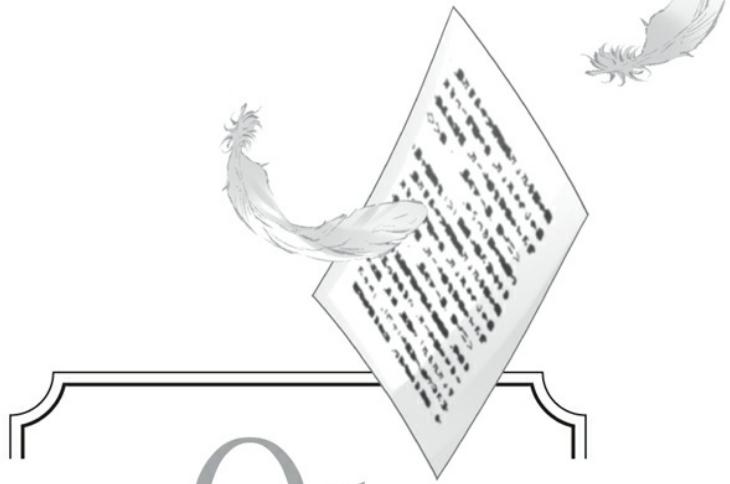


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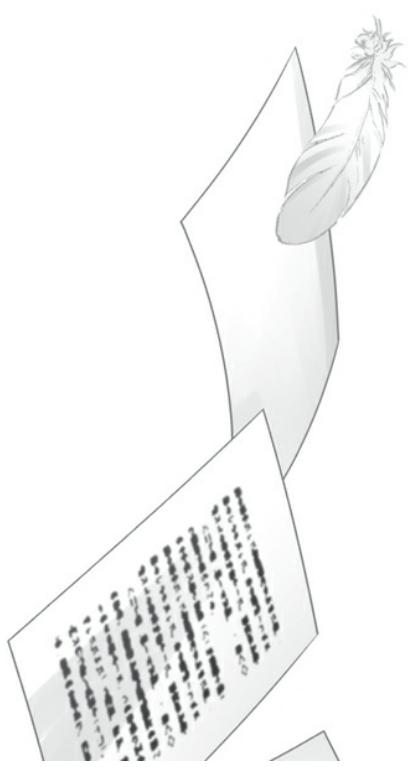
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HOLY MAIDEN SUMMONING
IMPROVEMENT PLAN



The Other World's Books Depend on the Bean Counter

HOLY MAIDEN SUMMONING
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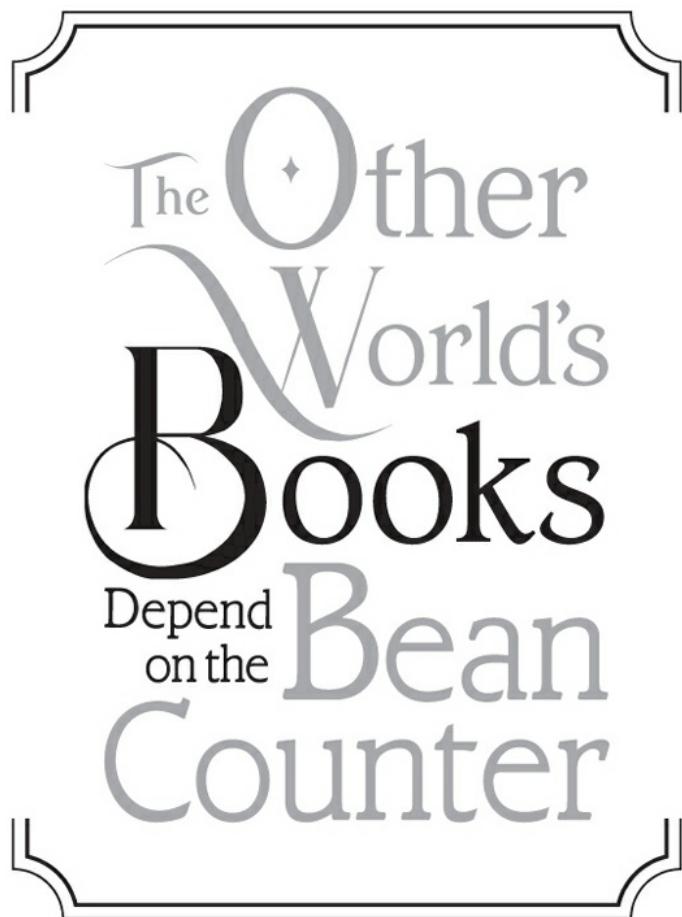
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ISEKAI NO SATA WA SHACHIKU SHIDAI Vol.1

SEIJO SHOKAN KAIZEN KEIKAKU

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CHARACTER INTRODUCTIONS



SEIICHIROU KONDOU

Twenty-nine years old. A salaryman who was swallowed up and transported to another world. A corporate slave to the core, he asked for a job without a second thought to his new situation. His eyes are almost always glazed over with dark circles under them.



ARESH INDOLARK

Twenty-two years old. Son of a marquess. An unmatched prodigy, he took up the post of commander at an exceptionally young age. Dubbed the Ice Nobleman, he is so talented that he has no interest in anything.



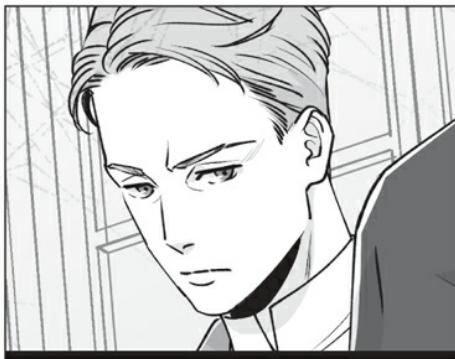
NORBERT BLANC

Eighteen years old. A frivolous boy who spends an hour every morning styling his hair. A fresh recruit at the Royal Accounting Department. A good-natured person with a childish temperament. He helps Seiichirou make his way in this world.



YUA SHIRAISHI

Sixteen years old. A high school girl who was summoned as a holy maiden. She has a sweet appearance and a cheerful personality. Never has any ill intentions, though sometimes she can't read the room.



CAMILLE KARVADA

Forty-two years old. Prime minister of the Romany Kingdom. Level-headed and shrewd. He realizes that "corporate slave" Seiichirou is a talented employee and appoints him as assistant director of the Royal Accounting Department.



IST

Thirty years old. Assistant director of the Royal Sorcery Department. He has droopy eyes and is always in a daze. He only comes alive when talking about his interests or research.

Prologue



Seiichirou Kondou was exhausted.

The number of staff had been slashed, and his work continued to increase. Budgets were being revised as soon as they were drafted. From morning until night, Seiichirou waged an all-out war against people bringing him their hoarded receipts, claiming they were urgent. *Assistant section chief* was a misleading job title—essentially, whoever held this position was forced to do odd jobs from both their superiors and subordinates.

Seiichirou's twenty-ninth birthday had come and gone before he knew it, and by the time he realized it, the shadow of thirty was already looming over his weary body. Not having been able to cook for himself lately, Seiichirou was severely lacking in nutrition to recover his energy. These days, the memories of his early twenties where he felt rejuvenated after a good night's sleep seemed like a lifetime ago.

Today, like every other day, Seiichirou was told, "You can go home now, you know." It sounded like they were saying "I'll let you go home early" and were graciously sending him home. However, it had been his day off—he had been called into work to do trivial tasks.

Yet as Seiichirou remembered that he hadn't done anything on his days off recently besides sleeping like the dead, he found it was worth being out in the sun-drenched city and decided to take a small detour on his way home.

That was where everything went wrong.

White pillars, patterned walls, and a blue sphere in the center of a high, domed ceiling.

It looks like the European architecture I saw as a student, Seiichirou thought dimly.

His fascination with the details of his surroundings was a way for his brain to escape his current reality.

Many people stood around him in the large room, as if encircling him.

None of them looked to be Japanese—in fact, their hair and eyes were all sorts of different colors. They wore garments you'd never see in Japan... Armor,

clergy robes... Seiichirou wondered if he'd stumbled onto the set of a fantasy movie.

"Success! Success!"

"The Holy Maiden has arrived!"

"Yaaaaah!"

These foreigners, who had been silent until that moment, all began to shout. Amid the frenzy, one man watched on with quiet, cold eyes. The peculiar darkness to his appearance set against his good looks stood out to Seiichirou.

The girl beside Seiichirou was looking around with a similarly perplexed expression. In stark contrast to the foreboding man, a beautiful young man wearing flashy clothes that looked luxurious approached them and offered the girl his hand.

Oh, right, Seiichirou remembered.

He had worked on his day off, and on his way home afterward, he had stopped by a shopping mall. After browsing at the bookstore, Seiichirou decided he was going to cook for the first time in a while, so he bought ingredients at the grocery store on the underground level. And then...

And then... That's right...

On Seiichirou's way home from the mall, he heard a girl's scream and ran toward the voice. A girl who looked like she was in high school was being swallowed up by the ground.

"No! Somebody! Somebody, help me!!"

At that point, only the girl's upper body was visible, and she was sinking even farther into the circle of light on the ground.

The girl cried and reached out to him. Seiichirou took her hand without thinking.

Knights accompanied the young man as he took the girl away, leaving Seiichirou behind. A few men who resembled priests led him to a separate room and offered him an explanation.

They introduced themselves not as priests, but as sorcerers and ministers of the royal court. This world existed in a different dimension than the world where Seiichirou was from, and they were currently inside the royal palace of the Romany Kingdom.

In the Romany Kingdom, there was a forest full of miasma known as the Demon Forest. About once every hundred years, miasma would gush forth, and the kingdom would be ravaged by a plague. A holy maiden—a girl with special powers—could purify it, and so they would learn of her location through a divine revelation. The Holy Maiden could live in Romany, or in another kingdom, or she could live in another world entirely.

This time, the Holy Maiden had been a girl living in Seiichirou's world, so they had gathered the kingdom's brightest minds and performed an ancient, secret art: the parallel world-summoning spell.

Parallel world? Holy Maiden? Kingdom? Miasma?

Truthfully, Seiichirou was mentally exhausted, and his mind was filled with thoughts of work; he hadn't been able to comprehend a single thing they said to him.

This might even be a daydream I've slipped into because I'm so tired, he thought.

The minister continued his explanation.

Seiichirou was, as it were, an ordinary person who accidentally got dragged into the summoning of the Holy Maiden. As the kingdom was responsible for this, they would be taking care of Seiichirou's food, clothing, and shelter.

"Do you have any other requests?" the man asked.

Seiichirou was coming up blank; he tried to consider the question.

They'll take care of my food, clothing, and shelter? Does this mean I don't have to go back to the office anymore? That I don't have to work? And that I don't have to work from the crack of dawn until the very last train, taking phone calls straight through my breaks without eating, cramming a jelly energy drink down my throat because I can't even make it through one nutrition bar? Or having to stave off the drowsiness with caffeine as I respond to other

departments' unreasonable requests?

Seiichirou was so exhausted.

He was tired of working from morning until night.

And having a life that was nothing but work and sleep.

Seiichirou's mind, however, was already impaired.

Before he realized what he was doing, he looked at the minister's plump, distinctive face and said:

"Please give me a job."



[CHAPTER ONE]

Employed

It wasn't like Seiichirou *wasn't* upset.

Seiichirou didn't know if he was really in another world or what, but even setting that aside, he had been carried off without his consent for the sake of this strange land. Even worse, the kingdom's target had been an underage girl. Although Seiichirou himself had only been caught up in it, he still thought it only made sense for the one responsible to come apologize first. But the person before him, if he believed what the man said, was a minister. Neither a king nor a prime minister—just a regular minister.

Seiichirou's way of thinking, however, placed the greatest importance on efficiency. You could call him an efficiency freak. After graduating college—no, even before that—Seiichirou prioritized achieving results in the shortest amount of time over his own feelings. Consequently, when Seiichirou was asked what he wanted, instead of picking a useless argument with the minister, he simply gave his response, and his answer came from his deep-seated corporate-slave nature—a job.

The minister was also in a bit of a pickle.

They were fortunate to have been able to summon the Holy Maiden from the other world safely with the secret art, but this unnecessary *tagalong* had come with her.

Moreover, the firstborn prince, who had been in charge of the summoning, had swiftly left with just the Holy Maiden, leaving behind this tired-looking man.

When the minister stopped to consider the prince's position and personality, he might have expected this. This man was left for the remaining members to deal with, but the commander of the First Royal Order and His Excellency the Prime Minister were both glaring at him, and the commander of the Third Royal Order was acting as if the man were completely invisible.

Viscount Adalbrecht, who usually ended up getting the short end of the stick in part due to his status as a viscount, held back his sigh.

The man before him wore silver-framed glasses and strange gray garments. Unlike the Holy Maiden, he was very slender with dull skin and dark circles under his eyes. When they asked about his relationship to the Holy Maiden, the man said they were complete strangers. The viscount began to feel a slight kinship with the man—he seemed to also have his own fair share of bad luck.

However, they couldn't just leave him to his own devices.

Even if no one was at fault for this, they had still accidentally summoned a random person. Depending on what the man said or did, the civilians might begin to criticize the royal palace, but most importantly, the man, though a stranger to the Holy Maiden, was from her town. Although it had been said for many generations that the Holy Maiden was known to be merciful, their treatment of this man could displease her.

The prime minister had directed them in advance that no expense would be spared to provide for the man's living costs, and that for now, they would keep him as one would a pet. The minister had also been instructed to fulfill some of his requests to secure this otherworlder's trust. The viscount and the others speculated about what he'd ask for: *money, women, a house, something like that...* But he had answered with blank, lifeless eyes.

"Please give me a job."

And so the room in which they had been offering the captive an apology (of sorts) metamorphosed into an interview room.

"A job...? Look, ki—I mean, sir... What can you do?"

This jerk almost called me kid!

Seiichirou felt a slight twinge of annoyance, but he suppressed it and

reminded himself that he was talking to an aristocrat.

If this were modern Japan, Seiichirou would tell them his class and grade rankings for all the qualifications he had, such as Grade 2 Eiken English, office suite software specialist, or abacus certifications, but these people wouldn't understand any of that. Seiichirou was the assistant section chief for the Accounting Department. His strong suit had always been doing calculations on the abacus, but he had no idea what was even considered general knowledge in this world. He wasn't even sure if the numbers were the same Arabic numerals. *But no..., Seiichirou realized. Mathematics is a concept. If I remember the rules of math, implementing them should be the same.*

"I'm good at doing calculations and accounting."

So Seiichirou was assigned to the Accounting Department of the royal palace.

After waiting in the reception room, Seiichirou was introduced to a mild-mannered man in his thirties with gray-streaked hair.

"I'm in charge of the Royal Accounting Department. My name's Helmut Somaria."

"I'm Kondou Seiichirou. It's nice to meet you."

"Kondo?"

This world appeared to resemble Europe, so they probably said their given names first. It seemed like it was difficult to say the last sound of Seiichirou's surname. Even the ministers, who had not asked for Seiichirou's name before then, were all muttering as if they were struggling to say it.

"Kondou is my family name, and Seiichirou is my given name. Please call me however you'd like."

"Kondo... Kon... Got it. I'll call you Kondo, then."

Seiichirou wasn't so childish as to make a fuss over what he was called, so he nodded without correcting Helmut's pronunciation.

They were then seen off by the ministers, who looked as though they were finally being set free, and Seiichirou left the royal palace with Helmut. As Seiichirou couldn't start working the very day he was abducted (*summoned*), he

was led to a room that had been prepared for him.

“This ordeal must have been terrible,” Helmut said.

Terrible or otherwise, Seiichirou would never have been in this situation if they hadn’t performed the summoning, but he just smiled awkwardly in response.

“I heard that you are good at calculations, Kondo.”

“Oh, well, that was back in my world. I’m not sure if my skills will transfer over to this world yet,” Seiichirou answered honestly.

Helmut smiled for some reason and nodded.

“Is that right? You don’t need to worry about that.”

Seiichirou tilted his head, wondering why Helmut was smiling when he had just been forced to take on a stranger who might be of no use to him. Then he asked Helmut if he could look at books about this world’s basic mathematics and similar topics. Helmut smiled and nodded, promising to bring some to his room later. Despite his situation, Seiichirou grew a little excited at the thought of possibly seeing new theorems and formulas.

Then Helmut led him to a massive brick structure just a few minutes’ walk from the royal palace. It resembled a European apartment building. It looked more like company housing than a dormitory. This was where many civil officials who worked at the royal palace lived. Helmut had a wife and children, so he had a house in the castle town, but most of the unmarried civil officials lived here. The knights, apparently, had other accommodations. The room was equipped with a kitchen and toilet, but bathing was communal in a large public bath. Seiichirou could either cook his own meals or eat in the dining hall. His company housing, food, and other expenses were also covered.

Seiichirou walked through the front entrance into a spacious lobby. An old man entered the lobby from a room with a reception window.

“I heard about everything. I’ll show you to your room.”

The petite man introduced himself as Dusan, the caretaker of the building.

“I’m Kondou Seiichirou. Thank you for letting me stay here.”

“Kondo?”

“That’s fine.”

Dusan led him to a room that was roughly two hundred square feet. There was even a futon laid out on the bed. Seiichirou was relieved the wooden floors didn’t squeak when he walked on them and that he didn’t smell any dust or mold. The room was cleaner and bigger than he had anticipated. As someone who had been accustomed to the clean spaces of modern Japan, he had been a little concerned.

Dusan told Seiichirou he would give him a call when dinner was ready, so he ought to rest. Once Seiichirou was alone, he took him up on that and sat on the bed. He felt the soft cotton and was once again surprised at how well he was being treated.

He had accidentally said “*Please give me a job*” on instinct, but he worried whether he could actually do it.

His seven years as a corporate slave, however, propelled him to work.

“That’s right. There’s also that girl...”

They had no relationship or connection—the only thing linking them was that she had asked him for help when he had been passing by. But as she was an underage girl from his town, he couldn’t just abandon her.

They had said that she would clear the miasma as the Holy Maiden, but they ought to make sure such a thing was really possible—and see if it would be safe. At any rate, this girl was young and had probably never worked before in her life. They had abducted her with the intent to use her, so naturally she had to be careful she was not being treated badly.

“When things settle down...maybe they’ll let me see her.”

It felt impossible for some reason, but Seiichirou had been abducted from another world, too. He would try to work on them to be that accommodating, at least.

But Seiichirou had to secure his own foothold before doing anything else.

Feeling exhausted from the strain of the day’s extraordinary events so far,

and lacking sleep, Seiichirou dozed off on his bed.

Knock, knock, knock!!

What?! This thought had barely crossed his mind before he had jumped up in a panic at the violent hammering at the door.

Seiichirou looked around and was relieved he hadn't slept for very long. It was still bright outside his window. The noise from the other side of the door, however, did not stop.

"Hey! Are you up?"

With the addition of a man's voice, Seiichirou could no longer ignore the situation. He got up very reluctantly.

"What is it?" Seiichirou asked, cracking open the door and peering out.

The boisterous man on the other side of the door shoved his face close to Seiichirou's. Seiichirou pulled back in surprise; the man had opened the door fully and let himself in.

"Hiya! I'm Norbert Blanc! Helmut told me to bring you some books and clothes!"

As Seiichirou examined the man who had so enthusiastically greeted him, he saw that in one hand he was holding three books that were roughly the size of pocket paperbacks and a cloth bag with garments inside.

"Oh... Thank you."

I see, so he's Helmut's messenger? Then that means...?

"So you're joining the Royal Accounting Department, I hear? I'm in the Accounting Department, too! Nice to meetcha!"

The man's blond hair fell in a loose, carefree style, and he wore a shirt with a white-and-blue design. His blue eyes looked straight down at Seiichirou without a trace of shyness.

"I'm Seiichirou...Kondou. It's nice to meet you."

"Kon...do?"

Seiichirou, tired of having the same conversation over and over, wondered if

maybe he should start introducing himself as Kondo from the beginning. But the man in front of him—Norbert—broke out in a smile.

“Sei it is! The pleasure’s mine!!”

I guess there are frivolous, happy-go-lucky guys in other worlds, too...

Seiichirou recalled the previous year’s new hires from his office in Japan, which was now very far away. The corners of his mouth curled up of their own accord.

Σ Σ Σ

The morning after Seiichirou Kondou had been abducted (*summoned*) into another world, he stood alone at the rear entrance of the Romany Kingdom’s royal palace.

He hadn’t been kicked out, nor had he been stood up for some arranged meeting.

Because of his deep-rooted company-slave mentality—or rather, because of his Japanese spirit—he had arrived of his own volition thirty minutes before the time Helmut had told him.

After the exuberant Norbert had given him his books, clothes, and other necessities the day before, he had shown him around the building. There was a buffet-style dinner in the dining hall. As Norbert explained everything, they ate dinner together and took a dip in the bath during an off-peak time. The residents’ communal bathing room was massive, so as long as Seiichirou avoided the busy hours, he could use it without any problems. He had minor complaints, like the soap lathered poorly and that the towels were scratchy, but he was still grateful because he had almost given up on the prospect of being able to soak in warm water.

Throughout the meal and bath, Seiichirou asked Norbert all sorts of questions about this world.

How to count numbers, time, the cycle of the year, currency... Everything Seiichirou inquired about was related to numbers in some way. Mathematics was a concept, and if he knew them, he would understand the standards

through which this world operated.

If Seiichirou was to organize the information he had just learned, the first point would be that each day was divided into six hours: Fire, Water, Wind, Earth, Wood, and Light. Clocks also existed. Seiichirou had watched the clock while counting and found that the concept of “one second” was the same in this world, and so one hour was 120 minutes—or two cycles around the clock.

The year was also divided into six months (Fire, Water, Wind, Earth, Wood, and Light), and each month was sixty days. This world seemed to have a propensity for numbers divisible by six.

The numbers in question, in both the books Norbert had brought him and on the clocks, were expressed as Arabic numerals, which Seiichirou knew very well.

But here, another question arose.

Seiichirou could read the books Norbert had brought him.

From the very beginning, Seiichirou had thought it was strange that he was able to understand what these people said, and he had wondered if perhaps he could understand the written language, too. Somehow, every sound he heard and everything he saw seemed to be auto-translated.

As a test, Seiichirou had written something in Japanese and shown it to Norbert, and he had understood it perfectly.

Seiichirou didn’t know how it worked, but maybe it was an apology from the thing they called God for abducting him from his world. It was certainly convenient, but Seiichirou was quite disappointed that he might have lost the opportunity to learn new mathematical formulas.

The reason Norbert wasn’t with Seiichirou presently, despite working at the same place, was simple: oversleeping. Norbert overslept, of course.

Seiichirou had woken up early so he could have some wiggle room before his expected arrival time. He had cleaned himself up and gone to the dining hall to eat breakfast, but Norbert had not been there. After breakfast, Seiichirou had gotten ready and waited around for a bit, but from his guided tour the day before, he had remembered how to get to breakfast and the royal palace with ease. Feeling as though Norbert was not needed, Seiichirou had set out for

work on his own.

I guess I am too early... Well, it's probably better than being late, thought Seiichirou, looking at the watch he had been wearing when he had been abducted. He had not taken off the mechanical wristwatch because he could still use it normally as long as he did the conversions in his head.

Today, Seiichirou was wearing a white shirt with vertical brown stripes and a high collar—and white pants. Most of the civil officials wore shirts with high collars, and brown represented the Accounting Department. It wasn't terribly uncomfortable.

Weather-wise, it felt like spring. Did this kingdom have a mild climate, or did it just happen to currently be that season? Bathing in the pleasantly warm morning sun, Seiichirou once again opened one of the books Helmut had lent him. It was a book about basic arithmetic, but Seiichirou found it interesting that occasionally the explanations for certain formulas would be worded differently than they were in Japan.

As Seiichirou was rereading the book in preparation for the day ahead and waiting for Helmut to arrive, a shadow fell over his head.

Seiichirou looked up and saw a man standing before him, clad from top to bottom in pitch-black (including his hair) clothing.

His clothes, which were starkly different from Seiichirou's uniform, were decorated in silver. There was something familiar about him.

He's the guy from yesterday...

The day before, in the room where Seiichirou had been summoned to this world, he had seen the foreboding man watching with a bored expression. Having seen him from only a distance, Seiichirou had gotten the impression that he was good-looking, but now that he was seeing him so close, it confirmed that he was a spectacularly handsome man.

He was not feminine, but Seiichirou had never met anyone for whom the word *beautiful* was more fitting. He had groomed eyebrows and sweeping black hair, as well as thick eyelashes and striking purple eyes. He was slightly taller than Seiichirou—perhaps slightly under six feet.

But above all else, he had a nice body. Seiichirou's initial impression was that of the man's sturdy muscles, which he could make out even through his clothes. He was not super buff, but he had the type of physique that girls probably liked.

"What are you doing here?"

The man looked so disinterested that, for a moment, Seiichirou hadn't realized the question was directed at him.

After two seconds' silence, Seiichirou saw that the man furrowed his brow, and so he answered.

"I'm waiting to meet someone."

"Waiting to meet someone...? Who?"

Seiichirou was standing at the rear entrance of the royal palace, alongside the wall, a short distance away from the employee entrance.

Even though no one else who had gone in or out had paid any mind to Seiichirou standing there, reading his book, this man, who seemed to be disinterested in everything, had gone out of his way to walk up to him.

Seiichirou wondered what the man's intentions were, but from his presence during the summoning and his general demeanor, Seiichirou assumed he was probably a high-ranking official and answered him politely.

"Helmut, from the Royal Accounting Department."

"...Why?"

The man was interrogating him using as few words as possible, leading Seiichirou to hazard that his status must have been incredibly high. The failure to offer good faith to a conversation partner was a hallmark of powerful people.

"Starting today, I'll be working at the Royal Accounting Department, so he's going to show me around," Seiichirou answered with a friendly smile.

Now the man was looking at him with deep suspicion.

"What for?"

Before Seiichirou could open his mouth, he heard a familiar, soft voice in the distance.

“Sei! Why did you leave without me?!”

Norbert ran up to them, dressed in the same uniform he wore the day before but with perfectly arranged hair, despite having overslept.

“What?! Commander Indolark?!”

The moment Norbert saw the man in front of Seiichirou, he skidded to a halt and stood frozen on the spot.

Sparing Norbert a sidelong glance, the man looked put off as his eyes fell upon Seiichirou before heading inside the royal palace.

“Wow, that was super scary! I’ve never seen the commander of the Third Royal Order that close before! What were you guys talking about?” Norbert asked, wiping the sweat off his face and walking up to him.

Seiichirou closed his book and tilted his head.

“Nothing. He just asked me what I was doing here.”

“Whaaat? Maybe he was worried about you because he knows you came here with the Holy Maiden during her summoning?”



“Oh, that makes sense.”

The fact that Seiichirou was a man from a different world and had gotten caught up in the Holy Maiden Summoning was still only known to very few people. The royal palace probably couldn’t have offhandedly let it out that an ordinary person had gotten involved.

Now that Seiichirou thought about it, the commander of the Third Royal Order was there during the summoning. If he hadn’t known of Seiichirou’s subsequent request for a job, it made sense that, upon seeing Seiichirou loitering around the royal palace in a civil official’s uniform, the commander would grow suspicious and call out to him.

“I heard he is ruthless, but I guess he’s got a soft side, too!”

I’m not so sure..., Seiichirou thought, tilting his head.

When Seiichirou and the girl had been in a panic after having been forcibly summoned from their former world, the commander of the Third Royal Order had looked at them as if he couldn’t have cared less. Before, too, the man had looked at Seiichirou as if he didn’t trust him at all.

“In any event, what is the Third Royal Order?”

“You don’t have to be so polite with me! Anyway, it’s an order composed of knights who fight using both swords and magic.”

“Magic?” Seiichirou repeated instinctively. This was the first he had heard of it since coming here.

“Yep! The First Royal Order is okay at it, but the Third Royal Order is a group of elite knights who can use magic *and* are super good at swordfighting! Especially that guy from before, Commander Aresh Indolark. He’s incredible!”

Norbert explained that there were three in total in the kingdom.

The First Royal Order guarded the royal palace and the town.

The Second Royal Order protected the royal family and other very important people.

The Third Royal Order hunted magical beasts and other creatures outside of

the town using their superior magic skills and swordplay.

The black-haired man from before was the commander of the last one, and black was apparently their color. That would explain why he had been dressed in that shade from head to toe.

The commander's skills were second to none and had landed him the position at an exceptionally young age. He also came from an upstanding marquess family, to boot. Good looks, a good family, physically powerful, incredible success... What more could the heavens possibly give this man that could make him happy?

But according to rumors, Norbert continued to explain, because of his incredible skill, the commander of the Third Royal Order had no interest in anything and was perpetually listless.

Yet that was part of his appeal and fame.

"Wow, that's incredible."

Norbert explained how he, too, had been born to a family with some measure of nobility, and those connections had gotten him his job in the Accounting Department.

"Stuff like that happens everywhere, huh?"

They then met up with Helmut, who arrived exactly on time. He first showed Seiichirou to the Accounting Department.

The royal palace was very large, but the floors used by the royal family and visitors were securely sectioned off. The Accounting Department, where Seiichirou was to work, was in a building that also housed the servants, like the personal attendants and maids.

Helmut showed him to a room that was about the size of a classroom with six desks inside.

"Is this...all?"

Seiichirou was shocked that only six people made up the Accounting Department for the royal palace, the heart of the kingdom. But Helmut replied saying that it was actually five, and that included Seiichirou.

“Well, we should ease you into the work here little by little. For now, why don’t we have some tea?”

“What?”

They hadn’t even started working yet, but Helmut cheerfully bustled off to prepare the tea.

“Wha...? That’s... I-I’ll help!

As the lowest-ranking employee, he could only offer his assistance and hurry after his boss.

In the end, all Seiichirou did that morning was drink tea and introduce himself to the other employees.

Just when Seiichirou had thought he was finally going to start work, he was told to go to the dining hall because it was lunchtime, and as he stood there in astonishment, he was ushered out. The employee dining hall was quite big. The knights and servants worked in shifts, but there was room for all the civil officials to eat together at the same time. The food was offered buffet-style here, too—you could grab a tray and take as much food as you pleased.

“I had this thought yesterday, too, but...don’t you think you’re not eating enough, Sei?” asked Norbert.

“You think so?”

Norbert had sat across from him like it was only natural, but Seiichirou didn’t particularly want to be lumped together with the young man. Seiichirou was well aware that his stomach had gotten smaller because of his irregular meals. More than anything, most of the foods in this kingdom were very fatty, and given his weak stomach, he wasn’t sure if he would be able to finish eating them.

“We can understand each other, and we look similar, but I guess there’s something different about us, after all,” Seiichirou muttered as he ate his vegetable soup.

Their lunch break lasted for the entire Fire hour... In other words, it was 120 minutes. Seiichirou had been told in advance that their working hours were

from Light hour in the day until Wind hour in the evening. Since that would be from ten in the morning until six in the evening, Seiichirou had been sure their lunch would have been an hour at most. However, “hours” in this world were 120 minutes, so perhaps it would have been too much of an annoyance to split it in half.

At any rate, Seiichirou was amazed at how short the workday was—eight hours, two of which were eaten up by lunch. Seiichirou wondered if he might have been given those working hours because he was new, and because he was more of a “helper” than an official employee, but that didn’t seem to be the case. Everyone started to tidy up a few minutes before the Wind hour was over, and the moment the clock hand struck, they all left en masse.

Seiichirou had never seen something like that before. He stood there, gaping in shock. But he came back to his senses when Helmut returned, handed him a small, heavy cloth bag, and said, “We have tomorrow off, so please go into town and buy whatever you need.”

“Oh! Are you going shopping, Sei? I’m heading into town, too. Let’s go together!”

“Perfect, you can have Norbert show you around.”

“O-okay.”

The smooth flow of their conversation made Seiichirou wonder if Norbert was really going to be keeping an eye on him, but he agreed.

The fact remained, however, that Seiichirou didn’t know the way into town, where the stores were, or what to even expect when going out in this world. It *would* be best to have an escort with him.

“I appreciate your kind assistance.”

“I told you—you don’t gotta be so polite with me!”

Σ Σ Σ

The castle town was within walking distance of Seiichirou’s lodgings.

The money Helmut had given Seiichirou the other day was separate from the monthly pay he would receive from the government—it seemed more like an

initial stipend. He had been told to use it to buy whatever necessities he required.

Inside the bag were thirty silver coins that were roughly the size of a ten-yen coin. Norbert had told him the coin's currency value, but Seiichirou could only be sure about the market rates by going into town.

The currency consisted of gold, silver, and bronze coins, and there were three different sizes of gold and silver coins.

The monetary unit was R. One bronze coin amounted to one rula. One large gold coin amounted to one million rula.

Helmut had given Seiichirou silver coins, so he currently had three thousand rula.

The castle town... So this is the royal capital?

The town, situated under the purview of the royal palace, was bustling with activity.

Seiichirou's eyes were drawn to the brick buildings, but there were also houses made of wood. Norbert first took him to a market lined with street vendors.

It was bursting with color and energy—numerous things were arranged for sale, ranging from items of colors and shapes that Seiichirou had never seen before to produce that vaguely resembled Japanese vegetables. One in particular that looked like a zucchini happened to catch his eye. He inquired about it and was informed it cost four rula. If he was to buy a zucchini in Japan, it would probably cost around one hundred to 250 yen. The other items were largely similar in price, depending on the scarcity of the thing in question, so Seiichirou converted the money under the assumption that four rula was roughly one hundred yen.

In which case, the amount that Seiichirou had been paid would amount to around seventy-five thousand yen. That was quite a lot of money for a stipend to cover necessities when his living arrangements were already taken care of. Seiichirou wondered if perhaps this was a wealthy country.

As Seiichirou searched high and low though the stalls, deep in thought,

Norbert (today wearing a blue shirt with gold embroidery) came up to him. His chest was, as usual, exposed, but the cloth of his shirt seemed to be of higher quality than the rest of the townsfolk. He had mentioned that he was from a high-ranking family, and it seemed like he was a bit spoiled.

“Is there something you want to look for, Sei?”

“There is. Fresh produce is just going to be bulky and get bruised, so I’ll buy that last. I’d like to take a look at some clothes and stationery.”

“You should have told me that earlier!” Norbert said, even though he was the one who had brought Seiichirou to the market without asking him beforehand.

“It was helpful for getting a feel of the town and the prices first.”

That much was true, but Norbert still looked embarrassed.

Just as Seiichirou started walking away from the street vendors, he noticed some small, nonfood items arranged on a cloth that had been laid out on the ground.

“Excuse me, could I have a look at these?”

The young boy, who may have been the shopkeeper, looked up in surprise.

“...I don’t have anything that would be up to snuff for a civil servant working at the royal palace.”

Seiichirou wondered how the boy had figured out he was a civil servant, but it seemed the insignia on his belt that had been provided for him was a dead giveaway. Perhaps working at the royal palace was highly regarded. To Seiichirou, the young boy’s servile attitude didn’t really matter one way or the other, so he crouched down, unfazed, and reached out for the object that had caught his interest.

It was an instrument with multiple flat stones strung onto three chords.

“This is...”

“Oh! That’s a, um...a toy! It’s a toy!”

The young boy avoided Seiichirou’s eye and answered evasively, but Seiichirou just stared at the instrument, paying him no mind.

“An abacus...”

He had seen the calculators used in this world at the Royal Accounting Department—they were incredibly large and looked more like scales than a calculator. They were also lavishly decorated, which was incredibly burdensome, and when Seiichirou asked the others, they confessed that they didn’t use them much. Instead, they did their calculations by hand on paper.

“Did you make this?”

“Huh? I mean... I did, but...”

For the second time, Seiichirou felt gratitude toward Norbert.

“I have a request for you...”

“*There* you are!! Where did you go, Sei?! I looked all over for you!” Norbert shouted.

“I was at one of the vendors. You just went off on your own,” Seiichirou replied, as if nothing had happened.

Seiichirou had finished negotiating with the young boy and had just started heading in the direction Norbert had walked off toward when the man reappeared. Seiichirou had truly just been doing a little shopping, and Norbert had been the one who had plowed on ahead without looking back.

“Guh! That’s true, but... It’s only your second day here. It’s dangerous being by yourself for too long, okay?”

With it being the royal capital, the town was peaceful in terms of public security, but there were some dangerous areas.

But the real reason was probably that if Seiichirou, a person who had accidentally come along in the Holy Maiden Summoning, acted too much of his own volition, it would probably cause trouble for the kingdom.

“Okay. I understand.”

“Hmmm... I feel like I’m starting to understand you more, Sei...”

Seiichirou had given Norbert a very appropriate response, but Norbert looked at him uneasily.

How rude.

Afterward, Seiichirou looked at clothes, and they ate lunch at a small restaurant Norbert recommended. Next, Seiichirou purchased a pen and some paper amid Norbert's curious looks. Then Seiichirou bought simple cooking tools, drinks, and finally, some fresh food before they made their way home.

"We're provided pens and paper at the royal palace."

"I wanted one for my own use."

Matching perfectly with the aesthetics of this world, the vendors had been selling feather pens, but there had been one magic feather pen that never needed to be refilled with ink. It had been quite expensive, but Seiichirou had jumped at it. He would never have to think about ink, which, as a recurring cost, would be economical in the long run. Best of all, he could turn the feather pen, which was totally unfamiliar to him, into a fountain pen without worrying about ink spills.

"Can you cook, Sei?"

"I'm not totally hopeless at it."

Norbert was carrying the heavy cooking tools and drinks for him. Norbert had not handed over the bags when Seiichirou had initially bought them because he had assumed from the unhealthy color of Seiichirou's face that he probably wouldn't have been able to carry them himself. It was true that Seiichirou hadn't been cooking recently because he had been so busy, but he hadn't lived alone for eleven years since his college days with nothing to show for it. Because his working hours were so short, and it seemed like he'd have quite a bit of time on his hands, Seiichirou thought it might be a good idea to start again. Above all else, he wasn't fond of the dishes in this world.

When they arrived back at their lodgings, it was already the evening Earth hour. They brought Seiichirou's things up to his room where Seiichirou thanked Norbert, and they parted ways. Even after Seiichirou ate dinner in the dining hall, took a bath, and put away his new items, it was only Wood hour. It wasn't even ten o'clock at night.

"I don't know what to do with myself..."

Seiichirou had always been so busy with work that he didn't have any hobbies. He had no idea how to use his free time.

"Maybe I'll sleep?"

Even though Norbert had carried most of his bags, Seiichirou hadn't taken a trip out of the house like that for a while—and in another world, at that. Seiichirou quickly got ready for bed and went to sleep.

The next morning, Seiichirou again left Norbert behind and set out for work first. When Helmut walked into the Accounting Department and saw him, his eyes widened.

"Good morning," Seiichirou said.

"G-good morning... Um, what are you doing?"

Seiichirou put down the feather duster he had been holding.

"The room was a little messy, so I cleaned it up."

That much was true. There were few people employed in the Accounting Department compared to the size of the office, but despite this, it had been in a state of...disarray, to say the least. Seiichirou had been concerned about the stacks of important documents, and so he had left for work early that morning to tidy up just a bit.

"I... I see..."

In the face of Seiichirou's nonchalant attitude, Helmut couldn't say anything more. Then, just barely before the start of work, Norbert and the other employees arrived at the office.

On his second day of work, Seiichirou was given the job of organizing documents. He was to file the papers according to their content.

"Sei, did you get enough sleep last night?"

Norbert spoke without any regard for the fact that Seiichirou was in the middle of work. Seiichirou simply answered yes without lifting his head. In fact, he had slept twice as long as he used to sleep.

"Reeeeally? Your dark circles are massive, though, so you still look kind of

tired."

"When you get older, even with sleep, you can't shake off your fatigue," Seiichirou said honestly.

Norbert, however, was still going on about something. Seiichirou carried on with his work, thinking, *Maybe he can't understand because he's young.*

"You can have this, Sei."

Seiichirou had been ignoring Norbert when he placed a tiny bottle on his desk.

Not that I care, but when is he going to start working? Seiichirou wondered as he finally looked up.

He saw the small, palm-size bottle with light-blue liquid inside.

"What is this?"

When Seiichirou took it in his hand and shook it, he heard it splash against the container.

"It's a nutritional tonic. You look exhausted, so drink it and have a good night's sleep tonight."

Seiichirou had already told Norbert that he had been sleeping enough, but since it was a nutritional tonic, he gratefully accepted it. He thanked Norbert and put the bottle away in his bag.

However, certain developments later that day only exacerbated Seiichirou's fatigue even more.

"Kondo, the Holy Maiden is calling for you."

The announcement came not long into Seiichirou's afternoon work hours. Seiichirou looked up in shock. He never thought he'd be able to see the girl so soon.

However, he was in the middle of his workday.

"I can go during a break or after work."

Seiichirou's boss, Helmut, flew into a panic.

"K-Kondo! This is an invitation from the Holy Maiden! Your work can wait, so please hurry!!"

At his boss's insistence, Seiichirou left with the man who had come to retrieve him. The man wore a green knight's uniform underneath a set of armor, and he led Seiichirou inside the main tower of the royal palace. As the most secure and heavily guarded part of a castle, the main tower would generally house the private chambers of the lord—that is to say, the members of the royal family.

And there, in the tower, was the Holy Maiden.

Two knights stood in the front of the room—and another man wearing black clothes that seemed familiar.

I'm pretty sure that's the commander of the Third Royal Order, um...

Seiichirou struggled to remember foreign names on the first attempt. Was it... something India? He could probably get by with calling him Commander if he was asked. Seiichirou looked over at the other knights, who wore green uniforms under their armor, and figured they probably belonged to the Second Royal Order, whose members chiefly acted as security for the royal family and other important people.

The commander's face was as beautiful as ever, but it was expressionless. He spared Seiichirou a fleeting glance before silently opening the door to the room.

The interior of the room was decorated so ornately that it looked like something out of a movie. There was a silver decorative desk in the center of the room, and next to it, wearing a dress from this world, sat the high school girl who was summoned. At her side was a handsome young man with white-silver hair... Seiichirou had seen him before. He was the important-looking man who had taken just the girl with him after the Holy Maiden Summoning.

"You sure took your time."

Seiichirou did not show any distress that the first words this man said to him, after having been so abruptly called here, were rude. Seiichirou gave a respectful bow in apology. Perhaps he should have knelt, but it was just his third day since arriving in this world, so maybe it could be overlooked.

"Please don't, Yurius. I was being selfish and called for him because I wanted

to talk to him,” the girl explained, admonishing the haughty man.

The girl wore a pale yellow dress, and her flowing hair was shinier than the last time they had met.

“I’m so sorry, um...,” she continued.

Seiichirou guessed that the girl was trying to address him but didn’t know his name, so he introduced himself.

“Seiichirou Kondou.”

“Kondou. I’m Yua Shiraishi.”

As the girl—Yua—introduced herself, her deep-pink lips curved into a smile.

“I wanted to talk to you sooner, but I had so much to do, so it’s taken me a while.”

Yua asked Seiichirou to take a seat, so he sat down on the leather sofa and gave her his full attention.

“Please have a seat, too, Aresh.”

“I’m fine.”

After the black-clothed commander of the Third Royal Order curtly refused her request, he leaned against the wall a short distance away. Seiichirou doubted whether that was an appropriate attitude for a knight to have, but he thought better of it—it was nothing he needed to worry about—and faced forward again.

Yua’s hair was glossy, her skin looked bright and healthy, her nails had been polished, and her dress was stunning. It was clear that she was being well taken care of.

“Have you heard about the legend of this world?”

“I have. The story of the miasma and the Holy Maiden, right?”

The story was that a holy maiden would be taken from a location that had been transmitted through a divine revelation, then forced to play her role to purify the miasma radiating from the Demon Forest.

Of course, Seiichirou did not say that. He had just kept his answer brief and

nodded.

“Right! Exactly! Apparently, I’m that Holy Maiden, and you got dragged into this and ended up coming here by accident!”

I know. Well, technically I only got dragged into this because you cried for help and reached out your hand to me, but if you really followed the breadcrumbs, this had all been the work of the leader of the kingdom. I’m not going to say either of those things, though.

“It appears so.”

Seiichirou simply nodded slowly, like the bobbing waves of a calm sea, but the man beside her, Yurius, cut in irritably.

“What’s with that attitude of yours?! Yua was worried and even took the time to speak to someone like you! Surely you have more to say than that!”

Seiichirou didn’t remember Yua being worried about him, and if he was to reveal his true thoughts, he would be directly criticizing the kingdom... Just who was this guy anyway?

“I’m sorry, that’s not what I... Um...”

Seiichirou looked at Yua, who seemed to realize that the man beside her hadn’t yet introduced himself, so she quickly filled Seiichirou in.

“Oh! This is Yurius, the firstborn prince of this kingdom. He’s been looking after me.”

Oh, that explains it... A prince. That must be why he’s acting like that.

“I’m astounded,” Yurius sneered. “You don’t even know the names or faces of the royal family?”

Yes, well, it’s only been three days since I was abducted, and you haven’t introduced yourself, come to see me, or even apologized, so...

“I apologize for my ignorance.”

“And then,” Yua continued, “that man over there with the black hair is Aresh, commander of the Third Royal Order. He’s really strong!”

For whatever reason, Yua had even introduced the commander, so Seiichirou

turned toward him and nodded politely. But then again, the commander was incredibly handsome, so it wasn't difficult for Seiichirou to imagine why a high school girl would be rather taken by him.

"So what are you going to do, Shiraishi?" Seiichirou asked, returning to the real issue at hand.

Yua looked down for a moment. When she raised her head, there was a twinge of apprehension on her face, but she met Seiichirou's eyes straight on.

"I want to fulfill the duties of the Holy Maiden! I mean, the people here are in a lot of trouble, and I'm the only one who can save them!"

Seiichirou blinked slowly.

Now that he thought about it, Yua was still a high school student who had yet to experience the real world—and seemed quite sheltered. Any person of that age would probably be excited at this extraordinary turn of events, despite the outrageous circumstances surrounding them, and they would accept the assertions of the people around them at face value.

Seiichirou glanced to the side and saw the prince's eyes, filled with satisfaction and affection, fixed on Yua.

"...There is something else I wish to discuss with my fellow compatriot," Seiichirou said. "May we speak in private?"

Seiichirou had made the request because he thought it would be a bad idea to talk about the next subject in front of the prince, and sure enough, the prince gave him an ugly scowl and shut him down.

"Two members of the opposite sex, alone in one room? What the hell are you thinking?!"

Seiichirou had a hunch that Yua and the prince had been alone together in the room before they had arrived—did that not count?

But luck seemed to be on Seiichirou's side, because just then, there was an unassuming knock at the door. Aresh opened it, and a man wearing a butler's uniform bowed and entered.

"I'm terribly sorry to interrupt, Your Highness Yurius, but His Majesty requests

your presence."

"What? I'm busy right now!"

"I'm very sorry, but it's urgent."

Yurius hesitated, but the butler wasn't backing down. He clicked his tongue in annoyance and stood up.

"Aresh, you're in charge. Don't take your eyes off him. Yua, I'm heading out for a bit."

Yurius gave Seiichirou one last silent glare before leaving the room.

That left Seiichirou, Yua, and the commander of the Third Royal Order alone in the room.

Seiichirou hesitated for a bit, but then decided the commander wasn't likely to interrupt them like the prince had. He steeled himself and began speaking in a quiet voice.

"It's fine if you have some sort of moral calling to do this, but please make sure you really understand the people around you and the situation you're in."

"What do you mean...?" Yua asked, furrowing her brow.

"I don't know much about the Holy Maiden's power or her duty, but at the end of the day, you were ab...summoned here to work for this kingdom. You should think hard about what that means and make sure you know all the conditions of that role before you do anything."

From the onset, the kingdom had captured Yua, without any consideration for her own personal circumstances, with the purpose of using her. Yua didn't even know how dangerous the Holy Maiden role could be, and as far as the kingdom was concerned, Yua could die if it meant the miasma was purified.

"Are you telling me to refuse...?!"

"I'm not telling you to refuse. I'm just saying to take more time to get a grasp of what's going on..."

"But...if there's an outbreak, a lot of people are going to die! I'm the only one who can do this! How can you say something so cruel?!"

It was not a question of cruelty—Seiichirou was talking about Yua's personal safety.

"Only the Holy Maiden can accomplish this... People will die... There will be an outbreak of miasma... All I'm saying is: You should verify these facts."

"So you're saying that everyone's lying?!"

"I'm not saying that."

However, these were individuals who seemed to think nothing of abducting two people. Seiichirou didn't care about their religious belief in Holy Maidens or anything like that—he thought the kingdom should work to solve their own problems.

"But everyone's in trouble! How can you say such awful things?!"

Despite Seiichirou intentionally trying to keep his voice low, Yua's emotional outbursts might have been audible from beyond the door.

Thinking that this might have been his only chance to talk directly with Yua now that she was the Holy Maiden, he had rushed things too quickly. People her age tended to put their emotions and feelings of righteousness above all else. Maybe he could have worded things differently.

"I heard that the kingdom is giving you money, Kondou! How can you say such awful things after that? I've had enough of this! I'm going to work hard for the people of this kingdom!"

After these declarations, Yua left through yet another door in the back of the room, which probably led to her bedroom. All Seiichirou could do was sigh.

Well, they do seem to be treating her well.

Aresh motioned silently, so Seiichirou stood and exited the room in response.

He left the main tower accompanied by the same knight who had initially fetched him, although the knight was more likely *driving* him out than seeing him out.

Right up to the end, neither Yua nor the prince apologized to Seiichirou.

Seiichirou thought it over.

Generally speaking, adults ought to patiently guide and advise young women of Yua's age.

However, as it was, Yua and Seiichirou had no relationship with each other—they were complete strangers, having only met for the first time three days ago.

Do I have any obligation to go that far for her?

“Oh well...”

Those sorts of things were situational.

For now, Seiichirou wouldn't be able to do anything unless he solidified his own footing in this world.

Now mentally as well as physically exhausted, Seiichirou drank the nutritional tonic Norbert had given to him earlier that day before going to bed.

It tasted disgusting.

Seiichirou, however, was surprised when he woke up the next morning.

His body felt lighter; his head felt clearer.

His chronic migraine was gone, as was his stiff neck, the accompanying pain, and the heaviness in his body.

Seiichirou once again left Norbert behind to go to work early, and Norbert once again arrived at work precisely on time. Seiichirou ran up to him with a smile that Norbert had never seen before, and his eyes bulged in astonishment.

“Good morning, Norbert! The nutritional tonic you gave me yesterday was very effective! Thank you very much!!”

As Seiichirou thanked him with never-before-seen exuberance, Norbert scanned his face. He could see Seiichirou's normally pallid complexion was tinged with color, and while his dark circles were still there, they had faded somewhat.

“Oh! So you drank it, huh? Good stuff, isn't it? This really skilled apothecary made it—he's the supplier for the Royal Orders!”

“Is that right? Um... Would it be possible for someone like me to buy that?”

The nutritional tonic was much more effective than any of the expensive

energy drinks Seiichirou had taken in the past. In a world where magic existed, it made sense that the tonic would work so well. For the first time ever, Seiichirou was impressed by this world.

“His medicine shop is in town, so even someone like you can buy it! Want me to show you how to get to his place next time?”

“Yes! After work today, if you can, please!!”

“What? Today?!”

Urged on by Seiichirou and his newfound excitement, Norbert ended up going back into town just two days after his last trip.

By the end of the workday, Seiichirou had sorted through half of the chaotically stacked papers, bound them together, and put them neatly away in a cabinet.

“All right, that’s ten bottles for six hundred rula.”

“Okay.”

“Huh?! You’re buying ten?!”

When work ended, Seiichirou had pestered Norbert to hurry, and they were currently inside the medicine shop. It was a tiny store filled with the unique smell of medicinal herbs.

Seiichirou had really wanted to buy more, but he didn’t have enough money on hand, so he just bought as many bottles as he could. Each one was sixty rula, or 1,500 yen, which was a decent price, but with how effective the tonic was, it was a steal. Seiichirou handed the money over with a grin. As long as the bottle remained sealed, the tonic could last for a year in a cool, dark place.

“You’re from the royal palace, aren’t you? I appreciate you fetching these for the Royal Orders.”

The thirtysomething-year-old man who appeared to be the apothecary seemed to have jumped to that conclusion after seeing Seiichirou and Norbert arrive in their official uniforms, without stopping to consider that one person would buy ten bottles for themselves. Seiichirou didn’t particularly feel the need to correct him, so he didn’t deny it.

Ding, ding.

Having finished his errand, Seiichirou had just been about to turn around and head home when the sound of a bell rang out, and the door to the medicine shop opened.

He saw a black-clothed man—Aresh, commander of the Third Royal Order—and another man in similar clothes with light blue hair enter the store.

“Whoa! Commander Indolark and Vice Commander Rhoda!”

The usually frivolous Norbert immediately stood ramrod straight. Following his example, Seiichirou took a step back and straightened his posture as well.

“...Huh? Well, what do we have here? It’s the Funnel Department! What are you doing in a place like this?”

The man who spotted them was not Aresh, but the blue-haired man in his thirties or thereabouts who had been called Vice Commander Rhoda. He must have been a part of the Third Royal Order as well, but he had few prominent muscles to speak of. His eyes drooped downward slightly at the outer corners, and there was a noticeable mole under one of them, almost like a teardrop. He was a fairly handsome man.

Correction: The man beside him was so beautiful that Vice Commander Rhoda only appeared to be “fairly” handsome. He was certainly attractive enough on his own.

“Well, uh, I’m just showing Sei...just showing the new hire around town,” Norbert answered nervously.

“Oh!” the man with the mole said, clapping his hands together. “Is this guy the Holy Maiden’s tagalong?”

It seemed the news had reached as far as the vice commander of the Third Royal Order.

“Hmm...,” he continued. “Even though you’re from a different world, there’s nothing special about you. You’re just an average guy.”

If anything, Seiichirou’s looks—the shadows under his eyes, the listlessness to his gaze—made Rhoda think that this other world was worse off than he had

originally imagined. But from Norbert's perspective, even with his worn-down appearance, Seiichirou was looking a lot better than he had before.

"Say, Aresh, you've met the Holy Maiden, right? How'd she look? Was she as haggard as this guy?"

"No, she seemed normal. If anything, I'd say she looks like the daughter of some wealthy aristocrat."

Then who the heck is this guy...? the vice commander thought.

Orjef Rhoda tilted his head, wondering if this otherworlder was the sort of manservant they had all imagined him to be, but Seiichirou, totally unaware of that, was still fixated on the phrase *Funnel Department*.

Funnel did not particularly give off a good impression. Plus, the Accounting Department handled money. So then, was someone "funneling" the royal palace's money somewhere else...? That couldn't be—the offender would have certainly gotten arrested, and it would have been the end of that. Something wasn't making sense about that nickname being thrown around so openly. Seiichirou resolved to ask Norbert about it once they parted ways with them, but the second he walked past Aresh on the way out, the man muttered a bombshell so quietly only Seiichirou could hear.

"You... The prime minister has his eye on you."

"!!"

Seiichirou instinctively looked back, but Aresh was ordering something from the medicine shop, not paying him any attention.

"Sei? What's wrong?"

"Nothing..."

Seiichirou shook his head. They bowed toward the two knights and left the store.

Well, it does make sense...

The commander had overheard his conversation with the Holy Maiden—with Yua—and the knights outside the room might have heard it as well. If they had, the kingdom would probably consider Seiichirou a nuisance who was

attempting to give the Holy Maiden unnecessary advice.

His words hadn't gotten through to Yua, the one they had been intended for, but he couldn't do anything about what had been done.

Right now, more than anything else, Seiichirou needed to focus on doing what he could.

That, of course, was his work.

"Norbert, there's one other place I was going to stop by, so you can head home without me."

"Huh? No way; I'm fine! I'll go with you! Where are you going?"

Seiichirou had felt bad for keeping him out for so long, but Norbert, unsurprisingly, had insisted on accompanying him. Just who ordered Norbert to follow Seiichirou around?

"I think it's going to be boring..."

Norbert dismissed this, so Seiichirou headed for the street vendors.

Σ Σ Σ

The next day, the Accounting Department was in a slight uproar.

"What?! You're finished already?!"

"Yes. Please give me my next task."

Just like the day before, Seiichirou looked unwell but was strangely animated. He had quickly finished sorting the documents and had checked the ones that had contained very detailed calculations.

With one hand on a mysterious tool, Seiichirou was truly in his element—he polished off the calculations with incredible speed. He could always do it mentally, but with an abacus, Seiichirou was a different beast entirely.

He was pleasantly strumming the custom-made abacus he had ordered from the young boy at the street market.

He was going to be dealing with a lot of tedious calculations, and his efficiency would suffer if he was just doing them in his head. He wanted to use a data

analyzing software, but he knew that would be utterly impossible. At least with an abacus, he could still make decent progress with his work.

Not just that, but there were nutritional tonics that could erase his fatigue.

That's right! No matter how much I work, I'll never get tired!!

My body won't get heavy! My stomach won't hurt! I won't feel nauseous! I won't get migraines! My neck, shoulders, and back won't go numb!

I can work as much as I want!!

What a wonderful world this is!

Seiichirou was truly ecstatic.

Helmut, overwhelmed by Seiichirou's incredible speed, gave into Seiichirou's insistence and assigned him more and more work.

The job of the Royal Accounting Department was to manage the treasury, allocate money to each department's budget requests, and manage that money. Consequently, the Accounting Department received applications from various departments every day. Seiichirou and the others checked the detailed budgets, classified them, then presented them to Helmut, who would then stamp and store them.

That was how Seiichirou immediately noticed it.

"Isn't this budget application strange?"

The first thing that struck Seiichirou as odd was that the amounts on the documents submitted were always clean, round numbers.

While they might have been justifiable on a draft budget, he wondered why they were being used on retroactive requests. Nevertheless, Seiichirou speculated that perhaps this kingdom simply didn't have any consumption tax and carried on.

Then he noted the sheer volume of request forms that were being sent in and the disproportionately short working hours of the employees. Because this was an issue of work style in general, Seiichirou reflected and thought it wouldn't make sense to compare this against the common practice of another world.

Finally, the applications were being sent excessively from one department in particular.

“These three requests from the Third Royal Order for ‘training expenses’ are exactly the same, but the amounts are all different. Moreover, they all exceed ten thousand rula.”

Seiichirou hadn’t seen the knights at work and had only glanced at the prices of weapons in town, so he couldn’t say for certain, but requesting over thirty thousand rula in the four days since Seiichirou had arrived here seemed excessive.

“Yes, they submit all their requests under ‘training expenses,’ so it’s fine if they all have different amounts,” Helmut said with a smile.

“...What?” Seiichirou asked, his temple twitching.

“The knights are very busy, you see, so they don’t have time to draw up such detailed request forms,” Helmut said, holding Seiichirou’s gaze as he gave his stamp of approval on each one.

Grab!

“Huh?”

Helmut widened his almond-shaped eyes slightly. Seiichirou had just wordlessly grabbed his dominant hand.

When Helmut quietly looked up, the young man who had been summoned just a few days before from another world was looking down at him with glazed eyes.

“Ko...Kondo?”

“...Please take them out.”

“What?”

Helmut hadn’t caught the words Seiichirou had muttered while still holding Helmut’s gaze. But when he asked Seiichirou to repeat himself, he saw the man suddenly widen his eyes.

“Please take out the total annual budget and the budget allocation

documents from last year!!”

Seiichirou couldn’t believe his eyes.

He was shocked to hear his boss wonder out loud if they even had documents from last year. Then, when Seiichirou went to the cabinets he had been tidying up the past few days, turned them inside out, and found the documents, he started seeing red when he saw the actual contents and sloppy bookkeeping.

“What are these request amounts...? This is almost the entire budget... We were only barely able to afford it... And these requests... Entertainment expenses? Meal costs? Brothel fees? Why was this much money requested and approved for a watch...? Who was this watch for...?”

As Seiichirou sat buried under a mountain of documents, muttering, a strange dark aura radiated from him. The other Accounting Department employees stood frozen in the corner of the room, wondering if this otherworlder could use magic.

“But there’s nothing we can do about it, Sei,” Norbert called out in a cheerful voice.

He was either trying to break the tension, or he simply couldn’t pick up on Seiichirou’s palpable frustration.

“...What?”

Totally imperceptive to the menace in Seiichirou’s voice—Seiichirou, a man who was never disrespectful—Norbert continued.

“I mean, we’re called the Funnel Department. We just move things along—we categorize budget requests and send them down the line.”

The Funnel Department... Here, surrounded by papers, Seiichirou finally understood what the nickname from yesterday meant.

It’s not embezzlement... It means we’re just a conveyer belt!



[CHAPTER TWO]

Promoted

In other words, the Royal Accounting Department was an accounting department in name only—it was just window dressing so aristocrats and powerful people could do whatever they pleased with the kingdom's tax revenue.

Reproaching the Accounting Department employees now would probably not improve the situation. The class system made it impossible to oppose the nobility and those with influence, which was how they had gotten into this situation, and this had already become an established setup. From briefly looking through the revenues, Seiichirou found that not only were the initial budgets set too high, their expenses were exceeding what was planned. That was money that intrinsically should have been saved, not spent.

This income and expenditure balance won't be able to last very long...

If there was even one crop failure or natural disaster somewhere in the kingdom, they would be finished.

Where is the money coming from that's making up for this shortfall anyway?

“Um... Sei...”

“Kondo...?”

Hearing the two men's timid voices, Seiichirou sighed loudly to calm himself down and put on a smile.

“I'm sorry. I'll continue doing the work I ought to do, so may I inspect the

other budget approval documents?"

Seiichirou spoke as if the matter was already decided, and it ended with Helmut nodding stiffly at his smile.

Helmut thought that if he did what Seiichirou asked for now and got back to work as usual, all would be well and good.

Seiichirou, however, was not giving up that easily.

"Kondo! Kondo! Was I not given request forms for the settlement of accounts?!"

Helmut held up the applications, less than a third of their typical volume, with a panicked look. Seiichirou, who was surrounded by piles of documents, glanced up, looking unconcerned.

"Yes. The requests that surpassed their budget, were used for inappropriate things, or were incomplete, I sent back to their respective departments with a clear explanation for their return."

"What?!"

Helmut approved everything—if Seiichirou had handed him the forms, the director would have stamped them exactly as they were, so he had sorted the admissible and inadmissible requests before handing them over.

"If you do that, the other departments are going to start hating us!"

"We can't help it if they decide to hate the Accounting Department, but I clearly explained the reasons for returning them. There's no need for us to accept inadequate documents."

"B-but..."

"Since this is the first time, I was somewhat lenient in my assessments to avoid any backlash. We're going to gradually write official forms and get the word out that we're not going to accept wasteful expenses, so these measures will take a bit of time, but I think they will go over well."

As Seiichirou said this, he simultaneously continued to use his personal calculating tool and write with his magic-ink pen, scribbling down detailed reasons for why requests had been denied. Seeing this, Helmut was rendered

speechless and returned to his seat.

During working hours, Seiichirou sorted through forms and wrote up rejection documents in addition to his usual work duties.

Outside that, he checked and summarized the previous income and expenditure reports and carefully looked over the problematic areas.

Seiichirou kept on working.

But his face was positively glowing.

No matter how much I work, I can get my energy back with those nutritional tonics! I can do as much as I want!!

Seiichirou was a corporate slave to the core.

Σ Σ Σ

“Hey, Aresh, I’ve been having some trouble getting my budget requests approved lately,” Orjef called out.

Aresh, who had finished with morning training and was heading to his office, just furrowed his brow.

“What about it? You already have the funds from the annual budget request, don’t you?”

“Yeah, but there are all sorts of additional things we need money for, right? Like any repairs we do on expeditions and stuff.”

“You’re the one who’s supposed to be taking care of all that.”

“Well, that’s true, but...”

As an extraordinary prodigy of both magic and swordplay, Aresh had made a name for himself at an incredibly young age. With his marquess pedigree and his good looks, Aresh had become a symbol of the Third Royal Order, which, as an order of magic, stood apart from the other Royal Orders. He had been appointed as commander at a young age.

Despite his meteoric rise to the top, perhaps because he had already had everything in life, he was totally indifferent toward status and prestige—he had no serious interests and was perpetually bored. Due to this, he was

dispassionate about his responsibilities as commander and wouldn't have minded at all if he was removed from his position that very moment.

However, the Third Royal Order was the most elite organization in the kingdom, and its members all felt proud to belong to it. Vice Commander Orjef was related to Aresh, and they had known each other since childhood. He was both Aresh's relative and, after serving in the Third Royal Order and achieving excellent results in battle, his young vice commander. The difference between Orjef and Aresh was that the former took pride in the Third Royal Order—or rather, prided himself in being a member of it.

So with Aresh lacking any drive to work, Orjef had taken the initiative and been managing the Royal Order.

"I don't think I've ever had the Funnel Department reject a request before."

There was, however, a clear note on the document explaining that the Accounting Department could no longer process requests in the name of "training expenses" alone—there was even a sample of the new form they were to submit.

Other departments were also having their applications returned with detailed notes identifying their problems—for example, inflated budgets were politely called miscalculations, and certain budget justifications were labeled as unclear. Members of the other departments would just tilt their heads and accept it as something out of their control. However, so many of the Third Royal Order's requests were rejected that Orjef and the other knights were starting to voice their complaints and wonder what was going on.

They were the kingdom's elite, so they all thought their spending would be covered by the kingdom's tax revenue.

"Oh, Aresh!" came a woman's voice.

Just as Orjef thought it might be time for him to go and give the Funnel Department a piece of his mind, he saw a young woman jogging down the corridor in a very unladylike manner, and he abandoned that train of thought.

"Your Holiness," Aresh said.

"You can call me Yua, you know! What a coincidence meeting in a place like

this, huh?"

Yua, the Holy Maiden who had been summoned from another world to save their kingdom, was smiling up at Aresh. It was Orjef's first time seeing her so close, and he widened his eyes at her lovely appearance.

She's totally different from that worn-out guy! I get why Aresh compared her to an aristocrat's daughter, though she slightly lacks elegance...

"Oh, hello! Um..."

Orjef fell to one knee when she turned to look at him.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Your Holiness," he said, taking her hand. "I am the vice commander for the Third Royal Order. My name is Orjef Rhoda. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

Yua smiled and nodded, blushing slightly.

"You mustn't run in the corridors, Your Holiness," came a voice.

Orjef had only been paying attention to Yua, but at the arrival of a person who had been following after her, he straightened his back.

"Your Excellency!"

The man who chided Yua wore a placid smile. He donned a white uniform decorated with blue and gold underneath a blue cloak, the length of which indicated his rank in the Romany Kingdom.

This person held the highest position—Camile Karvada, prime minister of the Romany Kingdom, a man more charismatic than Aresh.

Although Camile was not young, he was a fine man whose accumulated life experiences had made him attractive as an adult. He possessed both the ruthlessness to cut down a man with sharp words and a benign smile—and the wisdom to see everything and only move things along as he saw fit. To put it simply, you wouldn't want to make this dangerous man your enemy. There was a terrifying rumor in the Romany royal palace that if anyone was to displease him—even high-ranking aristocrats—they would be stripped of their title. It wasn't true, but it certainly seemed within the realm of possibility.

"I'm sorry, Camile. I still haven't gotten used to everything yet... I'll be more

careful," Yua said, looking up at him.

Yua seemed entirely relaxed as she apologized. She didn't seem to be nervous around him in the slightest.

"Where are you off to with the prime minister, Your Holiness?" Orjef asked.

Perhaps because of his intelligence, Camile disliked legends and had disapproved of summoning the Holy Maiden. But if he was looking after her, Orjef reasoned, then maybe he had accepted the kingdom's policy on placing faith in the Holy Maiden.

"Oh—no—we just met over there and started walking together. I'm on my way to a private tutor to learn about the kingdom's history."

"Is that right? I hope your studies go well."

"Well... I'm really not the best at studying. Plus, that tutor is scary... I would feel more motivated to work harder if they were as kind and handsome as Camile!"

Kind?! You just called the ruthless prime minister "kind"?!

Yua smiled bashfully at Camile, who grinned back.

Sure, he's handsome, but look closely, Your Holiness! He's smiling now, but his eyes aren't!

Orjef's silent plea could not reach Yua—whose cheeks turned red from Camile's gesture of friendly encouragement.

"The people in this kingdom are all so beautiful... Prince Yurius, Aresh, Camile... Oh! And Orjef's really handsome, too! Everyone looks like a model!"

The vice commander did not understand what *model* meant, but he thanked her for being counted as one of the good-looking. Aresh was still silent.

"That reminds me, the other day, I met the man who was summoned with you. Do the men in your world typically look like that, Your Holiness?"

Orjef didn't know what the norm in her world was, but he did have one frame of reference, so he figured he'd ask.

Yua tilted her head, smiling cryptically.

"There were a lot of handsome guys in my world, too! Kondou, let's see... He's your run-of-the-mill old man, I guess. He wore a suit on his day off, so he's probably a corporate slave."

"Corporate slave?" Aresh asked, unfamiliar with the phrase.

When Orjef thought back to the man, he recalled the otherworlder had a reasonably handsome face, but the memory of the man's weariness was even more overpowering. From a young woman's perspective like Yua's, she might have assumed his exhaustion was due to his old age.

Yua, looking delighted that she had finally elicited a response from Aresh, nodded and explained.

"Hmm, well, you have beasts of burden here, right? Animals you keep at home to help with work? I guess this is the company version of that..."

"What's a *company*?"

"Oh, it's a place where you work. So that phrase is used to kind of tease those who are controlled by their workplaces and never complain even when they're forced to work all the time, from morning till night, even on their days off. Wait... Is it supposed to be a self-deprecating term? Do people say it about themselves?"

Yua tilted her head—she seemed to have gotten confused from her own words. The three men thought back to Seiichirou's haggard appearance and nodded in understanding.

One man among them smiled, and unlike before, it reached his eyes.

"Corporate slave, huh...? That's very interesting," Camile muttered with amusement.

Meanwhile, the corporate slave Seiichirou was in the Accounting Department office by himself, working overtime voluntarily, his eyes glued to a document.

Seiichirou had concluded that the money to cover the insufficient budgets had been pulled from the Demon Forest Strategy division of the National Defense Force.

It is said that the Demon Forest releases miasma once every hundred years,

but it wasn't one hundred years exactly—the prediction included a certain margin of error. It had been 120 years since the last one, and the Holy Maiden had either been in Romany or an allied kingdom during the last few outbreaks, so there was a budget surplus. But because of that, the younger generations who were less knowledgeable about the Demon Forest had bled it dry without a second thought.

Now, not only were there visible signs of a looming miasma outbreak, but the kingdom had spent a large amount of money to perform the make-or-break secret art technique—summoning the Holy Maiden (and Seiichirou, the tagalong) from another world.

Originally, the budget for the Holy Maiden would have been enough for one person, but because of him, it had to be doubled to cover the living expenses of an additional person. Seiichirou, however, had no intention of turning down the financial support, no matter how tight the kingdom's budget was. In getting abducted, he had left behind everything he had cultivated in his life: his worldly possessions, and his family and friends. He deserved to be compensated for that.

Another issue was the prince, who seemed to hold the legend of the Holy Maiden passed down in the kingdom in high regard. He seemed to be buying Yua all sorts of things. That much was fine—whether it stemmed from love or admiration, the prince could do whatever he pleased. As far as Seiichirou was concerned, he could spend as much of his own money on her as he wanted.

However, the prince had billed the Accounting Department for everything he had gifted Yua, claiming them as national expenses under the Holy Maiden Budget. To make matters worse, the living expenses Yua received every day were three times more than the stipend Seiichirou was receiving. He wasn't complaining that there were differences in treatment between the Holy Maiden and a mere otherworlder, but the prince billing the Accounting Department for things like accessories on top of this was simply too much. The prince's argument was that, in order for the Holy Maiden to fulfill her role, she needed to understand the kingdom's culture and fall in love with it, but unfortunately, his financial sense was that of a royal, so he had been spending in excess.

Things are fine now, but if this continues and the miasma starts to cause

damage, things are going to take a turn for the worse...

Plants would be the first to be affected by the miasma, then the animals, and finally, it would spread to humans as a plague.

If there was a decline in crops, tax collections would go down. This would be true for animals, too, because livestock income would decrease. All the big shots seemed to think that revenue would just flow in without them needing to do anything. Seiichirou rubbed one of his fingernails as he calculated every conceivable simulation of events. Since coming to this world, he had unavoidably been forced to give up smoking, and this may have led him to inadvertently picking up this new habit of unconsciously fiddling with his fingernails.

There was another problem as well.

“Why did my request for the Third Royal Order get rejected?!”

Seiichirou let out an imperceptible sigh—this was the second raid that day.

The budget approval process had never been changed before, so no matter how lenient Seiichirou thought his rules were, the Accounting Department continued to receive similar types of complaints. If Seiichirou let Helmut handle them, he would once again simply give them the stamp of approval, so every time, Seiichirou would go out and politely explain why their requests had been rejected. But there were just too many complaints. With each one, Seiichirou had to stop working, and he wasn’t able to make progress. Given his personality, he was naturally starting to feel sick and tired of it.

“It’s no use talking to you! You’re a grunt! Where’s Director Somaria?!”

“Director Somaria is currently out of the office...”

A lie. To keep Helmut away during the hour people came with complaints, Seiichirou had shifted the time slot and relegated it to during the lunch break. Incidentally, he made sandwiches for himself and would eat them in the office, instead of the dining hall, as he looked at documents. Even so, compared with Seiichirou’s experience in Japan, he wasn’t getting any phone calls, which alone made his break periods very relaxing.

He carried on day after day in the same fashion, but then the thing he had

feared finally came to pass.

There was an official confirmation of a miasma outbreak.

There were reports of crop damage from the village closest to the Demon Forest, and tax revenues were declining.

The Holy Maiden, Yua, was still training for the purification, and such strong oppositions were raised by the prince and the faction of supporters of the Holy Maiden that they would not let the precious Holy Maiden go anywhere near the Demon Forest until she finished her training. It seemed likely that the current situation would be prolonged.

With this, the precarious state of the kingdom's treasury was exposed, and the Accounting Department was blamed for it.

"How the hell have you been running things?!"

"What do you mean, there's no money?!"

"There's got to be some embezzlement going on!"

Helmut trembled violently, wondering how this all happened, as he was berated repeatedly by the higher-ups from the Legal Department.

All he had done was approve budgets—the same thing everyone before him had done and exactly what he was told to do. Why was this practice being condemned now?

When Helmut slumped back into the Accounting Office afterward, Seiichirou was waiting for him. The shadows under his eyes had darkened again recently.

"Director Helmut, the documents are ready for you," he said, handing him a stack of papers.

Helmut shrank back from them. He was in no condition to do his usual work.

Seiichirou was a strange person—despite assurances from the kingdom that he would not need to worry about anything for his entire life, this man from another world who had been caught up in the summoning of the Holy Maiden had decided to join the Accounting Department of his own volition. Seiichirou had said in the beginning that he didn't understand the culture of this world, and Helmut had only accepted him because he had been ordered to do so from

the higher-ups, so he hadn't expected anything out of the man. But Seiichirou had ended up being more helpful than he had anticipated. He voluntarily worked outside of office hours, and before Helmut knew it, Seiichirou was even screening documents that were to be sent to him. The otherworlder was a strange person but a hard worker, and his working style was astonishingly incredible. This caused tension with the other departments, but the director was grateful that Seiichirou would also put himself in the line of fire.

However, this was not the time for Helmut to be dealing with Seiichirou's eagerness to work—nor did he want to.

"...I'm sorry, but could I do this later? There are some things I need to finish first."

Helmut looked exhausted, and his response sounded like it was squeezed out of him. Seiichirou looked at him with glazed eyes and offered the documents again.

"Here. These are documents detailing the kingdom's expenditures for the last twenty years with the requests received in the past year categorized, including a proposed draft budget for the future. Please look them over before the next meeting and give them to the higher-ups."

".....Hyah?"

Helmut had never in his life heard the sound that left his lips then.

At the meeting the following day, the members of the Legal Department and the directors from all the other departments turned pale.

There were detailed, revised income and expenditure reports for the past twenty years and the accurate sums of money spent by each department.

There was also a summary of how much was requested from the Accounting Department in the past year—and the reasons for the requests.

Finally, there was a revised breakdown of the current budget and a table showing the calculated total estimated cost of damages from potential future destruction caused by the miasma.

As there were no high-ranking officials in the Accounting Department, the

higher-ups had assumed they were not likely to be refuted, so they had tried to lay all the blame on them and pretended as if the requests hadn't happened. But now, with documents disclosing the requests for brothel expenses just one week prior, and the total sums spent at that brothel exposed before them, there was no way they could get out of this.

"...Did you make this?" asked Prime Minister Camile Karvada, a handsome man with slicked-back reddish rose-blond hair.

He sat in the center of the seats of honor in the council room. Helmut gulped, fearing that his heart might jump out of his chest at being directly addressed by such a man.

"No... It was..."

Σ Σ Σ

"I told you, the director is currently out of the office attending a meeting, so I will answer your concerns."

"And I told you: That's not gonna cut it!"

Complaints from other departments were now becoming almost a daily occurrence. Seiichirou had to stifle the urge to give the knight a good hard kick before responding. He knew that if it really came to blows, he wouldn't stand a chance.

But even if Seiichirou "wasn't going to cut it," he was the one who actually rejected the man's request. *Well, I suppose he means he wants to talk to a manager.*

"Helmut really is in a meeting!"

Norbert, unable to continue watching in silence, had tried to offer Seiichirou a helping hand from afar, but he retreated when the man shouted, "Buzz off, you son of a viscount!" Norbert was of no help.

Members of the Third Royal Order had more power than even lowly aristocrats, and it seemed as if their authority, more than their family status—more than anything—was what gave them such big heads.

"If we have to scrape together any more funds for the Third Royal Order's

budget, we will have to take them from the yearly miscellaneous expenses set aside for the residence halls.”

Seiichirou tried to hint that if they still demanded more money, then they might lower the quality of meals served in the residence halls, but of course, the man yelled again.

“Give me a break! We’re knights of the Third Royal Order! You’re just a greenhorn; you’ve got no power to—”

“Then why don’t we give him a managerial position?”

This new voice was by no means loud, but the sweet, low tones seemed to permeate through the chaos nevertheless, quelling both sides of the altercation.

“Huh...?”

Seiichirou looked past the burly knight and saw the fair-skinned Helmut with a handsome man who looked to be in his forties. The man had reddish-blond hair, wore a deep-blue cloak over an official uniform, and was very clearly one of the upper echelons in the kingdom. He stood with an air of superiority.

“Y-Your Excellency...!”

The knight bolted upright into a salute immediately, and even the members of the Accounting Department all hurried to sit up straight. Only Seiichirou, unable to follow the abrupt turn of events, stood motionless.

His Excellency... That’s got to be similar to the prime minister of Japan, right...?

The Accounting Department was in the royal palace, but why would the prime minister drop by such a remote office without any prior notice?

No one offered Seiichirou an answer to his question. They were all frozen in place, awaiting the prime minister’s next words. The prime minister himself leisurely walked forward.

As he drew nearer, the knight standing in front of Seiichirou scrambled out of the way, leaving the very dumbfounded Seiichirou all alone.

The prime minister suddenly leaned in very close.

"Hmm... I've never seen you this close-up before, but you don't look as bad as they say," he muttered in a voice so low only Seiichirou could hear.

Then, before Seiichirou had time to react, the prime minister straightened himself again and looked over at the knight.

"You won't listen to what he says because he's not a manager; he's just a low-ranking employee? Then I'll give him a position where he'll have the power to enforce decisions."

"What—? Th—that's—that's not what I..."

The knight began to panic, but Seiichirou felt even more flustered.

The prime minister was clearly talking about Seiichirou, despite having not discussed the idea with him beforehand.

"W-wait a second, Your Excellency... What's going on here...?"

"I am giving you the position of assistant director of the Accounting Department. I hope you'll continue to work ardently and faithfully for this kingdom."

Seiichirou could hear members of the Accounting Department muttering at the prime minister's words, but he had no time to look back.

"I-I'm really not fit for a managerial position..."

No! A manager—and especially a middle manager—just gets burdened with work from both their superiors and their subordinates! I just want to do my job, without any constraints!!

Seiichirou, in his panic, had made a mistake.

He had humbly refused the offer without hearing any details of the position. The prime minister, who was said to be the smartest person in the kingdom, narrowed his emerald-green eyes.

"Oh...? It looks like you have some experience being a manager..."

"!!"

Crap, Seiichirou thought, but it was too late.

The prime minister gave him a smile that could have also been characterized

as graceful and put his large hands on Seiichirou's shoulders.

"You really are a good corporate slave," he whispered cheerfully. "I look forward to your future endeavors."

The prime minister seemed to be in an incredibly good mood. From a distance, people surrounded Camile as he read over the documents that had been presented to him again.

The volume of information and the writing style itself leaves nothing to be desired. The databased predictions are persuasive, and he prepared several proposals on how to proceed. No one instructed him to do this—he was proactive and did all this himself. We obtained a real asset with this Holy Maiden's tagalong.

Sorting through the massive amount of data, organizing it into convincing reports, and even preparing breakthrough proposals... These were not tasks that could be completed quickly—they took time.

And...that corporate slave did it? Making these documents outside of work hours, asking for nothing in return...

The man was outstanding—a pawn who would voluntarily toil away.

A person like that...

How could I not want him?

Then the knights standing guard heard something unprecedented—something that made them question their own hearing and made the blood drain from their faces... Camile was humming.

Σ Σ Σ

"Oh, shoot."

Even though Seiichirou had been promoted, he woke up that day the same as he always had. He made and drank a simple vegetable soup, prepared a sandwich for lunch, and was about to take a nutritional tonic for his fatigued body when he realized...

He had run out of the ones that Norbert had helped him buy right after he

had arrived in this world. He knew he would have to purchase some more today, so he thought through how to fit it into the day's work schedule as he changed his clothes.

But then...

"...How do I put this thing on?"

Seiichirou unfolded the cloak the prime minister had given him the day before, utterly perplexed.

He had obviously never worn a cloak when he had been an office worker in Japan. His cloak was brown with silver ornaments, indicating that he belonged to the Accounting Department. The length of the cloak represented one's rank as a manager, and Seiichirou had been given a one-sided cape that cut off around his waist.

Yesterday had been so chaotic that asking how to put on the garment had been the furthest thing from Seiichirou's mind. Eventually, he decided to ask Norbert for help.

When he dropped by Norbert's room, his colleague had still been lazing around in his loungewear, but he let Seiichirou in. He immediately agreed to help Seiichirou and promptly started putting his cloak on for him.

"But gosh, I guess you're my boss now, huh, Sei? You overtook me in the blink of an eye!"

"I may be your boss, but I'm still technically a newcomer, so please don't worry about it too much."

"No can do! I mean, I've always told you to stop being so polite with me, and now that you're my superior, you *really* gotta stop!"

As Norbert was pressuring Seiichirou into speaking more casually with him, he fastened the silver ornament to the top of Seiichirou's shoulder. Seiichirou watched him, mentally noting how that part of the uniform worked, and nodded.

"Well, if you insist... Is speaking like this fine, Mr. Norbert?"

"You can't call me mister, either!"

"No, that's to show we're not close; it has nothing to do with rank."

"Then you *definitely* can't call me that!"

The brown cloak hanging from Seiichirou's shoulder attracted some stares during his walk from the residence hall to the royal palace, but no one gave him a hard time about it. It appeared that the incident with the prime minister the day before had reached quite a few ears.

Seiichirou was, as always, the first to arrive at the office, and he promptly started on the day's work. His workstation had moved from the corner of the room to the desk closest to the director.

Seiichirou's job wasn't over just because Helmut had presented his documents at the meeting the day before. Drawing from the data of past miasma outbreaks in the Demon Forest, he had to estimate future damage costs and devise ways of overcoming them. Well, thinking up those plans was the duty of the higher-ups, technically—the Accounting Department's job was figuring out how to be judicious with that money.

This meant that Seiichirou needed to learn more about the miasma problem—and the Holy Maiden, too. He had always wondered if the issue was truly impossible to resolve without the Holy Maiden.

Seiichirou had heard that magic existed in this world, but so far, he had only ever looked at numbers—he didn't know a thing about magic. He sighed, realizing that if he needed to learn about it on top of everything else, he was going to have to rearrange his schedule.

All he really wanted to do was work on his abacus all day, with numbers as his sole companions... He felt weighed down by the cloak hanging off his right shoulder.

God, I want a cigarette...

Seiichirou was formally introduced as the assistant director that day. Most unusually, he also finished his work on time that day. He claimed that he was leaving a little early because he had an errand to run.

After responding to Norbert's "Let's go celebrate!" with a simple "Next time," Seiichirou visited the medicine shop once again. The small wooden building had

the same distinctive smell of medicinal herbs as last time.

“Welco... Oh? You’re that guy from before...” The storekeeper with salt-and-pepper hair seemed to remember Seiichirou’s face. His eyes widened when he spotted the cloak on his shoulder. “So you’re a manager!”

“Oh, no, I wasn’t one last time.”

“So you got promoted! Congratulations!!”

Seiichirou wasn’t quite sure if it was a cause for celebration, but he thanked him anyway.

“And what’ll it be today?”

“Nutritional tonics. Ten... Twenty, please.”

Seiichirou had the money, but it wasn’t from his salary. The day before, the prime minister had personally given him his stipend from the kingdom.

He had been allotted eight large silver coins, which was eight thousand rula. In Japanese yen, that would have been approximately two hundred thousand yen, or roughly the average monthly income for an ordinary adult male. In Seiichirou’s case, his rent, utilities, and food expenses from the dining hall were paid for, so it was actually quite a lot of money.

Despite this, Seiichirou voluntarily took on a job, so he also got a salary from working at the royal palace—and a manager’s pay, at that. With this addition to his allowances, which were substantial enough that he would never have to work, Seiichirou would truly never have to worry about money unless he lived incredibly lavishly.

Seiichirou had no hobbies and had only ever traveled between his home and office, so his savings in Japan had been, compared to his peers, quite a sizable amount. He hoped it was transferred to his parents.

In this world, Seiichirou had the financial means to buy as many of the wonderful nutritional tonics as his heart desired. Given the effort it had taken to come out here to buy them, he had asked for a large amount, but the shopkeeper grew concerned. “Can you carry all those?” he asked. Seiichirou thought he made a fair point and corrected the number to be the same as last

time—ten bottles.

Once again, the man seemed to be under the impression that Seiichirou was an errand boy for the Royal Orders, but Seiichirou didn't bother to correct him and simply paid for the tonics.

When he walked out, the evening sun was painting the town crimson. It was still early evening.

Seiichirou considered stopping by somewhere else in town, but he had just bought a massive bag of nutritional tonics and was still not used to the fattiness of restaurant food, so he decided to go straight home.

Right. I'll have a tonic before I head back.

It would take a short while for the effects to kick in.

If he drank one now, by the time he returned to the residence hall, ate, and finished taking a bath, his fatigue would probably be gone. Then he could carry on with the work he couldn't do because he hadn't worked overtime today.

Seiichirou went down a side street outside the medicine shop, took one bottle out of the paper bag he was holding, and drank the entire thing, as he usually did, in one gulp—it would be undrinkable otherwise.

“Wh...at...?”

No sooner had he drank the tonic than the world began to spin.

Huh...? What's going on?

Seiichirou lost his sense of balance and fell to his knees.

Used to having poor health, Seiichirou felt bewildered by the familiar sensation.

Vertigo...? Why would I have that...?

The world continued to spin underneath him. His thoughts were disjointed.

He remembered it being as warm as a spring day, but for some reason, he suddenly felt cold. He braced both hands against the stone-paved ground to support himself.

“Hahh... H-hahh...”

Seiichirou could tell his breathing was becoming irregular.

Deep breaths, deep breaths, he tried to remind himself, but air wasn't getting into his lungs.

I'm hyperventilating...?! This...is pretty bad...

His vision was darkening. It was getting harder and harder to keep his eyes open.

Oh no, oh no...!

Seiichirou's body wasn't listening to him. He was panicking, cursing himself for forgetting to look into this world's standard of medical care.

Just then, he heard a low, familiar male voice.

"What are you doing?"

Rewinding just a bit—it was not a total coincidence that Aresh Indolark had come to that location.

Aresh was born with a vast amount of magic power and was very dexterous and skilled at controlling it. He was also a rare pentagram—he carried five of the six magical attributes.

Along with his magic power, Aresh was quick to learn spells, but after he had been employed by the Third Royal Order—an order of magic—his worrywart of a steward had recommended that he keep reserves of magic restoration tonics. He had never thought he would run out of magic, but this steward, who had been with him since childhood, had warned him that he could never know what may happen. So Aresh meekly went to the medicine shop introduced to him to restock. Magical energy was not something that could be replenished by sleeping, so his steward was right—if Aresh had magic restoration tonics, he could use them in times of unexpected need.

During the Holy Maiden Summoning especially, Aresh and the other magicians had been forced to use a large amount of magical energy, so he had expended it for the first time in a long while. Even now, his magic reserves weren't back to their usual state. Since there weren't plans for any expeditions in the near future, he had been trying to recover, with rest and medicine, little

by little.

Aresh's steward had introduced him to a tiny shop in town, run by a talented and reputable apothecary. Once it had got out that Aresh went there, orders had flooded in from the Royal Orders. Apparently, the store had gotten so busy that the owner was starting to hire people.

"Oh, Aresh! Welcome. Your usual?"

"Yes, three bottles please."

Magic restoration tonics were hard to preserve, so you couldn't buy it in large quantities. For this reason, Aresh frequently visited the store when he was in town.

"Oh, that reminds me—a courier for the Royal Orders came today. You guys must be busy, too, huh? Buying all those nutritional tonics..."

"A courier for the Royal Orders?"

Normally, this wouldn't have particularly interested Aresh, but he knew the Royal Orders stocked up on medicine twice a month. Two low-ranking members were usually supposed to go pick them up. When Aresh had seen the stores the day before, there seemed to be plenty of medicine left.

"That guy—you bumped into him the other day, too. The civil official with glasses and terrible shadows under his eyes. That reminds me, he was wearing a manager's cloak and said he had just been promoted. I guess even managers run errands, eh?"

"....."

Aresh immediately recalled the otherworlder with glasses and dark circles whom he had run into the other day.

He didn't know anything about a promotion, but the shopkeeper was surely talking about the man who had been caught up in the Holy Maiden Summoning. For the affair, Aresh had been forced to do many unreasonable tasks to carry out the lost secret art. He wondered if there had been any other method they could have used.

Moreover, there was much about this world's common sense that the Holy

Maiden did not understand.

Ever since childhood, Aresh had been the object of affection for many girls because of his good looks and his family's status, but he was used to this, and ladies of marriageable age would distance themselves before trying to catch his attention. The Holy Maiden, however, perhaps because of her otherworldly nature, interacted with Aresh in a very friendly manner, with no regard for his social status at all. Or maybe she believed that her rank was the highest of them all.

The Holy Maiden had the important task of purifying the miasma. But being from another world, the girl had no idea how to handle magic and had to be taught basic knowledge, so she had been assigned several tutors. The Holy Maiden had appointed Aresh, commander of the Third Royal Order, of all people, to be her magic tutor. In the first place, why would a student be appointing their own instructors? Aresh was neither a teacher nor a magician—he was a knight.

He had initially objected, claiming that he was too busy, but a superior had twisted his arm into becoming her tutor. They assured him that a magician would teach her the essentials, so Aresh ended up coaching her two times a week, an hour each session. But the Holy Maiden would ignore her studies during those sessions and beg Aresh to teach her about the kingdom. Those lessons were given at other times, and the prince, who was almost always with her, should have been teaching her those things. The miasma from the Demon Forest was an issue facing *their* kingdom, so because the Holy Maiden was from another world, she didn't seem to understand the urgency.

The other person from that world was strange, too.

The man had been summoned—specifically, the Holy Maiden had dragged him here—and the kingdom had frankly not known what to do with him. Aresh thought the man would have surely taken up the kingdom's offer to be kept like a pet, with all his expenses taken care of, but the day after the summoning, the man had been at the royal palace wearing an official uniform. When Aresh had called out to him, the otherworlder had looked at him with vacant eyes, as if he were a pillar or something.

From what he had heard from the man himself and what Orjef had told him, the man—his name was Kondo, apparently—had asked for a job, even though he would be getting enough money that he'd never need to work a day in his life ever again. He couldn't understand it.

Aresh was talented. He was good at everything he did, and even had the innate constitution for magic.

Whether he wanted them or not, these responsibilities were forced upon him, and he was able to handle them with relative ease.

To Aresh, the days were becoming blurred.

The person who the shopkeeper had seen must have certainly been Kondo. He said the man had been buying nutritional tonics, but would the Accounting Department be using them? Aresh felt slightly unsettled as he walked out of the shop, and just then, his keen senses picked up on a strange noise.

It sounded like a glass bottle shattering and someone groaning.

He normally wouldn't have paid this any mind, but this street was nearly deserted. With a strange sense of unease, he headed in the direction of the noise.

Even when he spotted a man wearing a brown manager's cloak, hunched over on a dark side street, Aresh did not panic.

“What are you doing?”

The man's shoulders twitched in response, but he didn't seem to be able to raise his head.

Aresh internally groaned as he found himself in a troublesome situation, but the man wasn't a vagrant; he was a civil servant of the royal palace in an official uniform. He probably wasn't some thief.

“Hey, are you conscious?”

It was only after kneeling beside him and looking into his eyes that Aresh's expression changed. It was the face of the man with terrible shadows under his eyes that Aresh had just been thinking about.

“You...”

There was no doubt about it. It was the man with glasses and dark circles—the one from the other world who had just joined the Accounting Department—Kondo.

His face was paler than the last time Aresh had seen him, and his vacant eyes couldn't focus on anything. Aresh clicked his tongue at the scene before him—the otherworlder shaking uncontrollably with medicine bottles scattered on the ground around him.

“Poisoning?”

There were many different types of medicine, but certain ones like nutritional and restoration tonics sped up the activity in the body's cells and could cause poisoning if taken in excess.

Seiichirou's symptoms were acute but severe. Aresh knew the man should go to a hospital but wasn't sure if he would last the trip. He placed a hand against Seiichirou's back and recited a spell. Heat warmer than the average human body temperature traveled from Aresh's hand to Seiichirou's back and permeated his body.

This was life force magic, a combination of the Light, Wood, and Water attributes. It was also called healing magic. Because it was difficult to handle and not many people could use it well, those who could became priests, which was why it was also known as holy magic.

Aresh, a rare prodigy, could use all attributes except Earth and excelled at combination magic.

“Hey... Can you talk?” Aresh asked after seeing Seiichirou's breathing gradually stabilizing and his body stop shaking.

“I... Huh...?”

Seiichirou slowly looked up at him. The shadows under his eyes were as dark as ever, but his skin wasn't as pale as it had been before. His cheeks were flushed, and his eyes didn't look as glazed. In fact, they looked a little moist...

“Huh?”

That was strange.

There was much more color to his complexion than even when Aresh had seen him before, in his normal state.

Aresh was sure his breathing had just been steady, but it was becoming labored again. Most tellingly, his characteristic vacant eyes were wet and tinged with distress...

“What is this...? Hot...”

“Magic-sickness?!”

Aresh very rarely shouted like that, and his expression was one none of the other members of the Third Royal Order had ever seen before—absolute astonishment.

Small children who couldn’t process the amount of magical energy that came into contact with their bodies suffered from magic-sickness. Since nearly everyone in this world was exposed to magic in their day-to-day lives, it only occurred in very young children—babies who could barely form words. Everyone was aware that they needed to be careful when using magic on babies.

Why would he get...? Is it because he’s from another world?!

It was exactly as Aresh surmised—Seiichirou, who had lived in another world, had never been exposed to magic.

And now he had received Aresh’s advanced spell with a weakened body that had no tolerance to magic at all. Seiichirou was unable to break it down, so it was turning into heat, spreading throughout his body.

“Shit... This is a mess.”

Aresh was holding him up, and Seiichirou’s breathing was steadily becoming more labored. His body was hot, and he seemed to flit in and out of consciousness. He had no idea what was happening to him.

“Ah, ah... It’s hot—hot...”

Panting heavily, Seiichirou grabbed Aresh’s arms for support.

“...Dammit.”

There was only one cure for magic-sickness.



To make the person's body build up a tolerance by acclimatizing it to the same magical energy.

If it was just a baby, you could gently pat their tiny frame and get them used to the energy little by little.

But this wasn't a baby—this was an adult male with absolutely no immunity to magic. Aresh had used an advanced spell, and a strong one, at that. If he didn't hurry, Seiichirou's life would be in danger.

Aresh spat out another curse before lifting and carrying Seiichirou's hot body in his arms.

"Nothing good comes from getting involved with an otherworlder... Don't blame me for this later," he grumbled before sprinting toward an inn on the outskirts of town.

It sort of feels like I'm floating.

Seiichirou's head felt empty—it was hard to hold a thought. It almost felt like being drunk, which reminded Seiichirou that he hadn't had any alcohol since coming to this world.

Even back in his former world, he had always been exhausted, so he never drank much. There had been some days, though, when he had been so tired that he strangely couldn't sleep, so he would use alcohol's depressive effects to help fall asleep.

This felt somewhat similar to that.

"...Hey."

Seiichirou tried to remember despite the brain fog if he'd had any alcohol.

Let's see... I had been promoted by the prime minister and went to work as usual... Oh, that's not right. Today I didn't work overtime.

"Hey."

That's right, I ran out of nutritional tonics. I left on time to buy some more, and I bought them, then I wanted to have one right away... Huh?

"Hey! You're awake, aren't you?!"

“...Huh?”

As soon as Seiichirou opened his eyes, he immediately saw a man with black hair, violet eyes, and ridiculously good looks.

Seiichirou was overcome with surprise, but when he came back to his senses and looked around, he saw that he was lying down in a bed in a room he had never seen before. Then there was that handsome man... *Oh, that's right. He's that incredible looker, the commander of the Third Royal Order or something.* For some reason, the man was hovering over him. To make matters stranger, Seiichirou's official uniform was undone down the front, exposing his chest.

Huh... Well, I'm totally lost.

“Um... Good morning.”

He at least knew that he had just been woken up, so he gave the appropriate greeting.

“You bought a nutritional tonic at the medicine shop, drank it, and overdosed. Do you remember that?”

Hearing the question, he recalled a vague memory.

That's right... I took the nutritional tonic in one gulp, like I always do, and got nauseous, my heart hurt, and it was hard to breathe...

Although Seiichirou still felt slightly lightheaded and feverish, he didn't have a headache, his nausea was gone, and his breathing was back to normal.

He had no idea why he was half-naked or why the commander was hovering over him, but judging from his current state of health and the man's attitude, it seemed as though the commander had helped him.

“I'm sorry for all the trouble.”

“...Do you remember?”

“No.”

When Seiichirou answered the question honestly, the commander sighed. Seiichirou felt guilty.

“I happened to pass by when you overdosed, so I performed a life force spell

on you."

"Life force..."

Seiichirou felt momentarily disoriented by the unfamiliar string of words but then remembered that this was a world with magic.

And this magic can even cure poisoning? That's amazing...

"I'm really very sorry about that."

This time, when he apologized, Aresh clicked his tongue in response.

Perhaps because of his brain fog, Seiichirou was having trouble speaking properly.

"This is such a pain..." Aresh grumbled with a sigh, but he felt more regretful than annoyed. From Seiichirou's pain and labored breathing, even he could figure out that things were very serious.

"Now, listen here. You overdosed on that medicine and were on the verge of death, so I subdued it with magic."

"Right," Seiichirou said, nodding meekly. It sounded like he was being admonished.

"But you're from another world, so you have no tolerance to magic."

"Okay...?"

"That's what caused your magic-sickness."

"...I see."

Seiichirou figured that was the cause behind his current fuzzy, drunken-like state, but he already seemed to have received an emergency, temporary treatment for magic-sickness.

"Your zero tolerance to magic is not normal, and my spell was too much for you, which caused this situation. If I had not started treating you immediately, it could have been fatal."

"...Right."

Seiichirou could hear the words that were being said, but it took some time

for the meaning to sink in to his sluggish brain.

His body still felt feverish. He writhed in discomfort.

“...I’ve only given you first aid, so I want to make sure I have your consent before I proceed with the rest of it. Can you hear me?”

Seiichirou was listening, so he nodded.

“Magic-sickness is treated by acclimatizing the sick person to the energy of the one whose magic they received. Right now, you have magic inside of you that your body can’t handle, so you’re running a fever. Unless we treat you, the magic will crush your vital organs, and you will die... Will you accept the treatment?”

Acclimatize magic... It wasn’t really ringing any bells for Seiichirou. This truly was a different world.

But Seiichirou didn’t want to die, either.

He still had documents and other matters to attend to.

So he answered...

“Please.”

The commander grimaced for just a moment...then he started taking off his black uniform.

...Huh?

The man was now naked from the waist up. His body was very different from Seiichirou’s pallid one—he could see the man’s sculpted muscles. With his muscular arms, he slowly stripped off Seiichirou’s unbuttoned top.

“...Open your mouth.”

The man’s thin, parted lips and handsome face were getting ever closer...and then their lips met.

...Huh?

The commander’s tongue wrapped around his with a wet sound that reverberated through Seiichirou’s mind. His head spinning, Seiichirou struggled to understand what was happening.

In great measure, however, Seiichirou felt the pleasant sensation of the heat of his body accepting the saliva flowing from the man into his mouth.

“...That was a temporary fix. Like I told you before, that won’t be enough, so we have to go all the way.”

Um... Right.

Seiichirou got the message. He was pretty sure he grasped the situation.

As he felt the man’s body against his own skin, caressing the lower half of his body, Seiichirou understood what was happening.

But he could think of nothing else.

Alongside the original heat, Seiichirou felt more warmth that seemed to spread throughout his body every time the man touched him. He wondered if this was magic. But that heat, along with the troubling, pleasant sensation, was causing an overwhelming feeling in the lower half of his body.

“Ah... A-ah...!”

Even though Seiichirou had been turned over, and the caressing had reached his backside, he gave himself up to the man’s treatment.

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The first thing Seiichirou noticed upon waking was an unfamiliar ceiling.

His mind was so clear that a common thought—*What’s that?*—immediately popped into his mind.

Then, when he sat up, he saw a half-naked man in a black shirt drinking tea.

He remembered...

“You’re awake?” the man asked.

Seiichirou answered in the affirmative.

Again, he remembered...

He recalled exactly what the man had told him, which he was only able to partially comprehend the day before due to the brain fog.

He perfectly understood the reason for the dull ache in his back, the creaking

sensation in his hip joints, so unaccustomed to movement, and most of all, the twinge of discomfort from a part of his body that should not have been in pain.

Then he realized something.

“What time is it?”

“...Huh?” the man answered with a crease in between his brows.

Seiichirou did not wait for his response and looked around the room for a clock. He found one on the wall that was so decorated it was difficult to read. Once he figured out the hour, the blood drained from Seiichirou’s face.

“I’m late!!”

“What?!”

It was already just before the Light hour—the time work began. Seiichirou had no idea where he was, but he assumed it was somewhere in town, and when he took into account the time it’d take to get to the royal palace, he knew he was going to be late.

Because he did not do overtime yesterday so he could go buy his nutritional tonics, there was a mountain of work left for him to do, and he wouldn’t even be making it into the office on time!

Seiichirou flew into a frenzy, throwing on his scattered clothes and snatching up his cloak. A few wrinkles were unavoidable at this point.

“I’m sorry! I’ll pay you back for saving my life later! I have work, so I’ll be going now!!”

Seiichirou said all this in a single breath and left the room without waiting for the man’s reply.

Several moments later, the abandoned commander of the Third Royal Order, Arech, could be heard screaming.

“HUUUH?!”



[CHAPTER THREE]

Examined

Seiichirou finally arrived at the office. He had run there as fast as he could while being dragged down by the ache in his lower body, but he did not stop as he approached the doors and slammed them open.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry I’m late!!”

In sharp contrast, everyone else in the Accounting Department was at ease, even enjoying cups of tea, as they had on Seiichirou’s first day.

“Oh, Kondo’s here. Well, let’s get to work, shall we?”

“Sei! I got here before you today!”

Seiichirou wondered why he had even bothered dashing here like a madman to save every possible second, but this predicament had been caused by his oversleeping (and the overdosing and the magic-acclimatizing sex before that), so he just bowed to everyone once more and took his seat.

He didn’t feel so bad when he initially sat down, but as time went on, the pain and discomfort slowly started gnawing away at him, making it nearly impossible for him to concentrate. He desperately wanted a donut pillow and started to miss Japan. His mind, however, was strangely clear. He could feel the effects of the nutritional tonic, despite having been poisoned by them before. Physically, he felt, if anything, better than usual.

Is this the spell’s power...?

Seiichirou had been in this world for one month, but he had yet to experience

many aspects of this world's unique culture, so even though he had been here a while, he was still impressed by it. Magic seemed to fill the void left by the lack of any science or technological development, which was very convenient. Or perhaps science was regarded as unnecessary precisely because magic existed. If there was no need for it, people's innovations would stagnate, and technology would never progress.

However, no matter how convenient magic was, it didn't seem to be something just anyone could use. There seemed to be some discrepancy when it came to who could control it skillfully. It was precisely because of this that the Third Royal Order, with their powerful magic, carried so much authority in the royal palace.

As he thought about that, Seiichirou suddenly realized something.

I guess it's pretty amazing that the commander of the Third Royal Order saved my life, then, huh...?

Such a valuable person to the kingdom had used his magic on Seiichirou—he had even gone so far as to have sex with him to save his life.

If Seiichirou were a woman, the commander's carnal desire as a man might have played a part, but Seiichirou was a male—and almost thirty years old. He was neither beautiful nor feminine. As far as he could tell, even if Aresh was attracted to men, it didn't seem like he would ever be at a loss for a partner.

It was terrible to think about, but Aresh did have sex with him—something he probably didn't want to do at all—to save his life.

If I were to apply Japanese law to this, I'd be in a really awful position...

When Seiichirou had woken up that morning, his head had been so full of thoughts about being late for work that he had just assumed he could formally give Aresh a gift of thanks at some later date. But this was bad... This wasn't something a box of cakes could fix.

“Nor?”

He had given in to Norbert's insistence that he call him by his nickname. It was unusual for Seiichirou to call out to anyone while working, and Norbert, who had not been concentrating on anything, immediately looked up.

“What’s up, Sei?”

Despite the fact that Seiichirou had been the one who called out to him, he was silent for a while, wondering how to phrase his question. Norbert tilted his head.

“If you...cause trouble for a superior, how do people in this world typically apologize?”

“A superior? You mean someone with a title?”

“A title... Yeah, that’s right.”

Seiichirou felt like he had heard that Aresh was the son of a marquess at some point.

“There are lots of different titles, but if the superior was someone from a high-ranking family, then worst-case scenario, you’d be thrown in jail.”

“Jail?!”

But now that Seiichirou thought about it, in a world with such a class system, that might be a normal punishment. Seiichirou reprimanded himself for having grown too accustomed to his old democratic state and spun his wheels over how to get out of this fate somehow.

He probably wouldn’t be allowed to take his work documents with him to prison.

“Sei, what did you do, and to who?” Norbert asked, his typical cheery expression growing slightly serious.

“Well... Um...”

“But then again, you’re being treated as a guest from another world. You’re under the kingdom’s protection, so I think they’ll overlook some stuff,” Norbert added, perhaps to comfort him.

Seiichirou nodded vaguely.

That’s right, thought Seiichirou. Maybe he could claim he didn’t know much about the different positions and aristocratic system, talk about how remorseful he was, and request protection... Maybe he could ask his direct superior,

Helmut, to be an intermediary... But then again, Helmut never liked to rock the boat, so while he wasn't a bad person, Seiichirou wouldn't feel comfortable relying on him.

Seiichirou then asked Norbert about the monetary values of spells, but he was told that it depended on the person casting it, and with the current market rate, he might need gold coins to afford it.

Just one gold coin amounted to around two and a half million Japanese yen.

Maybe I'll ask if there's any way to pay it in installments...

At any rate, it was difficult to meet with Commander Aresh without making waves, so Seiichirou anxiously pondered what to do. This concern, however, ended up being utterly unnecessary.

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Meanwhile, Aresh was carrying out his work, looking much surlier than usual. This was because his morning duty that day was to train the Holy Maiden in magic.

"Aresh, when did you first want to become a knight?"

How many times had he nearly replied with a sigh to the smiling, dark-haired girl's incessant questions?

But what was annoying Aresh even more was the man who had come from the same world as the Holy Maiden.

The day before, he had found the man from the other world on the verge of death. Unable to simply ignore him, he had tried to heal him with magic, but that had immediately caused magic-sickness. Aresh was the entire reason the man had developed this problem, and so having to treat that new ailment as well, he had no choice but to carry him to a nearby inn. He had never heard of a treatment for magic-sickness in adults, but he understood the theory behind it. When the man had looked up at him, cheeks flushed, eyes wet, Aresh steeled himself for the inevitable and embraced him.

The man's body had no muscle, no fat, and was uncomfortable to hold, but his sweaty skin felt strangely comfortable to Aresh's hand. The goal was to have

the man familiarize himself with Aresh's magical energy so he would become attuned to it, but the fastest and easiest way to do that was to have his own bodily fluids enter the man's body.

Aresh had never been with a man before in that way, but the basics were the same, minus the point of entry.

He had seen Seiichirou's glazed-over eyes several times before, but that time, his eyes melted from the passion, and Aresh had felt a part of his heart swell with satisfaction, which seemed to tip him over the edge, and he had spilled his semen into the man's—Seiichirou's—body.

But then...

The next morning, just as he had been wondering how Seiichirou would react once he woke up, the otherworlder started shouting about having work and ran back to the royal palace without so much as a conversation.

This was a man who, just a few hours previously, had slept with Aresh—another male.

Aresh couldn't think of any other way to justify it—the man was crazy.

He had been on the verge of death.

If Aresh had not passed by and cured him, he absolutely would have died.

But Seiichirou had to go to *work*?

Aresh had no idea what the man's train of thought might have been. Maybe otherworlders had different notions of common sense.

It was in the midst of all this frustration and confusion that Aresh had reluctantly reported for work that day. Now the Holy Maiden, who came from the same world as the man, was smiling and talking to him without a care in the world.

"Would you like to have lunch with me today? The food made by the chef here is really delicious!"

Aresh already knew that. The chef preparing meals for the Holy Maiden was the exclusive cook to the royal family, and he had eaten some of his cooking at dinners before.

Then he suddenly realized...

That man worked at the Accounting Department, so he probably had his lunches at the dining hall inside the royal palace.

He didn't have any obligation to go out of his way and check on him, but if Aresh was going to the dining hall to have lunch himself, he could do it in passing.

"Sorry, but there's something I have to do. Today's lesson ends here. Practice controlling your magic over the next three days."

"Huh?! I...!"

After his brief announcement, Aresh left the Holy Maiden's room without waiting to hear her reply.

Aresh was only going to get lunch during his break.

That's what he was telling himself as he headed toward the dining hall, where civil officials and knights were already eating their lunches. When he looked around, he saw a cluster of people wearing Accounting Department uniforms—white with brown stripes—but none among them had black hair.

"Hey," Aresh called out to the group.

"Huh...? C-Commander Indolark!!" said the young blond man closest to him, jumping up in a panic.

Aresh had a feeling he had seen him before, then remembered that he was the man who had appeared a short while after Aresh had approached Seiichirou in front of the royal palace.

"Where is he?"

"Huh? H-he...?" Norbert asked, tilting his head with a face shining in a cold sweat.

"That man. The otherworlder."

"O-oh! Sei! He always stays in the office during lunchtime—he brings his own lunch!"

"Brings his own...?"

Seiichirou had been in a wild rush and had probably ran straight to the royal palace from the inn where he and Aresh had been. He couldn't imagine Seiichirou having time to stop by his room to make food or buy something to bring with him.

"...I see," Aresh said, furrowing his brow.

Aresh promptly left the dining hall. Everyone from the Accounting Department watched him leave, dumbstruck and totally confused.

"Sei... What in the world did you do...?" Norbert muttered, the only one who remembered Seiichirou's question from that morning.

As Aresh had presumed, Seiichirou didn't have any lunch with him that day.

Well, missing one meal won't kill me, Seiichirou thought.

Seiichirou would much rather make up for the time he had missed the past two days. His fingers moved along the abacus.

He had happened to see an abacus-like object in town at one of the street vendors and had ordered a modified version. It wasn't exactly the same, but it was quite comfortable to use. The beads slid easily along the string—the boy who made it was talented. Seiichirou had once spoken to the boy and learned that he made them for counting numbers—the kid was smart and had a good eye for things. He wondered if such a motivated and clever kid would consider a job in accounting.

As Seiichirou was remembering the boy, he thought about how smoothly his work would go during lunchtime without any interruptions. Then, just as he cheerfully grabbed his next document, the door to the Accounting Office burst open.

Seiichirou looked up in confusion and saw the same beautiful face he had just seen that morning, now looking displeased.

"Huh...?" Seiichirou said, blinking in surprise.

Aresh barged into the room, grabbed one of Seiichirou's arms, and pulled him to his feet.

"Let's go."

“What?”

Aresh dragged Seiichirou out of the office before he could even ask “Where?”

The commander pulled Seiichirou down the halls, causing the people they passed to stare, and the two finally arrived at the medical office inside the royal palace.

To be exact, it was the Medical Bureau. Norbert had told him about the place using a map of the royal palace, so while Seiichirou had known where it was, he had never been there before. Aresh dragged Seiichirou along and slammed the door open without knocking. On the other side of the door, there was enough seating to accommodate five or six people. Seiichirou thought it looked like a private hospital’s waiting room.

A man was standing there, wearing a short-sleeved uniform that was slightly different on the top and bottom from the castle’s official uniform. He smoothed over his surprised look and approached Aresh.

“Commander Indolark. Where are you injured?”

“It’s not me. Is Quellbus here?”

“The director of the Medical Bureau? He’s in the back... Ah!”

Before the man could finish, Aresh dragged Seiichirou toward the inner door to the office and slammed it open—again, without knocking.

“Oh! You startled me. Aresh in the flesh? This is a rare visit.”

A tall bookshelf wrapped around the room, towering over the desk, chairs, and cot inside. The place looked like a cross between an examination room and a study. A man was sitting in a chair in the middle of the room, surrounded by a fragrant, familiar-smelling smoke. In response to Aresh’s abrupt entrance, the man simply looked back at them, calmly blowing out a puff of smoke.

He was a gentle-looking man with wavy dirty-blond hair tied back in a ponytail. He appeared to be in his midthirties. He wore a white coat over blue—not white—clothes, as well as gold-rimmed glasses.

But what caught Seiichirou’s attention the most was the thing hanging out of the man’s mouth.

“A cigarette...”

Seiichirou had been in this world a month already. During that whole time, he had never seen a cigarette, but now there was one right in front of him.

“Hmm? You want it?”

The man held out the cigarette between two fingers, and Seiichirou was about to dreamily walk over to the man without a second thought when Aresh grabbed him by the collar and yanked Seiichirou back to his side.

“Guh!”

“Are you kidding me?! Do you have a death wish?”

“I’m not going to die from smoking a cigar,” the man said. “What are you talking about, Aresh?”

“*This guy would,*” Aresh replied immediately. The man with the dirty-blond hair tilted his head.

“What?”

Seiichirou doubted Aresh’s assertion as well. He knew that cigarettes weren’t good for you, but he wasn’t going to die from simply smoking *one*.

“Who are you, by the way?” the man asked, voicing the obvious question.

Although Seiichirou was also confused, he suddenly remembered that they were still in his place of work and straightened his posture.

“I’m sorry. I’m Kondou, assistant director of the Accounting Department.”

“Huh? Oh, that’s right! The Holy Maiden’s tagalong!! Well, that’s just what I’ve heard. I’m Ciro Quellbus, director of the Medical Bureau. It’s nice to meet you.”

The man casually offered Seiichirou his hand, but Seiichirou was sure Director of the Medical Bureau must have been an equally distinguished title as Commander. Seiichirou shrank back, but Ciro pulled him into the handshake like it was nothing.

“My, I’ve been hoping to meet you! So why are you with Aresh? Are you two close?” Ciro asked with a genial, relaxed smile.

Seiichirou was at a total loss and had no idea how to answer. If he meant in a sexual way, then yes, they had been very close the night before.

“He almost died yesterday from overdosing on nutritional tonics and then from magic-sickness. It seems the constitution of these otherworlders’ bodies is different than ours.”

“Huh?” Ciro and Seiichirou said in unison.

Because the visit seemed likely to be long, Ciro led them to the next room over, the reception room. Seiichirou followed along obediently despite having wondered why there was a mountain of books in the examination room when they had a reception room.

“This is strange? I examined the Holy Maiden immediately after she got here, but there wasn’t anything particularly abnormal...,” Ciro said, scratching his head.

This was the first Seiichirou had heard that Yua had received a medical examination.

“But the Holy Maiden is supposed to be someone with magic in the first place, so she can perform the purification. This one’s probably different.”

“Now that you mention it, that’s probably true.”

Seiichirou had been lumped together with Yua and called “this one” because they appeared similar, but—and it had even slipped Seiichirou’s mind—the two of them had lived in entirely different environments. Even on Earth, even under the same atmosphere and gravity, different people had different allergic reactions.

“Besides, he got dragged into the summoning spell meant for one person, the Holy Maiden. Maybe there was some kind of divine protection he ought to have received during the summoning that didn’t work.”

“Yes, that makes sense!”

“Don’t give me that,” Aresh snapped. “Why didn’t you ever examine him?”

“Look, I’m not sure what to say...”

Seiichirou listened to the conversation, feeling a bit out of the loop, but he

tried to understand what Ciro was getting at.

The kingdom protected Seiichirou on the surface—they assisted him with his daily living expenses—but they didn’t care to do more than that. They would probably even consider it a cause for celebration if Seiichirou went and offed himself. He thought he had understood the situation he was in, but he had been naive. He had been negligent and should have personally requested a medical examination. This was his mistake.

“Now then, um...”

“It’s Kondou.”

“So, Kondo, since you have no tolerance to magical energy, the act of receiving a spell made you magic-sick.”

“It seems so,” Seiichirou said, nodding. Magic-sickness seemed to be the drunken state he had fallen into after Aresh had cured him.

“And you were poisoned? Why?”

“Think about it for two seconds. Are you still a doctor?” Aresh nipped.

In response, Ciro simply tilted his head and hummed. Seiichirou looked back and forth between them, wondering if the commander of the Third Royal Order was a more distinguished rank than a medical director... Maybe it was an issue of their peerage titles.

After looking up at the ceiling for a while, pondering the matter, Ciro suddenly widened his eyes and looked at Seiichirou.

“Is it possible you don’t have a tolerance to magicules, either?”

“Magicules?” Seiichirou repeated, tilting his head at the unfamiliar word.

“You don’t know what magicules are? Well... They’re kind of like an energy that exists in the air. It’s especially concentrated around magical beasts and the like.”

It wasn’t pollution, Ciro went on to explain, but a natural form of energy that existed in the world. Enchanted stones could be filled with magicules to create handy tools.

“For something like medicine, raw medicinal herbs contain a lot of magicules, which could probably easily cause poisoning! Am I right, Aresh?”

“How should I know? It’s your job to study stuff like that.”

Aresh had given a brusque reply, but Seiichirou could tell that the two men’s guesses about the situation were more or less the same.

“There are magicules in all foods, though. If you had no tolerance to it, you would have likely overdosed before you started drinking nutritional tonics.”

Like a doctor, Ciro asked Seiichirou about his typical eating habits.

“I usually have vegetable soup for breakfast, a homemade vegetable sandwich for lunch, and for dinner, mostly vegetables from the residence hall’s buffet.”

“Okay... Wait, what? Your body can survive on that?”

Survive on it? Seiichirou had thought his eating habits were healthier than when he had been in Japan.

“When I eat meat, my stomach hurts... I see. That must be because of the magicules, right?”

“Good god! At that point, you should have noticed!”

Perhaps Seiichirou should have, but he had always had a weak stomach because of his unhealthy living habits and lack of sleep, so having an upset stomach after eating meat wasn’t an unusual occurrence. An upset stomach was so normal for him that he hadn’t even noticed.

“Don’t you think this guy’s a little weird, Aresh?!”

“You think so, too?”

Seiichirou, who’d just been called weird for some reason, looked at the two men, his hollow eyes emanating grumpiness.

“But if you feel sick, vomiting makes it go away...,” Seiichirou argued.

His nausea usually went away after puking. With his stress levels and everything else plaguing him, Seiichirou had a knack for vomiting.

“Why are you saying that like it’s a normal thing to do?! If you feel nauseous,

shouldn't you rest?!"

Ciro was goggling at Seiichirou. There was a crease forming in between Aresh's eyebrows. Seiichirou stared back with a straight face.

"In any case," Ciro continued, "let's do a full-body exam. I'd like to use a magical observation spell—would that be all right?"

"Magic at that level should probably be fine."

Seiichirou wondered why Aresh was giving permission, but after reflecting on the situation, he realized Aresh probably knew the most about Seiichirou's body right now, so he kept quiet.

"Then let's get started!"

Ciro recited words Seiichirou couldn't understand, and a white light briefly enveloped Seiichirou's body before vanishing.

It was the first time Seiichirou was witnessing a spell while fully conscious, and he was a little excited.

Is this like an X-ray? Or is it more like a CT scan? Either way, it's very convenient...

Just as Seiichirou thought this, he started to go weak in the knees.

"Huh...?"

Just as Seiichirou felt himself start to wobble, unable to support his head, he felt something rough against his left hand and snapped back to consciousness. Looking down, he saw Aresh holding his hand. More surprising, all their fingers were intertwined. Back in Japan, everyone had called this way of holding hands the lover's link-up.

"I'm getting your body used to magical energy. We'll stay like this for a while," Aresh said.

Seiichirou's head did feel a little clearer, like how he would feel after chugging cold water when he was drunk, so he complied without arguing.

They had already kissed and had sex as part of Seiichirou's treatment. What did it matter if they were holding hands at this point?

“Oh...”

Ciro’s eyes were wider than even Seiichirou’s as the man stared at their joined hands.

“Did you figure it out?” Aresh prompted him.

“Oh yes...”

Ciro looked up, seeming to come back to his senses.

“Um, yes, well, we were right that Kondo barely has any tolerance to magical energy or magicules. But it’s not at zero, either.”

“...So he’s slowly becoming more tolerant?”

That’s right... The cells of a living organism will adapt to their environment in any situation to try to survive. It seems that process is the same way in this world, too.

“Right, little by little. If he focuses on eating foods with very small amounts of magicules, I think he’ll be able to eat normally before long.”

Ciro’s comment was rather vague, but Seiichirou couldn’t just stop eating altogether, so he decided to trust the doctor. He did value his own life. This doctor was easygoing, but Seiichirou thought he was probably trustworthy. At any rate, the commander of the Third Royal Order was here. Lying to Seiichirou was one thing, but it didn’t seem like this person would lie to Aresh.

Seiichirou had no other choice but to believe Ciro and make his body adapt to this world.

He solemnly came to terms with what Ciro had told him and nodded.

“So you definitely can’t indulge in things that are high in magicules, like tonics and cigars.”

“No!!”

“Well, you have a nutrient deficiency, so relying on tonics in your state would spell nothing but trouble! You have to first build a tolerance and get your diet in order,” Ciro said with a doctor-like definitiveness.

It might have been the first time Seiichirou had acted so openly distraught.

“But whenever I drank the nutritional tonic, my fatigue went away and my body felt better...”

“That’s how powerful the tonic you were taking is. Your body isn’t able to withstand it. You don’t want to drink it to feel better and then die, do you?”

Seiichirou, however, couldn’t forget...

He couldn’t forget the feeling of freedom when he had woken up that morning—his stiff shoulders, back pain, migraines, and the fatigue that he thought he would have for the rest of his life had vanished.

“That...was the one thing that made me happy since coming to this world...,” Seiichirou muttered miserably.

“...You just said something quite terrible. Do you realize that?”

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Seiichirou shifted uncomfortably from the commotion buzzing throughout the dining hall.

“What are you doing? Hurry and take the tray.”

The man—Aresh, commander of the Third Royal Order—pointed toward the food with an air of superiority, paying no mind to the situation around them, waiting for Seiichirou.

How did this happen...? Seiichirou thought as he took the tray.

After the doctor’s visit, Aresh scolded Seiichirou about his abnormal nutritional intake and lectured him about his unhealthy lifestyle and eating habits. When it was finally over, Seiichirou assumed he could go back to work. But then Aresh told him the lunch break wasn’t over yet and took him to the dining hall. It was quite mentally taxing, getting reprimanded at Seiichirou’s age.

But the one who had been doing the scolding was a big shot from another department—and one to whom Seiichirou owed his life.

Seiichirou may have been a corporate slave, but it went deeper than that. Seiichirou followed his personal principles, so he didn’t oppose Aresh and quietly obeyed him as the man was his lifesaver.

"This, and this, and this one, too. That should be fine."

Aresh placed piece after piece of food onto the plate Seiichirou was carrying.

"Make sure you remember this—tsuhash is a meat with very few magicules, and even you can eat the amount that's in the soup."

Aresh was sorting through the buffet foods and serving Seiichirou the ones with low amounts of magicules, and he kept adding more and more to the plate.

"...Thank you," Seiichirou answered, bemused at the mountain of food on his tray. "But I can't eat this much food."

Aresh glared at him.

"...Tch, you can't even eat this much? Then focus on eating the meat and grains. And finish your soup. Build your strength first," Aresh replied, disregarding whether Seiichirou could even finish that much.

But Seiichirou was a corporate slave who could not defy a superior's order.

With his stomach now full for the first time in a long time, he felt a little sick, but Aresh ended up letting him go just before the end of the lunch break. When he returned to the office, Norbert and the rest of the accountants were waiting for him and badgered him for an explanation.

"I got really sick yesterday when I was in town, and the commander happened to be walking by and helped me. He was worried about me today and brought me to get examined at the Medical Bureau," Seiichirou explained nonchalantly to his clearly curious colleagues, abridging the story in certain places.

"But Commander Indolark is famous for being totally indifferent toward people."

"Exactly! He's a super-amazing elite knight, but he's apathetic toward everything!"

"But then again, if you're an elite knight with that much going for you, it is understandable."

Wanting to finish up his work quickly to make up for his tardiness, Seiichirou left his jeering colleagues and returned to his desk. Norbert, sitting next to him,

leaned in closer to Seiichirou so as to have a private conversation.

“Hey, when you were talking about a superior you bothered, was that Commander Indolark?”

Given what Norbert had seen, it was clear what Seiichirou’s question that morning had been referring to. Or rather, Norbert had good intuition. Regardless, Seiichirou couldn’t avoid the situation, so he nodded meekly.

“It’s amazing that Commander Indolark used magic on you, but the fact that he didn’t punish you for bothering him is even more amazing!”

Norbert said it with a smile and an admiring tone, but Seiichirou could only register it as a threat.

I could be subject to punishment?

Seiichirou resolved himself—he had to apologize and pay Aresh back as soon as possible.

But first, he had to get through the documents in front of him.

Seiichirou’s best efforts, however, were in vain, because his work did not progress as he wanted before the end of the workday.

The reason for this was because he had to deal with the budget request complaints being lodged by the usual departments. Even though Seiichirou now held a high-ranking job title, it was just in the Accounting Department—and he was only an assistant director, at that. In a Japanese company, that was roughly the equivalent of being an assistant section chief. Seiichirou had stumbled into the exact same position he had held at his previous company.

The Third Royal Order was a group of elite knights, so they all seemed to think they should naturally be given preferential treatment. Therefore, they were the ones who complained the most about Seiichirou’s budget revision requests. They also seemed to look down on Seiichirou because he was a middle manager from another world who didn’t even have a title of nobility. Since he couldn’t even use magic or handle a sword, they probably saw him as the lowest of the low in society.

The time they spent chewing Seiichirou out each day was cutting into his work

time.

Surely it's a waste of time for them, too, coming all the way here just to complain. Maybe I should ask for grievances in writing from now on? But then, maybe yelling at me also helps them blow off some steam...? If that's the case, can't we set up some sort of box fitted with a recording device so I can listen to their complaints later?

But it was like the fable of the king with donkey ears—trying to keep people quiet is futile. Seiichirou tried to come up with some efficient solution, but he couldn't think of anything. He was born and raised in a democratic country and wasn't accustomed to dealing with people who had such an ironclad sense of self-importance. He thought that maybe this was one factor explaining why he could never respond to them adeptly. There were many other factors, too, but because Seiichirou could not understand the notion of not prioritizing one's work, the Third Royal Order knights and Seiichirou could simply never understand each other.

One day, Seiichirou tried asking his boss Helmut if he could prepare such a box with a recording device, but when Helmut heard the reason for it, he went pale and shook his head.

This department made a miscalculation again... Or maybe they're inflating the request on purpose... Rejected.

At the end of the day, Seiichirou was the only one left in the Accounting Office, working on his abacus. Along with checking the budget requests submitted by different departments, he also worked out the costs needed for projects. Since Seiichirou knew nothing of this world, he had to look over everything about these projects to understand them.

There was never enough time.

He started to feel resentment—if he had those tonics, he could cut down on his sleeping hours and work more.

“Maybe that specific medicine was just too strong... Maybe a less potent tonic would be okay...?”

Even in Japan, nutritional supplements came in a wide variety of potencies. If

there was one tonic that could be taken every day without a problem, then maybe someone with low tolerance like Seiichirou could take it once every three days.

All right, I'll go to the medicine shop again on my next day off and ask.

With renewed determination, Seiichirou grabbed the next document, but then he heard the door suddenly open. When he turned around, he saw a man in black clothes standing in the doorway—even his furrowed brow looked masterfully crafted.

“Commander Indolark?”

What could the commander want from the Accounting Department? Seiichirou wondered for a moment if Aresh had come to lodge a budget request complaint in person, but he didn’t seem like the type who’d deal with minor trifles like that on his own. Seiichirou had already gathered that from the few times they had met.

“Work hours are over. What are you doing?” Aresh asked in a low, attractive voice.

Seiichirou suddenly recalled having once heard that voice was a matter of biological physique—and therefore attractive people always sounded euphonious. He showed the commander the stack of papers in his hands.

“I’m a little behind on my work, so I’m staying late.”

“All by yourself?”

“Yes. It’s my work.”

There was a bit more to it than that. Seiichirou had increased his own workload out of a feeling of necessity. No one had asked him to do this—he had done it voluntarily.

“Did you forget that you almost died yesterday?!”

Indeed, he had.

Other than his creaking hips, Seiichirou felt wonderful, so he *had* forgotten. The day before, Seiichirou had straddled the line between life and death twice.

Caught off guard by this, he accidentally made a face of surprise. Aresh's furrowed brow deepened.

"Even the medical director told you that you had to recover first, didn't he?"

"Well... Yes. I'm sorry. I feel great right now, so it just slipped my mind."

"That's because your body has acclimatized to my magical energy. How many times am I going to have to do *that*?"

By "that," Aresh was referring to sex, and Seiichirou realized he was right... If they did *that*, Seiichirou could drink a nutritional tonic. But then, Aresh would need to cast healing magic on him... No. Seiichirou had to get his consent before doing that.

Seiichirou pondered silently for a while, weighing the variables: his pride as a man, his work, and the money he felt obligated to pay Aresh.

"Don't consider it, you idiot!" Aresh shouted.

He marched up to Seiichirou and grabbed his wrist. The documents Seiichirou had been holding fluttered to the floor.

"Ah...!"

"You're done with work for today! Let's go!"

"What? W-wait...!"

Ignoring Seiichirou's protest, Aresh dragged him out of the office and continued pulling him down the hallway.

This is the same thing he did during lunch...! But the documents...! At least let me bring the ones I can work on at home...!!

Naturally, Seiichirou's wish was not granted.

Aresh looked at the weary man slowly chewing in front of him and furrowed his brow.

The two of them were sitting in a restaurant in town. A fancy establishment fitting of an aristocratic commander...wasn't exactly how one would describe it. It was cozy, clean, and warm. It was a restaurant for ordinary people and had reasonable prices. The man who owned the place used to be the chef of Aresh's

estate, so it was something like a hideout for Aresh. He hadn't told anyone else in the Third Royal Order about this store.

However, the man sitting before him—Kondo—was an otherworlder whom he had taken (*dragged*) here.

The only reason he had taken Seiichirou to the Medical Bureau, and why he had shown Seiichirou what to eat at lunch, was because he had an uneasy conscience about the events of the day before. After all, Seiichirou was a victim of the kingdom's political actions—swallowed up and forcibly dragged into this world. It would go against Aresh's chivalric values to leave someone like that to his own devices.

Aresh tried to convince himself that these excuses were true, but he felt so uncomfortable that he shook his head.

He had neither the patriotism nor sincerity to speak about chivalry.

However, that did not mean that Aresh had developed feelings for Seiichirou because of their physical encounter, either.

It was only a twinge of concern that had pushed him to keep an eye on him—this was just the result.

Seiichirou had been at death's door, so Aresh had performed a spell on him.

After his spell caused magic-sickness, he had slept with Seiichirou to acclimatize the man to his magic.

Then, today, he took Seiichirou to the Medical Bureau so they could check his condition.

Aresh had taught Seiichirou how to choose his meals because a large amount of magicules would poison him.

There was nothing more to it than that.

But the problem was that in each situation, Seiichirou had acted quite unexpectedly, giving Aresh no choice but to look after him.

Not only had Seiichirou gone to work the day after nearly dying, but he had also stayed behind in the office and tried to forgo lunch to work. The man had to be insane; there was no other explanation.

Why were the people around him letting this go on? For one, Seiichirou was receiving financial support from the kingdom and should not have even needed a job. What could Seiichirou possibly have thought that led him to cutting back on food and sleep to work?

As Aresh looked at Seiichirou, he felt nothing but frustration.

It might have been the first time in Aresh's quiet life that he felt such a whirl of emotions.

On the other side of the table, Seiichirou was also wondering how this had happened as he ate the meal he had been served.

He had been working overtime, then Aresh had suddenly appeared and dragged him to this cozy restaurant with good ambiance.

The tyrant paid no attention to what Seiichirou had tried to tell him. He had simply ordered the dishes and commanded Seiichirou to eat. During lunch, he had been forced to eat the food Aresh had piled up on his plate, so his weak stomach wasn't grumbling with hunger. Even so, he still reluctantly ate, not wanting to offend this powerful man to whom he owed his life.

"Oh! It's good..."

The food was so delicious that Seiichirou spoke without meaning to. Surprisingly, the food suited Seiichirou's tastes.

It didn't taste too rich or fatty, like the other dishes in this world—if he had to describe it, he'd say it was mild, almost like flavors of Japanese cuisine. The stewed white fish had a simple yet deep flavor. It was the first time since coming to this kingdom that Seiichirou thought a dish was delicious.

"Eat this, too."

Perhaps because of Seiichirou's positive reaction, Aresh seemed to be in a slightly better mood, and he pushed another plate toward him.

"I can't eat that much."

Aresh just stared at him in silence, brow furrowed, so Seiichirou grumbled "Just a little, then" and reached for the dish of leafy vegetables. Seiichirou had first realized it at lunch, but Aresh ate a lot of food. Was it because, as a knight,

his body was a valuable tool; was it because he was from another world; or was it because he was young?

“This is a nice place, isn’t it?” Seiichirou asked, unable to bear eating in silence any longer.

“I suppose so.”

Aresh sounded rather arrogant, but then again, he *was* an important person, so Seiichirou put up with the comment.

He wasn’t quite sure what Aresh’s goal was with all this, but now that Seiichirou had this opportunity, he tried breaking the ice about the events of the past two days.

“I’m really sorry about this morning.”

“Oh. Right.”

Seiichirou felt really terrible about abandoning the man at the inn after he’d had sex with him to save his life.

“I know it’s belated, but thank you very much for yesterday.”

“...Right.”

Seiichirou wanted to follow up with talking about Aresh’s renumeration, but he wasn’t sure how to broach the subject.

“...How are you feeling?” Aresh asked.

“Huh? Oh, it’s probably the effects of the nutritional tonic, but I feel fine.”

That much was true. Seiichirou had been poisoned, but aside from the ache in the lower half of his body, he felt great. His head even felt clearer than usual.

“You almost died two times back-to-back. Don’t get careless.”

“Okay,” Seiichirou replied, agreeing with him, but the crease between Aresh’s eyebrows just started to grow.

“If you really understood that, wouldn’t you take time off work? Instead, you worked so late that you were the only one left in the office. What were you thinking?”

"Well... You're right. I'm sorry. I just wanted to catch up on some work I had fallen behind on..."

Aresh snorted grumpily at Seiichirou's answer.

"Why are you working at all?"

"Huh?"

Seiichirou blinked. The meaning of this basic question was failing to register in his brain.

"You don't have to work. So why do you put your nose to the grindstone for a job you don't need—and for a kingdom that's not even your native land?"

That much was true. This wasn't Seiichirou's home country.

There was no obligation or requirement for him to work.

"Hmm... Perhaps to create a purpose for my existence."

It wasn't out of any desire to be of use to this kingdom. Seiichirou had not a single iota of devotion in that regard.

For Seiichirou, however, work had been ingrained in him so deeply that it was like breathing—a fundamental part of life.

Not working was never an option for him.

"What?"

On the other hand, Aresh was far too incredible, so jobs were always falling into his lap. From his perspective, he was working reluctantly.

Their basic sense of values was different.

"The kingdom isn't going to do away with you just because you don't work."

The kingdom had not given Seiichirou a medical examination, and he had just learned about the dangers of magicules today, so he had his doubts about Aresh's assertion. He understood Aresh, at least, didn't feel that way, so Seiichirou nodded.

"I know. It's not about that. Call it forging an identity or some kind of self-affirmation, but I feel more relaxed when I'm working."

“I don’t understand.”

Seiichirou had heard that Aresh was a member of a marquess family.

Aresh, a knight, had marquess blood in his veins and the ability to control magic; plus he was handsome to boot. He probably had many facets that served to affirm his own identity outside of work.

“It’s just the humble commoner’s way of thinking,” Seiichirou replied, trying to wrap up the conversation. He never assumed they could see eye to eye on the matter anyway.

“...That doesn’t mean you have to work yourself to death. From what I’ve heard, your health has been poor since you got here. You shouldn’t have worked in that condition. Just what sort of management is the Accounting Department under?”

“...I have a terribly obsessive personality, so I did it all on my own initiative. And my health issues are chronic, so please don’t worry too much about it.”

Seiichirou smiled as softly as he could, omitting the part where his work had only increased because of the knights from Aresh’s Order.

The Accounting Department was not at all a toxic workplace. They encouraged their employees to arrive at and leave work on time. Seiichirou had simply volunteered to increase his workload and stay late doing it.

In fact, the work Seiichirou had willingly done since arriving in this world had brought about significant results—the kingdom’s finances were on the road to recovery, and he had managed to save Director Helmut from getting fired. But it didn’t seem as though Aresh had heard about this.

The elite in society are so out of touch, they probably have no idea how commoners go about their lowly lives, Seiichirou thought, sipping his faintly sweet tea.

“If you want to prioritize your work, shouldn’t you always make sure you’re in the best physical condition?”

Aresh’s reality check was painful to hear. Seiichirou smiled, mollified.

“You’re right. I’ll be more careful.”

Aresh continued lecturing him until the meal was over.

Seiichirou tried to pay when they left the restaurant, but the younger aristocrat shot him a glare that clearly said, “Are you trying to humiliate me?” and ended up paying for the entire meal. Aresh swiftly left for home before Seiichirou could remember that he hadn’t sorted out Aresh’s remuneration for all he had done the day before.

“What in the world was that about...?” Seiichirou said, and with no one there to answer him, he had no choice but to return to the residence hall.

He hadn’t been able to discuss Aresh’s payment, but he figured he would probably never meet the man again, so as he went to bed that night, Seiichirou thought about asking Helmut if he could deliver some money to Aresh for him, to show his appreciation.

Seiichirou’s guess, however, was way off the mark.

“Seeei! Let’s go to lunch!”

As soon as the Fire hour struck, signaling the start of lunchtime, Norbert had pranced up to Sei’s desk and made this request in a cheerful voice. Seiichirou stared at him silently with narrowed eyes.

“...I’ll go later.”

“Come on, come on! I’m starving to death here! Let’s go! Okay?!”

“...Then die.”

“I heard that, Sei! I heard that!! Couldn’t you have tried to say it a little quieter?!”

There was a reason for Seiichirou’s reluctance.

Norbert forced him down to the dining hall.

Amid the sparse crowd of people, there was one tall, dark shadow.

The commander of the Third Royal Order—with his good looks, black uniform, and matching black cloak—stood there with his typical blank expression.

When Commander Aresh spotted Seiichirou and Norbert, he started walking without a word. His manner clearly gave the direction “Follow me.” After

bowing, Seiichirou followed Aresh's lead and took a tray and plate. Then Aresh began silently loading food onto Seiichirou's plate.

Seiichirou scrunched up his face at the sheer amount of food being piled onto his plate, but he could not object to it. He would just make Norbert finish anything he couldn't. His colleague was apparently "starving to death" anyway, so that would work out perfectly. Meanwhile, Norbert had quickly gotten his own food and scurried off to another seat.

For the third time, Seiichirou followed Aresh and had lunch with him at a sunlit table.

Yes—Norbert was a traitor who had sold Seiichirou out to a powerful man from another department.

"That's going too far, Sei! Commander Indolark is worried about your health, so I'm helping him for your sake!" Norbert had insisted the second time he had invited Seiichirou to lunch.

"If you're trying to help, I want you to respect my wishes," Seiichirou had replied.

As Seiichirou remembered this conversation, he sighed and gulped down his soup. The soup of the day was one Seiichirou liked—it was light and resembled onion soup.

The day after Aresh had taken care of Seiichirou, brought him to the medical office, and stopped him from doing overtime, Norbert had invited him to lunch with an incredibly strained face. Seiichirou had followed him, confused, and had been led to the handsome commander.

Then, just like today, Aresh had silently forced Seiichirou to grab a plate and had started piling food on it without asking permission.

Moreover, when Seiichirou had tried to return to the office immediately after eating, Aresh seized him by the collar and dragged him out to the courtyard, where he would not let Seiichirou leave until the entire 120-minute lunch break was over.

"You won't rest when I tell you to, so I'm going to force you to rest."

Is this guy my attending physician or something?

Aresh didn't even allow Seiichirou to ponder that question as he started to coordinate all his lunch breaks.

But as all this was happening, Seiichirou's regular work never ceased, so he had no choice but to work overtime. It was his only option, but Aresh had foreseen this as well, because every time the workday ended, Aresh would stop by the Accounting Department Office to take Seiichirou away.



No matter how many times he told Aresh that he would get dinner himself, that he was *capable* of doing it alone, and would go straight home and sleep—or rather, that he would lie down—Seiichirou’s pleas were ignored. He was no match against the physical strength of this knight from another world, and so he was forced to enjoy delicious meals and relax.

“That guy’s supposed to be haughty and arrogant... Why is he taking such good care of me?”

By the time Seiichirou had returned to the residence hall and taken a bath, it wasn’t even the Wood hour (nine o’clock in the evening). Seiichirou resigned himself to opening a book on the current affairs of this world and mulled over strategies for the future.

Even if Seiichirou woke up at the crack of dawn and left for work, the gates would be closed, and he wouldn’t be able to get in.

His lunch break was wasted. He couldn’t work overtime. But there was a mountain of work he needed to do. There was only one alternative left for him.

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Before the end of the workday, Seiichirou blended into his surroundings, leisurely getting ready to go home for the day, and quickly crammed documents into his bag. If he didn’t pack them all in before Aresh arrived, it would all be for nothing.

Seiichirou had chosen the “take work home” option.

Of course, as an employee of the royal palace, Seiichirou had checked with Helmut beforehand and received permission to take the documents home. There were many files in the Accounting Department he couldn’t bring with him, but the job that Seiichirou personally and voluntarily worked on included predicting and working out what would be needed for future bookkeeping, so there were many tasks that did not require too much data. Seiichirou could just think up a framework and then flesh out the details later in the office.

“Kondo. It’s time. Let’s go.”

When Aresh walked into the Accounting Department without so much as a

hello and gave the order that sounded like something a prison guard would say, Seiichirou had already finished his preparations and stood up obediently.

“Good evening.”

“...What are you up to?”

All Seiichirou had done was greet Aresh, and that was the response he had received. Just what did this man think of him?

“Nothing in particular. I just have a rule not to waste my energy on useless endeavors.”

Aresh narrowed his eyes suspiciously at Seiichirou’s answer but didn’t question him further. Seiichirou also kept quiet and followed Aresh as he turned on his heel and walked away.

The inside of the restaurant was illuminated with subdued lights.

It was already the fourth time they had dined at Aresh’s regular restaurant.

They didn’t remain totally silent throughout the meals, of course. Seiichirou had broached some subjects (very considerately), and the two of them had had a few conversations so far.

In doing so, Seiichirou had been cunningly gathering information he wanted to know about the kingdom and magic. He wouldn’t even let mealtimes with his superior go to waste.

During one of those conversations, Seiichirou had mentioned wanting to pay Aresh for saving his life, but just as he said that, Aresh had become incredibly angry.

Seiichirou had just been talking about Aresh healing him with magic, but he had fixed him with a cold glare and threateningly asked, “Are you trying to treat me like a male prostitute?”

It was impossible to understand which subjects triggered anger in these elite aristocrats.

Seiichirou had politely explained that had not been his intention at all, and that he had just wanted to thank him for saving his life. But Aresh replied with “I don’t want anything,” so Seiichirou had stopped before he pushed this angry,

elite aristocrat too far. Naturally, however, Seiichirou wasn't going to back down so obediently.

"I just remembered, Commander Indolark, I have tomorrow off, so you don't need to take care of my meals."

The civil officials had set days off, but the knights worked on a rotation. Seiichirou mentioned it so it wouldn't slip Aresh's mind, but he didn't seem to be concerned.

"I know. Rest up. Stay in bed the whole day."

Is he really my doctor, after all? Seiichirou wondered with a strained smile.

"Well, I don't know about that..."

"Why not? Is there something you need to do?"

"Not exactly, but there's still so much about this world and this kingdom I don't know, so I'm going to go to the library and study."

"...What you need most is not knowledge, but rest."

From Aresh's perspective, Seiichirou had no mission, nor was he required to work, so he inevitably found it strange that Seiichirou was studying on his own. He wondered what made this man and the Holy Maiden so different.

And Seiichirou would do this all while tormenting his own body.

"And just so you know, drinking that sort of nutritional tonic is absolutely forbidden. You're not going to start relying on them again, right?"

"Of course not, I already know that."

At Seiichirou's quick denial, Aresh narrowed his amethyst-colored eyes.

"I almost died because of that medicine, so I won't take it anymore," Seiichirou said.

Seiichirou's smile reached his eyes, around which the dark shadows underneath had slightly faded.

Seiichirou thought that if he smiled like that, it would clear up some of the haziness in his eyes and alleviate the fatigue somewhat.

Later, however...

“I knew this would happen!!”

“What?! Commander Indolark, why are you here?!”

After dinner, Seiichirou had parted ways with Aresh in front of the restaurant and left for the medicine shop. But then, once inside, Aresh grabbed him from behind.

The two always parted ways in front of the restaurant after their meals. But Seiichirou never knew if Aresh left for the knights’ lodgings or for his own house. It was a fortunate precedent, however, because that night Seiichirou had taken advantage of the restaurant’s proximity to the shop and walked over.

Even though Aresh was managing his meals and forcing him to not do overtime, Seiichirou’s body was naturally weak, and the atmosphere of this world was poisonous to him. His fatigue was accumulating. Worst of all, his chronic migraines had returned and were very painful. These may have also been psychological in nature as they had reappeared first.

Even though Aresh had gone on about “forbidden” tonics, Seiichirou had visited the shop with the idea that something less potent might do the trick or that the shopkeeper might even have something similar to a painkiller. But just as Seiichirou had started asking the shopkeeper these questions, Aresh had grabbed him.

Aresh was taller than him, but Seiichirou didn’t approve of being picked up like a kitten.

“Commander Indolark... I thought you had gone home...”

They were in a back alley—Aresh had dragged Seiichirou there to avoid causing the store any trouble. *Is this like a shakedown?* Seiichirou thought, nervously looking up at the man who had a firm grasp on his collar.

“It was obvious from how you were acting that you were going to come here.”

The efficiency-obsessed Seiichirou had wanted to avoid the trip on his day off tomorrow, so he had tried to take care of this errand on his way home. That

was how he had been immediately discovered.

“Didn’t I tell you not to take the nutritional tonic?”

“I’m not going to take *that* nutritional tonic. I’m going to take something else.”

“Arguing semantics... You told me you understood, didn’t you? I’m going to tell that store not to sell you any more medicine of any kind.”

“WHAT?! You can’t!! Isn’t that an abuse of authority?!”

“Be quiet! Don’t you understand the state of your own body?!”

When Aresh shouted back at him, Seiichirou went silent. His body, however, was demanding that medicine.

Seiichirou had heard that, as one ages, the days they feel spry decreases, but ever since a few years ago, his body had constantly felt sluggish and heavy. His eyes were constantly bleary, he got migraines, and he had frequent stomachaches. On top of that, his neck, shoulders, and lower back were chronically in pain. Seiichirou realized that he could no longer run without a care, like he had in his youth, and he yearned for those days daily. But after he drank the nutritional tonic, his body felt light, his eyes became clear, and all the pain and discomfort in his body vanished—for the first time in many years, his body felt great.

That feeling of liberation... It wasn’t something he could forget.

Aresh looked down at Seiichirou, who was pursing his lips and avoiding his gaze, and let out a heavy sigh. Then he asked:

“What hurts?”

He muttered the words so quietly that, at first, Seiichirou didn’t hear them. When he looked back at Aresh, however, the commander repeated the question.

“Um... My head...”

“Geez...”

Aresh sighed again and gently covered Seiichirou’s temple with his large hand.

Aresh muttered something. It sounded like words—or maybe a song.

Seiichirou felt like he had heard it before somewhere in a hazy memory.

The place Aresh touched gradually started to feel warmer.

Magic didn't exist in my world, so maybe it doesn't get automatically translated...

As Seiichirou pondered this, Aresh moved his hand away.

“How do you feel?”

“Um...”

For a moment, Seiichirou didn't know what Aresh was asking, but the pain that had been ailing his brain was gone. Aresh had probably cast healing magic.

But magic should have been poison to Seiichirou's body, too... Just as he looked up at the commander to ask him about this, something warm pressed against his lips.

Aresh quickly pulled his lips away from Seiichirou's.

“...With that level of magic, this is all you need,” he said haughtily before turning and leaving.

Seiichirou stood there alone for a few moments, blinking in shock, but then he picked up his bag containing the work documents he brought home, realizing he should use his temporarily cleared mind to get some work done.

He had a feeling that the list of things he needed to consider had only increased again, but he had far too little information to begin doing that.



[CHAPTER FOUR]

Aged

To make things perfectly clear, it wasn't as if Seiichirou was inexperienced in love.

It had not been an unusual thing for him to have a girlfriend, nor was he a virgin.

His ex-girlfriends, however, had almost always broken up with him after asking the cliché question, "What's more important, your work or me?"

So Seiichirou was well aware that his current relationship with Aresh was strange, no matter how different things were in this world.

Aresh's initial actions had been to save his life, and afterward, his excessive concern and management of Seiichirou's health might have been some sort of atonement for the man who had been accidentally abducted from another world. Or maybe Aresh was just incredibly good-natured—maybe his personality wouldn't let him leave something alone once he had decided to take care of it.

However, that didn't explain their kiss the day before. Seiichirou had tried to purchase some medicine (nutritional tonics), and Aresh could have just left Seiichirou with his slight discomfort. But instead, Aresh had gone out of his way to heal him with magic and suppressed the incoming magic-sickness with a touch that might be considered the most profound act when choosing a partner—a kiss.

Had the commander not counted that kiss because they already had sex? Or was he treating Seiichirou more like a pet? Seiichirou couldn't tell what his intentions were, but he couldn't simply ignore him—partially because Aresh was the only person who gave much thought about Seiichirou's physical condition. It was fairly accurate to say that, at this moment in time, his life was in Aresh's hands. Moreover, Aresh was a representative of the kingdom—both his position and his social status made him impervious to any ill treatment.

“...Again?”

When Seiichirou looked at the document in his hand and saw the signature *Third Royal Order*, he let out a sigh.

The damage from the Demon Forest miasma was progressing slowly, but it was still continuing. They had not yet dispatched the Holy Maiden. It was incredibly difficult for Seiichirou to work out the costs for the Holy Maiden's “purification” thing because he had no idea if it would even be finished in one attempt.

There was still so much about this kingdom he didn't understand. For everything, including what was happening with Aresh, Seiichirou needed to gather more information before conducting an analysis.

For now, Seiichirou tossed the Third Royal Order's request for a stubbornly large, round number in the “Rejected” shelf and turned to the next document. If he didn't hurry, he would be dragged off to the dining hall at the start of the lunch break midway through work again. Seiichirou concentrated on the document for this reason alone, not noticing the buzz that was spreading throughout the office until Norbert poked him in the shoulder, and he looked up.

“Assistant Director Kondo of the Accounting Department, His Excellency the Prime Minister would like to see you. Come with me.”

Why don't the powerful people in this kingdom ever schedule appointments in advance...?

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“I'm very sorry for calling you here in the middle of work.”

I'm sure. If you were aware of this, you shouldn't have called me here, Seiichirou thought. Of course, on the surface, he put on a smile and said, "Not at all." Swallowing your words was just the social etiquette of working adults.

Seiichirou had not been taken to the prime minister's office, but somewhere that resembled a reception room. The two men faced each other across a rectangular, antique desk. Seiichirou was offered tea, which he drank to calm himself.

Even though he had been abducted from another world, it was incredibly unusual for anyone to be facing the kingdom's prime minister—the head of the government—like this. It was the second time Seiichirou had spoken to the man in person. The first occasion had been when he had forced a promotion upon him. Seiichirou supposed the man had recognized his achievements on the job.

However, Seiichirou was aware that he was an outsider.

The prime minister might have also learned that he had spoken to the Holy Maiden, Yua Shiraishi, in a manner that was disadvantageous for the kingdom. Even Aresh had once told him, "The prime minister has his eye on you." For someone like that to invite him here, alone—although there was a secretary and someone who resembled a guard in the room with them—Seiichirou couldn't help but feel wary. He didn't want to die for nothing, and more importantly, he wanted to beg that he not be fired from his current job.

"How are you feeling?"

"...Huh?"

Seiichirou had been sitting up so poised, holding himself so formally, that when Prime Minister Camile broke the ice, Seiichirou couldn't initially give him a proper response. A common Japanese greeting immediately popped into Seiichirou's mind, and when he came back to his senses, he responded with, "I'm doing well." *I'M FINE, THANK YOU.*

"Well, when I heard rumors that you had been taken to the medical office, I was concerned."

"I was just feeling a little unwell, but I'm better now."

The "I'm better now" part had been a lie.

"I see. That's good, then. You're a guest who's been summoned here from another world, after all. If you run into any inconvenience, you can tell me."

It seemed like the prime minister was aware of Seiichirou's situation—that the air was harmful to him, the food was detrimental to his health, and that if he ate too much of it, he would die. Seiichirou fixed a smile in response.

"You're much too kind. Everyone has been incredibly wonderful to me, so I'm fine."

"Really? That's excellent. By the way, I had some questions about the draft budget you drew up the other day."

The prime minister narrowed his blue-gray eyes as if to say, "The previous conversation is over now." It seemed as if that had all just been for politeness' sake.

As Seiichirou answered questions about the passages identified to him to the best of his knowledge, he was secretly relieved that this *was* about work. If he had been called here for a work matter, the unexpected invitation was unavoidable.

"Hmm... I must say, your way of thinking is very interesting. I can't deny I don't know much about budgeting, but I suppose that's inevitable."

"I apologize. There are many things in this world I still don't know about yet. I'm still trying to learn."

"No, it's fine. I think you're learning a lot while also juggling your work."

That much was obvious. As an accountant, not knowing this world's or this kingdom's norms would have been out of the question. On days Seiichirou didn't take much work home and on his days off, he spent his time studying everything he could about this world. He also listened to Aresh and Norbert during mealtimes. He considered these things part of his job.

"Incidentally, you haven't asked about the Holy Maiden at all."

Seiichirou had fallen so deep into work mode, feeling appreciated for his efforts, that he had let his guard down.

The tea that had just been sliding down his throat got caught at a weird place

and made a gulping sound on the way down.

“You came to this world with her, and apparently you were so worried about her that you gave her some advice, did you not? Don’t you want to inquire about how she is doing?” Camile asked, his expression calm.

So he has been informed about that, after all, Seiichirou realized.

Seiichirou thought Camile would scold him for having an unwelcome conversation with the Holy Maiden, who was so important to this kingdom, but Camile just waited for Seiichirou’s answer, his calm expression unchanged. Considering both Camile’s position and what Seiichirou had seen of the man, he could tell that this would be a tricky man to deal with. Depending on his answer, Seiichirou could be stripped of his job, put into isolation, or even brutally executed. After thinking it over, however, he sighed.

“Your Excellency, if you had been forcibly taken to an unfamiliar land and saw a child from your hometown whom you had never met before, what would you think?”

The outer corners of Camile’s eyes twitched at Seiichirou’s question, but the rest of his face remained tranquil. Camile answered, ignoring Seiichirou’s manner of speaking.

“If I was able to, I would probably try to protect them.”

It was just as Seiichirou had suspected—they were the same kind of person.

“Exactly. That’s pretty much how I feel about her. I will protect her, but within the limitations of what I can do. Not to mention, she is receiving a very warm patronage as the kingdom wanted her more than me, the heretical tagalong.”

Yua was a minor and should have been protected when she was in Japan. As an adult, Seiichirou was on the “guardian” side of the equation. Yua, however, had been abducted and was being treated hospitably, even if it was all so she could fulfill her duty as the Holy Maiden. There wasn’t much Seiichirou could do for her.

Yua had been put in a new environment before she had developed a sense of self-reliance, so despite Seiichirou’s best efforts to persuade her to think long and hard for herself before acting, the message had not gotten through to her.

Their relationship was not one that inspired enough enthusiasm in Seiichirou to put his entire life on hold to make her understand this.

It was too much of a headache to think about anything except work, so Seiichirou had inadvertently answered Camile honestly. But in the ensuing silence, just when Seiichirou was starting to worry that he had made a mistake, Camile began to talk.

“Ah-ha... Ha-ha-ha... You’re right. You’re absolutely right.”

The handsome man in front of him was covering his mouth with his hand, his shoulders shaking with laughter. Seiichirou felt slightly uncomfortable, but this didn’t seem to be a bad turn of events.

“You’re right. And guess what? I like that logical and cunning side of you.”

Seiichirou thought calling him cunning was a bit rude, but then again, he knew his actions were not exactly moral.

“Kondo, what’s your first name?”

“...It’s Seiichirou.”

“Say...chiro? Your country sure has difficult names.”

And your kingdom’s air is poisonous, Seiichirou replied in his mind, wondering if certain ethnic characteristics made particular sounds easier or harder to pronounce.

“Sei...Seiichirou, correct? All right, I’ll remember that.”

Apparently brilliant people could pick up anything very quickly.

“I find it quite beneficial speaking with you. I’ll call for you again if anything else comes up.”

It sounded like Camile was warning him to get ready for another visit, but if it was going to be a work call, Seiichirou had no qualms about coming, either.

Talking with the most senior bureaucrat in the kingdom was very beneficial for Seiichirou, too.

Seiichirou bowed, left the room, and returned to the Accounting Department. It was the Fire hour, but Norbert and the others had probably told Aresh that he

had been summoned by the prime minister. There was no need to force himself to go to the dining hall. *I drank tea, so I probably don't need lunch*, Seiichirou thought as he grabbed documents to work on in the deserted office. But of course, Aresh harshly scolded Seiichirou when he came to pick him up at the end of the workday.

To make matters worse, the tea he drank in the prime minister's office had given him a terrible stomachache.

"When they process tea leaves, they draw in magicules, and people use magic to make them, too. Don't drink anything I don't expressly say you can."

I can't believe I can't drink tea freely..., Seiichirou bemoaned, sighing internally as Aresh rubbed Seiichirou's stomach and kissed him.

Seiichirou remembered a few days before, when one of his juniors in the Accounting Department had offered him a snack...

"Assistant Director Kondo, I found some really good sweets in town and bought a ton! Would you like one?"

He was a plump young man whose official uniform strained a little at the seams. He held out a paper box containing round light-brown sweets. They looked flat like bread and resembled sweet buns.

Seiichirou wasn't especially fond of sweets, but he thought they were fine every once in a while. He reached for one, but Norbert stopped him.

"No! Don't you know that Commander Indolark said not to give Sei any food or drinks?"

"Huh?"

"Please don't give him any food!"

The words triggered an image in Seiichirou's mind of a note that had been posted on the doghouse he used to pass by on his way to elementary school.

Am I a dog...?

"Why do you have that look on your face?"

They were sitting across from each other in the restaurant Aresh had brought

Seiichirou to after work that day. Aresh glared at Seiichirou, whose brow was furrowed.

“No real reason...”

Despite what he said, Seiichirou couldn’t totally shake the questions that swirled in his mind: What influence did Aresh have? Or rather, how far was he planning to go to protect Seiichirou? How far did his influence extend? With his powerful position, Seiichirou was grateful for Aresh’s protection, but conversely, it attracted jealousy and impacted his work. Until he could get a read on Aresh’s intentions, he would never be sure how to respond to him.

“...Whatever. More importantly, how are you feeling?” Aresh asked, cutting up his poale, a kind of white fish.

Despite how he looks, he really likes to take care of other people.

“Thanks to you, my working hours have been shortened, so I’m doing just wonderfully.”

“...You’re well enough to be sarcastic, apparently.”

Seiichirou had to be very careful with medicine and magic, so Aresh preventing him from overdosing on magicules and managing his magic-sickness for him was helpful. However, being confined to a nine-hour workday with a two-hour break—seven hours in total—while being unable to do overtime, Seiichirou was not progressing with his work. There was almost a mountain of documents he wanted to get through, but he faced terrible interference from other departments—particularly, the one the man in front of him was in charge of.

“It wasn’t sarcasm... On top of being new in this managerial position, I still don’t understand the commonplace matters of this kingdom. And even if I try to acquire that knowledge, there are so many materials I can’t take back with me that it’s impossible for me to catch up during work hours.”

In response to Seiichirou’s denial and polite request that Aresh loosen his restrictions slightly, Aresh furrowed his brow again.

“Why do you try to do everything yourself? You’re a manager, so shouldn’t you give the tasks you don’t know how to do to your subordinates?”

Seiichirou tilted his head.

“Shouldn’t I know how to do everything *because I’m a manager?*”

Seiichirou believed that people at the top should be able to do everything, not just their own tasks.

Additionally, most of what Seiichirou did was simply salvaging the kingdom’s financial situation, which had nothing to do with his normal work duties. He doubted whether he could give that task to another person, and in any case, Seiichirou could do it faster himself than having to explain the process to someone else.

Aresh’s fork clattered when he put it down.

“I’ve left all my routine tasks as commander to my vice commander without any difficulties at all so far.”

Seiichirou suddenly realized why they had never discussed the budget requests, despite having met face-to-face so many times.

“Then what do you usually do, Commander Indolark?”

“Deal with documents only the commander can approve, go to executive meetings, things like that... Trainings, too.”

This time, Seiichirou’s eyebrow twitched. Those weren’t things that needed doing every day. It was just the bare minimum.

“...Can the Third Royal Order keep going with you doing so little?”

“I haven’t heard of any problems. In any case, I only assumed this role because the people around me asked me to. I don’t need to do anything more than that,” Aresh finished resolutely.

Seiichirou was once again struck by Aresh’s status in society—a natural genius and the son of a marques. He understood now. Aresh was the ideal person to be appointed as a representative for the Third Royal Order. It was no overstatement to suggest that if Aresh was hired by another department, it would be a huge blow to the predominance of the Third Royal Order.

“...I see. I understand very well now.”

“Hold on, don’t just jump to conclusions. What is it you understand?”

“I just saw the difference in our positions—and values—in a new light.”

This world was fundamentally different because it had a monarchy system. There was no way Seiichirou could get through to him.

Having come to this conclusion, Seiichirou then tried to change the subject, but Aresh wasn’t satisfied.

“Aside from our positions, what’s so different about our values?”

“No, I just thought a nobleman like you, Commander Indolark, couldn’t understand those of a commoner from another world,” Seiichirou said, trying to dodge the subject, but Aresh was persistent.

“Tell me. What’s with your obsession with work?”

“Obsession...?”

Seiichirou thought he was exaggerating—he just had a deeply ingrained corporate-slave mentality—but Aresh continued.

“You’re obsessed. You’re acting like a zealot, working all alone and even taking medicine, though you know it puts your life in danger.”

In Seiichirou’s world, it had been normal to take nutritional drinks to make it through work. Even if you had a fever, you would go get an IV drip during your lunch break and immediately return to work. But it was true that the nutritional tonics in this world were like poison to Seiichirou.

Yet the effects were so wonderful that he couldn’t help but reach out for them...

“But I’m not religious.”

“It’s a metaphor. No matter how you look at it, you’re acting like a zealot. Why do you push yourself that far for your job? You have money, don’t you?”

Seiichirou was again faced with a question he didn’t know how to answer.

In his old world, working was considered a citizen’s obligation.

More than that, however, it was something you were expected to do, and for Seiichirou, working gave him peace of mind.

“Because...the work is there.”

“No, it’s not! I heard that you’re the one who always creates additional work for yourself!”

Seiichirou had tried to imitate the famous saying of a mountaineer but had just been reprimanded in response.

He wondered for a moment how information about the Accounting Department had leaked to the commander of the Third Royal Order, but then the image of a certain frivolous, meddling coworker flashed through his mind.

However, Seiichirou couldn’t just let the “nonexistent work” comment slide.

“That’s fine for you to say, but the kingdom’s financial situation is terrible! We need to review and improve the system itself.”

“The financial situation is terrible...? I’ve never heard that.”

That was because the Third Royal Order was given preferential treatment with a budget that rivaled that of the royal family’s.

Additionally, all the details would have been given to Aresh’s subordinates. There was almost no way of him knowing about the situation.

“Commander Indolark, isn’t that because you *don’t care* about finance?”

“What did you say...?”

The stubborn man in front of him, who had called him a zealot, had accidentally provoked Seiichirou’s snide comment. Seiichirou immediately apologized, adding with a thoughtless smile, “I shouldn’t have said that.” Aresh’s face remained taut, and he snorted derisively before continuing.

“...You should be aware that your behavior toward work is negatively impacting the people around you.”

“...Negatively impacting them?”

Seiichirou had thought that his discovery of the misappropriation of the budget for the Holy Maiden and his subsequent review and establishment of a new one going forward had been beneficial for the kingdom.

“If a manager starts taking the initiative to work overtime, their subordinates

are going to lose their bearings."

"Ugh..."

Seiichirou had certainly sensed some puzzled looks since becoming a manager, as he was the first to arrive and the last to leave the office.

"Plus, you took it upon yourself to create this new system or whatever. If you don't intend on training anyone to help you or act as your successor, what's going to happen after you die?"

"Guh..."

In Seiichirou's old world, everyone constantly worked overtime, just like he did. To an extent, it was already a well-established system, built upon many implicit understandings, so there had never been any problems with it. But this was a different world. Their numeric system might have been the same, but their fundamental foundations were very different, and it was true that Seiichirou had been putting in extra effort.

But it still didn't sit right with Seiichirou that it was pointed out by a man who hardly worked.

Despite that, the man in front of him was the aristocrat and superior officer who had saved his life. Forcing down the unpleasant feelings bubbling in his chest, Seiichirou used all his energy to muster a smile.

"I'll handle it."

"You're not going to at all, are you?"

At long last, Seiichirou nearly cracked and was about to click his tongue in response to his bullheaded dinner partner, but he stopped himself just in time.

As Aresh was checking over the day's schedule in the Knight's Station for the Third Royal Order, he thought back to the conversation he had with Seiichirou the other day.

Aresh's job was to lead the Third Royal Order.

Their main role was to launch attacks during emergencies. Because of this, their everyday tasks included training, and managing their arms and horses.

As the commander, Aresh never missed a training, and as a commanding officer, the leader of his troops, he kept an eye on the neighboring kingdoms' affairs. As a result, he never paid much attention to internal routine tasks, and the others in the Third Royal Order jumped to take care of them.

As Aresh was sitting at his desk, he looked over at his subordinates, hard at work. He had been annoyed with Seiichirou yesterday for dismissing his arguments, but after sleeping on it, Aresh couldn't get what Seiichirou said out of his mind.

Shouldn't I know how to do everything because I'm a manager?

“...Huh?”

“What's wrong, Aresh?”

Aresh knit his brows. Vice Commander Orjef, who was sitting beside Aresh with a document in hand, looked up at him.

“...I don't see Harvey and Matthew. They're not off today, are they?”

As Aresh had been going about his morning duties in the Knight's Station, he had realized there were two people missing. Orjef's eyes bulged in unabashed surprise.

“What?! Th-they had something to take care of, so they went to another department. They'll be back before training starts.”

“Another department? What are they doing?”

“Oh, well, it's not something you need to worry about. Besides, you've got your tutoring session with the Holy Maiden today, right? If you don't hurry, you'll be late!”

The time for his magic-control coaching with the Holy Maiden was drawing near, but a feeling of unease lingered in Aresh's chest.

Commander Indolark, isn't that because you don't care about finance?

“...sh? Aresh!”

“Oh!”

Aresh had been so lost in his murky thoughts that he hadn't heard what Yua

said.

“...I’m sorry. What was that?” Aresh asked, a bit flustered.

Aresh was normally expressionless, so Yua’s eyes, with her long lashes, widened in surprise at this rare display of emotion.

“Um, I did what you told me to do. Did I do it right?”

She held up the assignment Aresh had given her. The assignment had been to use magic to move colored water through a maze enclosed in what looked like a miniature garden. Aresh nodded when he saw the pink water connecting the start to the goal using the shortest route possible.

“Yes, you did it right.”

If Yua could do this, Aresh thought they could go ahead and take her to the Demon Forest, but there had still been no order to commence the purification.

In any case, there was only one Holy Maiden, so it seemed her safety came first.

From Aresh’s perspective, however, magicules did not affect Yua like they did Seiichirou. She had magic from the very beginning and was in excellent health. She would have to go into the Demon Forest, but they were still in the initial phase of the miasma outbreak. If the Third Royal Order was there to guard her, Aresh didn’t think there would be any danger.

No, maybe Seiichirou is too frail to even compare to the Holy Maiden...

In any case, simply living a normal life weakened Seiichirou. Moreover, whenever Aresh took his eyes off him, Seiichirou would bury himself in work, and despite it being nearly impossible for his body to recover with magic, he tried to take nutritional tonics, which were essentially poison to him. To make matters worse, when Aresh tried to warn him, Seiichirou wouldn’t listen to his advice at all—no matter what the commander said, he would *look* like he was seriously listening and accepting his advice, but it was really going in one ear and out the other. Then he would turn his bleary eyes on Aresh and say, “We will never be able to understand each other.”

“...Um, Aresh?”

Aresh had been ruminating so deeply about Seiichirou that he missed what Yua said again.

“...We’ll end things here for today. Make sure to practice regularly until next time.”

They were at a good stopping point to wrap things up, so Aresh got to his feet. Yua, however, gently grabbed the cuff of his sleeve with her slender fingers.

“Um, could we...have lunch together today?” Yua asked, looking at him with upturned eyes.

Yua was just as the prince and the knights of the Second Royal Order described—a sweet girl who evoked strong protective feelings.

Aresh’s mind, however, remained stubbornly full of the man he couldn’t leave alone—a man beyond comparison to such a girl. If he didn’t go to the dining hall, Seiichirou would take that opportunity to skip lunch and continue working. That’s exactly what Seiichirou would do. Aresh would put money on it.

“I’m sorry, but I eat lunch at the dining hall,” Aresh said over his shoulder.

Then, without looking at Yua’s disappointed expression or the angry face of her guard from the Second Royal Order, Aresh left the room.

“This is nothing to worry yourself over, Your Holiness. Now let’s get ready to eat,” said the maid who looked after Yua in a cheerful voice, trying to comfort her.

They were still in the room Aresh had just vacated.

“Guys, I’d like to have lunch in the dining hall today, too.”

Yua looked back at them with a smile, but the guard shook his head.

“What are you talking about, Miss Yua? That’s where employees eat, and the food is of lower quality. Besides, I cannot permit this for safety reasons. You’ll have more suitable food prepared for you here.”

“But there are lots of people who work in this castle, right? I want to meet and talk to the people of the kingdom I’ll be saving. I think if I make more friends, I’ll be able to work even harder in my purification studies!”

Yua had gotten tired of eating lavish meals all the time and thought eating somewhere else every once in a while might be a nice change of pace. She also had a fleeting desire to eat with Aresh. Her maid, who devoutly believed in the Holy Maiden, and the knight from the Second Royal Order were moved and trembling with emotion as the Holy Maiden cared for the common folk as well.

“But from a security perspective...”

“The knights will protect me, won’t they?”

And so Yua’s desire was realized as she walked into the royal palace’s dining hall, accompanied by her maid and three guards.

Although her knights and maid had been taken aback by the decision, in her former world, Yua had just been a regular high school girl.

She had gone to school cafeterias, family restaurants, and even fast-food joints. Since coming here, she had been living the lavish life of an aristocrat, but she was still a normal high schooler at heart. She wanted to walk around more freely and eat more casually.

But everyone told her she was the savior of this kingdom and that she was to live a life befitting a holy maiden, so all she could do was work hard at everything, including her studies. To avoid danger while she was inside the castle, she could only go to certain areas, and someone would always accompany her wherever she went. Not only was it her first time in the employees’ cafeteria, but the entire office wing of the castle itself. On their way to the dining hall, even if the employees and civil officials didn’t recognize Yua, once they saw the scowling, green-cloaked knights from the Second Royal Order surrounding her, they seemed to understand her position and cleared the way for them.

“Whoa, it’s a buffet!”

When they arrived at the dining hall, Yua’s eyes shone as she saw the dishes lined up, and a small wave of whispers started to spread from the other people eating. Yua, however, didn’t pay this any mind, and her knights shook their heads at them. Presuming this meant they shouldn’t cause a fuss, the diners anxiously returned to eating.

“Miss Yua, I’ll go get you food. Why don’t you sit?” her maid asked.

“Huh?! But it’ll be so much more fun if I get my own!” Yua said, flatly refusing the suggestion.

Yua bounced up to the table lined with food. She wondered what to get first, her eyes scanning the dishes, when she spotted a black cloak on the other side of the table—one of the reasons for her visit.

“Oh! Aresh! Why don’t we...eat...together...?”

“Huh?” came more than one voice.

As soon as Yua had rushed up to Aresh, she saw he was with another person—a familiar man with black hair and dark circles under his eyes. For some reason, his mouth was open, just like Aresh’s.

Σ Σ Σ

Seiichirou had once again turned away the knights from the Third Royal Order who had come to complain to him. During the lunch break afterward, Aresh sat rather grumpily in the dining hall with his typical surly expression. Things had gotten quite awkward between them since last night.

He has a surprising amount of integrity...

Even after their dinner the night before, Aresh had partially walked Seiichirou home. Aresh had added this to their routine to make sure Seiichirou didn’t go to the medicine shop.

But he still felt awkward about it, so even though Norbert had always left to sit somewhere else after dragging him to the dining hall, this time Seiichirou grabbed his arm before he could scurry off.

“U-um... Sei? I’ll just be, you know...”

“We should eat together every once in a while, don’t you think?”

He stared down Norbert with a smile that clearly said “All you do is bring me here. Every single time. You can’t do that and then run away!” Norbert pleaded silently with his eyes: “No, no, I can’t! Please let me go!”

“...Hurry up,” Aresh said in a low, slightly irritated tone, breaking up their

prolonged staring contest.

The two men grabbed their trays and plates with an air of resignation. Aresh started piling food onto Seiichirou's plate without asking, as he always did. Seiichirou could serve himself—he had gradually learned what he could and couldn't eat—but it was difficult to bring this up when the man before him treated it as some sort of personal mission.

“Oh, that one is...”

“...The magicules in it will barely affect you, and it will make you stronger. It doesn't matter if you like it or not—eat it.”

Seiichirou, who had remembered not liking how that dish tasted, had spoken up without even thinking about it, but Aresh had been quick to shut him down.

Aresh kept serving more and more food, piece after piece, until finally, when there was so much Seiichirou would *definitely* not finish, he stopped. Norbert, on the other hand, had been helping himself to whatever and however much he liked. Perhaps because of his youth, there was a heaping pile of meat on his plate.

The commander of the Third Royal Order did not eat lunch in the dining hall often, but when he did, it was certain that a good seat would be available for him. Aresh quickly headed toward their “usual seats,” and Seiichirou followed, keeping an eye on Norbert, who was still waiting for an opportunity to sit somewhere else, so he wouldn't run away. Norbert was the only disquieting element in the otherwise typical dining hall scene, but there was a sudden commotion—and afterward, a girl's cheerful voice rang out.

“Oh! Aresh!”

Yua blinked in surprise to see Seiichirou, the salaryman who was, like her, from Japan. He was sitting across from Aresh, her main target.

“Why are you here, Kondou...?”

Just like before, Kondou wore an unhappy expression with unhealthy-looking shadows underneath his eyes.

However, he was wearing a shirt with a standing collar like everyone else. Yua

remembered once hearing that people who worked at the palace wore that outfit. There was also a brown cloak hanging off his shoulder, almost making it look like he really worked at the palace. Seiichirou had come here with her, but he had no role or powers, so the kingdom was supposed to be subsidizing his living costs. She had been so sure he would be living in town.

“...Why are you here, Your Holiness?”

Aresh’s low voice startled Yua, who was staring at Seiichirou in surprise. The unexpected encounter had made her forget her original reason for visiting the dining hall.

“Huh? O-oh, well, I just thought if you ate meals in the dining hall, that if I came here, maybe we could eat together... Besides, I’ve always wanted to stop by...”

Although Yua was still confused about the situation, she looked from Aresh to Seiichirou as she spoke, comparing the two men.

She was even more curious about why they were together than Seiichirou’s appearance, but first, she had to get food.

“Aresh, I’m going to go get some food. Could I join you?”

Aresh furrowed his brow but nodded, so Yua changed gears and headed toward the table lined with various dishes.

“But I’m so surprised that you two know each other! I thought you lived outside the palace, Kondou?”

After Yua had excitedly picked out her food, her maid had carried the tray back to the table. As soon as she sat down next to Aresh, she began asking questions. Seiichirou was sitting opposite Aresh, and beside him, Norbert, who was visibly uncomfortable, sat across from Yua.

“I live in a residence hall, not inside the castle. This is just my workplace.”

“Workplace? Huh? You mean you have a job here?”

With the kingdom guaranteeing Seiichirou’s livelihood, Yua’s surprise was understandable, but it had already been over two months since they had come here and Seiichirou had started his job.

“They’ve been letting me work at the Royal Accounting Department.”

“Really? You don’t have to work, but you still do? Kondou, you really are a corporate slave!”

Seiichirou’s eyes briefly twitched, but he understood that Yua probably didn’t have any malicious intentions. He didn’t say anything, but he twisted his mouth to make it look like he was smiling.

Yua was just a high schooler, and from her carefree attitude, Seiichirou assumed she had just heard the phrase *corporate slave* from the internet or television and was using the term lightheartedly. Seiichirou wasn’t one to get annoyed at every little faux pas made by an ignorant kid, but he felt a slightly ominous aura radiating from the man in front of him. Totally unaware that she had said something rude, Yua carried on with her conversation. The next question seemed to be more important to her.

“So how did you and Aresh...?” Yua asked, immediately changing the subject.

Seiichirou gave her the same innocuous version of events he had told Norbert and the others.

“I got sick when I was in town, and he helped me out. He’s been looking out for me in various ways since then.”

Yua clearly had feelings for Aresh, so Seiichirou decided it was best to keep quiet about the treatment afterward, the sex (of course), and Aresh’s relentless management of his health. Yua took the bait.

“Really?! Aresh really is kind, isn’t he?!”

“Huh?”

Kind... Well, it was true that Aresh had saved his life several times, but hearing him described as kind made Seiichirou feel incredibly uncomfortable. He was at a loss for words, but Yua plowed on, oblivious.

“Aresh teaches me how to manipulate magic once a week, and he’s such a nice teacher!”

“...What?”

Aresh was teaching Yua how to use magic?

“...Commander Indolark, you’re a member of the Royal Order, aren’t you?”

“...Yes.”

Seiichirou pondered this, unable to understand why the commander of a Royal Order was teaching the Holy Maiden how to control her magic. Shouldn’t her instructor have been someone else whose specialty was education or magic?

At Aresh’s indignant reply, however, he realized it had probably been at Yua’s request.

Seiichirou was partially amazed that the job of a commander could be altered because of the wishes of the Holy Maiden who might one day save the kingdom. At the same time, he felt bad about what he had said before when he implied that Aresh wasn’t doing his job properly. Aresh might have been arrogant and might not have cared for doing nitty-gritty work, but he was enduring having to teach the Holy Maiden, despite not wanting to, because of orders from above. As a corporate slave who could not oppose a superior’s orders, Seiichirou felt sympathetic and impressed with Aresh.

“...Why are you looking at me like that?”

“It’s nothing.”

Aresh gave him a look of extreme dislike.

“I’m sure you weren’t thinking anything good. Anyway, stop avoiding the trimp. I told you to eat everything, didn’t I?”

Seiichirou was being scolded for not touching the food covered in orange sauce—the same one he had objected to when it had been put on his plate before.

“You took something you don’t like from the buffet?” Yua asked, looking confused.

It had been beyond Seiichirou’s control.

“No...”

“He doesn’t have any magicule tolerance, so he eats what I tell him to.”

“Huh?”

Yua’s eyes widened for a moment. *You didn’t have to say that*, Seiichirou thought, groaning inside.

“Magicule tolerance...?”

“It’s a component of the air found naturally in this world. It is particularly concentrated in food, so if he doesn’t choose his foods properly, he could be poisoned to death.”

“What?! This is the first I’ve heard of that! I’ve been eating normally!”

“It wouldn’t be a problem for you, Your Holiness. You’ve always had magic and antibodies inside of you, so you’ll be fine no matter what you eat,” Aresh said.

Yua let out a sigh of relief. Her knight and maid gave a knowing smile and nodded.

“Thank goodness... Oh! But does that mean Kondou can’t just sit down and enjoy whatever he wants? The food here is so good, too. That’s upsetting...”

Despite her pity, Seiichirou’s expression didn’t change as he cut up his trimp.

“It’s fine. I don’t have much interest in food, so it’s not really a problem for me.”

In fact, even when Seiichirou lived in his old world, he had never really been picky about food. He had just wanted to get the nutrients he needed quickly, so he had often turned to supplements for help. He had no complaints about the food restrictions he’d had since coming to this world.

Yua must have loved to eat, because she tilted her head and looked at Seiichirou as if he were speaking a different language. The man to her side, however, knit his eyebrows and snorted.

“Liar. Your face is an open book about foods you like and dislike.”

“Huh?”

Seiichirou blinked at Aresh, the trimp still in his mouth. Aresh continued.

“You quite like tsuhash, right? Whenever it’s served in a meal, it’s all you look

at. Plus, when you eat something and like it, your eyes become softer, so it's easy to tell."

Seiichirou did, in fact, like tsuhash because of its light yet complex flavor. It was the first food he had thought was delicious since coming to this world. But having his favorite dish explained so casually in front of other people was embarrassing—didn't Aresh understand that?

"Sei, your complexion is getting a lot better!"

"Shut up."

Seiichirou's normal complexion was so bad that even blushing seemed to be considered a slight improvement for it.

In a fit of frustration, Seiichirou stole the tsuhash from Norbert's plate with his fork and replaced it with his remaining trimp.

"Ah! What are you doing?!" Norbert protested.

"Hey, I told you to eat it all, didn't I?"

Seiichirou's chaotic plan, however, was naturally thwarted by the man in front of him. Aresh pushed the trimp from his own plate onto Seiichirou's. Now Seiichirou had more of them than before.

"U-um..."

Yua looked bewildered by the childish back-and-forth of the adults around her.

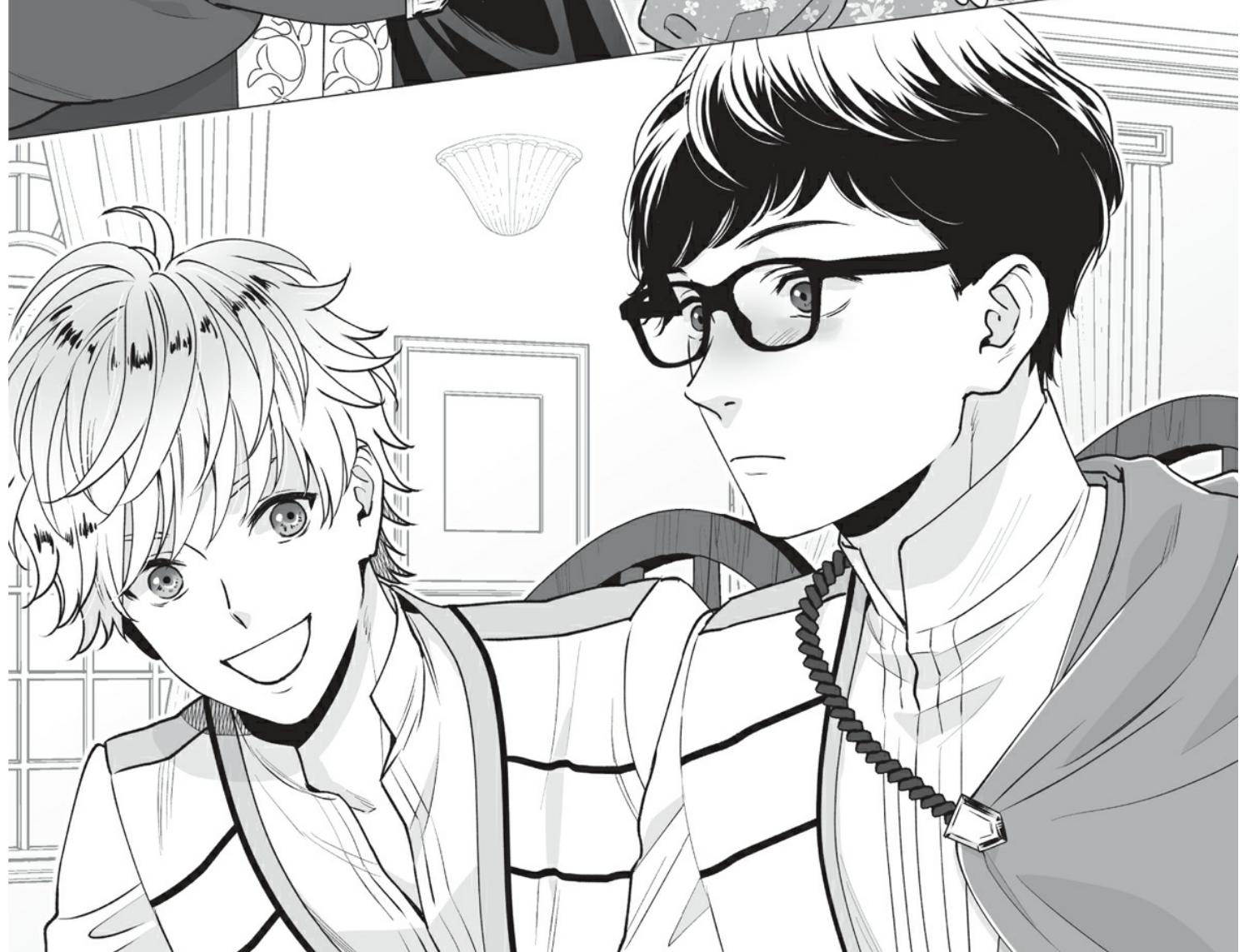
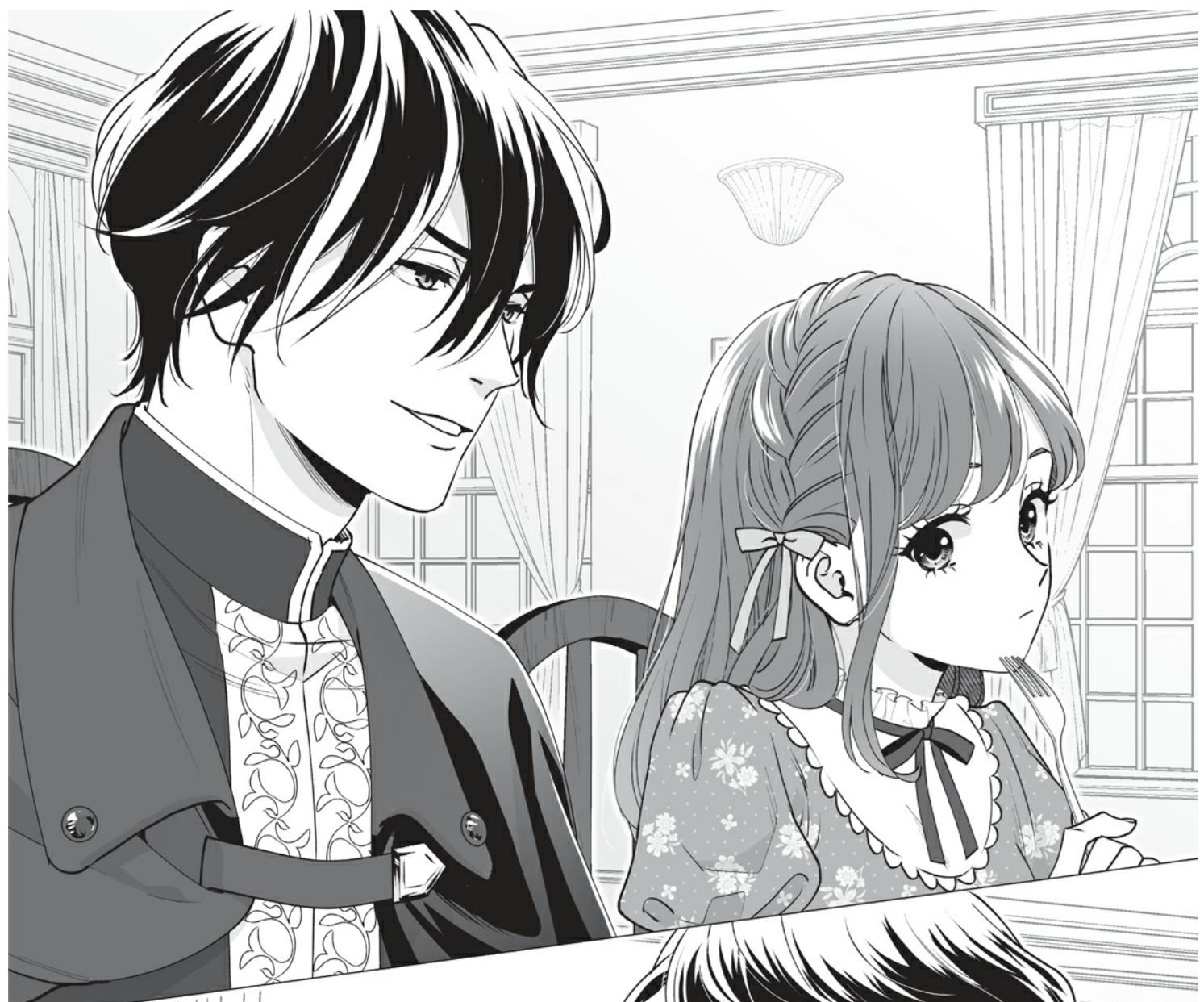
Yua had rarely interacted with Seiichirou (he was much older than her, a complete stranger, and a man, after all), and Aresh had always been a man of few words, at least around her, so her mind couldn't process what she was seeing.

Ever since she came to this world, the people around her had always put her first and centered everything around her, so now that she felt excluded from the conversation, she wasn't sure what to do.

"Um... Your Holiness...?" the blond man sitting in front of her said, cutting through Yua's bewilderment.

She remembered that he had introduced himself as Norbert before—he was an aristocrat and worked under Seiichirou in the Accounting Department. She hadn't really paid much attention to him, but looking at him again now, she noticed his blond hair, blue eyes, and handsome features. He also looked to be around her age, so she thought he might be easy to talk to.

“Yes? Oh, and you can call me Yua.”



Seeing her smile, Norbert, who had felt rather shy, gave her a relieved, friendly grin in return.

“Yua. There was something I wanted to ask you...”

“Yes?”

“Is it true that, in your home world, you don’t have to walk because the streets move on their own?”

“What?”

Yua blinked for a few moments, not understanding what he was asking. Norbert’s face, however, remained very serious.

“No, that’s what Sei said! He said that people in your world don’t need to walk because the streets move! He also said you could cross oceans and fly—not by emitting magic from your feet but by the ‘power of science’!!”

“What? You what???”

Not knowing how to respond to the blond-haired man in front of her, who had spoken with a kind of fire blazing in his blue eyes, Yua turned to look at Norbert’s informer, Seiichirou.

“Oh, I was just half-heartedly answering him so he’d stop talking,” Seiichirou replied nonchalantly.

“What?! Sei?!” Norbert shouted, jumping to his feet in shock. “Then did you also lie about the coming-of-age ceremony where you shoot sparks in the air—and the form of torture where you suspend yourself off a cliff?!”

“Yes, that’s right... They’re lies, although they’re not totally off the mark.”

“You’re kidding...!”

Norbert grasped for the truth with such a frantic expression that Yua, though still confused, replied that, for those two examples, he had probably been referring to the coming-of-age ceremony, during which people set off firecrackers—and bungee jumping.

“Sei...”

“You kept talking to me and blowing off your work during work hours. It was

distracting and annoying, so I answered just to shut you up.”

“That’s awful! I believed you!!” Norbert lamented.

“The only awful thing here is your attitude toward work,” Seiichirou replied coldly.

“Then... Then the one about girls wearing skirts above their knees with their legs exposed—and the places where girls gather wearing outfits that look like their undergarments...?”

“Those were true.”

“?!”

Yua thought Sei had phrased it strangely, but miniskirts and swimsuits were commonplace in their home world, so when Norbert looked to Yua, she nodded. Norbert’s dark, despairing face lit up at once.

But just then, the knight standing behind Yua cut into the conversation.

“How dare you fall in love with the Holy Maiden! Know your place!!”

As soon as Seiichirou realized the knight was looking at him, he frowned. For a moment, he couldn’t understand what the knight had said to him—or rather, his brain refused to make that connection—but after looking at the agitated, green-cloaked man, Seiichirou’s mind reluctantly started working, and he unwillingly spoke.

“I’m sorry, but what are you talking about?”

“No male can be so unaffected after seeing the lovely Holy Maiden in such immodest dress! I bet you only came with Her Holiness here in the first place because you had been following her around, huh?!”

Seiichirou could no longer stop his face from twitching. Just who was this idiot? He looked to be around twenty years old—was he a virgin or something?

“What...?” Yua asked. “Really...?”

Now she was looking at Seiichirou with frightened eyes.

Give me a break...

Resisting the urge to flip over their table and scream “Absolutely not!”

Seiichirou regained his composure. *Calm down; she's just a kid.*

In modern Japan, there had been a trend where female high school students were bizarrely elevated and highly valued in society. Because of this, female high school students had a strange sense of self-importance. This wasn't her fault, of course—it was society's fault.

And while Yua was certainly a cute girl, she was so far from Seiichirou's type that he basically felt no attraction whatsoever. She was a kid, and he never had romantic feelings for girls her age. Moreover, everything about socially inexperienced teenagers, including their values, was simply too different—just being around them was exhausting. For all these reasons, Seiichirou could never conceivably have any romantic feelings for Yua, ever.

But explaining this to the knight, with his aggressive, incorrect notions, and to Yua, with her unintentionally elevated sense of self-importance, would pose problems. This current predicament, however, already did. Another green-cloaked knight silently looked at him. For some reason, Aresh was staring at him, too. Norbert was looking at him excitedly. Seiichirou would be giving him an earful later.

“How about you say something, huh?!”

And how about knights not shout in public? Not to mention, this is a huge violation of privacy.

As the idea crossed Seiichirou's mind that perhaps the definition of what it meant to be a knight was different in this world, he carefully thought over his answer.

“I'm not romantically interested in younger people.”

To be precise, Seiichirou was not romantically interested in younger people with no experience being out in society, but he thought he might be accused of making fun of the Holy Maiden if he said that, so he had modified his answer.

Seiichirou looked across the table to see if the others had accepted his answer. The knight was furrowing his brow, but Yua was smiling in relief. That could have been seen as a rude reaction, if Seiichirou really thought about it, but since their feelings on the matter were mutual, he decided not to say

anything about it.

“That’s right. Kondou is way too old for me!”

“Right.”

Yua laughed—unaware of her own pride, so characteristic of teenagers and young adults who thought youth was the greatest quality of all.

Except Seiichirou did agree with her that being young was the best. But that was mainly in terms of health. He wished he could go back to the time of his youth, in which he could stay up all night and his body would still feel totally fine, without any neck pain, lower back pain, or migraines.

“Speaking of which, how old are you, Kondou?”

Did she really say I was too old without even knowing my age? Seiichirou thought. He started to quietly answer “twenty-nine,” but then he suddenly realized... It had been over two months since he had come to this world... That meant his birthday had already passed.

“Twenty-nine... Actually, no, I turned thirty a few days ago...”

“What?! You’re that old?!?”

It appeared Seiichirou looked younger than he thought he did. Yua’s eyes were screaming “He’s an old man!” As Seiichirou started to viscerally realize that, from a high schooler’s perspective, a man in his thirties *was* considered old, the vivaciously young and immature man beside him started to make a fuss.

“What?! It was your birthday, Sei?!?” Norbert cried. “You should have told me! I would have celebrated it!!”

Of course, a party animal—no, a nobleman’s son—would say that. Seiichirou wondered if Norbert liked parties.

“Thank you. Although, in my world, there was a custom where a subordinate would celebrate his boss’s birthday by tying an elastic cord around his legs and jumping off a building...”

“No, that’s torture, isn’t it?! Wait, was that a lie, too...?! Which is it?!”

Norbert was descending into raucous chaos, but as Seiichirou vaguely basked in the gratification, he felt a chill coming from the other side of the table and looked up.

“...What is it?”

“...Nothing.”

From his expression, it certainly didn’t look like nothing, but his beautiful face seemed as grumpy as it always did. Aresh sunk into morose silence.

“Aresh, you’re twenty-two years old, right?” Yua chirped, her tone indicating that she had, in fact, remembered his age correctly.

“Yes,” Aresh replied, and he sounded incredibly disinterested.

Wait... Twenty-two. Twenty-two years old?!

Seiichirou had thought Aresh was young, but he never imagined he would be eight years younger... In his home world, someone who was twenty-two would have just graduated college and entered the workforce. Was Seiichirou being ordered around and supervised by a man the same age as a fresh hire eight years his junior...? *This other world is a tough place to live in*, Seiichirou thought.

“How old are you, Norbert?” Yua asked.

“Me? I’m eighteen.”

“Oh! So you’re two years older than me! I don’t know many people close to my age, so I’m really happy! And Aresh is only six years older than me, right?”

“...That’s right.”

Young people got excited being around other people their age. It was a natural sight to behold. Seiichirou remembered that the prince had looked young, too, so surely he was around their age as well. Seiichirou wanted young people to hang out with other young people—he really did. Just as he thought this, however, the obtuse man sitting beside him shifted the conversation back to Seiichirou.

“So when should we celebrate, Sei?”

“I told you: It’s fine.”

“What?! Come on, let’s do it! I’m sure everyone in the Accounting Department wants to celebrate, too!”

“You guys just want to have a drinking party, don’t you?”

His colleagues were reserved, but they were strangely fond of booze and delicious foods. Seiichirou, however, would probably collapse if he had something as strong as alcohol. Before he could explain this, however, his guardian put a stop to the plan.

“You can’t have alcohol,” Aresh stated.

“I know that.”

Seiichirou didn’t want to die, nor did he want to cause any more trouble for Aresh.

“Aw! Then what do you want as a present? I can’t think of anything that made you happy except for those nutritional tonics, though.”

“That would be fine,” Seiichirou replied immediately without thinking.

“Hey!” Aresh admonished.

“Are you tired, Kondou?” Yua asked curiously, as she hadn’t heard about Seiichirou’s past situation.

“Well, yes...”

“It’s because you’re not cutting back on your workload.”

Aresh had interjected, but Seiichirou simply ignored him.

“I’m able to use healing magic now, so if you’re tired, I’ll treat you!”

“What?”

It appeared Yua had, through the process of learning how to use the Holy Maiden’s purification magic, also learned how to use healing spells. That much Seiichirou understood. *But wait... Magic is dangerous!* Just as Seiichirou was wondering how he could turn down Yua’s good-natured offer, she reached out her hand.

Her warm hand touched Seiichirou.

But no, her hand wasn't actually warm. Heat was radiating from her palm...

Grab!!

"Huh?!"

Before he realized it, Seiichirou found himself in Aresh's arms.

Without glancing at the stirring crowd around them or Yua's bewildered face, Aresh looked at Seiichirou.

"...Tch."

Aresh ordered Norbert to clean up their plates before grabbing Seiichirou's arm and dragging him out of the dining hall.

"Huh? What?"

Looking back at the perplexed faces inside the cafeteria, Aresh announced, "I'm the one taking care of him. Don't touch him."

"A little bit of her magic touched you, huh...? Open your mouth," Aresh ordered.

Aresh had taken Seiichirou to a deserted place that looked like a storeroom. Seiichirou obediently opened his mouth. Almost immediately, he felt the soft sensation of their lips pressed together.

After a few seconds, Aresh quietly pulled away. His expression was serious, and he stroked Seiichirou's face with surprisingly rough fingers, as if inspecting him for something. As Seiichirou felt the thick skin of Aresh's hands, he remembered that Aresh was a knight who routinely handled swords.

"Do you feel hot or sluggish at all?"

"No. Thank you."

Seiichirou wished Aresh would stop looking at him so doubtfully after asking him questions.

"Tch... Maybe it would be easier to just put a barrier around you."

"A barrier? Is that different from a spell?"

Aresh explained that it was a type of spell that acted like a protective field,

making whatever was inside immune to magic and magicules.

“Something like that exists...?”

If I had that, could I drink as many tonics as I wanted?! Seiichirou wondered, but Aresh continued to explain that it protected the body from outside elements. It offered no protection for anything ingested.

But it's certainly convenient. Why hasn't he used it before now?

Perhaps the question was written all over Seiichirou's face, because Aresh narrowed his long purple eyes.

“It consumes a lot of magic power. That magic would flow into you.”

So... Right.

Aresh would have to “acclimatize” the magic I receive...

“I see...”

The mood became awkward, but neither of them thought they would end up regretting their decision.

Orjef Rhoda, vice commander of the Third Royal Order, went about his usual duties, but he tilted his head, feeling a sense of unease.

Is there less paperwork than usual...?

Orjef's job was to help Commander Aresh.

Aresh Indolark was a man born with exceptional talent. Perhaps because of this, he couldn't have cared less about trivial matters. If no one had stepped in, the routine tasks of the Third Royal Order would have been left undone, so they were mainly taken over by Orjef.

He wasn't unhappy with this role. He and Aresh were cousins, but Aresh was far more gifted, and Orjef had never wanted to compete with him, even when they were kids. Additionally, by single-handedly taking on those duties, most of the members felt that Orjef was indispensable to the Third Royal Order.

Aresh was skilled in swordplay and magic, but Orjef was the one actually running the Third Royal Order. When he'd hear people say that, he would feel very satisfied with his position.

But then...

“Oh, Aresh! You’re here... What’s that?”

When Orjef heard a rustle, he looked up and saw the handsome, dark-haired, black-clothed commander walking into the room. He was holding a document that looked familiar.

“I summarized the proposed itinerary plans for the next expedition.”

“What?!”

The commander’s calmly spoken words were so astonishing that Orjef had no time to mask his look of deep shock.

Aresh, however, did not notice this and sat at his desk. He grabbed another document.

You’re telling me...Aresh is doing paperwork...voluntarily?!

If Aresh starts doing his work, he’ll be perfect in every way! What would be the point of me being here?! Orjef thought in a panic. But Aresh’s next words gave him pause.

“Orjef... Why do you think someone would say they’re not interested in people younger than them?”

“Huh?”

What did he just say? What did this genius mage and swordsman—this tall, cool, aristocratic guy—this man who caught every noblewoman’s attention, just say?

“Do...do you mean in a romantic sense?”

“...”

His silence confirmed it.

WE’RE TALKING ABOUT LOVE!!

Aresh is coming to me for love advice?!

Aresh had consistently been so emotionless that Orjef had always wondered whether he was emotionally stunted. Even though women of all ages had been

romantically interested in him, his cousin of six years younger would never give them the time of day. *And all this culminated in him falling for someone older?!*

Orjef wanted to jump up and down and shout for joy, but that would just spoil Aresh's mood and kill the conversation. *After all, this flawless cousin of mine is apparently not being considered a potential partner by this older person! I want to know more! Besides, Aresh is coming to me for help! I can't pass up this chance!*

Orjef regained his composure, cleared his throat, and tried to sound casual. He spoke deeply and clearly, attempting to sound like a mature master of romance.

"Hmm... If there's too large of an age gap, your values might be different, so that may be the reason."

Orjef spoke in incredibly general terms to prevent Aresh from clamping up.

"Values...?"

Aresh nodded with an earnest expression. It was the first time Aresh had ever taken his words this seriously, and Orjef felt moved. It also seemed to be true that his cousin was in love with someone much older. Orjef tried desperately to keep himself from losing his cool.

Ohhhh my god! I wanna know who this person is!! Ah! Is this why he's started taking work seriously?! Does that mean they work at the royal palace?! Who does Aresh know that's older and works at the royal palace?! I want to go find them right nowwwwwwwww!!

Σ Σ Σ

"Seiichirou."

A calm older man with rose-blond hair and a blue cloak approached him. Seiichirou stopped walking and bowed. As the man was the prime minister, Seiichirou probably ought to have knelt, but having been raised in modern Japan, that bow of politeness was unfortunately all Seiichirou could manage at such short notice. Prime Minister Camile didn't seem to mind, either. He raised a relaxed hand and came to a stop beside Seiichirou.

“I was thinking of calling for you again soon, so this is perfect timing.”

Seiichirou resented being interrupted in the middle of work, so this was lucky for him, too. He looked up, assuming they were to discuss a work-related matter.

“What is it?”

“The Holy Maiden has reached the final stage of her training, so we’re planning to inspect the Demon Forest soon.”

Finally.

It had been nearly three months since Seiichirou and Yua had been abducted. If it was just an inspection, Seiichirou thought they could have sent her with guards much earlier.

“Well, the Second Royal Order and the prince are against it, so it might take a little bit longer.”

“So Shirai—I mean, the Holy Maiden can use the power of purification now, right?”

“Yes, so I’ve heard.”

Seiichirou swallowed a sigh as he pictured an abacus and calculated the total cost of damages caused by the miasma from the Demon Forest and the costs racked up by the Holy Maiden in the last three months.

“We’ve submitted a request for this to be done as soon as possible, so I’ll be asking for your assistance as well.”

Seiichirou nodded, realizing that the prime minister was probably referring to him arranging funds for the miasma damage and expedition costs—and presenting them in a report. At any rate, if they didn’t hurry up with the purification, it would end up costing a lot more time and money. Perhaps persuading the Second Royal Order with numbers would be somewhat effective... Seiichirou contemplated this, putting the knight who had hassled him in the dining hall in the back of his mind.

“I’ll see you around, then.”

“Right. Good-bye.”

After parting with Camile in the hallway, Seiichirou thought of the work he was currently juggling and began putting together a schedule in his mind.

I should have prior expedition documents... If I bring some home and prioritize this task, I might be able to finish it by tomorrow evening...

Distracted, Seiichirou didn't notice them.

He didn't notice the eyes following him.

Nor the shadow as it ambushed him in a deserted hallway.

“Huh?!”

The first thing Seiichirou felt was the massive impact against his entire body.

After that, his mouth was covered, and Seiichirou, who was bowled over, was dragged farther away.

What...what's going on?!

His mouth was pressed shut with something like a cloth. Seiichirou was lying on his stomach in the dark storage-like room he had been dragged into. It felt like something heavy had been placed on his back.

“Hah... He was blasted away so easily.”

“He's not like the Holy Maiden. This otherworlder with no powers is so weak!”

“And you go around acting all high and mighty!”

Though Seiichirou couldn't lift his neck, he managed to look up. He could see two men looking down at him. He knew their faces. They were men from the Third Royal Order who had come to Seiichirou repeatedly to complain about their expenses.

The fact that he was hearing three different voices, however, meant that whatever was on his back probably wasn't a thing at all—it was a person.

His voice sounded familiar, too.

“Who knew this wretch in love with the Holy Maiden could have been played so easily?”

It was the knight from the Second Royal Order who had hassled him back at the dining hall.

It seemed as though this knight hadn't understood Seiichirou's denial of his accusations in the slightest.

In short, this devout follower of the Holy Maiden had formed an alliance with the two knights who already held grudges against Seiichirou regarding their expenditures.

Seiichirou immediately grasped the situation. But even though he understood and had gotten accustomed to this world, it was still a world in which Seiichirou's common sense didn't work. In this world, Seiichirou was even weaker than normal.

The knights attacked Seiichirou with an irrational violence he had never faced before.

After Camile Karvada had parted ways with Seiichirou, he suddenly turned around, remembering that he had forgotten to give the man a document.

Seiichirou worked well even when left to his own devices, but when presented with information and data, he produced even better results than Camile expected.

The man was so brilliant, Camile had even thought of bringing him to work in his own office, but Seiichirou seemed to be absurdly good with numbers. He was also valuable because he had not been influenced by any one faction, and Camile thought it might even be preferable to make him an independent authority.

Camile had worked at the royal palace for a long time. Partially because of his confidence in his own navigation abilities, he went down a more efficient, shorter, deserted passageway. Suddenly, he saw that a storeroom door had been left slightly ajar, so he calmly approached it, assuming someone had forgotten to close it. Then he heard someone groaning inside.

"Seiichirou?!"

Flinging the door wide open, Camile saw the man he had just parted from on the ground, groaning, his entire body covered in injuries.



[CHAPTER FIVE]

Implicated

“What do you mean?”

The man’s voice was usually quiet and intimidating, but now it was even colder. The director of the Royal Medical Bureau, Ciro Quellbus, repeated himself to the man, despite being terrified.

“I told you: Kondo’s medical treatment has been entirely entrusted to someone else, so I can’t personally heal him.”

When a subordinate had informed Ciro that His Excellency had brought in a clearly beaten and unconscious Seiichirou, Ciro had spat out the coffee he was drinking. This hadn’t simply been because Seiichirou was covered in injuries, but because he had been carried here by the prime minister himself.

Ciro had immediately taken Seiichirou to the treatment room...but when he had remembered Seiichirou’s peculiarity, he buried his face in his hands.

“You’re the medical director—aren’t you the best physician and healer in the kingdom? What do you mean you can’t heal him?”

Of course, on a technical level, Ciro was capable of healing Seiichirou. He took pride in knowing he could do it.

But Ciro *couldn’t*.

No—he *mustn’t*.

“Well, you see, I have someone going to fetch the person responsible for his

medical treatment right now, so..."

Ciro desperately tried to sidestep the conversation, but even he could tell how suspicious he was sounding the more he spoke.

However, Seiichirou's peculiarity was linked to his relationship with *that* person. Ciro, not wanting to say something and immediately have his head separated from his body, managed to elusively evade Camile's intense questioning.

"...I've heard that there are some who loathe the otherworlder who is not the Holy Maiden..." Camile continued.

What?! That's how you're interpreting this?!

There were certainly people who spoke ill of Seiichirou—he wasn't the Holy Maiden and didn't have any powers. They probably felt displeased that this regular guy, whom they had not intended to summon, had come along of his own accord and was now being taken care of on the kingdom's funds.

But of course, Ciro didn't feel that way. When he had initially learned of the ordinary man who had gotten involved in all this, Ciro had thought, *What awful luck*, and after actually meeting Seiichirou, he had a favorable impression of the otherworlder. *Though, he is strange*, he thought.

Moreover, after seeing Aresh, commander of the Third Royal Order and known as the Ice Nobleman, interacting with him that closely, Ciro couldn't imagine doing something as reckless as harboring any ill will toward Seiichirou.

In this situation, however, it was perhaps inevitable that the prime minister would have made that assumption.

Plus, the prime minister held the highest position in the government—he had the real power of the kingdom in his grasp. Ciro was in charge of the Medical Bureau, but Camile's position was even higher.

But if Ciro was to treat Seiichirou here...then he would have to face the wrath of the man holding the highest rank in the *military*.

Ciro really had no choice but to stall for time.

"...If you really don't want to heal him, then I'll arrange another healer for

him.”

“Y-you...!”

You can’t!

If someone was to perform healing magic on that many injuries, Seiichirou would immediately get magic-sickness. If someone was to do it in one go without this knowledge, Seiichirou would really be in trouble this time.

Moreover, the act of acclimatizing magic also used magic itself. It would be a race against time, and Ciro wasn’t sure if a healer would be able to deal with it quickly enough. It was impossible to acclimatize another person’s magical energy with Seiichirou, and the healer would have to overwrite the other spellcaster’s magic first, which would require a huge amount of time and energy.

But Ciro’s resistance was futile. Camile ordered his secretary to fetch another healer. Just as he reached toward the door to leave the treatment room, however, it loudly burst open.

“Aresh!!”

When the man Ciro had been waiting for finally arrived, he was so happy he almost cried for joy, but Aresh wasn’t donning his typical blank expression—his eyes resembled wildfires of fury.

“Commander Indolark?” Camile asked with a rare look of surprise.

Camile had heard that Aresh and Seiichirou were friendly with each other, but he had never seen the commander look this flustered before.

Aresh didn’t respond to either of them, however, and immediately walked up to Seiichirou, who was lying down on a bed, receiving only cool towels pressed against his bruises as treatment.

Aresh had just seen Seiichirou the day before. The ever-present dark circles still lingered under his eyes, but now bruises dotted his face and body. He seemed to have developed a fever from his wounds and was breathing heavily.



"I will treat him. Please leave," Aresh announced.

Camile furrowed his brow, looking displeased, so Ciro hastened to intercede.

"I'm very sorry, Prime Minister! Aresh takes care of all of Kondo's medical treatments, so..."

"That may be so, but why do we need to leave?"

"I-it's going to take some time, and I'm sure you're very busy, so you don't have to wait... Aresh, will a half hour suffice?" (This would have been one hour by modern Japanese standards.)

"One hour." (And this would have been considered two hours.)

"...Okay."

Ciro felt a twinge of emotion at Aresh's immediate reply, but he did as instructed by pushing the unwilling prime minister out of the room.

It wasn't painful...it was agonizing.

Seiichirou was punched and kicked by a group of muscular men.

It was the first time in his life that he had been attacked by adults like that.

Moreover, they were knights. The equivalent in his home world would have been soldiers. Try getting beaten by a well-trained soldier. Seiichirou, who was naturally feeble, had been rendered immobile after just one blow.

Upon seeing this, these men, who had been bestowed the profound title of knight, had laughed and continued their assault. It was well beyond painful at this point for Seiichirou. The agony was suffocating, and he desperately tried to endure it. The men had intended for this to be a warning—a way to let out their frustrations. They didn't want to kill him, so Seiichirou just had to wait for it to be over. However, it was also possible that these men didn't understand Seiichirou's weak constitution, so he tried to protect his vital organs as he endured the beating.

Before long, when Seiichirou was about to lose consciousness—

"Now that you've learned your lesson, don't you forget your place again."

With that parting threat, the ruffians parading under the title of "knights" left.

No... If they leave me here like this, I might die...

That was the last thing Seiichirou thought before losing consciousness.

The next thing he felt was a familiar warmth.

Then he felt something else familiar...someone's lips.

“...Hmm...”

Seiichirou felt rough fingers opening his mouth. Just as something soft and slightly wet slipped inside, he felt his slight fever subside.

“Ng... Hah... Ah...”

Seiichirou's hazy awareness gradually became clearer, and the sensations on his skin traveled all the way to his brain.

A hand traced down the side of his torso, alleviating the dull pain.

As the pain and agony abated, heat and pleasure started to build inside Seiichirou.

“Commander...Indolark...”

Seiichirou was finally able to open his eyes slightly, and he saw the person he had imagined to be there—a grumpy-looking Aresh, on top of Seiichirou's body, their skin flush.

“...How do you feel?”

“Ngh... Better...”

The slight unsteadiness he still felt was probably magic-sickness caused by the healing magic.

Perhaps because Seiichirou's injuries were so severe, Aresh was likely performing the magic acclimatization concurrently with the healing spell to get ahead of the magic-sickness.

Now that Seiichirou's body was no longer in pain, Aresh was probably about to carry on with the real treatment.

A wet sound coming from the lower half of Seiichirou's body reached his ears.

“It's going to take some time.”

“Okay. I’m sorry you have to do this again.”

Aresh looked down at him with an indescribable expression before covering Seiichirou’s body with his own once more.

Seiichirou’s body was engulfed in the acclimatized magic. Though his fever had subsided, his body felt hot for a different reason. Seiichirou slowly got up as he tried to calm his heavy breathing. Aresh effortlessly used a spell to clean Seiichirou’s body, which had been dripping with sweat and other bodily fluids, and gave him another kiss afterward. The kisses were so convenient that Seiichirou wondered if he might compensate Aresh for them, at least. All his senses were quite numb.

“Does it hurt anywhere?” Aresh asked, his voice husky, perhaps not totally cooled down from the sex yet.

Seiichirou remembered that he had been assaulted when Aresh started trying to move his bruised and possibly fractured arm.

“No, I feel fine.”

Seiichirou thanked him again and looked around. He guessed, from the vaguely familiar room they were in, that they were in the Medical Bureau.

Time had flown by—first, Seiichirou was getting beaten and kicked by those ruffians, then lost consciousness, and the next thing he knew, Aresh had been treating him. Seiichirou realized that someone must have carried him to the Medical Bureau. He had been very lucky. Seiichirou slowly put his clothes back on, thinking about how he ought to thank that person as well. His clothes were torn and stained in certain places with his own blood. Aresh asked if Seiichirou wanted him to clean his clothes with magic, but Seiichirou shook his head. They were fine as is.

“Um... Aresh? The hour’s almost up. Are you done yet?”

Seiichirou heard Ciro’s self-effacing voice coming from the other side of the door. He felt slightly ashamed to be addressed by someone who knew exactly what the two of them had been doing, but he opened the door, unable to shut himself away forever. When Seiichirou saw the other man with Ciro, his eyes widened.

“Prime Minister Karvada?!”

“Oh, it’s finally over? That took a long time, didn’t it?” Camile asked, the most powerful person in the kingdom’s government, disinterestedly snapping the book in his hand shut.

Just as Seiichirou wondered why he was here, Ciro explained that Camile was the one who had found him and carried him here.

“I-I’m very sorry for the inconvenience...”

“No, not at all. I’m just happy you’re okay,” Camile replied, smiling calmly.

Seiichirou felt incredibly grateful, but then he suddenly realized...

Surely this was an unbelievably lucky, advantageous situation?

No sooner had Seiichirou sat on the sofa than he felt an icy chill as Aresh asked (or *demanded*, more accurately), “So who were the people who attacked you?”

Seiichirou gathered his thoughts before answering.

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“No, Commander!”

Vice Commander Orjef looked at the two pale-faced knights following after Aresh, who looked like he had bitten into something bitter.

When Aresh had unexpectedly summoned Orjef and the two knights to his office, Orjef had tilted his head, wondering if something had happened. The two knights, however, exchanged a look as if they had an inkling about why they were summoned. The two were proud of the Third Royal Order name and had often harassed the Accounting Department regarding expenditures, so he wondered if perhaps the Accounting Department had finally complained to Aresh. Orjef was aware of these visits and hadn’t stopped them, and with the lack of motivation the old Aresh had shown toward his job, he had assumed Aresh would have let such matters slide.

When they entered Aresh’s office, however, they immediately felt the oppressive, icy-cold aura emanating from the commander. Orjef immediately

knew that the situation was not as simple as he had assumed. *Is Aresh emitting magic as well?* Orjef wondered. He was still able to withstand it, but the two young knights were starting to breathe faster, as if breathing was a struggle.

“What’s wrong, Aresh...?” Orjef asked.

“Harvey Morales... Matthew Nieves... Where were you during the Water hour yesterday?” Aresh asked the two in an accusatory tone.

The two men twitched in surprise and caught each other’s eyes before the older knight, Matthew, answered.

“We were sorting through the storeroom to check the expedition equipment before our afternoon training.”

“The storeroom on the second floor of the eastern wing?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I see... So this must belong to one of you, then?”

Aresh pulled out a piece of cloth small enough that he could hold it with two fingers. The cloth was a very familiar color.

Upon closer inspection, Orjef saw that the hem of Harvey’s uniform pants was slightly torn.

“Oh...! R-right! I think it got caught on something when we were checking the items.”

“I see... By the way, one of the civil officials was discovered beaten and unconscious yesterday.”

“What?” Orjef asked. He had not heard about this.

As he continued to listen to Aresh speak, an unpleasant sweat broke out on his back.

“The civil official was a manager. He was discovered in the storeroom on the second floor of the east wing, unconscious, with multiple bruises and a fractured rib and arm after having been violently beaten and kicked by multiple people.”

No way...

Orjef glanced at the knights. They had not bowed.

“By any chance, was this manager the so-called Holy Maiden’s tagalong?” Matthew asked.

The Holy Maiden’s tagalong... That was how they referred to Seiichirou Kondo, assistant director of the Accounting Department.

He was the burden who had come with Yua during the Holy Maiden Summoning, who not only had no abilities but also had no resistance to magicules and struggled to eat and drink.

Most of the people who said these things were from departments whose budgets had gotten slashed, but the general opinion of him within the royal palace was more or less the same. Incidentally, it was also well known that, for whatever reason, he ate lunch with Aresh, commander of the Third Royal Order. Orjef had even recently heard a rumor that no one was to give Kondo any food or drink without Aresh’s permission. But then again, Aresh barely had any interest in other people. Even him eating a meal with another person was virtually unheard of, so Orjef assumed that the rumors had been greatly exaggerated.

“That’s right. Do you know something?” Aresh asked.

“No, we just passed by him in the corridor after we left the storeroom. I see... So it happened after that...”

Matthew made a sympathetically sad face. Aresh continued to stare down at him, his cold eyes unchanging.

Orjef knew that look.

The look his cousin of six years younger was giving the knights...was when he was truly livid.

“The victim claims he used a nail that fell during the attack to tear off a piece from the hem of one of the assailants’ clothing.”

So it was them...

Orjef wished he could turn his face skyward.

My god, what a stupid thing to do...

"We're being falsely accused! Are you really going to believe that guy, Commander? We have no idea what kind of a place he's from!"

"Exactly! Besides, he was unconscious, right? In that case, isn't it more likely that the guy who found him is trying to pin the blame on the Third Royal Order?!"

After the sound of knocking, which had been drowned out by the knight's desperate objections, the door to Aresh's office slowly opened.

"Sorry to interrupt."

"Y...Your Excellency...!"

A middle-aged man with rose-blond hair and wearing a blue cloak entered the office—Camile, the most powerful government official. His secretary followed in after him.

Orjef and the knights scrambled to follow the appropriate etiquette, but Camile raised a hand to stop them. Aresh met his gaze and said:

"The one who found and looked after Kondo was Prime Minister Karvada."

Orjef could hear the two knights gasp from the shock.

"I could hear your voices from outside the door. So...? What was it that I did, again?"

Camile narrowed his blue-gray eyes at them. The two knights simply gaped at him, completely dumbfounded.

Then Camile's gaze landed on Matthew, and he piled on more pressure.

"This is the second time we've met, isn't it? We met before in front of the Accounting Department, remember?"

As Matthew recalled that memory, a cold sweat broke out over his forehead.

That Holy Maiden's tagalong had the audacity to be given a managerial position by His Excellency, thought Matthew. That's right... How could I have forgotten? That haggard, ineffectual man... He had connections with the prime minister.

"Seiichirou was in a terrible state. If no one had found him, he might have

died."

"We didn't...that bad..." Harvey muttered, shaking his head.

It was nearly a confession, but Camile did not respond to him. Instead, he deliberately yet gracefully tilted his head.

"Oh, did you not know? Because he lived in another world, he has no tolerance to magicules or magical energy, so he can't be treated with normal medicine or holy magic."

The others, who had heard the magicule rumors, were shocked. If they couldn't use medicine or magic on him, a scratch might even be fatal.

"So he requires special treatment. And the one who healed Seiichirou when he was battered was your superior officer over there."

Their bodies stiffened again. When they nervously looked back at Aresh, his expression was just as blank, and the same cold fury radiated from his body.

In other words, the two people who had looked after Seiichirou were the two most powerful men in the kingdom, and they were standing right in front of them.

"I have received testimony from eyewitnesses of you two frequently hounding Kondo about expenses."

Now that there was no way the two knights could talk their way out of being involved in the beating, they went pale and began to tremble.

"How could you two do such a thing..." Orjef asked, unable to help himself. Harvey desperately clung to him.

"You...you've got it all wrong, Vice Commander! We were talked into it..."

"Talked into it?"

"Excuse me," came a voice.

The door opened immediately after the knock. An intense-looking man who wore a green cloak stepped inside and seemed to be in his forties. He brought a pale young man in with him. Green was the color of the Second Royal Order. They were a group of knights who primarily guarded the royal family and other

important people. Their cloaks hung down their backs.

“Commander Radim...,” Orjef muttered.

Radim, commander of the Second Royal Order, took no notice of Orjef and pushed the man behind him wearing the same green-striped uniform to the front.

“I’ve brought him.”

“Oh! That’s the guy! That’s him!! He’s the one who talked us into making the Holy Maiden’s tagalong learn his place!!”

As Orjef tried to calm Harvey, who was enthusiastically gesturing toward the newcomer, he realized he knew the pale-faced, trembling man from somewhere.

The handsome young man was almost certainly...

“The Holy Maiden’s guard...”

“Was this really enough?” Radim asked.

After the ruffians had left Aresh’s office, Orjef had been stunned to see Seiichirou walk out of the back room, which the commander could use as his own private quarters.

His injuries from the beating had already been healed because of Aresh, but as he stood there in a fresh uniform, his complexion looked as pale as ever. Seiichirou nodded.

“Yes.”

The three knights’ punishment had included a one-week suspension, a ban prohibiting any further contact with Seiichirou, a one-year pay cut, and reparations.

“Are you sure they shouldn’t be stripped of their knighthoods?” Camile asked, but Seiichirou shook his head.

“No, there are so few knights as it is, and we need them to investigate the Demon Forest. Reducing the numbers of the Second Royal Order, the protectors of very important people, or the Third Royal Order, with their strong

tolerance to magic, would just cause more problems.”

“Even so, their suspension is too short.”

“No, it’s rather long. The only value in suspensions is letting everyone else know they’ve caused trouble. I’d rather they work more.”

The pay cut, on the other hand, was nice because, as they were high-earning knights, the treasury could save more money.

Then there was the reparation for damages.

“And they’re going to pay me exactly four hundred thousand rula in conjunction with the cost of my medical treatment.”

That amounted to ten million Japanese yen. With that said, however, he intended to pay Aresh for all the medical treatments he had performed on him so far.

“But why money...?”

Considering everything that had happened, Seiichirou had thought it best to punish them in a way that would wound their pride and dignity the most. After blinking a few times, he answered in a bored tone.

“Because money was the only thing we both could find value in.”

Titles? Knighthoods? Honor? Those sorts of things were worthless to Seiichirou.

“But most importantly, it’s because of this incident that the kingdom has officially declared me a protected person and the Second and Third Royal Orders owe me a huge favor, so we can speed up the Holy Maiden expedition to the Demon Forest! That will cut down on all sorts of expenses! Look at this, Prime Minister Karvada. I calculated and wrote a report on the expedition costs yesterday.”

“Oh! Let me take a look at that, Seiichirou.”

As Seiichirou cheerfully held out the document toward Camile’s outstretched hand, Aresh physically inserted his large body between them.

“Hold it right there, Kondo. You were seriously injured yesterday... After all

the energy you expended during treatment, I told you to rest... That's all I told you to do..."

Oh crap...

With Seiichirou's guilt written all over his face, Aresh exploded in anger.

The prime minister, who had secretly grabbed the report from Seiichirou, stealthily and quickly passed it along to his secretary. The two of them, along with Commander Radim of the Second Royal Order, who had missed his chance to dash out of the room, and Vice Commander Orjef of the Third Royal Order, who had rarely seen his younger cousin talk to another person like that, were forced to watch the scene unfold.

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"What do you think about doing it by mouth?"

"What?"

Several hours before...

Three days had passed since Seiichirou had successfully been able to weed out the obstacles in his job and, incidentally, since the day of Aresh's unbridled tirade. As per usual, Seiichirou was taken to dinner after work and was now in the room of a certain inn. He was not alone. Aresh, the same person he had just eaten a meal with, was there, too.

To explain how this came to be, one must go further back in time to the actual dinner. Right from the outset, Aresh had apologized for the mismanagement of his subordinates.

"I'm very sorry about all the trouble my subordinates have caused."

Even though no one was watching them inside the restaurant, when the commander of the Third Royal Order, a man responsible for the kingdom's safety, bowed, Seiichirou panicked.

"Don't be! That's already been settled, and most importantly, you were the one who healed me, Commander Indolark. In any case, please lift your head."

At that time, there were no other customers in Aresh's hideaway restaurant.

Despite this, Seiichirou could sense the chef, who used to work at Aresh's estate, and his wife paying very close attention from behind the partition.

"No. I oversaw them, and I was negligent."

Well, that much was true, but Seiichirou knew that there were circumstances behind why Aresh didn't manage his subordinates.

"I never expected you to oversee them that closely anyway, Commander."

"..."

The words had slipped out before Seiichirou could stop himself, and Aresh seemed to be holding his tongue with great effort, the side of his face twitching.

"I mean, you did promise that you guys would follow the new accounting rules, so maybe things ended on a positive note, after all. If anyone should be apologizing here, I should be one doing it."

"Apologizing to me?"

Aresh finally raised his head, looking puzzled. This time, however, Seiichirou was the one who furrowed his brow. Did this man truly consider Seiichirou's treatments as a matter of course?

"For my treatments. Back when I overdosed, my treatment this time, and all the other times. I know you refused before, but please let me pay you for the magic you've performed on me, at least."

The last time Seiichirou had suggested payment, Aresh had disregarded the healing magic aspect and had thought of it as compensation for the ensuing magic-sickness treatment alone. He had blown up at Seiichirou for treating him like a male prostitute by trying to give him money, so this time, Seiichirou intentionally emphasized the magic treatment aspect.

"But you only needed it this time because of my own subordinates' misconduct..."

"That doesn't change the fact that you saved my life, Commander. Twice, at that. Plus, you even offered to put a barrier around me. I only have a rough idea of the market price for spells, but for now, if you don't at least accept the compensation I'll be receiving, there will be no point in taking that money from

them.”

“In taking... You mean, that’s why you...?”

Aresh was bewildered at the thought of being paid with the same money that had been taken from his subordinates, but it was certainly true that healing spells were normally very expensive.

This was especially true for treatments involving life-threatening injuries or illnesses, like the ones Seiichirou had. Aresh had mostly healed him of his own volition, but if doing this would make Seiichirou feel better about everything, he would accept the offer. It wasn’t as if Seiichirou was short on money anyway.

Afterward, they went to the inn.

It wasn’t exactly a luxurious one, but it was reasonably well equipped. Each room had its own bath, and the staff members were thoroughly trained. It looked like an inn that high-ranking officials would use for clandestine meetings.

“I told you a little bit about the barrier before, but it acts like protective clothing, shielding your body from magical energy and magicules. Also, it will act as a shield against a certain level of physical contact—violence, in other words.”

“That’s incredibly convenient.”

It was a difficult spell, however, and very few people could cast it. Well, the unmatched genius Aresh could perform it, but the crux of the issue was the amount of magical energy it required.

That amount of magical energy would give Seiichirou magic-sickness.

“So instead of applying it all at once, I’d like to do it a little bit at a time in thin, overlapping layers, like coatings.”

Seiichirou didn’t understand the logic behind it, but it seemed as though Aresh wanted to apply a little bit of the barrier, acclimatize him to the magical energy, then later apply some more and repeat the process.

Seiichirou wasn’t sure which way would be harder on Aresh, but he thought following his suggested method would clear up one point that Seiichirou had

been concerned about.

And so Seiichirou looked up at Aresh with a serious face and asked:

“What do you think about doing it by mouth?”

Now we are all caught up to the present.

Aresh froze, and Seiichirou went on to explain what he had been worried about for a while.

“Commander Indolark, twice you have helped me tremendously, then treated me to alleviate the magic-sickness. But both times, I was nearly unconscious, and you took care of everything, right?”

Because Seiichirou’s life had been hanging by a thread in both instances, after Aresh had healed him, Seiichirou’s awareness had been made even fuzzier from being magic-sick.

In other words, Seiichirou had been a starfish in bed.

“I’ve wondered whether it’s right for me to place everything on you when I’m the one receiving treatment.”

When it came to sex, with an uncooperative partner, a huge burden was placed on the one doing the entering. It would also have been difficult to move a nearly unconscious partner around, not to mention having to single-handedly do the prep work.

Essentially, Seiichirou thought it would be better if they could acclimatize the magic through simple skin-to-skin contact rather than through sex.

The other times, Aresh had used so much magical energy that Seiichirou had suffered from acute poisoning, so it had been a matter of urgency that Aresh had to ejaculate inside of him. But this time, they could take their time and familiarize Seiichirou with the magical energy slowly. In fact, Seiichirou’s mild stomachache and headache had been cured with a simple caress and kissing.

On the other hand, asking Aresh to acclimatize such a large amount of magical energy little by little was requesting far too much of him. It was also strange for Aresh to shoulder all these burdens when Seiichirou was the one being treated. So he thought he should probably be the one doing the servicing.

And if Seiichirou was being honest, as an old man who sat for long hours at his job, it would also help out at work if he just endured a bad taste in his mouth than if he was penetrated.

Aresh sat on the bed, and Seiichirou stretched out over him. With Seiichirou in his lap, Aresh cast the barrier spell on him.

The spell combined three attributes: Light, Wind, and Wood. Like healing magic, few people could cast it.

As Seiichirou listened to Aresh's songlike incantation, he felt a soft breeze over his body—and then a slight sluggishness and feverishness. His mind still felt sharp, and he was still in control of his body—there were no problems there.

"...How do you feel?"

"Totally fine. Now...could you close your eyes?"

With a resigned look, Aresh did as instructed. His striking purple eyes disappeared behind his lids, and his long eyelashes emphasized his beautiful face, which was right in front of Seiichirou's. He realized that Aresh looked slightly younger with his eyes closed and pressed his own lips against Aresh's perfect, sculpted ones. He tracked his hand down Aresh's hard abdominal muscles.

Seiichirou had wondered, if he was fully aware and conscious, would he have been averse toward touching another man's penis, but he felt surprisingly fine.

He had figured it would be tiring to give Aresh a blow job every time, so the efficiency freak Seiichirou had suggested taking care of Aresh with his hands first. His desire to improve the efficiency of the magic acclimatization had even led Seiichirou to make out with Aresh during the fondling.

I feel a little awkward... I guess because this is my first time being fully conscious... But this is just treatment. It's for work. It's just for work.

That's what Seiichirou tried to tell himself. He pressed their bodies together, their tongues continuing to intertwine as he stroked Aresh's cock.

He had asked Aresh to close his eyes because he thought the commander

would get an erection faster if he imagined a woman.

“...Nh, hah... Commander Indolark... Does that feel good?”

“Don’t...ask...!”

Aresh’s voice was higher than usual, so Seiichirou figured things were going okay. He brought their lips together again and moved his hand.

“Kon...do... Your first name...is Seiichirou, right...?”

“Huh? Yes.”

When Aresh had called him by his name that was apparently difficult for people from this world to pronounce, Seiichirou had pulled his face back in surprise.

Then, when Seiichirou saw his lustful purple eyes staring straight at him, he was startled and froze.

“Do you...know my name?” the commander asked.

Seiichirou wasn’t stupid enough to think he meant his family name.

“Aresh.”

Aresh looked pleased, and his eyes softened for a moment before the two brought their lips together again. Seiichirou closed his eyes, too.



[CHAPTER SIX]

Dressed Up

“If you use this lotion made from callber extract, your skin will be so supple!”

“And then massage with this marisan oil!”

“Apply this liquid made from precious hinefawyn around your eyes!”

“There! Now the dark circles under your eyes are gone!” the three voices said in unison.

How did this happen?

Seiichirou had initially heard the news from his direct superior, Helmut.

“They’ve decided that the Holy Maiden’s expedition will be in six days.”

Finally? Seiichirou thought as he suppressed a sigh and checked the documents that had been handed to him. It had been five days since Seiichirou had urged for the purification to be expedited, after his beating had created a debt the Second and Third Royal Orders had owed him. He thought he had threatened them into doing it, but others, like the prince, might have pushed back against the plan.

Well, they finally came to a decision, and there’s no use talking about what’s already been settled. Now Seiichirou would have to calculate the cost of the current miasma damage and reexamine the expenses for the single-trip expedition.

“Oh, and the royal family will be hosting a dinner party in three days to

motivate the members of the expedition before departure.”

“...What?”

A dinner party before they've even done anything? This wasn't just to flaunt that the royal family was orchestrating the whole expedition and pressuring the members to do their best—it was also so the aristocrats could keep their eyes peeled for talented people who might play a big part in the purification. Seiichirou started working out the calculations in his head when he realized that, depending on the size of the party, they might use a large chunk of the kingdom's budget, but at Helmut's next statement, the hand in his mind froze over the imaginary abacus.

“I even got stuck going as your escort!”

That meant Seiichirou's attendance was already a done deal.

To be more precise, the frivolous young man sitting across from him was why Seiichirou found himself getting oil smeared over his face.

“This is your big moment, Sei!! Let's at least do something about those dark circles! I've brought my mother's maids over!!”

Seiichirou tended to forget that this ditzy blond man came from nobility—what's more, Norbert seemed to be the son of a rather wealthy family. He was certainly brash and rowdy, but he also had a strangely refined, quiet side to him. His good upbringing was seeping from every pore.

In any case, Norbert had unexpectedly brought three neatly dressed girls of various ages to the residence hall and had said that line by way of explanation.

Afterward, before Seiichirou knew it, he had been surrounded, jostled, and dressed in formal clothes Norbert had prepared for him, and made to stand in a dazzling hall.

Beside him stood Norbert, his hairstyle more subdued than usual.

“...So you were invited, too, huh?” Seiichirou asked him.

Seiichirou was the driving force behind speeding up the purification expedition, and he understood why his boss, Helmut, had been invited, as well, but he couldn't understand why Norbert, a civil official, was there. He seemed

to be rich, so Seiichirou thought he was attending as a noble, but if that was the case, wouldn't his parents have come?

"Yeah, I'm kind of vaguely related to the royal family, so I get invited to these kinds of things a lot."

"...What?"

Seiichirou furrowed his brow. For a second, he thought he had misheard Norbert saying something about the royal family.

"No, you didn't hear me wrong! My mother's status was really low, so I was adopted out, but I do have royal blood, so I'm forced to come to these parties with the ordinary invitees to develop an 'awareness of service to the royal family'—or something like that!"

So this frivolous, lighthearted man who Seiichirou could imagine asking if hardship was a type of food was really royalty... Yet he had the misfortune of being treated like a vassal. Seiichirou couldn't even imagine what that was like, but if it was true, it made sense why Norbert always clung to him.

"I see... So you're royalty..."

"Oh no! I'm basically next to last in the line of succession, so don't go putting on any airs with me!"

"Oh, it's not that. If you're royalty, there's a lot I'd like to discuss with you about the other members of your family. Pen me in for a chat later."

"What?! *That's* what you meant?"

The revelation about Norbert having royal blood had certainly been a surprise, but it wasn't going to change Seiichirou's plans or his position.

Later on in the party, the guests would be honored with a few words from the king, so they were instructed to chitchat among themselves until then. Seiichirou became one with the wall, watching the guests mingle with one another. He hadn't spotted Aresh, Yua, or the prince yet, so he assumed they would be introduced later. Naturally, as Seiichirou was just an employee from the Accounting Department, no one approached him to talk. Except for one man...

"Seiichirou? My word, I hardly recognize you!"

The prime minister, with his familiar rose-blond hair, gracefully walked over to Seiichirou, the crowds hurrying to clear a path for him. He was also wearing formal dress today, fine clothes decorated with an intricate design sewn using gold threads. His blue cloak, indicating his rank, was affixed with a flashier-than-usual, jewel-studded aiguillette braided chord.

"Your Excellency."

Seiichirou took a knee, put a hand to his stomach, and bowed. This was the typical way of bowing in this world. Camile raised a hand in response.

"Because of you, we were able to get the expedition date settled much more quickly. I thank you."

"No, not at all. You and the others were the ones who did the real work to make it happen."

The only thing Seiichirou did was turn the tables, threaten the Second and Third Royal Orders, and have them put pressure on the royal family. Seiichirou didn't do much himself.

However, it was true that the calculations he had drafted of the miasma damage, and the written estimate of by how much the damage was likely to increase every six days, had been very helpful.

"I suppose we'll just agree to disagree. By the way, your complexion looks much better today. That outfit really suits you, too."

Camile was as handsome as any foreign actor, and his eyes seemed to smile when he gave Seiichirou the compliment. Seiichirou briefly looked down at his own clothes, gave Camile an embarrassed smile, a typical Japanese response, and thanked him.

"I'm not at all familiar with this sort of stuff, so my colleague helped get everything ready for me. I've realized how...*difficult* it must be for women when it comes to these things."

The maids Norbert had brought with him had been outstanding, and they had managed, through lots of hard work, to fulfill Norbert's wish that Seiichirou get

dolled up. However, what Seiichirou had been lacking was neither expensive, elaborate clothing nor dazzling precious metals—it had been his energy.

No matter how lavish his clothes were, the impression that he was being forced to wear them was so incredible that the maids were unable to cover up the aura of exhaustion radiating from his body. Eventually, the maids had decided that the root cause of this was his lifeless eyes, so they had thoroughly massaged his face and body. They had used every trick they knew to try to make Seiichirou's complexion a little more radiant. Finally, the conspicuous shadows under his eyes were hidden with a product that was very much like concealer, and somehow they had managed to gussy up Seiichirou into his current state.

Seiichirou wasn't an unattractive man to begin with.

His looks were okay—he had a well-defined nose, and he had been quite popular when he was a student. But the feeling of weariness that engulfed him was so strong that it made him appear, even from afar, like a tired old man. And now Seiichirou, having received the full power of a noble lady's maids, coupled with his outfit, looked like a slightly aristocratic, sensible young man. But for the people who were familiar with his appearance before, the change was so dramatic that even the prime minister couldn't help but stare.

Seiichirou thought the massage had been pleasant and good for his overall health, but all he felt was discomfort that the skin around his eyes couldn't breathe from the makeup, and he was anxious to avoid getting the outfit he borrowed dirty.

Most importantly, however, Seiichirou had an objective in mind when he came to the dinner party. Even if he was forced to attend, he wouldn't let it go to waste. As an efficiency freak, that was just how Seiichirou operated.

"Prime Minister Karvada, there was a favor I wanted to ask you..." Seiichirou began cautiously.

"Hmm?" the prime minister asked, fixing his gaze on Seiichirou.

Just then, a voice from a tactless third party interrupted them.

"And here's His Excellency! It's been far too long!!"

The man walked straight up to Camile. He was on the heavier side, wore a distinctively flashy shirt with a stand-up collar, and had brown hair and a matching moustache. He was probably in his forties or fifties. The most striking thing about him, however, was the long purple cloak hanging down his back signifying his status.

Purple... I think that's the color of the Royal Sorcery Department.

Judging by the length of the man's cloak, he was probably the director. Seiichirou took a step back, knelt, and bowed.

"Director Zoltan," Camile said. "Thank you for all your hard work with the summoning ceremony before."

"Oh, don't mention it! But then, you know, such a massive ceremony could not have been possible without the Royal Sorcery Department!"

The man boasted in such a loud voice that he probably had no intention of pretending to be modest. He was the living embodiment of pride.

"They called on us for this purification expedition, too—they needed our power, they said! Guess what they want isn't the Third Royal Order who just uses brute force, but us—royal sorcerers with reliable knowledge and theories!"

I get it... This man seems to view the Third Royal Order and its members, who fulfill the role of magic knights, as his rivals.

Seiichirou wondered if the director had been present during the actual summoning ceremony, but when he tried to remember that day, he couldn't recall. From what Seiichirou had heard, the man might have gotten his current position through connections because he had an aristocratic title. He had no definitive proof of this, though. It was easy to guess, however, that this was the sort of person who Aresh would take no notice of.

"That's right, let me introduce you as well," Camile said. "This is Seiichirou Kondo, assistant director of the Accounting Department. He's an exceptional asset, and his efforts have helped hasten the realization of this expedition."

The overweight man—Zoltan—seemed to have just realized he was there. He looked down at Seiichirou, who was still bowing.

“Oh, the Holy Maiden’s...”

Seiichirou knew what Zoltan wanted to say next, but the director held himself back, partially because the royal family had formally declared Seiichirou a protected person—and partially because Camile was right in front of him.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. My name is Kondou.”

Seiichirou wasn’t bothered by Zoltan, however, and greeted him, trying not to seem rude. He had almost been snubbed, but he didn’t really care that much. More importantly, if this man was the director of the Royal Sorcery Department, that would save Seiichirou a lot of trouble. And if Zoltan really was a prideful aristocrat, he would be easy to deal with, so Seiichirou felt rather lucky.

But before Seiichirou could say anything else, Zoltan spotted something, became flustered, whispered to only Camile before dashing away, and returned, dragging someone with him.

“What do you think you’re doing?! At an event like this?! Come on! Go greet His Excellency!”

“But I haven’t left the lab in ten days, and I’m hungry!”

The man Zoltan had dragged back with him wore the same purple cloak, but it only hung from one shoulder. His bright hair was a shade between orange and pink. He was holding dishes that were being served at the dinner party, and there were bits of food clinging to his slightly childish face. There was a high probability this man was assistant director of the Royal Sorcery Department... When his eyes met Seiichirou’s, he blinked repeatedly.

Seiichirou was momentarily taken aback, but then he assumed the bowing stance. This man was in an assistant position, like him, but Seiichirou was just in the Accounting Department, not the Royal Sorcery Department. Moreover, Seiichirou was a newcomer who had been given his job through connections, and since he was the lowest-ranking member among them, he couldn’t introduce himself first.

“This is His Excellency Prime Minister Karvada and the assistant director of the Accounting Department, Kondo. Introduce yourself, too,” Zoltan told the man,

who suddenly straightened his posture and spoke, not to Camile, but to Seiichirou.

“Accounting Department?! Give me money!!”

“No.”

Seiichirou’s answer had been a pure reflex. Everyone around him became still. However, he didn’t pay this any mind and surveyed the man in front of him again. His hair was a bright color, one he’d never seen in Japan before. The parts in direct light looked pink. It was a very lovely color. This loveliness was also partially due to the man’s lingering youthful features. His slightly sleepy eyes were round, and his nose and mouth were rather small. There were still crumbs of food around his mouth. From his appearance alone, Seiichirou guessed he was in his midtwenties. Aresh looked older than he actually was, so he couldn’t really use him for comparison. But this man was certainly older than Norbert.

As Seiichirou was taking advantage of the silence to observe him, the man came back to his senses.

“Huh? What?”

His frequent blinking looked very childlike.

From how Zoltan had spoken and behaved before, it seemed as though he was the director on the political level, while this man took care of the practical business affairs as a royal sorcerer.

“Ist! It’s your first time meeting them, and that’s what you say?! Introduce yourself first!”

Seiichirou had been partially right—Zoltan was very prideful and disposed to buttering up to his superiors...but he also seemed to be a man with common sense and someone who had climbed their own way up in life. As a fellow middle manager, Seiichirou had a very good first impression of him.

“Oh, introduce myself... Introduce myself... Right.”

The man Zoltan had called Ist straightened his posture and wiped his mouth with the cuff of his sleeve—upon which Zoltan slapped him from the side with a

handkerchief. The man finally turned to Seiichirou and smiled softly with sleepy eyes.

“I’m Ist, assistant director of the Royal Sorcery Department. And you are...?”

Since it appeared that he had not heard Seiichirou’s prior introduction, Seiichirou took the bowing position again and gave his name for the second time.

“I am Seiichirou Kondou, assistant director of the Accounting Department.”

“Kondo. So you’re in the Accounting Department, huh? The royal sorcerers need a lot of money, but we barely get any. We’re destitute. So could I have some—? Ouch!”

Ist, who had clearly not learned his lesson, was now rendered silent from a punch to the head by a furious Zoltan whose veins were throbbing. Unlike the Royal Orders, who were very popular with the masses for doing things like hunting magical beasts and standing guard, it was difficult for the Royal Sorcery Department to produce visible results—and they needed money for research, too. Therefore, due to lack of funds, they were unable to progress with their research and were again unable to show results. As this cycle repeated, their budget had gradually been whittled down. Seiichirou, who had reorganized the past few years’ accounting documents, had known this very well.

The prince had been very enthusiastic about the Holy Maiden Summoning, and nobles who supported the Holy Maiden had contributed financially, so the Royal Sorcery Department was given a very large budget and pool of funds that they had been able to use.

And that was exactly why Seiichirou had schemed to meet them at this dinner party.

As Ist was curled over in pain, cradling his head with his hands, Seiichirou leaned forward and caught his eye.

“I can’t give you a bigger budget for nothing. But...if you listen to my request, I’ll consider it. What do you think?”

From a very close distance, Seiichirou saw Ist’s eyes widen—they were a warm jade green. Just as Seiichirou reminisced again about how colorful the

people of this world were, hands suddenly closed around his neck. No, that wasn't exactly right... Something was grabbing the nape of his neck and pulling him backward.

"Geh!"

Just as Seiichirou squeaked out a sound and thought for sure the blood flow from his carotid artery had been cut off, amethyst eyes—not jade green—filled his vision.

"Commander Indolark," Seiichirou said with a feeble voice as his throat was being constricted.

The commander staring him down seemed to have heard it, as he furrowed his beautiful eyebrows.

"...Aresh, that hurts," Seiichirou added, his voice slightly louder this time.

Aresh finally removed his hand from Seiichirou's nape and jaw, and Seiichirou coughed, fixing his collar.

"Aresh! You shocked me by running ahead like that!"

Before Aresh could say anything, Yua, wearing a white-and-blue dress, came running up to him. Her black hair was beautifully braided again today, and she looked like a real princess.

"Your Holiness," Aresh said.

"Your Holiness," Camile chimed in, "I think you're supposed to enter with His Highness."

From the surrounding commotion at Yua's appearance, Seiichirou could see why. This was a party to encourage those going on the purification expedition, and the debut of the Holy Maiden, the star of the mission, would probably have been a grand moment.

"Oh! I-I'm sorry, Camile! We are supposed to enter together, but Aresh went on ahead, and I just followed him."

"...Well, that's fine. Please go back before any chaos breaks out."

Although no one had closed in on them because of the presence of the prime

minister and Commander Aresh, Seiichirou could sense a few restless glances from people who had noticed Yua's entrance.

"Right, I'm sorry... Aresh..."

Yua looked up at the commander with upturned eyes and asked him to go back with her, but Aresh, dressed in his usual black cloak but with a different white-and-blue outfit underneath, narrowed his amethyst eyes slightly.

"I'm going to stay here. You and the royals are the stars of this party. I'm not needed."

Hearing this, Yua looked forlorn and reluctantly left when members of the Second Royal Order came to fetch her.

After she left, Norbert and Camile went to go greet the other nobles, and Zoltan followed behind them, leaving Aresh, Seiichirou, and Ist behind.

"...What's with your face?" Aresh asked.

Seiichirou thought he might have looked grumpy about having been strangled, but that didn't seem to be the case, so he just answered honestly.

"I don't understand your question."

"Your face means your face. And that getup. Where did you get it?"

"Someone from my department lent me these clothes. Oh! By *face*, do you mean this stuff?"

Seiichirou finally realized what Aresh was referring to, which was his appearance that had been painted by the maids employed by Norbert's mother—or perhaps adoptive mother.



"The same person who lent me these clothes told me I ought to look nice for the occasion, so his family's maids applied a bunch of stuff."

Aresh continued to look just as upset as before, as if there were an unpleasant smell in the air.

Seiichirou figured he'd better put some space between them if Aresh was in such a bad mood, but when he casually tried to shuffle away, Aresh immediately closed the distance.

"Huuuh?"

Ist twisted his head, perplexed, as the two men continued their silent, strange shuffling, and the party began.

The king entered first. He lamented about the damage caused by the miasma from the Demon Forest—and then expounded upon the sanctity of the Holy Maiden Summoning ritual.

Seiichirou thought that if the king had been that worried about the miasma, he should have made the purification expedition sooner, but he didn't breathe a word of this aloud and instead listened to the king's address with a serious expression.

Then Yua made her entrance, escorted by the prince. Yua announced that although she was still a bit wet behind the ears, she would try her absolute best for the people of this kingdom. The subsequent applause was so loud that it felt like the room was being split in two. Seiichirou raised his hands as if to applaud, but no sound came from them.

Finally, the prince stepped forward. He extolled about how wonderful the Holy Maiden was, declared that he would be leading the upcoming expedition, then announced the participating members.

Besides himself, the prince listed the names of knights in the Second Royal Order, whose job chiefly concerned protecting important people; members of the Third Royal Order, including Aresh; and royal sorcerers, including Ist.

The list of names was nearly the same as the one in the expedition proposal Seiichirou had given Camile, but the prince was naming more people than he

had planned for. He would have to revise his budget to account for this. Seiichirou was deep in thought, thinking about the work he'd have to do once he got home that he failed to hear something the prince said. He only returned to his senses when he noticed the people around him murmuring and staring at him.

"Huh?"

"Those are the members who will take part in the expedition. This crucial expedition has been coordinated by the royal family and is of great importance to the kingdom. I hope each and every one of you will participate with pride."

The prince stepped back after those concluding remarks. Then an attendant came forward and announced that the royal family and Yua would be retiring to restore their energy.

When Camile walked back up to him, Seiichirou soon learned what he had missed before.

"Seiichirou! I had no idea they had selected you to participate, too... Are you going to be okay?"

"I'm...going on the purification expedition, too...?"

Seiichirou's body had barely any resistance to magicules. Going to the source of the miasma, where the noxious air was filled with an even greater concentration of them, would be nothing short of suicide.

"...You can't go," Aresh said. "I will talk to the king."

A new voice cut in, interrupting him just as he had been about to decide that Seiichirou was not going to participate.

"The delicate Yua is going, but an old man like you will run away?"

It was the man who had just read out Seiichirou's name on stage, Prince Yurius. He was wearing a shiny white outfit with gold-and-blue detailing and a white cloak, which matched his silver hair. He looked just like a prince out of a fairy tale. His blue eyes were haughtily turned toward Seiichirou. Yua stood behind him, her eyes blinking quickly. She was looking at Seiichirou with a worried expression.

"It has nothing to do with age or sex. He isn't like the Holy Maiden—he has no tolerance to magicules. He will be in constant danger in a place with such thick miasma."

"It's ridiculous that the man who pushed for such a dangerous expedition gets to take it easy somewhere safe. He should go there himself."

Aresh had tried to explain that the level of danger in the Demon Forest was far different for him than for everyone else, but Yurius refused to budge. He seemed to be very displeased with Seiichirou for rushing the expedition. Camile joined the fray as well, rallying to keep Seiichirou from participating, but Ist, who seemed to have not been listening to anyone again, tilted his head and looked at Seiichirou.

"Kondo, you're coming, too?"

It had not been a part of his plan.

It was the whole reason why Seiichirou had planned on meeting Ist tonight and asking him for a favor...

"That's right... It'll be fastest if I go there and see it myself... Yes, I'll go."

Seiichirou hadn't spoken in a very loud voice, but the commander of the Third Royal Order immediately whipped around to look at him, his eyes wide like he couldn't believe what he was hearing. Seiichirou resolved to prepare himself not only for the expedition, but for the lecture he was about to receive, as well.



[CHAPTER SEVEN]

Set Out

Seiichirou recalled that, ever since coming to this world, the only times he had ventured outside of his commute between the royal palace and the residence hall were his occasional trips into town for dinners and shopping. Being a corporate slave at heart, this had been a habit that had been ingrained in him, but after realizing so belatedly that he acted the same way even in another world, Seiichirou broke into a pained grin.

“Whatcha smiling for, Sei?” the devil-may-care man asked, sitting opposite him in the carriage.

Norbert’s outfit was more casual today as it didn’t have a stand-up collar, but his clothes were more decorative and made from higher quality fabric than the ones Seiichirou had seen him wear in the residence hall.

Was it the same as in modern Japan, where you were expected to wear slightly nicer clothes when visiting your family’s house, or was it because Norbert was an aristocrat? Seiichirou looked at the scenery outside the window of the carriage, the first carriage he’d ever ridden in his life. “It’s nothing,” he answered quietly.

The day after the dinner party, as usual, Seiichirou left early to head into work—actually, even earlier than normal. He was very busy. Because he was going on a sudden “business trip” (the expedition), he had to finish as much work as possible, write up instructions and guides to give to the other employees so they could carry on his work, review the expenses for the expedition and

afterward, and compose a draft budget.

They would be setting out in three days. The round trip was scheduled to be six days long.

They would be riding horses and carriages down maintained roads for more than half the route, switching out the horses at a town at the midway point, and then changing them again on the return trip. Compared to what Seiichirou heard before, the number of participants increased even more. This was probably because people wanted to become involved after hearing the king's personal words of encouragement and squeezed themselves onto the list, forcing their subordinates to go as well. There were even other civil officials joining besides Seiichirou.

Well, since they're going, I'll make the best use of them, Seiichirou thought as he looked over the list of participants. Expeditions weren't free.

In any case, that was why Seiichirou had been slammed at work. There was barely time to finish everything.

On the day of the dinner party, Seiichirou had wanted to hurry home and do some work, but the night had ended with a lecture from Aresh. He hadn't even been able to talk to the royal sorcerer, as he had planned.

Even when he had tried to work during his lunch break, the lackadaisical "royal" (Seiichirou laughed at the thought) who was on the verge of tears dragged him down to the dining hall, and Seiichirou was not allowed to leave until the lunch break was over.

Needless to say, the commander of the Third Royal Order came to personally fetch Seiichirou at the end of the workday. The other members of the Accounting Department would start to buzz whenever this happened, which was a blow to Seiichirou's reputation, so he had suggested they meet outside, but each time, Seiichirou would get caught up in his work and end up being late. Now, whenever he tried to bring it up, Aresh would laugh.

Seiichirou, therefore, had been forced to leave the office on time, but of course, that hadn't dissuaded him. He took work home with him, and when Aresh was going to heal Seiichirou from the barrier sessions, he would secretly drink nutritional tonics and work throughout the night.

And now Seiichirou was riding with Norbert to his family's home. Not the royal palace, where his real father lived, but the home of his adoptive father, Viscount Blanc.

When Seiichirou had initially suggested the idea to Norbert, he had assumed his colleague would find it suspicious, but instead he had said:

"Huh? You, come to my house? Yeah! Of course, of course! When? Tomorrow? I'll let them know!"

Norbert had immediately agreed, with the excitement of someone who was having their friend come over to play. Seiichirou felt a pang of remorse for still not having a total grasp of the true character of this frivolous man.

Some time later, Norbert had belatedly asked Seiichirou why he wanted to visit. And he had replied saying he wanted to thank his family for the outfit and makeup they had let him use for the dinner party, which convinced Norbert.

Well, that was part of the reason, so it wasn't a total lie.

Viscount Blanc's estate was a jostling two-hour carriage ride from their residence hall. Seiichirou had heard that even low-ranking aristocrats were wealthy, and that proved to be true—a well-maintained garden sprawled out past the entrance gates, and the house itself, with its reddish-brown roof, was astonishingly impressive.

When the older-looking attendant who had met them at the gates showed them inside, Seiichirou almost sighed in awe. He thought he had gotten used to being at the royal palace, but the opulence of this estate was different. Seiichirou was never really one for looking at buildings, but he knew anyone would equally admire an elegant structure like this.

They were led into the parlor, where Viscount Blanc was waiting. Although the man had a carefree air about him, reminiscent of Norbert (despite not being related by blood), he looked to be a fine nobleman. Seiichirou could see wisdom and conviction in his eyes, which Norbert's eyes did not have—and which made him think that his plan might actually work.

"Where were you?"

The next day, Seiichirou had returned to the residence hall for civil officials,

where he had already grown accustomed to living. When he reached his room, he had been met with a face that seemed at odds with its surroundings.

When he had visited Viscount Blanc's estate yesterday, he had stayed the night at their insistence, and now it was the day before the expedition. To prepare for the journey, participants had been given the day off. Seiichirou, of course, had found this very fortunate and had brought back more documents than usual so he could spend the entire day working.

However, the handsome commander standing in front of him was looking down at Seiichirou with cold violet eyes.

"I was out on a personal errand."

"A personal errand? Before the expedition?"

It was *because* the expedition was coming up that Seiichirou had to hurry and do it, but he couldn't imagine saying as much would help Aresh's mood, so he held his tongue.

"...I heard you left with a guy from your department."

How do you know? And if you knew, why did you ask?

These questions ran through Seiichirou's mind, but he didn't vocalize them. Instead, he casually affirmed the claim.

"I did. His family prepared the outfit I wore at the dinner party for me, so I went to thank them. I went after work, and it was late, so I accepted their kind invitation that I spend the night."

He had stayed because he had the next day off. The residence hall didn't have any curfews, nor was he required to report if he was staying overnight elsewhere. There was nothing Seiichirou did that Aresh should find fault with.

"...Well then, what's all this, Seiichirou?"

Aresh pointed at the desk with his thin finger. Work documents were, naturally, scattered across the table. The work handoff had already been done the day before, so Seiichirou had been making a new draft budget and a list of a few things he wanted to check during the expedition.

"They're materials that I have been given permission from the director to take

home."

Seiichirou knew what Aresh was really asking, but he played dumb. Aresh got even more upset.

"You...! You're not just satisfied with putting your fragile body into a dangerous location, but you decide to work the day before instead of resting?! What are you thinking?!"

The residence hall was composed of brick on the outside, but the inside was made almost entirely of wood. Inevitably, the walls were not that thick, either. And even though this elite commander of knights was known by everyone, he had openly asked for Seiichirou at the front entrance. When Seiichirou looked around, he thought he could see a glimpse of familiar blond hair through the crack of the door.

"Are you even listening, Seiichirou?!"

Frustrated with Seiichirou's lack of attention, Aresh slammed his hand down on the desk. The tremors from the impact suddenly made a hidden bottle tumble off the desk, coming to a stop between the two men.

"Oh..."

At the sight of the familiar yet empty bottle, Aresh's anger finally exploded.

Then Seiichirou found himself on his own bed, being held by Aresh, whose shirt was unbuttoned, chest exposed.

The following explains how this situation came to be:

Aresh found out that Seiichirou had been drinking nutritional tonics. → He got angry. → Checked Seiichirou's physical condition. → Performed healing magic. → And started acclimatizing the magic in Seiichirou with skin-to-skin contact on the bed.

This sequence of events had already become a pattern.

However, the fact that they were doing it in Seiichirou's own room, in his own bed, made him feel embarrassed. Above all else, he hadn't been able to mentally prepare for this raid-like, surprise visit.

"Do you still feel feverish?" Aresh asked.

Seiichirou seemed to be in a daze. The more he looked at the man seated on his bed, holding Seiichirou in his lap and with his back against the pillows, the more he realized how handsome the commander was—he was so beautiful, he looked like a doll—but he also seemed a little young, perhaps because Seiichirou had gotten so used to seeing him.

(Incidentally, the gallery outside the room had scampered off in all directions when Aresh had started shouting, and he took the occasion to cast a Wind spell to keep any noise from getting out.)

“No... I feel fine now, so can I go back to working?”

“Absolutely not,” Aresh said, brushing aside hair that had stuck to Seiichirou’s damp skin.

“But now that I can go on the expedition, I want to get everything perfectly ready.”

At Seiichirou’s insistence that he be allowed to return to his desk, Aresh sighed, sounding truly exasperated.

“If you want everything to go well, surely your health comes first. You need to be more mindful of how weak you are.”

He was mindful of it. In any case, without Aresh, Seiichirou would have one day died simply from breathing, and any light scratch would have been fatal.

Their bodies were pressed together to acclimatize the magic. Aresh intertwined their fingers, perhaps to amuse himself, as Seiichirou buried his complicated feelings toward the man with his zeal for work.

“Besides,” Aresh added, “I’ve already compiled the Second and Third Royal Orders’ expedition expenses.”

“What?”

It was the first time Seiichirou had ever heard him talk about work—and administrative work, at that—so he looked up at Aresh with wide eyes and a stunned expression.

“...What’s with that look on your face? I don’t have it with me today. I’ll give it to you tomorrow, so work then. I came here today to reapply the barrier before

we set out. I had been waiting for you to mention it, but I had no idea you would go out on a trip two days before the expedition and then spend the day before shut up inside your room doing work..."

"I'm...sorry for the trouble..."

Seiichirou had selfishly assumed, since they would be traveling together anyway, that it would have been more efficient to apply the barrier then. But now that he thought about it, Aresh was the commander of the Third Royal Order. Seiichirou was a civil official who had been prevailed upon by the prince and forced into coming. There was no way they could travel together during the journey. Aresh had certainly seemed to have been in a tough spot.

"You and I will set out from here tomorrow."

"What? From here?"

That meant the other job Seiichirou had been thinking of doing was impossible... Well, it wasn't impossible, and it was very important, too.

"You're not going to go back to your place?"

"That's right. My preparations are all finished, and the other knights will carry my things."

The thought that they were going to *leave for work together* briefly flashed across Seiichirou's mind, so he desperately tried to think of something else and changed the subject.

"Where do you live, Comman...I mean, Aresh?"

Seiichirou had assumed because Aresh was a commander that he either lived in the royal palace or in the knights' lodgings, but surprisingly, Aresh said he lived in his family's house.

"Your family's house...?"

Seiichirou remembered hearing that Aresh was the son of a marquess. The class system had been abolished in modern Japan, so he wasn't exactly sure, but he thought it was quite a high position.

"Do you have any siblings, Aresh?" Seiichirou asked without thinking of anything other than whether it was normal for a working adult to live with his

family.

This time, Aresh blinked in surprise.

“...I have two older brothers and one older sister.”

So that meant this outrageously gorgeous commander was the youngest child... *He very much seems like the youngest*, Seiichirou thought. Perhaps Aresh knew what he was thinking, because then he pouted and pulled at Seiichirou’s ear.

“That hurts.”

“That’s all it takes?”

Seiichirou swore and twisted his body away from the ticklish sensation of Aresh’s fingertips rubbing his ear.

“Does everyone live at your family’s house?”

“No, my sister is already married, and my second-oldest brother has his own place.”

The eldest son would probably be taking over the house one day. Seiichirou puzzled over why Aresh would live at home in that case, and perhaps this question was obvious on his face, because Aresh went on to explain.

“I have a room at the knights’ lodgings, but my family’s house is closer to the royal palace and less of a hassle, so I almost always stay there.”

“I see.”

Seiichirou nodded, musing about how Aresh was a privileged man from a well-to-do family, so he didn’t seem to be suited to acting as part of a group. Aresh pulled his other ear.

“That hurts.”

“Hmph... What about you?”

Seiichirou thought in silence for a few seconds, not understanding the question, but then realized that Aresh was asking about the number of siblings he had.

“I’m an only child.”

“...You seem that way.”

Aresh's reply sounded like a retort, but it was probably also what he really believed. Even Seiichirou thought he acted like an only child. He had been jealous of people with siblings when he was younger, but he had also received all of his parents' love, so he had probably been happy.

But, now, looking at his current predicament, Seiichirou wished he had siblings.

“I'm all alone...”

He had always been so swamped with work that he hadn't gone home much for the Bon Festival or for New Year's, and because he was a male, they had not been that overprotective of him.

But now their only son had disappeared from their world, and Seiichirou wondered what his parents were feeling and how they were spending their time. If possible, he hoped they wouldn't dwell on the thought that he would one day return home. Now that he couldn't take care of them in their old age, he hoped they had received his remaining assets without any delays or problems.

As Seiichirou thought of his hometown and parents, which he usually tried to avoid thinking about, a spell was cast in a low, beautiful, penetrating voice from above.

No matter how many times he heard it, he always thought it sounded like a song.

The spell lasted a little longer today.

It sounds like a lullaby..., Seiichirou thought hazily. His head started to feel feverish, but just then, his mouth became occupied.

It was the departing ceremony for the expedition. The participants gathered in front of the royal castle; the king said some words of appreciation; Prince Yurius, who was leading the operation, gave a speech; and then they set off. The speech was pretty much the same as the one he had given at the dinner party.

They marched, like a parade, from the royal castle to the main gates of the town.

The crowds' cheers followed the prince and the Holy Maiden alike, but as soon as they saw Seiichirou, it transformed into a babble of hushed voices. He watched this all happen with an empty mind and his usual vacant eyes.

He had been in this mood since before they had set off from the square of the royal castle.

When the ceremony had finished, it had finally been time to depart.

The prince and the Holy Maiden headed toward the luxurious carriages; the knights went to their horses; most of the royal sorcerers and the civil officials with managerial positions moved toward the fairly average carriages (although they were already quite good since they didn't jostle around much, distinct from the communal one used by the general public); and the low-ranking civil officials, servants and chefs of the prince and Holy Maiden, and the medics headed toward the inferior, simple carriages. The knights mounted their horses.

Seiichirou was a manager, so he headed toward the regular carriages, but just then, a voice called out to him from behind.

"Seiichirou. You're over here."

"What?"

The stunning commander of the Third Royal Order, who had left Seiichirou's room with him for work that morning, causing a stir, had just called out to him with a face that suggested this was only to be expected. Fed up with Seiichirou, who didn't move, Aresh walked right up to him, kicking up the cobblestones in his wake. He grabbed the sleeve of the brand-new outfit he had put on Seiichirou that morning and marched back to his horse. Seiichirou had prepared his own clothes for the expedition, but the day before, they had been ferociously criticized by Aresh and were all replaced.

"Uh... Aresh? Is the tagalo—I mean, the assistant director of accounting—going to ride with you?" Orjef asked timidly amid the dumbfounded knights. Orjef had known him the longest and was the next most senior in rank.

Aresh nodded, his unwavering expression suggesting that this was a normal

and expected action.

“This man has no tolerance to magicules. Unless he’s constantly monitored, he will die. I’ll look after him.”

“But, well, in that case, wouldn’t it be better for him to ride in a carriage with a medic?”

“No. This man has many other troublesome peculiarities. I’ve been looking after him for a long time, and only I can do it. He is coming along on the expedition because of the prince’s order. He might even die because of it. So I will take care of him.”

Seiichirou was puzzled by this as he thought Aresh had deliberately cast the barrier on him the day before because he *wouldn’t* be able to be by his side during the journey. Plus, Seiichirou had wanted to talk to Ist and the other royal sorcerers during the trip—not to mention, he had never ridden a horse before. He had heard that riding a horse was quite tough on the body for people who were not used to it. There was no way he could do it for six entire days.

“Commander Indolark, with all due respect, I have never ridden a horse before. As you know, my weak body can’t withstand long hours of traveling.”

Aresh narrowed his eyes, displeased that Seiichirou had called him by his position and family name, but Seiichirou hoped, since they were out in public, he could be forgiven.

“...That won’t be a problem. I’ll take that into consideration and heal you as we travel.”

Did that mean he would constantly apply the barrier and cast healing spells and that they would need to stay close to each other so he could acclimatize the magic?

But Seiichirou wondered about that...

He felt as though Aresh’s behavior had been escalating over the past few days and pondered whether he ought to consider the Demon Forest as that dangerous...

As Seiichirou fretted over his own physical safety and reputation, Aresh

proffered a document he had prepared in advance.

“Here is a detailed account of the expedition expenses for the Royal Orders. You can read them as we ride.”

“Thank you for this.”

Seiichirou was much higher up on the horse than he had expected, and coupled with the unsteady footholds, he felt very uneasy. But with his back and legs totally flush against Aresh, who had mounted behind him, Seiichirou’s body was securely fixed in place.

“I know it’s a little late to be asking this, but will the horse be okay carrying two adult men?”

Seiichirou felt bad for the beautiful horse, its pitch-black mane matching Aresh’s outfit, but the commander denied this in his low, appealing voice.



“That won’t be a problem. Diana can run faster than any horse, even when I’m fully equipped with armor, a sword, and a shield.”

The horse’s name is Diana... So it’s female?

She would still be fatigued, Seiichirou thought, but perhaps this elite knight could fix that with his superb healing magic, too? Magic was truly convenient.

“I want to ride a horse as well,” Yua said after seeing the two of them riding in tandem, with Aresh seemingly holding Seiichirou from behind. Seiichirou saw the people around Yua try to pacify her.

“You’ll be riding comfortably in a safe carriage, Your Holiness.”

And so Seiichirou was put on public display until they left through the town’s main gates.

It was after they had gone through the gates that Seiichirou was finally allowed to read Aresh’s document. He leafed through it, the swaying of the horse not affecting his concentration at all.

“This expense account... Did one of the clerks make it?”

“No, I did.”

“What?”

“What’s with that reaction...? Is something wrong with it?”

“No...”

Far from it—the report was well organized and easy to read. Aresh, a man who had never been destined for odd jobs, had made this?

With Aresh having saved Seiichirou’s life so many times already, it was a bit late to reaffirm that he was, indeed, a genius.

“...What? If you have something to say, spit it out.”

From his breathing and tone, Seiichirou could tell Aresh was more uneasy than upset, but Seiichirou answered, unfazed.

“No, it’s a great report. Very easy to read. What does ‘supplemental equipment repair expenses’ refer to?”

“Oh, that’s...”

In any event, Seiichirou was grateful. This report would make his work progress much more smoothly. The fact that he was going to be with Aresh for the entire journey—a man who could produce documents of this caliber—meant that he had a chance to learn so much more about the management of money within the Royal Orders. At this, Seiichirou felt reinvigorated.

Σ Σ Σ

On the first day, they arrived at a town smaller than the royal capital that was gorgeous with many redbrick buildings. They arrived before dusk, and the lord of the town invited Yarius, Yua, their servants, Aresh, and the managers—including Seiichirou, of course—to stay at his estate. Almost all the other knights and civil officials were to spend the night at an inn.

Once he was finally alone, Seiichirou slowly stretched out his stiff body. Aresh had propped him up and healed him during the long horse ride, but his body had still put up with a lot. Specifically, his thighs and sides were killing him.

Horseback riding is an activity that will definitely give you sore muscles...

Seiichirou was scared of riding the horse the next day, but he was even more frightened of a delayed onset of sore muscles. He was old enough where he felt more at ease if he was in pain the very next day.

“Well!”

After Seiichirou managed to move his aching body, he left his room. He had asked the nonmanagerial civil officials to conduct a survey of the miasma damage in the town. Seiichirou had prepared various contingencies for when they would inevitably demonstrate unwillingness to listen to his instructions, but the scene with Aresh this morning seemed to have made an impact, because they had all obediently agreed to the task. What Seiichirou didn’t realize was that the civil officials had seen him working throughout the entire journey and had been secretly moved by his dedication.

Seiichirou’s current target was in another room on the same floor.

He gently knocked on the door but received no reply. Seiichirou had seen the

man enter this room, so he knew he was inside. He knocked again, a little more forcefully.

“Yeeeees?” came a flat voice.

The door opened, and Seiichirou gave a weary smile to the assistant director of the Royal Sorcery Department, Ist.

“Ist, do you have some time right now?”

“Huh? Kondo?”

Ist tilted his head, and he widened his dazed, sleepy eyes in surprise. Seiichirou repeated his question as if nothing had happened.

“I do have time, but the director told me not to talk to you too much.”

Surely Ist had also been told that he shouldn’t directly tell Seiichirou *himself* this, or had he simply not listened? In any case, he assumed this would happen and told Ist the line he had prepared for such an occasion.

“But it’s about how the Royal Sorcery Department receives funds, which you mentioned at the dinner party.”

And so Seiichirou was able to enter Ist’s room without any effort at all. The conversation with Ist itself was slightly difficult, but Ist was by nature a sincere person who was honest about what he wanted. Many people who turned their hobby into their job were like that. Because it was clear what they wanted, they were easy to deal with as long as the relationship was strictly business-related.

Seiichirou’s task wrapped up quicker than he had expected, so he headed downstairs where he had planned to meet the civil officials he had sent to collect intelligence. Much like the gorgeous town outside, the inside of the estate was filled with vibrant colors, but it wasn’t over the top and was well decorated. Seiichirou remembered reading in a book that this area had mines and was famous for its jewelry. There was still some time before the arranged meeting with the civil officials, so Seiichirou thought about taking a leisurely look around town, although he knew if he didn’t return in time for dinner, Aresh would probably give him an earful about it.

“Kondou.”

With his mind so full of other things, his reaction to this was a little delayed.

Seiichirou looked up and saw Yua standing at the bottom of the stairs, smiling and waving slightly at him. He hadn't spoken to her in a long time. Seiichirou suppressed his sigh, thinking about how nothing ever went according to plan.

Yua invited him to have tea and cakes in another room, but Seiichirou declined, saying he had to work in a little bit, so they decided to chat in the lounge space just past the entrance. Her shiny hair was beautifully braided as always; however, perhaps because she was on an expedition, she wasn't wearing the usual gowns she donned at the palace. Even so, in her neat, trim dress, she still didn't look like she was going on a dangerous mission with knights.

"It's been a little while since we've spoken, hasn't it, Kondou?"

"That's right," Seiichirou answered, casually examining their surroundings.

A knight was standing guard a short distance away, but when he met Seiichirou's eyes, he quickly looked away. He was the knight who had been silent during the fiasco at the dining hall. That meant he wouldn't act hostile toward Seiichirou unless he did something outrageous. Part of the reason Yua and Seiichirou hadn't spoken in some time wasn't just because she hadn't paid him much attention, but he had also been avoiding her.

If Seiichirou was being honest, things had gotten to the point where he considered Yua someone to be avoided at all costs. He knew that she had no ill will or ill intentions, but he came to understand that, for their respective positions and in all other aspects, interacting with her would not lead to anything good.

But Seiichirou also knew that Yua did not understand this.

"If at all possible, could we make this brief?"

"W-well... I want you to change places with me during our travels tomorrow!" Yua declared resolutely; her cheeks bright red. Yua's happy-go-lucky attitude was making Seiichirou dizzy... Or was that because he was closer to the miasma?

"..."

Seiichirou silently looked over to the knight. With his eyes, he tried to convey the question, “Isn’t her guard supposed to remonstrate her over something like this?” The knight, however, had a blank look and averted his gaze yet again.

That bastard.

“Um... Is that...a no?” Yua asked anxiously, looking up at the silent Seiichirou.

How should I answer?

He thought for a while but then got tired of it.

“Right... Shiraishi, do you understand the purpose of this expedition?”

“Huh? Of course I do. It’s to purify the miasma, right?”

“That’s correct. And you are very important, because only the Holy Maiden can do that.”

Yua looked bashful, even embarrassed, but Seiichirou wasn’t talking about anything like that.

“That’s why you ride in the same carriage as the royal family, and it’s why you’re surrounded by knights who guard you and are prepared for anything.”

Yua had probably already been told this many times by her handlers today before they had set off. Sure enough, she looked dejected, pouting her lips in displeasure. If nothing else, the behavior resembled that of a child trying to be a little selfish—it was even adorable.

But Seiichirou needed her to listen carefully to what he had to say next.

“And I am the person most susceptible to miasma in this world.”

“Um... Is that the ‘no tolerance to magicules’ thing...?”

“That’s right. In this world, for example, just breathing the air outside weakens me. And now I’m going to a place filled with a gas that would make a normal person sick. I would die for sure.”

“What...?”

Prime Minister Camile and Aresh had gone over this with her many times, but Yua still widened her eyes.

“You can’t... Surely you wouldn’t...”

“No, I would die. One hundred percent. In fact, since coming to this world, I’ve almost died twice.”

The first time, he had overdosed on too many nutritional tonics.

The second time, he had been assaulted by a man who had been the guard protecting the woman right in front of him.

“You are probably suggesting this lightly, but you’re asking for the people who protect you to increase their workload—and for me to potentially die.”

Yua’s feelings for Aresh were obvious, but frankly, Seiichirou didn’t want something like that to disrupt their ranks and increase their workload. He didn’t want to die over something like that, either. They were steadily getting closer to where the miasma was thickest. He might have thought that Aresh’s behavior was overkill, but in his current state, Seiichirou’s safety could not be assured without him.

“I...I didn’t mean that...”

The sight of the girl shaking her head with tears in her eyes was very pitiful, but unfortunately, Seiichirou’s feelings didn’t change.

“...It’s time you started really thinking things through. Because this is not a world where you can just do as you’re told and enjoy your peaceful days forever.”

Because Seiichirou was planning to crush this little girl’s future as the glorious Holy Maiden.

“So I heard you said something to the Holy Maiden?”

It was after dinner. Aresh was sprawled out in Seiichirou’s room as if he belonged there. Seiichirou, who had been going through the intelligence gathered by the civil officials, looked at him.

Yua had been visibly listless at the dinner. But the fact that she had come out at all, and hadn’t shut herself away in her room, was commendable. At any rate, if the Holy Maiden hadn’t shown up for dinner when the lord was graciously taking care of them at his estate, the lord would have been disgraced. The

prince, as might be expected of him, thanked the lord and covered up for Yua's lack of energy by saying she was tired from the journey. Seiichirou had always thought the prince was the biggest pervert around regarding the Holy Maiden, but now he felt he might have to revise his initial impression.

"Where did you hear that?" Seiichirou asked, turning in his chair with the documents still in hand.

Aresh slowly stood up and reached out to him. Then he sat back down on the bed and made Seiichirou sit in between his thighs, documents still clutched in his hands.

"From the Holy Maiden's guard... I've forbidden him from mentioning it to the prince."

"I appreciate that."

If the prince found out he had made Yua cry, Seiichirou would probably be cast away in the Demon Forest.

"...I thought you had no interest in the Holy Maiden," Aresh muttered, wrapping his hands around Seiichirou's waist. Seiichirou tilted his head.

"How could I have no interest in her?"

She was the one who dragged him into this world, she was the reason he was here, and she was the only means the kingdom had of combating the disaster that threatened their existence. But then again, the real ones responsible for Seiichirou's abduction were the people in the kingdom's head office, which had orchestrated the Holy Maiden Summoning, so Seiichirou didn't really hold a grudge against Yua for that. Putting his own situation aside, he truly felt bad for Yua, a regular high school girl, for being forced to live in another world. He didn't feel any bitterness toward her, but he wanted her to finally face reality.

"...I see."

"...Aresh? Why don't you head back to your own room?"

"I'll go back when you stop working and get in bed."

"...So you're not going to go back?"

"...So you're not going to sleep?"

Well—there I go shoving my finger in the hornet's nest.

“...Where did you go before dinner?”

With Aresh's hands wrapped securely around Seiichirou's waist and his head buried in his shoulder, Seiichirou couldn't see Aresh's face. It was fortunate, however, that he changed the subject, so Seiichirou went with it.

“I was getting the reports from the civil officials who collected information in town,” Seiichirou explained, holding up the papers as proof.

“Before that,” Aresh said in an even lower voice.

Before that, Seiichirou had his unproductive conversation with Yua, but Aresh already knew about that. So even earlier...was his secret conversation with Ist.

“I went to go ask a few work-related questions.”

“Where did you go?”

The way he worded this question suggested he might have visited Seiichirou's room when he hadn't been there, or that perhaps he had seen Seiichirou entering Ist's room. Aresh might not look it, but he was quite well-informed. Or maybe he was collecting information on his own. *Come to think of it, he's also really popular...* But just as Seiichirou thought this, Aresh, who had pulled back in irritation at Seiichirou's delayed response, glared at him grumpily.

The fact that Seiichirou went to Ist's room wasn't something he had to hide from Aresh, but he didn't want him telling others in the Third Royal Order and then its members making unnecessary remarks. There would probably be more purification expeditions, but it was very likely that this would be the only one that Seiichirou would be able to go on, so he wanted to settle everything during this trip.

“If you saw me, you should have said something,” Seiichirou replied, sidestepping Aresh's question.

Seiichirou knew that Aresh's concern over his actions had nothing to do with the political situation or his work.

“...Whenever you get wrapped up in your job, you ignore me and put me on the back burner without batting an eye.”

I wouldn't do something that rude to the person who saved my life..., Seiichirou thought, but then when he stopped to think about it, he realized Aresh was right. He had acted that way, and he felt guilty.

"There's no way that's true!" Seiichirou said, trying to deny it despite knowing otherwise.

Aresh took the documents out of Seiichirou's hands with half-open eyes and pushed him down on the bed. He hadn't removed his hand from around Seiichirou's waist, so Seiichirou guessed the commander wasn't going to return to his far more spacious and luxurious room. *Well, if letting him stay can smooth things over, it's a small price to pay,* Seiichirou thought as he reluctantly closed his eyes.

Before their departure the next day, Seiichirou saw Yua by the stables, but she averted her eyes, looking so obviously uncomfortable that he thought there might have been no point trying to keep their conversation a secret from the prince. Under Yarius's shrewd gaze, Seiichirou shifted to hide ever so slightly behind Diana.

They arrived at the second day's lodging around noon. It was smaller than the town they had stayed in the day before, but since the region beyond that point had started to suffer greatly as a result of the miasma, they had decided to not take any chances and just rest here. Then they'd depart early the next morning for the Demon Forest. Seiichirou, who had once again been doing work during the entire horse ride, was scolded by Aresh the moment they got to his room.

"What's wrong?"

"This town is close to the area ravaged by miasma. This concentration won't affect normal people, but for you it's poisonous. If I leave you alone, you might dash away into town to conduct inquiries or whatever, so I'm monitoring you."

In other words, Aresh wanted to make sure Seiichirou didn't leave his sight. Seiichirou had finished the matter he had needed to discuss with Ist the day before, and he had already asked the other civil officials to conduct inquiries on the miasma damage again. Correction—Seiichirou had made the person riding ahead of them deliver the written survey to the town official yesterday, so they simply had to explain the form and have him accept it.

Tomorrow they would finally be entering the Demon Forest. Seiichirou did feel anxious, but he also felt safe with Aresh by his side. So offending or displeasing Aresh, his lifeline, was not an option. That day, just to be safe, Aresh added another layer to the barrier, and Seiichirou slept in his arms.

Then, on the third day of the expedition, the party finally arrived at the Demon Forest.

Σ Σ Σ

One day, I was summoned to another world.

I was out shopping on my day off from school, and on my way home, my body was suddenly surrounded by light, and I was getting swallowed up by the ground. I tried so hard to resist—I cried out for help—and then this old guy who looked like a salaryman grabbed my arm, and we both got dragged in.

The next thing I knew, I was in a castle similar to the one I had seen at a theme park in Chiba—and surrounded by a lot of people. As I sat there, totally confused, a silver-haired prince who looked like he had popped out of a manga broke out from the crowd and kindly offered me his hand. He took me to another room, where he told me I was the Holy Maiden. Then various adults told me with very serious expressions that there had been an outbreak of miasma in the kingdom, a crisis that came about every hundred years, and it could only be purified by the Holy Maiden. It totally sounded like the plot of a video game or novel. I nodded, amazed. When the miasma overflowed, a lot of people got sick. So when they told me I was the only one who could save them, I had no choice but to accept the responsibility. After all, it's only natural to help people who are in trouble.

I was told that because the miasma wasn't bad enough to hurt people yet, I would first learn about the kingdom and train to draw out my powers. I was given all sorts of pretty dresses and accessories, and I lived in a room that looked like it was meant for a princess. But then again, it was a real castle, so maybe it really *was* meant for a princess.

The silver-haired prince who had initially offered me his hand was an actual prince, and his name was Yurius. He was really nice and gave me presents

almost every day. The food was super delicious; I was given a guard, who was a knight, and even a maid; and I studied every day from morning till night. After a short while, I was introduced to the most important people in the kingdom, including Aresh.

His pitch-black hair made me feel vaguely nostalgic for my former world, and he had a handsome coolness about him that was different from Yurius. He was introduced as the commander of the Third Royal Order. Not only was he super good-looking, he was also really strong. When I tried to speak to him, his expressionless face never changed, and his replies were always very short. I wanted to know more about him, so when I heard he was a genius at magic, I asked if I could learn magic from him, and so it was decided that he'd visit me just twice a week.

Studying every day was hard, but I felt the same way when I had been attending school, and everyone praised my rapid improvement.

I was going to save this kingdom and the kind people who lived here. I had to work hard.

Clunk!

“Ah!”

“Yua!”

On the third day of their purification expedition, the carriage, which seemed to be protected by magic, pitched violently, causing Yua to freeze in terror.

Yurius, who was sitting across from her, rushed over and held her in his arms.

“Everything’s okay; there was just a slight break in formation.”

“But was that...an animal cry?”

Their carriage was soundproof, and with the windows closed, they couldn’t really hear noises from the outside. If there was ever an emergency, the coachman would let them know.

“It’s okay, Your Holiness,” Yua’s guard said. “We’re close to the source of the miasma, so the beasts here might have turned violent. You have the most elite forces from the Second Royal Order with you, as well as the Third Royal Order.

There's no way we'll lose against those beasts."

Yua's eyes widened.

"B-beasts?! Violent beasts have shown up?!"

The miasma first would kill vegetation—and proceed to weaken the animals next. The weakened animals would then become violent and attack any living creature that ventured into their territory.

"Is everyone okay? It's just—I can use healing magic, too...!"

Yua had learned it as part of her purification training, and she had heard it was a rare form of magic that few people could use. She thought that if someone had gotten injured, then she might be able to help them.

"You can't go outside, Your Holiness, it's too dangerous."

"It's fine," Yurius added. "There are medics out there, so you should focus on the purification, Yua."

The world Yua had seen for the past three months had been peaceful. Everyone had been kind, and there had been no danger.

"In fact, since coming to this world, I've almost died twice."

"...!"

Yua's heart started to beat louder and louder.

As the Holy Maiden, she had spent her days surrounded by the prince, knights, maids, and tutors, being quietly protected.

Then what about Seiichirou, who was just an ordinary guy?

"This is not a world where you can just do as you're told and enjoy your peaceful days forever."

When they approached the outskirts of the forest, the source of the miasma, they were attacked by several beasts with long fangs that resembled saber-toothed tigers, but the knights were immensely strong.

"They usually don't attack people with weapons," Aresh said. "They must be very weak."

Seiichirou nodded, assuming this was part of the damage caused by the miasma. If that was the case, they wouldn't just have to reduce the taxes for neighboring towns and villages—they would need to reallocate defense funds. He took out his magic pen and abacus again and started working out the calculations. The knights coming back from the battle were dumbstruck when they saw him, but Seiichirou didn't care.

Quite a large party had accompanied them on their journey until then, but the only people going into the Demon Forest were the knights, the Holy Maiden, the prince, several medics, and some royal sorcerers.

"You're staying out here, too," Aresh told him.

Seiichirou briefly hesitated, but he thought that since he had personally entrusted this to Ist, things would probably be okay. He nodded. But when Seiichirou looked over at Ist, who didn't meet his eyes at all, he started to feel apprehensive.

The prince, however, put a stop to Aresh's plan.

"Wait. That one's coming, too."

Seiichirou looked at the prince and wondered if he really wanted to put him in harm's way that much, but then he locked eyes with Yua. She was standing behind Yurius and looking at Seiichirou anxiously, and he reassessed his judgment of the prince's motives. Her pale complexion did not seem to stem from her sensing the ominous aura radiating from the Demon Forest.

"...Your Highness, with all due respect, a civil official going any farther would just be a hindrance," Aresh argued, wanting to keep Seiichirou out of harm's way as much as possible.

When it came down to the Holy Maiden's demands or the safety of a mere civil official, it was clear that the prince would almost certainly choose the former.

Evading the gazes of the people talking to one another around him, Seiichirou approached Ist.

"Ist...," he whispered. "Ist. Do you remember what I asked you to do yesterday?"

"Hmm...? What was it, again?" the royal sorcerer replied with a goofy grin.

Seiichirou steeled himself, turned back to the crowd, and opened his mouth.

"I'll go, too."

Σ Σ Σ

Aresh scolded Seiichirou for a long time, and the people around them, though stupefied, tried to pacify him. Yurias looked reassured by the relief on Yua's face.

The purpose of the expedition was the Holy Maiden's purification.

They had spent so much money on the expedition. If they couldn't achieve any results because the Holy Maiden was mentally unstable, it would be a huge financial loss for them. Seiichirou also, of course, would feel uneasy unless he saw it with his own eyes as an otherworlder. He knew he had no right to say this as all he did was work and stay shut up inside the royal palace, but he had yet to fully grasp the basic knowledge of this world, so he wanted to see it for himself.

They left the horses and carriages behind for the other civil officials to look after, with several knights to guard them, and the remaining members set off into the forest on foot. The firm boots that Aresh had prepared for Seiichirou made it easy to walk through the forest without sinking in the mud. Seiichirou was wearing a tunic resembling a poncho out of a Western film that came up to just above his nose. He had been told to not breathe the air directly, but he could still feel the muggy, humid air, which he understood was most certainly the miasma. Without the barrier, Seiichirou probably would not have even been able to breathe through the cloth.

During the trek, Yua's guard carried her on his back. Aresh had offered to do the same for Seiichirou, but partially due to his stubbornness as a grown man, he had refused and somehow managed to walk the nearly two hours to reach the source of the miasma.

A huge tree loomed over them at the location that was supposedly the origin.

The bare tree just stood there ominously, its branches stretching out

majestically. They probably would have been covered in leaves on any other occasion.

“...Yua. Can you do it?” Yurius asked.

Yua had climbed down from the knight’s back. Her face looked pale, but her eyes showed resolve.

“...I’ll do it.”

At Yua’s words, the knights took their positions in the surrounding area to guard her.

The royal sorcerers and medics went to her side, just in case.

Yua extended her hands and started to sing.

No, it wasn’t a song. They were words to a spell Aresh had spoken to Seiichirou many times. An incantation of this world.

It felt like a refreshing breeze swept through the heavy air.

Just when Seiichirou thought the color of the blackened tree trunk had lightened a little, Yua’s voice cut off, and he heard Prince Yurius’s panicked scream.

“Yua!!”

When Seiichirou took his eyes off the surroundings and looked back at Yua, he saw her in Yurius’s arms. She was breathing heavily. She must have succeeded with the purification—but only partially.

From the literature Seiichirou had looked through, he had known that it would have been impossible to cleanse everything in one attempt, so he wasn’t particularly concerned and walked up to Ist.

“Ist... Ist! How much has been purified? *Purified*, I said.”

“Huh? Oh, right. Probably about thirty percent.”

If that was the case, they would need to go on three more expeditions.

The cost of each expedition was quite high, so Seiichirou had suggested beforehand that she take a magic restoration tonic and finish the purification in one shot—or that they return and rest at the town they had stayed at the day

before, then come back to the forest the next morning and repeat the process. But the Holy Maiden's purification was different than ordinary magic, so these ideas had been rejected.

"Yua, you've done wonderfully. You are a true holy maiden."

"Did...did I help?"

"Of course you did!"

"You were incredible, Your Holiness."

Seiichirou paid no mind to the people looking after Yua, who was a short distance from the tree—he had been checking with Ist about their subsequent plan.

"Hey."

Seiichirou felt a large hand grab his head tightly, putting a stop to their conversation.

"Didn't I tell you to stay close to me? What are you doing?"

Seiichirou looked up and saw the handsome commander of the Third Royal Order, a sharp line in between his brows.

"I just had a little favor to ask of Ist and the other royal sorcerers."

Seiichirou had answered honestly, but the crease between Aresh's brows only grew deeper.

"Why are you consulting the Royal Sorcery Department? If it's about spells, the Third Royal Order has a much better track record."

I see...

If that was how things were normally done in the kingdom, then the powerless Royal Sorcery Department would feel uncomfortable with Seiichirou's request.

But the way Aresh had phrased it sounded as if he was talking about the entire Third Royal Order, not just himself. Could that really happen? ...Would they be okay with it? It *would* be convenient.

Seiichirou gathered his thoughts, and his eyes and mouth turned into perfect

arcs when he smiled.

“Then I have work for you, Aresh.”

The Holy Maiden’s purification had cleansed some of the miasma, but there was still a subtle heaviness and humidity to the air around them. Other than the knights who had experienced many battles or sorcerers with strong magic resistance, it was unbearable for everyone else. They couldn’t help but find it eerie that Seiichirou, a man who normally couldn’t even tolerate magicules, was standing in such a place smiling.

“I thought I wouldn’t have enough people since the civil officials couldn’t come here, but if the members of the Third Royal Order can help, everything will be okay, right, Ist? Ist!”

When the otherworlder, whom their commander seemed to favor and had taken excessively good care of, spoke in such a forced cheerfulness, everyone in the Third Royal Order grimaced. Even the Second Royal Order started to gather around.

“Hold on a second; I haven’t heard of this! What are you planning to do?!”

Surprisingly, it was Director Zoltan of the Royal Sorcery Department who had made the objection. He was a high-ranking, overweight member of the reserves, but it seemed he had made it all this way without incident.

“Huh? That’s strange... I spoke to Assistant Director Ist about it the day after we met at the dinner party...”

That was a lie.

In reality, he hadn’t been able to talk to him then because Aresh had interfered, so he had only spoken to Ist two days ago, but it was at least true that Seiichirou had informed him beforehand.

“Is this true, Ist?!”

“Um... What was that, again?”

And so the members of the Royal Sorcery Department, who knew very well that this was a normal reaction from Ist, had no choice but to accept—because Ist was a manager.

“Well, isn’t this great?” Seiichirou said. “No one can tackle this job other than the Royal Sorcery Department, with your proficiency in magic and thorough knowledge of magical studies. That’s why you’ll also be receiving a special reward.”

As soon as the sorcerers heard this, their eyes lit up and were fixed on Seiichirou. They must have really struggled with securing research funding regularly.

“But you’re just the assistant director of Accounting,” Zoltan protested. “How can you decide something like that?”

“Not to worry. I have received signatures from both the director of the Accounting Department and His Excellency.”

This was real, so he handed the papers over unassumingly to show Zoltan.

“Hmph... So you do...”

With that, the Royal Sorcery Department was taken care of.

Seiichirou gave Zoltan, who wanted to take charge, instructions, and he had just select the members with strong resistance to magicules.

“So then, the Third Royal Order will...”

But here, Seiichirou was ordered to stop once again.

He looked back and saw Yua, her face still slightly pale, and the silver-haired prince, supporting her and glaring at him.

“Who gave you permission to act independently like this?”

Seiichirou had hoped the prince would have quickly retreated to help nurse Yua, but unfortunately, it seemed as though things hadn’t worked out that smoothly.

“His Excellency. I have a letter from him here entrusting this to me.”

“I’m the commanding officer of this purification expedition!”

“You are. So you’ve been entrusted with leading the purification expedition, haven’t you, Your Highness? What I’ve been entrusted with is a separate matter.”

“A ‘separate matter’...?”

“So perhaps you should quickly take Her Holiness somewhere she can comfortably rest, Your Highness.”

Seiichirou had thought the suggestion would make Yurius, who always prioritized the Holy Maiden, start moving, but this time it was Yua who shook her head.

“I—I want to stay behind with Kondou, too.”

“Yua...?”

“...”

She looked at Seiichirou with an imploring look. Seiichirou’s eyes softened.

After all this time, had she finally realized the dangers of this world and the perilous state of her own position?

But Seiichirou didn’t want her presence to interfere with his work, and there was nothing he could do for Yua at that moment.

“You look exhausted, Your Holiness, so please return to the town and rest.”

“So what do you want me to do?”

Just a few moments after Seiichirou thought Yua, Yurius, and the Second Royal Order had finally left, the prince and his two guards had returned.

“I’m sorry?”

“I told you: I’m the commanding officer. The miasma outbreaks are the gravest issue facing our kingdom. There’s no way I’m going to leave it all up to an ignorant otherworlder.”

Yurius was the prince of this kingdom, after all. He probably felt strongly about wanting to do something about the damages caused by the miasma. But then again, that didn’t change the fact that the “ignorant otherworlder” had been abducted by a summoning spell carried out on royal orders.

“...Then please step back with your guards and watch from a distance, Your Highness.”

Now that Yurius had quieted down, they could finally begin.

“Seiichirou, what should the Royal Order do?” Aresh asked.

The other knights remained silent, but their faces were screaming “Are we really going to do this, too?” Seiichirou avoided looking at them and started issuing instructions.

“Right. Please guard the members of the Royal Sorcery Department and make records of the barrier they apply.”

“The barrier...? What are they protecting?”

“They’re going to protect the kingdom,” Seiichirou replied nonchalantly.

The sorcerers and knights alike looked at him with obvious contempt.

“What nonsense!” Yurius spat out, then sighed as if Seiichirou was a complete idiot. “Barriers are highly complex spells that only few people can perform. You probably just wanted to protect the kingdom from miasma, but there aren’t enough sorcerers to cover the entire scope with a barrier.”

In fact, there were only eight sorcerers present who could cast the spell.

But that was enough for Seiichirou.

“You should think about it the other way around.”

Seiichirou positioned the sorcerers around the tree and asked Aresh to have his knights guard them—and measure and record the distance to the massive tree, the nucleus of the miasma. Sorcerers with strong magicule resistance and sensory perception, like Ist, were instructed to discern and record any changes inside the tree.

“You know where and what the source of the miasma is, so flip your way of thinking. We need to seal off the core itself.”



[CHAPTER EIGHT]

Decided

Seiichirou had a document in his hand, containing the recorded observations of the miasma concentration inside the ten-foot barrier that had been placed around the tree. He was in the middle of explaining something to Aresh, who was, per usual, sitting on Seiichirou's bed at the inn they had left that morning.

"Even so, if the miasma keeps permeating through, the barrier is going to need to be strengthened, because it's not a spell that lasts forever, right?"

Seiichirou had already experienced that for himself—Aresh applied the barrier spell to him daily now.

And so Seiichirou had planted vegetation around the tree and had arranged for one knight and one sorcerer to stay in town on standby to record how long it would take for the barrier to weaken.

"Ultimately, after Shiraishi completes the purification, we'll apply a barrier and station a permanent warden to that forest to regularly reapply it to prevent any miasma from escaping."

Of course, in the meantime, Seiichirou wanted research to be carried out on how to eliminate objects that became a core for the miasma.

"...I never even considered that until you said it," Aresh said, looking somber.

That was true for everyone in the kingdom, so Seiichirou didn't blame him.

"That's probably because the Holy Maiden exists. When there's a simple solution, few people will imagine other ideas that take time and effort. Thinking

comes to a standstill."

Well, except for some people who have strong inquisitive minds...

The faces of a sleepy-eyed sorcerer and a handsome, middle-aged man with rose-blond hair popped into Seiichirou's head. He grinned a bit awkwardly.

"Well, with this, the kingdom won't have to go through all the trouble of finding the Holy Maiden and summoning her from another world anymore, right?" Aresh asked, awkwardness tracing his beautiful features.

Seiichirou smiled.

"It basically means the kingdom will have to wipe its own ass."

But Seiichirou also knew that this plan wouldn't be accepted by everyone.

The existence of the Holy Maiden brought hope to the masses and acted as a huge ace up the kingdom's sleeve.

Zoltan had also protested loudly, claiming that performing the summoning acted as a show of power to the neighboring kingdoms.

In order to make the role of a holy maiden no longer necessary—and to convince the king—there was one more job left to do.

For this purpose, Seiichirou tried to return to his desk to continue working, but his arm was pulled from behind and he was tragically forced to sink down onto the bed.

"Aresh...I still have work to do..."

"Later. You were close to the miasma for a long time today. I need to reapply the barrier."

It was, in fact, thanks to Aresh's barrier that Seiichirou had been able to appear so unaffected, despite truly being the weakest man in this world. Even the knights who had magicule resistance and had trained in the forest had struggled.

That was why he couldn't thank him enough—Aresh was also the whole reason Seiichirou had thought up this plan.

The plan would require three additional purification expeditions, and

Seiichirou was sure to be recruited to come along again.

He had also noticed a change in Aresh's eyes, but now was not the time to bring it up.

"...Aresh, is all this really necessary?"

After the commander had cast the barrier spell, he had stayed on top of Seiichirou, peppering his eyes, ears, and the nape of his neck with kisses as he undressed him to press their skin together. Aresh was doing everything, so Seiichirou tried to take off his own clothes at least, but Aresh stopped his hands and continued to undress him.

It feels way more embarrassing when someone else undresses me...

Aresh's large hand crawled up Seiichirou's inner thigh, making him yelp unknowingly.

"...It's necessary."

That was a lie.

What Seiichirou needed was skin-to-skin contact and, depending on the situation, sometimes to receive Aresh's bodily fluids—it had nothing to do with Seiichirou's own pleasure or ejaculation.

"No, you don't need to do that...! Hold on, Aresh! Don't...don't touch th... Ah...!"

The commander was, naturally, very strong and able to ignore Seiichirou's feeble resistance. He started to slip his hand under Seiichirou's undergarments.

"Mouth! I'll do it with my mouth!!"

SLAM!!

"Kondooo? You in here?"

Seiichirou's desperate proposal was drowned out by the sudden opening of the door—and Ist's cheerful voice.

Ist, assistant director of the Royal Sorcery Department, was a different type of genius than Aresh—he had an immense intellectual curiosity for magic and was adaptable, and he excelled in many magical attributes, but his talents didn't

really extend beyond those spheres.

Ist had been born into a merchant family, not a noble family, but he hadn't gotten his position through financial means or by sheer force of personality—he was so bad at communicating with others, in fact, that he could barely get through his day-to-day life. His parents had been concerned about this, but they had fortunately discovered that Ist had a gift for magic, and so thanks in part to the influence of a kind viscount, he had been hired into the Royal Sorcery Department after graduating from the school of magic without a hitch.

Ist had caused quite a few problems since he had started working, but he produced great results, so he enjoyed days full of personal fulfillment, despite all that was said about him. He loved everything about magic research. He had even played a part in the renewed Holy Maiden Summoning ritual, because he had personally researched the principles and effects of the old spell that had been lost to time.

Thus, the Holy Maiden had been summoned. With Ist's intellectual curiosity satisfied, his interest had shifted to the Demon Forest.

Now, at the inn they chose during their return journey from the first purification expedition to the forest, Ist came across a very strange sight—the young, famous commander of the Third Royal Order and the otherworlder who had gotten dragged into this world.

They were lying on top of each other, half naked.

Ist tilted his head.

"...We're in the middle of something. Leave," Aresh ordered in a cold, low voice.

Ist, however, was too busy thinking of something else.

The otherworlder Kondo, who was for some reason the assistant director of the Accounting Department, was on the bottom. Ist felt as though he had heard Kondo had just gotten caught up in the summoning and, unlike the Holy Maiden, had no tolerance to magical energy or magicules in their world.

He thought there had been something off about Seiichirou since they had first met at the dinner party.

At the party, Ist had just assumed it was because Aresh was there, but come to think of it, the commander hadn't been there initially. Then Ist had met Kondo later, on his own. It had been the same then, too.

He had always sensed a hint of Aresh's magic coming from Kondo.

They couldn't have similar magical energy. Kondo couldn't use magic.

Did that mean he had been saturated with Aresh's magic?

Finally reaching this understanding, Ist nodded several times.

"Hey... Get out."

Ist's eyes were dazed and sleepy, and he hadn't shown any reaction—he just nodded. Aresh looked at him, unnerved, so Seiichirou tried to take advantage of the situation and wriggle out from under Aresh's body, but the commander unfortunately noticed and pinned his shoulders to the bed.

"It's not what you think! This is typical behavior for me! Let's regroup here, Aresh."

"No. You're going to try to weasel your way out of this and run away."

It was true that Seiichirou thought he would regain control of the situation if they broke apart, but Aresh was the one acting strangely, squaring off against Ist when he was on top of the bed with Seiichirou like this. Before Seiichirou could secure an upright position somehow, he decided to instead focus on getting Ist to quickly shut the door, but when he looked over toward the royal sorcerer, he noticed Ist's eyes were opened wider than usual. No, it wasn't that... They were sparkling with glee.

"Can I stay here and watch?"

"Because, you see, it is incredibly, incredibly rare for anyone in this world to have no magic tolerance—they would just be newborn babies. But because babies are small, there are few opportunities for them to be exposed to spells, so it's easy to get them used to magic. But Kondo is an adult with absolutely zero tolerance, yet he's received advanced barrier spells and is acclimatized to just a single person's magical energy. This is so, so rare from an academic perspective, and 'cause there are constant waves of Commander Indolark's

magic either inside or on him, there's no core, no natural mechanism of magic inside his body—it just circulates within him..."

It had been a little over two hours since they had set off in the homeward-bound carriage.

Why is it that when researchers find a topic they're interested in, they suddenly can't focus on anything else?

Seiichirou threw himself on the shelf of the carriage, and although the other sorcerers inside were looking at him, he was listening to Ist's lecture (which had started to omit pauses for breathing and any sense of formality) with all the ferocity of a paper tiger.

After much fuss, Seiichirou had finally succeeded in getting Aresh and Ist out of his room. He had refused to ride back with Aresh on horseback because they had already left the area where the miasma was thin, and the commander had already reapplied the barrier. Seiichirou also had to organize the documents he had to submit after they returned from the expedition, so Aresh had allowed him to ride in a carriage with the royal sorcerers.

"Magic circulation is how magic is spread throughout the entire body, but Kondo doesn't have that, so an alternative mechanism must be in operation, which must be..."

Ist's lecture was very interesting, but Seiichirou was regrettably very busy. He had to give his report to Prime Minister Camile when they returned to the royal palace, so it was certain the prince would summon him the second he stepped off the carriage.

He had to create documents that could at least explain the situation, as well as prepare letters for other people. Once the party arrived at the next town, the letters would be sent ahead on a fast horse, so he had to prioritize those.

Ist's rapid-fire lecture, therefore, washed right over him. Seiichirou only nodded intermittently, eyes on the document close by, writing with his magic pen in one hand and calculating on the abacus with the other.

The other sorcerers initially listened to Ist with great interest, glancing inquisitively at Seiichirou, and they soon had looks of awe. Seiichirou's hands

never stopped moving.

Σ Σ Σ

There was so much that needed to be done.

When the purification expedition concluded, Seiichirou had to immediately jump back into action or else his request would not go through.

It would require many collaborators and a lot of maneuvering behind the scenes. Seiichirou was now at a critical juncture.

In the lord's estate they had first stayed at, Seiichirou was giving the documents one final check and thinking about their return to the royal palace the following day.

The fast horse had already been dispatched, and although he would probably not be asked for them immediately, he had finished preparing the materials just in case. He needed to make sure he was on the same page as the prime minister and his collaborators, but they were brilliant people, so everything would probably be okay. And...while it could be a bit of a hassle, he was loyal to his desires, so all Seiichirou had to do was dangle some bait in front of him to get him to agree. He needed to have Zoltan accompany him, too, as a witness.

"You're still up?"

"...Is it normal for those in this kingdom to not knock?"

Seiichirou had thought perhaps it was just particularly ill-mannered, but Aresh, the son of a marquess, didn't knock, either, so he wondered if perhaps he ought to consider doing the same to follow national etiquette.

"I did; you just didn't notice," Aresh replied calmly.

Seiichirou squinted grumpily but held back his sigh.

They had only been apart for one day, and the commander had been in a bad mood since dinner that evening.

"Aresh, we return to the royal capital tomorrow, and the prime minister has given me orders, so I have to get his report and the original books for this venture ready..."

“I know.”

But despite his reply, Aresh pulled Seiichirou’s arm and led him to the bed.

“You’ve probably already finished preparing for tomorrow, right? But more importantly, if you’re going to get even busier from now on, you’ll need more of the barrier, won’t you?”

Seiichirou widened his eyes at Aresh’s unexpected consideration. Aresh had started doing more work as of late, but Seiichirou had always thought his excessive concern over his health before the expedition had been silly, so he was a little surprised.

It was true that once they returned to the royal capital, Seiichirou’s schedule would be even more packed. Aresh would probably be busy, too. The assistant director of the Accounting Department and the commander of the Third Royal Order meeting each other every day in and of itself was unusual anyway. But without Aresh’s good intentions, Seiichirou’s body, totally intolerant to magicules or magical energy, could never have sustained itself. This was a critical time for Seiichirou—he couldn’t collapse now.

“...Thank you.”

Aresh likely sensed the tension leaving Seiichirou’s shoulders. He wove together his songlike spell and pressed their lips together.

“...Hah... Ngh...”

Thoughts floated through Seiichirou’s feverish mind as he yielded his body to the feeling of Aresh repeatedly kissing him—and his large hand trailing down his bare skin.

If it weren’t for this man—this pedigreed, talented, high-ranking, beautiful man—Seiichirou would have probably died a miserable death very quickly.

Aresh had saved his life twice, and even setting that aside, there were so many things that would not have been possible without him. Seiichirou couldn’t yet confront the man’s feelings directly—there were still so many things that needed to take precedence right now—but after everything was over, he had a lot to seriously consider.

“...Hey,” Aresh said, perhaps sensing Seiichirou was thinking of something else.

“Yes?”

When Seiichirou opened his eyes, he saw purple eyes looking down at him, pupils wide with desire.

Oh, maybe I should do something about that.

Seiichirou tried reaching for Aresh’s midsection with his slightly sluggish hand, but Aresh stopped him.

“Aresh?”

Confused by whether the commander wanted him to proceed, Seiichirou looked back up but found Aresh staring at him with an unexpectedly earnest expression.

“I don’t ever plan on letting anyone else take care of you.”

Seiichirou needed quite a bit of time to understand that statement.

Aresh’s voice replayed over and over inside his head, as Seiichirou was turning the words over in his mind. He looked up again at the man holding him.

“...No,” Seiichirou said. “No, no, no, no! You’re saying that now?!”

He had been aware of Aresh’s feelings.

If he didn’t have feelings for Seiichirou, he probably would not have touched the run-down man as much as he had. Seiichirou would have been crazy not to notice, with how excessively the commander had looked after him.



Currently, however, without Aresh's protection—without his barrier spells and healing magic—Seiichirou couldn't survive. Moreover, he had to continue working toward the miasma purification mission, but all paths where Seiichirou lived on his own led to death: The miasma would immediately kill him, and even without that in the picture, the magicules in the air would weaken him until he died. If Seiichirou were to take medicine, it would poison him to death, and even if this poisoning was cured with magic, the magic-sickness afterward would kill him.

Without Aresh by his side, he would die in no time at all.

Seiichirou knew he had been taking advantage of Aresh's feelings for him, but managing the miasma damage had been his first priority. Seiichirou had assumed he would figure out what to do about Aresh once everything had settled down...

"Well, I just said it," the commander said arrogantly.

Aresh was eight years Seiichirou's junior. With his hair down, his face radiated sex appeal.

"Look, regardless," Seiichirou argued, "if I don't acclimatize myself to your magical energy, my constitution would be at risk even in the best circumstances, and I'm going to have to go to the source of the miasma in the future."

It wasn't exactly right to say the two men had been on equal footing originally, but now Seiichirou couldn't help feeling as though his life was almost being used as a pretext for their arrangement.

"That's true. So you can't be apart from me, right?"

"No, I'm saying that sort of arrangement, on a humane level, would just be..."

"So this arrangement would be the most efficient, right?" Aresh replied unflinchingly, as if it was the most natural solution.

"!"

Seiichirou gazed at him in wonder.

"Indeed!"

Aresh was right. Seiichirou couldn't be apart from him for a while because of his work, and this skin-to-skin contact *was* necessary.

This much was true even if Seiichirou had no intention of reciprocating Aresh's feelings.

"Since you won't be leaving my side, wouldn't it better to be transparent about my intentions? By clarifying it, my actions would be easier to understand."

"Y...you have a point! But wait, haven't you considered that this would make me feel awkward or fester animosity toward you?"

"You won't. I can tell just by looking at you. You seek clarity over ambiguity—and above all else, efficiency. You seek results more than the impact of someone else's actions."

Seiichirou was at a loss for words by this analysis, deeply impressed by Aresh's intelligence.

It was true that he was an efficiency freak to the extreme. It was why he was rather careless about the *process* part of doing things. He just wanted to obtain the most results he could in the shortest amount of time. As Aresh had pointed out once before, if you did a job in your department that only you knew how to do, it made sense from a long-term perspective to train a successor.

Seiichirou, however, had prioritized two tasks at work: rapidly learning and reorganizing the royal palace's finances, and bringing the miasma purification to a resolution. He had concluded it would just be faster if he did everything himself. Whether that had been the *best* course of action was irrelevant. He had wanted immediate results, and he was pleased with himself.

When Seiichirou had learned about magicule resistance and magic-sickness, too, he really *should* have consulted a doctor to combat it somehow. He didn't have any health-related protections from the kingdom, but he could have asked Ciro and figured something out. The reason he hadn't done these things was simply because Aresh's treatment took the least amount of time and was the least disruptive for his work. The situation Seiichirou found himself in now was just the result of those decisions.

“Either way, Seiichirou, I know you can’t give me an answer now, so I’m going to take advantage of that. This is the most efficient path, after all.”

Seiichirou had only ever seen Aresh looking either cold or unexpectedly childlike, but the confident smile on his handsome face now was stunning enough to immediately charm any woman.

Σ Σ Σ

Two days after the party had returned from the first purification expedition, Seiichirou was summoned to the royal audience chamber.

The king, Prince Yurius, and Yua were positioned directly in front. Prime Minister Camile, several aristocrats Seiichirou had never seen before, Commander Radim, and Commander Aresh were one step below the royal family. As Seiichirou knelt, he saw other nobles and managers lined up on either side of him, including Zoltan and Ist.

“Raise your head,” came Camile’s voice.

Seiichirou looked up.

It was his first time seeing the king so close. Unlike the silver-haired Yurius, the king had golden-blond hair. He also appeared a bit older than Camile. Seiichirou suddenly remembered that this man was also Norbert’s biological father.

“First, thank you for your work during the expedition.”

At these words of gratitude from the king, the surrounding nobles broke out into a quiet murmur, but the king ignored this and continued.

“I heard that, during this trip, you took another step to combat the miasma, separate from the purification.”

Their expedition had been carried out for the Holy Maiden’s purification. Seiichirou knew that his actions, which he had undertaken without the royal family’s knowledge beforehand, ought to be condemned. However...

“Before you returned, I received a report from Viscount Blanc.”

“What?!”

Yurius's eyes bulged at these words.

Viscount Blanc was Norbert's adoptive father.

"May I have your permission to speak?" Seiichirou asked the king.

"I will permit it," he replied.

Seiichirou knelt before he began.

"I know Viscount Blanc through his son, who is employed at the Accounting Department. He instructed me to experiment with a permanent strategy to combat the miasma for the benefit of the kingdom and, by extension, the royal family."

The viscount was a man to whom the king had entrusted his own son, albeit an illegitimate child. Even if his status wasn't perfectly suitable for the plan, Viscount Blanc was clearly someone the king trusted.

The story was that Viscount Blanc had acted with pure intentions for the royal family, and Seiichirou had merely assisted him in his endeavor. Seiichirou couldn't have asked Camile or Aresh—their status was too high, and they were burdened with the practical business side of the government, so the kingdom's political power would have been thrown off-balance. Moreover, the viscount's adopted son, Norbert, was Seiichirou's direct subordinate. He would have been crazy not to use him.

"I went to His Excellency for advice, and in an effort to avoid making Your Majesty meaninglessly concerned, I didn't send any word until after the experiment was successful. For this, I am truly sorry."

Seiichirou did not forget to mention that he had received approval from the prime minister for his actions. It had been too large a venture to have acted on the viscount's say-so alone.

"As I laid out in my report, we are currently temporarily preventing the further spread of the miasma. Depending on how long the barrier lasts, if we regularly send people who can perform the barrier spell, I believe we can resolve the issue of the miasma damage."

The nobles standing in line immediately spewed objections.

“What an audacious thing to do!”

“We already have the Holy Maiden!”

“There’s no need for such a wasteful enterprise!”

The complaints poured in one after the other, but Seiichirou’s expression did not change.

“Silence! You are in the presence of the king!”

Camile’s voice quieted the nobles, and Seiichirou gave the royal chamberlains a signal with his eyes. They started handing out documents he had given them in advance.

“What’s this...?”

“The estimated total expenses for the fifty-year period after summoning a holy maiden, compared with the estimated total cost of sealing the barrier.”

The numbers included the costs of the recent Holy Maiden Summoning ritual; the wages of the enormously powerful magicians who had been employed; the cost of living for the Holy Maiden for the next fifty years, derived from the money that had been spent until now; and the subsidies for Seiichirou, the man they had dragged into this world. He also included three times the cost of their recent expedition.

In contrast, the other budget included the labor cost to seal up the barrier; the expedition expenses for the forecasted period of time; construction expenses for a building for the permanent warden; maintenance fees for the next fifty years; and the warden’s salary.

Even in Seiichirou’s most conservative estimates, the difference in the budgets was a magnitude of at least five times.

“As for the maintenance of the barrier, we’re still in the experimental stage, but it’s been three days, and there have been no reports of it crumbling.”

Seiichirou had even calculated a little extra on the barrier strategy side of the equation, and the difference had still been enormous.

“The Holy Maiden Summoning only cost this much this time because the reference literature had been lost,” one aristocrat argued.

“You were never supposed to come in the first place. Don’t go including your subsidy in these calculations!”

The nobles certainly had many opinions, but even if Seiichirou removed those factors, the former plan was still more expensive. Most of the nobles, however, kept silent when clearly presented with the figures.

“The Holy Maiden is a national treasure! You should feel ashamed of yourself, denigrating her with these financial calculations!”

Seiichirou narrowed his eyes at the vilification coming from the platform.

“That’s right! What do you know about Her Holiness?!” Yurius spat.

Aristocrats with strong ties to the church also added their voices to the fray.

“Our kingdom does not exist without the Holy Maiden!”

“He’s just a weak otherworlder trying to cast a shadow on the authority of the Holy Maiden!”

They all felt as though having one was advantageous to the kingdom. Although Seiichirou thought that Yurius alone might have had slightly different motivations in mind.

This role binds the woman for her entire life. It should be abolished!

The king’s expression never wavered. Like Seiichirou, Camile had narrowed his eyes. A line had appeared between Aresh’s eyebrows. Seiichirou felt like he would explode unless he said something, but just before he could open his mouth, another voice rang out.

“I want to go home!” cried a lovely voice that sounded incongruous with the scene.

According to the literature in the custody of the kingdom, the legend of the Holy Maiden first began seven hundred years ago.

There was chronic damage from the miasma in those times, until one day a woman claiming to be an “emissary of God” appeared and completely purified the miasma.

The reigning king appointed that woman as his first queen consort, and the

masses revered her as a holy maiden.

Several decades after she died, miasma started to cause damage once more. A member of the royal family, with her blood running through their veins, received a revelation that the next holy maiden was a nun from a remote region of the kingdom.

Ever since then, the miasma would reappear in a cycle of roughly every one hundred years, and a blood descendant of the previous Holy Maiden would have a revelation revealing the next one's location.

It was said that all the Holy Maidens had pure hearts, were deeply affected by the masses who suffered from the miasma damage, and devoted their entire lives to helping others.

And now the current, seventh-generation Holy Maiden, a high school student from another world named Yua Shiraishi, had stepped out onto the red carpet of the royal audience chamber in front of the kingdom's leaders and most influential voices, her legs trembling.

"I—I will work very hard on the purification! But after that's finished, there's nothing else for me to do, right? Please send me back to my former world!"

Everyone immediately broke out murmuring, except for Seiichirou, who stealthily put a hand over his mouth to hide it.

"What are you talking about, Yua? You are honored—our only Holy Maiden. Even after the purification is complete, this kingdom will devote everything to cherishing you," Yurius explained with a sincere smile.

Yua's face, however, turned white instead of red.

Truthfully, even Yua herself had imagined this life of hers in this world would continue on forever. But that had been because she had long felt as though she were in a dream, that this world was simply not real. Her life had been one without any inconvenience. She had been given opulent and rare items she had never seen before. A beautiful prince had whispered sweet nothings to her, and knights and maids had served her.

But then she went on the purification expedition and saw the world.

Seiichirou's warning had brought her back to her senses, and she realized the danger of the position she was in.

She had no family in this world to love and protect her unconditionally. There were no friends whom she could talk to with a mutual and equal respect. She had no idea how much her common sense and thinking could really be understood here. Even if the purification was completed successfully, then what? Afterward, what would she do? What would she be *forced* to do? How would she live? Yua felt terrified by these uncertainties.

"Wh-why? I was summoned here to purify the miasma, wasn't I? After that's done, you have no more use for me, right?"

"That's not true. The sheer presence of the Holy Maiden brings prosperity to our kingdom."

Yurius and the other nobles kept saying kind things to Yua—that her existence alone was enough, that she was necessary... None of them realized this was what Yua was afraid of.

Because none of them had asked her even once how she felt.

Through a gap in the crowd, Yua eyed Seiichirou desperately. He was the only person from her world, the sole person who would understand how she was feeling. This exhausted man was an old corporate slave, but she had no one else she could turn to right now.

"K-Kondou...!"

At the sound of Yua's tearful voice, for a brief moment, Seiichirou softened his emotionless eyes and smiled.

"As I mentioned earlier, I believe the role of the Holy Maiden will no longer be necessary in the future."

Yua's eyes lit up, but Yurius scowled in displeasure.

"However..." Seiichirou added slowly, "there is currently no way for us to return to our former world."

"N-no... No! Dad! Mom! I miss my brother!! Send me back! Send me back home...!!" Yua sobbed, cowering on the floor in despair.

“Y-Yua...,” the prince said.

“Your Holiness, this world needs a holy maiden!” one of the nobles added, both of them bewildered.

Keeping one eye on the scene, Seiichirou instructed the chamberlains to prepare the next document.

“The next document will now be distributed.”

“What?!”

“Wh-what are you talking about?!”

“That’s right! It’s your fault Her Holiness is in a panic!”

Seiichirou’s words had probably been the trigger for her emotions, but that didn’t mean he intended to let the blame fall on him.

They seemed to have misunderstood something. Neither Seiichirou nor Yua had received any so-called revelation from God, nor did they have any intention of answering the call. Seiichirou, for one, had simply been physically dragged into this world by Yua.

They had been taken to another world, without their consent, and with nothing but the shirts on their backs.

In Seiichirou’s world, that was called abduction.

“As I mentioned before, there is no way to be sent back with the parallel world-summoning spell,” Seiichirou explained. “This spell hasn’t always existed, either. It was developed through advances in magical technology.”

“...What?”

He then looked over to where the royal sorcerers were sitting. Throwing all manners out the window, Ist trotted up to him, eyes shining. “You’re in the presence of the king!” Zoltan groaned, chasing after him as fast as his legs could carry him. Seiichirou appreciated his efforts.

“Right! With the parallel world-summoning spell, by relying on the magic of the Holy Maiden who has received the divine revelation, we can connect a path to the other world and summon her here almost flawlessly! But if we send her

home, even though we have coordinates from when we summoned her, there's a chance a dimensional distortion might send her flying to another world on accident, and we can't just, like, pool our magic together in a magic circle to catch her, you know."

"Ist! You need to watch your language...!"

Ist had been steadily losing his breath and sense of formality the longer he spoke. Zoltan had put a stop to it, his face pale, but nearly everyone in the chamber thought at the same time, *That's not the issue*.

"Oh!" Zoltan added. "Rest assured, ladies and gentlemen, everything Ist just spoke about will be summarized on a document that will be handed out later."

That's not the issue, either, thought the nobles.

"Well, as you can see on the papers that have just been distributed to you," Seiichirou interjected, proceeding smoothly in a businesslike manner, "the Royal Sorcery Department will be undertaking research for the purpose of sending the two otherworlders, including Her Holiness, back to their former world. The estimated costs for this have been calculated on page three of the document. Along with this, we are proposing an expansion of the Royal Sorcery Department, including personnel to fulfill the role of the miasma warden."

The royal audience chamber had been reduced to a conference room.

It probably would have been better for Seiichirou to lay out his proposal and hold a meeting at a later date, but he took advantage of the fact that the most powerful person in the kingdom—the king—and other powerful aristocrats were all gathered in the same room. Even Yua, the Holy Maiden, was there. This certainly saved Seiichirou all sorts of trouble, and as they couldn't stop him, he seized the chance to quickly give his spiel.

"Y-you dare meddle in the personnel affairs of the royal palace...?" interrupted one of the nobles.

Prime Minister Camile, however, immediately covered for Seiichirou.

"Yes, I received that proposal beforehand and have given my approval."

"Using the Royal Sorcery Department for spells? We have the Third Royal

Order, don't we?! How dare you slight them like this..."

"The Third Royal Order does not focus on research, but on fighting magical beasts. We are not researchers; we are knights. We go out on expeditions, too, so we can't devote much manpower to monitoring the miasma."

Commander Aresh had immediately brushed aside the objection that might have been uttered to curry favor with the Third Royal Order or the sons of the other aristocrats, including Aresh himself.

Seiichirou glanced up and accidentally met eyes with Aresh, whose expression seemed to say "See? I am useful, aren't I?" Seiichirou pretended like he hadn't seen him. On the outside, he might have looked like a cat or a large, feline beast, but on the inside, he was surprisingly more like a dog.

"You're just a normal schmuck who grabbed the Holy Maiden of your own accord! Your life here has been guaranteed, and you still want more?!"

"With all due respect, I was forcefully brought here without any say in the matter, but even setting that aside, I am not compelling anyone to use the kingdom's vast funds to send me back safely. I am proposing that we establish a new system whereby future Holy Maiden Summoning rituals won't have to take place, and the funds saved can be used to advance magical research. It will also be possible to effectively utilize this proposal in other areas as well, so there shouldn't be any disadvantages whatsoever... Isn't that right, Director Zoltan?"

"Y-yes. If we can stabilize the dimension and establish a safe landing point at the coordinates, our research on movement spells will progress by leaps and bounds."

"Yes! That's right! Movement spells!" Ist chirped. "Until now, they've required preparing a magic circle and having a spellcaster at the destination, and it couldn't be used to move living creatures, but if we can use a summon-return technique, we should be able to perform it easily! In other words—"

"Director Zoltan, could you take Ist away for a moment?"

"Of course."

"Ngh—"

He wrapped a cloth around Ist's mouth, and although Ist tried to continue talking, Zoltan dragged him back to their seats.

"...In other words, you're proposing that our kingdom give up the legend of the Holy Maiden in exchange for acquiring advanced magical technology?" the king asked.

The king had been sitting quietly until then, and despite being rattled, Seiichirou straightened his posture and knelt.

"It is exactly as you describe. Technological innovation and progress, and the personnel training that comes along with it, will help this kingdom grow. Moreover, the funds for this proposal can be covered with the previous miasma strategy budget, so I don't believe the kingdom will suffer any losses."

"Hmm..."

"W-wait, Kondou! What...what should I do until then...?"

Only the Holy Maiden would be allowed to speak while everyone else was waiting for the king's response. Yua, who seemed to be done crying, came running down the platform.

Even she knew the spell to send her back—if such a thing was even possible—would not be completed anytime soon. That was why Seiichirou had proposed this plan. With the Holy Maiden here, they could carry out research with a grace period.

"I think it would be best for you to stay in the royal palace until the purification is complete, Shiraishi."

Seiichirou had considered her expedition preparations, her health management, and exhaustion post-purification, and concluded that this was probably the best course of action.

"And after...after that is complete...what should I do?"

Seiichirou understood that Yua didn't want to stay at the royal palace, but he didn't have the right to make that decision.

"...What would you like to do, Shiraishi?"

"I... I'd like to leave the royal palace. But I can't just receive money for

nothing... If I could, I'd like to work where you do, Kondou."

"Oh, come on..."

"Huh?"

"No—I just mean, with your power as a holy maiden...shouldn't you work somewhere you can make the best use of your skills? Like a healing center or a church?"

Working with a high school girl who had grown up spoiled and never had a job before? Seiichirou desperately hoped it was a joke. Moreover, inside the royal palace, everyone would just see her as the Holy Maiden. Seiichirou could only imagine a future in which his work was constantly delayed, so he had politely tried to guide her down another path.

"Y...Yua... Why do you want to leave the royal palace?" Yurius asked, looking at her like a puppy she had abandoned. "You're the Holy Maiden... Even if you will one day go home, that won't change the great deeds you've accomplished in your role. It's only right that the kingdom offers protection and patronage to the Holy Maiden, so why don't you continue to stay here?"

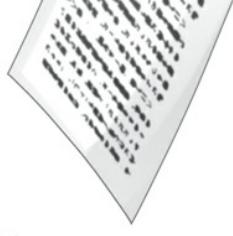
Seiichirou was sure there was a vague hint of love mingled with his religious faith in the Holy Maiden and his knowledge of her political utility, but he wished Yurius would do that bargaining somewhere else—somewhere private.

"Yurius... After the purification, I'd like to leave the royal palace for a bit and think some things over. Thank you so much for all the kindness you've shown me. I will return all the accessories and dresses you've given me."

I wish you'd sell them off to use as your living expenses or hand them over to the treasury...

But Seiichirou understood this was probably Yua's own way of expressing her decision.

He sensed the hint of finality ringing in the air and held his tongue about the dresses. Apparently Seiichirou's thoughts were written all over his face because, out of the corner of his eye, he saw Camile suppress a grin.



Epilogue



“Is this okay, mister?”

Seiichirou nodded, looking satisfied. In his hand was a wooden abacus the young boy had completed after much trial and error.

“Perfect execution. Here’s your payment.”

“Th-this much?! Really?!”

Seiichirou had spoken to the boy several times since they had first met at this stall, and he had asked him to develop a new product.

The boy’s name was Sigma, and he was twelve years old.

Sigma lived with his mother and younger sister. His father was a woodworker, and under his tutelage, Sigma was allowed to study the trade. At the same time, Sigma made original and practice tools to help with the family finances.

Sigma was a bit of a groveler, but he was also ambitious and intelligent. He had made the tool that had resembled an abacus to help with counting as calculating money at his stall had taken too much time and effort.

Without a deep knowledge of numbers, Sigma probably never would have been struck with the idea for the device. Seiichirou wanted a kid like this in the Accounting Department, but it was difficult for a commoner to become a civil official in the royal palace. Sigma also already had his sights set on becoming a craftsman, so Seiichirou opted to keep doing business with him without mentioning anything unnecessary.

“That includes the development costs.”

“Hmm... Well, I’ll take it. So you want me to make five more of these, right?”

“Correct. I’ll buy them for eight hundred rula apiece.”

“For real?! Oh, and when should I have them done by?”

“Let’s see... Our next expedition is in three days, so...if you could have them done in ten days, that would be a great help.”

“That won’t be a problem at all! See you in ten days, then!”

“Yeah. Thanks, kid.”

“Seiii!”

Just as Seiichirou left the street vendors and returned to the main street, he noticed a flippant young man running up to him from behind. He stopped and looked back.

“What’s the deal, man?! I look away for one second, and you disappear!”

“I didn’t intend for us to shop together.”

“But you literally said, ‘*Let’s go shopping together!*’”

It was their day off from work. Norbert had invited him out shopping, and Seiichirou had happened to have an errand to run, so they had gone into town. Seiichirou didn’t think he needed to be monitored anymore, but this silly man was still following him everywhere.

“That was a joke. I just went to get this. Look.”

Seiichirou handed him the abacus he had just received.

“Huh? This is that mysterious thing you use... Wait... This one’s lighter, isn’t it?”

“This is its true shape. It’s a type of calculator from my world. I’m giving it to you.”

“What?! Why?!”

Norbert’s surprise was staggering. Seiichirou wondered if his colleague had assumed he was a money-grubber or something.

“You can calculate things faster with this. I’ll teach you how to use it, so make sure you commit it to memory.”

“Whaaaat? So it *is* work-related, after all...”

Norbert was disappointed, but Seiichirou thought it was a joyous thing—Norbert would be able to do his calculations more quickly.

Seiichirou’s workload was rapidly increasing, and he no longer had the time to check the Accounting Department’s calculations. Aresh had been right—Seiichirou needed to train successors to keep the department functioning well.

“Oh, I just remembered! My dad is being elevated from viscount to count

because of your plan."

Seiichirou's strategy proposal regarding the miasma had been given on the orders of Norbert's adoptive father, Viscount Blanc. The kingdom likely had no choice but to praise his meritorious deed.

"Hee-hee, so that makes me the son of a count! With his connections, I'm gonna shoot up the ranks in no time!"

Seiichirou was slightly confused (Norbert was a royal anyway, so what was he boasting about?), but he returned the smile.

"You, my superior? I look forward to that."

For some reason, this made Norbert go pale and apologize.

After that assembly, Yua continued to live in the royal palace, but she went to the church during the day.

It had been decided that the church would look after her after the purification was complete, for several reasons.

They had provided a lot of support for the Holy Maiden Summoning ritual; the current bishop of the royal capital, though young, was said to be a man of great integrity; and Camile endorsed this plan.

But apparently there was some dissatisfaction with how the royal palace had monopolized the Holy Maiden until then. Even so, she wasn't going to be confined to the church from the beginning—she would be traveling back and forth between the two, and through this, Yua would be able to see both environments, so as to not be overly influenced by either one.

Even the nagging aristocrats eventually yielded when presented with the clear ranking of expenses, the sight of the poor girl crying and screaming, and the king's order.

The most pressing issue, however, was that the purification was yet to be finished. If the Holy Maiden were to be displeased or offended now, everything would fall apart.

They needed to realize Seiichirou's miasma warden plan before that happened. For the next expedition, they were to travel with construction

personnel and a warden candidate. They would also have to speak with the people in the neighboring villages. Seiichirou had put together the schedule after taking account of the possibility that it might take quite a while to carry out the plan.

Seiichirou started heading home, thinking about the things he had to do next.

Aresh was busy, too, and although he also had the day off work, he had some business to attend to, so he had told Seiichirou what to eat. The types of foods Seiichirou could consume had increased dramatically.

I guess he'll have to reapply the barrier before our expedition. Does that mean he'll spend the night in the residence hall again...?

He wished Aresh would refrain from doing so because of all the onlookers, but Seiichirou also had work to do, so staying in an inn the night before the journey would just be a hassle.

Was there no better alternative? As Seiichirou considered this, he entered the residence hall (today there were very few civil officials milling about), greeted the caretaker Dusan, and headed to his room.

“Oh, oh, Sei! Wait a second... Come to my room and teach me how to use this thing!!” Norbert called, frantically running after him.

Seiichirou, who was carrying shopping bags, shook his head.

“Later,” he answered, climbing up the stairs. He turned down the hall to his room.

“Ah...!”

“...What?”

Well, this explains where all the civil officials were.

There was a crowd of them, along with people Seiichirou didn't recognize.

Assuming there had been some sort of a disturbance, he tried cutting through the crowd to take refuge in his room, but just then, the civil officials who noticed him made a face of surprise and moved out of the way, making a path for him.

“...Huh?”

The place the crowd of people were moving away from was unmistakably Seiichirou’s own room, except the few personal belongings he owned had been removed. The room had been restored to the empty state it had been in when Seiichirou had first arrived.

“Huh? What...huh? Where’s my pen? Where are my work papers?”

Seiichirou looked around, overwhelmed with shock. The crowd of people behind him parted again, but he didn’t notice.

“That’s the first thing you look for?”

Seiichirou spun around at the low yet carrying, familiar, beautiful voice. Just as he thought, the commander of the Third Royal Order, who had said he had business to attend to today, was casually standing behind him.

“Oh... Aresh... What on earth is this?”

With the timing of his appearance, Seiichirou couldn’t help but think that he was involved.

Noticing Seiichirou’s unusually blank expression, Aresh squinted his eyes contentedly and broke out in a beautiful smile.

“I bought a house. You’re moving in, too.”

“Wh-what?!”

Seiichirou thought it was great that Aresh bought a house. He had been living at his family’s home and had a high salary, so Seiichirou thought he should do whatever he wanted with it. But how did that translate into Seiichirou living with him?

Aresh responded to his question with his typical cool, expressionless mask... But when Seiichirou looked at his face a little more closely, he noticed the man was in a very good mood. The commander replied as if the answer was obvious.

“It’s simple. You need me to manage you, and if I lose sight of you, your life will be in jeopardy. If we live together, that won’t be a concern anymore.”

“But that doesn’t mean...”

The relationship between them had changed slightly since Aresh had spent the night at the residence hall and forced Seiichirou into riding horseback with him during the expedition, but it hadn't gotten to the point where they should be suddenly cohabitating. Things were progressing much too quickly.

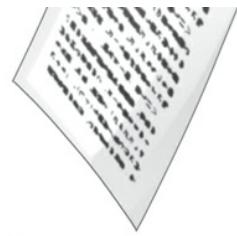
Moreover, Aresh had purchased a house without telling him and had even used Norbert to drive Seiichirou out, then forcefully moved his belongings. The way he went about this was too high-handed!

“But this way is more *efficient*, isn’t it?”

This man, eight years younger than Seiichirou, smiled at him, brimming with confidence. Seiichirou repressed the complex feelings swirling inside him and glared reproachfully.

“Don’t think I’ll listen to you just because you used that word!”

For now, at least, there seemed to be no need to think about *where* exactly the barrier would be reapplied before the expedition.



After the Epilogue...



Arech took Seiichirou to an area commonly referred to as the nobles' neighborhood, which was in the opposite direction of Seiichirou's residence hall.

Unlike in town, where the young boy Sigma worked at his street stall, the road was well maintained, without a single piece of garbage on the ground, and it led to a small estate. Despite the descriptor *small*, the building would have been considered a stately mansion in modern Japan. Judging from the windows, it was probably a two-story house, but the size of the roof suggested either a third floor or a large attic.

The redbrick walls of the first floor contrasted with the white of the second floor, and the ornate window frames and black roof helped give the building a simple design and kept it from looking too cutesy. To Seiichirou, a Japanese man who had only ever lived in apartment complexes and was totally unfamiliar with grand estates, it looked more like a hotel or a boardinghouse than a private residence.

There were even trimmed trees and flowers planted in the garden, adding flair and color to the estate.

This place definitely has a gardener...

As Seiichirou made his way through the gate, he looked at the grounds, experiencing another wave of dizziness at how different the culture was among the nobles in this world.

“Welcome home, Master.”

Seiichirou's sense of foreboding proved to be accurate—a woman in a stereotypical maid outfit and an older man wearing a black tailcoat greeted him with bows.

I knew it.

I totally knew it.

“It's wonderful to meet you, Mr. Kondo. My name is Valtom, and I will be managing this estate. I'm pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“I'm pleased to meet you as well, Mr. Kondo. My name is Milan, and I'm the

housemaid. I will be taking care of you, too, and I look forward to serving you."

Then the gray-haired, roughly sixty-year-old man and the graceful woman who looked to be around fifty leaned forward again and gave perfect bows.

"...Right. I'm Seiichirou Kondou. It's nice to meet you."

Unable to simply ignore them, all Seiichirou could muster was a businesslike response with emotionless eyes.

"I shall introduce you to the chef during dinner," Valtom continued. "We do have a regular gardener who comes once every six days, but Milan here takes care of the garden on a day-to-day basis. Please let us know if there is ever anything you need."

"...Right."

It was just as he had suspected—there was a chef and a gardener, too.

When Seiichirou had first heard that Aresh had bought a house and would be living on his own (although in reality, Seiichirou was being forced to live with him), he suspected this might end up being the case, and his hunch had proven to be correct.

Sons of aristocrats always had caretakers—there was no way they could ever live on their own!

It was just a part of aristocratic society, and Aresh had the money for it. Above all else, Seiichirou couldn't imagine the commander preparing his own meals or doing his own laundry or cleaning. Aresh could do what he pleased.

But if Seiichirou was going to live here, too, that was a different story.

Naturally, Seiichirou, who had never had a maid or a butler before, was reluctant to have someone else taking care of him.

"Just think of it like you're staying at an inn or something."

"I can't even imagine such a luxury as living in a hotel, either!"

Aresh took it for granted that he had been taken care of by others since birth—he had made that suggestion so easily.

"Besides, that wouldn't make me feel any better."

“You were fine at the residence hall, weren’t you?”

The residence hall wasn’t all-inclusive; it was just a communal living space. It was more like a dormitory, or better yet, one room in an apartment building. This, however, was different.

“We’re here. This is your room.”

Aresh opened the door to the second floor in an attempt to cut off Seiichirou and prevent him from arguing.

At the top of a wide staircase that led up from the entrance was the second floor, which seemed to be a private space for the residents of the estate—which now meant it was Aresh and Seiichirou’s floor. The servants, Valtom, Milan, and the chef apparently had rooms in the attic. It was called the attic, but it wasn’t shabby, of course. They were proper living quarters.

Seiichirou’s room was even bigger than the one he had been given in the residence hall. There was a solid-looking dresser the same color as the desk, and there was a sofa placed against the wall. It had good natural lighting, too, with sunlight streaming in through the windows. It was adjoined to a bedroom with a large bed and a sideboard. The furniture, walls, light fixtures, and even the small ornaments casually decorating the room were all finely crafted and not too ostentatious in color... All Seiichirou could tell, at any rate, was that they were very fancy.

“What do you think? Do you like it?”

“It’s so fancy I can’t relax.”

“Really? There aren’t any flashy decorations, and I picked a smaller, modest estate because it’ll just be the two of us.”

Does he think this is modest and on the small side because he’s a noble, or is it because he’s from another world...?

“That’s not... Well, I suppose we have a different set of values...,” Seiichirou muttered unintentionally, but he could tell Aresh’s mood immediately soured.

“...I’m sure you don’t care where you are, as long as you can do your work.”

Well, he’s not wrong...

Seiichirou's eyes wandered around the room until they landed on the desk, atop of which lay the pen and documents that had disappeared from his old room. Forgetting about Aresh's malaise, Seiichirou rushed over to them.

He looked over the papers, pretending not to notice the "told you so" look in Aresh's eyes.

At dinner, he was introduced to the chef, Pavel. He was a young man with brown hair and an impressive physique.

The dishes served were all to Seiichirou's liking, and just as he started feeling *déjà vu*, he was told the chef was an apprentice of the proprietor of the restaurant Aresh frequently used as a hideaway.

I see... That makes sense.

The butler, Valtom, had apparently worked at Aresh's family home since Aresh was a child, and when Valtom spoke to him, the words *young sir* often slipped out. Even though Aresh warned him about it, Valtom simply laughed.

Although Aresh went around acting like the master of the house, he seemed to be unable to defy the butler. A sulky and embarrassed look seemed to flash across Aresh's expressionless face. As Seiichirou watched him, thinking these things in secret, a dish made with trimp, one of his least favorite foods, was added to the menu.

The maid, Milan, had returned to work after taking a break to raise her children. She had a son and daughter. Both Valtom and Milan declared that they would devote all their energy to improving Seiichirou's magic tolerance and health.

When Seiichirou was finally alone in his room, he let out a heavy sigh.

The recent developments felt like crashing waves. He had a sense of fatigue that felt similar to his first day in this world.

He knew Aresh was pushy, and understood Aresh was just thinking about his health, but he never expected that they would cohabi—that they would live together.

He had talked to Aresh about rent and living expenses, but as he had

expected, the commander had shot down that idea. Seiichirou managed to get him to agree to accept the subsidy he received from the kingdom, but there was no way that was enough to cover his share.

The second expedition would be coming up in three days, but this had been an unforeseen waste of Seiichirou's time and energy.

Just as Seiichirou was putting together instructions for his subordinates for when he was out on the expedition, he suddenly remembered the day's events had taken place in the residence hall for civil officials.

What would they say to him when he went into work the next day...? Seiichirou felt depressed just thinking about it.

Then there was the owner of the house, who had caused this whole problem in the first place...

"I'm coming in."

"..."

As soon as the words left Aresh's mouth, he had opened the door to Seiichirou's bedroom and walked in. Seiichirou couldn't help narrowing his eyes in disapproval.

But more importantly, what was with that door in the first place?

Seiichirou was partially at fault for not having noticed it, but he had no idea that his bedroom was connected to the next room over.

"What's with that door? It locks, right? Anyway, can't you knock first and wait for a reply before coming in?"

Aresh had apparently taken a bath after dinner. His hair was down, and instead of his usual black clothing, he was wearing light-blue silk loungewear. Despite Seiichirou's questions, which were laced with a hint of reproach, Aresh took the documents out of Seiichirou's hands with his usual air of arrogance.

"It locks, but I have a duplicate key. Anyway, are you dissatisfied with this house?"

"What?"

Well, that's what I just said, Seiichirou thought, but when he looked up at Aresh with a puzzled expression, Aresh for some reason led him straight to the bed.

"If you're dissatisfied with it, tell me. This is my house, but it's also yours, too."

"No, this is your house, Aresh. I'm a freeloader at best..."

The only thing he could contribute financially was a tiny bit of living expenses. He wanted to make that very clear.

Aresh, however, didn't even try to hide his grimace. Perhaps he was more relaxed in his own home, but it was easier for Seiichirou to read his emotions here.

"...What was the place you used to live in like?" Aresh asked, suddenly changing the topic after a few moments of silence.

Seiichirou blinked in surprise. He knew the commander wasn't referring to the residence hall that he had called home until that morning.

"It was just a normal apartment—normal for my country, I mean... It was one room, like in the residence hall. It was like if that room had its own bath, toilet, and kitchen attached."

Seiichirou had lived in that apartment for over eight years since graduating from college and finding a job. It had been in a quiet city two train stops away from his office. It was slightly under two hundred square feet, had wooden floors, and a separate bath and toilet.

Seiichirou had usually just gone home to sleep. He hadn't been particularly dissatisfied with the place, nor had he felt like moving, so he had dragged out his tenancy year after year. Looking back now, however, he felt nostalgic for it.

"What was your parents' house like?"

"Ah..."

Seiichirou wondered what Aresh planned to do after asking that, but as his work documents were still confiscated, he had no choice but to answer in a dispassionate voice.

“My parents lived in a two-story house.”

Beyond clattering glass doors, there was an entryway. After entering the house, there was a door to the living room to the right. To the left was the stairs. Straight ahead was a door to the changing area and the bathroom. If you went up the stairs, you were met with three rooms. Seiichirou’s room had been the one facing south. There was also an area outside—it would be ridiculous to call it a garden—with just enough space to hang laundry and the futons out to dry.

“Surely that’s incredibly small?”

“It was. Even in my world, the country I lived in was considered geographically small, so my house was on the tinier side by global standards.”

Seiichirou’s family home was in the countryside. They hadn’t been particularly well-off, but they hadn’t been poor, either, so he thought his home was rather normal. Apparently, people overseas had sometimes called Japanese houses “rabbit hutches.”

“...So is that your ‘normal’?”

Seiichirou saw Aresh thinking it over and took the opportunity to reach for his documents, but Aresh grabbed his hand easily and turned him around, and he sank into the bed.

“Put your work on hold. There’s something you need to do more urgently than that, isn’t there?”

The expedition was in three days. It was clear Aresh was referring to the barrier.

“But doing it in one night worked well enough last time.”

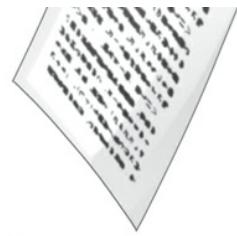
“But if we split the barrier spell over three days, rather than just doing it all at once, don’t you think we can prepare for the expedition while using less of my magical energy?”

There was no trace of the prior uneasiness on Aresh’s grinning face now, and because his features were so beautiful, his uptick in cheekiness only made him look more handsome.

“Please, enough of these logical arguments I can’t refute.”

“I’m just doing what you always do.”

And so Seiichirou, with no room to rebut this, spent the first night of his second move since coming to this world sleeping in Aresh’s arms.



[backstage]

Norbert's Reports



Norbert Blanc and his direct supervisor were just about to get started with work after their lunch break when they were both summoned.

“The...parallel world-summoning spell?”

We had been called to the royal audience chamber. The mild-mannered, timid Helmut was trembling, his face pale. Standing beside him, I had just absentmindedly repeated the words that had been spoken to us.

The king’s entourage, standing in wait by his side, opened their mouths to criticize my behavior, but the king quelled this with just a look and continued, unperturbed.

“That’s right. You know that a holy maiden has purified the miasma in this kingdom for generations, I presume? This generation’s holy maiden lives in another world.”

The king might have thought I knew all this, but the last time a holy maiden was summoned was over a hundred years ago. I had just turned eighteen. It wasn’t really ringing any bells.

I had taken lessons at the academy and been forced to study the kingdom’s history extensively, but the Demon Forest, where the miasma came from, was so far away from the royal capital, and it had last happened so long ago. And now, in the royal audience chamber, this esteemed figurehead was telling me about this fairy-tale-esque “parallel world-summoning spell” with a straight face? I thought I should at least be commended for not bursting out laughing.

But I ignored these feelings of mine, and the king continued.

“I mobilized the brightest minds of this kingdom, and the spell was a success. The Holy Maiden has been summoned. However, an otherworlder we did not expect came with her. We have decided to have him work in your department.”

“What?”

I thought it was totally ridiculous, but apparently after this otherworlder got dragged into our world, they had asked him what he wanted, and he requested a job. It made absolutely no sense. If it were me, I’d never work!

This otherworlder was totally incomprehensible to me, but I was tasked with

monitoring him and told to submit detailed written reports.

It was a huge pain in the butt, but there was nothing I could do about it. That was my purpose for living, so to speak.

I immediately had a room prepared for me in the residence hall where the otherworlder (whom I decided to call Sei because his name was long and kind of difficult to pronounce) would be staying, and I gathered the minimum daily essentials he might need and some clothes and went to visit his room.

He was an older man with black hair, glasses, and lifeless eyes.

I initially thought he might have been overcome with despair after being taken to another world, but I later came to learn that Sei just always looked like that.

Sei was a strange man.

I thought it was odd that the first thing he asked for was books, but he also came to work earlier than everyone else, cleaned the office, and worked more than anyone else, even though no one asked him to.

The fact that he was doing all this when the kingdom was guaranteeing his livelihood was strange on its own.

Even more surprising was that Sei, who had left me behind and promptly went to the royal palace on his first day of work, had been speaking with Commander Aresh Indolark of the Third Royal Order!

I knew exactly what I was going to write for my first report!

Activity Report No. 1

I showed Sei around the residence hall.

The next day, Sei left me behind and headed to work on his own. I hurried after him and saw him talking with Commander Indolark of the Third Royal Order.

Commander Indolark is a commander, of course, but he's also just so formidable that I think I would be too nervous to speak to him, but Sei was talking to him normally without any issue.

I submitted my report, but then at the end of work that day, I was summoned and warned that I “needed to include more detailed information.” *Details... Details, huh...?* I took up my pen, feeling a little hesitant.

Activity Report No. 2

We had the day off today, so I went into town with Sei to go shopping.

I wanted to show him the market first, but Sei said he wanted to buy fresh produce last, which was an oversight on my part.

Oh, and when we were walking through the market, Sei didn’t stick with me, so I had to go looking for him. Sei is very polite when he speaks, but I’ve learned that sometimes he doesn’t really listen to what others say.

He bought a magic pen, paper, a pot, a frying pan, water, and food. It seems like Sei can cook.

This time, I got scolded. “Not those kinds of details! Keep your personal impressions out of it,” they said. And: “What do you think you’re doing, getting outflanked by your target?!”

Ugh... Sei was so quiet anyway, sometimes I wasn’t even sure if he was there... Oh! But the stories he would occasionally tell me about his former world were fascinating. The world he lived in seemed like a really interesting—but terrifying—place.

Activity Report No. 3

When I gave Sei a nutritional tonic, he got super-duper happy.

He said he wanted more of them, so I brought him to the shop that sells the nutritional tonics later that day. It’s a store called Metron in the castle town.

There, we bumped into Commander Indolark and Vice Commander Rhoda.

When I handed my report to the secretary, for some reason, he looked at me with a troubled expression and said, “Please include what you felt in the report as well.” It was the complete opposite of what I had been told last time, but it was easier for me to write that way, so if including my impressions was fine, then that’s what I planned to do.

Activity Report No. 5

Sei, who is very capable at work, was promoted. He became the assistant director of the Accounting Department. Moreover, he was given the title by His Excellency! Being able to witness that firsthand was very exciting. Sei didn't know how to wear the cloak he was given, so he asked me for help. When I was putting it on him, I finally got him to stop speaking so politely and call me by a nickname. Even though he became my superior, I felt like we became closer.

Sei was unusually late today.

As he always came earlier than anyone else, we all wondered if he had taken the day off when he rushed into the office. Sei, who regularly looked tired but was always well-groomed, had come in with disheveled hair.

What's more, he had injured himself somewhere (his lower back, maybe?) and started asking me questions about how one typically apologized after causing trouble for a superior—and the market price for spells. These were seriously wild topics, but then again, Sei never really talked to me about himself much. But all my questions were totally blown away when Commander Indolark came up to talk to me in the dining hall at lunch.

Afterward, apparently Commander Indolark took Sei to the medical office to get examined, and believe it or not, they even had lunch together! I had been 90 percent sure the supervisor Sei had troubled was Commander Indolark, and when I asked him, he said I was right!

I got so excited and told Sei how absolutely amazing it was that he was saved by the Ice Nobleman, who then even took care of him! Then Seiichirou's eyes suddenly looked even more dead than usual... What was up with that?

But what was I to do about the report? I thought it would be fine, but Sei would be in serious danger if Commander Indolark had a change of heart or if the people around him started getting ahead of themselves.

Activity Report No. 7

Sei became very ill in town yesterday, and he said that Commander Indolark saved him. During the lunch break today, Commander Indolark took him to the medical office, then to the dining hall. This was the first time I'd ever seen Commander Indolark take care of another person.

Sei asked me about the proper apology procedure for when you have caused trouble for a superior and about the cost of spells, and it seemed these questions involved Commander Indolark. Commander Indolark didn't seem angry, and with Sei's position, he would be protected by the kingdom, right? Please be lenient with him.

The next day, I was summoned by the Ice Nobleman.

I was super nervous, but he just wanted to talk about Sei's meals. I was shocked when he told me that, as an otherworlder, Sei had no resistance at all to magicules, so if he ate food normally, it would harm his body.

And here I had been by Sei's side the entire time... His pale complexion, his lifeless eyes, how little he ate... They had all been so normal to me that I hadn't realized it at all.

Sei obviously looked unhealthy, but I had just assumed that might have been normal for otherworlders. I resolved to watch him more carefully in the future.

I would start by following Commander Indolark's orders to take Sei to the dining hall during lunch breaks!

Activity Report No. 8

I was summoned by Commander Indolark.

He spoke with me about Sei's meals.

He said that because Sei is from another world, he has no resistance to magicules, so eating normally might cause his body harm.

I decided to pay more attention to what he ate from now on, too.

For now, I've received orders to take Sei down to the dining hall every day during our lunch break.

Activity Report No. 9

I ended up eating lunch with Sei, Commander Indolark, and the Holy Maiden in the dining hall of the royal palace. Sei wouldn't let me leave at all.

With Commander Indolark, the Holy Maiden, and her guards from the Second Royal Order there, I felt super uncomfortable! They were even serving my

favorite, pasivale, but I couldn't go get seconds!

In the middle of lunch, Her Holiness tried to use holy magic on Sei, but Commander Indolark took him away. I think Commander Indolark is really good at taking care of other people.

Oh, and apparently Sei's birthday was last month.

As one might expect, even I was shocked by all the craziness in the dining hall the day before.

I was surprised by the Holy Maiden, but I was also flabbergasted by the knight of the Second Royal Order who scowled whenever anyone spoke to her and never missed a chance to yell at us. I was surprised by Commander Indolark, too, of course.

I had spoken to him a few times before, but it never got any easier. He had such an intimidating air about him—or perhaps the sense that he was an extraordinary person was just too overwhelming. I had no idea how Sei could talk to him so normally.

Oh, but when he spoke with Sei, Commander Indolark seemed pretty easy to talk to... Maybe.

There was a time when I thought that, too.

Activity Report No. 12

Sei got injured. The prime minister found him and carried him to the medical office, and Commander Indolark treated him. Apparently, the injuries were quite serious.

His wounds were taken care of immediately, but I heard that the people who ganged up and beat him, a fragile otherworlder, were knights from the Second and Third Royal Orders. Sei was dragged into this world because of the kingdom's own policies, so the entire kingdom should give him more protection.

One of the prime minister's subordinates informed us that Sei had been taken to the medical office.

Everyone was surprised by the news, but what was more surprising was that

Sei came to work like usual the very next day with the same expression as always.

Even if his injuries had been healed with magic, Sei was seriously incredible.

What's more, he was in a chipper mood, which scared all the other civil officials besides me! Sei himself told me later that he was in such a good mood because he had threatened the Second and Third Royal Orders into giving him compensation, sped up the Holy Maiden expedition, and had received an official proclamation of protection from the kingdom.

That was just what I had expected from Sei. Even if he took a tumble, he wouldn't just get back up for free.

But in contrast to Sei's joy, there was a person whose mood had soured: Commander Indolark.

It had somehow gotten around that Commander Indolark had been looking after the otherworlder, but with this incident, he kept his eyes peeled for anyone who would harm Sei.

Now that things had come this far, people started to think that the commander might not have just been protecting him out of the goodness of his heart or as part of his job, and with the kingdom's proclamation, no one put their hands on Sei or came storming and yelling into the Accounting Department anymore. Things were just as Sei wanted.

Because of this fiasco, the Holy Maiden's purification expedition was pushed up earlier than originally planned. They decided to have a dinner party to motivate everyone participating, and I was called upon to attend, too. I always got invited to these public events, and I usually thought they were a pain, but this time, Sei would be there as well.

Sei was, without exaggeration, a central figure behind the purification expedition.

I told my mom about how I needed to make him shine, and she was super enthusiastic about the idea and sent over my formal clothes, garments for him, and her finest selection of maids who gave beauty treatments.

In formal attire and with the shadows under his eyes gone, Sei looked nothing

like the tired man he usually was—I hardly recognized him.

His eyes, however, looked just as dead as always.

They were going to have my favorite food, pasivale, at the dinner party, too, so I was totally beside myself with excitement. That was why when Sei asked me a question, it sort of slipped out that I was related to the royal family. But then again, I figured it was about time I told him.

And then came Sei's reaction. I remembered how, in the past, people had been surprised, humbled, and apologetic, but Sei told me he was going to lecture me later! He looked furious, too. Sei was really something else! Although, his lectures were frightening.

It did make sense—Sei had been quietly seething at the kingdom that had made no official apology for dragging him into this world. Well, that seemed like a normal reaction. Different worlds had different ways of thinking, but if I went through the same thing, I would have been furious.

As an indirect member of the royal family, I thoroughly apologized, but even though I was a royal, it was just by blood—with my position and circumstances, I had almost nothing to do with the main family—so it wasn't really of any use. It did seem as though Sei understood that, too, though. In any case, I decided to write a few sharp remarks about it in my report.

Activity Report No. 13

I attended the dinner party with Sei. My mother arranged for Sei's formal clothes and things. It took a lot of work getting those dark circles concealed, but I think the maids did a pretty good job.

It was also decided that Sei, who has a weak resistance to magicules, would be participating in the purification expedition. I don't know what kind of screening picked Sei, who works in the Accounting Department, to participate, but I believe our kingdom can ensure the safety and peace of the otherworlder they dragged here.

When Sei randomly told me one day that he wanted to come to my house, I was thrilled. When I thought about it, except for the times I showed Sei around town or to the medicine shop, I hadn't met with Sei anywhere but work. I

contacted my parents immediately, and they readily gave their consent, so on our next day off, we went to my parents' house together by carriage.

Sei probably was just going to talk about his work, but I was happy that he chose my foster father as his partner, and just the fact that he was coming to my house was super exciting. Plus, I was proud of everyone in my family, which made me even more thrilled.

"Oh! There's pasivale! Sweet!"

"Pasivale? Is that what's it's called? This thing that looks like beef stewed in red wine?"

Sei and my father had finished their serious conversation, and from my seat that had been added to the dinner table, I had shouted out of joy. Sei had looked curiously at the dish.

I tended to forget because Sei spoke normally when he was hard at work, but his former world seemed to have different proper nouns for things, so there was a lot he didn't understand.

"That's right! It's a dish where the meat of a huge herbivore named a balog is fried then stewed with vegetables and alcohol. It's my absolute favorite! Oh! But there's alcohol in it, Sei, so you shouldn't have any!"

That was close! If Sei had gotten poisoned here, both his life and mine would have been in danger. My life would have been threatened by a certain commander whose name began with "In."

"But we also have a light dish made with your favorite meat, tsuhash! Please eat as much as you want!" I recommended to Sei, making sure to steer clear of the dishes that Commander Indolark regularly told me not to let him eat.

Sei seemed to really enjoy our chef's cooking.

A round trip to my house took four hours, so I practically forced Sei into staying the night. Since my family was providing our return carriage, he agreed, though reluctantly.

Sei would be embarking on the expedition in two days. He gave me a mountain of work to do in the meantime, but I figured I'd set that aside.

I hope he comes back safely.

Sei returned from the expedition after six days, right on schedule.

But then, before I could even rejoice over his safe return or ask him about the expedition, Sei dove headfirst into work. He also received calls from higher-ups, as if they were pressing him to work even faster.

From what I heard from my foster father later on, because of Sei's groundbreaking plan, the kingdom would be able to suppress the harmful miasma without relying on the Holy Maiden, and he would be receiving a higher peerage title.

That would make Sei, not the Holy Maiden, the savior of the kingdom. Thinking of Sei as a savior was super hilarious.

I thought this would also bring my monitoring of Sei to an end, but I was told to continue submitting my written reports. *Surely you don't need them anymore*, I thought and, in fact, told my adoptive father, but he said, "This is the only way we can have a link to him, so do it." I supposed that sort of thing was fine.

As for me, before I could even congratulate Sei, I was summoned by Commander Indolark.

"I heard that Seiichirou spent the night at your house."

"Huh? Uh... Yes, he did."

Feeling an immense pressure and an incredible chill radiating from Commander Indolark, I just managed to get those words out, but after I did, a wrinkle formed between his eyebrows.

Wh-what's that? Is he angry? Did I anger him?

To me, Commander Indolark wasn't the "incredibly cool and youngest commander," he was "Sei's (slightly fussy) guardian." That meant he was definitely worried that Sei had spent the night at my house!

"It's fine! I got rid of any food that Sei probably couldn't eat, and we only served the safe foods he likes, so he didn't get sick!" I said enthusiastically, but the line between Commander Indolark's eyebrows didn't go away.

“...You were the one who prepared Seiichirou’s clothes for the dinner party, weren’t you?”

“Yes, sir! Because that was Sei’s big night! My foster mother picked out everything, though!”

“You won’t have to do that again.”

“Huh?”

When I looked up at the tall Commander Indolark, his long violet eyes were burning holes into me. The ferocity of his determination was very clear.

“I will be taking care of everything for him. You won’t have to do anything.”

Oh? But I’ve thought something was strange for a while, haven’t I?

Yet I had never imagined that I would be so explicitly scrutinized by this super-handsome, super-impressive commander.

Activity Report No. 15

I realized that Sei is crazy incredible in lots of ways.

Afterword

Thank you very much for picking up this novel, whether you're reading it online or in the form of a physical book. My name is Yatsuki Wakatsu, and I was born on August 8. *Wakatsu* is actually written using the kanji for *eight*.

For their efforts in helping turn this story into a book, I would like to sincerely thank the staff member who first reached out to me, KADOKAWA, and Kikka Ohashi, the artist who drew so many beautiful illustrations for this work.

I never even dreamed of turning this into a book, so thankfully, when my readers told me they wanted to read this story in print, I thought, *Well, I guess I'll self-publish a small number of copies*. So I was really shocked when I was approached with the talk of making it happen, and the boorish thought of *I'll save money on printing costs...!* flashed through my mind. That wasn't very realistic...because now I understand they can also handle the online order processing for me. I will probably be able to rest in peace now, knowing that my corporate-slave experience was of some use.

Thinking back on it, I found out about web novels completely by chance, and as I read more and more of them, I wanted to read more of the ones I liked! *In that case, I thought, wouldn't it be faster to write them myself?!* It's been two and a half years since I started doing that. Then I began wondering if it would be okay if I incorporated BL elements into my stories when a reader told me on social media, "There's a page just for BL!" So this story was born as a result of me writing however I wanted.

I feel like the romance is too subtle for it to be called BL, but there seems to

be more people with a liking for subtle crushes than I thought. As someone fully aware that I have some obscure preferences, I would love to give everyone who says they enjoy this story a handshake. I'd love to go to a hot spring resort or something and have our own "If you're too detailed, they won't get it: Crush Contest" where we can talk to each other about the fictional pairings we're obsessed with.

This story isn't about someone who is transported to another world where they're extremely overpowered. The main character is truly just an ordinary guy who is so weak that the air in the other world doesn't agree with his body and nearly kills him. The mental resolve of this protagonist, however, is made from metal alloy, so you can smile and read without worrying about a tragic hero.

A lot of the supporting characters are a little strange, and yet our protagonist is the strangest of them all, so I'm very sorry that the outrageously good-looking Aresh did not have much of a presence.

For the bonus content at the end, I wrote a retrospective narrative of the whole story from Norbert's viewpoint. He's one of my favorite characters, as well as my editor's.

Last but certainly not least, Ohashi's illustrations of Norbert were spot-on. When I got the rough character sketches, I screamed, "Th-this is it!!" Of course, the protagonist Seiichirou had nice lifeless eyes, and Ohashi drew Aresh with such sharp, beautiful features. Thank you so much for bringing them to life.

It looks like Seiichirou is going to continue to plow headfirst into work, but I think Aresh will always be there by his side, keeping a watchful eye on his health and surroundings.

I hope there will be more *isekai* BL works in the future, and in closing, I'll say this: Thank you so much to everyone who has contributed to the publication and launch of this book.

Respectfully yours, Yatsuki Wakatsu

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