



4

KABEDONDAIKOU

ILL. YUNOHITO

Fake  
SAINT  
of the YEAR

You Wanted the  
**Perfect Saint?**  
Too Bad!





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# Prologue

I was falling.

I felt myself plunge down deeper and deeper, as though I were being sucked in by the darkness. At the same time, my consciousness became increasingly harder to maintain.

When I'd died for the first time, I hadn't been aware of it. I'd passed out, and when I'd woken up, I'd found myself in another world. This was my first time experiencing death for real. *Then again, I suppose death is usually a first.*

The bog-like darkness that had engulfed me was so deep that I couldn't hear the voices of the people around me any longer. Alone, surrounded by the silence, I looked back on my life.

For some reason I couldn't explain, I'd been reincarnated in the world of my favorite dating sim, *Kuon no Sanka ~Fiore caduto eterna~*, as the one character I despised more than anything: Ellize, the fake saint.

I'd decided to approach things from a glass-half-full kind of perspective, so I'd taken it as an opportunity to change the tragic ending of the story. From there on out...a bunch of things had happened. Truly, my life as Ellize had been an eventful one. I'd faced a ton of unexpected incidents, but I'd done my best to handle them as well as I could.

I'd discovered that I hadn't been fully dead, and that a part of my soul had remained on Earth. He'd let me know that my actions had somehow influenced the game's story.

I'd wiped out the entire monster population, ensured that Eterna—the main heroine—stayed alive, and even saved a few other characters from certain death along the way. I'd met entirely new characters such as the first saint or the prophet. Hell, I'd even somehow gotten the game's protagonist, Verner, to fall in love and confess his feelings to me!

In the end, I'd defeated the witch, Alexia, and given my life for Verner's.

*I sure picked a cool way to die, if I do say so myself.*

I'd done everything—no, that was pushing it. Let's say I'd done what I could. Now, it was their turn. The future ought to be shaped by the true inhabitants of this world, not some fake intruder who'd happened upon this world by mistake.

I hit the bottom. Those were my last thoughts before my drowsiness got the better of me. I was about to fall asleep when I suddenly noticed someone at the bottom of the pit.

It was a woman. She was pitch-black, as though she'd dropped a bucket of black paint over her head. She was sitting in a corner, grasping her knees and crying in a feeble voice.

Now that I was paying more attention, I noticed that she wasn't alone. There were a bunch of other women, their faces just as gloomy, who were also weeping.

For some reason, I instinctively understood that these women were the previous witches. I reached out with my hand, but I was blocked by an invisible wall. Apparently, I couldn't go over to the other side. I assumed that was because I was a fake.

*How can I get to the other side...? Ah... I'm an idiot. I'm done for already.*

There was absolutely nothing I could do anymore. Besides, I didn't need to keep playing the role of the perfect saint. I turned my back to the weeping women and started walking off in the opposite direction.

Ahead of me was a bright light.



## Chapter 71: Dark Clouds

Rain was falling.

The dark clouds that hung low in the sky blocked out the sunlight. Although it was the middle of the day, it was as dark as night. Water poured down from the sky, drenching everyone. It felt as though the heavens were crying along with the people whose tears blended with the rain.

Gloomier than the sky were the faces of the people. They were all looking at the ground. Some of them had dropped to their knees, unable to keep upright.

Ellize, the saint, was dead.

The news of her death had spread through the land faster than lightning. The fact that she was never the real saint had spread just as fast, but no one could bring themselves to call that girl, who'd accomplished so much for mankind, a fake. Instead, the church had decided to give her a new, more prestigious title. She was to be known as Ellize, the Great Saint.

Her funeral had been organized by King Aiz and became a grand affair. He'd decided to make it a state funeral, and countless people from all over the world had traveled to attend.

In Fiori, the dead were usually buried. However, no one could accept the thought of burying Ellize in the ground. Instead, Alfreia—at Supple's request, who'd pleaded for something to be done to stop her body from rotting—had sealed her into a crystal, preserving her beautiful, youthful appearance.

Inside her crystal, Ellize looked exactly as she had in life. She simply seemed to be asleep.

After her funeral service was held, King Aiz had ordered the construction of a proper resting place for Ellize. In the meantime, the Saint's Church was put in charge of protecting her body.

Each day, people would visit the church in which she was kept to pay homage to their saint before walking away, weeping.

Layla, the former head of Ellize's guard, visited her master's body every single day. She was there from morning to night, praying. She cried herself to sleep during the first few days, but eventually, she ran out of tears. Her face turned blank and emotionless, like that of a corpse. Her colleagues worried about her and tried their best to comfort her, but nothing worked. Layla was wasting away. She seemed to want nothing more than to join her master.

It was understandable. Besides, she wasn't alone in feeling this way—the rest of Ellize's guard was just as ashamed of themselves. They cursed their powerlessness.

After Ellize's death, a letter had been found in her room. In her own handwriting, she'd confessed to being a fake saint. She insisted that she'd acted alone, and that the knights that served her weren't to blame.

*If this letter has been found, it means that I either died fighting the witch or was sent to the gallows for pretending to be the saint.*

The very first sentence of Ellize's last letter showed her resolve. There was not one word of complaint or regret in the entire text.

Ellize could have—*should have*, according to some—blamed others. After all, it wasn't her fault if she'd been mistaken for the real saint. She'd been a baby at the time—an innocent victim of an adult's mistake. And yet, she didn't seem to resent anyone.

Until the very end, Ellize had only ever worried about others. She'd written that letter to defend her knights and their honor.

After reading it, her knights had wept. Tears streamed down their faces as they realized once again how useless they'd been. None of them had noticed that Ellize might have needed help. They'd never even *considered* it.

She must have felt anxious. Ellize had been separated from her parents at birth and forced to pretend all this time. A young girl who wasn't even the saint had done what no one else could. She'd never shown weakness. She'd simply smiled to reassure everyone that everything was all right. She'd worried about the very people who'd dragged her into this hell—her knights.

It must not have been easy for her. No, it *couldn't* have been easy. And yet, all



they'd done was call her a miracle worker and let her deal with everything on her own. They'd never realized that everything Ellize had done had been a result of her hard work—they'd simply been content clapping along whenever she performed another feat of greatness.

On top of that, she'd been fully prepared to accept the death penalty when the truth came to light.

They were so ashamed of themselves—of their station. Had any of them realized the truth and supported her? Had any of them helped Ellize bear her heavy burden? No, they'd all failed her. If anything, they'd *added* to her burden.

They were the worst. They assumed that Layla felt the same way. No, as the head of Ellize's guard and her closest comrade, she probably hated herself a thousand times more than the rest of them.

In addition to Layla, Fiora and John also visited Ellize every day. They gazed at her sleeping face and prayed.

Royals, nobles, and commoners alike indiscriminately thronged to the church. No one could bear to say goodbye to their saint, so they prayed by the crystal's side.

In the midst of this all, two people's absences were conspicuous: Supple and Verner.



"Ver, please eat... At least a little," Eterna said, setting a tray on Verner's desk.

"Don't wanna," Verner replied, his tone devoid of emotion.

There wasn't a hint of annoyance, anger, or even sadness in his voice. His eyes were clouded, and he couldn't focus on anything. Eterna was right next to him, but he barely registered her presence.

Verner had fallen into despair, and he'd fallen much, *much* deeper than anyone else. Ellize had died for him.

Needless to say, Verner hadn't done anything wrong. The witch's powers that had been lurking inside of him had acted against his will. It had all been an

unfortunate accident.

But if none of that had happened, Ellize would still be there. She would have been able to live at least a little bit longer. Verner had already been responsible for shortening Ellize's life, but now, he'd also let her exchange her life for his. He hadn't been able to give back to the one who'd saved him. Instead, he'd led her straight to her death.

No one could even imagine the depth of his guilt and self-hatred.

The attention everyone gave him only added to his pain. He wasn't worth worrying about. He wanted them to loathe him, to kill him. Being the target of a torrent of insults might have made Verner feel better. In fact, he'd felt much more grounded when Layla had grabbed him in a fit of rage rather than when he heard Eterna fuss about him. The others had quickly held Layla back, but Verner was still convinced that she'd been right to direct her anger at him. *She should've slain me on the spot*, he thought.

He felt like everything was hopeless, but somehow, he was still alive. What was the point of his body clinging to life? Did he have any lingering attachments to the world? Any regrets? Did he hope that Ellize would come back to life?

"Verner," his roommate said, "I know this is hard for you, but please try to consider her feelings."

Verner couldn't bring himself to care about what he was saying. He looked out the window. The world was supposed to be at peace, but the rain wasn't stopping. Peace didn't matter when you'd lost the sun. Light wouldn't shine upon this world anymore.

"If you don't eat, your body won't hold. Mr. Supple's acting strange—he won't come out of his lab—and you won't eat... I hate this."

Verner didn't care if his body failed him. His power wouldn't let him die either way. He'd tried to kill himself several times, but nothing had worked.

Everything would be so much easier if he were dead.

That cursed power was still there, inside of him, and it wouldn't allow him the luxury of ending it all. He felt as though the world was telling him that his sin was too great for him to seek an escape through death. He had to stay alive and



suffer.

Outside the window, the sky was dark. Verner wondered if Ellize was out there, somewhere, above the clouds. Even if she were, he'd most likely never get to join her. How could he hope to be reunited with her? He'd driven her to her death.

Still, the sky truly was dark—unnaturally so. Was this what it meant for a world to lose its light? The heavy, dim clouds had merged and blanketed the sky, and they seemed to bring a bad omen. He could feel a sinister power—much like his own—coming from them. To Verner, they looked like they had a will of their own.

He suddenly leaped to his feet.

It wasn't that he could feel dark magic coming from the clouds—the ominous clouds were made of darkness *itself*!

For the past few days—ever since Ellize had died, Verner assumed—they'd been slowly gathering in the sky. Soon, they'd take another form.

Why had he taken so long to notice?! Even if no one else had, he should've. No, he knew why he hadn't—he hadn't been paying attention to *anything*. His brain had pretty much come to a stop along with Ellize's heart, and he'd spent his days moping and practically comatose. That was why he'd let something so huge go unnoticed for so long.

He was fed up with himself, disgusted by his stupidity.

A heinous killer with an axe was standing right in front of him, ready to harm innocents, but he hadn't even bothered looking at him.

"What happened, Ver?" Eterna asked, confused.

She had no clue why Verner had stood up so suddenly. Although she was the saint, she'd only awakened a short while ago. She had yet to familiarize herself with her powers.

"Eterna, bring me my weapon!"

"Huh? No! No way! I won't let you hurt yourself once ag—"

"That's not why I need it! A battle is about to start!"

Eterna had hidden Verner's sword away so that he wouldn't try to commit suicide. However, Verner knew he'd need his sword.

The swirling darkness in the sky had almost reached its peak. It'd erupt any moment now. When that happened, chaos would befall their world.

Ellize had sacrificed herself to save this world. Even in his current state, Verner wasn't about to let her life's work go to waste.

*I should've noticed sooner,* he admonished himself. *I should've!*

Indeed, Verner could have noticed much sooner. However, that was the price he had to pay for letting himself waste away. His passivity had backfired, and now he wanted to kill himself for it.

"Hurry up! There's no time! It'll start soon!" Verner screamed.



All the knights and soldiers, with the exception of Layla, had gathered in front of the royal capital of the Bilberry Kingdom. King Aiz and Alfree, the first saint, led the troops. Profeta was next to Alfree, looking at the sky.

"Lady Alfree, as you requested, we've gathered as many men as possible," Aiz reported.

Alfree hummed. "Good." Her voice was unusually tense.

Profeta was aware that something ominous had been gathering ever since the day Ellize had died. She'd already predicted that this "something" would soon materialize.

She'd warned Alfree—who'd taken over Ellize's position as the saint—and had asked her to get Aiz to gather soldiers.

"Hey, Profeta, do you know what that thing is?" Alfree asked, storing mana in between her hands as she looked at the sky.

"Whatever is left of Eve...I assume," the turtle replied.

Alfree was ready to hit the mysterious enemy hard and fast. She didn't want the battle to drag out. But as the thing in the sky gradually took form, she wasn't sure that she could destroy it even if she were to use all of her strength.



She wasn't stupid enough to hold back in such a situation, but she had a feeling it wouldn't work regardless.

"Eve..." Profeta said with a sigh. "Originally, the witch was the world's proxy. Do you have any idea why she went wild and started killing humans?"

Alfrea snorted. "How should I know? My mother was already being chased by everyone by the time I was born."

Eve, the first witch, was Alfrea's mother. Although she treated her child with kindness, it didn't change the fact that she was already a widely notorious, infamous witch wanted for her crimes. Eve had lost control before Alfrea's birth, which meant the latter had absolutely no idea what had prompted this change.

"Let's rack our brains a little," Profeta said. "You know about mana circulation, right? That's how humans naturally recover mana and are able to use magic. Everyone does it automatically, but if you start doing it intentionally, you can speed up the process and increase your mana pool. That's when the practice becomes risky. Whenever people expel mana outside their bodies, some of their excess emotions are ejected with it. Negative emotions in particular tend to be expelled this way. In a way, this is a self-purifying mechanism the world has given you. It stops people from holding on to their negative feelings and becoming evil. However, it also means that the air that surrounds us is constantly filled with negative emotions. And so, if someone circulates their mana too much, they'll invite those inside their own body. If you let the process happen naturally, you'll expel more negative emotions than you take in, leaving you with a positive balance. Once you start speeding up the process, though, you both expand your storage capacity and increase the amount of negative emotions you take in."

"I know all that," Alfrea retorted with a pout. "What's up with you? Why are you trying to teach me the basics?"

She felt as though Profeta was treating her like an idiot. Everyone already knew what she'd just said.

"Hang on—I'm getting to the important part. I believe Eve's mana circulation was off from the start. The world created her to act as its proxy. To achieve

that, she needed to be strong, so I assume the world gave her a higher natural mana circulation speed. Over the years, she absorbed more and more negative emotions, until eventually, she couldn't handle them anymore, and she lost herself. I think that when Eve died, her soul departed, but the sum of negative emotions she'd accumulated over the years remained, giving birth to a power with a will of its own. That condensed negative energy is what was left of Eve, and what turned the successive saints into heinous witches unable to control their negative emotions. This power must have grown during the past thousand years until it became...this," Profeta explained, looking at the sky.

"Mother... How bothersome."

"That's the only thing you've got to say about her?" Profeta sighed. "Eve probably sealed you because she had an inkling this would happen. She put you in a state of suspended animation and let another saint be born, all so that she wouldn't turn you—her only family—into a witch."

Alfrea closed her eyes and reminisced about the past. She couldn't forgive her mother for sealing her. To this day, she was still pissed about it. However, if her mother hadn't done that, she wouldn't be here today.

She opened her eyes and looked at the sky. The dark clouds had taken the shape of a person. The faces of the successive witches rose to the surface one after the other as ominous laments filled the air. The dreadful spectacle chilled the soldiers to the bone.

"Too much mana circulation makes you crazy, huh? My mother was the first to go crazy because of it, and the saints followed in her footsteps. At the end of the day, people suffered for over a millennium because of their own negative emotions. That's ironic," Alfrea said.

"The only exception I know of is Ellize," Profeta said, bringing up the name of the beloved young girl who'd passed away only a few days ago.

Alfrea didn't answer, so Profeta continued.

"I believe Ellize was suffering from the same defect as Eve. Those who are born with flawed mana circulation have exceptional magic abilities, but their hearts darken little by little. In fact, I've seen similar symptoms in others in the past. All of them were tremendously talented at magic—I would even dare call

them geniuses. However, they were all—without exception—horrible people. Besides the witches, anyone else who suffered from this condition has marked history as an infamous villain. Ellize was confused with the saint at birth because of her remarkable affinity with magic and mana pool, but that wasn't because she was naturally talented. She suffered from abnormal mana circulation."

"But that doesn't make any sense," Alfreia said. "I've never met someone as pure and good as Ellize. She didn't have a single bad thought."

"That's why I called her an exception."

Profeta didn't know why Ellize had been able to remain sane while continuously circulating her mana to increase her capacity. Even if she had yet to go crazy like Eve, she should have at least shown some signs.

Profeta, being the kind of turtle she was, naturally had a couple of theories.

The first and most logical one was that Ellize's soul was already pitch-black from the start. If she'd been an irredeemable villain from the get-go, negative emotions couldn't have darkened her soul any further.

Profeta found that difficult to believe, though.

Another possibility was that Ellize was able to observe herself calmly from the outside, almost as though she were an unrelated outsider. With such a peculiar psyche, she might have been able to withstand watching her soul being slowly tainted.

That also didn't make much sense. How could someone who cared so little about what happened around them pour all their energy into seeking peace?

What if Ellize was so big-hearted that she could accept every bad emotion without being tainted? No, that was also unlikely. A human couldn't have such a forgiving heart. She'd have to be a goddess.

Profeta had no way to know what the truth behind the workings of Ellize's mind had been, but she knew one thing: Ellize had given her life to protect this world. There was only one thing for her to do.

"You know," Alfreia started, "I've always wondered why I had to stay in that

crystal for a thousand years, but I feel like I finally have my answer.”

“What a coincidence,” Profeta answered. “I’ve also just understood why I was given such a long life.”

Alfrea increased her mana output, while Profeta stomped on the ground vigorously.

The first saint and the prophet had both made up their minds. These millennial dregs had long overstayed their welcome in this world. *You have to know when to quit*, both Alfrea and Profeta thought. As the last two remnants from that era, they had to be the ones to bid the witches goodbye.

“I’ve waited a thousand years for this moment! It was all so that I could protect this world in her stead!” Alfrea exclaimed. “Let’s go, everyone! Give this your best shot!”

“For once, you’re making a lot of sense, trashy saint!” Profeta said. “You’re damn right! The time to make use of my ridiculously long life has finally come!”

Right as Alfrea and Profeta had finished raising their spirits, the witches’ grudge finally materialized in the world.

A wretched laugh echoed in the sky.

## Chapter 72: Witch

The dark clouds had gathered, merged, and materialized into a single figure. No, calling it a *single* figure would be somewhat misleading—it had first taken the form of several women.

No one but Profeta could recognize each of their faces, but these women were the past witches that had plagued humanity for a thousand years. Their forms had gotten tangled together until a single figure had emerged—a dark, cloudy giant that stood as tall as the firmament.

It was a gruesome spectacle.

Some witches' faces haphazardly stuck out from the giant amalgamation, while others were at the tips of tentacles that had sprouted from the giant's back. These visages were of varying sizes—some much larger than they'd been during their lives—but each had pitch-black skin and sclera, white pupils, and tears of blood that trailed from their eyes.

Alexia, who'd died a short while ago, was among them.

Cold sweat ran down Alfrea's back. "It's been a while, mother," she whispered.

She was looking at the largest face protruding from the giant's chest like a tumor. That one—a beautiful woman with cold eyes—was as big as a castle. It was Eve, the first witch. Only her daughter Alfrea and Profeta recognized her.

"That's not Eve," Profeta said. "That's just a residue."

"You're right..."

Alfrea had been reunited with her mother after a thousand years, but her mother's soul was long gone. What remained were the negative emotions the witches had accumulated over a thousand years. However, since witches were practically soulless dolls who, having lost their free will, were controlled by their negative emotions, one could say that these cursed dregs were, in fact, the very essence of the witches.



The faces all put their resentment into words:

“I hate you...”

“I’m so jealous...”

“Curse you...”

“I’ll never forgive you...”

These feelings didn’t belong solely to the witches. They’d accumulated them over the years, pulling them from the air—they were the mass of negative emotions that constantly poured out from everyone.

“If only Hans didn’t exist... I would’ve been the next commander. It should’ve been me. I hope he kills himself. I hope a carriage runs over him,” one of the witches said in a man’s voice.

No one really understood those words except for one soldier who suddenly paled.

“Th-That’s...my voice?” he noted, shaken.

“B-Barry! Is that truly what you think of me?!” another man—presumably Hans—exclaimed.

“No! This is a misunderstanding!” Barry immediately shouted.

Hans couldn’t hide his shock. Someone he’d always considered his friend had been thinking horrible things about him.

The next moment, another witch spoke in Hans’s voice. “That damn Barry... He doesn’t come close to me, but he wants to pretend he’s as good as me, huh? He’s so freaking annoying too—he’s always following me around like a damn dog.”

Having heard those words, Barry impulsively jumped at Hans’s throat. The other man was just as angry.

“You asshole!”

“Shut your trap! You wanna fight, is that it?!”

“Stop it, you two! Can’t you see it’s not the time to fight among ourselves?!” another soldier cried.

How could they face such a terrifying enemy if they were busy bickering with one another?

As a couple of soldiers got in between the two troublemakers and held them back, the witches kept talking.

“Lily’s so hot. She’s wasted on Rick. I need to find some dirt on her... I’m sure that if I do her once, she’ll fall for me and forget about that shithead.”

“If it weren’t for Miss Layla, my dad would still be head of the saint’s guard...”

“It’s all Lady Ellize’s fault that Verner won’t look at me.”

“Lady Ellize wouldn’t be dead if it wasn’t for Verner!”

“I’m the first saint, so they should all praise me more! Revere me!”

“Who cares about this damn world if Lady Ellize isn’t in it anymore?”

The voices continued, a new one coming out of a different witch’s mouth every time.

Some soldiers looked away in shame, while others covered their ears. Their ugliest thoughts, the ones they always pretended not to notice, were on full display. They didn’t want to hear, nor did they want to see.

And yet, here they were, manifested in front of them. That was the enemy they had to face—the true nature of the witches.

*This must stop*, Profeta realized. If they let the witches continue, the troops’ morale would plummet, and they’d be left defenseless. She exclaimed, “Alfrea!”

“I know! Argh... This monster sure is cruel!” she answered, firing mana projectiles at the giant.

She’d used dark magic, a power only the witches and saints could call upon. The pitch-black bullets went right through the giant’s torso. Light shone through the gaps for a second, but then they closed back up.

Alfrea groaned. “I gave it everything I’ve got, but this isn’t working at all!”

She took out a white flower—an angelo, just like the one Ellize had been wearing in her hair—and used it to replenish her mana.

She’d reluctantly poured all of her strength into a single attack to gauge her

opponent's constitution, but it had been utterly useless. If Alfrea's best wasn't good enough to even leave a *dent* in the giant, what would be?

"Why is this happening to me?"

"Everyone else should suffer too!"

"Why is the world fine when I'm in so much pain?"

"I'll destroy everything!"

The witches' grudges kept echoing as the giant started walking, paying no mind to Alfrea and the others.

A single one of its steps sent dozens of soldiers flying. They'd been standing at the ready, shields held high, but it wasn't any use.

"Don't let it reach the city! Engage, soldiers! Engaaage!!!" King Aiz screamed.

At his signal, arrows and magic spells flew. None of them were of any use. Just like Alfrea's magic bullets, they passed right through the giant without leaving a scratch.

The gigantic "witch" continued to walk toward the city. Alexia's face suddenly sprouted on its back.

"You traitor," she said, glaring at Aiz. "I gave you everything I had, but you trampled upon me. I hate you... I hate you so much..."

"A-Alexia..." Aiz whimpered.

Needless to say, Aiz felt terribly guilty about what had happened with Alexia. Hearing her curse him made him falter. And so, he didn't react in time to the dark blaze Alexia hurled at him. It narrowly missed, hitting the ground next to him, but the blast had been enough to send him flying. He collided with a building and groaned weakly.

"Hey! Wait up! Where are you going?!" Alfrea yelled.

"This is bad..." Profeta mumbled as she—slowly—rushed toward the city.

"Well, duh! Anyone with eyes can see that! The city is done for if we don't find a solution!"

"Not that. I mean, it's an issue, obviously, but...that monster seems to be

heading straight toward the church. It doesn't seem to have any intellect, but it can tell by instinct who the threat is..."

Profeta was walking as fast as she possibly could, but at the end of the day, a turtle was a turtle. There were a few species of turtles that were surprisingly fast on land, like softshell turtles, but Profeta wasn't one of them.

"That being is a heap of negative feelings. The one thing it hates most is its antithesis, the most positive of feelings—hope. We only have one symbol of hope around here," Profeta said.

"You mean me?" Alfrea asked, pointing at herself.

Profeta immediately crushed her pride. "I'm talking about Ellize, obviously. Even in death, everyone still relies on her. The citizens are gathering in and around the church to pray as we speak. If that giant crushes the crystal in front of everyone...they'll all fall into despair on the spot, and that thing will grow even stronger."

In terms of combat, Ellize was the only person who could measure up to the new "witch," but what mattered even more than that was what Ellize represented—hope, justice, and the triumph of light over darkness. All that remained now was her lifeless body, but even that was enough to support the people.

By destroying her body, the "witch" could kill three birds with one stone: they'd rid themselves of a potential menace, throw the people into despair, and strengthen themselves.

"Lady Alfrea!"

"Oh, Eterna! Nice timing!"

Eterna, Verner, and their friends were approaching at full speed on horseback.

The arrival of Eterna—this generation's saint—should have made hope bloom in the hearts of the knights and soldiers. With her and Alfrea, there were two saints on the battlefield. It was a historical moment.

Their opponent, however, was the culmination of a thousand years of hatred.

A saint needed, on average, fifteen years to awaken and be ready to face the witch. It'd then take another five years—more or less—for her to kill the witch and turn into the next one. In other words, a new witch was born every twenty years on average.

That meant that around fifty witches were contained in this new, gigantic monstrosity. Obviously, things didn't always work out that way, and that number was nothing more than an estimate, but it still meant that two saints were faced with around fifty witches. No matter how you sliced it, they had no way of winning.

No one but Ellize, who was as strong as all the other saints in history put together, could hope to prevail over this abomination.

"That thing is heading toward the church! We think it's after Ellize's body!" Alfrea told Eterna and her friends.

Verner's rage boiled over. He jumped down from his horse and swung the blade Ellize had given him. His blade passed right through the "witch" with no effect. When the monster retaliated with a punch, however, Verner was knocked away. His muscular, thoroughly trained body flew like an insignificant twig, and he crashed into the roof of a building. The tiles broke under the impact, and he disappeared inside the building.

"Hey! This is so unfair! You can't be both tangible *and* intangible! You gotta pick one, you monster! Why can *you* hit us when *our* attacks just go right through you, huh?!" Alfrea fumed.

"Calm down, Alfrea! It only takes physical form when it's about to hit someone!" Profeta warned.

Verner had been taken down a couple of seconds after making it to the battlefield but, thanks to his valiant sacrifice, a glimmer of hope had appeared. If they timed their attacks with the giant's, they should be able to deal some damage. That discovery was huge.

"Wait for it to attack!"

"Okay! In that case, I'll blast all of my mana at this thing once more! Eterna, you're with me!" Alfrea exclaimed.



“Yes!”

Alfrea, who had recovered most of her mana thanks to the angelo, mustered all of her strength. Eterna also started condensing her mana, while Marie and Aina followed suit with their ice and fire.

John, Fiora, and Crunchybite charged at the “witch” to attract its attention. The monster moved to brush them away with its hand as though they were flies, and the others didn’t allow that opportunity slip by.

“Now! Fire!” Profeta screamed.

Alfrea and Eterna immediately unleashed their full power on the giant. Marie, Aina, and a good chunk of knights also followed up with successive waves of magic right after them.

This time, their attacks did not go through the dark creature’s body. They crashed into it, creating a large explosion.

Alfrea struck a triumphant pose and exclaimed, “YEEEESSS!!! Wait... Is it dead?!”

The monster had been hit with the full power of two saints, as well as a great number of knights. Any one witch would have died on the spot—emphasis on the *one*. What they had to face wasn’t simply a single witch, though.

When the dust settled, the giant was still standing. The faces of two of the witches had been crushed beyond recognition, but the monster didn’t seem to mind as it continued its path.

“No way...” Alfrea whispered, exhausted. She laughed. Her tone was as light as always, but her heart sank. What else could she even do? This was hopeless.

She and Eterna, two saints, had used everything they’d had, and this had been the result? The monster had barely stopped walking and had regenerated itself in mere seconds.

The feeble hope their discovery had created had already disappeared.

The “witch” swung its arms, and Alfrea and the others were hurled into the air. They crashed into buildings, just like Verner and Aiz had before them. Some houses were already in ruins.

“No... Wait! I won’t let you get to her...” Verner said, crawling out of the rubble.

The “witch” ignored him and continued forward. It was clear that Ellize was the only menace in the monster’s eyes. The rest of them were all worthless flies. It didn’t care one bit about Alfrea’s and Profeta’s resolve, Verner’s determination, or the knights’ dignity. All it was interested in was the church.

And yet, something suddenly appeared to block its path—a huge mountain, nearly as tall as the giant, emerged from the ground.

It was earth magic, that much was obvious, but its scale was unbelievable. Only someone as powerful as the saint could achieve something like this.

And yet, the one who’d done that was no saint. He was a very ordinary, yet fanatic, man.

“Where are you off to in such a hurry?” Supple Ment, who’d been cooped up in his lab ever since Ellize’s death, asked.

He spread his arms, a vicious smile on his face. The next moment, the mountain crumbled and a stone golem emerged.

How in the world could that man unleash so much mana? He’d become just as powerful as Eterna or Alfrea.

The “witch” stopped in its tracks.

“Heh heh heh. Are you surprised? Are you wondering why I’m so powerful?” he asked proudly. “It’s a simple matter, so I’ll tell you. I used the same training method as you, witch. I circulated my mana as fast as I possibly could and increased my mana pool!”

Supple made it sound very easy. In a way, he wasn’t wrong—anyone could technically circulate their mana to become stronger. Ellize, who was also an ordinary girl, had performed countless miracles that way.

However, if it truly *was* that easy, everyone would be doing it.

Increasing your circulation speed meant taking in more negative emotions than you could expel, and your heart would gradually be tainted in the process. The first witch, Eve, was a very good example of what could happen if you

circulated your mana too much.

Besides Ellize and Eve, a few other individuals had suffered from a condition that naturally sped up their mana circulation, and—with the exception of Ellize—they'd all turned into heinous villains.

"Mister Supple? How in the world..." Eterna whispered.

"Why, don't be so surprised, Eterna," the teacher answered. "I've only had one goal since Lady Ellize passed: to resurrect her. She performed that same miracle with Verner before. I figured that if I could imitate it, I could save her. However, I'm but a mere teacher. My magic was far from being enough to even attempt such a feat. There was a solution to my predicament, though: I simply had to increase my mana."

Instead of giving in to despair, Ellize's number one fanatic had decided to look for ways to save her. The answer he'd found was to attempt to accomplish a miracle—the same one Ellize had in the past.

Ellize had been sealed immediately after her death. Supple had concluded that, as long as he could bring back her soul, he could revive her. In fact, that was *why* he'd asked Alfrea to seal her. His goal wasn't to preserve her body forever—it was to buy time until he could figure out a way to bring her back to life. If her body decayed in the meantime, it would be useless.

Supple was well aware that no regular amount of mana could help him perform such a feat, so he'd sought mana.

"B-But... You shouldn't be able to bear it..." Profeta said, flabbergasted.

"I'm a teacher. I've taught mana circulation for years. I'm well aware of the risks. I won't deny I've felt some dark urges. Wave after wave of foreign, somber feelings tried to taint my soul. But so what?! Why should I care about any of that? Even if you were to add up the negative emotions of the entirety of humanity since the very beginning of time, you'd still end up with a finite sum. How could that measure up to my boundless love for Lady Ellize?!"

Supple's answer made little sense to anyone but him. He was a raging pervert, and his obsessive love for Ellize had somehow triumphed over the countless negative emotions that had assaulted him. To sum it up, his heart was so

darkened from the start that there wasn't much to taint.

The “witch” struck the stone golem like it was an annoyingly large fly blocking its path. Supple’s golem responded with a counter.

Both giants lost an arm in the process. The “witch” quickly regenerated its missing arm, as did the golem. Supple’s creation simply absorbed new material from the ground.

“This is no use, witch! I can regenerate my golem just as fast as you can! You seem to take pride in your invulnerability... Well, my golem’s just as invulnerable!”





The “witch” and the golem exchanged blows, while Supple smiled as though he’d already won. They would strike each other, then regenerate themselves. This went on over and over again.

The severed parts of the being’s body dispersed into a black mist that would gather to reform that body part. As for the golem, his missing parts would turn into a fine powder that soon rearranged itself to fill the gaps. The two monsters seemed evenly matched.

“Prostrate yourself before the might of the supreme saint, you frauds! You’re all fakes that failed to reach the top!” Supple exclaimed.

Anyone would agree that what he’d just said was absurd. According to him, Ellize was the real deal, while the witches—who’d all been saints in their own right—were nothing but fakes.

Needless to say, he knew that *Ellize* was the fake. He had been there that day and heard the words from her very mouth. However, her grand reveal had done nothing to sway his faith. In fact, it had reached a new high.

She was a normal person. A regular girl who’d been mistaken for the saint by chance. And yet, she’d performed miracle after miracle! At that moment, Supple Ment had become keenly aware of the possibilities humans held, of the blinding light that slumbered deep within their hearts.

While Supple’s heart had always been full of respect and love for Ellize, learning the truth had multiplied those feelings a hundredfold. They had exploded and broken through the skies, reaching all the way to outer space. Needless to say, they were still growing to this day.

*Aah, how many times will she surpass my puny ideals?!*

Who cared what the world wanted? Humans didn’t need to abide by its will. They didn’t need any saints that were handpicked by it either. They could simply make their own decisions and forge their own path. Ellize had shown them that there were no limits! With a pure and righteous soul, one could achieve anything!

Supple didn’t care one bit about the witch’s lamentations. Alexia had been betrayed by her peers? So what?! Ellize had been betrayed too. And yet, she

hadn't fallen into despair—she'd forgiven and even *saved* the people who'd turned on her.

So what if mana circulation exposed your soul to others' darkness? Considering how powerful Ellize had become, she'd taken in more dark emotions than anyone before. She'd welcomed the world's pain and hatred and hadn't lost herself. If a so-called regular girl could achieve that, what were the previous saints' excuses?

Supple was positive: those who couldn't do that were the fakes, not Ellize.

Supple had finally realized that Ellize's miracles weren't miracles at all. People—normal people—could achieve all that through sheer strength of character.

He knew now: humans were wonderful and magnificent. And Ellize, the one who'd taught him all that, deserved the greatest love and devotion. No, she deserved much more than what he'd ever thought he could give.

“You're a bunch of fakes who couldn't even win over the ill will of our world. There's no way you can win over my love! My love is infinite, as is her glory!”

Supple was raising death flag after death flag as he watched his golem duke it out with the “witch,” a self-satisfied grin on his face. Someone probably should've gotten him to shut up, but—unfortunately—the people of this world weren't exactly familiar with the concept of death flags.

“Behold, witch! Bear witness to the great love I devote to the most sublime of saints! Your hatred is powerless in the face of my—”

Supple didn't finish his sentence. All of the witches had opened their mouths, their gaping jaws brimming with mana they'd gathered. They could fire at any time, he realized. Hell was at his door. His golem was powerful and could regenerate itself, sure, but if it was obliterated all at once, there'd be nothing to regrow.

“W-Wait... Hang o—”

*Fire.*

The golem was reduced to dust on the spot. As for Supple, he got blown away. He spun around in the air like a top before getting buried headfirst in the

rubble.

He'd raised everyone's expectations, but in the end, Supple was Supple. All the helpless onlookers could wonder was, *What in the world did he come here to do?*

## Chapter 73: Last Stand

The “witch” continued its advance toward the heart of the royal capital, destroying everything in its wake.

The citizens ran for their lives. They could only grit their teeth and weep as they watched their houses crumble.

Here, a young girl cried. She’d stopped running, unable to give up on her mother whose legs had been crushed by the rubble. There, a group of men who were trying to protect their houses with farming tools were mercilessly squashed under the abomination’s foot.

The knights and soldiers who’d already collapsed extended their arms, trying to grab the giant’s ankles to obstruct it. They could barely even crawl anymore, so they only managed to futilely grasp at the air.

Eterna, who’d run out of mana, fell to her knees. She was powerless to do anything but witness the “witch” as it continued its relentless march. Despair and helplessness filled her heart, but there was nothing she could do. Alfrea and the others had already fallen—this was the end.

“Stop right there! I won’t let you through!” she heard someone scream.

It was Layla. She stood between the church and the witch, her sword at the ready.

Although the head of the saint’s guard had always been an exemplary knight, she’d barely eaten or slept since Ellize’s passing. She was in no condition to fight. Besides, her foe’s power was so overwhelming that Layla wouldn’t have stood a chance even at her best, let alone in her diminished state.

She jumped to attack, but her blazing sword was easily caught. Several witches moved across the giant’s body to get closer to Layla—who was hanging off her sword—and extended their hands, grabbing her.

“Ah... Urgh...” she moaned in pain.

She felt as though every bone in her body would shatter under the witches' forceful hands. Layla let go of her sword as her consciousness started fading away. Her sight blurred.

Right before she passed out, though, Verner leaped. He'd wrapped his blade in darkness and severed the heads of the witches who'd been hurting Layla in one go.

Unfortunately, his attack didn't have much of a lasting impact. The severed heads disappeared in a cloud of dark mist before returning to the giant and reforming themselves.

The witches started laughing all at once, as if to mock their futile resistance.

Verner left Layla—who'd fallen to the ground after the witches had let go—and jumped once more. Before his blade could reach the monster, though, he was knocked back by one of the witches. He crashed into the church wall.

When he opened his eyes, the first thing he saw was the crowd of believers praying inside the church. In the center of this impromptu ceremony, Ellize rested inside her crystal. She looked exactly the same as she had in life.

"Damn it," Verner swore. His legs trembled, and he tried to use his sword for support to stand back up.

At this point, everyone could tell that the "witch" was after Ellize. It wasn't content simply trampling upon the people she'd given her life to protect—no, the monster had to desecrate her, even in death.

Verner was furious. He couldn't let the "witch" do that. He couldn't let Ellize suffer any more than she already had.

Was there anything he could do about it, though? Even if he were to manage to stand up, he already knew the answer. He'd failed to protect Ellize once before, and he'd fail again today. He wouldn't even be able to save her corpse.

Still, he stood up and dragged his body to the crystal, holding his sword in front of him.

He knew that what he was struggling to protect was nothing more than an empty shell. Ellize's soul was long gone, and that fact tore his heart to pieces.



And yet, he still wanted to protect her. He couldn't bear to see her injured.

And so, Verner stood tall even though he was fully aware that he couldn't win.

Around him, the people were still praying.

"Lady Ellize..."

"Lady Ellize, please save us."

"O glorious saint..."

"Please have mercy and rescue us..."

"I promise I won't lust after your sleeping body anymore, so please save us!"

The witches' faces sneered at the powerless mob and their laughs echoed, drowning out the prayers. As the witches' laughter got louder and louder, the giant tore off the roof and kicked down one of the walls.

How could this be the fate of the past saints who'd once fought to protect the world? Now, they'd turned to heinous witches who could do nothing but curse it instead. They reached out for the only light of hope the people had left, paying no mind to Verner, who was still standing in front of the crystal. He'd surely be crushed alongside it.

Verner watched the giant's arm approach without averting his eyes. He'd made an oath on that day. No matter what happened, he'd believe in the light—in *her* light—until the very end. Even though he was faced with impossible odds, he wouldn't run away.

The giant's hand was right in front of Verner's eyes. Suddenly...

"Stop praying and fight!"

"When will you stop forcing a single person to carry the whole burden?!"

The two men who'd just shouted slashed at the giant's arm.

The previous head of the saint's guard, Fox, and his predecessor, Dias, had stepped in to protect Ellize. Dias had been thrown in jail a while ago for rebelling against the saint, but Fox seemed to have gotten him out.

Fireballs flew toward the "witch" and hit it in full force.

The woman who'd just arrived had also been in jail for the longest time: it was Farah Dremy, a former teacher of the academy.

"H-Headmaster Dias?! And Miss Farah?!" Verner exclaimed.

"It's been a while, my boy," Dias said, pointing his lightning blade at the "witch." "I sure wish I didn't have to face such a monster... But I suppose the time has come to repay the debt I owe you and your friends."

"We couldn't stand idly by when the world is in danger!" Farah added. "We'll fight too!"

Dependable allies had made their entrance, but that was far from enough to turn the tables on the "witch." What could three more ants do against a giant?

Needless to say, Dias, Fox, and Farah were well aware that the odds weren't in their favor, but where there was a will, there was a way. They had no choice but to try!

"Layla Scott! How long are you planning to rest for?! How dare you call yourself Ellize's knight in that state?! Get up! Stand tall and fight! Prayers won't get you anywhere!" Fox screamed.

Layla opened her eyes and stood back up, grinding her teeth in pain. She forced her wobbly body to stay upright, clutched at her sword, and roared, "I don't need you...to tell me any of that!"

Three generations of head knights rushed at the "witch" side by side. While they hadn't discussed anything beforehand, they worked together flawlessly. One of them attacked the giant's limbs to throw off its stance, another drew its attention toward them, and the last went in with a strong move in the hopes of dealing some damage. Finally, Farah supported them from the back with her ranged spells.

Though they put up a good fight, their efforts weren't remotely enough to match the "witch" and its might, much less seize victory. Sooner, rather than later, they'd bite the dust. That was the harsh reality, regardless of whether Verner joined them or not.

Still, they weren't ready to admit defeat. They'd give everything they had to protect Ellize to the bitter end.



“You can’t beat that thing... There’s no hope...” one of the citizens whispered.

“They’re fighting to protect Lady Ellize...”

Verner and the others’ inevitable defeat was evident to the onlookers. However, looking at these warriors who refused to give in filled them with a sense of shame. They looked down at their hands, which were clasped in prayer. What could they achieve like that? *Nothing*, they realized.

If they stopped praying, they could pick up weapons instead. Hell, they could band together and carry the crystal away from the “witch.”

One of them slowly unclasped his hands. Now that they were free, he crouched and picked up a rock. The others followed suit, one by one. Some picked up weapons, while others worked together to lift Ellize’s crystal.

“Fight,” a man said, as if to persuade himself.

“Yes, fight,” a woman repeated, encouraging everyone.

None of them cared about the process that had prompted them to act. It could be mass psychology, or simply a moment of shared madness. It didn’t matter. They had to fight—they *would* fight.

Prayers wouldn’t help anyone, nor would they save the world. Even if God truly existed, He had proved time and time again that He wouldn’t help them. The past thousand years had been proof enough.

The one who *had* saved them was a young girl. She’d given them hope and done everything she could for them. Yet they’d still dared ask for more when she’d already entered her eternal slumber? After all that, they were still asking her to defend them?! They couldn’t.

“Don’t pray! Fight! We can’t keep locking our hands away pleading for someone to rescue us! Pick up a weapon instead! Do something, anything!” someone screamed.

All those who were still praying stopped on the spot. They’d made their choice.

It might have been their imagination, but the “witch” seemed to falter. It had stopped in its tracks for a moment. However, it soon grew even more frantic. It

was more convinced than ever that Ellize's body was the source of all hope. It needed to crush it, so it ignored the mob that surrounded the crystal and reached out for it.

Verner got in between the humongous hand and Ellize's resting space and tried to push it back, but that was far too reckless. The "witch" did not stop. Instead, it tried to squash him along with the crystal.

"Good grief... I can't tell if you're courageous or just reckless."

Verner suddenly felt a surge of power well up inside of him and he succeeded in pushing back the "witch." At the same time, he felt something flow into him from the crystal behind him—or rather, from Ellize's body.

He soon realized that it was the dark powers Ellize had taken from him years ago to protect him—a part of the powers Alexia had cut off before she'd turned into a witch.

A female phantom, arms crossed and clad entirely in black, appeared next to Verner. His first instinct was to clutch his sword tighter when he saw her. After all, while the shadow apparition had a different atmosphere and complexion compared to when he'd last seen her, there was no doubt that she was Alexia, the witch.

Dias was astonished. He couldn't take his eyes off his old master.

"Y-You're—" Verner started.

"Ah, my host, we finally meet face-to-face," Alexia said, cutting him off. "I've been watching you for a very long time, and I've always wanted to apologize to you. The same goes for you, Dias—I've made your life quite difficult. I'm sorry."

She sounded sincere; both Verner and Dias were surprised. They'd expected her to curse them like a haughty witch. Verner, in particular, had never imagined Alexia could be so soft-spoken. He was reminded once again of how much damage the witch's curse could do. *Alexia must've been like this when she was the saint*, he thought.

"L-Lady Alexia... Is it...truly you?" Dias struggled to ask.

"Yes, Dias. Although I'm only just a small fraction of my own soul," she

answered with a soft smile, then turned to Verner. “Verner—I know that, by entering your body, I’ve made your life terribly unhappy. I also know that it was my fault that Ellize’s life was cut short. I... After I killed Griselda, I started to feel myself turn into a witch. During that time, I experimented with different methods to find a way to chase the witch’s powers outside of my body. Although I didn’t do it on purpose, I ended up cutting off a part of my soul and expelling it.”

The fact that Alfreia had been sealed with her soul intact had already proved that dark magic could influence souls.

“After drifting away from my main body, I found you—a suitable vessel with a similar wavelength—by chance and settled within you. I couldn’t allow myself to disappear, because I... I wanted to find a way to stop myself from destroying the world. However, I ended up destroying your life and hurting others... I understand why you hate me, Verner. I’m sorry... I’m so sorry...”

As far as Verner was concerned, Alexia was his sworn enemy. She’d wormed her way into his soul like a parasite, made his family throw him away, and cost Ellize precious years of her life. Now was not the time to talk things through with her, though—doing something about the current menace was much more urgent.

“Keep your apologies,” he said. “Give me your strength instead. I need to stop that thing!”

“I will. I’m here because I believe you’re ready. You can finally handle my powers.”

Alexia had never wanted to hurt Verner. In fact, she’d spent most of her time worrying about him and blaming herself for her mistakes. When Verner was young, though, her voice hadn’t been able to reach him. Her dark powers were too heavy a burden for his small body. After Ellize had taken a part of her powers, she hadn’t even had enough strength left to call out to Verner.

With Verner so close to Ellize’s corpse, she had managed to return to him. At last, the part of Alexia’s soul that had entered Verner was whole again, and the boy was strong enough to withstand it.

“Great! Let’s go, then!” Verner exclaimed.

He reinforced his body with mana and slashed at the “witch.” Sure enough, it turned into mist, and Verner’s claymore passed right through without dealing any damage.

The “witch” immediately retaliated by throwing a punch at Verner, but dark magic erupted out of the young man and pushed away the giant instead. The darkness turned into a whirlpool that grew denser and denser until it took the form of Alexia. She lifted her hand toward the “witch” and twisted the space in front of her, pulverizing the monster on the spot.

The “witch” began to regenerate itself, and the first two heads to pop up cursed Alexia.

“Alexia, my nemesis...”

“Why am I there?! I hate you... I hate everything!”

The second one was Alexia herself. As for the first one, it was her predecessor—the witch Alexia had defeated.

“It’s been a while, Griselda. And...I assume you are me,” Alexia replied. At the sight of Griselda and herself overcome by their hatred, she found herself torn between contempt and self-derision. “You both look terrible.”

She might have hurt the abomination’s feelings, because it tried to throw another punch at her. Alexia didn’t move a finger. With her arms crossed, she created a barrier to block the hit. Its fist and Alexia’s barrier collided. It looked like she might lose the battle, but she didn’t falter.

“Don’t look down on me! Who do you think I am?!” she screamed, a look of haughty disdain on her face. “I’m Alexia, the saint who survived the worst era of them all!”

Her barrier spread and pushed the “witch” back.

Verner, who’d been watching them carefully, didn’t miss his shot. He slashed at the “witch” while Dias, Fox, and Layla threw themselves at it. The giant was forced to take a step back.

Once again, the witches all opened their mouths at once. They were planning to use the attack that had destroyed Supple’s golem again.

As soon as she noticed that, Alexia disappeared. She reappeared in front of Verner and put up a barrier just in time to block the witches' magic.

They'd just finished firing when the three head knights attacked again. Along with Farah's support, they managed to make the giant retreat further.

Everyone was finally on the same playing field.

Verner's opinion of Alexia was rapidly changing. When he'd fought her, he'd thought that she didn't have an ounce of dignity. The woman he was seeing today was completely different—her presence and majesty were worthy of a saint. The solemn woman's arms were still crossed. The former witch—or rather, the former *saint*—turned to face Verner, her hair fluttering gently.

"Verner," she said, a serious expression on her face.

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry, but...I've just used up the last of my strength."

"HUH?!"

He'd only just started viewing her in a good light, but she had to immediately ruin it!

Now that she'd mentioned it, though, Verner *did* feel like he was almost out of mana. After all, he was Alexia's vessel. It stood to reason that the more mana she used, the less he'd have left. Still, he hadn't expected it to run out after she'd only blocked two attacks from the "witch"!

"That monster's mana is ridiculous," Alexia said. "Besting it in a direct fight is impossible. We need to come up with a better plan, so I recommend fleeing for the time being. As long as you're not dead, you haven't lost. Did you know that's how I fought when I was the saint? I escaped whenever things looked dangerous and looked for a chance to strike back. Running away is a valid strategy, Verner. So run! It's time for us to escape! Come on, flee!"

"And you're proud of yourself?!" Verner screamed despite himself.

Alexia's suggestion reminded him of their earlier fight. Ellize had sent them to exhaust her because she knew that Alexia would have teleported if given the chance. Verner had thought that it was because Ellize's strength was simply out



of this world, but it didn't seem to be the case—perhaps Alexia had always been ready to flee at the smallest setback.

“Lady Alexia...” Even Dias sounded exasperated. She must have acted the same during her days as the saint.

“Is she okay...?” Farah asked. “She doesn't seem as reliable anymore...”

“Indeed...” Fox agreed, his voice full of apprehension.

Alexia's appearance had given them hope, but her shiny golden plating had already started to rub off. By now, everyone was a little unsure of what to do.

To be fair, Alexia hadn't been wrong. Sure, she'd sounded pathetic, but it was simply survival instincts at their finest. If a foe was far stronger than you, running away was the best option. After all, bullheaded pride couldn't overcome brute strength.

Besides, she wasn't the only one who fought that way. Each and every saint had been taught that their priority was to survive. Since only the saint could slay the witch, she always had to put her safety first and flee whenever the situation required it. As long as the saint was alive, there was still hope. If she died, humanity would have to wait another fifteen years—on average—before they were given another shot.

Alexia had taken those teachings to heart. She'd taken to escaping whenever she felt like she was in danger. Instead of fighting armies of large monsters, she'd prioritized scattering their forces and picking them off one chunk at a time. She'd also chosen the best possible time to challenge Griselda. She'd isolated her and created a favorable situation by attacking with an army of her own. She was sneaky and unfair...but she'd carried through and accomplished her mission.

In a fair, one-on-one fight, the balance was usually in favor of the witch. After all, the witch was a former saint, only with more fighting experience and greater powers obtained during her time as the witch. It was only natural that most of them would be stronger than the saints.

That was why using soldiers and knights as meat shields had been the only way for the saint to triumph over the witch. Alexia hadn't been the only one to

use that strategy either—pretty much every one of her predecessors had done the same thing.

It also explained why Alexia had been so terrified of Ellize. She hadn't needed knights to protect her—she'd been enough on her own.

"If you keep fighting that monster now, you'll just die. So you need to—"

"Sorry, Alexia," Verner interrupted.

"Huh?"

"I can't run away," he stated, raising his sword.

He stood his ground and got ready to face the "witch."

Verner knew he wouldn't win. His end was likely near, but that didn't mean he could leave *her* behind. Even if she'd already turned into a lifeless corpse, he couldn't abandon her. His struggles were meaningless, but he didn't care. There were times in the life of a man when he couldn't back out.

"You're a fool," Alexia said.

"I am."

"But I have to say, I don't dislike your spirit. Fine, have it your way. I'm already at my limit regardless, so I'll stick by your side until the end."

Verner increased the strength of his grip on his sword—Ellize's last gift to him.

He didn't have any more dark magic left. All that was left was him and his muscles. He'd trained as hard as he could to become strong enough to protect Ellize, and he intended to use every last bit of that strength for that very objective.

He grabbed his large sword with two hands and tried to stop the giant's oncoming fist. It was so heavy that he felt his feet sink into the ground. Still, he held on. Veins popped out on his arms and legs as he pushed back the arm with his sheer power.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!" he roared.

He managed to fling the humongous arm away and immediately thrust his blade toward the "witch."

## Chapter 74: Second Coming

*Hi everyone, Ellize here!*

*Aren't you dead, you ask? HA HA HA! YOU FOOLS! IT WAS A PLOY ALL ALONG! I'VE TRICKED YOU!*

*Nah, who am I kidding? I'm totally dead. Or at least, I'm pretty sure I'm supposed to be. To be fully honest, I'm probably the most surprised out of all of you guys.*

After I'd died on the other side and managed to—eventually—find my way out of the darkness, I'd somehow ended up floating around in my old apartment.

As it turned out, I was back on earth, and most likely for the last time. I'd done everything I'd had to do on the other side, and now I was dead. All that was left was to find my way to heaven and laze around until the end of time.

“Sup?” Fudou Niito (me) greeted me.

The other me was sitting at his desk, as always. He seemed even worse for wear than the last time we'd met up. On top of that, he looked positively pissed off. He probably didn't have much time left.

It was kind of funny how my sick body from my previous life was still clinging on to life when I'd already gone and died.

“Hey, been a while,” I said, waving casually.

Niito (me) glared at me.

“Watch the way you speak.”

“Oh, c'mon, who cares anymore? I'm done acting anyway.”

I'd played my part until the very end. The happy ending was underway, so there was no need for the fake saint act anymore.

I thought Niito (me) would get it, but instead, he grimaced.

“Feeling yourself, huh? You don’t know anything, yet you’re acting all high and mighty... Seeing your smug face makes me want to puke. So that’s how stupid someone looks when they pull the whole ‘I can look at the situation objectively’ card?”

“What the hell? What’s wrong with you today? You’re being so aggressive,” I complained.

I had no idea why, but Niito (me) was being a serious pain. *You’re just me, so stop acting like you’re a big shot!*

Instead of answering, he turned on his computer and launched *Kuon no Sanka*.

“We got it all wrong,” he finally said.

“Huh?”

“Explaining everything will take ages, so just watch,” he replied, pointing at the screen.

What I saw was...the total opposite of what I’d been expecting.

Layla clutched my dead body, bawling like a child. Her usually dignified behavior was nowhere to be seen. Trails of snot and tears ran down her face. Saying that it shocked me would be a huge understatement.

Layla was a kind soul, so I’d expected her to shed a few tears for me, but I’d never thought she’d fall apart like that. I understood on the spot that she wouldn’t get over my death as easily as I’d pictured. I just couldn’t imagine her picking up the pieces when she was in such a state.

The same went for the others.

Verner, in particular, had completely given up on life. He refused to go out of his room or eat. I even watched him try to take his life several times, only for Eterna to stop him.

The truth about me had quickly spread across the land, but the citizens also seemed to be heartbroken. The entire continent mourned me. The story progressed, but I’d yet to see a single character smile. They all had blank looks on their faces, as though they were waiting for death to visit and take them too.

The game ended on a scene where countless people had gathered, crying. Then, the credit rolled and the screen turned black.

*What the hell was that?!*

“That’s the happy ending you’re so proud of,” Niito (me) told me. I could hear the reproach in his voice.

*That’s...the ending I wished for?*

No, that didn’t make any sense. It shouldn’t have ended up like that. That wasn’t what I’d been trying to achieve. I’d never wanted to see *this*.

“We both thought only about ourselves until the very end. We failed to understand the feelings of the people around us. In fact, we never even *tried* to understand them. We’ve always been like that, haven’t we? Acting like nothing’s real and we’re in a stupid game. And so, when you ended up in an *actual* game, you kept living your life in the same exact way. Well, that’s the result. There’s a saying: ‘the only cure for stupidity is death.’ In our case, not even death could fix it,” Niito (me) said, his tone full of derision. His criticism was aimed at both of us equally.

I stared at the black screen blankly until I couldn’t bear it anymore.

“Even if you tell me all that, there’s nothing I can do about it anymore! It’s over! Everything’s over already!” I screamed.

I was aware that I was venting my anger at him, but I couldn’t help it.

*Fuck this! Why the hell did it turn out like this?! This bad ending wasn’t what I’d planned! All I wanted was for them to smile at the end! So why?! Where did I go wrong?! My plan was perfect!*

I’d gotten rid of all the monsters, fixed the food shortage, and improved their lives in every way I could think of. I hadn’t let any of them die, and I’d taken care of the witch myself! The shitty fake saint—me—had finally left the stage. I’d gathered all of the needed components for a happy ending!

Obviously, I’d expected them to be kind of sad after I passed. But at the end of the day, I was a fake! A rotten piece of shit! Why were they shedding so many tears over someone like me?! They should’ve cheered instead! Rejoiced

that the fake that had deceived them all along was finally gone! So why didn't they?! What in the world were they dissatisfied with?!

"We've never been able to read others, have we?" Niito (me) continued, exasperation thick in his voice. "And even when we had an inkling of what they were thinking, we could never empathize with them. That's why we isolated ourselves and turned out the way we did."

So what?! Was he trying to say that creating a happy ending was impossible from the start because I didn't understand others?

"You know what the strangest thing is?" he asked. "With death at my door, I think I'm finally starting to feel a sense of reality. I'm finally able to see that everything I've experienced throughout my life was real. It was never a meaningless game... What about you?"

"I..."

Honestly, I wasn't sure.

Deep down, I still felt like none of what had happened was truly about *me*. My hopeless brain made everything feel distant.

And yet, I found myself experiencing a strange feeling—one I'd never felt before. My chest felt tight in a way that didn't quite match the punctual bouts of sadness that usually accompanied bad endings in video games. I felt frustrated, angry, and impatient all at once. Whenever I recalled Layla's crying face, the impulse to hit something just took over. I could tell that I needed someone—anyone—to blame. I was desperate to find an outlet for my rage.

"At the very least, you're not thinking of *them* as mere characters anymore, right?" Niito (me) asked.

"But, it's too late. I..." I trailed off. I realized that these feelings probably meant that they'd become precious to me...or something.

But the time for action had long passed. There was nothing I could do anymore. I was dead on the other side.

The computer's screen suddenly lit up again. It seemed like the bad ending I'd seen wasn't the final ending. There was still more pain for me to witness.

A humongous monster appeared on the screen.

*Huh? What the hell is that?*

Several women seemed to have merged to create a giant. It started destroying the royal capital. Verner and the others tried to stop it, but they were no match for it.

“That’s the witch’s curse... It probably became like this because it couldn’t transfer to an appropriate vessel,” Niito (me) explained. “If you leave the game on for a while after the credits end, a whole new sequence starts. This is probably what the strange laugh after the bad ending was about.”

According to the text that had just popped on the screen, the grudges of the successive witches had merged to create this giant. Now that I thought about it, Niito (me) was right—there *was* a chilling laugh after the ending if you killed the witch with Verner. *So it was this thing all along...*

In other words, the cycle hadn’t been broken at all.

I’d always been convinced that if someone other than the saint were to slay the witch, the first witch’s grudge would have no one to pass to, and the chain would be broken. I’d been mistaken the whole time. If there was no suitable vessel, it materialized and turned into a monster instead.

Alfrea and Eterna were fighting on the screen, but their opponents were all of the past witches. Two saints simply couldn’t compare. They were defeated, then Four-Eyed Pervert stepped in in their stead. After he was done in, Layla, Verner, Dias, Fox, and Farah joined the fight.

I was even more shocked to see the masses fight to protect me.

*Stop! You can’t win... That’s not even me anymore; that’s an empty shell... Don’t put your lives at risk to protect that thing! Run away!*

I kept praying that they would, but no one fled. They continued to shield me like idiots.

“I won’t let you touch her, you monster!” a citizen whose name I didn’t even know screamed, clinging to the wicked creature’s hand.

“We won’t let you destroy our hope!” another nameless citizen roared.

*Please stop. I'm dead already. There's nothing to be done anymore... Nothing to be done...*

*...and yet, I'm so damn pissed! What's up with you, huh, you disgusting monster?! You think you can bully Layla and Eterna however you please?! You think you can do whatever you want just because I'm not there, huh?!*

Even the small children who couldn't fight were clinging to my crystal. I couldn't stomach that sight.

"Please, Lady Ellize... Please, save my papa..."

It was a strange feeling. I felt as though the child were talking directly to me through the screen. The kid's dad was probably out there, fighting the giant to protect my lifeless body.

Niito (me) looked at me, a smirk on his face. "They're asking for you, *Lady Ellize.*"

"It appears so..." I said, donning the costume I'd cast off once more. It was still too early for me to give up on my role.

I didn't care what that giant was. I didn't care that I was supposed to be dead. None of that mattered. I just couldn't forgive that thing. I couldn't accept the horrors taking place in front of me.

*How hard do you think I had to work to put that damn world back on its feet, huh?! How dare you laugh and destroy it, you bastard?!*

"Take my life and go, Ellize," Niito (me) said.

"What?"

"I still have a little bit left in me. That should be plenty of time to knock that monster out, don't you think? I'll be dead by tomorrow regardless, so it's fine," he said with a daring smile on his face, bringing his hand to his chest.

I smiled too. *Sorry, me, but I won't hold back now that you've said that. What's mine is mine, after all!*

Besides, I could tell that he was telling the truth. Even if I didn't do anything, he'd die soon, and his soul would merge with mine. Going through that process a few hours earlier wouldn't change much.



“I’m gonna do it for real, you know?” I warned him.

“Of course you are. As a matter of fact, I’ve already called someone over. I want my body found quickly. Wouldn’t want to bother the neighbors with rotting corpse stink for several days, right?”

Apparently, a sixth sense had told him that today was the day, and he’d already made arrangements. All the more reason to not hold back.

Niito (me) held his hand out and I took it. Light filled the room, and suddenly, Niito (me) collapsed. I felt his memories flow into me. Something just clicked. I’d found the missing part of me, and—although I was *technically* dead—I felt in better shape than ever before.

I looked at the computer screen. The adults were still fighting, while the children were still praying.

*I got it, I got it. I’m coming!*

I probably only had a few hours to do this, but it would be plenty...probably. After all, what was another monster to kill?

I concentrated hard, and my surroundings started changing. I was inside a crystal. I’d seen it on the screen, but now I could *feel* it too.

*Alfrea sealed me*, I realized.

She’d probably done that to preserve my body. I needed to thank her. If they’d buried me—or worse, incinerated me—I would’ve been in a serious pickle.

I looked around and saw countless people lying on the ground. Right in front of me, a beefy young man stood with his back toward me. *Verner*.

A little further away was the giant. Its hand was rapidly approaching me. I assumed it was trying to squash me along with the crystal. It seemed to know who the real threat was. Sadly for that monster, it had been just a little too slow.

I let my mana explode and broke the seal from the inside. Then, I jumped in front of Verner and blew away the arm that threatened to squash him.



The witches' shrill screams filled the air as the abomination and Verner fought. They soon turned into high-pitched laughs, and several of the heads assaulted Verner from every direction.

The young man swung his claymore with abandon. Still, he couldn't defend against so many of them at once, and sharp teeth sank into his arms, legs, and chest. His defeat was only a matter of time. Even if he were to manage to block most of the hits, he had no way to deal damage to the "witch." He'd eventually run out of strength and succumb to his wounds.

Verner couldn't tell how much time had passed since this hopeless fight had started. He felt as though he'd been struggling for hours already, when, in fact, they'd only been at it for a minute at most.

Blood poured down Verner's body, tainting his clothes crimson. He could feel his grip weakening. Soon, he wouldn't be able to hold his sword anymore.

Dias, Fox, Farah, and Layla had already collapsed. He knew he would be next. His lone fight wouldn't have a happy ending.

"Don't get cocky, you damn soulless remnants!" Alexia screamed.

Verner's mana had recovered a bit, and the former saint blasted it at the monster. This was their last chance at a counterattack. Needless to say, the amount of mana Verner had been able to recover in a little over a minute was negligible—it only stopped their opponent's movements for a couple of seconds.

Eve's head, which was protruding from the abomination's torso, retaliated by releasing torrents of mana toward Verner.

"Argh..." Verner groaned as he used his claymore as a shield.

The sword didn't protect him for long—he was soon sent flying with a scream. His back slammed into Ellize's crystal, and he fell to his knees, out of strength. Still, he didn't pass out. He used all of his willpower to stab his sword into the ground and used it as a crutch, slowly getting to his feet.

"I can...still fight..." he gasped feebly.

He'd stood back up, but anyone could tell that Verner had reached his limits.

The fact that he was conscious and on his feet was already nothing short of a miracle.

The “witch” trudged toward the boy, its footsteps echoing darkly.

“HEE HEE HEE!!!”

“Give up... Just give up...”

“Your efforts...”

“...will never be rewarded.”

The witches all laughed at once, as if to mock Verner’s pointless resistance.

Their words embodied their despair. They’d fought for hope, only to discover that there had never been any from the very start. That feeling had been etched so deeply into their beings that it had remained long after their death.

They would not hope anymore. They’d long given up, and they’d ensure that Verner suffered the same fate.

The “witch” was on the verge of squashing the poor boy when a cracking sound suddenly resounded. A blinding light surged from behind Verner and blew away the monster’s arm.

“Huh?” Verner gasped, wide-eyed.

His brain couldn’t keep up with the situation. *She* was in front of him, her pure white dress and beautiful golden locks fluttering in the wind.

No one dared to move or speak. The hectic battlefield fell silent. Everyone present needed a few seconds to understand what had just happened. Even after they did, they didn’t dare believe their eyes—were they dreaming? Was it some mass hallucination?

Verner wanted to call out to her, but he couldn’t bring himself to say a word. He was too scared that talking to her would dispel the illusion. After all, he couldn’t believe she was real—the timing was far too convenient.

Besides, it made no sense. Ellize had died for him. He’d witnessed it with his own eyes. He hadn’t wanted to accept it, so he’d checked for a pulse again and again. That was how he knew that Ellize had truly died on that day.

Had she resuscitated herself? Ellize had shown them many miracles, but this was beyond a doubt the most incredible of them all.

Unexpectedly, Ellize herself broke the silence.

“I heard everyone’s prayers. I heard your voice too, Verner.” She turned around to smile at him. The light the world had lost on that day had started shining once more. “Thank you for hanging in there, everyone. You can leave the rest to me.”

Cheers erupted in all directions, making the “witch” falter. As an aggregate of negative emotions, the one thing the “witch” hated most was hope.

Ellize raised her arms toward the sky and dispelled the dark clouds, letting the sun shine upon the royal capital. The rays of light healed the wounded and restored their spirit.

“Ah...” Layla sobbed, tears rolling down her cheeks at the sight of her master.

*She’s alive.*

Her master, who’d been sleeping since that day, had finally awakened. She watched Ellize walk up to her and crouch down. Her master then used her sleeve to wipe away Layla’s tears.

“It’s... It’s really you, right? Lady Ellize...”

“Yes. I still had something left to accomplish here, so I came back to wrap things up,” Ellize said with a smile.

She took a look at her surroundings. Countless blood-soaked soldiers and knights were on the ground, their bodies and their gear battered. Even the civilians were in a sorry state. Ellize’s light had healed most of their wounds already, but she could tell at a glance how badly they’d all been injured before she showed up.

*Idiots, she thought. They shouldn’t have bothered for a fake like me. I’m not worth it.*

Ellize wasn’t the saint they thought she was. She’d never taken this world seriously... No, she’d been that way in her previous world too. She’d never taken *anything* seriously, in fact. She always acted like she was in a game, like

nothing around her mattered. And, just as she'd always done, she'd gone about this world playing a game of make-believe, acting out her little saint fantasy to her heart's content. To put it bluntly, she was a piece of shit.

And yet, all of these people trusted her. Even after her treachery had come to light, they hadn't lost faith in her.

*What a bunch of idiots.*

But if that was the case...wouldn't it be fine for Ellize to keep acting until the finale?

Verner had once told her that when you played a role perfectly, it stopped being a role. Well, Ellize had made up her mind. She would turn her lies into the truth.

Her being a fake had already been exposed and her story was already full of holes but that didn't matter. As long as they believed in her, she'd continue to be their Ellize.

"Ellize..."

"You fake..."

"Why should we suffer when you, a sham, are worshipped?"

"I'll never forgive you!"

Words of hatred and jealousy continuously spilled forth from the witches' lips.

Ellize's expression was serene, though. "You're right, I'm a fake. I lied to everyone and pretended to be the saint. I won't deny it. However, none of that matters anymore."

Golden mana radiated from her. She was far more powerful than she'd been before her death. After all, she'd finally gotten the missing part of her soul back. After all these years, Ellize was whole again, and her mana increased tremendously.

With her soul complete, Ellize somehow felt closer to this world. Fudou Niito—or rather, she supposed, it was Ellize herself back when she was still Niito—had told her something. (She was still pretty damn confused about the whole situation and wasn't sure how to refer to him/herself yet.) At any rate, he'd told

her that in the face of death, he'd finally realized something important: the world he'd been living in all those years was real. He'd stated the obvious, and yet, it had felt like a grand discovery to someone like him, who'd always felt as though he were inside a game, or as though there was an invisible screen separating him from the rest of the world.

Niito had felt it on the verge of death. As for Ellize, she'd needed to die twice to finally get it.

An intense rage accompanied her realization. It was nothing like the usual annoyance she felt when she saw her favorite characters being picked on. People she held dear had been hurt, and Ellize had trouble handling the depth of that new feeling. She was truly angry for the very first time, she realized.

"You said you wouldn't forgive me, right? I feel like I'm finally starting to understand this feeling. I suppose that is what anger does to you," she continued calmly.

Regardless of Ellize's tone, the "witch" flinched, intimidated by her aura.

Layla was even more surprised. She'd served Ellize for years and had seen many expressions on her face. She'd seen Ellize happy, sad, and serious...but never angry. For the first time ever, Layla and the others heard a murderous impulse hidden behind the melodious notes of her voice.

"I'm the one who'll never forgive you, you freakin' bastard."

A gigantic sword of light fell from the sky and struck the "witch" in the chest.

## Chapter 75: Final Battle

The blade of light Ellize had called upon pierced through the “witch.” Had she been fighting a regular monster—or even an archmonster—the battle would have ended on the spot. That was how powerful her blow had been.

Still, Verner and the others knew that wouldn’t be enough to take it down.

“That won’t work, Ellize! That thing is made of mana, so you can’t hit it like that! It only materializes when it’s about to attack!” Profeta warned.

Ellize’s expression grew darker.

Unlike Alexia and the others, this “witch” wasn’t near-invincible. It was but an aggregate of the past witches’ grudges—a lump of mana with a will, a mishmash of the witches’ dregs. While it, as the source of the world’s suffering, was unmistakably a “witch,” it technically wasn’t one at the same time. That was why Supple’s golem had been able to damage it. In exchange for losing its invincibility, though, the “witch” had gained a new power that pretty much made it immortal—it was intangible instead.

Sure enough, the hole Ellize’s blade had opened up closed in a matter of seconds.

Mana was much like air—it was everywhere. Trying to attack the witch while it was intangible was as much a hopeless endeavor as trying to punch the air.

“HEE HEE HEE!!!”

“MWA HA HA HA!!!”

Several faces cackled as their necks extended. They intertwined themselves around Ellize and tried to strangle her, but her trusty barrier stopped them.

The fake saint didn’t even flinch. Their attack had been a complete failure. On top of that, the blade of light that Ellize had called upon earlier suddenly moved and beheaded the witches that had attacked.

The abomination recoiled as several faces groaned. The severed heads

disintegrated into black mist and returned to the “witch.” Before long, they grew once more.

When the monster materialized itself, it was definitely possible to damage it. The issue was that the “witch” seemed to be able to turn part of itself into mana at will.

Unless Ellize killed it in one strike, it would keep regenerating itself. In fact, Ellize couldn’t be sure that even if she destroyed it in one blow, it wouldn’t turn into mana and reform itself anyway.

“When the going gets tough, the tough get going,” Ellize declared in English.

She’d just thought up a new technique. As always, her taste in names was awful, so she’d defaulted to a foreign proverb. Thankfully, no one would understand it in this world. The people here were convinced that this peculiar language Ellize sometimes spoke was a holy language with mysterious powers.

Light gathered behind Ellize’s back, and a giant made of light appeared. What better way to fight a giant made of mana than to make her own?

The Tough Guy, as Ellize had named him, looked like an old, yet burly man. He was dressed in a white toga, which showcased his well-built shoulders and perfect muscles. A circlet rested on top of his white, shoulder-length hair, and a thick mustache and beard entirely concealed his mouth.

The Tough Guy clutched the sword of light and approached the “witch,” making the ground tremble with every step. He slashed at the witch. To no one’s surprise, it dealt no damage at all.

Ellize didn’t mind, though. She’d created the Tough Guy to act as a decoy.

“Festina Lente,” she chanted.

While the “witch” was busy with the Tough Guy, she cast her spell on the citizens. Countless pillars of light appeared.

Ellize’s first move had been to evacuate the civilians outside the battlefield. Layla immediately understood the implications; a desperate whimper escaped her. Ellize wanting them out of the way could only mean one thing: the fight would grow fiercer.



The fake saint set her sights on a desolate spot that had already been mostly destroyed by the “witch.”

“King Aiz,” she called out. “I’m afraid I’ll need to go all out. Is that all right?”

“Do what you have to do. With the city in that state, it doesn’t matter anymore... Besides, we can always rebuild it.”

The path the “witch” had taken—a straight line from the city wall to the church—had long since turned into a mountain of rubble. On the other hand, the buildings on the other side of the church remained unblemished.

Ellize’s decision to fight in the ruins to avoid further destruction was a sensible one. Needless to say, taking the fight out of the city would have been the best option, but she didn’t think she’d have much success trying to lure the witch away.

Having made up her mind, Ellize flew to the desolate area and had the Tough Guy lure the abomination toward her.

Ellize had yet to use any showy spell. She didn’t want any innocents to get mixed up in their fight, so she was trying to make sure she and the “witch” were far enough away before she did anything.

*If that thing’s made of mana...that skill’ll probably work. I just need to figure out the best way to do it.*

As she dodged the witch’s attacks, Ellize started devising a plan. She was going to create a barrier that wouldn’t let mana through, just as she had when she’d fought Alexia.

While Ellize could isolate the “witch” and prevent it from recovering mana, she couldn’t destroy the mana it was currently using. That was why she needed to play her cards right. If she simply created her barrier right now, the monster would most likely escape.

Making the barrier inescapable could be an option, but then what? It probably wouldn’t hold forever. Should she hurl it into outer space with the “witch” inside?

She didn’t know what would become of mana in outer space, but she was

pretty sure the abomination wouldn't be able to come back to this planet ever again.

Still, there were obvious holes in the method. *In most stories, the seeds of destruction left by previous generations always find a way to come back and bite humanity in the ass!*

Ellize resolved to try to destroy it first. If she couldn't do it, then she'd send it into outer space as a last resort.

*I'll try my luck first. It'll be for the best if I can beat this thing here and now,* Ellize thought, leaping in front of the "witch."

She couldn't attack first. She needed to wait for the giant to strike, then aim for the moment it materialized.

The witches' faces all opened their mouths at once, and condensed black mana came flying out.

Ellize flew higher to dodge and threw her hands up.

"Aurea Libertas!" she exclaimed.

Beams of light rained down. They twisted and turned in the air before hitting their target. As the beams of light pierced through the witches' necks, beheading them, the Tough Guy swung its sword, cutting the gigantic monster in two.

Ellize's beams of light automatically pursued their target...but so did the dark beams of the "witch." She thought she'd dodged everything, but the dark mana suddenly changed direction and flew right at her.

Ellize reacted quickly, increasing her speed and creating some distance between her and the monster. However, the beams changed their trajectory and followed her once again. She decided to change her strategy. She quickly fell toward the ground, then made a ninety-degree turn right before impact. The dark beams weren't able to follow the sudden turn, and they crashed into the ground, exploding.

Ellize called upon another beam of light. This time, she didn't let it scatter into countless small lasers but focused the entire ray on the "witch." It pushed the

horrid being backward until it disappeared into the light.

The fake saint's light beam had destroyed everything in its wake. The collapsed buildings and piles of rubble were nowhere to be seen. All that remained was a long crater.

Alfrea, who was cowering behind Profeta's back, whispered, "That girl is in a league of her own..."

Who in the world was she? Alfrea totally understood why the Church had decided to give her the title of Great Saint. If Ellize was to be treated as a fake, what did that make her and the other saints?

Ellize kept her eyes trained on the crater she'd created, waiting silently to see what would happen now that she'd destroyed the "witch" in one hit. After a few moments, however, she sighed.

"MWA HA HA HA!!!"

The "witch" had already started regenerating itself from scratch.

Sadly for them, Ellize had guessed right—even if she destroyed the monster in one go, it was still able to reform itself. In other words, there was no point in attacking it.

Interestingly enough, the "witch" had decided to adopt a new appearance. The monster now only consisted of an upper body—Eve's, according to the gigantic face that stared at Ellize.

It had apparently decided—did it even have the intelligence to make decisions? No, its instincts had probably pushed it to act—that its previous form wasn't a good fit to fight Ellize. Thus, it had made the necessary changes.

One of its humongous hands closed in on the fake saint, trying to grab her, but Ellize swiftly leaped to dodge. At the same time, the Tough Guy hit the abomination in the face and sent it crashing into the ground. It cracked under the impact, and fissures snaked out as the weakest spots caved in.

The "witch" was far from done, though. This time, it tried to grab Ellize with both hands. Ellize waited until the gigantic limbs were close enough, then chanted, "A picture is worth a thousand words."

Her mana exploded in all directions, annihilating everything around her. In the past, this spell had allowed her to erase several archmonsters from existence in one hit. Ellize had grown far stronger since that time, and her attack was even more destructive. The Tough Guy was also hard at work, hacking the horrid being's faces to pieces with its large sword.

Once again, Ellize had succeeded in destroying the monster entirely. And yet, mere seconds later, the witches' hateful laughter echoed around her.

It truly was pointless.

This time, the faces of the successive witches all appeared. They floated in midair, creating a vision of horror. Those who witnessed this terrifying spectacle would surely have lost their faith in the past saints for good.

*The poor saints are probably turning in their graves,* Ellize thought.

The only ones missing were Eterna, who'd just become a saint; Alfrea, who'd been sealed before she could kill her mother; and Lilia, who'd died before she could accomplish her mission. Obviously, Ellize, who was never an actual saint, wasn't there either.

Ellize let out a sigh of relief, but she was forced to conclude that defeating this monster was, as she'd feared, impossible.

Wrapping it up in a barrier and throwing it into outer space was probably her best shot.

*Damn, I messed up... I should've gone through with that when it still looked like a giant! I doubt that thing figured out my plan, but it's going to be a pain in the ass to trap with it all spread out like that...*

The witches' faces floated around like clouds. Ellize would need to create a *giant* barrier if she wanted to entrap them all at once. Besides, with her enemies so scattered, attacks could come from all sides. Ellize wasn't sure what—or where—to defend.

*Argh! I don't have a choice, do I?! It's gonna make me use more MP than I'd like, but I can't be stingy and let people die!*

If the witch-clouds started carpet bombing indiscriminately, it would be a

disaster. So Ellize decided to give up on preserving her mana.

“Aurea Libertas,” she said, ready to destroy the faces high up in the sky.

The condensed ray of mana soared up before separating itself into several lasers that flew toward each of the faces. The witches opened their mouths and spat out beams of black mana to counter them, but the fake saint’s magic was far more powerful. The vomit-beams were pushed back into the witches’ mouths, closely followed by Ellize’s attack. The witches’ faces exploded.

Ellize panted. She looked up while trying her best to calm her ragged breathing. She’d just used over a hundred thousand MP. With such a wide area to cover, she hadn’t been able to skimp on the mana cost at all. Not to mention that each face had been powerful on its own. She’d had to use quite a lot of mana on each of them to destroy them.

After a few seconds, a new “witch” appeared in front of Ellize, who was still struggling to steady her breathing.

This time, her enemy took the form of a human figure about as tall as herself.

## Chapter 76: The Light in Their Hearts

Ellize was surprised to see this new form. The shapely woman standing in front of her—Ellize estimated that the woman was about thirty, as per her modern Japanese standards—had ice-blue eyes as sharp as a knife but oddly devoid of life. Her harmonious features contrasted her cold and unfeeling expression.

Ellize wasn't quite sure which witch she was supposed to be, but she was starting to notice a pattern—the woman, like all the saints, had silver hair. She wondered how no one had found her out despite the obvious discrepancy, then laughed at herself for being preoccupied by such pointless thoughts in the middle of a crucial fight.

*Whatever! It was kind enough to become compact again, so now's my chance!*

With all her energy condensed in the same spot, the “witch” was certainly stronger than before, but Ellize didn't care. This worked in her favor. She just had to imprison her inside her barrier and send her on her way to outer space.

The “witch” didn't allow Ellize to bask in her optimism for long. She lunged at her at high speed, bringing down a sword made of mana. Ellize created one of her own and swiftly blocked it. However, she failed to withstand the momentum of the hit, and she was sent flying backward.

She crashed through several intact buildings behind her before slamming into the ground violently. She stood up, shaken. Ever since she'd become Ellize, she'd never suffered any major damage—her sturdy barrier had always protected her. Obviously, she hadn't disabled it. While most of the impact had been absorbed by it, she had been hurt.

Still, Ellize was confident that her spells were more destructive. While the “witch” could regenerate herself without limits, her maximum MP output at any given time was the sum of the fifty witches' mana—no more, no less. Ellize estimated that potential to be around a hundred thousand MP. She could easily double that in a single attack. In fact, now that she'd finally become one with

Niito again, she could probably use ten times as much mana in one go.

The issue was that Ellize's reserves and stamina weren't unlimited. She could suck in mana to recover her MP, but she didn't have much longer to live. She'd only managed to come back from the dead because she'd taken what little time Niito had left.

In a drawn-out fight, the "witch" would eventually gain the upper hand. No matter what happened, she needed to avoid a war of attrition.

Ellize leaped and crossed swords with the "witch" again. She was prepared this time, and the one who was pushed back was the "witch." Ellize sent her crashing into the ruins, then threw her sword of light at her, impaling her on the spot. The sword got stuck into the collapsed wall behind the monster, preventing it from moving.

Ellize wouldn't let this opportunity pass her by. She created a barrier that wouldn't allow mana to pass through or around the "witch." She poured a hundred thousand MP into the barrier to make sure her enemy wouldn't be able to easily destroy it, then immediately moved on to her next spell.

"Festina Lente!" she exclaimed.

The pillar of light rose toward the sky, carrying the barrier and its contents. It would continue to rise until it reached a vast, dark space, very very far away from Fiori. Even if she didn't manage to send the "witch" into outer space, she'd make sure she ended up far enough to never be able to reach this planet again.

She watched the pillar of light rise over the clouds until, eventually, she couldn't see it anymore. At the same time, Ellize let out a sharp gasp and clenched her chest.

She'd been fine blasting magic in the past, but she was having more and more trouble calming her heartbeat. She couldn't tell if it was because she was out of shape, having been dead for a few days already, or if it was because she was to die soon. For all she knew, it could even be a bit of both. One thing was certain: her body wouldn't be able to cast powerful spells in close succession anymore.

"Lady Ellize! Are you all right?!" Layla screamed, running up to Ellize and helping her stay upright.

The unbridled joy that had filled Layla's heart when she'd seen her beloved master come back from the dead had been replaced by fear and uneasiness. She'd never seen Ellize struggle so much in a fight before. She'd always taken care of the largest of armies, the strongest of archmonsters, with a flick of her fingers. And yet, here she was, obviously exhausted, struggling to even breathe properly. Layla couldn't help but fear she'd lose her again.

"Layla... That's not important right now. You've lost so much weight..." Ellize murmured.

She could barely hide her shock at Layla's appearance. She had become so gaunt that her natural beauty had started fading.

Ellize realized all over again how deep of a wound she'd left in her heart. She'd taken this world too lightly. In fact, she'd taken *everything* too lightly from the day she was born.

She'd decided on her own that, since Layla was originally supposed to betray Ellize, she wouldn't be too sad when she passed away. She'd ignored Layla's personality and had refused to see her knight's devotion, all so that she could keep believing in her selfish and ridiculously optimistic little plan.

Anyone else would have noticed immediately that it was bound to end badly, but Ellize had remained blind until the very end. Now that she'd finally opened her eyes, it was too late. Her second coming would last but a few hours. Ellize doubted she'd even get to see the sun rise again in this world.

For the first time, Ellize feared death. Would Layla be okay after she was gone? She'd suffered so much already, yet Ellize had given her hope by coming back to life...only to rip it away from her. She was going to break Layla's heart *again*. The more she thought about it, the stronger this new, peculiar feeling became. Ellize didn't want to die, but there was nothing she could do about it.

"Is it over?" Alfrea asked, walking up to Ellize.

Unlike Layla, she seemed fine.

"I believe it is. I trapped it inside a barrier and sent it so high in the sky that it shouldn't be able to come back here, even if it breaks the—"

Ellize suddenly fell silent. Something was plummeting down from the sky with



a sinister noise.

*No way.*

Ellize was aware that the “witch” could merge with living beings—it had done so with the saints over fifty generations, after all—but she would never have thought that it could parasitize inorganic matter.

She turned to Profeta nervously, and the turtle confirmed her fears. “This is bad... That thing took over a huge rock. It’s falling straight toward us!”

Ellize understood at once what had happened. The “witch” had latched onto a meteorite, and it was using it to return to this planet! If Ellize let that happen, things wouldn’t end well.

*Damn! Humanity might just go extinct if this thing hits!*

Ellize groaned. “I need to destroy it!”

She raised her arms toward the sky and started gathering as much mana as she could. She was up against a meteorite—one massive enough to sign humanity’s death warrant—so she couldn’t be half-hearted. Ignoring her palpitations, she squeezed out every last drop of mana she had left. The pain in her chest became sharper, but she refused to let it stop her.

“Aurea Libertas.”

A golden beam of light came flying out of her hands. It was much brighter than any of the previous beams Ellize had fired. There was no doubt that the rising light was visible even from the depths of outer space.

Ellize’s full powers pulverized the meteorite before it could even come close to Fiori’s atmosphere. Needless to say, the “witch” vanished alongside it.

The fake saint fell to her knees, a hand on the ground for support.

“Ha... Ha... Ha...” she panted, clutching her chest with her other hand. The pain told her that she’d just shortened her life span again.

Layla was on the verge of tears. She helped Ellize up, cursing her powerlessness.

Despite all that, the “witch” started reappearing in the sky.

“Layla... Get away from here,” Ellize said weakly.

Her legs trembled, barely holding her up as she started circulating her mana. Her last attack had entirely drained her mana, but she had no time to waste—she needed to recover it, and *fast*.

However, Ellize was surprised by an uncomfortable sensation she hadn’t been expecting. Actually, rather than uncomfortable, the feeling was downright unpleasant. Fear, despair, hatred, jealousy... All kinds of twisted emotions entered her body alongside the mana she was absorbing.

Circulating mana meant taking in negative emotions. Ellize had always known that, but it had never affected her...until now. She wondered what had changed and soon came to the conclusion that *she* was the one who had.

Ellize had always observed everything—including herself—through a thick filter. She’d watched herself go through life from an objective standpoint, both in this life and her previous one. That was what had allowed her to ignore the negative emotions that had entered her body whenever she’d circulated her mana. They didn’t fit in with the role she was playing, so she’d never paid them any mind.

As to why it had suddenly changed, she couldn’t say. Was it because she’d come back to life? Because she’d finally recognized this world as her reality? Or perhaps because her soul was finally whole?

Whatever the reason, Ellize couldn’t observe herself from above as though she was just controlling a character anymore.

The negative emotions she’d ignored for years now annoyed her, and destructive urges she didn’t even understand crept into her heart. She tingled with a strange need to mess everything up.

People usually buried their darkest emotions deep inside their hearts, hidden from view. Taking in mana put you face-to-face with that darkness, that selfish desire to be saved even if the rest of humanity was damned, that urge to enjoy the best in life and leave others only the crumbs. The pangs of jealousy, resentment, or even hatred that were directed at those who did better than yourself.

All these feelings burned fiercely inside of Ellize and clung to her. *No wonder Eve went crazy*, she thought.

She'd surely wondered whether humans deserved salvation. Weren't they the ones she ought to destroy? The saints-turned-witches must have all reached that same conclusion—that was why they'd embraced the dark side.

Ellize let out a soft laugh, then took in as much mana as she could.

So what if people had ugly thoughts? She'd known that all along! She was also one of those irredeemable humans, so looking her ugliness in the face was nothing.

The previous saints, including Eve, had all been *too good*, Ellize realized. They'd been way too pure; their souls so pristine, that they'd easily been stained black.

Ellize wasn't like that, though.

*Sorry to disappoint, but my soul's been pitch-black from the start!*

She only ever thought about herself and couldn't think of a more enjoyable pastime than bullying those weaker than herself... Provided she had a believable justification. She was a piece of shit, through and through.

She wasn't stupid, though—she was aware that if she let herself run wild, she'd eventually have to deal with the consequences. To avoid that, she'd become pretty damn good at pretending to be a good person. Still, that didn't actually *make* her one; it was all just an act.

While feeling a surge of negativity enter her was unpleasant, it wasn't enough to cause any serious change. Her pitch-black soul might have ended up a little darker, but who could tell the difference? She certainly couldn't.

Things must have been quite different for the saints. They'd most likely gone through a harsh phase of denial. Ellize could almost picture it.

*Humans can't be that bad! They're pure!* they'd most likely thought.

Eventually, they hadn't been able to believe in their idealistic views anymore and had given in to despair.

Ellize wouldn't despair, though. After all...

*They're definitely not as bad as me!*

...one couldn't be disappointed when one had virtually no standards! As far as Ellize was concerned, none of the dark thoughts she'd seen were as terrible as her own.

Jealousy? Nothing worth making a fuss about! Anyone would be envious of those who had more.

Ellize, for one, wanted nothing more than to see all of the damn Chads who'd never spent a Christmas night alone drop dead.

Resentment? Anyone would be mad if someone did them dirty, right? The whole "forgive and forget" policy was easy enough to throw around, but wasn't that just weakness at its finest? What else could you do? Accept the affront and cry yourself to sleep?

Hatred? Well, didn't everyone have at least a couple of people they just couldn't stand?

Those were all natural feelings. So was craving the approval and attention of others. Men were social animals. They obviously needed to feel appreciated and loved within their community.

The same went for every desire known to mankind. If anything, Ellize didn't see how humans could live *without* desires to spur them on.

None of these feelings were worth worrying about—they weren't even all that shameful.

More than the negative emotions, what truly stirred Ellize's heart was something else. Hidden under the darkness were faint, barely noticeable noble feelings.

There were prayers—some wished for their loved ones to be safe; others for them to stay happy and healthy.

There were glimmers of hope. Somehow, some still believed that tomorrow would be a better day. A light still shone inside their hearts, pushing them to move forward despite the pain.

There was courage too—a pure white blaze that neither fear nor hardship

could extinguish.

Finally, there was love. All kinds of love too: filial, friendly, affectionate, fraternal, and romantic. Ellize had never felt any of these emotions before, and for someone like her, love was a much stronger poison than any negative feeling.

*AAAAARGH! I took in so much mana at once that I ended up with wacky feelings!*

While dark emotions were merely annoying to Ellize, noble feelings were much harder to handle.

The pristine hearts of the previous saints had been tainted dark until they'd lost their minds. If that was the case...what if the reverse was possible too? What if Ellize's darkened soul could be cleansed by these noble emotions?

The answer was that it was very much possible.

*Nope, nuh-uh, forget it! I'm out! If this goes on, I'm gonna be purified and die before the witch does! Don't you guys know you should never heal an undead?!*

People's feelings seeped out of their bodies along with their mana, including their positive emotions. However, such feelings were so commonplace for the previous saints that they'd never even truly noticed them. Instead, they'd ended up focusing on the negative ones—the ones that had ultimately corrupted their souls and led to their downfall.

On the other hand, Ellize, who was already so low that she couldn't possibly fall any further, was the exact opposite. The negative emotions that flowed inside her seemed natural to her, while the positive ones threw her heart in disarray.

Ellize thus reached a very simple conclusion.

*I so don't need all that.*

Just as healing magic dealt damage to undead monsters in most games, impure people like Ellize weren't equipped to handle such light. What some deemed to be a warm, pleasant light could be blinding to others, and Ellize was blinded.

Sadly for her, the mana around her was thick with the prayers, hopes, and feelings of love directed at her.

*Are y'all trying to kill me before the witch? Is that it?!*

“Witches,” Ellize said, looking up at the “witch” with an affectionate smile on her lips.

Her legs were still shaking. She couldn't for the life of her believe that her lips had automatically curled into such a soft smile. Had the purification process started already? If that went on, her soul would soon be as pure as the driven snow, and she'd become someone else altogether!

Ellize wasn't exactly enthusiastic about such a change, so she made up her mind to end things as soon as possible.

“You turned into witches because you couldn't bear the darkness of people's hearts,” she continued. “However, darkness isn't all there is inside their hearts. The things you tried to protect as saints—the things you held dear—they're still there!”

Ellize had already entered uncharted territories. For some reason, she'd started thinking that the world was precious. A weird urge to embrace and love everyone and everything had bloomed inside her heart.

*What the hell is that?!* she thought. She could still make sense of the destructive urges she'd felt earlier, but this was too much. It was absolutely baffling. She'd always been up to hug cute girls, but now...she also somehow wanted to embrace dudes?! Had she lost her mind?!

*Oh no. That's a huge no. I do not swing that way, and I sure as hell do not want to touch any filthy dudes!*

And yet, Ellize couldn't help but see the world in a new light. She felt unconditional love for everyone, including Verner, John, and even the turtle!

She needed to do something before she seriously ended up insane.

Saints held out for five years on average before their hearts were entombed by darkness, but Ellize clearly lacked the willpower. Forget five years, she'd be doomed in five minutes—yet another record for her!

“So please, accept this! This...is the light inside their hearts!” she exclaimed, releasing the cumbersome feelings she’d been wanting to rid herself of toward the “witch.”

They took the form of a clear white aura, and Ellize wrapped them neatly in her golden mana.

Ellize didn’t need them. Her soul was darkness incarnate, and she was fine with that. Keeping them would only purify her and change her. The best people to dump those things on, she’d realized, were the witches, whose souls were originally pure light.

However, she’d underestimated the power of that light, and she collapsed. Before she could hit the floor, two pairs of hands held her up.

They belonged to Layla and Verner. Ellize felt their sincere love flow through her, and she almost died on the spot.

*Damn, I’m gonna combust, she thought, but still smiled at them. They were so dear to her that she couldn’t help it. This is bad. If I don’t get rid of all these weird sensations soon, I’m gonna turn into a true saint. Eek!*

Terrified, Ellize put her hand up and hurled all of the noble feelings that plagued her at the “witch.”





“Take thiiiiiiiiis!!!” she screamed as a blinding light streamed out of her hand. The “witch” had yet to materialize, but the light hit it nonetheless.

## Chapter 77: When the Tragedy Ends

The bright light drowned everything out, and the witches, who'd laughed throughout the entire battle, finally shrieked in pain.

The “witch” was only supposed to materialize when it was attacking, but for some reason, the intense light of the people's hearts had no regard for the rules. The abomination was weakening.

Ellize, who'd been on the receiving end of the witch's grudge, had an inkling why. When it had flowed into her, she'd died almost instantly because her body couldn't withstand it. Before her passing, she'd still felt like a part of the witch's memories and feelings had started streaming into her.

This “witch” was an aggregate of the previous witches' negative emotions. Starting with Eve and her overdeveloped ability to take in mana, they'd all accumulated more darkness than they could handle. After their death, their twisted mana had endured, merging with their predecessors' and seeking the next heart to inhabit. Over the past thousand years, this twisted mana had done nothing but grow, until eventually, it had turned into the abomination before them—negativity and darkness in its purest form. That was why no spell was strong enough to destroy it.

For example, if a person consumed by hatred were hit, cut, or even killed, it wouldn't do anything to erase their hatred. The same could be said of a jealous person. Blasting a powerful spell at them wouldn't make them any less jealous.

The source of the personified darkness was disillusionment—despair of humanity. The witches had ended up wondering whether helping people when they were so horrible was truly worth it. And trying to challenge that feeling with brute strength could only yield the reverse effect. The more the people feared and hated the “witch,” the more those feelings seeped into the ambient mana, strengthening the monster.

But then, what could be done to defeat the “witch”?

Well, the answer was surprisingly straightforward: shower it with positivity.

Now, for another example—imagine that someone hurt you. You’d naturally start disliking—or even hating—they. Now, imagine that this same person saved your life. Your hatred would soon fade in the face of the new, more powerful positive feeling you’d develop. Another analogy could be that of a child who hated wasabi and mustard. If they grew to like it, they’d eventually forget about their past distaste for it. In other words, one could grow to love something or someone they used to hate, and naturally, the reverse could happen too. Any specific feeling could be offset by one directly opposing it.

Since the “witch” had fallen into despair because of the ugliness of the human heart, all Ellize had to do was show it the beauty and light that lay underneath it. (In truth, Ellize was so done with being blinded by that light that she couldn’t wait to dump it onto someone else.)

“The witch is in pain! Nothing else worked, but this...” Verner whispered, flabbergasted.

He didn’t understand why this had worked on the seemingly invincible enemy. To be fair, he was also confused about the process itself. Could you just throw positive feelings at others like that?

“The human heart—rather, the wickedness within it—gave birth to the witches. As a result, they destroyed, massacred, and plunged the world itself into darkness. The more suffering there was, the murkier everyone’s souls became, which tainted the witches further. This vicious circle has oppressed us all for over a thousand years,” Ellize told them.

Simply saying that the witches had all gone batshit crazy because of too much mana circulation didn’t sound as cool, so she’d gone out of her way to find a dramatic explanation. At the end of the day, the meaning was the exact same, but her impactful wording would go a long way in terms of leaving an impression.

“If the darkness of people’s souls can affect the world, then I’m certain the reverse is also possible. The light hidden inside each of our hearts—our brilliant hopes and dreams—can light up the world. All I did was direct that at the witch.”

What she'd *actually* done was deflect the positive feelings directed at her toward the witch because she didn't want anything to do with them, but that didn't sound as pleasant.

Ellize rose into the air and created a faint gleam around her figure to attract everyone's attention.

"Still, one thing hasn't changed. I'm afraid we are still pushing everything onto the saints' shoulders. If we want the world to change for good, we need to rise to the occasion. Every single one of us must stand up and fight."

Or, in other words: *Get moving and stop making me do all the work!*

Ellize had shown them that pleasant emotions worked on the "witch." All that was left was to continue. What better way to get people to pump out more positivity than to get them involved?

The people took Ellize's words to heart. They all got up, their eyes sparkling with hope.

"She's right! We shouldn't let one person protect us all! Let's protect what we love ourselves!" someone exclaimed.

As he spoke, light overflowed from his chest and made its way toward Ellize.

"Everyone, let's seize our tomorrow with our own strength!" another voice shouted. Like the first, another ray of light appeared.

One person turned to two, and before long, the entire crowd had risen to their feet. A steady stream of light—composed of attributes like courage, friendship, justice, kindness, compassion, and love—merged with the mana and traveled through the air. They flowed into Ellize and strengthened her.

*AAARGH!!! That's way too much!*

A torrent of dazzling light that couldn't even be compared to the previous one struck Ellize and her undead heart in full force. She lost altitude and almost collapsed, but Verner immediately supported her.

Initially, Ellize was thankful, but when she felt the wave of love pouring out of his heart, she wondered if he was just there to rub salt into her wounds. Still, she endured with a smile and nodded at the young man.

“With this...” Verner started.

“It’s oveeeeeer!” Ellize finished for him, firing the light she’d accumulated at the “witch.”

It exploded when it came into contact with the monster, and a shrill cry filled the air. The clouds dispersed, and cheers erupted as the people finally caught a glimpse of the sun high up in the sky.

Suddenly, something fell right in front of Ellize.

“No way... M-Mother?” Alfrea asked, her voice shaky.

A woman was groveling on the ground, her entire body covered in a layer of darkness as black as ink.

Ellize’s previous attack had most likely destroyed most of the negative emotions. The remnants—this woman—crawled toward Ellize and let out a feeble cry. She looked pitiful. Ellize softly reached out to pat her head and poured more positive emotions into her directly. Overkill, perhaps, but Ellize didn’t care.

“You’re fine. You’ve suffered enough,” Ellize said. “You can rest now.”

“Yes...” the “witch” muttered weakly, vanishing after that final blow.

Cheers erupted once more as the people celebrated their Great Saint.

Finally...it was finally over. This marked the end of a cycle of pain that had lasted for a millennium. There would never be another witch again...nor another saint forced to sacrifice herself for the rest of the world. From tomorrow onward, everyone would be responsible for their own destiny.

Having rid this world of its greatest calamity, Ellize stood up. She focused on the feeling of the breeze against her skin for a moment, then looked at Layla.

One last hurdle remained: how would she tell Layla that she only had a few hours left?

In the past, Ellize wouldn’t have spared much thought to this. She would have simply assumed that Layla would get over her death eventually. She knew better now—especially after she’d felt the extent of Layla’s love firsthand during the fight.

It was quite a pickle she currently found herself in. Even though peace had returned to this world, Layla's heart would break when she died again.

Ellize had absolutely no idea what to say to mitigate her pain; unfortunately for her, she had no time to think of anything either. Now that the fight was over, and she had finally relaxed, she was assailed by the horrible chest pains. She fell to her knees.

She should have had a couple more hours left, but she was painfully aware that she'd chipped away at her life by overdoing it during the battle. She probably only had minutes left, not hours.

Layla embraced her weakened body, and Ellize saw the fear and pain in her eyes.

"Please...someone, anyone! Save Lady Ellize! Heal her, quickly!" Layla screamed.

Several knights came running and started casting healing magic, but to no avail. Ellize wasn't hurt. Besides, she was perfectly capable of using healing magic herself.

Ellize felt her consciousness slipping away, but she clutched it with everything she had. She refused to close her eyes. She couldn't die in Layla's arms for the second time. What if Layla killed herself from the trauma?

Ellize had always been very indifferent to the prospect of her own death. As far as she was concerned, she'd go when the time came. It wasn't a big deal.

And yet, for the first time, she didn't want to die. Ellize didn't want to live for her own sake, though—she simply didn't want anyone to be saddened by her passing.

Unfortunately, the increasingly painful palpitations in her chest held little regard for her feelings. She could feel death looming over her.

*Damn... My voice...won't come out.*

She wanted to talk to Layla at the very least, but even her voice had betrayed her.

She was worried that Layla would follow her master in death immediately

after. But whenever she tried to call out to her, coughs came out instead. She wasn't even allowed to cheer Layla up in the end. She saw Layla's expression shift into a sad smile as she hugged her tighter. She'd resigned herself, Ellize understood.

"Lady Ellize... I won't leave you alone. I'll be right there with you, so don't worry..."

*What the— Scotterbrain?! Please hang on, Layla! If you were trying to put me at ease with that line, it was just about the worst thing you could say! Please rethink your— Wait, why am I speaking politely even in my head now?!*

Layla had stressed out Ellize even further with her promise to commit suicide after her death.

On top of that, the fake saint was currently feeling quite unsettled because of the aftermath all the positivity had left inside her heart. She hadn't exactly been purified by the light and turned into a good person, but she felt like she was sitting on the fence of decency...which was already weird in its own right for her.

She was at a loss. The only thing she could do was battle the drowsiness that threatened to take over her.

Suddenly, Profeta appeared on the edge of her vision. "You're quite something, Ellize. I had a feeling you'd be able to change the fate of this world, but to think you really went and did it!"

*Why, thank you very much,* Ellize thought before shifting her focus back to Layla and her dumb mistake-to-be again. She was still trying to figure out a way to prevent this disaster.

Ellize couldn't really tell whether Profeta had guessed her thoughts or not, but the turtle continued, "There won't be another witch, nor another saint, again. This means there is no need for a prophet anymore either."

*True,* Ellize thought. Her eyelids had grown so heavy that she couldn't fight them anymore. She let them fall, and from that point onward, became utterly incapable of opening them again.

She felt a tear drop fall on her cheek—Layla's, her brain supplied—and, while

she wanted nothing more than to wipe her knight's tears for her, she couldn't get her arm to move.

"Oh my, looks like I don't have the time for long speeches," Profeta said. "I'll just do what I have to do, then. I, Profeta the prophet, choose Ellize to be my successor!"

At her words, something started streaming into Ellize. Her drowsiness disappeared, and she got up as though nothing had happened. She stared at her hands, amazed, clenching and unclenching her fists again and again.

Before she could figure out what had happened, though, she found herself slammed to the ground. Layla had jumped on her, overcome with emotion.



## Chapter 78: And So, the Tale Unfolds

A thousand years ago, the world had given birth to Profeta. To be more accurate, it had most likely been a thousand and four or five years ago, but even Profeta herself could no longer be sure, so we shall round it down and stick to a thousand.

As one of the world's proxies, Profeta was born with an intellect on par with that of a human. Thus, she'd never gotten along with her kind. After a few difficult years, she'd decided to leave her homeland behind and embark on a journey.

She hadn't had any specific goals in mind, but she'd had a destination. As the prophet, Profeta knew where the saint would be born. The only issue was that she was a turtle. At the time, Profeta hadn't been as big as she was now, so she'd been even slower. Every step she'd taken was slow and steady, true to her species' nature.

After she'd traveled for a while, Profeta had reached a place where food was scarce. Unable to sustain herself, she'd almost died alone on the side of the road.

The one who'd saved Profeta was a certain woman who, in those days, had yet to lose her mind entirely—Eve.

While she'd had an inkling that the prophetic turtle would eventually become a thorn in her side, Eve had picked her up nonetheless—she needed her. A child had been growing inside of Eve's belly, and she'd been painfully aware that her sanity was slipping away from her. She'd feared that she wouldn't be able to raise her child, so she'd hoped to leave the baby in Profeta's hands—or rather, her feet.

Profeta had ended up becoming little Alfreá's caretaker. She'd grown up by her side like an older sister—(although if you asked Alfreá, she'd tell you that the turtle was simply her favorite pet).

One day, Eve had reached her breaking point.

She'd immediately fled as far as she could, hanging on to the last thread of sanity she'd had left to make sure she wouldn't hurt her daughter.

Alfrea convinced herself that her mother had thrown her away, but the reality was a little different. Had Eve not left in time, she would most likely have turned against her greatest threat—the young Alfrea.

After her mother's departure, Alfrea had discovered her mother's true identity and all of the terrible deeds she'd committed. She'd resolved to stop her.

It was hard to say whether Alfrea had made that decision on her own or if the world had stirred her in the direction that suited it. Regardless of the reason, she'd carried Profeta—who soon became her favorite shield instead of her favorite pet—away and recruited comrades to help her fight the witch. Before long, she'd become strong enough to rival her.

She'd succeeded in defeating her once, but then she'd fallen for Eve's tricks until it was too late.

Her mother had come back and sealed her, and with her out of the picture, Profeta had made her way to a large lake in the middle of the forest. There she'd remained, watching over the world.

She'd never been able to easily travel because of her walking speed, but she'd become far too big for someone to pick her up and carry her like Alfrea used to.

In the forest, Profeta had met strange monkey-like people. At first, they'd treated her like a monster. In order to show them that she wasn't hostile, she'd taught them how to treat wounds and illnesses. From that point onward, they'd become strangely attached to her.

After a while, the royal families had started visiting her. Apparently, Alfrea had blurted out that a prophet existed during one of her drunken nights. People had been searching for her for years.

And so, for many, many years, Profeta would inform them of the birth of the next saint. With each new prophecy, though, she gradually lost track of her *raison d'être*.

The saints were victims to be sacrificed for the good of the world.

Whenever Profeta would give the royals information on the new saint, a baby would be ripped away from her parents and raised for the sole purpose of battling the witch...only to ultimately become the next one.

The only thing Profeta had achieved was to push those girls into hell. Wouldn't it have been better if she stopped with the prophecies altogether? As the years passed, she'd found herself asking that question more and more often. Besides, the hard-won period of peace would almost never last more than five years—they'd just delay the problem, not solve it.

Still, if they were to have stopped fighting, the current witch would have never known peace, Profeta realized. Only the next saint could set her free by taking her place.

To bear with her guilt, Profeta had continued to make more predictions, hoping that the witch would be freed from her suffering as quickly as possible. She'd continued the cycle, dropping another saint into hell to save the previous one.

Seventeen years ago, Profeta—who'd by then pushed dozens of girls into hell—made a terrible mistake.

She'd prophesied that the next saint would soon be born and saw that her parents were thinking of naming her Ellize. She'd told Aiz and informed him of the location of their village.

She hadn't expected that a huge problem would arise, though.

There was another couple in the same village. They were also expecting a child and were on very good terms with the parents of the future saint's—so much so that the two couples often discussed baby names together.

The saint's parents had eventually changed their minds and decided on the name Eterna for their baby girl. Since they'd given up on the name Ellize, their friends—who liked the name very much—had decided to use it instead.

That was how the two babies had been mistaken at birth, resulting in the worst mix-up in Fiori's history.

Profeta had realized her mistake right away. Though she'd wanted to warn the king, she was too slow to make her way to the royal capital on foot and too big to fit inside the steam train. She'd contemplated tasking the guardians with the mission, but they couldn't understand each other!

The turtle had been left with no choice but to wait for the royals' next visit. The thing was, they didn't visit her often. She was stuck and soon fell into despair.

Profeta had always been good at making predictions, and she could already see the bleak future that awaited humanity because of her.

Saints were practically living sacrifices, but they were also revered and carefully brought up as saviors. They'd always be forgiven no matter what they did, and there were always people around them at their beck and call.

People raised in such environments usually became twisted. The previous saints had mostly turned out to be all right, but that was only because they were somehow born with a heart purer than most other human beings. They also seemed to have a natural and unconscious need to fulfill their duty.

Ellize would be different. She was a regular person with no God-given duty, so she'd surely grow up to become an arrogant girl. A chill had run through Profeta as she'd imagined how terrible the fake saint would become.

To make things worse, Ellize suffered from the same birth defect as Eve—her mana naturally circulated at a much higher rate than that of regular people. That meant that the negative emotions she took in would slowly taint her heart as she'd be unable to process and dispose of them fast enough.

Nobody who'd suffered from that illness—Excessive Circulation Syndrome, as Profeta called it—had turned out to be decent human beings. In fact, they'd all ended up being scoundrels of the worst kind. Many had even left their mark in history as notorious villains.

Profeta had ended up putting the worst possible person in the worst possible position.

The prospect of their grim future had weighed heavily on her mind. She'd been convinced that soon, the royals would march an army into her forest and

execute her for her mistake.

However, Profeta's predictions had proven to be wrong.

The fake saint, Ellize, grew up to become saintlier than any saint before her. No matter how much she circulated her mana, her heart showed no signs of darkening. Her mana pool, on the other hand, skyrocketed. She started exterminating monsters left and right. She healed the sick and the wounded, restored nature, and even found a way to fight starvation.

Before she knew it, the baby she'd mistakenly pointed to as the saint had become the greatest saint in history. Although Alexia the witch was still alive, Ellize had succeeded in bringing peace to the world.

*What in the world was going on? How had that happened?* Profeta wondered.

She was utterly shocked by this unpredictable development, and she found herself clinging to a new hope. Perhaps she, the fake who'd surpassed the real saints, could change the world for good.

Saints were sacrifices bound by their heavy duties, but they could only save the world for a very short amount of time. They were just cogs in an unstoppable wheel of suffering and pain. Ellize, however, wasn't part of this system. She was free of their constraints.

That was why Profeta had made the decision to come out of her forest and stand on the front line—something she hadn't done in nearly a thousand years since she'd fought alongside Alfreia.

She'd hoped that something would finally change, and her wishes came true. Ellize removed the source of the pain.

Thanks to her, there would never be another witch. Thus, there was no need for any more saints.

The origin of all their pain was the darkness in people's hearts, which had corrupted each witch. Saints had never been the answer—as it turned out, the only way to rid the world of the curse was for the light inside each person to shine through.

All that was left, Profeta concluded, was to bring about the happy ending

Ellize hoped for—a future where everyone could smile.

Ellize was on the verge of dying after using all of her strength. If that happened, no one would smile, so Profeta decided to nominate her as the next prophet. Unlike the saints, Profeta had the right to pick her successor herself. By doing so, she'd transfer both her power and the rest of her lifetime into them. She supposed that the world had made it that way so there'd never be two prophets alive at the same time.

That meant, of course, that Profeta would die. She felt herself grow weak, but she smiled nonetheless. With this, she'd been able to prevent the worst future—the one in which Ellize died.

"Profeta... Why?" Ellize asked. She seemed puzzled by the fact that she'd just escaped death.

"Why are you even asking? If you die, everyone will fall into despair once again. The cycle of suffering has finally ended. I can't let this world's light die out at the very end, can I? Better I die than you. I've already had a long life, you know? Besides, I got to witness the end of this tragedy when I thought I never would. If I can give you a little more time, this longevity of mine will finally be of some use. Most people don't get to die such a satisfying death, Ellize."

Profeta wasn't putting on a brave front. She had no regrets; she truly believed that she couldn't have asked for a better ending. Besides, if she hadn't, she suspected she'd be stuck living out the end of her needlessly long turtle life in boredom and regret.

"I don't even have much longer to live, so what does it matter?" Profeta continued. "I've got, what? A hundred years at best?"

"That's an awfully long time, actually," Alfrea quipped.

As far as Profeta was concerned, a hundred years was nothing. For a human, though, it was tremendous. Instead of dying young, Ellize would get to enjoy a full life.

"Ellize, you need to keep on living," Profeta said, ignoring Alfrea. "You rescued so many people. You even saved what was left of Eve and the others. So how could I let you perish like that? From now on, I want you to live for yourself."

Find someone you like...or stay celibate, that's fine too! What matters is that you do what *you* want to do and live happily. You don't need to keep being their saint any longer."

The era in which the saint was needed had ended today. Just like Ellize had said, it was time for a new era—and she was needed to welcome it.

*What ought to disappear is the millennium-old relic of the bygone days*, she thought to herself. Then, she said, "Your era starts now."

Having entrusted her dreams to future generations, the turtle who'd watched over the world for a thousand years closed her eyes.



*What a nostalgic dream*, she thought as she opened her eyes.

The sight that greeted her was the same as always: the ceiling of her bedroom. As she woke up from her nap, she mused to herself that she hadn't dreamed of her past—or rather, of her previous life—in a while.

She slowly got up, smoothed her disheveled black hair with her hands, and woke her computer from sleep mode.

Her desktop appeared on the screen. The wallpaper—a scene from the game she'd written, *Kuon no Sanka*—showed Ellize surrounded by the entire cast, smiling. One look at this picture was enough to warm her heart.

"I wonder how Ellize is doing these days...?" she asked herself out loud. "According to Niito-san, there's a pretty big discrepancy in the timeline. Considering what he said, I should have just died on the other side."

The young woman—Yamamoto Tamaki—smiled.

After her death in Fiori, Profeta's soul hadn't passed to the other side. Instead, she'd been reincarnated into this world. Compared to the millennium she'd lived out in the other world, her time here had been rather short. Still, she'd already accomplished something—she'd turned her memories into a story.

She didn't mind that everyone else thought that her story was just fiction. All she wanted was to make sure as many people as possible would hear of it, to

have them know about the saints who'd disappeared in the gaping pit of history. And she wanted them to know about the fake saint who'd brought an end to it all.

She'd sent her story to an online contest on a whim, and it had been picked up and turned into a game. At that point, her novel hadn't been completed yet, but since she'd had to focus on the game scenario instead, she'd left it hanging.

The game version, she'd figured, would attract a wider audience, and even more people would learn about Ellize's awesomeness.

Just as she'd hoped, the scenario had been okayed by the game company. However, they'd requested a ton of changes. They didn't want the story to be linear, so they'd forced her to add all the other routes. They'd also ended up going with Verner as the main character instead of Ellize. In the end, *Kuon no Sanka* had become a dating sim.

"A linear game with an overpowered female protagonist won't sell!" they'd told her. Tamaki realized later that they'd been planning on going the dating sim route from the moment they'd offered her the award.

*God damn it!* Just thinking about it pissed her off.

And to add insult to injury, they'd removed Ellize from the heroine lineup because she was too powerful compared to the other characters. That was when Tamaki had spoken up and vehemently opposed the cut. She'd picked up the pen because she wanted to tell Ellize's story. Omitting her was completely out of the question. After long rounds of negotiations, Tamaki had succeeded in saving Ellize's storyline—on the condition that it became a hidden route. It would overshadow all the others if it wasn't, the company had said.

*Curse you, Ijuuin!*

The discovery conditions had ended up being so far-fetched that no one had found the route for literal years.

*Damn you, Ijuuin!*

"Now then... They wanted me to write about what happens at the end of Ellize's route as a DLC, huh? They just keep shoving requests down my throat! I also wish I knew what happened afterward! I can't believe they kept telling me



that Ellize's route was useless, yet now that it's popular they want to make money off it!" Tamaki grumbled to herself as she thought of the new scenario Ijuuin wanted her to write.

Speaking of Ijuuin—she'd met up with him only a few days ago along with a man named Fudou Niito. They'd had a very interesting talk, but for some reason, Ijuuin had forgotten all about it. She'd tried asking him about it again, but all he'd answered with was "The scenario changed? What are you talking about? It was like that from the start!" He also seemed to have no idea who Fudou Niito was.

She hadn't been able to get in touch with the man who claimed he'd met Ellize either. He'd looked like he was about ready to kick the bucket, so it was likely he'd already passed away.

If everything he'd told her was true, it left her with one question: why was he, out of all people, able to contact Ellize?

A couple more mysteries also remained.

The biggest of them all was the alternative story Tamaki had seen when she was still Profeta—the one in which Ellize was a horrible person.

Tamaki had called that story "scenario A," but she still had no clue why or how she'd been able to see it. Had some sort of memory filter impacted her to prevent her from seeing the real future? Or had the world tried to give her a hint in an effort to change an upcoming tragedy?

Fiori itself had most likely been trying to break the chain of suffering, and that was why it had brought Ellize to them. Tamaki was pretty sure that was just wishful thinking on her part, but it'd be nice if she was right.

No amount of rumination would give her the answer, though, so she decided to settle on the theory she liked most.

"What would Ellize have done after? She'd probably step down from her role as the saint. She always seemed pretty hellbent on giving Eterna back her rightful spot, after all. In that case... I can picture her building a little cottage in the forest and retiring. Yeah, she'd totally do that. Little Verner and Miss Layla would surely follow her... I'm writing a dating sim here, so there needs to be

some romance, after all. To be fair, I'm not sure if Ellize ever *had* romantic feelings for anyone at all, but the players will be happy if I write her together with Verner. Now, the thing is that Verner tends to do the most unexpected things. Instead of following her to her cottage, maybe he'd blurt out something like, 'I'll leave to become a man strong enough to protect you!' and go on a journey to train..."

Tamaki casually typed away, imagining Fiori's future after her passing.

Things may have turned out exactly as she'd predicted...and they may have ended up being completely different. All she knew was that a happy tomorrow was waiting for them all. After all, they had the strongest fake saint with them. Better than that, they had the one-and-only Great Saint who'd made her *raison d'être* the people, not the world.

Tamaki smiled fondly at her screen as she lost herself in thought.

## Chapter 79: And Then...

After we'd defeated the witch, a plethora of— Uh, I mean, a *bunch* of things happened.

*Jeez, I can't stop being overly polite even inside my head now!*

I'd thrown the noble feelings that had come pouring into me at the witch as quickly as possible, but it seemed like they'd still managed to contaminate—or rather, cleanse (?)—my rotten psyche somewhat.

Still, as the worst piece of shit in the world, a little purification was hardly enough to turn me into a real saint. I'd just gotten a little bit closer to being a regular person. Besides, I was pretty sure that the feeling would fade soon enough, and I'd return to my true trashy nature.

Anyway, after the battle, a state funeral had been held for Profeta.

She'd sacrificed herself so that I could continue a carefree life. While I would've normally felt bad, her satisfied smile at the end had convinced me that everything was all right. I was almost envious of her serenity.

Alfrea had known her for a very long time, so I'd figured she'd probably be devastated. To my surprise, though, she looked perfectly fine. I'd asked her about it, and she'd told me that, while she was a little sad, Profeta had lived a long and full life. She was even slightly pissed off that the turtle had found such a satisfying way to die.

The guardians had somehow got wind of Profeta's passing, so they'd rushed over to her funeral. They'd been mistaken for monsters and almost killed before I'd cleared up the situation, so now they liked me even more. I still didn't really know what to do about it—I didn't particularly like monkeys, after all—but that was that.

With the witch finally defeated once and for all, a big parade spanning several days had been organized. It was like a never-ending festival.

The fact that I was never the real saint had spread through the land before I'd

even come back to life, but I'd apparently earned a new title in my absence. I was now the Great Saint.

*Who's the idiot who came up with that title?! I'm a fake, guys! A fake!*

There were *two* actual saints around, so couldn't they just focus on them for a change?

Oh, by the way—as the turtle's successor, I'd obtained her powers. If I focused my senses enough, I could see places far, far away from where my physical body was, as if watching a movie! It even came with sound!

Naturally, my brain couldn't process everything everywhere all at once, but if I focused on a specific place, I could see and hear anything I wanted.

You know what that meant, right? If I decided to peep on Eterna in the bath, I totally could! I hadn't, though. I was a gentleman, so I'd *never even consider* doing something like that! Seriously, I hadn't! For real!

Anyway, we'd finally reached a truly happy ending. Well, about as happy as we could get given Profeta had died in the process, but you know... I was kind of on the fence. I felt like recognizing that we'd reached this ending thanks to her sacrifice was the best way to honor her.

Leaving that aside, I only had one last thing to do: step down from my position as the saint and skip town overnight!

Having a lazy fake in such an important position forever was no good. I'd asked Aiz to give Eterna her rightful spot back again and again, but he kept refusing. This left me with only one option: I'd disappear so that he wouldn't have a choice.

If I left Layla behind, she'd probably spend the rest of her days crying, so I'd take her with me.

There was just one little thing I wanted to take care of before I left.

Although I'd never agreed to Dias's request—in fact, he'd pushed it onto me without even asking for my opinion—I still remembered that he'd begged me to save Alexia. And so, I made my way to the church's basement where the crystal Alexia had been sealed into remained.

“Lady Ellize... Are you sure you want to go through with this?” Layla asked, not bothering to try to conceal her disapproval.

I understood her feelings. By now, everyone knew that the witches were also victims. However, there was a world of difference between knowing it and accepting it. Reason and emotions didn’t always mesh well together.

Everyone from her generation abhorred Alexia for what she’d done to them, and there was no way those feelings could disappear so easily. Besides, I wasn’t exactly a fan of Alexia either—I’d also been tempted to leave her in that crystal forever.

Now that everything had ended, though, there was no point in doing that. Plus, I found it difficult to get over that face of hers... Right before she’d been sealed, her face had contorted in terror. Leaving her like that wouldn’t be very nice, I figured. Poor Alexia would be doomed to expose that shameful expression to future generations forever. Even though I wasn’t fond of her, she was just too pitiful.

“The darkness that turned her into a witch has already disappeared,” I told Layla. “She’s back to being a regular person now.”

I looked at Alfrea to signal it was time.

Last time, I’d broken through Alfrea’s seal with sheer force, but since I had the spellcaster right here with me, I could just ask her to undo it. Unlike the others, Alfrea was unbiased toward Alexia. If Verner had been the one to cast the seal, he probably wouldn’t have agreed to undo it.

“Roger,” Alfrea said, her expression calm. “I know how hard it is to be trapped like that, your soul unable to pass on even in death... I can see why you want to free her.”

Alexia’s soul was still right there, in that crystal. The spell had been invented for that very purpose, after all. Eve had wanted to put Alfrea in a temporary state of suspended animation while making sure she wouldn’t die. To do so, the space inside the crystal was entirely frozen and hermetic—nothing could escape it, not even souls.

Without that specificity, Alfrea’s soul would’ve long departed for the other

side. Fudou Niito, for instance, had only been dead for a couple of minutes, but that had been enough for half of his soul to transmigrate into Ellize.

While Verner had inadvertently killed her, the crystal had preserved her perfectly. Neither her brain nor her organs had started necrotizing. In other words, it wasn't too late for me to resuscitate her!

"Here I go, Ellize!" Alfrea exclaimed, holding up her hands. "Seal Removal!"

The crystal that had been holding Alexia captive vanished. I used wind magic to keep her body from falling to the ground and pressed my palm against her chest.

First, I had to patch her heart up. With that done, I moved on to using thunder magic to shock it. I also placed my other palm on her mouth and conjured wind into her lungs to get her to breathe.

"Lady Ellize? What are you...?"

If I told Layla what I was doing, I was pretty sure she'd pull her sword out to slay Alexia on the spot, so I kept my mouth shut. After a few moments, Alexia coughed, and her chest started rising and falling naturally.

*All clear, resuscitation complete!*

Just as I'd expected, I'd made it in time.

"Lady Ellize... Why?"

"She's not a witch anymore, Layla... That's why."

Now that everyone knew that the previous saints were, in fact, the witches, there was no way Alexia could return to being a saint. However, she ought to have the right to live the remainder of her life peacefully in some remote place.

I didn't used to think like that, but I supposed all the niceness from the fight was still affecting me.

That also reminded me that a part of her soul was still stuck in Verner. It was probably time for that bit to go back to her as well.

"Verner," I said. "There's something I haven't told you. The darkness you had inside of you belonged to Alexia."

“I know... She told me during that battle.”

“She must have torn away this part of her before she fully turned into a witch in the hope that it would stop her. That’s how that piece of her soul found her way into you.”

“Yes, I know that too.”

Verner had ended up becoming the protagonist *because* Alexia had left a piece of her soul in him. I was surprised to hear that he already knew, though. Come to think of it, I’d seen him and Alexia fight together in front of my crystal in the game, so they’d probably patched things up or something. Either way, Verner was truly protagonist-coded. The people who’d created the game—Ijuuin-san’s team and Yamoto-san—had most likely chosen him as the main character for that very reason.

Speaking of Ijuuin-san, I hoped his memories had come back after Niito (me)’s death. I’d inconvenienced him so much, and yet I hadn’t been able to apologize.

“If it’s all right with you...would you mind giving Alexia that part of her soul back?” I asked Verner.

“Gladly.”

*That was fast!*

Once he went through with it, Verner wouldn’t be able to use darkness magic ever again. He was agreeing to become weaker, yet he hadn’t hesitated for one second.

*Yep. Handsome guys are beautiful inside out. That’s just how it works.*

He must’ve changed his views after going through joint struggles with Alexia.

I took Verner’s hand in my own and held the other against Alexia’s. Just as I had done in the past to steal—um, I mean, *borrow*—part of Verner’s powers of darkness, I sucked out Alexia’s soul. This time, I immediately transferred it to Alexia. I didn’t return her powers to her, though. She was better off without them. Instead, I scattered them into the air—including the small part that I still had left inside me from before. Then, I gathered some positive feelings drifting around and hurled them at the darkness, making them vanish for good.

While I'd taken the powers of darkness inside me, I'd ejected them back out almost instantly. I'd only lost a couple of weeks' worth of my life at worst. I felt a little stupid for shortening the life I'd received from the turtle, but hey—she'd given me almost a hundred years! What were a few weeks in the face of that?

*A hundred years is way too much, you stupid turtle!*

Anyway, Verner and I were now both entirely darkness magic-free. That wouldn't bring back the years of life I'd lost, but now that witches no longer existed, there was no need for this magic either.

Besides, even without my powers of darkness, I was still super-duper strong. I even had a new killer technique in my arsenal—it involved hurling a blast of light magic at my enemies. All in all, I had no need for darkness magic.

"Um..." Alexia whimpered.

*Oh. Look who's awake.*

She looked utterly confused. She probably didn't understand how she was alive. The second she saw me, though, she leaped back in fear.

"E-E-Ellize! What's going on?! Why is my seal— No, why am I alive?!"

Although she was no longer a witch, her personality obviously hadn't changed one bit. To be fair, I was pretty sure she was just as annoying when she'd been the saint. I remembered her being haughty in the game too.

"Please calm down," I said. "We broke your seal because you're not the witch any longer, and you're alive because I just resuscitated you."

"I'm...not the witch anymore? Now that you mention it, the urge to destroy everything around me has vanished. It feels like...the thick fog that surrounded my heart has finally lifted. Still, I don't understand—why would you bring me back to life? You didn't stand to gain anything from it."

In addition to inheriting the first witch's grudge, saints were forced to look the ugliness of people's souls in the face. That was how they became witches. Now that the grudge had disappeared, Alexia had also lost her aggressiveness. However, that didn't mean that her faith in humanity had magically been restored. She probably couldn't fathom why I'd saved her.



“Am I not allowed to save people unless I profit from it?” I asked.

Alexia wasn't wrong. I didn't stand to gain anything. If I *really* had to give a reason, I guess it was because leaving Alexia like that would've left a bad taste in my mouth. I just wanted to do the right thing and feel good about it. Somewhere along the way, I'd gotten kinda addicted to the feeling—it was essentially spiritual masturbation.

“If you must know, the previous headmaster, Dias, asked me to save you. That's my reason,” I concluded.

“You're...” Alexia paused to stare at me in disbelief. She let out a deep, exasperated sigh, but the corners of her lips curled. “...such a weirdo. There's a limit to how much of a goody-two-shoes one can be. I've...never thought about things that way. I was the saint, but that position brought me nothing but anguish. All I could do was think about how pitiful I was for being forced into that situation. I'd think to myself, ‘Why do I have to help people when no one ever helps me?’ If I'd been even half as noble as you... I probably wouldn't have ended up like this. I don't resent you anymore, Ellize—I'm just envious of you. You're a true saint, down to the purity of your heart.”

*Uh, you couldn't be more wrong.*

The only reason I'd settled so easily into the role of the saint was because I'd gotten hooked on the pleasure helping others gave me. I'd just been enjoying watching myself pretend to be a good guy from the outside and praising myself for being so cool. I hadn't faced any anguish or stress. Besides, I was already a piece of trash from the get-go, so I couldn't fall any lower!

The other saints had ended up joining the dark side because they'd spent their entire lives working for the good of others. They'd put their satisfaction aside. That's why they hadn't been able to keep it up forever. In fact, I was already impressed that they'd managed to keep it up as long as they had.

*Your soul darkened because you were so much nobler than me in the first place*, I thought. I couldn't exactly tell her that though, so I just smiled awkwardly. *Don't forget rule number one of adulting: when you don't know what to say, smile! Careful not to overuse that technique, though!*

Afterward, King Aiz and his soldiers took Alexia away. While she wasn't the

witch anymore, it wasn't advisable for her to appear in front of people ever again. I knew Aiz would treat her right, though. I could tell that he felt guilty about what he'd done to her. When I'd tried to put in a good word for her, he'd immediately told me I didn't need to bother—he already knew that she deserved to live out her days in peace.

Obviously, since he couldn't let too many people know about her, she'd be confined. Apparently, Aiz intended to build a mansion with a nice garden for her in a remote place where she could live with Dias. There'd be guards around her property at all times, but she'd still be able to go out and enjoy the garden. As long as she didn't stray too far away or commit any further crime, she'd be left in peace.

*I'm so damn jealous. I wanna live like that too!*

## Final Chapter: The Peace We Found

I'd achieved everything I'd set out to do. From now on, the world would move forward without the need for picking out proxies. People would forge their own destinies.

They wouldn't need me anymore either. While I wasn't the saint, I'd become the prophet. People gave way too much importance to the things I said. If I stated that something was white, everyone would agree, even if it appeared pitch-black in their eyes—that was just how influential I'd become.

However, I didn't believe it was right for some sort of absolute presence to remain in that kind of setting. How could the people choose their own path if I was right there dictating what was right or wrong?

Thus, it was time for me to leave center stage. I'd go to the forest where Profeta used to live, build myself a nice, big log house, and spend the next century relaxing.

And really, all excuses aside, I was just done with politics. I couldn't think of anything more cumbersome, and since there weren't any monsters around anymore, I didn't see the point in putting in all that work. The heroes in stories are always cool and all, but with their foes out of the way, even they would struggle to shine. The same went for me. Without monsters to butcher, I didn't have much to show.

Besides, if I remained in the public eye, I'd mess up sooner or later.

I'd still offer advice to the royals if they so desired, I'd help out if the people needed me, but—as a general rule—I wouldn't get involved anymore.

Back to my plans. I'd set up a small field behind my house. Since there were also plenty of fruit trees in the forest, it looked like I wouldn't struggle too much to be self-sufficient. Actually, the guardians also regularly brought me fruit or game they'd hunted, so I had more than enough to get by.

I had a lot of time on my hands thanks to the turtle, so I figured I'd take it easy

and slowly try to grow ingredients that didn't originally exist in this world. That way, I could cook everything I craved.

"Lady Ellize! I caught a lot of fish today!"

I turned toward the voice and saw a casually dressed Layla with a basket full of fish. Verner was right next to her.

Layla had left her position as a knight behind to follow me to the forest. I felt a little bad about it—she'd worked hard all her life to earn her spot as head of the saint's guard, after all—but she'd assured me that I was her only saint, and she wouldn't have it any other way.

One way or another, she'd adapted to our new lifestyle pretty quickly. She fished or hunted every day, which was actually a great help. I was starting to think that her true calling was to be a huntress all along.

Oh, right! Let me tell you about the others too!

Fiora and random dude had somehow gotten together, and they were even thinking of getting married in the future!

Four-Eyed Pervert was still working as a teacher. Apparently, he was in the middle of writing a book on my achievements. He often visited us here and was one of our only links with the outside world. He even sent Stil's birds to keep in touch regularly between his visits. I couldn't help but think that his level of devotion was kinda freaky, but oh well.

Marie and Aina had officially received an offer to become knights after their graduation. They were still training at the academy for the time being, but they'd soon join their peers. While there was no real need for a saint any longer, the royals had decided to keep a professional army around. The knights would work there from now on, and instead of offering their loyalty to the saint, they'd offer it to the people.

In the end, this generation's saint, Eterna, never assumed her rightful spot. Instead, she continued to attend the academy. She told me that she intended to return to her birth village after graduating. Her broken heart had apparently healed quite fast, since she'd been getting cozy with Sylvester Lordnight—Verner's roommate. As far as I was concerned, that was for the best. I just

wanted her to be happy.

Alfrea was the one who had succeeded me as the saint. Apparently, she wasn't doing that great of a job, causing headache after headache for her attendants. That sounded just like her.

Last, but not least, our dear protagonist—Verner. He'd ended up following the most surprising of paths. I still had no clue what he was thinking, but he'd suddenly decided to put his studies on hold to leave on a training journey. He'd blurted out that "he wasn't worthy of standing by my side and wouldn't come back until he was strong enough to protect me." He'd even left behind the sword I'd given him, departing empty-handed. Apparently, he needed to "earn the right to wield it" or something.

I checked on him from time to time with my newly gained powers. He was mostly fighting strong people to hone his skills and developing manly friendships everywhere he stopped.

*What in the world is he trying to achieve? He's not going back to the bodybuilding♂ ending, is he?*

I knew that he was working so hard for, uh...me...but I still doubted I'd ever be able to return his feelings. That was why I'd told him he should give up on me and find another girl he liked, but he'd hit me with the most embarrassing line I'd ever heard.

"Becoming strong enough to protect you is my happiness," he'd said.

*What's up with that insane pick-up line, Verner?! If I had the heart of a girl, I would've fallen for you on the spot!*

I'd gone through a bit of a change during the final battle, but I was still a straight man inside. Sadly for Verner, I'd never ever return his feelings. I...was still a man inside...right? To be fully honest, I wasn't so sure of it anymore. A few weeks ago, I would've insisted that there was *no* chance that my mind would ever swap genders, even if my body had. After all, I'd lived as Niito for years, and my identity was fully formed by the time I'd transmigrated. However...since that final battle, I could tell that something fundamental had changed inside me. To tell the truth, I was kind of scared I'd eventually let myself get swept away.

Even though Verner had once again veered off course, he'd come to visit me today for the first time in a while. He apparently had something to give me.

He'd bulked up a lot while he was away. I still remembered how scrawny he'd looked the first time I'd seen him—a slender pretty boy right out of a dating sim. Now, he looked like he should be in some sort of fighting game. All he needed was a white dogi—the kind you see martial artists wear—and he could start saying “I must keep searching for someone stronger than I!”

*You're still Verner, right? The dating sim protag? You weren't replaced by some fighting game character, right? You're not going to hadouken me out of the blue now, are you?*

I couldn't tell how this world would change from now on. (In fact, I was especially lost when it came to Verner, I had no idea what that boy was doing.) But somehow, I firmly believed that things would turn out all right in the end.

Why, you ask? Because the eternal tragedy of the scattering flowers had finally come to an end. This world wasn't the world of *Kuon no Sanka* any longer. A new story had already started to unfold—one I didn't know anything about.

“So, um... Lady Ellize, would you please accept this?” Verner asked, handing me something. “I found it on an eastern island, and then...Miss Layla and I worked on this together.”

It was a hair ornament made with an angelo. It looked very similar to the one I'd lost after my fight with Alexia. Now that I thought about it, I hadn't worn a flower in my hair since then. It wasn't like I particularly minded either way. I hadn't been wearing the angelo flower for the looks of it, after all. I simply kept it around in case I ever needed to recharge my MP urgently—not that I'd ever even needed to in the end.

I hadn't missed the ornament after losing it, yet...Verner had somehow kept it in mind and found a new one for me.

*Stop it! You're gonna make me blush, you idiot!*

“As I thought, white flowers suit you the best, Lady Ellize.”

*Stop it! You're gonna make me blush (again), you idiot!*

Verner was a natural at this whole dating sim protagonist thing. I still couldn't believe he could blurt out such lines so easily.

Well, I needed to thank him, at the very least. Angelos were incredibly rare, after all. I couldn't help but wonder where that island was. *He didn't swim all the way there, did he?*

At any rate, I'd pour some mana into it later so that it'd never wither.

"Thank you, Verner. And thank you too, Layla," I said with a smile.

*Rejoice, this beautiful girl (from the outside only) is blessing you with her smile!*

Verner and Layla both blushed and averted their eyes. *I get why Verner reacted like that, but what's the deal with you, Scotterbrain?!*

Suddenly, I heard a voice call out in my head. *Someone, anyone—please help me!*

*Oh my, someone's in need of saving.*

I used my prophetic powers to figure out the location of the scream. It had come from a mountain trail five kilometers away from here. I could see a young girl in distress. She'd missed her footing and had fallen down a cliff. She was injured and couldn't get up on her own.

*That's a bit of a pain, but I can't leave her be, can I?*

I told Verner and Layla I'd be out for a short while and flew to the girl.



The girl held her wounded leg with one hand and wiped the tears that kept rolling down her cheeks with the other.

She'd left her village to head to the closest city, but she'd lost her footing on a mountain path and tumbled down a cliff. Thankfully, she hadn't lost her life, but her leg was broken and stuck under a rock. She wouldn't be able to walk.

Had she known things would end up this way, she would have made a detour and avoided the mountain. It was too late for regrets, though.

This mountain wasn't all that dangerous, but who knew when the next

traveler would walk along this path? What would become of her if she was forced to stay here all night? Would wild beasts attack her? What if she died of thirst or hunger before anyone found her?

*Someone, anyone—please help me!*

She pleaded for help inside her heart again and again, but who would hear the voice inside of her? She'd been screaming out loud until a few minutes ago, but her voice had become hoarse. Even if someone were to walk past her, they may not notice her if she couldn't scream, she realized.

The cloudy sky above her suddenly cleared up, and the sun shone upon her. Then, a beautiful girl wearing a pure-white dress descended from the sky. Her blonde locks gleamed like gold, and her glimmering green eyes looked like two brilliant jewels.

She was so beautiful that the wounded girl couldn't help but wonder if God had carefully handcrafted her.

"I heard your voice calling for help," she said, holding out her white, unblemished hand for her to take.

Today too, the beautiful fake saint sparkled, the sun shining behind her.





## Extra Story: Another World 1

Half a year had passed since the witches had been erased from existence for good.

I'd retired from the world and now lived in a log house deep in the forest with Layla. I didn't have much to do, so I spent most of my time lying around. It was what I'd always wanted. I was more than satisfied with my current life, and yet...for some reason, I often felt like I'd left something undone. I couldn't pinpoint *what* it was, though.

I'd defeated the witch while making sure Eterna survived. I'd also avoided the death of all the other characters that were supposed to die. I'd even gotten rid of the source of the witches' corruption and broken the cycle for good. I'd done a pretty damn good job of bringing a happy ending to this story, if I did say so myself.

Sure, I hadn't done *everything* perfectly, but I couldn't help that. I'd been given cheat powers and overwhelming talent, but at the end of the day, I was just me.

A smarter transmigrator would surely have found a way to give the people of Fiori a better living environment, improve the political system, and lead this world in a better direction, but I couldn't do all that.

Mass-producing potatoes had helped the hunger issue somewhat, but there were still people who died every winter. The life expectancy was also ridiculously low when compared to modern-day Japan.

Sadly, I was just a regular guy who'd proved time and time again he was far from being a genius.

Take Verner and Eterna, for instance—initially, I'd wanted to set them up together, but I'd ended up messing up their relationship instead. Eterna had failed to develop serious romantic feelings toward Verner, preferring to keep him as her best friend instead, and Verner...well he'd fallen for me, of all

people. Speaking of which, I still wasn't sure how *that* had happened.

That couldn't be what bothered me, though. *I mean, it does bother me, but it's more of a current issue than some sort of regret.*

What could it be...? The fact that I couldn't figure it out was probably what annoyed me the most. It was like having a fish bone stuck in between your teeth—a small, yet constant irk.

*Overthinking it isn't gonna help me*, I decided. Sometimes, when you didn't know, you didn't know! No amount of thinking would magically give you an answer. If anything, it was the kind of stuff that suddenly popped into your mind out of nowhere if you left it alone.

*Should I abuse my powers as the prophet and peep at people for a change of pace?*

My guilty pleasure used to be bullying monsters to let off steam, but now that there wasn't a single monster left in the entirety of Fiori—I'd exterminated them myself—I'd had to find a new hobby. So, yeah, my current obsession was to sit on my rocking chair while taking a peek at people's lives. Privacy? I don't know her.

*Now, now! Where shall I look today? Let's start with the academy—that's always a solid choice.*

"Huh?" I blurted out.

What I was seeing was...strange, to say the least. The place where the academy used to stand had turned into a wasteland; only ruins remained.

*The school was...destroyed? No, that doesn't make any sense. In fact, the building's still standing, I can see it. What the hell is going on? There are...two academies?*

It was all so strange. I felt like I was watching a split screen. On one side was the academy I knew. I could even see Eterna and random dude studying together. On the other side, though, was footage of the exact same place, only...different. It was like some sort of battle had taken place right there and destroyed most of the building. There were even a pair of students fighting monsters.

I took a closer look and noticed that one of these students was Verner. He didn't look like the Verner I knew, though. He'd lost his left arm and had an eye patch over his right eye. Besides, he looked much more...violent—bloodthirsty, almost—than the young man I'd gotten to know.

?

???

*What the hell is that?!*

It was the first time my footage had ever split into two, but even putting that aside, there shouldn't have been any monsters left. How was that happening? What was I watching?

Oh, and for the record, the Verner I knew was in another place altogether. He was standing under some waterfall for...training purposes, I guess? *For real, though, what in the world is that boy doing?*

*All right, I don't get it. How can there be two academies and two Verners?*

If Profeta had still been with us, I would've gone to her for advice. Sadly, she wasn't.

*Wait... What if...?*

Something suddenly came back to me. Profeta had once told me that she'd seen Japan, and more specifically, the timeline inside which the original Ellize appeared in *Kuon no Sanka*.

Yamoto-san had assumed that two timelines existed—one in which I'd transmigrated into Ellize, and one in which I hadn't. The first one, timeline A, was my starting point. There, Ellize was a piece of shit, and the story of Kuon no Sanka had unfolded in a terrible direction. That was the game I knew.

The second one, timeline B, had me as Ellize. In other words, it was the timeline I currently existed in.

I didn't know how to trigger it—it could be random, for all I knew—but the prophet seemed to have the power to observe different timelines.

Which meant I was currently looking at a different world altogether...probably?

“There’s no end to them! Marie, run away!”

“No... I’ll stay with you even in death!”

*Oh, so that girl’s Marie, huh?*

It was starting to look more and more like I was indeed peeping at a parallel universe. I continued to observe their fight. Countless monsters continued to launch themselves at the group of students. Before long, they ended up exhausted and surrounded.

I didn’t know how they’d found themselves in that situation, but things didn’t look good.

*Come on! Keep at it, other-world Verner! You can do it! I believe in you! Don’t give up! You’re not a quitter, are you? Uh-oh! Shimura! Behind you! They’re coming from behind too!*

Neither my joke nor my warning reached Verner, and he was attacked from behind. The situation was getting dire.

*Aaargh! I can’t bear to watch! This is so irritating! If I was there, I would’ve sent those freakin’ monsters flying in a matter of seconds!*

That was my last thought before my surroundings blurred. Before I could even understand what was happening, I’d ended up next to Verner and Marie on the battlefield.

*What the...?!*



*How’d things end up like this?*

Not a day would go by without him asking the same question. As the young man—Verner—gazed at what used to be his school, he couldn’t help but feel regret. He was the only man in the world with the powers of the witch.

These powers had once ruined his life. He’d been shunned by his family and driven out of his home. After he’d wandered aimlessly for a while, he’d met a young girl named Eterna.

When he closed his eyes, he could picture her face so vividly—the face of the

one person he considered family, the only woman he'd ever loved from the bottom of his heart.

Verner and Eterna had left their poor village to enroll in the magic academy, the school where future knights serving the saint were trained.

Several reasons had motivated Verner to enroll. First of all, he wanted to learn how to kill monsters so that he could protect his and Eterna's village. Second, he hoped to find a way to control the dark powers inside of him. And, finally, third, he wished to become strong enough to protect Eterna.

Eterna hadn't wished to become a knight, but she'd followed him to the academy out of worry. Verner hadn't expected that, but—while he didn't want her to be in harm's way—he was happy that she'd decided to stay by his side.

Their new life at the academy proved more difficult than they'd anticipated. Most of the other students looked down on them for being commoners, and they soon discovered that the saint—or rather, the fake saint, as they'd come to learn later—they'd have to protect was rotten to her core.

No amount of words could describe how horrible Ellize was. She only ever thought of herself, and whenever she disliked someone, she abused her authority to make their life a living hell. She was the kind of monster who could drive people to suicide without batting an eye.

She was also incredibly good at shifting the blame, so she'd play the victim every chance she got, whining and crying to attract empathy.

To make things worse, the fake saint had taken a liking to Verner. As a result, she'd started relentlessly bullying Eterna and his other friends. She'd even sent a group of hoodlums to assault Eterna. Luckily, Verner had gotten to her before it was too late, but whenever he thought about what might have happened if he'd been just a few minutes late, his blood ran cold.

The head of Ellize's guard, Layla, had ended up betraying her. With her and several others' help, they'd eventually managed to take down Ellize and exile her. He'd heard that she'd ended up dying alone in the slums. Sadly, Ellize's harassment had only been the first of many trials. Even with her out of the way, the difficulties continued.

At around the same time Ellize had been banished, Eterna awakened as the real saint. She was given the heavy task of fighting the witch.

Besides that, a teacher brainwashed by the witch had attacked her, a horde of monsters had raided the academy, and a perverted stalker had kidnapped Eterna to push his obsessive ideals onto her. Eterna had also had to deal with her terrible reputation. Ellize had done so many horrible things that the saint was hated by virtually everyone. Poor Eterna was the one who had to pay the price.

Even the nobility—who'd always supported the successive saints—refused to help Eterna. The hatred toward the "saint" had grown so much that no one wanted to associate with her anymore.

In a fit of rage, an angry mob had even attacked Eterna's birth village.

Even so, Verner and Eterna had never stopped fighting. They'd pulled through and overcome all of these obstacles together. After a while, they'd come to realize that no one was as dear to them as the other. They professed their love and got together.

Verner was chosen as the new head of Eterna's guard and allowed to become her closest support. He vowed to protect her no matter what. Unfortunately, Eterna lost her life in the final battle against the witch.

Verner had sworn to protect her. He'd promised her that he wouldn't let her die. And yet, he'd failed to do so. The person he loved the most—the one whose life he valued more than his own, had willingly sacrificed herself to kill the witch. She'd breathed her last in Verner's arms.

In hindsight, Eterna had most likely made up her mind before the fight even started, Verner realized. She'd probably resolved to die when she'd learned that the saint turned into the next witch.

The saddest thing about the whole ordeal was that Eterna's death had only been the prelude of the true tragedy.

When the witch died, her powers and curse would pass onto the saint, and she'd become the next witch. But what happened if the saint died before she could turn into a witch? Did the witch's powers disappear without a proper

vessel? That's what Eterna had assumed. She'd thought that, by sacrificing herself, she'd be able to break the cycle. The royals had also believed the same thing.

It had never happened before, thus no one could have guessed that the theory was nothing but wishful thinking.

Having lost its vessel—Eterna—the witch's grudge escaped and materialized.

The grudge of the first witch had passed to the saint who'd defeated her, and she herself passed it forward to the next saint. The cycle had repeated itself again and again until, in the end, the rancor and despair of all the previous witches merged into a warped abomination.

At last, the people of Fiori witnessed the true nature of the calamity that had plagued them for a thousand years.

Verner and all the others finally realized who their real enemy was. However, it was far too late—there was nothing they could do anymore.

The only way to triumph over this monster was to prevent it from emerging. Now that it was there, the world was doomed. There was no one who could stand up to it—no miracle worker to save them all.

Despair itself was at their door. All was truly lost.

Needless to say, Verner fought regardless. He didn't want to let Eterna's death be in vain, so he and his friends made an oath and stood up to the monster. Even those who'd once been his enemies rallied to his cause and joined the struggle. Whenever one of them passed away, the others inherited their will, fighting even harder despite the tears that streamed down their faces.

They had to win. Losing wasn't an option, they told themselves. In the end, everything would be all right, they'd make sure of it.

*We can do it. As long as we don't give up, there's still hope!* they thought.

And so, the brave warriors mustered their courage, cheered each other on, and faced despair itself.

However...



“MWA HA HA HA!!! HA HA HA HA!!!”

Despair, in the form of the “witch,” laughed hysterically as it trampled upon them mercilessly.

Verner and his comrades tried to cut, burn, and shoot the “witch” with spells and arrows. Unfortunately, it was to no avail—the abomination restored its body again and again. No matter what they tried, it continued marching through the land and destroying everything that stood in its path. The academy, countless villages and cities, entire nations—nothing escaped the giant.

*No doubt it’s out there right now destroying something, somewhere,* Verner thought. Unless someone stopped it, the “witch” wouldn’t rest until the entire world was in ruins.

Verner and his comrades—everyone he’d come to know—had lost. The saint’s guard, with the exception of Verner himself, had long since died. Even Layla, the most powerful knight who’d once stood in Verner’s path before she betrayed Ellize, had lost her life. He himself had lost an arm.

The “witch” hadn’t stopped its rampage, and the people lived in fear, unable to sleep soundly as they wondered when their turn would come.

Verner looked up at the sky. There, in the place where his school once stood, he reminisced about the old days. They’d been harsh, sure, but he’d been happy then.

His boyish fickleness and naivete had long since left him, and he’d become a proper warrior. His eyes—sharp as those of a bird of prey—shone with a cold gleam, and his body was covered in scars. One of the worst ones, which lay on his right cheek, had been poorly sewn. An unnatural mark remained, disfiguring him. He wore a tattered old cloak, which threatened to fall apart over his battered armor. The edge of his claymore had long since dulled. He’d become much taller and more muscular compared to his school days—he stood at an impressive 190 centimeters tall.

“Verner... Are we going to keep fighting?” Marie—his last standing comrade—asked, clutching Verner’s cloak.

She was the one who’d saved Verner from the clutches of death, nursing him

back to health after one of his battles against the “witch.” When he’d opened his eyes, she’d asked him to flee as far away as possible with her. They’d stop fighting and live together, she’d said.

Her proposal had made Verner happy. To hear that someone still cared about him that much after he’d lost everything had brought tears to his eyes. However, he hadn’t been able to bring himself to say yes. The rage that burned red inside his chest wouldn’t let him give up.

He knew full well that he’d never defeat the “witch.” Just as Marie had suggested, the best he could do now was focus on fleeing to save his life. However, he refused to accept that.

He’d lost his friends, mentors, comrades, and beloved. He couldn’t forgive the monster who’d taken them from him, who’d trampled all over them like they were nothing but garbage. No, he wasn’t mature and clever enough to forget about them for the sake of survival.

He’d keep fighting. Winning or losing didn’t matter anymore in his eyes. He simply couldn’t give up the fight—it was all he had left. His thirst for revenge was the only thing that kept him alive.

“Yeah,” he answered, his voice low.

It came out like a groan. Marie thought he sounded like a starving beast. She could see the burning inferno behind his eyes. The kindhearted and gentle young man she knew was no longer there.

“Can’t we...stop? You know we can’t beat that monster...”

After she’d saved Verner from the brink of death, he’d gone on to challenge the “witch” five more times. He would collect information on its location, then estimate its trajectory to find it and fight. Each of their battles had ended in a matter of minutes. The “witch” would send him flying, then continue on its path of destruction, not even bothering to finish him.

Every time, the number of scars on Verner’s body increased.

Compared to when he was a student, Verner had dramatically improved. He’d also become much better at using the witch’s powers inside of him. However, that was far from enough to even leave a scratch on the “witch.”

Marie couldn't bear to watch him go through that anymore.

"You know, I...keep having that dream," Verner said.

"What dream?"

"The one where I still thought everything'd be fine in the end. Everyone's there... Eterna too. But then, everything goes up in flames. I try to reach in to save someone—anyone—but I can't grab 'em. They all turn to ashes in front of me. That's when I wake up. And I swear, each time, I'm filled with rage and hatred—especially at myself for being a good-for-nothing. Then, I just can't sit still." As he spoke, Verner clenched his fists. "I've gotta kill that thing... I've gotta, Marie! Just picturing everyone's faces smiling and laughing... It drives me crazy! I'll kill it! I will! I don't care if it's impossible, I swear I'll do it!"

Marie shivered. She knew that Verner had no way to win, no matter how many times he challenged that monster. But she realized now that he'd keep trying. He'd keep trying until he, too, lost his life.

That sudden realization was hard for her to bear. She cast her eyes down and bit her lip. She heard Verner unsheathe his sword and immediately raised her head.

"Verner?"

"Looks like we've got guests, Marie. That thing's gotta be close," he huffed, glaring at his surroundings.

A few—no, several dozen—monsters came out of the woods. They used to obey Alexia, so now they responded to the abomination's will. Wherever the "witch" went, animals transformed into new monsters. Oftentimes, they turned into archmonsters—powerful beings that had rarely ever appeared in the past. In other words, the presence of a large number of powerful monsters in a single area showed that the "witch" was close.

At any rate, their purpose hadn't changed—they still attacked people.

Verner roared and launched himself at the beasts, claymore in hand. Most of them leaped back, but one unfortunate minotaur was too slow. Verner cleaved it in two, and the pieces hit the ground with a *thud*.

Verner's blade measured a meter and a half, and—including the handle—it was longer than Verner was tall. A regular soldier wouldn't even have been able to lift the monstrous blade, let alone wield it. Verner effortlessly swung it around at an incredible speed. An ordinary person could only see the blurry afterimage it left in its wake.

Verner followed up with another swing, cutting the monsters who'd yet to land in half.

Marie stood behind him, gathering her mana. After a short while, she raised her staff, and several monsters froze. Verner only had to tap them with his sword to shatter them into pieces.

All of them were almost as strong as archmonsters. Under normal circumstances, an entire squad of knights would have needed to work together to take them down. Yet, Verner and Marie slaughtered them one after the other. Before the world collapsed, they surely would have been celebrated as heroes. The current world, however, was overrun by such monsters—getting rid of a few of them wouldn't change much.

A pterosaur flew at them, breathing fire, while a lion with a human face threw itself at them. At the same time, a stone giant swung its large hammer down on them, and a large hydra slithered closer, baring its poisonous fangs.

Verner and Marie counter-attacked, protecting each other's backs. They killed the monsters one after the other, but replacements continued to swarm them. They were outnumbered.

"There's no end to them... Marie, run away!"

"No... I'll stay with you even in death!"

The "witch" created powerful monsters at a rate previously unheard of. Archmonsters and quasi-archmonsters ran wild everywhere, making Fiori a living hell. There were no safe places anymore. The number of monsters would only rise with time, and before long, not a single human would be left alive.

In the past, humanity had somehow managed to maintain a relatively safe zone in which cities had developed. That was impossible now. No matter where you went, you'd run into hordes of monsters.

“Urgh...” Verner groaned.

A scorpion monster had just spat out a cloud of poisonous gas from afar. Verner could swing his claymore all he wanted, he had no way to counter the toxin. He managed to blow some of it away with the wind he’d created, but it hadn’t been enough to get rid of all the gas.

Marie started coughing, and Verner felt his body grow heavier.

“Don’t you dare...look down on me!” he screamed.

He bared his teeth and dashed forward, sword in hand. He cut the scorpion open, but his sudden move had separated him from Marie. A bear monster took advantage of her isolation and pounced on her.

Verner managed to stab it to death at the very last second, but a wolf monster leaped at him from behind. He reacted quickly and turned around, but he hadn’t been fast enough to block. Sharp fangs dug into his shoulder. Verner retaliated by slamming the wolf into a nearby tree. The monster keened and let go, falling to the ground.

His wound was deep, and he’d been beaten on the right side—the only arm he had left.

The two companions fought as hard as they could, but gradually, they were cornered. They were starting to realize that this would likely be their last battle.

“I won’t die here! This ain’t oveeeeeeeer!!!”

Killing the “witch” was Verner’s only path to redemption. He’d already lost everything he wanted to protect, but he was still alive because his role wasn’t over. He was still there so he could keep swinging his sword and etch at least a tenth—no, a hundredth—of his comrades’ suffering into the “witch.”

He couldn’t die here. He’d never forgive himself.

He forced his wounded body to move out of sheer determination and cut down foe after foe. There was no end to them, though.

Marie had already fallen to her knees. Her exhaustion was catching up to her, and the poison she’d inhaled had clearly weakened her. Her face was ghastly pale and she looked like she might pass at any given second.

Needless to say, the monsters didn't give her any time to rest. They leaped at her at once. Verner embraced her in a last-ditch effort to shield her with his body.

"Aurea Libertas," a clear voice said.

Verner had never heard that voice before, but for some reason, he felt like he knew it.

At the same time, countless beams of light rained down, annihilating the hordes of monsters. In the face of the divine light of judgment, the might or speed of the monsters did not seem to matter.

After a few moments, silence fell.

"No way... A...miracle?" Verner whispered, his voice shaking.

He'd seen it all happen with his own eyes, but he couldn't quite believe it was real. His brain couldn't comprehend it. Light had suddenly poured down and wiped out the monsters for them... Who would believe such a ridiculous story?

And yet, it had happened. And the person who was responsible for it descended from the sky.

Verner took one look at her and immediately assumed that a goddess had descended.

Each strand of her hair looked like a delicate piece of gold thread. She had smooth, white skin and the most beautiful face Verner had ever seen. She wore a simple white dress that billowed around her as she landed. The golden locks and dress reminded him of the hateful fake saint, Ellize, but the exquisite young lady couldn't be any more different compared to the waste of space he'd known.

She held out her hand, and Verner felt the poison disappear from his body. His wounds also healed.

"Are you all right?" the young woman asked with a smile.

Verner was so taken aback that he stayed mute. Marie was just as shocked. She couldn't believe that such a person existed at all.

They both wondered if they'd died. Was this nothing but a beautiful dream?

After all, it made absolutely no sense. How could someone like her, powerful enough to slaughter dozens of monsters in a split second, have remained anonymous? If there was a goddess in Fiori, they would have heard of her. Where had she been hiding up until now? And what had she been doing?

Verner was overthinking things so much that he couldn't tell if this was reality or not anymore.

"A-Are you...a goddess?" Verner blurted out in spite of himself.

The one thing he knew for sure was that the young woman in front of him wasn't the saint. Two saints never existed at the same time, and this generation's saint was Eterna. Even if a new saint had been born after her death, the girl would be a baby. Besides, Verner doubted that the knight could find and protect her in this hell. If she'd been born at all, she was probably dead already.

That said, it made even less sense if she were just a normal human. It was completely impossible. And so, Verner reached the only plausible conclusion: she had to be a goddess who'd descended to save the world. She was clearly much stronger than any human.

The young woman smiled wider and softly said, "No, nothing like that. I'm just...a busybody. I saw you two fighting, and I couldn't bring myself to ignore your struggle."

*A busybody?* Verner couldn't believe it, but he forced himself to stay quiet.

No matter who she was or what her motivations were, she was their savior. He had no business being rude to her. What he ought to do was thank her for what she'd done.

"I see..." he said. "Well, you have my thanks. Without you, we'd be done for. I'm Verner, that's Marie. We're on a journey to slay the damn 'witch.' What's your name? If you don't mind telling us, anyway."

He bowed deeply to demonstrate his respect.

Even in this hopeless world, there was still someone as powerful as her left. Her presence lit a spark of hope in Verner's heart, and he truly wanted to know her name.

Her eyes wandered awkwardly. She seemed uncomfortable, but after a few seconds, she resigned herself and looked Verner straight in the eyes.

Then, she blurted out something absurd. "My name is Ellize."

At those words, the tension in the air grew palpable.



## Extra Story: Another World 2

*Do forgive my blunt opening statement but...damn, the atmosphere is tense around here.*

For some reason, I'd managed to sneak a peek at a parallel world that seemed to follow the original plot of *Kuon no Sanka*. Verner and Marie seemed to be in a pickle, which had prompted me to think that I could easily save them if I were there. Suddenly, I'd been transported!

*You don't get how? It's okay, me neither.*

Had I teleported myself with magic unconsciously? It didn't make sense, though. I was incredibly good at magic, sure, but even I couldn't jump over to another universe just like that, right? Besides, I was pretty sure anyone but the witch would die if they tried to use teleportation. It was a shit spell, and I'd never even entertained the idea of trying it myself.

Anyway, since I'd ended up there, I'd annihilated the monsters in a jiffy and saved Verner and Marie. They'd asked me if I was a goddess, but when I'd answered that I was just Ellize, the mood had taken a turn for the worst.

I mean, I kinda got it.

Verner's eyes were boring holes into me. He was low-key scaring me, and I couldn't help but wonder if he really was the same guy I knew.

*No, but like, for real—who are you? You've got a whole 'nother personality going on here! I feel like I'm standing in front of Mr. Verner, not my usual li'l Verner!*

In the game, Verner was always a character that would change somewhat based on which events he went through and which stats you raised. There were ways to turn him into a bit of a brute, but this dude here felt like someone else entirely—kinda like the gritty sort of character you'd see in an apocalypse story!

I took a good look at his face. Sure enough, his features were the same as those of the Verner I knew, but there was something—a dark gleam in his eyes

—that I’d never seen before. His eyebrows were also a lot thicker, for some reason.

*Add the eye patch, the missing arm, and the height, and you’ve got yourself a super-duper-scary warrior.*

I also had yet to forget how he’d sliced through a minotaur—which wasn’t quite an archmonster, but was close in terms of strength—with one slash. How was that even possible?! In my world, a similar minotaur had served as Alexia’s bodyguard—that’s just how strong those things were! For Verner to slay it in one hit, there was no doubt in my mind—he must’ve reached the maximum level.

*He’s maxed out all of his stats for sure!*

This Verner would probably overpower Alexia super easily.

On a side note, while I’d healed Verner and Marie’s injuries, I hadn’t fixed Verner’s arm and eye. It was a bit meta, but an eye patch and a missing limb kinda showed a character’s strength—like battle scars. If I took those visual cues away from him, I was afraid Verner would become weaker... Nah, I’m obviously joking. I was just worried he’d become hostile now that he knew who I was, so I didn’t wanna risk making him stronger.

From what I could tell, this Verner seemed to have gone through Eterna’s route. Or...maybe not? Now that I thought about it, with the “witch” eventually joining the fray, most routes probably ended up like that after the main story.

*Whatever. The route he’s on doesn’t really matter.*

What *actually* mattered was that, regardless of the route, the original Ellize had been a pain in the neck, and he hated her guts. That meant there was a pretty good chance I’d get punched in a couple of seconds.

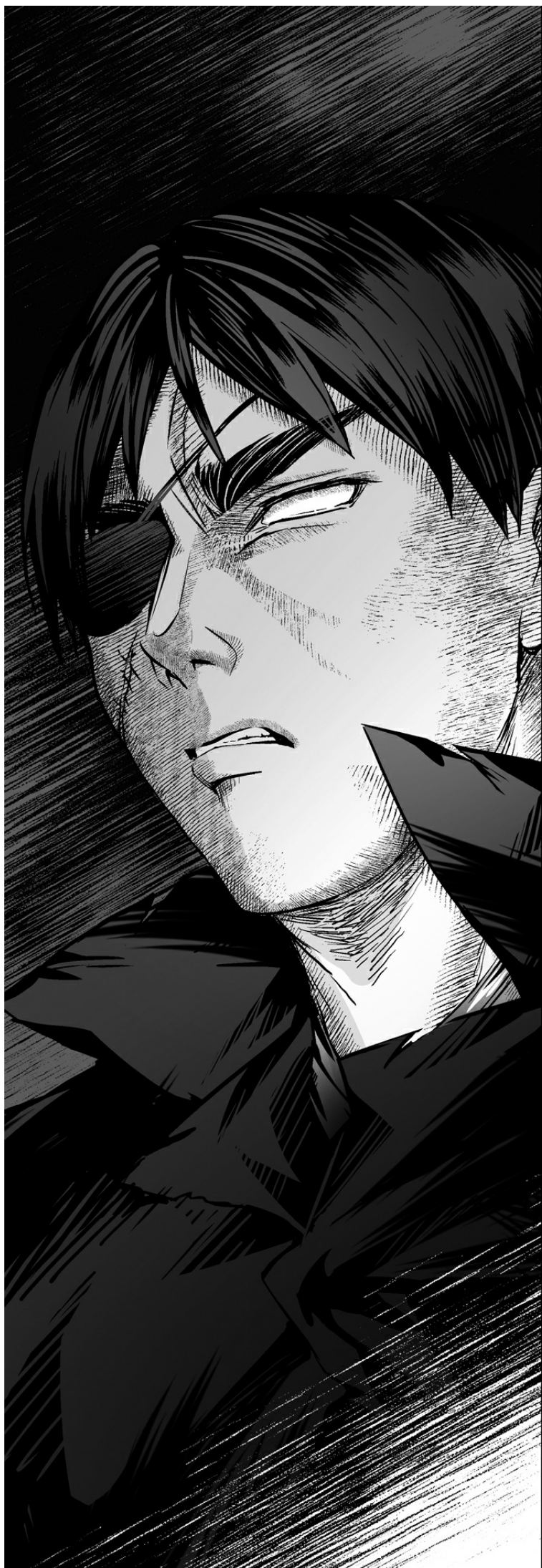
I probably shouldn’t have been so honest—I could’ve even introduced myself as Fudou Niito—but trying to hide my identity was too much of a pain. I figured it’d be better to be upfront than to have them find out the truth later on. I’d learned the hard way that secrets became harder and harder to reveal the longer you waited.

Anyway, back to the point—I was currently freaking out because of Verner’s

glare.

“Ellize...ya said?” Verner repeated, furrowing his eyebrows.

*Boy, his eyes are intense!*



His pupils had moved upward, and I could barely see them anymore—in fact, I could only make out the whites of his *incredibly* creepy, bloodshot eyes. *Can you even see in front of you like that, Verner?!*

Veins had popped out all over his face, and he looked like some sort of demon. *Do people even have that many blood vessels running through their faces?!*

Suddenly, he sighed and relaxed his face. “Nah, there’s no way...” he whispered, scratching the back of his head. He seemed to have reached a conclusion all on his own. When he looked at me again, he was much calmer. “Sorry ’bout that. You’ve got the same name as someone I used to know, so I overreacted. You’re nothing like her, though.”

Mr. Verner had apparently convinced himself that I just happened to share the same name as Ellize. To be fair, the Ellize of this world should’ve been long dead, so it would’ve been way weirder if he’d assumed that I was her.

I considered explaining the whole parallel world thing to him, but since science fiction wasn’t really a thing here, I’d have to work from the ground up. I didn’t know where to begin, and I doubted he’d get it anyway, so I decided against it.

I mean, what if he decided to kill me once he realized I was indeed Ellize, the fake saint? Not that I was scared or anything. He *was* intimidating, but I wasn’t scared at all! Not one bit!

“Someone with the same name? What kind of person was she?” I asked.

“A piece of trash. Ya do have kinda similar features, but that’s about it,” he said. “Wait, you’ve never heard of her?”

I paused, then replied, “Only a little.”

“Long story short, she got switched with the saint at birth. That bitch took advantage of her role to do awful things. That’s why no one trusts the saint anymore.”

“And where is she now?”

“In hell.”

Instead of telling me she'd died, he'd gone straight for the dramatic answer. That went to show how much he hated her. If I messed up, that hostility would be directed at me. *I'm living dangerously today.*

"In hell..." I repeated. "I see. So you're certain she's dead."

Verner's face soured. *Did I piss him off?*

The corners of his mouth turned up into a feral smile. "If she's alive somewhere, I'll have her head. I'll kill her again and again if I have to."

*EEK!*

Mr. Verner's face relaxed, but I could feel his rage burning under the surface. I resolved to avoid oversharing—I'd doom myself if I did—and focus on gathering information instead.

This world was most likely home to the first scenario—the one in which I didn't intervene. After Eterna's death, the "witch" had appeared, driving this world to the brink of collapse.

Yamoto-san had never witnessed these events, so they hadn't made it into the game. Instead, the players were encouraged to begin a new game plus after they'd reached the ending. Needless to say, Mr. Verner and Marie here hadn't been able to do that. Their world hadn't magically disappeared after the ending Yamoto-san had seen either.

These were all just assumptions, and I was hoping to probe a little to see if I was right. After I'd talked with Verner a bit more, my suspicions were confirmed. I also learned that our main character was—or rather, had been—on Eterna's route.

Verner would've gotten suspicious of me if I just asked him to tell me everything I wanted to know, so I'd made use of the knowledge I had to ask leading questions. That way, I could confirm my doubts without arousing too much suspicion.

I now had a much clearer idea of the situation, but I was far from having fixed my main issue: I had no clue how to get home, and I didn't exactly like the idea of remaining here forever. Everything was in ruins, so I couldn't picture myself living comfortably.

Besides, I could already picture Scotterbrain's tears if I never came back. I'd recently realized that she was a lot more sensitive than I'd initially thought. She was the kind of person who'd initially resist and pick death after being captured by goblins or brigands, only to break down crying five seconds after.

Anyway, my point was that I wanted to go home but didn't know how. Would I be able to if I defeated the "witch"?

"What d'ya intend to do next?" Mr. Verner asked me.

"I'm going to defeat the 'witch,'" I answered.

I didn't know if that would help me return—in fact, I didn't really see how the two could be linked—but I didn't see any harm in trying.

*It's not like it's gonna be hard. I got rid of that thing once, and I already know how to fight it from the get-go now.*

Besides, the last time I'd fought that abomination, I'd only just been resurrected, and I'd fought on borrowed time—far from being in top condition. I now had an incredibly long life ahead of me and I wasn't just waking up from literal death.

*Heh heh! I've pretty much won already!*

"Then I guess our objectives match. Wanna join us?" Verner asked.

The main character had invited me to join his party. To be fair, I had a feeling he wanted to keep an eye on me more than anything else, which...made sense. As far as he was concerned, I was incredibly suspicious. I'd appeared out of nowhere and shared a name with one of his archenemies. I was shadiness personified!

He'd most likely decided that keeping me close until he could figure out whether I was friend or foe was the best course of action. I didn't want him to turn on me if I said no, so I figured I might as well accompany them for the time being. I could fly away at any time and go look for the "witch" on my own if I wanted to.

"It'd be my pleasure," I answered, holding out my hand.

Verner grasped it firmly and shook it. Marie followed suit, but her handshake

was a lot weaker. She hadn't said a word since I'd gotten here and seemed hesitant.

*She's probably wary of me, I assumed. Well, she was always a woman of a few words, so I guess it's up to me to close the gap between us.*

We'd gotten off on the wrong foot because of my name, but I'd make sure to show them I was nothing like the original goods!



"While there is life, there is hope," I said in English.

As always, blurting out my killer move names in English made me seem a lot cooler!

I extended my arms and blasted healing magic all around me.

Today marked the end of my first month traveling with Mr. Verner. We were currently passing through a village, and I'd taken the occasion to heal the wounded to lighten up the atmosphere a little.

Every time we stopped in a village for the night, it was the same thing: wounded, gloomy people everywhere! That left me with no choice but to do something about it—I didn't want to spend my evenings surrounded by negativity.

"Thank you... Thank you..."

"I can't believe I'm standing again... I must be dreaming!"

The people I'd just healed thanked me as they shed tears of happiness. I couldn't even laugh at them because I'd found them on the verge of death.

There'd been plenty of suffering in my world too, especially around the time I'd just started out as the saint, but things had never been *this* bad. In all seriousness, every single person I ran into looked like they were on death's door. Some were so weak that they could barely stand, while others were so wounded that they looked like mummies. Even worse, abandoned corpses littered the streets.

*Am I in hell?*



Food was incredibly scarce. I could tell that if we started eating inside a village, the residents would pounce on us at once to steal whatever meager rations we had. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if they attacked us anyway just to check if we had something or not. The situation was just that dire.

I wasn't being overly paranoid either. According to Verner, that *had* happened to them once. They'd been passing through a village when its citizens had attacked them. They'd been forced to slay them to defend themselves. *Scary, I know.*

And so, to avoid getting swarmed by angry mobs—and to make sure I also got to enjoy some decent food—I'd started distributing rations. I grew vegetables extra fast using magic and boiled them along with whatever birds Verner managed to hunt.

*What is it, what is it? Villagers will try to kill me to steal my food? Ha ha! They won't if I give it to them first! Smart, I know.*

By the way, I didn't have much, so I only used salt as seasoning. It was crude, but I couldn't really help it. I could get as much salt as I wanted in the sea, but the same couldn't be said for other spices and condiments. Sadly, I couldn't make soy sauce and miso appear out of nowhere.

In a way, you could say that we got to appreciate the true flavor of the ingredients—or rather, that we *only* got to appreciate that, I supposed... Seriously, though, not even having ponzu sauce on hand was a crime! This stuff could've been edible with some rice and eggs, but... *What do you mean I can't whine about not having eggs because I cooked the bird?! Whatever, it's not like we have rice anyway!*



“Thank you... Thank you...”

“This is so good...”

“I don’t even know when I last had a meal like this...”

For some reason, my half-assed stew had moved these people to tears.

*Um... I feel kinda bad for serving y’all something so sloppy now...*

Leaving the jokes aside, this world was truly in a scary state. At this rate, it was only a matter of time before humanity disappeared altogether.

According to Verner, the situation was roughly the same everywhere. I’d only been there for a month, but I’d also witnessed desolation and suffering everywhere we’d gone.

I’d grown some fruit trees and vegetables around the village so that they’d have something to eat for the time being.

When we left, the villagers gathered to see us off. They all came up to me, one by one, to offer their thanks.

I answered with platitudes like, “I know things are hard now, but please don’t give up,” “No matter how dark the night, the sun will rise,” or “Thou art wheat, and thou shalt grow strong and straight even if thou are trampled upon.” Sorry, that last one was a lie. I didn’t have the nerve to say that kind of bullshit out loud.

“Thank you... Thank you...”

*Dude, can you say anything else?* I thought to myself. Still, I had a feeling that guy kept repeating those lines the whole time.

“We will never forget you!”

“Please stay safe!”

We walked away to the sound of the villagers wishing us well and headed toward the “witch” once more. They continued to wave until we’d disappeared over the horizon. *Nope, actually, they’re still waving—just checked.*

“Incredible as always, El. People treat ya like a saint wherever ya go,” Verner said with a chuckle.

*Do I hear a hint of irony in your voice, Mr. Verner?*

He probably thought it was funny that someone who shared a name with the infamous fake saint was treated like a saint. By the way, Verner always called me El, never Ellize. He probably hated the original too much to bring himself to say that name. *I get you, bro.*

“He’s right... You’re really amazing, El,” Marie said, looking at me with her bright eyes.

Just like Verner, she’d taken to calling me El. While she’d been wary of me at first, we’d gotten a lot closer recently.

Well, I’d been here for a month already, and I’d been nothing but nice in an attempt to show them that I was nothing like the Ellize they knew. Still, I wasn’t sure they liked me enough for me to drop a bomb like, “Oh, by the way, I’m the Ellize you know—just from another timeline!” without them trying to sucker punch me.

They both seemed pretty much convinced that I was a different person who only happened to share a name with her, and...well, technically I *was* another person. While we did share a body, we had different souls!

After we left that last village, we had to sleep outside for several days. Finally, the next village on our path came into view.

We traveled on foot, but since walking for days on end was exhausting, I often cheated with a bit of floating magic. I usually cast it on Marie too, which she seemed to appreciate very much. Mr. Verner, on the other hand, had insisted that he wasn’t so weak with a cool, dependable smile on his face.

I respected his wishes when it came to walking, but I hadn’t even asked for his opinion before I’d cast my cleaning spell. As a Japanese person, cleanliness was *super* important to me, and I couldn’t stand any funk.

“This is a large village,” I remarked as we approached.

As I’d mentioned before, the other villages we’d passed had all been in a terrible state. To be honest, they hadn’t even truly been villages anymore—they’d been more like ruins that people still inhabited. That was just how bad things were.

This village, however, wasn't damaged at all. The buildings were neat and numerous. To be honest, I was even tempted to call it a town instead of a village. The streets were fairly animated, and there wasn't a single corpse to be seen on them.

"It is. I'm pretty shocked, actually. Never woulda thought a place like this would be left nowadays," Verner said.

He seemed excited and started walking a little faster. Even in this world, there were still places where people lived normally. That must've made him happy.

A gatekeeper stood in front of the village, and as soon as he saw Verner, his eyes widened. He looked him up and down a couple of times before exclaiming, "Mr. Verner...is that you?!"

"Have we met?" Verner asked. "Sorry, but I don't remember ya."

"That's all good. You wouldn't remember a regular knight like me. I'll never forget you, though. I was there when we fought Alexia and when we tried to defend the royal capital against the 'witch.' Well, I guess I only fought Alexia's sidekicks, and...I spent most of the battle against the 'witch' passed out under the rubble, so..."

As it turned out, the gatekeeper was a knight. I'd heard that the saint's guard had been annihilated, save for Verner and Marie, but it looked like some regular knights had survived. As for the fact that Verner didn't remember him... Well, I couldn't say it was all that surprising. He couldn't commit every knight he'd ever encountered to memory, especially not those he hadn't even talked to. It was only natural that others remembered the head of Eterna's guard, though.

"The brave heroes who fought the hardest died, but weaklings like me survived. Ironical, right?" the gatekeeper said, his voice trembling with frustration.

Verner tapped his shoulder. He didn't say anything, but apparently the gesture was enough. The man nodded and looked Verner in the eyes. I could tell that the two of them had understood each other and shared something strong.

*Oh my! Is that guy falling for our dear protagonist already? No? All right, it*

*was just a joke!*

“The mayor of Elbatch nursed me back to health, and I’ve decided to protect this place to thank him. I lead the vigilante group around here. What brings you here?” the gatekeeper asked.

“I’m on a quest to slay the ‘witch.’ We’re following its trail.”

“Slay the... But that’s—”

“I know, ya don’t need to say it. I’m not giving up—it’s the only thing keepin’ me alive.”

“I see...”

I was pretty sure the man wanted to say that killing the “witch” was impossible, but Verner wouldn’t hear it. He wasn’t wrong, though. If you fought that monster normally, you’d never win. The game was rigged from the start, and Verner knew that too.

*I mean, that thing managed to come back even after I hurled it all the way to outer space!*

“Do we have visitors, Enpy Cee?”

“M-Mayor! Deputy mayor, you’re also here!”

And here came the rumored mayor. Visitors must’ve been quite rare considering the circumstances, so they’d probably come out to check us out. The villagers were also looking at us from a distance. Oh, and when I said “looking at us,” I really meant that most of them were only staring at *me*. I was used to it after years of being admired so I didn’t really mind.

The mayor was a gaunt man with neat features. His black hair was tied back in a low ponytail, and a lone strand framed his face. He was wearing a pair of cracked glasses, and— *Wait! That’s Four-Eyed Pervert!*

“Supple?!” Verner shouted at the same time I realized who was standing in front of us.

“V-Verner?!” Four-Eyed Pervert exclaimed, surprised.

He immediately took a few steps back.

In this world, Four-Eyed Pervert had abducted Eterna before being wrecked by Mr. Verner and fired from the academy—as you could probably guess, the two of them were far from having a good relationship. Unlike Ellize, the game never mentioned what had happened to Four-Eyed Pervert after the event. He just disappeared, never to be brought up again. Well, apparently, he'd survived.

“You're so loud! What's going on?” a feminine voice called out from behind Supple.

She—the deputy mayor, I assumed—stepped forward, and I took in her features. She was also emaciated, and her skin didn't look so good, but I could tell that she used to be a beautiful woman. *What a waste*, I thought. She had brown hair and a sizable chest that I couldn't help but study in detail— *Hang on! I know those boobs! That's Farah!*

“Miss Farah?!” Verner once again exclaimed at the same time.

“Crap! Verner!”

*I remember now! Farah does survive on Eterna's route.*

The tension was palpable. One wrong move, and this would turn into a brawl. Verner's hand flew to the pommel of his sword, and Supple and Farah panicked.

“W-Wait!” Four-Eyed Pervert exclaimed. “We have no reason to fight anymore!”

“He's right! Besides, you know the witch was controlling me!”

Verner's expression had yet to relax.

He'd reached for his sword on reflex, letting his feelings get the better of him, but I didn't think that he actually intended to fight them—he wasn't that stupid. He probably understood that killing these two would only hurt the villagers who relied on them. Still, these two had hurt his beloved Eterna in the past, so I could see why he might've been reluctant to let bygones be bygones. He probably didn't know how to react without forgiving them or escalating the situation.

In such cases, an unrelated bystander could be a lot of help.

“Please calm down, Mr. Verner,” I said. “There's no point in fighting them.”

“If ya say so, El...”

*See? He just needed someone to talk him out of it.*

I was going to speak to Farah and Supple next, when suddenly—

“Mayor! Th-The sky... Look at the sky! Black clouds!”

I’d just barely managed to calm everyone down, but people were already screaming again!

*What’s up with the sky, huh? Is a pretty girl about to fall on us? I’d happily welcome her if that’s the case. Yeah, no, doesn’t look that way.*

Armed men came running to us from the other side of the village. They were screaming orders, their faces white as a sheet. That was probably the vigilante group the gatekeeper had brought up. Considering their reaction, this wasn’t some routine training. They were shaking like the end of the world was near.

Fear spread at an unbelievable speed. Soon, all of the villagers looked terrified.

Four-Eyed Pervert and Farah were also frozen in place, and even Marie shivered. Verner, on the other hand, let out a ferocious laugh.

A dark cloud loomed close to the village. Needless to say, it wasn’t simply a regular rain cloud. Horrendous faces appeared here and there, mocking those who dared look at them. Their shrill laughter echoed from afar.

“HA HA HA HA!!!”

*Sup! It’s been a while, “witch.” Glad to see y’all are doing well and still laughing.*

“Why is the ‘witch’ here?! It shifted from the path the mayor predicted?!” the gatekeeper cried, his voice trembling.

From the sound of it, Four-Eyed Pervert had found a way to estimate its path, so he’d deemed this place safe for the time being. Well, the “witch” had apparently changed its mind and was heading straight toward the village.

Four-Eyed Pervert couldn’t have imagined that a being seemingly devoid of intelligence could suddenly adjust its trajectory to pinpoint a village.



Unfortunately, this was bound to happen. The “witch” was an aggregate of negative energy, and its most basic instinct was to destroy hope and other such noble emotions. At this point, this village—which had remained relatively unscathed until now—probably had the biggest concentration of hope in the whole world. It was only a matter of time before the witch came to bulldoze it.

“Talk about convenient! No need to waste any more time lookin’ for it!” Verner shouted, an unhinged smile on his face. “It’s been a while, ya bastard! Been dying to see ya!”

He grabbed his sword as veins popped out all over his face.

*Seriously, dude, you’re scaring me.*

I still couldn’t believe the dating sim protagonist had changed this much. He was a whole other person at this point.

Dark energy poured out of Verner’s body and gathered in his sword. He seemed to have completely mastered the witch’s powers inside of him.

The “witch” didn’t pay him any attention, though—it simply kept marching toward the village.

Verner charged at it with a battle cry. He raised his blade, and a flash of dark mana shot forth. He swung it once, twice, thrice, but to no avail. The “witch” was pure mana. Neither magic nor swords could hurt it. In fact, nothing but drowning it in a torrent of noble emotions worked, so Verner’s little show of swordsmanship was completely useless.

Besides, Verner was brimming with hatred. He couldn’t win like that.

Now that I thought about it, the way the whole thing worked was truly horrendous. If you were trampled upon like Verner had been, you’d obviously either fall into despair or feel anger—two negative emotions. Once that happened, you were doomed.

“MWA HA HA HA!!!”

Several tentacles came out of the dark being’s body and assaulted Verner. Marie used ice magic to flick a couple of them away, while Verner cut down others. However, they didn’t manage to block all of them in time, and Verner

was pushed back. He contracted the muscles of his powerful thighs to avoid toppling over as he coughed out a mouthful of blood. As soon as the tentacles relented, he immediately struck back.

*That's Verner at max level for you! He's a beast!*

The witches all opened their mouths at once and released countless black beams. I remembered hearing that Four-Eyed Pervert's golem had been destroyed in mere seconds by this attack. The destructive beams hit the ground, kicking up a cloud of smoke. I lost sight of Verner.

"Verner!" Marie screamed, panicked.

The next moment, Verner tore through the smoke and drove his blade into the "witch." He was covered in blood. Despite the fact that he'd likely sustained life-threatening injuries, he was still surprisingly lively.

The bulging veins on his face told me that he was even angrier than before.

"That all ya got, 'witch'?! I'm not gonna die so easily—come at me for real!"

Still, Mr. Verner was pretty damn cool! He'd pretty much transcended the limitations of humanity! He was made of flesh and blood, yet he was sturdier than a golem. LMAO.

*Oops.* I was so engrossed in watching Verner fight like some sort of superman that I'd forgotten to help out.

The "witch" had masterfully turned this place into a despair party, but I was about to turn the tables on it. This should've ended with an overwhelming victory for the "witch." Unfortunately for it, *I* was here. While I felt kinda bad for stealing Verner's thunder, sometimes you had to do what you had to do.

First, I blasted a large beam of light at the snickering "witch" to introduce myself. Half of the monster's body disappeared on the spot, while the rest flew several dozen meters away and exploded with a loud *BANG*.

"E-El? How...?" Verner asked, flabbergasted.

I supposed I'd had yet to do anything showy in front of him. I'd even held back a lot on the "Aurea Libertas" I'd used when I'd met them, because I hadn't wanted them to get hurt.

A few seconds was all it took for the monster to regenerate itself, and the witches' faces all turned to me. It looked like I'd done a pretty good job getting it to register me as its main enemy.

Just as they'd done with Verner, the witches all opened their mouths at once and fired. Needless to say, that stuff wouldn't work on me. Instead of dodging, I let the dark beams crash into my barrier to show everyone the gap in power.

Then, I fired a blast of light upward and scattered the dark cloud looming over us, allowing the blue sky to greet us. I completed this nice picture by making plants grow in the blink of an eye all around us.

*How's this, guys? What do you think about me turning this dark, desolate wasteland into a luxurious meadow?*

"This is...a miracle!" the gatekeeper whispered.

"I-I knew it! I knew I wasn't mistaken! The real deal did exist all along!" Four-Eyed Pervert muttered.

You'd probably guessed this already, but I hadn't bothered doing all that for nothing. I needed noble feelings to fire at the "witch," and the people's hearts weren't going to light up in the middle of a pity party. I'd put on a show to rekindle the flame of hope inside their hearts.

My preparations were complete, and I was all ready to end things!

*People of Elbatch! Lend me your energy!*

"The sun shines upon all alike," I chanted in English as I raised one hand toward the sky.

I used mana circulation to take in the mana around me, but I was more careful this time. If I absorbed positive emotions without being careful, I'd become even weirder. I just gathered it all in my hand instead—you wouldn't catch me making the same mistake twice!

The positive energy I gathered formed a sphere of light that shone like a small sun.

*Say your prayers, "witch"! This one hit will... Umm, it will... Yeah, no—it won't kill the "witch," will it?*

Right when I'd thought I'd won, I realized my mistake—there just wasn't enough positivity in there. I'd probably be able to deal some damage to the “witch,” but I wouldn't kill it.

I wasn't sure how I hadn't thought of it before, but the reason was kinda obvious: there weren't enough people around.

Back then, a good chunk of the Bilberrian population had gathered in the capital, and they'd been more excited than ever because I'd miraculously (lol) come back to life. On the other hand, I currently had only one village at hand. Besides, no one knew me here. They knew Ellize (and hated her guts) but I wasn't sure that counted...

I should've known that I could never gather enough noble feelings to defeat the “witch.” My little sun was...subpar, to say the least. At best, it would erase a couple of the successive witches' grudges from existence.

*I'm doomed, aren't I?*

## Extra Story: Another World 3

A tragedy was coming to a close in the quiet of the forest; or perhaps, the ending *itself* was the greatest tragedy of all.

A young man was sobbing as he held the body of a young girl to his chest. She was dying and all he could do was embrace her as she slowly turned cold.

“Ver... I... Having you by my side truly was...a blessing...”

“No! Don’t die! You can’t! Don’t leave me!”

*When did our fates diverge? Why did it have to end this way?*

It was already too late to find the answer to those questions. Things could no longer change...

The only thing the young man could do now was to lose himself in regrets.

“Ver... I love...you...”

The young woman—Eterna—mustered her courage to show Verner one last smile amidst her tears.

The truth was, she didn’t want to die. She too wanted to stay with him—not as the saint and her knight, but as a man and a woman free to walk down their own path until the end.

However, as the saint, she had a duty bigger than her own desires—a mission no one else but she could accomplish. And so, Eterna fought. She fought with all she had, defeated Alexia, and ended up suffering a fatal wound. Saying that she “suffered” that wound wasn’t quite accurate—she’d inflicted it on herself.

Once she killed Alexia, she’d become the next witch and turn against humanity. Ever since she’d learned that terrible truth, Eterna had made up her mind. She’d break that cycle and secure a happy future for the people she loved. She’d chosen death to finally, *finally* bring this tragedy to an end.

And so, convinced that it was the only way to free the rest of the world, Eterna committed suicide.

When had she messed up? What had she gotten wrong?

Eterna closed her eyes. She could feel Verner holding her tight even as her body grew colder. She wanted to wipe away his tears for him, but she couldn't lift her arms anymore. She tried to move her hand, but it fell limply on the ground.

"Eterna..." Verner lamented in between sobs. He wept as he embraced the lifeless body of the girl he loved. *Don't go! Please, don't go!* he begged inside of his heart. *Don't leave me all alone in this world!*

He squeezed her in his arms, trying to keep her here with him. It was a pointless act of resistance, and when Verner realized it, he cursed his powerlessness.

Little did he know that it wasn't the end. As one tragedy came to a close, another took its place.

Verner was still holding Eterna's corpse when a shadow started to seep out of her cold body. At first, he didn't notice—he was too preoccupied by his grief. After a while, though, he sensed an ominous presence above him. He lifted his face and saw *it*...

"HA HA HA HA HA!!! HEE HEE HEE!!!"

...the dark cloud that loomed over him and the countless feminine faces sprouting out of it, mocking him.

Amid this disturbing cloud, Verner recognized Alexia's face—the woman Eterna had given her life to kill. Suddenly, it dawned upon him. That *thing* was the root of it all! The culprit behind all of their suffering, the horrible curse that had turned generations of saints into heinous witches!

That thing was the "witch."

Lost between anger and pain, Verner reached for his sword. At the same time, one of the gruesome faces opened its mouth and fired a beam of black light. Verner was blown away before he could react.

That attack was so powerful, so destructive, that Alexia's blows felt like child's play in comparison. Verner felt himself slam into a tree. He had yet to recover

from the fatigue of fighting Alexia. He collapsed, unable to stand back up. He was about to lose consciousness when something even crueller happened. It was as if the world wanted to let him know that it wasn't done with him, that many more tragedies were still awaiting him.

A tentacle extended from the “witch” and coiled around Eterna's body, lifting it up.

“Don't you...dare! Give Eterna...back to me!” he screamed, forcing himself up even as he coughed up blood. He had no strength left. His outstretched arms trembled, and half of his field of vision had turned dark already. “Eterna... Eter...na!”

Wasn't it enough? Hadn't she been through enough?

Eterna had already suffered plenty. She'd persevered even through the tears. Why couldn't destiny let go of her? Why couldn't she be allowed to rest in peace even in death?!

“Don't...fuck...with me!” Verner groaned, clenching his teeth so hard that the taste of blood filled his mouth.

Red tears flowed from his only remaining eye, and his face twisted in rage. The “witch” kept cackling, as if to let him know it didn't care. It flew away, the sound of its shrill laughter gradually fading.

The source of all evil had taken away the corpse of the girl he loved while mocking him—them.

Verner, his arms still stretched toward the sky, could only grasp at air.

“ETERNA! ETERNAAAAAA!!!”



*All right, I'm done. I'm not playing this crappy game any longer!*

Or so I'd say while slamming my controller into the wall if this was an *actual* video game.

To defeat the “witch,” I needed to harness the light inside of people's hearts. However, this world was in such a state of despair that there simply wasn't enough hope to do that...which meant I couldn't kill the “witch.” Checkmate.

*No, but for real—what am I supposed to do?*

Even as overpowered as I was, I just couldn't kill a boss like that. If we hadn't found a way to damage it yet, I would've kept looking, but I knew we had to wait for it to attack to strike back! The thing was, even though I could deal as much damage to it as I wanted, it could regenerate itself. There was no point.

At this point, it seriously looked like some kind of bug. You know, something like—even if you got the boss's HP to reach zero—it'd keep attacking you forever instead of disappearing like it should. Anyone would either resell such a crappy game or dump it in the trash. *Hurry up and update the damn thing, dev team!*

Anyway, the small sun in my hands wouldn't do anyone any good as long as I just held on to it, so I hurled it at the "witch." It exploded, and a blinding light shone as the laughter stopped.

"Did ya get it?!"

*Verner! The second you ask that question, it's over already!*

Although I supposed there was no need to chide Verner for raising a losing flag—my attack was doomed to fail either way.

The "witch" had vanished, and the villagers started cheering.

*Oh! Hang on, there's more hope around! Yeah, no—still far from enough.*

As I looked in the general direction that the "witch" once stood and pondered my next move, I noticed something amid the floating black mist. It looked like...a person—a woman, I think? She had long, silver hair and beautiful features—definitely cute enough to be a love interest. Actually, she was as pretty as... *ETERNA?!*

"Eterna!!!" Verner, who noticed at the same time I did.

Despite his cry, Eterna didn't budge. Her eyes remained closed.

But more importantly...she was naked! In the nude! Nakey!

*YEEEEESSS!!! THANK YOU, WORLD!!!*

*Aaaaah, my eyes are blessed! Hang on—now's not the time to rejoice! Why's*



*Eterna inside the “witch”?! What’s up with this new development?!*

As I ogled at Eterna like an idiot, the “witch” gradually restored itself. She was on the verge of disappearing into the black mist once more.

*Not happening!*

I didn’t really care about the “witch” regenerating itself since I’d already expected it to, but I wasn’t about to leave the corpse of our poor main girl in there. I was an Eterna stan through and through—saying that I was unhappy with the way she was being treated—especially in death—would be an understatement!

*What do you mean, I was literally cheering five seconds ago? Shut up! Those are two completely different things! Actually, you know what? Forget about it altogether!*

Sometimes I kinda wished I had the ability to mess with people’s memories.

Leaving my internal turmoil aside, I flew forward, grabbed Eterna’s arm, and pulled.

“Huh?!”

I froze. Eterna’s didn’t feel at all like I’d expected, and—while it was incredibly faint—I felt... *No... There’s no way...*

The witches cackled, and I realized my mistake. I shouldn’t have allowed myself to be distracted, no matter what.

The “witch” pulled Eterna inside of itself with such intensity that I was forced to let go of her arm. Before I could react, the “witch” had finished regenerating itself and moved away. I had a feeling there were one or two fewer faces than before, but it still looked pretty damn lively.

Still, it showed that my attack had been at least *somewhat* useful. While the “witch” couldn’t be stopped for more than a few seconds with such a blow, the positivity I’d hurled at it had indeed destroyed a couple of them for good. Getting the “witch” to zero HP wasn’t enough to defeat it, but it was still possible to decrease its overall HP count permanently.

*I should probably try it one more time to make sure.*

Besides, there was something else I wanted to check. To do so, I needed to get to Eterna once more.

I thought I was stuck, but I might've found a way out. If I could gradually weaken the "witch," I had a shot at making it harmless, even if it didn't disappear entirely.

Just as I'd finished hyping myself up, the "witch" decided to change direction. It was currently flying away.

*Is it...fleeing? Seriously?*

When had that thing become smart enough to retreat? My best guess was that it had instinctively fled from me because I'd used an attack it had never seen before.

*In a way, it takes after Alexia.*

I considered chasing after it but immediately gave up. To blast people's noble emotions at that thing, I needed...well, people.

In my previous world, there were people pretty much everywhere I went, and there was so much hope floating around that I could've fought the "witch" virtually anywhere...even if I couldn't kill it in just one blow. Things were different here—leaving this village meant I'd have no way to attack anymore.

All in all, there was nothing I could do about the "witch" running away. As I watched it disappear, the noisy cheers of the villagers echoed once more.

*Dang, y'all scared me!*

"WHOOOOOOA!!! She drove the 'witch' away!"

"I can't believe it! It's a miracle!"

"You're amazing!"

"You saved us..."

"Thank you! You have my eternal gratitude!"

I turned and flashed my usual business smile. *When in doubt, always smile.*

That somehow got them even more excited, and they started freaking out over me even more. I still loved being in the center of it all, so it was doing

wonders for my attention-whore tendencies. Showing off how cool I was and being showered with praise as a result always made my day, no matter how many times it happened.

*Sorry but, once an attention whore, always an attention whore.*

I was having an absolute blast, but...why was Four-Eyed Pervert kneeling on the floor? *What's wrong with you?*

"O glorious saint! It's such an honor to make your acquaintance!" he exclaimed.

"Hmm... I'm not the saint," I retorted.

What in the world was this weirdo on about? I'd never even *pretended* to be the saint in this world, so why were things developing in that direction again?!

I shot a glance at Verner to gauge his reaction. He was looking down at Four-Eyed Pervert.

"Moving on to a new target already, shitty four-eyes?" he taunted, his voice thick with disdain.

"How preposterous! I'm simply showing my devotion to our glorious saint."

"Yeah, sure. I'm warning ya just in case—ya pull the same shit as last time, your head's gonna roll."

*EEK! This Verner is terrifying.*

I knew he was looking out for me, but still!

"O glorious saint, would you be so kind as to bless this poor soul with your sublime name?"

"I'm not the saint," I repeated. "And my name is Ellize."

"A beautiful name worthy of our saint! How fitting, how noble, how— Huh? E-Ellize?" Four-Eyed Pervert stopped in the middle of his ridiculous monologue to stare at me. My name had given him pause, but after taking a good look at my face, he smiled. "I finally understand now. That piece of filth had even stolen the real deal's name... Pretending to be her wasn't enough—she even had to defile the true saint's name."

Hearing him call Ellize a piece of filth cracked me up. Witnessing how badly everyone hated her here felt great.

“The real saint is Miss Eterna. I’m just a regular person who happens to be decently good at magic,” I replied.

I honestly didn’t get why I had to go through this whole saint thing again when I hadn’t said a word about being one this time.

“Way to downplay your abilities, El,” Verner said, walking up to me. “That aside, I’ve got some questions for ya.”

I didn’t think he was trying to intimidate me, but the way he towered over me—coupled with his creepy face—scared me shitless.

“What was that last attack? Something different happened. It worked!”

“I harnessed the noble emotions present in the air and threw them along with my mana,” I explained.

“The...‘noble emotions’?”

“The ‘witch’ is an aggregate of the successive witches’ grudges. You could say that it’s a lump of mana stirred into action by negative emotions. Since it’s made of pure mana, neither physical nor magical attacks can hurt it—or, rather, they *can* deal damage to that abomination, but they cannot harm the grudges that make up its core. That’s why it always regenerates itself. The only way to truly offset it is to drown it in positive emotions.”

Explaining the way it all worked to Verner made me realize all over again how ridiculously unbalanced this fight was. The devs had messed up so badly that the command to end the boss and restart the fight was the same, creating an endless loop.

*Still no patch in sight, huh?*

“Why would that be the only exception?”

“Opposite emotions cancel each other out. Wouldn’t you be less sad if something joyous happened to you? It’s the same logic. At its core, this monster is made up of the witches’ despair over the state of the world...or perhaps over their own fate...”

“And the opposite of despair is hope, huh? Something no one’s feeling anymore.”

*Yep, exactly. That’s why this game’s ridiculous.*

The longer the “witch” was kept unchecked, the more people fell into despair and forsook all hope—making it impossible to turn the tables on it. With time, its victory would become inevitable.

I was belatedly realizing how easy I’d had it in my previous world. Circulating my mana for a few moments had been enough to fill me with so much hope that it had even messed with my personality. I’d dumped these awful feelings at the “witch,” and poof—it’d disappeared! This time, I’d consciously handpicked the noble emotions around me, but it’d been far from enough. Making up for that would prove difficult.

“If hope is the biggest threat to that monster— Wait, did it come to this village on purpose?”

“I think so. It must have felt that the people of this village had more positive feelings than others.”

“That bastard... It’ll trample on the last bit of happiness it can find, that it?!”

I could hear the rage in Verner’s voice. I completely understood. Whoever was the happiest would be killed first—I couldn’t think of anything more cruel.

Verner turned to look at me. I’d never seen such furrowed brows in my life. *He’s so scary...* Or so I thought, before I noticed the vulnerability underneath.

“Do you think there’s a way to...get Eterna back?”

A realization dawned upon me. “Mr. Verner...was that your goal all along?”

Verner paused, his head drooping, before revealing his true feelings. “Yeah... I don’t care about the world or the ‘witch’—I just want her back. I know that she’s...she’s already gone. I know that I sound like a dumbass who doesn’t know when to quit, but I can’t leave her like that! I just want her to rest in peace... She deserves that...”

“Verner...” Marie whispered.

That was why he’d kept challenging the “witch” even though he knew he’d

never win. He despised that monster, obviously, but—more than that—he wanted to get Eterna’s body back.

It was a bit too early for the dramatics, though. I’d made an incredible discovery earlier.

“Miss Eterna is still alive,” I said.

Verner and Marie both froze. Verner blinked repeatedly, staring at me with a dumbfounded expression on his face.

“I noticed when I touched her earlier,” I explained. “She’s in a state of suspended animation, but she’s not dead yet. She’s not gone, Mr. Verner—she’s still in there.”

“No way... That’s... Are... Are ya sure?”

“It seemed to me like she’s been sealed. I’m not sure if you’re aware of this, but darkness magic isn’t about wielding darkness itself—it’s the power to manipulate spaces, and by doing so, to create an area in which not even light can travel. Eterna’s been trapped in such a space, so her body’s remained perfectly preserved.”

I’d seen this happen twice and lived—or rather, died—through it once. I knew what I was talking about.

Besides, it all made sense—Eve’s grudge had started this curse, so it made sense for the “witch” to be able to use Eve’s skills. Although I had to wonder why it didn’t use such barriers for self-defense. I had a feeling it drew whatever dark powers were left inside of Eterna and used it to keep her sealed. As a result, it’d left itself defenseless. At the end of the day, the “witch” was just a bunch of grudges jumbled together. Even if it had inherited the know-how from Eve, it didn’t have the power to manipulate space.

“This is nothing but conjecture, but I think Miss Eterna became a witch, albeit partially. I heard that she’d died from the wounds she’d sustained while fighting Alexia, but I’m fairly certain that Alexia breathed her last before Eterna succumbed to her injuries. The witch’s powers transfer *immediately* after the witch dies. At that point, Miss Eterna was still alive.”

I should’ve figured that out sooner.

In the version of this route I knew of, Eterna and Alexia dealt fatal blows to one another. However, they didn't die simultaneously. Alexia died first, then Eterna. While the gap had been small—a few dozen seconds—it had still been enough time for part of the witch's powers to enter Eterna's body. She'd even had the time to say her last words in Verner's arms.

“Mr. Verner, I'm sure you're aware that the witch's powers will do anything to keep their host alive. It kept Miss Eterna on the brink of death, but she'd already sustained a fatal injury; because of that, it was unable to heal her and use her as its next host. However, that aggregate of negative emotions has no intellect and cannot comprehend this. Therefore, it remained glued to Miss Eterna and ended up sealing her.”

As for why she was naked... Well, I wasn't sure either. The space the “witch” had created probably isolated her from everything else—including whatever clothes she'd been wearing at the time. For all I knew, foreign bodies could make seals weaker. It was kind of like...when you applied shatter-proof film on a windowpane. If you left a hair or some dust in while you applied it, air would eventually enter, and it would fall off...right?

Now that I thought of it, Alfreea had also been sealed naked. I hadn't, but my seal hadn't exactly been the sturdiest—I'd broken out of it pretty damn easily.

“Are you sure? Are you sure that she's...still alive?”

“Yes. She's on the brink of death, but she's alive. If I can get to her, I should be able to heal her.”

I could fix rotting flesh, damaged organs, and restart people's hearts. The only thing I couldn't do was bring back someone's soul. However, Eterna was still in there, so there was room for me to intervene. Ironically enough, the “witch” had stopped her from dying.

While I was thinking about it all, Verner grabbed my hand and surprised me.

“Please, I'm beggin' ya... Please save her! I'll do anything ya want... I'll even give ya my life, so please!”

*Oho? Anything, you say?*

Leaving the bad jokes aside, I would've saved Eterna even without him asking.

In fact, I would've done it even if Verner had begged me *not* to. As a fan, I craved a happy ending! What better feeling than to see your favorite characters come back from a desperate situation?

"I'll take you up on your promise," I said. "Stop treating your life like it's disposable and live a long life. You're the one Miss Eterna will want to come back to."

I took the chance to give him a stern warning. Verner nodded, his hand still clasping mine.

*I feel a lot more motivated now!*

I'd messed up Eterna's route in my previous world because I was a dumbass, but I'd gotten an unexpected opportunity to see my OTP together!

*Okay! It's time for some serious business.*

Defeating the invincible final boss was going to be a pain in the butt, but I'd figure it out as I went.

For the time being, I had to prepare for the next battle as well as I could. I touched Verner's shoulder and cast healing magic. I'd avoided doing it before because I hadn't wanted him to turn on me, but it was finally time.

Light emerged and took the shape of an arm. To be honest, the light served no purpose as far as healing went, so I could technically do without it. I just added it to avoid looking at the gory spectacle of the blood vessels, nerves, muscles, and skin reforming in front of my eyes. The light eventually disappeared, revealing his brand-new arm.

A look of astonishment replaced Verner's usual frown. I also fixed his right eye while I was at it, and he removed his eye patch, utterly shocked.

I left the scars where they were, though. Scars were a man's badge of honor. I didn't want to mess with his and have him yell at me.

"How's that even possible...? My arm, and even my eye..."

"You wouldn't be able to hug Miss Eterna properly with only one arm or see her face properly with only one eye. I know you didn't ask for my help, but I took the liberty of healing them."



“Thanks, El. I’ll never be able to repay ya for everything you’ve done,” Verner said, opening and closing his left fist over and over again.

He dug into his pocket until he found a gleaming blue stone. It didn’t quite look like a jewel. It was more like a...healing crystal or something. He pushed it into my hands.

“Hmm... What is this?” I asked.

“Found it on my travels. It’s an augurare crystal. It’s supposed to have the power to grant wishes. I kept it with me hoping it’d work, but I’ll give it to ya instead. I know it’s not enough to repay ya—nowhere close—but that’s the only thing I’ve got that’s remotely valuable. Take it, please.”

“I don’t want you to compensate—”

“I’d feel bad if I didn’t give ya anything in return. You’ve healed my arm and eye, El. Take it, if only to make me feel better.”

I couldn’t exactly say no, so I accepted Verner’s gift. I kinda got where he was coming from—always being on the receiving end would leave a bad taste in my mouth too. I didn’t really have any use for a wish-granting crystal, though...

*Guess I’ll sell it when I go back to my world.*



Three days after our first fight with the “witch,” it came back to the village.

The “witch” despised hope more than anything, so it was only a matter of time until it returned to destroy this place.

The villagers had seen me chase away the supposedly unbeatable monster with their own eyes. They were even more optimistic than before, so they must’ve stuck out like a sore thumb in the midst of all the despair.

I’d called it, but I still thought it was kind of funny for the “witch” to come crawling back after running away like that last time. It went to show that this idiotic beast moved on instinct—which, to be fair, was quite convenient.

“MWA HA HA HA! HEE HEE HEE HEE!”

The dark clouds gathered and materialized into the terrible “witch.” Its shrill

laugh echoed, as though it had entirely forgotten about its recent defeat.

It always materialized to attack, but I was now noticing that it didn't keep its form at all times. Did it drain too much energy? I supposed it made sense. Why bother looking for a host if it didn't need one in the first place?

Anyway, all speculations aside, it was time to fight!

I'd learned from my previous mistakes. My first move was to create a barrier with a five-hundred-meter radius to close off the area. Just like when I'd fought Alexia, I'd made a barrier that didn't let mana through. This time, I wouldn't let it get away.

If I'd been a little quicker on my feet, I could've done that last time too and prevented it from fleeing, but I wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed...

There was one little issue with that method, though—since noble emotions were the only thing that worked on the “witch,” I had no choice but to trap the villagers inside the barrier alongside us. Obviously, I'd asked for permission beforehand, but that didn't change the fact that I was treading a tightrope.

To ensure the villagers' safety, I'd asked Verner, Marie, Four-Eyed Pervert, and Farah—every decent fighter, excluding me—to protect them.

In other words, the “witch” and I would face off one-on-one. To be fair, I was the only one who could put up a fight against it, so it wasn't like there were other solutions in the first place.

“The sun shines upon all alike,” I said in English as I raised my hands, gathering all of the noble feelings and shaping them into a sphere of light.

*Ladies and gentlemen, the pitcher is about to throw the first pitch!*

I smashed the ball of light into the witch as a greeting, and it dispersed into a thin black mist once more. I knew it'd quickly reform itself, so I used that time to get my next spell ready.

“Fortune favors the bold,” I chanted.

Eight swords of light fell from the sky, forming a perfect circle around me. I made them float, pointing the blades away from me, then moved the ring of light behind my back and let it spin.

*What's the point of this? Nothing, why? But come on, it looks cool, right? Isn't that reason enough?*

I floated as I countered attacks so they wouldn't hit the village.

"MWA HA HA HA HA!" Shrill laughter echoed once more as the witch finished regenerating itself.

The number of faces had dropped again. For instance, I could tell that Griselda, the witch that had come two generations before Eterna, had disappeared. *YES!*

Countless tentacles erupted and flew at me, but I used some of the swords floating behind me to cut them down. Whenever they were done slashing at the tentacles, they returned to their original position on my back.

I felt just like the Provid\*nce Gundam!

Using funn\*ls had always been my dream! Wait, the Provid\*nce Gundam used the DRAG\*ON system, didn't it?

Anyway, I was all done charging it up, so I fired a second little sun at the "witch."

The villagers cheered as the abomination vanished once more.

*Perfect, perfect! Keep up the hype, guys! The outcome of this fight literally depends on it, so don't fail me now!*

Half of the reason I was doing useless—but very cool-looking—stuff, such as making blades of light rotate behind my back, was to look stronger. Visual effects had a lot of impact on the way an audience reacted. The other half was just because I was having a blast doing it.

The most crucial part of this battle would be to keep the villagers hyped up so that they'd keep pumping out hope for me to use. If I failed, I wouldn't have any more ammunition.

To achieve that, I had to be careful not to repeat the same exact attack patterns over and over again. The villagers might end up thinking that I'd never win and lose faith. Instead, I had to keep emphasizing my strength, and I figured visual effects were the way to go.

“Now!” I exclaimed, getting my blades of light to surround the “witch.”

Light beams came flying out of the tip of the blades, destroying the witches’ faces. Some tried to retaliate by firing dark beams, but our attacks canceled each other out. Eventually, my swords flew back to me.

All the while, I was charging up for the next real blow.

You may be wondering why I hadn’t been rapid-firing successive suns, but with so few people around, I needed a pretty long time to charge back up. In fact, I felt like it was taking longer this time...or was that just my imagination?

Whatever! I blasted the third sun at the witch. The same thing happened—it was gradually starting to feel weaker.

Unlike that time when I’d fought the “witch” in my previous world, I was neither tired nor on the verge of death. I was doing fine physically speaking, but this fight was starting to get annoying for a whole other reason.

“She’s fighting it! She’s fighting that abomination!”

“You can do it! Keep at it!”

“But...isn’t it regenerating itself after each attack?”

That wasn’t good. They’d finally calmed down enough to analyze the situation.

*I knew it... From their point of view, what I’m doing looks useless.*

I’d told Verner and the others my plan, and I’d asked them to help cheer up the villagers if they started having doubts. I could only hope that they’d do a good job of it.

I heard Verner explain to them that—while it didn’t look like it—my attacks were, in fact, effective. Unfortunately, the villagers knew very little about the “witch,” or even about magic in general, so I wasn’t sure they’d believe him.

I tried a few other tricks I had up my sleeve to get the crowd riled up again—I could take out my Tough Guy, make light beams rain from the sky, and sprout flowers around us. No matter what I tried, though, the time it took for me to charge each new sun grew longer and longer.

The amount of faces on the “witch” had dwindled significantly, and I could tell I wasn’t far from winning. It was just that the final push was hard.

At that moment, the “witch” started wriggling and changing its shape. My barrier was still active, so I doubted it’d take up half of the sky like last time, but I was still anxious to see what form it would take.

*Uh-oh.* I gasped before whispering, “So this is how you want to play it...”

The “witch” hadn’t exactly changed shape—it had crammed itself into Eterna’s body, and now it was forcibly moving her around.

The black mist covered her body, quickly turning into a black dress.

I couldn’t help but think that something was strange. If the “witch” could do that, why hadn’t it done so from the start? Hadn’t the “witch” appeared *because* Eterna’s body couldn’t become a host for the witches’ grudges and powers? The grim spectacle that was unfolding in front of me had overturned all of my theories.

Eterna wasn’t dead, that much was certain. However, I didn’t get how or *why* the “witch” had turned her into its host now. She was in a state of suspended animation, so she shouldn’t have been able to withstand the bulk of the witch’s pow— *Oh, crap.*

It was all my fault. I’d attacked the “witch” so much that its powers had finally become weak enough to fit inside Eterna’s diminished body.

*Damn! I made everything worse! How stupid can I be?! Oh no... What do I do now?*

## Extra Story: Another World 4

*All right, I'm in a pickle.*

I was fighting the “witch” in another world where virtually everyone was so depressed that gathering hope was like pulling teeth. Even so, I'd managed to back it into a corner by firing successive attacks until...it took over Eterna's body in a last-ditch effort to survive.

I could probably continue to weaken the “witch” even inside of Eterna, but the issue was that I had absolutely no way to bypass her defenses. Saints and witches could tamper with space. With that power in its hands, the “witch” could just block every attack I threw its way. This was the very reason the witch could normally only be defeated by the saint.

As a lump of mana, the “witch” had lost this ability to gain some sort of bugged immortality. Saints and witches, on the other hand, weren't immortal, but they were impossible to hurt unless you also had their powers.

In the past, I'd sacrificed a big chunk of my life span to borrow some of Verner's dark powers and break such defenses. The issue was that I'd gotten rid of the last of those powers after I'd freed Alexia from her seal.

*It's not my fault! I wasn't going to act as the saint anymore, so I didn't see the point in keeping them! How was I supposed to know that I'd need them again?!*

Without saying a word, Eterna lifted her hand, pointed her palm at me, and fired several blasts of condensed mana.

My blades of light automatically intercepted them and flew at her. Needless to say, they were unable to touch her. They slowly flew back to me, wobbling as though they were dejected.

*It's not your fault, guys, so keep it up. What to do now?*

Eterna and I were locked in a stalemate. She was far too weak to hurt me, and I had no way to bypass her defense. We were staring at each other in silence when I felt a hand on my shoulder.

“Mr. Verner?”

“This battle’s mine to fight. I’ll stop that thing,” he said. “I’m sorry, El, but I can’t leave this to anyone else.”

I’d tasked Verner with the villagers’ protection, but he hadn’t been able to stand by any longer.

He’d made the right choice, though—unlike me, Verner had dark powers. He could get to Eterna. In fact, I was *very* happy he’d stepped in without a word from me. I wouldn’t have had the face to ask him to save my butt after I’d insisted I’d take care of things myself.

“Mr. Verner, please try to get close to Miss Eterna without hurting her,” I told him.

“Ya got a plan?”

“Yes. If it goes well, we’ll be able to save Miss Eterna. Will you do it?”

Verner stepped forward, a smile on his lips. “Leave it to me.”

With those words, he rushed forward, his cloak flapping in the wind.

*Whoa. This Verner is so reliable.*

I wasn’t into men, but even I couldn’t help but admire guys like him. He truly was the kind of guy other men would fall for.

Eterna immediately fired mana beams at him, but that didn’t stop him. He roared as he cut through them with his claymore.

*Hang on, he’s repelling the saint’s spells like they’re nothing? How even?!*

On a closer look, he had missed some of them—they hit him in the stomach and arms. However, he didn’t show the slightest sign of hesitation. He powered through.

Eterna jumped back as she fired mana bullets, trying to maintain the distance between them.

The bullets exploded when they hit Verner, but he soon rushed out of the smoke. He had taken some damage. I could see a trail of blood running down the side of his face, and his cloak was falling apart. Still, he refused to slow

down. He kept moving forward, closing in on Eterna even as she relentlessly attacked him.

*Did his Hyper Armor kick in or what?!*

“Give her...back...to me!!!” Verner roared, veins popping out on his face.

He finally reached Eterna, and he pulled her into a tight embrace. Eterna kept attacking him with her magic. Blood drenched his clothes, but he refused to let go.

“Eterna...you’re finally back in my arms. Sorry I’m late, but don’t worry—I’ll never let ya go again.”

“V-Ver...” Eterna whispered.

*HUUUUH?! She can talk even though she’s practically dead and sealed?!  
Wait... Did Verner break the seal with his dark powers?*

If that was the case, this was my chance. I flew to them in a split second and put my hands on Verner’s back.

I was about to do the exact same thing I’d done in my previous world when I’d stolen—um, *borrowed*—Verner’s dark powers, but with Eterna instead. However, since I wasn’t the saint, absorbing those powers into myself would cut my life span drastically. That’s why I’d decided to use Verner’s body as a buffer.

Instead of laughing, the “witch” groaned. It was fighting me, trying its hardest to return inside Eterna, when something unbelievable happened: Verner grabbed it with his bare hands!

He stuck his face right up against the abomination, their foreheads pressed together. With a fierce smile on his face, Verner started to threaten it. “Don’t ya think you’ve done enough, you damn bastard? Let go of your goddamned regrets and drop dead!”

The “witch” whimpered.

Verner’s smile was radiant. He was still all teeth, when—suddenly—he leaned back and headbutted the witch. He didn’t stop at once, though—he struck it again and again until his face was covered in blood.



After the fifth time, the “witch” gave up and fled, leaving Eterna’s body.

*Seriously? That’s—that’s a thing? The protagonist at max level is so damn scary...*

“El!” Verner exclaimed.

“Y-Yes!”

Verner’s way of dealing with the “witch” had freaked me out so much that I’d just stood there, gaping at him like an idiot. I snapped out of it and placed my hand on Eterna. Needless to say, I was going to heal her. I dealt with her wounds and restarted her heart.

Eterna opened her eyes, and Verner tightened his embrace even more.

“Ver... Hurts...”

“Ya idiot! D’ya have any idea how worried I was?!”

*Aaaah, I sighed inwardly. Now, that’s a sight for sore eyes— Um, I mean, what a moving moment...*

With the “witch” gone, Eterna was back to being stark naked. Sadly for me, as soon as Verner noticed, he wrapped his cloak around her.

*Not cool...*

Anyhow, Eterna was safe and sound, and the “witch” was once again defenseless.

Which meant...that it was time to put an end to this!

*Let’s put on one last show!*

I raised my hand and started charging up another sun. Compared to earlier, I was able to gather a lot more noble emotions in a shorter time. I could tell that the two who were providing me with the most positive energy were Verner and Eterna.

To put it bluntly, the power of their love was about to save the world. My heart was also brimming with self-satisfaction. I’d finally gotten rid of the last regret I didn’t even know I had.

Right before I’d transmigrated, I’d been watching the end of Eterna’s route

and lamenting. My disappointment and sadness had been the starting point of this whole thing. In a way, you could even say that I'd come here because I wanted to see Eterna and Verner reach their happy ending.

A lot had happened ever since I'd become Ellize. While I'd earned my happy ending, it wasn't the one I'd been hoping for at the start. I'd ended up destroying Eterna's route with my own two hands. Don't get me wrong, though—I wasn't trying to say that I was unhappy with my current ending. It was just that I'd never been able to do anything for the two people I'd always wanted to save.

Yamoto-san had put it very well. If the world the original scenario was based on was Fiori A, I'd reincarnated into Fiori B—another world entirely. I hadn't saved the original Fiori A Verner and Eterna!

*Take this, you damn "witch"! This is my...*

*My...shameful desire, my greatest wish, my obsession! This is the stubbornness that fueled dozens of angry emails to the dev team, whining about the lack of a happy ending for my dear waifu! This is the fervor that got me blocked by said dev team! It's what pushed me to spam anonymous forums with complaints and annoy everyone while making a jackass out of myself because I couldn't accept reality! This is the frustration I felt when I begged people to write a happy ending for Eterna's route, only to get retorts like, "Write it yourself, idiot!" This is the despair, anger, and sadness I felt when I was told to "stop writing fanfics like they're freaking scripts," and that my writing was "an unreadable piece of trash" that "looked like a grade-schooler wrote it." This is the embarrassment I felt when people said that they "had no clue which character was saying what," that I "should know better than mix first-person and third-person POV," that "adding the POV of all the characters was way too old-school" and that it was "just plain boring." This is the confusion I felt when I read those comments. DON'T MESS WITH ME, OKAY?! Y'ALL TOLD ME TO WRITE IT MYSELF!!!*

*Hang on, Fudou Niito—what the heck were you doing while I was living as Ellize?! We're back to being the same person, so I've gotta share your dark history, brooooooooooooo!*

I'd overcome all of these hardships, transmigrated all the way here, and was finally ready to blast my, uh, mess-of-emotions-that-wasn't-quite-hope-but-that-would-work-just-as-well at the "witch!"

As my sun hit the abomination that plagued this world, a shrill cry filled the air, and it started crumbling away. It might've been my imagination, but I felt like its last cry was even more desperate than the time I'd beaten it using legitimate noble emotions only.

The tattered "witch" disappeared until nothing was left behind.

"Is it...over?" Verner asked.

"Yes," I answered confidently. "I can't feel its presence anymore."

*We won! The bonus arc is finally over too!*

Sure, it was a bit of a sloppy victory—actually, it'd become downright disgraceful toward the end—but who cared? The important part was that we'd won!

*The end justifies the means!*

Besides, it wasn't like my feelings were that far off from hope, right? They were a...murkier, kinda gross version...but hope was hope!

"At last... At last, the 'witch' has been defeated!" Four-Eyed Pervert exclaimed, moved to tears. "Our glorious saint accomplished a miracle!"

"For the last time, I'm not the saint..." I answered, looking down at the idiot prostrating himself at my feet.

*The real saint is right there!*

Miss Farah looked absolutely fed up as she dragged Four-Eyed Pervert by the ear and forced him to get up. I heard her whisper, "Why in the world did I fall for someone like him?"

*Excuse me? Sorry? Are you two an item in this world?!*

Now *that* was a crack ship. Speaking of pairings, how was my very conventional OTP doing?

*Oh my... Things are getting heated over there!*

Verner and Eterna were locked in a tight embrace as though they only needed one another to live.

“E-EI? What’s happening...?”

“Huh?”

I’d been so focused on enjoying the lovey-dovey spectacle that I hadn’t noticed Marie coming up to me. Her words pulled me out of my reverie, and I realized that something strange was happening.

A golden light was shining upon me, and I started glowing too. I wasn’t sure how I knew, but I was convinced that I was about to return to my world.

“It looks like it’s time for me to go,” I said.

I finally understood why I’d been brought to this world.

Saints had originally been created by the will of the world to counter the witch. However, no saint could ever stand a chance against the “witch.” I mean, saints were even part of the damn monster.

Out of options, this world had decided to take drastic measures and bring me here. I imagined Fiori A had gone to Fiori B and whined, “Hewwo, I’m in a jam—pwease hewp me.” Fiori B had probably sighed and gone “You’re hopeless...” before sending me over. Well, I wasn’t sure if that was exactly how it’d gone down, but that was the idea.

*Probably.*

“You’re leaving so soon?”

“I was never meant to stay here,” I explained. “I’m from a parallel world. I was brought here to defeat the ‘witch’ by the will of your world. My mission is over now.”

I was a bit like a temp worker—though I hadn’t exactly given my consent or signed any contracts.

“A goddess sent by the world to drive away evil... I knew it! You’re the one true saint!”

What was Four-Eyed Pervert on about? I didn’t have the patience to correct

him anymore, so I just let him say whatever he wanted.

I was about to go home, but I figured I might as well help out while I still could. I wasn't exactly one to do overtime for free, but I'd make an exception for today. Well, if I didn't, this world was done for.

For the first time ever, I used all of my MP at once to cast the biggest healing+nature regeneration spell I could muster. I immediately circulated my mana to replenish my MP and did it a second time.

I couldn't cover the entire planet with my healing magic, so I also created little mana spirits and scattered them around so they could heal people on the other side of the world. If I'd tried that in the past, I probably would've ended up sending most of them to unpopulated areas because I wouldn't have been able to see. Fortunately, now that I was the prophet, I didn't have that issue anymore.

*Gotta go home with a bang! Let's go! Que será, será!*



It was a true miracle.

Ellize spread her arms and released a warm light that changed everything.

Desolate wastelands turned into fertile fields, and the vegetation that the "witch" had burned down flourished one more. Flowers blossomed, and the contaminated water of the lakes and ponds turned clear. The dark sky turned bright blue as the clouds vanished, allowing the rays of the sun to light up the world. The wounded and the ill regained their vigor as beautiful spirits flew across the world, sharing their brilliance wherever they went. Some of them merged with the earth, the sea, the mountains, and the forests, bringing them back to life.

Faced with this spectacle, the people of Fiori joined their hands in prayer. No one had ordered them to, but they all spontaneously felt the need to pray.

"Mr. Verner, that's all I can do for you," Ellize said. "Countless challenges will await you. I cannot bring back the lives that have been lost to the 'witch.' However, I'm sure that all of you will find the strength to move forward. You have a beautiful future ahead of you."

“You’ve already done more than enough, silly...” Verner said, an awkward smile on his face.

His comrade in arms had left him and the rest of the world an incredibly grandiose parting gift. His debt toward her had grown once more, and he knew he’d never be able to repay her. He wanted nothing more than to devote his life to give back to her, but she’d be returning to her own world soon.

At the very least, he wanted her to put her mind at ease before she left.

Verner looked at her and smiled from the bottom of his heart. He hadn’t worn such a peaceful, gentle expression since the day he’d lost Eterna.

“I’ll take it from here,” he promised. “There’re still monsters around, but they won’t be breedin’ like crazy anymore. Don’t ya worry, I—no, *we’ll* do what needs to be done. Everyone here’ll do it.”

Ellize smiled back at him, and the two of them exchanged a firm handshake. Marie, who seemed reluctant to part with Ellize, hugged her to say goodbye.

The light that surrounded Ellize grew brighter—the time for farewells had come.

Ellize seemed to suddenly remember something. She let out a small “Ah!” before saying, “I almost forgot! If you’re able to, please visit Ordinary Fuguten. The first saint is sealed there, but you should be able to release her from her prison, Miss Eterna. I’m sure she’ll be of help to you.”

“The first saint? Seriously? Didn’t she turn into a witch?”

“She’s a special case,” I told Verner. “Do ask her, I’m sure she’ll tell you her story.”

“I see... Thanks, El. I can’t think of a more reliable ally than another saint. We’ll find and free her, promise.”

While the “witch” had been defeated, there were still countless monsters endangering humanity. The first saint would surely prove to be a formidable ally in this new battle.

Having vowed to release the first saint from her seal, Verner felt his suspicion turn to certitude.

“Well then, El, give my regards to the ‘me’ of your world,” he said, hoping to confirm his theory.

“Wh-When did you figure it out?”

Her reaction confirmed it. She *was* Ellize, not someone who simply shared the same name.

“When I introduced myself, ya looked surprised. Ya knew my name already, but ya seemed shocked by my looks. The ‘me’ ya know’s still a student, ain’t he?”

“He... He is, yes.”

“Besides, ya said that ya were from a parallel world yourself. Y’know that was a pretty big hint, right?”

Still, this Ellize was so different from the piece of shit he knew that Verner was convinced that it wasn’t the entire truth. The Ellize he knew was rotten to the core, and the girl he’d come to know was fundamentally different—they were like day and night.

None of that mattered, though. Whoever she may be, the girl in front of him was a kind soul and a dear comrade to him.

“Do you hate me?” Ellize asked.

“Course not. You’re you, and ya got nothin’ to do with the piece of shit I used to know. You’re our precious comrade and savior, El.”

Seeing Ellize and Verner smile at each other ignited a spark of jealousy in Eterna’s heart, and she clung to Verner’s arm. She didn’t say a word, but her face screamed, “He’s mine!”

The fake saint who’d come from another world smiled fondly at her. “Take good care of her.”

“I was gonna,” Verner replied immediately, pulling Eterna into another embrace.





Verner didn't need to say anything else out loud. His expression spoke for him—he seemed to claim to the world that he was Eterna's, and that Eterna was his.

Eterna blushed and hid her face in Verner's arms.

"I don't think we'll ever meet again, Mr. Verner, so I leave this world in your hands."

Verner nodded. "Take care of yourself, El."

He clenched his fist and thrust it forward. Ellize copied the motion.

The two of them belonged to different timelines. They'd most likely never see each other again. The fact that they'd met at all was nothing short of a miracle. However, Verner knew that he'd never forget their meeting. He'd only come to know her one month and three days ago, but he'd cherish their short time together until he passed. He already knew that those memories would become one of his most prized treasures.

"Goodbye, everyone. I wish you all the best!" Ellize said before rising into the sky.

The goddess was returning to the heavens after gracing them with her presence.

Verner and the others looked up at the sky. Supple had dropped to his knees and was praying like a fanatic.

A couple of minutes—no, a dozen—later, Verner lowered his head. Eterna was still nestled against his body, and he tapped her shoulder softly.

"We're gonna be busy from now on," he said. "We gotta make this world a better place—can't have her laughin' at us."

Eterna and Marie nodded, and the three of them walked away.

They'd keep on living in this world—the very one their new comrade had saved from despair.

Verner stopped and looked at the sky which Ellize had disappeared into one last time. He offered her the gratitude he hadn't managed to express with

words inside of his heart, then set out once more.



“Huh?”

I came back to my senses on my chair, slightly disoriented.

I brought my hands to my temples and rubbed until my blurry vision cleared up. I was in my room at home—not in the saint’s castle, but rather, my log house in the forest.

My rocking chair was still swaying gently as I stared at the wall in confusion.

*Huh?*

I’d just checked the clock tower in the capital with my prophetic powers, but the time had barely changed since I’d gone to the other side. It was still on the same day here as when I’d left.

*Wait, wait, wait... No way...*

I stormed out of my room and went down to the first floor.

Layla was there, cooking dinner.

“Oh, Lady Ellize,” she said with a smile when she saw me. “Fishing was good today, so we’re having fish for dinner.”

Layla and I took turns cooking, but she still did it more often than I did. She always fussed about taking care of the chores for me, but I wished she’d come to terms with the fact that I was no longer the saint soon.

Leaving housework aside, Layla was acting the same as usual. Had I been missing for an entire month, she definitely would’ve had a different reaction.

“I’m looking forward to it, Layla,” I said. “Say, I fell asleep earlier. Do you happen to know how long I slept?”

“I’m not sure. It couldn’t have been that long, though...”

*Right...*

That settled it. It had all just been a dream.

*A dream, huh...? How cliché.*

Still, I did feel like I'd been traveling for a month, and I remembered everything that had happened over there with frightening detail. Could dreams truly be that vivid?

Well, at least it had been a good one. I couldn't believe I'd literally seen my dream Eterna route play out!

I'd come to terms with my disappointment, when suddenly, something fell from my pocket.

"Oh my, isn't that an augurare, Lady Ellize?"

"You know about those crystals?"

"Yes. They're supposed to grant your wish if you keep one in your pocket. Soldiers often bring them to the battlefield as lucky charms. I'm surprised you'd have one, though. Do you have a wish?"

*A crystal that grants wishes, huh?*

I didn't remember buying anything like that.

*"Found it on my travels. It's an augurare crystal. It's supposed to have the power to grant wishes. I kept it with me hoping it'd work, but I'll give it to ya instead."*

Ah.

AH!!!

Verner! The other Verner had been the one to give it to me! Which meant...that dream hadn't been a dream at all!

YEEEEEEES!!!

I picked up the blue crystal and held it tightly in my palm.

I'd been thinking about selling it after I'd returned to this world, but I changed my mind. This crystal was very effective, after all.

"I got it from a very dear friend of mine. Although I suppose the order was all wrong..."

*My wish's been granted already.*

Layla didn't get what I meant. She looked at me, confused.

# Sequel: The Fake Saint Is Off to Japan 1

*All right, so, hear me out—don't you think the best kind of games are the ones where you actually get to keep exploring the world after defeating the final boss?*

In an overwhelming majority of games, the credits started to roll pretty much right after you beat the final boss. Then you'd end up back on the title screen. While you *could* start another run, the only thing you'd get to see was the world as it was while the final boss was still out there.

Every time I played a game like that, I was a little disappointed.

It's not that I didn't get why the developers made them that way. Creating a whole other set of lines for every NPC to fit the new status quo sounded like a ton of extra work. Still, I couldn't help but be curious about the future of the world I'd spent hours saving. When nothing was waiting beyond that struggle—other than some sort of time loop where you could only redo everything from the start with the final boss alive and kicking—it left a bad taste in my mouth. It made me feel like the protagonist's efforts to bring peace hadn't amounted to anything.

*Is it only me? Once I've kicked the final boss's butt, you should let me experience peace instead of bringing back the bastard! Yeah, I have strong feelings about this!*

Anyway, my point was that I'd finally reached that ideal state here, in Fiori! *Hooray for post-bullshit worlds!*

In a not-so-distant past, I'd spent my days pretending to be the saint. Now I was finally free to lounge around all day! I still had my public image to worry about, so I couldn't exactly come out and say I was a dude inside all along. Besides, my true character wasn't all that lovable, so I'd kept a saintly persona to a certain extent.

Thankfully, I lived like a hermit now, so I didn't have to do much acting—I

barely came across anyone, after all.

Speaking of my days as the saint, I used to wear a white dress created especially for the role. Now, I wore...a different white dress! Not much had changed since I still only wore *one piece* of clothing, but it was still worth mentioning. Sadly, I wasn't the king of the pirates yet.

Anyway, I'd designed my new dress with my knowledge of the modern world in mind, so it looked a lot like the ones girls in Japan used to wear.

*What is it? You're wondering, "Aren't you embarrassed to wear a girly dress, even though you're a man?" Well, I mean...I was kind of embarrassed at first, but I've been doing this whole saint-in-a-dress thing for over ten years, sooo...*

I didn't really think much of it anymore. People get used to anything, truly. Besides, in this world, even men wore fluttering, dress-like tunics without any pants underneath. In some cases, they were so short that they reminded me of miniskirts.

All this to say that a long dress like the one I was currently wearing wasn't really anything to be embarrassed about.

Even though everyone and their grandma knew that I was a fake, the people had somehow taken to calling me Great Saint. I expected that the leading cause behind the nickname being popularized was the royals. It would've been difficult for them to simply admit to messing up, and that was the way they'd found a way to mitigate the issue...*probably*.

I personally thought that they'd be better off focusing on the *real* saints. According to the theory, only one saint should exist at any given time, but there'd been so many exceptions happening in this generation that there were *three* of them at the moment: Alfrea, the first saint; Alexia, the previous saint; and Eterna, the rightful saint of this generation. Needless to say, I didn't count myself.

Speaking of Alfrea, I was currently exploring ruins at her request. She'd kept saying that there was a place she wanted to investigate, and that she needed me to come with her, so I'd ended up tagging along.

The ruins were pretty much piles of stones stacked up. They totally reminded

me of the inside of kofun—ancient Japanese tombs I’d seen on TV in my previous life. Alfrea and I—accompanied by a bunch of soldiers surrounding us, just in case—were walking along the narrow corridors that made up the interior of the structure. I got why the knights had insisted on accompanying us, but I wished they would’ve waited outside—it was incredibly cramped, and I struggled to take every step.

“Lady Alfrea, where are we?” I asked eventually.

“I’m not sure either, actually,” she answered. “I came once with my mother when I was a child. According to her, this is the place where everything began. I don’t really get what she’d meant, but...”

“This is my first time hearing about it.”

“Th-That’s not my fault, okay?! It’s just that I’d...kind of forgotten about this place until last month. But it’s been a thousand years, so I couldn’t help it! You should praise me for remembering at all!”

The place where everything began... The name alone made it sound super-duper important, and I could already see the flags pop up like mushrooms all around us. Alfrea had never mentioned these ruins before. Well, with Eve’s grudge out of the way for good, there was a pretty good chance it wasn’t much of a priority anymore.

“Anyway, when it came back to me, I figured that taking a look couldn’t hurt, so I sent a letter to Fuguten. They answered that there was something strange in the deepest part of the ruins. Intriguing, right? That’s why I asked you to come with me. If anything happens, I know I can count on you,” Alfrea said.

“Something strange...” I repeated.

What were we going to find there?

*Eve said that this was the place where everything began, right? Maybe there’s a historically significant artifact or something!* I thought as we moved forward.

I would never have guessed what we actually found, though.

It was a rift. A rift in space and time.

And no, I didn’t mean that as some sort of metaphor—there was quite

literally a crack opening up space itself right in front of us. Around it, a crystal was keeping it sealed. It looked exactly like the one Eve had used to seal Alfrea—the space there was frozen. That likely meant that Eve herself had sealed it, but...what the hell *was* it?

“This is indeed...very strange,” I said. “Lady Alfrea, could you confirm that this is a magic seal?”

“It definitely is. It’s the exact same spell as the one my mother used on me. But to what end...? Also, this seal’s starting to break.”

This spell froze space itself, so it shouldn’t have been possible for it to break naturally. Under normal circumstances, only a similar power—dark magic, that is—could weaken or break such a seal. I doubted that anyone had done that, yet Alfrea was right—this seal was definitely on the verge of breaking. That told me that the rift itself was pretty damn dangerous.

“E-Ellize, can you also sense...this? It’s giving me the chills... I don’t want to stay here any longer. Can we go home?”

“Yes, I can also tell that this crystal is brimming with negative emotions.”

Dark emotions seemed to be seeping through the rift into our world. It was all very ominous.

To be perfectly honest, my own soul was just as rotten and dark as whatever was coming out of that rift, so I wasn’t all that fazed. I felt at home, in a way.

I could see why the people from this world would hate it, though. If Alfrea had come here without me, she most likely would have passed out from the shock. The people of this world—especially the saints—were just too pure. They were weak to such dark urges, so they could easily be tainted. In fact, that was exactly what had happened to all the previous saints except Alfrea. None of them had been able to withstand that darkness for more than five years.

I, on the other hand, was perfectly fine. Noble emotions were the biggest danger to my personal integrity, but I was in my element in a room full of negative ones. I was constantly taking in the mana around me, so I was filtering a lot of the bad vibes in the room.

Anyhow, Alfrea was right to want to leave. This place was like poison to her



soul. I could only imagine how difficult staying put was for her.

The knights also seemed to be having a tough time. They most likely had no idea what was causing their discomfort, but their irritation was plain to see. *Some of 'em are making funny faces, ha ha.*

“Lady Alfrea, please leave at once with the knights. I’ll investigate this crystal and its contents myself.”

“I...will take you up on that. Be careful, Ellize.”

Rather than arguing, Alfrea left immediately. The knights showed a little more hesitation, but Alfrea encouraged them to follow her—she knew how strong I was. Eventually they did, leaving me alone in the ruins. It wasn’t like I even needed escorts in the first place. As far as I was concerned, a thousand guards just meant a thousand hindrances to take care of.

“Now then...”

Just to be safe, I deployed the sturdiest barrier I could around myself. I didn’t think anyone could hurt me when I put all of my strength into defending myself. In fact, I could jump into a raging volcano, be hit by a thunderbolt, or dive into the depths of the sea without sustaining a single scratch.

What in the world *was* that rift? It was definitely something bad since so many negative emotions were continuously seeping out of it, but I couldn’t figure out why it felt so familiar to me.

I felt like I was standing in front of my parents’ house. *How come?*

Standing there staring at the crystal all day wouldn’t give me any answers, so I decided to step closer and inspect it.

I carefully brushed the tip of my finger against it.

“Huh?”

My vision turned white.

*It’s so bright...*

What had happened? Was I under attack? It wasn’t gonna work, though. I was basically invincible!

*Huh? Hang on...? My barrier is eroding?!*

Was that because of some sort of space magic? Either way, it was bad news!

I kept reinforcing my barrier from the inside to replace it while I waited for the light to vanish. After about ten seconds, it disappeared, and I opened my eyes.

For some reason, I found myself standing inside a modern apartment. The room was so neat that it didn't look like anyone actually lived there, though. Still, the layout felt familiar to me. I hurriedly checked the position of the toilets and the bathroom to confirm. Sure enough, I realized that I knew this apartment.

I rushed out and finally got the confirmation I was waiting for.

This was my old apartment, which could only mean one thing...

*I'm in Japan?!*





I could hear cars and trains around and every single person I saw had far better skin—and hygiene—than virtually anyone but the heroines in Fiori. I was also assaulted by the impure air you could only breathe in gigantic cities!

*Yep, that's Tokyo. The (former) fake saint is in Japan, baby! The fake-saint-in-Tokyo arc is coming! No, seriously, what the hell's going on? How did I end up in Tokyo? I was in Fiori five minutes ago, wasn't I? This makes no sense!*

Well, it wasn't like I'd never ended up in Japan magically before. Until I defeated the "witch," my consciousness often found its way there to join the other me. However, that was only because the missing part of my soul had still been there after failing to transmigrate. It was a bug caused by the simultaneous existence of Fudou Niito and Ellize—my two selves. Now that the two pieces of my soul had fully merged together, it made no sense for me to end up here. I never would've thought I'd see Japan again. Besides...it felt oddly real, and I could feel the air against my skin...

*No way...*

It wasn't just my spirit that had made the trip this time, it was my entire body!

Just to test my theory, I laid my hand flat against a window after I'd returned to my apartment. Sure enough, I felt the texture of the glass very distinctively. I opened it and felt the wind against my skin. That confirmed it—I'd been transported to Japan with my physical body.

*What do I do now?*

Thankfully, it seemed like I wouldn't have to worry about the possibility of being unable to go home. I looked around my room, and I could somehow perceive the same spatio-temporal rift I'd seen in Fiori.

*I'll check first to be safe.*

Sure enough, I was able to go back and forth between the two worlds. Touching the cracked rift was all it took.

I quickly exited the ruins, explained the situation to Alfrea, and returned to Japan.

This time, I'd brought a few things with me to experiment. I discovered that as long as I enveloped them in my barrier, I could bring both living things and inanimate objects along without any issues. However, crossing the rift was incredibly taxing, and I was pretty sure no one else but me could create a barrier sturdy enough to survive the trip. A regular person would end up smashed to smithereens. Maybe ghosts and spirits could make it, though. *Who knows?*

Anyhow, I'd secured a way home. With that worry out of the way, I could enjoy myself! I'd finally found my way back to Japan, so going back to my little forest without doing anything would be a huge waste!

I hoped to speak to Yamoto Tamaki-san, *Kuon no Sanka's* scenarist if I could.

More than anything, though, I wanted to eat till I burst! I'd done a lot to improve my quality of life in Fiori, but—while I had much better meals nowadays compared to when I first transmigrated—the food was still a far cry from what you could find in Japan. There wasn't much variation, and the condiments and spices available didn't allow for refined dishes. And I was getting super tired of having potatoes every day!

Whenever I *really* couldn't take it anymore, I took it upon myself to cook. I was a lazy guy at heart, though—what I truly wanted was to enjoy great food *without* having to lift a finger. I wanted others to do the hard part for me while I relaxed and ate.

Anyway, point was that I wanted nothing more than to rush to a convenience store to buy pastries or to a family restaurant so I could lounge while getting endless free refills.

The sad part was that I had no money...or an ID or bank account, for that matter.

*Uh-oh. I'm stuck, aren't I?*

In Fiori, I could've crafted weapons, armor, or even farming tools with my magic and sold them to get a bit of cash, but Japan didn't work that way. Randomly selling goods in the streets with no permit was very much illegal. *Unauthorized business is bad, kids! What should I do?* I thought about bringing forth precious metals and selling them to specialized shops, but... *Yeah, no,*

*they'll want to check my ID.*

The same went for gold and jewels. Nowadays, even secondhand bookstores checked your ID when you tried to sell them books. In fact, you needed an ID for virtually *everything*. There probably were a couple of old privately owned bookstores that wouldn't bother with the brass tacks, but I didn't have books with me. Even if I did, I doubted I'd earn enough to do much anyway.

*This is a pain. I have no clue how to make money!*

I had some decent savings as Fudou Niito, but I'd given everything to my family before passing away. Well, I'd probably get arrested if I tried using Niito's account with my current looks anyway. I had a feeling no one would believe me if I justified it by saying I was his reincarnation.

I guess my only option was to look for a part-time job that paid in cash and didn't require an ID... But if working was the cost to fill my tummy, I'd just give up and go home.

*Gimme a break! Why do I have to work?! I don't wanna! Nope! Not doing it!*

And so, after ruling part-time jobs out, I'd ended up creating precious metals and selling them.

How did I manage that without an ID, you ask? Easy! I used my prophetic powers to look for a specialized shop with complacent employees and headed there.

The guy I talked to was incredibly shady, and he may or may not have looked like some sort of ex-convict, but whatever. I was thankful he let me sell my stuff and that was it. *We don't judge a book by its cover in this house.*

I now had around two hundred thousand yen in my hands. I couldn't buy anything too fancy, but it was more than enough to enjoy regular restaurants.

I picked up a simple three-hundred-yen wallet at a 100-yen shop to store my money. For some reason, such products—ones that cost more than a hundred yen—had become super common at 100-yen shops in recent years.

Anyway, now I had a (cheap) wallet and (some) cash, so it was time to live it up!

## Sequel: The Fake Saint Is Off to Japan 2

The nostalgic BGM of the city filled my ears as I strolled through the streets. I was looking for a restaurant that'd make my radar beep. I hadn't had modern food in ages, but I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to eat. Or rather, there were so many things I wanted to eat that I couldn't decide on anything!

Instead of overthinking it, I'd decided to walk around until I stumbled on the perfect place.

*Huh? Do I think I'm in Solitary Gourmet? So what?! I promise I won't start making faces while saying, "I'm so...hungry..." so leave me alone!*

Seeing Tokyo again after so long made me realize how comfortable modern life was. The roads were all perfectly maintained, and there was plenty of goods to go around. You only needed to walk a couple of seconds to find a place to eat.

While Fiori had gotten a lot better in recent years, I still hadn't gotten over the desolation of the past.

There was just one problem... Why was everyone looking at me so much? They weren't just stealing glances at this point—they were outright staring! I'd especially designed my dress so that it'd look like the kind of fashion Japanese girls wore. I was positive I didn't look like a weird alien or something, but I guess I did seem foreign with my long blonde hair and facial features... Not to mention my ethereal beauty. That was probably why I stood out.

*Whatever, I don't care about their stares. I just wanna get some food.*

The first place that caught my eye was a katsudon restaurant. The large poster next to the door showed a perfect bowl topped with beaten eggs that looked *delicious*.

I pondered over it for a while before concluding that it was a bad idea. A bowl of katsudon from the get-go was a bit too heavy. I wasn't even sure I could eat that much in one sitting with my current body. Although I could've easily

knocked back a large serving of katsudon, a side of croquettes, and a bowl of ramen for dessert back when I was Fudou Niito—well, while I was healthy, at least—I doubted I could finish even half of that as Ellize.

My next stop was a convenience store. There were so many options. I was always surprised by the selection of sweets these places had to offer. These days, they could easily compete with bakeries and cake shops.

*All right, let's put the convenience store on hold.*

I'd walk around a bit more and if I couldn't find anything else I wanted, I'd come back.

A bit farther, I stumbled upon a Japanese barbecue place! Enjoying some grilled meat alone was probably the greatest luxury a common guy could experience, and the restaurant even had free ice cream! But, somehow, I didn't feel like it right now.

I turned the corner and saw a shop that specialized in French toast.

*Yes! That's it!*

Now that I thought about it, I'd never made French toast in Fiori.

It was a pretty simple recipe that only required eggs, milk, sugar, and bread. You soaked the bread in the aforementioned ingredients, fried it, and you were done. Obviously, making a *good* version wasn't that easy. Even if it had been, it still would've been difficult for me to pull off on the other side.

The biggest issue was the bread itself. It was a pain to make from scratch, and successfully baking the sort of soft bread I wanted was near-impossible considering my skill level and the equipment and ingredients I had at hand. Okay, I know I started off saying it was a simple recipe and immediately contradicted myself, but that was what it was. French toast was only quick and easy *because* you could buy packs of sliced bread in any shop here. It was the same as saying that curry was an easy dish anyone could make when you'd only ever used the premade curry roux from the supermarket.

*Let me tell you that making it from scratch was a whole other animal!*

I'd tried a few times on the other side, but all my attempts had failed. Besides,



it was freakishly expensive because of all the spices you needed. I wasn't even sure I even knew *which* ones were necessary, by the way!

Enough curry talk—it was time to focus on French toast! I'd made up my mind. *French toast it is!*

As I stepped into the shop, the server froze and stared at me silently for a few seconds. "W-Welcome," they eventually stuttered before gesturing toward the tables. "Please pick any seat you'd like!"

*First time serving an otherworlder, huh? I'm a bit disappointed with the service.*

I picked a cozy seat in a corner by the window and opened the menu.

High-grade cultured butter, whipped cream, and honey; three cheese crème brûlée; whipped cream tower, ice cream, and fruits... There were a lot of choices—even a bagel version! *Does that count as French toast?*

Looking through the pictures and reading the description was rousing my appetite.

*Which one should I pick?*

In my past life, I could've eaten them all, but this wasn't an option anymore. I could tell from the picture that one serving was going to be my maximum.

*All right! I've decided!*

I was going to go with the plain option—one that truly embodied the very essence of French toast!

I pressed the little button to call a server, and one of them arrived in less than ten seconds. I placed my order, but the server looked at me in confusion.

"Ah. Excuse me," I apologized. "One honey French toast, please. And one coffee."

*I'm such an idiot!*

I'd mistakenly spoken in Fiorian at first!

*You're in Japan, so speak Japanese, me!*

I could hear the servers whisper in the kitchen.

“Oh my god, I panicked!”

“I’m terrible at English!”

“Speak human when you’re here!”

*Sorry... It wasn’t English, though...*

After a few minutes of waiting, a sweet aroma wafted over, and my French toast was brought to my table.

The bread had a beautiful golden color, and it was nicely grilled on top. I could also tell that the egg mixture had perfectly seeped into it. Pure white powdered sugar had been sprinkled over it delicately, and a copious amount of honey added the last touch. Each slice of bread wasn’t all that big, but there were three of them—lots for me to enjoy.

There was also some whipped cream and vanilla ice cream on the side to mix and match the flavors however I liked.

For the first taste, however, I decided not to add anything.

I took a bite of the freshly made French toast. The upper layer was crispy, but as I sank my teeth deeper into it, I felt the fluffiness of the bread and the sweetness of the half-cooked egg mixture melt on my tongue. The aroma and flavor of the honey deepened the taste. While they were both sweet, they merged together perfectly instead of canceling each other out.

This was exactly what I’d been expecting when I’d read the name of the dish on the menu—in a good way.

The contrast between the soft inside and crispy surface of the bread was perfection. And, while it was fairly sweet, the flavor disappeared on my tongue without being too much, leaving me wanting more. I felt like I could keep eating this forever.

Next, I put some whipped cream on top. It somehow made the dish look much fancier. It was the same as adding whipped cream to your custard pudding or pancakes—they automatically looked ten times more elegant.

As for the important part—the taste...

*My, my, how interesting. The cream asserts itself and changes the tone of the*

*entire dish.*

It felt as though the whipped cream was wrapping the toast in a soft, fluffy blanket. For all its softness, though, it added even more sweetness to an already sugary dessert. It was like an explosion of sweetness—a heavy, saccharine punch delivered right to taste buds.

I took a sip of black coffee to reset my palate.

If I was having coffee on its own, I usually preferred adding some milk and sugar, but I was an ardent supporter of black coffee when it was paired with sweets. The bitterness of the coffee could offset the sweetness of the dessert and vice versa.

Last, I'd try the vanilla ice cream. If I just dumped it over the French toast it'd just be difficult to eat, so I scooped a spoonful and ate it. The taste was...well, it was regular vanilla ice cream, so it wasn't anything groundbreaking. After living as Ellize for seventeen years, though, I'd missed it a lot.

I took another spoonful, deposited it on top of the French toast, and cut a morsel with my knife.



The warmth of the toast and the coldness of the ice cream clashed inside my mouth, creating a strange-yet-wonderful contrast. As the ice cream melted, it mixed with the French toast. Unlike with the whipped cream, the two flavors gradually became one, blending into one another.

This new mix also paired perfectly with coffee. Not that it surprised me—coffee jelly and vanilla ice cream combos were a staple for a good reason.

Before I knew it, the contents of my plate had entirely disappeared into my stomach, and all that was left was a bit of whipped cream. I wasn't barbaric enough to just eat it like that, but it felt like a waste.

*In that case...*

"Excuse me," I called out. "I'll have another coffee, please."

When my new cup arrived, I added in the whipped cream instead of milk and sugar. *It's not proper restaurant etiquette, but let's not dwell on that.* Not following the rules oftentimes yielded delicious results.

I avoided stirring too much so the whipped cream wouldn't entirely dissolve and had a taste.

*Hmm... Not bad. Coffee and whipped cream definitely work well together.*

I'd had a great meal; I absolutely didn't regret picking this place.

*Wait, does this place do takeout?* I wanted to bring French toast to Layla and Alfreia to see their reaction. *No? What a bummer. Oh well, guess I'll just buy the ingredients and cook it for them when I'm back on the other side.*

The first ingredient on my shopping list was toast, obviously, but I didn't want to go for the cheap stuff you could get at some corner store.

*Isn't there a bakery around here?*

If there wasn't one, I'd buy a pack of thick-sliced bread at a convenience store and call it a day.

I also needed eggs, milk—or maybe fresh cream if I wanted them to be fluffier? *Whatever, I'll just buy both.* I'd get domestically produced honey too. As for the vanilla ice cream... *I guess I can use magic to keep it frozen, so it*

*should be okay.*

The first stop was the convenience store. I could get pretty much everything on my list there.

“Excuse me, miss,” someone called out to stop me. “Could I have a moment of your time? We’re filming a show called *Ultimate Quiz Runner*, and we’re trying to see which questions people on the streets get right. Would you like to participate?”

I turned to look at who’d just spoken. There was a man holding out a mic and a cameraman filming us beside him.

*Ultimate Quiz Runner* was a show in which celebrities and idols had to answer questions to move on to the next stage. If the contestants failed to answer easy questions that pretty much everyone got right, they’d be eliminated on the spot and dropped into a pit. All in all, it was a pretty funny show. There was always at least one idiot that messed up on easy questions, though, so I’d started suspecting that it was all staged.

The way they decided which questions were easy or not was by challenging people in the street. If ninety percent of passersby gave the right answer, it was deemed “obvious.” They were currently filming that process.

*It’s my first time getting interviewed!*

The man who’d called out to me was staring at me with a blank look on his face. The cameraman was also frozen, and several people were staring at us.

*Huh? You’re the one who came to talk to me in the first place, so why’re you ignoring me now? That’s rude.*

“Umm...?” I started.

“Oh. E-E-Excuse me...”

*Why’re you suddenly stuttering, bro? Are you okay?*

That guy wasn’t the least bit professional. I assumed he was a newbie assistant director or something and not an actual TV host. *Sorry you got roped into doing the interviews.*

“So, umm... We were hoping you’d answer one question for us so we can

ascertain the correct answer rate, and...”

“Sure, I don’t mind,” I said.

“Thank you very much. All right, then... Between these two dogs,” he said, pulling out photos, “which one is closer to a wolf genetically?”

The newbie assistant director (?) showed me a Shiba Inu and a Siberian Husky.

*Oh, I know this one.*

If you relied solely on their appearances, you’d be tempted to go with the Siberian Husky, but Shiba Inus were actually the closest dogs to wolves, genetically speaking. While videos of Shiba Inus getting their cheeks squished by their master made them look about as doofy and unthreatening as possible, they were practically wolves.

The photos also made it pretty obvious they were trying to mislead me. The Siberian Husky looked super cool, while the Shiba Inu was getting its cute, puffy cheeks squeezed.

“I would say the Shiba,” I answered.

After I gave the right answer, I was asked to sign some sort of agreement form stating I didn’t mind them using the footage.

I then bid the crew goodbye and headed to the convenience store. As I was picking up the ingredients for the French toast, I suddenly realized that I’d forgotten to ask them to blur my face and voice.

*Whatever. It’s not like I live in Japan anyway.*

## Sequel: The Fake Saint Is Off to Japan 3

Wherever she passed, people froze and stared.

Although she was walking through the streets as though she belonged there, her presence felt so ethereal that anyone who saw her had to stop for a moment and wonder if what they'd just seen was real or a fragment of their imagination.

The target of all of these gazes? A blonde girl.

Her beautiful long locks gleamed under the rays of the sun, as dazzling as gold threads and as soft as the most exquisite silk. Her green eyes, her shapely nose, her cherry blossom-colored lips, her smooth, unblemished, pale skin...every part of her was doll-like perfection. She was wearing a plain white dress, but on her, it looked as good as an intricate ball gown. The simple white flower that decorated her hair completed the outfit, enhancing her beauty.

*Anything would look good on her*, the passersby thought. Next to her radiance, the city appeared dull and gray. Only *she* was the light, and it seemed like a halo accompanied her every step. Needless to say, this was nothing more than an optical illusion. There was no halo around her, but she shone so brightly that those who witnessed her glory could have sworn there was.

That was just how much she stood out. She was almost like some sort of otherworldly goddess. Only she deserved to stand in the spotlight. Everyone else was a supporting role. She was a star—the only true star there was.

Naturally, such a person couldn't simply walk through the streets of Tokyo without becoming the talk of the town. People took to the internet to share their admiration.

【Lady Ellize?!】Quiz Runner 【THREAD 172】

### 768 Nameless Runner

You guys are spamming threads. This is the 30th one I've



seen popping up just today!

---

### **769 Nameless Runner**

It's not even that bad on here. You should see the Kuon no Sanka and Ellize stans forums. They're going ham

---

### **770 Nameless Runner**

It's my first time on here and the amount of threads is freaking me out. What's up???

---

### **771 Nameless Runner**

You didn't watch today's episode, did you?

---

### **772 Nameless Runner**

Nah, I missed the second half

---

### **773 Nameless Runner**

So there was a question about whether shibas or huskies were closer to wolves. They showed a regular girl answering and boy was she gorgeous

---

### **774 Nameless Runner**

I fell in love with a 3D gal for the first time in my life

---

### **775 Nameless Runner**

No but like, can humans even have such shiny hair? Is that a thing?

---

### **776 Nameless Runner**

No. No one's hair does that in real life. D'y'all think life is an anime or what?

---

**777 Nameless Runner**

The show edited her hair for sure

---

**778 Nameless Runner**

It looked super realistic tho... Well, I guess glowing hair isn't all that realistic

---

**779 Nameless Runner**

They didn't edit it. I saw her answer the question irl

---

**780 Nameless Runner**

Seriously? How was she?

---

**781 Nameless Runner**

She smelled freaking good

---

**782 Nameless Runner**

Creep.

---

**783 Nameless Runner**

>>781

---

**784 Nameless Runner**

>>781

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**785 Nameless Runner**

>>781

---

**786 Nameless Runner**

Isn't she an Ellize cosplayer?

---

**787 Nameless Runner**

She even has the flower so she's gotta be. People checked on the main thread and there's no other chara with that exact flower. It's kinda weird, though. Why not wear Ellize's dress if she's cosplaying?

---

### **788 Nameless Runner**

A full cosplay in the streets is pushing it, isn't it? She compromised with the flower and a less flashy white dress.

---

### **789 Nameless Runner**

Why are y'all so sure? There are hundreds of charas w/blonde hair and green eyes

---

### **790 Nameless Runner**

Because of the flower, you dumbass.

---

### **791 Nameless Runner**

So what? You think Ellize's the only character with a flower, huh? Not the brightest flower in the garden, are you?

---

### **792 Nameless Runner**

You mean "not the sharpest tool in the shed"? There are plenty of characters with flowers in their hair, but the shape and number of petals don't match. This looks just like the angelos we see in Kuon no Sanka. Though this one is probably synthetic. Anyway, the point is that no one would bother recreating that exact flower if it isn't to cosplay Ellize. How about you spend five minutes googling before replying next time?

---

### **793 Nameless Runner**

Go fight elsewhere. You're so annoying.

---

### 794 Nameless Runner

Isn't Ellize that saint who's supposedly so beautiful she appears to be glowing in the game?

---

### 795 Nameless Runner

\*Fake saint But yes.

---

### 796 Nameless Runner

The heroine of the one true route

---

### 797 Nameless Runner

I still think the devs are weirdos for putting so much effort into a hidden route. No one even found it for years!

---

### 798 Nameless Runner

Speaking of, how come it wasn't discovered earlier? The conditions are a bit obscure, but the emulator crew shoulda figured it out waaaay quicker

---

### 799 Nameless Runner

No clue. I found it pretty early on, but I didn't post about it so maybe others did the same

---

### 800 Nameless Runner

Sure, sure. We all believe you lol

---

### 801 Nameless Runner

Lie better.

---

### 802 Nameless Runner

It's true! I extracted the data so I knew it was there

all along but I forgot about it and only played it recently

---

### 803 Nameless Runner

LMAO ME TOO!!!

---

### 804 Nameless Runner

Same, I also knew it was there. I was too busy to play at the time and ended up forgetting about Kuon no Sanka entirely until a couple of weeks ago.

---

### 805 Nameless Runner

Anyway, how was she irl? Glowing fr?

---

### 806 Nameless Runner

Totally

---

### 807 Nameless Runner

LMAO

---

### 808 Nameless Runner

LMAO

---

### 809 Nameless Runner

Seemed that way at least

---

### 810 Nameless Runner

The way they asked that question made the answer so obvious. The moment they brought up the Shiba I knew they were trying to mislead people. They could do better, seriously.

---

### 811 Nameless Runner

Let's just say that Lady Ellize blessed Japan with her

visit.

---

**812 Nameless Runner**

That cosplayer's stupid good

---

**813 Nameless Runner**

If you're looking for the real Lady El, she's sleeping next to me.

---

**814 Nameless Runner**

You sure that's not Elizabeth?

---

**815 Supple Ment**

Lady Ellize! O' Glorious saint! Lady Ellize! Lady Ellizeeeeeeee!!!

---

**816 Nameless Runner**

>>815

Go back to your world!!!

---

**817 Nameless Runner**

>>815

Don't butt in, Four-Eyed Pervert!

---

**818 Nameless Runner**

【Breaking news】I work at a convenience store and I got to touch Lady Ellize's dainty fingers when I gave her her change

---

**819 Nameless Runner**

So jelly

---

**820 Nameless Runner**

You’ve used up your luck for the rest of your life

---

**821 Nameless Runner**

Which store?! What’d she buy?

---

**822 Nameless Runner**

Not telling you where. You creeps are all gonna rush here. I was freaking out so much that I can’t even remember what she bought. I’m pretty sure she got some bread.

---

**823 Nameless Runner**

Bread...? For real?

---

**824 Nameless Runner**

That’s so normal LMAO

---

**825 Nameless Runner**

There’s no sliced bread in Fiori, must be why

---



“This is so good!!! It’s so soft it’s melting on my tongue!!!”

“The cloud you made for me last time was already very soft, but this is incredible...”

As soon as I went back to Fiori, I threw together an emergency meeting and made French toast for the occasion. The emergency meeting was obviously to discuss the spatiotemporal rift that led to another world.

Layla, Alfrea, and King Aiz were the only ones here. I still had no clue what that rift was, so I figured keeping the information under wraps for the time being was for the best.

Alfrea and the others seemed to be enjoying the French toast I’d made, but I personally felt like something was off or missing.

I'd followed a recipe I'd seen on TV once upon a time that promised to help you make "professional French toast at home" to a T, but I wasn't entirely convinced. At the end of the day, while these shows *did* help you get closer to the food a professional chef would cook, it wasn't quite the same. So, while I'd done a pretty good job, it still wasn't as delicious as the one I'd had at that one place.

*I wonder if the quality of the ingredients is the issue... I'm sure restaurants use the finest eggs, milk, and bread there are. Or maybe my skills are the issue. Professionals are on another level altogether. I wish they would've let me get takeout!*

By the way, the "cloud" Layla had mentioned was what people called cakes in this world. When I'd offered some to the big shots for the first time, they'd kept going on and on about how it was like eating a cloud, and the name had ended up sticking. So yeah, this had nothing to do with the emo boy who ran to a brothel dressed like a girl the first chance he got.

"Moving on to the more pressing issue..." the king started. "You said there's another world beyond the rift, correct?"

"Yes."

"What is it like?"

"It's...very dangerous. I don't think anyone else but me should venture there," I answered.

If I'd said honestly that the rift led to a rich peaceful nation, countless idiots would've flooded over to go there seeking food or riches. I didn't think anyone who tried would be able to make it, but what if they did and a conflict broke out?

I felt bad for lying to King Aiz, but I didn't intend on telling him—or any of the other royals, for that matter—what Japan was truly like. To be perfectly honest, I didn't even want him at *this* meeting. I wouldn't breathe a word to Alfreea either—that girl couldn't hold her tongue to save her life. The only person here I'd consider telling the truth to was Layla.

*Though maybe I shouldn't... What if she goes all Scotterbrain on me again?*



*You know what? I'll keep my mouth shut and keep pretending that Japan is super-duper dangerous.*

"I saw countless steel monsters running faster than horses, and the air was poisonous—so thick and impure that I couldn't even see the stars. The sea was a muddy dark color, and the people—there were people—all walked to their working stations with defeated looks on their faces," I explained.

Well, had I lied? There were tons of cars, and the quality of the air truly left much to be desired. The sea bordering Tokyo was also pretty damn dirty. Most people also went to work every single day and fought with the dreadful evil called *overtime*. *Corporate slaves don't have it easy! For real, though, NEETs are winning at life.*

"Y-You were alone in such a horrible place?! Next time, I'll come with y—"

"I'm fine, Layla. You know I have a resistance to poison. Besides, I can run away if it comes to that. To be honest, going alone is easier in that regard. I believe I should be the only one entering this world to investigate."

If I took Layla to the other side, I had a feeling she'd pick a fight with a truck and get run over in the first five minutes. Actually, she was strong enough to slice the truck in two, so I should probably worry about the driver and all the other vehicles that'd obviously get dragged into the accident.

Alfrea would probably run around excitedly, get lost, and cry in a corner until I managed to find her again.

If I had to take someone along...it'd be Eterna or Verner. These two would most likely be fine, but Layla and Alfrea were out of the question.

The next time I went to Japan, I'd buy the game and a console, then swing by an internet café to play *Kuon no Sanka* again. If I wasn't mistaken, you could play it on some handheld consoles these days, so it probably wouldn't be too complicated.

I already knew the story *very* well, but playing it again could always lead to new discoveries.

## Sequel: The Fake Saint Is Off to Japan 4

Under the pretense of investigating, I'd made my way back to...Japan!

Once again, I'd arrived through my old room and sneaked out.

*Let's go, Tokyo!*

Speaking of my old room, since I'd died in it so suddenly, it had apparently become stigmatized property.

It made my life easier. I hoped people would keep believing it was haunted for a long time.

Anyway, I was in the mood for curry today! First things first, I started walking toward a nearby curry restaurant.

Huh? Wasn't I supposed to buy a console and a copy of *Kuon no Sanka*?

Yeah, no, I'd given up on that already. Trust me, I'd tried! But the game was sold out at all the shops I visited. I could've downloaded it directly from the console's digital store, but the console itself was also sold out!

Out of options, I'd had no choice but to amend my plans—which meant curry. *Alas, sometimes the world stands in your way!*

I was walking along as inconspicuously as possible, but just like last time, people were gawking at me. I was used to the attention, though, so I just ignored it and went about my business. *Eat up, folks—I'm serving looks.*

Although I was a fake, I'd still lived as the saint for seventeen years on the other side. This wasn't my first rodeo—far from it. To make sure my cover would be perfect, I'd gotten used to sprinkling a bit of magic here and there. I looked perfect from every angle.

I spotted a young man—probably a university student—staring at me with a dreamy look on his face, so I smiled his way.

*Rejoice, for you've been blessed with my (fake) saint's smile!*

Unfortunately, a nearby car collided with another that had stopped at the red light. The following car was dragged into the accident, adding to the confusion. It looked as though no one had been hurt, thankfully, but the cars were in a sorry state. Besides, the road was completely blocked.

*Hey, that's dangerous! Why were you looking at me?! Eyes on the road when you're driving!*

After a couple more steps, some guy stopped me and offered his business card. "H-Hello! I'm sorry for stopping you like this. I'm Usojiyanai, from True-False Entertainment. Would you happen to be interested in joining the industry?"

*I thought these talent scouts only ever showed up in anime and manga! So they're actually a thing, huh?*

These invitations were always scams, though, right? *Sorry, but I'll pass.*

I'd read enough doujinshi to know that the girls who said yes were always dragged to confined rooms and surrounded by a bunch of dudes. "You brought a cute one," they'd say as they locked the door to make sure the girl wouldn't be able to get away. "Don't worry about it. That's the usual process," they'd tell her as they started with soft touches to avoid spooking her. Then, they'd casually tie her up under the guise of taking pictures, and by the time the girl realized something was truly off, it'd be far too late. She'd lie there, angry and shivering as the men had their way with her.

*I know my stuff, all right?*

I ignored the guy and hastened my pace. However, I soon found myself blocked by a crowd. *What's going on?*

"Damn it! Why isn't the ambulance here yet?!" I heard someone scream from the center of the throng.

I managed to take a look and saw a middle-aged man frantically performing CPR on another guy of similar age. He was doing everything he could to save his life, while the crowd that had formed around them was content watching from afar.

*Well, after calling an ambulance and finding an AED, I suppose there isn't*

*much to do besides wait. Hang on—someone did call for an ambulance, right? This wasn't one of those cases where everyone's waiting for the person next to them to actually make the call, right?*

“Bad news!” a man exclaimed as he came running from behind me. “The ambulance can't get through because of an accident down the road!”

*Oh. That accident, huh?*

It was quite unfortunate that the ambulance had come from that direction. It'd have no choice but to turn back and take another path. That would take time, and it was unclear whether the man would hold on until then.

*Wait...is he gonna die because of me?*

That driver had taken his eyes off the road because of me, after all.

*No, he's at fault. I didn't do anything!*

But still...I was indirectly involved, wasn't I?

*Ugh, fine!*

I pushed my way through the throng and sat down next to the unconscious man. The guy who'd been doing chest compressions tirelessly this whole time stopped as he looked at me blankly.

*Why are you stopping?! Move your hands!*

I rested my hand on the unconscious man's chest and used thunder magic to kick-start his heart. I also took the chance to blast some healing magic at him to fix his fractured ribs. I wasn't sure whether they'd broken when he'd collapsed, or if it was because of the chest compressions, but that didn't change anything.

After making sure he was breathing again, I stood up silently and started walking away.

“W-Wait! You... You got him to breathe by touching his chest?!” the other man exclaimed.

*Dude, I have other places to be—the curry restaurant, in fact—so don't ask questions!*

I couldn't exactly ignore him, so I turned around and decided to shove all the

credit—and all the annoyance that came with it—onto him. Right as I was about to start talking, though, I paused for a second. The guy was so muscular it was funny. *You a bodybuilder, or what?*

“I didn’t do anything,” I finally said. “I wanted to take over to help you, but he started breathing again just as I did. You saved his life with those chest compressions.”

I was ready to leave when I noticed that some idiot was filming me with his phone. I walked away, but he followed me from a distance.

*Really? We’re stalking people, now? Don’t blame me if I pay you back with a little prank, then.*

I summoned a gust of wind and aimed at the stalker’s hand, making him drop his phone. It fell right into a storm drain and disappeared. *YES! BULL’S-EYE!*

“NOOO!!!” the man screamed. “MY PHONE!”

*Serves you right! If you contact a worker, you’ll probably be able to get it back! Good luck, bro!*

By the way, the curry I had after this tasted incredible.



Net! News

【The beautiful respondent of Quiz Runner looks exactly like a famous game character?!】

6/13 (Wed.) 20:22

Have you seen the picture of the lady who’s currently shaking the internet?

Three days ago, at 18:23 on the tenth of June, she appeared for around ten seconds on *Ultimate Quiz Runner*. The show, famous for having celebrities and ordinary contestants compete by answering questions, has always enjoyed high ratings since it started airing one year ago.

The correct answer rate, which is shown on-screen at all

times, is ascertained by having regular people answer the questions in the streets. Occasionally, such footage is shown.

In this case, a young lady was asked to answer the following question: “Between a Shiba Inu and a Siberian Husky, which dog is closer to a wolf genetically?” The blonde green-eyed beauty, who appears to be European or American, stole the hearts of thousands of viewers in those short ten seconds. The participants on set were also stunned into silence as they watched her interview.

While no one has been able to figure out the mysterious girl’s identity, her resemblance to one of the characters of the dating sim *Kuon no Sanka ~Fiore caduto eterna~* has been noted by fans, who speculate she may be a cosplayer.

Reports concerning her whereabouts have started appearing on several websites, but we ask that you avoid inconveniencing this lady. Please remain reasonable.

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She can’t be from our plane of existence. That girl’s gotta be 2.5D

---

Pfft, she was edited like crazy, wasn’t she? ...she was, right???

---

If I see her irl I’ll give myself a heart attack. I want her to give me a heart massage too.

---

Bro, the one doing the chest compressions was a beefy dude

---

If I can get the saint to give me mouth-to-mouth, my life will have been worth it

---

Her trying to perform CPR was very Ellize-coded

---

The bulky middle-aged dude cracked me up, though. He was going at it so vigorously. Is he a pro wrestler or something?

---

The guy's ribs were cracking, legit thought he'd die because of that

---

I mean, that's how it goes when you've got killer arms

---

Still, isn't the guy who filmed an absolute bastard (and I'm putting it mildly)? He did nothing but film, even when the first responder asked him to call an ambulance and look for an AED.

---

He totally is. He even zoomed in on the unconscious man's face. Tbh, we should call the cops on him.

---

Seriously, though, what did Lady Ellize (tentative) do?

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She said it was a coincidence that he started breathing right when she arrived. That sounds a little too convenient, though.

---

Why's my wife's picture here?

---

Excuse me? You mean *my* wife, right?

---

She's Verner's wife.

---

Her hair looks sooooo soft. I wanna ruffle it!

---

Over here, officer! We've got a creep!

---

For real, though, don't be weirdos and harass her. Stalking's a crime.

---

On the internet, Ellize's appearance in the real world was a hot topic.

Obviously, almost no one actually thought that the Ellize from the game had somehow found her way to Tokyo. While the people kicking up a fuss in the comments sounded like idiots, they did have a bit of common sense—enough to believe that such a thing wasn't possible.

However, one woman wasn't like them.

After reading through several articles talking about Ellize, she closed all of her tabs and leaned back on her chair, letting out the breath she'd been holding.

"It's really her..." the black-haired woman—who looked rather plain compared to how she usually did, given that she was lounging at home—whispered. She'd spent the last hour staring at countless pictures and videos of the blonde girl, and she'd finally reached a conclusion. That was Ellize. The *real* Ellize. She'd somehow made it to this world.

The young woman was far from being insane. In fact, she had a very good reason to believe what she did. She was the only person here who knew that Fiori truly existed.

How? Well, she'd lived there for a thousand years before entrusting the rest of her life span to Ellize herself. After her death, she'd found herself in this world, her memories intact.

That was why she knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that this Ellize was the real deal.

"Ellize... What in the world are you doing here?" Yamoto Tamaki—or Profeta, as she was called in her past life—whispered.



## Sequel: The Fake Saint Is Off to Japan 5

*Hi everyone! Ellize here! I'm taking a break from hanging in Japan to visit a desert island here in Fiori today!*

Everything had started a couple of days ago when I'd seen the guardians hard at work to maintain the locomotive.

While my realization was a bit late, it had gotten me thinking: wasn't that steam locomotive way too advanced compared to the rest of Fiori?

At first, I'd assumed that there was a civilization of that level *somewhere*. But now that I knew Fiori better, it had struck me: there simply wasn't!

The rest of this world was stuck in the Middle Ages—or worse in some areas because of the damage caused by the witch.

The only means of transportation available were horse-drawn carriages, and suspension hadn't even been invented. You felt every single rock along the way. I didn't see how locomotives made sense in the midst of this, which had led me to the question: where the hell had this technology come from?

I wasn't sure I was on the right track, but I'd thought of a few possibilities.

Theory number one: the world used to be far more advanced, but that knowledge had been lost along the way.

That was the most straightforward explanation. A civilization capable of building steam engines used to exist, but they'd been destroyed by the witches and their technology was forgotten.

If that was truly the case, though, I felt like there should be far more vestiges of that ancient civilization. Besides, if the engines were that old, they shouldn't work anymore, right?

Theory number two: one country had mastered this technology.

No matter the world, different countries never advanced at the same exact pace. Case in point: while the Japanese were still busy striking each other with

katanas to defend the honor of their lords, some foreigners had already managed to send hot air balloons into the sky. Conversely, while Japanese people now communicated with smartphones and flew in modern aircraft, there were probably still primitive tribes hunting naked and living with nature.

By this logic, one country could've advanced far quicker than the others.

The issue was that I'd traveled pretty much everywhere while hunting monsters, and I'd gone to every single country at least once. I could say with certainty that I'd never visited some sort of technological powerhouse.

Theory number three: a past transmigrator built that locomotive.

If I'd transmigrated from modern-day Japan, who was to say that this hadn't happened before?

If a previous transmigrator had been some sort of genius light novel-protagonist type, they definitely could've brought modern knowledge and technology to this world and kick-started an Industrial Revolution.

There were barely any archives in this world, so almost no one knew the past well enough for me to ask... Well, no one except Alfrea. She'd been around for a thousand years, so I'd gone to her.

"Oh, right, you wouldn't know about this, Ellize," she'd answered immediately. "There used to be an incredibly advanced island in the past. The steam train that you know was built by their engineers as a gift for the Bilberrian—well, at the time, it wasn't called Bilberry—royals. It was a sign of friendship. But, um...my mother relentlessly attacked that island and destroyed their civilization. The island was submerged into the sea, and the few survivors fled to a nearby island—it's called Giappon nowadays, I believe."

Giappon was the pseudo-Japan of Fiori. To be honest, I still wondered why almost every fantasy world had to have a pseudo-Japan somewhere in the East. Still, while Giappon was an island, it was rather close to a continent. Unlike Fuguten, it hadn't been left unscathed by the witch.

I'd gone there in the past and I'd even encountered their king. To be honest...they hadn't really struck me as a genius-scientist nation. If anything, the country was a lot like Edo— No, worse...like Sengoku period Japan.

After Alfrea, I'd turned to Aiz.

"That is correct, the people of Giappon have indeed mastered advanced techniques we cannot mimic. In fact, the steam locomotive that we royals use is still being maintained and repaired by them. However, keeping it functional is the only thing they will do. They're terrified of their own knowledge and refuse to build anything new. They seem to believe that *science*—yes, I believe that is what they call it—is cursed and will provoke the wrath of the witch."

That made a lot of sense. I didn't see how a thousand-year-old locomotive could've stood the test of time without anyone repairing it.

As it turned out, the people of Giappon did have fairly modern technology, they simply refused to do anything with it because of their trauma. Considering what Alfrea had told me, Eve had bullied them pretty badly, so I could see where they were coming from.

Eve must've realized that science was a big threat to her.

Still, the other thing that Alfrea had brought up—how the island had sunk under the sea—had to be unrelated. While I could probably achieve that, I doubted a witch could've ever submerged an island large enough to have become a nation. It was most likely a natural phenomenon.

With all that new information in mind, I'd decided to take a look at the ruins of the ancient island. While it had indeed been submerged, the summit of its tallest mountain still poked out of the sea.

To be totally honest, I didn't think there was a lot of meaning in what I was doing. A genius regressor surely would've been able to learn crucial things from the ruins, but I was just a former writer. In other words, I wouldn't figure out squat.

I'd just come to satisfy my curiosity, that was all. The battle that opposed the witch and the saint was over, and there weren't any more final bosses for me to beat up. Now, I was able to explore and enjoy the world after the end of the scenario. Maybe I'd find some foreshadowing, as was often the case in these kinds of ruins.

*All right! Time to barrier up and dive!*

I jumped into the water and looked around as I sank deeper and deeper.

*Yup. Can't see a thing.*

I cast a spell to illuminate the darkness, and sure enough, I saw remains that indicated a nation had stood right here in the past.

The buildings looked nothing like the skyscrapers you'd find in modern-day Japan, but they reminded me of early modern Europe. There were even cars that looked exactly like the ones in old black-and-white photographs.

There was no doubt the inhabitants of this island had reached a high degree of civilization.

*What a waste... Without the first witch going on a rampage, Fiori might've become more developed than Earth by now.*

The witches were entirely to blame for the current state of this world.

Well, I supposed this could also be seen as a blessing in disguise. If their scientific knowledge had advanced unchecked, nuclear weapons and the like would've eventually been invented.

*Hang on. Could the world have created the witch to prevent scientists from going too far? Nah, that's too far-fetched.*

I swam around as I observed the vestige of the civilization Eve had brought to ruin.

I saw high-rise buildings, several vehicles—including tanks—and even what I assumed were firearms. For the witch to have gotten rid of such a country so easily truly showed the gap in strength between her and regular people. Still, she'd most likely used her monsters strategically to defeat them, relentlessly conducting assault after assault.

As I wandered through the streets of the city capital—no doubt once the pride and joy of these people—I eventually stumbled upon the remains of a large building. I sneaked in through a gap—a former window, I assumed—and found myself inside a vast hall.

The floors were made of a peculiar material I didn't recognize, but it looked a lot like marble. While it was now in a poor state, I could easily imagine how

magnificent the room must've been in its prime.

Further down the hall was an imposing throne. It was also broken, but the backrest was mostly intact and I could make out letters.

*Oho! What does it say?*

We have lost.

Our Saitonaruta Empire has obtained the ability to interfere with space and time through intensive magic research.

That technique has allowed us to discover the existence of another world and timeline. We succeeded in creating a rift that leads to it in Fuguten, the closest place to that world.

Through that rift, the wonderful energy of that world has started flowing inside ours: anger, hatred, envy, murderous impulses, belligerence, competitiveness, vanity, the need for approval, and other such powerful emotions that were so scarce on this side.

I have come to learn the truth. Our world prevented us from feeling those emotions. It was controlling us.

Taking in those negative emotions has changed us. The need to become stronger, faster—to go further and higher now inhabits us.

Our longing for strength gave birth to weapons. Our longing for delicious flavors made us develop our culinary skills. And our longing for an easy life pushed us to elevate our standard of living.

The years of stagnation we experienced in the past almost seemed like a lie in comparison to the speed at which our empire grew. At that rate, world dominion was well within our grasp.

And yet...our foolish world refused to approve of our ways!

It took control over the woman to whom we'd given the power to wield space and time. It made her its proxy and turned her against us!

Were we such a threat to the world?!

Either way, our demise is imminent. The absurd powers that the witch—Eve—possesses will soon vanquish us for good.

But it is already too late. The seeds of discord have been planted.

Just like I did, that woman will also soon come to change. I've seen how hatred has started penetrating her soul. She's faithful to the world's will for now, but that will not last.

Foolish woman! You stopped our march toward disruption, but you shall follow the same path!

Foolish world! The humans you love so dearly will be put to death by the proxy you created through your own will!

*Phew, that was long.*

Whoever carved that onto the throne sure was motivated! And super skillful!

*Honestly, I'm impressed. But a throne isn't a diary, bro, come on.*

Anyway, I now had a pretty good idea of what had happened and why the rift existed. The world had created the first witch because of them.

*This fancy chair's pretty valuable as far as history goes, so I'll bring it to Aiz as a gift.*

The second I reached for the throne, though, a voice echoed out from God-knows-where.

"Who's the fool who dared touch my throne...?"

I debated ignoring it altogether and going home, but I decided against it. I looked around, trying to figure out where the sound had come from.

Black mana, which had somehow been lying in wait, appeared and quickly gathered to form a human silhouette.

*Huh? Is this the start of a boss fight? I don't really feel like it right now. Can I go home?*

"I've been waiting...for the moment when our empire would rise again...and the darkness of people's hearts would triumph..."

“I...see...”

“I knew someone with enough mana to rival the witch would eventually appear. Finally... Finally, the time has come. My revenge against the world starts now! You, pitiful girl, will become my vessel!”

*Okay, so this guy ended up staying in this world as a lump of negative emotions just like Eve, huh? And just like her, he needs a vessel to go on a rampage.*

The human-shaped shadow stared at me, flickering in the most ominous of ways.

*Boy, I really found a hidden boss.*

It was sometimes a thing in video games. You’d think you were done, but a new dungeon popped up after you cleared the final boss. Then, you’d find another boss who claimed to be the true mastermind with some long-ass speech you couldn’t bring yourself to care about, because you barely even knew them. In most cases, the only reaction you’d have was wondering what the hell that boss had been doing until now.

Anyway, the guy from Si...Sigh Empire—or whatever it was called—rushed at me, looking every bit like the hidden final boss he was trying to be.

*Ugh... What an overwhelming presence...!*

“Aurea Libertas + light of the people’s hearts.”

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARGH!!!!”

*There you go: dead. Looking scary’s one thing, but that’s not quite enough to win a fight now, is it?*

## Sequel: The Fake Saint Is Off to Japan 6

While the guy from the Saitou Naruta Empire had appeared with all the flair of a hidden final boss, he'd been surprisingly easy to defeat. After he kissed his ass goodbye, I grabbed the throne—as well as a couple of other things, including jewels and engraved slates—and made my way to Aiz's place. I dumped it all on him so he could take care of the tedious historical research.

I'd started this journey to understand why a locomotive existed in a world that clearly hadn't reached that level of technology. Now that I'd found my answer, I'd lost interest.

To be fair, I wasn't sure I even cared much about the real reason the world had created the witch, or why the amount of unpleasant emotions in Fiori had increased. The “witch” was already gone, and so was the lump of negativity it had been holding on to. So what was the point of hearing out a whole new boss who wanted to rehash the same old story?

So, anyway, I decided to stop thinking about the what's-its-name Empire and headed to Japan again.

My goal for today was to get a set of gardening tools, a book about home gardening, and some seeds. I mainly wanted to grow fruits—currently, I was thinking of blueberries and olives. Needless to say, I'd probably use healing magic to help them shoot up in a jiffy.

I'd done that many times already to regrow forests and orchards to alleviate the food shortage.

Why was I trying to pick up gardening, then? Well, mainly because the fruits on Fiori weren't all that good. They hadn't been selectively bred for generations, which meant that bananas, for instance, were hard and not the slightest bit sweet. Several fruits had also disappeared altogether because of the witch.

That was why I'd decided to import some from Japan before I closed the rift



for good.

I knew that introducing alien species could have dire consequences on ecosystems, so I was planning to keep the seeds I brought back in my personal garden.

Perhaps I'd spread sweet potatoes, though... They grew easily on rough land and would help prevent famine. Besides, sweet foods were mostly rare and pricey, making them hard to access for commoners in Fiori. If I popularized sweet potatoes, they'd have access to something sweet.

As I'd already mentioned, I intended to close up the rift for good soon. It had been there for so long that I didn't think it could influence the people of Fiori all that quickly, but there was still a risk the negative emotions from Earth would eventually add up to dangerous levels. To be safe, it was better to get rid of it altogether.

I also assumed that I'd transmigrated into this world because of the rift. If I left it as-is, there was a chance malicious transmigrators could appear.

Anyway, I felt like it was safer to get Alfrea to seal the rift properly. I'd only do so after going back and forth a few more times and getting everything I needed, though.

Speaking of things I needed to do, there was one person I absolutely wanted to see while I could, so I decided to look for an internet café first. If you walked around a station, you were bound to stumble into a couple pretty quickly.

As I walked through the streets, the howling of sirens echoing around me, I searched for an internet café. If you were wondering why it was so noisy... Well, it was because a nearby house had just burned.

I'd witnessed that right after I'd arrived, actually. I'd walked out of Fudou Niito's old apartment, only to see that the house on the opposite side of the road was on fire!

I was scared that if I left it alone, the fire would eventually spread to my old flat, so I rushed into the house, rescued the little girl that had yet to escape, and created a vacuum around the building to extinguish the fire.

I didn't live in Niito's flat anymore, but it'd be a pain if it burned down. I did

have some lingering attachment to it, and—most importantly—the room concealed the rift! Without it, the press would surround the place twenty-four seven. Not to mention the government would most likely declare it a restricted zone. After all, the rift was pretty damn visible—it was an actual crack floating midair. There was no way the government would leave it alone.

Anyway, after I'd brought the little girl to her family, I got them and the crowd that'd been staring, dumbfounded, to promise not to mention me to anyone. Then, I left.

There was nothing much I could do about the damage. *Oh well, I'm sure your insurance will take care of that anyway. I hope you guys can be satisfied with the fact that no one got hurt for the time being.*

As soon as I found an internet café, I went in, paid at the counter, and headed to my private booth.

First, I looked up “*Kuon no Sanka* Emperor Saitonaruta.”

I didn't remember anything about an empire from my own playthroughs, but I'd only ever truly finished the first version of the game. As Fudou Niito, I'd also played the second version, of course, but I hadn't been able to go further than the appearance of the “witch.”

Yamoto Tamaki had written the scenario based on what she'd seen in her previous life. She'd told Niito herself. Now that both parts of my soul had merged properly, I knew that too.

Yamoto Tamaki, the scenarist, was the reincarnation of Profeta.

I remembered her saying that she'd always been good at making predictions, even in her past life. Profeta had also told me in Fiori that—if she ever felt like it—she could easily predict what would've happened if Verner had fallen for Marie or Eterna instead of me.

I wasn't the brightest bulb in the box, but even I could draw the right conclusion from all of the evidence. Yamoto Tamaki was Profeta—I was sure of it. In fact, I didn't see how anyone else could've come up with *alternative* explanations.

If the Saitonaruta Empire or that emperor appeared in the game, it meant

that Profeta knew about it.

The first search suggestion was “Emperor Saitonaruta pitiful.”

*Huh?!*

I ignored that and clicked on the first result.

## **Emperor Saitonaruta**

### **Profile:**

A character of the game *Kuon no Sanka ~Fiore caduto eterna~*.

Only appears after the main route has been cleared.

Emperor Saitonaruta is the sovereign of the Saitonaruta Empire, a nation that was brought to ruin by Eve, the first witch, and submerged into the sea.

He’s a giant with a muscular build, a white beard and a trident in hand.

He believes that negative emotions are necessary for humanity to evolve and advance. He and his people developed dark magic through extensive research.

They made use of these powers to open a rift that linked Fiori to another world. Negative emotions poured in from the gap, rousing the fighting spirit of the people of Fiori who were otherwise pacifists. Their competitiveness resulted in the fast development of the empire.

While these events took place a thousand years before the main story unfolded, the Saitonaruta Empire had acquired advanced technology on par with early modern Europe.

Their behavior did not go unnoticed by the world which decided to create a proxy—the first witch—to stop them.

After a fierce fight with Eve, the first witch, the

empire eventually lost, unable to resist her ever-growing monster army and superhuman powers.

Much like the “witch,” Emperor Saitonaruta refused to let go of his grudge. He remained in his palace for a thousand years, appearing in front of the protagonist who’d come to explore the ruins.

### **Backstory:**

Emperor Saitonaruta appears to be the main cause of the tragic cycle that plagued the world of *Kuon no Sanka* for centuries.

His actions gave birth to the first witch and to dark magic, making him the true villain.

Likewise, the overload of negative emotions that drove Eve crazy can be attributed to the rift created by Emperor Saitonaruta and his people as the world had not accounted for an energy that was originally scarce in Fiori (still, some players have raised the point that since the witch was created after they’d already started drawing negative emotions from another world, the world should have taken that parameter into account).

It is believed that Eve’s Excessive Circulation Syndrome would not have driven her mad in the original environment of Fiori.

Players have also theorized that Eve was given Excessive Circulation Syndrome—which her successors did not suffer from—because a regular mana supply would have made it impossible for her to take down a nation as powerful as the Saitonaruta Empire.

Some also guessed that, as the first villain, Emperor Saitonaruta himself also suffers from Excessive Circulation Syndrome.

## **Boss fight:**

While Emperor Saitonaruta's description makes him sound like a powerful foe, players do not consider him such, as it is possible to have Ellize in your party at the time of the fight.

Ellize's stats remain the same as her stats during the final battle against the "witch," so as long as you have her in your party, losing the fight is practically impossible.

While Emperor Saitonaruta has the most HP out of every enemy—besides the witch with a whooping 99999 HP—Ellize's damage output with the spell Aurea Libertas easily passes 100000 regardless of her equipment. This allows her to one-shot him.

Not to mention that, after her awakening during the "witch" battle, "Light of the people's hearts" is automatically cast alongside every attack. As such, no matter which attack you use, the damage will be doubled thanks to the sensitivity of Emperor Saitonaruta to positive emotions. Even without using Aurea Libertas, you will only need two spells or three normal attacks at most to defeat Emperor Saitonaruta.

As a result, the much-awaited hidden boss fight becomes an instant win, and many players have expressed their surprise at this denouement. This has also led many to view Emperor Saitonaruta as a pitiful character rather than a powerful mastermind.

It is possible to enter the fight without Ellize, but since her presence is necessary to visit the underwater ruins, you must also bring three other allies along and modify your party composition before the start of the fight.

The BGM of the fight against the emperor is the same as the one of the “witch” fight, *Never-ending Tragedy*. The contrast between the dramatic BGM and the anticlimactic fight is regarded as humorous by many, especially considering the fact that the fight ends for most players before the intro of the BGM can even end.

Countless memes have been created by players, making Emperor Saitonaruta a beloved character often nicknamed “the gag emperor.”

*Oh my...*

Poor Saito-something had apparently been turned into a meme because of me.

*But it's not my fault, is it? That guy was just way too weak...*

He was far stronger than Alexia, but compared to the “witch”... Well, he was a small fry, to put it nicely. To be fair, it wasn't like the grudge of one weird old man could compare to a thousand years of grudges accumulated by the most powerful beings of this world—witches.

As far as I was concerned, the peaceful, post-clear world didn't need any more bosses, so it didn't matter.

Still, this meant that Profeta had known about that gag emperor all along. She'd never mentioned it...but then again, while he was the true cause behind everything that had happened, it wasn't like he'd been much of a threat. I could see why she hadn't felt the need to warn me about him. Unless someone with strong mana randomly decided to visit the depths of the sea, he had no way to do anything. Going out of our way to defeat him would have been overkill. In fact, needlessly meddling with him was riskier than leaving him alone, so Profeta must've decided to keep her mouth shut.

Anyway, enough about the gag emperor.

My next step was to get in touch with Yamoto Tamaki. As you may have guessed, the person I hoped to see while I was in Japan was our resident turtle's

reincarnation.

I didn't have any actual reason to see her, but...I wanted to. I'd only survived the last battle with the "witch" because of her—because she'd given me her life. I wanted to thank her properly at least once.

I created a free email address and sent her a message. A random mail risked getting ignored, so I made sure the sender's name appeared as "Fudou Niito."

"Ellize" would've been fine too, but I was worried she'd assume I was a fan role-playing as myself. There were plenty of similar social media accounts...including tons of bots. Even if they didn't role-play, it wasn't rare for people to use their favorite character's name as their handle.

Rather than an email from one of the many Ellizes online, I figured my old name would catch her attention more easily.

As for the subject line, I wrote "I'd love to continue our discussion about timelines."

I didn't have anything to do while I waited for her answer, so I decided to read manga while enjoying some soft serve.

## Sequel: The Fake Saint Is Off to Japan 7

I'd sent my email an hour ago, but I still hadn't received an answer.

There were plenty of people who only checked their mailbox once a day—many of whom only did so in the morning. Besides, my email was admittedly a bit suspicious. Even if she'd seen it, she could have assumed it was fraudulent.

I was obviously going to be patient for a bit longer, but if I still hadn't received an answer after a few days... I'd have to give up. I didn't even need to see Yamoto Tamaki in the first place. I just wanted to thank her for my own personal satisfaction. I would be the only one benefiting from this meeting by getting rid of my regret. *Selfish, I know.*

Profeta, on the other hand, didn't stand to gain anything. That was why I didn't want to bother her or force my way in to see her. If she saw the email and decided she wasn't interested, that was fine. I'd give up on that one regret, go home, seal the rift, and end this story for good.

I spent the next hour watching a playthrough of Ellize's route. I couldn't play it myself because the consoles were all sold out, but there were plenty of videos around. That said...watching myself on-screen was *incredibly* embarrassing! *I'm dying of shame here!*

Inside the game, I looked exactly like your average saintly heroine. "Ellize" even blushed sweetly when you raised her affection enough.

*No, seriously, stop! I don't have a humiliation kink. What's wrong with you, Miss Turtle?! Did I ever make these kinda faces?! No! I don't think so! So why make things up?!*

As Fudou Niito, I'd never felt so icky watching these. In fact, I remember laughing my ass off most of the time. Now that I thought about it, it was probably because I still felt detached enough. Even though I was aware that Ellize and Fudou Niito were both me, I hadn't had access to Ellize's memories at the time. I'd been able to just brush things off and think, *Lol. Look at the other*



*me acting like a dating sim heroine, ha ha.*

With my soul whole again and both my memories as Ellize and Niito, this was just torture. I felt like my cheeks were about to catch on fire.

*Stop! No more! I can't take it anymore!*

I switched tabs in a fit of desperation and checked my mailbox again. She'd finally answered!

*Perfect, I don't need to watch the rest, then!*

Yamoto Tamaki was asking if I wanted to meet tomorrow. "Same café, same time," she'd written without specifying anything else.

*I see.*

She was trying to ascertain whether I was the real Niito or not. As expected, she'd thought that my email was a little suspicious.

Thankfully, I still remembered the details from last time, so that wouldn't be an issue. I answered briefly to tell her I'd be there, then left the internet café.

I felt like everyone was staring at me even more than usual on my way out, but I ignored them. I wasn't going to start caring now.

After that, I visited a few shops to buy the seeds and gardening tools I wanted before going back to Fiori. I was pretty far from my log house, so I decided to spend the night at the saint's castle instead.

Alfrea begged me to cook her dinner, and I eventually agreed. I decided it'd be my way of paying her back for letting me stay at her castle. To be perfectly honest, I would've much rather preferred to sit on my butt and let others serve me.

*Sadly, you can't always get what you want.*



*All right so, this may be abrupt, but I'd like to say that whoever invented hotcake mix is a god.*

With this wonderful kit, even an amateur like me could make delicious pancakes of my preferred thickness.

I'd first noticed how godly hotcake mixes were while watching a TV series about a gourmet. I saw the main character enjoying a thick stack of pancakes and I immediately craved some. I rushed to the convenience store to buy myself a couple, but they only sell those thin, boring ones.

Out of options, I'd purchased a pack of hotcake mix...and that was how *everything* started.

*And yes, I'm aware I've been calling them pancakes half of the time and hotcakes the other half. Leave me be.*

As a rule of thumb, I called the ones I made at home with hotcake mix "hotcakes" and the rest of them "pancakes." To be honest, I had absolutely no clue what the difference was.

Anyway, to make hotcakes, all you had to do was add soy milk and eggs to the mix, blend it all together, and add a dollop of oil. Then, you poured some batter onto the pan, flipped it halfway through, and bam! Done!

I usually layered two hotcakes on a plate along with some butter and maple syrup. *Why two layers, you ask? Because it looks good, that's all.*

By the way, I personally didn't usually cook hotcakes on a pan. I used a rice cooker instead—much easier. In Fiori, though, that wasn't an option. I'd thought about buying a rice cooker and bringing it over, but I'd ultimately decided against it. It would've been a little out of place here.

I brought Alfreia a plate, and as soon as I set it on the table, she practically started vibrating. She was looking at me like she couldn't possibly wait any longer.

*How should I put it...? Once again, it feels like I'm feeding a puppy.*

"Please dig in," I said.

At my signal, Alfreia started wolfing down her food. Her manners were terrible by any standards, but she still looked adorable—a testament to the extent of her natural beauty.

If I overindulged her, though, she'd put on weight in no time. I'd make sure to keep things in moderation.

I also offered to make more hotcakes for Alfrea's guards who wanted to try them. I hadn't expected quite so many volunteers to raise their hands—all of them, in fact—so I ended up going through all of my hotcake mixes in one morning.

Alfrea, always the glutton, started covetously looking at her subordinates' plates after she'd emptied her own. *Come on, stop it!* One of the knights looked away for a second, so she tried to take advantage of that and try to snatch a hotcake, but he dodged elegantly.

*I can't believe her...*

"Ellize! You should come live in this castle with me!" Alfrea cooed. "Marry me! Don't you wanna become my wife?"

*A most tempting proposal. I'm the wife, though, huh?*

Still, living with Alfrea would hardly be restful. I'd have to give up on my NEET aspirations. Besides, I had a feeling she didn't exactly understand what asking for someone's hand in marriage implied.

*Was she really on the verge of getting married before she got sealed...?*



A couple of hours later, I returned to Japan and made my way to the café where I'd met Yamoto once before. I entered at the exact same time as last time. As soon as I stepped through the door, though, all eyes turned to me.

I quickly recognized one of the faces—a young woman with black hair—and walked up to her table. All the while, she stared at me unblinkingly, a vacant expression on her face.

"E-Ellize?" she asked tentatively.

"It's been a while, Profeta. You go by Yamoto Tamaki here, correct?" I answered with a smile.

Her eyes opened wide. I understood her surprise—she'd been expecting Fudou Niito to show up, not Ellize. She looked around, then quickly stood up.

"Follow me," she whispered. "You stand out too much; we shouldn't stay here."

She grabbed my hand before I could answer and dragged me away. *Why did you ask me to follow you, then?*

She hurriedly paid for her drink and dragged me to a nearby parking lot. She stopped in front of a fancy red car and hopped in. *Whoa, she drives a fine car!*

“Sit on the passenger seat... Um, I mean, there, next to me,” she explained awkwardly, gesturing. “All right, now fasten your seat belt. Oh. Hmm... See that string there? Well, hmm... You know what? I’ll do it for you. Hang on.”

I’d yet to say a word, so I totally got why Yamoto was treating me like that. From her point of view, I was actually from Fiori and had no idea how to function on Earth. She must’ve thought that I had no idea what a seat belt—or a car, for that matter—was.

She started the engine, drove away from prying eyes, then asked once more: “You’re really Ellize...right?”

“Yes, I am.”

“I can’t begin to tell you how shocked I am. I’ve seen posts on the internet in the past few days, so I knew you were here, but how in the world did you do that? And you even know who I am! How?!”

“I drew that conclusion from what I heard from Mister Fudou. I wasn’t sure initially, but your reaction confirmed it,” I lied.

Yamoto stopped the car on the side of the road and proceeded to rub the area between her brows.

As you’d probably already guessed from my answer, I had no intention to reveal to her that I was Fudou Niito.

Why? Obviously, because she’d seen me going in and out of the women’s bath whenever I pleased at the academy! I’d made use of my womanly appearance to *appreciate* the nudity of the female students many times. I wasn’t about to tell Yamoto that I’d always been a dude on the inside—she’d think I was some kind of pervert!

Well, to be fully honest, I still wouldn’t have told her regardless. I probably was the fakest sham there was, but I’d sworn to play my role as Ellize until the

very end. I didn't intend to take that back now. Protecting the image of Ellize everyone had formed over the years wasn't actually my responsibility, but I still kinda felt like I'd gone too far to back out now. Anyway, I intended to take my secret to my grave, and that was final!

*I have my pride as a liar, all right?!*

"Fudou-san once told me that you visited him in this world. Ijuuin-san also confirmed it, but I remember them telling me that you didn't have a physical form. You were supposed to be like a ghost... You clearly have a physical form now. What's going on?" Yamoto muttered, as though she was talking to herself more than to me.

She seemed desperate to make sense of the situation, but the more she thought about it, the more confused she appeared.

*I can hear the gears grinding in her brain.*

Yamoto was also from Fiori. Compared to the people of Earth, her natural resistance to weird, magical events was much higher. Besides, she'd lived for a thousand years and seen a lot on the other side.

She soon raised her head and looked at me, her expression far more relaxed.

"I do have many questions, but I'll leave them for later. I'm glad I get to see you again, Ellize. It's been far too long."

"Likewise, Profeta. I'm happy to see you look well."

I wasn't sure saying that to someone who'd died was appropriate, but she *did* look full of vigor.

Now that she was in the correct headspace to listen to me, I explained the rift and how I was able to travel between the worlds thanks to it.

Yamoto crossed her arms, sighed, and replied, "To think such a place existed... I can't believe Alfrea kept that to herself all this time."

"So you didn't know about this either, Profeta?"

"No. Eve must have shared it with only her daughter."

The prophet could see any place in the world without having to go there, but

they couldn't observe every single location at once. They needed to make conscious choices as to what they wanted to see. Had Profeta known about the place, she would've taken a look for sure. The thing was, she didn't even know it existed.

"Still, it makes a lot of sense," Yamoto said. "This rift is what connected both worlds all along. That's most likely how my soul found itself in this world after my death. Now that I think about it, that might also be why I retained my memories. Reincarnating in another world must have made the impossible possible."

Her theory would also explain my experience—and, for all we knew, perhaps that of others as well. As long as the rift remained, more people risked transmigrating in the future.

*We really should get rid of it as soon as possible.*

When I returned to Fiori, I'd ask Alfreea to seal it up for good.

"Still..." Yamoto started, looking at me fondly. I could see the admiration in her eyes. "I finally see why no one ever doubted that you were the saint. I mean...I did understand it, but as a human, I'm now experiencing that feeling for myself."

*Well, not to brag or anything, but I put a lot of effort into my appearance to make sure that wouldn't happen!*

While my personality was a major red flag, my appearance was the greenest flag there was. No one looked saintlier than I did.

I'd taken the same approach as most people playing that one party game, Werewolf—you had to try to look like a harmless villager even more than the real ones. The actual villagers, on the other hand, didn't need to go the extra mile—they were already harmless.

*Nah, for real, I was so on edge the entire time. I still think it's a wonder no one figured it out.*

"How do you even do it? There aren't any beauty salons or skin care regimens to speak of, and there's barely any makeup in Fiori. You're an enigma."

I smiled and kept my mouth shut.

*Can't you guess? The key is magic. It's all magic!*

I wouldn't go through my *entire* routine because it would take ages, but to give a few examples—I used water magic to moisturize my skin, healing magic to repair any imperfections, and I made sure my hair and skin were always in perfect condition. Any new way to improve my appearance I could think of, I immediately applied.

The maids of my castle used to tell me how jealous they were that I could look so pretty without having to do anything, but they had it entirely wrong. I had a wide array of spells on auto mode, so I was technically *always* doing something about my looks.

Well, since I was able to regrow people's arms, I didn't think my being able to keep my skin smooth and moisturized through magic would be *that* shocking. Healing magic was so overpowered that it could most likely even bypass the limit on the number of cell divisions.

I'd gotten rid of the dark powers inside of me, but even without them, I still hadn't aged a day.

By the way, even if I were to suddenly stop using magic, I wouldn't suddenly age in one go. I wasn't projecting an illusion over my actual face—which I *could* technically do with light magic—I was just maintaining my appearance. So if I ever disabled my automatic spells, my looks would simply slowly deteriorate over time.

The original Ellize had ruined her natural beauty by going ham on every craving she ever had. Apparently, she also stank. In the game, Verner had once stated that her stench combined with the saccharine smell of the perfume she drowned herself in was so pungent that he could barely stand to be in her presence.

My point was: even if you were born with striking good looks, you could easily destroy them if you weren't careful.

"You shouldn't wander through the streets too much," Yamoto said. "This country is far safer than anywhere in Fiori, but no place is perfectly safe. There

are still dangerous idiots roaming around. In fact, I'd say there are many more scoundrels here, and with your looks...I worry even those who usually control themselves may lose their minds for a moment."

"Thank you for warning me. I'll be careful."

"Glad to hear that," she said, taking out her cell phone from her breast pocket. "Say, would you like to go somewhere quiet where we can talk? For the entire day if possible. I'd love to hear about everything that happened after my death. It will probably be our first and last... No, never mind. Let's not bring up depressing topics today."

I assumed she'd taken out her phone to check if she was free for the rest of today and tomorrow. Either way, her offer was a godsend. I'd come to this world hoping to have a proper conversation with her, so I had no intention to refuse.

I nodded without a word.



## Sequel: The Fake Saint Is Off to Japan 8

The quiet place Yamoto had chosen was an old ryokan with hot spring facilities near a train station. There was a business hotel close by, but she seemed to prefer old-fashioned places.

Once we checked in and entered the privacy of our room, Yamoto turned to me.

“Were you surprised?” she asked, a soft expression on her face. “There are many such lodging facilities in this world. I considered inviting you to my house at first, but if I’d brought an otherworldly goddess like you home, my family would have freaked out. Explaining the situation to them would have been a pain. This felt like the easiest option.”

While she’d been a millennial turtle in Fiori, Yamoto was now a twenty-year-old young woman. I wasn’t surprised to hear that she still lived with her parents, and I could see how bringing over someone who obviously wasn’t Japanese could lead to a bunch of nosy questions.

Still, it felt weird thinking that she now had a family. She’d obviously have one, being reincarnated as a human and all, but it felt strange...in a good way, though. When she’d mentioned them, a faint smile had curled her lips upward, and I was relieved to see she seemed to have a good relationship with them.

“This ryokan is a bit old-fashioned, but it’s pretty cheap. There’s even a hot spring—you should have a soak later.”

A hot spring, huh? This meant I could go to...the women’s bath. I hadn’t enjoyed being a peeping tom in a while.

The whole gender-bender thing had done nothing to kill the Neo Armstrong Cyclone Jet Armstrong Cannon inside my heart. Speaking of my cannon, it sadly had no interest in my own naked form. It was probably natural, but standing in front of a mirror did nothing for me.

Anyway, I started telling Yamoto about what had happened after the battle

against the “witch.” I explained that I’d given my spot as the saint to Alfreea immediately after, caught her up on what everyone was doing, brought up Emperor Saitonaruta, and mentioned how I’d kicked his ass in a split second.

Yamoto also shared with me how it had been for her on Earth. She cackled as she recalled how confused she’d been at the start.

“At first I thought this was some sort of joke,” she said. “Can you imagine me, a thousand-year-old turtle going to school surrounded by little humans? Moreover, academics is so much more advanced here that I actually had to sit and listen to the teachings of youngsters who hadn’t even lived a tenth of my life. And you know what? It wasn’t so bad. I figured you might kill Saitonaruta’s ghost eventually. It made the most sense.”

“As I thought, you knew about him, Profeta.”

“I did, but I didn’t think there was much point in warning you about him. As long as he was under the sea, he wasn’t a threat to anyone. I might have told you after everything was over, but sadly, I ran out of time before that.”

Just as I’d suspected, she had known about the Saitonaruta Empire and simply hadn’t mentioned it for the reasons I’d guessed. For all the trouble he may have caused years ago, the guy was practically harmless at this point. This brought his priority order way down on the list—especially considering that, at the time, we’d had Alexia to worry about.

I’d died immediately after we’d taken out Alexia, and by the time I’d come back to life, the fight against the “witch” was already underway. Then, Profeta had passed. There hadn’t really been a good time for her to bring him up.

There was something rather peculiar about our situation.

I’d died in Japan before being reincarnated in Fiori. Profeta had died in Fiori before being reincarnated in Japan. In other words, we were both dead people. And yet, here we were, having a conversation—it was quite something, right?

Speaking of which, both of us had died, but neither had seen the world beyond...had we?

“Profeta, there’s something I’d like to ask you. Do you think that this world is the afterlife for the people of Fiori?”

I used to believe that Fiori *was* the afterlife. I'd assumed *Kuon no Sanka* had somehow been modeled after it...but I realized it was completely and utterly impossible after I'd learned that Yamoto had written the game's scenario based on what she knew and her imagination—not because she was some sort of omniscient god.

This had cast doubt on my strong belief that a world after death had to exist. For all I knew, I'd mistakenly rushed toward death hoping to find solace in an afterlife that had never even existed.

“No,” she replied. “I think I ended up here by chance. There *is* a place where the souls of the deceased go in Fiori. I felt it when I became the prophet, and I know the saints have too. The world's will—if I can call it that—taught us that truth. I'm sure you'll feel it too someday.”

The prophet was also one of the world's proxies. Considering the existence of both the prophets and the saints, there was no doubt the world had a will of its own. And apparently, that will had somehow told Profeta and the others that the afterlife was a thing.

This meant there had to be an afterlife in Fiori... Then again, maybe it didn't. The will of the world had historically been a bit unreliable. Besides, even if it *did* exist, there was no telling it'd actually be the lazy person's paradise I'd always dreamed of.

*I mean, the world's will is a bit of a klutz...an irresponsible klutz.*

If it had been a little more on top of things, it wouldn't have let that tragedy go on for over a thousand years, right?

Eve's descent into madness could be attributed to Emperor Saitonaruta, and creating a saint to stop her made sense too. But why hadn't it ever done anything to fix the glaring problem that was the saints' weakness to negative emotions? All the saints (except Alfreea, who was an exception) had joined the dark side one after the other because of it. Rather than trying out something new, the world had tirelessly created a succession of saints with the exact same recipe. *No wonder Fiori became such a mess—the world never learned from its mistakes!*

Not to mention that this ridiculous cycle had given birth to the “witch,” an

abomination no one could defeat! In the end, another bug in the system—me—had ended up bringing an end to the whole mess.

*What nonsense.*

In the game I knew of, the world after death was a wonderful place where you could rest without a care in the world. However, that was nothing more than a figment of Profeta's imagination.

Besides, the one who'd written the game I knew of wasn't even *this* Profeta. It was the one from the original Fiori—the one in which everything had ended *very* badly. Now that I thought about it, she might've just written what she hoped the afterlife was to ease her pain. After all they'd gone through, she would've wanted the people she used to know to be happy, at least in death.

I know it took me a while to realize, but I was kind of amazed at myself. I'd done all that because of the baseless assumption that I'd get to take it easy in NEET paradise after I died. *This brings my stupidity into a new light!*

Had the split of my soul affected my intellect that badly? I could see myself far more clearly now that my soul was complete again. Looking back on it, Fudou Niito (me) had always thought that Ellize (me) was a bit of a dumbass who failed to notice even the most obvious problems.

At least seventy percent of my intellect had remained in Niito.

The issue was that even now that I was whole, I *still* couldn't exactly claim that I was the wisest guy around.

"What's wrong? Is something on your mind?" Yamoto asked.

"I was just wondering what the afterlife could be like."

"Well...I don't think we'll find out until it's time for us to go. Leaving that aside, dinner won't be served for a while. What do you say about trying out the hot spring?"

At the end of the day, she was right. There was no way to know what the afterlife would be like before our death. I wasn't in a hurry to find out either. I'd stopped thinking of death as an easy escape. *How could I after seeing Layla break down like that?*

*All right, that's enough thinking for today! Forget about theology, now's the time to enjoy a nice soak!*

I didn't need to die to get a glimpse of heaven, if you catch my drift. *Heh heh heh.*



Long story short, heaven didn't exist.

There were only old ladies around—any young women around had most likely elected to stay in the stylish hotel next door.

Yamoto was right there with me, and while she technically was a young woman...she was a thousand-year-old turtle on the inside. I couldn't shake off her old appearance from my mind no matter how much I tried, so my interest in her was close to zero.

I ended up soaking in the hot water for a while before getting up and calling it a day. While it had been kind of underwhelming, I had to admit that bathing in a hot spring always felt great. This experience had motivated me to look for a natural hot spring and start digging once I went back to Fiori.

*I'll invite Alfrea and Eterna.*

"Just as I thought, your yukata suits you. Well, I suppose everything does," Yamoto commented.

"It suits you too, Profeta," I answered.

"I appreciate the flattery. All right, it's almost time for dinner, so let's go back to our room."

After our bath, Yamoto and I had both changed into yukata. Modern dresses stood out a bit too much at traditional ryokan, so I'd probably keep it on until it was time to leave.

On our way back to our room, we passed a few people. Each time we did, they stared at me, mouth agape. *Yup, no surprise here.*

Dinner was served. It consisted of sashimi, tempura, roasted pork, and chawanmushi—exactly what you'd expect at a ryokan.

“Not too surprised, Ellize?” Yamoto asked. “In this world, people often eat raw fish. Don’t worry, though, I guarantee you won’t get sick. This is wasabi. Try it, then add the amount you like to the fish.”

She sounded elated and she looked at me intently, anticipating my reaction. She was probably waiting for me to have a typical otherworlder reaction—you know, the usual “No way! I can’t believe raw fish tasted so good!” after taking a bite.

I totally got her. I also loved this trope—it was exactly why I baked cakes for Layla and Alfreia on the other side.

Yamoto was a light novel and game writer. Observing a real otherworlder’s live reaction would become a priceless experience she could incorporate into her work. As for her, I imagined that she probably hadn’t been shocked by the whole eating raw fish thing. After all, she’d been a turtle in her previous life—she must’ve retained some of her turtle tastes even as a human.

Oh well, I wasn’t complaining. I hadn’t had sashimi in a while. I decided to go for the staple first—lean tuna. I added some wasabi, dipped it in soy sauce, and ate it.

*That was a bit too much wasabi.* I wondered if my palate was more childish now compared to my previous life. Still, it was great. I was almost moved by the wonderful taste of the fish.

In passing, I was usually one to dissolve some wasabi in my soy sauce rather than adding it to the fish directly. I knew it was a breach of etiquette, so I avoided doing it in public, but I still thought it tasted best that way. When I didn’t use my preferred method, the spiciness of wasabi was too overwhelming, and I felt like I couldn’t enjoy the taste of sashimi properly. Dissolving the wasabi in the sauce first curbed the spiciness and allowed me to enjoy both flavors distinctly. It was especially obvious with fish that had a light, delicate flavor. You ended up tasting only the wasabi and the soy sauce.

But, well, to each their own, right?

Incidentally, my favorite sashimi was salmon. The faint sweetness and fatty taste were addictive, especially when mixed with the acidity of soy sauce and the spiciness of wasabi that lingered afterward.

“This is good,” I said.

“Your reaction is so normal... I was expecting something more...”

“Well, it’s not my first time trying sashimi. I had some in Giappone.”

“Oh, right. I forgot that country existed for a minute. It’s no wonder you’re unfazed, then.”

Giappone was the pseudo-Japan of Fiori. The food culture there was fairly similar to that of Japan, and I’d been served sashimi and tempura on one of my visits to hunt monsters. As such, one could eat sashimi even in Fiori.

The more I thought about it, the more convinced I became that a Japanese person had transmigrated to Giappone in the past—probably someone bright, at that, since they’d reinvented soy sauce and miso too.

“Speaking of which, you can speak Japanese, Ellize. Did you learn the language here?”

“Yes. I used to chat with Mister Niito a lot, after all.”

It wasn’t exactly a lie. I’d learned Japanese in Japan (after I’d been born here in my past life) and I used to talk to Fudou Niito quite a lot.

I didn’t want to keep discussing this topic for too long—I was worried I’d slip and say something stupid, so I went back to eating.

My chopsticks’ next target was the tempura.

There were two camps when it came to tempura: tsuyu sauce or plain salt.

I personally was a tsuyu sauce kind of guy. Tempura with just plain salt were great too, don’t get me wrong, but they were kind of dry. Adding a bit of sauce made them easier to eat.

Obviously, I was talking about store-bought tempura. It wasn’t really something that could be fixed, but tempura usually sat in supermarkets for hours before being eaten. The batter inevitably became dry and kind of chewy. Tsuyu sauce helped smooth over these issues.

Freshly deep-fried tempura, on the other hand, were perfectly crispy. Dipping them in sauce would make them lose their crispiness, so I liked to eat those

with salt.

While shrimp were a staple, I preferred pumpkin, sweet potato, or eggplant tempura. My fondness for vegetables could probably be explained by my taste for sweetness.

I was glad to see that the tempura we'd been served were crispy. Even if the taste was identical, the texture of the batter could truly make or break tempura.

Next was the pork. It had been roasted on a ceramic plate. While it was a very simple dish with light seasoning, the meat was good—a world of difference from the pork you could find in Fiori. People ate pork there too, but there hadn't been hundreds of years of selective breeding to create the perfect species. They just fed whichever pig they could find and then ate them in winter when nothing else was available. As I chewed on the specially-bred-and-raised pork, I inwardly thanked the animal. It was cruel, for sure, but there was no denying its meat was incredibly good.

*Thank you, piggy.*

In between bites, I had a bit of rice and felt thankful for that too. There was also rice in Fiori, but as with the pork, the difference in quality was painfully obvious. The blood and tears of the farmers who'd competed for centuries to create the best possible rice were worth something, after all.

I finished my meal with the soft taste of the chawanmushi before setting my chopsticks down.

I used to be more into Western food, but I'd just realized all over again how good Japanese cuisine was. In my previous life, I would've picked steak over sashimi, fried shrimp over shrimp tempura, and custard pudding over chawanmushi any day. How foolish I'd been! I had no clue what was *truly* good.



## Sequel: Farewells and New Beginnings

I woke up after a good night's sleep and got some breakfast—rice, miso soup, natto, hot spring-boiled eggs, grilled fish, and some salad. I also picked up a plate on which individual pieces of seaweed were piled up.

It wasn't anything fancy, but it was a nice and hearty breakfast. I didn't necessarily want to scream about how delicious each dish was, but I enjoyed it and I knew I'd start my day in a good mood.

*Yep, that's how a proper Japanese breakfast ought to be.*

I felt like the smell of the hot springs had stuck to the eggs somewhat, but that could've been my imagination. For all I knew, they were store-bought, and they hadn't been boiled in this particular hot spring at all.

Anyway, after I'd finished my meal, I had a short morning bath to warm up my body. Just like the previous day, there wasn't a single young girl in sight, but I didn't mind—I'd long since given up on that.

"Shouta! Stop running down the stairs!"

Or so I thought. After I'd finished with my bath and was walking down the corridor, I suddenly heard the voice of a young woman. Sadly, she obviously had a kid.

The voice had come from the upper floors. In the next moment, I spotted a ten-year-old boy dashing down the stairs.

*How lively.*

As he grew up, he'd start minding others' eyes and stop enjoying himself like that. *So have at it now, kid!*

It was the same at the pool. Kids jumped in, but adults worried so much about how others would view them that they entered the water as quietly as possible. Even if no one was looking at them, most adults became incapable of doing anything that could be perceived as "weird."

Another good example was the kid's menu at restaurants. As a child, I'd obviously whined and thought that only babies could want those things, but as an adult, I realized what an attractive option it was. The portion wasn't so huge that you couldn't finish it, and in most cases, the dishes had a bit of everything. They even came with a complimentary dessert. All that for a super cheap price! And yet, I was completely incapable of ordering it for myself. *I mean, what if the waiter thinks I'm ridiculous and silently mocks me for it?*

I always wished the kid's menu had a more neutral name instead. If it was also served on a normal plate instead of some colorful childish one, adults could also order it without feeling ashamed.

A noise pulled me out of my thoughts, and I looked up to see the kid flying down the last flight of stairs.

*Kid! Who told you to jump?!*

If I left him alone, he'd get badly hurt—or even die in the worst-case scenario—so I stepped forward and caught the flying kid midair.

I usually cast magic spells to kill monsters, so most people pictured me as a backliner, but I was actually better than Layla with a sword. My physical abilities were pretty damn good. Catching a single kid was no big deal to me.

To be honest, I *did* cheat a little by enhancing myself with magic. If I were to arm wrestle with Layla with no magic at all, she'd probably beat me. As a former guy, it was a bit pathetic to admit, but it was what it was.

Anyway, I'd caught the kid without any issue. I slowly put him down.

"Are you all right?" I asked. "It's good to be lively, but you have to be more careful."

"O-Okay..." he answered, his head bobbing up and down like a puppet and his face bright red.

*A cold? Nah, who am I kidding? As a former man, I totally know what he's thinking.* He looked no older than ten, so he was obviously a bit precocious. *Already at the age to discover love?*

I left the precocious brat behind and started walking toward my room once

more.

“Poor kid. He ended up diving right into Ellize’s chest when she was wearing nothing but a thin yukata... And she was just out of the bath too. He’ll never get over it...” Yamoto whispered.

“Profeta, you’re overthinking this,” I said.

*It’s not my fault if that kid develops weird preferences, okay?! I saved him, so don’t make it sound like I’m the one to blame!*

“He only saw me for a few seconds. He’ll forget me just as quickly as we met,” I added.

“I’m afraid those few seconds will impact him for the rest of his life...”

*I’m sure he’ll be just fine. Probably. And even if he isn’t, it’s still not my fault!*



A dozen minutes had gone by since we’d checked out of the ryokan, and neither of us had said a word since we’d gotten in Yamoto’s car.

I looked at the scenery outside the window, desperately trying to think of what to say to break the silence when Yamoto spoke:

“Ellize. The rift... You should close it up as soon as possible.”

I thought she might say that, and I agreed—that thing needed to go. I’d reached the same conclusion myself.

I’d ended up in Fiori and Yamoto in Japan because of it. And, long before us, malice had found its way into Fiori because of it, giving birth to a tragedy that spanned a thousand years.

Besides, when I thought of Giappon, a country that was obviously modeled after Japan, I could only assume that other transmigrators had existed in the past. The fact that their presence hadn’t left a wide impact on Fiori’s history was only a coincidence. Well, perhaps they’d had *some* influence, but the destruction caused by the witch and her monsters had erased it.

Either way, that world was finally at peace. There was no telling what another transmigrator’s presence could bring. To prevent the worst, I needed to close

the rift.

It also meant that I wouldn't be able to come here anymore, and I'd never see Yamoto again.

This would be our second—and last—farewell. We'd never meet again in this lifetime, or in death. Closing the rift also meant that her soul wouldn't return to Fiori when she died.

"I know, but—" I started.

"It's fine," Yamoto cut me off.

She stopped the car on the roadside and turned to face me. Her expression was calm and gentle, yet resolute. She'd made up her mind. I could see it in her eyes: she'd stay here. Instead of returning to Fiori as Profeta, she'd keep living here, on Earth, as Yamoto Tamaki.

Yesterday, she'd started a sentence she hadn't finished.

*"That will probably be our first and last..."*

I didn't need her to finish it to know what she meant. This was our first and last chance to spend time together. That was why she'd asked for an entire day of my time, and why I'd so gladly accepted.

"My role in Fiori is over," she said. "And I'm satisfied. I bore witness to the end of the tragedy, and I was granted a new life. I even got to see you again. That's more than enough. Even if I can never go back, I'm plenty happy."

"Profeta..."

"Profeta is dead, Ellize. I'm human now, and my name is Yamoto Tamaki," she declared with a smile.

She seemed so secure in her decision that I didn't dare say anything more.

Yamoto looked something up on her phone and pointed the screen at me. It was a thread full of people sharing where they'd seen me. Some were obviously looking for me.

"Take a look," she said. "You stand out far too much. You're even going around resuscitating people and saving children from fires... We have a saying

here that goes ‘People will talk.’ These stupid stalkers haven’t caused any issues yet, but they will. It’s only a matter of time before someone breaks into your old apartment and finds the rift. What do you think will happen then? You need to close it before it gets to that.”

Yamoto opened her car door. We were in front of my old place. I’d told her where I used to live when I described the rift and she’d given me a ride. We both went up to my old room, which was now vacant. I walked to the rift and stood still.

“Profeta— No, Miss Yamoto... This is farewell.”

“It is...”

As soon as I touched the rift, it’d truly be the end. I’d be back in Fiori and would ask Alfrea to seal the rift. I’d never see Japan or Yamoto again.

Getting Alfrea to undo the seal temporarily wasn’t impossible, but I felt like doing that would only make things harder for Yamoto. She’d decided to build a life for herself here, and I wanted to respect that.

She...hadn’t asked me to take her to Fiori or to bring Alfrea to see her one last time. I was sure that she wanted to, and she must’ve known that I *could* make that wish come true—it wouldn’t even cost anyone anything. Yet she hadn’t asked.

That wasn’t because she didn’t miss Alfrea. I believe she was afraid that if she did see her, her resolve would shatter. She was afraid she’d give up on her current family and friends to go back to Fiori. And so, Yamoto couldn’t bring herself to ask.

If I kept going back and forth and she cracked because of me, I wouldn’t forgive myself. That’s why I’d decided I wouldn’t visit anymore.

This was the end.

“Don’t worry about me, Ellize. My life is much fuller here. I didn’t live on the other side—not really. I just...didn’t die for a thousand years. But all I did was sit there, unable to do anything but observe. Everything is different now. I’m *truly* alive. So don’t worry about me. Go live *your* life to the fullest.”

Yamoto's smile was bright as she extended her hand to me. I shook it and nodded.

"You're not living inside of a story anymore. The eternal tragedy of the scattering flowers has ended, and not even I can predict what awaits beyond the happy ending—you and the others will build the future with your own hands. Just know I'll always be praying for your happiness."

"I'll be doing the same, Miss Yamoto. Please be happy."

We hugged briefly, then I turned my back to her. I headed to the rift, put up my barrier, and jumped into the light without looking back.

As the light enveloped me, I said goodbye inside my heart—to Yamoto Tamaki, to Japan, to Earth, and to the lingering attachment I had for this world.

*Goodbye, and thank you...*

...

*This really isn't like me.*

*All right, I'm done with the heavy atmosphere! This is over. Time for a bath!*



After Ellize disappeared, Yamoto looked at the rift for a while. Then, she walked away resolutely, as if to shake off any regrets and attachments she had left.

That world would be fine. With Ellize there, they'd overcome whatever life threw at them in the future. Yamoto believed that from the bottom of her heart.

She decided she wouldn't think about them anymore. She'd focus on finding happiness here, in the world she now called home.

She took out her phone and rang up one of the people she'd come to love.

"Hello, mom? Did you see my message yesterday? Yeah, I stayed at a ryokan with a friend. She just left, so I'll be coming home now. Do you need me to pick up anything on the way? No? Okay, I'm heading straight home, then. See you in a bit."

She hung up, a smile on her face. She'd lived for over a thousand years, yet, here she was, calling a woman who'd barely lived a few dozen years "mom."

Still, she wasn't Profeta—she was Yamoto Tamaki, a regular girl. She would be allowed to fully embrace the mundane happiness of having a family, right?

*I'll take them on a trip next time, she thought. I have more than enough money saved up.*

Yamoto still had regrets and fears, but she wouldn't let them stop her from moving forward. Her future was brimming with hope, she was convinced of that. She wasn't the lonely turtle trudging toward a future she couldn't envision anymore. She was a young woman ready to live her life in this world to the fullest.

"Still...I'm pretty sure that she's also a transmigrator," Yamoto whispered. "Well, she didn't seem to want to talk about it, so I'll let her keep her secret."

Yamoto sauntered through the busy streets, enjoying the soft breeze that made her hair sway gently, and soon disappeared into the crowd.

## Side Story: What Must Be Passed Down

*Hi everyone, it's Ellize again. I've recently come to realize the greatness of life-sized figures. I'm sure you're wondering what's up with my sudden announcement, so lemme fill you in!*

As everyone knew, destroying the “witch” had rid Fiori of witches, which also meant no new monsters would ever appear. Since monsters were originally regular animals transformed by the witch, they couldn't proliferate without a witch around. I'd practically—if not *entirely*—annihilated them on this continent thanks to my overzealous hunting.

To find a monster nowadays, you needed to go to desert islands or some far-off shore. There were also probably still a few left in Fuguten. Even then, those who went looking for them on purpose barely ever found one—that's just how close to extinction they were. With no way to reproduce and no witch to create more, they'd soon disappear from the surface of this world even if I didn't lift a finger.

Why was that an issue, you ask? Well, to me, it kinda was.

There wasn't much to do in this world, and bullying monsters was admittedly one of my only hobbies. If they went extinct, I'd be left with nothing to do!

While I was happy lounging in my forest log house most of the time, I still needed a hobby I could throw my energy into. I hadn't come here to become some sort of hermit.

*I really shoulda bought a portable game console while I was in Japan.*

It was too late now, and I kind of regretted it. I could still go to Alfrea and ask her to lift the seal for a bit, but what if I ran into Yamoto? It'd be incredibly awkward...

That was how I'd brought boredom upon myself.





One day, as I was particularly bored, I decided to go on a walk to pass the time. I went to explore the lake that Profeta used to live in.

I didn't have any particular reason to go there, but I figured that since I'd never seen the inside of the lake, I might as well check it out. To be honest, I didn't expect to find anything special down there.

I put up my barrier before jumping into the water. Near the bottom, I found the entrance to a tunnel. I followed its curve upward until I emerged inside a cavern. I tried to breathe and noticed I could. It had to be connected to the outside somehow.

I looked around and saw an incredible number of stone slabs. Each of them had text and a drawing. When I got closer, I realized they were records of the successive saints' growth. They each came with a portrait carved into the stone.

Even Lilia, a saint who'd been forgotten by most because she hadn't carried out her duty, had her own.

I could only think of one stalker—um, I mean, *dutiful observer*—who could've recorded the lives of every saint from childhood to adulthood in such detail. This was the work of Profeta, who'd stayed here watching the outside world from afar for hundreds of years.

Even though I wasn't a saint, she'd also recorded my life. Finding it made me feel a little strange.

*How did a turtle manage to write and draw, though?* Had she carved those by holding a metal rod with her mouth? If so, the word "deft" wouldn't even begin to describe her.

Well, I supposed she'd had a thousand years to hone her craft, so it probably wasn't all that shocking...or was it?

Profeta had most likely left these behind out of her sense of responsibility, although I suspected guilt had also been one of her motivations.

Whenever she notified the royals of the birth of a new saint, they would immediately collect the girl, separating her from her parents. The saint would then be brought up solely for the sake of defeating the witch, after which she'd become one herself until she was killed by the next saint.

Profeta must've felt guilty for pushing these little girls onto such a path. At the very least, she must've wanted to make sure they'd be remembered—if only by her.

"Hmm? What's that?" I thought out loud, noticing letters carved directly onto one of the cavern's walls.

The text read:

I leave this request to whoever finds this place. I've recorded the lives of all the saints from their birth to their death. If nothing has changed, and the world is still suffering from the dominion of the witch, please leave these records where they are.

If the world has changed, however... If there is now room in the people's hearts to think of those who fought to bring them peace, please tell the world about these women. Their stories must be passed down. Let it be known that their fleeting lives scattered into nothingness after they were made to carry the heavy burden of protecting the world.

Profeta's plea made sense. Bringing these slabs to the people when the witch was still there would only have led to criticism. Lilia, in particular, would've been regarded as a useless saint who hadn't even been able to accomplish her mission. Not so long ago, no one would've found it in themselves to thank and respect the past saints or to offer prayers for the peace of their souls.

*Room in their hearts, huh?*

Did they now have that room?

I'd done a lot to improve the state of this world, and respect and devotion toward the figure of the saint was at an all-time high, but was that enough?

Still, something bothered me a little. Who else but me would ever come here? If I turned back and left these stone slabs behind, there was a good chance they'd be forgotten forever.

I wanted to fulfill Profeta's last wish, but I couldn't exactly suddenly show up in the capital with these things, could I? It was still too early.

To make sure these records wouldn't disappear into oblivion, though, I knew I had to bring them out and hide them elsewhere.

*For the time being, I'll erect some statues in the forest.*

I didn't think suddenly telling everyone at once about the saints' stories was a good idea, so I decided to slowly increase the number of people in the know instead.



And that was how I started crafting sculptures of the previous saints.

I'd applied the same method I'd used to make weapons for Verner and the others to build a temple. Now, I was in the process of crafting a statue for each saint.

It was a fascinating activity. I wanted to make sure I got all the details right, and whenever I got engrossed in my craft, I didn't feel the time pass at all. I especially had a fun time working on the curves of their boobs and butts. Obviously, I pretended I was doing this for appropriate reasons. These statues would eventually be used to hold memorial services for the saints.

Anyway, I'd just finished Lilia's statue. She'd been the saint two generations ago. From what I'd read on the slate Profeta had engraved, her life had been quite difficult.

Despite being the saint, she was very much a normal young girl at heart. She'd always dreamed of living an ordinary life, and when Aiz—full of good intentions—had told her the truth, she'd fallen into despair. She'd died soon after.

*That's tough.*

Honestly, I thought it was unfair that a fake like me was being remembered when Lilia's story wasn't being passed down. While I was mostly making these statues for my personal satisfaction, I hoped they'd serve that purpose one day.

Anyway, I was about to move on to the next saint on my list when someone entered the temple.

"Lilia..."

I turned around and saw the old man Aiz.

His eyes were wide open as he stared at the life-sized statue of Lilia I'd just finished. He'd probably come to see me, but he didn't say a word. Instead, he walked up to the statue on shaky legs. It was like he couldn't even see me. As he reached the statue, Aiz fell to his knees and broke down sobbing.

It wasn't the first time I'd had such a thought but, seriously—for an old man, he was such a crybaby. He was definitely the type to start blubbering whenever he got drunk. *I'm calling it now!*

After bawling his eyes out for roughly ten minutes, Aiz finally calmed down enough to have a proper conversation.

"I'm sorry, Lady Ellize," he said. "I showed you quite the embarrassing spectacle. But...where did this statue come from?"

"Profeta left us her memories," I said.

I showed him the stone slab dedicated to Lilia, and he started crying again. He brought his sleeve to his eyes and wiped away his tears roughly.

"I see... The future generations will finally know Lilia... Thank you, Lady Ellize... Thank you so much!"

*The old man must've suffered a lot too,* I thought watching him.

While the names of the past saints were taught at the academy, Lilia's wasn't. I used to think that saints who hadn't succeeded were excluded out of spite, but I'd recently come to understand that this was the only way to protect their memory. Talking about them would only lead to the people hating them for allowing the witch and the monsters to make them suffer. For them to be able to accept their struggle for what it truly was, peace needed to be achieved first. People needed time.

That was most likely why Aiz had removed Lilia's name from the school's curriculum, even though that decision must've hurt him.

"I believe it's still too early to let the world see this, but one day..." I trailed off.

"Yes, one day..." Aiz repeated.

One day, time would erase the weight of their failures. When the pain was far

enough in the past and the people finally had room in their hearts to accept her, Lilia would simply become one of the many saints who'd been made to shoulder a tragedy far bigger than them by the world.

I could only hope that they'd be remembered and that their stories would be passed on long after I was gone so that something like that never happened again.

Well, that was my serious excuse at least. I couldn't just come out and say that I just enjoyed crafting statues of pretty girls, right?



That night, I had a dream.

Just like when I'd died, I was surrounded by darkness. And standing in the darkness were the saints who should all have been long gone. They smiled, but I could see the unshed tears gleaming in their eyes.

Lilia, who was at the front, took my hand. She squeezed it tight and said, "Thank you."

Then, they all turned around and left.

I could see a light in the distance, where people I didn't know were waiting for them. While I'd never seen any of these people, I instinctively knew that they were their loved ones—the knights who'd served them, their lovers, and their families...

One by one, the saints who'd been trapped in the darkness disappeared into the light...and then I woke up.

My first thought was that my brain sure had a way to create dreams to make me feel better. That was all dreams were—the brain organizing memories. The dead never visited you to talk to you... Or at least, I didn't *think* they did. So many impossible things had happened in this world that I didn't know anymore. Hell, my spirit had even traveled to Japan a few times during my sleep.

Still, the dream I'd just had was definitely my brain showing me what I wanted to see. And yet, hearing Lilia thank me like that... Even a scumbag like me would get a surge of motivation.

I rose from my bed and headed to the temple.

*Here's to another day living as Ellize in this world!*



## Afterword

Thank you very much for purchasing this fourth volume of *Fake Saint of the Year*. I'm kabledondaikou—the archduke of kabledon.

I'll be spoiling the content of the novel in this afterword, so if you haven't read the book yet, I advise you to do so first.

First of all...allow me to celebrate the completion of the story! I was only able to finish and publish the entire story because of your support, so thank you very much!

Four volumes is by no means a long series, but in the world of light novels, the “third volume wall” is known to be a rather big hurdle. And so, being able to get the fourth volume out feels like an accomplishment as an author.

This volume also marks the end of the series, so in my case, it's even more of a resounding success! Not to mention the fact that a manga adaptation has recently started! I can't begin to express how happy this makes me.

The only thing I can wish for at this point is an anime adaptation...but that would be asking for too much, wouldn't it?

Regardless, this series is finally over. How did you like this last volume?

The very last battle was worthy of its title, and even the ever-carefree Ellize struggled for real. She couldn't handle the last foe on her own, and she was only able to grasp victory because she borrowed everyone's strength.

And yet, instead of giving her a clean victory, the pure light of the people's hearts ended up dealing some serious damage to Ellize herself and purifying her somewhat. That's Ellize for you—her soul is so dark that pure, noble energy hurts her.

Remember, you shouldn't use Arise on undead targets.

“Another World,” the first extra story that follows the novel, was originally bonus content that was sent exclusively to my followers on *Kakuyomu*. It's a



very important narrative arc in which Ellize finally gets rid of her last regret (having failed to save the Eterna who lived through a bad ending). It was added to this final volume so that those who couldn't set up a *Kakuyomu* account—or those who didn't receive the story because of a bug—could read it.

It's set in a world where a bad ending has already taken place. Even with Ellize's intervention, a total happy ending couldn't be achieved. Still, Verner, Eterna, Supple, Farah, and—of course—Alfreea will surely work together to lead their world toward a better future.

I wrote the Japan arc as a hidden dungeon instance that pops up after the final boss has been defeated. I'm a big fan of discovering extra bits of information that weren't disclosed in the main story by entering hidden dungeons or simply by talking to the NPCs after clearing games.

I find that these sorts of in-depth settings can often mess up the tempo if they're brought up during the main story, especially when learning about them doesn't change anything. Bringing them back later on is interesting, though, as it helps you understand the bigger picture without pulling you away from the action. It also feels like a reward for finishing the game.

While I love these sorts of post-clear additions, I don't often come across like-minded individuals.

Anyway, if I expand on this any more than I already have, I'll end up repeating myself, so I'll wrap things up here.

This work is finally over, and I'd like to offer my gratitude to those who made that possible: KADOKAWA's team, who helped me through it until the very end; Yunohito-sama, who drew wonderful illustrations throughout the volumes; and—of course—you, my dear readers, who bore with me until the end.

Thank you so much.

While the novel is complete, I hope you'll support the manga adaptation that will start coming out soon. Ekakibito-sama will bring the world of *Fake Saint of the Year* to life in a brand new way, so please look forward to it.

I hope we meet again someday.

kabedondaikou.

# Fake SAINT of the YEAR 4

You Wanted the  
Perfect Saint?  
Too Bad!

“I still had something  
left to accomplish here,  
so I came back to wrap  
things up.”


Ellize

Layla









“Just as I thought,  
your yukata suits you.  
Well, I suppose  
everything does.”

Yamamoto Tamaki





4

KABEDONDAIKOU

ILL. YUNOHITO

Fake  
SAINT  
of the YEAR

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Fake Saint of the Year: You Wanted the Perfect Saint? Too Bad! Volume 4

by kabledondaikou

Translated by Rymane Tsouria Edited by Maral RahmanPour

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Ebook edition 1.0: March 2024

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