kingdom. If someone unrelated to the royal family were to defeat the Demon Lord, this reasoning would falter.

“I’m impressed. That is correct,” she said, eyebrows raised.

I’m sorry, Your Majesty, I cheated a little. I only knew that because the prince participated in taking down the Demon Lord in the game.

“Being the descendant of the hero is merely the official reason, but having a justification itself is important to a king,” the queen continued. “We plan to send Edwin to defeat the Demon Lord. It would be wonderful if you could join the battle as a saintess.”

If I were to be worshiped as a saintess who helped defeat the Demon Lord, I would have to marry Prince Edwin.

No, thank you. Marrying into the royal family sounds exhausting.

“There is a new student in my same incoming class who uses light magic. I believe she is much more suited to be the saintess, rather than a dark magic user like myself. She already seems to be getting along with Prince Edwin at the Academy.”

Miss Heroine, I sacrifice thee.

“How unfortunate. Though, I did expect you to turn me down. It’s all right that you don’t want to. You can be honest with me. Oh, and if you don’t like Edwin, would you consider marrying Maurice?” the queen asked, referring to the first prince.

“No,” I declined without hesitation.

I mean, she was the one who said to be honest.

“Ha ha ha! There’s no need to be so opposed; I won’t force you. The last thing we want is to drive you out of the kingdom. However, I do wonder how my sons would react to hearing how clearly opposed you were to the idea of marrying them,” the queen laughed. The fact that I so flatly rejected the princes must have amused her.

Once her laughter had calmed down, Her Majesty regained her composure and began to speak on a new topic.

“We can discuss the Demon King in more detail at a later date. The more immediate problem you will face will be the aristocrats trying to persuade you to join their political factions. Unfortunately, the news about you being level 99 has already spread. I believe their maneuvers to draw you in will begin tomorrow.”

“Wouldn’t joining Your Majesty’s faction solve the problem?”

“The king and I are members of the dominant faction, who are also known as moderates or royalists. The problem is that the faction isn’t a monolith, so members of the dominant faction would fight over you. Though, we aren’t also known as moderates for nothing. There wouldn’t be as many issues, and you would probably be able to handle it yourself.”

The queen’s lecture on the political factions of aristocrats, a topic I lacked knowledge about, continued. “You must look out for the radicals led by the Duke of Hillrose. They have proposed wars of aggression on other kingdoms—try to keep your distance from them. You should also be wary of being contacted by agents from other countries. If you are ever given an enticing offer, let me or the king know. I promise you we will arrange something beyond their offers.”

The thorough and complete support from this kingdom made me fully aware of how I had become a living strategic weapon. I then realized that I had no idea what faction the Dolkness family was a part of, so I decided to ask the queen.

Her Majesty looked hesitant but answered, “The Dolkness family, or should I

say, aristocrats that are called pseudo-centralists, are radicals. The duke wishes to grow the radical faction as much as he can, and they want to be a part of the centralists' factions. It is a result of their agendas aligning."

To think that we were radicals... My family is probably wrapped around the Duke of Hillrose's thumb.

"What should I do if my family were to demand I be adopted by or marry into the Hillrose family?"

"I will issue a royal decree prohibiting you from being transferred from your family registry. Without the ability to be added to another family's registry, it will be impossible for you to be adopted or married against your will. However, there will be people who oppose this, so I'm afraid I can only keep the decree active until you graduate."

"Thank you, Your Majesty, that is plenty sufficient."

I'll have to do something about my relationship with my family before I graduate.

"Yumiella... I was wondering, what do you think of your parents?" the queen asked as if reading my thoughts.

"I have never met them, so I couldn't say. It seems that they aren't very good people, so if possible, I would like to cut ties with them."

The queen must not have expected me to say I'd never met my parents—she gasped, her face now filled with sadness.

"I see... If you would like, you could become my—" She cut herself off. "No, you would probably refuse. In any case, you can think of me as your own mother. If you are ever in need of some attention, please feel free to stop by." The offer was sweet, but as someone whose mental age was over thirty, it was a bit of an awkward situation to be in.

"Thank you. I appreciate the offer, but your kind words are more than enough."

Afterward, we discussed my life in Dolkness County. As the story of my life progressed, the queen's expression became increasingly sorrowful. By the time

we reached the dungeon arc of my fun level-grinding times, tears were streaming down her face.

“We will be sending one of the king’s men to the Academy. If you are ever in trouble, please let him know.”

For some reason, the queen seemed to feel the need to protect me. As mothers often did for their visiting children, I was sent home with an abundance of treats.

Interlude 1: The King

A black orb suddenly appeared in the sky above the Royal Academy, then instantly disappeared into thin air. The King of Valschein was unsure if it had been an attack from an opposing nation, a new kind of monster, or if the Demon Lord had been resurrected two years earlier than they had anticipated, so he immediately ordered the Knight's Order to investigate the situation.

The truth came to light in no time at all—a young girl of only fifteen years old, who was an incoming student of the Academy, caused this unprecedented event. Her name was Yumiella Dolkness, and she was level 99. The king immediately invited her to the palace.

After she had left the palace, the king and queen discussed the day's events in the royal family's personal quarters.

"She was an exceptional girl," praised the king. "I can't believe she's only fifteen."

The queen nodded in agreement. "Yes, it's truly incredible."

Depending on the kind of person Yumiella was, the worst-case scenario could have been the country falling to ruins. The king had called for an audience in desperation of at least avoiding that worst-case scenario, but the results were better than he could have hoped for.

"She not only has combat skills, but she is also smart, logical, and wants for nothing," the king lauded.

"The way she carried herself was lovely as well," admired the queen.

The king had planned to monopolize her by providing her with anything she wanted, but he had been completely shot down. However, the king didn't regret this outcome. Those whose alliance was motivated by greed would likely betray that alliance out of greed—this was something the king and queen had known all too well through their experiences with handling crafty aristocrats.

"I never would have thought that a fifteen-year-old would reach level 99..."

“I didn’t even know that there was an upper limit to levels.”

Scholars across the world had been puzzling over what a level was for many years. The only information known for certain was that defeating monsters, whose bodies were entirely made up of magical energy, would activate and increase one’s magical energy.

The Commander of the Knight’s Order was accomplished enough to go down in history at level 60. Even though word had spread that level 99 was the limit, there was no record of anyone reaching that level in the entire world, so until now, this information had no way of being confirmed.

“I believe the limit was a theory with little evidence behind it,” speculated the king. “We’ll know for sure if her level stays the same.”

“I can see why Edwin had such a hard time believing Yumiella, but even then, what he did was too much.”

“I agree, Edwin’s self-righteous actions are indefensible. I’ll have to knock some sense into that boy.”

The royal couple worried over their second-born son, who had attempted to unfairly condemn the one person who should never be antagonized.

The king shifted his focus back to Yumiella. “Anyhow, I’m surprised she didn’t die from training like that. Even Adolphe said it would be impossible for him.”

“I don’t believe she had any choice but to become strong. She grew up without anyone to love her, without anyone she could depend on...” the queen trailed off. Her heart felt heavy as she recalled the stories she was told of Yumiella’s childhood. “Even so, she doesn’t despise those around her. She’s truly a strong girl.”

“Indeed, perhaps we should despise the superstitions that pervade our country. Even the aristocrats in the audience chamber were too blinded by their prejudice to see that she was a lovely young girl.” Though it was hidden by her unparalleled strength and unusual hair color, Yumiella had refined features. Many high-ranking aristocrats were handsome, but even the king, who was used to being around so many elegant aristocrats, could recognize that she was a charming girl.

“So, what are we going to do?” the queen pondered. “We can’t let her leave this kingdom.”

“Of course not, but it seems like our hands are tied at the moment.”

The king and queen were both sympathetic to Yumiella’s situation, but they also had responsibilities as leaders of the kingdom. They had to make sure that Yumiella would stay in Valschein and, if possible, that she would use her strength for the country.

“That’s true,” agreed the queen. “She doesn’t appear to want anything.”

“I assume aggressively trying to appeal to her would be the wrong move.”

“Yes, I believe she will stay here as long as there isn’t anything too troublesome for her,” the queen reasoned. “All she wants is to live in peace.”

“Then we must straighten up the Academy,” decided the king. “We’ll also have to prevent the other aristocrats from trying to recruit her.”

The king sighed, thinking of the aristocrats who would take every opportunity to even just marginally increase their power. Their efforts to draw her in would only cause Yumiella to be discontented with the kingdom. However, Yumiella refused royal patronage—she understood that there were new problems that came with the position that would put her in.

“It can’t be an adult that persuades her... It would be wonderful if she could become friends with someone of the same age and grow fond of this kingdom.”

“Edwin’s definitely out.” The king sighed. “If only we had known about her sooner...”

“It’s truly unfortunate. There were many other ways he could have verified her level. I’ll need to have some words with him as well. Though, I’m quite sure that Yumiella would have refused any connection to the royal family even without the fuss about expelling her.”

“Let’s have Ronald sent over to be the new headmaster. He’ll do what he can to look out for her from the shadows, but besides that, he’ll be a silent observer.”

The king decided that there would be no major decisions made regarding

Yumiella in a desperate attempt to maintain peace in the Kingdom of Valschein and a peaceful life for Yumiella. However, the king knew that neither of those hopes would come true.

“In two years, the Demon Lord will return, and Yumiella will be fated to face him.”

Chapter 2: The Hidden Boss Attends the Academy

In the week since I had been called to the palace, I had become pretty popular at the Academy. Even right now, I was being radically flirted with.

“...and that’s how we would rule our neighboring nations as colonies. As I said, all you have to do is destroy the opposing nations’ armies. As your husband, you can leave all the political stuff to me.”

Correction: a radical was flirting with me. The boy who was passionately speaking on the wonders of colonialism was the most intense out of all the radicals I had met in the past week, so much so that grouping him together with the others felt like an insult to them.

As the queen expected, the day after I had been summoned to the palace, the children of high-ranking aristocrats were lining up to speak with me. Most of the moderates were relatively easy to get along with. The guys greeted me with treats and tried to make small talk while the girls invited me to tea parties. I assumed their goals were to maintain some level of contact, but they never openly discussed any political topics.

Once I began interacting with the upper-level students, my fellow first-years, who had been avoiding me since the incidents of the previous days, slowly began to talk to me. Up until that point, they had apparently thought I was a dangerous person who couldn’t be reasoned with.

On the other hand, the radicals began aggressively attempting to recruit me. One person tried to gift me expensive gemstones, while another asked for my hand in marriage. Naturally, I politely declined both offers. Through Rita came a message from my parents regarding an arranged marriage. The royal decree had only prohibited marriage, not engagement. Of course, my parents included that hair-splitting point in their message as well. I naturally ignored it but felt sorry for Rita, who was caught in the middle.

While speaking with some of the radicals, I came to the understanding that their faction was just made up of a group of people who were unhappy with the

way things currently were. It felt like they mostly wanted me to make their house stronger, rather than to win wars. They were probably only advocating for war in the first place so they could get credit for some accomplishment or obtain a new domain.

“...and at the end of it all, we’ll take over the entire continent. Don’t you want in on this?”

His speech finally appeared to be over. He probably introduced himself in the beginning, but he had been talking for so long that I had no idea what his name was.

“No, thank you.”

I usually threw in social pleasantries like “That sounds wonderful” and gently turned down the advances by adding, “Unfortunately...” along with some reason to refuse, but I couldn’t bring myself to do that with him.

“It’s not a bad deal for you either. I mean, you get to be my wife even though you have black hair. I’ll even buy you as many dresses and gemstones as you want.”

There were condescending people among the moderates and radicals, but he was on another level. He was also the first person to say something discriminatory about black hair to my face.

I decided to deliver my finishing blow. “I’m only interested in people who are stronger than me.”

I came up with it a few days ago, and it worked on everyone. It was my ultimate weapon.

“In this day and age, you can’t just get by with brute force. What’s important is how smart you are, and I’m pretty gifted in that area.”

Well, it didn’t work. And on top of that, his argument was sound.

It’s kind of pissing me off that he’s right. Why is the guy trying to use me as a human weapon saying something logical?

“I see. Then I’ll make sure to avoid doing anything violent, like going up against armies or suppressing rebels,” I countered.

As soon as I said I wouldn't fight, he got flustered and panicked about potentially not being able to achieve his goals.

"People who are only good at fighting like you should mindlessly listen to smart people like me!"

"You say that you're smart, but are you at the top of your class?" I asked, slightly sarcastically. That shut him up for a moment.

"Intelligence can't be determined by test scores..." he mumbled.

He's still not giving up, huh? Let's try a different approach, then.

"You mentioned taking over the continent, but who exactly would be in charge once that happens?"

"Me, of course," he said with a smug look on his face. "I'm confident in my governing skills."

"Governing? So, you would rule over the entire continent?"

"Exactly. And that would be possible if you were to become my wife."

"Ruling over the entire continent means you would be ruling over the royal family, the rulers of this kingdom, correct?"

"What?"

"That would mean you plan to commit treason against the Royal Family of Valschein."

His eyes widened. "W-Wait, no, that's not—"

"According to the laws of this country, I believe treason is punishable by death."

My line of questioning led him right into my trap. He became pale and was frantically looking around to see if anyone had been listening in on our conversation.

I didn't think he'd fall for it that easily. I'm glad the self-proclaimed genius is actually quite stupid.

"Don't worry, I'll pretend this conversation never happened. There may be some people who overheard us, though, so it's probably best if you refrain from

interacting with me,” I said seriously. “Otherwise, you may be falsely suspected of something just by being with me.”

“Y-You better not repeat this conversation to anyone!” he said, terrified. With that, he ran off down the hallway. He must have bumped into someone when he turned the corner because I heard a pathetic scream soon after.

Now that I’ve finally gotten rid of that annoyance, I should get back to my dorm. Though, holing up in the library sounds good too.

As I thought about my plans, I ran into a group of female students led by Eleanora Hillrose, the daughter of the premier radical, the Duke of Hillrose. She had blonde ringlets and was adorned with a variety of resplendent accessories—even in uniform, she didn’t look anything like a student.

“Oh, Yumiella, what a coincidence. I was just thinking about how I wanted to speak to you. You have some time right now, don’t you?”

Her ringlets bounced around as she spoke in a tone that insinuated she wouldn’t take no for an answer. It would have been easy to run from her, but I couldn’t keep avoiding my classmate.

Better to accept my fate now, rather than later...

I did my best to hide my displeasure as I responded. “Yes, I was actually just thinking about what I would do with my spare time.”

“Splendid! We’re having a tea party prepared in the parlor. Please join us!”

“Thank you so much for the invitation, Lady Eleanora.”

We had made our way to the Academy parlor and were now chatting with tea in hand. I didn’t have much social contact growing up, but I could at least keep up with simple conversation. By making use of “Really?” “That’s wonderful!” and “Please tell me more,” I was able to keep up with any topic that baffled me, such as dresses or perfumes. In fact, these phrases were how I got through the last week.

“I only use perfumes from Parfeu.”

“Really?”

“I was quite impressed with the founder’s vision.”

“That’s wonderful!”

“The story of when he created his first perfume is very romantic.”

“Please tell me more.”

Behold the three sacred treasures of small talk! Incredible!

I barely heard a thing she was saying, but a perfectly acceptable conversation was taking place.

Did she really invite me just to chitchat?

I stared intently at Eleanora as she continued talking. With her long blonde ringlets and entourage surrounding her, Eleanora looked much more like a villainess than I did. I would have loved to loudly point out this casting error.

There was no end in sight to the current topic, that is, until one member of her entourage whispered something in Eleanora’s ear. She immediately stopped talking about perfume, and a serious expression came over her face.

Looks like we’re finally getting to the main purpose of this invite.

“Yumiella, you must give up on getting with Sir Edwin.”

“Are you talking about Prince Edwin?”

“Who else? If you give up, I will allow you to join my faction.”

A puzzled look came over my face. I had no idea what she could be talking about.

“Don’t play dumb!” Eleanora exclaimed. “I know that His Majesty proposed that you get engaged to Sir Edwin! You aren’t worthy of him. If you don’t concede, you’ll be making an enemy of me.”

I think you should be having this conversation with Miss Heroine, not me.

I hadn’t spoken to Alicia directly yet, but every time we made eye contact, she would glare at me as if she was trying to shoot me with her mind. Even though she hated me, I had no recollection of doing anything to make her despise me. The whole situation was baffling. But unfortunately, I ended up speaking to the love interests at the entrance ceremony, so my grand plan to avoid the game characters as much as possible had essentially already failed.

I should probably focus on clearing up this misunderstanding with Eleanora.

I opened my mouth hesitantly. “Regarding the engagement to His Highness, I have already told His Majesty that I respectfully decline his offer.”

“You’re lying! After your audience at the palace, you met up with the queen, didn’t you? You must have told her then that you wanted to marry Sir Edwin!”

“No, I did not. As proof, it’s been one week, and there hasn’t been anything announced. I haven’t even spoken to His Highness.”

The last part was a lie—a few days after my audience, I had spoken with Prince Edwin just once. Accompanied by William and Oswald, he begrudgingly apologized and left before I could say a word.

Bringing that up would only make things more complicated, so she doesn’t need to know that small detail.

After a pause, Eleanora spoke again. “That’s true... You do seem to know your place. Very well. If you vow to stay away from Sir Edwin, I will allow you to join my faction.”

Eleanora seemed to be easily convinced, so now, all that was left was turning down the invitation to her faction.

“That sounds wonderful, but I would like to respectfully decline this offer.”

She looked at me in disbelief. “What? Why? I-Impossible. You’re just pretending to be uninterested so that you can still go after Sir Edwin, aren’t you?!”

Jeez, what’s her problem? She’s so annoying...

According to her, marrying the prince and joining the duke’s faction were of equal value.

I don’t want to do either... What a pain.

“I believe there are people much better suited for Prince Edwin than I am. I think you and His Highness would make a lovely couple, Lady Eleanora.”

“Well! You certainly have good judgment. In fact, I have danced with Sir Edwin on multiple occasions, and each time, he’s been absolutely wonderful,

and...”

My completely disingenuous flattery immediately put her in a good mood, prompting her to endlessly list all of Prince Edwin’s wonderful qualities. It appeared as though she really was in love with the prince. She hadn’t approached me because of her family—it was simply because of her crush on the prince.

Well, that was easy. Sorry for calling you a pain.

I continued to listen to Eleanora’s ramblings about Prince Edwin, and the tea party eventually came to an end, with the matter of joining her faction left ambiguous. I ended the day exhausted after dealing with two very intense people, but I hadn’t considered the possibility that an even bigger pain could be waiting for me tomorrow.



As I was having lunch in the Academy dining hall, Alicia, the main character, appeared. Her pink hair swayed adorably with each step she took in her march toward me.

When she reached me, Alicia’s voice echoed throughout the dining hall as she loudly declared, “You were the resurrected Demon Lord, Yumiella?! I won’t lose to you!”

Everyone in the dining hall, including myself, seemed stumped.

How does she know that the Demon Lord is going to be resurrected? Could she have memories of a past life and knowledge of the game like I do?

The resurrection of the Demon Lord was something only a handful of people were supposed to know about. Seeing that we were in a public setting, I pretended to be clueless about it.

“The resurrected Demon Lord?” I looked at her questionably. “What are you talking about?”

“Don’t play dumb! Ed told me that the Demon Lord will be resurrected in two years.”

Ed? Oh, Prince Edwin. It’s only been a week since you met, and you’re already

using nicknames... Aren't you moving kind of fast? But that's beside the point. Looks like the idiot prince blabbed about classified national information to Alicia.

"By Ed, do you mean Prince Edwin? Did His Highness say that I am the Demon Lord?"

"No, he didn't. He just said that in two years, the Demon Lord would be resurrected, but I can tell! You're the Demon Lord, aren't you?"

Nope. I may be the hidden boss, but I'm not the Demon Lord.

The entire dining hall buzzed in response to hearing that the prince said the Demon Lord would be resurrected. Although some people seemed to believe her, most thought Alicia was lying.

So, I leaned into that to cast even more doubt. "I have no way of knowing if His Highness really said that, but the resurrection is supposedly happening in two years, no? Do you have any proof that I'm the Demon Lord?"

"I mean, you have black hair! Only bad people have black hair and use dark magic!"

Wow, I can't believe that the cheery and optimistic Miss Heroine is a bigot...

I intently observed her as she spoke, but she seemed to be completely serious.

I guess more than being a bigot, she just can't tell the difference between fiction and reality.

In this world, the villains in picture books classically had black hair and used dark magic—they had a similar position to an evil queen in a fairy tale or a man sitting in a large chair stroking a cat on his lap.

"I think you may be mistaken," I said slowly, denying the accusation once more. "We aren't living in a picture book."

But Alicia showed no signs of giving up.

"But you have black hair, and you use dark magic..."

Are those two qualities her only pieces of evidence for proving I'm the Demon

Lord? I was just born this way... I guess the Demon Lord was born that way too, though I'm unsure of the specifics.

"Both the color of my hair and the element of magic I use are qualities I was born with. Are you implying that I was born evil? Have I been evil since I was an infant?"

For someone like Alicia, who probably believed that people were born good, this was probably a difficult question to answer.

"That's...um... You're going to become evil in two years."

"Do people with black hair become evil as they grow older? If that's the case, shouldn't people with black hair just be killed while they are still infants?"

She gasped. "How could you say something so horrible?!"

Alicia seemed irate by my comment, but she was also saying horrible things.

"You were the one who brought up black hair being the sign of evil. If you truly believe that I'm the Demon Lord, you should show proof of my evil deeds."

As expected, she had no proof of any evil deeds. Alicia fell silent, looking down with teary eyes.

I haven't done anything illegal...yet.

Wanting to avoid any more trouble, I thought about making my exit, but it seemed that I was too late—the three love interests had entered the dining hall. William, the hotheaded swordsman, was the quickest to notice that something had happened here.

"Hey, you! What are you doing? What did you do to Alicia?!"

If we're being honest, it's more like she did something to me.

The other two quickly followed, immediately checking if Alicia was okay.

"Now that we're here, there is nothing to worry about, Alicia," Oswald consoled her.

The trio had been in low spirits after the incidents on the first day of classes, but Alicia had apparently cheered them up. They still avoided me over the past week but seemed to be back to their usual selves.

“She was making preposterous claims, saying the Demon Lord is going to be resurrected and that I am the Demon Lord. I merely denied those claims.”

The resurrection of the Demon Lord was to be kept under wraps—even though Alicia said she had heard it from the prince, everyone would believe him if he denied it.

C’mon, just say that the stuff about the Demon Lord is nonsense.

“It is true the Demon Lord will be resurrected in two years, though it’s something only a few know about.”

There was an uproar of confusion at the bombshell the idiot prince had just dropped.

Why would you admit it if you know that it’s something only a few people are aware of?

William and Oswald appeared to be unfazed by this information, likely having already heard it from Prince Edwin.

“I see, so you’re the Demon Lord.” The prince seemed convinced of Alicia’s claims. “As a member of the royal family of the Kingdom of Valschein, I won’t let you have your way with this country!” he declared, pointing his finger at me.

How was it possible that the idiot prince was pulling something like this again? I don’t think he was this senseless in the game, though. Was he okay?

“No, I’m not,” I denied again. “Isn’t the Demon Lord supposed to be resurrected in two years? I’m here right now, so how could I be the Demon Lord?”

“You’re probably going to commit acts of evil in the future. You can’t fool me.”



The prince had developed a theory similar to one Alicia had earlier—perhaps their similar thought processes were what led them to become friends.

I sighed before responding. “This country doesn’t have any laws to try someone for future crimes, does it? It would be a different story if you uncovered a criminal plan of some sort.”

“Don’t try to muddle things with your technicalities! I’ll punish you myself!” William exclaimed, visibly irritated.

William drew his sword, causing screams to erupt around us.

“Um...do you really think you can win against me?”

I wonder if he already forgot that I sent him flying across a room the other day. Oh, shoot, that kind of sounded like something a hidden boss would say.

William must have also recalled the events of the first swordsmanship class because he stilled and didn’t try to attack.

I gave up on trying to reason with the two idiots and decided to ask Oswald instead. “Just to confirm, do you actually think that I’m the Demon Lord?”

“If that’s what Alicia claims, I will believe her.”

I guess cool-type glasses characters aren’t smart after all. Why does she have such a hold on you?

“When I lost my confidence and felt like I had no magical talent,” he continued, “Alicia cheered me up. I want to believe her.”

In the game, he was a gifted mage but was self-conscious about being physically weak. Alicia comforted him by saying he could just work on his strengths...or something like that. In Oswald’s eyes, I was someone who not only had more physical capabilities but who also surpassed him in the skill he prided himself on the most, magic.

I get why he hates me so much, but I really think it’s just because I’m a way higher level than him...

I thought that Alicia was quick to get the love interests to fall for her, but I realized then that it had been the adversity, in other words, me, that caused the

expedited feelings.

“Your strength would also make more sense if you were the Demon Lord.”

Um, actually...never mind. I can't argue with that when I pride myself on being stronger than the Demon Lord.

“I see. Well, I'll be excusing myself now.” I felt that continuing this banter would be pointless and tried to leave.

“Hold up. Do you think you can just run from us?” The prince spoke as if to stop me but didn't actually move closer to me. The other love interests were equally frozen, so I decided to ignore them and make my exit, but then Alicia stood in front of me and blocked my path.

Is she brave or just reckless?

“Don't run away!”

I sighed again. “If I actually was the Demon Lord, what were you planning to do about it? Are you going to kill me? If that's the case, I will resist you with everything I have.” I moved close to Alicia's face while I spoke, causing her to yelp and step back. “You and those three over there are too weak. If you want to take down the Demon Lord, you'll need to become much stronger.”

I need them to become stronger, so they can defeat the real Demon Lord!

“I won't lose! I'll become stronger without using evil methods like you did!”

I raised my brows. “Evil methods?”

“Ed, Wil, and Os all said that you had to have done something evil to get so strong.”

If defeating monsters is bad, then I guess they're right.

I turned to the trio. “Is that your excuse for losing to me?” They all attempted to refute my statement at once but couldn't seem to find the words.

I guess I hit the nail on the head.

“I'm sure you guys have the necessary technical skills, so work hard on leveling up. I've heard that the Demon Lord uses dark magic, so Alicia should work on her light magic as well,” I advised them. Once again, I turned to leave

the dining hall when I was plagued with a passing thought.

Hold on... Was it really okay for me, Yumiella Dolkness, to simply tell them to “work hard on leveling up” and leave it at that? As the self-proclaimed grinding master, shouldn’t I be passing on my vast knowledge about leveling? It might even give them a better impression of me.

Alicia and the others looked confused as I stood in place, not making my exit. Prince Edwin was the first to speak up. “H-Hey, what’s wrong? Do you have something you want to say to us?”

“I do. I’m going to teach you the basics of level grinding.”

“What are you talking about...?”

I began to explain the basics of level grinding to the scared group with an intentionally louder voice so that the other students of the Academy who were trying to eavesdrop could listen in. I gave them all my tips: throw away the amulet of protection and carry an amulet of growth; play a monster-summoning flute as loud as possible and go solo for maximum efficiency; Alicia, who can use light magic, should train in a dark-type dungeon; monsters specializing in offense can be defeated quicker than those specializing in defense.

“That’s how I recommend raising your levels.”

I feel like I really did something here. Now I get to feel accomplished and happy, and everyone here got useful information and was happy—level grinding truly brings happiness to the world.

“A-Are you trying to kill us?!” Prince Edwin exclaimed hysterically.

I was slightly heartbroken at his reaction, given that I meant well, but perhaps I had been slightly too strict—maybe it would be best if I helped them myself.

“Your Highness, I believe that you and your companions will have no problems with these methods. But perhaps, if you are scared, I can come along.”

“H-How dare you make fun of me!”

“Let’s go!” Alicia chimed in. “She’s the Demon Lord—we shouldn’t be taking

anything she says seriously!” The boys immediately listened to her words and turned to leave.

Being nice sure is difficult.

I looked around the dining hall, and the students who had been listening in turned their faces to avoid eye contact.

I’ve been so kind and generous. How is my reputation not skyrocketing right now?

I decided to listen in on everyone’s whispers.

“Aren’t monster-summoning flutes dangerous? Even a member of the Knight’s Order would be at risk using one.”

“Do you know of any dark-type dungeons? I didn’t even know something so horrifying existed.”

“That’s probably where she came from. Do you think she’s planning on taking the prince there to kill him...?”

“She wouldn’t do that...or would she? It might not be totally implausible.”

Oh, this isn’t good.

The other students had started to grow more comfortable around me, but now we were back to square one.



Alicia might have been reincarnated like I was. There was no guarantee that I was the only person with memories of my past life who reincarnated into this world. The person with the highest chance of having been reincarnated was Alicia since she often acted unusual—though she may have just been acting strange because of the unusualness that was me.

If she was reincarnated and only roughly remembered the game’s story, it would make sense why she was so hostile toward me. Perhaps she got so close to the prince and other love interests so quickly after entering the Academy because she understood her position here.

After school, I observed Alicia.

“She’s just a nice kid,” I whispered to myself.

In the game, she had a cheery and genuine personality and entered the Academy in hopes of helping people with her magic. She had trouble learning the habits of aristocrats, and at times, her genuine personality would harm her instead—the love interests would then come swooping in to help her, leading her to gradually open up to them.

After reflecting on the in-game character, I turned my attention back to the real-life Alicia in front of me. She was crouched down in the Academy garden and feeding a stray white cat.

So cute...

The cat, of course. As for Alicia, she was also nice to everyone in real life. She acted the same when no one was looking and was kind to animals. I was the only one who seemed to bring out her hostility.

“Bye-bye, kitty,” Alicia said sweetly before getting up and heading inside a building. I had to follow her, but there was something I needed to do first.

I jumped down from the tree I had been hiding in and inched closer to the white cat.

Remember, Yumiella. Avoid eye contact so it won’t be alarmed, only make small movements, and don’t make any loud sounds.

The cat hadn’t noticed me yet, so I called over to it so as not to startle it with my presence.

“It’s okay... Don’t be scared.”

The cat had been cleaning itself after filling its belly, but as soon as it noticed me, it let out a sharp hiss and ran away.

I guess I should’ve expected that.

I exhaled deeply, and my shoulders dropped in disappointment. Ever since I had been reincarnated as Yumiella, animals hated me—or rather, they were scared of me. I gave up and decided to go after Alicia, only to find that when I turned toward the building, a male student was standing behind me. He had gray hair and, if my memory served right, was a first-year student like me.

His name was, uh, something I can't remember.

I waited a moment before speaking up.

“Did you see that?”

“No, I didn't see anything,” he said after a pause, awkwardly looking away from me.

He definitely saw the cat run from me.

“It didn't run away from me. If I wanted to, I could have caught that cat, but I let it go. I believe that would be the correct explanation of what occurred here.”

My excuse only seemed to make things worse. Without waiting for his reply, I quickly fled the scene.

Though I had lost sight of my subject of observation, she couldn't have gone too far. As expected, I found Alicia in the library. I couldn't just enter the library through the door, though, so I headed back outside of the building.

“The library is on the corner of the third floor... There it is.”

I jumped up toward the vicinity of the third-floor window and held onto the small cracks and protrusions on the wall.

Oh shoot, I made a small crack. I hope no one finds out.

I carefully moved to the nearest window while sticking close to the wall and peeked into the library. Alicia was heading toward a desk with Prince Edwin.

“Um, I don't think I've ever heard of this before,” Alicia said.

“Ah, right, this is something you would probably be unfamiliar with. They're technically laws, but they are more like dos and don'ts for the aristocracy of Valschein.”

Alicia seemed to be studying with the help of the prince. They were probably talking about the preamble in the lawbook. Alicia's eyes beamed as she listened to the prince speak—I couldn't feel an ounce of malice coming from her.

Though she appeared to be friendly with the other two love interests, from the outside, she appeared to be the closest to Prince Edwin.

It looks like she's probably headed for the Edwin route. I'd love it if she could

support the prince and her people as the saintess who saves the kingdom.

It seemed like I wouldn't be getting anything out of continuing to observe her, but just as I decided to wrap things up, Alicia found a book and exclaimed, "Oh my gosh, this picture book!"

"Is there something special about that book?" the prince asked curiously.

"This is the book that was read to me as a child. The evil witch in this story was so scary, but when I found out I could use light magic, I thought I could maybe take down the witch."

I could feel a strong sense of determination from Alicia's words.

Why is she so aggressive toward me when she already has enemies, like the Demon Lord and the witch in the picture book? Hold up... The witch in the picture book...

"It couldn't be, could it?"

I waited for Alicia and the prince to leave before entering the library from the window to find the book she pointed out. I picked it up and flipped through the pages, looking for an image of the villainous witch.

"She looks like...me, I guess?"

Besides the fact that the witch and I both had black hair, there was something about her that seemed familiar. Could it really be that this picture book existed in Alicia's subconscious, and that caused her to see me as the enemy?

A wave of fatigue came over me as I realized that the result of all my observations was one measly picture book.



The following day after school, I headed to the Academy drawing room after being told that the headmaster wanted to see me.

I wonder what the old man wants with me.

But when I reached the drawing room, the person waiting for me wasn't the elderly headmaster I had been expecting.

"Hello, Yumiella. I'm Ronald, the new headmaster."

“Hello, I’m Yumiella Dolkness. But, um, what happened to the previous headmaster?”

“He’s left the position for certain reasons. You probably won’t be crossing paths with him ever again, so it’s nothing you should be concerned about,” he said with a smile.

Ronald was completely different from his predecessor. He was young, probably not even thirty years old, and his smile felt fake as if he was replicating a textbook example of a reassuring smile.

“I’ve come to the Academy under His Majesty’s orders. I’m also aware of the current topic of gossip, the Demon Lord, so you don’t have to worry about that.” He was probably the person the queen was referring to during our conversation. The fact that he knew about the Demon Lord must have also meant that the king’s faith in him was strong—though I found him pretty suspicious.

“His Highness is quite the troublemaker,” he remarked. “I never would have thought he’d spill the kingdom’s classified information in public. It must have been rough for you too.”

Prince Edwin had declared that the Demon Lord would be resurrected in two years. On top of that, Alicia had accused me of being said Demon Lord, and this incident had already spread to every student at the Academy. I grimaced, remembering that almost every student at the Academy was currently avoiding me, but Ronald didn’t seem to notice.

“His Highness isn’t usually so shallow-minded, but recently he’s been quite troubled, or should I say, unstable. Even his two friends, who are usually there to support him, are similarly distressed.”

“Did something happen to them?”

There must have been something that happened recently to make them unstable, but it was more than likely just me.

“Ha ha, you’re really going to ask that?” he laughed. “Well, let me give you a little context. His Highness and his two friends have never experienced any setbacks. They were all exceptional from a young age and always outperformed

their peers. Their egos were quite large as well, but while they were winning, it never harmed them. But then, someone appeared and crushed that pride of theirs. They probably didn't want to believe that could happen, at least enough to try and keep their sanity intact by allowing themselves to believe that person to be the Demon Lord."

I guess it was my fault, after all.

Due to my actions, the current situation was quite different from the game's story. I never thought that things would go according to the game's story, but the fact that things had gone so differently from the beginning up to this point might have had a large effect.

"I understand their situation, but is there anything that can be done about the other students being scared of me?" I asked.

"Unfortunately, it's nearly impossible to get rid of a rumor that has already spread. The official position of the kingdom will be to deny allegations of the Demon Lord's resurrection, but many will still believe it's true. It would be wise to understand that you're in a similar boat, especially since the rumors about you aren't totally unbelievable, given your strength. There are even those in the palace who think you are dangerous and have misgivings about you."

I get it. From the outside, I'm just a level 99 rando who appeared out of nowhere.

"I believe there are only a handful of people who aren't afraid of you. Even I'm a little scared." Contrary to his words, Headmaster Ronald showed no signs of fear. "Rest assured, His Majesty knows it's impossible for you to be the Demon Lord."

I would have understood if the king thought the Demon Lord had been resurrected two years early, but it seemed I was never suspected in the first place.

I wonder if he has some undeniable proof that I'm not the Demon Lord.

I cautiously observed every movement the headmaster made, no matter how small, in an attempt to figure out his thoughts.

It's useless. I can't tell what he's thinking at all.

“Does the royal family have details regarding the Demon Lord?” I asked.

“No comment,” he responded, his smile widening.

Isn't that basically telling me yes?

Headmaster Ronald knew about Prince Edwin's childhood, what the king was thinking, and information that only prominent figures of the kingdom would be privy to. As young as he was, he most likely held a very important position, so I was also curious about why he hadn't shared his family name when he introduced himself.

He seemed to know exactly what I was thinking. “I'm just a headmaster,” he said frankly. “I'm also the liaison to you and His Majesty. If you ever want to ask His Majesty anything, just let me know. Depending on the topic, I might be able to give you an answer right away.”

The fact that he could potentially answer immediately probably meant that the king allowed him discretionary power—he was definitely someone of high standing.

“I see. You're not just all brawn, are you? I can see why Her Majesty is fond of you. It also makes my job easier.” Ronald's eyes were wide as he spoke, appearing to be genuinely enjoying himself.

Darn, he read my thoughts again. But I could have sworn I didn't say anything that could give away my thoughts or change my expression in any way.

It felt like Ronald could be the one to figure out the secret of my past life. I didn't like him.

“Well then, let's jump into what happens now,” he said excitedly. “Today was more about introducing myself, but I wanted to add a little extra. I would like for you to help run the outdoor training that will be starting soon.”

The outdoor training was basically just level grinding, where the Academy had students hunt monsters safely. My thoughts went to the prospect of helping the prince and his friends, aka the Demon Lord suppression squad, with their level grinding.

“Understood. Will I be supporting His Highness and the others then?”

“No, we’re planning on having you join a different group.” I thought that was strange, given that we would eventually have to fight the Demon Lord together, but then Ronald threw a question back at me. “Let me put it this way, would you be able to cooperate with them in battle?”

Ah, I see. Even if I tried to help them, they wouldn’t accept it right now.

“It’s definitely a problem we’ll have to solve at some point,” Ronald clarified, “but we won’t be able to do anything about it right away.”

If things continued like this, we probably wouldn’t be able to take down the Demon Lord together. When the opportunity arose, I would eventually have to convince them that I’m on their side.

“Understood. Though, I do think there will be some fighting over the groupings.”

On one side was the popular prince, and on the other side was me, the one regarded as the Demon Lord. It was clear which side students would want to be on.

“We’re planning grouping students as we have done in the past, by splitting them up into central aristocrats and provincial aristocrats. You’ll be in the provincial group.”

“That seems like quite a haphazard way to group the students,” I remarked.

“There’s a proper reason for it,” Ronald explained, “You see, there’s a big difference in motivation toward level grinding between central and provincial aristocrats.”

Once Ronald brought up that incentivized difference, his intentions became clear. It was likely that only a handful of central aristocrats would be proactive about level grinding, since most of them would take over their households or obtain a government position after graduating from the Academy. In other words, there was no benefit to them reaching a high level. In contrast, for provincial aristocrats, particularly those with small domains, it wasn’t uncommon for the heads of domains to handle monsters themselves, and second-born sons or younger would often become soldiers. Naturally, even central aristocrats needed to be at a decent level if they wanted to become a

military officer or join the Knight's Order, but as far as I knew, they weren't as desperate as provincial aristocrats.

"Will His Highness and the others be all right in such an unmotivated group?"

"We have a personalized plan just for them, so they'll be prepared in two years. We'll have them at level 40 by then, at the very least."

Hearing that they would be level 40 to fight the Demon Lord made me nervous—in the game, the appropriate level was around 60 to 70.

"Level 40... It would be better if they could be at least level 60."

"Commander Adolphe, with all his experience, is level 60. Getting them to that point in two years is unreasonable."

Huh, I guess if you put it that way, they'd be working extremely hard just to reach level 40.

I nodded. "I understand. So, what exactly should I be doing?"

"The training will be held in the forest just outside the Royal Capital, so there shouldn't be any issues, but I'd like for you to handle any emergencies with the lead instructor."

The forest outside the Royal Capital... That's probably the first stage in the game. I'm pretty sure all the monsters there are weak, so I doubt there'll be anything for me to do.

"So, I should just stand there and watch over the battle?"

"You could say that. I heard that you have some fairly strange methods for level grinding, so try not to do anything too weird."

Huh? What does he mean by strange methods? I guess not using an amulet of protection and battling solo could be considered a little strange...but it's normal to loudly play a monster-summoning flute, right?



The day of outdoor training had arrived, and I joined the provincial aristocrats, as Ronald and I had discussed. Everyone kept their space from me out of fear, so I stood alone and watched the training from a distance.

I'm bored...

There were around twenty students participating in the training, but only three wolf-type monsters appeared. On top of that, there was no tension from being in a forest because we had set up shop in an open field with a cliff and a great view. There were several students swinging at or landing multiple spells on a single monster—it felt like it was slightly overkill.

“I’m so bored that I might yawn,” I thought aloud.

“Me too. This is definitely not efficient,” a voice responded.

Someone was listening!

I turned in the direction of the voice to find a gray-haired boy watching the battle take place with disinterest, the same boy who saw the cat run away from me. This was our first conversation since then.

I remembered his name from the entrance ceremony after my embarrassing encounter with the cat. It was Patrick Ashbatten. His father was a margrave, and just like William, he had reached level 10 before entering the Academy. Relative to other students, he probably had more experience fighting monsters.

“I think there could be more monsters,” I said, opting to act as if the incident with the cat hadn’t occurred.

“I agree. If they split up into a vanguard and rear guard and worked together, I think they could handle a few more.”

He spoke normally, surprising me. A student willing to talk to me, in general, was a rare occurrence. I was slightly pleased to be talking to someone my age for the first time in a while.

“Do you split up into vanguards and rear guards when leveling at the Ashbatten Mark?”

“Yup, the vanguard will hold down the monster while the rear guard attacks. That’s our standard formation.”

I tilted my head in confusion.

Experience points are distributed based on the damage done... Wouldn't that cause everyone's levels to increase unevenly?

I voiced my confusion. “Wouldn’t the vanguard have trouble leveling up?”

“We also switch it up and have the rear guard hold down the monster with magic while the vanguard attacks. Though, it’s less stable like that.”

I see... I’ve only explored efficient solo level grinding, but things were different when done in a group.

“Would we be able to do that with the people here?” I asked.

I looked around, taking count of the students, and found there were roughly half who could be in the vanguard and half who could be in the rear guard. With everyone being aristocrats, there were potentially those in the vanguard who could use magic, making for a good balance of teams.

“I think we could do it, but it wouldn’t matter since there are barely any monsters,” Patrick responded, confused.

“If the lack of monsters is our only problem, then I have something that can solve it,” I said, pulling out a monster-summoning flute from my pocket.

The headmaster told me to just watch over the training, but it’s probably fine for me to help out a little...right?

For some reason, Patrick had gone pale and began fumbling over his words. “What is—hold on, is that a monster-summoning flute?! Don’t play that—”

But I didn’t hear the rest, as I had already taken a large breath and started playing. The teacher was the first to notice the sound of the flute and attempted to jump in front of the students to protect them, but I stopped the instructor before they could.

“Even with the flute, this level of training is too tame. Besides, Patrick offered to take command,” I said, pointing to Patrick. Upon being named, he hurried over to the other students and immediately began instructing them.

“Split up into a vanguard and rear guard! If you’re in the vanguard, focus only on keeping the monsters in place! If you get hurt, immediately fall back and get healed with a potion. Those in the rear guard with more mana, use area attacks! The vanguard will hold down any other monsters, and the rest of the rear guard will attack!”

As I stood there, impressed with Patrick's clear instructions, the bushes in front of us began to rustle. A herd of monsters was coming.



As expected, everyone was able to survive the wave of monsters without any injuries. With Patrick commanding them, the students were able to coordinate with no unnecessary actions. Having no knowledge on group battles, I was continuously impressed throughout the fight. The students' energy appeared to be completely wiped out from the battle, with some even sitting down, looking like they had run out of mana.

"Hey, Yumiella! Why'd you go and do that out of nowhere?" Patrick exclaimed angrily, making his way toward me. Despite being in the vanguard and holding down more monsters than anyone else, he was still full of energy.

What is he so upset about? Oh, right, he was in the vanguard. Maybe he's unhappy because he couldn't raise his own level?

"Don't worry. I'm sure there are students who ran out of mana, so I'll keep the monsters at bay." I smiled. Patrick stared at me quizzically, seeming confused at my reassurance that I would help the vanguard level grind.

You really don't have to worry so much.

I played the monster-summoning flute loudly for the second time. Everyone turned to stare at me skeptically, so I explained my actions properly. "I will stop the monsters in their tracks, so the vanguard can take their time finishing them off."

The forest rustled, making everyone's faces twitch.

It's the second time. They should be used to it by now.

"The monsters will be making contact soon." As soon as the words left my lips, droves of monsters appeared—far more than the previous round.

The moment the monsters prepared to spring forward, their shadows began to make eerie movements, undulating as they spread before a myriad of black arms shot out. The black arms took hold of every monster, completely shutting down their movement. The monsters thrashed in an attempt to break free, but

the spell I had used, *Dark Bind*, didn't budge.



“Go ahead and attack,” I encouraged the students in the vanguard, but no one moved.

Isn't it obvious that the monsters can't move because they're being held by the shadows?

“Um... Those arms...”

“It's my magic. The spell is called *Dark Bind*. I like it because it's not very deadly.”

“They won't attack us?”

“Don't worry. The monsters are completely immobilized,” I confirmed.

“No, not the monsters.”

Huh? There's nothing else that could attack them besides the monsters here.

As I tilted my head in confusion, Patrick slowly walked up to a monster and attacked, and then turned back to the students. “See? There's no problem. The shadow arms are safe.”

Once Patrick spoke, the students who were in the vanguard began to swing at the monsters.

Oh, I see. They were afraid of my magic. Is it that scary?

I couldn't quite understand their point of view because I had grown up playing rock-paper-scissors with *Dark Bind* to kill time.

Once the monsters had mostly been taken care of and the scent of blood had spread across the open field, the monster carcasses would soon disappear, leaving behind only magic stones.

I'm pretty used to it, but I think it might be kind of hard to watch for aristocrats.

“I guess the magic stones will be divided up on a first-come-first-served basis, then.” Surprisingly, every student immediately began collecting the magic stones. Even female students were cautiously walking up to the monsters' carcasses to pick up the stones.

I guess provincial aristocrats are pretty tough. I bet centralists wouldn't be

able to do the same.

Once everyone's hustle for extra money had ended, Patrick came over to me.

"Yumiella, the next time you're going to play the monster-summoning flute, can you at least let me know beforehand?" He seemed completely exhausted as he spoke.

"Good work, Patrick," I commended him in response. "Your command was incredible."

"Well, I guess you didn't mean any harm," he said, sighing.

Harm? Did I do anything bad?

"What do you mean?" My question only seemed to exhaust him even more.

Just then, the bushes behind us made a sound, and as I turned around, a monster was in the midst of lunging toward me.

Patrick is close by, so I'll have to attack in a way that doesn't hurt him.

As I considered my next move, Patrick suddenly leaped in front of me, and my mind went blank at the unexpected situation.

Why is he in front of me?

By the time I shook off my confusion and realized I needed to protect him, the monster had bitten Patrick's arm.

"Black Hole!"

I panicked and accidentally cast my strongest spell, obliterating the monster save only its head. All the trees within a roughly ten-meter radius had disappeared, leaving the ground spherically carved out. It looked as if my main objective was to destroy the forest and that I had just decided to include the monster's body as an afterthought. I succeeded in not harming Patrick, but I had focused too hard on that and miscalculated the strength of the spell.

"Get a potion," Patrick groaned. He had removed the monster's head from his arm and was now moaning in pain.

"It's okay. I can use recovery magic as well. *Heal.*"

Generally, *Heal* was known as a light magic spell, but the same spell existed in

dark magic as well. In the game, there were bosses who had minions that could use recovery magic despite being monsters. Yumiella, the character, didn't use recovery magic, but I was able to use it with no problems. The hidden boss being able to use recovery magic sounded like a recipe for disaster, but I couldn't help the fact that I was able to use it.

The only issue with the spell was that it looked absolutely horrible. Light magic *Heal* would envelop the injury in light and cure it, while dark magic *Heal* would cause flesh to regenerate in lumps out of the injury—the injury would heal with no scars, but the process was extremely grotesque.

“Ugh...” Patrick groaned, appalled at the sight in front of him.

I'm sorry, I promise it only looks bad now.

“I think it should be all right now,” I said when I finished. “But are you in any pain?”

“No, I'm all good now. Thank you.”

I was worried that there would be side effects to using the spell on someone who wasn't a dark type, so I was relieved by his response.

“Why did you jump out in front of me?”

“Sorry, I just thought it would be dangerous...” he mumbled.

Dangerous...for the monster? No, he probably means me. Why was he worried about me?

“Dangerous? For me?” I asked, confused.

“You need to take better care of yourself!” he yelled suddenly. “You don't have an amulet of protection, right? You need to be more careful before it's too late!”

He apparently protected me because he was actually worried about me. This was the first time something like this had ever happened, which made me slightly flustered.

“Th-Thank you.”

“I know you saved me and all, but wasn't this a bit much?” he continued,

pointing to the carved-out forest.

“I apologize, I miscalculated my strength. It’s a common occurrence while level grinding—”

“This? A common occurrence? Yumiella, you really need some more common sense...”

I’ve gotten rid of an entire mountain before. I think in comparison to that, I’ve gotten pretty good at holding back.

Patrick’s lecture on my lack of common sense continued, growing even more heated.

He’s right. Destroying the environment is a bad thing. Perhaps he’s someone who really loves nature...?



“I didn’t know that there was dark-type recovery magic as well.”

“Yes, it can regenerate at least an entire arm.”

The day after the outdoor training, I was once again summoned by Headmaster Ronald. I got an earful about using the monster-summoning flute, despite already having gotten my fill of talking-tos from Patrick’s scolding yesterday.

“Do you know that from experience?”

“Yes,” I said, pointing to my shoulder. “My arm got slashed off here.” Ronald’s expression surprisingly changed to slight shock at my explanation, twitching through his usual smile.

I recalled that encounter being a really close call—one wrong move, and I could’ve lost my head instead of my arm.

Recovery magic can’t regenerate a head...can it?

“That’s enough about me. How were His Highness and the others?”

“Prince Edwin, William, and Oswald are pretty much on track.”

“I see. No one else defeated any monsters, did they?” Central aristocrats weren’t eager to level grind, so this result was probably inevitable, but Alicia’s

name not coming up concerned me. Her light magic was vital to taking down the Demon Lord.

“Yes, they apparently defeated every monster that appeared. Not that it’s a good thing, but the other students just lauded them for it.”

“That’s fine and all, but what was Alicia doing during the training?” Though she was a commoner, Alicia was allowed to enter the Royal Academy due to her talent for light magic. She had to strengthen her light magic. It was imperative that she leveled up.

“Just like the others, she didn’t defeat a single monster. It seems that the three boys instructed her to stay back.”

“Does she seem to have any motivation?”

“Well, she didn’t seem unhappy about His Highness and his friends protecting her.”

I sighed at his response. Alicia had been all over the love interests at the Academy. If things continued like this, she might not ever voluntarily participate in battle.

“I guess she acts the same as when she’s at the Academy. She said she wouldn’t lose to me, but I wonder how she plans to do that.”

“I’m wondering too, but at the end of the day, we need Alicia to become stronger. His Majesty is planning to set her up to be a saintess. I might need your support, so be prepared.”

All right, if it comes to it, I’ll just throw her into a dark-type dungeon. Be happy, Alicia. It’s a dungeon where only monsters you have an advantage against appear.



My lonely school life slightly changed after the day of the outdoor training because now, Patrick would occasionally strike up a conversation with me. When we needed to pair up for any activities in classes, he would volunteer to be my partner when I was left out, as if he had no other choice.

“I’m sorry, Patrick. I’m sure you have friends you’d like to pair up with.”

“It’s no problem. I owe you one anyways.”

Does he mean from when I healed his injury? What an honorable person.

“Please don’t worry about that. You probably had potions you could use.”

“If you say so. I guess I’ll go pair up with someone else, then.”

“Wait, no, actually, you should worry about it, seeing that I healed your injury and all.”

“Even though you were the one who summoned the reason for that injury?”
By now, we had gotten close enough to banter like this—he was probably the person I had gotten the closest with since being born into this world.

It was currently the swordsmanship class, so we stood facing each other with wooden swords in our hands. Even to my untrained eye, Patrick’s swordsmanship looked as if there was nothing superfluous about it. It was beautiful—perhaps pursuing efficiency led to beauty. It might not have been the most fitting word to use, but even the way he took command during training could be described as beautiful. In contrast, despite it being the result of focusing on efficiency, my level grinding was probably hideous and unrefined.

“Whoa!”

“Ah, I’m sorry! I’m so sorry,” I apologized.

My own superfluous thoughts led me to miscalculate the proper amount of force, and I had sent Patrick flying backward. At the very least, it wasn’t as bad as the time I sent William flying. I couldn’t see any injuries, but I still hurried over to use my recovery magic on him.

I won’t make the same mistake.

“Thanks. I’m all right now.”

“I’m sorry. Thank you for being my partner.”

Patrick took a moment to catch his breath before responding. “I must not be much of a partner, though,” he said with a frustrated look.

“No, that’s not true at all. There’s a lot I can learn from your swordsmanship. I’m no match to you when it comes to technique.”

I wish he wouldn't make that face. I'm really just relying on my reaction speed and strength from being at such a high level.

“Are you planning on studying sword-fighting techniques as well? What are you trying to fight?”

He made a good point. I could probably defeat the Demon Lord at my current strength, so there might not be a point in getting any stronger in that regard, but we lived in a vast world. There were places that extended beyond the areas of the game's map—it wouldn't be strange if there was someone stronger than me out there...probably.

I decided to keep my response simple. “Likely the Demon Lord.”

“The Demon Lord? Is it true that he's going to be resurrected in two years?”

“I'm not sure. It's either a delusion of Prince Edwin's or something the king is hiding.”

That's a lie, of course. I totally know.

“Both seem plausible,” he agreed.

The prince's recent behavior had been so strange that no one could say for sure that the Demon Lord's resurrection was just a delusion of the prince. No matter where they were in the Academy, he and Alicia were always being lovey-dovey with each other. The most recent incident that spread through the Academy was that they were feeding each other cake in the courtyard. As a result, some students began to think that the prince was spouting nonsense regarding the Demon Lord's resurrection. Despite that, the rumors about me being the Demon Lord wouldn't wind down. If anything, the rumors were reignited after the outdoor training.

“Patrick, don't you have any concerns about me being the Demon Lord?”

“Isn't the Demon Lord a guy?” he asked simply. “Also, I resent that they're using the fact that you have black hair as evidence.”

I was drawn to his emphatic tone and gave him my full attention. He took notice and continued, brushing his fingers against his hair as he spoke. “When I was younger, I was self-conscious about my hair being close to black after my

relatives had commented on its color. My family told me it was nothing to worry about, but I hated my blackish hair.”

To me, that shade of gray doesn't look quite black. It's more like...

“I think it looks closer to white.”

“White, huh?” He looked down. “I guess compared to your hair, it might be closer to white,” he said before turning his gaze to me. “But that’s why I respect you for being confident, even with your jet-black hair. I vow never to despise you or have disdain for you based on your hair color.”

I turned away in embarrassment—for a moment, it felt like a romantic confession.

It's not even close to that kind of conversation.

“Th-Thank you very much. I think your gray hair is lovely.”

“Thanks. I think your black hair is pretty too.”

At that point, I was at my limit for how much embarrassment I could handle and attempted to move on from this conversation. “Oh, um, would you like to go another round?”

“Yeah, let’s do it.”

Having failed at keeping my calm following that conversation, I once again miscalculated the proper amount of force and sent Patrick flying.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,” I repeatedly apologized as I cast my recovery magic. The exasperated looks of “she’s done it again” coming my way hurt. Fortunately, Patrick immediately opened his eyes and got up. I felt reassured that he hadn’t lost consciousness.

“I’m all right. There’s no pain left either. I noticed this last time too, but recovery magic feels pretty nice.”

“It does look quite terrible, though.” My response caused him to grimace—perhaps I reminded him of the sight of his flesh swelling up as his injury healed the other day.

“You can even use dark magic without hesitation. You’re really amazing,

Yumiella.”

“I was just lucky.” The elements someone could use were basically determined at birth. I used this fact to negate Patrick’s statement, but he shook his head.

“That’s not what I meant. I think, even if I could use dark magic, I would have hidden it. It’s the same with your hair, but you don’t deny who you are. I don’t think that’s something everyone can do.” Patrick’s words suddenly made me realize something.

“Yumiella could use dark magic since she was born?” I asked, mainly to myself.

The game explained that she was able to use dark magic as a result of becoming evil, but that might not have been the whole story. Perhaps the character Yumiella hid that she could use dark magic while she attended the Academy. If that was the case, it would have fed into her hatred for the main character, who proudly used her light magic and was loved for it.

“Huh? You use dark magic, don’t you, Yumiella?” Patrick responded with confusion.

I told him that it was nothing and not to worry, all while continuing to mull over my in-game self.



Today was the second day of outdoor training. We were walking around the forest near the Royal Capital, but there were no signs of monsters yet. I was currently in the midst of receiving another helping of warnings from Patrick.

“Do not, under any circumstance, play the monster-summoning flute.”

“I’ve already been warned by the headmaster multiple times. I won’t play it anymore,” I reassured him.

“You didn’t bring it, did you?”

I paused. “I did bring it, but you can trust me.”

I promise I won’t use the monster-summoning flute, so can I at least just carry it with me? I think it’s fair since it’s something I always have with me.

I stuck my hand in my pocket and ran it along the object in question as I convinced myself I was right in my mind.

“You can’t just burn down the forest because you’re bored, all right?” lectured Patrick.

“I know. I’m here today as a healer.”

We finally arrived at the same clearing as the previous day of training. I was on standby, ready to use my recovery magic if necessary. But after some time, I found myself in the same position as last time.

“I’m so bored.”

I’m so tired of this... Maybe I could shoot some fireworks or something. Might as well go big or go home, right?

I reached my hand up toward the sky before snapping back to reality.

Oh, that was a close one. I’m supposed to be the healer of the battlefield.

My provincial classmates were consistently defeating the sporadically appearing monsters, but it felt lacking in comparison to the pandemonium that was in the previous session. There was something relaxed about the air around them. In my experience, these situations were the most dangerous because it’s when people get complacent.

“Watch out!”

“Aaah!”

At the same moment that someone called out, the scream of a male student resounded across the clearing. The student was bitten by a wolf-type monster; his pants were shredded and blood was running down his leg.

He was fighting in the vanguard. If he just hadn’t let his guard down, I’m sure he could have handled it.

“Yes, yes, I know. I’ll be right there to heal it.” I made my way toward the injured boy and cast my recovery magic. The blood that was running down his leg was now wiggling like an amoeba back into him through the wound.

There we go. Good as new.

“It’s all better now!”

“Whoa...”

The previously wounded student and our peers had gone pale from watching the wound heal.

That’s weird... Aren’t healers usually popular? That’s beside the point. Right now, our problem is this relaxed atmosphere. We need to be more on edge.

I retrieved the monster-summoning flute from my pocket, but someone behind me reached over and grabbed it out of my hand. I turned to find an exasperated Patrick.

“I thought I told you not to use this,” he reprimanded me. “You shouldn’t even be bringing it. It’s dangerous just to have it around.”

“The current situation is more dangerous,” I explained. “Isn’t a certain level of tension needed to keep everyone alert? Everyone here has the skills to keep up. We didn’t even have any injuries last time. Though, it would be even better if we could send everyone alone into dungeons.”

“Better? That’s absurd. It’s ridiculous to suggest sending people into dungeons alone.”

He just negated my entire life. For the sake of my identity, I feel the need to thoroughly protest against Patrick.

“First of all, the current method is way too inefficient. It’s wasteful for multiple people to be attacking a single low-level monster. I think we could be going up against monsters of a slightly higher level. Last time, even you said that the training method was inefficient, didn’t you, Patrick?”

“Well, that doesn’t mean...”

Patrick was still not very receptive to my argument.

I’m not saying we have to use the flute; I just want everyone to be a little more alert...

“Oh! How about this?” I spoke slightly louder so that the other students could hear. “What if we injure everyone on purpose, and then we heal them with magic? I think if everyone understood the pain of getting hurt, they’d all be

more on their toes. Oh, and don't worry about me. I'm pretty certain I can hold back enough not to kill anyone!"

"Huh?"

Everyone was pale with shock at my suggestion.

This is my chance!

"Okay, then, let's vote!" I exclaimed, shooting my arm into the air. "Please decide between the flute or getting injured!"

The flute won the vote unanimously.

Hooray for democracy!

While watching my classmates battle the herd of newly summoned monsters, I realized that I had spoken quite impolitely to Patrick. I guess I got a little heated since it was about level grinding. As the son of a margrave, Patrick was a higher rank than me, the daughter of a count. The standing of the Dolkness family would go down if the Ashbatten family were to condemn us.

Maybe that's not such a bad thing, considering what my family is like.

The only problem was that the thought of Patrick disliking me made me sad. He consistently went out of his way to talk to me since I was always alone and was the only person to ever call my cursed-looking black hair beautiful.

I kept finding myself looking at him. Currently, Patrick was fighting in the vanguard while commanding the entire group.

Is that...?

He was using wind magic to deliver his spoken instructions to the other students. At the same time, he was using earth magic to stabilize the ground they were standing on. It was something I couldn't even dare to imitate. Patrick might have been a genius when it came to battling with a group of people.

Wait, no, that's not what I should be focused on. I need to think about how to approach him after this.

The students defeated the herd of monsters with no injuries, as expected. Patrick was quickly surrounded by our classmates who were lauding him for his

amazing performance, so unfortunately, it didn't seem like I could go up and talk to him.



I ended up returning to the Academy without talking to Patrick at all. It was already summer, but my heart felt like it was ice cold.

"What should I do?" I sighed.

If I just thought of it as returning to my post-entrance ceremony self, never speaking to Patrick again didn't seem so terrible.

It doesn't seem so bad...yet I don't feel any better about it.

As I stared out of a window in the hallway, Alicia and Prince Edwin came up to me as if to pour salt into my wound.

"Hey, I heard what you did! About your evildoings during outdoor training!" Prince Edwin exclaimed. "I heard you threatened everyone with your dark magic and forced them to fight a herd of monsters. I bet you were trying to kill someone and call it an accident. Who were you trying to kill?"

It seemed that the events of our group's training had been exaggerated to the prince, but I was aware that I had gone too far and had no motivation to talk back to him. Someone had most likely ratted me out to the prince, but it was to be expected.

"I heard that you also have a horrible method of healing people!" Alicia chimed in. "And you were manipulating that herd of monsters, weren't you, Yumiella?"

Their voices of blame began to sound farther than they actually were, and the colors of the world started to fade.

Whatever... I really couldn't care less right now.

I sighed before finally replying.

"Can we be done already?" I said, raising my right hand over them, feeling extremely heavy.

"Wh-What are you doing with that hand?!"

I felt like I was seeing things in black and white.

I'll just stop them here and make my escape. I'll have to get some inconspicuous clothes straightaway and then find an unpopulated route out of this kingdom... What's next...?

My head felt heavy, and my thoughts wouldn't stop whirling. I had just decided to cast a spell to bind them here and leave, but then, someone stepped in between us. The student that had come between us had gray hair, a color that I could recognize even in this black-and-white world I was currently seeing.

"Please wait, Your Highness."

"Patrick Ashbatten, why are you defending Yumiella?"

Colors began to flood back into my world.

Looks like my depressive episode is over. That was quick.

"It's true that Yumiella used a monster-summoning flute, but she did so out of concern for the students whose defenses were down," Patrick explained. "She shouldn't be at fault... Well, I guess she kind of is..."

Patrick's defense started to fizzle out.

Yeah, you're right. I'm at fault. I just couldn't stand seeing such ineffective level grinding, so I took some extreme measures.

It was only natural that I was reprimanded. I couldn't believe the victim complex I was experiencing a few moments ago.

Man, I was acting like the entire world had rejected me. Why was I worrying so much?

"But I will say this!" Patrick piped up loudly again. "Yumiella's methods are somewhat popular with provincial aristocrats. She also hasn't gone against any rules of the kingdom or the Academy, so I would appreciate it if you stayed out of this, Your Highness."

After a long pause, the prince said, "I'll back down for now, but that doesn't mean I approve of this. Let's go, Alicia." Prince Edwin had been overpowered by Patrick's strong wording, so he took Alicia with him and left, leaving me alone with Patrick.

Oh, right, I still don't know if Patrick is mad at me for my impoliteness... I can feel the colors fading again. Not sure what those two things have to do with each other, though.

"That must have been rough for you too, Yumiella."

"Thank you very much. Um, but was it all right for you to say that to His Highness?"

"I *am* the son of a margrave, so the second prince hating me isn't a big deal."

"Um...also...are you not upset?"

"I guess I'm more tired than upset. I just don't think he has enough self-awareness as a member of the royal family," he responded, complaining about the prince instead.

Wrong person!

I quickly corrected myself, causing an exasperated look to come over Patrick's face.

"You were worried about something like *that*? It's not like you're one of those big-headed centralists, so just speak to me in the way that's easiest for you, I won't mind."

"What do you mean, 'Something like that?'"

Hierarchy is important to the aristocratic society. Is it really okay to just disregard it like that?

"You have other things you should be more concerned about," he clarified.

Oh, that's what you meant. I understand now.

"Thank you."



Patrick fell silent for a moment before speaking up again.

“It’s rare to see you smile like that,” he said, slightly tense.

*I’m smiling right now? I guess I was pretty scared about being disliked by him.
If possible, I’d like for us to be friends, but that’s probably asking for too much.*

Interlude 2: Jessica Montford

Entering the Royal Academy was the biggest event of Jessica Montford's life—being a young girl who came from a small provincial family and was the daughter of a baron. There was the overwhelmingly bustling Royal Capital, the unbelievably grand construction of the Academy, and on top of that, the second prince was one of her classmates. However, what surprised her the most wasn't any of that—it was a girl the same age as her named Yumiella Dolkness.

Yumiella had stood out since the entrance ceremony. When her level assessment put her at level 99, she didn't panic, despite being suspected of fraud. If anything, she was acting as if it was natural for her to be level 99.

It wasn't until the first day of classes that Jessica was truly afraid of Yumiella. Yumiella had sent her opponent flying in their swordsmanship class and painted the entire sky black in their magic class. There probably wasn't a single student who didn't feel fear after witnessing that giant black orb floating in the sky.

The rumors started by Prince Edwin and Alicia that Yumiella was the Demon Lord were also suspected by Jessica's peers to be true. Though she didn't think much of it before, Yumiella's black hair began to feel sinister, and her expressionless face—making it impossible to read what she was thinking—scared Jessica. After the entrance ceremony, she spent her days keeping her distance from Yumiella, who now felt like a strange creature.

But then, the students' feelings toward Yumiella began to change after the first round of outdoor training. When she had shrunk from being scolded by Patrick, Jessica felt like she was just a regular girl. Though she was curt, Yumiella would properly respond when spoken to and didn't use her strength blindly. Jessica started to wonder if maybe she wasn't such a scary person after all, but the first term passed without the fear in her heart ever completely disappearing, and she returned home for the summer break.

After the first day of school following summer break, female students of provincial families gathered in a first-year classroom. The girls who were

detached from issues like the centralist faction wars were simply happy to be reuniting with their friends. Jessica was there as well.

During long breaks, provincial aristocrats were allowed to return to their homes, but there were many who chose to stay due to the distance or cost of returning. Yumiella and Patrick were two of those who stayed behind. Having just returned to the Royal Capital, the girls began to catch each other up on their summers.

“It’s been a while! But I guess only, like, half of us went home?”

“Who stayed at the Academy? Did anything happen in the Royal Capital while we were gone?”

“I stayed back. The high-ranking centralists seemed to have a lot of parties and retreats going on, but nothing really happened with us.”

“Parties sound nice,” sighed one girl. “There were some gatherings hosted by provincial aristocrats, but they weren’t really parties...more like banquets?”

The glitz and glamor of the Royal Capital seemed to be out of reach for the provincial girls. Several of them sighed deeply.

“Wouldn’t it be kind of scary to be invited to the Royal Palace, though?” one girl chimed in, trying to hide her envy. “I couldn’t go. I’d be too nervous.”

“Oh, I heard that Alicia was invited by His Highness.”

“What?! No way! Isn’t she a commoner?”

Jessica and the other girls present weren’t at all discriminatory toward commoners, but they didn’t think very well of Alicia, who was only close with a member of the royal family and sons of powerful nobles and no one else. Their unladylike conversation continued.

“I thought His Highness had better judgment. Yumiella being the Demon Lord must be wrong after all.”

“I don’t believe it’s true either. Oh, by the way, how were Yumiella and Sir Patrick during the break?”

“They were the same as usual—kind of like an older brother and his younger sister or a beast tamer and his beast.”

“My impression of her changed quite a bit. I thought she was a scarier person.”

“I can’t blame you. There were even rumors of her being the Demon Lord.”

“Aren’t there some people who still believe that?”

There were surprisingly only a few students who still believed the rumor that Yumiella was the Demon Lord. However, many students still kept their distance from her because they were afraid of angering her, knowing that she certainly had above-average combat skills.

“She might actually be just...a normal person.”

“Isn’t it still scary to try and talk to her, though?”

Logically, Jessica knew that Yumiella wasn’t a terrifying person, but she couldn’t get rid of the instinctual fear she had toward her.

“On another note, a monster appeared near my house during the break, and I was able to take it down!”

“The same thing happened to me! I came home at a higher level than my brother.”

The provincial girls were quite fond of Yumiella’s level-grinding methods. Though there was some risk to it, they were able to participate in battle without any worries, thanks to Patrick’s command. Slightly scary and hard to approach but not a bad person—this was how the girls felt about Yumiella.

“Oh, speaking of monsters,” Jessica chimed in, “a dragon appeared near my family’s domain.”

The other girls fell silent at the mention of the strongest monster in their mindless chatting, and Jessica began detailing the events that took place at her home during the summer.

One of the girls eventually broke the silence, astonished. “What?! A dragon? Like the ones that fly? *That* kind of dragon?”

“Wouldn’t the army handle something like that?”

“My family’s small, so taking care of the dragon is a lower priority, especially

since there haven't been any victims or anything either."

Even though the girls were at higher levels than many others their age, taking on a dragon would be impossible, even as a group. There was only one person they could think of that could take down a dragon.

"Maybe...maybe Yumiella could, but there's no way I could ask her."

Chapter 3: The Hidden Boss Enters a Battle Arts Competition

After summer break was over and the heat of the summer had begun to calm down, one of the Academy's major events, a battle arts competition, would be held. Within this competition, there was a swordsmanship division where participants would battle each other in a one-on-one tournament and a magic division that was judged on a point scale. Students of every grade could participate, but participation was not mandatory.

I didn't plan on participating. The battle arts competition was a great opportunity for students who aspired to be military officers to show off their skills, as many powerful aristocrats came to spectate the competition—it felt wrong to get in the way of that.

As I stared at the bulletin board with the event information, Patrick appeared beside me.

"The battle arts competition, huh? Are you going to participate, Yumiella?"

"Of course not," I replied matter-of-factly. "How about you, Patrick?"

"I'm gonna pass too. It's not like I'm trying to be an officer in the King's Army. On top of that, the grand prize is something I can't imagine anyone wanting. I guess it's more like a bonus, though, since honor is the main prize."

The battle arts competition was an event that also occurred in the game. The in-game prize was a pretty strong weapon but of no use to me. Still, I looked toward the bottom of the bulletin board to see the grand prize listed.

It's still a rare item, so I would think there'd be more people who'd want it...

"An amulet of dark magic enhancement?!" I exclaimed.

Patrick nodded. "Useless, right? You're the only one who can use dark magic, and there's no need for you to be any stronger so—"

"I want it! I want it very much! I'll do whatever it takes to get it!"

“Hey, calm down, Yumiella.”

I need to register to participate immediately!

Patrick was saying something, but I didn't have time for that. I took off running to the teacher's offices and expressed my wish to enter the tournament, only to be led to the headmaster's office.

Ronald was wide-eyed with surprise. “Wait, you really came?” he said, partly to himself.

“I'm going to enter the battle arts competition,” I said immediately. “I have the right to participate as a student of this Academy, right? Right?!”

“You're scaring me a bit,” he replied with a nervous smile. “Don't worry, you can enter, so you don't have to get so close to me.”

Oops, got a little too excited there. The prize isn't going to run away, so I should discuss this calmly.

As I collected myself, I wondered why the prize was different from the game.

Did the story change because of me? The new prize even feels like it was made for me.

“If I hadn't noticed what the prize was, the winner of the tournament would've had an encounter with a mysterious bandit,” I joked.

“How scary,” he responded dryly. “But someone winning it wouldn't be possible. Take a look at the competition guidelines.” The headmaster pulled out the same papers that were posted on the bulletin board.

At the very bottom, it should say that the grand prize is an amulet of dark magic enhancement...

“Wait, the grand prize for winning *both* divisions?”

“Yes, it's the prize for winning in both the swordsmanship and magic divisions. I didn't think anyone could do it, so I was planning on just giving it to you after the competition.”

It was probably useless to ask why he went through the trouble of making it the prize in the first place—I had clearly fallen for the grinning headmaster's

trap.

“It’s no problem then,” I responded. “I’ll enter both divisions.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t think you would actually go for it... His Majesty actually told me to just give it to you. I wonder if I’ll get in trouble.”

Ah, so the amulet is from the king. The headmaster could use a good scolding from the king.

“I’m grateful to His Majesty.”

“It’s true that I want you to enter the competition, but I won’t force you. I’ll give you the amulet if you decide not to. His Majesty and I are just happy to give you something you want.”

That felt somewhat unfair. Event rewards were meant to be obtained by clearing the event.



The day of the battle arts competition had arrived and was being held in the army’s training grounds outside of the Royal Capital. The weather was unfortunately cloudy, but the hastily built stands were filled with aristocrats. As the participants were hard at work getting in last-minute practice in the middle of the venue, Patrick and I stood back in a corner.

“It’s an even bigger event than I thought.”

“It’s usually held within the Academy, but there were too many aristocrats who wanted to view the competition this year, so they decided to hold it here instead.”

“Oh, because the prince is entering?”

It was only natural for nobles to want to observe a special event for the second prince. However, as a magic swordsman, the prince was probably at a disadvantage. Considering the divisions were either just swordsmanship or just magic, William and Oswald were more skilled.

“I don’t think they’re after His Highness, but...” Patrick turned to me and gave me a pointed look. “You know?”

“It’s tough being popular,” I sighed dramatically.

There was no doubt that the competition had become such a large event because of me. I wasn’t sure if those who came to watch felt like they were coming to see a lion at the zoo or if it was more like viewing a new weapon at an arms manufacturer presentation.

The competition was about to begin, and the participants were called to gather up.

“I’m off, then. I’ll do my best!”

“Yeah, do your best.” Patrick paused. “Or actually, maybe not your best. Do your appropriate, moderate, held-back best.”

That’s a bit much. You don’t have to be that worried, Patrick. I’ll be fine.

After leaving a melancholic-looking Patrick, I made my way toward the center of the venue.

The competition started with the swordsmanship division. First, the tournament pairs were decided by lottery. Almost every other participant besides me was a male student, and they were all drawing the lottery while looking as if they were praying to a higher power.

Prince Edwin and William ended up in the right block, causing every participant who would go up against them in the first round to sigh. By the time it was my turn to draw, there were only two blank spots left. It was a fifty-fifty chance between the right block and the left block. Though I didn’t mind either spot, the tension in the air around me seemed to reach a climax.

“Number 3, you’re on the left side.”

“Aaagh!” the participants in the left block roared, falling to their knees as despair washed over their faces.

There’s no reason to be that upset, is there?

I shifted my gaze away, unable to bear watching the unlucky group any longer, only to make eye contact with William.

“I heard you stayed at the Academy during summer break.”

“What? Oh, yes, I did.”

“I was training the entire break, so don’t think things will be like last time. I’m level 20 now,” William boasted. I felt a little sorry for him, but seeing how proud he was of himself was actually kind of funny.

Don’t do it... Hold in that laugh.

Level 20 was amazing... I think. It was said that there weren’t many people who could raise their level by that much during their time at the Academy, so William was amazing for accomplishing that in one year.

“That’s incredible...heh heh,” I responded, failing at containing my laughter.

“How dare you laugh! You better not be thinking that a difference in level is equal to a difference in skill!”

William wasn’t wrong. There were personal differences in stats at the same level, as well as differences in technique. However, no matter how much of a genius swordsman William was, there was no chance level 20 could do anything against level 99.

Our attention was called at just the right moment—the matches were about to begin. Everyone in the venue, including William, turned their gaze toward the arena. Each participant was to bring their real sword for their matches in the battle arts competition. Stopping at the last moment was possible with a certain level of swordsmanship, and there was a recovery team on standby. Everyone also had an amulet of protection, so there was no concern for insta-kills.

The first match began. I was a complete novice when it came to swordsmanship, so I thought the technique of the two participants currently dueling was incredible. One was keeping a solid guard and only counterattacked at the right moment, while the opponent skillfully switched his posture and used a more technical approach with feints. My only gripe was they were both painfully slow. Their levels were low, leaving their bodies to be low-spec.

People in this country, or rather, people in this world, are making level grinding out to be more difficult than it is. They should focus on raising their levels before honing technical skills.

The opponent using the technical approach won the first match. He had been

enjoying his victory, but his expression clouded when he saw me.

I'm looking forward to our match in the second round.

"First round, second match! Yumiella Dolkness versus Lewis Wrexham!"

My turn. Let's have a good match.

The venue went up in a frenzy that was incomparable to the first match. Even tough-looking aristocrats, who were most likely military officers, were leaning forward, trying to avoid missing even a second of the match.

My first opponent was a well-built upper-level student. I didn't have a single doubt that I would win, but I thought it would be nice to let him look good.

I'll hold back and let him show off his swordsmanship to the audience before going in for the winning blow.

The other thing I had to worry about was the durability of my sword. I was using a pretty expensive one, but if I were to wield it with my full strength, it would most definitely snap in half. The savings I had amassed by slowly selling magic stones I collected during my level grinding had actually been quite drained due to the sword durability tests I conducted.

I guess I can always just go clear a dungeon again.

I unsheathed my one-handed sword and began to do some practice swings.

Let's see if it can handle this.

The sword boomed as it swung through the air, causing the ground to tremble slightly.

Nice, I'm glad the sword can withstand at least that much.

I faced my opponent and waited for the signal for the match to begin, but the referee stood frozen still. Even the rowdy venue was suddenly quiet.

"Um... Are we not starting?"

The referee seemed to snap back to reality at the sound of my voice and was about to give the signal to begin, only to be interrupted by my opponent.

"I withdraw," my opponent squeaked.

“Yumiella Dolkness wins,” the referee announced after a pause.

Maybe he suddenly felt sick or something, I told myself.

Though it was by default, I had gotten through the first round.

After my match, the competition progressed without issues. It was now the first match of the second round, and I was up against the student with the dexterous sword skills.

“I withdraw.”

No way. There’s no way that all my opponents will withdraw...right?

I made it to the finals without fighting in a single match. My opponent was William, who beat Prince Edwin in the semifinals by a narrow margin.

Please, I beg of you, don’t withdraw.

“Did you think I would withdraw? Well, too bad. I’m making this a fair fight.”

All right! Good job, William!

If it weren’t for him, I would’ve finished this competition with a bad taste in my mouth.

“This is the Great Sword of Strohd! It’s a fine blade that I worked hard to obtain,” William exclaimed proudly, pointing a sword at me that was about the length of himself. The Great Sword of Strohd was something I had seen before in the game. It had no element, but it was an item that was a league ahead in terms of physical attack power. It was supposed to be an item that could be found toward the end of the game, so I was left wondering how William had obtained it. In terms of its durability, it was the best sword one could have—it might even be able to withstand my full strength.

“The final battle!” the referee announced. “Yumiella Dolkness versus William Ares! Begin!”

William immediately went for an attack, believing the idea that making the first move would lead to victory. He held his sword high above his head, swinging down. I twisted my body and dodged his attack. He continued to make daring attacks but couldn’t even get the tip of his sword to graze me.

“All you do is dodge,” William gasped, out of breath.

“It’s because we have a difference in material strength.”

My sword was a normal item that was available for purchase—it would probably easily break if it were directly up against the Great Sword of Strohd. A master swordsman could probably parry the attack or aim for a weak point in the blade.

Should I try it just once...?

It would be easy to defeat William without our swords hitting each other, but I felt beholden to my default wins. I decided to contribute to making the final battle worth watching.

“Here I come!” William exclaimed, swinging his great sword above his head.

“Go ahead. Come at me.”

The image of what would happen was clear as day.

When he swings down, I’ll elegantly parry his attack, knocking his sword back before counterattacking.

I swung my sword up from below in time for William’s attack. The moment our swords clashed, a crack formed in mine.

Oh, that’s not good. I’m pretty sure there was a rule where you would lose if your weapon broke. I shouldn’t have tried to use a master’s move.

I wasn’t giving up just yet. I drew my right hand back carefully, so I didn’t break my sword and made a fist with my left hand before thrusting it forward. My left jab landed on the wide middle of his sword, and the blade of the Great Sword of Strohd broke into pieces.

William was bewildered. “What?! My sword! How could it lose to such a dull blade?”

My hand had moved before I could even think, but William seemed to have missed it. In fact, no one in the entire venue seemed to notice that I broke the great sword by punching it.

I don’t think there’s a rule forbidding the destruction of weapons by hand

anyway, so yay! A win for me.

“The winner is Yumiella Dolkness!”

The venue erupted into a massive frenzy at the referee’s declaration. William seemed to be in a trance, though it was unclear if it was caused by the shock of losing or the loss of his favorite sword.

I am sorry about breaking your sword.

The swordsmanship division of the martial arts tournament had concluded. Next up was the magic division. In this division, the participants would each perform magic for the panel of judges, and the winner would be decided by the number of points they received. The judges were made up of three Court Mages.

I was last, so there was quite some time until I had to go up. It probably couldn’t be helped that my eyes wandered around, looking for *him*, who was somewhere in the venue. But as I searched the venue, my gaze met Oswald’s.

No, not you. I’m going to break your glasses.

Oswald made his way toward me. “You did great in the swordsmanship division,” he said.

“Thank you,” I responded cordially.

“However, the magic division won’t be so easy. Points are given based not only on potency but also on the different types of magic as well as accuracy. Even though I may not be able to defeat you directly in battle, I have the advantage here since I can use the four main elements,” Oswald haughtily explained, pushing his glasses up.

Oh, I see. I guess I might be at a disadvantage since I’ll only be using dark magic. It looks like he prepared some kind of strategy for the competition, so I better think of something too.

I shifted my attention toward the center of the venue, thinking there would be something I could reference for my plans. Just as I looked over, Alicia was about to perform her magic. She held both her arms up toward the sky, causing particles of light to pour down and shower the venue. The sparkling magic

seemed to be recovery magic that was thinly spread across the area.

She seemed to have not done any level grinding—as expected—and it was so weak that it probably couldn't even heal a scrape. However, the sprinkling of light that rained down from the gray sky was dreamy. The particles appeared to stay intact even when touched, and people began to hold their hands out and stare at the droplets of light. I hated to admit it, but it was beautiful. I even joined in and reached out to grab a particle as well.

“Huh? It disappeared.”

As soon as I touched it, the granule disappeared.

I guess it's not just Alicia who hates me, but light magic in general.

Alicia received eighty-eight points out of a maximum of one hundred. The judges gave her points based on the rarity of her magic as well as its beauty.

If rarity can get points, then maybe I still have a chance at winning.

The magic division continued, and Oswald's turn arrived. I paid attention since no one else had beaten Alicia's score yet. Oswald made his way to the center of the competition venue and pounded his staff against the ground near his feet. The ground began to grow before my eyes, becoming as tall as a person before forming into something else.

“It's like a die,” I muttered to myself.

The raised earth was, as far as I could tell, a flawless cube. The judges let out gasps of awe at the preciseness of his magic. Next, Oswald sent a gust of wind magic flying like a blade, which cut the cube into palm-sized pieces. It was also an extremely accurate spell—each piece of earth was a small cube. Finally, he created a large pillar of fire and immediately put it out with water magic, which ended his magic performance.

Oswald had shown accuracy with earth and wind magic and potency with fire and water magic. There was a large round of applause for him having used all four main elements. He earned the maximum number of one hundred points. It was finally my turn, but victory seemed to be slightly out of reach this time.

“It looks like I've won,” Oswald muttered to me in passing on his way back to

his seat. “No matter how hard you try, you won’t be able to get over a hundred points.”

“There’s still the possibility of a tie,” I bluffed, still unsure of what magic I would perform. Looking at the venue from the center made me very aware of how many eyes were on me, making me slightly nervous.

Oh, there’s Patrick. Why is he so far away?

I tried smiling at him since we made eye contact, but that only made him take three steps back.

Hey, what was that for?

“The final participant is first-year, Yumiella Dolkness!”

The signal to start was finally given. I decided to use maximum potency so Patrick would be able to see from his position as well. It had been many years since I used my magic at full power. I couldn’t help but feel the corners of my mouth turn up into a smile.

“Black Hole!”

A black orb appeared much higher than the one I created at the Academy before. The orb continued to grow larger as it swallowed the clouds.

“Is it nighttime?” someone murmured in the now silent venue.

My magic spread across the sky as far as the eye could see, leaving only a sliver of light peeking through on the horizon. In the next moment, light overflowed from the sky above—*Black Hole* had destroyed the overcast clouds, leaving blue skies and a visible sun.

Well, that was unexpected.

I gently laughed while squinting at my now bright surroundings.

“I didn’t know I could use beautiful magic too,” I whispered to myself.

Suddenly, the entire venue was hit with ferocious winds. Black clouds began to fill up the sky, and large droplets began to rain down. Screams erupted like it was the end of the world.

“This is the end! We’re all going to die!”

“I knew it! She was the Demon Lord after all!”

You’re all overreacting. Also, these are false charges. The rain and wind aren’t my fault.

“I didn’t do anythi—oh.”

Black Hole had eliminated the entire atmosphere along with the clouds. The vacuum that was created pulled in the atmosphere from the surrounding area, suddenly lowering the atmospheric pressure.

Sorry, everyone, looks like it was actually me.

The mini typhoon ended five minutes later, and the panic in the venue began to subside as well.

It’s basically summer, so I hope you guys can forgive me for the wet clothes.

As I looked down at my feet, feeling guilty, I picked up on someone’s voice.

“So... How many points was that?”

Shoot, I’ve still only used one spell.

I had to get points by showing a variety of magic.

Perhaps I could make hands come out of everyone’s shadows or show off my turbid recovery magic. I wonder which would be the best.

“Please wait!” I interjected. “Before you decide on my score, please let me show you at least one more—”

“Three hundred points! You win, so please stop!” screamed one of the judges, who was in the middle of discussing my score with the others.

I thought the maximum was one hundred.

Oswald had frozen up after hearing my score, which made me feel a little sorry for him.

Thus, I won both the swordsmanship and magic divisions of the battle arts competitions and received the amulet of dark magic enhancement. Ronald handed me the prize I had been after during the awards ceremony.

“Thank you very much. Now my magic potency will increase.”

“Do you really need this?”

The headmaster didn’t seem to understand how wonderful this amulet was. There were too many people who didn’t understand the value of things.

Patrick would probably understand.

Later on, I showed off my grand prize to Patrick.

“Do you really need that?” he asked.

Maybe I’ll just show off my amulet-enhanced dark magic right here.



A few months had passed since the battle arts competition—the season had changed to winter, and the end of my first year at the Academy was near. I was a lone wolf in my school life, as usual. If anything, people were more afraid of me after the competition. I couldn’t recall any recent conversations that weren’t with Patrick.

Alicia was the same as usual, not appearing to be working hard on level grinding. We were likely moments away from the hellish level-grinding dungeon time I had planned. If she didn’t take down the Demon Lord as a saintess, it would be trouble for me.

I was unsure if Headmaster Ronald warned Alicia and the love interests against talking to me, but they certainly picked fewer fights with me. The love interests hadn’t neglected their training either, perhaps due to the difference in skill they experienced at the battle arts competition. They would sometimes shoot me nasty looks, but I got to live in peace, so it was no issue.

“Recently, Alicia’s belongings have been disappearing. You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that, would you?” Prince Edwin asked me one day.

So long, peaceful life.

“I have no clue.”

Alicia’s belongings were disappearing? Yumiella was behind that in the game—perhaps someone else was bullying Alicia.

“You’re always alone. I know you’re up to something.”

I'm pretty sure the reason that I'm alone is at least half your fault.

The prince had skipped the innocent until proven guilty step and had jumped to deciding that I was the culprit.

“The Demon Lord hiding someone’s belongings? I didn’t realize he did cute things like that,” I said with wonder.

I still had no idea what kind of impression they had of me. They had suspected I was involved with a mudslide that occurred in a faraway domain several months ago, and they thought I was behind the destruction of the Academy flowerbeds. Combined with my strength, their suspicions that I was the Demon Lord would not go away.

“I’ll find some kind of proof,” the prince huffed. “When that happens, I’ll banish you from the Academy.” Prince Edwin left immediately after delivering his heroic line. He had apparently not given up on banishing me from the Academy, but his efforts were futile because neither the king nor the headmaster had any intention of doing so.

I think he’s just gone too far to be able to take things back at this point.

If the prince were to accept that I wasn’t the Demon Lord or an evil person, it would mean he would have to come to terms with being wrong. Having never experienced setbacks or failures, that was likely impossible for him and his pride. Alicia, on the other hand, was just delusional.

I pondered who could be behind Alicia’s things disappearing. There were many students at the Academy who disliked Alicia—some who disliked her because she was a commoner and some who disliked her because she was close to the prince and his friends. Upsetting Alicia meant upsetting the prince, so many people walked on eggshells around her. There weren’t any stories about something directly being done to Alicia, though, because she spent all her time with those three. Alicia’s only allies at the Academy were probably the three love interests.

How sad for her... Oh, wait, my situation is sadder than hers. But it’s okay. I have Patrick.

Thinking seemed to lead to nowhere, so I decided to take action and observe

the classroom after school. I hadn't learned any useful tricks, such as making my presence disappear or becoming one with the shadows, so I had to camp out normally.

An hour into my observation, the only thing that happened was Alicia and the love interests coming by to see if her belongings had been stolen. Then, they mentioned something about going to a popular café and then left the classroom.

Are they really planning on finding evidence against me?

Just as I had gotten bored and was about to leave, a female student entered the classroom. She was one of the girls always hanging out with Lady Eleanora. Her family was probably radical and, therefore, always at Eleanora's beck and call due to her standing as the lead radical's daughter. After eyeing her surroundings for a moment, she began to go through Alicia's desk. Upon finding the culprit, I silently landed on the ground.

"What are you doing?" I called out to her.

Until now, I was resting casually in the corner of the ceiling—one of those maneuvers that you would usually see ninjas doing.

"U-Um, it's not what it looks like! I heard that Alicia's belongings were disappearing, and I was worried about her," she began explaining herself before realizing that I was the one who called out to her. "Oh, Lady Yumiella..." Her face had twisted into a look of terror as if she was experiencing the end of the world. "Please don't k-kill me! I was only doing as Eleanora told me to!"

Once again, who do people think I am? I haven't killed anyone yet.

The girl who had been hiding Alicia's belongings spilled everything one after another without even being asked. Her family had the lowest status within Eleanora's faction, and she was often made to run errands—this being one of those errands. I wondered about what I should do. Just handing her over to the prince and leaving it at that didn't sound right. Eleanora would most likely say that the girl had done it on her own accord and cut her off.



"So, are you accusing me of instructing her to hide Alicia's belongings,

Yumiella?”

I had decided to confront Eleanora directly. The girl that I had caught red-handed had no qualms about leading me to the parlor where Eleanora was.

“Not at all. I just thought I would let you know that your friend was doing something bad, Lady Eleanora. She’s even said it was her own idea.”

“I see. She’s done something unforgivable, hasn’t she?”

“Yes, she has. I’m sure His Highness would be upset if he were to hear about this. She’s your friend, so he might end up disliking you too.”

The moment she heard that the prince might dislike her, Eleanora—who had been feigning ignorance up until that point—immediately turned pale.

“She did it on her own, right? Why would I be...”

“His Highness may see her as a member of your faction, but don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone.” Eleanora appeared surprised at my promise to keep this under wraps. “Others may notice that something happened, so it may be a good idea not to punish her. If we do that, I’m sure you’ll be able to wed Prince Edwin, Lady Eleanora,” I continued, trying to use a kind voice.

“What? But what about that home-wrecker?”

“Are you referring to Alicia? There’s no way a commoner could marry into the royal family.”

That’s a lie. His Majesty is planning to wed Alicia to the prince after being introduced as the second coming of the saintess. Especially because she’d kill two birds with one stone: she’d prove the legitimacy of the royal family’s right to rule and would be popular with commoners.

“R-Right. A commoner could never marry into the royal family,” Eleanora repeated.

“Yes, and we can’t have any of you experiencing any setbacks because of some petty bullying. I advise you to also tell the members of your faction to not do anything to Alicia,” I warned. Hopefully, this would keep anyone from bullying Alicia on her behalf again.

“Yes, of course, but why are you telling me these things?”

“I don’t think too highly of her either, but bullying her would only turn His Highness into her defender, deepening their relationship. Oh, and His Highness isn’t too fond of me, so let’s keep our meeting today between us.”

Thanks to Eleanora’s simplemindedness, I was able to achieve all my objectives: I stopped the bullying of Alicia, protected the culprit, and eliminated any reason for Eleanora to interact with me in the future. I left the parlor in high spirits.



“That’s surprising of you,” Patrick responded after hearing the whole story. He was worried about me after the false accusations from Prince Edwin, so he came to see how I was doing. I couldn’t keep the situation from him.

What did he mean by surprising?

“I thought your usual self would hand over the culprit to His Highness and leave it at that,” he continued. “That would stop the bullying, and Lady Eleanora already has no reason to interact with you since His Highness hates you, right?”

Patrick wasn’t wrong. I thought for a moment about why I had taken such a roundabout approach before coming to a realization.

“It’s because the girl who was caught... She could have been me.” Originally, I was supposed to be the one who hid Alicia’s things.

“What do you mean?”

“If there was a version of me who hid the fact that I could use dark magic and hadn’t level grinded at all, I could’ve been in that situation,” I explained.

The Yumiella in the game, maybe she was...

“I could’ve been told by the parents I’d never met to be friendly with other aristocrats and done everything I could to join Eleanora’s faction,” I continued.

That me would most likely be the lowest on the totem pole, forced to do the things that no one else wanted to do themselves.

“And then, if I was forced to bully someone, and Eleanora cut me off when I was caught...”

Did the in-game Yumiella have any allies?

“If no one was on my side, and I hated my parents, hated Eleanora, and especially hated Alicia, who could use light magic and was loved by His Highness and his friends...”

Alicia, who could use light magic, and me, who could use dark magic. Her, loved. Me, unloved. Maybe Yumiella wasn't some small-time villain who became the hidden boss because of some afterthought of the developers. Maybe she was actually the victim of this world.

“I would have started level grinding to get revenge. But the dark element is weak to light, so I wouldn't have been any match for Alicia, and I would've been killed.”

The main difference between my in-game self and my current self was whether I level grinded or not. It was whether I had the one thing I could always rely on—strength.

“Those ‘ifs’ exist, so I wanted to help the girl,” I finished, looking up to find Patrick gazing at me with pity in his eyes. “What's wrong? It's just a hypothetical story,” I said with a smile, though I wasn't sure if I was really smiling.

“That doesn't change things,” Patrick replied, sounding as if he was pained. “That doesn't change things between your hypothetical and current self. The only difference is whether your level is high or low.”

“That difference has a large impact.”

No. The biggest thing is that I have memories of my past life. That's it... It's because I'm mentally older.

“Do you currently have people on your side? Do you hate Alicia? Do you dislike this world? If so, then I...” Patrick trailed off, staring straight into my eyes.

It's okay. I don't hate anyone or dislike anything. Worst case, I just run far away and hide my identity. But there are things I like about my current situation.

“No, I don't feel that way. It's enough to just have an acquaintance I can talk

to from time to time,” I replied while staring back at him.

Even if there are things that I slightly dislike in the future, if Patrick is here, I don't mind staying in this kingdom.

Patrick fell silent, leaving me worried that I had said the wrong thing.

“I see...” he said in a comforting voice. He smiled, only to look a little sad before continuing. “Acquaintances, huh?”

Well, yeah. I'd say we're at least acquaintances with how often we talk.

I hadn't realized it would be so difficult to just get one acquaintance. I wondered when I would finally be able to make a friend. A romantic partner was completely out of the question.



“Oh, Yumiella, we meet again.”

“Yes,” I responded after a pause. “Coincidences are scary things.”

After the bullying incident the other day, Eleanora had been following me around. Today she was once again waiting for me right outside the classroom.

“I was just about to have some tea. As a treat, I'll invite you.”

She's really scary. What's scary about her? Well, the scariest thing is that I don't ever know what she's thinking.

I was sure I had recommended she keep our relationship hidden because Prince Edwin wouldn't be too happy about it. Despite my cautions, she talked to me all over the Academy, regardless of where we were. However, I'd rather not be friends with Eleanora, given that she was the daughter of the Duke of Hillrose, the leader of the radicals who wanted to start wars.

I'll just be honest and turn her down. It's fine if she turns hostile toward me.

“Lady Eleanora, I'd like it if you would stop inviting me to tea.”

“Why? We also have delicious snacks, you know?” she asked, tilting her head in confusion.

What the hell? She's undefeatable.

“If you’re friends with me, His Highness will dislike you as well.”

“Oh no, that would be terrible! Would you please give me some advice?”

I gave in. “Fine, I’ll go. That’s the only way to make you happy, right? I’ll go.”

I don’t want to deal with this prima donna anymore.

Eleanora took my hand and pulled me through the Academy halls. A cheery Eleanora and unhappy me—we were an unusual pair, and the students we walked by were wide-eyed with surprise. I had assumed we would be going to the usual parlor, but soon I realized we were going in a different direction. If we continued, we would reach the area with the student dorms.

“Um, where are we headed?”

“To my room! I wanted to be able to talk leisurely today.”

After arriving at Eleanora’s room, we sat across from each other at a small table. Eleanora’s room itself was almost exactly the same as mine, but every piece of furniture was much more luxurious and refined.

“Here, Yumiella, please have some of this.”

“Thank you.”

I wonder if it’s poisoned...

I mustered up my courage and took a bite of the cookie.

“How is it?” she asked.

I took a moment to reply. “It’s kind of...an odd taste.”

I was truly uncertain of how it tasted. If I had to pick between good and bad, I would probably say it tasted good, but it also wasn’t particularly delicious.

Why did she feed me something like this?

“I was the one who made them,” she stated, looking slightly unhappy.

“Oh, I see. It makes sense why it has a strange taste, then. I think it’s even starting to taste bad.”

This is my opportunity to make Eleanora hate me! If I lied and said it’s the best cookie I’ve ever had, she would just continue to follow me. Go ahead, get mad

at me, you selfish prima donna!

Eleanora did the opposite of what I had wanted and beamed at me.

“Yes! It’s a strange, odd flavor, isn’t it? But everyone keeps saying it’s the best cookie in the world!”



“What?”

“Yumiella, you’re the only one who’s told me the truth,” Eleanora exclaimed while clasping her hands around mine.

Oh shoot, did I make the wrong decision?

“Um, why did you suddenly decide to make some sweets?”

“I heard that Alicia brought Sir Edwin some handmade sweets, so I wanted to do the same.”

“I don’t think you have to do something like that. Actually, I think it might be impossible for you, Lady Eleanora.”

I just needed the determination to be disliked. Eleanora, the daughter of the lead radical, and me, a living strategic weapon, being friends would only give the wrong impression.

“I think so too! Everyone said I should do it so I tried, but I don’t think it’s very *me*.”

“Huh?”

“Yumiella, you’re the only one who’s told me the truth!”

Yeah, you already said that.

What was happening? The harder I tried to make her hate me, the more she liked me. I couldn’t have been the only one who disagreed with her—was Eleanora surrounded by yes-men?

“I’m the only one? Does no one else tell you the truth?”

“Everyone thinks that there’s no way I would make a mistake. Even if they’re thinking something different, they convince themselves that I’m right and they’re wrong...”

There’s no way that’s true. They just don’t want to upset you.

“That’s what they told me.”

Oh, I see, you’re just being fooled.

This prima donna was honest to a fault, which made me worried that a

malicious person could control her to do as they pleased.

Wait... Could she already be controlled by someone?

“Regarding the hiding of Alicia’s belongings incident from the other day...” I started.

“I-It wasn’t me who instructed her to do so. It was, um...” Eleanora denied, awkwardly avoiding eye contact.

Your reaction is making it too obvious.

“Who was the first one to bring up that idea?”

“What? What do you...?”

There was no doubt that Eleanora had instructed the girl to bully Alicia, but could someone else have proposed that idea? Who came up with the idea to harass Alicia because she was in the way? I had been misled due to her family’s background, but Eleanora was a naive and good girl. At least, I thought she was. I couldn’t see the girl in front of me, who was groaning in desperation in her attempt to properly answer my questions, as a bad person.

“What do you think of the incident of having Alicia’s belongings hidden?”

“I-I didn’t think it was a very good thing to do, but after hearing what everyone had to say, I thought...that it was for the best.”

“Did you instruct them to hide her belongings then?”

“Yes, and then that girl volunteered to do it herself.”

After hearing her side of the story, it appeared that the bullying of Alicia wasn’t something that Eleanora herself had started. A member of her faction had brought it up, then the other members echoed that sentiment, convincing Eleanora that’s what she should do—this is what I believed to be the truth.

I snapped back to reality after having been lost in thought about Eleanora’s situation. Even if Eleanora wasn’t a bad person, the fact that I didn’t really want to be friendly with her didn’t change. The issue with her family was still there, and the people around her were bizarre, complex, and straight-up scary.

“You shouldn’t trust your friends too much,” I sighed.

“I’ll be fine! Because you’ll become my friend, Yumiella!”

I won’t. I don’t have any ill will toward you, but I don’t want to be your friend.

“Well, I’m busy with a lot of things...”

“There’s a lot of things I want your advice on. Well, it’s actually about the romance between Prince Edwin and myself.”

“I’m not really familiar with that kind of topic.”

“But you said that you were sure that Prince Edwin and I would get married, didn’t you, Yumiella?”

I couldn’t just tell her it was a lie. With Eleanora looking at me with such a carefree smile, there wasn’t anything I could say to her.

How did this happen?

Interlude 3: Eleanora Hillrose

Eleanora Hillrose, the only daughter of the sole duke in the Kingdom of Valschein, reigned supreme over the female students of the Academy. It was natural for daughters from radical families to pay attention to her, but even the daughters from families in the king's faction couldn't ignore her presence. All this gave the impression that Eleanora was a tyrant who abused her family's power. However, that was far from the truth.

Eleanora and her friends were gathered in the parlor after classes, as usual, chatting with tea in one hand.

"I'm thinking of holding a large tea party," said Eleanora. "And I'd like to invite not only you ladies but other people as well."

"That's wonderful, Lady Eleanora! Who are you planning to invite?"

"Hmmm," Eleanora pondered. "How about Amy? I haven't spoken to her very much."

The faces of Eleanora's entourage turned grim upon hearing Amy's name. The name belonged to the daughter of the Minister of Commerce—in other words, her family was a part of the king's faction.

"I'd advise against that," one girl replied critically. "I've only heard bad rumors about her."

"Yes, I don't think Lady Amy would be a very good choice," another girl chimed in.

"Is that so? Well, if you all think so..."

Eleanora was ignorant of and unconcerned with the political issues between aristocrats. She believed that the girls in her entourage spent time with her because they liked her. The girls used that to their advantage to manipulate Eleanora and maintain the factions at the Academy. These girls were also the ones who told Eleanora that she could still marry the prince, despite being in a faction that opposed the king. But secretly, they were laughing to themselves

about how easy Eleanora was to control. Unfortunately for them, an aberrant presence that began influencing Eleanora had recently appeared.

“Oh! We should invite Yumiella as well,” Eleanora said excitedly. “She turned me down the last time, but I’m sure she’ll come this time!”

“Yumiella? But... His Highness hates her.”

“That’s right. He could end up hating you as well, Lady Eleanora.”

“It’ll be all right. I feel like my relationship with Sir Edwin will progress by getting some advice from Yumiella,” Eleanora explained.

Despite her words, from the outside, it looked like she just wanted to be friends with Yumiella.

“I’m going to go invite Yumiella!” Eleanora blurted before suddenly standing up and leaving the parlor. The stunned entourage exchanged glances of confusion.

Meanwhile, Eleanora had made her way to the dorms and was now in front of Yumiella’s room. Usually, a servant would be sent over with an invitation letter, but she distinctly took action herself when it came to Yumiella. The maid poked her head out from behind the door to see who was visiting, and her eyes widened upon seeing Eleanora.

“You’re the daughter of the Hillrose family, correct?”

“Yes, is Yumiella here?”

“Y-Yes. Right this way.”

After slightly forcing her way into Yumiella’s room, Eleanora beamed when she saw Yumiella, who was currently reading a book. In contrast to Eleanora’s vibrant enthusiasm, Yumiella was expressionless as usual, even after having her room barged into.

“Yumiella, I’ve come to see you!”

“Well now, I see that you’ve gotten comfortable enough to barge into my room,” Yumiella said, making no attempt to hide her displeasure. Eleanora seemed to be completely unbothered by her tone and took a seat right in front of Yumiella.

“I’m going to hold a tea party. You’ll come, right?”

“I’ll refrain from attending.”

“There’s no need for you to refrain from anything with me!”

“Why do you pay me any attention in the first place, Lady Eleanora?”

Yumiella’s question made Eleanora recall recent events.

Eleanora took notice of Yumiella when she was called to the Royal Palace when they first entered the Academy. She thought Yumiella would become her romantic rival after she was asked to marry Edwin during her audience with the king, and Eleanora was ready to fight over him.

Even after that misunderstanding was cleared up, Yumiella was still someone her beloved Prince Edwin didn’t like, so Eleanora disliked her as well. Those feelings changed after the incident where Alicia was bullied. Eleanora had never meant to go so far, but she ended up instructing some girls to hide Alicia’s belongings after being persuaded by those around her.

When Yumiella found out, Eleanora thought she was done for. She thought that the incident would spread, and Edwin would find out, leading him to hate her. But Yumiella didn’t reveal what happened to Edwin. Not only did she stay quiet, but she even gave Eleanora advice on how to proceed.

At the time, Eleanora was attempting to bake sweets. It started when her entourage encouraged her to try it after hearing that Alicia had given Edwin some homemade sweets. Eleanora was enthusiastic at first, but her sensitive palate led to disaster—she was completely unable to make something that she was satisfied with. However, the people around her kept praising her, saying everything she baked tasted the best in the world.

Eleanora had been concerned about the disconnect between her own impression and what the others were telling her, but Yumiella was the only one who gave an appropriate review, saying that the cookies she baked tasted strange. She was the only one who told the truth. And then, Yumiella even said that Eleanora could definitely marry the prince. She was used to her entourage telling her so, but it was refreshing to hear it from an outside party.

From then on, Eleanora would talk to Yumiella whenever she had the chance.

Yumiella reacted differently from the girls in her entourage and from the other students, and seeing her reactions was just so much fun for Eleanora. Having never come across anyone who behaved so openly unfriendly toward her, Eleanora developed an endless interest in Yumiella.

After thinking back on the state of things, Eleanora answered Yumiella's question.

"It's because you're different from others."

"Well, that's because I'm me," Yumiella said with a sigh.

"That! That was so Yumiella-like!" Eleanora excitedly pointed out. "Also, it's because you said that I could marry Sir Edwin."

"I see," Yumiella replied after a pause.

Eleanora began to talk about one of her favorite topics—tea—in an attempt to entertain Yumiella. She didn't notice that her words were being ignored. Yumiella was lost in her thoughts, worrying about how she would break it to Eleanora that she had lied about Eleanora's and the prince's chances of getting married. The two of them were on completely different pages, but on the outside, anyone would just see two good friends.

Chapter 4: The Hidden Boss Meets a Dragon

“What’s that prima donna’s deal?” I sighed.

“I think it’s fine. Think of it as something you only have to deal with until graduation and just be friends with her.”

Patrick and I were talking while walking side by side down a hallway at the Academy. Eleanora hasn’t seemed to have had enough of me and still talked to me all the time. I had been relying on Patrick, but he appeared to be amused seeing me be followed around by her.

“I don’t want to deal with the duke’s family.”

“I’ve talked to Lady Eleanora a little bit. She’s pretty strange, but you know she isn’t a bad person. It wouldn’t hurt if you made a bit of an effort,” Patrick remarked.

“I’ll think about it,” I groaned. “Well, I’m heading back to my room now.”

Patrick really keeps pushing for us to get along.

Having arrived in front of the dorms, I turned the corner and began walking in the opposite direction of Patrick, only to be stopped immediately.

“Oh, wait,” Patrick called out. “Are you going to the end-of-year party?”

“I don’t really care about social events, so I don’t think I’ll be going.”

“I see,” Patrick said after a moment. “You should come if you change your mind.”

After saying goodbye to Patrick, I found myself thinking about the occasion while walking back to my room.

“The end-of-year party, huh,” I muttered to myself.

That school event was a proper soiree as it doubled as social etiquette practice. In other words, it had nothing to do with me, so I figured it was fine to miss it.

Oh, right. In the game, there was an event where you sneak out of the party venue with the love interest with the highest affection parameter.

I did want to see whose route Alicia was currently going down, though it may not actually be useful information since we had already gone quite off track from the game's story. I would be grateful if she were going down the main story's Prince Edwin route. If that were the case, she would defeat the Demon Lord and then get engaged to the prince as the second coming of the saintess, leaving me completely unaffected—at least, ideally, she would.

I already told Patrick I wouldn't be attending, but perhaps it would be all right for me to show my face for a bit. The various thoughts swimming through my mind kept me from noticing someone's presence near me. Suddenly, a voice called out to me from point-blank range.

"Yumiella! Have you decided on your dress for the end-of-year party?"

Whoa, it's her again.

Recently, I had gotten somewhat used to her, and my responses were becoming superbly perfunctory.

"My dress? I can't wear my uniform?"

"You absolutely cannot. We're going to wear fabulous dresses and dance!"

"But I don't have a dance partner," I tried to reason.

"What? You have Patrick, don't you?"

The double ringlet-haired prima donna is saying something funny. Why is Patrick's name coming up?

I knew how to dance—we had simple lessons at the Academy, and I could probably dance pretty well if I used my physical abilities to their fullest for once. After all, it was a school event; it might be good to attend. The only thing was, did I even have a dress?

"Patrick doesn't have anything to do with this. Also, I don't have a dress."

"I see. If we had one made, it wouldn't be ready in time. Then... I shall lend you one of mine! Let's pick it out together!"

I said I didn't have a dress, but it would have been more correct to say that I didn't *know* if I had a dress. I had spent the past year alternating only between my uniform and pajamas.

I feel like there's a closet in my room...maybe...

After successfully shaking off Eleanora, I returned to my dorm.

"Hey, Rita, do I own any dresses?"

Rita's eyes widened. "How unusual for you to be concerned with dresses, my lady."

You don't have to be so surprised...

Since she was sent by my parents, Rita continued to relay their instructions to me. Just the other day, she had mentioned talks of an arranged marriage for the umpteenth time, which I brilliantly ignored. Rita had resigned to just relaying their messages rather than trying to get me to uphold their instructions because I always refused to listen.

"I need one for the end-of-year party. If we don't have one, I can just wear my uniform—"

"Nonsense! This party is a special occasion, my lady. Let's do makeup as well."

"Makeup is unnecessary."

Rita performed her job as a maid perfectly, and the tea she made was wonderful. I just wished that she would stop trying to take every chance she could to get me to dress up.

I don't care about whether it's common sense or not in this world, students shouldn't be wearing makeup.

"So, do we have any dresses?"

"Well, we do, but..." Rita replied vaguely. She made her way to the closet and opened the doors to show me what was inside.

Ah, I see.

The closet was filled with a plethora of fabulous dresses. The pastel-colored dresses hurt my eyes.

“Oh, wow...” I managed to force out. “How wonderful... These frills and ribbons are so exaggerated and *totally awesome*.”

“The mistress ordered these,” Rita responded to my sarcasm. I wondered how old this mother of mine thought I was.

The dresses, which there were several of, were all warm colors like pink and yellow. They were tailored to the measurements of my uniform, so sizing didn’t seem like it would be an issue, but that made me more uncomfortable.

“Something a little plainer would be nice, like black or white.”

“White is for weddings, and black is for funerals,” Rita stated matter-of-factly.

“Then how about brown or gray?”

“They’re not really common colors.”

Why not? I don’t dislike gray.

Just then, I heard the sound of a knock followed by someone’s voice.

“Delivery for Lady Dolkness.”

“I’ll get it,” Rita offered.

I’ll leave handling the guest to her. It’s unfortunate, but I guess I’ll give up on the end-of-year party. Wait...unfortunate? I didn’t think I was particularly looking forward to the party, so why does it feel unfortunate?

Rita returned while I was still pondering.

“It’s from Her Majesty.”

It appeared that the guest brought a gift sent by the queen. I had already received several gifts from the queen, such as tea or treats; however, this gift looked different.

“What is that? Isn’t it kind of big?”

Rita was holding a bag about as tall as her—it was the perfect size to hold a dress.

Could it really be...? What kind of timing was this?

“I’m going to open it,” Rita said, unveiling the gift. “As expected, it’s a dress.”

The gift was a red dress. It was the kind of red that could be described as deep, refined, or perhaps, wine-like.

“Wow, this crimson red dress will look really good on you, my lady.”

My lack of vocabulary felt like it was on display.

It's called “crimson” red, huh? I should've taken a color assessment or something.

“Well, I don't think it'll fit,” I declared.

“Let's try it on!”

Rita was more aggressive than usual, and she pushed me to try on the dress. The sleeveless, sheath silhouette design was perfect for my body type.

Wait... Why does she know my size?



The day of the end-of-year party arrived, and students dressed to the nines were gathered in a hall at the Academy. Looking at the glittering chandelier and the young men and women dancing in an open space underneath it left me dying to leave.

The hall fell silent as I walked in. I continued walking into the venue without a care, despite all the eyes I could feel gathering on me. Slowly, whispers started to buzz around, likely about things such as my dress being dyed crimson from blood spatter—it was easy to tell even without listening in.

There was one person headed in my direction while everyone else kept their distance. Eleanora, who had been a bit far from where I was, made a beeline toward me upon spotting me enter the hall. She adorned her dress, seemingly accustomed to this sort of event.

“Wow, Yumiella! I guess you decided to attend after all,” she said happily.

“Hello, Lady Eleanora.”

“Did you not ask Patrick to escort you?”

I wanted to ask why Prince Edwin wasn't escorting her, but that was something I wouldn't say no matter what. I had confirmed that Patrick would be

attending, but other than that, we hadn't talked about the party at all. He was popular with all provincial aristocrats, regardless of gender, so there was a chance he had made plans to escort someone else.

"Why are you bringing up Patrick?" I asked, genuinely confused.

Is it because I don't spend time with anyone else? Eleanora needs to stop making everything about romance.

"Huh? That's because you're—"

"Yumiella, you came," a voice called out as if to interrupt Eleanora.

"I'll go somewhere else, so I don't bother you two," she said before hastily leaving the scene.

Her consideration is unnecessary. There are no unrequited or requited feelings between Patrick and me.

I turned around to find Patrick, just as I had expected. I always recognized his voice.

"I kind of felt like coming," I explained. "But I was just thinking that I would leave after all."

Wearing this dress is actually a little embarrassing...

Patrick hadn't responded to anything I said and stood there frozen and wide-eyed.



Confused by his reaction and lack of response, I took a step closer to him, only for Patrick to take an immediate step back.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“N-Nothing.”

There’s no way it’s nothing.

Patrick’s gaze darted around suspiciously.

“Really, what’s wrong, Patrick? Are you looking for someone?”

“It’s nothing.”

What is up with him? Is he really looking for someone, or... Oh! I know!

It wouldn’t be unusual for Patrick to have a crush on a girl or two. It wouldn’t be good for him if she were to see us together.

I guess I’ll be considerate now and leave. How sad...

“I’ll be going, then.”

“Wait,” Patrick said with an uncharacteristically serious face. He had grabbed my arm to stop me, which made my heart skip a beat.

Was it because of how warm his hand was? I mean, this dress doesn’t have any sleeves.

“Um... It’s fine if it’s only one song, but will you honor me with a dance?”

“Honor you with a dance” sounds so aristocratic. I should also be happy about it like an aristocrat and say something back.

“Sure.”

Oh no, that came off kind of cold.

“That response is very you,” Patrick said with a small smile.

I guess it was okay.

In an area off to the side from the center of the hall, Patrick and I began dancing hand in hand. In my mind, I was able to dance perfectly, and I had confidence in moving my body, so why were my movements coming out so

disjointed? I was envious of Patrick, who was perfectly taking the lead.

“You can step on my feet. Just relax more.”

“You don’t mind having your feet crushed?”

“Hey, *stepping* on and *stomping* on are two different things.”

As we bantered like we normally did, I started to get used to dancing, and my body began moving smoothly with the music. With a bit more room to breathe, I was able to peer around at my surroundings. There were a lot of eyes on me, especially those of male students. They must have felt like they were seeing a battle robot suddenly start dancing.

“Aren’t there too many people staring?”

“It’s because you’re pretty.”

“Wha—?”

What are you saying? And without hesitation? I need to calm down. I’m not someone whose feelings get swayed by social pleasantries. But my hands are starting to sweat. What should I do...?

“If you say things like that to just anyone, people won’t believe you,” I said, attempting to collect myself.

“I don’t know if you’re just dense or...”

“Well, there’s no way I could give a proper response to some social pleasantry.”

“Actually, I’m the dense one. Today I finally realized that I—”

My only thoughts were about my sweaty palms, so the moment the song ended, I quickly let go of his hands and wiped mine on my dress.

“What were you saying?” Then, I realized that might have been rude. “Oh, that wasn’t because your hands were dirty or anything. It’s just my sweat.”

“I know. Never mind,” Patrick responded, slightly annoyed.

I’m sorry my dancing was so bad. Well, time to leave.

Just as I was about to ask Patrick what his plans were after the dance, a voice

came from my side.

“Lady Yumiella, will you honor me with a dance?”

The offer looked like it came from an upper-level student.

Who are you?

I could hear Patrick sucking his teeth.

Oh, I get it. I don't know the details, but this guy must not get along with Patrick. This is a job for my finishing blow.

“I’m only interested in people stronger than me.”

“Oh, um, I see,” he responded with a blank look. Dejected, he backed off.

Nice! I drove him off, Patrick.

“Your type is...strong people...” Patrick was muttering something with a serious look on his face.

Are you okay?



The end-of-year party was over, and the long spring break was before us. I was currently being invited to have tea or attend parties by many students. The students who were cautiously talking to me were probably being told by their families to invite me. Each time I turned them down, I was met with a complicated expression that looked to be a mix of relief and a hint of disappointment.

Naturally, my family had told me to return home. The invitation came with the objective of trying to introduce me to “someone wonderful,” which they didn’t seem to have any intention of hiding.

Above all, I don't think that they can call going to a house I've never been to before to visit people I've never met “going home.”

There was somewhere I desperately wanted to go to during this spring break. I was going to go even if I wasn’t invited, but, if possible, it would be better to be invited. I wasn’t sure if my feelings got through to her, but just three days before the break, the girl I was waiting for finally came to talk to me.

“L-Lady Yumiella, there’s something I’d like to talk to you about.”

“Sure, I can talk, Jessica. Also, you can drop the ‘lady.’ No need for formalities.”

The girl whose invitation I was waiting for was Jessica Montford. In the game, she was Alicia’s friend. She spoke kindly to Alicia, who was having trouble fitting in at the Academy, and with similar commoner-like values, the two became fast friends. Jessica shared basic aristocratic information that would help Alicia and helped with progressing the game—she was a supporting character. In reality, Alicia got close to the love interests almost immediately, so the two never developed a friendship. I’d never spoken to Jessica before, but I needed to go to her house.

“Well then, Yumiella, you must have plans during the long break, right?” she asked while twitching like a small animal.

“Not at all. My schedule is completely empty.”

So please invite me to your house.

“Um, a dragon appeared near the Montford Barony, where my home is. Currently, only livestock has been harmed, but people could be harmed at any moment. The central army won’t get involved until a person is injured, so... I thought maybe you could do something about it, but there’s no way you can, right?”

Naturally, I immediately responded, “Let’s go and get rid of that dragon.” I didn’t think that it would go so smoothly.

This was an important event in the game. Jessica would have asked her friend Alicia for help during this crisis at her barony, but because of my effects as an abnormality, they never became friends. This led Jessica to resort to desperate measures and come to me instead.

Of course, there was a reason I accepted her request—the reward for this event was very attractive.

“Um, is it really all right?” Jessica seemed perplexed at my willingness.

You can be happy about this. I’m also happy that you came to me.

Patrick invited me to visit the margrave's mark, but of course, I turned that down.



The long break had started, and I was at the Montford Barony. Jessica, who used to be terrified of me, was now able to converse with me normally—perhaps she had gotten used to me during the carriage ride over.

“You’re sure that the dragon is a fire type?” I asked at some point on the journey to her domain.

“Yes, that’s what my father’s letter said. It’s apparently settled down on the tallest mountain in the area.”

“I see. Is there anything else I should know?”

“Um... The letter also mentioned that it didn’t seem like it could be defeated without countermeasures against fire. I think I can get you more details when we get home.”

It’s just like the game, I guess I can look forward to that too.

I thanked Jessica and turned to look out the window just as her home came into view. The Baron of Montford’s barony was in the countryside on a rustic land overflowing with nature. I could understand why it was alarming for a domain of this size to have a dragon appear.

“I’m home!” Jessica loudly announced at the doors to the baron’s mansion. “I brought someone who can probably defeat the dragon!”

One after another, the servants appeared, joyed at her return.

“Welcome home, my lady. It must have been a long way for you and your friend.”

Heh heh, “friend.” I think you mean “vermin exterminator.”

“Thank you very much for inviting me. I’m Yumiella Dolkness.”

“Thank you for coming,” Sir Montford greeted. “Unfortunately, a dragon has appeared in this area, so we might not be able to be as hospitable as expected,” he said apologetically.

Huh? I thought Jessica sent a letter explaining things.

“Father, Yumiella is the person who will defeat the dragon for us.”

The baron’s face twisted in confusion at Jessica’s explanation. “Oh, she’s the person you were saying was as strong as the Demon Lord?”

Wait, Jessica. You wrote in the letter that I’m only as strong as the Demon Lord?

As I glared at her from the corner of my eye, Jessica panicked to explain.

“Yumiella’s level is 99. And I said she was strong enough to defeat the Demon Lord, not that she was as strong.”

The baron’s expression remained unchanged. This was something I hadn’t experienced in a while.

The next morning, I immediately started for the mountain to take down the dragon with two soldiers accompanying me to show me the way. Jessica was considerate and offered to join me, but I politely declined because she didn’t seem like she would be an asset for battle.

“Hey, why do we have to go along with what some spoiled aristocrat wants?” one of the soldiers muttered to the other.

“I don’t know. We have to follow the baron’s orders.”

The two soldiers apparently thought of me as some spoiled girl who just wanted to see a dragon. I ignored their quiet bickering and speed-walked up the mountain trail.

We eventually found a clearing halfway up the mountain, and I decided to wait for the dragon there.

“Let’s take a break here.”

The two who followed me sat on the ground, out of breath.

You guys need some more stamina. Might I suggest level grinding?

“Miss,” the older soldier began between gasps. “I forgot to mention this, but if the dragon appears, we’re leaving right away. Keep your aristocratic debauchery to a minimum.”

Do they still not understand what's going on? Do they not find it weird that I'm not even close to out of breath coming all this way?

Suddenly, it was here. I glared toward a point in the sky without responding to the soldier. Confused by my actions, the soldiers also looked up at the sky, finding a single shadow.

“Wh-What is that? That shadow... Is that the d-dragon?”

The shadow grew as it got closer, and eventually, it was close enough to be easily recognizable as a dragon.

“Hide! We'll wait it out!”

“It looks like it's already found us,” I informed them calmly.

The soldiers scurried and hid in the shadow of a nearby boulder.

Didn't they hear me? Hiding is useless at this point.

The dragon was circling the area around us—perhaps its guard was up because humans had entered its territory. The dragon that appeared was a fire type, just as Jessica had described. Flames curled around the edges of its mouth as if to warn us that it could breathe fire at any moment.

As I stared at the dragon in the sky, I thought about how I would defeat it. If possible, I wanted to retrieve the magic stones after taking it down, but most of my long-range spells would destroy everything, leaving nothing behind, and my targeted spells activated through the target's shadows, meaning I couldn't use them against a flying enemy.

I quickly glanced at the soldiers hiding behind the boulder, only to find their faces twisted in despair.

“I-It's all over... I'm going to be eaten...”

Aren't you guys giving up too easily?

My company seemed to be mentally unwell, so I decided to take care of things quickly.

“Black Hole.”

My spell activated, covering the dragon's left wing in darkness. The wing then

disappeared, along with the darkness. The dragon spun around and dove to the ground. I was about to finish it off, but it looked like it had already died from the impact of hitting the ground.

Well, that was weaker than I thought it would be.

“Y-You did it! You’re amazing, miss!”

The soldiers had done a one-eighty and were so moved that they began crying.

Was it really that impressive? I said I would take care of the dragon three whole times on the way here.

“I hate to ruin your moment of happiness, but it isn’t over yet.”

Yes, I had defeated the fire-type dragon, but this battle wasn’t over yet. The truth was, the dragon that settled down on this mountain was one of a breeding pair. In the game, it was said that the boss’s element was fire, so many players likely equipped water-type weapons and fire-resistant armor. However, after defeating the fire-type dragon, there was another battle with a wind-type dragon. Of course, the second was stronger, so the event was a trap where you actually had to prepare against the wind element.

Suddenly, a roar reverberated through the entire mountain.

Maybe it’s angry that its wife was killed. But wait... Maybe this one’s the husband.

The wind dragon flew into the sky from a nearby forest, making a beeline for us.

That’s a wind type for you. It’s so much stronger than the last dragon.

“L-Look out!” one soldier called out, seeing that the dragon was barreling toward me.

It was no problem for me, though.

“Shadow Lance.”

The dragon had stopped right before me, pierced midair by the plethora of spears protruding from my shadow before dying. This dragon’s demise came

from attacking me from the direction my shadow was cast.

The soldiers looked as though they had aged several years after two rounds of the emotional rollercoaster that was preparing to die and making it out alive. I sent them back with two large magic stones for the trouble. As for myself, I went to the top of the mountain to obtain the item I came here for.

Why did a breeding pair of dragons suddenly come to this mountain? To raise a child, of course. I couldn't help but smile at how well things had gone.

Within the nest sat the item I came looking for—a dragon egg.



The long spring break was over, and today was my first day as a second-year student. Considering I arrived on the first day of the new term holding a large egg, I had drawn attention to myself.

“Hey, Yumiella, it’s been a while,” Patrick greeted me. “So, uh... What’s that?”

“It’s my child. I gave birth to it.”

Patrick took me seriously for a moment and grabbed my shoulders. “What? With wh—Oh, you’re joking,” he cut off, seconds from interrogating me about who the other person was.

Jeez, I didn’t think he would panic so much. Do I look like I could give birth to an egg?

“It’s a dragon’s egg. Some stuff happened over the break. You get it.”

“Get what? I don’t think ‘some stuff’ typically leads to obtaining a dragon egg. Are you going to hatch it?”

“That’s the plan. I’ve already discussed it with His Majesty.”

I had gotten permission from the king to keep the dragon through the headmaster. Dragon tamers were valuable and usually belonged to the state, but I received the kind treatment of getting an exemption for that as well. I was even asked if there were any concerns about my school life—for those at the top, at least, this country was the best.

As for my joke earlier, the part about the egg being my child wasn’t

completely wrong. Dragons incubated their eggs by pouring magic energy into them. The more magical energy that was poured into an egg, the stronger the hatchling would be, so dragon parents would spend their time pouring magic into the egg to the point that meals became a constant necessity—which is why, in the Montford Barony, they were uncharacteristically attacking livestock.

Upon hatching, the baby dragon would recognize the entity that it received the most magical energy from as its parent, even if that entity was a different species. In other words, if a human were to incubate a dragon egg, the dragon would recognize that human as its parent. It was said that monsters could never fully bond with a human, but dragons were the only monsters that had the possibility of obeying people.

That being said, it was extremely difficult to obtain a dragon that was comfortable with humans. Eggs were already difficult to find, and even if you found one, pouring more magic into the egg than the original dragon parents wasn't something that could easily be done. The fact that the Kingdom of Valschein had only tamed two dragons was proof of that.

In the game, the egg was affected by Alicia's magical energy and thus produced a light-type dragon. That dragon grew big enough to fly the party members around. Yes, I had intruded on the event where you obtained a method of travel. I figured there were no restrictions like in the game, where you could only travel to places you had visited before, so it was extremely enticing to me. I wanted to fly. It was a convenient travel method, and if necessary, it would surely be helpful in providing an easy escape from the kingdom.

"I don't know how to say this, but...there's something ominous about it, to say the least," Patrick said, looking at the egg as he spoke.

Well, that's kind of mean.

It was true that the egg, which had turned jet-black after I had poured so much magical energy into it that I was concerned about it exploding, was giving off an intimidating aura.

"Don't say something so terrible to my child. It's so cute," I replied while hugging the egg. At first, I had thought of my future dragon as a convenient taxi,

but after carrying it with me all day, every day, I started to care for it. It was going to be born through my dark magic, so it was the same as my own child—I wasn't going to treat it badly because it was classified as a monster.

Patrick raised his brows. "Cute?"

"Yes, I'm sure this dragon will be adorable once it's born. Oh, right, I need to think of a name."

"I see. So you're not trying to bring about the world's strongest dragon," Patrick said, sounding a tad weirded out.

What in the world is he talking about?

"It's my child, so of course, it's going to be the world's strongest dragon," I stated.

"Ah, I see. Well, I hope it hatches safely," he responded with a tired look before getting up and leaving. Patrick only made that face when I did something wrong, but he usually took the time to correct me. I wondered if I had said something ridiculous without realizing it.

Some time passed, and I was now known as "the dangerous person with the egg" by the new students at the Academy. It was around this time that I noticed the egg moving from time to time. Considering how much time had passed, I figured it would hatch soon—maybe even as soon as today or tomorrow. I invited Patrick over in hopes of sharing the touching moment with him.

"Welcome. Now that I think about it, this is the first time I've invited someone to my room."

"Th-Thanks for having me."

Patrick was obviously flustered as he entered my room.

Maybe it's that boy thing, where he's embarrassed because he's in a girl's room. No way, I can't imagine him thinking of me like that.

We talked about what we did during the break while watching over the egg. It eventually got too late, and we were about to give up on it hatching today, but then, the egg showed signs of movement. After a moment, cracks began to form, and the egg started swaying.

“You can do it!” I cheered. The egg began moving more aggressively in response, and eventually, a jet-black claw shot out. “Yay! We did it, Patrick!” I glanced over to find him wearing a solemn look of determination.

I didn't think you would take the birth of my child so seriously...

Patrick must have been nervous. “Those sharp claws...” he started muttering. “I should’ve said something earlier. I’ve never even heard of a cute dragon. You’re going to be disappointed.”

“Huh, what did you say?” I asked, barely paying him any attention. “Oh, wait, look! It’s breaking more of the shell! Keep going! You can do it!”

Once its hand freed itself, everything happened quickly. The dragon hatchling broke through the shell and came crawling out. I was so moved that I was frozen in place.

After a beat, Patrick began speaking gently. “Um, I know you were imagining a cute dragon, but I think a sca—I mean, cool dragon, isn’t so bad, so—”

Patrick called it cool, but to me, it was more...

“Cute!”

What a cute dragon!

The hatchling was about as big as a medium-sized dog, with a large mouth and large eyes. Its appearance felt divine. Naturally, its body was jet black, like my own hair and eyes. Children take after their parents, after all.

“I guess if you think it’s cute, then it’s fine. I do think it’s kind of celestial, though.”

Patrick was saying something, sounding muffled, but I couldn’t hold back anymore and hugged my child. The hatchling’s face was buried in my bosom and purring like a cat.

“Patrick! It’s purring like a cat!”

“It sounds more like it’s growling...”

I continued petting my hatchling while thinking about a name. I had been brainstorming about it this entire time, but I couldn’t come up with anything

good.

“Your name will be... Hmm...dragon, ryu...” I thought out loud.

A name that’s just based on those words is probably too simple.

“That ‘Ryu’ name sounds good,” said Patrick.

“Huh? Ryu is... Oh, right.”

Patrick had provided a great idea. In this world, the Japanese word for dragon, ryu, didn’t exist. I liked the sound of the name Ryu. I didn’t know how to tell dragon sexes apart, but I was under the impression that he was a boy, so it was perfect.

“Ryu. Your name is Ryu.” I wasn’t sure if he understood my words, but Ryu happily yelped while breathing fire. I fanned the fire he breathed right into my face away with my hand and steeled myself to discipline him. “Ryu, you can’t breathe fire inside the room.”

He yelped once more, this time without breathing fire.

What a good boy!

The problem was he also shot black lasers from his eyes, which I had to twist my neck to dodge.

“That was bad too. Well, Patrick, I should put Ryu to bed, so let’s call it a day.”

“Wait, are you planning on keeping the dragon in this room?” Patrick asked from the far corner he had moved to, where he was making himself small.

When did that happen? Maybe he’s not good with animals.

“Of course. We’ll share a bed until he gets bigger.”

Ryu was probably going to get too big to fit in the room, but that was a bridge I’d cross when we got there.

“I see. I’m sure you’ll be fine, but don’t die, okay?” Patrick said before leaving the room in a hurry.

The next morning, I woke up to Rita screaming. I shot up, wide awake and worried about what had happened, only to find a Ryu that was now much

larger than me, fast asleep.

They say that kids grow fast, but I didn't think it was to this extent...

For now, I was happy that my child was healthy and growing. The next issue I would rack my brain over was how I could get Ryuuk out of the room.



I later found out that hatchlings grew from the magic energy given to them by their parents. It had become a habit of mine to pour magic energy into the egg as I slept, which led me to carelessly do the same with Ryuuk after he hatched—it was no wonder that he grew to be larger than me overnight.

After managing to get him out through the window, I decided to look for a living space for Ryuuk. I had already gotten permission from the king to raise a dragon, so surely it wouldn't be an issue for the Academy to prepare somewhere for him to sleep.

"We have to figure out where you're going to live," I told Ryuuk. "You'd probably prefer somewhere close to my room, right?"

Ryuuk barked in agreement as he walked alongside me in the Academy courtyards.

He understands what I'm saying? Is my child a genius?

I watched him as he leisurely strolled along on all fours while his large wings made short continuous flaps.

He's too cute!

"Aaah!" The sound of a girl screaming resonated throughout the Academy courtyard.

What's going on?

"Ryuuk, this might be dangerous. Get behind me."

I cautiously checked my surroundings with Ryuuk hidden behind me. I found the student who screamed in a part of the courtyard not too far away, but no signs of what may have caused her alarm. Having heard the same cry, other students and teachers arrived on the scene, wondering what had happened,

only for them to scream simultaneously.

“Waagh!”

“Aaah!”

What is everyone so afraid of? There's some unknown danger nearby, and I need to protect my child!

“Dragon! There's a dragon!”

It appeared that a dragon, one of the strongest monsters of this world, had appeared at the Academy. I squinted up at the sky in search of the dragon but couldn't find anything. Patrick had also made his way to the courtyard and was slowly making his way toward me.

This is no time for such leisure, Patrick!

“Whoa, I didn't know that dragons could get so big in one day.”

“It seems that a dragon has appeared at the Academy, but I can't find it,” I worriedly explained.

“What do you mean? It's right behind you.”

What? But behind me was just Ryuu, my lovely, adorable dragon hatchling.

Oh.

“I see,” I said, relaxing. “Everyone was making a fuss about Ryuu.”

“It's normal to make a fuss over a dragon. Anyways, I'm surprised he got so big.”

Screaming after seeing a cute animal isn't normal, it's just startling. I wish they wouldn't do that. But I guess I understand where they're coming from.

“Well, I guess he *is* that cute. It's possible that we'll soon be seeing Ryuu rise in popularity.”

Patrick looked baffled. “What?”

“Ryuu!” I turned to my baby excitedly. “Everyone's offering to play with you!”

Before I knew it, more students had gathered to see Ryuu.

They must all be animal lovers, and all animal lovers are good people.

Ryuu took off running toward the other students, hoping to play with them.

He has so much energy!

“Aaah! Run!”

All the students immediately dispersed into the buildings surrounding the courtyard.

Huh?

“Why is everyone running?” I wondered aloud.

“Stop him, Yumiella!” Patrick shouted. “Bring Ryuu back!”

“Ryuu, come here!” I called.

I guess some people are afraid of animals. I’m an animal lover, but I can accept and respect their feelings.

Ryuu came running back, his long tail wagging rapidly.

“What do you think?” I asked Patrick while keeping my eyes on my hatchling.

“What? Oh, about Ryuu...right. I’m not sure about him being cute...but he seems like a good boy. But it’s dangerous to let him play with people so—”

Before Patrick could finish his sentence, his mouth had been obstructed by Ryuu’s. Actually, it would have been more accurate to say Ryuu’s mouth was obstructed, given that Patrick’s entire head was now inside it.

I’m so jealous. I wish that was me.

Patrick must have been happy that Ryuu was being so playful with him because of how much he was yelling and flailing around.

“Ryuu, I think that’s enough,” I cautioned. “Your drool’s going to get all over him.”

Ryuu, my very smart boy, listened and let go of Patrick.



“Are you okay?” I asked Patrick. “Are you the kind of person who cares about getting drooled on?”

“I’ll just be glad that I’m alive,” Patrick said shakily. He got up and stumbled away before eventually sitting down on the ground.

I decided it was time to play with Ryu. I wasn’t sure what dragons did for fun, but moving our bodies around would probably be a good time. However, before we could play, someone else appeared in the courtyard, getting in the way of our family fun time.

She’s annoying even now that we’re second-year students.

“Oh, Yumiella! Are you also out for a morning stroll? I’m...oh?” Eleanora was walking toward me but stopped in her tracks after noticing Ryu. After silently staring up at Ryu for a few seconds, she suddenly gasped loudly.

Don’t yell, please. What if you scare him?

“Who is this cutie?!” she squealed.

Oh, I didn’t take Eleanora for an animal lover. I thought prima donnas like her usually hated animals.

“His name is Ryu. And yes, he’s cute, isn’t he?”

“May I touch you?” she asked Ryu. After getting his permission, Eleanora gently petted his jet-black neck and chin. Ryu let out a rumbling purr and seemed to be enjoying it.

“He’s truly adorable. Why don’t you all come closer?” Eleanora said, calling over to her entourage. The girls, who had been watching from a distance, aggressively shook their heads in refusal.

“Many people seem to be afraid of dragons. I think there’re only three people who are okay with him.”

“Isn’t it just two people?” Patrick—one of the three people—corrected.

I see. As his parent, I don’t count.

Ryu appeared to have taken an interest in the brooch Eleanora had on, getting close to it and sniffing around.

You like sparkly things, Ryuu? You're quite the fashion connoisseur.

"Oh, are you interested in this?" Eleanora asked. "I see we share a fondness for gemstones."

Along with the brooch on her chest, Eleanora was also wearing a necklace with a large gemstone on it. Frankly, I didn't understand the appeal.

"Here, Ryuu, go and get it!" Eleanora took off her brooch and threw it with all her might. The brooch painted a beautiful curve as it flew through the sky.

Huh? Is it okay to just throw it like that? Isn't it expensive?

Ryuu followed Eleanora's instructions and made a beeline for the gemstone around her neck, chomping onto Eleanora's head like he did with Patrick.

I'm so jealous!

"You went for the gemstone on the necklace! You're so smart, Ryuu!" I cheered.

The girls in Eleanora's entourage all screamed at the sight.

If you're so worried about your boss, you should come save her.

"All right, Ryuu, that's enough."

Eleanora gasped for air. "I thought I was going to die!"

Die? That's an overreaction.

Despite her words, Eleanora looked somewhat proud.

"The world is a vast place, but I must be the only daughter of an aristocrat to have been nibbled on by a dragon!" she said while hugging Ryuu after escaping his bite.

"Yes, after all, most people die after being bitten."

If Ryuu had seriously tried to bite Patrick and Eleanora, they would have lost their lives. On the other hand, a dragon that playfully bites... Well, what was better than that?

"Surely Sir Edwin will notice me now!"

Hmm, I'm not so sure about that.

It was eventually decided that Ryuu would stay in a warehouse on the outskirts of the Academy.

It's a bit of a distance from the dorms, but I'll be sure to visit frequently.



I was now a second-year student at the Academy, something I had completely forgotten about amid Ryuu's hatching. In other words, there were students here now who were a year younger than us.

Those students knew nothing of the various things I had done at the Academy. In other words, those relationships would be formed with a clean slate.

I hope I can utilize my past mistakes to build good relationships with my juniors. It's fine if they're a little cocky. I'll accept them as they are. I can do that as their elder. Even if they say something about my black hair, I'll let it slide.

With virtuousness in mind, I was prepared to welcome the incoming students, but something seemed to be off with them. Upon seeing me in the halls, they would step to the side and freeze up, and if they saw me in the courtyard, they would run into the building.

"Did I do something to the new students?" I asked Patrick one day after classes. He was officially my go-to when I was struggling with something.

"I don't think you did anything to them directly, but..." he trailed off.

"I did something to them indirectly?"

"Well, Yumiella, you're pretty famous. Most of the aristocrats in this kingdom know who you are. Even if they didn't, there was still that incident with Ryuu."

Things were better now, but everyone in the Academy had overreacted to Ryuu. I could understand being afraid of a dragon, but Ryuu was just a hatchling, so there was no need to be so afraid of him. I was also unhappy with the fact that Eleanora was the only one who agreed with me.

My classes are done for the day. Maybe I should go see Ryuu. I should invite Patrick as well!

"Are you free after this?"

“Sorry, I have something.”

Patrick seemed to be busy ever since the end-of-year party. He seemed to be traveling outside of the Academy, but he wouldn't tell me where he was going. I was worried because he would sometimes return with injuries.

“What's going on with you lately? If you're mixed up in some trouble, I'd like to help you.”

“A little longer. Just wait a little longer,” he said with a serious look. “When the time comes, there's something I want to tell you.”

What does he want to tell me?

Patrick began to act differently around the time we became second-year students, but the only things that happened around then were the end-of-year party and Ryu's birth.

Oh, I got it! It must have something to do with Ryu.

“I might be wrong, but I think that what you want to tell me and what I'm thinking are the same thing.”

“What? That's... Wait, no. I want to be the one to say it,” Patrick sputtered as his face turned red.

I could completely understand how he felt. After all, I was also slightly afraid.

“It could end up being fun, or it could end up being painful. But I think we should just take this leap rather than stand still.”

“Okay. You're right,” Patrick agreed, looking determined. “Let's say it at the same time, then. Yumiella, I...”

“Patrick, I...”

We have the same feelings. It's okay.

“I want to fly on Ryu!” I said, actualizing my desires at the sky I yearned for.

Wait, did Patrick just say something different?

His words had been drowned out by my own, and I missed what he had said.

Patrick spoke again first. “Fly...like through the sky? Riding on Ryu's back?”

“Yes! I’m a little afraid, but that doesn’t mean you’re allowed to try it on your own before me, though. That wouldn’t be fair.”

Ryuu had been growing quickly and was now about the size of a house. On top of that, he was able to fly without anyone having taught him. Seeing Ryuu like that could only lead to a single thought—I wanted to ride on my dragon’s back and fly through the sky. It was what anyone would dream of. Patrick must have been going to visit Ryuu on his own and had gotten injured playing with him a few times.

“Um, I don’t particularly want to fly.”

I was lost. “What? Then what did you say just now?”

Patrick averted his eyes. “I’m surprised that you’re scared of flying,” he said, blatantly changing the subject. “I thought you weren’t afraid of anything.”

I guess it’s pretty embarrassing that I thought we were thinking the same thing. But I was the one who made that mistake, so it should be more embarrassing for me.

I decided to go along with the current topic, putting aside what Patrick really wanted to say.

“I’m a bit scared of falling through the sky,” I admitted.

“I think that’s scary for anyone. Unless you’re some veteran wind mage, it’s hard to control your body in midair.”

“Right? I can’t help but think about what would happen if I fell where someone was standing. Even if I’m all right, it would be dangerous for the person I landed on.”

I would most likely be fine if I fell from high up, but that wasn’t the case for the people I’d be falling *on*. The thought of something bad happening to them scared me so much that it kept me from flying.

“Oh, so you weren’t scared for yourself.”

“It’s okay, though. I think I’m going to try it out right now.”

There was no time like the present. I decided to head to Ryuu immediately.

Patrick said he had plans, but he tagged along. Perhaps he was interested in flying after all. We walked side by side and arrived at the Academy warehouse that was now his home.

“Ryuu!” I called out.

Ryuu poked his head out from the doors of the warehouse, which had been widened after some rushed construction. Upon seeing my face, he happily waddled toward me and rubbed his head against my side.

Ugh, he’s just too cute!

“I was thinking you could give us a ride today,” I said to Ryuu. “Just let me know if it’s hard to fly.”

Ryuu yipped in response, as if telling me to leave it to him, and he flapped his large wings, showing me that he was willing and excited.

“Shouldn’t you hold off if you’re worried?” Patrick chimed in, spoiling our fun. He looked up at Ryuu. “Couldn’t you use a saddle or something to secure yourself to him?”

“It’s okay. I feel like I can do it now!”

“Based on my experiences, you’re the most dangerous when you’re confident. There’s no doubt about it.”

Wow, I didn’t realize I was so untrustworthy to him.

If I waited and got a saddle like Patrick suggested, who knew when my first flight would be? A saddle for a dragon would probably require a custom order that would take quite a while to be finished. I went ahead and jumped onto Ryuu’s back.

“Let’s go Ryuu! We’re going beyond the sky today!”

A few minutes later, I was free-falling through the air. The cause was my own over-excitement. I looked up at Ryuu as I fell, who was now quite far above me, in hopes of getting his help. He gave me a confused look as if to ask what game we were playing now.

It looks like he won’t be of much use.

I wasn't sure if it was due to his instincts or because of how I usually played with him, but Ryu seemed to perceive me as an individual who was much stronger than him.

"Maybe I can at least change the trajectory of my fall," I muttered to myself.

If I continued on my current path, I would crash into the commercial area of the Royal Capital. I tried to think of somewhere that was an open space with no people and decided on the Academy grounds. There were many buildings near campus, but the area where Ryu lived was relatively empty.

"Maybe if I just shoot out some magic energy..." I mumbled, mind working.

This might have been easier if I could use wind magic, but unfortunately, I only had dark magic at my disposal. I decided to release a concentrated burst of pure magic energy to the side in an attempt to change the trajectory of my fall.

It was extremely inefficient, but my spur-of-the-moment plan went surprisingly well—I was now falling straight toward the Academy. The speed of my fall began to increase, but it seemed like I would reach the Academy with no issues. To be certain, I continued to make small adjustments by firing horizontal bursts of magic energy.

"Oh, wait, couldn't I have just pointed the burst downward?"

I had only been thinking about landing somewhere away from other people, so I had completely forgotten that I could just decrease my speed using my magic energy the same way. But as the thought occurred to me, it was too late. I crashed into the ground with a thunderous sound.

A cloud of dirt billowed around me. I was able to change the direction of my body at the last minute and land on my feet, which kept my uniform safe, fortunately.

"There's so much dirt in the air." I coughed. "And my shoes are ruined too..."

Well, that was quite the experience.

I sat on the ground without giving it much thought.

"Yumiella! Are you all right?!" Patrick called while running over to me. He had most likely witnessed my fall.

“I’m okay. The only victims were my shoes,” I joked, pointing at my shoes.

“Hold on. I’ll carry you in a second.”

“What? Wait, I can walk. It’s fine!” *There was no need to be so worried.*

So quickly that there was no moment to stop him, Patrick scooped me up and held me bridal style. I flailed my limbs around, but it didn’t seem like I would escape. I mean, I could probably escape if I thrashed with all my might, but I didn’t want to hurt Patrick, so I held back on all my movements. This moment brought my weakness to light—even though I had the brawn, I was light in weight.

“Where does it hurt? I’ll take you to the infirmary right away. No, wait, if we used Yumiella’s recovery magic, you could just... Where’s Yumiella?”

Are you really that flustered? You’re holding me.

It took quite a while to calm Patrick down after all of that. Apparently, the story of how Patrick ran around the Academy carrying me bridal style immediately spread throughout the student body.

“Hey, why did you get so panicked?” I asked when he had calmed down.

“Sorry, I just thought you got hurt, and I couldn’t help myself.”

“There’s no way I would be hurt after something like *that*. You worry too much.”

“You need to care for yourself more. Everyone else might not think it, but you’re human too.”

Huh? People don’t think I’m human?

I felt like he said something vaguely terrible to me, but I let it go since Patrick was the only one who worried about me like this.

I need to be grateful to him.



My second summer break was already here, and I was visiting Craftsmen’s Row in the Royal Capital to pick up my custom-made saddle for Ryuu. I didn’t think it was necessary, but after being pushed by Patrick to do so, I decided to

have one made.

Being a custom order, it took quite a while for the saddle to be completed. In the meantime, I had been practicing my magical energy bursts and had now gotten to the point where I could gently land even if I was flung into the air, which made the saddle even more unnecessary.

As I wandered through a street lined with food stalls on my way to Craftsmen's Row, a man came up to me and began walking alongside me.

Is he hitting on me?

"Don't respond and just listen," he spoke quietly, staring straight ahead. "I'm an agent from the Kingdom of Lemlaesta. I have something to discuss with you. If you intend to listen to what I have to say, keep going straight and enter the restaurant on the right. It's the two-story building with the red roof," he said before abruptly walking away from me.

Yeah, I obviously knew he wasn't hitting on me. Regardless, what do I do?

Lemlaesta was a neighboring kingdom and close to Patrick's home, the Margrave of Ashbatten's mark. I expected that an agent from a potential enemy kingdom would make contact with me at some point, but it felt like they were too late. Perhaps there were some mitigating circumstances, or maybe this was more than just a simple extraction.

My curiosity beat my sense of danger, and I decided to enter the designated restaurant. It looked quite expensive for an establishment in the Commoners' Quarter—perhaps aristocrats secretly visited here as well. Upon entering, a server guided me to the second-floor room in the very back. I found myself getting excited at the clandestine nature of it all.

Inside the room, there was an ordinary-looking man with no standout features seated at a table. He gestured for me to sit down.

"You must be Yumiella. Thank you for coming here today. I'm from the Kingdom of Lemlaesta. Please, call me Linus."

"Here's the menu. Order whatever you'd like," he insisted.

It seemed like it would be on him, so I decided to order as much as I wanted. I

didn't have any financial troubles, thanks to the magic stones I collected and sold from monsters, but now that I had a big child to care for, there was no harm in being a little frugal.

"I'll have the stewed pork bung."

A stewed dish like this was probably prepared ahead of time, so it would be ready right away. It was the perfect meal to order, given the situation, but I also just wanted to eat something with bold flavors for once.

"O-Okay. I'll go put in the order," he said with a troubled look before exiting the room to place the order with a server.

Did he think I was implying that I would eat his intestines or something?

"Don't people usually order a cake or something?" I heard him mutter from the other side of the door.

Ah, I see. That's completely my fault. Sorry about that.

Linus came back shortly with the stew.

"Thank you for the food," I said happily. "Oh, I'll be listening while I eat, so you can go ahead and start talking."

A secret meeting with an agent from a neighboring kingdom while eating stewed pork bung... Any way I look at this, the whole situation sounded like a joke. The atmosphere was now vapid, but Linus began to speak.

"Let's see, where should I begin? I'm a secret agent currently residing in the Royal Capital of the Kingdom of Valschein. There are a few of us here, including the man who spoke to you earlier. We've known about you since you entered the Academy, and we've been collecting information about you and researching you."

Researching me? Come on, I'm not some new species.

"As a result," he continued, "we came to the conclusion that it would be extremely difficult to welcome you into our kingdom. You don't seem to have any interest in titles or wealth, and even if you were to leave this kingdom for some reason, there's no reason you would go to the nearby Kingdom of Lemlaesta."

So that's why they hadn't contacted me. I wonder why they decided to take action now.

"However, the higher-ups back in our kingdom weren't satisfied with that. It seems that certain aristocrats are meddling as well, so after the dragon, I couldn't hold them off any longer. The guys back home are always just giving out orders from the comfort of their own homes..."

The latter half devolved into Linus venting about his job.

I was at a loss for what to say and decided to throw some words of appreciation his way.

"Um, thank you for your hard work...?"

"I have to ask; do you have any interest in coming to the Kingdom of Lemlaesta? We'll give you anything in our power."

"What will I be forced to do in exchange?"

"I believe you'll be in the military."

If I'm in the army, this kingdom will be my enemy. On top of that, Patrick's home would be the battleground.

"I politely decline."

"Of course you do."

It seemed Linus expected my response because he didn't appear to be disappointed in the slightest. He was an agent of a neighboring kingdom, so I had mentally prepared for something wild, but things weren't going as I had hoped. If anything, this was failing to meet any of my expectations.

I *did* start to feel bad for Linus, so in a sense, he might have succeeded at his job.

"There's one more thing I'd like to ask," Linus stated. The main purpose of our conversation was over, but it seemed he wasn't done. "It's for my own curiosity," he added.

"What is it?"

"What is your reason for staying in this kingdom? We assumed you would run

off to somewhere far away within six months, especially since the discrimination toward black hair is particularly horrible in this kingdom.”

He was somewhat right. Immediately after entering the Academy, I had plans of hiding who I was and then going to live in a kingdom far away. So what had led me to my current situation? It was truly baffling.

*No, I know the truth. Things probably changed after outdoor training at the Academy when I met **him**.*

“I’m here because I need to defeat the Demon Lord. It’s a global crisis, after all.”

That’s a lie. If they know that I care about him, they might take him hostage.

“What? The Demon Lord should only attack this kingdom, though.”

The Demon Lord’s target is just the Kingdom of Valschein? I’ve never heard anything about that. The king and headmaster seem to know something about the Demon Lord, but do they know about this too? I guess there’s the possibility that Linus is mistaken.

“What does that me—” I started to ask Linus, but it appeared I was too late. “Looks like we’re out of time,” I told him.

I could hear the sound of armor clanging outside the restaurant. They were probably Valschein soldiers. I expected they would come, but it seemed this kingdom had also assigned an agent to me.

“Out of time?”

“There will be people entering this establishment. They’ve blocked the back door as well. I think you can escape if you go out the window and over the roofs.”

It wasn’t long before Linus moved. He immediately did as I said and jumped out the window.

He turned back for long enough to say, “Thank you very much. I’ll be sure to return this favor one day,” and then he was gone.

I wanted to ask him more about the Demon Lord, but I also didn’t want to see him again. However, this interaction was fruitful. Thanks to Linus’s question, I

was able to realize my feelings for him.

Even if he was just talking to me out of pity, even if he was just dealing with the problem child out of a sense of duty, he spoke to me. We had trivial conversations and laughed together, he put himself in danger when a monster attacked me, and he genuinely worried about me when I fell off Ryu. He treated me like a normal girl.

That's who Patrick was, and I probably liked him.



At an elementary school in the countryside, there was a girl who was the only student in her grade. The student closest to her in age was a boy two years older than her. He would happily listen to what she had to say and even help her study. That girl's first love would no doubt be that boy.

"I think my situation is similar to that girl's."

"What? Similar to who?"

"I think she's just mistaken familiarity for love because she hasn't interacted with very many people."

After letting Linus, the secret agent from a neighboring country, escape, I left the restaurant using the same route. Upon returning to the Academy and calmly analyzing my thoughts, I came to the conclusion that my belief that I liked Patrick was a misunderstanding on my part.

I was currently discussing those thoughts with Patrick, but I left out the preamble because it was embarrassing. Naturally, he had no idea what I was talking about and had questions.

"I'll ask again. What are you talking about?"

I finally mustered up the courage to say what was on my mind. "Um, about how I want to be friends with you."

"You didn't even think of me as a friend until now?" he asked, sounding dejected.

"What?"

“I thought of you as a friend.”

What a statement of inner beauty. Actually, he was good-looking inside *and* out. No one is good on the inside and on the outside. There must be something wrong. I won't be tricked!

“J-Just so you know, I won't invade Lemlaesta,” I tried to assure him. “If needed, I can offer some protection to your mark.”

Patrick's home was along the kingdom's border. My utility value must have been priceless to the Margrave of Ashbatten.

“Your trust issues run pretty deep, huh? I guess it's the fault of those around you. It's kind of embarrassing to have to spell it out like this, but I won't ever try to use you for your powers. I know you would run away if I tried to pull something like that, and I don't even want to do something like that in the first place,” he declared. He stared straight into my eyes for a moment before his face turned red, and he turned away. “Even if you somehow dropped down to level 1, I'd stay with you.”

“That's okay. If that happens, I'll just grind back up from level 1.”

“That's not what I... Never mind,” he sighed.

I only said the thing about grinding back up again to hide my embarrassment. But I felt like he already knew that which was also embarrassing.

In an effort to change the subject, I pointed to the bulletin posted in the hallway.

“Hey, look. It's the results of the midterm exams. You're at the top again, Patrick.”

“So are you. After all, you at least know how to study.”

My eyes flashed. *Was he implying that studying was the only thing I could do?*

There were two exams a year at the Royal Academy—one right before summer break and one at the end of the school year. The questions they asked usually covered topics about the kingdom's history and laws, so it was extremely easy. I was able to pass both of the first-year exams with ease, and I was able to score almost full marks on this midterm exam.

Patrick and I looked at the names of the top performers while continuing our conversation.

“Maybe they’re being considerate by not posting everyone’s results,” I wondered.

“There would probably be a lot of issues if people thought that an heir to a powerful family was stupid.”

The top scorers were me, Patrick, Prince Edwin, and Oswald. It was basically the same lineup as the previous year.

“I guess there’s no bonus for getting good grades on the exams.”

“It doesn’t affect the career exams to become a high-ranking official after graduating either. Students from lower-ranking families also cut corners so they can go unnoticed.”

I was intrigued. “What? I didn’t know about that. Maybe I should make mistakes on purpose too. I don’t want to attract any negative attention.”

“Aren’t there other things you should be considering if you don’t want negative attention?” Patrick asked incredulously. “Also, I think it’s more convenient for you if people think you’re sharp.”

Just as Patrick said, there would be too many inconveniences if people thought I was simpleminded. There were many who would try to deceive me and pull me into their camps.

“Hold on. Does that mean people think I’m smart?”

“Well, exam scores aren’t everything,” Patrick replied immediately.

Isn’t that something someone with bad grades would say?

I glared at Patrick out of the corner of my eye, which he pretended to ignore and proceeded to change the subject.

“Did you know that if your grades are bad enough, you have to take a makeup exam? Apparently, they inform the students who need to take it secretly.”

“Isn’t that just a rumor?”

Rumors couldn’t be trusted, especially when there were rumors going around

saying I was planning to run the kingdom behind the scenes or train my dragon to rebel against the kingdom.

Even if they really did makeup exams, I couldn't imagine a student who would be stumped by those questions. It must have just been a rumor after all.

"That is true," Patrick said, acknowledging that the information was unconfirmed. "Even if it was confirmed, it's not anything you would ever have to deal with."



I completely forgot about the dubious existence of the makeup exam, and the following day, I was summoned by Eleanora. Usually, she would tell me what she was inviting me over for, whether it be for tea or to talk about accessories, but it was never anything serious.

However, this time was different. All she told me was that she "needed to discuss something of extreme importance." I usually came up with some excuse to turn her down, but this was too out of the ordinary, even for her.

After school, I arrived at the parlor that Eleanora frequented and nervously opened the door. Eleanora and a few members of her entourage awaited me inside.

"Yumiella! You're finally here!" Eleanora exclaimed, jumping up from her seat. She took my hand and led me to my seat.

"Hello," I replied cordially. "So, what did you want to discuss?"

Her family led the radicals of this kingdom—an important fact that I would come close to forgetting quite often. Thus, I couldn't even begin to imagine what could come out of her mouth.

After swiveling her head around to check her surroundings, Eleanora leaned in close to me.

Ugh, I knew it. It's something awful that can't be openly talked about. I'm going to be dragged into a war that'll divide the country, won't I?

"Could you help me study?" Eleanora whispered into my ear.

"What? Study?" I asked without thinking.

Is that code for something?

“I misspoke. You *may* help me study.”

“Um, what exactly do you mean?”

All she did was make her statement go from semi-polite to condescending.

Eleanora seemed frustrated that I still didn’t understand what she wanted. “I’m saying I want you to help me study so I can pass the makeup exam!” she blurted.

What was the point of being quiet earlier?

“The makeup exam? You want me to help you study?”

“Precisely. Aren’t you at the top of the class?”

It appeared the makeup exam existed after all. On top of that, a student who needed to take the makeup exam also existed.

Couldn’t she just have her entourage help her? They’re always together anyways. I don’t really feel like tutoring.

“Um, how about having them help you?” I asked, gesturing to her entourage.

“That’s impossible because I have the best score out of all of us.”

You’ve got to be kidding me.

I looked over at her entourage, only for them to awkwardly avert their gazes.

“Lady Eleanora, did you look at all of their answer sheets?”

“No, I just asked them what their scores were,” Eleanora said, tilting her head in confusion. The girls turned pale at her response.

Ah, I see what’s going on here.

Her entourage probably self-reported lower scores than her out of consideration to Eleanora. I could see why students would cut corners, like Patrick explained yesterday. If it got out that any of these girls were top performers, it would surely be a disaster.

“I guess I’ll do it...” I sighed. “I just have to look over your studying, right?”

“That’s right! You know, there aren’t many people who can help me study.”

With how intense I anticipated this discussion was going to be, I felt like something small like this would probably be fine to help with.

A short while later, I was keeping my promise and helping Eleanora out.

“It says here that three generations ago, our ruler was King Cyrus,” I read out to Eleanora.

“Wait. Then, who is Douglas?”

“He was the king before Cyrus.”

This prima donna was catastrophically bad at studying. Most people could pass an exam if they could memorize key points, but even memorization seemed to be difficult for her. My ability to speak formally began to crumble as well—even her entourage left in fear of her exploding at my insolence, leaving me alone with Eleanora.

If you're going to claim you're in her faction, shouldn't you at least be able to handle this much?

“You seem to have a good grasp on recent history, Lady Eleanora.” Strangely, I wasn't even being sarcastic.

“Of course I do! It's about Sir Edwin's father and grandfather!”

It appeared she had no trouble recalling information on topics that she liked.

Now that I think about it, she always talked about tea and perfume in such detail. Such long details...

“Could you possibly remember things if they were related to His Highness?” I could feel my brain working.

“Of course! I know everything about Sir Edwin.”

I think “everything” might be an exaggeration. It's honestly a little gross how much she likes the prince.

“Maybe we should just relate everything to His Highness and remember it that way? King Cyrus was the grandfather of Prince Edwin's grandfather.”

“Oh, he was? So that makes him...Sir Edwin's great-great-grandfather, right?”

Why are you surprised? That's how royal families work.

There was a lot wrong with Eleanora's perception of things.

After coming up with this new method, Eleanora made great progress with her studying. Whether it was history or law, if I forced my explanations to relate to Prince Edwin, Eleanora was able to memorize everything in no time.

"Who successfully completed the large-scale irrigation of Matlock?"

"Um, it was Sir Edwin's great-grandfather's younger brother, so... It was Prince Cliff!"

"That's correct."

That was actually the one problem even I couldn't answer on the last exam. Her passion for what she liked was incredible.

Eleanora ended up passing her makeup exam with flying colors, almost getting full marks on the history portion.

"It's all thanks to you, Yumiella! Thank you very much!" she said with a smile.

I had to admit, it didn't feel too bad to be thanked with a genuine smile like that.

"Let's study together for the next exam as well!" Eleanora beamed.

I have to help her study again? Is this going to continue until we graduate?

My short moment of feeling good dissipated, and I was instantly downcast.

I feel like I'm only taking losses here.

Interlude 4: Patrick Ashbatten

“Hey, Patrick. Are you free after this?”

“Sorry, I’m busy,” said Patrick Ashbatten, the second son of the Margrave of Ashbatten, turning down Yumiella. At first glance, Yumiella looked as expressionless as usual, but Patrick could tell that she was upset. Over the course of spending time with her, he learned how to notice the slight changes in her expression.

“Hey, can’t you just tell me what you’re always doing alre—”

Patrick could tell he was about to be interrogated by Yumiella, but an unexpected relief unit appeared.

“Yumiella! I think this accessory will look amazing on you!”

“Ugh, she’s appeared again,” Yumiella grumbled. “Wait here, Patrick.”

“Why don’t you just accept Lady Eleanora as a friend already? Well, I’m leaving now.”

It was fortunate for him that Yumiella got caught up with Eleanora. Patrick took this chance to leave the Academy and headed toward a dungeon near the Royal Capital, where he had been visiting the past few months whenever he was free.

The dungeon was less than an hour west of the Royal Capital, and the monsters that spawned there were a considerably high level. There was a lower-level dungeon to the south of the Royal Capital that most Academy students and members of the military used, leading the western dungeon to be known as a hidden dungeon.

Patrick arrived at the hidden dungeon’s entrance with a sword in one hand. Because of the dungeon’s proximity to the Royal Capital, there was a soldier guarding the entrance to prevent civilians from entering. The soldier, who had become acquaintances with Patrick, spoke to him with familiarity. However, he had yet to discover that Patrick was the son of a margrave.

“You’re here again?” he asked in a friendly manner. “I don’t know how you always go in there and come out unscathed. Why are you coming here so diligently?”

“I just have something I need to get stronger for.”

“Oh? Is it about a girl? Do you have a romantic rival or something?” the soldier teased. “Fighting over a girl... Now that’s youth for you. You better not cause a bloodbath.”

“Well, I don’t have a romantic rival, but the girl herself is...” Patrick trailed off, purposefully trying to remain ambiguous after feeling like he had overshared. He left the soldier, who surely had no clue what he was talking about, and entered the dim dungeon.

As he defeated the sporadically appearing monsters with his sword and magic, Patrick pondered the reason why he was going through all this trouble.

“Her type is someone stronger than her, huh?” he muttered to himself.

Yumiella’s words at the end-of-year party were what made Patrick start working so hard at level grinding. Patrick was aware that Yumiella only said that to turn down a student who had asked her to dance, but Patrick wondered if any person who wanted to stand by Yumiella could afford to be weak.

They certainly couldn’t be so weak that they would drag her down by accidentally getting themselves involved in a hostage situation or anything like that. On top of that, a certain amount of strength was necessary to keep up with Yumiella’s regularly bizarre actions.

That is why he had to become strong—so he could tell her how he felt.

“Three days ago, she broke one of the school’s swords, and before that, she was shooting magic into the sky because it ‘made Ryu happy,’” he recounted aloud. “Why did I fall for her?”

Patrick spun around and swung at a monster that came up behind him while thinking about the reason he came to like Yumiella. She had been on his mind ever since he first laid eyes on her at the entrance ceremony, but it was more out of pity rather than romantic interest at the time. He thought about all the struggles she had faced until now and the difficulties she would continue to face

moving forward, all because of her black hair. Having had a period in his life where he was self-conscious about his gray hair, he understood her situation well.

However, she forcibly created a place for herself with her overwhelmingly high level. He had even heard that she carried herself with confidence during her audience with the king. She appeared unbothered by those around her being terrified of her and tactfully handled those who got close to her for her power. Patrick had been skeptical of the rumor that she might be the Demon Lord, but he did wonder if she was something different from himself and others.

“No, Yumiella’s just a regular person,” he said, shaking his head as if to chase those thoughts away. “She gets hurt by the littlest things and gets worried over insignificant stuff.”

Figuring he should return to the surface soon, Patrick started in the direction he came while continuing to reminisce. Though he had respected and admired her, at the same time, he had felt fear toward Yumiella. But one day, that fear disappeared by complete coincidence.

Alone in the Academy garden, Yumiella was obviously sulking after the cat she was calling over ran away.

“She’s just a regular girl who’s my age. Regular... Is she regular?”

She was not. Patrick hadn’t forgotten about how she had caused a ruckus during their first outdoor training. Was her obsession with level grinding because of her unfortunate childhood or something she was born with? It was still unclear to Patrick, who had known her for a while now, and it was questionable if Yumiella herself even knew.

“It’s no use. I can’t figure it out,” he sighed while recalling various other commotions she had caused.

He had fallen for her unknowingly as he spent more time with her—that was the only explanation. However, Patrick hadn’t figured out if what he felt toward her was platonic or romantic for quite a while.

He became fully aware of his feelings at the end-of-year party in early spring.

Adorned in a dress, Yumiella was breathtakingly beautiful. Various thoughts ran through his mind after seeing her: the realization that there were probably a lot of other people who took notice of her beauty, the fact that someone else who liked her might show up, and the realization that he had known she was beautiful all along. All these thoughts led Patrick to finally understand his feelings.

Patrick continued to make his way to the surface, thinking that he might have been as dense as Yumiella.

By the time he had returned to the Academy, night had already fallen. The sun had completely set, and the area was only lit by the dim magical illumination emitted by the street lights. As he entered the Academy, he could feel the gatekeeper giving him a disapproving look in regard to his late return. He hurried along the empty path to the dorm and found someone awaiting him.

“Welcome home. Do you have any injuries today? Are you all right?”

“Oh, it’s you, Yumiella. Don’t worry, I’m not hurt. You should get back to your room. It’s dark out.”

“It’s fine. When your level is as high as mine, dark places are a nonissue.”

Yumiella was right. The five senses sharpened as one’s levels increased—this applied to night vision as well. Patrick’s ability to see in the dark had also improved, but not enough to see what kind of face Yumiella was making.

“Well, I’ll be going, then. Good night, Yumiella.”

“Wait, Patrick!” she called out. “I figured out where you’re always going!” she exclaimed, stopping Patrick in his tracks.

Patrick was frozen, fearing that he had finally been found out.

“There’s no need to be embarrassed,” Yumiella continued. “Though, I do have concerns about you getting injured. I know it’s not really my place, but what kind of person *is* this girlfriend?”

“Girlfriend?” Patrick’s mind went blank at the unexpected word. Yumiella had a wild imagination—this was something that Patrick understood because of how well he knew her. He collected himself and asked, “Whose girlfriend are

you referring to?”

“Your girlfriend. Your significant other. You’re going out every day to go on dates with your significant other, aren’t you?”

“That’s completely wrong. I don’t have a significant other living outside the Academy in the first place.”

“Oh, so she’s in the Academy? Do you guys come back at different times to avoid being seen together? Wow, I didn’t realize people actually did things like that.”

Patrick had no idea what kind of thought process led her there. This was a usual occurrence, but he still struggled to understand. If you were to ask her to elaborate, it would surely follow some logical path, but he didn’t feel like asking.

“That’s wrong too. I don’t have a significant other.”

“I see. That’s unexpected. I guess that’s fine, then. Good night, Patrick,” Yumiella said dryly before heading toward the women’s dorms.

Patrick was left alone, confused as to why he just had to declare that he was single.

“I guess she doesn’t think of me in that way at all,” he mumbled to himself. The dejected Patrick wasn’t able to see Yumiella happily skipping away.

After returning to the dorms, Patrick went to a room that wasn’t his own. Upon arriving at the heavily guarded room, he was led inside to where *he* awaited.

“I apologize for being late,” Patrick said.

“I saw her waiting to ambush you. I guess you might be right,” the owner of the room said, looking up from his book.

Patrick sat across from him with familiarity and ease.

“What shall we talk about today, Prince Edwin?”

Chapter 5: The Hidden Boss Enters a Dungeon

Where is Patrick going so frequently? What is it that he's so passionate about?

The first thing that came to mind was level grinding, but I shouldn't automatically think he was the same as me. Though reluctantly, I was beginning to understand that I was maybe a bit strange.

I thought about what people his age threw their passion toward and had an epiphany while being forced to listen to Eleanora go on about her love for the prince.

I see. It's romance. Come to think of it, we are in the world of an otome game.

It was probably normal for Patrick to have a significant other—he was good-looking and kind, not to mention smart and pretty strong.

Also, he's...

I let out a deep sigh, unable to finish my thought due to an impending sense of emptiness. My one saving grace was that my friendship with Patrick continued.

I wonder what his girlfriend thinks of me. A significant other from outside of the Academy, who can only see her boyfriend for short periods of time... Insert woman who is overly friendly with her boyfriend at the Academy she can't enter and...

I was totally the villain in this scenario, which only made me feel more depressed.

Wait, that doesn't explain why he sometimes comes back injured. Are they having lovers' quarrels? Just how strong is his girlfriend?

The thought that he had bad taste in women floated in my mind for a second before I realized that if being too strong was a red flag, I was waving it too.

Finding out the truth was scary, but I had to know, which is why I ended up ambushing him one night, only to find out that my theory was completely

incorrect. But it didn't matter. I was slightly, actually, very happy about it.

Several days later, Patrick suddenly had a request for me.

"There's someone I want you to meet and talk to."

"Sure. Who do you want me to meet with?"

It was unusual for Patrick to want to introduce me to someone.

Is it someone I know? I feel amazing right now, so I'll meet whoever and talk with them as much as they'd like.

Patrick looked uncomfortable at my question.

"I don't think you would want to meet with him, and you might not believe it, but he's actually sorry for what he did..." he rambled.

"What? Who is it?"

Patrick paused before finally answering. "It's His Highness."

My mood immediately crashed at the sudden mention of the prince. Of course, I would agree to meet him, but the bliss I had been experiencing the past few days had completely disappeared.

We were in the Academy drawing room, the same room I was in when I was called upon by the headmaster for the first time. Prince Edwin and I were sitting face-to-face in utter silence.

Recently, the prince pretty much stayed away from me. Alicia would still come bother me occasionally, but I felt that the prince was pretty calm. He also seemed like he wouldn't start the conversation at all.

Weren't you the one who called me here to talk about something? You even went through the trouble of using Patrick to get me here.

"Um, what did you want to talk about?" I asked, finding it unusual that he wasn't snapping at me.

"I'm sorry," the prince said with a determined look.

"What?"

"I apologize. I acted rudely toward you, Lady Yumiella. I had made incorrect

assumptions, but I continued to be senselessly stubborn.”

My mind went blank at the highly unexpected words coming from Prince Edwin. He continued speaking, paying no attention to my confusion.

“My father had already told me that there wasn’t even a one in a million chance that you were the Demon Lord, and I had known that was likely the truth. However, I couldn’t admit that something I had already claimed was wrong. I only listened to what people said when it was convenient for me. My juvenile behavior imposed inconveniences on you, Lady Yumiella. I’m sure that I made you feel awful as well. I’m truly sorry for my actions.”

I guess he’s just a kid.

The prince wasn’t the only one who was childish; the entire student body was children. Blindly believing baseless rumors and ostracizing those who are in the minority or attracting bad attention... Anyone who was disliked by the leader of the class would be ignored by everyone else. This current situation I was in could have happened in a Japanese high school as well. What I was most curious about was the reason for Prince Edwin’s sudden change of heart.

“Why are you apologizing all of a sudden?”

“I heard what Patrick had to say.”

Patrick? Why is his name coming up here? Come to think of it, he’s also the one who said I should meet with the Prince.

“Patrick had me listen to stories about you,” he continued as if he predicted my next question. “He told me about how your strength was the result of an incomparable amount of effort you put in. He told me about how you usually acted, and I came to realize that you were just a regular person. I had believed that I put in the most effort out of anyone without any proof of that and harbored fear somewhere in my heart that you weren’t normal and something else. I guess all of this just sounds like an excuse. It’s selfish of me to ask, but could you forgive me?”

“I understand your situation, Your Highness. I’m aware that I’m an unconventional person as well. I accept your apology.”

Whether I forgave him or not, I had no intention of being friends with the

prince, but I didn't want revenge either. None of this would change anything about how I acted.

"I'd like to make amends somehow. Is there anything I could do for you? I'll do whatever is in my power."

"If you could let me join you in your battle with the Demon Lord, that will be enough."

Every time the prince did something to me, it felt like my peaceful life moved further out of reach, so I didn't want anything from him. If anything, I wanted him to stay away from me as much as possible.

"I see. It's just like Patrick said," he said, seeming satisfied.

What did Patrick tell him?

"Actually, there is one thing I'd like to ask of you, Your Highness. Could you perhaps tell me what Patrick said about me?"

This is fine, right? I'm dying to know.

"He said that you had no interest in influential power or wealth and that you're generally an overly trusting good person. He also said that you were a strong person who didn't let a bad reputation get to you. Patrick has occasionally been telling me things like that for about six months now."

It was more praise than I thought it would be, but there was one thing that bothered me.

"What did he mean by 'generally'?"

"He said your thoughts and actions were strange, but generally, you were a good person... Don't forget that these are Patrick's words."

Sure, I'm aware, but did he really have to include all that?

"I just thought that I should answer your question honestly." It was as if he had read my thoughts through my gaze.

That's a weird thing to be serious about. Well, I guess I kind of knew that Patrick thought that.

After our conversation ended and Prince Edwin left, Headmaster Ronald

entered the room.

“How was your conversation with His Highness?”

“I thought he was someone else. Are you sure that wasn’t a body double?”

The headmaster smiled wryly.

“It was actually his behavior this past year that was strange. His Highness has always been a flexible and understanding young man. I’m relieved to see that he’s back to being himself. It’s all thanks to Patrick. He wouldn’t listen to anything His Majesty or I had to say, but for some reason, he seemed to pay attention to Patrick’s words. I wonder if it’s because they’re the same age.”

“Well, now that I can help with level grinding, maybe we’ll be able to take care of the Demon Lord.”

Perhaps, now I would be able to lead a proper school life. My gratitude for Patrick was endless.

“About that, the other three seem to be the same as usual,” the headmaster observed.

The other three were probably Alicia and the other two love interests.

“Couldn’t His Highness just talk to them?”

“He did, but it didn’t work. Alicia is stubborn, and the other two say they believe her and won’t budge. Alicia’s the only one who hasn’t raised her level, so I’ve decided to forcibly intervene. It’s best for the kingdom if she defeats the Demon Lord as the saintess. Could I leave her to you? You can do whatever you’d like, as long as she doesn’t die.”

“I don’t want to be alone with her, so I’ll be bringing other people as well. Is that all right?”

“Of course. It would be great if you could bring His Highness along as well.”

Alicia is just the same as before, huh? I thought she would listen to what Prince Edwin had to say... I’m a little disappointed in her.

Regardless, things would be significantly easier now that the prince understood that I wasn’t the Demon Lord. As for leveling up Alicia, this was

something that I had previously proposed to the headmaster, so I was happy to do it.

Maybe if Alicia learns the pleasures of happy, fun level-grinding time, she'll become a little bit more normal.



“It’s happy, fun level-grinding time!”

“Nooo!”

Lady Alicia Ehnleit, thank you for choosing to fly Ryuu Airlines. We will arrive at the Dolkness County dark-type dungeon shortly.

As I had my fun pretending to be a flight attendant in my head, Ryuu did a flip in midair as if he wanted to do something on the house for us because of how much fun I was having. Alicia seemed to enjoy the special treatment as well, so much so that she had stopped her complaints about wanting to be let off and was now silently enjoying the flight. Patrick and Prince Edwin had joined us on this flight as well but had been silent since we departed.

I better not do anything that ruins this incredible experience for them.

I had originally planned to leave defeating the Demon Lord to Alicia, given that my original objective was to avoid gathering any attention. However, at this point, I had almost completely given up on achieving that objective, so there was no reason to hold back anymore. I could go ahead and take down the Demon Lord myself. The thing was, there could potentially be some hidden mechanic in the game where Alicia’s light magic was necessary to defeat the Demon Lord. For now, it was imperative that Alicia level up.

Having gotten the headmaster’s approval to do whatever I wanted, I decided to take Alicia to a dark-type dungeon—the very same one that I had frequented in the past. It was a terribly unpopular place because of how disadvantageous the four main elements were against dark magic. But for Alicia, who used light magic, this was a highly effective dungeon for training because of the plethora of enemies she would have an advantage against.

“Ryuu, can you land over there?” I asked, pointing toward our destination that was now in view. Ryuu responded with an affirmative bark.

I turned toward my passengers. "Everyone, we'll be landing soon," I said. "Oh? Is everyone awake?" Alicia seemed to have passed out at some time, while the other two stayed silent with stiff expressions.

We finally landed, which Ryu handled more gently than usual because we were flying with four people today.

"Thank you, Ryu. You can go play until I call you. Just make sure to stay away from where people are, okay?" Even though everyone had gotten off, Ryu showed no signs of leaving and lay on the ground, positioned in a way that surrounded me.

Ah, it's not a school day, so he thought that we could play together.

"I'm sorry, you can't come into the dungeon with us. We can play tomorrow, okay?" Ryu reluctantly gave in, moving his tail out of the way to let me through. "Thank you. You're such a good boy." Ryu was generally independent, but he seemed to want attention today.

I'll have to spoil him plenty tomorrow.

"So, Alicia's asleep. What should we do?" I asked.

The unconscious Alicia was currently being carried by Prince Edwin, who was looking unwell. Even Patrick looked like he was ill.

Are you guys okay? We're just getting started.

"We have no choice but to wait for her to wake up," said Prince Edwin while placing Alicia under a tree. "I'll watch over her."

"I'm sorry, I need a break," Patrick blurted before immediately dropping down to sit on the ground. I was thinking of going into the dungeon with him while waiting for Alicia to wake up, but that was now off the table. He pulled out a handkerchief and placed it on the ground next to him. "You should take a break too. Sit here."

"Okay," I replied and sat on the handkerchief.

This isn't a double date, you know.

I turned away from Patrick and pretended to stare into the distance, hoping he wouldn't notice that my face was slightly flushed.

“H-Huh? Where are we?” Alicia asked groggily.

“I’m glad to see you’re awake. We’re in front of the dungeon,” informed Prince Edwin to the finally awake Alicia.

Patrick seemed to be feeling better as well, so it was time to dive into the dungeon.

I’ll wash the handkerchief and return it to him later.

The four of us walked through the dim dungeon, with Alicia latched onto the prince, looking around anxiously.

She’s overreacting. Not having both your hands free is so much scarier.

“So, what kind of monsters appear in this dungeon?” Patrick asked, walking alongside me with his sword in one hand.

“The lower levels just have bat-types and snakelike monsters, I think.” There were too many types of monsters. I couldn’t remember all the names.

I think the bat one was...a Swarm Bat?

“Oh, there’s one monster that we need to be extra careful of.”

There was one type of monster whose name even I remembered. It was an inconsequential monster in the game but troublesome in real life.

“There are strong ones too? I’ll be careful.”

“No, they’re not that strong, but—” I was about to explain the monster to Patrick, but then, I saw my shadow wriggling around unnaturally from the corner of my eye. “It’s here. A Shadow Assassin!”

The amorphous black monster that appeared from my shadow headed straight toward us. I kicked it away, which was enough to cause the monster to disappear like mist.

“Shadow Assassins appear all over the dungeon, so be careful,” I explained. “You can take care of them after they appear easily like I just did, but they’re a little annoying when they come out during battles with other monsters or while you’re taking a break.”

My three companions suspiciously stared at their own shadows. “I see why

people don't come to this dungeon."

There's no need to be that on guard. If we're talking about pure battle power, someone of a single-digit level could easily handle one of those.

"Is there anything else we should be cautious of?" Prince Edwin asked hesitantly.

"Hmm... There're trap holes, but I actually treasured those because they got you into the depths of the dungeon far more easily. But they appear randomly, and areas you've already explored can spawn them as well."

"What kind of place did we walk into?"

"It'll be all right if we stay together. That way, when we fall, it'll be as a group," I reassured them.

Though this dungeon wasn't as friendly to explorers compared to other dungeons, its efficiency for level grinding was the best.

I wish they would just accept things a bit more easily.

However, there was one person in our group who didn't want to tolerate anything.

"I don't want to do this anymore!" Alicia shrieked. "Let's go home, Ed. That person is trying to kill us!"

Alicia ran toward the dungeon's exit.

"Hold on, Alicia!" Prince Edwin yelled after her.

I guess it was too much for her after all. We'll probably have to leave the dungeon for now and wait for Prince Edwin to convince her to come back in.

I sighed and watched as she fled, only for her to suddenly disappear.

"Oh, a trap hole."

"Alicia!" Prince Edwin called out in a panic, but the trap hole had already vanished. She was now alone in a deeper level of the dungeon.

"I wonder what level she fell to," I pondered curiously.

"Huh? Didn't she just fall to the second level?" Patrick asked.

It wasn't Patrick's fault that he didn't know, but trap holes would drop you to a random level. It obviously wasn't *structurally* possible, but that's how they worked—it might have been more accurate to call them teleportation circles rather than trap holes, but there was definitely a sensation of falling when going through one.

"As long as she's within the first twenty levels, she should be fine, but any further than that and things could be a bit dangerous."

"A *bit* dangerous?" Patrick said, turning pale before my eyes.

"Hm? What's wrong? It's times like these where we need to be calm and—"

"Yumiella, how dangerous is it for Lady Alicia to fight a Shadow Assassin?" Patrick cut in.

"What? I don't think it would be that dangerous."

"How about a dragon? How dangerous would that be for her?"

"A dragon might be a bit dangerous, but it could change depending on the type of dragon."

Why was Patrick asking all these questions?

"Your Highness!" Patrick suddenly yelled at the dazed prince. "Yumiella said it was 'a bit dangerous' to fight a dragon! Her 'a bit dangerous' means that Alicia's chances of survival are hopeless!"

Hold on, a bit just means a bit, nothing more and nothing less. You're exaggerating, Patrick.

The prince suddenly began running as if he were trying to reach the depths of the dungeon on his own. I grabbed his arm to stop him.

"Let me go!" he shouted. "I have to save Alicia! She's the one who's shown me the path!"

"Calm down. What are you going to do by just running off on your own?"

The path that he was talking about was probably something related to the game's main story. If I'm recalling correctly, the story was something along the lines of the prince being unsure about what he should be doing as the second

prince, and thanks to Alicia, he was able to discover the path he should take.

I guess even though she's...how she is, Alicia must be properly playing the role of the main character.

For now, we had to find Alicia.

“Let’s split up the work. You two should search up to the twentieth level together. We wouldn’t want another one of you to get lost, so please make sure to stay together. I will search the deeper levels. Patrick, His Highness can be unpredictable, so take care of him, okay?”

“Got it. You be careful too, Yumiella.”

I ran toward the depths of the dungeon, now alone. This dungeon was like my backyard—the path to the deepest levels was etched into my memory.

“Wait, weren’t the stairs over here?” I mumbled to myself.

Well, it had been a while. My memory seemed to be a bit shaky.

After taking a few detours, I arrived at the twentieth level through what was basically the shortest path and began looking for Alicia.

I hope she ended up on a lower-level floor...

I especially didn’t care for the floors around the twentieth level because of the centipede-like monsters that appeared. The centipede monsters were large, so I had no choice but to use more advanced spells against them. Because of that, the ratio of mana used to experience points gained was terrible and inefficient. My dislike had nothing to do with how they looked, of course.

“Ed! Where are you? Can you hear me?” Alicia’s voice rang out from the twenty-third floor.

I ran in the direction of her voice, dealing with the monsters I encountered without stopping, just as I had been doing up until this point. When I finally found her and confirmed it was her from behind, I called out to her using the kindest voice I could muster.

It would be a pain if she ran away from me too.

“I’ve come to save you.”

“Ed?”

“I’m sorry. It’s just me.”

Alicia had turned around with a smile on her face, but it faded into a frozen look of fear upon seeing me.

Am I really that unreliable? You know, at this level, you’re better off with me than the prince.

“What did you do to me?! Why are we separated from everyone?”

“You see, you fell through a trap hole that—”

“You planted a trap hole?! Take me back! What are you planning to do to me?!” Alicia screamed, her voice reverberating through the dungeon.

Wow, using such a loud voice in a dungeon... Maybe she has a talent for level grinding, after all.

“Trap holes are part of the dungeon. I’m not going to do anything to you, but I’m sure that group headed this way will,” I said, pointing in the direction behind Alicia.

“A group?” she asked slowly before finally understanding the current situation.

Monsters all over the dungeon had reacted to her loud voice and were gathering near us. It was a miracle that she hadn’t encountered any of them until now.

Now that we were here, it was probably fine to use this opportunity to get Alicia to grind her way back to the surface, so I decided to leave the monsters that were swarming us to her.

She looked at me with a panicky expression. “H-Help me!”

“It’ll be all right. I’ll make sure to help before you die. My recovery magic can regenerate an entire arm,” I said comfortingly. It would have been a total waste if she were to panic now, but my efforts were futile, and Alicia became frantic and began rapid-firing magic into empty space.

“Nooo!”



Oh, a ball of light she shot out hit the bat-type monster that was closest to us. Hmm, she's using a lot of magic unnecessarily, but the dungeon passageways are cramped, so a bullet-hell style of combat would probably be effective.

In the end, the monsters that had gathered had all jumped into Alicia's barrage of bullets in some way or another and were extinguished. The despicable, large centipede was also unable to survive after getting hit by light magic, its weakness.

Once Alicia noticed that the monsters were gone, she collapsed on the spot.

"W-We survived? Can we go home now?"

"Well then, let's regroup with His Highness and Patrick. There are just twenty-two more floors to the surface."

Alicia paused. "What?"

"I'll stay out of the battles as much as possible. I'll be the guide and leave the monsters to you."

Alicia stood there, face frozen in shock.

It's okay. You can do it, Alicia.

I wasn't sure if it was because she was the protagonist of the game, but Alicia was strong enough to be able to get through the middle levels. Truthfully, I wanted to go farther into the dungeon, but I restrained myself.

"I can't!" Alicia exclaimed. "You can easily defeat monsters, can't you?!"

"Oh, you're being loud again... I think they're coming from that direction this time. Please handle them just like you did earlier."

Her words were that of contempt, but perhaps Alicia actually had fun level grinding. Why else would she have yelled again right after fighting all those monsters just moments ago?

There were a few dicey moments with monsters getting quite close to us, but Alicia was able to wipe out all of the monsters this time as well. Then, I began guiding us out.

We walked through the passageways of the dungeon without speaking and

made it up two floors the same way. After our third enemy encounter on the current floor, Alicia suddenly stopped in place.

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

“I’m out of mana. I can’t do this anymore...”

“Oh, that’s not a problem. I came prepared with mana potions!”

Having never run out of mana before, I had never really used a mana potion. I knew they were absolutely disgusting, but if I had needed some while level grinding, I’m sure I would have downed them without hesitation.

“I don’t really like those...”

“All right. I’ll give you a sword then, so please take care of the monsters with physical attacks.”

Alicia finally gave up and drank the potion with tears in her eyes.

“Your mana is low because your level is low. Why don’t you take down any monsters during outdoor training?”

“Th-That’s because Ed and the others said they would protect me...” Alicia said, trailing off.

It seemed she was aware that things weren’t okay as is.

Alicia had gotten permission to enter the Royal Academy thanks to her prospective talent with light magic. On top of that, Prince Edwin revealed the resurrection of the Demon Lord to her, and she agreed to join the battle to defeat the Demon Lord. After all of that, there was no way that Alicia could neglect strengthening her light magic.

We continued to make our way through the dungeon. As I had expected, Alicia had a talent for battle. Though her magic was a violent barrage in the beginning, she was able to gradually correct her control. She had also been reacting frantically every time we encountered a monster in the beginning, but now, she would start attacking before she spoke. Even the potion that she was taking small sips of was now getting chugged.

Things are going pretty well. Both Alicia and the prince should be happy with results like these. Maybe the day that Alicia’s misunderstandings about me are

cleared up isn't too far away.

The way that she took down monsters while repeatedly muttering under her breath that she didn't want to die was like that of a battle robot. It also reminded me of my past self and left me feeling nostalgic.

I can't believe that she was letting her wonderful talents die all for the superiority she felt from being protected by a good-looking guy. It was truly a waste.

"Looks like this floor is all clear. Let's head up to the next one."

"I don't want to die, I don't want to die... Oh, I should just kill Yumiella. She's probably the Demon Lord anyways..."

After whispering some disturbing things, Alicia suddenly turned and cast her light magic in my direction. I deflected the ball of light with my hand, finding that it was absolutely painless. Even though light magic was the type I wasn't good with, there was too big of a difference between our levels for it to do anything to me.

"O-Oh no. I-I...I'm sorry, I'm sorry," Alicia deliriously apologized.

She is way too unstable. I thought she'd be feeling calmer the closer we got to the surface.

During the latter half of our return trip, Alicia did exactly as I said with no complaints. She had become a completely different person to who she was before entering the dungeon, but we had achieved our goal, and she seemed harmless to me.

It's probably fine. It should be fine...right?

"Are you okay?" I called over to Alicia.

"He he he, if I kill monsters, I get to live, if I kill monsters, I get to live..."

Wow, this feels like it might actually be pretty bad. Can I let her meet up with the prince like this? Patrick is probably going to be mad at me again.

We regrouped with the others on the fifth floor. They had been on their way back up after having gotten to the twentieth floor.

“Oh, there they are,” I said to Alicia before yelling out to the others. “I found Alicia! As you can see, there’s not a scratch on her.”

“Alicia! I’m glad to see that you’re safe,” Prince Edwin called back to us.

“What? Ed? Are you real?”

Prince Edwin ran over and hugged Alicia.

Could you please do that somewhere else?

Patrick came up to me and leaned in.

“Hey, Yumiella. Is she okay? Her eyes look kind of dead,” he whispered.

“She’s probably suffering from some trauma.”

Alicia was close to being out of commission, so we called it a day.

The next day, Alicia seemed to have returned to normal overnight.

“You were a bad person all along, Yumiella! It seems like you’ve tricked everyone around you, but I won’t fall for it!”

It appeared that her mind was stronger than I thought it was.

“Please don’t slack on level grinding from now on. If your grinding falls behind, we’ll just have to enter another dungeon together.”

“Eeek!” Alicia yelped and ran off.

It seemed that yesterday’s events may have traumatized her. The prince had been worried about Alicia disliking level grinding even more after having a terrifying experience, but turns out, there was no need for concern. From that day forward, Alicia began to level grind as if she were possessed. She was the final weapon in the battle against the Demon Lord, so I did something good here... At the very least, that’s what I told myself.



I often walked around the Royal Capital on my days off from the Academy. I preferred wandering around the commoner district rather than the aristocratic quarter. I had a lot of fun finding stores that sold cheap but delicious treats, buying rare fruits that street vendors sold, and peeking into suspicious stores in the back alleys.

After Ryu was born, I hadn't really visited, so today, I decided to take a stroll around the Royal Capital for the first time in a while. I was dressed in my outfit for visiting the Royal Capital, which consisted of a simple dress and a hat to hide my hair.

I had planned on playing with Ryu today, but he had gone off to play outside of the capital. If I called for him, he would return, but there was no reason to do that. And so, I walked around the capital aimlessly, eventually finding myself at the commoners' residential area, where small houses were crammed together, outlined by complicated alleyways.

There were no stores or anything that could be a landmark, and I was on the verge of declaring myself lost. I could go back the way I came by retracing my steps, but that would be boring—it was much more fun to blindly keep walking and end up somewhere I never would have imagined myself.

I took turns on the narrow pathways using my intuition, eventually finding myself even more entangled when I heard the voices of children. It sounded like there was some bullying going on. A couple of them were speaking in abusive tones.

"Your hair is creepy."

"I know the truth. He's a demon's kid. He doesn't have a dad, right?"

"Ew, your mom likes demons?"

I could also hear the child being bullied speaking shakily, as if they were holding back tears. I had no intention of getting in between some children fighting, but their words were too cruel, so I changed my mind.

The voices came from an alley one house over, so I leaped over the house, landing silently. A boy who looked to be around seven years old with dark brown hair was surrounded by three boys.

"What are you doing?" I called out.

The three boys looked at me in surprise.

"Wh-What do you want? It's none of your business."

"It's pretty uncool to gang up on someone and bully them."

“His hair is black, so he’s the bad one. We didn’t do anything wrong.”

The boy with the dark brown hair had the darkest hair I had ever seen on someone else in this world—Patrick’s gray hair was closer to white, and that was still enough to make him self-conscious in the past, so it was understandable that people would discriminate against this kid.

“Not every person with black hair is bad, are they?”

“But it’s black. Don’t you think that he looks like a bad guy?”

They don’t have any reservations about discriminating against black hair. It’s probably partially because they’re children, but it’s possible that adults just hide their feelings and let their hatred simmer secretly.

Again, I was made aware of how deep the discrimination against black hair was in this kingdom. I had given up until now, thinking that I couldn’t help facing discrimination. Perhaps my senses had been numbed. But I wanted to do something for this boy.

“I don’t think his hair is black, though,” I said as the boys stared at me in confusion. “Wouldn’t real black hair look like this?” I took off my hat and my black hair tumbled down.

Upon seeing that my hair was as black as the darkness of the night, their eyes widened in disbelief, and they went into a frenzy.

“A real demon?”

“Maybe she’s the Demon Lord.”

“Hey!” one boy exclaimed. He seemed to be their leader. “Don’t freak out. She’s just a regular human,” he reassured his friends. He didn’t seem to realize that he was contradicting himself.

“Some people do call me the Demon Lord. So, don’t call his dark brown hair ‘black’ anymore. It’s unpleasant to be grouped together like that,” I said while floating black orbs of magic around me.

The boys’ faces froze in fear before they screamed and ran away.

“Heeelp!”

Nice. I was able to be scarier than usual. I'm sure they'll develop some sense of unity after running away from a scary person together. Then, they'll pick on the brown-haired boy less, and... Wait.

I moved my gaze from the boys who were running away to my side and saw that the boy with dark brown hair hadn't run away.

"U-Um, thank you for saving me," he said timidly.

Hey, kid with the dark brown hair, there's no point in me being the bad guy if you don't run away with them.

"You should go on ahead and run away too, since your hair isn't black."

"No, it's all right. It's my hair's fault anyway."

The boy flashed a smile so faint that it felt like he could break at any moment.

I see. He's given up already, just like I had in the past.

"My name's Yumiella. What's yours?"

"My name is Phil. I'm six years old."

I've got to say, it's rare for a child not to be scared of me. I've talked to lost children before and they usually just burst into tears.

He was six years old, not so far off from the age I regained the memories of my past life, given that I was five at that time. But I had my memories to keep me mentally stable and understood that there was no basis for the discrimination, but Phil didn't have that—the emotional scars he carried must have been deep.

"Do you have any friends, Phil?"

"No, I don't."

"Is your family nice to you?"

"I don't have a dad, but my mom is nice."

A gentle expression appeared on his face when he spoke about his mother.

His family is kind to him. That's probably his only hope...

"My parents apparently don't want to see my face, so I've actually never met

them,” I confessed.

“What? That’s...”

“But recently, I made a friend and a cute kid too.”

“You have a child?!”

Oh, that’s what caught your attention. Wait, wouldn’t it be nice if he became friends with Ryuu? Phil and Ryuu would both gain a friend, and I would be relieved that my child finally has a friend as well. I think it’s a wonderful idea where everyone benefits. It’s a win-win-win!

“I do, even though I didn’t give birth to him. He doesn’t have any friends either. Would you like to meet him?”

“Y-Yes, if that’s okay...”

“You don’t mind the color black, do you?”

“I don’t! I don’t care about hair color!”

I was referring to the color of his entire body, not hair, but this is probably fine.

I brought Phil with me to the outer walls of the Royal Capital.

Following a stranger all the way here... He’s not very careful, is he?

“How far are we going?”

“Okay, let’s wait a bit. He should be here in five minutes.”

I fired dark magic into the sky like fireworks to call Ryuu over.

“Whoa, I knew it was magic. You were using magic earlier. Are you an aristocrat?”

Phil was surprisingly sharp. Even the way he spoke was quite mature. I assumed boys his age were rowdier, but perhaps the environment he grew up in caused him to be different.

“Technically, I am, but don’t worry about it. My rank is low anyway.”

This wasn’t a lie. Counts were the lowest of the top level of the aristocratic rankings. As I stared at the sky, I saw Ryuu’s shadow appear in the distance.

“Oh, looks like he’s here.”

It had only been three minutes, so Ryuu must have been close by. Phil was looking around curiously, so I pointed at the sky.

“What?! A dragon? It’s the one that was recently in the capital!”

“Yeah, he’s the one I wanted to introduce you to. He’s a nice boy, so don’t be afraid.”

Ryuu flew downward, making a beeline for me, and landed with a thunderous sound.

“Ryuu, this is Phil. I’d like you to be friends with him.”

Ryuu roared as if to say it was nice to meet Phil, who was scared stiff and had fallen backward at the sight of the dragon. It seemed that he was so scared that he couldn’t say anything.

Hm, perhaps this was a mistake. If you look closely, you can see that Ryuu is adorable and cute, but it’s not often that people understand that.

Surprisingly, Phil, who was still stiff with fear, reached out to touch the tip of Ryuu’s nose. It probably felt ticklish to have his nose touched, but Ryuu stayed still.

“I-It’s nice to meet you, Ryuu.”

“Are you all right, Phil? Aren’t you scared?” I said, picking him up from behind.

“I’ve had some bad experiences because of how I look, so...” he mumbled.
“Um, so, I don’t want to dislike anyone because of how they look. Ryuu looks scary, but he didn’t do anything when I touched him, so I thought maybe we could be friends...”

“You’re a strong boy, Phil.”

Patrick called me strong before, but I think the ones who are truly strong are people like Phil.

A short while later, we were flying through the sky on Ryuu’s back. Phil was scared at first, but now he was comfortable enough to enjoy the views.

“You have a friend, right, Yumiella?”

“I do. His name is Patrick. What did you want to ask about him?”

“Since I can’t make friends on my own, I was just thinking about how incredible you were.”

That’s not true. Patrick was the one who spoke to me first and made the effort to get to know me.

“I’m the same as you, Phil. He was the one who started talking to me first. At the time, I had kind of given up on being friends with people.”

Phil gasped upon hearing that I had given up. It was possible that he had given up on healthy interpersonal relationships as well.

I need to fix this issue so that there aren’t any more kids like Phil, but... How exactly do you get rid of discrimination?



Following their meeting, Phil and Ryu would go out and play often, just the two of them. Even today, Ryu was energetically flying off.

I was slightly sad about it, but maybe it was better for children to play together.

Even when I was a child, I was... Never mind, I only have memories of level grinding.

I walked out to the Academy courtyard and looked up at the sky, only to have the harsh sunlight shine directly into my eyes—it was already summer. I heard a voice call out from behind and turned to find Patrick.

“Oh, did you need something?”

“Hey, Yumiella, it’s about our upcoming summer break. I’m going to leave the Academy, so—”

Patrick had spent the last summer break at the Academy like I did. I was really grateful that he would talk to me from time to time. He was probably worried about what I’d do during the break if I were all alone. He seemed to feel bad for leaving the Academy, but luckily for me, I had plans for the break as well. Now that I had Ryu as a method of transportation, I could travel far away.

“It’s all right. I have somewhere I’d like to go this year. It’s summer, so I thought I should be out making wonderful memories.”

“I see. That’s good. I was worried about you being all alone at the Academy.”

Though his words were comforting, Patrick looked somewhat sad.

Oh, Patrick must’ve wanted to use Ryu to get home. I see why he wanted to check in with me.

“I’m not here for Ryu. It’s only natural to not want to leave your friend alone,” he added.

I guess he knows what I’m thinking. Now that I think about it, Patrick didn’t like flying.

“Oh, right. I forgot that you’re afraid of heights.”

Patrick surprised me with his fear of heights. He had said that it’s common for people to be afraid of heights, but Phil got used to it right away and enjoyed traveling through the sky.

“Hold on. Flying is on a whole different level, and... Never mind that. Where are you going? Did Lady Eleanora invite you somewhere?”

“She did invite me somewhere, but...”

Eleanora had invited me to a summer retreat, but I turned her down. We ended up agreeing to exchange gifts, but I wasn’t exactly going to a tourist destination, so I had no idea what I would get her.

“I’m thinking of going to Valius this summer.”

“Valius? Oh, for the dungeon.”

“Yes, I want a sword from that dungeon.”

Valius was a town with a famous dungeon, though perhaps it would be more accurate to say the town surrounded that dungeon. The contents of a treasure chest obtained from the dungeon in Valius were on another level. People from all around were drawn to those items, and eventually, a town grew around it.

“But there’s no need for you to have a dungeon sword, is there? It’s not like you’re going to fight very often in a melee position.”

I had been learning swordsmanship for over a year now at the Academy and had started to gain more technical skills instead of just forcing my way with my

high level, leading me to want my own sword.

This was something I learned during the battle arts competition last year, but commercial swords had a fatal flaw.

“Well, commercial swords break when I swing them with my full strength.”

“Oh, that’s right.”

As usual, Patrick was completely put off by me.

Weapons obtained from dungeon treasure chests often had high functionality, as they were made from unknown metals or had additional effects added to them—this was exactly what I was looking for. For now, anything was fine as long as it was sturdy.

“I tried buying a dungeon sword, but that broke too. I thought it would be easier to go get one myself if I wanted something better.”

“So that’s why you chose Valius. The swords there would probably be the best quality. I’m sure you’ll be fine but be safe.”

In the game, the Dolkness dark-type dungeon was the best for level grinding, and the Valius dungeon was the best for gathering equipment. The properties of each item were random, so you had to grind until you got an item that had the element and additional effect you were looking for.

My dungeon-grinding summer was about to begin.



On the first day of summer break, I flew on Ryu to the town of Valius. I had Ryu drop me off a little bit outside of the town to avoid a commotion, and I walked the rest of the way.

Valius was lively with groups of mercenaries, soldiers, and merchants from around the world all interacting. First, I obtained lodging at an inn before immediately heading to the dungeon. The population density of the area was intense. Various people who were about to enter the dungeon were hanging around outside. I walked up to the reception area at the entrance of the dungeon.

“Excuse me, I’d like to enter the dungeon.”

The lady working at the counter furrowed her brows at me. “You can’t enter here without permission. We’re busy, so please leave if you’re just here to stir things up.”

I had forgotten, but the dungeon in Valius required permission to enter due to its popularity.

“I apologize. I do have a permission form,” I said, pulling out my prepared form.

“Let’s see here... A signature from His Majesty?! Wait, Yumiella Dolkness... Are you *the* level 99, Lady Yumiella?”

I guess she knew who I was. I was still unsure how widespread my existence was.

I immediately got the approval to enter and promptly made my way into the dungeon. Monsters of all types except for light-type showed up in this dungeon. Because of that, the dungeon in-game was said to be bad for level grinding, but having reached max level, that wasn’t a concern for me.

My only objective was the treasure chest that appeared in the lair of the boss on the fiftieth level. In the game, that treasure chest would guarantee equipment of certain performance, so I was after that.

I saw some adventurers in the lower levels, but around the twentieth level, I stopped seeing other people. I saw some untouched treasure chests, but they were all filled with low-quality equipment.

That’s how it goes for chests outside the boss’s lair.

I didn’t have a useful video game inventory, so it was a shame, but I decided to leave them behind.

During my first round, I got lost around the fortieth floor but eventually made it to the boss’s lair on the fiftieth floor.

“Welcome.” The boss chuckled. “To think a human who could make it to the depths of my dungeon would appear...”

The boss was a demon with the head of a goat. The boss of the dark-type dungeon I frequented was a Dullahan that didn’t speak, so this was the first

time in my life that I met a monster that could speak human language.

“Please give me a good weapon,” I prayed. “*Black Hole.*”

“Aaagh!”

The demon disappeared, leaving a large magic stone. A treasure chest appeared, containing a fire-type sword of moderate quality. It was about the same quality as the dungeon sword I had previously purchased and broken, so this was a fail.

Dungeons would allow you to teleport to the entrance after defeating the boss. I had no idea how it actually worked. Dungeons were full of mysteries, from the infinitely spawning monsters to the treasure chests that were replenished out of nowhere.

There was some commotion due to the fact that I had conquered the dungeon, but I ignored it and set off for my second round. The magic stone and sword sold for a good price.

On my second round, I had forgotten the path to the boss in some places and wasn't able to shorten my time.

“Welcome. To think a human who could make it to the depths of my dungeon would appear...”

The goat-head demon said the same thing as the last round—it seemed that respawned demons didn't retain their memories.

“Please give me a good weapon. *Black Hole.*”

“Aagh!”

The treasure chest contained a full-body suit of metal armor.

Ugh, I don't want this...

On my third round, I was able to remember the path and get to the boss much easier. There were some instances throughout the floors where I wasn't sure if I was taking the quickest route, so I planned to try different paths from here on out.

“Welcome. To think a human who could make it to the depths of my dungeon would appear...”

“Please give me a good weapon. *Black Hole*.”

“Agh!”

A wind-type spear. Another fail.

I decided to call it a day and sleep at the inn.

On my tenth round, I succeeded in identifying the shortest route—my grinding efficiency would surely increase now. However, I was having trouble getting a weapon I wanted.

Maybe I should try changing how I take down the boss.

“Welcome. To think a human who could make it to the depths of my dungeon would appear...”

“Please give me a good weapon. *Shadow Lance*.”

A water-type staff. Guess the spell doesn’t matter.

On my eleventh round, I concluded that my material desire must be the problem—I needed a heart that desired for nothing.

“Welcome. To think a human who could make it to the depths of my dungeon would appear...”

“I don’t need a good weapon. *Black Hole*.”

An earth-type hammer. Yeah, I saw that coming.

The magic stones from the boss initially sold for a high price due to their rarity, but their price started to crash because I was flooding the market with them. Unfortunately, the price of the boss’s magic stones would probably only continue to drop.

On my twentieth round, I’d had enough already.

“Welcome... Wait. Have I met you before? No, there’s no way a human could

make it to this level so easily.”

“I’m sorry. Kick!” I exclaimed, kicking the boss.

“Aaagh!”

The goat-head demon started to faintly recall the events that had occurred up to this point.

I’m sorry, but I need you to die for my sword.

“Wow, this is...!”

A light-type sword came out of the treasure chest. Even the presence of the robust sword was different from everything that came before it. It might be an item that could handle my full strength.

Having the dual power of a light-type sword and dark-type magic also sounded pretty good. I ecstatically reached out to the sword.

“Ow!”

The moment I touched the sword, I felt a stinging pain in my finger. I tried again, and the results were no different.

It appeared that this sword had stronger dark-type resistance than light-type force and was reacting to my dark magic. It probably wouldn’t be harmful to most people because, typically, only monsters were dark types.

Even the sword is treating me like the Demon Lord. I’m sad.

I decided to explore the town of Valius for a change of scenery, but there wasn’t anything to see in particular—all this town had was a dungeon.

I mentioned that I would only be going into the dungeon during my summer break at the inn I had become a familiar face at, which apparently caused speculation about the boss’s magic stones. People planned to buy them right now while there was a big supply and their prices were low and planned to sell them once the supply was gone and their prices had increased. So, now, the prices of the magic stones were starting to rise again.

On my fiftieth round, I could feel my emotions fading away. Unlike level

grinding, item grinding was rough because there was no clear end—I had no idea if I was closer or farther from my goal.

“Eek, please stop already... Wait, what did I just...?”

The goat-head demon never retained his memories, but it was as if there was something he remembered by instinct because he was now overcome with fear when he saw me.

Even though he was a demon, I started to feel bad for him. My break was also close to being over, so I decided to make this my last round.

“Thank you for everything up until now. *Black Hole.*”

Ever since the light-type sword I acquired a while ago, I hadn’t gotten anything that seemed like it could handle my strength. I thought I behaved relatively well in my day-to-day life, but my luck was absolutely terrible.

This is probably going to be a failure again.

I opened the treasure chest with low expectations, only to find a very familiar magical energy pouring out of it.

“This is...dark-type magical energy?”

Inside the treasure chest, there was a dark-type sword. It was shorter than a standard two-handed sword, but longer than a one-handed sword. It was likely a bastard sword known for its ability to be wielded both one-and two-handed. I could feel dark magical energy coming from the blade that didn’t reflect a single drop of light.

The previous light-type sword had a divine presence, but this sword had an ominously intimidating quality to it.

This equipment isn’t cursed...right?

Dark-type weapons were even rarer than their light-type counterparts. They hadn’t appeared in the game, so I was overjoyed to find they existed.

Was my bad luck until now preparation for this?

I was unsure of the truth, but I was certain that there was some unbreakable relationship between the dark element and myself.

I left the town of Valius, new equipment in tow.



“Here, Patrick. This is a gift for you I got in Valius.”

“Is this a magic stone? It’s pretty big.”

As a result of aristocrats and investors buying up the boss’s magic stone in droves, the stones were now more valuable than when I sold my first one, to the point where it was a sign of high status to even own one.

“It’s a magic stone from the dungeon boss. I brought home the last one as a keepsake.”

“Oh, it’s one of the magic stones that everyone’s talking about right now? There’s no way I could accept something like this...”

Patrick was insistent on not accepting my gift, so I gave him the dagger I had brought back with me because it was easy to carry. He told me to save the magic stone for a rainy day, pointing out that money was important.

After selling forty-nine of these, money is not something I’m worried about.

Then, I realized I had forgotten about Eleanora.

Can I just give her a dagger like the one I gave Patrick?

The gift, which I had anticipated her refusing, was well received. Eleanora swung around the dagger while striking strange poses—she was extremely dangerous right now.

“Thank you, Yumiella! I’ve never had a dagger before! It’s my first time getting a gift like this!”

“Easy there,” I cautioned. “You’d probably prefer a jewel or something, right? I have a big magic stone. How about that? It’s sparkly and pretty.”

“I prefer this dagger! Imagine Sir Edwin and me fighting back-to-back incredible... Here, Yumiella. Come over here and pretend to be Sir Edwin!”

I was forced to play along in this strange skit.

Note to self: don’t let prima donnas get ahold of blades.

Interlude 5: Headmaster Ronald

It was night, and Headmaster Ronald was at the Royal Palace giving a report to the king. His report was mainly about how Yumiella was doing at the Academy. Ronald, who had been posted at the Academy shortly after Yumiella entered, occasionally visited the king.

“It’s been about six months, but there don’t seem to be any issues with the dragon. It doesn’t even attack people. Though, I never thought it would get that big.”

“Yes, I saw it flying around again during the day today,” the king said with a sigh as he recalled the sight of Ryu leisurely traveling through the air. The king, as well as his predecessors, had struggled tremendously to raise the kingdom’s dragons, while Yumiella did it perfectly in just six months.

“Lady Yumiella seems to be smitten with the dragon, always calling it cute. I believe it’s good for her mood as well.”

“She’s calling that dragon *cute*?”

“It’s something normal people cannot understand. Aside from Lady Yumiella, Lady Eleanora has also taken a liking to the dragon.”

“Well, that girl *is* strange, after all,” the king replied, absentmindedly staring into the distance.

He was, of course, acquainted with Eleanora, given that she was the daughter of a duke. The king wasn’t too fond of her. She would act exactly the same even in His Majesty’s presence, and she was harder to deal with than the aristocrats who hid their evil intentions.

The king cleared his throat as if to chase away his unnecessary thoughts. “Well, if Lady Yumiella is happy, then there’s no problem. If we can keep those who are fussing over the fact that we won’t use the dragon in the military quiet, then everything will be great. How is her life at the Academy? Have there been any changes recently?”

“There’s nothing in particular. I believe we can safely say that the incident with Lemlaesta won’t be a problem.”

The king was also aware of the fact that an agent from the neighboring country of Lemlaesta had made contact with Yumiella. It was something that could easily be anticipated, but they trusted she wouldn’t succumb to temptations, so it wasn’t a matter of concern.

“How are her interpersonal relationships?”

“Her relationship with Patrick seems to be the same as usual.”

“So, no progress, I see. How does he feel about it?”

“He sternly told me to stay out of it, saying that it was between the two of them. He mentioned that if he worked in the kingdom’s interests, she would immediately disappear. Patrick also mentioned that it was a matter of pride.”

Naturally, the king also knew that Yumiella and Patrick got along. If they could draw Patrick into their camp, it would be easier to keep Yumiella in the kingdom. The king had attempted to bring this up to Patrick through the headmaster, but his response was less than ideal.

Regardless, the king was grateful to Patrick—for what he’d done for Yumiella but also because he was responsible for Edwin’s change of heart.

“He should at least have freedom in that area. After all, we are consistently being helped by him, including everything with my son.”

“Yes, I’m not sure where we would be if it weren’t for Patrick.”

“How is Lady Alicia? Have there been any changes to her behavior now that Edwin has changed?”

“No major changes aside from the fact that she is now taking level grinding seriously. Perhaps the shock therapy worked.”

The shock therapy that Ronald was referring to was Yumiella’s style of level grinding. After experiencing that, Alicia continued level grinding. However, Ronald was slightly worried about sending Alicia to defeat the Demon Lord. Her cooperation with Yumiella was hopeless, and it was possible that she would hold the party back.

As the king pondered with his hand on his chin, Ronald spoke up. “I think it may be wise to reconsider setting Alicia up to be the saintess.”

“That would be difficult. If we just think in terms of defeating the Demon Lord, sending Yumiella on her own would be the best. However, that would lead to issues in the future.”

The Kingdom of Valschein was founded by the hero and saintess who sealed away the Demon Lord. The royal family had the right to rule the kingdom because they were the descendants of that very hero, the first king.

By now, this story was a legend, but if Yumiella were to defeat the Demon Lord on her own, it would cause the royal family’s legitimacy to waver. This was something that Yumiella understood as well, and she had expressed that she was opposed to being set up to be the next queen.

“Things would work out wonderfully if Lady Yumiella just married His Highness and became the second coming of the saintess,” Ronald complained with a heavy sigh.

“Be careful to never say that to her.”

“I am very aware. I wouldn’t dare, nor could I. I believe that enough is being done about the Demon Lord for now, but what shall we do about the army of monsters that will appear at the same time?”

Supposedly, the Demon Lord could control monsters. Though monsters rarely left their habitats, it was said that the Demon Lord would use his powers to have them march toward the Royal Capital.

The king had been expanding the military behind closed doors to prepare to handle the army of monsters.

“That is progressing as planned. Our reserves for expeditions are being prepared, and the resources needed to build a simple defensive wall are being gathered.”

“It seems that we will be ready in time for the resurrection of the Demon Lord. You are going to recruit the aristocrats’ private armies as well, correct?”

“Yes. I’m thinking of letting them know around six months ahead of time.

However, there are potential enemies near the domains of aristocrats with large armies. We wouldn't want to poke sleeping bears."

Those with armies close to the king's in size were the provincial aristocrats that resided along the borders of the kingdom, including the families of two margraves. It was possible that other kingdoms would use the chaos of the Demon Lord's resurrection to invade Valschein, so the king was planning to have the kingdom's army be the central force of the efforts against the army of monsters while the provincial aristocrats monitored the borders.

"There are too many things to think about aside from the Demon Lord. Surely the story of the hero and the saintess is just a glorified fairy tale," Ronald said with a sigh.

Hero and saintess were just titles—the hero was definitely strong, and the saintess was definitely a light-magic user, but they didn't have any other special powers, nor did God speak through them.

Detailed records from that time were under strict storage in the Royal Palace's library. There were some parts of it that were hidden or had been changed, but there was highly accurate information recorded there.

"Right, I had given you permission to view the records as well."

"Yes, I've read the records from back then. Just as you said, I believe the identity of the Demon Lord is..."

Chapter 6: The Hidden Boss Receives a Confession

If I had the choice, I would not have wanted to be born into aristocracy. There were so many things to learn, such as etiquette and dances, and I hated conversing with excessive social pleasantries required among aristocrats.

However, there were some moments where I felt it might have been a good thing that I was born as an aristocrat, typically when I was eating a delicious treat. Eating something delicious cost a pretty penny—these treats would have been out of my budget if I were a commoner.

Some treats I bought for myself, and some treats were gifts from Her Majesty or Eleanora. Today, I planned on eating the cookies that were gifted by Eleanora. Though cookies didn't sound like much, they were probably quite delicious because Eleanora picked them out, and the one thing I could trust about her was her taste.

"Rita, could you prepare me some tea?"

"Yes, my lady."

Rita was very talented at preparing tea and always flawlessly cleaned my room. If you ignored the fact that she was employed by my father, she was the perfect maid.

Delicious treats and delicious tea... It's another lovely day.

I gracefully took a sip of my tea like a proper aristocrat's daughter.

Oh...? This tea tastes different than it usually does. The tip of my tongue feels tingly... Maybe Rita changed the tea leaves? Or it could just be that this batch was poor quality.

"Hey, Rita, are these the same leaves you usually use?"

"Yes, it is the same as usual."

It seemed it was my tongue that was poor quality. Perhaps it wasn't worth being an aristocrat after all. The treats I bought downtown were good enough

anyway.

The tea I had the next day also tasted strange.

Maybe I'm starting to catch a cold. Not that I've ever caught one before.

After school, I decided to return to my room early and rest as a precaution, only to be stopped on the way there by a man I didn't recognize.

"Excuse me. Might you be Lady Yumiella?"

"Yes, I'm Yumiella."

"My name is Alastor. I work in the kingdom's Department of Magical Instrument Development. I'd like your cooperation in developmental experiments for magical instruments."

I had no obligation to cooperate, but I *was* interested in magical instruments currently under development. Thanks to magical instruments, I was able to live a life not too different from my past one.

"Sure, if it doesn't take too long."

"Yes, it'll be over shortly. I've prepared things in that empty classroom."

The fact that they were asking *me* meant it was probably an endurance test or something along those lines. I was wondering where I was going to be taken, but it was apparently an experiment that could be done in an Academy classroom.

"This is a new type of magic-sealing manacle," he explained. "We want to test if it can even hold up to your magic, which is probably the strongest in this kingdom."

"Oh, so it's an endurance test after all."

Alastor pulled out a magical instrument that looked like a pair of handcuffs.

If I remember correctly, magic-sealing manacles make targeted types of magic unusable. I believe they're used to restrain mages.

Alastor put the magic-sealing manacle on me. I wasn't sure what they were made of, but their weight was incomparably heavy to something like iron. It was probably sturdy in both a magical and physical sense.

A man and a handcuffed female student alone in an empty classroom... This suddenly looks criminal.

“Should I try to use magic with these on?”

“Yes, try gradually increasing your magic output. If it seems like the instrument can’t take it, I’ll signal to call it.”

I attempted to cast a small spell just as I was told to, but nothing happened. I slowly increased the amount of magic I was releasing, but there were no signs of any change. Finally, I tried to use my magic at full power, but even that ended in failure.

This magical instrument is incredible. This is the first thing that’s held up to my magic.

“That was my full power. This magical instrument is incredible,” I told him in awe.

As I was shivering, half moved and half frustrated by my possibly first-ever sense of defeat, Alastor’s next words almost went over my head.

“Okay, now’s our chance!” he shouted. “Let’s kill her and get the hell out of here!”

No, I haven’t lost, not yet. If I can’t use magic, I just need to fight with physical strength.

“Hyah!” I used all of my strength to tear apart the magic-sealing manacle. The chain on the manacle easily broke. *Nice, now we both have one win and one loss. It turned into a draw.* “Huh?”

Only then did I realize that I was surrounded by armed men.

“Hey, what are you doing? Hurry up and kill her!” Alastor commanded the others with a sleazy expression on his face.

“Um, I’m sorry...” I said.

“Yeah, that’s right,” Alastor smugly replied. “The magical instrument experiment was a lie. I didn’t think you would fall for it that easily.”

“Um, I broke this...” I moved my eyes to the manacle and back up again.

“Huh?” The other men had frozen after seeing me tear apart the manacle, but Alastor seemed to have just noticed. Though he was happily cackling just moments ago, the color was now draining from his face. “Th-That was just a joke. We appreciate your cooperation with the experiment. Well, I’ll be off, then.”

“Do you really think I believe that?”

It seemed that I was about to be killed a moment ago, and I was mortified that they thought they could neutralize me just by sealing my magic. I captured Alastor and his men and handed them off to the kingdom’s soldiers. According to the headmaster, there would have been someone behind the scenes who led them into the Academy, so I still needed to be cautious.

Two days later, I felt something strange on my chest and woke up to find a masked man before me.

Is he some kind of pervert? Did he touch my breasts?

“N-No way...” the man mumbled as his eyes widened in shock. I noticed that he was holding a large knife and that there was a hole in the chest area of my clothing. I had probably been stabbed, despite there being no damage to my body itself.

“Um... You’re like an assassin, right?” I asked.

“Gah! Freak!”

It appeared that I had just been the victim of attempted murder once again. I wasn’t sure of the assassin’s level, but there was no way I could be killed that easily.

A short while later, Patrick called out to me in the halls of the Academy, but it was for the best that I kept some distance between us for a while. “So, since there’s been two assassination attempts on me already, you should probably stay away from me,” I told him, but despite my explanation, he didn’t move.

“Are *you* all right though, Yumiella?” he asked, staring straight at me intently.

“What? As you can see, I’m perfectly fine—”

“I’m not worried about you being killed. I’m not sure how I should say this,

but... I doubt you can just be 'perfectly fine' knowing someone wants to kill you."

Someone was trying to kill me... This was probably a first for me. Was there a part of me that was hurt by that?

I do think I've experienced that feeling of being attacked somewhere before...

"That's why," Patrick continued while I remained lost in thought, "I think you should stay with me for a while. You don't have to worry about anything. I'll take care of your enem—"

"Oh! It's the feeling of fighting monsters!"

"What? Monsters?"

I was used to the murderous intent coming from monsters. It had taken me longer to recognize the feeling from the assassins because it was not as strong coming from them. It was safe to say I was used to being in kill-or-be-killed situations. I explained that to Patrick, but he didn't seem satisfied.

"Well, it's different with monsters than it is with hu—"

"Watch out!"

An arrow flew in from the open window. It probably wouldn't have hurt me if I got hit, but I didn't want it to tear my clothes, so I grabbed the arrow with my hand.

"I'll go capture the marksman! You should hide just in case," I said to Patrick before jumping out of the window to capture the amateur who shot the arrow.

I won't forgive them no matter what. What if the arrow had hit Patrick?

Perhaps the Academy had become a hotbed for assassins. We didn't have classes tomorrow, so I planned to head outside of the Academy. Of course, I was going to keep it a secret from Patrick since he would probably stop me—I didn't want to get him involved. Maybe the assassins would actually leave me alone outside of the Academy.

"Surround her! Surround her and skewer her!"

I was surrounded by roughly twenty scoundrels in a back alley of the Royal Capital. The men looked like your typical villains, armed with spears and swords.

Does this still count as an assassination?

“Dark Bind,” I said, casting the spell with a sigh. One after another, the men were restrained by the arms that reached out of their shadows.

“Aaaagh! What is this?!”

I was starting to reach my limit. I had been leaving it to the kingdom’s soldiers to interrogate the assassins, but the identity of the person behind all this was still unclear. It was probably about time I took matters into my own hands and looked for the culprit myself.

“Who is your leader?” No one answered me, but the men’s gazes all focused on one man—the man who had instructed them to surround me. “You must be the leader. Who requested this job?”

“How should I know?”

“Shadow Lance.” Spears shot out of the shadows and pierced his foot, causing blood to splatter all over.

“Gaaagh!”

“Heal.” I treated his injury with recovery magic. There wouldn’t even be a scar left over. “How many times do I need to do this in order for you to talk?”

I didn’t have the skills to torture him effectively without killing him, so my only option was to repeat this process. There was no way he would die, and it didn’t leave any lasting damage, so you could say it was a humane method of torture.

“That’s brutal...”

“That’s not something a person would do.”

“She’s a freak after all...”

Well, I called it humane, but the other men didn’t seem to respond to it too well. “It doesn’t have to be the leader who talks,” I said, turning to the other men. They immediately fell silent, averting their gazes.

“I really don’t know! You have to believe me!” the leader desperately pleaded. “I was just told by some person who wouldn’t show their face to kill the black-haired girl leaving the Royal Academy!”

“It looks like you haven’t had enough. Don’t worry, I wouldn’t run out of mana even if we did this a hundred times.”

“You’ve got it all wrong! I’m telling the truth! Please believe meeee!”
Ultimately, the leader started crying. It seemed that he really didn’t know. The other assassins likely had their services requested by someone they didn’t know as well. It was no wonder that the investigation hadn’t progressed.

Now that I was under attack everywhere, my room became my only safe haven. It was broken into once before, but now, all possible entrances and exits were barricaded. I considered flying around on Ryu indefinitely, but I couldn’t sleep in the sky, and the burden on Ryu to keep flying like that would be considerable, so I decided against that idea.

I sighed. I was in my room, drinking the tea Rita had prepared for me. It still had a strange taste to it.

Should I go see a doctor if this continues? Everything else tastes normal.

I started thinking about how the recent attacks had gotten kind of sloppy.

Usually, assassins use something like poison...

“Hey, Rita... Could you try this tea for me?” I asked, handing her the cup I was drinking. She took it with both hands and stared intently at the cup. Her hands began to shake, causing the tea inside to swish around. She had turned completely pale by the time she slowly began to raise the cup to her lips.

“P-Please forgive me. My sister has been taken as a hostage,” Rita said shakily as she placed the cup down on the table.

So it was poison after all.

It appeared that I had been drinking poisoned tea for the past week. The poison was probably weak, considering it wasn’t very effective.

“What kind of poison is in here?”

“Um, I was told it was a strong poison with a lethal dose of one drop. I put five

drops in each time...”

Come on, me, how did you not realize?

In the game, poison had several levels of strength, each having a set amount of damage it dealt. It seemed that this was the case for the real world as well. If it was proportional damage, I might have been dead by now—or actually, I would have noticed if I was truly dying. This incident was a tragedy caused by my bottomless HP.

Rita was most likely instructed to poison me by her employer.

“So, the person who instructed you to do so was...”

“Yes, it was the master,” Rita admitted. Perhaps she had given up and thought there was no way out of this.

The person trying to kill me was my father.



“What do you mean by your sister being a hostage?”

“My younger sister works at the main residence in the Royal Capital. She’s unrelated to all of this. Please, at least spare...”

According to Rita, who was poisoning me, her sister had been taken hostage by my father. I decided to think about what to do with her after I saved her sister.

“All right, then, we’re going to go get your sister. I don’t know what she looks like, so you’ll have to come with me.”

“What? But I was poisoning you...”

“There was no way the hidden boss was going to die by poison.”

“H-Hidden?”

“It doesn’t matter. Hurry up! Let’s go!”

I had accidentally let my game knowledge slip. Why was I so flustered? Was it because Rita’s sister was in danger? No, my feelings were probably in a frenzy right now due to the knowledge that my parents had tried to kill me, and now, I was going to meet them for the first time.

“Come here, Ryuu!”

We rode on Ryuu’s back and flew through the night sky to the Royal Capital. Ryuu’s dark color, combined with our high altitude, made seeing us from the ground difficult.

“Hey, Rita, where’s the Dolkness house?” I had gotten amped up and just left, but I didn’t actually know where my own family’s house was. Rita, who I had forced to come with me, had her eyes tightly shut, possibly from a fear of heights. “You can give instructions starting from the Royal Palace, right? You don’t have to open your eyes.”

“Y-Yes. You leave the gates of the Royal Palace and go straight, turning right at the third main street...”

I traced the path along the streets, looking at it like a map from our vantage point in the sky. I couldn’t tell colors apart very well in the dark, so I had Rita describe landmarks by their shape.

“And then it’s the second house on the left.”

“The one with an annex in the back right in reference to the front gates?”

“Yes, and the main building is L-shaped.”

It’s that one.

The mansion looked to be a size larger than the one I grew up in. I guess they were fine with that because they never visited Dolkness County.

“We’re getting off, Rita.”

“We can’t. If a dragon landed in the yard, it would cause a commotion.”

Rita was probably worried about causing harm to her sister, but there was nothing to worry about.

“It’s fine. Only we’re getting off. Ryuu, keep flying above that house.”

“My lady, what are you...”

We’re just parachuting in, minus the actual parachute. I’ve done this a bunch of times. I’m an expert.

“We’re going to jump now, but I want to sneak in, so stay quiet, okay?”

Rita looked deathly pale, but after a moment of silence, she nodded in agreement—likely having prepared herself in order to save her sister.

With Rita in my arms, I jumped off Ryu's back. The moment I jumped off, I started shooting out magic energy in a downward direction, making sure we didn't pick up too much speed. Rita continued to keep her eyes closed, hanging onto me tightly. She didn't let out a single peep.

I continued to decrease our speed as we got closer to the ground, and soon enough, we landed softly in the mansion's yard.

"All right, we're here. Where's your sister?"

Once she let go of me, Rita collapsed to the ground. After taking a moment to catch her breath, she spoke softly. "Right now, she should be in her room. This is just my guess, but I don't think she's been told anything. I think she finished her work for the day as usual and has retired to her room."

We sneaked into the mansion, led by Rita, and arrived at the servants' living quarters. She stopped in front of a specific door and knocked softly.

"Sara, it's me, Rita," she called quietly.

The door opened. "Rita? What are you doing here?"

Upon seeing that her sister was safe, Rita got choked up with emotion, tears spilling as she hugged her sister. Sara, not understanding the situation, seemed puzzled.

"Rita? What's wrong?" She then turned to me. "Um, who are you?"

"Inside we go. We'll get caught if we stay out here," I said, pushing Rita and forcing our way into the room—sneaking in would have been pointless if we got caught now. I closed the door behind me and scoped out my surroundings. The room looked like it housed multiple people, but currently, it was only occupied by Rita's sister.

Rita was still crying, so I decided to explain the situation myself. "You were taken hostage by my parents. They told Rita they would kill you if she didn't kill me." The violence of the word "kill" made Sara freeze in shock.

Perhaps I should have sugarcoated my phrasing a bit. Maybe "stuffing away"

or “squishing” would have been good. They almost sound kind of cute.

“I’m sorry, Sara. This is the end for me. Thank you for everything until now,” Rita blubbered as if these were her final moments. “My lady, if you could at least spare my sister...”

“Rita?! What are you talking about?”

Huh? How did the conversation get here?

“Just so you know, I don’t have any intention of giving you up to the soldiers.”

“Yes, I’m aware. If you could just do it in one go, maybe somewhere my sister won’t see...”

What was I, some kind of devil who wouldn’t hesitate to kill her after this touching display of sisterly love? I’ve done a lot up until now, but I haven’t killed anyone, nor do I have any plans to.

“I won’t be squishing you either.”

Rita only did what she did because she was threatened, and the only effect it had on me was that my tea tasted bad for a week. I wasn’t particularly bothered.

I guess I can see why Patrick called me a good person and overly trusting.

“I have no intention of punishing you. We can talk later about how things are going to be moving forward.”

I’m sure Rita doesn’t want to work for the Dolkness family anymore, so I’ll need to help her look for her next job.

Rita lifted her head up, eyes widening in relief. Slowly, her eyes began to swell with tears again.

Wait, please don’t cry anymore.

She came up to me and fell to her knees. “My Lady...no, Lady Yumiella, I vow to devote my loyalty to you until the end of my life.”

“Oh, um, yeah. Thank you?”

Uh, that’s not really what I was going for...

Rita stopped crying and was now looking up at me ecstatically.

Creepy...

It felt like I had cleared up one misunderstanding by creating a new one.

I'll deal with this later.

"I have something to take care of, so you two, just wait in this room." I probably should have let the sisters escape first, but there were people I needed to meet.

I slowly made my way through the mansion, heading the way Rita told me to go. I didn't bump into anyone on my way to the room that was my destination.

I actually wanted more time to mentally prepare.

I opened the door, and two pairs of eyes fell on me. The two people in the room were having some food while drinking wine.

It seems the couple is getting along well.

My father was the first to speak. "Who are you? How did you get in here?"

"Good evening. Thank you for having me. Or would it be better to say I'm home?"

"Home...? That black hair... You must be...!"

"It's nice to meet you, father, mother. I am your only daughter, Yumiella Dolkness. The Yumiella Dolkness who you tried to use. The Yumiella Dolkness who you tried to kill."

My parents looked surprisingly normal. I had thought that they were going to be typical overweight, evil aristocrats, but they didn't have any standout features. They were both blond-haired and didn't look anything like me. If they weren't eating in this mansion, I would have a hard time believing they were my parents.

"Damn them. I even paid them handsomely..." my father muttered.

"So you admit to trying to kill me?"

"It's your fault for betraying us in the first place! Do you hate us that much for isolating you in our domain?!"

It was only now that I'd met them that I realized this, but I didn't particularly hate my parents. Of course, I had some qualms about how they acted as aristocrats, but I did think that I wouldn't be who I was today if they had pampered and spoiled me growing up.

"What do you mean when you say I betrayed you?"

"We know that you're planning to dispatch troops with those in the king's faction. Because you went to their side, we've been humiliated!"

It was true that I leaned more toward His Majesty's faction. However, that was partially because I wanted to distance myself from the radicals.

"Planning to dispatch troops?"

"The soldiers directly under the kingdom's command are preparing for a large-scale dispatch. I bet you have a hand in it."

I'm starting to see the whole picture now.

In order to prepare for the resurrection of the Demon Lord, the kingdom was currently organizing the military. The radicals, having gotten ahold of that information, probably misread the situation, thinking that the moderates in the king's faction were planning a war against another kingdom. They were probably concerned about the moderates' power growing due to the dispatching of troops.

The fact that I, a strategic-level weapon, was under the protection of the royal family probably only furthered their delusion, especially because I had turned down every invitation from the radicals. That put my parents in bad standing within their faction, leading them to attempt to assassinate me, as they would rather have me killed than have me in the hands of their political opponent. That last portion was mostly a guess, but I was probably correct for the most part.

"There will be no dispatching of troops to another kingdom, and I have no intention of participating in any invasions either."

"Why not?! If you succeed in war, the Dolkness house can grow even larger! We could maybe even obtain a central position. We wouldn't have to be called pseudo-centralists anymore!"

Maybe you should focus on enriching your county if you don't want to be called a pseudo-centralist.

"Father, why don't you return to the county? I think our current county is plenty large, and it could be good to start up some kind of business."

"Such nonsense! The county can be left to the deputy while we just collect taxes!"

"How do you feel, mother?"

"You want me to live like a country bumpkin? It's bad enough that you had to be born with black hair. Why did a child like you have to be born?!"

This conversation was going nowhere. Not only were our values different, but so were our morals. My feelings would never get through to them, and their way of thinking was something I couldn't understand. I was about to sigh, but I swallowed away the temptation.

These parents were no good. I already had no expectations for them as parents, but they were no good as aristocrats either. I decided that I needed to interact with them as not just their daughter but as another aristocrat.

"Father, please give me your title."

"What are you...?"

"I'm usurping your title. You can turn me down if you'd like. After all, I'm the only heir to the Dolkness house. But once you're gone, I'll automatically become a countess," I said, teasing the idea of murder. My father, who had been red with anger, was now turning pale.

"S-Someone! Call for the guards!"

"Do you have someone in your personal army who can win against me? If you do, you should have sent that person to assassinate me."

"There's no way you're getting away with treating your own parents like this —"

"You're one to talk, sending assassins to kill your own child." I turned to my mother, who had gotten up from her chair. "Oh, do give up on running away, mother."

She began to panic and try to persuade me. “Yumiella, you know there’s many good offers of marriage that have come in for you? You’ll find happiness if you marry into a large house.”

“I’m plenty happy right now.”

Also, I might have someone I like right now...maybe.

“You have black hair. There’s no way you could live life normally and find happiness.”

“There are people who’ve said they like my black hair. Please don’t decide my own happiness for me.” I didn’t see any point in continuing this conversation any longer. In an effort to intimidate them, I created a black orb out of magic and let it float beside me. “Now, please choose. Would you like to be under house arrest and live a slightly inconvenient life or would you like to die gracefully right here and now?”

“Y-You couldn’t kill someone...”

Why are they saying something parental after all this time?

“Don’t you know what happened to the assassins you sent to kill me? My magic can make the object of my choice disappear. I don’t have to clean up any bodies, so it’s very useful.”

The assassins were all alive, but seeing how much my parents were shaking, they probably didn’t know that. I used *Black Hole* to make an empty chair disappear, which finally broke them. They began to scream like children and beg for their lives.

“A-All right! We’ll do as you say, so just don’t kill us!”

After these events, I was completely sure that I had a strong displeasure toward murder. I had obtained strength that was impossible for most people by killing many monsters, but apparently, I had a human heart after all. Occasionally, and it was only very occasionally, I would feel uneasy about that, so it was a relief to know for sure.



“They are under the wrong impression that His Majesty is preparing to

dispatch troops to another kingdom.”

“I see. To think that the radicals had such an impression... I guess even the Duke of Hillrose couldn’t keep them under control. It’s true that there are some moderates who are suspicious of the strengthening of the military. The resurrection of the Demon Lord had been kept a secret in order to avoid commotion, but perhaps we should make it public soon.”

I was currently reporting the incident with my parents to His Majesty—my second time meeting the king face-to-face. This time, we were meeting one-on-one in a small drawing room rather than in the large audience chamber we were in previously.

“We also have to think about how we’ll handle the Count of Dolkness,” the king continued. “Hmm, what to do about the next lord of the county... It would be great if you would take that on.”

“Yes, if Your Majesty would allow it, I would like to succeed the title of countess,” I responded. The king widened his eyes in surprise upon hearing that I wanted to take over the county, likely because I had avoided obtaining any power like this until now.

“I thought you would turn me down. What has changed?”

“I would like to try and eliminate the discrimination against those with black hair. In order to do that, I thought it would be best to take center stage.”

“Eliminate discrimination... That’s a path full of trials and tribulations. Discrimination and ostracism are created by the weak and unsightly parts of people’s hearts. Overcoming those factors on your own is already difficult. Making others overcome it is another level of effort.”

“Even if I can’t eliminate discrimination, I would be happy if I could lessen it.”

For Phil, the boy with the dark brown hair, for myself, and for the children who will be born with black hair in the future.

“Also, His Highness was able to overcome his so-called weak heart,” I pointed out.

Just as Prince Edwin was able to change, other people could also change.

Though, in His Highness's case, the incredible one might actually be Patrick, who convinced him.

"I see. In that case, will you be continuing to make achievements?"

"Yes, but I do not intend on making any war-related achievements. Even if I were to succeed in war, it would only make me the object of fear."

From now on, I needed to become a kind Yumiella who governed fairly, not a scary Yumiella with ruthless strength. My strength was sure to be a double-edged sword in this endeavor.

"So you will perform your duties as the county owner. Very well, I will prepare for you to succeed the title of countess. We do have precedent for female counts."

"Thank you very much."

"Well then, what shall we do about the former Count and Countess of Dolkness? We can execute them in the name of the king."

"I would like to have them under house arrest in Dolkness County."

"Just as Ronald says, you're a good person with a bottomless heart," the king said with a small chuckle.

Ronald's been saying that too?

"No, it's just that I believe my reputation would suffer if I took on the title after killing my parents. I think them not being able to live a lavish life in the Royal Capital anymore is punishment enough."

Though I was satisfied with the points I brought up, I felt that the true reason was that I was truly put off by the idea of someone dying. As an aristocrat, logically, I knew that I couldn't be idealistic about everything. But I didn't want to kill if I didn't have to. If there were lives I could save, I couldn't help but want to save them.

All this sounds strange coming from the person who has probably killed the most monsters in the world.

"I understand," the king said kindly. Perhaps he had seen right through me and knew how I felt.

“Soon, we will be announcing the Demon Lord’s resurrection to the public. That should quiet down the radicals. I doubt they would come out and say they will defeat the Demon Lord themselves. I would like you to be there for the announcement, Lady Yumiella. I’m sure there are many people who will feel at ease seeing you there.”

“Understood. His Highness and Alicia will be there as well, right?”

The prince and I were fine, but Alicia still saw me as an enemy. It had gotten even worse after I helped her with level grinding.

“Yes, we’ll have Edwin keep her in line, and I’ll do what I can to make sure there’s minimal contact.”

“Thank you for your consideration.”

“What to do with Lady Alicia... We have to think about having her and Edwin get married. Would you be interested in being the saintess, Lady Yumiella? ‘Saintess’ is just a title given to the person who defeats the Demon Lord alongside the hero. There’s no need for them to be a light magic user.”

“I’m sorry, but...”

“I know. I just thought I would ask,” the king said with a wry smile.

If you know, then I’d prefer you didn’t ask.

Though becoming the saintess would probably be an effective plan to eliminate discrimination against people with black hair, that was the one thing I didn’t want to do.

“Don’t worry,” the king continued. “I won’t stick my nose into matters of your marriage. There’s a man you’re getting along with, isn’t there?”

“Do you mean Patrick? We don’t have that kind of relationship. Besides, I’m into people who are stronger than me.”

I guess the king knows about Patrick after all.

I had to do everything in my power to hide my positive feelings toward him—not because I was embarrassed but because there was the possibility of him being taken as a hostage. I had impulsively used my usual rejection line.

If Patrick were to be taken hostage and the culprits demanded something of me, I don't think I would be able to deny them. Of course, that would only be if they could thwart my hostage-recapturing plan.

"Yes, it's probably better you hide your relationship with him until you have a stable foothold. I'm sure the consequences of any harm coming to him would be terrifying, but there are many who wouldn't consider those consequences."

Um, the part about us not being in a relationship is true... Doesn't seem like he's going to believe me, though.

"Eliminating discrimination..." the king pondered, calling back to our previous conversation. "It's quite the undertaking, but I like it. I'll help you as well so that we can also prevent a second Demon Lord from being born."

"A second Demon Lord?"

Perhaps His Majesty's lips were loose after talking about romance. He had just dropped a massive bombshell.

The second Demon Lord? Is the Demon Lord that will resurrect soon the first? What does the royal family know about the Demon Lord?

"Oh my, I have... Please forget that statement. I thought it would be fine to tell you, but I believe the battle against the Demon Lord will go better if I don't say anything. Please refrain from asking any further questions about it," the king said, bowing deeply.

"Does that mean you won't tell me for reasons related to me, not because of reasons related to the royal family?"

He said that it would be more convenient for the battle against the Demon Lord if I didn't know the whole story. It's as if he thinks I would hesitate to fight the Demon Lord if I knew his identity...

"I apologize. I vow to tell you before I die, but I cannot right now."

"I understand. If Your Highness has made that decision, I will trust it."

The king absolutely refused to speak anymore on the secret of the Demon Lord.

In the game, it was only said that he was an evil being that controlled the

monsters, but what kind of truth is hidden behind that?



After discussing it with the king, it was decided that I would announce my succession of the title of countess at the Founding Festival, along with the announcement about the resurrection of the Demon Lord. The festival was right at the beginning of winter, and aristocrats from all over gathered at the Royal Capital to celebrate the founding of the kingdom.

Patrick was very worried about the multiple assassination attempts on me. I got permission from the king as well, so I decided to at least tell him what happened. We were sitting across from each other in my room at the dorms while drinking warm tea.

“So, with that, I’m a countess now.”

“I see. You went through a lot, huh?”

“Yeah.”

Patrick’s simple words felt like they lifted a weight off my chest. I thought I was fine, but a lot had happened, and I must have been tired at the end of it all.

“I’m surprised that you’re going to succeed the title. Did something in you change?”

“You know how it’s hard to live in this country with black hair? I’d like to change that, so I can’t avoid putting myself out there anymore.”

“I like your hair. Is that not enough?” Patrick asked, staring straight into my eyes.

Jeez, that scared me. I thought he was asking me out for a moment, but it was just about my hair.

“If it was just about me, then that would be enough. But thanks to a certain boy—”

“Boy? Who is he? Where is he from?”

What? That’s what you want to know?

I began telling him about the events surrounding Phil in order, including the

fact that Phil made me feel like the entire kingdom needed change.

“Because of that, I thought I needed to bring change to the entire kingdom. There’s probably a lot of people who are having a hard time, and we just don’t see it.” This was a small declaration of my determination.

Patrick had a stern expression after hearing what I had to say.

“Will that bring you happiness, Yumiella?” He leaned in and whispered, genuinely worried about my future. “If you leave for somewhere far away, you could live freely and not worry about that. I could go too, and—”

“Please stop. I’ve already made up my mind.”

Patrick was kind. If I were to hear him out any longer, my determination would have wavered.

“Okay, then, I’ll help as much as I can. It’s not like I’m completely unrelated to the issue,” he said with a soft smile as he touched his gray hair.

“Thank you. I guess the first thing is to make sure we graduate. His Majesty said I could deal with the county after that.”

The current owner of the county being absent made me uneasy, but Dolkness County had spent several decades with the current owner away from the area. There was already a system in place where the deputy handled the actual work, and the owner living in the Royal Capital would just sign off on the documents.

Of course, things couldn’t stay that way forever, but it was something that could be dealt with in one to two years after I graduated from the Academy. There was a message from His Majesty saying that things could be left to the deputy until I defeated the Demon Lord and graduated.

“Does that mean you’ll be returning to Dolkness County immediately after graduating?”

“Yeah, that’s the plan. Though, I do think it would be best if I visited at least once before that happens.”

“I think you can just send a letter. You’re planning on going to Dolkness County with Ryuu, aren’t you? That would cause an unimaginable frenzy.”

Darn, I knew it. The king also implied the same thing.

“I guess I’ll send a letter, then. Hmm, there’s a lot to think about now that I’ll be a countess.”

“You can take it slowly. I’ll help you out too.”

I was to become the county owner of Dolkness as a countess, so I also had to think of my heir. Worst case, I could just adopt, so there was no need to focus on marriage as my only solution.

I can’t marry someone who just wants my land, and I don’t want someone who’s too much older than me either. If possible, I’d like to build a good relationship with my marriage partner, and I’d like them to be a second-born or younger provincial aristocrat with knowledge regarding running a county.

Now that I had given it some thought, there were quite a few requirements.

On top of that, I would need them to be cooperative toward me. I don’t think there would be anyone who’d conveniently match all of that...

“Hey, Patrick, how do you feel about me adopting you?”

“Once again, saying something completely out of nowhere... Adoption? What?”

“You’re the second-born in your family, right? Since you can’t succeed the title of margrave, how about settling for a count?”

“I don’t want to be adopted.”

I wasn’t expecting him to turn me down right away, so I was a bit shocked.

“Um, I thought it would be nice if we could become family...but I guess you don’t want that.”

“That’s not what I said!” Patrick exclaimed, raising his voice—something he rarely did.

There must be another reason he doesn’t want to, then.

I decided to reason with him. “Don’t worry. I’ll retire right away! I won’t pick on your wife or anything!”

“I just don’t want to refer to you as my mother.”

His reasoning was understandable. It was insane to think about us being

parent and child when we were the same age.

Or, actually, it might not be that unheard of with aristocrats. I feel like I may or may not have heard of people whose second wives were younger than their children.

Patrick seemed to be seriously against it, so I stopped the adoption discussion there, and we started reminiscing about the past together. It hadn't even been two years since we entered the Academy, yet the topics were endless.

"It's been a while since we've talked this much, especially since I haven't gotten to spend much time with you these days," I admitted. "Can't you tell me where you've been going all this time already?"

"Just wait a little bit longer. After that, there's something I want to tell you."

With that, Patrick left. It was around the time we entered our second year at the Academy, but Patrick often ventured outside the Academy alone. Not getting to spend much time with him made me feel lonely.

Lonely, huh? I've been alone all my life, yet I feel lonely now. It's pretty clear what my feelings toward him are.

"I guess my time with Patrick ends at graduation," I muttered to myself.

I was dreading our graduation from the Academy in a year and a half more than the resurrection of the Demon Lord in six months.

I wonder if I'll be able to tell him how I feel by then.



The time for harvesting was over, and winter was about to be in full swing. The Kingdom of Valschein's Founding Festival was the day when the most people gathered in the Royal Capital. With the harvest festival going on as well, even the commoners were rowdy and festive. Aristocrats also gathered in the Royal Capital on this day and celebrated the founding of the kingdom. Last year, I spent the holiday touring the Royal Capital, but this year would not be as quiet.

In the grand hall of the Royal Palace, I was on standby at the wing of the stage. I was in the proper attire, a dress, given that this was a ceremony. I

peeked out at the venue to see many people standing around and chatting, as well as a large amount of food laid out like a buffet; however, most people barely had a sip of the drinks in their hands, and not a single person had touched the food.

I wish I had some containers on me.

“His Majesty has arrived!”

With that announcement as a signal, the aristocrats put down their drinks and took a bow, as did I. The king then began to speak.

“Everyone, thank you for coming. Please raise your heads and unwind.”

Upon lifting my head, I could see Alicia and Prince Edwin just past the king—they were in the stage wing opposite of me. If we were together, we could have caused a scene, so I was grateful for their consideration.

The king offered some celebratory words about the founding of the kingdom, then proceeded on to the next topic.

“I have something important to tell everyone. Some people may have caught on due to Edwin’s indeliberate statements, but in less than a year, the ancient Demon Lord will be resurrected.”

The aristocrats started whispering to each other upon hearing this, but there wasn’t much confusion. After all, Prince Edwin had already publicly mentioned that the Demon Lord would be resurrected. Though the king had denied it, there were probably many who suspected that it was the truth.

“The Demon Lord was sealed away by the hero, who was our first king, and the saintess, who was our first queen. However, even strong seals eventually break, and the first king had accurately estimated when that would be. The Demon Lord will surely be weak immediately upon his awakening. Even though the hero couldn’t do it, it’s possible to definitively defeat the Demon Lord and end suffering for our future generations!”

The venue erupted at the king’s declaration to achieve a feat that would surpass the first king.

“It is said that the Demon Lord can control monsters. The Demon Lord will

most likely send an army of monsters to attack our country in order to build up his strength. I will leave the army handling this to Commander Adolphe. We have already started preparing for a large-scale dispatch of the Royal Army, but no matter how many troops we have, it wouldn't be enough. I would like to ask those here to send some of your troops as well."

There were various reactions to the request for soldiers from the king. Some were excited to be fighting for the kingdom, some looked like they were in a difficult situation, perhaps from not having enough troops they could lend, while some seemed to be thinking about how they could maximize their exploits.

"As for the crucial Demon Lord himself..." The aristocrats quieted and focused on the king's words so they didn't miss how he was going to handle the Demon Lord when just sealing him was all the first king could do. "A small, elite unit will enter the Demon Lord's home base and take him down! I'd like to introduce the members..."

The king began by introducing Prince Edwin. The prince made a declaration of his determination, to which the entire crowd applauded. William, Oswald, and Alicia were also introduced, until finally, it was my turn.

"Finally, we have Yumiella Dolkness. She has reached level 99, a feat no one has accomplished before, and has tamed a dragon. She will surely be a strong force against the Demon Lord. I'd also like to take this moment to announce that she has succeeded the title of countess and is now the Countess of Dolkness."

It's my time.

I psyched myself up and made my way up to the stage.

"Thank you for the introduction. I am Yumiella Dolkness. I have faced many hardships because of my black hair. At one point, I had given up, thinking that it couldn't be helped, but I met a certain boy, and my feelings changed. I met this boy, who had a kind heart despite the horrible things he had to endure because of his hair color, and I felt that I had to do something about it. Because of that, I want to do everything I can to take down the Demon Lord, the main reason for this discrimination."

I've gone and said it in front of people. What if they don't accept me?

The venue had gone silent. In the quiet hall, the sound of one person clapping rang out—the sound came from my side. It was Prince Edwin. Following him, the king and queen clapped, and eventually, the entire audience joined in.

After the founding ceremony ended, a grand ball would be held. I should be actively participating in social scenes like this; however, I had completely lost my stamina after my short greeting on the stage.

I escaped from the venue and made my way to the courtyard in the Royal Palace. The night was cloudy, and there wasn't a single light shining in the courtyard.

It's so dark here. I can probably avoid being found if I stay here.

"Oh, Yumiella, there you are."

And... I was immediately found. The person making their way toward me was Patrick.

That's weird. I don't think he was invited to the ceremony.

"Patrick? What are you doing here?"

"I'm here by courtesy of His Highness. But I couldn't find the person I wanted to invite to dance with me, so I've come to look for her."

"Who are you looking for? Would you like help finding her?"

The only people who were invited here were the heads of aristocratic households and their wives, so who could she be? Could she be...someone's wife or a widow?

"Patrick, I think widows are fine, but I think you should stay away from married women."

"What kind of misunderstanding do you have this time? No, wait. Don't say it. I don't want to hear," he sighed, looking at me with disappointment.

Something's strange...

This courtyard was quite dark, and I was only able to see with no issues

because of my level 99 senses. Patrick shouldn't have been able to see in this darkness with his level.

"Patrick, you can see right now?"

"I was hiding it, but I didn't think you'd notice it like this. Yes, I'm level 60 now. My senses have gotten sharper, but in this darkness, I could only make out a human figure."

Level 60 would put him at the top level in terms of strength in this kingdom.

When in the world did he...?

"Oh, so you weren't at the Academy recently because..."

"Yeah, I spent all my free time going to dungeons. And I got a lot of help from this thing," Patrick said, pulling out an amulet that was around his neck.

"Is that an amulet of growth? Hey! It's dangerous not to have an amulet of protection on you. What would you do if something happened to you?!"

"You were the one who said we should be using these, weren't you?"

Huh? He's right. I did believe that the amulet of growth was the only choice for level grinding. I blurted out that it was dangerous because...

"No, it's dangerous. I wouldn't like it if something happened to you."

"Just so you know, I felt the same way any time you did something reckless."

"I'm...sorry about that?"

Moving forward, I have to be less reckless. With that said, what exactly have I done up until now that would be considered reckless?

"I can't see your face because it's dark, but I know that you don't understand what I'm saying. That's fine, though. What I wanted to ask was, could you let me join the battle against the Demon Lord?"

In the game, level 60 was the appropriate level to fight the Demon Lord. He would probably be an adequate asset in battle, but there was something else I wanted Patrick to do.

"I can't do that. I want you to protect the kingdom."

“I guess I’m not strong enough after all.”

“It’s not that. I think you would be a great help if you were to join the battle against the Demon Lord, but I think where you shine best is in large-scale group battles. I want you to defend the kingdom against the army of demons because I can’t help with that.”

His command of group battles that I saw during our outdoor training at the Academy had almost no unnecessary calls and even felt beautiful. I would be enough to handle the Demon Lord, so I wanted him to keep the damage from the defense battle to a minimum.

The margraves would likely be sending out an army as well. Even if he couldn’t command them, with his skills, he was sure to succeed there. With the ability to prove one’s strength with something as clear as levels, there was no way they could deny his help.

“Also, do you know what the first and second-highest level man and woman who defeat the Demon Lord will be called?” I asked.

“That’s right... They would be the hero and saintess.”

“I guess it would be okay if you wanted to start a new kingdom with me.” If Patrick wanted to defeat the Demon Lord to prove he was worthy of being king to start his own kingdom, I wouldn’t mind helping him.

“No, I don’t want to be seen as some challenger to the throne. But if you wanted to become a queen, I wouldn’t mind doing that for you.”

“I obviously don’t want that.”

That would mean that we would get married, but perhaps he hadn’t realized that.

“I understand. I’m sure Ashbatten will be sending out soldiers, so I’ll support them.”

“Okay, I’m sorry. Also, um, why did you rush level grinding so much? I don’t think I said anything about the Demon Lord’s resurrection.”

“You...” he trailed off.

I what?

His face, which I could see despite the darkness, was twisting into various expressions.

“What about me?” I asked.

“I wanted to be stronger than you.”

Hmm, if you look at our base stats, I think that’s a moon shot.

“Are you frustrated with being weaker? That’s okay. Hey, strength isn’t the only value a person has.”

“You’re the one who started it. You said that you liked guys stronger than you.”

That was my rejection line for sons of aristocrats. In reality, the person I had feelings for was weak in comparison to me.

Wait, so I said that I liked strong people, and he wanted to become strong after hearing that...

My mind was starting to get confused.



“Um, that was something I made up to turn people down, so... I don’t actually think that,” I explained awkwardly.

“That’s what I assumed it was, but then, I thought that being by your side would require a great deal of strength,” Patrick said with a sad expression.

That would mean it’s like that, right? Even I can tell that much. Something... I need to say something...

“Um, Patrick, let’s play rock-paper-scissors.”

“What?”

“Here we go. Rock, paper, scissors.”

Though he was confused, Patrick properly put out his hand. Unfortunately, I won.

“What’s the result? It’s too dark for me to tell who won.”

“You won. You’re stronger when it comes to rock, paper, scissors. I think I like people who are stronger than me after all, so...”

Patrick, this is as far as I can go. Please get where I’m going with this.

“Yumiella...”

Patrick put his hands on my shoulders, and—

Patrick, you must have been lying when you said it was too dark to see my face because you know exactly where my lips are.

Chapter 7: The Hidden Boss Faces the Demon Lord

Immediately after I started my third year at the Academy, a group of monsters heading toward the kingdom was spotted. Just like the story in the game and like the Royal family had anticipated, the Demon Lord had likely been resurrected.

The combined forces of the kingdom and the aristocrats stationed in the direction of the Demon Lord's castle were probably dealing with the army of monsters right now. Patrick should also be there, assisting the margrave's army.

Our elite unit put together to defeat the Demon Lord headed on Ryu's back in the direction that the monsters were swarming. I was fully decked out for battle, a rare occurrence for me, even though that just meant I had my dark-type sword that I usually didn't carry around. I painstakingly grinded that dungeon to obtain it, so it would've been a waste not to use it on the Demon Lord.

The other four members of the group were also sporting pretty good equipment. William's current great sword looked sturdier than the one I destroyed, and Prince Edwin and Oswald's staffs looked like the ones I saw toward the end of the game.

As for our key member Alicia, she had a sword hanging from her waist—another rare sight. However, both the scabbard and handle were wrapped up in cloth, so I couldn't tell what kind of sword it was. Alicia was stronger with light magic anyway, so there probably wouldn't be an opportunity for her to wield it.

Alicia was currently sitting behind me, pale in the face and screaming.

"I'm scared! I'm scared! I'm scared!"

"It's all right, Alicia. You've got us," William assured her.

The others tried to comfort her as she seemed to recall the trauma of level grinding with me, but it didn't seem like they were doing much better.

I guess they can't show that they're scared in front of the girl they like.

Alicia was getting along with all three of the love interests at the Academy. Prince Edwin, William, and Oswald were very clearly head over heels in love with her, to the point where it was obvious to any outsider.

“So, who do you actually like, Alicia?” I asked.

“This isn’t the time for that kind of conversation!” Prince Edwin yelled.

It is when you’re hugging her from behind like that.

Although there was no more bad blood between us, he still seemed to be very much into Alicia.

This is why I can’t deal with people who are all about love and romance... Though, I guess I’m not really one to talk.

“Ryu, drop us off at that clearing over there,” I instructed with the point of my finger.

The Demon Lord was said to be able to control monsters. As of now, there weren’t any changes to Ryu’s behavior, but the Demon Lord’s powers may affect Ryu, so I had him drop us off a distance away from the Demon Lord’s castle as a precaution. From there, we would walk to the castle. After getting off Ryu, I thought it would be best for him to go help the troops dealing with the army of monsters.

“Go to Patrick,” I told him. “And don’t accidentally attack any people thinking they’re monsters.”

I’m a little bit worried someone might mistake him for one of the monsters and attack him, but there probably isn’t anyone who could hurt Ryu.

After letting out a single roar, Ryu took off, looking slightly worried for me.

I led the way as we walked toward the Demon Lord’s castle. I planned on staying out of any conversations and silently scouting the area on the way there, but Alicia increased her speed to walk alongside me.

“Yumiella, I’m sorry for everything until now. I’ve said a lot of horrible things to you, but I thought we should work together from now on... Let’s do our best together.”

Are you okay? Did you eat something weird?

Alicia had been totally treating me like the enemy until now, so I wasn't sure why she had a sudden change of heart. Perhaps it was because of how afraid she was to go up against the Demon Lord.

"Oh, yeah, good luck." I couldn't help my stale response. I didn't really trust her.

After that, Alicia returned to the rest of the group behind me. All I wanted was for Alicia not to get in the way during the fight with the Demon Lord.

Even Alicia wouldn't do something as stupid as that, right?

As we continued to make our way through the forest, an old castle made out of stone slowly came into view. We didn't encounter any monsters, perhaps because they were all headed toward the kingdom.

"There it is. That must be the Demon Lord's castle." I paused for a moment, thinking. "But why is there a castle out here in such a secluded place in the first place?" I asked naively.

"This entire forest used to be a large domain, but people don't come here anymore because of the Demon Lord," Prince Edwin responded.

This is the first I've heard of this. So that castle was the governor's mansion. I've read lots of books related to the Demon Lord, but nothing like this was written in any of them.

This may have been information that only the royal family was privy to—the prince spilling confidential information without thinking was par for the course.

Prince Edwin spoke a bit louder as he addressed everyone. "All right, let's go in."

"The Demon Lord is in there, correct? Wouldn't just destroying the entire castle with him inside take care of things?" I felt there was no need to enter the enemy's territory ourselves. If we could one-sidedly attack from a distance, that would be for the best.

"We can't do that... We, um, wouldn't be able to confirm that he's dead," the prince rebutted with a reason that sounded like he came up with on the spot.

But I *was* curious as to the identity of the Demon Lord, so I decided to overlook that.

“All right, then. Let’s enter the castle. Everyone, please stay behind me.” I reached out to open the main doors to the Demon Lord’s castle. The door opened with an unpleasant screech signaling that it most likely hadn’t been opened for many years.

The inside was dim and completely silent.

This place was full of monsters in the game... I wonder what’s going on.

I couldn’t help but feel like this was a sign that something bad was going to happen. In fact, I had been feeling like this since we started making our way here.

If I were to face the Demon Lord head-on, I probably wouldn’t lose. The only thing I was afraid of was a surprise attack—if I was hit with one of the strongest spells or if I got hit with an attack to my vital organs, then even with my strength, I wouldn’t be fine.

The four others followed behind me, keeping a distance.

If we’re ambushed from behind, I’ll do my best, but worst case, I’ll have to forget about them.

I focused on the sounds of everything in the area, increasing my hearing to the point where even the slightest sounds from the group behind me were noisy. While I listened in, I could hear Alicia chant a spell.

“Holy Enchant!”

A spell that affixes the light element to an object? That surprised me. I guess it’s fine to be prepared, but it would be nice if she told us what she was doing first.

I almost turned back to complain, but I collected myself in order to focus on the area in front of me.

The next moment, a brilliantly shining sword erupted from my chest. I had seen this sword before—it was the light-type sword I obtained in the dungeon in Valius. I had wrapped up the sword, which had rejected my touch to even its

handle, in a cloth, brought it back, and sold it off. The weapon was more dark-resistant than light-type and, affixed with the light element, could have an immeasurable effect on the dark element.

By the time I realized that I was stabbed from behind, my consciousness faded away.



The herd of monsters that suddenly appeared in the Kingdom of Valschein was headed straight for the Royal Capital. If the monsters were able to invade, then the Royal Capital would not be the only place affected—there would be extensive damage to the entire kingdom.

The Margrave of Ashbatten's army was also part of the combined forces gathered to stop the monsters. However, they didn't send many soldiers out. They also had to reserve forces in the event that another kingdom used the commotion to invade—even the margrave himself wasn't present.

With a small group of expert soldiers, the Ashbatten army was performing the best out of all the troops in the combined forces. This was partially due to the high level of skill that was required to protect the borders, a task the margrave's army was famous for, but this was not the only reason.

"Third platoon, take three steps back! I'm going to create a dirt wall! Second platoon, switch with the first platoon!" The young commander directed the margrave's army by sending out instructions with wind magic while, at the same time, creating a defensive fighting position with his earth magic on top of valiantly fighting in the front lines.

"Little master, you're doing too much. At this rate, you won't last 'til the end," the lieutenant, a veteran of the army, said calmly.

"I think I'm too old for 'little master' now, don't you think?"

"Shall I call you Sir Patrick then?"

"Stop that. You're giving me chills." Patrick shivered. "I get your point, though. I'll step back a bit."

The two, who had known each other for a long time, fell back from the front

lines and casually bantered back and forth as the momentum of monsters slowed. Patrick was frustrated with himself for his lack of experience. He was still no match for the lieutenant, who was an experienced soldier.

“I still can’t believe you’ve gotten this strong,” the lieutenant marveled. “You probably could’ve joined the battle against the Demon Lord.”

“I probably could have. I think I should have gone after all. I wonder if Yumiella is doing okay...”

“Oh right, your lover. I can’t believe you found someone before the young master.”

Patrick wondered why his older brother got to be “young master” while he was still called “little master,” but he kept it to himself.

Patrick stepped farther away from the battlefield to take a small break. As he was hydrating and refueling with some of the other soldiers, a voice rang out from the distance.

“Dragon! There’s a dragon!”

Hearing that the strongest monster had appeared, the soldiers in the area became unsettled. Even the lieutenant was grimacing, but Patrick stayed calm. He wiped off the blood on his sword without even glancing in the direction that the dragon appeared.

“I can’t believe a dragon appeared. We’ll have to be prepared to lose some soldiers,” the lieutenant said.

“Don’t worry about it. The dragon is black, right? That’s an ally. His name is Ryuu—”

“It’s red.”

“What?” Patrick finally looked up from the sword in hand to find a fire-type dragon causing havoc. Mages blocked the fiery breaths that were shooting down from the sky, but they were clearly reaching their limits. “I’ll take care of the dragon. You take care of everything else!”

Patrick started running and created a foothold by raising the earth with magic. He then created a tailwind with magic to help lift him high into the air.

“The first move is mine!” Patrick swung his sword down on the dragon’s head, and it went crashing into the ground. Soldiers immediately surrounded it to follow up on the attack, only to find that it was already dead.

When Patrick gently landed on the ground, cheers erupted at the birth of a new champion. On the other hand, Patrick was mainly relieved that there weren’t any victims, given how late he was to handle the dragon.

“This time, it’s wyverns!” a voice yelled out. “A herd of wyverns is headed this way!” Once again, Patrick geared up for battle. Wyverns were similar to dragons in their ability to fly, but their strength and size weren’t anything special compared to dragons. They were weak in comparison, but they weren’t monsters with low battle skills by any means. Their strong flying capabilities were also troublesome.

Patrick looked into the distance and could already count a few dozen wyverns. “I can’t reach them with arrows, and we don’t have enough mages. There are too many for me to handle on my own...” he thought aloud. He didn’t think they would lose regardless of how many wyverns there were, but with that many, there were bound to be a few that slipped through. Patrick couldn’t fathom the damage a wyvern could cause if any made it to the Royal Capital.

Patrick helplessly stared at the herd of wyverns that continued to make their way closer. The next moment, a flood of black magical energy rained down from even higher up than the wyverns. The herd of wyverns was sucked into the dark-type flood and disappeared without a trace.

What came down from the sky was a jet-black dragon. It was this dragon’s breath that destroyed the herd of wyverns. The size of this dragon was incomparable to the one that appeared earlier. Its claws and teeth were sharper than the sharpest of swords, and a massive amount of magical energy was overflowing from the corners of its mouth. The dragon was ominous, but at the same time, there was something divine about it.

The wyverns were taken care of, but the soldiers were shaking with fear from the dragon they thought they would have to deal with next.

“Ryuu’s here! We’re saved!” Patrick shouted with an expression of relief. “Calm down, everyone! That dragon is an ally!” Just as Patrick said, Ryuu

showed no signs of attacking the soldiers and only fired his breath onto the monsters.

Eventually, Ryu slowly descended to Patrick's side. The surrounding soldiers watched from a distance. "Thanks, Ryu. You saved us. I'll leave the flying monsters to you. After this is over, let's go to Yumiella together," Patrick said while petting the tip of Ryu's nose. Ryu roared in agreement and flew back up into the sky.

After Ryu joined the battle, the defense had more room to breathe.

"You even killed a dragon on your own..." the lieutenant praised, standing beside Patrick. "I'd love to know the secret to your strength."

"First, you carry an amulet of growth, then you use a monster-summoning flute in a dungeon."

"Hold on. There's no way I could do something so insane... I'm sorry, but is that the method *she* uses?"

"No need to apologize. I think it's insane too," Patrick reassured. The lieutenant had turned pale at the eccentricity of Yumiella's style of level grinding.

"Little master, are you by any chance carrying an amulet of growth right now?"

"Right now, I have an amulet of protection on me. We made a promise to each other."

"Good. As long as you have an amulet of protection, you can avoid instant death. She is really something for not carrying one with her when level grinding."

"A situation where you could die instantly, huh? I think an amulet of protection might be useless for Yumiella." Patrick couldn't imagine a scenario where Yumiella would need to be saved by an amulet of protection. She would probably be able to instantly defend her vital organs and use recovery magic to immediately get back on her feet—as long as it wasn't a surprise attack with the element she was weak to. "The element she's weak to..."

Patrick stared off into the distance in the direction of where Yumiella was, unpleasant thoughts running through the back of his mind. Yumiella wasn't necessarily undefeatable. She was only able to stay calm through assassination attempts because there was a difference in their levels. If someone of a high level used a high-quality weapon to attack her, naturally, she would take damage.

"Yumiella, stay safe," Patrick whispered to himself while gripping the amulet around his neck.



"Why don't you understand?! We have to kill her off!"

"Yumiella hasn't done anything wrong! Why do you all treat her like she's the enemy?!"

I was woken up by hysterical screams.

Oh, right. Alicia stabbed me in the back. Literally.

Still lying on the ground, I held back the groans and used recovery magic on myself. Once I healed my wounds, I stood up and felt the amulet around my neck sway. It wasn't the amulet of growth that I had spent many years with, nor the amulet that enhanced dark magic, the prize of the battle arts competition—it was the amulet of protection that Patrick gave to me. We promised each other we would carry one.

Thank you, Patrick. This saved me.

It seemed that Prince Edwin and the other three were arguing.

"Usually, you would want to do something like this *after* taking down the Demon Lord," I called out to them.

"Wh—?! Why are you alive?" Alicia responded incredulously.

"You all have one too, don't you? An amulet of protection? So, you'll be explaining why you stabbed me, right?"

"I-It's all your fault... I'm supposed to be the one who defeats the Demon Lord with my light magic!"

Like hell I'm going to die for a reason like that. I don't even want to take credit for taking down the Demon Lord.

"It's all right if I incapacitate her, right?" I asked, turning to Prince Edwin, who was by my side. "It would be troublesome if she stabbed me in the back again while we were fighting the Demon Lord."

"Just wait a moment. I'll reason with them." Despite the prince's words, it felt like we had already reached a point where that would be impossible. I wouldn't be able to fight the Demon Lord without turning my back to them, and there was no way I was going to do that again.

Prince Edwin began trying to convince Alicia and the others who were opposing us. "Alicia, please stop. You have such a kind heart. You must know this is wrong. You can't baselessly discriminate against people with black hair."

"No! She is someone who shouldn't live!" Alicia exclaimed.

"Will, you don't like things that are unreasonable, right?" the prince asked William.

"What happened to *you*, Ed? You didn't like her before either," William responded.

The prince then turned to Oswald. "Oz, what happened to your usual calm self?!"

"Even now, I'm calm. After we defeat the Demon Lord, she's going to be dangerous for the kingdom. We should take this opportunity to take her out."

"Your Highness, I think that it's impossible to reason with them. This is dangerous. We're in enemy territory. You should just give up, and I'll restrain them," I said.

We can let the law judge Alicia and the others. I didn't think they would do something this stupid. I don't want to dirty my hands with people like them.

The king would surely give them quite the punishment for friendly fire in the midst of the kingdom's biggest crisis—they might even be imprisoned for the rest of their lives.

"Restrain us? You were able to survive, thanks to an amulet, but do you really

think you're any match for us right now?" the hotheaded William gloated as he unsheathed his sword.

Just where does all that confidence come from?

"If you add up our levels, together, we're level 120. That means we're stronger than you," Oswald declared, pushing up his glasses.

Um, I don't think that's how it works.

I had thought this before, but Oswald was just a glasses-wearer who pretended to be cool and wasn't actually smart by any means. If his logic was correct, then that would mean I was just as strong as ninety-nine people who were all level 1—there was no way a group of fewer than one hundred level 1 people could defeat the Demon Lord.

Wait, that means each of them is only around level 40. That's way weaker than Patrick.

"Ed, please, come to our side," Alicia pleaded to the prince, using an upward glance with teary eyes.

So that's how she made three guys fall for her. I'm impressed.

"Do you think you can fight me head-on and win? You used a surprise attack because you weren't confident that you'd have a chance against me, right? Your Highness, please step back. I won't kill them or anything." As I took a step forward, Alicia and the others took a step back and braced themselves. Just as I had thought—they were bluffing.

Right when I was about to use magic to restrain them, the entire area was filled with that which I was all too familiar with—dark magical energy.

What's happening? I haven't used my magic yet.

"Your Highness, stay back!" I warned.

"Wh-What are you—?!"

I grabbed Prince Edwin by the collar and leaped backward. At that moment, the space we were previously standing in became engulfed in darkness.

"This is..." This was *Black Hole*, one of the strongest dark magic spells. Only

two enemies in the game were able to use this. The hidden boss—me—and the final boss...

“He he, infighting in enemy territory, huh? Humans really are quite foolish. Or rather, it’s the people of Valschein who are foolish. No, it would be more correct to say that the royal family of Valschein are the fools. I’ll have to thank you. I was able to take down three of you without any effort at all.” In the spherically carved out hall in the Demon Lord’s castle, a man dressed in black Japanese armor appeared. Yes, this was his castle.

“The Demon Lord...” I muttered.

“I see, so that’s what they’re calling me now,” he said, his words catching my attention.

He looked just like he did in the game—dressed from head to toe in jet-black Japanese armor. The only thing that could be inferred was that he was a man. Even his face was obscured by a Kabuto helmet that covered his head.

“Please stay back, Your Highness,” I warned again.

As I urged the prince to keep his distance, the Demon Lord let out a resentful growl. “Huh, so that man’s a member of the royal family, huh? Don’t expect to die so simply.” It seemed that he had an exceptional hatred toward the royal family. The in-game Demon Lord complained about humans and the kingdom, so I guess he was the same in real life.

I wonder if there’s a reason for his hatred that wasn’t explained in the game.

I unsheathed the sword hanging on my waist and stood across from the Demon Lord. I decided to use my sword one-handed, so I could use magic easier. As I waited for the right moment to attack, the Demon Lord spoke.

“Hey, you. What’s your name?”

“I’m Yumiella Dolkness.”

“Dolkness... I’ve never heard the name. Must be a recent aristocrat. There are few households that have been around since this kingdom was founded. Well then, Yumiella Dolkness, how about you abandon the evil Kingdom of Valschein and join me?”

Oh, there's the classic question. I wonder if he'll offer me half the world.

"No, thank you. I don't have any reason to do something like that."

I wondered why the Demon Lord was only trying to get me to join him.

Is he trying to increase his strength by appealing to me, or is he—

"H-Help..." a voice murmured faintly from behind the Demon Lord, sounding like it could disappear at any moment. The floor of the Demon Lord's castle, where the voice came from, was carved out with magic and, currently, a blind spot for me.

"I see you're still alive." The Demon Lord turned around and picked up Alicia, whose clothes were tattered like torn-up cloth.

Oh right. She and the others had on amulets of protection. I guess you can even survive a spell that destroys an entire space itself once with an amulet.

The amulet that had saved my life saved hers as well. William and Oswald should have been alive as well, but they must have been unconscious because they didn't make a sound. Either way, without any method of recovery, they were probably covered in wounds.

"Alicia!" the prince cried. He tried to run toward her, but I stopped him by grabbing his collar. The Demon Lord faced us, still holding Alicia by her arm.

"I was listening to your conversations, but I really don't understand you two. I did realize that these three are garbage right away," he said, gesturing toward Alicia and the two others behind him. "Prince of Valschein, why do you care so much for this one? Wouldn't it be better to get rid of a fool who would stab their ally in enemy territory?"

"Alicia did something unforgivable, but even so, I love her."

"How absurd. What's the point of love? People will even betray those they love if it furthers their own interests."

"That's not true. I wouldn't betray those that I love."

"Well then, if you stand there and watch Alicia, or whatever her name is, die, I will accept my own death. If that happens, the Kingdom of Valschein will be free from the threat of the monsters. Love or benefit—which will you choose?"

“That’s... You can’t compare an entire kingdom and one person. There isn’t even any guarantee that you would keep your promise...”

Alicia, still held captive by the Demon Lord, became erratic, seeing Prince Edwin at a loss for an answer. “Ed, I don’t want this! Save me!”

The Demon Lord turned his face to look at Alicia. “Stay quiet. Actually, let’s ask you, Alicia. You, the prince, and the kingdom. I’ll save one of those three. Go ahead and choose,” the Demon Lord threatened, bringing his face closer to hers.

“Me! Please save me!” Alicia answered in screams, possibly at her limit with the stress and fear she was feeling in that moment.

“See, Prince of Valschein? This is what people are like.”

“No...” Upon hearing Alicia beg for her life uninhibitedly, the prince was left in a daze. According to the prince, Alicia was a kindhearted girl who just acted differently when she saw me. That was something that I understood as well. She was originally someone who was worthy of being the main character of the game. However, reality had strayed from the game’s story. Alicia had spent her time until now avoiding the various obstacles she was supposed to encounter during her first and second year at the Academy. I believed that this was the reason why her heart was still weak.

“Well, I only asked who I should kill out of curiosity,” the Demon Lord said before strangling Alicia, who let out a cry of agony.

“Alicia!” Prince Edwin tried to run to her once again. It was then that I felt something was off about the Demon Lord’s actions. The Demon Lord should be able to kill Alicia easily, but he was slowly strangling her, as if to make us watch her die.

I jumped in front of Prince Edwin and shoved him behind me. “Emergency escape by shoving!” At the same time, magic was shot my way. I used my magic just in time for the spells to cancel each other out. A bit of my momentum was lost, but I immediately ran toward the Demon Lord and closed in on him.

“You’re fast.”

“*Shadow Lance.*” A spear shot out from the Demon Lord’s shadow, and he

used Alicia as a shield to block it.

However, I had anticipated that very move. “That’s exactly what I thought you would do.”

“What? Recovery Magic?!” Alicia had been slowly recovering herself in a way that the Demon Lord wouldn’t notice. Although she was stabbed by my *Shadow Lance*, Alicia had an exceptional resistance to dark magic—she was able to tolerate my spell that I only weakened enough for the Demon Lord not to notice. My real objective was a physical attack, and my kick landed on his helmet.

“Gah!” The Demon Lord staggered back and let go of Alicia.

“I’ll be taking back this hostage, then.” I threw Alicia, as well as the unconscious William and Oswald, behind me. I was only a *little* worried that the impact of being thrown would be the nail in their coffin. “Things would have been easier if the prince hadn’t kept getting in my way,” I sighed. I couldn’t hear a single sound of movement from behind.

You guys aren’t dead, right?

“You don’t seem to respect the royal family either... Are you sure you don’t want to join me?”

“I’m sure. Why do you keep only inviting me to join you?”

“Well...” The Demon Lord appeared to be thinking of an answer to the question, but I sensed that he was going to cast a spell instead. It was also likely that his target was not me but the four in the back.

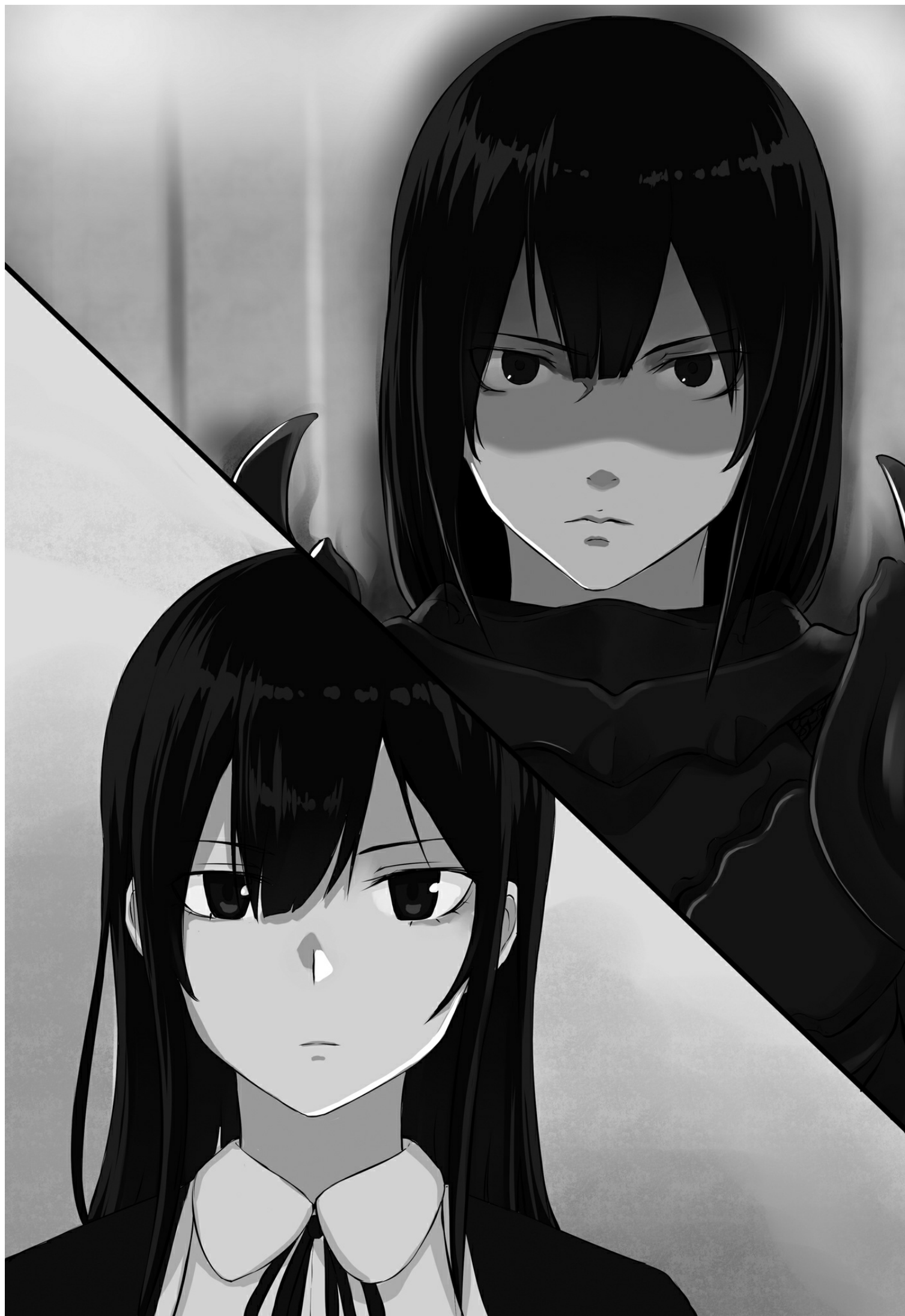
I knew it. I should have left them and come alone.

As expected, the Demon Lord shot his magic behind me. I continued to cancel out his attacks with my own spells, but we weren’t getting anywhere—this battle was going to have to be in close quarters. I ran forward like a bullet and swung at the Demon Lord. I aimed for his neck and felt my attack hit something.

“You’re fast. It seems that your strength is on a different level from the others,” the Demon Lord said calmly as he jumped backward.

“Huh? I thought that landed.” *That’s strange. I should have hit something.* Just

then, the Demon Lord's helmet crumbled away, and the face underneath looked like... "Me?"



No, he's a man. But this man's black hair, black eyes, expressionless face, and even his facial structure look exactly like mine. I feel like we even have a similar air about us.

"I guess we do look similar. I was surprised when I saw you earlier. I shouldn't have any descendants, so it may be that we share a distant relative."

It appeared that the Demon Lord was a human, or rather, he was a human in the past.

"Did you ask me to betray everyone just because we share a similar appearance?"

"Isn't this kingdom, nay, this world, hard to live in with your black hair? Haven't you dealt with unreasonable things? Resent the world, resent the kingdom, hate the people, and destroy everything with me." The Demon Lord's eyes clouded with overwhelming hatred.

The Demon Lord seems expressionless like me, but even so, his resentment is on full display. I wonder how much animosity is stirring within him.

"It's true that my life until now was unreasonable and hard to live through, but I felt resignation rather than hatred. I've thought about running away countless times, but I've never once wished for the end of the world, the destruction of this kingdom, or the death of people."

I...don't think I have. I'd like to think I've never felt that way because I could actually make all of that happen if I wanted to.

"Why do you care so much? In the end, you're just going to be betrayed. I want to know, how did the story of this kingdom come to be told?"

"It's said that the hero and saintess sealed away the Demon Lord and created this kingdom."

I wonder if the Demon Lord's secrets are related to the founding of this kingdom.

The Demon Lord erupted into laughter. "The hero and saintess, huh? Those snobs."

"Snobs?"

“Don’t you think it’s strange? Shouldn’t there have been a kingdom here before the one called the Demon Lord appeared?”

I *had* found that strange, and I even looked it up once but didn’t find a single piece of writing related to the history before this kingdom was founded. I convinced myself that the records had burned up in flames during the battle with the Demon Lord.

“Before the Kingdom of Valschein was established, this entire area was in a period of warring states where there were rivalries between warlords. The First King of Valschein won many consecutive battles and created this kingdom with the help of two skilled people working under him. One was a user of light magic, the other a user of dark magic.”

“Were you...”

The two people must have been the first queen and saintess, and the other...

“Yes. I served the King of Valschein. I respected and worshipped him. My loyalty to him was second to none because he was accepting of my black hair, which had been seen as unlucky even back then.”

So, the Demon Lord was a loyal subject of the first king who ended up betraying the kingdom later on.

“But as soon as the kingdom was stable, I was sent to these backwoods,” continued the Demon Lord, referring to this castle’s remote location. “The king feared my strength. No, from the beginning, he was only after my strength. He probably secretly detested black hair and dark magic.” Despite his harsh words, the Demon Lord’s expression was surprisingly gentle as he spoke about the past, like he was nostalgic for those days.

“Is that why you started a rebellion?”

“Absolutely not!” the Demon Lord exclaimed, his face instantly filling with rage. “That is absolutely not true. I thought the way that I was treated couldn’t be helped. The king truly cared for his people, and I thought that was enough. It didn’t sound so bad to spend the rest of my days in this secluded place, hearing what the king was up to through others from a distance.”

That probably wasn’t what happened, though, and the Demon Lord likely did

not throw the first stone.

“The king raised an army against me. I didn’t have an army of my own to go up against him, so I pleaded for him to stop. I pledged that I would fight in any harsh battlefield for him.”

Why didn’t he fight back or run away if there was no chance of winning?

As I thought about his actions, I realized that, unlike me, the Demon Lord probably cared for this kingdom.

“I cared for this kingdom and its people,” the Demon Lord said sadly. “I loved them, but I was betrayed. I was betrayed by the people in my domain who blindly listened to the rumors that the king spread and even my most trusted subordinates.” Because he loved the kingdom so much and so deeply, it was easy for his feelings to flip to intense hatred. “It was then that I killed and destroyed everything in my path. Eventually, I found that I was able to control monsters. Even though I never cared for monsters because of their threat to the kingdom and its people, I still used them.”

I didn’t know much about the Demon Lord’s story, but I do know how this story ends.

“But I lost. They avoided confronting me directly and sealed me away using an ancient spell. And that’s how we arrive at the present. Even after hearing this, do you still side with the Kingdom of Valschein?”

“I think that the first king is entirely at fault for all of that, but things are different now.”

“Oh? But it seems like those three over there haven’t accepted you.”

“Well, they’re on the extreme end of those who dislike me... Neither His Majesty nor His Highness are like that.”

“They were probably just cajoling you in anticipation of my resurrection. Even if you kill me and return, there’s no place for you in this kingdom.”

After hearing the Demon Lord’s story, I understood what the king meant when he mentioned a second Demon Lord. I also understood why the king thought it was better that I didn’t know the identity of the Demon Lord.

“I would like to eliminate the discrimination against people with black hair for me and for the black-haired children that will be born in the future as well.” That was why I couldn’t become an enemy of humanity—that would only exacerbate the discrimination against those with black hair. “Upon hearing that, His Majesty said he would support me so that we could also prevent the creation of a second Demon Lord. I’m just guessing, but I believe that you are the villain in the story that’s been passed down in the royal family. However, I think that His Majesty is aware that you didn’t cause a rebellion and knows that you were truly born out of discrimination and contempt.”

I was genuinely someone who could become a Demon Lord—one that was far stronger and more terrifying than the one before me.

“People’s feelings are fleeting. Even if things are good now, the situation will change in a few decades.”

“If that happens, I’ll run away—out of this kingdom or even outside of this continent. There are people here who are capable of killing me or possibly sealing me away, but here I am.”

I was referring to Alicia, who was probably the greatest light magic user in all of history. But I wouldn’t be bested by her a second time. If I destroyed the light-type sword, it would probably be impossible for her to kill me.

After hearing what I had to say, the anger in the Demon Lord’s face slightly softened. “You’re...how should I say this...kind of cold. Do you have anyone you love?”

What is he suddenly bringing up?! The Demon Lord shouldn’t be gossiping about love lives.

Flustered, I stumbled a bit before responding. “I-I do...”

“What would you do if he betrayed you?”

I didn’t say that the person I love is a guy. I mean, he is, but even so.

What *would* I do if Patrick betrayed me? I would probably just flee the kingdom. I wouldn’t want to hurt him and hurt myself by hurting him.

“I think... I would run away. If he were to betray me, I would accept it if that

would bring him happiness.”

“That’s how I felt at first as well. I saw *her* happy with the king and thought that was fine. But things weren’t so good when I was betrayed a second time.”

Were the Demon Lord and first queen lovers? He had his lover stolen by his king and still served him... This guy’s loyalty is incredible.

“I have the option to run away. You didn’t have that. I think that’s the only difference between us.” You could also say that the Demon Lord was brave enough to face this kingdom, while I wasn’t.

“Run away, huh? I never even thought of that. I wonder if history would have been different if I had fled...” As I watched him imagine a different life, my will to fight gradually dissipated. Patrick was right... I may be an overly trusting person.

“What if you were to run away now? We could say that you died, and you could go somewhere far—”

“I can’t run after having done all this,” the Demon Lord interrupted. “I think your mission to get rid of discrimination is venerable, but I still think this country should be destroyed.” It seemed that the Demon Lord would face this kingdom until the end.

Unable to reconcile our feelings, there was only one option left for the two of us—a battle of kill or be killed.

“I understand. It looks like we have no choice but to fight.”

My battle with the Demon Lord resumed, with those words as the starting signal. We both jumped backward and attacked each other with magic from a distance. My magic was more potent and troublesome to deal with, but I had to intercept the Demon Lord’s attacks and cancel them out so none of the stray shots hit the four knocked out behind me.

I guess I’m at a disadvantage from a distance after all.

I tried to close in on him, but the Demon Lord targeted both me and the floor. As I jumped into the air to dodge an attack, a smug look sprawled across his face.

He probably thinks I can't move freely in the air, but too bad for him because moving in the air is what I'm good at.

I made my way to the Demon Lord by shooting magical energy out behind me. The Demon Lord's eyes widened with surprise at my speed, but it was too late for him.

"I've got you." I swung my sword, cutting off his right arm and sending it flying. Without a moment's delay, I brought my sword up to his throat. I instantly went for the kill...or at least, that's what I thought I would do. My hands froze and the point of my sword stopped just before reaching the Demon Lord's throat.

"What's wrong? Hurry up and kill me."

"Would you reconsider running away...?" I asked. I thought that I was prepared for this, but after hearing his story, my resolve had wavered. The king's advice was spot on.

"How tedious! You must have killed countless monsters to be this strong. This is the same! At this point, I'm closer to a monster."

"That's not true. You are a person."

"I don't know if you're trying to show kindness, but that will be the reason for your demise in the future."

The Demon Lord was someone much stronger than I was. He had much more of a backbone than me. I understood his warning as well—not being able to kill was my weakness. But even so, I couldn't help but feel it would be all right if things stayed that way.

I shut my eyes tightly and took one deep breath before opening my eyes. "One last thing. Please tell me your name because you're neither a monster nor the Demon Lord."

His eyes widened, and his lips curled up in a small smile as if he were astonished. "My name is..."

That day, I killed someone for the first time.

Epilogue

Roughly a month later, I was visiting the location once known as the Demon Lord's castle. The castle which was basically just ruins at this point maintained a tranquility to it that was unchanged from when I last visited. However, this time, there wasn't anything unsettling in the atmosphere.

"I think it was around here where I was stabbed right through my back."

"I'm sorry. I should have gone with you."

"Didn't you play a very active part in the defense battle? I think that's more than enough."

Apparently, Patrick had even taken down a dragon by himself, though he claims that it was a dragon much smaller and weaker than Ryuu. I would have preferred that he didn't compare a savage, wild dragon to my mild-mannered, adorable Ryuu.

"I still don't think it's right that they're just being confined, and that's it. There should be a more appropriate—"

"I've already had a lengthy discussion about that with His Majesty. It's fine."

To the public, Alicia and the others were currently having their wounds treated, but they were actually confined somewhere in the royal palace. Having them publicly judged for their actions would be inconvenient for various reasons, but it wasn't right that they would walk around freely as contributors to the Demon Lord's end. I also wouldn't be able to have a clear conscience if they were to be secretly killed. I figured things settled into a comfortable state.

"It might be fine if you're just thinking about it rationally, but how about your feelings? Don't you resent them?"

"Hmm, I guess I resented that it was only His Highness and myself at the ceremony. Because it was just us, everyone came up to me too." A kingdom-level ceremony was held in celebration of the victory against the Demon Lord. Prince Edwin and I were the only members of the party in charge of defeating

the Demon Lord who participated in the ceremony and swarms of aristocrats came up to me to give congratulatory words as well. Some people made me feel like they were genuinely grateful, while others were suspicious of Alicia's absence, which made the event endlessly nerve-racking.

Patrick rolled his eyes upon hearing my tale of resentment.

I'll have you know that ceremony was really rough.

"I guess if that's how you feel... So, why did we come out here today?"

"I thought I'd dig a grave. I'm sorry for making you tag along when it's not your problem."

I had come all this way to prepare a grave for the man known as the Demon Lord. I couldn't save him. All I could do for him was give him a decent burial.

Patrick tagged along without saying a word. The spot I picked was a small hill overlooking the castle. Without using my magic, I dug a hole with my hands and buried a memento—his broken Kabuto helmet. After finishing the preparations, I put my hands together and closed my eyes.

Many thoughts spun around my mind as I prayed, and by the time I opened my eyes, it was already evening, and the sunset was illuminating his grave.

"Patrick, the person who was called the Demon Lord was..."

I wanted to at least tell him the truth. I wanted him to know what I had done, but my mouth wouldn't move the way I wanted it to. I was unable to get another word out. Patrick stuck with me through a long silence.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to," he said from behind me.

I wonder what kind of face he's making right now...

I manage to continue without turning to face him. "The person who was called the Demon Lord was just a person. He was just a person who thought about others, worried for others, and resented others." I couldn't even tell how my voice sounded right then.

"I see."

“So, um, I...a person...” I killed a person. Those were the words that weren’t coming out. I couldn’t handle that truth. I was afraid of Patrick hating me, and I hated myself for worrying about him hating me. Before I knew it, there were tears flowing down my face, blurring the beautiful sunset. “I, him...”

“I get it. You don’t have to say any more. I understand,” Patrick said gently as he hugged me from behind.

He’s warm.

“I think you did the best you could, Yumiella. But even if you made the wrong choice, I would still love you and would still want to be with you forever.”

“Okay.”

“I don’t know what else to do for you... Telling you that is the only thing I *can* do.”

“Okay, I understand.” I didn’t know if there was more that I could have done for the man known as the Demon Lord. My actions may have been for the best or for the worst. But regardless of morality, Patrick was on my side. “Thank you. I’ll do my best from now on.”

“Don’t try too hard. Things go south when you try too hard.” I slipped out of Patrick’s arms and turned to find Patrick smiling like he usually did. I was probably smiling as well.

Everything’s okay now.

There were lots of things I had to do moving forward—the county that my parents had neglected was probably full of problems, and I had to do something about the social climate of contempt toward people with black hair.

What do I need to handle these things? What am I currently lacking?

“I need to get stronger. My level won’t go up anymore, so maybe I should train a new ability.”

“Like what?”

“Maybe I could learn to stop time? There’ve been many situations I could have handled better if I was able to stop time.” It wasn’t that difficult. I didn’t have to stop time itself. I would just have to stop people’s movement, stop

natural phenomena from occurring, stop the stars from moving, and then finally hold a clock's hands in place—then I could say I stopped time.

Oh, I'm getting kind of excited.

Patrick was silent for a moment before responding. "I'm glad to see you're back to your usual self." Though he said he was glad, there wasn't an ounce of happiness on his face.

Does Patrick prefer warping to stopping time?

But I was probably correct in thinking he seemed to be having a bit of fun as well.

"Aren't you curious about it?" I asked. "Stopping time and everyone's movements, I mean."

"If I were to stop time, would you be frozen as well?"

"Oh, I wouldn't want that. Let's say that you can choose what you want to be frozen."

"Then I'd like you to stay still for a second." Without giving me a chance to ask why, Patrick hugged me, this time from the front. Time wasn't stopped—if anything, it felt like time was passing by faster. My heart was beating incredibly fast, so that had to be what was happening. I raised my head that was buried in his chest, and our eyes met.

"Patrick..."

"Yumiella..."

Just saying each other's names filled me with happiness.

If we can spend our time together, then I have no need to stop time—

"Yumiella! I found a pretty rock! I shall gift it to you!"

Never mind. I want the ability to stop time after all.

I escaped Patrick's arms to see Eleanora running toward us while waving.

Eleanora had been very worried about my going to battle the Demon Lord. When I returned to the Royal Capital, she embraced me, partially in tears. Since then, she has followed me around everywhere without leaving my side.

Even today, she forcibly came along with us.

Shouldn't you be worried about the prince, not me?

While I was digging the grave, she was off somewhere nearby playing with Ryuu. She was carrying a round stone she had found somewhere. Ryuu followed after her, giving off an atmosphere of fatigue.

I'm sorry, Ryuu. That must have been tiring.

Eleanora finally reached us and held up the rock. "Isn't it so perfectly circular?! I found it over there, and... Oh?" She was proudly talking about her rock but stopped and looked back and forth between Patrick and me before realizing something. "Oh! I will keep my distance for a bit! Please take your time!" She ran to a nearby tree and hid behind it.

No, wait, she's poking her head out and looking over here.

Patrick and I looked at each other—it wasn't the right mood to continue.

"Lady Eleanora, please come out. We're going home."

"I'm not here! Please continue what you were doing earlier!"

What a pain...

As I grumbled to myself, Ryuu laid down next to me and closed his eyes. It appeared to be bedtime for the good boy.

"Ryuu, don't sleep just yet! We won't be able to go home! Hey, what are you eating, Lady Eleanora? Is that piece of fruit you found on the ground? Please spit it out right now! Hey, why are you laughing, Patrick?!" Patrick seemed to be having fun, laughing at my disarray, and, drawn in by his laugh, I began laughing too.

Maybe commotion like this isn't so bad every now and then.

Afterword

Hello, I'm Satori Tanabata. Thank you very much for picking up this book.

Are you all people who read the afterword of books? I have to apologize to other authors because I usually don't read them, or I just skim through them. I was told to write an afterword, but I have no idea what I should write.

I thought about the reason for the existence of an afterword while eating my second string cheese.

Was an afterword for people who want to know more about the author? But these days, people can usually learn about the personal life of authors they like by checking places like Twitter. I don't use Twitter, though.

Then, was an afterword for basking in the afterglow of a book? If that was the case, I apologize for what I've done.

Was an afterword to thank the editors, illustrators, and readers? No, my gratitude couldn't fit onto two pages. All right, that's enough thanking.

Still unsure of the significance of the existence of an afterword, I stood still in a daze, my string cheese finished. I was in a daze because I was supposed to have two string cheeses, but they were both gone. To this day, I do not know what happened to the cheese.

Troubled, I tried googling it. The only reason that googling didn't result in an answer was because my internet connection was out.

Surprisingly, I found out that there were many people who liked reading the afterword. I apologize for saying I don't read them. Not only do many people like them, but some people were also afterword fundamentalists who decided to buy a book only after reading the afterword. How strange.

I saw an opportunity for success there. An afterword was a space to appeal to people who loved to read the afterword. People who read the afterword seem like they, you know, have superior personalities. There's no doubt that they are wise people with common sense and intelligence. They're not strange at all.

So, I will list some of the appealing points of this book. To see the charm of the story itself, please read the blurb or the *obi* wrapped around the book. The editor in charge is incredible, so I'm sure they've done a better job than I have of conveying the charm.

For the charm of the characters, please look at the cover or illustrations. Rather than me needlessly talking about it, it would be faster to just look at Tea's art. It's cute when Yumiella, who's usually expressionless, has a slight smile or is blushing.

All I can say is that this is a book written by an author who writes this kind of afterword.

Also, this book is the novelization of a web novel, but with the help of editors, it is surely a much more complete story compared to the web novel. There is also fifty percent more content than the web novel.

We've arrived at the end. To my two editors, the illustrator Tea, proofreaders, everyone involved in the publishing of this book, and everyone who picked up this book, I want to truly thank you.

I hope to see you all again.



“The eldest daughter
of Count Dolkness,
Yumiella Dolkness.
L-Level... 99.”

(Oh... This is bad.)

VILLAINESS LEVEL 99

I May Be the Hidden Boss But I'm Not the Demon Lord



Grinding
a difficult
dungeon
for drops!

“Please give me
a good weapon.
Black Hole.”

“Welcome. To
think a human
who could make
it to the depths
of my dungeon
would appear...”



VILLAINESS LEVEL 99

I May Be the Hidden Boss
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1

SATORI TANABATA
ILLUST. TEA



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Villainess Level 99: I May Be the Hidden Boss but I'm Not the Demon Lord Act
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by Satori Tanabata

Translated by sachi salehi

Edited by Kristina Breisacher

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