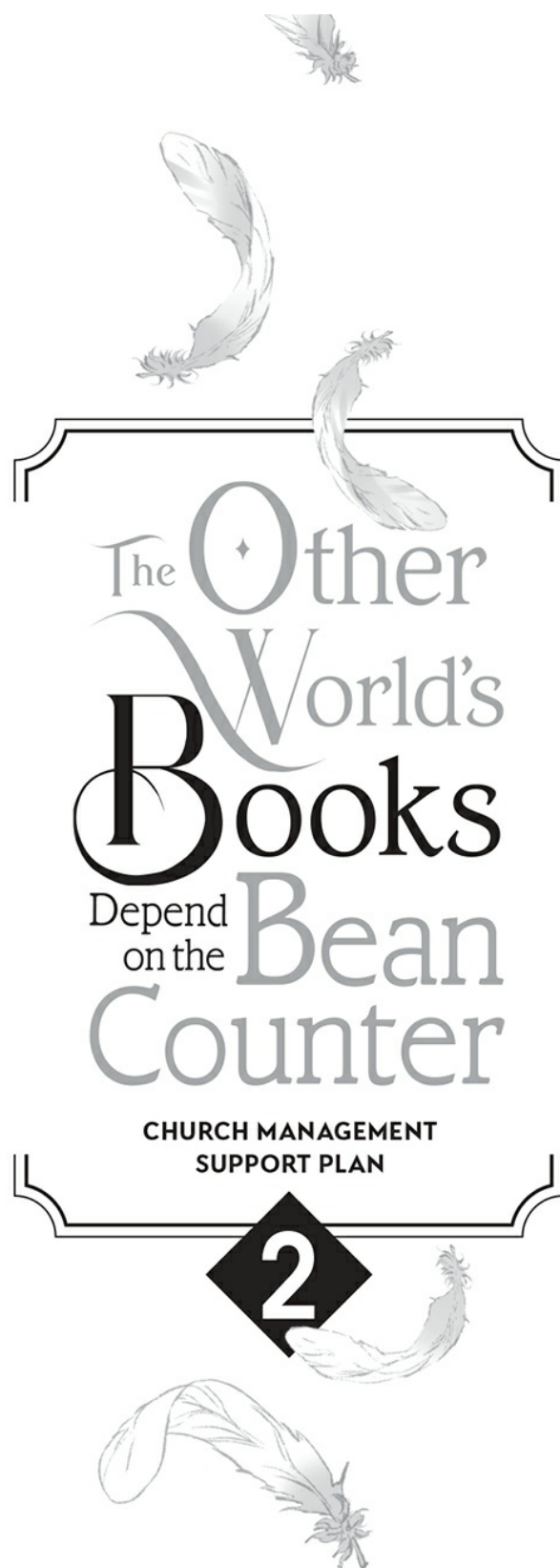




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The
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CHURCH MANAGEMENT
SUPPORT PLAN

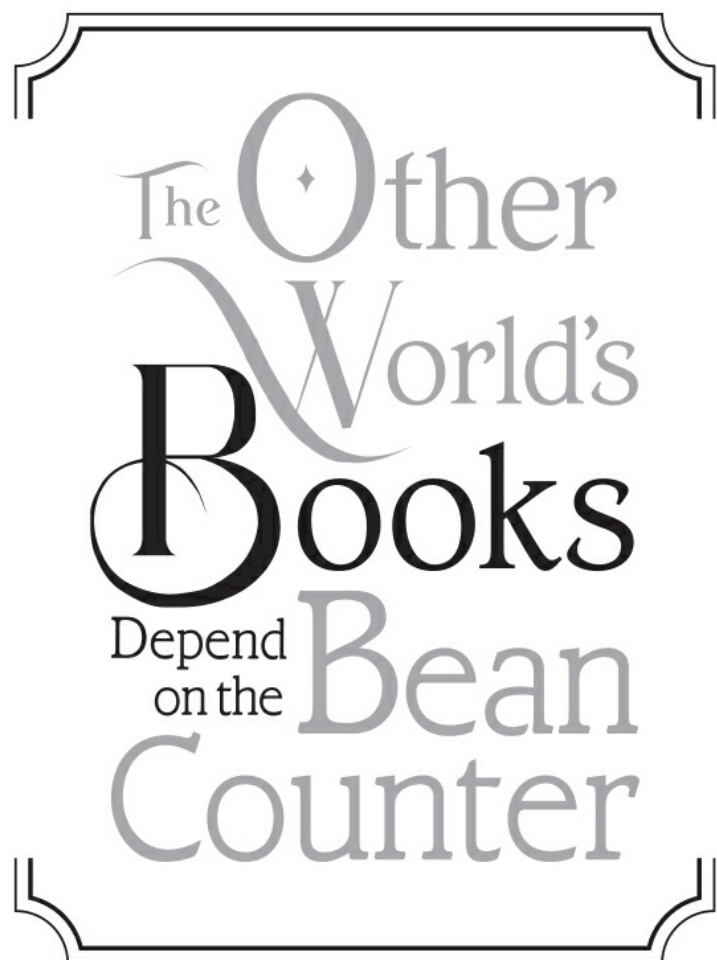


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ISEKAI NO SATA WA SHACHIKU SHIDAI Vol. 2

KYOKAI UNEI SHIEN KEIKAKU

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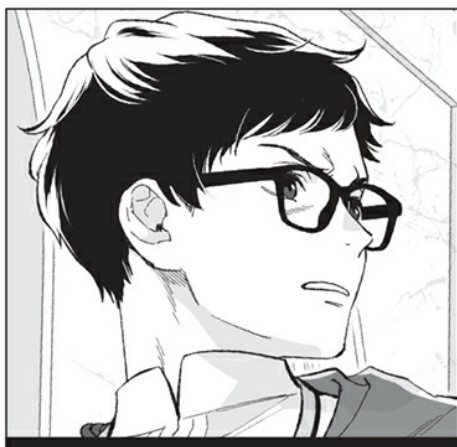
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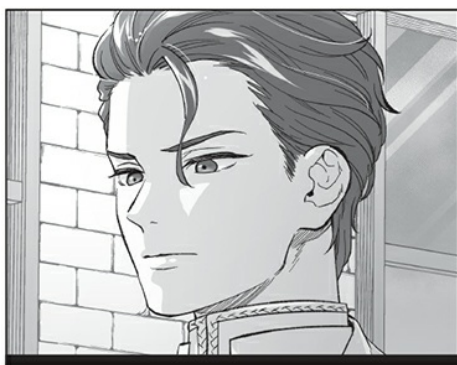
SEIICHIROU KONDOU

A workaholic who got caught up in the Holy Maiden Summoning and transported to another world, Seiichirou proved his skills when he started working for the Accounting Department. However, his body reacts badly to the magic that permeates the other world, and he falls sick easily, so Aresh always takes care of him.



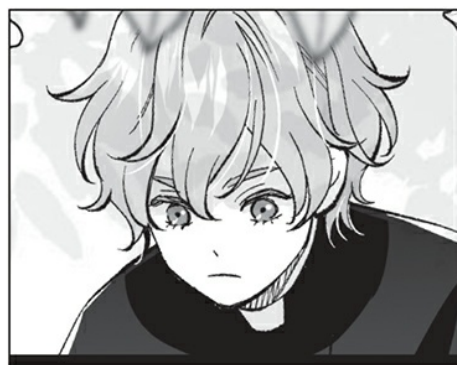
ARESH INDOLARK

Commander of the Third Royal Order and the son of a marquess, sometimes called the "Ice Nobleman." Due to his incredible talent, he was never interested in anything, but after meeting Seiichirou, he transforms and becomes incredibly overprotective.



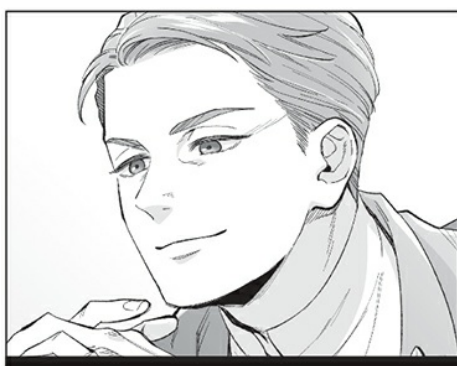
SIEGVOLD

A priest at the church in the royal capital, where Seiichirou has been temporarily assigned. He has violet eyes, just like Aresh, and a similar vibe as well. A pious, deeply serious, intelligent clergyman.



SELIO

A commoner boy and apprentice monk who becomes Seiichirou's guide at the church in the royal capital. Although he initially butts heads with the so-called Holy Woman's Extra, his honest personality is hard to hate.



CAMILE KARVADA

The levelheaded, shrewd, and capable prime minister, said to be the most powerful person in the Romany Kingdom. He has taken a liking to the "corporate slave" Seiichirou and often assigns him important tasks.



NORBERT BLANC

A carefree young man and Seiichirou's subordinate in the Accounting Department. Although he is the king's biological son, he is so far down the line of succession that he barely has a claim to the throne. He gleefully watches Aresh and Seiichirou's relationship unfold.



Prologue



Seiichirou Kondou, thirty years old, was good at waking up.

Seiichirou was unfamiliar with insomnia—he fell asleep immediately after getting under his duvet, and he even woke up before his alarm. The only snag was that his body couldn't keep up with his mind, so he struggled to physically get out of bed. People might have called this being a poor riser, but as Seiichirou's mind was awake, he prided himself on being good at waking up.

This had not changed even after coming to another world.

It hadn't changed since that day Seiichirou had been heading home after working on his day off, seen a high school girl being swallowed up by the ground, taken her hand, gotten dragged into the portal himself, and been abducted—or summoned—into another world.

Even though the kingdom had guaranteed they would cover his living expenses, Seiichirou had asked for a job and been placed in the Royal Accounting Department, where he'd made good use of his prior work experience. It was a very benign post...or rather, the post barely had any substance to it.

However, because Seiichirou had then voluntarily increased his workload, and because his body had a bad reaction to the magicules within the atmosphere of this new world, he became physically weak.

Seiichirou had ended up on the verge of life and death—but, fortunately, a kind person had saved him.

This kind person became concerned about Seiichirou's health after that, and with their help, Seiichirou had become healthy again...but he was still unable to get out of bed after waking up.

This was because he was presently trapped within the arms of this kind person—who was, more specifically, the son of a marquess of the Romany Kingdom, and the commander of the Third Royal Order, Aresh Indolark.

Since Seiichirou's body was immobile, his gaze wandered around the room, which was illuminated by the light streaming in through the gap in the curtains. He was already familiar with the subdued green walls and the glossy wooden sideboard. Perhaps “familiar” was overstating it, though. Seiichirou had been

living in this room for two weeks, but a sense of discomfort still lingered inside him—he was uncomfortable with the soft sheets, the feather duvet, the ridiculously chiseled face right in front of him, and the muscular arms wrapped around his shoulders.

“...You’re awake?” Aresh asked, his voice groggy and slightly lower than usual. He slowly opened his purple eyes, which were rimmed with long eyelashes, and carefully brushed back Seiichirou’s bangs with bony fingers.

“Aresh... Why do you get in my bed every night?” Seiichirou asked grumpily as Aresh tucked Seiichirou’s hair behind his ear and traced a finger down his jawline.

Seiichirou had mostly been forced to live with Aresh, but they each had their own private rooms. Their bedrooms, however, were connected, and Aresh had a key to the door between them. Seiichirou had protested this many times, but because Aresh was the owner of the house, he came in whenever he wanted.

On several occasions, Seiichirou had stayed up too late working, so Aresh had thrown Seiichirou into bed and held him there in a grappling hold until he had fallen asleep, so Seiichirou had certainly learned his lesson—he’d started obediently going to bed before the clock struck midnight. But even then, Seiichirou still found himself in this predicament whenever he woke up in the mornings.

Truthfully, however, Seiichirou understood why Aresh did this.

Seiichirou’s body was incompatible with and weakened by the magicules of this world, and Seiichirou knew that, every night, Aresh was casting a healing spell on him.

Seiichirou also knew that because he had no tolerance for magic power, Aresh held him closely in order to acclimatize his, Aresh’s, magic power to Seiichirou. That was the entire reason the two of them had become close—in more ways than one—to begin with.

Prior to all this, Seiichirou had purchased nutritional tonics, which were packed with magicules, to use as refreshers. After drinking one in a single gulp, however, he had collapsed, and Aresh, who happened to be nearby, had nursed him back to health. Because of this, Seiichirou had developed acute magic-

sickness, and so, to save his life, Aresh had gone so far as to perform the act that would most quickly acclimatize his magic power to Seiichirou... They'd "hooked up," as one might call it.

After that, for whatever reason, Aresh had started taking care of Seiichirou, and, to keep him corralled—for Seiichirou nearly died every time Aresh took his eyes off him—Aresh had taken the plunge; he'd bought a house and had them live together.

He'd done all that, but the two of them weren't even lovers.

They had only gone all the way twice—the first time was after Seiichirou had chugged the nutritional tonic, and the other was after Seiichirou had been beaten up by knights who held a grudge against him. The act of spilling semen into someone's body was only done to urgently acclimatize magic power in order to cast very powerful spells... It was only necessary after healing someone with no tolerance to magic power and who was on the verge of death.

Therefore, on all other occasions, like whenever Aresh healed a slight ailment or cast a barrier spell, they didn't have to go that far. All Aresh had to do was touch Seiichirou to acclimatize his magic power. Seiichirou did feel bad about this, so he tried to take care of Aresh in return whenever possible.

Seiichirou had picked up on Aresh's feelings of...a certain *L* word toward him, and Aresh also made no effort to hide it since becoming aware of it himself.

Seiichirou knew he ought to be clear with Aresh about his own feelings, but if he were to lose Aresh's protection right now, Seiichirou might die. Two and a half months after coming to this world, under Aresh's watchful eye, Seiichirou had little by little become accustomed to magicules. He had also made connections at the medical office, and he had even received official protection from the kingdom. But going to the medical office for checkups and having to worry about his tolerance would take a lot of time and effort. Seiichirou valued efficiency above all else, and he wanted to spend as little time as possible focusing on his own health until he'd settled the projects he was currently managing.

For that reason, Seiichirou didn't have the time to think about his feelings for Aresh. And, knowing this, the handsome knight eight years Seiichirou's junior

softened the look in his violet eyes and asked arrogantly:

“It’s more efficient this way, isn’t it?”

δ δ δ

As Seiichirou put together a bundle of papers and sighed, someone spoke from the seat next to him.

“Got something on your mind, Sei?”

When Seiichirou looked over, he saw Norbert—blond hair arranged as perfectly as ever—looking back at him with his head tilted curiously. Norbert was the son of a count, but Seiichirou was assistant director of the Royal Accounting Department, so the young man was Seiichirou’s direct subordinate. He was technically also the son of the current king, but Seiichirou didn’t really need to worry about that particular detail. The one word that encapsulated Norbert was *playful*, so it was fine.

“...No. More importantly, Norbert, did you finish those documents I asked you to take care of?” Seiichirou asked, shaking off his thoughts of earlier that morning.

Norbert’s friendly face smiled even wider as he handed over a stack of papers.

“Flawlessly! Look!”

While Seiichirou coolly looked over the documents, he was inwardly amazed. Norbert’s motivation to work might have been hit or miss, but for someone who bragged about having gotten this job through his connections, he was surprisingly talented.

“That was fast.”

“Thanks to that tool you gave me, calculations are much easier!” said Norbert, raising the jingling abacus-like tool Seiichirou had commissioned from a young boy at a street stall.

“I see... I guess it would be all right if I gave you a little more work, then.”

“What?! Oh, there goes my big mouth!!”

In the past, Seiichirou had done everything himself, but he was gradually

learning how to delegate tasks to his subordinates.

If he didn't, that overprotective knight would come to the office after work hours and force him to leave even though he still had things to do. And even if Seiichirou took work home with him, Aresh would just toss him onto the bed and it would never get done.

Moreover, Seiichirou was making quite a lot of progress on the plan he was working on, and its foundations were already laid. Several departments were involved, too, so it was impossible for one person to do everything. This was also partly because Aresh, who was familiar with Seiichirou's bad habits, had taken the lead, so the plan had been divided up among the different departments and was thus progressing smoothly.

Nevertheless, Seiichirou couldn't shake his corporate-slave impulse to understand everything and keep a close eye on every detail, so his workload was quite large compared to everyone else's.

Destructive miasma descended upon the Romany Kingdom once every one hundred years.

The kingdom had already successfully carried out two of three planned expeditions to purify and seal the miasma.

Once they completed the final round of purification, the miasma would disappear, and then they could begin to subdue the magical beasts that had gone berserk and fix the damage done to crops in each region.

When the miasma disappeared, they could also begin constructing a facility for the wardens of the barrier seal.

Currently, only a small number of people with a strong tolerance to magicules could be brought on these missions, so they had only been able to conduct construction surveys on the later expeditions, when there was less miasma. Seiichirou wanted the purification to be completed as soon as possible, but they had just finished the second expedition, and as the kingdom wanted to stay on the safe side and let the Holy Maiden rest, the date for the next expedition had yet to be decided. Although a barrier was in place, it wasn't going to last forever, and the expeditions were not without cost. Seiichirou had wanted to stay at a nearby village and finish the whole thing in one go, but apparently

there was additional significance in the Holy Maiden's purification expeditions themselves, so the faster pace Seiichirou wanted wouldn't have worked out.

There was also a budget drafted for the Royal Sorcery Department's research into new movement spells so that Seiichirou and the Holy Maiden could go home, but that would take a little longer to be approved. Then again, however, even if the kingdom ignored that proposal, a certain research fanatic—the assistant director of the Royal Sorcery Department—would more than likely continue that research on his own.

Go home, huh...?

Currently, there was no means by which Seiichirou could return to his home world.

But he had been brought here to begin with, so in theory, it wasn't impossible to be sent back. He had drafted a budget and received approval from the king to have this research proceed on a kingdom-wide scale.

But going home not only meant leaving his work here unfinished...it also meant leaving Aresh.

For the most part, Seiichirou's plans were proceeding smoothly. The next expedition could probably happen sometime in the next month.

Perhaps the time was approaching to start seriously considering some things.

Seiichirou blinked slowly and took up his pen again.

In this world, things are never that simple, Seiichirou thought later, in His Excellency the Prime Minister's office.



Temporarily Transferred

The royal castle was the residence of the king. It was a social gathering place and the cornerstone of the government. But it was also the workplace for all castle employees, including Seiichirou. Most of the work, however, was done in a building separate from the main tower, which was where the royal family lived and where guests were welcomed. Yet even in this separate building, the Accounting Department was at the far end, while His Excellency the Prime Minister's office, to which Seiichirou had been invited, was centrally located.

"Sorry for calling you all the way here," said the intelligent, handsome prime minister, his subtly pink-blond hair as perfectly combed as always.

He stood up from behind his desk and sat down on the sofa opposite Seiichirou. This was the seating area where the prime minister received visitors, and Seiichirou had been here many times before.

"Not a problem," Seiichirou responded shortly, sipping a little bit of the tea that had been served to him. It was less bitter than usual.

Seiichirou didn't like taking breaks from work, but when one was summoned by Camile Karvada, prime minister of the Romany Kingdom, you couldn't very well ignore the invitation. Camile and his subordinates also understood Seiichirou's nature, so recently they had begun to refrain from sending for him so unexpectedly, and had started serving him tea that was only mildly impacted by magicules. The entire reason why Seiichirou, who was merely assistant director of the Accounting Department, had such frequent opportunities to speak with the prime minister was because they were trying to keep up appearances that the "Strategy to Combat Miasma Without Requiring the Holy Maiden" Seiichirou had come up with was being carried out on the prime minister's orders.

Ever since Seiichirou had gotten mixed up in the Holy Maiden Summoning and

come to this world, he had reviewed and revised the royal palace's sloppy accounting processes, came up with a new strategy to combat miasma without a holy maiden, and had also been attempting to implement said strategy. These were issues that Seiichirou could not tackle alone, given his position and social standing, so he had piggybacked off the names of Prime Minister Camile and Count Blanc (although he had been a viscount at the time), the adoptive father of his subordinate Norbert. Camile, who had always been opposed to the Holy Maiden Summoning, had recognized that their interests aligned and joined forces with Seiichirou. So now the kingdom itself had also begun working to bring an end to the need for the Holy Maiden purification.

Camile had even been the one to make Seiichirou a manager. Camile greatly appreciated Seiichirou's corporate-slave mindset. There was no better term than *convenient* for someone who voluntarily worked even when left alone and who produced results that exceeded what was expected of them.

Both men were thoroughly rational, so they got along well.

Seiichirou was aware that Camile was using him, but Camile was also letting Seiichirou use him in exchange. And unlike Commander Indolark, who had a tendency to interfere, Camile was incredibly communicative, quick to take hints, and easy to work with, so Seiichirou took it all in stride.

So, although Seiichirou was used to being summoned to this room, he had no idea what this latest summons was about. He had already submitted the results of the second expedition, the exact calculation of expenses, and the estimate for the warden's facility. Furthermore, the next expedition was still on hold. If this meeting was about the upcoming movement spell research, which was to replace the Holy Maiden Summoning, they were still discussing what the right balance would be with other departments. They had also issued a call to recruit personnel, but the interviews were supposed to be the following week. Had a certain sleepy-eyed sorcerer charged ahead with the research on his own?

Perhaps one of those plans had gotten pushed forward, or maybe another department or a noble had interfered... If a noble *had* interfered, there was very little Seiichirou could do about it, so it was likely another department. Aresh could probably keep the Third Royal Order in check, so Seiichirou guessed that one of the pencil pushers had probably complained about the draft budget or

something like that.

Seiichirou tried to consider every explanation he could possibly image for the summons, but in the end, he was still caught totally by surprise.

“Oh, Sei! Welcome back! What’d you talk to the prime minister about? Oh! I mean, if it’s okay for me to hear about it.”

Seiichirou finally returned to the accounting office just before the lunch break. When Norbert saw him, he ran up to the man like a puppy who had found its master. Norbert had always acted like he was Seiichirou’s personal monitor. Seiichirou wondered for a moment whether Norbert was asking a question he already knew the answer to, but after seeing Norbert’s cheerful attitude, he dismissed the thought.

Seiichirou projected his voice as loudly as he could so that Norbert and everyone else in the Accounting Department who was secretly straining to eavesdrop could hear him.

“The day after tomorrow, I will be temporarily transferred to the church, so until that time I will be dividing up my duties and handing them over to you all.”

δ δ δ

Somewhere at the heart of the government, where foreign bureaucrats frequently visited, the floor was covered in luxurious carpet. And pitch-black boots were trampling it.

“Prime Minister!”

Aresh shook off the guards who tried to hold him back—mostly knights of the Second Royal Order. He scowled at Camile, who sat beyond the door that had been opened by a fearful attendant. The crease between Aresh’s eyebrows was 30 percent deeper than usual.

“Commander Indolark. You’re being quite loud, don’t you think? What’s this about?”

Camile, who had been working on a document at his desk, pulled off his reading glasses and calmly gestured to the knights to have them stand down. Aresh barged in and stopped right in front of Camile’s desk, looking down at the

prime minister while using the intimidating height difference to his advantage.

“This is ridiculous! What’s the big idea, assigning someone from the Accounting Department to the church?!”

In response to this question, which he had been expecting, Camile put down his pen with an unhurried—even graceful—movement, and looked back at Aresh.

“I thought I explained this all to the man in question, and he agreed to it... Was I mistaken?”

As Camile spoke, he tilted his head to look behind Aresh.

“...You weren’t mistaken,” Seiichirou, who had been dragged along by Aresh the entire way, answered with a nod.

They were formally offered seats in the lounge suite, and were served both normal tea and Seiichirou’s special tea. As Aresh inspected the tea, Seiichirou managed to catch his breath.

“I already told you this, Aresh. As I explained yesterday, the church has not submitted their income and expenditure report, so I’m being sent to investigate.”

“Yes, I heard you say that. But there’s no reason it has to be *you*.”

Seiichirou suppressed a sigh because this was the same back-and-forth they had repeated multiple times since the night before.

“I am the most knowledgeable about accounting, and many aspects of the church’s income and expenditures are unclear, so we may also have to restructure the administration from the ground up. That’s why we thought that it would be fastest if I went...”

Seiichirou had explained this several times, but then Aresh would give him that look that silently asked, “Have you not trained a successor yet?” and Seiichirou would avoid his eyes. If it had just been a normal investigation, another member of the Accounting Department could go, but if they were going to dredge up problematic areas and revise them on-site, it would be more time-efficient for Seiichirou to go himself.

“I was the one who decided that Seiichirou was best suited to handle this and the miasma strategy affair,” interjected Camile. He was the most powerful person in the government, but not even that authority weakened the ferocity of Aresh’s gaze.

“...The sacred relic is also stored at the church, so there are several different kinds of barrier spells there. The concentration of magicules is high. For someone like him, with no tolerance to them, this job is impossible.”

The church may have been unique in terms of its accounting, but they also used numerous spells and unique barriers to protect and worship the sacred relic, the church’s very reason for being, which made it a space rich with magicules.

“But Seiichirou went to the Demon Forest, the source of the miasma, and came back safely, didn’t he?”

“That’s...!”

That was because Aresh had carefully performed barrier spells on Seiichirou and had “trained” him slowly over time. Not even Aresh, however, was shameless enough to say that out loud.

Nor was Camile one to pass up that moment of opportunity.

“Besides, Commander Indolark,” said Camile, leaning back in his chair and crossing his legs, “your position as commander of the Third Royal Order and your marquess bloodline give you a powerful political voice. You ought to be a little more mindful of that.”

“What...?”

“I understand that you’re worried about Seiichirou, but you’re being too overt with your support. The plan to counter the miasma calls for me to give Seiichirou orders. If you act as Seiichirou’s ally so brazenly on top of that, you’re going to skew the balance of political power and provoke others’ animosity.”

If the prime minister and the commander of the Third Royal Order were to become allies, they would certainly be *too* powerful.

That was why Seiichirou had turned to Camile, not Aresh, for help with the

miasma strategy plan. He and Aresh were too close.

The fact that they were now living together had spread as rapidly as could be imagined after Seiichirou's dramatic exit from his previous lodgings, and Aresh acting like Seiichirou's guardian had already become the stuff of legend among the civil officials and knights. Recently, some people had even started going out of their way to observe the pair in the dining hall. But despite this, during previous expeditions, Aresh had made it clear to all that he was going to do what Seiichirou wanted done. At this point, irrespective of the truth, the rumors had snowballed, and Camile had even heard people speculating that the members of the Third Royal Order were the yes-men of the Accounting Department, and that the knights were receiving money siphoned from the budgets.

"I'm not saying Seiichirou has to live there. What I'm saying is that he'll commute to the church for a month. In that time, the shameful rumors about the Third Royal Order should disappear."

"..."

After Seiichirou had been beaten up by those knights, Aresh had deliberately gone around acting as Seiichirou's protector. Of course, it wasn't that Aresh had no concerns about living together, or that he didn't want to be by Seiichirou's side.

However, even if Aresh disregarded the fact that Seiichirou was an otherworlder, Seiichirou had become too deeply entangled with the central figures of the kingdom.

Aresh just wanted to have Seiichirou where he could see him and protect him.

He hadn't realized that those actions had directed suspicion and animosity not only toward Seiichirou but also at the Third Royal Order.

Aresh closed his eyes, as if he were letting these facts soak in, and when he opened them again, he looked at Seiichirou.

The otherworlder was so fragile that he would die if left to his own devices...

The dark circles that never disappeared, the glazed eyes, the lifeless face, the thin body...

Seiichirou was so different, so far beyond Aresh's expectations. That was not just in regards to his waifish features, either—it included his work ethic, too.

"Aresh...", Seiichirou said. "With the church's cooperation, the miasma strategy and the research on movement spells will advance by leaps and bounds! There's no reason not to make the best of this!"

Feeling Camile's eyes also on him, Aresh sighed in resignation and then immediately sucked in a sharp breath.

That afternoon, all the departments were abuzz with the topic of the angry shouts that had been heard coming from the prime minister's office.



Seiichirou returned to his room, toweling his hair dry. The bath in Aresh's house was small compared to the communal bath he had used in the residence hall, but it was big enough for one person and quite lavish. When Seiichirou had first seen the hot water coming from the mouth of an animal that resembled a lion, he had wondered if it was some sort of joke, but it appeared as though the luxurious tastes of nobility were pretty much the same in this world as in his home world. When Seiichirou applied an oil that the maid Milan had suggested to his hair, then rubbed a floral-smelling soap and towel (also provided by Milan) over his body, his ragged hair and skin became positively lustrous. His colleagues in the Accounting Department had even remarked that Seiichirou smelled strangely good.

"Are you still upset?" asked Seiichirou.

Hanging the towel that he had used on a chair, Seiichirou observed the master of the house, who was reclining on Seiichirou's sofa. Aresh had apparently taken a bath earlier, and he now wore a white shirt open at the chest and loose pants. Seiichirou slowly approached the sofa, feeling a bit out of sorts with Aresh not in his usual black getup. Examining the younger man's features, Seiichirou saw that Aresh's beautiful eyebrows were furrowed, and his thin lips were set in a slight frown. This look on his face, along with his clothes, accentuated his youth, and Seiichirou had to resist the urge to smile. At home, Aresh always shed his commander's demeanor and looked totally different than

he did in public, and this was especially apparent today.

“...What are you smiling at?”

Seiichirou’s grin had been noticed, but he switched to wearing an innocent expression instead.

The line between Aresh’s eyebrows deepened, but he tugged Seiichirou’s arm and pulled the other man onto his lap.

“Your hair is damp. How many times do I have to tell you to dry it thoroughly?”

“I thought I’d dried it well enough.”

“*How so?* You’re unbelievable...”

Aresh sighed, disappointed, then spoke, weaving together what sounded like a short song. A warm breeze blew across Seiichirou’s face. His once-damp hair was now smooth and untangled.

Magic really is an incredible and useful thing, thought Seiichirou.

But just as this thought crossed Seiichirou’s mind, he leaned his flushed body (though it was *not* flushed from the bath) against Aresh.

“I’m not upset,” said Aresh.

Seiichirou didn’t understand what Aresh meant at first, but then realized that Aresh was answering his previous question. Aresh sighed again as he combed his fingers through Seiichirou’s hair. It was an inconsequential thing to notice, but Aresh’s breath tickled his ear.

“Your body gets this intoxicated after just a minor wind spell. Why would you try to go to such a dangerous place...?”

Aresh seemed to already know what Seiichirou would say, so Seiichirou took advantage of this and refrained from answering.

“The church does have special wards, but the worst part is, prayer emits magic power. It’s probably the second-worst place for you to be, other than the Demon Forest.”

Since it was a church, Seiichirou had assumed that in this world of magic,

what Aresh had just told him would indeed be the case, but the circumstances seemed as though they'd be worse than he'd thought.

"Well, in that case..." Seiichirou started to say.

Turning down this job, however, was not an option for him.

"Please be thorough," he finished.

Seiichirou swallowed Aresh's next sigh.

Roughly 90 percent of the people in the Romany Kingdom were monotheistic and worshipped the god Abran. This would probably have sounded strange to the people of Japan, where a myriad of gods had taken root. However, this was a world in which said god occasionally delivered divine messages, so it seemed that Abran really existed, and in close proximity to humanity, at that. The main cathedral housed the pope of the Abran religion and was located elsewhere—it wasn't the magnificent church in front of Seiichirou.

Seiichirou looked up at the white building, which was roughly thirty minutes by carriage from Romany castle, and absentmindedly calculated the cost of maintaining it.

It must be hard to clean the windows of such a tall building...

According to the documents Seiichirou had consulted, the church's employees—or perhaps "devotees" would be more accurate—totaled around fifteen people. Even if he included the workers at the facility that housed and supported orphans (which resembled an almshouse), the number didn't exceed twenty. Although there seemed to be monetary assistance from the locals, it probably wasn't enough to operate such a fine church. In which case, it was reasonable to assume that a portion of its costs were being covered by an outside source. Seiichirou had checked the income and expenditures for the previous year, but unfortunately, since it had been made during a time when the Accounting Department had accepted insufficient reporting, there was no itemized list, so Seiichirou could glean nothing about what exactly the money had been used for.

As Seiichirou worked numbers on an imaginary abacus, he walked through the church gate and began to feel a suffocating sensation as well as something

like humidity clinging to his skin.

“...Pheeew... Haaah...”

Seiichirou took deep breaths and relaxed.

Aresh had painstakingly applied a barrier to Seiichirou the day before. Seiichirou knew he ought to be fine.

After taking another deep breath, Seiichirou started walking again, and he saw a young, green-haired boy striking an imposing stance at the entrance. He might have been around thirteen or fourteen years old.

His features, which still looked rather childlike, were fine enough that one might even have called him pretty. His bright-green hair was on the long side, and his green eyes, framed by gorgeous eyelashes, looked at Seiichirou with hostility, hinting at the boy's aggressive personality. Based on the black, flapping monk's robe the boy wore over his white shirt, Seiichirou assumed he was a member of the church. And since the boy was waiting in front of the door, Seiichirou thought the boy might be his guide.

Seiichirou stopped a short distance away from the young boy, put a hand to his stomach, and gave a small bow.

“It's nice to meet you. I'm Seiichirou Kondou, from the Royal Accounting Department. Please accept my kindest regards—”

“I want nothing to do with your regards, old man.”

Seiichirou's eyes flew open mid-bow, and he saw the tips of the young boy's shoes quickly disappear from his line of sight.

“What are you just standing there for? Any time I spend with you is time wasted, so hurry up.”

Seiichirou looked up and saw the boy glaring back at him from the entrance, seeming irritated. He followed, as the boy had instructed him to do (after a fashion). The boy huffed through his nose, then proceeded briskly inside.

He led Seiichirou not to a reception room, but to a modest room roughly the size of the one Seiichirou had lived in at the residence hall.

“Excuse me, I'd like to speak to the person in charge,” said Seiichirou, but the

boy snickered.

“The priest is busy. He doesn’t have time to meet with someone like you.”

“Is that right? I’m sorry to hear that. Then I’d like to speak to the person in charge of your accounting.”

“Everyone’s busy. It’s impossible.”

It’s impossible?

Seiichirou wondered if the boy had decided this all on his own, but then he noticed several monks and nuns peering at him from the doorway, so that didn’t seem to be the case.

“I’ve received official orders from the royal palace, so I’ve come to investigate the church.”

If the boy was harassing Seiichirou because he didn’t like the otherworlder, that was one thing. But if he was fully aware of the circumstances surrounding this visit and persisted, his actions would be considered treason. After Seiichirou had stated his intentions, the boy scrunched up his pretty face and looked back at the monks and nuns peeking at them from the other room.

“Did you hear that?! He says he’s investigating the church like he’s so important! Civil officials from the royal palace sure are something else, huh?!”

The ridicule that followed made Seiichirou reorganize his thoughts.

He was obviously not welcome.

From their reactions, Seiichirou gathered that they were displeased with both Seiichirou himself and the royal palace’s investigation.

But this was his job.

Repeating himself would probably just add fuel to the fire, but Seiichirou was an envoy—the kingdom had officially dispatched him. Moreover, if the church did not cooperate, that would come at a price for them, too.

When Seiichirou looked around again, he noticed that all the monks and nuns he could see were quite young. Just how much did they understand about the situation?

“No one’s going to cooperate with you, so just do whatever you want until the end of your term.”

With those sharp parting words, the boy and the others left. He seemed to have been telling the truth about them not having any time to spare.

But more importantly...

“What? I can do whatever I want?”

“What are you doing here?”

At the sound of a low, carrying voice, Seiichirou looked up from the document in his hands.

Seiichirou had wandered the stone corridors and found a room that resembled a library. He had been perusing document after document, sorting out the ones of interest and copying down the information he needed. The church’s document management was sloppy. Regardless, Seiichirou had passed the time incredibly fruitfully. When he looked up, the sky was already crimson, dyeing the man’s pure-white clothes red, too.

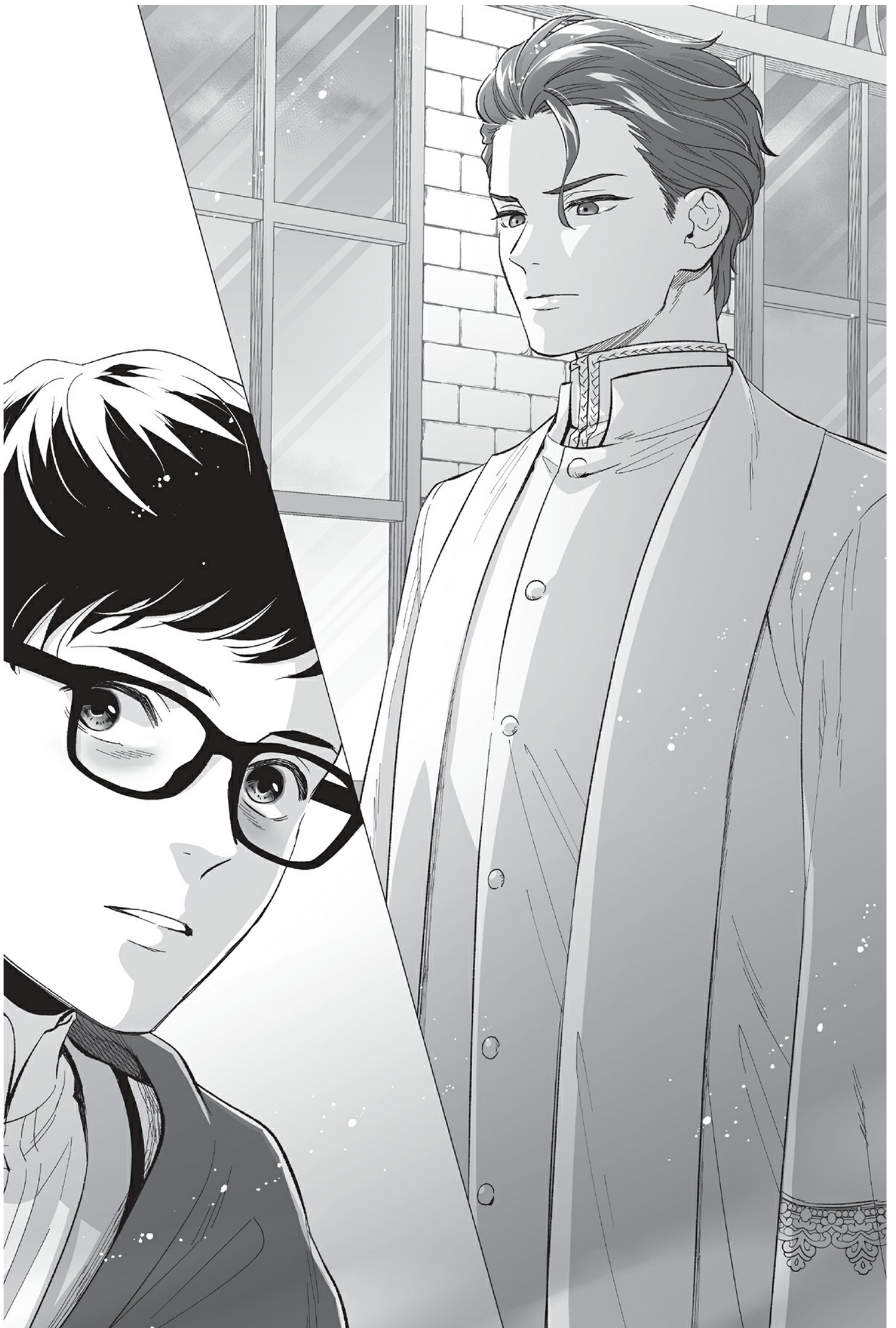
...Huh? Pure white?

In this kingdom, the only people who wore clothes of pure white were members of the royal family and members of the church with the rank priest and above.

Which meant...

Seiichirou looked at the man’s face again.

His hair was slightly wavy, swept back, and seemed soft. His eyebrows were sharp, and his nose was well-defined. The shape of his mouth clearly communicated his resolve, and he glared at Seiichirou with intelligent eyes.



The suspicion in his expression reminded Seiichirou of his first meeting with Aresh.

Seiichirou stood from his sea of papers and bowed.

“Please excuse me. I’m Seiichirou Kondou, from the Royal Accounting Department.”

The man’s sharp eyes widened slightly.

“The Royal Accounting Department...? And what business has brought a civil official like yourself to the church?”

Seiichirou’s glazed eyes widened a bit in surprise.

Are all the church’s leaders, from the priests to further up the chain of command, unaware of the royal palace’s investigation?

Had only some of them been informed? Had this man been intentionally kept in the dark?

Once more, Seiichirou looked over the man he assumed was a priest. He was taller than Seiichirou, although perhaps the people in this world were simply born with different physiques from his own, much like the physical differences between Western and Japanese people from Seiichirou’s home world. The man was slimmer than Aresh, but they were probably about the same height. His chestnut-colored hair was swept back, giving the impression of his being neat and serious. His outfit really did look like that of a clergyman. He looked to be in his midtwenties, so, being a priest in the royal capital, he must have risen quickly through the ranks. Or perhaps the elegance and arrogance that oozed from him meant he was of nobility.

He’s a very serious-looking man.

That was Seiichirou’s initial impression of the person he’d assumed was a priest.

And if that impression was true, the truth might very well have been kept from this man intentionally.

“This branch didn’t submit an income and expenditure report, so I was ordered to come investigate.”

“An income and expenditure report? That can’t be... But if that were true, why would a civil official from the Royal Accounting Department be in our reference room alone? What happened to the accounting manager, or your guide?”

“The person who received me when I arrived told me to do whatever I liked, so I began my investigation.”

“What?”

With a twitch, the priest (or so he assumed) furrowed his eyebrows nervously.

“Who was this guide?”

Now what was Seiichirou to do?

From the looks of things, a civil official from the royal capital wandering around the church on his own was probably not very welcome behavior. Seiichirou had roamed around by himself even though he fully understood this, but he had secured permission first. He wagered that several people were probably going to get scolded for this, the green-haired kid worst of all.

...But then again, there’s no point in covering for him, is there?

Unfortunately, Seiichirou knew very little about the church. If he had known this situation was to unfold, he would have asked Camile or Aresh a little more about the people working here. But his mind only contained accounting information.

“I didn’t get his name, but he was a boy around thirteen or fourteen years old, with green hair.”

“...Selio, huh?” the man mumbled.

Then the man put a hand into the flap of his clothes, took out a small, round tool that resembled a pocket watch, and brought it to his mouth.

“Selio, come to the reference room immediately.”

Because magic existed in this world, science was not very advanced, but magic engineering gave life to tools that used magic power. If you took the study of magic out of the equation, the framework of the discipline was simpler than science, but held its own in terms of usefulness. Seiichirou, however, who

had absolutely no magic power, could not use magic tools.

“My apologies for the belated introduction. I am Siegvold, priest of the Abran religion in the Romany Kingdom royal capital branch. I was at a branch in another town for a few days, so I was unaware of the situation. I apologize.”

The man’s manner was beautiful and practiced. Seiichirou was taken aback—an unusual occurrence—and blinked in undisguised shock. Seiichirou had been thinking that he wasn’t fond of the church’s staff, but the man in front of him—Priest Siegvold—seemed different from the rest.

It might have been the first time since Seiichirou had come to this world that he had been treated with such politeness during an introduction.

“Thank you very much for your courtesy. I’ve come on behalf of the royal palace to collect the income and expenditure report and to investigate the management of expenses.”

“Not at all, I’m very sorry for the impolite reception you’ve had. But this room houses the church’s important documents and precious literature. We do not allow outsiders to view them.”

And yet the room hadn’t been locked, and there had been no signs of guards. But saying as much seemed like a hassle and would make it harder to access the room in the future, so Seiichirou meekly apologized.

“I’m sorry for my ignorance. I’d like to request permission to conduct the inspection, but what should I submit, and to whom should I submit it to?” Seiichirou asked, facing him directly.

Siegvold pondered.

“...I’m sorry, but I’ll have to double-check with whoever is in charge of communicating with civil officials about this first.”

Well, that does make sense, thought Seiichirou. Siegvold had only just returned from an official trip, and it appeared as though the royal palace hadn’t informed him about the investigation. He probably had yet to grasp what was going on.

Just then, they heard light footsteps, then saw a pretty, green-haired boy with

a look of panic on his face.

“M-Mr. Siegvold, you called— Huh?! Why are *you* here?!”

The green-haired boy, whose name was apparently Selio, appeared shocked when he spotted Seiichirou behind Siegvold. He grimaced at Seiichirou, but when his gaze returned to Siegvold, his face went pale.

“Selio, I’m not happy with you running amok in the church. Also...is this the right person?”

The priest directed this question at Seiichirou, and Seiichirou nodded in the affirmative.

“Selio, I hadn’t heard that the royal palace was sending someone to conduct an investigation. Who gave you your orders, and why did you abandon this civil official? Answer me.”

“W-well...there was a message from Bishop Mateus that someone was coming from the royal palace for an inspection...”

“There was? And why was this civil official from the royal palace alone in the reference room, which outsiders are forbidden to enter?”

“That’s because—he went ahead on his own, and—!”

“He’s never been inside a church before, so there’s no reason why he should know which places are off-limits, is there? Wasn’t it your duty to tell him?”

“W-well... I mean... I’ve got a lot of stuff to do...”

“I know you are all very busy. But are your tasks more important and urgent than showing a civil official from the royal palace around?”

“N-no...”

Selio had acted so arrogantly in front of Seiichirou, but before Siegvold, he was as quiet and meek as a rescued kitty. He threw a glare in the direction of Seiichirou, who had been watching the boy indifferently.

“Why did you leave that room...? You didn’t even come when we called you for lunch...”

Apparently, they had been planning on providing him with a meal. But with

Seiichirou's allergy to magicules, he had brought his own special lunch with him that included foods with magicules he could tolerate, so he wouldn't have eaten theirs anyway.

"You told me to do whatever I liked, so I did my work as I pleased."

"That was just a figure of speech! The reference room is the most off-limits place you can think of for people outside the church!"

"This is the first I'm hearing of that. That rule wasn't indicated anywhere."

Selio apparently had a short fuse along with the immaturity that befit his age, so while he did not deny this, he still insisted on his own innocence.

"Even if I didn't spell it out for you, you should have looked into *that* much before you came!"

"Selio, be quiet. It was your responsibility today to show this civil official around, correct? But...," Siegvold continued, now addressing Seiichirou, "this church has places with precious objects and unsullied areas into which entry is forbidden. Please respect this."

"I understand."

Seiichirou nodded, but he also realized that the man hadn't specified any particular locations.

He wasn't quite thorough enough.

"It's already the second Earth hour. Please go home for the day."

"I will. I'll be back tomorrow."

Seiichirou thanked the man and was about to put the documents away, but Siegvold stopped him, so he just left the room as it was. This time, Selio followed him out—probably to see with his own eyes that Seiichirou did in fact go through the gates.

"When I looked for him during lunch, he wasn't there, so I was sure he had just left..." Selio muttered to himself.

Seiichirou could hear the boy, but he just walked on, feigning ignorance.

"Well then, I'll be off."

Seiichirou turned around at the gate and bowed, but Selio had reverted from a rescued kitty back to a hissing cat. He was shorter than Seiichirou, so he couldn't look down on the man, but he cocked his head arrogantly and gave Seiichirou the most scornful look he could manage.

"You don't have to come back at all, but if you do, I'll be supervising you starting tomorrow. Don't think you can just do whatever you please."

And with that, Selio slammed the door shut.

"Starting tomorrow"? He should have been supervising me today, but he slacked off.

Seiichirou got a better grip on his papers, onto which he had copied some information, and started his journey home.

Bishop Mateus and Priest Siegvold, huh...?

δ δ δ

"You're late."

"...Aresh, you're home early."

When Seiichirou returned home, the owner of the house greeted him in a daunting stance.

Seiichirou had promised Aresh that during his temporary assignment to the church, he would stick to his usual work hours, but Seiichirou had been so engrossed in the documents that he had accidentally stayed late. If Siegvold hadn't found him, he might have stayed in that room until nighttime.

Nevertheless, Aresh was a manager himself—the commander of the honorable Third Royal Order—and he seemed to have developed a desire to work. Though going home on time every day would have been inconceivable in modern Japan...

"Isn't it your job to get things done on time?"

Aresh immediately began the interrogation.

"How's your body feeling?"

“I feel fine.”

“And your mood?”

“Not bad.”

And thus, the physical exam began at the entrance. Per the master’s wishes, neither Valtom the butler nor Milan the maid approached.

“Are you hungry?”

“Huh? No, not really...”

Seiichirou wondered why Aresh was asking, because Seiichirou had never had much interest in food, but the mystery was soon solved.

“We’re going to take a bath, and we’re going to reapply the barrier there.”

“What? Hold on...!”

Aresh then led Seiichirou to the bath, and Seiichirou ended his first day thoroughly dizzy.



[CHAPTER TWO]

Consulted for Love Advice

The following day, before the Light hour, Seiichirou visited the church again, and waiting for him with sharper eyes than before was the green-haired boy—Selio.

“Tch... You came.”

Sucking his teeth, Selio turned around without any regard for Seiichirou and quickly walked away. Although Seiichirou hadn't been told to, he followed, feeling the heavy, humid magicules wash over him. He was brought to a different place than the day before, a large room that would be the right size for a conference. Selio wasn't the only church employee, either. There were several monks, and their gazes were all fixed on Seiichirou. Seiichirou briefly thought they were going to put him on trial unofficially, but then the monks left the room so swiftly he was taken aback.

“I told you no one has time to deal with you,” Selio said mockingly.

Seiichirou thought that the church administrators themselves might be understaffed. The royal palace was relatively well-staffed, so he had assumed that it was like that for the entire kingdom, but apparently it wasn't. He'd had this thought yesterday as well, but for an operation this large, twelve monks was not a lot.

“I see. That must be difficult.”

Prime Minister Camile had authority over government personnel, but the church, though it was under the protection of the kingdom, was an independent organization. Seiichirou couldn't just interfere as he liked.

“It is! We're not like you civil officials, creating unnecessary work...”

Wait, that's my line...

“But if you had submitted your income and expenditure report, I wouldn't

have to come investigate.”

And then Seiichirou wouldn't have had to leave his normal job and be temporarily transferred to the church, which was a very dangerous place for him. Selio, however, didn't care a lick about what Seiichirou had to say.

“That's your business, isn't it? The church is an independent organization, after all. We're not under the kingdom's control, so who do you think you are, telling us to submit a report every year?”

As the kingdom's official religion, the church was given preferential treatment and even subsidies—yet this was their attitude. Seiichirou had been sure that Selio was his guide because he was the accounting manager, but he had been mistaken. Most of these words would never have left the boy's mouth if he knew even a little bit about accounting.

“...I'd like to meet the person in charge of accounting.”

“Cipriano's not here.”

“Cip...?”

The name was difficult for Seiichirou, a Japanese person, to parse audibly. When he asked for the name again, Selio answered with a snort.

“You really came here without even knowing that?”

Seiichirou certainly didn't know enough about the church. He had been so focused on the numbers that he had neglected any other information, which he regretted now. But even so, why would the church's accounting manager be gone when the royal palace was conducting an investigation?

“When will he be back?”

“He went to a meeting in another town with Bishop Mateus, so he won't be back for a while.”

Bishop Mateus again...?

Seiichirou pondered this, but Selio paid him no mind. For the rest of the morning, Selio escorted him around the church. Seiichirou was used to the royal palace as his place of work, but the inside of the church had an entirely different aesthetic. This church was probably so beautiful because it was in the

royal capital. The stone interior, with its stained glass windows, decorative arches, and moldings, looked more fantastical than the interior of the royal palace. It was probably more striking to Seiichirou because he wasn't used to it. There were statues, too, which Seiichirou suspected were portrayals of important religious figures or perhaps their god, but whenever he approached them, he felt a bit dizzy. Because they made him feel unwell, Seiichirou assumed they were genuine relics, and that it was their magicules making him feel that way. But Selio told him, "We put barriers on them to stop people from pulling pranks."

So it's a spell?

When it came to guiding Seiichirou around the church, Selio became talkative and proud, so they had not even finished seeing half the church by the time the bell rang. The bell indicated the start of the Fire hour as well as the start of lunch.

"We really don't have anything to give you, you know, but since you're an envoy from the royal palace, I guess I have no choice but to feed you."

After a moment, Seiichirou realized he was being invited to lunch, and shook his head.

"Oh, that's not necessary. I bring my own lunch, so don't go to any trouble for me."

Selio stomped away, his face bright red.

Now, lunch...and free time.

"What are you doing there?"

At the sound of that same low, carrying voice Seiichirou had heard yesterday, he looked up from the documents in his hand. Just as he had expected, a man all in white was looking at him with a domineering gaze. Seiichirou carefully put the documents on the desk, stood, and bowed.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Priest."

"What happened to Selio?"

"He went to lunch."

“And what are you doing?” Siegvold asked, looking down by Seiichirou’s hands, where there lay papers, pens, and documents.

“Work.”

A vein in Siegvold’s temple twitched.

“Where are those documents from?”

“They’re not from the reference room you told me not to go into. They’re the visitor logs from the assembly room.”

“...Please get permission before moving any documents.”

“I did talk to the person who was in the assembly room, but from now on I’ll be sure to properly get permission.”

The monk in the assembly room had given Seiichirou a noncommittal response, although he had looked like he wanted to ask what Seiichirou was going to do with the logs, so Seiichirou had taken advantage of the opportunity and borrowed them. Siegvold looked at Seiichirou suspiciously after his quick answer, but his interrogation ended there.

“So, what about your lunch?” Siegvold continued.

At which point Seiichirou suddenly remembered...

“Oh... Come to think of it, I haven’t eaten yet.”

Siegvold’s brow furrowed.

“I can’t believe Selio left you behind—”

Seiichirou cut in, not wanting Siegvold to get the wrong idea.

“Oh, no, it wasn’t like that. He invited me to lunch, but I brought my own, so I declined.”

“I see. In that case, please come this way. Eating and drinking is not permitted here.”

Siegvold then led him to a courtyard with a small flower garden.

“...What is this place?”

“It’s a flower garden that was made by the Holy Maiden from two generations

ago. She said flowers heal people's hearts, and she took care of the flowers herself when she was at this church."

"Two generations ago..."

The Holy Maiden two generations prior was recorded as being a nun from a rural area of the kingdom. So, after she had fulfilled her duty as the Holy Maiden, had she taken up residence at the church in the royal capital?

Seiichirou took in the shoots of grass, the flowers of various colors forming an arch, and in the center, the white stone statue that seemed to depict the Holy Maiden. Sadly, Seiichirou was not admiring the flowers—his mind was too preoccupied with the cost of maintaining the garden.

At any rate, the two men sat on one of the benches surrounding the courtyard and ate lunch. Siegvold showed no sign of leaving, and Seiichirou wondered if he was being monitored as he dug into the lunch that Pavel, Aresh's chef, had made him.

"I heard that you're an otherworlder, and that you were summoned here with the current Holy Maiden."

After swallowing a bite of his sliced tsuhash and vegetables, Seiichirou nodded.

"Yes, that's right."

"I see... Truth be told, I also participated in that summoning ritual..."

And yet, the fact that they had already met once but Siegvold was only now identifying Seiichirou as an otherworlder probably meant that he had been one of those people who had been blind to everything besides Yua. In the same vein, though, if Seiichirou were asked about the summoning, he would only think, *Now that you mention it, members of the church were there, too, huh...?*

However, apparently, Siegvold was not like the others. He rose without a word, stood in front of Seiichirou, took a step back, then bowed with a hand over his chest. In this kingdom, that bow was the equivalent of a salute.

"Thank you for answering Abran's call and working with the Holy Maiden to save this kingdom. I sincerely apologize for not introducing myself to you

sooner.”

The priest had such beautiful features and spoke with such elegant mannerisms, it was like he had fallen out of a movie. Seiichirou nearly dropped his fork. He quickly put his lunch box to one side and got to his feet.

“Don’t be, I just got caught up in Shiraishi—I mean, in the Holy Maiden’s summoning... It was a coincidence that we came here together, and I’m an ordinary guy with no powers, so there’s no reason to thank me.”

“Nonsense. The summoning ritual was incited by the divine message of Abran. Your arrival also has meaning.”

If that were true, Seiichirou was hoping to see some comprehensive postoperative support. Seiichirou’s body did not agree with the air in this world or its spells, and initially, everyone had treated him like a parasite that had just jumped into the summoning on his own. He was tempted to file a complaint with the so-called god of this world, but seeing Siegvold’s unwavering stare, he held his tongue.

“You may not be the Holy Maiden, but that doesn’t change the fact that you’re a disciple sent by God.”

“I’m not that impressive...”

“Nonsense. It is the will of God.”

Seiichirou had never been received so well since coming to this world, but he felt somewhat uncomfortable. Perhaps this was what it was like to have responsibility thrust upon you and have everyone expect things from you. Seiichirou mentally floated the idea of asking Yua about that feeling the next time he saw her.

After that, Seiichirou couldn’t muster up the energy to finish his lunch. When he returned home, Pavel gave him a sad look and tattled to Aresh, who then lectured Seiichirou.

δ δ δ

Papers were stacked messily on a desk. After a few minutes, Norbert glanced again at the small mirror propped up on the same desk. The way his hair was

arranged above his left ear today didn't look quite right, so he kept fiddling with it.

"Norbert! When we're done for the day, you wanna go out for a drink?"

"Yeah, that sounds great! Let's do it, let's do it!"

Norbert was the son of a count and the biological son of the current king, but that latter fact was essentially a secret, and, in principle, employees at the royal palace were forbidden from using their social status as an excuse for their actions. Although not everyone abided by this rule, Norbert seemed to follow it. He was also the youngest in the department and had an easygoing personality, so everyone treated him with familiarity.

The person who had approached Norbert about drinks was a man three years his senior in the Accounting Department. This man's family had their own peerage title, and he got along well with Norbert.

"But you haven't made much progress with this, have you? Is it really okay for you to come out for a drink?" asked the senior, looking down at Norbert's desk.

But Norbert smiled, looking completely unbothered.

"It's *fiiine*! Sei won't be back for a month, after all! I've got ages before then!"

Suddenly, a soft voice that still carried throughout the room spoke. "When did I say that was your only task?"

An immediate hush followed this... They could even hear the gentle flutter of the curtains.

Norbert forced his frozen neck to turn very slowly. Then he saw just the man he knew would be attached to the voice...the assistant director of the Accounting Department, Seiichirou Kondou, gazing at him with the ever-present dead-fish look in his eyes.

"S-S-Sei?! What are you doing here?! Aren't you on assignment at the church?!"

"I have today off."

"So why are you here?!"

“To see if you were slacking off.”

“Eep!” squeaked Norbert, sounding like the breath had been knocked out of him.

Seiichirou took documents off Norbert’s desk and flipped through them.

“I’m kidding. I came to do my own job,” Seiichirou said with his typical blank expression.

Norbert was relieved for a moment, but then Seiichirou continued:

“Well, part of my job is knowing what you’re doing at work.”

The blood drained from Norbert’s face again.

“B-but Assistant Director! Today’s your day off, right? Why did you come here...?” the other man from the Accounting Department fearfully asked Seiichirou, his superior.

But when Seiichirou answered, he looked as though the question had only confused him.

“Why, you ask? To do my work...?”

To Seiichirou, a day off was a day he could use to do work that had piled up, but at his own pace.

“B-but shouldn’t you rest on your day off?!”

“Then when will I do this work that’s piled up?”

Although Seiichirou had tried to delegate his work to others as much as possible, he still had too much on his plate.

Alongside his normal duties, Seiichirou was improving the kingdom’s accounting processes, working on the new miasma strategy, increasing the number of staff at the Royal Sorcery Department, and assisting with the research on summoning techniques. On top of all that, he was also on assignment at the church. It was unarguably more work than one person could handle, but practically none of it could be handed off to anyone else.

“Is it okay to tell Commander Indolark that?” asked Norbert.

“...I need to get it through your head who your boss actually is.”

“Eep!”

“But...I’m the one in charge here...,” came another voice.

Sadly, the voice of Helmut Somaria, the forty-two-year-old director of the Accounting Department, reached no one.

“Oh! Sei, you can’t eat that!”

Seiichirou had ended up doing his work as normal, and during the lunch break he had gone to get food at the dining hall, blending in with the rest of the staff from the Accounting Department. Seiichirou huffed at Norbert’s warning.

“I can’t carry on never eating things. I’m building a tolerance little by little.”

Because of Aresh’s support and Chef Pavel’s hard work, Seiichirou had been steadily improving his tolerance to magicules. He could now eat little bits of everything except extremely potent foods.

“What? Really?! Well, I’m going out for drinks today. Would you like to come, too, Sei?”

“Did you hear what I said?”

“Little by little,” Seiichirou had said. If he were to drink alcohol, he would immediately collapse. The other civil officials from the Accounting Department who were at their table were staring at Seiichirou in shock. Their superior from another world had lifeless eyes and did nothing but work; he had outstripped them professionally at the speed of light. Only Norbert could relax around him. Seiichirou was aware of this, too, of course, but he didn’t mind. As long as his relationships at his job didn’t get in the way of his work, it was fine.

“Yeah, yeah. That sucks!”

Only Norbert would say such a thing. Nevertheless, Seiichirou assumed that Norbert’s task of monitoring him must surely have concluded by now. How long was Norbert going to stay glued to his side?

“I wanted to ask about the church and stuff,” said Norbert.

“Yeah, I want to ask about that, too.”

“Huh? You do, Sei?”

Norbert's eyes were wide. Seiichirou nodded, swallowing his sautéed tsuhash.

Seiichirou had come to the royal palace today not only for work, but also to collect information from Norbert. The only things he knew about the church were facts he had read in books. What did the church mean to this world—to this kingdom? What did the people who worked at the church mean to the royal family and citizens? Seiichirou had come to the realization that it was slightly difficult to do his work without this sort of complex information.

"Norbert, have you ever been to church?"

"Ha-ha-ha! What are you talking about, Sei?! Of course I have!"

Norbert laughed at him, but that was only to be expected in a land with an official religion, of which 90 percent of the population were followers.

Norbert explained that everyone went to church when they were six years old to be baptized. Similarly, coming-of-age ceremonies which were held at eighteen years of age took place at the church. People also held seasonal festivals and gave offerings there; the people of Romany were closer to the church than to the royal palace.

"And after all, I'm the son of a viscount— I mean, a count."

"What does being an aristocrat have to do with it?"

Norbert explained that it was only natural for landowning aristocrats to support the churches on their lands—and for non-landowning aristocrats to support the church or the orthodox church in the royal capital.

"I see."

Now that Norbert had mentioned it, there *had* been some familiar aristocratic surnames in the visitor logs Seiichirou had peeked at the day before.

"Plus, most of the official church positions are filled by aristocrats."

"What? Really?"

"Yep. Pretty much the only people who can serve in the church are those raised in the relief house or people with a lot of magic power. Many aristocrats have a lot of magic power, so it inevitably shakes out that way."

People with a lot of magic power were employed to serve the church because they used that magic power for prayer, rituals, and protecting the sacred relic. Seiichirou knew it was a place where he would experience discomfort. Had he just been feeling the effect of the magicules from the sacred relic's barrier? Without Aresh's barrier on him, Seiichirou would probably have collapsed on his first day.

Seiichirou thought back to the people who worked at the church. Some of them were certainly crude, and some of them were incredibly well-mannered. They were a mixture of commoners and aristocrats. The only person with an official position that he had met so far was Priest Siegvold. Seiichirou had gotten a strong aristocratic feeling from him before, but did that mean he was actually an aristocrat? Seiichirou wondered, *What does it mean socially in this world for an aristocrat to put him or herself in the church?*

"They say the job of serving Abran in the church itself is an honorable thing, but really, for aristocrats, a lot of them are in the church because they either have crazy amounts of magic power, or they're a problem for their families, y'know?"

I see...

If an aristocrat got an official position in the church, that was one thing, but if they *didn't*, there was either an issue with the person themselves or their very existence was a problem for their families. It was no wonder that aristocrats weren't clearly identifiable in the church. Normally, it wouldn't be strange for aristocrats to be distinguishable at a glance. However, Seiichirou didn't know the reality of the situation yet.

Nevertheless, Norbert was able to say these things because he was fearless—or rather, because he had no tact—so they were probably his candid impressions.

After lunch, Seiichirou returned to the Accounting Department like he normally would, and Norbert asked him curiously:

"But wait—how can you come to the dining hall like normal? Wouldn't it be bad if you ran into Commander Indolark?"

The fact that Norbert had asked such a question head-on, in such a

nonchalant way, was exactly what made Norbert Norbert.

“Aresh never comes to the dining hall on his own, so it’s okay,” Seiichirou replied with a slightly smug look on his face.

Aresh only came to the dining hall to help with Seiichirou’s meals. As commander of the Third Royal Order, his meals were usually brought to his office. Norbert looked at him, amazed, and continued in much the same manner:

“Man, Sei, you’ve gotta be super scared of getting found out by Commander Indolark, huh?”

Unsurprisingly, Norbert’s workload for that afternoon increased.

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“How *nice*. Civil officials get to rest whenever they please.”

It was Seiichirou’s third day at the church, after only one day away, and it began with that snide comment from Selio.

Seiichirou might have worked in the Accounting Department without rest, but everyone else working at the royal palace almost always took their days off. Naturally, though, this was not the case for industries of production, like farms. If you went to the markets, too, they were always open for business. When Seiichirou had asked the young boy who made his abacuses, Sigma, about this previously, Sigma had replied, “If we take days off, we’ll make less money, won’t we?” The church seemed to be open all year round as well, and even though citizens came to assist, Selio, the other monk apprentices, the monks, and the nuns all lived where they worked, so their lives and work were inextricably linked. As was the case in modern Japan, studying while working at a live-in job would make one’s days off feel a bit muddled. From his conversation with Norbert the day before, Seiichirou had gotten the sense that it was common practice for nobles to donate to the church, but he couldn’t help but wonder how the church in the royal capital had gotten into this mess.

Seiichirou contemplated this with a vague sense of discomfort, so he gave Selio a half-hearted response.

“Yeah.”

To reiterate—Seiichirou had not, in fact, rested.

“*Tch!* This is why I can’t stand civil officials...! Just do whatever you want!” yelled Selio, stomping away and trying very hard to make his footsteps loud, despite his the thinness of his body.

Seiichirou had scored some free time.

“You again...?”

In the study at the back of the assembly room, the now-familiar priest with chestnut hair, Siegvold, appeared, standing with his back to the sun.

“It’s always a pleasure,” Seiichirou responded.

Siegvold looked around, appearing exasperated, then looked back at Seiichirou.

“Where has Selio...? I probably don’t even need to ask anymore, do I?”

Well, it’s the same predicament we were in on the first day, so there’s probably no point asking.

Seiichirou said nothing, giving the man a slightly pained look.

“He’s a difficult child...,” said Siegvold. “His faith is very deep, but he’s too forthcoming with his emotions.”

“Well, isn’t that common for boys his age?”

Given Selio’s age, he would probably be a junior high school student or thereabouts. And if he had been raised from a young age in the closed-off world of the church, his values might have become slightly skewed.

“...Could he be doing this to get around his supervising duties...?”

As Siegvold’s purple eyes narrowed, his slightly lowered voice reminded Seiichirou of someone. Seiichirou calmly shook his head.

“Definitely not. Besides, he never seemed fond of me from the start.”

In fact, it would have been easier for Seiichirou to work without Selio’s supervision, but Seiichirou had no intention of stopping, even if Selio tried to

deter him. Seiichirou was so confident he could fool the boy with his eloquence and competence that he didn't care if the boy was there or not.

"Right... He certainly has very strong feelings toward nobles and civil officials, almost like an inferiority complex."

If the church knew that and had still made Selio Seiichirou's guide, they seemed to have quite some animosity toward the royal palace.

"Some of the monk apprentices are children without any relatives, and most of them are commoners, so they feel defiant toward anyone who comes from the royal palace. I'd like to get you another guide, but as this appointment came from the bishop, who is currently absent, I can't just change it on my own."

"No, don't worry about it."

Seiichirou, who had been born and raised a commoner, understood how they felt. He nodded, and just then, the lunch bell rang.

Then, for some reason, Seiichirou was in the flower garden with Siegvold again.

"The church would also prepare a meal for you, you know."

Seiichirou had brought his own lunch, and, perhaps following his lead, Siegvold had brought something that resembled a sandwich. There was no one else in the flower garden, but it was well-maintained and bathed in gentle sunlight.

"I have allergies—there are a lot of things my body doesn't agree with, so I bring my own lunch."

"Things your body doesn't agree with?"

"Yes. I don't have any tolerance toward magicules and magic power—normal things in this world—and when I eat too much of something with a lot of magicules, it's bad for me," Seiichirou explained briefly.

Siegvold's eyebrows furrowed quizzically.

"If I absorb too many magicules, I'll be poisoned," Seiichirou clarified.

"You'll be...poisoned?"

“Yes. Basically, the nausea and dizziness exhaust my physical strength. Incidentally, I don’t have a tolerance to magic power, either, so healing magic—holy magic—has the opposite effect on me.”

“The opposite effect?”

“It will improve my wounds or my mood, but afterward I’ll get magic-sickness and run a fever.”

“Magic-sickness so severe you run a fever...? You’re not a baby.”

“Yeah, you’re telling me. I’m worse than a newborn, apparently.”

Aresh had told Seiichirou that if he had even the smallest injury healed, he would run a fever so high he would immediately feel dizzy, and that this reaction was worse than that of a newborn baby. Even Ciro, the medical director, had been surprised.

“I can’t believe it... You, a disciple...? But the Holy Maiden...”

“That’s because Shiraishi was officially summoned to this world as the Holy Maiden, right? Divine protection or something? Doesn’t something like that exist?”

“That’s... Yes, certainly... Divine protection...,” Siegvold said before falling silent.

I might have made a mistake, Seiichirou thought as he looked at the priest.

From what Seiichirou had seen, Siegvold was a devout believer. Until now, Seiichirou had so often been treated like the Holy Maiden’s tagalong—or rather, like a nuisance—but Siegvold had treated him politely from the beginning. This man was invaluable to Seiichirou as the first person to show him respect. But even that politeness was because he’d considered Seiichirou to have been summoned by the god he believed in. If, however, Seiichirou were a man without the divine protection of this world—a man who became gravely ill by simply breathing its air—was he really someone this world had sought out? Seiichirou didn’t have to think long about the answer—*no*.

Seiichirou was just an ordinary man who had gotten dragged into the Holy Maiden Summoning. His very existence was undoubtedly heretical in this world.

Would this deeply religious man really treat a heretic in the same way he had treated him before? As a clergyman, would he treat Seiichirou with mercy?

No—enough of that wishful thinking.

Seiichirou steeled himself and faced Siegvold. The man's chestnut-colored hair looked red under the soft sunlight.

Looking over Siegvold's face again, Seiichirou noticed that his well-defined nose suited his thin lips. His face was so strikingly handsome, he even seemed a bit cold when he was silent. His eyes flicked upward, meeting Seiichirou's.

"In other words...you're a disciple that's been given a trial."

"What?"

Without thinking, Seiichirou had scrunched up his face, so he breathed and tried to regain his composure as best he could. No matter how absurd the thing Siegvold had just said was, he was still a powerful person in the church. Even though Seiichirou thought, *What is this guy on about?* he couldn't show it in his expression. He tried to control the muscles of his face, but Siegvold did not stop talking.

"God's divine discretion has brought you across worlds. Your inability to adapt to this world is nothing but a test from God. We, too, undergo trials and training to communicate God's will to the masses and serve God. We also elevate ourselves and bring ourselves closer to God's will."

Siegvold's expression was serious, and he looked intently at Seiichirou. This interaction reminded Seiichirou of whenever the enthusiastic switch of Ist—the oddball assistant director of the Royal Sorcery Department—was flipped. Seiichirou had probably flipped Siegvold's switch by accident. As a modern Japanese man who was indifferent to religion, Seiichirou had no idea what expression he ought to make at a time like this.

For now, Seiichirou would mentally sort through Siegvold's speech and absorb whatever he could.

"God's divine discretion," "We, too, undergo trials"... Seiichirou sensed respect and camaraderie in those words, not ill will. However, unless Seiichirou did something, Siegvold would paint him as a *"disciple that had been given a*

trial.” Seiichirou had just heard some unsettling words, like *training*, and if he wasn’t careful, it was possible that this deeply religious priest would force him to train as a real disciple.

Looking at Siegvold now, Seiichirou felt a sense of foreboding, among other things.

“No, I’m a just a regular person who simply got dragged— I mean, who happened to come here in the Holy Maiden Summoning...”

“Of course not! Abran would never do something that has no meaning.”

Seiichirou believed that Siegvold, the other priests, and the sorcerers were the ones who had carried out the Holy Maiden Summoning, and that their god had merely shown them a divine revelation. Siegvold, however, thought differently about the matter. He believed that summoning humans from another world wasn’t a realm in which humans could tread—it was God’s domain—so they had merely been assisting God. Therefore, the Holy Maiden Summoning was God’s will, and by extension, the appearance of Seiichirou was also God’s will.

“No, really, it was just by chance that I touched Shiraishi—the Holy Maiden, I mean—when she was being summoned. It was just a coincidence...”

“Everything God does has meaning. Even things that seem accidental to our human eyes are God’s divine will.”

“...”

Seiichirou carefully scrutinized Siegvold’s words once again. All he could sense was that Siegvold felt no animosity toward him. He closed his eyes for two seconds, then replied:

“I see.”

In other words, Seiichirou adopted a stance commonly referred to as “looking the other way.”

“Whoa, he’s here again!”

As usual, Norbert arrived at work mere seconds before it was due to begin. And, upon entering the Accounting Department, his thoughts accidentally

slipped from his mouth. The man Norbert was referring to looked at him with his usual glazed eyes. Then narrowed them.

“Perfect timing, Norbert. I have a task for you.”

“No! You’re kidding, right?! You heard what I said and just thought of that, didn’t you?! Or *made it up*, I should say! I’m sorry!!”

Clinging to Seiichirou’s cloak, a garment which indicated Seiichirou’s official position as a civil servant, Norbert somehow managed to avoid having his workload increased. Immediately forgetting the danger that had just passed, he started chatting with Seiichirou, who was working in the seat beside him like it was a matter of course.

“You’ve got another day off from the church investigation today?”

“My work schedule is the same as it was here.”

Because the church was open every day of the year, arrangements had been made to ensure that Seiichirou’s days off were the same as when he worked at the Accounting Department. The church had been informed of his schedule as well.

“And you came here to work again...? Don’t you have anything else to do, Sei?”

“What I do on my days off is my own business,” replied Seiichirou without even looking up from his papers.

“Oh? Your own business...?” Norbert asked, tilting his head, but Seiichirou did not respond.

Norbert, however, didn’t understand the concept of feeling discouraged or learning a lesson the hard way, so he continued peppering Seiichirou with questions as usual.

“That reminds me, Sei, have you been getting along with the church people?”

The way he said it sounded like an older relative asking a kid if he had made any friends at school. Seiichirou deflated momentarily, but then he remembered everyone at the church, looked at Norbert, and smiled slightly.

“...You may be an idiot, but you might be a good subordinate.”

“Huh?! Where’d that come from?! I’m blushing!”

As Norbert blushed, the other civil officials in the Accounting Department thought, *Wait, he just called you an idiot in no uncertain terms, but it’s a good thing?!* Norbert, however, seemed very pleased, so it was probably fine.

Seiichirou had gone to the church for three days, but Selio still flared up rudely at him, and the other monks and nuns avoided him and whispered about him. Norbert had been right—Seiichirou had caught glimpses of people who appeared to come from noble families here and there—but all of them had looked at Seiichirou, a man who had come from another world and was now working as a civil official, with extreme distaste. On the flip side, Selio and the others with commoner backgrounds seemed to dislike civil officials in general.

And then, more than anything else, Seiichirou had to deal with Priest Siegvold. Ever since that first day, Siegvold would come straight to Seiichirou whenever their eyes met. But perhaps it was more accurate to say that Seiichirou would bump into him unexpectedly wherever he went (after slipping away from Selio). One could have called the priest the caretaker of the church, so the fact that he was present was a good thing—it was proof that he was involved with the administration of the church—but unfortunately, this priest got in Seiichirou’s way.

And now that Seiichirou thought about it, no one in the Accounting Department had ever gotten in the way of his work, which reaffirmed his belief that he had been fortunate with his job. Although, technically, there had never been anyone in the department who *could* get in his way. They say you only realize the beauty of your birthplace after leaving it, after all. Even if Seiichirou’s real birthplace was an entirely different world...

And so, once again, Seiichirou spent his day off working diligently and enthusiastically.

However, that was not the full extent of Seiichirou’s work. He was supporting the research for a spell that could send him back to his home world, after all. Prime Minister Camile had even been taking action to secure researchers for the Royal Sorcery Department and making arrangements to increase the number of personnel, but unfortunately, because it was a highly skilled

profession, he had not been able to find enough candidates. Because the members of the Sorcery Department performed spells, Seiichirou had assumed there was a sort of status associated with the department, but after seeing the reality of it firsthand, he had realized that might not be the case.

“It’s Kondou, assistant director of the Accounting Department.”

Seiichirou was on the very opposite end of the building, quite far from the Accounting Department. He knocked on the door of the Royal Sorcery Department’s laboratory, but there was no reply.

“Pardon me,” said Seiichirou, pushing the door open.

It was the middle of the day, but the lab was dimly lit. There were large desks covered and piled high with things like books, pens, and other unidentifiable objects. One object might have been some kind of dried fish. There was something hanging on the wall that looked like an animal pelt. The floor was littered, too—with both things and people. Seiichirou took care not to step on the royal sorcerers wrapped in blankets and headed toward the back, where the mess was the worst. He managed to step over what looked like a barricade of books and then called out to the bundle of blankets, who was the owner of the barricade.

“Ist. Ist! It’s Kondou. I’m here to get a progress report.”

The blankets began to stir, and then a head of pink hair, messy from sleep, popped out of the middle of them.

“Hmm? Morning already?”

“No, it’s the middle of the day. The evening Water hour, to be precise.”

The man’s sleepy eyes were even droopier than normal. This wasn’t a butterfly emerging from a cocoon—it was Ist, assistant director of the Royal Sorcery Department. As he got up, his head wobbled like he couldn’t keep it steady.

Assistant director of the Royal Sorcery Department.

As the name implied, he was the second-in-command of the department of magical research, which carried the entire kingdom on its shoulders—the

number two.

Ist had the same rank as Seiichirou, and they were the same age as well. Compared to Seiichirou, whose constantly glazed eyes and dark circles gave off the impression that he was exhausted, Ist, who seemed vaguely absent-minded and childlike, did not look to be the same age as Seiichirou at all.

Moreover, the number one of the Royal Sorcery Department—the director—was a man who had obtained that position because of his aristocratic status. So in actuality, the number one sorcerer in the department was the baby-faced Ist, a man with lines from his blanket and traces of drool on his right cheek.

In this world, where magic was the norm and relevant in people's everyday lives, the Royal Sorcery Department was the star of the government offices.

Seiichirou had been surprised the first time he had visited the Sorcery Department, which resembled a garbage dump. But he'd also felt a vague sense of nostalgia. When Seiichirou had lived in Japan, he had worked at an IT company. This lab very closely resembled the graveyard of system engineers before a delivery date. For this reason, Seiichirou regularly visited this room, which no one except members of the Sorcery Department wanted to go near.

“Oh, Kondo... Long time no see.”

“It's only been six days. Anyway, I'd like the progress report, please.”

Ist was truly the greatest sorcerer in the kingdom, but because he poured every ounce of his brain power into magic research, there was not much else to him besides that. Incidentally, because Ist tended to drop all formalities and pauses for breath whenever he got excited, Seiichirou had jumped the gun and already told Ist that he didn't need to be formal around him because they were the same age.

Seiichirou had entrusted Ist with researching a movement spell to get the otherworlders back to their home world, but as the one managing the budgets, Seiichirou needed regular progress reports. Seiichirou used these as a basis to allot budgets and even to put in a good word about the personnel issue. The one who had to deliver the reports, however, was Ist.

It probably would have been better if another sorcerer handled them, but the

Sorcery Department had other work to do, and they couldn't devote all their time to the research Seiichirou had requested of them—a spell to send him back home. Besides, all sorcerers were like Ist to some degree. Therefore, when Ist had complained that submitting a written progress report would be impossible, Seiichirou had thought, *I bet*. But Seiichirou had to be updated one way or another. He had considered having someone permanently stationed at the Sorcery Department to give him reports, but with sorcery being a specialized profession, the average person probably couldn't understand what sorcerers were doing just by observing them. As Seiichirou had puzzled over this conundrum, Ist had suggested:

“Why don't I talk, and you write down what I say?”

That was why Seiichirou regularly listened to and summarized Ist's verbal reports, which often wandered from place to place and sometimes raced noisily along. A short distance away, from heaps of trash—or rather, from here and there around the lab—other sorcerers watched on.

“The otherworlder is amazing...”

“Even we sometimes have trouble understanding what Ist is saying...”

“There's technical terms and stuff, but Ist also goes on tangents a lot and has a weird way of speaking...”

“And the otherworlder listens to him, summarizes it in his head, and writes notes, all while simultaneously using that weird ah-back-us tool thing.”

“Are all otherworlders like that?”

“The other world must be scary...”

“Probably, but I think this assistant director of Accounting is just a weird guy... Sort of like Ist...”

““““Oh!”””” they all said in unison.

Despite the chatter of the sorcerers, who for some reason had come to an intense understanding about something, neither Seiichirou's pen nor Ist's rapid-fire talking paused for quite some time.

“...I see. I get it. It goes without saying that you need more people, but you

also need funds to buy the tools that you need for the research, right?”

So they lacked people *and* things.

“Huh? You’re gonna buy some for me? Yay!”

“I haven’t said I’ll buy them yet. For now, I’m going to take this home and redo my preliminary calculations.”

“When? When are you gonna buy them? Tomorrow?”

“I told you, I haven’t said I’ll buy them yet. I’m going to the church tomorrow, so I can’t come here.”

“The church? Kondo, you’re going to the church? Then bring me that thing. The sacred relic.”

“That is obviously impossible.”

Selio had said there were barriers around the sacred relic, so just entering the room in which it was housed would probably put Seiichirou’s life in danger.

After their conversation, Seiichirou checked a few things, said a half-hearted good-bye to Ist, who had once again immersed himself in his research, spoke a bit with the other sorcerers, then left the lab. Seiichirou had entrusted Ist with the spell to send him home, but the Sorcery Department was also involved in monitoring the miasma barrier in the Demon Forest.

If they sleep on the floor, their bodies will start hurting and they’ll get poor-quality sleep, which will reduce their efficiency... Maybe I should have a nap room made for them or something.

Seiichirou put his own affairs on hold as he walked through the castle, pondering how the sorcerers at the Royal Sorcery Department could advance their research most effectively. Even though it was Seiichirou’s day off, he couldn’t just wander around the royal palace in his casual clothes. In his usual civil official uniform and his short, one-shoulder cloak indicating his managerial position, he looked right at home in the castle—except for his lifeless, glazed eyes.

Then he saw a girl running toward him, looking the way she always did—neither in a civil official uniform, nor a chamberlain uniform, nor even a dress.

“Kondou!”

She was the only one who called Seiichirou by his name with the correct pronunciation—the one who had dragged Seiichirou into this world, and the one who would save it—Yua Shiraishi, the Holy Maiden. She had been a high school student who lived in modern Japan without wanting for anything, but then she’d been suddenly summoned here as the Holy Maiden who was to purify the miasma of this world.

When Yua had first arrived, everyone had welcomed her warmly, and as the Holy Maiden, she had lived in the royal palace, spending her time surrounded by knights and maids and without a care in the world. However, after experiencing the purification journey, Yua had realized the dangers of this world and the perilousness of her own position and had asked to return to her home world after her mission was carried out.

“It’s been kind of a while, hasn’t it?”

At the same time, though she’d never had much interest in Seiichirou before, she now seemed to be relying on him as the only other person who was from her home world—and as her means of going home.

However...

“It has. It’s been a while since I’ve seen you, too, Prince Yurius.”

“*Hmph*. I don’t even want to see your face.”

Yurius, the firstborn prince of the Romany Kingdom, came up from behind Yua and responded to Seiichirou’s politeness with contempt. Yua’s former hangers-on did not approve of Seiichirou and Yua interacting, but they were only ever rude to Seiichirou, which made them even more annoying.

Seiichirou was proceeding with his plan to have a spell made to send them back home to Japan for selfish reasons, so he wished Yua would go back to not interacting with him. Unfortunately, Yua had become slightly distrustful of people and wanted to distance herself from those who had previously pampered her. From her perspective, Seiichirou, a man from her home country, was the only person she could fully trust. Yua was a sixteen-year-old girl in a different world who was feeling uneasy, so obviously Seiichirou couldn’t directly

refuse her. Thanks to the punishment the knights who had beaten him before had received, along with Aresh's watchful eye, other people didn't harass Seiichirou. However, that protection didn't extend to the prince currently standing in front of him. As a result, Seiichirou had to accept the Holy Maiden's smiles and the prince's glares and snide remarks simultaneously.

But even though Yua had become somewhat more careful, she didn't notice Yurius's attitude and continued talking.

"I went to the Accounting Department to see you the other day, but they said you would be gone for a while on another work assignment?"

"Yes, I'm currently on assignment at another location. Today's my day off, so I came here," Seiichirou answered, wishing she would stop visiting in the middle of work without any advance warning.

"Your day off? And you came to your workplace in your uniform?"

She asked the question as if it were strange, but Seiichirou didn't understand what was so strange about it, so he nodded, his expression unchanged, as if it was a normal thing to do. Naturally, however, in a situation like this, Yua's response was the correct one.

"Huh? I see... That sounds...tough? But if you can come here, too, that must mean you're on assignment nearby, right?"

"Yes. It's at the church in the royal capital."

"What?! The church in the royal capital?! That's where I go, too!"

"Huh? Oh, right..."

Yua's words had jogged his memory. Yua was currently living in the royal palace while commuting to the church to assist with purification and healing magic. After going on the first purification trip, Yua had wanted to leave the royal palace, wary of the people there who had summoned her and welcomed her. But it would be difficult for a woman from another world to live on her own, and it would be catastrophic if anything happened to her. Seiichirou had jumped in to help persuade her to stay at the palace, and so now she was living in the royal palace while visiting the church during the day to broaden her horizons. And there was only one church near the royal palace that was worthy

of welcoming the Holy Maiden.

“Do you like your activities at the church?”

“I do! I’m so happy there are so many things that I can do, like purifying the sick who come to pray and healing the injured! And everyone is so kind to me.”

Yua spoke energetically, as if she felt like her work at the church was more valuable than the time when she had been immersed in studies at the royal palace. Perhaps she had always been more inclined to practical application than book learning. Her reaction puzzled Seiichirou, and the faces of the members of the church floated in his mind’s eye, but then he remembered that the people at the church were probably nice to the Holy Maiden.

“Especially Selio... He’s a monk apprentice who showed me all around the church. He’s such a pretty boy! And such a good kid, too! He teaches me so much!”

“...Huh?”

“But I go to the church almost every day, and I’ve never seen you there! Isn’t that weird?”

“Well, the inside of the church is big, isn’t it? I mainly do office work, so I rarely ever go near the chapel.”

“Oh, I see. That reminds me, the relief house—”

“Yua, you’re the Holy Maiden, so you should just concentrate on your purification instead of working.”

Just as Yua had been about to say something, the heir to the most powerful person in the kingdom, neglected for the entire conversation, had interrupted her.

“Yurius... I’ve told you so many times, I want to do whatever I can to help.”

“I’ve told you, you’re the Holy Maiden, so you should only do the purificati—”

“And I’ve told you I don’t want that!” said Yua in a slightly raised voice, cutting Yurius off.

Then, looking surprised by her own reaction, she apologized, curtsied, and

walked away rather quickly. Several people followed her from where they had been hiding, so it seemed as though she didn't need to worry about guards.

Well...

Acting like he had neither seen nor heard anything, Seiichirou bowed and quickly turned to leave, but—

“Come with me for a minute.”

Seiichirou was stopped by the prince's intimidating command. There was no way he was going to escape.

“Why...?! Why has Yua started refusing me...?!”

Seiichirou was forcibly brought to the prince's private quarters. The room was filled with lavish yet surprisingly tasteful and subdued furnishings. The maid had brewed tea and laid out sweets, but Seiichirou couldn't eat them, of course.

There was also a knight in front of the door wearing armor with green ornamentation—a member of the Second Royal Order, which guarded very important people—so it seemed unlikely that Seiichirou would be able to leave. He didn't bother hiding his sigh as he got comfortable in his chair.

“Why does Yua rely on a feeble man with no powers like you, and not me? Answer me, Kondou!”

Perhaps because Prince Yurius had heard Yua call him “Kondou” more than anyone else, he addressed the otherworlder with the correct pronunciation of his name—and a heavy dose of intimidation. But even without asking, Yurius could probably figure it out if he thought about everything that had happened until that point, so what exactly did he want Seiichirou to say?

Yua would perform the purification as the Holy Maiden, but when that was finished, she wanted to return to her home world.

The kingdom wanted her to stay even after she'd finished the purification as the Holy Maiden.

Yua wanted to distance herself from those in the royal palace who had spoiled her and withheld inconvenient information from her.

The kingdom wanted to keep the Holy Maiden in the royal palace and use her

diplomatically and politically as a symbol for the kingdom.

No matter which way you sliced it, reconciling these desires was impossible.

In particular, the kingdom needed a descendant of the Holy Maiden so that they could receive the divine revelation for the next Holy Maiden. Although Yua had probably not yet realized that the prince wanted to start a family with her, she seemed to have rationalized that he was trying to get closer to her because she was someone from another world. Even if she were to realize his true intentions, however, she was from a modern Japanese generation in which gender equality had proliferated, so she would probably feel extremely indignant about it.

How could Seiichirou explain this to the prince without making any waves?

Better yet, Seiichirou reasoned, the other adults around the pair didn't harbor intense adoration for the Holy Maiden like the prince did, and they had probably recognized the prince's feelings, so they should be the ones to gently break the news to him. Seiichirou looked around again, but none of the knights or maids met Seiichirou's eyes. They were foisting this upon him.

"...Maybe Your Highness and Shiraishi—I mean, the Holy Maiden—have been clashing because you two have different values."

"Values? But Yua comes from a noble family, so they're probably not that different."

Yua's family had probably been wealthy, but nobility did not exist in Japan. In any event, she had come from a different world.

He's kidding, right? He doesn't even understand that? He needs me to explain things from that basic of a level? And everyone's still avoiding my gaze...

"No, nobility doesn't exist in the country we came from. It existed previously, but it has long been abolished."

"Really? But, even so, Yua's the Holy Maiden! It's only proper that a Holy Maiden be treated hospitably. Lately, though, Yua's been acting like she's uncomfortable with that."

That might be because she doesn't want to be indebted to anyone, but she

probably just doesn't want anyone devoting themselves to her, Seiichirou thought as he chose bland, inoffensive words:

"...She's probably just being modest."

Yurius continued to complain to Seiichirou about Yua not giving him any attention, and Seiichirou continued to employ the skill characteristic of Japanese salarymen—that of being artfully evasive.

As firstborn prince of the kingdom, Yurius had very little free time himself, so after half an hour, he finally told Seiichirou to go, and released him. But just when Seiichirou thought he was finally free, he opened the door and saw a man with fierce features and a green cloak standing in his way.

Please, just let me work.

Seiichirou's day off, it seemed, was not over yet.

In the Romany Kingdom, there were three Royal Orders of knights.

The First Royal Order was the organization that protected the country. They mostly provided defense within the borders.

The Second Royal Order protected the key figures in the kingdom—the royal family and nobles.

The Third Royal Order, with Aresh as their leader, protected the kingdom from magical beasts and invaders from outside the kingdom.

Each Royal Order was given their own color: The First Royal Order were clad in red, the Second Royal Order green, and the Third Royal Order black. Incidentally, the Royal Sorcery Department wore purple, the Legal Department wore blue, and the Accounting Department wore a subdued brown.

The green-cloaked man who had clearly been lying in wait for Seiichirou was the commander of the Second Royal Order. And Seiichirou, who had previously been deeply inconvenienced by the misconduct orchestrated by this man's subordinate, already knew who he was. Seiichirou hoped, therefore, that the commander would forgive the slight crease that formed between his brows.

Although Seiichirou felt aggrieved on the inside, he made the appropriate bowing gesture.

“Commander Makovska. It’s been a while.”

Radim Makovska responded to Seiichirou’s politeness with a slight nod and then asked, “May I have a word?”

Seiichirou’s plan for the day had been to work in the Accounting Department in the morning and then do some research in the Royal Library in the afternoon. Yurius had already caused a massive delay in this plan, so he hoped Radim could cut him some slack.

“I’m very sorry, but I have some business to get to...”

“I won’t be long.”

If I don’t have the right to refuse, don’t even ask.

Radim brought Seiichirou to a reception room by the Knight’s Station. Seiichirou couldn’t help looking around restlessly on the way there, and Radim’s intense eyebrows dipped with concern.

“...You don’t need to worry. No knight will lay a hand on you.”

Seiichirou had previously been beaten by members of the Second and Third Royal Orders, who had called him the Holy Maiden’s tagalong and warned him to stop meddling in the kingdom’s affairs. Radim assumed, therefore, that it was only inevitable that Seiichirou would feel skittish around knights. Seiichirou, however, had much bigger concerns. This was the Knight’s Station—the place where Aresh, commander of the Third Royal Order, was very likely to be. After Seiichirou had been beaten by those knights, Aresh had healed his injuries, Seiichirou had received quite a lot of money in damages, and the Second and Third Royal Orders had owed him a favor. All of which had made budgeting and his other tasks much easier to accomplish. Seiichirou had already moved on from that incident. More importantly, Seiichirou’s current worry was whether Aresh would catch him working on his day off. Aresh was always telling Seiichirou to rest. What would Seiichirou have to suffer if Aresh found out he was coming to work on his days off...? If Seiichirou wasn’t careful, he could be confined to the house.

But, even scarier than that...Aresh might make Seiichirou take a *real* day off from work.

“...So...could we make this chat as brief as possible?”

“Right... Sorry.”

Radim, still assuming Seiichirou didn't like the location because knights were around, looked apologetic as he offered Seiichirou a seat and took the one opposite.

“I wanted to talk about His Highness Yurius.”

There's something else?

Seiichirou almost frowned at this, but then he remembered that the job of the Second Royal Order was largely to protect important people. Almost all their work had to do with the royal family. It was good the commander was so enthusiastic about his duties.

“Could you somehow act as a go-between for His Highness and the Holy Maiden?”

“I'm going home.”

“Huh?”

On his way back to the Knight's Station, vice-commander of the Third Royal Order, Orjef Rhoda, came to a stop when he spotted a cloak in a color he very rarely saw.

“That was...”

A brown cloak signified a member of the Accounting Department. The Accounting Department was at the far end of the royal palace, and its members shouldn't have had any business near a training center like this. Plus, the fact that the man was wearing a cloak at all meant that he had a managerial position. And speaking of Accounting Department managers, he had heard rumors that Aresh, commander of the Third Royal Order and Orjef's own cousin, had impounded the otherworlder.

“I think his name was... Kon... Kon...ou?”

“Is something wrong with Seiichirou?” came a voice from behind him without warning.

“...!!”

Even though he was a knight, Orjef was so spooked he thought his heart was going to jump out of his mouth. He turned around and saw, as he'd expected, the familiar, handsome face he had imagined earlier.

“A-Aresh... Don't startle me...”

Despite Orjef's reproachful look, Aresh repeated himself, looking as unruffled as ever.

“You startled yourself. So what's wrong with Seiichirou?”

“Seiichirou?”

Orjef tilted his head at the unfamiliar name, but when Aresh reminded him, “You just said his name,” Orjef realized that that was the otherworlder's given name.

“Oh, just now I...”

But as Orjef started to speak, he suddenly remembered something. Aresh had always been proficient and incredible at everything, so he'd never had any interest in anything. However, he'd been doing a lot of surprising things lately, and all of them had to do with that otherworlder.

Everyone longed for the position of commander of the Third Royal Order, but Aresh had always performed its duties like they were a chore—like the honor had been forced upon him. Even with this attitude, however, he was stronger and more talented than anyone else, and as he came from a good family and was handsome to boot, no one had any room to complain. In fact, Aresh had even gained more sympathizers since assuming the position. For some reason, though, he had recently started keeping an eye on his subordinates' movements and voluntarily doing administrative work without any reluctance. And from what Orjef had heard, it seemed that Aresh—yes, *that* Aresh—had even fallen in love with someone. Apparently, that was why he had started to work so hard at his job. Orjef was sure he would never forget the excitement he had felt when Aresh had first dropped hints about that.

That Aresh, who was so indifferent toward others, it was as if he had left his capacity for emotion in his mother's womb... Orjef couldn't believe *that* Aresh

was capable of having special feelings for another person. Or that he would come to Orjef for advice about it! Orjef had suppressed his infinite curiosity with his knightly spirit and had patiently listened to Aresh's story.

Although Aresh had told his story in a very matter-of-fact manner, the details had been so bittersweet that Orjef had almost instinctively writhed in agony, and recalled memories of his own childhood.

In other words...

That *motivator* for Aresh was *something* worthy of being called his *first love*.

Aresh had been perplexed by emotions for the first time, and Orjef had been thrilled to hear him talk about it. Orjef had avoided asking about the other party as much as he could, under the assumption that Aresh would stop coming to him for advice if he pried too heavy-handedly. Orjef did, however, investigate the people Aresh normally associated with. Obviously, he did want to know who this other person was. However, unfortunately, he hadn't found anyone in contact with Aresh who fit the description. Other than the otherworlder.

Aresh's behavior toward the otherworlder went well beyond any normal standards of overprotectiveness. When Aresh was around the otherworlder, he always put the other man first no matter the situation, and he constantly worried about him. To top it all off, Aresh had left his family's home, whisked the otherworlder away, and started living with him. As soon as Orjef had heard about that, his belief had solidified...

The person on the receiving end of Aresh's "thing" was that otherworlder.

If Aresh hadn't come to him for advice, Orjef might never have noticed anything. In fact, there were many who saw the two men together and simply thought, *Commander Indolark is surprisingly good at taking care of others!* These people thought there was nothing more between Aresh and the oddball workaholic.

But when Orjef tried to look at their relationship through this platonic lens, Aresh seemed overly possessive of the otherworlder. And Commander Radim had just led that same otherworlder into the reception room... What would happen if Orjef told Aresh about this? The answer was as clear as day. Partly because they were in the middle of work, but mostly because he couldn't

imagine anything worse than the commanders of the Royal Orders fighting with one another, Orjef decided to feign ignorance.

“Well, I heard about the next expedition, and I was wondering if he would come.”

“Last time, he was forced by the higher-ups to do a preliminary inquiry for the plan to seal the miasma, but he’s so weak, he should never have gone to the Demon Forest in the first place. I will never let him go there again.”

Does Aresh have the power to decide that? Orjef wondered as he outwardly nodded in agreement. In any event, he thought it was probably prudent to get out of this area as quickly as possible.

“That reminds me, we’ve received the documents about the expedition. They’re in the office. Would you mind looking them over?”

“Sure thing.”

Aresh nodded and took a few steps forward, but then he stopped in his tracks and looked back. Orjef stood at the ready, wondering if Aresh had gotten an inkling about something. Then, Aresh—a man in the throes of his first love—looked at Orjef with a grave expression and said:

“I’m the only one who can call Seiichirou ‘Seiichirou.’ His family name is Kondou. If you’re going to address him, use that.”

Orjef agreed, feeling as if he were swallowing sand.

Meanwhile, Seiichirou had arrived at home and was greeted by their maid, Milan. As soon as he got to his room, he let out a sigh. His afternoon plans had been ruined thanks to Yurius’s complaints and Radim’s attempt to recruit him to make the prince’s love a success.

Today has been nothing but bad luck...

Seiichirou understood the kingdom’s desire to have a descendant of the Holy Maiden so that they could receive the divine revelation for the next Holy Maiden, but if the “miasma barrier” policy Seiichirou had come up with went well, they wouldn’t even need another Holy Maiden. They still didn’t know what was to come, though, or when they could expect something to happen. He

understood their desire to have a backup plan. And although the prince appeared rather disconnected from reality, he did seem to have a crush on Yua. If that was something Yua reciprocated, they would need to further discuss her plans to go home, but right now, Yua wanted to keep her distance from Yurius. Yurius, not understanding this, kept trying to get closer to her, pushing her away even more in a vicious cycle. After all, if someone were to tell a high school girl from his home world, “I want your child as a backup plan, so become my wife,” Seiichirou knew they would be cut down with a single word: “Gross.”

“You seem a little tired,” commented Milan as she hung up Seiichirou’s cloak.

Seiichirou had insisted that he wanted to do as much of his chores on his own as possible, but Milan had pushed back by saying, “This is my job, after all,” and so she’d ended up looking after Seiichirou. She had realized very early on that Seiichirou yielded incredibly easily to the word *job*.

“No, I’m... Well, I guess I am.”

Seiichirou was many magnitudes more tired than his normal job made him.

Shaking his head, he switched his thoughts to work mode. He was doing okay collecting data at the church. They clearly viewed Seiichirou as the enemy, but their security was lax, so he wasn’t facing any difficulties in that regard. Sloppy security aside, Seiichirou was an auditor who had been officially assigned there by the kingdom, so they should have been submitting data to *him*. Moreover, the bishop and the accounting manager were both in another town on a business trip, but they would be getting back soon, so Seiichirou wanted to gather all the materials before then. The problem was that Seiichirou’s lack of knowledge about the political situation with regards to the church and nobility seemed to be hampering his progress.

As a member of the Accounting Department, Seiichirou only ever wanted to follow the numbers, but that didn’t seem possible with this assignment. The tendrils of the nobility wound their way into every crevice of the kingdom. Norbert had said all the powerful people in the church were nobles, and that while being sent to the church was publicly an honor, not everyone wanted to go.

When Seiichirou thought about powerful people in the church, the first

person to pop into his mind was a certain priest who didn't listen to him very much.

The priest clearly acted and carried himself in an aristocratic way, so Seiichirou's conversation with Norbert hadn't raised any suspicions about him. In fact, Seiichirou had suspected he was an aristocrat from the beginning. The priest seemed to have confidence in his work, and he was a thoroughly devout believer.

But among the monk apprentices the priest gave orders to, Seiichirou had caught sight of some incredibly condescending characters. They probably came from noble families, too. If they were expressing their own dissatisfaction with being in the church, Seiichirou could understand their attitudes.

To Seiichirou, a job was a job, so no matter how much he disliked the task, if he had been instructed to do it, he would have no other choice. Therefore, although he was incapable of understanding the root of their problem, he could understand how things had come to be that way.

Now that Seiichirou thought of it, he wondered if the nobles who joined the church were totally cut off from their families. He didn't remember Siegvold offering his family name.

Milan was approaching him with a change of clothes, so he asked her this question. She had served the marquess's family for a long time, so she knew much more about the aristocracy than Seiichirou did.

"It varies. As long as you belong to the church, you cannot receive the patronage of any one household, but some people do receive support from their parents. And some children of very respectable families are entrusted to the church for a while for etiquette apprenticeships, so they're not completely cut off from their families."

Now that Milan had mentioned it, Seiichirou remembered seeing a few incredibly lavish rooms when he had explored the church. Those must have been for the aristocratic children they looked after.

There was still so much Seiichirou didn't know. He thought it would probably be best for him to check a few things with Camile, but Camile was the prime minister. He was, quite literally, the busiest man in the kingdom. While Camile

could summon Seiichirou at the drop of a hat, even if Seiichirou did request a meeting, he wasn't sure when that meeting would take place.

"Pardon me."

The butler of the house, Valtom, knocked and entered just as Milan left.

"Aresh has returned. If you'd be so kind, would you go meet him?" Valtom asked with a perfect bow.

Seiichirou looked at the clock. It was still the Wind hour (around five in the afternoon). Aresh had come home incredibly early.

That was close...

If Seiichirou had stayed at the royal palace any longer, he would have come home later than Aresh, and Aresh would have seen Seiichirou in his official uniform.

Although Seiichirou's blood ran cold at the thought, he went out to greet the man. Valtom had served Aresh since Aresh was a little boy, and although he was a butler, he was also like a parent to Aresh, or his stalwart ally, and the only person who could admonish him.

Valtom asking Seiichirou to go see Aresh meant that he *had* to do it, but Seiichirou was turning a blind eye to this for the time being. He had once wanted to ask the servants of the house what they thought he was to Aresh, but he hadn't been able to pluck up the nerve to do it.

"Welcome home, Aresh."

When Seiichirou greeted him from the spacious entrance hall, which looked like it belonged to a slightly upscale hotel instead of a house, Aresh's eyes momentarily widened before he frowned.

"...What are you scheming?"

"Why the attack on my character?"

Aresh passed his cloak and bag to Milan and approached Seiichirou, looking even more suspicious.

"I'm just greeting the owner of the house. What do you take me for?"

“An over-the-top workaholic.”

This is the thanks I get for coming out to greet him... I'll just stop doing it from now on, Seiichirou thought, but then Aresh began rubbing Seiichirou's temple with his slender hand. His words and actions were incongruous, but overall he seemed pleased.

However, Seiichirou, who was born and raised in Japan, a country of modesty, nonchalantly distanced himself from Aresh's touch.

“...”

The wrinkle between Aresh's eyebrows deepened, but he couldn't do anything more in front of Milan and Valtom. Pretending not to notice, Seiichirou tried to leave the room, but then Aresh directed his clear voice at Seiichirou's retreating figure.

“I have the materials for the next expedition. Do you want to see them?”

“Yes, I do!” Seiichirou immediately yelped, and happily followed Aresh to his room. “We're planning on finishing the purification during this expedition, so I suggested going with a sorcerer for the barrier as well as an architect and waiting at a nearby village, but that wasn't accepted, huh?” Seiichirou asked aloud.

That was a shame, because it would have reduced the overall cost of the expeditions.

“We're planning on finishing the purification, but it's not a sure thing. We'll have to do some checks afterward, and since there's a shortage of sorcerers anyway, they probably couldn't assemble enough sorcerers at one time to cast the barrier,” Aresh explained.

“So the expedition for the barrier will get rescheduled...?”

Seiichirou had revised the budget for the Royal Sorcery Department and had been able to increase it, but they hadn't been able to hire more staff. It was quite difficult, since not everyone could become a sorcerer.

“You need a certain level of magic power to take a position with the Royal Sorcery Department, right? Are there really so few people who can meet those

standards?” Seiichirou asked.

He had assumed that because this was a world where magic was commonplace, everyone could use magic, but it seemed that it varied greatly from person to person.

“In addition, if you’re going to work in the Demon Forest, you also need high magicule tolerance.”

Both magic power and one’s tolerance to magicules varied greatly based on the individual, so people who had both were akin to superheroes. That was why the knights of the Third Royal Order were so admired, and why they could walk around the royal palace like they owned the place.

“Members of the Third Royal Order have inner strength, are physically strong, and excel at magic control. Even if you have magic power, it’s useless if you can’t control it,” Aresh added.

“You mean it can go berserk or something?” Seiichirou asked, remembering the movies and cartoons he had seen when he was little where characters would lose control of their superpowers.

Aresh nodded.

“That’s right. That’s why almost all children with those tendencies are placed in the custody of the church.”

“The church...?” Now that Aresh mentioned it, Seiichirou remembered that there were barriers in every nook and cranny of the church. Moreover, aristocrats, commoners, and orphaned children all worked together there. Was this the result of the church assembling those with strong magic power and magicule tolerance, regardless of their social status? “That makes sense. I see...”

As Seiichirou looked down, deep in thought, he felt something soft touch the exposed nape of his neck.

“Aresh...”

“What?” Aresh answered while moving his fingers, which were entwined with Seiichirou’s.

Seiichirou was sitting between Aresh’s legs on the sofa—Aresh’s condition for

letting him see the documents. There was no way for Seiichirou to escape. His right hand was restrained, and Aresh's left hand moved to his inner thigh.

"Ngh..."

"I'm putting another barrier on you."

Aresh weaved the songlike spell right beside his ear.

Seiichirou was engulfed by a gentle heat. Although he felt dazed, he looked back at Aresh with more awareness than before.

"Aresh—*ngh*—I'll... I'll do it with my mouth..."

Seiichirou had suggested this to thank him for the spell, because ingesting Aresh's bodily fluids was the quickest and easiest method of acclimatizing his magic power—faster than just pressing their bodies together—but Aresh shook his head.

"No, it's fine. Turn this way, instead," Aresh said, easily repositioning Seiichirou's body.

They were face-to-face. Seiichirou was, in other words, straddling Aresh's hips. Naturally, he was startled and squirmed, trying to get off Aresh's lap.

"Aresh! I'm too heavy...! Let me go...!"

"You're not heavy at all. It's fine, just calm down."

There's no way I'm not heavy! I'm a grown man!

Aresh's arms restrained him, steady as a rock. Before long, Seiichirou grew tired and relaxed, and Aresh loosened his hold.

"Hey, what are you...?!"

Aresh untied Seiichirou's loungewear pants, fastened only by a waistband cord, slipped his hand inside, and stroked him.

"Ahh...! I'm fine, Aresh, so you—!"

Seiichirou tried to escape Aresh's hand by pulling his hips away. The large hand was stroking and rubbing him inside his underwear, and Seiichirou was having trouble catching his breath. Gradually, he started hearing a wet sound coming from the lower half of his body.

“Ahh...”

Schlick.

Just when Seiichirou thought he heard Aresh’s low voice, thick with desire, he also felt his cock being pulled out of his pants, and then another kind of heat, not Aresh’s hand, rubbing against it.

“...?! A-Aresh... Ah!”

Eyes wide, Seiichirou saw Aresh stroking both of their cocks at the same time with his big hand. Even if Seiichirou tried to escape, though, he was too drained from magic-sickness, and he was no match for Aresh when it came to physical strength anyway. He tried to persuade Aresh against this while pulling his hips away with all the strength he could muster.

“...! A-A-Aresh...! P-please... Ngh! Please let me use my mouth!”

“No.”

Hearing the heat in Aresh’s voice, Seiichirou looked up. Then he regretted doing so.

Aresh’s face was mere inches from Seiichirou’s, and Seiichirou saw that the beautiful young man’s cheeks were flushed, and that his violet eyes were filled with desire and looking right at Seiichirou.

“A-Aresh...! I c-can’t... This is...too embarrassing...!”

“*Hahh...* That mouth of yours talks a lot...,” Aresh muttered, breathing hotly against Seiichirou’s skin and nipping at his talkative mouth.

“Mnn... Ngh... Ah... Mmm!”

“*Hahh...* Ngh...”

Embarrassing wet sounds came from above and below, and Seiichirou had no choice but to cling to Aresh.



At the end of the day, it would have been preposterous for anyone to come to Seiichirou for advice on romance.

He had yet to be able to honestly confront his own romantic relationship, after all.



[CHAPTER THREE]

Planned

When Seiichirou awoke the next day, he found himself, as expected, in Aresh's arms. He had already grown so used to waking up with Aresh's body wrapped around his—that body that had touched him so much the day before—that he might have even gained a sense of security from it.

No, no, no! Seiichirou admonished himself when his thoughts began to stray in that direction. He shook his head.

There's no point in getting used to this.

As one might expect of such a young commander from the most celebrated Royal Order, Aresh was very intelligent. He was a quick learner, and very perceptive. And it was clear that he was making use of a certain facet of Seiichirou's personality... It wasn't that Seiichirou was easily influenced, but he hated wastefulness, so he was quite adaptable in the sense of wanting to efficiently achieve the best results possible from any given situation. Because of that, Aresh was a formidable opponent.

However, *this* was not the sort of thing Seiichirou ought to accept in the name of efficiency. Even someone like Seiichirou had that much of a conscience.

"...Mm... You're up..."

Just as Seiichirou was counting prime numbers in his head to calm himself down, a languid, beautiful voice, even lower than usual, came from overhead.

"Oh... Good morning," Seiichirou said—a conditioned reflex.

Aresh smiled slightly, and he gave Seiichirou a kiss instead of a reply.

Due to Seiichirou's negligence, that morning had been perfectly choreographed as one between lovers. Inside a carriage headed to the church, Seiichirou barely stopped himself from putting his head in his hands. He sighed.

He had to get a grip. The next purification expedition would be in six days.

There was no definitive proof that it was going to be the last. Therefore, Seiichirou had drawn up a budget for a backup expedition and had also submitted a draft budget for the barrier warden's building, for after the purification was complete.

The problems they faced were gathering the personnel to create the barrier and choosing the wardens. The Third Royal Order would be accompanying them on the expedition, and so, as this was a different matter from their original duties, it would have been unwise to use them for anything more than that. Well, Seiichirou actually would have liked their help, even if only with barrier techniques, and if Seiichirou asked Aresh, he probably wouldn't refuse. But Seiichirou was always asking Aresh, and by extension, the Third Royal Order, for things, so there was concern that the balance of power in the royal palace would be affected. That was partly why Seiichirou had been temporarily transferred to the church—Camile was probably telling him in a roundabout way to find someone else to rely on, outside the Third Royal Order.

However, since both tasks they needed to carry out depended on people having the necessary innate constitutions, they weren't attracting many applicants.

Working at the royal palace wasn't limited to nobles. The Sorcery Department in particular was a collection of people with special skills, so there were many non-aristocrats. Even Assistant Director Ist was the third son of a merchant family. But you had to have a basic education to handle magic in the first place. Anyone who couldn't read was out of the question. Additionally, if you were to work in the royal palace, you had to have a certain level of etiquette. For these reasons, commoners wishing to be sorcerers must have either discovered their magical ability at an early age or enrolled in a magic school, and these schools were only attended by children whose families could afford it. This naturally narrowed down the number of eligible candidates. On top of that, people with magic ability were in great demand across all professions. Although working at the royal palace was an honor, a sorcerer could make better money working for a noble family. Moreover, until recently, the Royal Orders had applied so much pressure to the Accounting Department that the Sorcery Department hadn't had enough funds to conduct their research, so it was understandable that not

many people wanted to take on the job.

Seiichirou wanted to secure six barrier wardens to work in shifts. They couldn't take six people from the Royal Sorcery Department, so they desperately needed new personnel.

As Seiichirou considered this, the carriage arrived at his destination. The driver informed him of this, and Seiichirou disembarked. Looking up once again at the white stone building, so different from the surrounding brick ones, Seiichirou pondered...

In the custody of the church, huh?

"Tch. Here again today, nuisance?"

Seiichirou, who had gotten used to hearing the boy's tongue-clicking the moment they saw each other, returned the greeting:

"Good morning, Selio. You look as busy as ever today."

Selio's bright-green eyelashes moved up and down as he blinked. When he was with Seiichirou, his face was set in a perpetual scowl, and as usual, he began to raise his voice.

"It's because you're here! I am busy, but because of you, I can't work!"

The work done by the members of the church, including Selio and the other monk apprentices, was very diverse. They cleaned the massive church, welcomed civilians who came to worship, helped with the relief house, did their normal studies, and assisted with events organized by the church.

Seiichirou didn't mind being left to his own devices, but because he had repeatedly wandered around on his own and looked at documents without permission, even Selio seemed intent on keeping an eye on him. With Selio glaring at him in the same room, Seiichirou decided that for now, he would summarize the data he had copied thus far.

But that didn't even last an hour.

Selio had been doing some of his own work while keeping an eye on Seiichirou when suddenly, a man who looked about twenty years old and who was wearing a monk's robe barged in without knocking and haughtily said:

“Hey, Selio! What are you doing? What happened to helping out at the relief house?”

“Huh...? Oh, I’m keeping an eye on this guy today, so I asked to have my shift covered...”

Selio looked puzzled, but the other man glanced at Seiichirou and snorted.

“You can leave a guy like that on his own. He’s just the otherworlder tagalong who can’t do anything anyway. Besides, *you guys* help out at the relief house, remember? Don’t blow it off.”

Seiichirou watched these events unfold, wondering if the young man’s clear distinction between himself and “*you guys*” meant that he was one of the rumored monks of noble birth. Even Selio, who always acted in a menacing way toward Seiichirou, didn’t seem to be in a position where he could talk back to this fellow. Although Selio glanced repeatedly at Seiichirou, who was bewildered, he agreed and left the room.

The other man also left, but not before spitting at Seiichirou, “Don’t step a toe out of line, you pleb otherworlder!”

“...So now you’re here?” Siegvold asked, massaging his temples.

“Yes,” Seiichirou replied humorlessly.

Seiichirou had not been sitting quietly where he was supposed to be, of course, and Siegvold had discovered him in the church library.

“Gracious... Those good-for-nothings. I’m going to call for Selio, so please go back to your room.”

“Oh, in that case,” said Seiichirou, who didn’t think he was included in the “*good-for-nothings*” group, “please let me go with you to the relief house.”

“...Why?”

Seiichirou hadn’t expected to be asked this. He tilted his head as he answered.

“The relief house is also under the jurisdiction of the church, so it’s part of the investigation. I’ve only seen it from a distance thus far, so I thought this might be an opportune time to visit.”

Seiichirou had been tasked with verifying the church's income and expenditures. As such, he had to understand all expenses incurred within the church.

"Besides, if I go to the relief house, Selio can carry out his duty to attend me while still helping out there. Wouldn't that be more efficient?"

"Efficient... Well...it would be."

Siegvold looked at him grimly but agreed, so they set out for the relief house at once.

The relief house was situated beside the church, and until then Seiichirou had only seen it from far away, but he had seen children around it, ranging from toddlers to youngsters around Selio's age.

"According to the documents I've seen, you currently have twenty-eight children, correct?"

"Where did you see documents regarding the relief house...? Were they from the reference room on your first day here?"

"Yes, well... Do you have any rules for when children graduate from the house?"

"Are you so unapologetic because you're a civil official? Or is that just your personality?"

Siegvold had lowered his voice somewhat, but Seiichirou pretended not to notice this as he asked his next question.

"I get that a lot, so it's probably just my personality. You do have an age limit for graduation, correct?"

Siegvold nodded with a disappointed look on his face.

"...That's right. Children are cared for at the relief house until they turn twelve, upon which they are baptized and become monk apprentices or take a live-in job in town."

So those who appeared to be twelve years old or older were monk apprentices.

“I see. Where do these kids find work?”

“Disciple, with all due respect, perhaps you should conduct yourself more like a disciple of Abran...”

“I’m not a disciple. So where do the children with no relatives find employment?” asked Seiichirou, pressing forward and ignoring Siegvold’s clear displeasure.

In the first place, the idea of Seiichirou being a disciple of Abran was something Siegvold had come up with on his own.

“Children without any relatives mainly find employment as apprentices to craftsmen. If they train and acquire a skill, they won’t struggle to earn their keep.”

“Craftsmen?”

Sigma, the boy Seiichirou had met at the market, had said the same thing, so this was probably a widely held belief in the kingdom. But...craftsmen?

“I heard there are many children here who possess a lot of magic power. Aren’t there jobs where they could make use of that?”

In the blink of an eye—

Siegvold’s violet eyes became even more vibrant.

“...?!”

Seiichirou’s body stiffened at the surge of magic power, even though he had a barrier on him.

“I don’t know what you’ve heard, or where you heard it...”

Siegvold’s handsome face had lost its color. Only his violet eyes seemed to be shining brightly.

“...but many of these children have become unable to stay with their parents because they couldn’t control their magic power. Here, we teach them that control so that they can live normal lives.”

They were in the custody of the church to prevent their magic power from going berserk...

Aresh had also told him about that the night before.

It probably would have been dangerous to leave a child who might lose control of their magic power at their parents' house.

But to say that the children have become “unable to stay” there...?

It made it sound as if these children had caused problems, and that their families had had no choice but to place them in the custody of the church... It was a strangely specific way of phrasing it.

Sensing that it would be unwise to prod Siegvold further on the matter, Seiichirou quickly pivoted.

“...Is that right? Well, could you tell me about the activities that go on in the relief house?”

“You’d better ask Selio about that,” Siegvold replied, imitating Seiichirou and reverting to the conversation’s previous tone. He must have retracted his magic power as well, because it became easier for Seiichirou to breathe. “...Ah, he’s spotted us.”

The boy with bright-green hair broke apart from the crowd and ran up to them. He immediately started shouting.

“You! What’d you come all the way here for?!”

Seiichirou replied, completely unbothered by this:

“You’re my guide and supervisor, but you said you also had to work at the relief house, so I thought it would be best if I came to the relief house so you could do both at once.”

“W-well...”

“Wasn’t Fredrik supposed to be on duty today? Goodness... If he does that again, you tell me.”

“Yes, sir...,” Selio replied quietly to Siegvold’s scolding.

He can’t do that, Seiichirou thought, looking at the boy. It was clear to him that if Selio tattled about something like that, it would only make the situation worse for him. This Fredrik, who seemed to come from a noble family, was

obviously very prideful, and from the looks of Selio, what had happened was probably a regular occurrence. Siegvold was probably also from a noble family, but of a different kind.

Siegvold reminded Seiichirou to rein in his independent wanderings and remember his position as a disciple, then returned to the church.

The moment Siegvold disappeared, Selio scowled at Seiichirou.

“Why did you come to the relief house?! This isn’t a place for someone like you!”

“Why...? Didn’t I just explain to you why I came here?”

According to Seiichirou, it was so Selio could do both of his jobs at once. (That was the pretext, at least—Seiichirou had actually come to investigate the relief house.)

“I heard you, but you were lying.”

Seiichirou blinked, surprised that Selio had called him out.

“It wasn’t a—”

“It *was* a lie! Because someone like you—a civil official like you—would never come here! You might be an otherworlder, but you’re not like the Holy Mai—”

“Oh, is that you, Kondou?!”

Selio’s belligerent shouts were cut off by the Holy Maiden’s cheerful voice.

Yua rushed up to him and, perhaps because Seiichirou was seeing her under bright sunlight or perhaps because she was wearing simpler clothes than he’d seen her wear at the castle, she looked like she would have in Japan—like a cheerful young girl you might find anywhere.

“So you really do come to the church, Kondou!”

Yua ran right up to him, her whole face lit up in a friendly smile. She didn’t look out of breath in the slightest. Seiichirou smiled back weakly, once again feeling envious of her youth.

“Didn’t I already tell you that?”

“But I couldn’t find you, even when I went looking for you! What’s going on? I

thought you said you didn't ever come this way?"

"Just doing a little investigating. What are you doing here, Shiraishi?"

Seiichirou had heard that Yua was working at the church to use her power of purification as well as her healing magic, so why was she at the relief house, and not the chapel or the treatment room?

"Oh, lately I've been helping out at the relief house, too."

Why...?

Seiichirou just managed to stop himself from frowning in confusion.

Why do another job when you are needed elsewhere and have a unique power as the Holy Maiden? Don't you know the phrase "being just the right person for the job"? Other people can help out at the relief house, but only the Holy Maiden can perform purification—do you understand that?

These thoughts crossed Seiichirou's mind, but then he remembered that this girl was not yet an adult and had no obligation to work, so he bit back his questions.

"...Is that right?"

"Yes! Oh, but at this relief house—"

Just as Yua started to say something, a pale hand was suddenly thrust between the two of them.

"W-wait!"

"" ...?"

Both of their dark-brown eyes fell on the head topped with bright-green hair.

"Y-you two don't get along, right...?"

"Huh?"

"What?"

Again mirroring each other, Seiichirou and Yua tilted their heads and looked at one another. Seeing this, Selio's heavily lashed eyes widened, and he froze.

Whatever Selio thought, the truth of the matter was that Seiichirou and Yua

had never once been on bad terms.

Seiichirou did think Yua was a pain, but he didn't hate her. And Yua, for her part, had been so excited when she had first arrived in this world that she had slightly neglected Seiichirou, but she didn't hate him, either. Plus, as of now, Yua could even be said to be attached to Seiichirou, as an adult from her home world who she could rely on. And as long as Yua listened to him and didn't act out unnecessarily, the Holy Maiden was a great asset to Seiichirou, so he welcomed her acquaintanceship.

They had therefore never been on bad terms or at odds with one another for as long as they had known each other. When Selio heard this, however, his face turned stark white.

"What...? B-but... But...this guy's diminishing the power of the Holy Maiden..."

Selio was probably referring to Seiichirou's plan to cast a barrier in the Demon Forest and abolish the Holy Maiden system.

"Huh? Why would that make Kondou and I not get along?"

Yua—the Holy Maiden in question—looked at the flustered boy, her honest eyes surprised.

"Why? I mean, then the Holy Maiden would be insignificant..."

"Yeah, I'd be thrilled if I became insignificant! Because then I could go back to my home world!"

This time, Selio froze completely.

Now Seiichirou understood... Everyone in the church viewed him as an enemy because he was trying to eliminate the significance of the Holy Maiden, who was also an object of their religious faith. They saw him as an enemy of the Holy Maiden. Seiichirou had thought that it was strange for them to butt heads with a civil official who had come from the royal palace, but now he understood. As Seiichirou accepted this, he gave Yua a reminder, just in case.

"Shiraishi, even if the barrier is successful, you won't be able to go home right away, you know."

"Oh, I know that! The spell to send us back has to be completed first, right?"

Once the purification is finished, I'll work really hard to help with that, too!" she said, balling her small hands into fists.

Looking at her, Seiichirou wondered if letting her meet Ist would be a good thing. Yua tended to get tunnel-visioned once her mind was made up on something (although not nearly as badly as Ist). Seiichirou couldn't help feeling that if he let the two of them meet, it would cause an unpleasant chemical reaction. Then again, he would worry about that later—he had to do what he'd come here to do.

"Do you come to the relief house often, Shiraishi?"

"Huh? No. Today is only my fourth time here."

Apparently, she had developed an interest in the place after meeting orphans who had come to the chapel to see the Holy Maiden.

"Oh, and at this relief house..."

Seiichirou remembered that she had just been about to say something like this a moment ago.

They probably wouldn't have shown the Holy Maiden any of the unsavory aspects of the relief house, but conversely, perhaps they had revealed secrets about the place precisely *because* she was the Holy Maiden. Seiichirou urged her to continue.

"Yes? What is it?"

"The children don't receive any education at all!"

"...What?"

Yua's face flushed with agitation, and she continued.

"They don't even let them go to school! They just help at the relief house every day! I don't think it's very good for their futures!"

According to Yua, the older children looked after the younger children and lived communally, doing cleaning, laundry, and cooking all day long, and except for the help of a few of the apprentice monks like Selio and some of the women from town, they did almost everything themselves.

“...Shiraishi—” Seiichirou began, but Yua stopped him, shaking her head.

“I know that not everyone can go to school.”

She was able to understand that much, at least.

“But just because they are orphans, they don’t get the opportunity to learn, and they work nonstop from such a young age... I feel so sorry for them...”

Seiichirou even knew of children from town who still had their mothers, but because their fathers had died, they’d worked from a young age and never attended school. There were tons of kids like that in the downtown area. That was just the way this kingdom—and this world—was. It wasn’t appropriate to compare it to modern Japan.

However, Seiichirou could agree with one part of the sentiment Yua wanted to express:

The children lacked the freedom to choose their own professions.

That was the point that weighed heavily on Seiichirou’s mind.

It was a waste. Losing out on such talented and capable people because of their birth or upbringing was a blow to the whole kingdom. Sigma was certainly talented, and the magic power the children at the relief house possessed was very valuable.

“That’s why I just wondered if there was anything I could do...,” Yua continued.

As the Holy Maiden, there’s a million other things you ought to be doing first, Seiichirou thought, but then he heard Selio’s voice.

“You’re really nice, Your Holiness...but that’s not possible.”

Looking back, he saw that Selio had finally become un-petrified, and that his lovely face was frowning.

“At the relief house, we don’t have enough time or money to do anything like that. We even have to do our own laundry and cleaning.”

“But...Selio,” Yua protested, “didn’t you have a job you wanted to do when you were little?”

“Well, I...”

“The little kids at the relief house tell me, you know, ‘When I grow up, I want to be a sorcerer at the castle!’ or ‘I want to be a knight!’ I just don’t think it’s right that in this world, their dreams can’t come true just because of the circumstances of their birth or upbringing.”

“The world Your Holiness is from...must have been a very peaceful world...”

“The world I came from also had war, discrimination, and even relief houses. But if you studied and worked hard, your dreams could come true just like everyone else’s. I want that to be the case for the people here, too.”

“It’s impossible, but...”

Selio’s eyes welled with tears.

“It would be impossible to change everything all at once, but it’s worth considering, isn’t it?” Yua asked.

As Seiichirou hastily scribbled something with his magic-ink pen onto the piece of paper he had been holding, he lowered his gaze and said:

“It would be difficult to establish an educational operation all in one go, but there could be a way of opening something like a private school for children who can’t attend a formal school. By putting the schools in churches, we can easily spread them to each city, elevate the public’s confidence in the church, and increase the number of worshippers. And this part may be wishful thinking, but with a greater vested interest from citizens, public aid to the church might increase as well.”

“Wh-what?! There’s no way things would go that smoothly...!”

“Wow, that’s amazing! It’ll be like an open-air classroom!”

“Y-Your Holiness...! What about the school supplies?! How many people do you think stay at this relief house alone?! You guys can’t prepare materials for that many people! Besides, what about the work at the relief house?!”

“Even if we don’t have enough for everyone, we can cut down considerably on the amount we need by using a shift system.”

“Sh-shift system...?”

Seiichirou showed Selio the note he had just written.

“Divide the children at the relief house into three groups, like this. On Fire day, group one takes classes, and groups two and three work. On the next day, Water day, group two takes classes, and groups one and three work. You could all manage with that kind of setup, couldn’t you?”

In this world, weeks were divided into six days. Two days a week would probably be enough for learning, even more so if the children weren’t used to studying in the first place. And if the students took turns using shared educational materials, they would only need one-third of the materials.

“As for the subjects, I think it would be a good idea to focus on teaching them basic reading, writing, and arithmetic.”

“Huh? But for a lot of jobs...”

“It’s impossible to improve rapidly in all areas. Even just being able to read, write, and do arithmetic will be very helpful for when they’re in town, and will expand the range of occupations available to them. Plus, if they discover a particular talent, they can go on to study at a real school.”

A scholarship system would be good to have, too. It would probably be a good idea for the royal family to finance it to help bright children go on to higher education, Seiichirou thought. If they cultivate brilliant workers, these children will later come work at the royal palace to return the favor. It’s preemptive recruitment—or is it more like grooming? But since this idea involves personnel recruitment, it would probably be a good idea to run it by Camile, too. I’m sure he’d be all for it.

“W-wait a minute! You can’t just make that decision...!”

“Well, now that that’s decided, I’ll have to identify all the children at the relief house and then consider appropriate age groupings. I’ll lay the groundwork for this at the royal palace afterward. What are you wasting time here for, Selio? You’re busy, so hop to it.”

“Y-you... I hate you so much!!”

Unfortunately, Selio’s heartfelt shout wasn’t even perceived by the Holy Maiden whom he admired so much, much less by Seiichirou.

The windowless room was blue, all the furniture was the same polished, dark-brown color, and the atmosphere was somewhat solemn. Seiichirou sat on the leather chair offered to him, in front of the antique table, with a few words of thanks.

“It’s been a while, hasn’t it, Seiichirou?”

Across from Seiichirou sat the most powerful man in the government, Prime Minister Camile Karvada. The handsome, older man had his pink-blond hair combed back. He leaned back in his chair, softening the gaze in his gray-blue eyes that glimmered with expansive intelligence and shrewdness.

Because Prime Minister Camile was a very busy man, Seiichirou had not seen him since the day he had last been in this room with Aresh, after he had received instructions on his temporary reassignment. Seiichirou had a heap of reports and questions for Camile, but he was forced to prioritize either Camile’s busy schedule or acquiring reliable and detailed information.

“I am very pleased to see you in good health, Your Excellency Prime Minister Karvada.”

Camile huffed a laugh through his nose.

“You don’t have to be so formal. You and I have a relationship, don’t we?”

The question was heavy with undertones, immediately flipping the rather academic atmosphere into one laced with salaciousness, but the relationship between Camile and Seiichirou was simply that of an incredibly distinguished man from another department and a middle manager—there was no private relationship to speak of. If anything, considering Seiichirou’s current work as well as the work they were doing to abolish the Holy Maiden Summoning, he would call them “accomplices.”

“I appreciate that. Now, shall I begin my report?” asked Seiichirou, trying to forestall any idle chatter.

Camile nodded, looking satisfied by Seiichirou’s reply, and urged him to continue.

“First of all, I would like to apologize for not having been able to compile a report with specific figures, because I have not yet managed to grasp the situation fully.”

“Yes, that’s fine. The bishop and accounting manager are currently absent, right?”

“Correct. For some reason, they are out on a business trip during the time they were warned a civil official would be coming from the royal palace to conduct an investigation.”

“I have arranged for them to return the day after tomorrow. But wasn’t their absence rather in your favor, Seiichirou?”

“That’s true. It was very easy to do research.”

Under normal circumstances, the accounting manager would have showed Seiichirou around as he conducted his investigation, but if the manager was absent...Seiichirou had really had no choice but to look around for himself.

“Your report is fine as it is. Let me hear what you think.”

“I cannot present you with any data, so I am reluctant to say this, but...there seems to be a discrepancy between the rank and number of aristocrats who have visited for worship, and the church’s donations.”

“Embezzlement?”

“I haven’t been able to consolidate the church’s internal operating expenses yet, so I can’t say for certain.”

Seiichirou had jotted down the names and numbers of worshippers in the chapel. He had identified the nobles among them and then calculated their estimated donations based on the information Norbert had given him, but from these calculations, it seemed to Seiichirou that the church should have more than enough to cover their operating expenses.

“Hmm... Do you have any idea how they’re spending it?”

“I don’t... But the relief house, the apprentice monks, and the priest aren’t involved, at least.”

“The priest...,” said Camile, his refined eyebrows twitching upward. “Oh,

Priest Siegvold?”

“Do you know him?”

“Yes, he’s famous. Because of his social standing, certainly, but largely because of the amount of magic power he possesses and his good looks. But on the other hand, that sort of religious devotion is hard to come by in aristocratic circles.”

It was just as Seiichirou had predicted—even among nobles, Siegvold’s family was of the upper echelons. And despite his appearance, his expansive magic power seemed to be in demand, even among aristocrats. This made the life path of the children in the church even more puzzling.

“That’s right, your world didn’t have any magic, did it? Magic power is used for spells and magic tools—it’s a valuable source of energy—but it’s difficult to handle. It requires specialized knowledge and skills. That’s why children born with too much magic power train in the church to *reduce* the amount of magic power they have.”

“Reduce...their magic power?”

Whenever Seiichirou heard the phrase “a dangerous source of energy,” nuclear power always came to mind. It could produce a steady, massive supply of energy without emitting carbon dioxide, but it was also accompanied by a level of danger. Tempting propositions always came with risk.

Even so, was it possible to reduce the amount of magic power one already possessed? The fact that Camile had said this with such a serious expression suggested this was common knowledge in the kingdom.

“Speaking of which, how’s your resistance to magic and magicules coming along?”

Seiichirou not only possessed no magic, but he also had no tolerance to it, so even the most trivial spell caused his body to overheat, and absorbing too many magicules made his body weak.

“Fortunately, it is improving, albeit slowly.”

Because Aresh regularly cast weak spells on him, and because Seiichirou

continued to eat foods containing low amounts of magicules, his tolerance was growing, bit by bit.

“That is very fortunate. However, you seem to have reined in a fellow who’s reputed to be as difficult to handle as Priest Siegvold,” said Camile, stifling a chuckle.

Seiichirou’s eyebrow twitched slightly. He exhaled.

“Rein in... You’re speaking of someone as if they were a horse...”

“Right, he’s more of a beast than a horse, isn’t he? They don’t say this in high society, but apparently, amongst the knights he’s called the ‘Black Beast.’ In which case, I suppose you’d be his chains, not his reins, eh?”

“Your Excellency...,” Seiichirou started to say in a defeated voice, unsure how to respond.

Camile’s eyes softened with amusement, but then his expression suddenly became serious once more and he continued:

“It’s no joke. Whatever your feelings are, you’ve become his chains. Unlike the Priest Siegvold’s chains, you are real, you can be touched, and you are vulnerable to boot. I’ll try to look out for you as much as I can, but you can never be too careful.”

So other people had finally noticed Aresh’s attachment to Seiichirou. Previously, regardless of what happened around him, Aresh had never shown much of a reaction and had only behaved as though it was all a waste of his time. The only thing that *had* elicited a reaction from him was this tired man without any powers who had come from another world as the Holy’s Maiden’s tagalong. Seiichirou had been working hard to carve out a position for himself, but he couldn’t help feeling as though he had been trying too hard—prioritizing it even over his work—and that he had mistaken the means for the ends. Camile had even temporarily transferred Seiichirou to the church to show him that he stood distinct from Aresh.

“I appreciate your concern.”

“Well, please be careful... Now, pivoting a bit, I hear you’d like to open private schools in the churches for the masses?”

“No, it’s nothing that ambitious.”

Children—primarily orphans—would be taught reading, writing, and arithmetic at the church by volunteers. That was it.

“As for the advantages of this plan, it would improve the church’s image, which would in turn improve the image of aristocrats who donate to the church. It would also attract more worshippers and probably make it easier to increase the public’s affinity for the church.”

With that, they might even be able to expect the townsfolk to provide aid for the church’s activities.

“Moreover, if people can read, write, and do arithmetic, it will expand their employment opportunities, curb crime, and increase the standard of living for ordinary people. The kingdom could even subsidize sending the brightest children to schools.”

As Seiichirou listed off all these benefits, Camile propped his elbow on the armrest of his chair and leaned his cheek against his hand.

“You are truly a brilliant man, but you’re going to go poking your nose into education, too?”

“I’m not going to be that pushy about it. It was the Holy Maiden’s idea in the first place. I just helped fill in the details.”

“The Holy Maiden, huh? She probably thought of the idea after seeing the children at the relief house. Even the children of aristocrats get that way sometimes.”

Camile went on to explain that there had been calls to reform the education system and the social hierarchy, but the reason these calls had never moved forward was because they cost money.

“My subordinates are currently putting together estimates of the proposal’s positive economic effects. We’ll be submitting that within the next few days for your consideration.”

“Ah, so that’s where your specialty comes in? ...I’d like to ask you a question.”

“Of course.”

Camile leaned forward off the backrest of his chair, his blue-gray eyes fixed on Seiichirou.

“Seiichirou, what do you want to do to this kingdom?”

This kingdom that had abducted him alongside an underage girl they called the Holy Maiden?

What did he want to do to this kingdom that had abandoned him, the very air of which didn't agree with his body?

If asked that same question, Yua would have probably replied with something like “I want to make this a kingdom where everyone is equal” or “I want to make this a kingdom where no one suffers from hunger or miasma.”

Seiichirou opened his mouth.

“Nothing.”

Seiichirou, on the other hand, didn't want to do anything to this kingdom.

He really didn't.

He truly had no desire to improve the kingdom or make its people happy, nor could he remember ever having such a thing in mind.

He was just trying to make his own job run more smoothly.

“The staffing shortage at the Sorcery Department is serious, and it will cause delays with the miasma strategy as well as completing the spell to send us home. However, those are not job positions just anyone can fill, so I want to recruit a wide range of people.”

Even though it was possible for ordinary people to work at the royal palace, it was impossible for uneducated people to do so. Even Ist had attended school.

“Ha! You...you really...”

Camile sank back into his chair, barking out a dry laugh. His tone of voice and expression were more childlike than Seiichirou had ever seen from him before.

“Besides,” Seiichirou continued, “it would be an enormous loss for the kingdom to overlook those with talent. Even if the kingdom paid for a hundred ordinary people to move on from a small, private school to formal schooling, it

would pay for itself if even one of these people joined the Sorcery Department and achieved something. The fact that the kingdom doesn't provide such a cost-effective service is a waste."

Humans were a resource, too. Perhaps Seiichirou thought this way because his corporate-slave nature had been so deeply ingrained in him.

"Certainly. You're right—a kingdom cannot carry on without its people. Not utilizing them effectively would be a loss."

It seemed to be a quirk of Camile's to chuckle in the back of his throat.

In any event, Seiichirou was glad that the prime minister, the highest-ranking manager of personnel affairs, seemed to be interested in the proposal. Seiichirou felt privately relieved, and then Camile stared at him again, a smile on his lips.

"Ah, what a pity. It is a pity, Seiichirou."

"What's wrong?" Seiichirou asked, assuming that the "pity" was a flaw in the plan they had just discussed.

But that didn't seem to be the case.

There was a look in Camile's eyes that Seiichirou had never seen in them before.

"It's not about that. Truly...if not for that black beast, I would have kept you to myself and taken good care of you."

Faced with the blatant desire of a superior, Seiichirou barely managed to gulp the saliva down his throat and say, "I appreciate your concern."

Camile let out another dry laugh.

δ δ δ

"Have you finished checking the equipment for the expedition?" asked Aresh, having completed his daily paperwork early.

Orjef nodded, amazed.

Aresh had really changed. Before, he would have never shown interest in this

sort of task.

“We’ll be heading out the day after tomorrow, so we’re all good to go. I hope the miasma completely vanishes this time.”

“Yeah.”

Nor would Aresh have ever agreed with any wishful thinking. The change in him, a person who’d used to just go about his work dispassionately, was surely due to the influence of that otherworlder man.

“The whole expedition team has the day off tomorrow to prepare and rest. What are you going to get up to, Aresh?”

“Rest.”

His straightforward, short replies were the same as ever, though.

On the way to the training grounds, however, Orjef suddenly remembered something and called out to Aresh:

“Some of the knights are going to have a drinking party tonight, like a send-off. What do you say, Aresh?”

“No thank you.”

“I figured you’d say that.”

The other knights would probably have gotten nervous if Aresh had suddenly showed up at their drinking party. Orjef did think many of them would be thrilled at the chance to get closer to the commander they so admired, but having Aresh appear without any prior notice would be more like an act of terror.

Although, in Aresh’s case, I’m sure he just wants to get back to his new home as soon as possible.

Ever since Aresh had bought a house in the suburbs, he had started working even faster and rushing to get home as soon as he finished. To an outsider, he was probably acting like a newlywed... And, well, that wasn’t exactly incorrect. Orjef had no idea what it was about that otherworlder that drove Aresh so crazy, but he just wanted to maintain the status quo of quickly progressing with their work in relative peace.

As soon as Orjef thought this, Aresh twitched, suddenly stopped walking, and turned around. Seeing this, Orjef stopped walking, too.

“Aresh? What’s wrong?”

Orjef tried to follow Aresh’s line of sight, but Aresh had already started walking again at a very fast pace.

“...I told you, saying that isn’t going to change anything...”

“Can’t you do something...?”

Orjef quickly followed Aresh and heard voices he recognized. At the end of the corridor, he saw two familiar figures of different statures:

Commander Radim of the Second Royal Order, and the otherworlder—Seiichirou.

“What?! ...Crap!”

Aresh’s walking speed increased another notch and then, without slowing down, he grabbed a handful of the brown cloak—its wearer had his back turned to them and hadn’t realized they were there—and pulled. Seiichirou, having been abruptly yanked backward, panicked and regained his footing before checking who was behind him. Then his face fell into a grimace. Seiichirou was probably the only person in the Romany Kingdom who would make such an expression at the sight of the beautiful knight commander.

“What are you doing here, Seiichirou?”

“Oh...Aresh...”

Orjef remembered hearing that the otherworlder was on temporary assignment at the church, but here he was in his uniform for the Accounting Department, looking as though he was reporting to work as usual.

“There’s no way you’re coming here to work on your day off...”

“No, there’s no way.”

Seiichirou straightened his posture and turned to face Aresh.

“I just came here today to give Prime Minister Karvada a progress report. However, as it is a part of my job, I simply wore my civil official uniform as my

formal wear.”

The way Seiichirou answered so smoothly, without any hesitation, it really didn't seem like he was lying—to people who didn't know him very well, at least.



“...Really? So then why do you have the Second Royal Order’s budget report in your hand? That doesn’t have anything to do with the church.”

“Oh, Commander Makovska handed me this just now. Isn’t that right, Commander?”

“Huh?”

Seiichirou and Aresh stood in front of Radim. Seiichirou’s eyes were typically sluggish, but his gaze was intense. Aresh’s violet eyes looked colder than usual. Radim looked between the two, wondering how to respond, but the fact of the matter was that Radim was a man who shouldered the duty of a commander. He quickly came to a decision and nodded forcefully.

“Yes, that’s right. I just happened to catch sight of him, so I thought I’d pass it along.”

Just what I thought you’d say, Commander. Now I can probably smooth this over somehow, thought Seiichirou, but then he heard someone cry out an merciless message.

“Hey, Sei! Did you get the Second Royal Order’s budget report? You’ve been gone for a while, so I came to get you! I found the documents you asked me for this morning, too, but I left them on your desk.”

A young blond man waved as he walked over to them. Seiichirou turned toward this man and was unable to meet the eyes of the others for some time.

“How many times do you need to be told to get it through your head? Or is that head of yours just for decoration?”

This lecture had started after Seiichirou’s punishment, which included being forcibly removed from his place of work and made to stay in the training grounds until Aresh had finished his own work, so Seiichirou had felt like he was lying on a bed of thorns. Moreover, now that Aresh was droning on and on, lecturing him on the carriage ride home, Seiichirou felt the urge to play innocent about his own mistakes and formulate a retort.

“But it *was* true that I had a report to give His Excellency the Prime Minister. I’d already gone to the trouble of putting on my uniform and going there. I was

just going to do a couple of things.”

“No, you weren’t,” said Aresh, curtly dismissing this. “A day off is a day for rest.”

After they returned home and finished eating and bathing, the two of them changed into comfortable loungewear. Because of the lecture, they were now sitting on opposite sides of the desk in Seiichirou’s room.

“More importantly, Aresh, the purification expedition party sets out tomorrow, right? Are you prepared?”

“It’s the third expedition. Milan already finished getting my things together ages ago, and I told you before that the knights take care of most of the preparations, didn’t I?”

Now that Aresh mentioned it, Seiichirou felt like Aresh had said as much before the first expedition. He also remembered that Aresh had rejected all the clothes Seiichirou had prepared for the expedition, so in the end Seiichirou had been made to look like Aresh from head to toe. He also recalled being forced to ride on a horse together in full view of the public, which had been quite humiliating.

“But if we’re talking about preparations, we should be discussing you, not me.”

“Me? But I’m not going on this expedition...”

If they had assembled enough sorcerers for the barrier, Seiichirou would certainly have wanted to bring an architect along and accompany the party, but he had heard that they were just going to be finishing up the purification on this trip, so there was no real point to him going. He also had work to do at the church, so he couldn’t have gone anyway.

“That’s exactly why. I won’t be here for a while, but you’ll be going to the place with the greatest concentration of magicules in town, so I need to cast a very thorough barrier on you.”

“Oh...”

That had completely slipped Seiichirou’s mind. The church housed the sacred

relic and many magic tools, and it was where magic power was used in prayer, so it was filled to the brim with magicules and magic power. It had only been because of the knight in front of him, who also happened to be a top-class sorcerer, that Seiichirou had been able to do his work unaffected.

“Um...”

“Tomorrow is my rest day before the expedition... We have plenty of time,” said Aresh, getting to his feet.

Seiichirou, unable to escape, looked around the room.

Seiichirou couldn't go to the church without having the barrier applied to him—his life depended on it. But it was also strange for Seiichirou, knowing full well about Aresh's feelings, to ask Aresh to do it. It would sound selfish said out loud, but Seiichirou wondered if Aresh could somehow make it feel a little more clinical. Aresh's hands, however, were always incredibly gentle.

Aresh made Seiichirou lie down on the bed and then moved a hand down his side, under the thin fabric of the shirt Seiichirou wore as nightclothes. His hands were calloused from holding swords, but also warm. Seiichirou had poor circulation because of an imbalance in his nervous system, but Aresh was the exact opposite—his body temperature naturally ran hot. As he slowly caressed Seiichirou's skin with his warm hands, his lips trailed near the other man's ear.

“Ngh... A-Aresh... We don't...h-have to do that, so...”

Feeling like he was about to lose control, Seiichirou held his breath and turned his face away, but then his shoulders twitched in surprise when Aresh kissed his ear.

“Don't be silly. I would never waste a chance to touch and be touched by you.”

Aresh nipped softly at Seiichirou's ear.

“Get that through your head.”

Then Aresh's lips, curved in a spectacularly bewitching smile, pressed against Seiichirou's.



Contemplated Magic Power

When Seiichirou went to the church after his day away, Selio greeted him not with his usual scowl, but with a rare smile.

“Heh-heh! It’s finally time for you to pay the piper!” Selio said, looking smug.

Seiichirou had been the only one on the receiving end here—or to be more precise, he’d been going around collecting things—so he tilted his head in confusion, but then he remembered that the bishop and the accounting manager would be returning that day.

In fact, Seiichirou had been awaiting their return for a while, but Aresh’s barrier-casting the night before had been so intense that his mind still felt slightly dazed and his body sluggish. Even so, Aresh hadn’t gone *all the way* with him, so he didn’t have any internal pain...

As for Aresh, he had embarked on the purification expedition early that morning.

“That reminds me. Shiraishi—I mean, the Holy Maiden—won’t be able to visit for a while, but she asked me to send you her regards.”

At the sound of Yua’s name, Selio visibly choked on his words and gritted his teeth. He seemed conflicted about something.

“...I do not approve of you or the way you attach yourself to the Holy Maiden and throw your weight around just because you two are friendly!”

Apparently, Seiichirou and Yua being on bad terms wasn’t the only reason for those who revered the Holy Maiden to hate him. Seiichirou could not recall ever throwing his weight around. However, the claim gave him a vague sense of déjà vu—he wondered whether the information had been deliberately planted, or if the rumor had just made its way here very slowly.

“...Ignorance will be your ruin, Selio. Why don’t you attend the school, too,

once it's finished?"

"Huh?! Are you making fun of me?!"

"It's a good thing to be perceptive," said Seiichirou, walking quickly into the church with Selio's angry voice echoing behind him.

In the end, Seiichirou did not meet the bishop until the afternoon. Siegvold summoned him and led him to a drawing room Seiichirou had never visited before. It was decorated with a chic red rug, curtains, and other objects that had a subdued style but were of very high quality. Seiichirou could tell, because he had spent plenty of time in the royal palace and the mansions of the aristocracy since coming to this world.

"You're the otherworlder who descended upon this world with the Holy Maiden? I've heard about you."

Everything about the way Bishop Mateus behaved indicated that he felt superior to Seiichirou.

In fact, as the bishop of the royal capital, he was of high status, and most importantly, he seemingly came from an aristocratic family, so his attitude was understandable. But Seiichirou was an envoy from the royal palace before he was an otherworlder. Although, the bishop's attitude suggested that he, along with the church, harbored antagonism toward the royal palace, therefore it was inevitable that he should feel that way.

In contrast, everything about the church's accounting manager, Cipriano, indicated he was friendly. He was a thin man with narrow eyes who appeared to be around Seiichirou's age or slightly older. His pale-blue hair was short, and he was the sort of man who would probably make a good impression on anyone, although they would likely also forget what his face looked like by the next day.

"I apologize for the delay in getting you the income and expenditure report."

Cipriano went on to explain that during the time he had been busy helping with the Holy Maiden Summoning, he'd lost the report he had initially drafted. Afterward, while re-creating it, he'd been looking after the Holy Maiden, and then, because some problems had cropped up with another branch, he'd had to

accompany the bishop on an official trip, so the report had been delayed again.

“Is that right?” asked Seiichirou. “But, you know, a deadline is still a deadline.”

Bureaucracy would never get anywhere if you asked about every single detail in an excuse.

“Aren’t *you* also the reason we had to suddenly start looking after the Holy Maiden?” the bishop interjected grumpily.

Cipriano pacified him, his expression troubled.

“No, Bishop. The Holy Maiden always planned on coming to the church, so I should have finished the preparations. This is all due to my inexperience.”

“In other words, you’re still working on the report, correct?” Seiichirou asked.

“Yes. I’m very sorry.”

Seiichirou had been convinced they were just going to hand over the report and kick him out, but if Cipriano was still working on it, that meant he could continue his investigation. Although he couldn’t get a read on their intentions, he wasn’t going to let this valuable opportunity that had fallen into his lap go to waste.

“Don’t be. In that case, I’ll be coming here for a little while longer. This is perfect timing, because I have a proposal regarding opening a learning institution at the relief house, on the Holy Maiden’s orders.”

“A learning institution?” asked Siegvold, although Seiichirou had assumed that he had already heard about the plan from Selio.

“The ever-considerate Holy Maiden has asked me to open a place in the church where both orphaned children and the children in town who can’t attend school can learn reading, writing, and simple arithmetic, and she has appointed me to oversee the planning stages.”

The part about Seiichirou having been appointed was a lie, but he was going to draft the plan because if he left it to Yua, no progress would ever be made.

“That’s great!” said Siegvold. “Just what I’d expect from the Holy Maiden and the disciple!”

Unlike Siegvold, who was all smiles, the bishop scowled.

“Using the church? You can’t just decide that on your own.”

“Well, it’s still in the planning stages right now. But I think there are many advantages for the church as well...”

Seiichirou then handed over the proposal he had drafted after his meeting with Camile. He had minutely laid out and slightly exaggerated the potential benefits to the church he had already explained to Camile, such as elevating the church’s status and the possibility for an increase in donations. After seeing that the bishop’s mood had visibly improved, Seiichirou looked around the room. Dealing with people who had clear objectives was child’s play—the tricky part was dealing with people in important positions who looked harmless and were forgettable.

“Abran made the right choice, after all!” said Siegvold. “Please let us help you with this, Disciple!”

And then there were those who were delusional, yet possessed both authority and initiative. That type of person was convenient.

After that, Seiichirou’s work at the church changed slightly. Selio still came out to greet him with a look of disgust, but for some reason, he began showing an interest in Seiichirou’s work, and above all else, he wanted to hear about Yua. Seiichirou knew very little about Yua herself, but Selio seemed happy enough hearing about their home world. And perhaps word had spread that Seiichirou was friends with the Holy Maiden, or perhaps the other monks and nuns had seen Siegvold or Cipriano talking to him in a friendly way, because then they, too, started to at least say hello whenever they saw him. And the biggest change was...

“Disciple.”

As Seiichirou was going over documents Cipriano had given him, the low, pleasant voice called out to him from the entrance. Seiichirou turned around and saw chestnut hair that looked gold in the sunlight. Then he saw purple eyes—an eye color which, surprisingly, was not seen very often in this world, but which was very familiar to Seiichirou—staring at him.

“Please stop calling me that...,” Seiichirou said, annoyed.

“But you are a disciple, Disciple,” Siegvold replied with a serious expression. “In any case, Disciple, it’s the Fire hour. Have you had lunch?”

“I’m not a disciple... Oh, I didn’t notice the bell ring.”

Actually, Seiichirou *had* noticed, but he had planned on ignoring it until he reached a convenient stopping point.

“Then let’s go eat now. You have a very small appetite even at the best of times, so if you don’t eat, you won’t be able to endure your trial.”

Ever since Seiichirou had brought up opening a learning institution, Siegvold’s micromanagement, which had always been present to some degree, had become even more pronounced. Particularly, he praised Seiichirou as a “disciple most serious about his test from God” for coming to the church despite having no tolerance to magicules, and he fussed over Seiichirou’s health. His reason for this was different from Aresh’s, but his attitude, paired with his violet eyes, gave Seiichirou awful déjà vu. Seiichirou was also in a tight spot, because this attitude also kept him from doing some of the reckless things he’d been thinking of doing now that *that individual* was away on an expedition. The purification expedition would take three days to arrive at the Demon Forest, and so, including the extra day that had been set aside, the party would return after seven days at the latest. In the meantime, the income and expenditure report had already been submitted once, but there had been so many calculation errors and so much inadequate labeling that Seiichirou had sent it back with those areas highlighted. Cipriano had not looked upset at all, and had even apologized.

Just after noon on the seventh day, the church suddenly erupted with noise, and Seiichirou learned that the expedition party had returned.

“The Holy Maiden has successfully purified the miasma!” cried Selio proudly, as if he had accomplished the deed himself.

Sparing him a sidelong glance, Seiichirou reviewed his Plan A proposal, the one drafted under the assumption that Yua would complete the purification. He had shown both plans to Camile, but he hadn’t wanted to antagonize anyone else by submitting tentative proposals too early, so he had refrained from doing

so. He wondered whether it would be better to submit them immediately or to wait a day... For now, Seiichirou decided to ask Aresh how things were going.

The barrier that Aresh had so carefully applied was still in effect, so Seiichirou wondered optimistically whether Aresh had needed to apply it so intensely after all. When Seiichirou returned home that day, however, he was informed that Aresh was absent.

“The purification was completed successfully, but a pack of magic beasts were spotted in the nearby mountains, so the Third Royal Order stayed behind to take care of them,” said a messenger from the royal palace.

Seiichirou also received a letter from Aresh. After watching the messenger leave, Seiichirou returned to his room and opened the envelope. Inside was writing paper with gilded edges, containing a message in beautiful script that repeatedly told Seiichirou to take care of his health in Aresh’s absence, not to work too much, and to get proper rest. Seiichirou continued reading the letter through his annoyance, and at the end, it said:

I hope that you’ll drift to sleep alongside my soul.

Seiichirou thought the use of the word *soul* must have been an exaggeration... but then he wondered if perhaps this mission of Aresh’s was life-threatening. Milan had just returned from seeing the messenger off, so he asked her about it. She covered her mouth, eyes wide, and said, “Oh my!” Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were shining.

“Oh-ho! Aresh writes very passionate letters, doesn’t he?”

As it turned out, referring to the soul was an expression often used by knights to represent their feelings.

I hope that you’ll drift to sleep imagining that I’m by your side.

It was undoubtedly a love letter.

δ δ δ

Yua visited the church three days after she’d returned home from the expedition.

She had been busy, because despite the fact that the Third Royal Order was absent, a party had been held the day after the expedition to celebrate the completion of the miasma purification. Incidentally, Camile had asked Seiichirou to attend, but Seiichirou had declined.

The sorcerers who had accompanied the expedition party and the Third Royal Order had stated that the miasma had completely vanished, but Seiichirou was told that he would only be able to take the construction workers to build the lodgings for the barrier wardens after this had been confirmed one more time.

As soon as Yua arrived at the church, she was given a very warm welcome by the townsfolk and the monks, and then she went to greet the bishop.

“Priest, shouldn’t you go to Shirai— I mean, the Holy Maiden?” Seiichirou asked Siegvold, assuming that, because he held Abran above all else, he must also have deep respect for the Holy Maiden. But the serious, stubborn priest shook his head.

“The Holy Maiden has fulfilled her mission. You are still working on your mission, Disciple... Plus, if I take my eyes off you, I don’t know what you’ll do.”

The past few days, Seiichirou had tried to skip meals or take documents home behind Siegvold’s back several times, so the man’s faith in Seiichirou seemed to have taken a nosedive.

“As a disciple, you should be a little more self-aware...”

Siegvold had grumbled that complaint to him dozens of times. Seiichirou’s reply remained the same each time, as well—it was a formulaic back-and-forth.

“I’m not a disciple.”

But even so, his annoyance with Siegvold’s attempts to treat him like a disciple were mingled with a sense of respect.

And Siegvold, too, admired Seiichirou’s tenacity and initiative toward his job, the indignity of his actions aside. Seiichirou carried out his work indifferently, even though it was work that he should never have had anything to do with at all. The man was not even born in the kingdom—he had come from another world entirely. Abran had given him a test and made his body weak to magicules and magic power, but Seiichirou nevertheless devoted himself to the

people of this kingdom, even if it meant self-sacrifice. Siegvold naturally felt deeply impressed by this. In reality, Seiichirou's behavior was simply explained by his proclivity, as a corporate slave, to continue working, but there was no way Siegvold would know that.

Siegvold also considered it his duty as a believer to help make this handicapped disciple's activities easier.

"Could you stop calling me 'disciple,' at least? There are people around."

Some of the monks were open in their dissatisfaction with the fact that Siegvold called Seiichirou "disciple" in addition to being so solicitous toward him. Even if Seiichirou wasn't on bad terms with the Holy Maiden, he was still the Holy Maiden's powerless tagalong.

"But you are a disciple, Disciple... Still, I suppose I have no choice. I'll compromise. Then it'll be...?"

"Kondou. Seiichirou Kondou."

"Mr. Seiichirou."

He's not using my last name? Seiichirou momentarily pondered, but then he remembered that Siegvold had discarded his own family name.

"...Yes, Priest."

"You call me by my name, too, then."

"Huh? No, I don't think that's really..."

"I compromised. Shouldn't you compromise, too?"

Seiichirou had been about to tell him that it wasn't really necessary, but when Siegvold insisted, Seiichirou felt as though resistance would be futile and bit back a sigh.

"Okay, Mr. Siegvold."

"Oh, there you are! Kondou!"

Seiichirou looked up at the sound of the cheerful voice and saw Yua running toward him, full of energy. He also spotted Selio jogging frantically after her, not wanting to be left behind.

“It’s been a while, Shiraishi. Great work with the purification expedition.”

Yua smiled bashfully at Seiichirou’s words of appreciation, looking much more grown-up than when he had first met her. Over the three expeditions, she seemed to have matured slightly.

Siegvold took a knee, bowed respectfully, and offered the Holy Maiden Yua words of sincere gratitude.

“I am so grateful for your work during this purification expedition, Your Holiness. Thank you again.”

“Huh?! C-come on! Please stand up, Siegvold! You already thanked me two days ago!”

Priest Siegvold had also been invited to the purification celebration. Siegvold slowly got to his feet and straightened up. A flustered sigh escaped Yua’s lips.

Huh?

“...Oh, Shiraishi,” Seiichirou added. “It doesn’t have to be now, but I wanted to ask you about the expedition.”

Seiichirou had seen the written report, but he wanted to know what it had been like from the perspective of Yua, both as the Holy Maiden and as an otherworlder.

“Yua’s busy! She doesn’t have any time to spend with you!”

“I wasn’t asking you, Selio.”

“Huh?!”

“Then would you like to go to lunch together? I want to ask you about the private school, too! ...Siegvold, you can come as well, if you’d like...,” Yua added, glancing up at him.

Siegvold’s expression remained unchanged as he nodded.

“That sounds fine. I have to monitor the dis— Seiichirou’s meals, anyway.”

“Monitor? Monitor his meals?” Yua asked, tilting her head curiously.

Siegvold explained that if he took his eyes off of him, Seiichirou would skip meals. Seiichirou pretended not to hear him.

“Wow! This is such a beautiful place!” Yua cried.

They would have attracted a lot of attention in the dining hall, so the four of them had come to the church’s flower garden, which had become the place where Seiichirou and Siegvold took all their lunches.

“This flower garden was made by the Holy Maiden from two generations ago.”

“I had no idea a place like this even existed at the church!”

Selio diligently carried food over to the round, iron table in the middle of the flower garden. The church generally made simple meals, but apparently things were different for the Holy Maiden and the priest—for them, Selio had brought out a wide variety of foods.

“You won’t be having any, right?” Selio checked with Seiichirou, though it sounded like an accusation.

“Right,” Seiichirou replied, nodding.

As usual, he took out the lunch Pavel had made him.

“Oh, that’s right! If Kondou isn’t picky about what he eats, he’ll be poisoned.”

Seiichirou nodded. Yua had a good memory—she had only eaten a meal with him once before. But just then, Selio’s eyes bulged.

“What?!”

Had Seiichirou not told him?

“Selio, Mr. Seiichirou doesn’t have any magicule tolerance, so he has to be careful about what he eats and how he lives his life,” Siegvold explained.



“What? No magicule tolerance...? But magicules are really helpful as long as you don’t ingest too many of them, and they’re like air—they’re everywhere...”

“He came from a different place. They probably have different food and different air.”

“Y-Your Holiness, do you also...?”

“I’m fine. I was told I got some kind of...divine protection thing.”

“Mr. Seiichirou was given a divine test; he came from another world, and he works for the sake of this kingdom. You should really consider this before interacting with him,” Siegvold admonished.

Selio looked visibly shaken, but Seiichirou felt uneasy. He wasn’t a disciple, and he hadn’t been given a divine test—he just acted out of a love for working. He wished Siegvold wouldn’t proselytize with this strange image of him.

“Selio, Mr. Siegvold’s just exaggerating. I’m not a disciple. I’m building my tolerance little by little right now, so I won’t die unless I ingest a lot of magicules.”

“You could die?! ”

Seiichirou had intended to smooth things over by saying this, but it seemed to have had the opposite effect.

“But your lunch looks really delicious!” Yua added, looking into Seiichirou’s lunch box, perhaps attempting to shift the mood of the conversation.

Pavel was the chef employed at Aresh’s house. As the former apprentice chef at Aresh’s parents’ house—the marquess’s residence—he was certainly talented. He was a curiously muscular man with a cheerful, friendly personality, and he had been kind to Seiichirou from the start. He had thoroughly studied magicule tolerance and made delicious foods, even taking Seiichirou’s preferences and nutritional needs into consideration—it was just what Seiichirou would have expected of a professional brought in by Aresh.

“Yes, it is delicious,” Seiichirou agreed.

Seiichirou thought that any food was fine as long as it supplied nutrition, but even he looked forward to the meals Pavel prepared. However, sometimes

Seiichirou would get so wrapped up in his work that he would forget to eat his lunch.

Everyone's attention had turned to their food, so Seiichirou decided to change the subject.

"So, about the purification expedition....," he prompted.

Yua explained that although not much had changed during the first and second purification, this time, after she had purified everything and the miasma had disappeared, there had been a downpouring of light, and buds had grown on a portion of the tree. This budding was proof that the purification was complete, and it was through many cycles of this process that the tree had grown to its current size.

Of course, after Seiichirou's persistent reminders, the sorcerers had also measured the magicule concentration, but the measured value was safely within the standard range for the area, so they had officially announced the purification complete.

"But when they were checking the surrounding area, they found the footprints of some beast—I think it's called a nepomuk?"

Nepomuks were large magical beasts that normally lived in colder regions, but it was presumed that magicules had lured them to the Demon Forest. For magical beasts, magicules made the atmosphere comfortable and caused their power to surge. Overindulging, however, would turn the nourishment to poison and make the beasts go wild. They had already confirmed that other magical beasts had gone berserk in the area around the Demon Forest, so they couldn't just let nepomuks, which were large and aggressive by nature, run free.

The Third Royal Order, therefore, had returned to their original duties and set off to take down the beasts.

"They asked around in nearby villages, and there were reports of nepomuk sightings. They seemed to be coming from a mountain on the far side, so Aresh said they'd take care of them right away."

The Demon Forest was three days away from the royal capital. Turning back and regrouping would have taken quite some time. If the Third Royal Order

could replenish their supplies in the village, doing that first would be most efficient. If Seiichirou had been there, that's probably what he would have suggested.

But...

"I wonder if they'll be okay..."

Even Seiichirou was surprised by this—he hadn't meant for those words to come out of his mouth.

"Both Yurius and the knights of the Second Royal Order said there's no reason to worry about the Third Royal Order. I'm sure they'll be fine."

Since coming to this world, Seiichirou had only ever seen the Third Royal Order work during the purification expeditions, so those who had lived in this kingdom for longer probably had a clearer picture of how things might go.

And Aresh was exceptionally strong, and could do magic, too.

Seiichirou reminded himself of this, but unfortunately, he still couldn't finish the lunch Pavel had made him that day.

"Kondo, you have a letter from Aresh."

The morning of Seiichirou's day off, Valtom gave him a letter which had apparently arrived that morning. Most people in this world used trained messenger birds to send letters, but letters from nobles and other elites, as well as official letters, were sent using a movement spell, which was how this letter had been delivered from a distance three days away by horse. It was the same type of movement spell Ist was researching. To perform it, a magician and a magic tool with a magic circle incorporated into it were necessary, and you couldn't send very much at one time, or anything too large. But it was ideal for sending confidential documents or very important letters because no one could intercept them. Aresh had sent a letter addressed to Seiichirou alongside every one of his regular reports from the Third Royal Order... Because of this, Seiichirou wished he could be the one to receive the letter from the royal palace messenger every day.

The wax sealing the letter was pressed with Aresh's personal engraving, which differed from the Indolark family crest. Seiichirou opened the letter with a

paper cutter. Everything about it looked so expensive, he couldn't bring himself to tear it.

The first part of the letter was filled with Aresh's usual concern over Seiichirou's poor health and his warning that if Seiichirou ever skipped a meal or pulled an all-nighter, he would immediately be able to tell when he got home and saw Seiichirou's face.

The village at the foot of the mountain is helping us, so we're not facing any problems in terms of supplies, but the nepomuks cover such a wide territory that the survey is taking some time. We planned to ignore the magical beasts until the purification was complete, and we'd like to reduce their numbers as well, so it looks like this will take quite a while. Your assignment at the church should be finished by now, so be careful not to go anywhere the magicules are too intense. If you ever feel unwell, consult Ciro immediately.

Ciro, director of the Royal Medical Bureau, was friends with Aresh. He had looked after Seiichirou when Aresh had taken him there for a physical examination, and after Seiichirou had been attacked. He was a good-natured man who worried about Seiichirou (as Seiichirou did not receive thorough protection from the kingdom), and he had inquired about Seiichirou's health the few times they had met in the royal palace since then.

In order to build the facility for the miasma barrier, we need to subdue the magical beasts in the area. There's nothing for you to worry about—just be conscientious about your own health.

“...”

Seiichirou had vaguely suspected as much, but Aresh had dispatched the knights to subdue the magical beasts around the Demon Forest to aid Seiichirou's proposed plan of sealing the miasma with a barrier after all. Seiichirou sighed.

Aresh had probably planned to do this from the beginning, although the discovery of the nepomuks had likely hastened his plan. Even Seiichirou thought Aresh's plan was more efficient than going on multiple expeditions, but when it came to subduing magical beasts, safety was the priority. Seiichirou didn't want them feeling pressed for time and rushing.

Aresh Indolark was brilliant, and his cool good looks and manner of speaking made him appear very grown-up, but after having observed him closely for several months, Seiichirou knew that Aresh was surprisingly immature. He pouted whenever Seiichirou didn't keep him company because of work; he looked embarrassed after being scolded by Valtom; and whenever he had tedious work to do, he became even clingier, trying to hide his reluctance to go take care of it. Seiichirou, therefore, imagined that this abrupt mission had been planned because Aresh wanted Seiichirou to praise him.

I should have warned him not to do this beforehand...

Coming from a world without any magical beasts and where he had been generally divorced from danger, such childish emotions made Seiichirou wonder what he would do if something happened to Aresh. He should have guessed that this was going to happen and stopped Aresh...

The final sentence on the gold-rimmed paper read:

Now that we're apart, I can't help but wonder about the past, before we had ever met.

Now that we're apart, I cannot comprehend the way I felt before I met you.

"Oh, mister! It's been a while."

In the open-air market, a boy wearing a dirty hat blinked up at Seiichirou. His name was Sigma, and he was the boy who had made Seiichirou his abacus soon after he had arrived in this world. If Seiichirou's memory served, the boy was twelve years old.

"It has been a while... You've got a lot of things here."

After reading Aresh's letter, Seiichirou had decided to go out into town, because his thoughts were spiraling with worry at home. Sigma was both training under a woodworker whom his late father had known and earning money by selling tools he made using leftover wood. The wooden toys and devices lined up on the cloth, however, were incredibly varied, which made it seem as though Sigma had used a lot of his breaks from work for practicing.

"Oh... Well, my master hurt his hand, so I can't go to training right now."

Sigma continued to explain that his master's injury wasn't healing well, and with his age, it seemed likely that he would close his shop soon.

"I'm looking for a new place, but because I'm a kid, I'm never the one picked first, I guess..."

People with families, grown men, and other established adults would be chosen first. Sigma had been allowed to use the space and the leftover lumber, though, so he had made all these things while practicing on his own.

"This is good timing, then," said Seiichirou. "I want you to make more abacuses, like the ones you made for me before."

"That's perfect! You pay well, too! Yay! How many, then? Two? Or five again, like last time?"

"Thirty."

"Thirty?!"

Sigma's naturally large eyes widened even more.

"Yes, thirty. And I'd like them made a little smaller than the ones you've made before."

"Th-they're pretty simple to make, so it won't be a problem making them smaller, but I don't have enough materials for thirty."

So there was a limit to how much the boy could rely on his boss's generosity, it seemed.

"I see. In that case, let's go negotiate with your boss's lumber supplier directly. If we say we were referred to him by your boss, no one should get offended."

While Seiichirou was at it, he would cover that portion of the fee as a cash payment.

"Huh? Th-then, I guess..."

"And, Sigma...would you like to go to school?"

Sigma's eyes widened again, and he just blinked at Seiichirou's smile.

Afterward, Seiichirou and Sigma went to visit Sigma's boss and immediately made a deal with the lumber supplier. After agreeing to see Sigma again in a few days, Seiichirou left. He was very busy that day, precisely because it was a day he wasn't scheduled to go to the church on assignment. If his temporary assignment had gone according to plan, his work at the church should have been finished by now, which Aresh had alluded to in his letter, but the submission of church documents had been delayed due to the bishop's absence. Moreover, Seiichirou had to continue visiting the church for a little while longer to set up the private learning institution. Seiichirou had previously been caught and scolded for working at the royal palace on his day off, but Aresh wasn't there now. As he headed to the royal palace now, Seiichirou reasoned that if someone were to rat him out later, he would rather be scolded all at once.

When Seiichirou visited the Royal Sorcery Department, Assistant Director Ist was back to business as usual, surrounded by his barricade of books, even though he had also gone on the expedition.

"Oh, Kondo! Huh? Something's different..."

Ist's eyes were sleepy, and his hair was still tousled with bed head, but he hadn't just been asleep—this was his normal state. As proof of this, the papers around him were covered with new iterations of magic circles.

"'Different'?"

Ist always said strange things, but when he said something was clearly unusual about Seiichirou, Seiichirou had no choice but to ask for an explanation.

"Hm? Your magic power is different... Oh, that's right. The Third aren't here right now, are they?"

"Third? You mean the Third Royal Order?"

Ist had a bad habit of understanding things in his head but not using words others could grasp. From the little information Ist provided, Seiichirou had to guess and fill in the gaps. Magic power, different, the Third Royal Order... Come to think of it, Ist had previously witnessed Aresh acclimatizing his magic power

to Seiichirou... Remembering that fiasco, Seiichirou's face burned.

"Ist... Please don't talk about that kind of stuff in front of others..."

"Hmm... Really? Okay. As long as you're fine, that's good. That reminds me. Did you bring the sacred relic?"

"You don't forget stuff like *that*, do you? While you're at it, I'd appreciate it if you would commit to memory that I already told you that's impossible."

Ist tilted his head in confusion. People like him only ever remembered things that were personally convenient. Since they were going on a slight tangent, however, Seiichirou decided to steer the conversation back on course.

"I think it's impossible for me to even touch the sacred relic, but why do you want it so badly?"

Even though Ist had asked over and over about the sacred relic, the magic power in the barriers surrounding it was so strong that Seiichirou had never wanted to approach it. He had not even confirmed its existence.

"Huh? It has accumulated so much magic power. If I had it, I could do all the experiments I wanted. I want it so bad!"

"It *accumulates* magic power?"

The name "sacred relic" had suggested that it was an object of worship where this kingdom's god resided. Seiichirou had imagined that it was something like a rock or a statue, but if it could accumulate magic power, it wasn't a natural object, but a man-made one... It was a magical tool, surely?

"Ist, have you ever seen the sacred relic?"

"Yep! All the kids in this kingdom pray to it at their baptism when they're six years old. I've got a lot of magic power, after all."

Ist was the best sorcerer in the kingdom in practical terms, so it wasn't surprising that he had possessed a lot of magic power even in childhood.

During baptisms, children in the kingdom who turned six years old went to the church, reported themselves to God, offered prayers of thanks, and officially registered as citizens. It seemed as though children were temporarily registered before the age of six, just like the old registration system in Japan.

And when these children prayed, it was to the sacred relic.

A sacred relic that accumulates magic power... That reminds me, didn't Camile say something strange before?

"That's why children born with too much magic power train in the church to reduce the amount of magic power they have."

Seiichirou had thought there was something strange about that at the time, but he hadn't really understood magic power, so he hadn't said anything.

Magic power was energy inside the body. Aspects of the body, like blood volume and metabolism, could be altered over time by one's diet and lifestyle. If the same thing could be done artificially with magic power...where was the accumulated magic power going?

Seiichirou listened to Ist's report on the expedition and his research progress, then walked through the hallways to return to the Accounting Department. He felt a slight twinge of discomfort about the revelation he'd had, but he had no idea whether this situation was the norm in this world or if it was considered abnormal, so he decided to ask Norbert. Then he would check the accounting tasks, look over the draft budget for the barrier facility so that he would make it in time for the end-of-the-month income and expenditure settlements, and then—

"...Oh, I'm sorry."

Seiichirou had been walking and thinking at the same time, so he had accidentally bumped into someone. He hadn't been walking that quickly, so he hadn't been knocked backward, but he'd run into something incredibly large and solid. When Seiichirou looked up, his expression hardened.

"Kondou. I need to talk to you. Come with me," said an arrogant voice.

The wall Seiichirou had collided with was Radim, commander of the Second Royal Order, and behind him was Prince Yurius. Seiichirou braced himself to rearrange his work schedule yet again. Then...

"Seeei! Did you finish your errand at the Sorcery Depart...ment...?"

Norbert had probably only been able to see Seiichirou's cloak from behind the

pillar. His out-of-place, cheerful voice rang out around them before tapering off into silence.

“Yes, I’m done. This is about work, I presume? Then let’s go.”

Norbert always had bad timing with these sorts of things, but this time, his timing was perfect. Seiichirou quickly made to leave, but naturally, the muscular man stopped him with an arm.

“Kondo, His Highness said he needs to talk to you.”

“But I have work to do... See? My subordinate came all the way here to get me...”

Seiichirou tried to offer this futile resistance, but said subordinate looked as though he was about to run away at any moment. *So someone like Norbert isn’t enough of a deterrent*, Seiichirou thought, but then Radim unexpectedly loosened his grip. Thinking this might be his chance, Seiichirou straightened his back and was about to lay out the reasons he had to leave so that he could escape, but Yurius spoke first.

“It doesn’t matter. That man can come, too.”

“Huh?” asked the two members of the Accounting Department, their foolish voices harmonizing.

Soon, Seiichirou sat beside Norbert in the prince’s private reception room, the same place Seiichirou had been brought to before. Yurius sat opposite them, and behind him stood Radim, whose massive build and stern expression were intimidating. Yurius, with his silver hair and blue eyes, and with knights guarding him in this luxurious room, looked the spitting image of a prince, but Seiichirou’s impression of Yurius as a pubescent adolescent was too strong for him to feel awe.

And this was because, just like their last meeting, Seiichirou had been summoned here to discuss—

“I heard you were being very friendly with Yua the other day, Kondou.”

—*this*.

Seiichirou couldn’t bring himself to hide his exasperation anymore. The only

thing he had talked to Yua about recently was the private learning institution and the purification expedition. Was he being watched? Thinking it through rationally, it made sense that the Holy Maiden had guards or secret agents with her, but with Seiichirou being summoned here for this sort of thing so frequently, the word *stalker* popped into his mind.

“What was that about, Kondou?” Yurius pressed him.

“You claim I’m being friendly with her, but almost everything we talk about is work-related...”

“‘Work-related’? If you and Yua are talking about work...does that mean the spell to send you home has been completed?!”

Yurius suddenly got to his feet, openly shaken. Seiichirou began to wonder whether this man was capable of fulfilling the duties of a crown prince, given he was prone to such strong emotional outbursts.

“No... Not that. It’s something else.”

“What...? Something else...?”

Then Seiichirou suddenly remembered—he was talking to His Highness the Prince, who had a crush on Yua.

He would be...a good source of funds.

“Sei...?” Norbert murmured. “Are you up to no good...?”

“That’s right, Your Highness! I’m helping the Holy Maiden create a private school for the children of the relief house and the poor children in town!”

“A private school?”

Once again, Seiichirou offered the same explanation to Yurius and Radim that he had previously offered to Camile and Siegvold, but this time, he thoroughly laid out Yua’s suggestion, and explained the idea and plan had all come from Yua.

“Just what I’d expect of Yua! What a wonderful idea!”

“Of course Her Holiness would think of this! She’s not just thinking of the poor children, but of the whole kingdom...!”

Neither Yurius nor Radim suspected a thing, and both were deeply impressed. The other knights standing guard and the maids in attendance were also trembling with emotion. Seiichirou inwardly chuckled about their blind acceptance of the Holy Maiden, which was just as he had assumed it would be.

“Did the Holy Maiden really come up with that? That flawless reasoning sounds a lot like something you—”

It didn’t slip Seiichirou’s mind to shove a tea cake into the mouth of the flippant man beside him—the only other person in the room without blind devotion to the Holy Maiden—to stop him from saying anything unnecessary.

“...?! What are you...?” asked Radim.

“He said he wanted my helping of tea cakes, so I just gave it to him.”

Seiichirou had assumed that Radim wasn’t paying attention to him anymore, but the man glowered at him with unexpected intensity. Seiichirou had managed to smooth things over, however. Radim didn’t look fully convinced, but Norbert seemed to be enjoying the pastry that had been shoved into his mouth, stuffing his cheeks, so nothing more was said.

“But if Yua had an idea like that, she should have told me instead of a lowly person like you...”

“She probably meant to tell you once the plan had been finalized, Your Highness. But if you, in all your wisdom, were to realize her plan first and make her wish come true by offering support...”

The prince had been thinking along the same lines.

He would do everything in his power to support her.

“...!”

In other words, this was the perfect chance for Yurius to show her that they had the same values, and to use the power of his position as prince to impress her.

“That’s right! That’s right!! I was just thinking the same thing, for real! Yua and I are so like-minded!”

Yurius grew so excited, his speech became considerably less proper.

“Exactly,” said Seiichirou. “Oh, and if you put forward your personal funds to support her, instead of the kingdom’s treasury, it would further emphasize that it was your own idea and seem much more manly. That’s how it was in our world.”

“Oh! Really?! Well, that’s exactly what I was going to do! I’m going to go talk to Yua right now!”

Yurius ran off in a hurry, and the knights from the Second Royal Order chased after him.

“...Sei, that was very well put, but do you intend to carry out your plans using the prince’s personal funds, not the kingdom’s budget...?” asked Norbert, who, contrary to his appearance, was being very well-behaved and munching away at Seiichirou’s tea cakes.

“A lot of the kingdom’s budget is already being used at the moment, mostly on the miasma barrier. I’ve also increased the budget for the Sorcery Department, so while we’re finally on track to make up for the Holy Maiden’s budget embezzlement, we don’t have much extra,” Seiichirou replied, looking unconcerned. “Besides, it’s true that in my home country, self-sacrifice is considered a virtue.”

“Whaaat? No wonder people there grow up to be workaholics like you!”

Seiichirou sipped his tea, musing that Norbert really did strike at the heart of the matter every now and then.

Well, for now that’s one—no, two troublesome matters settled.

Seiichirou got to his feet to return to the Accounting Department and do some work. Norbert hurried after him, his mouth stuffed full of sweets. Then Radim called out from behind them.

“Kondo.”

Seiichirou looked back. A maid brought him something.

“You should eat that with the others in the Accounting Department.”

They had gone to the trouble of wrapping up the sweets Norbert had enjoyed earlier. Radim glanced at Norbert, which reminded Seiichirou of something.

Radim was commander of the Second Royal Order, the knights who protected the *royal family*.

“Does His Highness know?” Seiichirou asked, being deliberately obtuse with his question as he took the package.

Radim nodded.

“His Highness also ordered these sweets to be prepared.”

“What?”

“You don’t believe it...? His Highness’s admiration for the Holy Maiden is at times intense, but he is a magnificent heir to the throne.”

Perhaps Seiichirou’s impression of the prince came from how he had mainly seen the lad when he was with Yua. In any case, it was largely irrelevant to Seiichirou who became the next sovereign of the kingdom. After he thanked Radim and left, he threw the package of sweets to Norbert, who had been waiting for him.

“Gracious, Sei! After all, this is, in a fashion, an item bestowed upon us by His Highness!”

Seeing Norbert’s smile, Seiichirou could tell that he understood the meaning of the package.

“You think nothing of it?”

Although Norbert and Yurius were both children of the current king, Norbert had been born to a low-ranking mistress and had been adopted out, and his biological older brother stood above everyone as heir to the crown.

“If I’m forced to admit it, I guess my relatives do have a tendency of luring me with food.”

“...? There’ve been other times besides this?”

“There have, there have,” said Norbert, chuckling.

Norbert was already eighteen years old. In Seiichirou’s world, he would be considered an adult. He had long passed the age where he should be getting excited over sweets.

“Well, it happens a lot with nobility.”

“Really?”

“I only had to know about my family because it’s the royal family, just in case anything were to happen, but after aristocrats adopt their kids out those kids often never know their own relatives.”

“You mean people don’t even know they’re related?”

That sounded like the world of a television drama.

“Heirs to the family are usually told, but other relatives may not know at all. That’s how you can have two people who you think kinda look alike, and then they end up being siblings or something.”

“Hmm...”

Seiichirou’s bewilderment in this case may have stemmed from his unfamiliarity with aristocratic society in general, rather than his unfamiliarity with this world.

“That reminds me, Norbert—you’ve been baptized, haven’t you? Have you seen the sacred relic?”

“Oh, the sacred relic. Yeah, I have. That statue with the magic crystal inside, right?”

It appeared every citizen had seen the sacred relic after all.

“That statue—”

“It absorbs magic power, right?”

Seiichirou hadn’t been expecting much—he had just figured that since Norbert was a member of the royal family, he might as well ask—but Norbert’s answer came readily.

“Is that common knowledge?” Seiichirou asked.

“Oops! Oh, darn, that was a secret.”

“Hey!”

If what Norbert said was supposed to be a secret, that might mean it was a

state secret. Seiichirou didn't want Norbert to go around leaking things like that in everyday conversation.

"Well," said Norbert, "since it's you, it's fine, right?"

Then Norbert giggled, which made Seiichirou assume it had been intentional. This devil-may-care man occasionally acted in ways that were in stark contrast to his appearance—ways that almost made Seiichirou's heart stop beating entirely.

Seiichirou had no choice but to slip into a rarely visited storeroom to continue the conversation.

"Who knows?"

Norbert accurately intuited the aim of Seiichirou's brief question.

"The members of the royal family and the church bishop know."

It really is a state secret, then?

Seiichirou would never have imagined that even Prime Minister Camile and Commander Aresh were in the dark about this. It was no wonder, then, that people were telling him different things.

"What are they doing with the accumulated magic power?"

The words "magic power" seemed fantastical, but it was basically energy. If it was drawn from people's bodies and collected, it could be regarded as an asset of the church. But there hadn't been any records of income or expenditures by means of magic power in the church's report.

"The royal capital's defense barrier."

"Defense barrier...?"

Seiichirou was again faced with a phrase he had never heard before.

Norbert explained that a defense barrier, managed by the royal family for generations, had been laid around the royal capital of the Romany Kingdom, and that it prevented magical beasts from approaching the capital.

"If something like that existed, wouldn't everyone be able to tell?"

It was understandable that Seiichirou couldn't because he had absolutely no

magic power, but all other citizens possessed some magic power, even if they couldn't invoke magic. Besides, the existence of a city that magical beasts categorically never approached was too unnatural to be believable.

"A barrier being placed over a city isn't unusual in itself. Everyone knows about them. But the barrier for the royal capital is a little unique. It's specially made to reflect magic attacks from other kingdoms."

The explanation was so fantasy-esque that Seiichirou was struggling to follow it, so he translated it into scientific terms in his mind. The only difference was that one was an electric fence that kept out ferocious animals, and the other was a plasma shield equipped with offensive capabilities... *Aren't those totally different things?*

"Aren't those totally different things?"

Seiichirou was so surprised that he voiced the question that had just popped into his mind.

"They're not *totally* different. They're both made with magic stones and magic circles. This one just requires an enormous amount of magic power to keep it running."

For an electric fence—that is, a normal barrier—you would first prepare a magic circle and magic stone, then invoke the barrier with magic power, after which it would last for some time. Seiichirou understood how this worked, after all, because he was currently trying to have one applied to the Demon Forest.

The barrier over the royal capital, however, couldn't be maintained without a continuous supply of magic power, and it was apparently so complex that if the supply ever ran out, they would have to reconstruct the barrier from scratch.

"But it's difficult to keep magic power flowing in all the time, so that's where the church comes in."

A special magic tool was built into the sacred relic that allowed people to dedicate magic power through prayer.

That was why the kingdom supported the church.

"Since the church is protecting the kingdom, shouldn't they advertise that?"

“If they did that, other kingdoms would find out about the barrier, wouldn’t they?”

“Oh, I see.”

Seiichirou, who was from a generation that had never known war, hadn’t immediately realized this, but he had learned that conflicts between kingdoms were possible in this world from past military expense documents in the Accounting Department.

The Romany Kingdom had a mild climate and vast tracts of land where crops flourished. This was only hampered by the Demon Forest, but even that aspect of the kingdom added a certain appeal, because this was the place where the legend of the Holy Maiden had taken root. The Holy Maiden was an immutable bastion of hope to the kingdom’s people, so as long as the kingdom had control of the Holy Maiden, they could easily unify the people. That was precisely why the kingdom wanted the Holy Maiden, and why they were trying to introduce someone into the royal family with the Holy Maiden’s blood who could receive the divine revelation for the next Holy Maiden. Seiichirou, however, was in the middle of trying to ruin this entire plan.

Regardless, as soon as Seiichirou got back to the Accounting Department after Norbert’s shocking confession, he began rifling through file cabinets.

Seiichirou believed he could find the flow of money that had been used for the defense barrier somewhere, no matter how well hidden it was.

And throughout the course of that night, Seiichirou figured out what was happening.

The individual sums of money were not large, but as Seiichirou sorted through them, he saw artificially inflated amounts. If Norbert had never told him about the barrier, though, Seiichirou, who knew very little about magic or the church, would have overlooked them.

Seiichirou learned three things after conversing with Norbert and looking over the documents.

First, the magic power of the people’s prayers could be stored inside the church’s sacred relic.

Second, the royal capital's defense barrier utilized that magic power.

Third, the monarchy was financially supporting the church, which included an amount for the magic power supplied.

That would explain why, even though Abran was already the state religion, they were given substantial financial support. A part of this magic power had also been used for the Holy Maiden Summoning. However, there was no concrete numerical value for the amount of power listed anywhere. As the entire setup was a secret, this was probably to be expected. The Accounting Department documents had mixed up the category of "defense expenditures" with "financial support to the church," and the venture was only vaguely mentioned in Sorcery Department documents.

However, seeing that magic power was recognized as an energy resource and that it generated money, Seiichirou needed to know more about it.

"Seiichirou, you don't look well. Are you all right?"

After staying up nearly all night looking for documents, Seiichirou reported to the church the next day, but just as he arrived, Siegvold called out to him.

"I'm fine."

The circles under Seiichirou's eyes were darker than usual, and his face seemed a bit pale. Moreover, perhaps because his mind was preoccupied, his typically glazed eyes had a far-off look about them, and he occasionally muttered something to himself. He certainly didn't look fine.

"But your face is..."

"Oh, Siegvold! And Kondou, too! Good morning!"

Siegvold had just been about to argue, but Yua greeted them cheerfully first.

Looking around, they saw Yurius in modest clothes, with his head wrapped in a turban, happily walking behind Yua. Perhaps he was trying to disguise himself. There were several people that appeared to be plainclothes knights around him, so he seemed to have come with guards.

"Your Holiness...and Your Highness...," said Siegvold, looking confused.

"You don't have to be so respectful," Yurius answered in a cheerful voice.

“When I look like this, you can relax and call me Yuri.”

“Kondou! Yuri said he was going to help with the private school! Apparently he’d been thinking of doing the exact same thing! He came here today incognito to inspect the relief house!”

Just as Seiichirou had expected—a man in love was quick to take action.

“Kondou, just a moment...”

Seiichirou had been watching the scene with a vaguely uncomfortable expression, but just then, Yurius locked his arm around Seiichirou’s neck and pulled him away.

“What is it, Your— Yuri? It seems like things are going well.”

“Your idea is going fine, but what’s with Yua’s attitude toward Siegvold?!” Yurius hissed in an undertone.

Seiichirou glanced back and saw Yua, with pink cheeks and sparkling eyes, looking up at Siegvold and happily chatting away. Seiichirou had thought that Yua liked Aresh, but perhaps the hearts of high school girls were easily changeable.

“I thought Yua liked Aresh,” said Yurius, “but maybe she also likes serious, straitlaced guys like Siegvold?”

Seiichirou was surprised that Yurius had noticed.

“I don’t know. Why don’t you ask her yourself?”

“You’ve seen Yua and Siegvold together loads of times, haven’t you?!”

That may have been true, but Seiichirou’s mind was almost entirely occupied by work matters, so he neither cared for nor paid attention to things of a romantic nature. However, Siegvold was certainly handsome, tall, and fit.

Come to think of it, do he and Aresh kind of look alike?

“Maybe she likes the way he looks?”

Comparatively, Yurius was slender, around Seiichirou’s height, and his thin appearance was more befitting of the word *beautiful* than *handsome*. Even Yurius’s coloring—glittering silver hair and blue eyes—was flashier than Aresh’s

black hair or Siegvold's brown.

"Their coloring, too... Black and brown were common hair colors in my home country, so maybe she feels more at ease with them than you, with your silver hair and blue eyes?"

"Gold and silver hair and blue eyes are hallmarks of the noble royal family!"

Now that Yurius mentioned it, it was true that the current king and Norbert had the same hair color.

"But she's not very used to them..."

"But those two have purple eyes, and that's an unusual trait even in this kingdom!"

Is that right? Come to think of it, I don't think I've seen anyone with purple eyes besides those two.

"Yuri? Aren't we going to the relief house?"

"I'm coming now!"

Tossing Seiichirou aside, Yurius rushed over to Yua. Siegvold crossed paths with Yurius as he rushed up to Seiichirou.

"Are you okay?"

"Oh, yes..."

From up close, Seiichirou noted that Siegvold's eyes, as violet as amethysts, were indeed the same color as Aresh's.

"That's how you can have two people who you think kinda look alike, and then they end up being siblings or something."

"...There's no way," Seiichirou muttered to himself.

Siegvold tilted his head, looking at Seiichirou's face.

"What? I knew it, you don't feel well..."

"Kondou!" yelled Yurius. "You come, too! Show me around and explain!"

"Yes, yes..."

Their sponsor had come all the way here in person. Seiichirou headed toward

the relief house, assuming it would be easier for him to explain everything at the place itself.

Selio seemed to be in charge of the relief house that day. Although he was made temporarily wary by the unexpected appearance of Yua with a man, he seemed to accept it after seeing Siegvold and Seiichirou, too. But there was more to come—Seiichirou then spotted an unexpected person at the relief house.

“Sigma!”

“Oh, mister... Thank goodness you’re here...,” said Sigma, breathing a sigh of relief.

The familiar boy with the dirty hat had been loitering around the entrance to the relief house. Amidst Yurius’s and Yua’s vigilant guards, Seiichirou stepped forward to put Sigma under his protection.

“What’s wrong? Why are you here...?”

“Oh... Well, when I told my mom about the private school, she said, ‘Go there right now and secure a spot before that nobleman changes his mind!’...”

Sigma didn’t speak in his usual cheeky manner, but rapidly and nervously, perhaps because he was in the presence of Yurius, who was clearly of higher status.

Seiichirou had always imagined Sigma’s mother to be sickly and fragile, but he now understood that mothers from the merchant area of town were indomitable women—although Seiichirou *wasn’t* a nobleman.

“That’s excellent timing, then. Now that both of our targets—children from the relief house and children from town—are here together, it will be easier to explain the venture to our sponsor.”

“Spon...sir?”

“The one paying for the school. It’s that man in the turban over there. I’m not a nobleman myself, but that man’s rank is very high, so be careful,” Seiichirou whispered to him.

Sigma’s spine snapped perfectly straight, as if someone had put a ruler down

his back.

“You... What kind of a relationship do you have with that kid?” Selio asked him. Selio, thoroughly unnerved, had just been explaining the relief house to Yurius, but he had perhaps been freed from that task, as he was now approaching them.

“What kind of a...?”

“A street vendor and his customer” would have been the closest fit, but there was a bit more to their relationship than that.

“Sigma is a boy I’ve recruited because he’s incredibly smart and has potential.”

Sigma was quick-witted, ambitious, and clever, so he was sure to be a success. When Yua had first mentioned the idea of a private school, Sigma was the first person who’d come to Seiichirou’s mind. In fact, Seiichirou couldn’t help thinking that such a system was made for the boy. And there were sure to be many other children like Sigma. That was exactly why he had told Camile that even if they had to fund it from the kingdom’s treasury, the venture would more than pay for itself.

“Recruited...? F-from where...?”

“A vendor stall in the merchant area of town.”

Seiichirou explained to Selio that when they had first met, Sigma had been crafting original tools by trial and error to make calculations easier for himself, and that his ingenuity and initiative was incredible. For some reason, however, Selio froze, and Seiichirou couldn’t tell from his expression whether he had been listening or not.

“Selio?”

“...!”

Selio jolted at the sound of his own name. Siegvold sighed.

“Didn’t I tell you, Selio? This is the sort of person the disciple—Mr. Seiichirou—is. Don’t get carried away by the words and preconceived notions of the people around you; look with your own eyes and think for yourself.”

Selio was visibly at a loss for words, so Seiichirou decided to leave him be. Just as Seiichirou once again attempted to enter the relief house with Sigma, however, the arrival of yet another unexpected visitor made him freeze in his tracks.



[CHAPTER FIVE]

Collapsed Again

In front of the entrance to the relief house stood a man...

"I'm here."

His hair was a mild mixture of orange and pink, a color rarely seen in Seiichirou's home world. The man grinning absently with sleepy, peridot-green eyes was a shut-in type, who was typically in the laboratory surrounded by his nest of books... But Assistant Director Ist of the Royal Sorcery Department was not being a recluse today. He looked different somehow, and Seiichirou realized it was because he had never seen Ist in sunlight before, except on one expedition. Seiichirou was impressed by the fact that Ist had seriously come outside for something other than work, but the most important aspect of the entire scene was where Ist had made his appearance.

"Why are you here?"

"Huh? You came to the office yesterday and looked at a bunch of documents, so I thought you were going to see the sacred relic."

Seiichirou *had* dropped by the Sorcery Department the day before without any prior notice and had spent a long time looking for documents. But he had never imagined that Ist could be so perceptive and proactive about something he desired. Lamenting his own lack of foresight, however, wouldn't improve the situation, and he couldn't let this reckless sorcerer go unchecked.

"Who's this guy?"

"Is he the visitor?"

Young children had already spotted the crowd forming in front of the relief house and gathered outside. Slightly older children, who could tell from Ist's clothes that he was high-ranking, were more careful and watched from a distance.

“Hey, don’t do that! This guy’s a sorcerer from the castle...!” said Selio, boldly rushing out from among the children, perhaps fearing that the children of the relief house would be impolite to Ist and get scolded.

Seiichirou, however, was more worried that Ist would try to do something to the children. Surprisingly, Ist only sat in front of them, met their gazes, and asked:

“Have you already prayed today?”

“Nuh-uh, not yet.”

“They said a visitor was comin’ today, so we’d do it later!”

“Is that right? Can I go with you, then?” Ist asked, tilting his head.

He was speaking in the same tone as the children—though as a matter of fact, he was speaking in his normal tone of voice—and the children, perhaps sensing that his mental age was close to theirs, smiled at him, obviously at ease.

“You want to pray? Sure!”

“Ist, what do you mean by ‘pray’? ...Ist!” said Seiichirou.

“Mr. Seiichirou, you know this man...?”

Siegvold responded to Seiichirou before Ist did. It wasn’t far-fetched to imagine that a priest like Siegvold was acquainted with the assistant director of the Sorcery Department. At the very least, they must have both been in the room when Yua and Seiichirou had been summoned.

“Oh,” said Seiichirou. “As you might know...this is Assistant Director Ist of the Royal Sorcery Department.”

“Mr. Ist. Welcome to Abran’s church.”

Siegvold extended his hand. Ist looked at it blankly for a while, and then, as if remembering something, he nodded and shook the priest’s hand. Seiichirou was reminded of the suffering the director of the Sorcery Department often underwent.

“So you were just saying...,” prompted Siegvold.

“They’re going to go pray, right? I’ll go with them.”

Ist spoke as if it had already been decided. Despite his odd appearance and mannerisms, Ist still held the position of assistant director of the Royal Sorcery Department. Siegvold, who was incapable of being unkind, looked to Seiichirou for help, but Seiichirou pretended not to notice. In light of Ist's purpose—prayer—Seiichirou guessed that he was probably going to supply magic power to the sacred relic.

Yua had apparently been listening.

"Oh, you're going to pray? Then I'll go, too!" she said, raising her hand.

"...?!"

Seiichirou was shocked.

Wait! If "prayer" supplies magic power to the sacred relic...

Judging from Yua's reaction, she had participated in "prayer" before. She spoke as if she did it daily.

Purification was the Holy Maiden's highest priority, but they've been squeezing magic power from her, too?!

The Holy Maiden's miasma purification was supposed to be prioritized above all else, and in the royal palace, Yua had been managed so that her magic power was not used for anything outside of training. A few healing or purification spells in the intervals between expeditions were probably not a problem, because they could be considered practice for her manipulation of magic or as a gesture to elevate the value of the Holy Maiden, but Seiichirou didn't know the limit to how much magic power could be supplied to the sacred relic. If it was able to absorb boundless amounts of magic power, it could have influenced the purification. Yua had even previously tried to use a healing spell on Seiichirou when he had been feeling ill, and she had probably been praying with the children as an extension of her assistance to the relief house, but these things had surely not been reported to the royal palace. And indeed, Yurius's face changed.

"Yua...have you been participating in prayer frequently?"

"Huh? Y-yes. I usually do when I help at the relief house..."

Yurius's graceful eyebrows furrowed. It was the first time he had ever looked at her like that, and Yua seemed bewildered.

"Shiraishi."

Yua turned toward Seiichirou, looking slightly panicked.

"Ist is going to show me around for the prayer, so could you show Yuri around here?"

"Huh...? Oh, sure..."

Seiichirou briefly glanced at Yurius and accidentally caught his gaze. Yurius looked away.

"Right," said Yurius. "Yua, please continue with the tour."

"R-right."

Yua nodded with a smile, confused but relieved to see that Yurius was back to grinning at her like usual.

"Well, let's go, Mr. Siegvold," Seiichirou prompted.

"Go? Where...?"

Siegvold had apparently not been able to follow their conversation.

"To the location of the sacred relic, of course."

"What?! You can't—it's a special place of worship, so outsiders need permission from the bishop to go in."

"Is that right?"

Siegvold explained that it was usually open to the public during ceremonies, but that typically, only people involved with the church could enter.

"I see. Could you go ask the bishop, then?"

"This is so sudden..."

"No, not for me, but for Ist. He came all the way here, alone, without any appointment, for the sole reason of praying. You understand what that means, don't you...?"

Ist was assistant director of the Royal Sorcery Department. He might have

held the same rank as Seiichirou, but compared to the Accounting Department, the Sorcery Department was higher up on the totem pole. That department's assistant director had come all the way here by himself and said he would participate. In other words...

"He's not someone who's going to listen if you tell him no. I really don't know what he'll do, so please hurry and check that he can. You don't have that much time."

"I'll go right away!"

And so, after receiving permission from the bishop, Ist, the children from the relief house, Siegvold, and Cipriano, who usually led the worship, went to the prayer room. Seiichirou and Sigma joined them. To Sigma, the diversion was nothing special. He had just followed Seiichirou because Seiichirou was the only person he knew. However, because he had been trained as a craftsman, he looked at the decorations inside the church with great interest.

"Kondo, I am sorry for the delay in revising the income and expenditure report. I think I'll be able to get it to you tomorrow," Cipriano, the church's accounting manager, said apologetically, his thin eyes narrowing even further as he smiled.

"Not at all, it's fine. Tomorrow? Sure. I'm sorry to have made you go to the extra trouble when you're already busy."

If all went well, Seiichirou would probably also be saying good-bye to the church tomorrow, and if so, there were a number of things he needed to finish by the end of the day. Seiichirou focused all his energy into his legs, which felt wobbly from lack of sleep.

The prayer room they were led to was more modestly constructed than the prayer room visited by the public. The room was stone-paved and roughly two hundred square feet in size. A white rug was laid out on the floor. Stained glass was inlaid in part of the ceiling, and the light from the ceiling painted the rug with a kaleidoscope of colors. There was a platform directly facing the door, which appeared to be an altar, upon which lay a foot-tall statue with a blue, jewellike object implanted in it.

That had to be the sacred relic.

The statue was of a man with a dignified face. Seiichirou had seen a large statue that resembled this one in the prayer room for the general public, so he assumed this was the god Abran. Physically speaking, Seiichirou was feeling terrible.

Siegvold, standing beside him, didn't notice Seiichirou's worsening complexion.

"It's as beautiful as ever...", said Siegvold, letting out a sigh of rapture. "When I was young, I couldn't control my magic power, so I wondered if I was an evil child."

Siegvold explained that he had then been brought to the church, and by praying to Abran in this prayer room, he had calmed down, and had then vowed to serve God for his entire life.

You just calmed down because you had your excess magic power absorbed...

Of course, there had probably been a psychological aspect to Siegvold's transformation as well. After Siegvold's spontaneous magic outbursts had abated, he must have felt as though he was able to rely on God and had learned to control his magic power. In fact, from the way Siegvold had described it, he also seemed to think the sacred relic was simply an object of worship. *He's lived in the church all this time and never noticed?* Seiichirou thought, but after remembering Siegvold's personality from the month they had spent together, Seiichirou thought that Siegvold might very well be in the dark. Siegvold wasn't a man who would approve of embezzling donations or absorbing magic power from believers.

But Seiichirou, distracted by these contemplations, had been careless.

Well, it was also partially due to his lack of sleep and his intoxication from the magic power which filled the room.

"Mister, look out!!"

Seiichirou didn't notice the cluster of magic power heading straight for him until he heard Sigma's voice.

“Huh?” Sigma said, sensing that something was out of place.

Sigma had been kicked out of the house by his mother. Then he had visited the relief house and then, for some reason, had ended up joining this group to pray.

“What’s wrong?”

The one who had heard Sigma speak was the sleepy-eyed man who had just earlier been driving Seiichirou, a civil official and a very important customer of Sigma’s, up a wall. This man was also wearing a cloak, so although he didn’t really look it, he must have been an important person from the castle.

“Oh, no, it’s just... I was kinda thinkin’— I mean, I just thought that the way I prayed before was different...”

“Oh? You’ve prayed before?”

“I don’t got much— I mean, I don’t have a lot of magic power, so I did at my baptism, but that was five years ago, so maybe they’ve changed how you do it...”

Sigma faltered as he answered, trying not to speak discourteously, but the other man, Ist, nodded several times, unbothered by Sigma’s awkward attempts at formality.

“You’re right. It’s been a while since I’ve prayed, too, but it wasn’t like this before. When you pray like this, too much of your magic power gets absorbed, which can upset the circulation of magic power in the body and make some kids lose control.”

“What? Magic power...gets absorbed...?”

“Huh?”

Sigma, who only knew of prayer as a ceremony to convey thanks for the divine protection of the god Abran, was surprised, but Ist, who oversaw the Royal Sorcery Department, the umbrella organization for the magic power of the kingdom, did not understand that anything was strange about this information, and tilted his head. Ist had always had vast amounts of magic power and was more interested in spells than the average person, and because

he excelled at seeing the flow of magic power, he had always understood that prayer supplied magic power to the sacred relic. He'd assumed that everyone else knew that, too. Ist didn't know, therefore, what Sigma was surprised by, and because he had a rule to not think about things he didn't already know about or have an interest in, he passed over the interruption and continued the conversation.

"That priest seems to be able to sense it, so I guess prayer is pretty much like this all the time now," said Ist.

He was pointing at Cipriano, who was giving the children instructions and leading the prayer. Sigma couldn't understand what Ist was talking about, but he tried his best to follow along.

"U-um, does that mean you can tell how much magic power someone has? Sir?"

"Hm? How much...magic power?"

"Huh? Um—yes. Magic power."

"Yes, I can tell. The Sorcery Department is full of people with high perception abilities, after all."

"The Sorcery Department?! Are you a sorcerer, mister?!"

"Yes, I'm from the Sorcery Department. And today I'm actually wearing my cloak like I should be."

Sigma set aside his follow-up question ("Do you usually forget to?"). To commoners, especially those from the merchant part of town, civil officials in the royal palace lived in a totally different world, so people like Sigma didn't know the departments were classified by color or even what their cloaks meant. Regardless of whether they were of noble or common birth, however, children admired knights and sorcerers all the same. Sigma, in particular, admired sorcerers who did research and created useful spells and tools more than he did knights who went into battle. Although Sigma did not realize that the sorcerer in front of him was the top sorcerer in the kingdom, he looked up at Ist with a twinkle in his eye.

It was mysterious—as soon as Sigma knew that Ist was a sorcerer, even his

sleepy eyes and incredibly dirty sleeve cuffs seemed cool, like he was exhausted from research. Ist was always sleepy-eyed, even when away from his research; he didn't listen to people when they were talking; and his sleeve cuffs were always dirty. But Sigma had no way of knowing these things.

"Oh, oh! Then—then wouldn't it be a relief if there was a tool that could let even people without any perception abilities tell how much magic power someone has?!"

"Hmm?"

"I said, wouldn't it be a relief if someone without perception abilities like me had a tool that could make that visible?"

During the course of their short conversation, Sigma had noticed—perhaps because he had a young sister who was similar—that Ist wasn't able to catch what someone said to him on the first try, so he had repeated himself. Ist was not particularly hard of hearing, however. It was just so easy for him to get lost in his own thoughts, and he had a very patchy notion of what it meant to listen to others, so most words just ended up going in one ear and out the other.

When it came to something that interested him, however, that was a different story.

Ist had, in other words, heard what Sigma had just said perfectly. He had just been asking Sigma to explain. In detail.

"What would it look like? Something people without any perception abilities put on their eyes? A tool people wore? Observing others with glasses?"

Suddenly, Ist began talking very quickly while moving closer to Sigma. Sigma leaned back, answering Ist's questions to the best of his ability.

"U-um, that would be fine, I just thought it would be good if anyone could see that and be able to tell, so maybe put the value somewhere everyone can see it at a glance or something..."

"At a glance? How would you do that? Numbers? Words? What about people who can't read?"

"N-not words... Like, colors and stuff..."

“Colors?! Make it so the amount of magic power changes the color?”

“Um, not that... Well, is there even something that magic power changes anyway?”

“Yes, there is. There is. A substance called quercil that gets bigger when exposed to magic power. It’s poisonous, though. It can be extracted from a crystal often used in spell research.”

“Does it change color when exposed to magic power? Or does it just get bigger?”

“Yes, that. It expands.”

“In that case, why don’t you put it in a rectangular mold where only the bottom can come into contact with magic power?”

“And when it expands, it will stretch upward.”

“Right. And if you make it so the pressure of the expanded part changes the color...”

“The amount of magic power will change the color! We did it!!”

“Wait, this is still just hypothetical! It’s not finished yet...!”

Sigma quickly stopped Ist, who had been about to start cheering, but secretly, Sigma also wanted to jump for joy that they had conceptualized a finished product. Sigma had always loved making things. His hands were dexterous, so he had wanted to become a woodworker like his father, and he enjoyed making wooden toys for his little sister. As an extension of this desire, Sigma had also, after much thought, made tools to help with monetary calculations at his stall and had tried inventing tools to make housework easier. Most people shied away from things they had never seen before, and it was hard to get people to understand the tools, even if Sigma explained them. Only his mother and little sister happily listened to his explanations. But in the midst of all this, he had met Seiichirou. It had been the first time someone else had praised his creations—Seiichirou had even given him money for them. For Sigma, this had been an astounding experience. And now, the young boy’s possibilities had grown once more.

This excitement, however, was short-lived.

The man beside him, who had until that moment continued to rattle on at a rapid pace, suddenly noticed something and turned his head. Ist was looking at the praying children and the priest leading them... Something was odd.

One small boy's body began to tremble.

"This is bad. It'll overflow."

"Huh?"

After a vague, inaudible murmur, Ist took something out from the cuff of his sleeve. By the sound of it, Sigma could tell that Ist was holding a collection of small, hard objects that resembled stones. At the same time, Ist started muttering a spell that sounded like a song. Ordinary people weren't familiar with spells—they only ever saw them used in church or during ceremonies. Even in this emergency, though, Sigma's shock and anxiety was tinged with excitement at getting to see a spell up close. Ist reached out his arm, which the necklace-like bundle was wrapped around, toward the child, and the trembling child's body gradually relaxed.

"Oh no, it got out," said Ist indifferently, his tone very different from when he had been chanting the spell.

"Huh?"

Just as Ist spoke, however, Sigma saw something fly out of the child's body at great speed. Then it flew straight at Seiichirou, who had been talking to the priest in the back of the room.

"Mister, look out!!"

Seiichirou hadn't noticed because he had been busy talking. There was nothing Sigma could do. If he were to try to intercept such a large cluster of magic power, he would get seriously hurt. Sweat broke out all over his body, but just then, a white light filled the space in front of Seiichirou.

Siegvold had thrown out his arm and immediately cast a barrier to protect Seiichirou.

For a moment, light covered the entire prayer room and nothing else could be

seen, but then, when it seemed the cluster of magic power had safely dissipated, Seiichirou, Siegvold, and the room looked the same as before.

“Th-thank goodness, mister...”

As Sigma slumped to the floor, behind him, the child from whom the magic power had burst from looked around, unaware of what had just happened. It didn't seem as though there was anything wrong with him. Cipriano was checking on the child and looked pleased, so Sigma once again returned his gaze to Seiichirou.

“Huh?! Mister?!”

“Seiichirou! Seiichirou, hold on!” said Siegvold.

There, in Siegvold's arms, was the limp figure of Seiichirou.

Seiichirou did not respond to Sigma or Siegvold's calls. His eyes were blank, and his breathing shallow. If the cluster of magic hadn't hit him, why was he like this? As Sigma and Siegvold panicked, Ist came running up and examined Seiichirou.

“M-Mr. Ist,” said Siegvold, “what in the world is this...?”

“Yep, I knew it. His ward wore off,” replied Ist, looking carefully at Seiichirou's unfocused eyes. Then he abruptly put his lips over Seiichirou's.

“What?!”

“...!!?!”

Sigma and Siegvold were seized with shock, but Ist ignored them and put his tongue into Seiichirou's slightly open mouth as the limp man continued to be held by Siegvold.

“Ngh... Ugh...”

“Hmm... Hmm... No good, huh?” muttered Ist, saliva dribbling from his mouth.

Sigma was totally confused. Siegvold, equally confused, quickly took Seiichirou in his arms and used the cuff of his sleeve to wipe Ist's spit off the prone man's lips.

“I-Ist, in this holy church—at a time like this—what are you doing?!”

Ist tilted his head, sleepily stared into Siegvold's violet eyes, then nodded.

"I suppose it'd be faster with the same person who cast the barrier. You've got lots of magic power, Priest."

"Wh-what...? The same...?"

Ist, the only one who understood what was happening, nodded again. Sigma was lost—he wanted to ask for an Ist interpreter, but the only one here who could do that was currently at death's door in Siegvold's arms.

"Stop joking around," said Siegvold, lifting Seiichirou up in his arms. "We have to hurry and get him to the treatment room—"

Just as he was about to carry Seiichirou to the church's treatment room, Ist stopped him, his expression filled with concern.

"No, you can't. If you take him to the treatment room, Kondo will die."

"Die?!"

The shock of these words made Siegvold freeze once more, but what Ist said next utterly destroyed Siegvold's train of thought.

"So, Priest, would you please sleep with Kondo?"

δ δ δ

"Oh, Aresh!"

Yua had opened the door to find Aresh still in his expedition overcoat.

After she had parted ways with Seiichirou and the children had left to go pray, she had taken Yurius around the relief house, explaining her plan to him.

"Aresh. You've returned from the expedition?" asked Yurius.

Aresh, who had been looking around as he came through the open door, seemed to have just noticed the pair of them. He bowed to Yurius.

"Just a short while ago. The Third Royal Order has returned home safely without a single loss."

"All right. Good work."

After the formal greeting, Aresh once again straightened up and looked around.

“Welcome back, Aresh!” said Yua.

“Yeah... Thanks,” said Aresh. He had almost left his response half-hearted, but then, remembering that Yurius was right there, he had made his reply more polite. Aresh’s eyes, however, continued to roam the space. “Where is he?”

To whom that word referred to went without saying—in other words, Aresh was looking for the man so obsessed with work that he was reckless with his own health.

Immediately after Aresh had returned from the expedition, he’d discovered that Yurius was fortunately absent from the royal palace, so he had postponed his report and returned home. That was, of course, to check on the man Aresh’s thoughts had been preoccupied with throughout the entire expedition. Also, to say that he had missed him. No—it was also to complain that the man had never sent a single reply to the letters Aresh had delivered every day with his regular reports. Before Aresh had left the royal palace, however, he had met one of that man’s subordinates, who had informed him that said man was currently at the church.

Even though his scheduled temporary assignment at the church was supposed to be over.

That man was already physically weak to magic power and magicules, and without Aresh’s thorough barrier, going to the church itself was suicide. Nevertheless, Aresh had also been gone longer than planned, so why now, when the barrier had probably almost worn off, had Seiichirou continued to go to church? Aresh regretted his own thoughtlessness when he had taken into account the end date of Seiichirou’s assignment and decided it would be all right to extend his expedition.

Aresh remembered that that man never acted the way he wanted him to.

And so he hadn’t paid any mind to the subordinate trying to stop him and had ridden his horse straight to the church.

“Kondou, you mean?” said Yurius. “He’s at the prayer room with the kids from

the relief house.”

Unlike Yua, who had tilted her head, not understanding who was meant by the word *he*, Yurius had guessed immediately. But this answer made Aresh furrow his brows.

“The prayer room...? You don’t mean the place where the sacred relic is, do you?”

“Oh yes! That’s right,” Yua said. “He said he wanted to go see the sacred relic — AH!”

The roar of an explosion had interrupted Yua’s reply.

“What? What?! Wh-what was that...?!”

“There’s no fire!” said Yurius, surveying the area with Yua in his arms. “That explosion... It might have come from the prayer room!”

Aresh had run off before Yurius had even finished his sentence.

δ δ δ

“Wh-wh...what...did you just...?”

Siegvold was so shaken, his voice sounded shrill. Female visitors to the church often said Siegvold had a calm, beautiful voice, but the current state of his voice was rather inevitable.

“After all, you put the barrier on Kondo earlier, didn’t you?” Ist asked.

“I did, but how is that related to s-s-sleeping with him?”

“Hmm?”

In contrast to Siegvold’s panic, Ist tilted his head, acting as though nothing was strange about his request.

“Did you not know Kondo has poor tolerance to magic power?”

“Huh?”

Now that Ist mentioned it, Siegvold remembered Seiichirou telling him as much in the flower garden. But even so, Seiichirou had been regularly coming to church without any problems, and he hadn’t seemed to be taking any

precautions other than being careful about what he ate. Then Siegvold remembered... Seiichirou had been stumbling earlier and had looked ill.

“Yes, usually he has a barrier covering his entire body that protects him against any external magic power or magicules.”

“Such an advanced barrier?! Wait, but if that’s true, then...”

“It’s useless now. The barrier has almost entirely worn away.”

“...?! He was aware that he has no magic power or magicule tolerance, but not of the barrier?!”

“Hmm? He was aware of it.”

“...?!”

Siegvold’s surprise was reasonable. If that was true, then Seiichirou had continued to come to church, even knowing the burden it would place on his own body.

Seiichirou’s condition that morning had deteriorated due to the disappearance of his barrier, and yet he had come all the way to the prayer room... As Siegvold held Seiichirou in his arms, he was deeply impressed by the man’s self-sacrifice. In fact, Seiichirou’s wobbliness had mostly come from his lack of sleep, but there wasn’t anyone who could point that out.

“So, now Kondo has acute magic-sickness, and if the magic doesn’t get acclimatized to him, his body’s going to go into overdrive.”

“Oh... So before, that was...”

The abrupt kiss had been Ist trying to impart his own magic power into Seiichirou... Siegvold was momentarily relieved.

“Yeah, but Kondo’s got a predisposition that makes it hard to acclimatize magic power to him, so that little bit of mouth-to-mouth wasn’t enough. Plus, it’s easiest for the one who cast the magic to acclimatize it. So, please pour your magic power into his body as quickly as possible.”

“B-but that’s...”

Siegvold understood what Ist was so dispassionately trying to convey.

But that meant having sex with the exhausted, grown man in his arms who had horribly dark under-eye circles.

The man who had been summoned from another world by God, who had neglected himself and served this kingdom, who had endured God's test, and who was now weakened because of it...

Siegvold tightened the muscles in his core and steeled his resolve.

"...I understand. It will be a lifesaving act. I will take responsibility for this and sleep with Seiichirou—"

"That won't be necessary!!"

At the crunching sound of something breaking and a voice so low it sounded as if it might have crawled out from the bottom of the earth, everyone looked around and saw a man dressed in black from head to toe, his clenched fist sunk into a wall.

"What...?! Who...?"

The man looked so sinister that Siegvold unconsciously held Seiichirou closer to his chest, as if to protect him, but as he did this, the man in black erupted with a magic power that could only be described as homicidal.

"Aresh!" called Yurius, running up behind him.

Siegvold finally realized that this intruder was Commander Aresh Indolark of the Third Royal Order. Aresh's bloodlust subsided, but the fire remained in his eyes as he bounded toward Siegvold—or rather, toward the man in Siegvold's arms, Seiichirou.

"I manage everything about *that one*. Give it back," Aresh announced, glaring at Siegvold.

For a moment, Siegvold had no idea what Aresh was talking about, but when Aresh reached out his hands, he realized "*that one*" meant Seiichirou.

"'Give it back'... Mr. Seiichirou is not a thing. Besides, he's very weak right now. I cannot give him to you."

The commander of the Third Royal Order was regarded as having exceptional talent as a sorcerer and a knight, but Siegvold's answer was firm. Siegvold

believed he had to personally protect Seiichirou, who had collapsed after sacrificing himself for the kingdom and its people.

“...”

Waves of pressure rolled off Aresh. Siegvold could feel their weight, but he didn't recoil. He returned Aresh's glare, and his eyes, the same shade of purple as Aresh's, were full of resolve.

Faced with these two handsome men glaring at each other and the pressure emanating from them, the others in the room were speechless—all they could do was look on. The voice that did break the silence came from between the two men.

“Ugh... A...resh...?”

“...! Seiichirou! You're awake!” said Siegvold. As the one physically holding Seiichirou, he noticed him coming around first.

Seiichirou had a fever caused by magic-sickness. He turned his unfocused, blurred gaze toward Aresh and let out a hot breath.

“Ah... Thank goodness... You're safe...”

“...!!”

After muttering that single sentence in a tone of sincere relief, Seiichirou lost consciousness again. The two purple-eyed men froze.

“Right...,” said Yurius. “Siegvold. Aresh usually manages Kondou's physical condition. Kondou will be fine if you leave this to Aresh. Hand him over.”



Siegbold had no choice but to hand Seiichirou over if the prince of the kingdom instructed him to. Reluctantly, he offered Seiichirou to Aresh.

“D-don’t be so rough! Handle him with more care!”

Aresh took Seiichirou and hoisted the man over his shoulder. Despite Siegbold’s protest, Aresh only spared him a brief glance before promptly turning away.

“Well, if he’s with Aresh, he’ll probably be fine,” said Ist leisurely.

“R-really? Didn’t you say that using the caster’s magic is the fastest way?” asked Siegbold, unable to totally hide his concern.

Ist’s response, however, was unambiguous.

“He’ll be fine. He’s used to it this way, after all.”

“What?”

Seiichirou felt hot, his head was throbbing, and his body hurt all over.

It reminded him of when he had been bedbound with the flu back when he had been a company slave. Back then, too, he ought to have gone to the hospital and rested during the early stages of the illness, but he hadn’t rested until he had passed out from his fever. After they’d confirmed he had the flu, they hadn’t let him go back to the office. He had been capable of working, though, so the office had sent him data to work on. In the end, his fever had reached 104 degrees Fahrenheit.

Seiichirou was currently in less pain and discomfort than he had experienced back then, but his head felt like it was spinning, and his awareness seemed very far away. But this feeling was familiar.

The only fever I can remember is that time I had the flu. What does this remind me of? Let’s see...

When Seiichirou regained consciousness, the spinning abated.

He still felt feverish and couldn’t move his body, but he didn’t feel any discomfort or nausea. In fact, he felt warm and pleasant. It felt like heat was gradually permeating his body, like when he had soaked in hot springs—that’s

what it was like.

A hot spring... A hot spring?

When was the last time I went to a hot spring? ...It was on a company trip, right after I joined the company, wasn't it?

He had been fussing over his superiors twenty-four seven, had gotten tangled up in sales, and hadn't been able to rest or enjoy himself at all. The hot spring had been the only good part of the trip. And they had stopped going on company trips the following year as a cost-cutting measure.

Let's see... What was it, again?

That's right, a hot spring. No—that's not it. It's not a hot spring.

This warmth isn't just coming from the outside. It's coming from the inside, too.

It's familiar.

This is...

"A-Aresh...?"

His eyelids heavy, Seiichirou managed to work his vocal cords enough to speak. His voice was hoarse, as if he hadn't spoken in a while. His vision was blurry and sensitive to light, but he could see familiar amethyst eyes.

"You're finally awake... Thank goodness..."

That low voice was familiar, too. When Seiichirou heard that voice, which had even more passion to it than normal, Seiichirou's consciousness traveled downward.

"Ah... Ngh!"

Seiichirou looked down, and sure enough, their naked bodies were pressed together, and heat moved inside him.

"Huff... Ungh..."

Aresh's cock slowly moved in and out of him.

"It's...going to take a while yet...you reckless fool."

This unhurried action was probably being done out of concern for Seiichirou's health. Even so, Aresh's hot cock filled his body, pouring magic power into it, and a shiver crawled its way up from Seiichirou's tailbone.

"Ah... Ah... Aresh...!"

Seiichirou knew all too well what this act meant, and he also understood how things had come to be like this.

What he didn't understand, however, was why Aresh was there now.

"...What?"

"...Ngh, ah... When...did you...get back...? Ngh!"

"This morning. Right after I did, I heard you were at the church, and I went straight there. That's how I made it just in time."

Now that Seiichirou had regained consciousness, Aresh's detached, robotic movements became unhurried, drawing out Seiichirou's pleasure. Although it was just the third time they'd had penetrative sex, they had done other sexual activities many times before, so Aresh was well acquainted with what Seiichirou liked.

"You...really don't...ever listen to what anyone says...and you don't think about your health! I take my eyes off you for one second, and this is what happens!"

"Ah, I... U-Ungh... Ah...!"

"Ugh...! And then, you don't send me a single letter, and to top it all off, you collapse in the arms of another man...!"

Aresh's anger had returned, and he tried to stop himself from accidentally getting rough, but when his frustration flared up again as he spoke, he stopped moving to let it wash over him.

"Really... If it weren't for *that*, I might not have forgiven you, you know."

Seiichirou didn't understand Aresh's mumbled words, partly because of his fever, but he put a hand to Aresh's cheek and looked up at him.

"Welcome home, Aresh."



[CHAPTER SIX]

Hospitalized

“Oh my god, I was so surprised when I heard you collapsed, Sei!”

Norbert, wearing his civil official's uniform, was waving his arms around dramatically as he spoke. Seiichirou was lying on the bed, his upper body elevated. His complexion, which had improved recently, was still somewhat pale.

It had been two days since the incident at the church.

Seiichirou had been protected by Siegvold's barrier just in the nick of time, but it had given Seiichirou magic-sickness, and he had collapsed. Although Seiichirou's memory was hazy, apparently Aresh had appeared just in time and taken him to the medical office. Seiichirou had received treatment, escaped death's clutches, and had then been ordered to rest in the hospital for three days.

Seiichirou hadn't seen Aresh since then.

“That's enough of that. Just hand over the documents I asked for.”

“Should you really be doing this while you're recovering?”

“I'm fine.”

Although Seiichirou had been ordered to be on bed rest, he had taken advantage of the fact that the medical office was in the same building as his workplace and, when Norbert had come to visit, had asked the young man to bring documents to him so he could work. Speaking of visits, Siegvold had also come to visit Seiichirou as soon as he had regained consciousness.

“I'm so sorry!”

Seiichirou had been shocked by Siegvold bowing his head as soon as he had entered the sickroom. It was still difficult for Seiichirou to get up, so from where he lay in bed, Seiichirou had managed to ask Siegvold to raise his head, which

Siegvold had eventually done, albeit with a gloomy expression.

“Even though I knew you didn’t have any tolerance to magic power, I put you in danger.”

Despite Siegvold’s low spirits, Seiichirou could confidently say that his problem that day had been lack of sleep, that he had intentionally accompanied them to the prayer room, and that he would have gone there even if Siegvold had tried to stop him. To the contrary, if Siegvold hadn’t put up a barrier, that cluster of magic could have caused Seiichirou grave injury as well as magic-sickness. And even if, hypothetically, he had managed to barely cling to life after being struck by such an impact, Seiichirou would have had no choice but to receive a healing spell, which would have worsened his magic-sickness. That one blow would have been the difference between life and death.

“So there’s nothing you have to worry about, Mr. Siegvold. More importantly, thank you for saving me. Without your barrier, I probably would have died instantly.”

Seiichirou nodded at the other man, but Siegvold looked unwell.

“Mr. Siegvold?”

Then, Siegvold seemed to make his mind up about something. His violet eyes found Seiichirou’s, and he opened his mouth.

“Actually...”

δ δ δ

The day after Norbert’s visit, and the day before Seiichirou was to be discharged from the hospital, he was visited by Valtom, Aresh’s butler.

“How are you feeling, Mr. Kondo?” he asked, handing him a get-well gift. Seiichirou accepted it, feeling embarrassed.

“Thanks to Aresh, I’ve already recovered, but I was told to rest until tomorrow to be on the safe side.”

“That is good to hear. Mr. Aresh has said he will come pick you up when you are discharged tomorrow.”

Seiichirou was quite surprised by this. By the time he had fully regained consciousness after Aresh had treated him for magic-sickness that day, Aresh had already left.

The shoulders of Ciro, the director of the Medical Bureau, had slumped as he muttered, “This isn’t a love hotel,” before he’d ordered Seiichirou to stay at the hospital for three days and filled Seiichirou in on the situation.

Ciro had explained that it was clear Seiichirou had developed magic-sickness, but that Aresh had first carried him to the medical office so that he could get a thorough medical examination and so that, if anything unexpected were to occur, it could be properly dealt with. On the way, Aresh had supplied him with small amounts of magic power and acclimatized it.

Then, just like when Seiichirou had been beaten by the knights, after engaging in a certain activity in the backroom of the medical office, Aresh had moved Seiichirou to a hospital bed and left before Seiichirou had woken up. Seiichirou had assumed that Aresh would return very soon afterward. Although he was a bit disappointed, he convinced himself that Aresh was probably busy with post-expedition work.

However, Seiichirou also wondered whether he was interpreting it that way because he wanted it to be true.

So then, when he heard that Aresh was coming to pick him up the next day, he felt momentarily relieved. But then Valtom delivered more news.

“Aresh has been bedbound because his magic was depleted...?” Seiichirou repeated.

“To be precise, his magic was depleted, and then he drank too much magic restoration tonic, causing him to fall ill.”

Aresh had been born with a lot of magic power.

However, having just gotten back from an extended trip consisting of the purification expedition and then having to eradicate magical beasts, supplying Seiichirou with magic power on top of all that had taken quite a lot out of him. Moreover, because the medicine to restore magic power circulated and amplified magic power in the body, it was not recommended that anyone ingest

large amounts of it at once because of the huge burden it placed on the user's body. Aresh had taken too much of it and become bedridden at home.

So that's why...

Seiichirou had thought it was strange.

He'd thought it was weird that Aresh hadn't come to lecture him under the guise of a sympathy visit, but in greater measure, Seiichirou had found it odd that Aresh had left him in the care of the medical office. The Aresh that Seiichirou knew would have brought him home and kept a close, watchful eye on him.

Although maybe it's presumptuous of me to say something like that confidently...

"Mr. Kondo."

Despite his concern for Aresh's welfare, Seiichirou had been trying to think things through logically to avoid acknowledging his own relief when Valtom called out to him in quiet voice.

"I have known and taken care of the young master...of Aresh...since his infancy. He even asked me to join him when he left his parents' house. I know this is overstepping my position as a butler, but I do feel a sort of parental love for him."

Valtom spoke modestly, but it was evident that Aresh owed Valtom a great deal, and even Seiichirou could tell that Valtom's position was much greater than that of just a butler.

"Therefore, Mr. Kondo, my greatest priority is protecting the young master's health."

Valtom lifted his head and met Seiichirou's eyes. Seiichirou had never seen the man's intense gaze before, and he naturally sat up a little straighter.

"I am fully aware that by telling you this, I am disobeying the young master's wishes. I am prepared to be punished for it. But the young master's health is the most important thing in the world to me."

"Right..."

That was only natural.

Seiichirou had never met Aresh's parents, but in aristocratic families, the servants took care of the children more often than the parents did. Valtom's service to Aresh was heartfelt, and his love for Aresh might have exceeded that of Aresh's parents.

"After the young master met you, he cast aside his apathy and became more energized than I have ever seen him before. And then he fell in love, and I was overjoyed. I intended to watch over whatever path he wanted to take."

Hearing for the first time how Valtom viewed them made Seiichirou feel more flustered than he expected. Seiichirou had always wanted to ask the people in the house how they saw him, but he had been too afraid to do so.

"You are my savior, too, Mr. Kondo, for inspiring the young master to live."

Seiichirou didn't think he had done anything that impressive, but it seemed that Valtom had been greatly affected ever since Aresh had started running around taking care of the otherworlder.

"However..."

Valtom's gaze became ominous again.

"...the young master cannot live without his health. I want to respect the young master's wishes, but, though this may go without saying, I wish to care for his physical health before anything else. Although perhaps these are just the thoughts of old age."

"No, I understand..."

Valtom's point was logical. If he loved Aresh like a parent, it was only natural he'd think that way.

To Seiichirou, Aresh was the strongest person in this world—he had vast stores of magic power, he was skilled with a sword, and he was a commander. Seiichirou had relied on him too much because of this.

But Aresh was still a human being, and both his magic power and his physical strength were limited.

When Seiichirou had heard that Aresh was going to hunt magical beasts after

the expedition, he should have felt concerned. Why had he taken it for granted that Aresh would always help him?

“I’m sorry... I’m solely to blame for this situation.”

Seiichirou knew he had the bad habit of forcing himself to plow through whatever circumstances he met and neglecting his own health when it came to work, but he now realized for the first time that Aresh’s health was also affected by this. Seiichirou had been the one to push Aresh’s health into this predicament, just as had happened with Aresh’s hunt for magical beasts.

“There’s no need for you to apologize to me. The young master decided on his own to go on the hunt because he wanted to impress you.”

Valtom winked and gave him a small smile.

“However, I do want to preserve the young master’s health, even if that means making him unhappy with me.”

These were natural feelings for a parent to have. Seiichirou felt a little envious that Aresh had someone who was so unconditionally concerned about his health at a time like this. Seiichirou didn’t have a parent in this world—an unconditional and absolute ally.

However...

“Please just bear in mind that there is someone who suffers when you fall ill, Mr. Kondo.”

...Seiichirou was suddenly reminded that he *did* have one unconditional, absolute ally.

The morning Seiichirou was set to leave the medical office, he woke, ate the low-magicule meal served to him, and got ready to go home. But the medical office was located in Seiichirou’s workplace, and all Seiichirou had were the change of clothes Milan had prepared for him and the work documents Norbert had brought him, so he finished getting ready very quickly.

“So? How do you feel?” asked Ciro casually, wearing a long, white coat. Seiichirou was sitting on the bed, waiting for Aresh to pick him up.

“I feel great, thanks to you. I was able to rest.”

“You made your subordinate bring you documents and worked, didn’t you?”

“I hardly worked at all.”

When Seiichirou pressed Ciro about the price of his hospitalization, Ciro explained that he didn’t need to pay anything because he was a civil official. Seiichirou was again impressed that the benefits of working at the royal palace extended to something like this, and by the generosity of their employee welfare system.

Very soon after Seiichirou had started talking to Ciro, Aresh arrived ahead of schedule.

“Your color looks a lot better,” he said as soon as he entered the room.

Then, without even looking at Ciro, he walked up and stroked a finger against Seiichirou’s cheek. As he did so, Seiichirou studied Aresh’s complexion. It looked the same as it always did. If Valtom had never told him that Aresh had been bedridden, Seiichirou would never even have known. The fact that Aresh had gone to the trouble of getting Seiichirou hospitalized while he himself had recuperated in bed at home implied he didn’t want his own condition made known. Valtom had been fully aware of this when he’d told Seiichirou and had been prepared to be punished for doing so, but Seiichirou was neither that thoughtless nor that foolish. Adults often pretended to be ignorant of things other people didn’t want them to know.

“I’m sorry for worrying you.”

“Not at all,” Aresh replied sarcastically, but it didn’t seem like he was going to deliver his usual lecture. He simply stroked Seiichirou’s face.

But now that Seiichirou thought about it, it was their first time seeing each other after two full days—their first meeting since Aresh had treated Seiichirou and brought him back from the brink of death. Aresh must have been concerned.

Seiichirou could almost physically sense Aresh’s feelings, which he never tried to hide, being transmitted through his skin. Uncharacteristically, Seiichirou felt heat rise to his face.

“...? You feel hot. Do you still have a fever?”

“...No, I’m fine.”

“You two should go home before you start flirting with each other,” said Ciro, who had been sitting, ignored, behind Aresh. “How many times do I have to tell you that the medical office isn’t the place for that sort of thing?”

Ciro’s voice brought Seiichirou back to his senses. He dodged Aresh’s hand and thanked Ciro.

“Thank you for everything you’ve done, Director.”

“Stop being so reckless.”

“I will,” Seiichirou immediately replied.

“Will you *really*?” Aresh asked, looking suspicious, but he was in a much better mood than Seiichirou had imagined he would be in. Considering Seiichirou had been in a coma, he had been prepared to receive a tornado of a lecture once he had recovered.

“Oh, Kondo, you’re already going home?”

Although Seiichirou inwardly puzzled over Aresh’s mysterious good mood, he was just reminding himself that not getting a lecture was the best possible outcome when there was a knock and the door opened. Ist appeared, along with...

“Sigma?!”

“G-good morning.”

It was Sigma, the woodworking apprentice from town.

“Why are you two together...?”

Did they know each other? Seiichirou combed through his memories. He remembered having seen them talking out of the corner of his eye when he had been talking to Siegvold at the church, but that was the extent of what he knew about their relationship.

“Who is he?” Aresh mumbled in Seiichirou’s ear.

“The boy who made my abacuses,” Seiichirou whispered back.

Sigma’s eyes remained glued to the muscular, dark-clothed man by

Seiichirou's side as he spoke timidly.

"Well, um, Ist invited me to see the Sorcery Department..."

"What?!"

"When we met at the church, we got really pumped talking about magic tools... I like woodworking, but I've always wanted to make magic tools. But I don't have much magic power, and it costs a ton of money to make magic tools anyway, so I thought the only people who could work with magic tools were engineers employed by aristocrats, so I figured I'd never have anything to do with them, but then Ist asked if I'd make them together with him..."

"What?!"

Seiichirou stared in silent, open-mouthed amazement for some time.

Seiichirou had noticed Sigma's ingenuity. He had noticed that Sigma liked to make things, and that he had ambition. That was exactly why he had wanted to have Sigma study in the private school, then attend formal school on the kingdom's scholarship, and then one day work at some department or another at the royal palace... Seiichirou would have been thrilled if Sigma were to join the Accounting Department. He'd never thought that Ist would beat him to the punch. Seiichirou, clearly bitter, nearly asked Ist, "You've snatched him from right under my nose, haven't you?" Ist, however, didn't seem interested in Seiichirou's irritation. His sleepy eyes were wide and sparkling.

"Kondo, I've made something amazing! Sigma gave me the idea for it. It's just a prototype, though."

"Ist, you..."

"Believe it or not, you can measure magic power with this!"

"Tell me more."

"Hey!"

After Seiichirou's dramatic change of tune, he had leaped up and tried to run over to Ist, but Aresh had stopped him by getting a secure hold of his head.

"You've been hospitalized and you're just getting discharged today. What is motivating you to work right now? We're going home."

“What...? But, well...”

“We’re going home.”

“...Right.”

Aresh had saved him from the brink of death yet again. Seiichirou couldn’t go throwing a tantrum now.

“Ist, do a write-up for me aft... Oh, right, you can’t.”

Ist was incapable of writing up reports. Even if he did try, it was clear that it would be full of abstract phrases and generally be a composition only Ist could understand.

“Oh, I’ve done a basic write-up of the mechanics and the materials used,” said Sigma, offering Seiichirou three sheets of paper.

Seiichirou’s eyes widened.

“Sigma, you’re the best!”

Without a second thought, he hugged Sigma, along with the papers.

“Huh? No, not really, I just always saw the costs submitted when making things at my supervisor’s place, and I always needed to decide on prices for the things in my stall, so I just added them up like I usually would...”

What brilliance! Incredible! I want him in the Accounting Department after all... No, having a kid like him in the Sorcery Department would also be a huge help. But I want to raise such a brilliant boy by my side...

As Seiichirou began agonizing over this with Sigma still in his arms, Aresh again pushed Seiichirou back with a hand over his forehead, snapping him back to reality.

“You little... Do you remember what I just said?”

“Yes, of course. We’re going home. Sigma is going to private school and then formal school, so he probably won’t be getting a job anytime soon— Ouch, ouch, ouch! Aresh, you’re squeezing! Okay! I shouldn’t do that, right? I’ll take the papers home and leisurely look over them there— Ouch, ouch! I shouldn’t do that, either?”

From Ciro's perspective, Seiichirou was obviously at fault in this situation, so he didn't put a stop to any of this. Sigma looked on in bewilderment. Ist was already thinking of something else and not paying attention at all. Then, with the worst possible timing, Siegvold, having come to celebrate Seiichirou's discharge, walked in.

"Seiichirou is in recovery! What are you doing to him?!"

Taken in isolation and without any warning, the scene looked like the muscular knight Aresh was unilaterally assaulting the recovering, feeble Seiichirou. Siegvold panicked and tried to save Seiichirou from Aresh, but there was no way a knight hardened by battle would lose to a mere priest. Aresh brushed aside Siegvold's hands and secured Seiichirou in a prison of his own arms.

"I'm sorry for troubling you, Mr. Siegvold," said Seiichirou. "This is nothing, so please don't worry about it. Aresh, I was wrong, so please let go of me... Guh!"

For some reason, before Aresh let go of him, he squeezed him even tighter—so tight that Seiichirou thought his breakfast might come back up. Then Aresh released his hold, and Seiichirou compared the handsome men—one in white and one in black—who were standing before him.

I see. It's not just the color of their eyes—they have similar builds, and even the energy around them is similar...

They were probably around the same height. Their looks were different up close, but from a distance they looked similar, like they were brothers or relatives. Neither Aresh's nor Siegvold's mannerisms, however, were like those of brothers.

Could the marquess family have had an illegitimate child? ...It does happen. There's even one in the royal family.

"Seiichirou, are you feeling better now?"

Without resolving the standoff with Aresh, Siegvold's violet eyes turned to Seiichirou.

"I am, just as I told you when you first came to visit me. These three days I was hospitalized were like a vacation, so..."

“I see...”

Siegvold looked at Seiichirou, then at Aresh. His expression didn't look dangerous like before—it was more like a covert glance. Then he glanced at Seiichirou again. For some reason, his face turned red, and he looked away.

“...? Mr. Siegvold, did you need anything from me...?”

“No, nothing. Rather, if there's anything I can do to help with the matter we discussed the other day, please let me know.”

And with that, Siegvold bowed and left the room.

“What did you discuss the other day?” Aresh asked indignantly, but Seiichirou shook his head.

“I'll tell you after we get home.”

The day Seiichirou regained consciousness, after Siegvold had come all the way to the medical office and apologized, he'd hung his head and confessed something.

Which was...

δ δ δ

“Well, the cluster of magic that flew toward us... It wasn't just an accident.”

After Aresh had taken Seiichirou away from the church, the prince had questioned Siegvold about the situation.

It was then that the two other people who were there at the time, Assistant Director Ist of the Royal Sorcery Department and the boy from town that Seiichirou had brought along, had said something strange.

“The way they pray and the incantations are different from how they were before.”

Because Siegvold had been talking to Seiichirou, he had not seen the children pray, and as a priest, he usually did not take care of the children of the relief house, so he hadn't accompanied them to the prayer room recently, either. When Siegvold had asked how they'd prayed and what they'd said, Ist had recited it perfectly—astonishingly, he had memorized every word and every

movement. It was different from the “prayer” that Siegvold knew, and it used more magic power than was necessary. This also confirmed that Cipriano had intentionally triggered the spontaneous magic discharge in the child who had lost control of his magic power—or, more precisely, he had caused the discharge and then aimed it directly at Seiichirou.

When Seiichirou heard this, he was horrified. He had never imagined that someone would go to such unabashed lengths to prevent their embezzlement from being exposed. If Ist had not coincidentally been there, the whole matter would very likely have been written off as nothing more than a child’s lack of magic control.

As a priest, Siegvold had promised that he would go to any lengths to provide testimony about this incident.

Seiichirou’s temporary assignment at the church came to an end with the submission of the income and expenditure report during his hospitalization.

“Welcome home, Mr. Aresh and Mr. Kondo.”

When Seiichirou finally returned home with Aresh after his three-day absence, he was greeted at the entrance by Valtom, Milan, and Pavel, the chef.

Technically, they were probably there to greet Aresh, their master, but Pavel seemed to have been quite worried about Seiichirou’s absence. He was on the verge of tears as he asserted, “I will make you healthy, Mr. Kondo!”

Seiichirou was a little nervous seeing Valtom again after their last conversation—especially with Aresh by his side—but when the expert butler met Seiichirou’s gaze, he smiled with all-knowing eyes and bowed. Seiichirou became even more frightened of what and how much Valtom had guessed, but he decided to grin and bear it.

It was still midmorning, but Seiichirou had been told to take off work until the next day, so he was organizing his work desk to put away his papers and things when Aresh came in. Aresh was also off work until the following day.

“Seiichirou, come here.”

Aresh called him over to the sofa, and Seiichirou dutifully obeyed. Just then, Milan brought up some tea along with Pavel’s specially made low-magicule

baked goods. Thanks to Pavel, Seiichirou had started to dabble in more indulgent foods. When Milan left again, Aresh searched Seiichirou's face, tracing its contours as if to make sure of something.

"You've lost a little weight."

"Really?"

Lately, Seiichirou had been eating three square meals a day... But even if he excluded the past three days and included the time from before Aresh's expedition, it was true that Seiichirou might have been a little neglectful of his meals.

Then it suddenly occurred to Seiichirou—this was the first time since before the expedition that he was directly facing Aresh in a clear state of mind. Seiichirou examined Aresh, too. His features were still so handsome that they didn't seem natural, but Seiichirou felt as though Aresh's cheeks were slightly sharper than normal.

"I think you're the one who's lost weight."

"When an expedition is extended, that's somewhat inevitable. You, however, are naturally skinny, so you must be more careful, for the sake of your health."

Aresh traced a hand along Seiichirou's waist, and even Seiichirou could feel his bones at the surface. Seiichirou's slender body was a far cry from Aresh's burliness. As one would expect from a knight, Aresh's body was covered in muscles. If you looked at just his face, he gave off the impression of a model or a prince, but once he undressed, he was undoubtedly a warrior.

Aresh also had violet eyes that could suck anyone in.

They were unlike the sparkling blue eyes of Norbert and Yurius.

They were also different from Siegvold's eyes, which resembled a calm sea.

Now that I'm looking closely, I guess they aren't that similar...

But for some reason, Seiichirou was reminded of Siegvold, and his thoughts drifted to the church.

The church's income and expenditure report had been officially accepted, and the investigation and audit of its contents were mostly complete. There was no

more work that Seiichirou had to do at the church.

Since Yua and Yurius were so enthusiastic about the church-sponsored private school, Seiichirou figured it would probably be more exciting to put them at the center of operations, so Seiichirou would be working exhaustively on the project from behind the scenes. The income and expenditure task, too, would be finished once Seiichirou presented the documents to Camile and gave his report. Seiichirou had virtually no political power, so he had no part to play beyond that.

But what was it that felt so out of place?

It wasn't that the bishop and the accounting manager had been kept away on a business trip.

It wasn't that, for a while afterward, they had submitted blatantly inadequate documents, pushing the submission date back even further.

It wasn't even that Seiichirou had almost gotten injured.

Something was bothering him.

"Seiichirou."

Seiichirou suddenly snapped out of his reverie. Aresh was looking at him, a line between his furrowed brows.

Right, that face...

"I'm fine. There's nothing wrong with me."

"Are you sure? You lie so easily."

But as Aresh spoke, the line between his eyebrows softened. Seiichirou was moved by a feeling that was hard to describe.

"Yes. I really did rest for those three days. What about you? Aren't you tired after going on a hunt after the expedition?"

"I'm fine now... I worried you, didn't I?"

"...? Yes."

Seiichirou *had* been worried that Aresh had gone off to hunt magical beasts immediately after the purification expedition, but had he ever told Aresh as

much? Though Seiichirou pondered this for a moment, he couldn't deny that it was true, so he admitted it.

"Um, Aresh..."

"What is it?"

Now that they were face-to-face, Seiichirou hesitated to say it, but he made up his mind and opened his mouth.

"Is there anything you want?"

"What?"

Aresh's thoughts were written all over his face—*What is he talking about?* Seiichirou cleared his throat and repeated himself with as calm an expression as he could muster.

"It would have to be something I'm capable of giving, but...is there anything you'd like me to do, or is there anything you want?"

Aresh didn't even try to hide his suspicion, clearly wondering why Seiichirou would come out and say something like that. Seiichirou looked away and tried to argue his point again.

"It's just—you saved my life again, so I'd like to show my appreciation. But you won't accept money from me, right?"

"Of course not."

Aresh received a much higher salary, so he was wealthier than Seiichirou anyway. Previously, Seiichirou had received money from the knights who had injured him and had given it all to Aresh as a fee for the treatment he'd provided, so Aresh had had no choice but to accept it, but there was no way he would accept money with the way their relationship was now. Even with Seiichirou's living expenses, they had gone into mediation with Valtom and had somehow gotten Aresh to accept the stipend given to Seiichirou by the kingdom, at least.

"So I wanted to pay you in some other way—with something I can do."

"Paying with your body?" Aresh grumbled in astonishment. "You can't seriously..."

But Aresh suddenly stopped himself midsentence. *So there is something*, thought Seiichirou, repeating his offer.

“You can pick anything. I owe you my life, Aresh, so you can even ask for something slightly unreasonable.”

In an unusual turn of events, Seiichirou was the one drawing closer to Aresh on the couch. Aresh, cornered at the edge of it, pressed his lips into a thin line and looked down and slightly off to the side, clearly conflicted. It must have been something very difficult, or something hard for him to say. Seiichirou had initially thought that Aresh might impose restrictions on Seiichirou’s health or work, but that didn’t seem to be the case. He had been pondering how to avoid such a scenario, but all that thinking seemed to have been for nothing.

What came to mind next were things of a sexual nature... But Aresh was usually not very happy when Seiichirou offered to do things to him. Instead, Aresh would ask to make out, which Seiichirou often declined because it was embarrassing and inefficient. *It’s probably that, huh?* While Seiichirou imagined all the possible scenarios, Aresh seemed to have steeled his nerves.

“Anything...right?”

“Anything.”

Except asking me to stop working or to drop dead.

“Then...change the way you talk.”

“Huh?” Seiichirou said a bit stupidly, momentarily unable to comprehend what had just been said to him. He turned the words over in his mind.

He still didn’t understand.

“Huh? Is something rude about the way I speak? Did I say a word you’re not supposed to say here or something?”

In the eight years since he had become a working adult, Seiichirou had thought he had developed a good grasp of how to speak respectfully, but maybe he had been doing something wrong. Or maybe he had been using slang that had a different meaning in this world. After he asked, however, Aresh looked dismayed and shook his head.

“No, it’s not that. I’m asking you to change the way you talk to *me*.”

“How should I change it? Which part of it is impolite?”

“It’s not that... I’m saying I want you to talk to me like you talk to that kid.”

“Huh?” said Seiichirou, this time in the most puzzled tone he could manage.

Seiichirou stared at Aresh, but he was looking away awkwardly.

Kid? He said “kid,” right? The only kid I can think of that I’ve seen with Aresh recently is Sigma. The way I talk to Sigma?

“Um... If you’re talking about Sigma, he’s a kid from town. I’m a customer of his street stall. Our relationships are totally different...”

“So what? I’m closer to you than that kid is, aren’t I?”

Seiichirou was, of course, closer to Aresh in terms of intimacy, but if it were a question of social standing, Seiichirou was closer to being on Sigma’s level. Aresh was an aristocrat and a commander, after all. Seiichirou looked at Aresh, unsure how to respond.

Does this mean...that this man, as beautiful as a sculpture...this aristocrat, the strongest knight in the kingdom...is jealous of a ten-year-old kid from the merchant area of town...?

“Ugh... My chest hurts...,” said Seiichirou, suddenly hunching over with a hand on his chest. Aresh’s head snapped up and he grabbed Seiichirou’s shoulder.

“...?! Where?! How does it hurt? Show me!”

“Not like that... It’s just...my heart skipped a beat for the first time in a long while. It’s not an illness or anything.”

Never had Seiichirou imagined that this commander would try to compete with a child.

When Seiichirou looked up, he saw Aresh watching him with a puzzled but worried expression. He was obviously a gorgeous, handsome man.

I’m...totally done for.



[CHAPTER SEVEN]

Cornered

“I’ll be counting on you, then.”

There was no reply, but there never was, so Seiichirou didn’t wait for one. He simply shut the door, turned on his heel, and walked back to his own department on the opposite end of the building.

One month had passed since Seiichirou had started his temporary assignment at the church. His last day had technically been during his hospitalization, but now that his task was finished and he could return to his own workplace, his sense of nostalgia was...nonexistent. Seiichirou had been reporting to the Accounting Department for work every time he’d had a day off from his assignment, and the medical office where he had been hospitalized until just the other day was located within the royal palace, so if anything, he was rather tired of seeing the place.

Even so, when Seiichirou opened the door to the Accounting Department and was immediately greeted by Norbert—“Welcome back, Sei!”—and all the other employees with smiles on their faces, he felt secretly relieved.

Seiichirou was grateful that he could concentrate on his own work. He had visited the accounting office on his days off, but with his hospitalization, it had been six days since his last visit, so work had piled up quite a bit. Because he had visited the Sorcery Department that morning, Seiichirou threw himself headfirst into work to make up for falling behind. He became so immersed in his work that he didn’t even realize that the lunch break had started. Then his lunch “date,” who had not been seen in the Accounting Department for quite some time, appeared in the office.

“Seiichirou! The Fire hour started ages ago! What happened to lunch? Hurry up!”

The black-clad knight, with his low, carrying voice and his loud footsteps, flung

open the doors of the Accounting Department.

The few people who had already finished lunch and were relaxing; Norbert, who had been grumbling and waiting for Seiichirou to wrap things up; and Seiichirou, who had been concentrating on his work, all looked up at the man. Aresh, ignoring everyone else's gazes, stared at Seiichirou as he marched up to him. His stance was imposing as he stood in front of Seiichirou, assistant director of the Accounting Department. Coupled with his remarkable physique, Aresh's presence was incredibly intimidating.

"Seiichirou, you heard the midday bell, didn't you? Then what are you doing?"

Seiichirou immediately sensed that he would only make Aresh grumpier by telling him that he hadn't heard the bell because he had been concentrating.

"I did hear the bell, but I wasn't at a good stopping point," he answered instead.

It didn't make a difference.

"I've told you so many times to make sure you eat your meals, haven't I? Besides, didn't we agree to eat in the dining hall together on days we both work at the royal palace?"

Seiichirou wondered if he ever *had* agreed to something like that, but before Seiichirou had been assigned to the church, that had in fact been their daily routine. Perhaps Seiichirou had just gotten wrapped up in his normal work after being absent for so long, or perhaps this was a habit that Seiichirou had developed from secretly working on his days off. At any rate, he was certain that nothing good would come of resisting Aresh, so Seiichirou put his papers together and got to his feet.

"Sorry, I got too wrapped up in catching up on work. Let's go, Aresh."

The day before, after a long discussion, the two of them had reached a stopgap compromise in which Seiichirou would address Aresh slightly less formally. Aresh huffed and turned on his heel, appearing disinterested in what Seiichirou had just said, then walked away as if it was a given that Seiichirou would follow. But Seiichirou could tell—Aresh's mood had improved.

"I-in that case, I'm going out to eat today!" said Norbert.

“What are you talking about? You’re coming, too.”

Seiichirou grabbed Norbert by the collar as he tried to run away, then followed Aresh.

Seiichirou got food in the dining hall, instructed, as ever, by Aresh. They’d just reached seats that were in full view of the public when suddenly, someone called out to them—someone who, like Aresh, was not supposed to be in a place like this.

“May I join you as well?”

Seiichirou looked up and saw rose-blond hair and a blue cloak.

Camile Karvada, the most powerful person in the Romany Kingdom’s legal system, was smiling at them.

“Oooh, here we go again...,” Norbert muttered.

Seiichirou ignored the young man, privately thinking that Norbert was going to help him eat every last bite of his enormous serving of side dishes again today.

“You’re feeling better, I see, Seiichirou?” Camile asked as he began to eat the food his chamberlain brought over to him as if it were a matter of course.

“Yes, fortunately,” Seiichirou replied, resigning himself to the prime minister’s company.

More than half of the lunch break had already passed, so few people remained in the dining hall. But even those people were so far away it was as if there were a barrier applied to the table—there was no one within a radius of fifteen feet around them.

“It seems the church’s income and expenditure report was correct and complete.”

“Yes...as a written report.”

The income and expenditure report had been submitted right after Seiichirou’s hospitalization, and it abided by all the stipulations required of a written report.

“I also received your report about the matter you mentioned before. Thank you for all your hard work.”

Seiichirou had already completed and submitted a document comparing the total donations with the amount of money the church was likely spending on operating expenses, which he'd harbored doubts about.

“Not at all. That was just my job.”

And that was the extent of the work Seiichirou had been entrusted with.

“The miasma has finally been suppressed, and I would certainly like for everything to settle down, but I can't let the current situation continue unchecked, either. And you mentioned something about magic power, didn't you? That incident could be useful, too, right?”

Seiichirou knew that Camile was telling him to help put a leash around the church's neck. But Seiichirou was just assistant director of the Accounting Department. He was merely a public figure who did financial calculations.

“Please forgive me. Religious institutions are difficult to deal with in many ways. You're asking me to make political moves, but I can't,” said Seiichirou, making a show of shrugging his shoulders as if to say, “It's outside of my jurisdiction.”

The most Seiichirou could do was work out estimates. There was no way he could meddle or interfere with religion or politics.

Camile raised an eyebrow, as if he were saying, “Oh?” But there was a limit to what Seiichirou, an insignificant accountant, could do.

“I've checked with the aristocrats who were listed in the worship book as not having donated money, compared the names against last year's Accounting Department documents, and put together a summary with concrete figures, which I'll present to you later. I'm sure this will distress the aristocrats whose generous donations were underestimated or the ones whose names were omitted, so would you please discuss that matter with the Legal Department?” asked Seiichirou.

The corners of Camile's mouth rose.

“Also,” Seiichirou pressed on, “the Sorcery Department is currently developing a tool which can quantify the magic power generated from the special prayer along with the magic power needed for the barrier, so that will be prepared and submitted to you shortly. Additionally, we are in the process of confirming some facts with vendors that chiefly utilize magic tools, so I should be able to hand that over to you as soon as it’s finished.”

When Seiichirou had stopped by the Sorcery Department that morning, the device that measured magic power was nearly completed. Of course, there was room for improvement, but for now they just needed quantifiable data and visible results. Seiichirou had requested that the numerical units of measurement be more exact.

With Norbert’s help, Ist had come to understand the overall workings of the barrier around the royal capital. Ist was exceptionally talented at perceiving magic power, and because he had done research on the royal capital defense barrier on his own without being asked, he had been able to analyze it quickly.

“Right, that’s great! You really are incredible, Seiichirou. If you ever get tired of that black beast over there, do give me a shout.”

Camile chuckled. The other civil officials were chatting amongst themselves, watching the group from afar although they couldn’t overhear their conversation. Norbert, however, was close enough to hear what they were saying, and his eyes went so wide it seemed as though they might pop out of his skull. His gaze quickly darted between Camile, Seiichirou, and the black beast himself, from whom a dark aura seemed to be radiating.

“Funny joke,” said Seiichirou, trying to play it off even though internally he was sweating bullets, wondering where on earth that comment had come from.

Camile’s blue-gray eyes, however, were unexpectedly serious, staring at Seiichirou so intently it took his breath away.

“I think it’s because I like your composure and your objective approach to work, but you’re really on board this time, aren’t you?”

Camile spoke as if he saw into the depths of Seiichirou’s heart, just as Seiichirou would have expected from the politician entrusted with the entire kingdom. It was a bit frightening, but Seiichirou also respected the man’s keen

insight. The man probably had no equal when it came to discovering concealed motives.

Seiichirou had taken a step back from the church investigation.

Unlike the miasma strategy, the barrier planning, and the research on the spell to return home, the circumstances surrounding the church investigation had very little to do with Seiichirou himself. The only advantage of taking the job had been dissuading people in the royal palace from thinking that the Third Royal Order was at Seiichirou's beck and call. It was good that the kingdom's budget would be carefully examined and increased as a result of the investigation, but Seiichirou wasn't that concerned with the development of the kingdom. Seiichirou's home was elsewhere, and he would return there one day, after all. He was just doing his job.

However...

"That's right," said Seiichirou. "My life was intentionally targeted, so I want to follow this through to the end."

Cipriano had clearly been trying to kill Seiichirou.

Seiichirou had the right to know why, and to get revenge.

To do that, he needed to expose the true state of affairs in the church.

"...What do you mean? Tell me exactly what's going on."

"Oh!"

Seiichirou's demeanor had previously been composed, but now anger had bubbled up inside him.

During his conversation with Camile, the emotions that Seiichirou had been subduing had gotten stirred up, making Seiichirou blurt out the truth of what had happened.

In high society, Aresh was referred to as the Ice Nobleman. He was called the black beast amongst the civil officials and knights of the royal palace. He was the strongest knight in the Romany Kingdom. And Seiichirou had forgotten that that very same man was right beside him.



When Seiichirou visited the church alone for the first time after a week's absence, Selio, who had always greeted Seiichirou with a scowl before, looked shocked when he spotted him.

"Wh-why are you...?! You weren't supposed to come back here...!"

"The investigation is over, but I did tell you we're going to run a private school here, didn't I?" Seiichirou answered, as if this was obvious.

Selio, however, just blinked in response, so, without waiting for a reply, Seiichirou started walking to the relief house. Selio ran after him.

"You can't just go in on your own! You need to get permission!"

"From whom? If you're talking about the bishop, he's already given us permission for the private school."

After Seiichirou nonchalantly shrugged off the question by swapping the concept of having permission to visit with the concept of having permission to create the private school, Selio was struck speechless, as Seiichirou knew he would be.

"...What the...? Well, you're all better...," muttered Selio, looking down.

"What?" asked Seiichirou.

But Selio said, "Nothing!" and his blood seemed to boil.

Is he a child?

"Anyway! You have to ask Siegvold first!" said Selio, standing in Seiichirou's way.

Seiichirou obediently consented and headed to Siegvold's room.

"Oh...?"

As they approached, they saw a thin monk standing near Siegvold's room.

"What's going on?" Selio asked fearfully.

Seiichirou felt a sense of déjà vu. This was the young man, the one who

seemed to be of aristocratic birth, who had forced the relief house responsibilities onto Selio before. The monk snorted and lifted his chin, deliberately acting condescending.

“Siegbold is with someone right now. A maid and an otherworlder tagalong can’t just visit him whenever you want.”

Had this young man not seen Siegbold literally following Seiichirou around everywhere until just recently? Moreover, although Seiichirou was an otherworlder, he currently held a titled managerial position, so Seiichirou didn’t think there was any problem with his visit from a status perspective. This monk, however, seemed to be particularly obsessed with whether or not someone was of nobility. Before Seiichirou could even open his mouth, though, the boy with bright-green hair stepped forward.

“It’s forbidden to discriminate on the basis of family or birth in the church!”

“What...?”

Though impressed that such a rule existed, Seiichirou stared, wide-eyed, at Selio’s unexpected behavior.

“And this...this guy’s going to teach orphans and ordinary people how to learn, and broaden their possibilities in life! Which one of you is really following Abran’s teachings?!”

“You little... Who do you think you’re talking to?”

Selio had probably never defied this condescending monk before. After this admonishment, the monk raised his hand in a fit of temper. *This is bad*, thought Seiichirou. Just as he was about to intervene, though, the door behind the young man opened.

“What’s all this commotion?”

The man who walked out was, naturally, the person whose room it was—Siegbold—but a man dressed in contrasting black clothes also appeared behind the priest.

“Th-that knight is...!” Selio sputtered, looking at Seiichirou.

Oh, that’s right.

Selio was seeing the man who had appeared when Seiichirou had collapsed, and who'd unexpectedly whisked him away.

"I-I'm sorry, Siegvold... Commander...," said the monk. "I told these guys you were busy, but they kept nagging me to show them in..."

"Yes, that's fine," replied Siegvold. "I'm the one who asked him to come."

"What?!"

Before the monk's eyes even had time to widen at that response, the commander—Aresh—walked over to Seiichirou's side, sidestepping the monk.

"You're late."

"Am I?"

Their words were brief, but both the monk and Selio were astonished by the closeness between the two men. The scene was a familiar one to anyone from the royal palace, but it certainly was astonishing to anyone seeing it for the first time.

On one side was the Ice Nobleman, the youngest person to ever take up the post as commander of the Third Royal Order.

On the other side was the otherworlder with no powers to speak of, who had come to this world clinging to the Holy Maiden like a tagalong.

In this closed-off world of the church, that perception of Seiichirou had lingered.

"Selio, go to the prayer room. Summon the children and come back here," said Siegvold. Though Selio was worried about Seiichirou and Aresh, he had just been about to bolt off in a panic.

"Y-yes, sir!"

He refrained from doing so, however, and quickly headed to the relief house instead.

"It's been a while, Seiichirou," said Siegvold. "Your complexion looks better today."

"Thanks to you."

“Isn’t it thanks to *me* that your complexion looks better?”

“Aresh, that is not what I’m talking about.”

Seiichirou was growing annoyed with Aresh—Aresh *knew* what Seiichirou meant and had still interrupted—and then he saw Siegvold looking at him.

“Even the priest is fed up with you, *sir*.”

“Hey—watch your mouth.”

Aresh had told Seiichirou to be more casual with him, but Seiichirou had dismissed that request since they were in public. Then Siegvold also lodged a complaint.

“Seiichirou, you promised to call me by my given name.”

“What? Right, I did, didn’t I? Mr. Siegvold, then.”

“...You don’t use ‘Mr.’ with the commander, so it’s strange to address me as ‘Mr.’”

“What?”

Well, now that Seiichirou thought about it, it *was* strange not to use “Mr.” with Aresh, a commander from a marquess family, but to use “Mr.” with Siegvold, who was a layman priest, although he probably did come from nobility. However, if Seiichirou were to adopt that logic, then he would never be allowed to use “Mr.” with anyone who had the family status of marquess or lower.

“Well, Aresh and I are close, so I’m just...addressing him as I would anyone I had a close relationship or friendship with.”

“I can’t be your friend?”

Siegvold was acting different from how he usually did. He usually only talked about the church or Abran, but he had been discussing unrelated topics for some time. In any event, they had already had a briefing about what they were to do that day, and Seiichirou knew they had no time to waste chitchatting.

“A friend... Well, his situation is different...”

Seiichirou had spoken to Siegvold more than he had spoken to anyone else in

the church, so they had grown close, but Seiichirou seriously doubted whether they could really be called friends. Additionally, Seiichirou wanted to avoid being treated as a disciple with such blind devotion on a daily basis.

“All people are equal before God, regardless of their situation,” Siegvold retorted.

Seiichirou didn’t feel that way, but he thought that was a very priestly way of thinking. Just then, something obstructed his vision.

“Wha— Aresh, hold on! You’ll get fingerprints on my glasses!”

Seiichirou protested—people who didn’t wear glasses always handled them too roughly—but no response came from Aresh.

“Aresh?”

Seiichirou moved Aresh’s hand out of the way, looked up, and saw the two violet-eyed men standing opposite each other in confrontation.

Just as Seiichirou was thinking, *This standoff looks familiar*, and before the two men could say anything, he heard footsteps coming up from behind him.

“Oh! Kondouuu!”

Running down the corridor, waving her hand, was Yua Shiraishi, the current Holy Maiden. Behind her was Yurius wearing the same incognito outfit as before, Selio and the children from the relief house, and then Cipriano.

“I was just about to pray with the children when I ran into Selio!”

After that, they had all come straight to Siegvold’s room.

“It’s been a while, Aresh! Since the last expedition, right?”

“...Right.”

Grab!

Seiichirou had been looking on, relieved that Aresh’s attention was distracted by Yua, but then Yurius, who had come up from behind her, put his arm around Seiichirou’s neck and dragged him off to the side of the corridor.

“What *now*?”

“Why is Aresh here?”

“Lots of reasons. More importantly, why is Shiraishi still participating in prayer? Didn’t you make her stop after last time?”

Magic power was absorbed through prayer in the prayer room.

The Holy Maiden’s magic power was special, necessary for purification, so her magic power being absorbed was unacceptable.

“The purification has been completed, but there are a few things I’m concerned about... I’ve been monitoring and keeping an eye on things.”

“...Are you talking about the barrier, by any chance?”

“...How do you know about the... Oh. *Him*, huh?”

The magic power collected by the sacred relic in the church was used for the barrier that protected the royal capital.

The fact that the citizens were being forced to supply magic power for this special barrier in the royal capital was only known by a subset of people from the rank of royal family to the rank of bishop, so it made the identity of Seiichirou’s informant obvious.

Surprisingly, Yurius did not frown and simply continued.

“...I had my subordinates look into it, but they couldn’t find Yua’s magic power amongst the magic power used for the barrier.”

Seiichirou didn’t really understand the nuances of magic power, but apparently magic energy could have several different kinds of attributes. The other sorcerers at the Royal Sorcery Department had taught him this while he had been waiting for 1st one day. Among these, the Holy Maiden’s magic power stood apart from the rest, and so, even if it was mixed with other sources of magic power, hers could be detected after a careful analysis.

“That’s useful information. We haven’t had enough time to investigate that deeply, so that’s a huge help.”

“...Wait. You’ve just involved Yua and me in some sort of scheme, haven’t you?”

“Since you happen to be here, why don’t you join us?”

“Just who do you think I am?! Such insolence! I always knew you never felt a shred of respect for me!”

Oh, you noticed?

Royals seemed to have cultivated a discerning eye for that sort of thing. Seiichirou saw Yurius in a new light, once again. It was around the third time the young man had showed any depth.

“In our country,” Seiichirou explained, “we have a proverb that goes, ‘Make use of anybody at hand, even your parents.’”

“What a country!”

“It’s both my and Shiraishi’s birthplace...”

“...I suppose I have no choice.”

The prince would go along with anything if Seiichirou mentioned Yua’s name, so in that sense, Yurius was an uncomplicated fellow.

“...It seems as if you’ve grown a lot closer to His Highness as well in my absence,” came Aresh’s voice.

A black aura emanated from the knight standing behind them.

“What in the world are we to do, then?” asked Cipriano, who had been watching the course of events silently.

Seiichirou smiled back at the man who had tried to kill him just one week prior.

“The usual prayer. If you would, please, Cipriano.”

Although he eyed Seiichirou’s smile suspiciously, Cipriano gave orders to the children of the relief house.

“All right, then, everyone. Please line up in front of the sacred relic.”

Selio and Yua, who had come with them, assisted him. As Seiichirou observed, he did preparations of his own.

He took out a foot-long, cylindrical magic tool. As he went to place it by the

sacred relic, Aresh silently snatched it from him and put it down in his stead.

“Thank you,” said Seiichirou, smiling awkwardly.

Aresh huffed and turned his head away slightly. He still seemed upset.

“What is that?” asked Cipriano, who had left the job of instructing the children to Selio. He pointed to the large thermometer-like object Aresh had placed beside the sacred relic.

“It’s a magic tool to measure the amount of magic power. The Sorcery Department asked me to do a trial run.”

“Measure magic power...? I don’t think an experiment like that should be conducted during the sacred act of prayer... In any event, prayer is a demonstration of faith in Abran. It’s not right to do something like measure someone’s heart in a church.”

At Cipriano’s words, the other monks that had gathered in the room—perhaps the aristocratic monk from before had summoned them—began whispering and making faces of agreement. *This is why I can’t stand religion*, thought Seiichirou, but before he could even answer, as if it had been a coordinated act, a new voice rang out from the entrance of the room.

“It’s fine. Let’s allow it.”

“Bishop?!”

Everyone’s eyes were wide at the appearance of Bishop Mateus, with his burly physique that seemed incongruent with the church’s simple meals draped from head to toe in fluttering, white garments. They were also shocked by his statement, but once they noticed the man behind him, they froze entirely. Even those who weren’t priests that visited the royal palace knew what the man’s long, blue cloak meant.

“I will show you proof that my church is doing nothing shameful, Prime Minister.”

“I appreciate that,” said Camile, nodding and smiling at Mateus’s words.

“Cipriano,” said the bishop.

“Yes.”

The two men's eyes met. Camile and Mateus stepped away from the door and lined up beside Seiichirou and the others, so Seiichirou stepped back. Aresh and Siegvold fell in line, forcing Seiichirou still further back. The two men, with their similar statures, stood in front of Seiichirou, blocking his view, so he had to peek out between them. Yua and the children kneeled on the rug in front of the sacred relic, and Yurius stood beside them.

At Cipriano's command, prayer began.

The sacred relic glowed and its jewels shone, but no children had a spontaneous magic outburst like last time, and before long, the prayer chant had finished.

Aresh stopped Seiichirou from retrieving the magic tool and walked forward to do it himself. Seiichirou would have been fine doing it since Aresh had so thoroughly reapplied a barrier to him the night before, but Aresh was being overprotective. After Aresh handed the tool to him, Seiichirou saw that half of the display area was colored red.

"So?" asked the young monk. "What does that magic tool tell you?"

"The amount of magic power that was just offered through prayer."

"What does it matter if you know that? Prayers to Abran are offerings to Abran."

The monk was still insisting that prayer was nothing more than a show of devotion to Abran. However, Seiichirou shook his head.

"That's not true. Magic power offered in prayer is also used for the defense barrier that protects the royal capital."

Although people understood that prayer moved magic power, a surprisingly large number did not know the magic power they offered was being used as energy. They probably thought there was no way something so sacrilegious would be done.

Ignoring the buzz of chatter that had just broken out, Seiichirou continued.

"And here is the amount of magic power used for the royal capital defense barrier expressed in numerical form."

Seiichirou passed out a document he had drafted based on the numerical value of magic power needed for the royal capital defense barrier, which the Sorcery Department had given him, and the numerical value of the magic power provided to the government from the church.

“Hm... If you convert it into a month’s worth, it equals out,” said Camile.

“Of course,” said Mateus, looking triumphant and puffing out his chest. “It is our duty as believers and citizens to offer the power of prayer to the kingdom, after all.”

Even though few people realized that was what they were doing, it seemed as if the bishop had decided to insist it was all being done for the sake of the kingdom. Mateus gave Seiichirou a condescending glance, but Seiichirou held out another document, unperturbed.

“...What? There’s something else?” Mateus asked, taking the document with a scowl.

Seiichirou’s sluggish, dark-brown eyes settled on Mateus.

“Yes. This is the measured value of magic power from a prayer three days ago.”

“...!! ...?!”

Mateus, Selio, and all the other church members stared at Seiichirou with expressions of shock.

“What do you mean?! You just took the measurement today, and you haven’t even been visiting the church! Don’t blabber such nonsense! You’re standing before God!!”

One person, Siegvold, quietly walked up to the sacred relic and took out a magic tool from behind it. It was similar to the one they had just seen.

“...?! Siegvold... You...”

“Yes, the magic tool was completed four days ago, so I asked Siegvold to take a measurement with it.”

What they had needed were the eyes of the public, a person with power, and visible results. Numbers alone would not have achieved this, and immediate

results on their own would have been weak proof. Also, if the person leading the prayer were connected to the church, they would not have shown their true colors under public scrutiny, and as there were so few people who could visually see the subtle changes in the flow of magic power, people would very likely have claimed it was a false accusation. Therefore, as soon as the measuring device had been completed, Seiichirou had contacted Siegvold in secret and requested this of him.

Because Seiichirou knew that a man who loved, respected, and believed in Abran more than anything would not allow for that faith to be defiled in a church of all places.

“As you can see, more than half of this measuring device is colored. On a scale of around one to ten, it might be anywhere from five to seven. Incidentally, this much magic power would be enough to run a magic tool to heat this entire room. For a normal household, it would last a week.”

“Then...where on earth is the rest of it...?” Camile asked deliberately, as if the baton had been passed to him after Seiichirou’s explanation. “Do you know, Bishop?”

Mateus, who could clearly not shout at Camile, merely opened and closed his mouth soundlessly.

“I launched an investigation,” Yurius continued, “and I heard that the Holy Maiden’s magic power wasn’t included in the magic power supplied to the government for the barrier. Where did you send Yua’s magic power?”

By this point, Mateus’s face had already turned ashen.

Numbers and authority really are incredible, Seiichirou thought as he took out the next document.

“That’s correct. Here are the statistics for the magic power used in this kingdom’s commerce, agriculture, and manufacturing industries this fiscal year. When we followed up and questioned the suppliers, we could not confirm the existence of several of them.”

“What?!”

Mateus’s mouth opened so wide it looked like his jaw had unhinged, but he

shouldn't have forgotten—Seiichirou's job was assistant director of the Royal Accounting Department, the department that knew everything about the kingdom's finances. Things might have been different back when the department had been sloppily run, but the documents for the current financial year, which had been put together after Seiichirou had come to this world and taken charge, were detailed, diversified, and accurate. That was why Seiichirou never overlooked even the smallest numerical discrepancy.

“But it's strange,” Seiichirou said. “Even if you deduct the magic power that was allegedly purchased by these vendors from the magic power produced by prayer...there's still a little left over, isn't there?”

“Huh?”

Mateus's face was incredibly pale, but he seemed to have heard Seiichirou's words correctly. He didn't know, after all.

“It was just a small amount at a time, but by doing this every month, one could accumulate quite a large amount of magic power. But just what was that magic power being used for...Cipriano?”

Seiichirou looked at Cipriano, who was standing on the other side of the bewildered, confused children. He had not said a single word during the entire explanation. Aresh had been keeping a watchful eye on him the entire time, so he hadn't taken a single step from where he stood, either.

Cipriano's expression was eerily unchanged.

He still had the same narrow, empty eyes. His face, which seemed to be both smiling and angry, was just as forgettable as ever.

“C-Cipriano...?” asked Selio, turning and looking at the man as if he couldn't believe his eyes or ears.

Cipriano didn't respond to him.

“Cipriano... Answer me,” said Siegvold, walking toward him. “What did you do with the magic power from the prayers of these holy believers?”

Seiichirou could see that Siegvold was suppressing agitation behind his violet eyes. Siegvold was honest and courteous, but at heart he was a passionate

man.

Worst of all, Cipriano's behavior had trodden on the religious faith that Siegvold held most dear. There was no way Siegvold wouldn't be upset. Seiichirou, remembering when he had broached the plan to Siegvold and how difficult it had been to stop him from leaving to question Cipriano on the spot, hid himself slightly behind Aresh. He was aware of how vulnerable he was.

"Holy...are they...?" Cipriano repeated softly, his voice bland and emotionless.

This was followed by loud laughter.

Yua held the frightened children close to her.

"Don't make me laugh! There is only one true God—Merke! That egotistical nobody Abran is no god!!"

"You... You're a heretic!"

"Merke?"

"She's a goddess worshipped in the east. She governs harmony and eliminates enemies from other worlds."

"Enemies from other worlds..."

Abran was the state religion of the Romany Kingdom, and 90 percent of the population followed that religion. The remaining 10 percent, in other words, did not.

"To hell with the Holy Maiden! To hell with purification! And to top it all off, this Holy Maiden is an otherworlder? The very act of connecting a passageway to another world, of disturbing the balance, defiles this land! It's a complete farce! Your Abran is the evil god that creates the miasma!"

"What are you saying...?!" Siegvold's face had turned white, and he trembled with anger. "Abran's divine protection has given this country bountiful harvests! What blasphemy!"

"Hah! What kind of a god of harvest is that?! A god that can only provide peace and a bountiful harvest for a scant hundred years at best is no god at all!"

"You...!"

The edges of Siegvold's body seemed to blur like a mirage.

"Seiichirou, behind me."

Aresh's tone was firm, so Seiichirou figured that was probably Siegvold's magic power visualized. Siegvold's reason seemed about to slip away. Seiichirou looked around. He was relieved to see that Camile had brought guards with him.

"Heh...ha-ha-ha! You fool. You asked me what I used the magic power for? Here it is!!"

Cipriano, whose looks had undergone a considerable change in just a few minutes, continued to laugh as he took a small sphere from his breast pocket. Multicolored stones were embedded in it.

"...I sense a high concentration of magic power. That's...going to explode!"

"A bomb?"

Was it like the magic-power version of an electromagnetic bomb?

Seiichirou had honestly assumed that this might all have been the work of someone dissatisfied with the kingdom's government, but he hadn't expected it to be a religious zealot.

I'm not good at dealing with religion.

Faith, for better or worse, affected the mind. It even destroyed reason.



As a nonreligious person, Seiichirou simply could not understand that way of thinking.

“Terrorists that use religion as a pretext are the lowest of the low...!”

They had been too hasty in cornering the man.

Just as Seiichirou realized that, the sphere in Cipriano’s hand started to emit light.

Everything surrounding it was bathed in white.

The blinding light engulfed the small prayer room.

Seiichirou felt the strong arms he knew so well closing around him.

You did it again.

You saved me again.

But I don’t want you to get hurt, either...

“...? Hmm? Huh?”

As time ticked by, all Seiichirou could sense were those strong arms and that familiar scent. There was no subsequent shock wave. Seiichirou opened his eyes. No matter how well he had been protected, he should still have been able to feel the impact of a bomb exploding, at least.

Aresh, his arms still around Seiichirou, seemed to be thinking along the same lines. Seiichirou felt Aresh’s arms relax, so he stretched and looked at the room over Aresh’s shoulder. He felt like the room was brighter than it had been before, and when he looked up, sure enough, he saw the bomb.

“...That’s...”

The bomb that Cipriano had thrown was floating in midair, emitting light, surrounded by a hard shell on all sides.

“Wow, I did it!” came a cheerful, out-of-place voice. Everyone’s eyes turned toward its source.

The Holy Maiden who had been summoned from another world looked cheerful, though her forehead was sweaty. She smiled and clapped her hands.

“Wh-what did you...do...?” Cipriano muttered, his eyes wider than Seiichirou had ever seen them.

Yua might have heard him. She took a breath, opened her hands again, and gently drew the bomb toward her.

“Yua! Isn’t that dangerous?!” cried Yurius, immediately stepping in front of her to shield her.

Yua, looking slightly bashful, smiled and shook her head.

“I think it’s fine now. I hardened my magic power.”

“Hardened...?”

“Yeah. I thought it would be dangerous if that thing exploded, so I wrapped it in my magic power and hardened it.”

“Something like that...is possible?” Seiichirou asked involuntarily. Yua came from the same world that he did, but she performed spells that astonished even the people of this kingdom.

Yua tilted her head.

“Huh? But isn’t that what you’ve been doing, Kondou?”

“What?”

Seiichirou could not use magic, of course. The others were also looking at her with doubtful expressions. Yua continued:

“You know, the barrier for the Demon Forest. The barrier isn’t blocking what’s outside—it’s securing the inside so that nothing dangerous gets out.”

“Oh, right...”

Now that Seiichirou thought about it, it was the same mechanism he had been implementing to seal the tree from which the miasma radiated.

“Well, I just suggested it, I haven’t actually been doing it myself...,” Seiichirou said.

Not to mention, what Seiichirou had done was very different from thinking of it on the fly in an emergency and successfully pulling it off.

“Huh? But you thought about it and organized so many people to carry it out. Isn’t this the same as what you did?”

Although Yua had performed the purification and helped the church as the Holy Maiden, she spoke as a woman with no experience out in society. The strength almost vanished from Seiichirou’s limbs at her words. However, because of that inexperience, Seiichirou knew her opinion of him was genuine, with no strings attached.

Seiichirou had always seen Yua’s thoughtlessness and naïveté as drawbacks, and even allowing for the fact that she was the Holy Maiden, he had always found it rather off-putting to see how many devoted themselves to her. But now he kind of understood their feelings. Everyone had a weak spot for compliments that came from the heart.

“...What’s with your face?”

“Hey! What are you doing?”

Seiichirou was happy that they were safe, but his nose was also being grabbed by Aresh, whose brows were furrowed. Seiichirou had thought the tense atmosphere had done an about-face and calmed, but only one part of the conflict seemed to have been resolved.

“Such is the power of the Holy Maiden and the disciple chosen by Abran! Did you see that, Cipriano?! This is the power of Abran! The teachings of Merke—denying such precious people—are exclusionary and wrong!”

“Tch...!”

It was unusual for Siegvold to look so triumphant. Cipriano fell to his knees, his teeth clenched in frustration. However...

“No, every person is free to believe whatever they want.”

The words had unconsciously slipped from Seiichirou’s mouth.

“Disciple, what...?”

Both Siegvold and Cipriano turned to him, looking as though they couldn’t believe what they’d heard, but there was one other person in agreement with Seiichirou.

“That’s right! Isn’t it normal that there are so many gods?”

“Your Holiness?!”

All the church members’ eyes went wide as dinner plates. Abran’s Holy Maiden and Disciple, of all people, had just accepted the existence of other gods.

“What are you saying...? There’s only one God—Abran. You should know that better than anyone, Your Holiness. Right?” asked Mateus with a tremble to his voice. He was looking at Yua as if begging for her reassurance, but Yua shared a glance with Seiichirou and tilted her head.

“Huh? Why is that? I did hear a voice in my world before I got summoned to this world, and I was given the power of purification, and sometimes a man appears in my dreams and teaches me things, but...what does that have to do with there not being any other gods?”

Yua had just inadvertently revealed a few things that Seiichirou wanted to circle back to, but he decided to set them aside for the moment and nodded. Just because someone had never seen something wasn’t proof that it didn’t exist.

“And while Abran is certainly the state religion, the Romany Kingdom does not prohibit other religions. Isn’t that right, Prime Minister?”

Seiichirou looked back at Camile, who nodded firmly. The kingdom supported the Abran religion and offered them financial assistance, but they did not suppress other religions. Other religions were taxed at the same rate as the Abran religion.

“Do you believe...in Merke?” Cipriano asked, looking at Seiichirou with a desperate expression. Seiichirou and Yua looked at each other.

Shinto had been the religion of Japan in ancient times, but Buddhism had also flourished, and Christianity had spread throughout the country, too. There were even people living in Japan who believed in Hinduism.

After all, there was a saying in Japan that there were eight million gods.

They believed that gods dwelled in everything in existence, and there were

more than eight million things in existence.

Although in recent years Japan had been called a nonreligious country, it was a country with a religious spirit.

They believed in nothing, but they also believed in everything.

And they would not deny anything.

“Well, she exists, doesn’t she?”

That was as far as Seiichirou would go.

Yet Cipriano remained silent, as if thinking over these words deeply. He hung his head, and droplets fell to the floor.

“Will you...forgive me...?”

“What? That’s rather beside the point.”

“What?” asked Cipriano, blinking at Seiichirou in confusion, his eyes still wet with tears.

Seiichirou wondered why even Siegvold was looking at him with such a puzzled expression.

“Embezzlement of donations, embezzlement of magic power, attempted murder, damage to property,” said Seiichirou, methodically listing all the crimes that came to his mind. “I need more than one hand to count your crimes. Plus, you’ve acted in the presence of the kingdom’s central figures—royalty, the prime minister, the Holy Maiden—so you’ll be charged with treason as well.”

“Posing as a follower of Abran also falls under the crime of deception,” Camile continued. “And your fraudulent appropriation of funds encompasses both basic embezzlement and corporate embezzlement. You’ll likely also be charged with harm against a sovereign and defamation, too, separate from the treason.”

As one would expect from the most powerful person in the kingdom’s legal system, Camile listed the man’s crimes one after the other. As Camile spoke, the knights that he and Aresh had arranged for beforehand restrained Cipriano and Mateus.

And with that, Seiichirou’s work at the church was truly complete.



Epilogue



“Well, Helmut, I’m off.”

“Right, take care.”

Seiichirou stood up, holding a pile of documents. Norbert quickly got to his feet as well.

“O-oh! W-we’re leaving already?! Hold on!”

“Isn’t it a basic rule to leave with plenty of time before an appointment? Hurry up.”

Norbert came running to him holding documents he had chaotically scrapped together. He looked to be on the verge of dropping them.

“Oh, it’s Mr. Kondo and Norbert! Hello.”

“Sigma.”

Out in the corridor, they bumped into Sigma, the young boy from town who had previously been an apprentice woodworker. He looked sharper now in his neat shirt and pants.

“Ist summoned you here again today?” asked Seiichirou.

“Yes. He said he wanted to do lots of experiments while we still had a ton of magic power.”

“Don’t overdo it, okay? I’m heading to the private school now. Would you like to come with us?”

Royal Sorcery Department Assistant Director Ist had begged for the bomb in which Cipriano had stored the embezzled magic power, and in doing so had successfully acquired an energy source for his experiments. Sigma’s contributions toward the creation of the magic power measuring device had also been recognized, and so he had been given formal permission to visit the Royal Sorcery Department. However, because Sigma could only do very simple reading and writing and had not yet entered a formal school, he would be treated as a trainee while he was a student. To prepare for formal schooling, he had been attending the private school spearheaded by the Holy Maiden and the crown prince in order to become an exemplary student.

“Oh, I was gonna head back to the lab first before I go.”

“Sigma, try saying that again.”

“Oh! I mean, I have plans, so go on ahead...please...?”

Sigma had been self-taught and could do simple reading, writing, and arithmetic, so his biggest hurdle was etiquette. If Sigma started attending formal school, he would be surrounded by the children of aristocrats and wealthy merchants, and Seiichirou had no idea what they would say to him. However, Sigma had real talent and goals, so Seiichirou thought he would do well as the kingdom’s first scholarship student.

“Oh, Kondou, Norbert! Welcome,” said Yua with a smile as they arrived at the relief house.

The bishop of the church had been replaced, and even though Mateus’s family had offered to pay a massive amount of bail, he had been sent off to a remote region of the kingdom. Given the circumstances, Cipriano would probably spend his entire life behind bars, even excluding the fact that he was a heretic.

The news that a private school, organized by the Holy Maiden and the crown prince, had opened at the relief house had spread far and wide, and there had been such a rush of applicants that they’d decided to increase the number of classes, and even split them into morning and evening lessons. It took more time to develop the private school than they had originally accounted for, but that was unavoidable. They just needed to pull through and build a good reputation with the help of Sigma, their exemplary student.

And as for Yua...

“Yua.”

“Yuri.”

...she seemed to be getting along surprisingly well with Yurius, who had been visiting the private school frequently under the guise of conducting “inspections.” As evidence of this, Yua continued to commute from the royal palace to the church, even though the purification was completed.

“Kondo...would you like to work directly under His Highness the Prince?” asked Commander Radim of the Second Royal Order, who had been coming to the relief center as the prince’s guard.

“You’re joking.”

“No, I’m serious...”

Radim still seemed to be on team “get the Holy Maiden and the crown prince together.”

Looking at Yua, Seiichirou mused that she liked guys who scolded her more than guys who pampered her, and although she had a thing for older guys, she seemed to enjoy hanging out with her peers better... But Seiichirou didn’t want to say anything unnecessary and get dragged onto Radim’s team, so he remained silent.

“Oh? Where’s the chalk?” Seiichirou asked later.

He had been preparing for class when suddenly, the green-haired boy with long eyelashes named Selio presented the missing box of necessary implements to him.

“...Aren’t you busy?” Selio muttered without making eye contact.

“I am busy. That’s why I’ve decided to hand off my weekly math class to my subordinate.”

“What?!”

When Seiichirou called Norbert over and introduced him, Selio looked down, his mouth pressed into a straight line.

“...Norbert, did you do something to him?”

“What?! No way, this is my first time meeting the kid! If something happened, you’re the one that did it, Sei! Or maybe he...”

As the two men spoke in undertones in front of the boy whose head hung dejectedly, they heard him speak faintly.

“Y-you’re...not going to come here anymore...?” asked Selio in a whisper.

Seiichirou tilted his head.

“I’ll come here again. The private school only just started.”

Yua and Yurius were just figureheads, so it would have been a difficult venture to operate without someone working feverishly behind the scenes.

Plus, with the recent large-scale embezzlement that had been running rampant in the church, periodic investigations would be necessary in the future.

“Sei, you really are popular wherever you go, huh?” Norbert said during their last briefing for the lesson.

“Huh?” asked Seiichirou, furrowing his brows. “What are you talking about?”

Aresh aside, Seiichirou had basically always been treated as a nuisance or a tagalong in this world, and he had never been popular with anyone.

“But didn’t the prime minister try to recruit you before we came here?”

Correction: There was one other exception...

Camile had just invited him to leave the Accounting Department and join the Legal Department as an accountant. Seiichirou had declined the offer, of course, but then Camile had asked if he would work as an independent entity or accept a peerage, which Seiichirou had also earnestly refused.

Seiichirou thought he was best suited to busily working away as just a cog in the machine. The people around him would probably advise him that, if he were a cog, then he should stop flying this way and that or spinning in reverse, but it’s difficult for people to be objective about themselves.

After observing Norbert’s first lesson, Seiichirou prepared to return to the royal palace.

When he tried to leave the church, however, he found an opulent carriage blocking his path to the stagecoach.

It was obviously the carriage of a nobleman, so it would have been rude for Seiichirou to force his way through. Seiichirou briefly pondered if he should leave the church through the back entrance, but then he spotted the man getting out of the carriage.

“Siegvold?!”

“Seiichirou! You came to teach?”

Siegvold got out of the carriage with graceful steps, and today he was wearing purple and red formal dress instead of his usual snow-white priest uniform. He looked like a completely different person.

“Oh—yes. Um...that outfit...”

“Oh, right. I was invited to my parents’ house.”

Siegvold explained that after the recent incident, his parents had asked him if he wanted to leave the church and return home now that he was able to control his magic power well enough, but he had declined the offer.

“I still want to serve the god I believe in,” said Siegvold with a cheerful expression.

Seiichirou glanced at him and then at the crest on the carriage.

I think that’s...the crest of the Erwell marquess family...

Seiichirou had tried his best to learn the names of all the marquess families as foundational knowledge for working at the royal palace, but the reason why he really remembered this name in particular was because, when he had investigated the church’s donations the other day, he’d seen that the Erwell family had donated conspicuously large sums. Seiichirou remembered that Marquess Erwell was the lord of a wealthy territory in the west, and he had strong political influence. But most importantly...

What...? He’s not related to Aresh...?

Seiichirou had gotten so weirdly worried for nothing. *Maybe I suffer from senseless anxiety*, thought Seiichirou, heaving a deep sigh.

“But this experience has made me realize I need to expand my views,” Siegvold continued, “so please call on me whenever you visit the church.”

“Right. Will do.”

It’s a good thing that you want to soften that hard head a little.

Seiichirou nodded with a smile, thinking that it was also a good thing Siegvold was such an influential member of the church and had connections to a

distinguished family in the west.

δ δ δ

“Seiichirou, let’s go home.”

When Aresh showed up at the accounting office at the regular time that afternoon, Seiichirou had already finished getting ready to leave.

“I heard the prime minister and the prince tried to recruit you today,” Aresh began as soon as they got in the carriage.

Seiichirou unconsciously touched the collar of his uniform, wondering if it had been bugged.

“Your ears are certainly the first to hear any news, *sir*. But I declined both offers.”

“Hey—watch your mouth.”

“We’re not home yet.”

Aresh’s thin lips pressed together grumpily.

Is he a child?

Seiichirou had been about to relax, but, realizing that he was starting to enjoy seeing Aresh make that face, he pressed his lips together, too.

There was still a mountain of problems with being with Aresh, and Seiichirou planned to return to Japan someday.

He couldn’t decide whether answering Aresh’s feelings was the right thing to do.

As Seiichirou sat in silence, this time it was Aresh that looked over at him, as if picking apart his behavior.

“...When it gets a little warmer, why don’t we go to a town by the sea?”

The word “sea” made Seiichirou startle, and he asked, “Where did that come from?”

Seiichirou had been born in Shizuoka Prefecture, near the sea. Ever since he’d moved to the Kanto area for university and then to Tokyo for employment, he

had never gone to the ocean, and he hadn't seen it at all since coming to this world.

The ever-perceptive Aresh seemed to immediately notice Seiichirou's positive response to his question, and he repeated it.

"...There's an ocean?" Seiichirou asked.

"Yes. It's by my family's main household. They also have a second home in the territory, at a location that's popular as a health retreat, so we'd be able to relax in privacy."

The territory governed by the Indolark family was in the south and was large and abundant with nature, but the land had also been developed, and it was popular as a wellness destination.

"You work too much, so it would probably be best for you to get some space from your job."

"This again..."

Seiichirou had so much to do, but if he were to be whisked away to a health retreat in this world that didn't have electronic forms of communication, he wouldn't be able to work at all. The idea of visiting the sea was certainly appealing to him, but just as he thought that he had to somehow stop Aresh from carrying out this plan, Aresh huffed.

"I know. Not until after you start seeing some progress. I won't make you leave your work behind half-done."

"...!"

A familiar pain shot through Seiichirou's chest. He slouched forward, a hand pressed over his heart.

"What's wrong, Seiichirou?" asked Aresh, immediately rising from his seat and scanning Seiichirou's face. "Are you in pain?!"

That again...! "Ice Nobleman"... "Black beast"... What nonsense!

As his chest tightened in short, repeating increments, Seiichirou took a long breath.

He knew.

He would admit it.

Seiichirou looked up. Aresh's violet eyes looked uneasy.

Seiichirou no longer wanted to merely be on the receiving end of things. He no longer wanted to be the only one being protected.

"...Aresh."

"What? Do you want to go back to the medical office?" Aresh suggested.

Seiichirou shook his head, then pressed his mouth to Aresh's well-proportioned, soft lips.

They would talk about their future together.



After the Epilogue...



No sooner had Seiichirou and Aresh gotten out of the carriage and stood in front of the door to their home than it was opened from the inside.

““Welcome home, Mr. Aresh and Mr. Kondo,”” said the butler Valtom and the maid Milan in unison, bowing.

“Yeah,” said Aresh.

“Thank you,” said Seiichirou.

After their brief replies, Milan removed Aresh’s cloak from his shoulders and carried it in her arms.

“Everything’s ready if you’d like a bath, but perhaps you’d like to eat first?”

“Shall we eat first, Seiichirou?”

“That’s fine, but I’m not really that hungry yet, so can I rest for a little while in my room first?”

“By ‘rest,’ you mean ‘work,’ don’t you? Did you bring work home with you again?”

“No, of course not. I’m just going to read a book and rest.”

“...Fine. Valtom, dinner will be in half an hour,” Aresh instructed, looking back at him.

Valtom’s eyes softened in a smile. Milan’s eyes lit up.

“Understood. I’ll have Pavel prepare caralapui.”

“Sure.”

Then, after delivering pristine bows, the two quickly returned to their work.

“Aresh, what’s ‘caralapui’?”

Seiichirou had not heard that word before, but he assumed it was a type of food if Pavel was preparing it. However, he didn’t understand why Valtom had announced this to Aresh. After he asked, Aresh was silent for a few moments before looking at Seiichirou, looking away again, and clearing his throat.

“Caralapui is a dish from my hometown eaten during celebrations.”

Such as after baptisms, coming-of-age ceremonies, and...marriages.

“...?! How?! How could they tell?! Valtom, Milan!!”

No one answered Seiichirou’s cries, but Aresh and Seiichirou ended up eating the caralapui together at dinnertime, under the warm gazes of their three servants.



Caralapui was a type of baked sweet.

Pavel presented them a heap of the extra-large baked sweets with a smile that stretched from ear to ear. Seiichirou was more concerned by how many sweets the chef had made in such a short time than by his own embarrassment. They couldn’t eat all of them, of course, but it was typical for leftover caralapui to be given to servants and neighbors, so Pavel gleefully took the leftovers away.

Wait, what is he going to say when he gives them to the neighbors?

But there was nothing Seiichirou could do to stop him.

“You’re not going to take a bath, Seiichirou?” asked Aresh, who had already taken his after the meal. When he had walked into Seiichirou’s room, he had found him lying face down on the bed.

“Seiichirou, are you asleep?”

“No, I’m not asleep...”

Aresh sat down on the bed. Seiichirou slowly got up before Aresh could reach out to him.

“...? What’s wrong?”

Aresh was furrowing his brows and trying to look into Seiichirou’s face because he was simply worried about him. Seiichirou understood that. But Seiichirou didn’t understand why he was so calm. Was it a cultural thing? A cultural difference? Seiichirou wanted to let his head fall into his hands.

“Have you come down with a fever?”

Aresh pressed his hand against Seiichirou’s forehead, but there was no fever. When Seiichirou looked up to tell him as much, he saw that Aresh’s face was

unexpectedly close. Their eyes met.

Aresh's hand moved down from Seiichirou's forehead to stroke his cheek, then slid to his jaw, where it applied a slight pressure. Seiichirou didn't resist this pressure—he just silently closed his eyes and accepted Aresh's lips.

After their lips parted, Aresh continued to stare at him, their faces still close. Seiichirou breathed out a resigned sigh.

"There's nothing wrong with me, and I'm not mad... I'm just a little embarrassed."

"Embarrassed? Why?" asked Aresh, his expression serious.

Why *wasn't* Aresh embarrassed that, at their age, the servants were so unabashedly celebrating the start of their relationship?

"Valtom and the others would never do anything I would be opposed to."

Seiichirou remembered that the handsome man in front of him, who was in a good mood although it didn't show on his face, was an aristocrat from a marquess family. It made sense now that the way he thought about servants was fundamentally different. *Nothing I can do about that*, Seiichirou nearly thought, but then he revised his opinion. Previously, Seiichirou would have resigned himself to the fact that their values were probably different and not expressed his own views, but he had resolved to face Aresh directly from now on, so he had to at least speak his mind, even if they couldn't understand each other.

"I get that, but in my country, romance wasn't something that was very public, so...I'm not used to it."

"I didn't think that from your letters, but I understand. I'll tell Valtom, too."

Aresh hadn't totally understood Seiichirou's perspective, but that compromise was enough for now. Feeling relieved, Seiichirou thanked him, and Aresh kissed him again.

They were just pressing their lips together, but when Seiichirou felt something soft and wet against his mouth, he obediently opened up for it.

"Mmm... Hmm?"

Just as Seiichirou felt warmth stroking his side, he realized something was off about what Aresh had just said and opened his eyes.

Letters?

“Letters...? What do you mean by that?”

“The letters. Your replies to me.”

As Aresh spoke, his lips brushed Seiichirou’s ear, his voice making Seiichirou’s eardrums vibrate. Seiichirou felt as if heat was washing directly over his skin, but he couldn’t just ignore what Aresh had said. He shook his head and escaped Aresh’s lips.

“Replies...? You’re kidding me...!”

Seiichirou reflexively tried to get off the bed to run away, but Aresh, with his strong arms, was easily able to manhandle Seiichirou back onto the bed. Seiichirou, however, couldn’t give in.

“Y-you read them?!”

“They were letters to me, so what’s so wrong with my reading them?”

When the expedition had been extended so that the Third Royal Order could eradicate the magical beasts, Aresh had sent Seiichirou a letter every day. In contrast, Seiichirou had never written a single reply.

But that wasn’t exactly true. Seiichirou *had* written replies to Aresh’s letters, but during the castle envoy’s regular visits, Seiichirou had never been able to bring himself to ask the envoy to deliver them. The letters should have still been in his desk drawer.

“I don’t think it’s right for you to go rummaging around in my desk of your own accord, even if you are the owner of the house. It’s an invasion of privacy.”

“It wasn’t me. Valtom gave them to me.”

“Valtom did?! Ugh...”

It had probably happened when Seiichirou had been hospitalized in the medical office. Valtom had probably passed them along, Seiichirou predicted, before he had visited Seiichirou and given him candid advice. It was no wonder,

then, that Valtom had backed down so quickly, and that Aresh hadn't been nearly as grumpy as Seiichirou had expected on the day he had been discharged.

"...Please give them back."

"The letters are addressed to me, so they're mine."

"I didn't send them, so they're still mine...! H-hold on...!"

Aresh stroked the lower half of Seiichirou's body, and his words of argument died in his throat. Aresh took advantage of the opportunity to pull Seiichirou close again and plant kisses on his cheek and ear.

"A-Aresh, I haven't had a bath yet..."

"...You're going to get dirty anyway, so you can do that later," Aresh said, pressing his nose to the base of the other man's throat.

Seiichirou bristled.

"Hey...! Don't smell my body odor! We can do it, but let me take a bath first..."

"You'll take too long. I can't wait any longer."

"Ngh... Come on..."

Aresh's large hand slipped under Seiichirou's shirt and traced a path from his side to his chest. Seiichirou gave up trying to resist, and Aresh put a hand around the back of his neck.

"Ngh... A-ah..."

Thinking back, Seiichirou realized it was the first time they were touching each other for reasons other than magic power acclimatization.

Aresh had pressed their bodies together and put his saliva into Seiichirou many times to subdue Seiichirou's magic-sickness after casting a barrier or healing spell. However, the level of magic-sickness that required them to go all the way only developed after Seiichirou had a powerful healing spell cast on him in a life-or-death situation, and magic-sickness of that level would leave Seiichirou with a very fuzzy sense of awareness.

In other words, although it was not the first time they had done this, it was the first time Seiichirou was doing it with crystal clear consciousness from beginning to end.

“Ah... That’s...!”

When Aresh’s fondling moved to Seiichirou’s backside, Seiichirou briefly tensed up, even though he had been prepared for it to happen.

“...You don’t want to?” Aresh asked in a husky voice, pressing a kiss to Seiichirou’s sweaty forehead.

Seiichirou shook his head. He was the same man, after all. He knew how much self-control it took for Aresh not to ask to go all the way when their acclimatization activities reached to this point, and he also understood why Aresh wanted to do this on the day his feelings had been reciprocated. Plus, Seiichirou wanted to do it, too.

Seiichirou stared back into Aresh’s violet eyes that were darkened with lust. He gave him a kiss, just a brief touch of lips, and then answered in the younger man’s ear:

“I...want to do it, too.”

Seiichirou felt heat being pushed into his body—into a place that had been thoroughly prepared with what might have been perfumed oil. It wasn’t his first time, but the upward thrusts were a novel sensation, and Seiichirou panted to try and relax as much as possible.

“Hah, ah...! Hah... Hah...!”

There weren’t any cramp-like pains, but he couldn’t shake the uncomfortable feeling. He clung to the bedsheets, but his hands were pulled away.

“Ah... Huh?”

“Put your hands...here...,” Aresh said, leading Seiichirou’s hands to his sweaty shoulders.

Before Seiichirou could reply, heat from the next thrust naturally made his hands clench.

“Ah! Ngh...! A-Aresh...!”

Seiichirou wanted to ask him to go more slowly, but his voice had fled, so he just held on to Aresh as best as he could. With Aresh's body covering him, and hot breaths and grunts in his ear, Seiichirou felt his body growing steadily warmer.

Oh, that's right...

Amid his hazy thoughts, Seiichirou realized that he liked Aresh's voice.

δ δ δ

"Still, there are limits," Seiichirou grumbled the next morning to his lover, who was eight years his junior.

"To what?" asked Aresh, clearly in a good mood and oblivious to Seiichirou's bad one, pressing a kiss to the other man's forehead.

"Listen, Aresh. My stamina, my age, my occupation, and my physical constitution are all different from yours."

One of the men was the twenty-two-year-old commander of a Royal Order. The other was a thirty-year-old corporate slave that never exercised and had an allergy to magicules, which sometimes gave him magic-sickness.

If you were to quantify their stamina, Aresh's would probably have been ten times greater.

Stamina aside, Seiichirou's muscles and joints ached from the many positions that he had been contorted into.

"I guess so."

"...Considering everything, let's only do *that* once a week, before my regular days off."

"What?!" asked Aresh, jolting up at Seiichirou's suggestion. "Once a week?! You're joking!"

"Yes, once a week. If we do *that* frequently, it'll be no joking matter."

Seiichirou was lying down limp, and Aresh realized that his face was slightly pale. Contemplating his overexcitement the night before, he cast a light healing spell.



It wasn't often enough for the young Aresh, whose first love had finally been reciprocated, but that was the limit for Seiichirou's stamina and lower back. Seiichirou shook his head. Aresh knew about his frailty, so he understood that it wasn't wise to put such a strain on Seiichirou's body. After some consideration, Aresh was struck with an idea.

"Wouldn't it be efficient to do it while I cast a healing spell?"

"..."

Because Aresh's expression never changed much and because of his self-restraint until that point, Seiichirou seemed to have misread the man. However, Seiichirou wouldn't concede. The idea of the healing spell was appealing, though.

"If you cast a healing spell on me, then I can drink a nutritional tonic the day before..."

The words unintentionally escaped Seiichirou's mouth, and then Aresh's anger came pouring down like thunder. For the next three days, the servants looked on pleasantly as the two men had their first lovers' quarrel.



[backstage]

Norbert's Reports 2



My name is Norbert Blanc. I'm a sprightly, energetic eighteen-year-old. I'm the third son of Count Blanc, and this spring I got a job at the Royal Accounting Department through his connections.

I call him Count Blanc, but he only became a count recently. Before that, he was a viscount. His elevation in rank was all because of Sei—that is, Seiichirou Kondo, the man who was summoned along with the Holy Maiden during the Holy Maiden Summoning.

The Holy Maiden Summoning is a state ritual to summon the Holy Maiden from another world so that Her Holiness can purify the miasma that develops in this kingdom once every hundred years. Until now, nearly every Holy Maiden identified by the divine revelation lived within the kingdom, but this time, totally unexpectedly, the Holy Maiden was living in another world, so the whole kingdom came together and revived a *super* old summoning ritual.

Then Sei, a totally regular guy without any powers, got dragged into the summoning. The kingdom just wanted to cover his cost of living, have someone keep an eye on him, and leave him be, but then Sei told them something ridiculous: "I want a job!" He came to the Royal Accounting Department because it was a job where he could put his previous work experience to good use. Yep, the same place I work.

Then, because it was convenient in many ways, I became the person who monitored Sei. I always thought he was just an ordinary guy—the Holy Maiden's tagalong—but Sei is actually super amazing.

Sei cleaned up the kingdom's accounting, even though no one asked him to, and he tidied up the expenses that were being selfishly used by the knights and the aristocratic superiors. And *then* he even launched a plan to prevent any further miasma damage and turned the common practice of the Holy Maiden purifying miasma on its head.

At that time, it was difficult for Seiichirou to launch the plan on his own, so he asked my father to act as the originator of the idea. The plan worked great, so my father was elevated to the rank of count for his contribution.

So yeah, Sei is basically the savior of the entire kingdom and my family. Even though he doesn't look like it.

Oh yeah, that's right. I was assigned to monitor him for two reasons: because we work at the same place, and because I would never betray the royal family. Why would I never betray the royal family? Because I'm the illegitimate child of the king and a woman who served at the royal palace, whose father was a baronet. Although the royal family has more or less acknowledged my existence, I can never be formally connected to the royal family because of my mother's status, so I was adopted out to Count Blanc, a man the king trusts very much. So I do have royal blood, but I was brought up to live as a retainer so that I would never desire the throne. Oh—but my adoptive father and adoptive mother are very kind, and my adoptive older brother and older sister have doted on me as if I were their real brother, so I never had any hardships growing up. It's like, maybe I was lucky not having the pressure of being in the royal family growing up? Or something like that.

Well, because of that, I didn't really have much to do other than getting invited as a retainer to official ceremonies and things like that. There was a sense of affirmation when I was given the duty of being Sei's monitor.

In the end, although Sei held some resentment toward the kingdom (he seemed to be the most frustrated about no one ever apologizing to him after he had been summoned here against his will), because of his supremely efficiency-oriented thinking, he never once considered treachery or anything like that, and ultimately he accomplished something incredibly beneficial for the kingdom. And we all lived happily ever after. Or so I thought.

"But they said they wanted me to keep submitting reports! Why? It's such a pain!" I said, throwing myself onto the sofa.

"It's your duty," my father chided, grinning. "Make sure you do it well."

"You say it's my duty, but Sei's doing really amazing things for the kingdom, so there's no *need* for me to monitor him."

Sei didn't have any powers, and the kingdom had abandoned him without even giving him a proper medical checkup, so it was weird that they were making me keep an eye on him. Because they had left him to his own devices, Sei had almost died from magic-sickness after magicule poisoning.

"Try to understand how the king feels—he wants to connect with you,

regardless of what form it takes.”

Sure, my adoptive father could say that, but as someone who had been raised in an adoptive household for as long as I could remember, it didn’t make sense to me at all that the king wanted some kind of father-son connection. Besides, most of that “connection” consisted of these annoying tasks, so I honestly wished he would just give it up. I didn’t say any of that, of course, but my adoptive father seemed to understand anyway—he smiled again.

I sighed and glared at the instructions I had thrown onto my desk.

At this point, the only thing there is to report about Sei is that he worked hard at his job yet again today, I thought.

Unexpectedly, however, the day after I returned to the royal capital from my trip home, Sei was urgently called to see the prime minister. It wasn’t the first time this had happened. Sei had wedged himself into the heart of several of the kingdom’s important projects, after all. The prime minister had summoned him several times about that stuff before. But out of consideration for the fact that Sei didn’t like having his schedule thrown off, the prime minister had begun to approach Sei with the invitations several days in advance. This time, though, they only gave him one day of advance warning, so it seemed urgent. Most telling of all was how Sei’s eyebrows were furrowed when he returned from the meeting. Assuming he might have been given a difficult order, I immediately rushed over to him and started asking questions.

Activity Report No. 16

It’s been decided that Sei will go to the church on temporary assignment. He will be there for one month to retrieve their income and expenditure report.

Also, it’s very sudden; it starts tomorrow, so I’ve been assigned a lot of work. To be honest, it’s going to be tough, so it seems like it will be even tougher for Sei.

I don’t understand how things wound up this way, but I’m worried that Sei’s got too much to do. But then again, Sei seems the most alive when he’s working.

I was surprised about Sei’s sudden transfer to the church, and I was sure that

Sei had too much work on his plate, but just as I was wondering what could be done about it if Sei himself had accepted the job, I saw him being dragged off by Commander Indolark at the end of the lunch break. I immediately guessed that it was to protest that Sei was being forced to work too much, but afterward, Sei came back and uneventfully continued the process of transferring his work over to us, so I figured that this job might be something not even Commander Indolark could overturn.

If not even Commander Indolark could stop it, then maybe Sei's assignment to the church was more than just an investigation. After all, being the prime minister's favorite and being constantly orbited by the commander of the Third Royal Order was probably a bad position for him to be in. Sei seemed to have been a little concerned about that as well, but he's pretty obtuse when it comes to aristocrats and politics... Or, to be exact, he'd rather think about work than that kind of stuff.

The way Commander Indolark was so concerned about Sei was clearly abnormal, and he had forced Sei to live with him, so it wasn't exactly a situation they could talk their way out of. Even if everyone else seemed to want to boil it down to "the commander of the Third Royal Order protecting the otherworlder," I wished they would see it for what it was. The commander wasn't trying to hide it, after all. He glared at me just for giving Sei some clothes, you know?

Commander Indolark's feelings were obvious, but how did Sei feel? I had tried probing the matter, but whenever I brought it up to Sei, he would turn off any emotion and just start doing more work, so it seemed to be a subject he didn't want mentioned. But Sei's physical condition was precarious at best, and his life would honestly be in danger if he were to separate from Commander Indolark, so I didn't think Sei could blatantly reject him, either. I got the sense that Sei liked to think of himself as tough and cold, but I always thought he should rely on the commander more, at least.

Plus, since Sei had started living with Commander Indolark, his complexion was looking better—perhaps because his health was being managed at home now, too. And it might have just been my imagination, but I felt like the resting expression on his face had softened a little as well, though I couldn't say for

sure.

Well, for now, I just had to do the work that was piling up in Sei's absence. The instructions were written so densely that I actually gasped when I saw them, but if Sei wasn't going to be here for a month, I would probably have plenty of time.

Or so I thought.

"When did I say that was your only task?"

It had been three days since Sei had left for his temporary assignment at the church... I had just been having a lively chat that morning with my senior in the Accounting Department about going out for drinks when a cold voice had rung out, and it felt like I had been doused in cold water. When I turned toward the voice, I saw someone who wasn't supposed to be in the office standing there with eyes as lifeless as ever. It was Sei.

"S-S-Sei?! What are you doing here?! Aren't you on assignment at the church?!" I asked in a panic, thinking that perhaps his assignment had ended prematurely.

"I have today off."

I felt relieved, but only for a second. If it was his day off, why was he here?

"So why are you here?!"

"To see if you were slacking off."

"Eep!"

I genuinely forgot how to breathe for a moment, but then Sei told me in a totally monotone voice that he was kidding. Sei's jokes needed to come with a health warning!

Sei worked incredibly diligently after that, and when we went to the dining hall during our lunch break, he asked me about the church.

"Norbert, have you ever been to church?"

"Ha-ha-ha! What are you talking about, Sei?! Of course I have!"

It was unthinkable that anyone leading a normal life *wouldn't* have gone to

church. Besides, I was an aristocrat, so didn't that go without saying? I laughed, but Sei looked puzzled. *Huh? Are there no churches in the world Sei is from, maybe?* But when I asked him, he said there were.

In the country Sei was from, there were many different religions, and people were free to choose between them. Well, religion wasn't mandatory in our kingdom, either, but since the royal family supported the Abran religion and the divine revelation of the Holy Maiden came through the Abran religion, naturally most people chose that.

Consequently, there were Abran churches in almost every town and village in the kingdom, and because they were under state management, it was standard for baptisms and coming-of-age ceremonies to be held in those churches, too, which was how the Abran religion had even spread all the way to villages in areas that did not suffer much damage from the miasma. Landed aristocratic families like mine naturally supported the churches in our territories.

"I see."

Sei looked down, nodding vaguely. It looked like a lot of things were going through his mind.

"Plus, most of the official church positions are filled by aristocrats."

"What? Really?"

"Yep. Pretty much the only people who can serve the church are those raised in the relief house or people with a lot of magic power. Many aristocrats have a lot of magic power, so it inevitably shakes out that way."

Huh? Is this also news to him? No way—Sei is naturally weak to magic power and magicules, so wouldn't it be dangerous if he didn't know that? I thought that was the main reason why Commander Indolark got so angry and protested so much?

I looked at Sei's face again closely. His complexion looked...well, not great, but normal. The dark circles under his eyes also looked like they always did—bad, I mean. His face always looked so unhealthy that it was hard to see any difference. But he was eating fine and, compared to when he'd first got here, the amount he ate had increased, likely because he had developed some

tolerance to magicules, so maybe he would be okay? Well, he had his exclusive healing magician Commander Indolark by his side, so he probably would be.

“But wait—how can you come to the dining hall like normal? Wouldn’t it be bad if you ran into Commander Indolark?”

Even though the overprotective Commander Indolark who prioritized Sei’s health above all else would never have allowed Sei to come into work on his day off, Sei was using the dining hall brazenly.

“Aresh never comes to the dining hall on his own, so it’s okay,” Seiichirou replied with a smug look on his face.

Oh my god—he must be super scared of Commander Indolark!

I mean, he’s hiding the fact that he’s working from the person who manages his health?! He might not be okay, after all!

Activity Report No. 17

It’s been three days since Sei started his assignment at the church. With Sei’s instructions, work at the Accounting Department is progressing smoothly.

Sei has been going to the church using his work schedule from the Accounting Department, so today was his day off from having to go to the church. But for some reason, he came to work at the Accounting Department. I don’t really get why, but there were some tasks that only Sei could do, so we were all really grateful.

But if he continues to do this, I don’t know when Sei will be able to relax. Sei is a weird— I mean, an unusual person. He even works in secret. So I think he needs someone else to also watch over him.

When I asked him out for a drink to relax, he immediately refused.

I put down the pen with which I had been writing my report and lay down on my bed in the residence hall, waiting for the ink to dry.

Talking with Sei about the church today had brought back a few memories.

Everyone who lived in the kingdom was baptized when they turned six. As was common practice, when I turned six, I’d also participated in a baptism ceremony specifically for the children of nobles. Baptisms for the children of

aristocrats were held in the royal capital—in other words, at the church that Sei was currently visiting. It was a four-hour carriage ride there and back from my family's home to the royal capital, so that was the first time I'd been to the capital.

I had been so excited that I'd asked my much-older brother and sister over and over what the royal palace was like, and what the baptism would be like. Then I went with my father and mother to the royal capital and had my baptism.

It was there that I saw the king for the first time.

After a noble baptism, children would all go to the royal palace to hear a few words from the king. Not one child at a time, of course, but all together. Aristocratic children debuted in society at age eight, but the baptism ceremony was really the first time the children of aristocrats got to meet each other.

After being officially registered as a citizen for the first time through the baptism, I felt elated, as though I had joined the ranks of the adults, and I was incredibly excited about the spaciousness and opulence of the royal palace.

The first time I ever saw the king, I couldn't see him very well because he was far away, but I remember thinking that he had the same hair color as me. Afterward, we had some free time to spend at a standing party with buffet-style refreshments in a large reception hall. All the parents were busy talking with each other, so I ate snacks and played with the other children I had met. There were so many snacks I had never tried before at that point in my life, so I ate them with my friends, and we'd say things like "I wonder what this one is!" or "I know that one!" Of all the snacks, there was one baked pastry with a flaky dough and syrupy lucott inside. It was so delicious. I was absorbed in eating one when, suddenly, someone took it from me.

Shocked, I looked up and saw a slightly older boy with silver hair looking down at me.

"...You like this?" he asked.

He was clearly from a family of higher status than mine—plus he was older—and I couldn't tell him to give it back, so I just nodded. The silver-haired boy hummed, sounding bored, then bit into the baked sweet I had been eating.

“Ah!” I shouted without thinking.

“So sweet...,” the boy complained, not paying me any mind and finishing off the entire thing.

If you’re going to complain, you should have just given it back! I thought, but I couldn’t say that out loud.

As that had been happening, all the snacks were taken from the table. I felt gutted. In the end, that boy stared at me and then left without another word.

“Just who was that kid...?”

“That was the prince!” said the child of a viscount, who was with me.

The royal family had been standing so far away at the beginning of the party that it had been difficult for me to see them clearly, but it was then that I remembered there had been a young, silver-haired boy behind the king.

“I guess the prince is a piggy meanie.”

The words came out of my mouth before I could really think about them, but soon after, another pile of the same baked sweet was brought out to replace the empty plate, and I soon forgot about it.

That night, after we returned home, my father and mother told me who my real parents were. I was surprised, but my honest reaction was that of mild indifference.

Even though they told me I was really a child of the king and that the mean, silver-haired boy from that day was my older brother, it didn’t really sink in. I mean, I had only met them once, and I hadn’t even seen the king’s face clearly.

When I asked them if anything was going to change now that they’d told me, they said no, nothing would really be different.

My adoptive father and mother told me that I would always be their child, that I would not be reinstated into the royal family, and that I would simply serve as a retainer. *Oh, thank goodness!* I had thought before falling asleep like I always did. Those were the things I could remember.

Sei came to work again. He said it was a personal choice to work on his days off, but is that true? I want to rest on my days off.

Sei called me a “good subordinate”! It was the first time he’s told me something like that, and it made me super happy! We’re really getting along well... I was really touched.

After work, Sei went to the Sorcery Department, but after that His Highness the Prince and the commander of the Second Royal Order really inconvenienced him by wasting his time. I wish they wouldn’t add to Sei’s already overflowing workload.

Sei next came to the Accounting Department three days later. Naturally, it was a day he was supposed to have off. It seemed as though Sei didn’t intend to ever rest, so I thought that maybe I should rat him out to Commander Indolark before he went on the expedition, but it seemed Sei was visiting today to deliver a report to His Excellency the Prime Minister. However, he worked at the Accounting Department feverishly until the time of his appointment, and he worked again after he got back from the appointment.

I managed to reach a convenient stopping point in the fresh stack of documents that had piled up, but Sei still hadn’t returned from his errand to collect a report from the commander of the Second Royal Order. I figured I shouldn’t abandon Sei, who had showed up on his day off, so I decided to look for him.

The commanders’ offices were in the wing of the palace closest to the knights’ training grounds, so they were surprisingly far away.

As I walked along a corridor that was much less crowded than the wing for civil officials, I looked around and saw a brown cloak poking out from behind a pillar. I also caught a glimpse of a green cloak on the opposite side of the pillar, so I waved and called out Sei’s name helpfully, as I assumed that he had been detained by Commander Makovska of the Second Royal Order.

“Hey, Sei! Did you get the Second Royal Order’s budget report? You’ve been gone for a while, so I came to get you! I found the documents you asked me for this morning, too, but I left them on your desk.”

I figured that if Commander Makovska knew Sei also had work to do, he

would probably let him go. *I did a good job, huh?* I thought proudly, looking at Sei. Sei looked back with a deathly pale face and eyes that shot daggers at me. Huh? Why was he doing that?

“Oh...so you’ve been in the Accounting Department all morning...”

Father... I saw the devil emerge from behind the pillar!

Activity Report No. 19

What did Sei get up to today? He gave a progress report to His Excellency the Prime Minister. However, in the hours he wasn’t doing that, he was working in the Accounting Department, like he always does.

Then Commander Indolark finally found out about this. It was partly my fault, but I think Sei, who knew that Commander Indolark would get angry about it but still came to work, is also at fault.

Commander Indolark took Sei to the knights’ training grounds, and Sei didn’t return to the Accounting Department after that. I took the Second Royal Order’s budget report Sei had collected back to the Accounting Department.

The day of the miasma purification expedition had finally arrived. If everything went well, the current cycle of miasma would be purified. Everyone had high hopes.

But I was more worried about whether Sei would act recklessly in Commander Indolark’s absence. The church was filled with magic power thanks to all the barriers, so it was a dangerous place for someone like Sei, who got magic-sickness. Come to think of it, there was a magic crystal in the church with high magicule purity. Sei would probably collapse if he went near something like that.

I wonder if he’ll be okay...

From what Sei had told me, ever since the incident when the knights had attacked him, Commander Indolark had been putting barriers over him. You couldn’t really call something like that “overprotective”... Considering Sei’s constitution, his frailty, and his contributions to the kingdom, I actually thought it was something the kingdom needed to be doing for him. I was sure that Commander Indolark doted on Sei, though.

Commander Indolark would be away on the expedition for a while. Because he had discovered that Sei was working on his days off, he had probably pieced together that Sei was more tired from working than expected, so I figured the commander was taking appropriate measures.

But things would probably be okay, since Sei's assignment at the church was going to end before the expedition was over.

How naive I was to think that! I was so naive. I didn't really know Sei at all.

"What? Sei's not coming back? Why not?!"

Because even after the scheduled one-month period, Sei did not return to the Accounting Department.

"Apparently the accounting manager has been out with the bishop, so the main purpose of the investigation—the income and expenditure report—isn't finished yet," answered Helmut, director of the Accounting Department, with a troubled look on his face.

Helmut was a nice boss, but now that Sei had seized nearly all the real power in the Accounting Department, he hadn't had much of a presence in the department lately.

"What? The deadline for the income and expenditure report was quite a while ago, wasn't it? He didn't do it at all?"

"Well, about that... The Holy Maiden was initially supposed to go to the church, but she was won over by the royal palace, right? Recently, she's started going to the church during the daytime, and then various unforeseen things piled up, and he didn't get around to it, apparently."

Huh? But they could surely have predicted those things would come along, not to mention that the church had originally planned to take her in anyway, so I didn't think it should have increased their workload. Besides, the royal palace had informed them they were going to send someone for an inspection, and yet the bishop had left? And he'd brought the accounting manager with him?

Yikes! Something smelled fishy.

That reminded me... Sei didn't know about the relationship between the royal

capital defense barrier and the church, did he? That was an arrangement between the royal family and the church, after all.

When Sei had said the other day that he didn't know much about the church or politics, he hadn't brought up the sacred relic then, either.

I had a feeling Sei was going to ask me to generate an exact number for the amount of magic power that was supplied.

Activity Report No. 20

Sei did not come back from the church, even after everyone set out for the miasma purification expedition.

Commander Indolark, who is in charge of Sei's health, is absent, so I'm worried about Sei's well-being. Apparently he isn't returning to the Accounting Department even though we're beyond the agreed-upon one-month period because of some problem on the church's end. Even though the royal palace informed them that the investigation would be taking place, apparently the people in charge were absent. Was the kingdom always looked down upon like this before Sei's arrival?

If the purpose of this investigation is to clarify the church's income and expenditures, then I think I should tell Sei about the you-know-what.

The day after I submitted my report, Helmut summoned me.

"This is for you..."

He handed me a letter with a gold wax seal.

Well! A reply!

When I opened the letter alone in an empty room, I was greeted by very methodical writing that I had never seen before.

Dear Norbert Blanc,

Your reports are always very useful.

Regarding your report from the other day, considering the relationship between the royal family and the church, I cannot say that I agree with your conclusion.

However, the prime minister has already submitted a formal complaint regarding the absence of the people in charge at the church, so the matter will probably be resolved soon.

Please continue your diligent work.

There was no name attached, but it was a handwritten letter from the king. It was the first time I had received such a thing.

“Ha-ha-ha! What in the world is this?”

I had always thought that there was no familial affection between us at all, but I was surprised to find that the letter actually made me happy.

“Apart from its contents.”

I understood the king’s opinion, but look... I’m a bit of a talker, and sometimes things just slip out. It’s not like I can stop the inevitable, right?

Activity Report No. 21

Thank you very much for your kind words the other day, Your Majesty. I shall continue to work hard as your retainer.

First, I’d like to offer my congratulations on the successful completion of the purification expedition.

However, I heard that the Third Royal Order didn’t return, and that instead, they immediately went on to hunt magical beasts. Sei is still working without any rest. Commander Indolark is the only one who can stop Sei, and Commander Indolark is also the one person who can heal Sei, so I’m very worried.

The purification had been successfully completed, and all of the miasma had disappeared.

The royal capital was bustling with people shouting, “Long live the Holy Maiden!” but the Third Royal Order, the most elite unit in the kingdom, was nowhere to be seen. Magical beasts had been spotted in the vicinity of the Demon Forest, so the Third Royal Order had traveled there to take them down.

I knew that hunting magical beasts was the main job of the Third Royal Order, but I still thought, *Come on! What are you doing, Commander Indolark?! Sei*

was working in such a dangerous place (even though it was only dangerous for Sei) without resting at all (although Sei was doing so voluntarily), and the commander wasn't there by his side! Wasn't he worried about him?!

No—the commander was obviously worried. I knew that. But I couldn't stop Sei, so all I could do was pray that Commander Indolark would come back soon.

Also, Sei was using his day off to work at the Accounting Department again.

We were on lunch break, so I was going to invite Sei, who had left to do something at the Sorcery Department, to have lunch in the dining hall. When I was out looking for him, I stumbled across him, but he was about to be taken away by Commander Makovska and the prince!

This is like déjà vu, right? There was a scene like this just the other day, right?

Unlike last time, however, I was carried off with him. I made up my mind to start looking at my surroundings carefully before I called out to Sei from then on.

We were brought to the reception room of the prince's private quarters and were served snacks and tea. *Oh! These are the ones with Lucott inside.* The tea was my favorite brand, too. I wondered how they'd found out about this kind of stuff, but the only person I could talk to about it was Sei, so for now I just grabbed a sweet.

Even though Sei was sitting before the silver-haired prince, who was now all grown-up, he didn't seem intimidated. In fact, he seemed more relaxed than usual. *Sei, this guy is kinda the first in line for the throne, you know?*

But all that came out of the first-in-line-for-the-throne's mouth were questions about the Holy Maiden—and private matters, at that—so many that I understood why Sei wasn't bothering to hide his annoyance. Just as I came to that realization, I suddenly saw a glint in Sei's dull eyes. And, well, it may just be a metaphor, but it really looked like Sei had spotted prey...

"Sei...? Are you up to no good...?"

Stubbornly ignoring me, Sei suddenly launched into a plan for creating an educational institution for orphaned children and commoners, all organized by the Holy Maiden. *What—this guy's increasing his workload again?! Does he not*

know the concept of overwork?!

“Just what I’d expect from Yua! What a wonderful idea!”

“Of course Her Holiness would think of this! She’s not just thinking of the poor children, but of the whole kingdom...!”

The prince and the commander were deeply impressed, not doubting in the slightest the validity of what Sei had said. But the Holy Maiden could never have come up with such a multifaceted and detailed proposal.

“Did the Holy Maiden really come up with that? That flawless reasoning sounds a lot like something you—”

But before I could finish, Sei crammed a sweet into my mouth without even glancing my way, shutting me up. Sei was usually mature, but occasionally, like now, he would resort to force.

“...?! What are you...?”

Whoops. Commander Makovska, guard of the royal family, had gotten angry.

“He said he wanted my helping of tea cakes, so I gave it to him.”

Of course Sei would say that. I don’t think there’s anyone who can do a better job of taking an obviously weird situation and convincing other people that it’s nothing.

As I had these thoughts, I chewed on the sweet that had been crammed into my mouth, filling my cheeks.

Oh, this one’s good, too! There’s a little bit of sour sweetness from the beil...

“But if Yua had an idea like that, she should have told me instead of such a lowly person like you...”

“She was probably meaning to tell you once the plan had been finalized, Your Highness. But if you, in all your wisdom, were to realize her plan first and make her wish come true by offering support...”

“...!!”

Sei was coaxing the prince even more with lip service.

“That’s right! That’s right!! I was just thinking the same thing, for real! Yua

and I are so like-minded!”

The prince had gotten so excited, he had started talking very informally.

“Exactly. Oh, and if you put forward your personal funds to support her, instead of the kingdom’s treasury, it would further emphasize that it was your own idea and seem much more manly. That’s how it was in our world.”

“Oh! Really?! Well, that’s exactly what I was going to do! I’m going to go talk to Yua right now!”

After the prince rushed out in a hurry, the knights of the Second Royal Order quickly followed him.

“...Sei, that was very well put, but do you intend to carry out your plans using the prince’s personal funds, not the kingdom’s budget...?”

“A lot of the kingdom’s budget is already being used at the moment, mostly on the miasma barrier. I’ve also increased the budget for the Sorcery Department, so while we’re finally on track to make up for the Holy Maiden’s budget embezzlement, we don’t have much extra.”

Had we reached a point where the finances of the Romany Kingdom couldn’t function without Sei? Would the kingdom be okay?

Now that the prince was gone, we were quickly dismissed. I stepped out on my own first and Sei had a little chat with Commander Makovska, but when Sei left, he was carrying a package, which he tossed to me. I could tell from the way the package rustled and how light it was that more of the sweets we’d been served were inside.

“Gracious, Sei! After all, this is, in a fashion, an item bestowed upon us by His Highness!” I said with a smile.

Sei looked at me with a slightly surprised face.

“You think nothing of it?”

I had been adopted out, the son of the king and a lowly but beloved mistress, and my biological older brother stood before everyone as first in line to the throne.

“If I’m forced to admit it, I guess my relatives do have a tendency of luring me

with food.”

“...? There have been other times besides this?”

“There have, there have.”

Ever since that first meeting all those years ago, pasivale had been served at every dinner party. I was also given these sweets every time I saw the prince, even though I had long since grown up.

“Well, it happens a lot with nobility.”

“Really?” asked Seiichirou. “That reminds me, Norbert—you’ve been baptized, haven’t you? Have you seen the sacred relic?”

“Oh, the sacred relic. Yeah, I have. That statue with the magic crystal inside, right?”

Apparently, Sei knew about the existence of the sacred relic, too.

“That statue—” Sei started to say, as if he were sounding me out.

“It absorbs magic power, right?” I readily answered.

“Is that common knowledge?”

“Oops! Oh, darn, that was a secret.”

“Hey!”

Sei’s eyebrows were furrowed. I smiled sheepishly.

“Well, since it’s you, it’s fine, right?”

I’d been careless. But I couldn’t unsay what had already been said, right?

And Sei would make good use of the information, right?

After letting out a small sigh, Sei directed us to another location, so I obediently followed him.

Activity Report No. 22

Sei began talking about how they will soon be setting up an educational institution at the church for orphans and commoners.

The Holy Maiden is at the heart of the project, and His Highness Prince Yurius

plans to support her as well.

I think His Excellency the Prime Minister will give you more details, but from what I've heard, it sounds like a seamless plan that's very typical of Sei, so I'm sure it will progress without any problems.

But to be honest, Sei has too much on his plate. Though Sei says the Holy Maiden and the prince will be handling the educational institution, Sei is taking on all the work behind the scenes. I ask that you please take immediate action.

I wrote a report focusing on Sei's habit of overworking, without mentioning the royal capital defense barrier.

I was sure the higher-ups had probably already realized how important Sei was by now, but if no one intervened, Sei was absolutely going to work himself to death. They needed to take his responsibilities away by force, but that was a next-to-impossible undertaking. Unless they hurried, Sei would really be in trouble.

And my bad premonition was right on target.

"Sei's in the hospital?!"

Helmut gave me the shocking news as soon as I got to work, and I immediately tried to run out of the room, but apparently Sei hadn't regained consciousness yet.

But Commander Indolark had made it just in time and had performed medical treatment, so the only thing left was to wait for Sei's strength to recover.

"Th-thank goodness..."

There was truly no telling what Sei would get up to if left alone, and he was so weak that he could die the second you took your eyes off him. I thought about how I hadn't been able to save Sei again, even though we were so close, and I sunk to the floor, relieved that Sei was safe for now and that Commander Indolark had returned.

Now that Commander Indolark was here, I could have peace of mind.

I was given permission to visit Sei the next day. Well, actually, it was a message from someone at the medical office, telling me that Sei himself had

urged me to bring him work documents. Sei had almost died! What was he talking about?!

Despite my frustration, I was happy that Sei was conscious. When I went to visit him, I gave him get-well gifts from everyone in the department.

“They wanted me to tell you to get well soon because they want you to come back!”

Sei never talked very much to the others in the Accounting Department, and he seemed to think they didn’t like him, but I didn’t think that was true. I mean, a boss who can work that hard is obviously cool!

“Yes, yes, that’s fine, just hurry and give me those documents I asked for.”

...Yeah, I guess it’s best to work in moderation, after all.

Sei’s face was pale, but he was sitting up straight and his speech was just as forceful as ever. He said he would be discharged the day after tomorrow.

I heard this secondhand, but apparently Sei was hospitalized because of a spontaneous outburst of magic power during a magic power offering.

He had become intoxicated from the magic of a barrier the priest had put up to protect him, to be exact.

I heard the outburst had come from an orphan who lived at the church, but members of the church were supposed to attend and direct the ritual of offering magic power for children who couldn’t control theirs very well yet.

Activity Report No. 23

Sei has been hospitalized. I regret that I have to submit a report like this again, and that I wasn’t able to protect Sei myself.

I heard that this time, it was because of a failure during the offering of magic power by the children of the relief house, but I think that’s almost impossible. Surely it’s an issue with the clergyman directing the ritual. Please investigate this.

As soon as Sei was discharged from the medical office, he came back to the Accounting Department!

Well, it hadn't been too long of an absence because Sei had been coming to work twice a week, but still, when I walked into the Accounting Department, I was so happy to see Sei already hard at work! *Huh, I came to work late? Nuh-uh, you just came too early, Sei!*

However, Commander Indolark came around for his regular lunchtime pickup.

"Seiichirou! The Fire hour started ages ago! What happened to lunch? Hurry up!"

Commander Indolark appeared with loud footsteps, projecting his voice.

The few people who had already finished lunch and were relaxing; myself, who had been waiting for Sei to wrap things up; and Sei, who had been concentrating on his work, all looked up at him.

"Seiichirou, you heard the midday bell, didn't you? Then what are you doing?"

Oh, that's right... I remembered that now that Commander Indolark was back, we probably wouldn't be able to have lunch together like when Sei had been working on his days off. We would go back to that same, familiar routine...or so I thought.

"Sorry, I got too wrapped up in catching up on work. Let's go, Aresh."

"...?!"

Why was he being this familiar with Aresh?! How was Sei, a man who always armed himself with courtesy to build up walls and create space between himself and other people, being this familiar with Commander Indolark, a commander of knights and the son of a marquess family?!

Whoa! You did it! You totally did it!

"I-in that case, I'm going out to eat today!"

I was definitely going to be a third wheel (even though I had been one for a while now), so I tried to dash out, but Sei grabbed me by the collar.

"What are you talking about? You're coming, too."

Why can't Sei read the room?! His intuition is crazy good when it comes to work, so what is it? Is he a dunce? Come on, I don't want to be dragged into

this!

Then, as soon as we got to the dining hall...

“May I join you as well?”

That was the voice of yet another person who was not supposed to be in a place like this.

I looked up and saw rose-blond hair and a blue cloak.

Camile Karvada, the most powerful person in the Romany Kingdom’s judicial system, was smiling at us.

“Oooh, here we go again...”

This was going to be just as traumatic as the stomachache-inducing lunch with the Holy Maiden, wasn’t it? I wanted absolutely nothing to do with this!

The others in the dining hall were watching us from a distance, as if there was a barrier around us, and there was no one within a radius of fifteen feet around us. I wished I could go join those keeping their distance.

“It seems the church’s income and expenditure report was correct and complete.”

“Yes...as a written report.”

“I also received your report about the matter you mentioned before. Thank you for all your hard work.”

That’s probably a report about embezzlement, I thought, filling my cheeks with pasivale.

“The miasma has finally been suppressed, and I would certainly like for everything to settle down, but I can’t let the current situation continue unchecked, either. And you mentioned something about magic power, didn’t you? That incident could be useful, too, right?”

I could tell that the prime minister was asking Sei to help him put a leash around the church’s neck. But I had already asked the king not to increase Sei’s workload!

“Please forgive me. Religious institutions are difficult to deal with in many

ways. You're asking me to make political moves, but I can't," said Seiichirou, making a show of shrugging his shoulders as if to say, "It's outside of my jurisdiction."

Thank god! Sei actually can turn down a job! I thought, impressed. But that feeling was short-lived.

"I've checked with the aristocrats who were listed in the worship book as not having donated money, compared the names against last year's Accounting Department documents, and put together a summary with concrete figures, which I'll present to you later. I'm sure this will distress the aristocrats whose generous donations were underestimated or the ones whose names were omitted, so would you please discuss that matter with the Legal Department? Also, the Sorcery Department is currently developing a tool which can quantify the magic power generated from the special prayer along with the magic power needed for the barrier, so that will be prepared and submitted to you shortly. Additionally, we are in the process of confirming some facts with vendors that chiefly utilize magic tools, so I should be able to hand that over to you as soon as it's finished."

You're doing a buttload of work!

You're not turning him down at all! In fact, you were doing work in advance!

Why would someone in the hospital work?! I'm begging you to rest!!

I had facilitated quite a few things for members of the Sorcery Department regarding the defense barrier of the royal capital, as Sei had told me to do, but they'd worked too fast!

"Right, that's great! You really are incredible, Seiichirou. If you ever get tired of that black beast over there, do give me a shout."

When the prime minister said that in a cajoling tone I'd never heard before, and with a smile that was very unlike him, I thought my eyes were going to pop out of my head. Then, when I saw the black aura rising from the strongest commander in the Romany Kingdom, I could practically hear my bones rattle with fear.

"Funny joke," said Sei, trying to cut the conversation short.

But the prime minister's gaze remained firm.

In an unexpectedly serious tone, he continued, capturing Sei's undivided attention:

"I think it's because I like your composure and your objective approach to work, but you're really on board this time, aren't you?"

Honestly, it was obvious that Sei didn't work for the sake of the kingdom in the slightest.

However, he would spare no effort if it meant making his own job easier or returning to his home world.

But the current issue with the church didn't have anything to do with either of those goals Sei was so obsessive about.

"That's right," said Seiichirou. "My life was intentionally targeted, so I want to follow this through to the end."

My heart fell. The spontaneous discharge of magic power had been no accident after all.

Before I could express any of the feelings that had welled up from the pit of my stomach, though, the black beast sitting diagonally across from me exploded.

Activity Report No. 24

The current situation involves both the embezzlement of donations and magic power from the church. The heretic's goal was to cause the decline of the Abran religion.

I agree with what the priest said—Abran brought Sei here through the summoning, and he's a disciple whose present impact on the kingdom is immeasurable. I've said it many times before, but we should be protecting him more heavily.

I also believe that this affair came about partly because the royal family and the church have kept the defense barrier of the royal capital a secret. If Sei had never provided us with those detailed numbers, the people's magic power would have been wasted, or worse, it would have been used to harm the

kingdom.

I think we should clearly present information about our national resources. Please consider this.

Oh, and to reduce Sei's workload, I'll be teaching an arithmetic lesson once a week at the church classroom. I'm not really of much use in the Accounting Department, but I'm hoping I can reduce Sei's responsibilities a little.

I'll also do my best for the children who will carry the kingdom's torch in future generations.

"All right!"

I put the report I had just finished inside an envelope.

After that lunch meeting, the prime minister, the commander, the prince, and even the Holy Maiden had gotten involved in Sei's plan, and Sei had successfully exposed the heretic who had committed crimes in the church and had tried to take Sei's life.

The heretic's goals had been to pocket the magic power that had been offered, use it for advancing his own religion, and to eliminate the two people who had been summoned through the Abran ritual summoning—the Holy Maiden and Sei. In other words, Sei had been voluntarily going right into the heart of enemy territory. *What an order to give him, Prime Minister!* I thought, but if Sei hadn't gone, the heretic would certainly have targeted the Holy Maiden, and I'm not sure she would have made it out unscathed.

Apparently the Holy Maiden had contained the explosive magic tool with her holy powers, though.

"Well, Helmut, I'm off."

"Right, take care."

I saw Sei standing there, holding a pile of documents. I quickly got to my feet as well.

"O-oh! W-we're leaving already?! Hold on!"

"Isn't it a basic rule to leave with plenty of time before an appointment? Hurry up."

Sei wasn't waiting for me at all. I haphazardly scooped up my scattered papers and chased after him.

"Oh, it's Mr. Kondo and Norbert! Hello."

"Sigma."

Out in the corridor, we bumped into Sigma, a young boy from town who had been an apprentice woodworker when Sei had met him the first time he'd ventured into town. The boy looked sharper now, in his neat shirt and pants.

"Ist summoned you here again today?" asked Seiichirou.

"Yes. He said he wanted to do lots of experiments while we still had a ton of magic power."

"Don't overdo it, okay? I'm heading to the private school now. Would you like to come with us?"

The kingdom had recognized Sigma's contributions to the development of the magic tool he had cocreated with the Sorcery Department, which had made them a central player in the incident, after which Sigma had been given permission to visit the Royal Sorcery Department. But Sigma could only do simple reading and writing, and he had yet to enroll in formal schooling, so this was just the first step of many on his journey.

"Oh, Kondou, Norbert! Welcome," said the Holy Maiden with a smile as we arrived at the relief house.

"Yua."

"Yuri."

The prince had been frequenting the church classrooms that he and the Holy Maiden had set up under the guise of "inspections," and the two of them seemed to be getting along surprisingly well. I supposed that, for now, that was all well and good.

As I pondered this, watching the couple with some unease, I noticed that right next to me, someone was being recruited for something.

"Kondo...would you like to work directly under His Highness the Prince?"

“You’re joking.”

“No, I’m serious...”

Commander Makovska of the Second Royal Order, who had come as the prince’s guard, was fervently trying to persuade Sei to join them. Sei is just so incredible, you know, that he would do excellent work no matter where he goes.

As Sei and I prepared for our respective classes, a pretty boy with bright-green hair approached Sei. From the way he was dressed, I guessed he was a monk apprentice.

“...Aren’t you busy?” Selio muttered without making eye contact.

“I am busy. That’s why I’ve decided to hand off my weekly math class to my subordinate.”

“What?!”

After Sei called me over and I introduced myself, the boy pressed his mouth into a straight line and looked down.

“...Norbert, did you do something to him?”

“What?! No way, this is my first time meeting the kid! If something happened, you’re the one that did it, Sei! Or maybe he...”

He had obviously become attached to Sei and was going to miss him!

The boy asked in a faint voice if Sei wasn’t going to come anymore, and when Sei answered that he would occasionally come back, the boy smiled briefly before the grimace returned to his lips.

It’s so obvious...

But wait! He’s still going to work?!

“Sei, you really are popular wherever you go, huh?” I said honestly as we were having the final briefing for the class.

“Huh?” Sei asked, looking so dubious it was as if he were saying, “What are you talking about?”

Why do his powers of observation totally cease to exist when it comes to

anything outside of work?

It went without saying that Seiichirou was popular with Commander Indolark, but the prime minister was also trying to headhunt him (along with making moves on him romantically); that priest also had a crush on Sei, the “extraordinary disciple”; and the prince and Holy Maiden were totally wrapped around his finger, too.

If Sei ever got serious about it, he could totally take over the kingdom, couldn't he?

Oh—I haven't sealed my report yet, so I'll add a sentence to it later.

I really think Sei is a super amazing guy in so many ways.



Letters from Seiichirou



Dear Aresh Indolark,

Thank you for your letter.

Also, congratulations on the completion of the purification. I know this could not have happened without your great efforts and the efforts of the entire Third Royal Order.

I heard that you went to hunt magical beasts in the vicinity afterward. Even though you'll be replenishing your supplies at the neighboring village first, this will become a series of battles, so please take care to avoid becoming fatigued.

Now that the purification is complete, I'll be preparing to move forward with the barrier project on my end as well.

I await your safe return.

Sincerely yours.

Dear Aresh Indolark,

Thank you for your letter. However, since you are using the state's magic movement circle, I think you probably shouldn't send them quite so frequently.

I heard you're in the mountains, and that's it's colder there than in the royal capital. It didn't feel that cold when I accompanied the party on the first expedition, but I guess the temperature has dropped since as the seasons have changed. Even here at the royal capital, it has started to feel chilly in the mornings and evenings. Is there anything you feel like you need? I'll use your answer as a reference for the barrier facility accommodations.

My work has been going well. There haven't been any issues. The priest has been very kind to me, and the accounting manager has been very responsive in drawing up the report. There aren't any problems at all.

Please take care of yourself.

Sincerely yours.

Dear Aresh Indolark,

Thank you for your letter. I'm becoming acquaintances with the envoy from the royal palace, and it's incredibly awkward. I will follow your lectures to the letter, even if you don't send them every day.

I saw the original report regarding the details of the hunt, but how are you doing? You're having battles one after the other. Are you tired? I know it's difficult in your position as commander, but please try to make sure you get enough rest.

I met Shiraishi when she came back to the church the other day, and she told me about your successes. I heard these magical beasts are of a large and ferocious species, aren't they? Again, please be careful.

Afterward, Shiraishi and I talked about the educational institution we're going to open in the church. At Shiraishi's suggestion, we are planning to provide a basic education to the children of the relief house and the children from town who can't go to formal school. Shiraishi was the main person who came up with this plan, so I'm just going to help her. If the level of education of the citizens improves, then the quality of the next generation's civil officials will also improve.

But for now, I await your safe return.

Sincerely yours.

Dear Aresh Indolark,

Thank you for your letter. The envoy from the royal palace has seemed annoyed up until yesterday, but today he just seems resigned. As I've written many times, there's no need for you to send me letters every day.

You've warned me again and again, so I'm being careful with my health. Everyone at the house is taking wonderful care of me, so I'm working and doing well.

The other day, I had the chance to go to the flower garden inside the church. Apparently, it was made by the Holy Maiden from two generations ago. There were a few flowers which were a little different in color than the flowers of my home world, which was very interesting. Flowers certainly heal people's hearts in any world, don't they?

I hope you have something in which you can find healing, Aresh. Please take care of yourself.

I await your return.

Sincerely yours.

Dear Aresh Indolark,

Thank you for your letter.

Regarding the private school at the church I wrote about the other day, it appears likely that we will receive support from the crown prince. Actually, if the plan were to be launched by the crown prince and the Holy Maiden, we would be more likely to get support from nobles, and we would probably receive a positive response from citizens, too. It's such a huge help that the prince is so enthusiastic about the plan.

Today is the seventh day since you went out on the hunt, but there's still no end date in sight, is there? I heard that you're expanding the scope of the mission to hunt down other magical beasts, but even if you don't get rid of all of them, knights will go back to the Demon Forest several times during the construction of the barrier facility, so wouldn't it be good enough to just stave off any immediate danger?

I don't know much about magic power, but Valtom and Ist have told me that it takes some time to recover. You've already used your magic power as a guard in the expedition and when you put a barrier on me before that, so I'm wondering whether that has affected your health. I'm a little worried.

From the bottom of my heart, I await your speedy return.

Sincerely yours.

Afterword

I'd like to thank everyone who has picked up this story, whether you're reading it online or in print. I just can't believe this is the second volume!

This was only possible thanks to everyone who bought the previous one. Thank you so much.

I'm very sorry that my slow writing pace has kept you all waiting for so long.

In the first volume, we were worried that Seiichirou's emotions might be frozen and unyielding, but in this volume, he seems to have become a bit more human, hasn't he? He is just as much of a workaholic as ever, though.

Previously, Seiichirou was in a constant state of anxiety at the precariousness of his own position, having been suddenly transported into another world, but thanks to his hard work, he has established his position and has realized that he has some people on his side. Even his facial expressions have softened considerably. Aresh's devotion and love were also partially responsible for this.

When it comes to Aresh, I've been told that he barely made any appearances in the first volume, and in the second volume...I'm sorry to say that it's more of the same.

There aren't many works in the Boys Love genre that can make the other romantic lead rejoice that it's been so long since they've reunited, but...I guess it's like that saying, isn't it? "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," or something. It's probably something like that. Seiichirou's primary focus is work, but it's not like he's forgetful.

A manga adaptation of this story has also begun to be published on the internet.

I was just as incredulous about that development, too. When I heard about it from my editor, I remember thinking, *What in the world is he talking about?* as I replied with something like, “Oh, right.” My editor probably thought, *What’s this person’s problem?*

The artist, Kazuki Irodori, draws each chapter and illustration with so much care that I’m incredibly moved when I see them. The facial expressions that can’t be conveyed in the novel are also mesmerizing, so if any of you haven’t read it, please, *please* do!

In the beginning, when Aresh and Seiichirou aren’t involved with each other at all, it’s so exciting to see their expressions when they look at each other.

It’s also fun to see depictions of characters who don’t appear in the novel’s illustrations.

Speaking of illustrations, I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to Kikka Ohashi, who drew the illustrations for the second volume of this work as well.

It was a dream come true to once again be able to enjoy Kikka Ohashi’s depictions of the characters, so subtle and full of personality.

The new characters in the second volume, Siegvold and Selio, were also fantastic—they were just as I had imagined them.

Siegvold’s sense of seriousness and good breeding came out so clearly. And the priest clothes are kind of sexy, aren’t they?!

Plus, the lovey-dovey picture everyone was so eagerly awaiting is incredible. It was a little reward.

Finally, for all the hard work they have put into the publication and launching of this book, I would like to thank KADOKAWA; my editor, Ohashi; everyone involved in binding and proofing the book; the printing offices; the bookstores; and all of you.

Let’s meet again if we have the chance.

Respectfully yours, Yatsuki Wakatsu

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