



GIFTING this WONDERFUL WORLD with BLESSINGS!

15

Heretic
Syndrome

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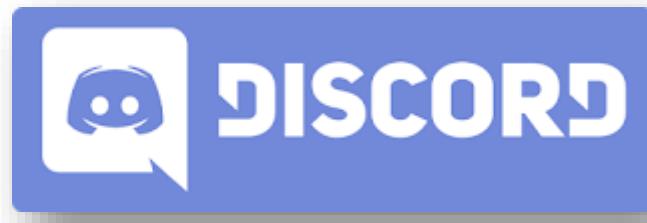
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GIFTING this
WORLD with
BLESSINGS !

Heretic
Syndrome

15





...Satou Kazuma-san.

*Are you glad that you've
come to this world?*

*Have you ever
regretted it?*

I don't regret a thing.

*I'm glad to
have come here.*

KONOSUBA! 5th Anniversary



Congratulations!!!!

GIFTING this WONDERFUL WORLD with BLESSINGS! 15



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PROLOGUE



It was a normal day in this peaceful, uneventful town.

“Kazuma-san, Kazuma-san, pass the soy sauce.”

“Here.”

Unlike Megumin and Darkness who woke up early in the morning, Aqua and I were helping ourselves to a late breakfast.

Upon receiving the bottle, she said thanks and proceeded to—

“Hey, you just touched the soy sauce, didn’t you?”

“No I didn’t.”

This girl has about a one in five chance of purifying the bottle of soy sauce whenever she handles it.

“Then go ahead and spread it on your meal. It isn’t water, so it won’t ruin the taste, right?”

“... Say, Kazuma, why are you being so harsh? We’ve been together for quite some time, haven’t we? So you must know what is going on, right?”

With a gentle smile, I pushed the plate of grilled fish to Aqua.

“You keep saying that you didn’t purify the seasonings every time it happens, right? So go ahead. Pour some soy sauce on this fish and dig in.”

“Oh, fine, I’ll do it! What’s the big deal, I just changed a little of the soy sauce to water! Thinning the sauce a little will surely make it more delicious!”

Aqua tipped the bottle over and poured a stream of water onto the plate.

“... Do you have anything to say?”

“... I’ll go buy more soy sauce later, so please pass me the salt...”

With a regretful expression, Aqua shook the salt shaker over her meal.

Just then.

“Ah! What are you doing!? That’s mine! Give it back, you beast!”

Chomusuke jumped onto the table and snatched her meal away.

The cat crawled to my feet to enjoy her meal. At the same time, Aqua rose to her feet and glared at it.

“... This thing really looks down on me. Move aside, Kazuma. It’s about time someone taught this evil black furball about the hierarchy in this house.”

“Oh come on, it’s just breakfast. Can’t you just enjoy your meal quietly...?”

Aqua furrowed her brow and pounced upon the cat.

“Ow! This horrible demonic beast! It actually dares to scar the flawless skin of a goddess! Fine, if that’s how you want to do... Hot!”

I can understand her cries of pain, but hot?

I was a little curious, but I ignored the grown girl having a deathmatch with a cat and continued eating...

“Kazuma! Kazuma! This demonic beast just breathed fire!”

“Hey, cut it out! Don’t shake me while I’m drinking soup! Besides, didn’t I already say it in the past? That cat can breath fire and uses it to cook her fish.”

Perhaps spooked by Chomusuke, Aqua quickly distanced herself.

“I knew it. I always knew this thing wasn’t an ordinary cat from the moment I saw it, but... Oh, I see it! I see it now! I see its true form!”

So you finally realized it.

Glancing over while finishing my meal, I saw Aqua staring intently at the cat.

“Your true form is... Yes, a really devil-like form! Hey, let me sniff you! Don’t think you can mask the scent of devils from a goddess!”

She kept stealing glances at me while she said that. It seems like she’s not completely confident in her deduction.

“I don’t have full confidence in her identity either, so go figure that out by yourself.”

“... Well, it doesn’t really reek like a devil... Why does a cat have the smell of soap on it? Come on, I’ll give that fish to you, so tell me your true identity. I’ll keep it a secret.”

Aqua crouched before Chomusuke as she dug into the fish and asked with a straight face.

“Hey, if you mess with her too much while she’s eating, she’ll get angry—”

“Waaaah! Stop! Stop! I get it! I get it! I won’t pester you about your identity, so don’t scratch up my precious hagoromo!”

Looking at Chomusuke attacking Aqua after she ignored my warnings, I let out a contented sigh.

“... It’s so peaceful...”

“What do you mean by peaceful, you shitty NEET! I’ll give you some of my side dishes during dinner, so hurry up and stop this thing!”

1

DIVINE PUNISHMENT UPON
THIS HOLY WOMAN!



Part 1

A Demon King's General and a Dark Priest, Celestina.

She's an opponent that far outclasses a NEET-turned-adventurer like me.

Right now, I'm standing over her in a deserted alley, where she's crouching after Wiz exposed her identity and Vanir fleeced her off all her money.

—Serena looked up at me, pointed her index and middle finger at me and opened and closed them repeatedly.

When I replied with a puzzled look, she angrily snapped.

“Tobacco. I’m talking about tobacco. Someone with such a bad reputation as you must have some of that on hand, right? Come on, give me some. I haven’t had the chance to smoke ever since I came to this town.”

“N-No, I don’t have any.”

What even passes for cigarettes in this world?

They probably don’t have any disposable ones wrapped in paper, so perhaps she’s talking about a pipe?

No, wait, this woman is a punk?

As a former hikikomori, I subconsciously started speaking in a polite manner when confronted like that.

I get along just fine with Dust and his friends, so I wonder why only she causes this kind of reaction in me.

Hearing my reply, Serena looked down and irritatedly scratched at her head.

There's not a single trace of her prim and proper demeanour left.

Eventually, she heaved a big sigh.

"I guess there's no point in trying to keep the act up... I'm Celestina, the Demon King's General in charge of schemes and infiltration, and a Dark Priest that follows the Dark Goddess of Puppetry and Vengeance, Regina."

"So you actually call your own goddess a Dark Goddess. I would've thought those of the cloth would treat their own god as absolute and decry all the others as heretics."

The moment I said that, Serena's face instantly shot up.

Her expression was completely different than what she had before, a cold and expressionless mask like that of a doll's.

She's quite beautiful, but seeing her look at me with such a mask sent a chill down my spine.

... I let my guard down because Wiz and Vanir were here, but now that I think about it, I'm alone, without any proper equipment, and standing in a secluded alley with a Demon King's General.

Isn't this really bad?

"My goddess is the patron of vengeance and puppets, you know? What else can she be other than a Dark Goddess?"

She showed me a gentle smile, one at complete odds with her rough tone.

Her smile seemed artificial yet carefully crafted, resembling ones that you'd see on a doll.

As expected from a follower of the Goddess of Puppetry.

It gives off a gentle allure when she's saying her usual kind words, but it couldn't be more out of place in this situation.

This situation where she could kill me any time she pleases.

My heart was pumping wildly, but I did my best not to let it show.

"... Puppetry. Don't tell me, the zombies at that graveyard that were immune to Turn Undead were..."

"Oh, yes, that was all me. Those weren't zombies, they were simply corpses animated by the power of the Dark Goddess. It was really hard to set all of that up. I had to dig up all the corpses one by one in the middle of the night and put them under my control. When the priests in town found themselves helpless, I would come in and handily take care of all of them... It's a good technique to use to gain the trust of all the adventurers in a city in one fell swoop."

This girl really is rotten.

No, perhaps I should say, as expected of a General of the Demon King's army.

"... Then, all those things you said earlier about the Demon King being a girl and the curse and whatnot is..."

"Huh? What, you actually believed that? I tell that story to every skilled adventurer that seems like they'd be a threat to the Demon King. The curse afflicting the girl will eventually wear off and the Demon King will disappear, so peace will return to the world even if they don't risk their lives fighting the Demon King. Most of them give up after hearing such a story. Everyone values their own hide, after all. If you give them an excuse that makes risking their lives unnecessary, they'll happily take it and be on their way."

This girl really plays dirty.

There would also be those who'd stay their hand upon learning that the Demon King was originally a young girl.

As expected of the Demon King's General in charge of schemes, she really is cunning.

I would like to take back those passionate feelings I felt when I first heard that story.

"But, why are you telling all of that to me? Sure, your identity was revealed thanks to Wiz and Vanir, but showing your entire hand like this is a little..."

Serena replied without her smile faltering in the slightest.

"I just thought that rather than pile on more lies and put us both on guard, it'd be better to tell you the truth and come to an arrangement... I've been observing your conduct and actions these past few days, but I still have absolutely no idea why the Demon King considers you a threat... I'm just going to lay it out plainly, you're a NEET who dislikes hard work."

"Yep, that's me."

I instantly replied.

"You have no intentions of risking your life to defeat the Demon King for the sake of humanity, right?"

"Not at all."

Yet another instant reply.

"... If you hear that someone you never knew living at someplace you've never been has been suffering under the Demon King, what would you think?"

“I’d send them my condolences...”

I flippantly answered while picking my ear.

“...”

Serena stared at me with that expressionless mask of hers.

... She’s expressionless, but for some reason I get the feeling that she’s looking down on me.

Back when I was living in Japan, I never felt any righteous indignation or call to action whenever someone brought up unfortunate children or similar topics.

Even if I was a billionaire back then, I probably wouldn’t have spared a thought about helping unfortunate children I’ve never met living on the far side of the world.

I’m not some kind of fiend or anything, I’m just a regular Japanese person.

... I think...

... Probably...

“... Umm, I’m pretty sure most people would give similar responses, so can you please stop looking at me like that?”

“Eh? A-Aaah, sorry. There have been people who’ve given me similar replies, but this is the first time someone has answered instantly without even the slightest hint of hesitation, so...”

She sounded slightly flustered, but her expression didn’t change at all.

“... I was ordered by the Demon King to investigate this town where several Demon King’s Generals went missing, and the man whose

name kept cropping up in relation to them, but... At the end of it all, the man who's at the center of everything is you. Leaving that aside..."

"Wait, hold on a minute, being described as the man at the center of it all doesn't sit well with me. If anything, I'm the one who's constantly getting caught up in such matters."

"Indeed. Leaving that aside, I've gotten a firm understanding of your personality."

Saying that, Serena smiled.

"Satou Kazuma, the Demon King's Army would like to offer you a deal."

"Oh?"

Serena stooped lower to the ground.

"Thanks to a certain person, the war between the Demon King and humanity that's been at a stalemate for quite some time has started shifting again. After losing so many Generals, the barrier around the Demon King's castle is on the verge of collapsing."

"Oh ho? Could that certain person be referring to me?"

"... Yes, it is referring to you. Why do you seem so smug? Don't get ahead of yourself."

Serena averted her eyes, but, yeah, I've become quite manly, haven't I?

"I see, so it seems like the Demon King is in quite a pinch right now. If the barrier were to fall, the famously combative Crimson Demons will launch constant teleport raids on the castle."

“True, we aren’t in a very good position right now, but that’s the same for humanity, no?”

... Hmm?

“In the past, strong people with strange names and a disregard for common sense would constantly appear in this world. Those people caused us a lot of pain. However... I think it was around the time our fortune teller detected a strange presence in this town? Well, for whatever reason, those hero candidates have completely stopped showing up.”

Hero candidates with strange names and a disregard for common sense most likely refers to the people like me who are transported here from Japan.

And for those guys to have completely stopped showing up...

Ah.

“... What’s wrong? It feels like you’ve come to some sort of realization... Why are you all shaken up? ... Well, whatever. Anyway, we would like to strike a deal with you.”

I have an inkling of the reason why new cheat wielders have stopped appearing in this world.

Isn’t it because I brought Aqua to this world?

No no, her job should’ve been taken over by that replacement angel.

She looks pretty capable, so she should have a good handle on things.

I told myself that this has nothing to do with me to calm myself down and maintain my composure.

“W-What kind of deal?”

“Your voice is cracking, you know? Seriously, what’s wrong?”

Even though Serena seemed concerned about me, she continued.

“You should join the Demon King’s Army.”

She said that in the same manner one would use to invite a fellow classmate to an after-school club.

“... Huh?”

What did she just say?

“Don’t give me that. I’m asking you to join the Demon King’s Army... You are our kind of people. I know that very well.”

Hey, don’t screw with me.

“Don’t misunderstand me. Sure, as you’ve most likely already known, people in general call me a brute and scum and NEET and lolicon and such, but—”

“This is the first time I’m hearing about the lolicon bit.”

Ignoring Serena’s words, I straightened up and raised my fist.

“True, as a human I might have more bad qualities than good ones... Indeed, I have more than enough money for my needs, any indecent desires I have can be satisfied through *that* shop, and I have affectionate companions that fawn all over me. I would like to be pampered while living an easy life. One where I occasionally splurge on useless expensive things and occasionally book out the tavern for a whole day and trouble everyone...”

“You’re even worse of a human than I thought...”

I grew more and more passionate as I continued.

“But even I have a small amount of compassion and a sense of justice. I don’t care if someone I don’t know is suffering in a place I’ve never been to, but I’m not so scummy that I’d ignore someone asking for aid right in front of me. ... I understand why you might want my power on your side. I understand, but I have no intention of turning upon the people who’ve taken care of me all this while.”

“... No, it’s not like we want you because of your strength...”

... ...

“What, aren’t you afraid of my full power and would rather have me as your friend instead?”

“Not at all. The truth is I’d rather keep you as far away from me as possible, but, like I’ve said earlier, those people with strange names have stopped appearing.”

She suddenly stood up and brought her face inches away from mine.

“There’s a persistent rumour about these people with funny names. That they are chosen by the gods or some such.”

That’s exactly the case.

... I won’t confirm it for her, of course.

“But then, those people who were constantly popping up like weeds suddenly stopped appearing after you showed up. It’s almost as if the gods are saying that you alone would be enough. Even the Demon King thought that you might be the descendant of some legendary hero or the other that shows up in the fairy tales.”

At the same time I brought Aqua to this world, the cheat wielders stopped showing up, and my name kept cropping up in the incidents relating to the defeat of the Demon King's Generals.

Indeed, this would cause anyone to sit up and take notice.

What an annoying misunderstanding.

"I don't have the strength or force of will to survive in a place surrounded by monsters like the Demon King's castle. Please tell Demon King-san that I'm not that amazing of a person. Getting involved in the vanquishing of your Generals is just a stroke of luck. I just happen to have really amazing luck. Apart from that, I'm a weakling with the weakest job, Adventurer. Having you treat me like an enemy really scares me, so please stop. Please relay that to him."

Hearing my words, Serena let out a bitter laugh.

"... Yeah, I thought so. I've confirmed that after seeing you in person. The only person who wanted you to join us is the Demon King, and I do think that he's worrying too much... But is this okay? There'd be quite a few benefits for you if you were to join us... Ah, yes, you're a virgin, no? If you join us, you'll be able to indulge in all your wildest sexual desires. Incidentally, most female demons have really hot bodies."

"... I-I'm not going. If it was me from a few months ago, I probably would've been convinced, but right now, I'm in my popular period. Such cheap benefits wouldn't sway me."

"Why are you so restless?"

As expected of a Demon King's General. What a terrifying negotiation technique.

Anyone without a will of steel like me would've fallen right away.

“... Well, it’s fine. I’ll tell the Demon King that you’re a small fry too insignificant to bother with. He’ll probably stop keeping his eye on you after that. I’ll also arrange for him to tell his underlings not to lay a hand on you.”

“Thank you very much!”

“S-Sure... In return, keep my identity a secret, even to your companions. Don’t interfere with my business in this town. And, as for my two colleagues... Don’t tell them about what I’ve been up to. Especially Wiz. ... Those are the conditions of my deal.”

I hesitated for an instant.

“... Tsk, I don’t have a choice. My conscience and sense of justice are yelling at me to punch you, but the town would be in big trouble if we clashed against each other directly...”

“Yeah, yeah, you can drop that now. So I take it we have a deal? It’s good that you’re a sensible person.”

Saying that, she patted her butt and turned to leave...

“... Ah, sorry, but... Can you lend me some money?”

Wordlessly, I handed some money to the Demon King’s General who just got fleeced by her colleague.

“You owe me one.”

“... Gurk...”

—As I was making my way back after parting ways with Serena.

My head was swirling with thoughts of the future.

“Still, even if she’s a Demon King’s General...”

I do feel a little like I betrayed humanity as a whole, but with this, my safety is assured.

As an adventurer that fights with monsters, it's not like I hold no regrets at all, but there's not a whole lot I can accomplish by picking a fight right there.

Sure, technically I'm involved in the destruction of several of the Generals, but to be honest, I mostly contributed by giving instructions to others.

Like in Beldia's case. Aqua was the one who weakened him before I stole his head away.

Vanir was taken out by Megumin's Explosion.

Against Hans, Aqua purified the hot springs while Darkness protected her, and Megumin once again blew him up with her spell.

As for Sylvia, he actually ended up getting a power boost thanks to my actions...

And Wolbach was pretty much all Megumin...

All of those incidents ended well, but there was probably nothing I could've done if I faced them alone.

If I had rejected that deal back then, it would've immediately turned into a fight...

Challenging a Demon King's General head on would undoubtedly result in my swift and sudden demise.

I'm nothing but a simple small fry. Just escaping the Demon King's notice is good enough for me.

“I’m home!”

While my head was filled with such thoughts, I absentmindedly opened the door to the mansion...

“Waaaaah! Waaaaah!”

“There, there, please stop crying. Kazuma should be coming back... Ah, Kazuma, welcome back. You came in at just the right time.”

I stepped right back out and closed the front door.

The door flew open with a bang.

“Hey, don’t pretend you didn’t see this! This is a really serious matter!”

Hearing Darkness’s words gave me nothing but bad premonitions, but I tentatively asked.

“... So what happened this time?”

Aqua was curled up in a fetal position on the sofa in the main hall and crying up a storm, clearly in no position to answer any questions.

In her place, Megumin heaved a deep sigh and said.

“... Apparently, she caused some kind of ruckus in the guild and was thrown out by the adventurers... I don’t know exactly what she did, but it seems like Aqua is barred from entering the guild for a while.”

... Did she actually end up turning all the wine in the guild to water?

“Megumin and I came back to the mansion after investigating that woman and found her crying with an invoice in her hand.”

That must be the bill for all the wine she turned into water.

... Investigating?

“Are you investigating Serena? Is that why you two have been spending all your time out lately?”

Darkness excitedly replied.

“Exactly! Listen to this, Kazuma, something’s really odd about that woman! Someone skilled enough to take out an undead horde that large should be a fairly famous priest, but when I went all over searching for more info... there isn’t even a single rumour in any of the cities I contacted about a priest named Serena!”

After Darkness, Megumin, while patting Aqua on the head, continued.

“... On top of that, according to the guild staff, that woman has never once claimed a reward from the guild. No matter how saintly of a priest she is, this is way too absurd. You need to present your adventurer’s card in order to claim a reward... So we were thinking that perhaps there is a reason why she can’t show others her card.”

... These girls. They normally only ever get up to stupid things, but for some reason, they just have to be really sharp in this instance.

“If only you could demonstrate such competence every day... That being said, don’t look any further into her. We’ve reached an agreement. Serena will no longer approach us or badger me to let her into the party.”

In response to my words, Megumin and Darkness gave each other puzzled looks.

Part 2

The next day.

“It’s a really fresh feeling for just the two of us to be out together. Still, what business do you have at the guild? Are we going to get lunch at the tavern?”

Darkness and I were headed to the guild.

Megumin was still playing babysitter for Aqua who has holed herself inside the mansion.

Plus, if things really take a turn for the worst, she wouldn’t be able to cast Explosion in the middle of town.

That’s why I brought Darkness along, but...

“... Why are you dressed like that?”

Instead of wearing any sort of armour, Darkness was wearing a very upper class seeming dress that I almost never see her wear.

Instead of her usual straight skirt that’s easy to move around in, she’s wearing a white frilly dress with a matching set of elbow gloves.

In her hands was not a weapon, but a parasol.

“... What are you saying? You were the one who invited me. Everyone in this town already knows about my identity, so there’s no need to go out of my way to hide it.”

Darkness answered, her face blushing as she looked down at the ground.

“... Well, I guess it’s fine.”

It's not like we'll get into a fight the moment we see each other or anything.



... Indeed, I'm heading out to observe Serena's actions.

With Darkness's strong sense of justice, she'll probably kick up a fuss if she learnt that I struck a deal with a Demon King's General, so I kept it a secret from her.

Similarly, Aqua would probably head right out to pick a fight with her if she knew she was a Demon King's General, so I kept it a secret from her as well.

And telling Megumin is out of the question.

Striking a deal with the Demon King in order to guarantee my safety.

Even I think that's low, but if Serena too were to be taken out after coming to this town, the Demon King will definitely take action.

This is not just for my sake.

If it comes down to that, the entire town itself might be at risk.

Serena said not to interfere with her business in this town.

That one line piqued my interest, so I headed off to the guild to investigate, but...

"Not many people have heard the name of the Goddess Regina, but her power is the real thing. Any number of your wishes may be granted with her power."

"Is that true!? Will she allow me to get a boyfriend!? I don't have much choice but to sleep in the stables, but whenever I confess to a man that isn't an adventurer, they would say 'The smell of horse dung is a little...' and reject me!"

"That can be accomplished. Bring me the hair of the man in your heart. With the aid of Regina-sama, I will make a charm that helps him return your feelings."

“Serena-san! Me too! Please make one of those charms for me too!”

“Hey, don’t cut in line! I was here first!”

A massive ruckus greeted me from the moment I entered the guild.

... What's with this commotion?

Serena has pretty much become the face of the guild. She was seated at a table at the center, and the adventurers were crowded all around her.

She addressed the concerns of one adventurer after another with a gentle smile plastered unfalteringly on her face.

“Come, no problem is too small or worry too insignificant. I shall hear you out. That is the duty of a priest, after all...”

“... U-Um...! I have trouble making friends in this town...! I came back to this town with my best friend, but she has been quite busy lately... A f-friend...! I want a friend with whom I can eat dinner with! I don't want to eat alone anymore...!”

“Er, well, even with the aid of the great Regina-sama, I'm not sure what I can...”

“... Is that so... I'm sorry...”

Serena is acting like the perfect exemplar of a priest.

Apart from a certain lonely Crimson Demon who left in low spirits, most of the other adventurers had their problems resolved one after another.

“Hey, Kazuma, what's going on? Don't tell me, the reason you invited me to the guild is because of that woman...!”

Darkness said uneasily as she repeatedly tapped me on the shoulder.

“... ? Yeah, I’m here to investigate Serena. I’m a little curious as to what she’s up to.”

“Y-You...! You said you reached an agreement with her! You were the one who told us not to look any further into her! I even... I-I even dressed up like this...”

Darkness gradually deflated as she continued.

... ...

“... Did you think I was inviting you out on a date or something?”

“N-No...! N-N-Not at...!”

Darkness blushed deeply and panicked, destroying any of her attempts at denying it.

At the same time, Serena stood up and made ‘come over here’ motions at me.

Shortly after, Serena moved over to a corner of the guild.

Perhaps being considerate of us, the other adventurers started milling around, leaving me and Serena alone in the corner.

“It doesn’t seem like you’ve spoken about me to anyone. Just a fair warning, this is also for their benefit. I might not be particularly combat focused, but I’m still a Demon King’s General. The Dark Goddess Regina is the patron of puppetry and vengeance. If I were to die, not only the person who killed me, but people in the general area would be struck by a powerful curse. At a guess, I’d say perhaps half the town would be wiped out.”

Serena narrowed her eyes as she started, but her smile didn’t falter at all.

Her expression remained the same as she drew closer.

"There are a lot of different types of curses. Ones that render body parts useless, ones that petrify, and even some that are far crueler. If someone other than you finds out about my true identity, I'll probably have no choice but to defend myself. In that case, there are bound to be a lot of casualties. You should think deeply on that if you ever think of breaking our deal."

I wonder why this girl is telling me all of her secrets.

... Wouldn't just saying that you'll be cursed if she dies do the trick?

Simply saying that would've made anyone hesitant to kill her.

Perhaps my thoughts showed up on my face, as Serena thrusted her finger out at me.

"Go ahead and stab my finger with your dagger. Ah, but don't stab too deep now."

...?

"What are you saying? I can't do that in front everyone. What are you, Aqua?"

Saying that, instead of using a dagger, I pricked Serena's hand with a toothpick from one of the tables instead.

"!?"

The same instant I pricked her with the toothpick, I felt a stabbing pain on my finger as well.

Looking down, I noticed a small bubble of blood forming on my right finger.

It's the exact same place I prodded Serena at.

I see, that's why Regina's called the Goddess of Vengeance.

"... Do you understand now?"

"... This town is like my sanctuary of sorts. I won't make an enemy of you. I don't know exactly what you're planning, but would you stop scheming in this town and go back to the Demon King's castle?"

In response, Serena merely gave me that same smile.

With a sigh, I left her side and returned to the table that Darkness was sitting at.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Darkness..."

"Ojou-sama! Lalatina ojou-sama, what's with your outfit!? What's with your maiden-like outfit, ojou-sama!? It looks really cute!"

"Lalatina-chan, your frills are really cute! Don't hide your face, let me have a good look!"

"Hey, ojou-sama, why are you blushing? Come on, strut your stuff!"

Darkness, dressed in her frilly one piece dress, was blushing all the way to her ears as she covered her face in her hands, her shoulders shaking.

The usual adventurers were gathered around her and teasing her.

"Hey, don't bully our ojou-sama! She's not a display piece! Shoo, Shoo!"

Even as I chased away the adventurers, what Serena was planning weighed heavily on the back of my mind.

Part 3

“Hey, I’ve heard that Serena-sama’s holding a sermon! Get a move on!”

“It’s this way! You’ll miss out on seeing Serena-sama’s esteemed face if you don’t hurry!”

It’s been a few days since we had that chat.

Aqua’s ban on entering the guild has since been lifted, but now, there’s something very odd with the town.

“Over here! Over here! Serena-sama’s about to start! Hurry up!”

“H-Hey, wait up! Why are all of you acting so odd? Serena-sama this and Serena-sama that... Isn’t she just a priest?”

The name on everyone’s lips was Serena-sama.

In the blink of an eye, everyone’s started looking up to that Demon King’s General as though she’s a saint.

“... What exactly happened to this town in the few days since I was sealed away in the mansion?”

“What do you mean sealed, you hikikomori? While you were cooped up at home, Serena has become the idol of this town.”

I told off Aqua who finally came out of the mansion and was surprised at the state of the town.

“... That woman really smells fishy. Well, since Kazuma told me not to go after her, I’ll leave it as it is.”

Megumin, trailing behind Aqua and me, muttered.

“... Well, her acts are praiseworthy, at the very least... It’s a little odd for me to be saying this, but the way she seems to have no human

failings at all doesn't quite sit well with me. Still, since Kazuma said that, I too will leave things be. At the end of the day, I always treat your warnings seriously. I won't ignore your words and head off to do my own thing anymore."

And Darkness said that almost immediately after Megumin did.

... My chest hurts for some reason.

I wonder what they'll think of me if they know that I made a deal with a Demon King's General to keep her identity secret.

Will they look at me with contempt?

Will they punch me?

Sure, I made that deal to protect my hide, but it's also for their safety as well.

Especially Aqua. If she learns that Aqua's an actual goddess, there's no way the Demon King will stand idly by.

Yes, keeping my nose out of her business is for the best.

With the three of them in tow, I headed down the street towards the guild...

"Serena-sama! Serena-sama!"

"Serena-sama, please, please grant my wish!"

"Yes, yes, there's no need to rush. Please line up orderly...! Regina-sama can grant any number of your wishes, and of course, there's no need for any payment. Now, please."

"Thank you very much, Serena-sama! The truth is..."

... The street ahead of us is filled with a crowd of people. And right at the center of it all is Serena.

It almost looked like a popular idol being cheered on by her enthusiastic fans.

Seeing that, Aqua snuck away and hid behind me.

Seems like getting repeatedly overwhelmed by Serena has taken its toll on Aqua, giving her an instinctive aversion to her.

Serena met my gaze and gave me a slight bow of acknowledgement.

Just then.

“Serena-sama! Please, this guy got heavily wounded during an extermination quest...! It’s a pretty serious wound! Can you please help him!?”

A band of adventurers appeared near the town gates.

Two of them were carrying a third upon an improvised stretcher.

He must have taken quite a serious wound. His eyes were lifeless and his breathing was ragged.

And, in a voice almost too soft to be audible, he muttered.

“... —Qua... Aqua... Nee-chan... please...”

I wasn’t the only one who heard that voice. It seems like Aqua heard it too.

“I’m right over here! Leave it to me, you’ll be completely fine in an instant!”

Perhaps overjoyed that she’s being relied upon, Aqua happily rushed over to the injured person.

—Only to find her path blocked by the crowd around Serena.

“Ah, what are you doing!? You’re in the way! Do you want a taste of my God Blow!? If I don’t heal him quickly...”

As Aqua angrily protested, Serena crouched down next to the injured adventurer.

“Heal! Heal! Heal!”

As Serena repeatedly casted heal, that adventurer’s wounds rapidly faded away.

It wasn’t long before the light returned to the man’s eyes.

“... T... T-T... Thank you very much, Serena-sama...!”

The man who was calling for Aqua just a short while ago was breathlessly thanking Serena while tears flowed down his cheeks.

What’s with that?

Healing wounds with magic is an everyday occurrence for us adventurers.

Normally, just having your wounds healed isn’t enough to make an adventurer break out in tears and start attaching -sama to their healer’s name

Aqua even revived several adventurers, and no one treated her with anywhere near the same amount of reverence.

Sure, it’s normal to be thankful, but those are all adventurers who put their lives on the line to go up against monsters.

Healing wounds is the job of priests, just like how it's the job of the vanguard to stay out front and protect the priests from harm.

It's a symbiotic relationship.

Priests can't take down monsters by themselves, and on the other side, the simple presence of a Priest in the party makes a great difference in their survival rate.

In other words, Serena is simply doing her job as a priest.

Of course, it's natural to offer thanks.

But that...

As I was thinking that, Aqua casually wandered over to that adventurer and placed a hand on him.

His life threatening wounds may have closed, but he was still sporting a few scratches here and there.

It seems like fully healing him is outside of Serena's power.

Aqua must have moved to heal him up.

But.

The hand Aqua offered was brushed away.

And not by anyone else, but by the very adventurer she tried to heal.

"Ah..."

Aqua let out a soft gasp of surprise.

"I want to be healed by Serena. There's no need for you to do anything, so please get away from me."

The man said directly to Aqua's face.

Part 4

Aqua plodded back towards us with drooped shoulders.

Seeing her so depressed gave me an unpleasant feeling in the pit of my stomach.

Something feels very wrong about today's incident.

Megumin and Darkness were looking at Serena and the surroundings with a complicated expression.

Serena had her usual carefully crafted smile plastered across her face.

This is Axel. The town of beginners filled with nothing but weaklings. Why would a Demon King's General be doing this all the way out here?

And what exactly is she planning?

It'd be far easier to come up with a countermeasure if her plans were more easily understood.

Normally, I would've just pretended I didn't see it and moved on with my life.

But, for some reason, I have a really unpleasant feeling in the pit of my stomach.

It's like this combination of irritation and impatience... I can't really describe it too well.

The crowd surrounding Serena were enamoured with her to a degree that defied common sense. The priest only appeared in this town a short time ago. It's almost as if they were under some sort of spell.

The Goddess Regina is said to be the Goddess of Puppetry and Vengeance.

... I only have my suspicions to go on, but could this be the power of puppetry?

As I was thinking that, Aqua, who finally made it back to us, looked enviously towards the crowd surrounding Serena before depressedly turning her back on it...

It's been quite some time since we started living in this town.

Even Aqua who was treated as a troublemaker has become a sort of mascot of the guild.

She would head over to the guild to drink up with familiar adventurers whenever she's free, but now even those adventurers wouldn't give her the time of day.

... She was a person who would cause all kinds of trouble the moment I take my eyes off her and leave me to clean up after her. A handful of a goddess.

She never listens to a word I say, and would do that exact thing I tell her not to. A Goddess that is more associated with public entertainers than any sort of divinity.

She who possessed not a shred of cuteness nor holiness, a Goddess in name only.

A goddess who sent me to this world only to force upon me a life of hardship.

Someone who caused me no end of irritation every day, and the one who's been with me the longest in this world—

... Ah, god dammit!

Seeing Aqua all depressed and completely unlike her usual bubbly self really doesn't sit well with me!

She's the only girl who doesn't cause any feelings in me as a member of the opposite sex.

Whenever she gets into trouble, it's just her reaping what she's sown, so I never paid much thought to it, nor did it elicit any particular feelings in me.

So, what exactly is this clawing feeling in the pit of my stomach?

... Dammit, should I ignore our deal and start moving against her?

But, she's a General who came to investigate this town on the Demon King's orders.

If she doesn't make it back safely, I'll definitely be targeted by the Demon King.

Me, who almost pees his pants just by getting close to a thug with a scary face.

If I get targeted by the Demon King...

—Just then...

Someone tapped me on the shoulder.

“... Kazuma, I don’t know what’s going on, or what exactly you’re troubled over right now, but it’s something you decided for everyone’s sakes, right? Then isn’t it fine? No matter what you choose, it always works out in the end.”

What Megumin said not only didn’t help any, it actually intensified what I was feeling.

“... Indeed. I’m sure you thought hard about it before telling us not to get involved with her. That’s why... Just do as you wish so that you won’t have any regrets.”

Knowing Serena’s true identity, Darkness’s words only made things worse.

That said, Serena had the power of Vengeance.

Killing her would bestow a curse upon the surrounding area, but perhaps Aqua would be able to do something about that?

No, no, I can’t be hasty. This isn’t something I can just brush away if it doesn’t work out. It’s too dangerous of a bet to take.

Well, at the end of the day, she’s still a human, so could I ambush her with a Bind and drag her off to a dungeon somewhere and deal with her there?

No, no, she’s a Demon King’s General and a Dark Priest on top of that. She might be able to dispel the Bind even after she’s been captured, just like Aqua did in the past.

... Ah, dammit! I can’t consult with anyone about this either, so what should I do!?

Perhaps I’ll break my promise and consult with Wiz and Vanir?

But if Serena finds out...

—Just then, unaware of my inner turmoil, Serena walked over to us with a smile on her face.

Seeing that, Aqua jumped up with a start and hid behind me.

Surrounded by her followers, Serena moved to pass me by the streets.

Just as she crossed my path, she stopped for a moment.

And in a voice just loud enough to be heard by me.

“You remember our deal, yes? I hope you remember the kind of disaster that would befall this town if you break it. ... Though.”

She let out a small laugh.

“You seem to be making quite the anguished expression. ... Ah, yes, I still owe you a bit of gold, don’t I? ... Hmm, if you attempt to challenge me alone without the aid of Wiz or Vanir or revealing my identity to anyone else... Yes, if you do that, I shall face you as a Demon King’s General without taking the inhabitants of this town hostage. ... But you’re very similar to us. A coward and a realist, one who can weigh the pros and cons. I trust you won’t do something so foolish.”

Almost as if she was taunting me, she left one final line before moving on.

“Now, my debt to you is cleared.”

Argh, this really makes me sick.

I'm not some hero of justice or anything. Of course, I value my life the most.

But at the end of the day, I know the people in this town.

... No, wait. Don't be hasty, think about this.

If I do try and pull something here, in the worst case scenario, the entire town might end up in a pinch.

But, wait, isn't this town already in quite a bad situation?

The thing that disgusts me most is that I'm the only one who knows her true identity and can't tell anyone else about it.

Ah, dammit! Why exactly...!

Why am I the only one who has to shoulder the fate of this town!?
Why do I have to think so hard about his!?

—Suddenly, I felt Megumin's hand on my right fist that was clenched so tightly that it has gone completely rigid.

She was staring straight at me, so I thought that she was going to say something, but...

“... W-What?”

“... ...”

Megumin continued to wordlessly stare at me.

At that point, I felt something touch my left hand too.

“... You too? What do you want?”

“... ...”

Turning back, I saw Darkness holding onto my left hand.

“What’s up with you two? If you want to say something, just say it.”

... Well, after being together for so long, I’m sure they can tell that I’m hiding something.

They might have even figured out that there’s a reason why I couldn’t tell them about it.

... Maybe I should just go for it.

Come to think of it, I’ve tangled with plenty of strong foes in the past.

Those all happened as a result of some kind of circumstances or just me getting caught up in things.

This is different. This would be me and me alone picking a fight with a Demon King’s General of my own free will.

Normally I had everyone with me, and even if the worst does happen, I had the insurance known as Aqua.

But if I were to challenge her by myself and get killed without anyone knowing...

Just thinking about it made my knees grow weak. This really isn’t like me at all.

It’s me. Me who has the weakest job picking a fight with a Demon King’s General all on my lonesome. Is it really fine to cross such a dangerous bridge because of a fleeting emotion?

Yeah, if I just turn a blind eye to this, I’ll be able to continue living a luxurious life, the same as before.

—Though, there is one thing.

There's just the one thing that might be the impetus to kick me into action...

... ...

“... What, you too? Seriously, say something already.”

I said to Aqua who started pulling on me by the hem of my clothes.

I really wish the three of them would stop silently judging me like that...

“Kazuma-san, Kazuma-san.”

Unlike the other two, Aqua softly spoke.

Turning around, the Aqua who's normally all bubbly and to whom the word depressed seems to hold no sway over.

That girl who never thinks deeply and could scarcely be imagined to have any sort of worries.

Having her hand shoved away by that adventurer must have shaken her quite deeply.

She looked up at me through teary eyes, and in a voice that seemed on the verge of breaking into tears, said.

“... Does this town not need a goddess like me?”

... ...

“Let go of me.”

I softly admonished the three of them who were holding onto me.

“Ah...”

Instead of complaining like she usually would, Aqua obediently let go of my shirt without a single word of protest.

Then, turning my back on Aqua who's making an expression that reminded me too much of an abandoned dog, I said.

“Cast some support spells on me. Ones that increase my strength and speed.”

Aqua casted those spells without a single question.

I'm not looking at those three.

The only thing within my sights is a distant back slowly striding further and further away from me.

That's why I don't have even the slightest idea what kind of expressions those three are making.

“Hey, Aqua.”

“...? Yes?”

Taking my eyes away from Serena for a moment, I turned to face Aqua behind me.

“I’m probably about to take a whole lot of damage and get knocked out, so I’ll need you to heal me. Darkness, please take my unconscious body to the police station. Megumin, those people surrounding Serena right now will probably raise quite a fuss, so I’ll leave threa- soothing them to you.”

“W-What? Kazuma, what exactly are you saying!?”

“Wai-Kazuma, what are you planning to do!?”

After conveying my instructions, I kneeled and entered into a crouching start.

The only thing in front of me was Serena, her back turned upon us as she was leisurely walking away.

“Hey, Kazuma-san, what are you doing? I have a really bad feeling about this...”

Aqua was saying something, but that isn’t important right now.

“Hey, wait, Kazuma, what are you doing all of a sudden...! I know I said to do as you wish, but that woman is merely suspicious. She hasn’t actually broken the law, so don’t do anything vio—!”

Darkness was also saying something in a panic, but before she could finish, I, strengthened with Aqua’s support spells, sprinted towards Serena’s back.

“K-Kazuma, I don’t know what you are doing, but you are really cool right now! It really tickles my Crimson Demon heartstrings!”

My name is Satou Kazuma.

I'm a man who supports true gender equality, a man who wouldn't hesitate to dropkick a woman in the face.

"Don't encourage him, Megumin! Kazuma, wai—"

Leaving the voices of my comrades behind me, I sprinted full pelt towards Serena and shouted at her...

"Let's both take a nap today! I'll leave thinking about how to seriously get in your way for tomorrow!"

Serena turned around in surprise, only to be met by a full powered drop kick directly to her face.

2

DIVINE PUNISHMENT UPON
THIS NEET TOO!



Part 1

A dimly lit room.

“... Don’t think you’ll be treated this cordially forever. I’ll ask again... Satou-dono, you dropkicked a passing priest who has done nothing to provoke you yesterday. Do you deny this?”

“I do not.”

Upon hearing my instant reply, one that I’ve repeated who knows how many times by now, a vein started twitching on the temple of the brown haired female knight seated opposite me.

“... Right, so you, upon seeing the back of the head of a passing priest, was seized with the uncontrollable urge to dropkick her. However, the priest detected your presence and turned around, causing you to kick her right in the face instead. In other words, you did it on a whim. Is that right?”

“That’s exactly the case.”

The pen the knight had in her hand snapped right in half.

“... That priest is the same person that Lady Dustiness asked me to thoroughly investigate a few days ago. Does that have anything to do with this matter?”

“It doesn’t... Probably...”

The knight threw away the remnants of the pen and slammed her hands on the table.

“You piece of shit, do you think I’m some sort of inept retard!? We have been looking into that priest too! Do you really think that excuse will work on me!?”

“S-Stop! Using violence during interrogations is against the law! Get me a lawyer! I can afford it, so get me a lawyer!”

I yelled as the knight grabbed me by my collar.

I wanted to get away, but right now, both my hands were chained together. All she had to do was pull on my chains to foil any attempts at such.

“Satou-dono, you’re speaking to a knight of Axel! One in charge of managing this police station! Naturally, I’m well aware of the odd atmosphere that has taken over this town as of late! You know something about this, right!? You might have a bad reputation, but even someone like you wouldn’t kick a woman for no reason! Considering your actions in the past, you must know something! Now, out with it! What are you hiding!? What is happening to this town!?”

“I-I know nothing! S-Stop! You’re a knight of a lower standing than house Dustiness, right!? I’ll tattle on you! I’ll tell Darkness that you did some unspeakable sexual things to me!”

“H-Hey, don’t fabricate things! In the first place, Lady Dustiness is well known for being just. I know she’s in the same party as you, but she wouldn’t unjustly exercise her power just because of that. Too bad for you! Just wait here, I’ll go fetch the lie detecting magic item!”

The knight looked down upon me with a smug smile as she confidently declared that.

D-Dammit!

“I-I beg your pardon!”

A voice called out from the other side of the door.

Without turning away from me, the knight said...

“What is it!? I’m busy right now! This man keeps replying with empty platitudes...!”

“Well... Lady Dustiness wants to see him...”

“!?”

The knight let go of my collar.

—This is the interrogation room at the town’s police station.

After kicking Serena in broad daylight, I lost consciousness and found myself detained here when I came to.

Seems like the damage I inflicted upon Serena really was completely mirrored back onto me.

Even though I felt a strong impact the moment my legs made contact, I don’t feel any pain or discomfort at all right now. Aqua must have healed me while I was out.

And that brings us to now.

Ever since I woke up, I’ve been interrogated by this knight who seems to be the one in charge of this police station...

“Why is Lady Dustiness here? Tell her that I shall see her after I find out what this man is hiding. Satou-dono is a fairly accomplished adventurer, so a stay in the detention cells should suffice. I shall give her a detailed report after I’m done.”

The knight said without turning around.

This isn’t good.

I can’t speak of Serena right now.

Especially not towards someone as hardheaded as her or Darkness.

I did ask Darkness to get me out of here, but we are talking about the same Darkness who dislikes injustice and abuse of power.

Telling her to get me out without even filling her in might be a little too much...

—Just as I was thinking that, the man on the other side of the door said in a troubled voice...

“T-That’s...”

“What’s the matter?”

The knight turned around with a puzzled expression, and standing next to the man was...

“My apologies, it’s me. I hope you don’t mind if I let myself in.”

The door opened an inch, and standing next to the man was Darkness.

As the man bowed and retreated, the knight gave Darkness a crisp salute.

Following that, I screamed.

“Lalatina-sama!”

“H-Hey, I told you not to call me Lalatina! ... Ahem. My apologies. So, did you learn anything from him?”

Darkness was flustered for a moment, but quickly recovered her posture and asked the knight.

The knight, standing as stiff as a board, said.

"This man clearly knows something, but has told me nothing nothing but a stream of excuses like having struck her out of irritation or for fun... Please wait for a moment. I'll rip out whatever it is that this man is hiding...!"

After hearing the knight's formal reply, Darkness looked me right in the eyes.

"... Kazuma, is that woman's secret something you can't tell even me or Aqua or Megumin?"

I wordlessly nodded.

Seeing that, Darkness fell silent for a moment.

"... Is it bad if someone else knows about it? Are you saying to leave this incident to you? ... If you can't reply, it's fine to remain silent."

"... ..."

I wordlessly returned Darkness's gaze.

With that, Darkness shifted her gaze from me towards the knight and awkwardly scratched her cheek.

"So, well... Could you let him off on my account? Considering his previous achievements, couldn't you file this incident as a fight between two adventurers...? "

"Huh? ... Umm, well... Are you certain, Lady Dustiness? The other party didn't lodge any reports, so there's no issues with this, but... you who hates abusing your authority..."

The knight gazed between me and Darkness with a surprised look on her face.

Eventually, the knight handed the keys to my manacles over to Darkness.

In truth, I probably had the same expression as the knight right now.

She didn't use her authority even when she was about to be married off to Alderp, but now she's using it in this situation... She's really changed.

Ignoring mine and the Knight's gazes, Darkness said,

"Kazuma, you don't have to say anything. I'll leave this matter to you. However, I'll handle the cleaning up... At least rely on me for that."

"Dustiness-sama!"

"Hey, don't grab onto me! I can't unlock your chains if you move around that much!"

That hardheaded Darkness, that very same Darkness who went on about the law and what humans ought to do and such not too long ago...

Sure, she has been less willing to let her principles get in the way as of late, but still...

To think that she'd trust me enough that she'd do this for me.

Overcome with joy, I happily placed my wrist in front of her, and she unlocked them without any hesitation.

"U-Umm... Lady Dustiness, is your relationship with Satou-dono really that of simple party members...?"

Almost like she's afraid to hear the answer, the knight hesitantly asked as she looked upon us with a dumbfounded expression.

Darkness blushed slightly, but managed to keep a straight face...

“... We’re just party members. Right, Kazuma?”

“... Well, I suppose.”

Hearing my reply, Darkness seemed relieved, but a hint of sadness flashed over her features for a moment.

The knight let out a relieved breath as well.

“Y-Yeah, of course... Lady Dustiness is like a dignified exemplar that all of us female knights look up to. There’s no way she could be together with such an infamous man, and a commoner on top of that... Yeah, of course, they’re just friends...”

... ...

“Yes, indeed, we are just regular party mates. Party mates that take baths together and get into close contact in tight spaces. The kind of party mates where she asks me to remove her panties when she needs to use the toilet. What else? Oh, yeah, the kind where I’d sneak into her room in her mansion and push her down, and then she’d turn the tables and push me down. And there’s also that time where she tried to drug me to sleep. Yes, we’re just regular party mates.”

“!?”

“T-T-T-That’s no— That’s not true! I-It isn’t...”

The knight looked at us with a stunned expression, and Darkness was at a loss for words.

“Y-Y-You two are... !? It’s— It’s that, right? You’re companions, after all! That’s just fooling around and teasing each other, right, Lady Dustiness!?”

“Awawa! Y-Yes, it’s just like that! It’s just... like...”

The knight got really desperate for some reason, and Darkness awkwardly flailed around.

Looking at those two, I rubbed my wrist where the manacles were and said.

“Oh, yeah, we kissed.”

“!?”

The knight blushed and her jaw fell open.

And Darkness, blushing all the way to her ears, pressed her face against my back and slowly slid down.

—After getting released from the police station, I’m currently getting an earful from Darkness.

“... You-You really are— How could you!? What should I do? That will become a rumour amongst the other knights and nobles... I’m not helping you again if you get caught! ... Actually, I can’t show my face around this place anymore...”

“But none of those things I said were lies.”

Darkness, still blushing, glared at me upon hearing my words.

That said, while she does seem a little troubled, it doesn’t seem like she’s particularly angry.

Judging that her mood isn’t that bad, I raised something with Darkness.

“Say, Darkness, can I ask you for a favour?”

Part 2

“Now, there’s no need to be embarrassed. Tell me about what’s troubling you... Oh, my, if it isn’t Kazuma-sama.”

“Yo, Serena. There’s no need to attach -sama to my name, it just makes us sound distant. Just Kazuma is fine.”

At a corner of the guild, Serena was extending a helping hand towards another troubled adventurer.

As I appeared, Serena flashed me a warm and welcoming smile, one which I returned in kind.

The favour I asked of Darkness was to have Aqua put a barrier around the mansion and hole herself up inside together with Megumin and Aqua.

And also to inform them that I won’t be coming home for a while.

Serena spoke in a warm and welcoming manner, almost as if I never dropkicked her.

I too adopted the same jovial tone.

“You’re offering help to the troubled adventurers again, huh? It must be tough on you to do this every day. Do you want my help?”

“No, no, it wouldn’t do for me to take up the time of the busy Kazuma-sama. How about turning your strengths and efforts to getting rid of monsters instead?”

Despite our casual small talk, for some reason, the adventurers around us seemed quite on edge.

Most of the adventurers here were the same ones who saw me deliver a dropkick to Serena yesterday.

It must have seemed strange to them to see us chat away so casually after such an incident.

Despite her polite refusal, Serena still seemed to regard me with some degree of wariness as I sat at a table a short distance away from the crowd.

Eventually, she shook her head and turned back to the adventurer.

“... My apologies. Now then, why don’t you start by telling me about your troubles?”

The adventurer, who had been politely waiting while we had our little chat, hesitated for a moment before saying,

“Um... It just never goes well no matter how I confess. Whenever I get close to girls, they always say ‘You’re a pretty good person’. They always say that, but then when I ask them to go out with me, they always decline...”

That’s a pretty common story.

Serena gave the adventurer a gracious smile.

“Don’t you think being called a good person is the highest form of praise? Most other forms of charm and beauty fade away with time and age, but someone who’s beautiful on the inside will stand the test of time... Please continue being a good person. Being called as such by many people is quite charming on its own, don’t you think? It’s too soon for you to worry and despair over it. I’m certain the person who would fall in love with you would appear soon...”

Serena replied with some equally common platitudes.

It seems she can’t use the power of her goddess on every little problem that crops up.

The adventurer brightened up slightly.

“Y-Yes! I was feeling a little down since I kept getting rejected in the same way, but... thanks to you, I’ve cheered up a little. Serena-sama, thank you ver—”

“If he’s that charming, why don’t you just go out with him?”

Just before the adventurer could finish his words of gratitude.

My carefree words caused Serena and the crowd that surrounded her to stiffen up.

The adventurer who came to consult with her slowly turned around to face me.

His expression made me think that the thought hadn’t crossed his mind before, but he started entertaining it the moment I mentioned it.

I decided to help him on a whim.

Even I get in a mood where I want to help others from time to time.

Sure, people call me fiend and heartless and whatnot, but when someone is in trouble right in front of me...

“Serena even called you charming, you know? She went all the way out there to send those signals to you, so why the hell are you chickening out now!? The reason you’ve been rejected all this while is for this very moment!”

“Seriously!? Then... Serena-sama!”

“Y-You’re a good person, but, well...”

Hearing what Serena had to say even before he completed his confession, the adventurer let out an anguished squeal and moved to dash out...

I grabbed his hand before he could leave.

“Why are you giving up so easily!? Don’t just accept their words at face value! Women are complicated creatures! You need to learn how to read between the lines! Haven’t you heard of the term tsundere?”

“..... Tsun... Dere...?”

“U-Umm...”

As I started trying to convince the adventurer, Serena uneasily interjected, but I continued.

“Saying no even though they like you. Haven’t you heard of this famous term before?”

“I-I do know of that phrase! I see, read between the lines...”

“Wai—”

After receiving my encouragement, the adventurer tightly grabbed Serena’s hand.

“Serena-sama! I... I...!”

“W-Wait a minute! Please calm down...! Argh, you lit— K-Kazuma-sama!”

Ignoring Serena’s cries, I left the guild to think about what I can do to get in her way tomorrow.

Part 3

It's been a few days since I was released from the police station.

Serena, along with her usual crowd of hangers on, warily gauged their surroundings before exiting a restaurant.

They're probably on the look out for a certain someone who has been harassing her these past few days.

One of the adventurers from the crowd, who has become more like Serena's personal bodyguard detail than anything else, leaned over and whispered something to her.

With my Lip Reading skill, it was easy to make out what he was saying.

"It's alright, Serena-sama. There's no one nearby."

Observing Serena's figure from behind, I muttered to myself.

"Wind, check. Distance, check. Angle, check."

On a rooftop quite some distance away from the group, I ran down my short checklist.

Right now, I'm observing her through my Farsight skill while training my bow upon her.

It'd be hard for them to notice me from this distance.

Of course, Serena would know who exactly attacked her.

Even though I had my bow trained upon her head, if I let my arrow loose, I would instantly die along with her.

Not only that, but if what she said a few days ago was real, the people around her would be cursed as well.

Right now, Serena was gripping a cup of something she bought from the restaurant in her hand.

I don't know exactly what's inside, but it's probably some cold juice or coffee or something.

... That's just perfect.

The arrow I'm using has a rounded tip, so even if it does end up accidentally hitting her somehow, it wouldn't be lethal.

My goal right now isn't to assassinate her.

Indeed, my goal is...

"Snipe!"

Along with a strong gust of wind, I let loose my arrow.

And the target of that arrow is...

"Gaaah! Dammit, so she was drinking hot coffee!?"

I rolled around on the roof in response to the sudden burning sensation that spread across my hand.

Observing Serena with Farsight, the cup in her hand had been split open by my arrow and she was hastily trying to shake away the coffee that covered her hand.

... Dammit, so this won't work either.

Shaking my head, I got back to my feet and continued observing her.

—I figured out several things about Serena after harassing her for the past few days.

The first thing is that, even if you hurt her in an indirect fashion, that damage will still be reflected to you.

Just like in this incident. Even though I didn't attack her directly, the burns caused by her spilled coffee were still transferred to me.

If an indirect attack would work, I'd have bought one of Wiz's potions that exploded on impact and snuck it into her belongings...

Serena warily looked around as she healed her hand.

It's doubtful that she'd be able to find me, but just to be safe, I activated my Lurk skill and changed locations.

—Another thing I've discovered about Serena's powers.

"U-Um, Kazuma-san...? Err, I came with you because you said you wanted my help with something, but isn't this against the law...?"

The rapid change in the behaviour of the adventurers is definitely related to her power in some way.

The adventurers who started addressing her as -sama still retain their own individuality.

The one thing they all have in common is that all those folks who basically revere her as a goddess now are those who have consulted with her before.

"Well, the act itself probably isn't exactly praiseworthy, but... I'm begging you, Yunyun, I'm keeping this a secret from Megumin and the others. You're the only one I can count on."

"I'll do it! Please let me do it! We are friends, after all! Leave it to me! You can rely on me for anything!"



Perhaps being happy to be relied upon, Yunyun enthusiastically nodded.

It's midnight right now.

Despite my reckless request, Yunyun still agreed to go along with it.

Even though she consulted with Serena just like all those other adventurers who ended up as part of Serena's entourage, Yunyun still retained her senses.

I wonder why Yunyun's still fine even after consulting with the Priest that follows the Dark Goddess of Puppetry.

Right now, we are in front of a sturdy and windowless cottage that Serena was staying at.

Her followers erected this building to serve as her residence after she started getting attacked by a mysterious assailant.

I started preparing in front of the cottage.

I gave a small signal. Upon seeing it, Yunyun nodded and started softly chanting her spell.

A small shimmer fluttered around us, before fading away.

Yes, the spell I requested from Yunyun is the one the Crimson Demons are so fond of, the light refracting spell that made us invisible.

After casting it on us, Yunyun leaned over and softly whispered.

"Is this okay, Kazuma-san? All that's left now is to cast Silence on the door, right? Actually, the town has been really weird as of late. Does it have anything to do with what you're doing now, Kazuma-san?"

“Yeah, it does. What we’re doing now is very close to a criminal act, but this is all to save this town, so don’t worry. Ah, of course, I’ll have to ask you not to tell anyone about tonight.”

“... ... Right.”

“Ah...”

Perhaps reminded that she doesn’t have anyone to tell tonight’s events to in the first place, Yunyun started slowly tearing up.

As I tried to comfort this lonely girl, I started making preparations to cast my spell as well.

I’ll probably end up using a lot of mana tonight.

That why I bought several manatites from Wiz’s shop.

The bigger and clearer these stones are, the more expensive they are and the more mana they contain. This time, I only brought a few mid grade manatites with me.

It’s quite cold around this time of year.

It probably won’t melt before morning.

I pointed my hand towards the door and—

—Dawn.

After a short nap, I returned to the cottage to check on my work.

“*Huff! Huff!*”

The sound of someone smacking against the door was mixed with the soft, somewhat urgent sounding cries of someone behind it.

“Serena-sama, we’ll do something about this ice soon, so please hold on for just a while more!”

“Argh! That’s why I said that a room at an inn with proper guards would be better! There would be a toilet attached too!”

“We can’t help it, we didn’t have the money! Serena-sama, please hold on for just a while longer! Hey, aren’t any of the adventurers who can use fire magic here yet!? What about hot water!? Or at least get a hammer or something to break through!”

“A hammer wouldn’t work on this! Some twisted guy sprayed the entire house with water before freezing it, so the entire thing is frozen solid! Ahh, what should we do...!?”

With the aid of Yunyun’s invisibility spell, I spent the entire night using Create Water and Freeze to encase the door of the cottage in a solid block of ice.

Still, I haven’t gotten a clue as to what Serena’s true goals are.

Why would she travel all the way to this town of beginners to get more followers through her powers of puppetry? What purpose would that serve?

My mind filled with such thoughts as I casually observed the adventurers work themselves into a panic from afar and dug into the cup of shaved ice I bought on the way.

—A few more days have passed since then.

I made contact with Darkness, but apart from Megumin repeatedly trying to cast Explosion in the skies above town and Aqua complaining incessantly over being unable to go out, there didn’t seem to be any issues.

I was a little worried that Serena might snap and target the mansion or them, but it seems like she's still putting on a tough front.

Though, her mask has been cracking a lot recently.

It seems like those rumours I spread about her a few days back did get to her.

With those thoughts in mind, I busied myself with preparing my next trick.

“S-S-So this is where you were, Kazuma-sama. I-I’ve been searching... wanting to meet with you.”

Suddenly, I heard a polite-seeming voice that was only just barely able to conceal her anger from behind me.

I turned around and cordially smiled.

“Yo, if it isn’t Serena. It’s been some time. What’s wrong? You’re scaring the people around you with that face of yours, you know?”

Right now, we are in the backyard of the inn that I’m currently using as my base.

Normally, the adventurers who slept in the stables would use this place to sharpen their weapons and tend to their armour and such, but for some reason, right now, I’m the only one here.

Serena put on an obviously forced smile in response to my greeting.

“Yes, it has been some time, Kazuma-sama... May I ask what are you doing there?”

She warily asked upon sighting the item in my hand.

“Do you know of the balloons that they are selling at Wiz’s magic item shop? This is called a water balloon. It’s an item that expands

upon being filled with water. Right now, instead of water, I'm filling it with a mixture of paint and starch—”

“Hey cut it...! I don't know what you intend to do with that, but if you're planning on playing some kind of prank with it, then I won't stand idly by.”

Saying that, Serena took a step back.

At the same time, a few of the adventurers surrounding her stepped forward.

“... Hey, what are you trying to do?”

“You are asking me that? ... I'm almost at my limits. These people are almost completely under my control. If I order them to kill you, they'll do it without blinking an eye... I really underestimated you. To think that just you alone could really push me to this level...! Yeah, you really had your fun, didn't you!?”

This ain't good.

Right now, the only people around here are us.

Serena was smiling, but that smile didn't reach her eyes.

Crap, I might have went a little too far.

However...

“Hey, you were the one who told me to challenge you alone. I boldly rose up to your challenge, and now you, a Demon King's General, is attacking me, the one with the weakest class, with numbers on your side. Don't you think it's unfa—”

“Shut the fuck up!!”

Serena interrupted me with a sudden outburst.

“How dare you! You sure enjoyed yourself spreading all those rumours about me, didn’t you!?”

She glared at me with bloodshot eyes.

“H-Hey, wait! As promised, I didn’t tell anyone about your true identity, so those rumours that I paid the blonde-haired delinquent to spread shouldn’t matter—”

“As if! Of all things, you had to spread the rumour that I’m actually a man! You even mixed in bits of truth like how my voice occasionally breaks...! Thanks to you, several people even asked me about it directly! There were even a few who said they’d prefer it if I was a man... Just what is wrong with this town!?! You bastard... I’ll fucking kill you!”

She started waving her hands and chanting...

Noticing an old man passing by, I hastily interjected.

“Hey, someone’s watching!”

“Kcht...! G-Good morning. The weather is quite nice today, isn’t it?”

“Oh, Serena-san. Good morning. Yes, the weather is pretty good today.”

As expected of the much revered Serena-sama.

It seems like she’s familiar with that man.

As Serena started making small talk with that man, the adventurers around her stared blankly into space.

Well, this ain’t good. A Demon King’s General snapped.

She’s the general in charge of schemes and whatnot, so I expected her to go about things in a more roundabout way, but to think that

she'd demonstrate her power in the middle of the town... What should I do?

Fighting her and her pupeted entourage head on.

No, that's impossible. Most likely, I wouldn't last a full minute.

Serena seems to be wrapping up her conversation, and the man seems like he's about to make his leave.

"Then, allow me to cast a spell of protection on you for your safe journey..."

"Ah, thank you very much."

Should I make a run for the police station?

No, I might have the Escape skill, but if Serena casts her buffs on the adventurers surrounding her, it's not impossible for them to catch up to me.

Just then, Serena raised both hands to her chest and took up a pose like she was offering a prayer.

I knew a chance when I saw one.

"Then, safe journeys upon yo—"

"Wind Breath!"



Just as Serena was casting her spell on the passerby.

I thrust my hand towards the ground directly beneath her feet and unleashed a strong gust of air from it.

As I did so, her robe flew all the way up to her head, and she, with her hands around her chest, could do nothing to stop that.

I'm really lucky that she's wearing her usual mature-seeming long skirt.

After confirming that her robe was fully above her head, I took out my wire from my pocket and aimed at her torso.

“Bind!”

“Wha—”

A muffled voice sounded out from within the robe.

With my Bind, I've secured her robe over her head.

Normally, this skill would only be useful for buying time, but in this case...!

“Serena-sama!”

“Se-Serena-sama is—!”

“Serena-sama is all bundled up!?”

Seeing Serena bundled up with nothing between her waist and her ankles but a set of panties seem to have momentarily jolted the adventurers back to their senses.

“Aahh, thank the gods. What a divinely shaped ass...”

The person Serena was talking to fell to his knees in awe and stared intently at her panties.

“Hey, wait, sto—!”

Serena struggled within her robes, but the wire I used was the mithril wire I commissioned for use against monstrous targets.

She might be a Demon King’s General, but she’s still a human. It’s not something she can struggle her way out of.

“Aah! Serena-sama... Serena-sama’s ass is in broad daylight...”

“Hey! Hide it! Form a wall! Hide her from view!”

“T-To think that Serena-sama wears black panties... I need to remember this...”

Despite having mostly returned to their senses, the adventurers around Serena still formed a circle around her to hide her from view.

It doesn’t seem like Serena’s strong enough to dispel my Bind like Aqua.

An angry-sounding voice emerged from underneath the robe. It seems like she’s no longer able to maintain her facade.

“Damn you Satou Kazuma! Don’t think you’ll get away with this! Once I get out of here...!”

Well, I don’t know what will happen once she does, so to buy myself a little bit more time, I took a deep breath.

And shouted to the world.

“Oh no! The great Serena-sama is right here with her bottom exposed!”

“S-S-STOOOOOP!!!”

Part 4

“So you’ve come to visit again, Satou-dono.”

“I’ve come to visit again, Chief.”

A female knight was staring at me from the far side of a small desk.

Indeed, I’m being interrogated yet again.

As the prime suspect in the Serena panties exposure incident, I was once again detained at the police station.

Yeah, I suppose they won’t be able to overlook that kind of ruckus.

Her adventurers couldn’t tear through her robes, and I put my all into that Bind, so it wouldn’t wear off for quite some time.

The people who were attracted by my cries formed a crowd around her and made the place seem as lively as a marketplace.

And the police who came to investigate the commotion once again brought me into custody...

The female knight let out a sigh.

“Satou-dono, allow me to be frank. You’re a nuisance.”

“Even if you tell me that, I’m not exactly doing this because I want to...”

—After I’ve been caught, the police sent a couple of people to meet with Darkness.

However, apparently, she said that she wouldn’t bail me out anymore.

Perhaps I shouldn't have teased her in front of this knight the last time I was here.

"... This time, that priest submitted an official report. Even if you have Lady Dustiness's favour, it'd be hard for her to bail you out this time. Someone far higher ranked than her would have to vouch for you, otherwise..."

"Yeah, I suppose so."

Relying on Darkness so often wouldn't sit very well with me either.

Even if she bailed me out again, I'll most likely end up back here again before long.

After hearing my reply, the knight let out another sigh.

And then, tossing away the serious demeanour she has shown me all this while, she rested her forehead upon the desk and started grumbling.

"Argh, dammit! Why were you caught so easily!? You could've easily escaped from us if you would've just put up a bit more resistance!?"

"Is that something a police chief should really be saying?"

The knight slowly raised her head at my words.

"In the first place, what is that woman? All those people who saw her underwear ended up as her fervent supporters. Sure, she has a good body. In this town that's filled with weirdos, she's a rare sensible person... But even so, the pace at which she's getting new converts is really strange. What, is it really her panties? Just by showing people your panties, you'll get people to become your fans? Could even a hardheaded fool like me get a few fans if I flash my panties here and there for a bit? I know this town is a little out there, but still... Ah, dammit, if that's the case, I might as well...!"

.....!?

“Wait, all those people there ended up as her followers? Just by seeing her panties? I mean, sure, if there’s a religious organization where the lady priests show us their panties, I’d love to join it, but...”

Something feels off again.

The men of this town pretty much all make frequent use of the succubus service. Just seeing her panties wouldn’t...

Well, sure, it’s natural to be thankful to see such a beautiful sight, but becoming her follower just because you’ve seen her panties is....

... Thankful.

Something’s nagging at me.

Regina is the Goddess of Vengeance. Could it be that... Hmm...

That adventurer who was grievously wounded a few days ago.

He ended up joining Serena’s posse after his wounds were healed by her.

Sure, it might be natural to end up being her follower after getting healed of such grievous wounds.

However, if I recall, he was one of the adventurers who got revived by Aqua in the past.

Her daily behaviour doesn’t exactly make her out to be some sort of goddess deserving of worship, but as far as her healing skills are concerned, Aqua should’ve been far more highly regarded.

It feels like I'm close to putting my finger on something, but I just can't narrow it down.

Yunyun went to consult with Serena, but her problem wasn't resolved, and she kept her senses.

And the people who saw Serena's panties thanks to me ended up becoming her followers.

In other words...

"Satou-dono! Don't just space out! Answer my question! You know about that woman's secret, right!? Now, come on, out with it!"

... Ah.

"AAAAAAAHH! WHAT THE HELL!? I was just on the verge of figuring it out! Why the hell must you interrupt me at the crucial point, you left-on-the-shelf knight!?"

"Ah, you actually said it! It's not like we female knights don't date because we don't want to! Having children would be detrimental to our mission, so we're just waiting for a wonderful man who would understand... Don't cover your ears, Satou-dono! Listen to me! And if you're going to call me left-on-the-shelf, at least introduce me to someone decent...!"

Blocking out the words of the knight who was screaming about something while shaking the table, I tried to go back to my train of thought.

In order for Serena to turn people into her puppets, they must need to be grateful or feel like they owe her in some way, or something of that sort.

That means that in order to break them out of that state...

Aqua might be able to solve it with her Break Spell, but if her identity was revealed to Serena in the process, that'd be checkmate. I can't take that chance.

... But before I can focus on this.

“Satou-dono! I don’t care about his personality, as long as he has a somewhat modest income... The important thing is being able to do housework! A house husband would be best. Apart from that, telling me, ‘I love you,’ once every day—”

“Say, chief, can I make a request of you?”

“... What is it?”

The knight who was going on about something weird suddenly turned sullen for some reason.

“I would like to send a letter. Money is no object, I just need to send a letter to an acquaintance in the capital. Express, of course.”

Part 5

“Now then, Satou-sama, please take care. If you ever find yourself in trouble, please feel free to rely on us.”

“A-Ah... Thanks...”

The day after I sent out the letter.

The knight gave me a crisp salute similar to the one she gave Darkness a few days ago as she was sending me off.

It's quite impressive how much her personality has changed over the past day.

She seems to be giving me the same sort of treatment she would give a high-ranking noble.

Well, that's probably because of the letter I had hastily written getting delivered to those two women in the capital...

“To think that Satou-sama is connected to not only the Dustiness family, but the Symphonia family as well... And for that Claire-sama to write back with specific instructions not to give you any cause for offense... This is the first time I've seen that happen.”

I sent the letter to the two nobles who served as bodyguards for Iris, Claire and Rain.

Ever since the two of them replied, the stiff attitude that this knight showed me has completely vanished.

She displayed an amazing smile while shaking my hand.

“I wondered what happened when Rain-dono appeared here in tears while bearing Claire-sama's letter... You really are a playboy, Satou-

sama! Not just Lady Dustiness, but even Claire-sama and Rain-dono...!"

"Err, well... That's not quite the case, but nevermind..."

It's almost to the point where I want to ask who the hell she is.

It seems like she's under the impression that I'm close friends with Rain and Claire.

In that letter, I wrote that I recovered my memory, and I'll soon be paying them a visit to give my thanks for that incident.

And, as a postscript, I added that I have fallen into quite a spot of trouble, and it would help me if they would provide a document with their signature on it. That's all.

Upon hearing about my situation from the person who delivered the letter, the two of them immediately agreed to become my guarantor. Or so I've heard.

"... By the way, where are those two right now? I would like to give them my regards."

"Claire-sama said that she'd be taking a vacation at a hidden villa starting today, so she wouldn't be in the capital even if you went there. Rain-dono was handling the paperwork for your release, but the moment she was done, she used Teleport and disappeared off somewhere."

Oh, so they are that afraid of me, huh?

I followed the knight to the entrance of the police station.

The other policemen gave me pitch perfect salutes as I passed by.

The female knight put her arms behind her back and leaned forwards with a smile on her face.

“Satou-sama, from now on, we’ll turn a blind eye to any happenings in town, so feel free to tease or investigate or do whatever else you want to that priest!”

“T-Thanks...”

Is this town okay?

“You know, you said you looked up to Darkness and stuff a few days ago, so I thought you’d be a more inflexible person...”

“A great noble like her would be able to have her pick of any handsome noble scion she wishes, but despite that, she chooses to be alone. We nobles who are similarly alone look up towards her and admire her for that... Come to think of it, Satou-sama, in addition to having such amazing contacts, you also have fame and a mansion, right?... Not only that, but you have a fortune that would put several nobles to shame, no?”

“... I-I suppose...”

... ...

“I’m Aloerina, 23, single, the surprisingly devoted type, and pretty amazing when the lights go—”

“Well, I have to go! Thank you for your hospitality! I’ll repay you someday!”

I get the distinct feeling that nothing good will happen if I were to linger here, so I hurriedly left the police station.

—I was momentarily blinded by the morning sun upon leaving the police station.

Was it because of the time I spent in that dark detention cell?

I couldn't see clearly due to the glare, but even so, my eyes were drawn towards a certain figure standing outside.

Long flowing blue hair that shimmered in the morning sun.

A blue hagoromo that gave off a gentle seeming aura.

Standing right there was a person I hadn't seen in a long time, cheerfully waving at me with a bright smile upon her face.



It's almost like she's welcoming home a friend she hadn't seen in a long time.

"Welcome home, Kazuma! Thank you for your hard work!"

I told her to hole herself up within the mansion. Why is it that she never listens to a word I say?

Still, I am a little happy to see her.

Just a little.

She might not know the full story, but she still came out to greet me upon my release even knowing that it's dangerous outside the mansion.

With a smile in my heart, I headed towards her...

"Say, with this, you've been in the care of the police for more times than I've been, right? You can't call me an ex-convict anymore, can you!? Say, how does it feel, Kazuma-san who called the police on me when I took over the mansion? The same Kazuma-san who called me ex-convict who knows how many times after that? So how does it feel? How do you feel now!?"

... ...

This little bitch!

"Hey, you didn't wait for me here just because of a stupid reason like that, did you!? Don't screw with me! Why do you think I spent so much time in the care of the police!? In the first place, I got arrested in the process of protecting the peace of the town! Don't compare it to the petty crime you did, you Goddess of Criminals!"

"Waaah! How could you say that?! You'll get divine punishment, you shitty NEET! Why don't you tell me the reason why you ended up in

the care of the police so many times!? Come on, say it! If your conscience is clean, then why don't you come out and say it!?"

Dammit, I haven't seen her in a while, and all I want to do is to smack her upside the head!

I wouldn't be struggling so much if I could say it!

Actually, we are talking about that bloodlusted Serena here. It wouldn't be surprising if she attacked us right now.

Speaking bluntly, even if the worst happened, as long as Aqua is fine, she'd be able to do something about it with her Resurrection.

Well, that's just as a last resort, but still.

Perhaps because they are both priests, Serena does seem to have her eye on Aqua, so it's best to get her home as quickly as possible.

While making sushing motions with my hands, I said.

"Argh, fine, I did it because I couldn't stand that priest, alright? There's no other reason in particular, so hurry up and get back inside the mansion. What happened to Darkness and Megumin anyway? I told them to keep an eye on you."

"Those two were caught in my certain kill party trick, the type 100 mist! Once activated, it'd last for at least half a day before fading. Actually, they just got bored after holing up in the mansion for so long. Being a NEET and spending all day indoors gets old really quickly. You're being so unfair, Kazuma. You've been staying outside all this while, right? I want to go to a slumber party too. Take me with you."

It looks like this idiot plans to follow me even though she hadn't the slightest idea what I've been up to.

Her certain kill party trick sort of intrigues me, but right now, the most important thing is what to do with her.

... Well, before any of that, I should get a meal.

The portions they provide at the police station isn't much.

I can think about how to persuade Aqua while we are having a meal...

With that in mind, I took Aqua with me and wandered around town for a bit to find a good restaurant.

Just then.

The group I'd hate the most to run into right now appeared right in front of me.

"Yo, aren't you early, Satou Kazuma. I've been waiting... You have your companion with you today? Well, no matter. Let's settle our score, Kazuma. I'm almost boiling over with rage right now!"

Serena, looking at me with bloodshot eyes, her original gentle demeanour nowhere to be seen, and her entourage of adventurers—

Part 6

“Kazuma-san! Kazuma-san! What is going on!? Why are those people chasing us!? I don’t think I’ve done anything... I can think of a few reasons why they might be chasing us, but why!?”

“Properly apologize when they regain their senses! Dammit, how many people did she turn into her followers while I was in jail!? No one is taking notice even all the ruckus we’ve been causing!”

Aqua and I were running through the town.

There were about ten adventurers chasing us, but none of the people in town even raised an eyebrow upon seeing us tear a path through it.

I’ve managed to stay ahead of them thanks to Aqua’s buffs, but it’s only a matter of time before I’m cornered.

... In the first place.

“I thought she was more of a schemer! Doing this just because I teased her a little is way too rash! Her actions are getting more and more overboard!”

She at least bothered to keep things out of the public eye when she attacked me the other day, but now she’s not even trying.

She must be pretty confident in how thorough her brainwashing of this town is if she’s willing to act so brazenly.

Aqua, half-crying as she ran next to me, screamed.

“Hey, I thought you were arrested for sexual harassment! Just what did you do to that priest to make someone as gentle as her so mad!?”

“Nothing much! I just froze her inside a house with no toilet, spread some strange rumours about her, and called a lot of people to see her when her panties were visible for about an hour, that’s all!”

“You can’t complain if she kills you over that!”

Dammit!

I purposefully toppled the merchant display stores I ran past, creating obstacles behind me to slow my pursuers down.

Several angry voices called out after me as I ran, but I didn’t have the time to apologize and offer compensation to each and every store owner.

I have no idea how many people have been pupeted.

With Serena pursuing me so boldly through the streets, it’s best to think that most people on the streets are my enemy.

Thus, I naturally avoided the crowds and went through the less crowded areas.

Even though she had no idea what was going on, Aqua still followed me without any hesitation.

This isn’t good. If anything were to happen to her, I won’t be able to get revived.

Should I send her off to the police station on her own?

Or should we keep running towards the mansion like this...

“Hey, Aqua, do you sense anything when you look at these people!? You wiped out the curse on Darkness’s dad in a snap back then, didn’t you!? Can’t you sense any evil power at work here!?”

“My divine eyes tell me that the most evil existence in this town is the man running next to me!”

This bitch!

Just when I’m considering tripping her and using that opportunity to run away, a triumphant voice called out from behind me.

“The only path ahead of you leads to a dead end, Satou Kazuma! Did you not notice the arrangement of the people on the streets!? It’s all to lead you to a deserted area. The only thing ahead of you is...!”

Indeed, the only thing around this corner is a dead end with a high wall blocking any progress.

Anyone would know this after spending enough time in this town.

“Hey, Aqua, they’ll catch up at this rate! Crouch down below the wall and fling me over it! I’ll pull you up once I’m on top! We’ll be able to escape that way.”

“I see, what a wonderful idea! Then, Kazuma, why don’t you fling me over!? I’ll pull you up once I get on top of the wall!”

“Y-You little...”

Aqua said that without blinking.

After spending so much time together, it’s obvious to the both of us what we had in mind.

As Aqua and I rounded the corner at the same time...

“Pant... Pant... H-Have you finally given up, Satou Kazuma...! Y-You’ve got a pretty good priest there... Pant... Pant... That’s some pretty powerful... Support spells... Pant... Pant...”

Serena breathlessly said upon seeing us stopping, as she tried to catch her breath.

Then, it seems like she finally noticed.

We didn't stop because we gave up.

Serena followed our gaze.

Standing right there was...

"Welcome! We have been awaiting you, dear customers! The weather is nice today, so Moi and the shopkeeper have decided to set up an open air store here!"

"Ah, welcome! It's just like Vanir-san said, we've gotten customers even in such a place!"

Wiz and Vanir, their goods spread out upon a rug right at the end of a dead alley.

—I don't want to deal with this all-seeing Devil anymore.

Part 7

“Hey, what are you selling? ... Actually, are you okay? Smoke is coming out from your head, you know?”

“Vanir-san went off the handle just now, saying ‘I just got rid of the Bug Killerin, and you brought in another bunch of weird stuff!’... But don’t worry, Aqua-sama. I just drank some sugar water earlier, so my body will automatically heal up. Even if the worst comes to worst, I can just drink some water from anywhere... Ah, Aqua-sama, that’s Vanir-san’s recommended item for the day.”

Aqua squatted next to Wiz and started picking through the products on display.

While the two of them were having a casual conversation,

“Hey, Vanir, what’s the meaning of this? Are you still not satisfied after taking all the money I had on hand?”

“Did you pull the strings behind the scene this time? No, actually, what are you doing setting up shop at the end of a dead alley that I got chased into? Just how much did you foresee this time?”

Serena and I hounded Vanir.

The members of Serena’s entourage who were chasing us are currently standing by a short distance away from us.

Vanir responded with a laugh.

“Fuhahahaha! Now, now, there’s no need to be so angry, you two. Right now, my job is to earn money, so Moi shall appear at any place that smells of money. Worry not, Moi has prepared items that would be of great benefit to the both of you. So, would you like to take a look?”

Leaving Vanir aside, there's no way we can start fighting in front of Wiz.

Serena and I looked at each other and wordlessly agreed on a temporary truce.

... No, wait, in this situation, couldn't I just throw our deal out the window and clue Wiz in on what's going on?

With Vanir, Wiz, and the goddess Aqua here, there's a decent chance that it'll work out in my favour.·

The problem is that I'm not entirely certain who Vanir and Wiz would end up siding with.

We might be on fairly good terms, but I have no idea what their relationship with Serena is. The only thing I know is that they used to be co-workers.

In the past, Wiz got really angry when she learnt that another Demon King's general, Hans, had laid a hand on another person.

I recall her saying something about Hans breaking some sort of agreement she made with the Demon King...

Still, I have no idea how she would react in this situation.

She might be one in name only, but she's still a General of the Demon King.

Though, it's probably safe to say that those two wouldn't work together with Serena to attack this town—

"Hey, don't think of doing anything strange now. Let's make a truce for today."

Seemingly understanding what is currently going through my head, Serena whispered into my ear.

... Dealing with an intelligent enemy like her is really annoying.

"Now, now, you two, stop standing there whispering to each other and give my products a look. Even without using my all-seeing gaze, Moi is certain that there'll be something that'll have the two of you jumping for joy."

Serena and I shot Vanir a doubtful gaze after hearing his suspicious sounding invitation.

Unfazed by it, Vanir brought out a piece of paper.

"First is this! This is a contract that states that Moi will not interfere no matter what you're plotting in this town—"

Serena snatched away the piece of paper before Vanir could finish his sentence.

Come to think of it, Vanir did promise to keep her personal information a secret because of her status as his customer, but he didn't promise not to get in her way.

Devils like Vanir seem to place a high amount of importance on contracts.

Dammit, if I had known, I would've snatched it for myself...

"Say, Vanir, I can definitely pay a higher price for that than her, so would you mind selling that to me?"

Upon hearing my words, Serena triumphantly said.

"Hey, hey, this is a first come, first served sort of thing. Vanir, how much is this?"

"730,330 Eris."

“All of my money again!? I only just managed to save up this much, you piece of shit!”

Serena angrily shouted as she threw her wallet at Vanir.

“Thank you for your patronage~!”

... Oh, right.

“Oh, yeah, Serena, you still owe me some money, don’t you!? Pay me back right now! You were the one who said you’d face me as a Demon King’s General if I challenge you alone! It’d be something else if you face me one on one, but if you are going to break your promise and send a bunch of guys after me, then pay me back right now! ... Hehehe, with this, you’ll have to return what you just bought from Vanir, right?”

“Y-You bastard... Dammit. Hey, you!”

Serena called out to one of her adventurers.

With a blank gaze, the man approached Serena.

“Give me some money... There, will this do!?”

Serena snatched the wallet from that adventurer and handed it over to me.

Dammit, I guess that was too naive of me.

... Hmm, wait.

“... ? ... Huh? W-What am I doing here...?”

“Tsk.”

The adventurer who got his wallet taken regained his senses for a moment, and Serena clicked her tongue upon seeing that.

... Well, isn't that interesting.

"Umm, can I have a moment?"

In a cheerful tone, Serena called out to the adventurer.

"That's odd. I'm pretty sure I was... Ah, what is it, Serena-san? Why are you holding the hem of your skirt..."

As he was saying that, Serena, blushingly, lifted her own skirt and gave the adventurer a good view of what's going on underneath.

"Umm... What do you think after seeing this?"

"Thank you very much! Thank you very much! Thank you ver...y..."

The man looked utterly elated for a moment, but soon, his expression was replaced with the same blank one that the others had.

... Oh, this is very interesting indeed.

"Oh, did you see that? That priest that looks so refined actually did something like that! What a pervert!"

"Celestina-san... You always were a little boorish, but when did you become so bold..."

"Celestina? Do you know that priest?"

Seeing Serena's actions, Aqua and Wiz gleefully gossiped like old housewives.

Serena herself ignored the two of them, instead seeming more annoyed that I seemed to have picked up on the man's behaviour as she turned back to Vanir.

"Hey, Vanir, with this, you won't get in my way anymore, right? I can take this as a contract, right?"

“Indeed, we have made a contract. Worry not, we devils absolutely will not break a contract. ... Now, boy.”

Yes, it really does seem like you need to feel like you owe something to Serena in order to become puppeted by her.

Thus, if you feel as though that debt was repaid in some way, whatever form it takes, her control over you will be broken.

Just like what happened to that man when Serena took his wallet.

The reason why Serena flashed her panties to him is most likely due to the boom in followers she experienced after that incident with my Bind.

It's definitely not a bad method to quickly turn someone into her puppet.

“Hey, boy, Moi is about to recommend some products to you.”

... Hmm, but, come to think of it.

The people who were already her puppets came to their senses for a brief moment upon seeing her panties back then.

Why would that happen?

“... Hey, boy who’s been staying outside as of late to enjoy a certain service that gives him visions of the two girls back at the mansion and pretty much all the women present right—”

“Yes, yes, show me the goods! What do you want me to buy, Vanir!? My wallet is quite full right now, so I’ll buy anything you have to offer!”

Ignoring Serena, who was giving me an extremely disdainful gaze, I moved to examine the items that Vanir prepared...

“... What’s this?”

“This case contains the ‘Useless Potions Series’ that this worthless shopkeeper bought in the past.”

You just said it’s useless.

“For instance, this is the Stats Up Potion (Changed). It’s made from a regular stats up potion, and is more effective than its regular counterparts.”

“... And its side effects?”

“As it increases one of your stats, its paired stat will decrease.”

... Paired stat?

“So, what would happen if I drink it?”

“Your strength will increase tremendously, but in return, your intelligence will decrease.”

I see.

“It might be pretty useful for a frontline combat class that doesn’t require much intelligence to do their job...”

I rotated the potion in my hand and mused out loud. At the same time, Serena stared thoughtfully at the bottle.

“So, how much is this reduction in intelligence?”

“It would definitely end up lower than this boy’s blue-haired priest.”

I returned the potion to the case.

“Then what about these? The first part of Forbidden Potions Series! This potion will allow you to draw the ire of monsters for the rest of your life when you drink it! Perfect for earning experience points! Or

this one that'll raise your magic power in exchange for killing your hair follicles! Or this one that'll reduce your magic to zero but raise your levels by leaps and bounds! Or this potion that attracts the opposite sex but make you smell like a goblin? Or this level reset potion that's perfect for masochists who would wish to relieve their harsh training?"

"They are all defective products! I don't need them!"

Just as I reflexively interjected,

"Or this potion that cures the Puppet status effect?"

"What!?" x2

Vanir casually offered an item that'd be extremely useful to me right now.

"Oh, that seem to have caught both your interest. This is a potion that cures the unique status ailment 'Puppet'. That said, that's a very rare status effect that no extant monsters can inflict. As far as Moi is aware, the only one that can inflict it right now is a minor Dark Goddess..."

"Don't refer to Regina-sama as a minor Dark Goddess!"

Ignoring the angry Serena, I took the potion from Vanir's hands.

"Is this the only bottle you have?"

In response, Vanir jabbed his finger towards Wiz.

Right there, rows upon rows of potions are displayed on the mat that Aqua is currently crouched in front of.

Dammit. Sure, it's a great help and all, but I can't help but feel frustrated that we've all been dancing in the palm of Vanir's hand all this time.

She might be my enemy, but Serena probably feels the same way.

Staring at those potions, Serena bitterly said.

“... Didn’t you make a contract not to get in my way?”

“Fuhahahahaha, the all-seeing devil so declares! Even if these potions fall into this boy’s hands, they will not get in your way! In fact, there will come a day when you’ll be deeply thankful that this boy has these potions on hand. Now, boy, the Forbidden potion series, and that Puppet curing potion I just gave you is a free service! Now, here comes the main event! How much are you willing to pay for a case of those potions over there...!”

Letting out an ecstatic laugh, Vanir once again moved towards the case of potions...

“Ah, Aqua-sama, what are you doing? Those potions might not be of much use now, but Vanir-san has been carefully preparing them since morning. You shouldn’t stick your finger in them.”

“Nevermind that, you’re starting to turn a little see through, you know? Have you been taking in enough water? It’s great that you have so many useless potions right now. Here, I’ve turned them all into clean water, so douse yourself with them and cool off.”

“Sorry, Aqua-sama. Thank you very much... But Aqua-sama’s divine power is making me sort of numb...”

...

The three of us fell silent upon seeing what Wiz and Aqua are doing.

Out of all of them, Vanir, after spending so much effort to get us dancing to his tune, naturally stiffened upon seeing that.

“... Snicker.”

“!”

This really isn't a laughing matter, but for some reason, Serena and I let out a chuckle at the same time.

Part 8

“Fuhahaha! Fuhahaha! Moi has really overlooked you this time! Moi should’ve taken care of this goddess of toilets a long time ago!”

“Do it if you think you can, you Masked Devil! I don’t know what kind of goods you were trying to sell to our Kazuma, but aren’t you embarrassed at all to lose your temper just because things aren’t going your way? Are you really a Great Devil? Is your title self proclaimed? How do you feel after having your products ruined? Come on, tell me! It’s really amazing! Kususu! Fukususu!”

<TL Note: Kusukusu (クスクス) is the onomatopoeia for a snickering, teasing sort of laughter, the kind you’d expect a clique of cool girls to be having behind the dork’s back. If you know of a good english equivalent, contact me.>

...

“Vanir Style Death Ray!”

“Reflect!

—I jabbed my thumb towards the unfolding commotion behind me sighed.

“... Hey, what should we do about those two?”

“... Why are you asking me? In the first place, just what is that priest to be able to fight with Vanir like that?”

Technically, she’s a goddess. Technically.

Wiz, seemingly having been caught in the crossfire, fell charred and smoking to the ground.

Serena heaved a sigh.

“Well, the only one who could’ve stopped them got taken out instantly, so there’s really nothing we can do. I’m not considered particularly strong amongst the Generals... Aah, this feels really stupid. Doesn’t seem like anything good will come out of tangling with you... There are too many strange folks hanging around you. Other than Vanir and that priest who’s currently fighting him to a standstill, you also know a lot of other dangerous people, don’t you?”

I can’t deny that.

There’s the proudly crazy girl back home, everyone back in the Crimson Demon Village, and the strongest step-sister in the world, just to start with.

Perhaps sensing something from my expression, Serena went “Uwah...” and cringed a little.

“*Sigh...* Oh, fine, I give up on this town. Truth be told, I underestimated you. I should’ve come at you with full force right from the start.”

Saying that, Serena heaved yet another sigh.

Her gloomy gaze has been focused on Aqua and Vanir fighting all this while.

... Well, I can understand where she’s coming from.

Even I wouldn’t have taken such a ridiculous bunch seriously as opponents.

“You bitch of a goddess, Moi shall have you compensate me for all the potions you rendered useless today!”

“Ahahaha! Devil who believes that everything moves according to his plans, only to get his hopes dashed at the last moment every single time! I shall not compensate you! In fact, I turned your useless potions into Aqua’s beautiful and delicious water, so if anything, you should be paying me!”

“Don’t you dare imitate me! Those lines are my trademark! That is it! Moi shall beat you black and blue and take every last coin you have!”

... Yeah, I can understand where she’s coming from.

Well, I’d be fine if things ended here.

After all, I did already avenge Aqua for what she suffered the other day.

...

No wait!

I didn’t kick her because Aqua was depressed or anything.

I didn’t pick a fight with a Demon King’s General just because Aqua seemed uncharacteristically sad.

It has nothing to do with that good for nothing goddess. I did that to resolve the unpleasant feelings in my stomach, that’s all.

As I repeated that to myself, I said to Serena.

“Then we’ve reached an understanding, right? Just to say it again, I have absolutely no interest in the Demon King, so there’s no need to treat me as a threat. To be honest, even if you tell me that the Demon King and humanity are at war over the state of the world and whatnot, when I’m living in such a peaceful town, it really doesn’t resonate with me at all. Seriously, if you leave me alone, I won’t cause any trouble for you.”

“Yes, yes, I get it. I’ll tell the Demon King that neither you nor this town is worthy of his attention, so there’s no need to worry so much about them. And I’ll leave this town too. That’ll be fine, right?”

I let out a breath I’ve been holding.

“Right, then, we have a deal... *Sigh*. You said you weren’t strong amongst the Generals, but even then, I was really breaking out into cold sweat while facing you. In the first place, rather than charging right at someone with the weakest class like me, a General should act like one and come up with some grander schemes...”

I started grumbling about all the worries that have piled up over the last few nerve-wracking days.

“Well, I didn’t have it easy either. Though I don’t really care about any of it now... *Sigh*, I’m not looking forward to this... This might be the end of your part in this, but I still need to report to the Demon King afterwards.”

With an exasperated look on her face as she gazed upon the goddess and devil fighting, Serena started grumbling as well.

“Either convince you to join us, or kill you. Those were my original orders regarding you... Well, I’ll tell you something. The truth is, I wasn’t exactly looking forward to clashing with you either. I’ll forget about how you exposed me in front of half the town, so you forget about a bunch of things too, alright?”

“Yeah, yeah. After this, we are both even, okay?”

Serena produced a small smoking pipe and what appeared to be tobacco from the folds of her robe.

After lighting it with a very familiar item, she took a deep draught from it before turning to me.

“With this, you won’t be targeted by the Demon King’s army anymore. Oh, one more thing, your companion. She was called Megumin, wasn’t she? There was a pretty large bounty on her head too, so I’ll get rid of that for you.”

Seriously? When did that happen?

Though, she’ll probably be happy if she learnt that the Demon King’s army put a bounty on her head...

“Oh, please do that. Oh, wait, wouldn’t I have something like that too? If I have a bounty on my head, please take care of that too.”

“Yes, yes, leave it to me. I’ll handle it.”

Serena exhaled a cloud of smoke in a somewhat annoyed manner before bringing the pipe to her lips again.

“... Sigh. You know, you could be a little more thankful to me, right?”

Her gaze was still squarely focused on Aqua and Vanir as she said that.

“Oh, yeah, thank you. But, leaving me aside, just what were you planning to do in this town anyway. This is just a town of beginners...”

... Wait a minute.

What’s with this strange sensation?

“...You finally said it.”

Serena still hasn’t turned to look at me.

She said that while breathing out a cloud of purple smoke.

... I said it? ... What did I say?

Why is my body feeling so strange...? And my head is feeling floaty...

... Ah...

“My, my, you really are something. You already figured out how my power works, right? You might be the first one to get this close to figuring out the true form of my power.”

... Oh shit... You dirty little...!

I let my guard down because Vanir and Aqua were fighting like usual...

“You wanted to know what I’m planning in a town of beginners like this, right? There, there, I’ll tell you all about it, so be thankful to me, okay? You asked, so of course I’ll answer. I listened to your request, so you’ll owe me for this, right?”

Shit... shit....

Hey, stop! Don’t say anything more!

I wanted to say that, but not a single word came out of my mouth.

It’s not just my mouth, my entire body has gotten really sluggish.

“You coward! Stop using Wiz as a shield! ... Hey, actually, don’t you think Wiz has gotten really see through right now?”

“Then you stop throwing around purification spells! ... No, no, this is taking things too far. That’s a warning sign. At this rate, the storekeeper will vanish for real.”

“W-W-What should we do!? Really, what do we do!? If I cast healing on her, she’ll just vanish faster!”

"There's some sugar water in that bag over there, so let the storekeeper drink some. This usually works out. She'll spring right back like a snake after shedding its skin... probably."

Vanir and Aqua are currently panicking over a Wiz that became almost completely transparent.

At that instant.

—Serena finally turned to face me.

A triumphant grin was plastered across her face.

"The truth is, the army will dispatch a division to this town not too long in the future. But, well, this town is the town furthest away from the front lines. There's no way we can march an entire army all over the country to this town. Thus, only a small amount of units are scheduled to be sent here through Teleport. But, well, for a town of beginners, that is more than enough."

Hey, stop! Don't say anymore!

"Do you know the fallen angel, Duke? He went missing around this town a while ago."

...?

Oh, right, that's the guy who was saying something about becoming a Demon King's General and challenged Wiz only to get taken out.

"It seems like you do. Could it be that you took care of him too? Well, we received a message from him before he disappeared, warning us to be wary of you."

That bastard. He actually did such a thing.

Though, yeah, he did say something like that. Something about this town becoming a priority target or something.

So the reason this town is getting attacked is because of me?

No, I couldn't care less about that right now. If I hear anything more, it'd really be bad.

"Ah, don't get the wrong idea. This town has been a target for quite some time. Even before the Generals started disappearing and high bounty targets started getting taken out."

Sto—...!

... ...

"W-Why...?"

I couldn't control my body very well right now, but I still forced those words from my mouth.

I know that if Serena tells me her big secret, the puppling process would just progress further.

I know that, but...

"Because this is the town of fledging adventurers. Because this is the town of beginnings. I might be a Demon King's General, but I'm still a human. I even used to be an adventurer, you know? And of course, when I first started as an adventurer, I was directed to this town. Everyone picked up their first quest here. This is the town of beginners, Axel. The weakest monsters all over the world are purposely cultivated and given a breeding population here. A town specifically meant to raise newbie adventurers."

It'd be like the starting town in a game.

It's supposed to be a town for beginners, but for some reason, I've been through a lot of hardship in this town.

“Then, what would happen if this place were to be destroyed? Goblins might be known as a staple training target, but even their rusty blades are dangerous to newbie adventurers fresh out of the gates. Giant frogs can be taken down as long as you get enough people on your side, and the only place where they breed is here. If this town didn’t exist, exactly where would newbie adventurers go to train?”

... I see.

“Do you get it? Apart from a few exceptions like the Crimson Demons with their mysterious training method, all famous adventurers had their start in this very town. They raise their levels here before setting off towards other towns. Unless they have some special reason, most adventurers will stay in this town until they gain quite a few levels under their belt. And those people will eventually end up facing off against us.”

I can’t hear any more of this...

“Now that the people bearing strange names have stopped showing up, if this town disappears too, the recruitment of adventurers will cease entirely... You know of the strongest of the Demon King’s Generals? The Demon King’s daughter? She’s currently planning a large scale attack on the fortresses along the frontlinew and the capital. That will surely cause significant casualties amongst the adventurers... And, if those guys who are desperately holding the line and awaiting new reinforcements were to hear that the training ground of new adventurers, the town of Axel is destroyed....”

... Their morale would naturally take a huge blow.

In this world that’s crawling with monsters, who knows how many years it would take to rebuild a town?

Aah... My consciousness is going...

“... I guess you’re nearing your limit. This power isn’t a curse. No matter what kind of person you are, there’s no way you can resist it. Especially not a man like you. But don’t worry. If I give you an order you really hate, you’ll still be able to resist. It might cause you great pain, though. But it’s you we are talking about. I’m sure you won’t simply lay back and submit to being my puppet... Now, let me enjoy finding out exactly how much you will resist my orders...!”

Serena happily laughed.

And at long last, my thoughts ceased entirely...

—At the very edge of my consciousness, I heard Serena’s gentle voice.

“Now, listen very closely... You feel something at the depths of your heart, don’t you? That’s all the humiliation, injustice, and ridicule you’ve suffered... Think back. You’ve been looked down on by the inhabitants of this town, right? Have you ever been laughed at for having the weakest job? Have your companions ever slowed you down or gotten in your way?”

Those words flowed sweetly into my chest.

“Yes, why do you have to always clean up after everyone? There’s no need to hold it in any longer. Throw away your restraints, your common sense, your morality, your conscience. Throw them all away... Now, it’s time to take your revenge along with me. Very soon, my friends will gather in this town. When that time comes, you will help us alongside the other puppets. Now, it’s time to take your revenge. Revenge on the inhabitants of this town, and your former companions—!”

“—Wiz, are you okay? Do you know who I am?”

“...? Aqua-sama? And Vanir-san? What’s the matter? Why are the two of you so close to me?”

“Hmm, if you don’t remember what happened, then there’s no need to worry yourself. It’s best not to force yourself to remember.”

“Y-Yeah! If you don’t remember, it’s probably best not to dwell on it.”

Aqua, squatting next to Wiz who’s laying on the ground, got to her feet and turned towards me.

“Kazuma! We should head home soon. It’s kind of scary watching Darkness and Megumin rummage around the house like bears while you were out. Let’s head home and calm those two down.”

She approached Serena-sama without any hint of wariness at all and extended a hand towards me...

... I deftly dodged Aqua’s outstretched hand.

“....?”

Aqua tilted her head and gave me a confused look.

Serena-sama seemed really amused to see her like that.

She straightened her shoulders and said with a hint of laughter.

“This man said he doesn’t want to go back to you guys anymore. He wants to become my companion. Isn’t that right, Kazuma? You don’t need those potions anymore, do you? Come on, tell it to them.”

In response to Serena-sama’s words, I said.

“I’ll be of the Regina cult as of today. I’ll be working together with Serena-sama from now on, so send my regards to the rest for me.”

Part 9

Serena-sama who's walking in front of me is thinking about something.

What is she thinking about? Is something troubling her, I wonder?

... Just then, Serena-sama suddenly stopped and turned to face me.

"Say, you're currently pupeted right now, right? You'll do anything I say, right?"

Why would she ask me something that's so obvious?

"Of course, Serena-sama. Even If you would order me to hold up your breasts in place of your bra for an entire day, I would happily obey."

"A-Ah, is that so... I wouldn't give you such a ridiculous order, so don't worry. None of the other puppets have ever declared that they would join the Regina cult, so I just... but well, there's no need to worry about that."

Serena-sama turned back and continued walking.

Then, in a voice like she's been holding this back for a long time, she whispered.

"... Finally..."

It's a voice just soft enough to be heard by me.

"Do you know how long I have been waiting for this moment!? Do you have any idea how much shame I endured at the hands of the Demon King's Army after Regina-sama was captured and sealed by the Crimson Demons!?"

"No, I do not."

“Is that so? Then just stay silent and listen! A few years ago, the seal on Regina-sama was broken for some reason. And I only recently regained my powers. One day, out of the blue, the power Regina-sama gave me suddenly increased several fold! Yes, Regina-sama gave me who have been struggling for so long her blessings!”

“Isn’t that because the Regina cult was just you at that moment?”

“I told to you listen quietly! I’m in a good mood right now, so don’t ruin it!”

—After telling everyone that I joined the Regina cult.

Aqua cried and gabbered about something, but Serena let out a triumphant laugh before leading me away, and we quickly left the area.

Incidentally, I gave the puppetry curing potion to Aqua to shut her up.

It doesn’t seem like Aqua knows what that potion is, however.

Now that I’ve become Serena-sama’s devout subordinate, there’s no need for me to have such a dangerous item.

After parting ways, it seems like Serena has started looking for a new base of operations now that she gained such an excellent pawn in the form of me.

Also, it seems like she relaxed her control over the other adventurers to put more focus on me. Just in case.

She said something about control capacity or whatever.

Perhaps the number of people she could puppet at once is limited.

And if she's putting so much effort on me, that just means she requires my abilities that badly.

As I walked behind Serena who was in a great mood, I had to ask her a burning question.

"Incidentally, Serena-sama, what're the conditions to remove the puppet status from me?"

Serena-sama immediately stopped upon hearing my question.

"... You are really puppeted, right? Why do you need to know that information?"

She said in a harsh tone without turning back.

"It's nothing major, but I'd be quite troubled if I were to be released from Serena-sama's puppetry. I simply wish to keep my distance from any situations that seem like they'd be able to do so."

I casually answered, and Serena turned back in surprise.

Eventually, she grabbed my face with both hands and stared deeply at my face.

"... You...? ... Yes, I can feel the power of Regina-sama coming from you. What's happening here? Could that be it? Did I put too much power into it and overdo the brainwashing...? Rather than ending up as a puppet, it's more like I've gained a devoted underling capable of independent thought... Well, no matter. It suits my purposes just fine. Keep at it."

"Of course, Serena-sama."

She nodded contentedly in response to my instant reply.

"Very well, I shall tell you. This will be helpful to you too. The first is if your feelings of owing something to me were to change, but you

already know that. Next is a strong faith... You know, back when you bound me up and exposed my panties to my puppets, they regained their senses for an instant, right? Those kinds of 'stroke of good luck' events that would make people thank their god are particularly dangerous. I don't know what kind of god you worship, but do take note of that."

"Don't worry, the one I worship is Regina-sama. If something erotic were to happen as you were out doing your everyday business, the one I would be thanking is Regina-sama."

"I-Is that so...? Don't push yourself. There's not a single human who doesn't have faith in something. It doesn't have to be towards a god, even if such notions were directed to a devil or a Dark Goddess, it'd still be effective. What did you worship before you started worshipping Regina-sama?"

"No, I didn't worship anything."

"Haha, I see. Well, you don't have to tell me if you don't want to. Let's get along, partner."

Serena-sama called me her partner.

I'll have to really put in some work for her sake.

We've arrived at the doorstep of a high class seeming inn.

"Right, we'll stay here for today. It's a little on the expensive side, but it's fine every once in a while. Kazuma, go pay for it."

"I refuse."

I immediately rejected Serena's request.

"... What did you just say?"

“I said I refuse. If I pay for your stay here, my feelings of owing something to you will be resolved. The puppetry on me will be dispelled.”

“Aah... right... But, still.... O-Oh, well...”

Serena-sama seemed to be thinking about something as she took out her wallet.

And inside her wallet is...

“Ah! Dammit, I forgot that Vanir took all my money again! Hey, Kazuma, I don’t care if it voids the puppetry or whatever, just lend me some money! I’ll release a few puppets to strengthen my control over you. Just lending me a bit of money won’t...”

“You can’t do that, Serena-sama! Getting complacent like that is especially dangerous! All the villains I know of in manga and games always end up losing because they get complacent at the very end. Don’t worry, I’ll just go borrow some money from those people over there.”

“M-Manga? Game? ... O-Oh, very well, thank you... Ah, but, wouldn’t that just end up with you clearing your feelings of indebtedness too...?”

Leaving Serena-sama who was mumbling something behind, I approached a couple of the adventurers who just happened to be milling around the entrance.

“Sorry, can I have a moment? You see, Serena-sama here has a bit of money trouble and can’t afford to pay for the inn right now. She’s poor and has few survival skills, so won’t you take some pity on her and gift a bit of offering to her?”

“Eeh!?”

Serena let out a surprised voice from behind me.

The adventurer in front of me took out his wallet without a word of complaint.

“Serena-sama is in trouble? Leave it to me, I’ll give poor Serena-sama... Serena-sama? Why did I start attaching -sama to her name? ... Ah, nevermind. Here. Seriously, what’s a priest doing asking for money? Please work harder, Serena-san.”

“Ah... U-Um... Thank you very much.”

Serena-sama said with a blush.

The adventurer handed over a small sum of money before disappearing off somewhere.

It seems like that adventurer was one of Serena-sama’s followers.

His puppetry was broken just now, but that won’t be a problem.

Serena-sama has me, after all.

“Aah... That man was a pretty skilled adventurer... Oh well. Come on, Kazuma, hurry up and pay for the room with that money.”

“Roger that. But, before that...”

Before leaving for the counter, I approached the tired seeming Serena.

And grabbed her bountiful chest with both hands.

Then, I wordlessly started groping them.



...

I silently stared into Serena-sama's eyes as I enjoyed the soft sensation in my palms.

Suddenly, my hands were knocked away by Serena-sama.

"Y-Y-You little!? W-What are you doing!? Just what are you doing!?"

Stepping back in a panic, Serena screamed without a care for the people who are around us.

"Calm down, Serena-sama. You're attracting attention."

"That's my line! Yeah, people are watching! What are you doing!? Why did you suddenly start fondling my boobs!"

What a strange question.

"What are you saying? I just borrowed money for your sake, you know? In other words, the feeling of obligation I hold towards you just weakened. Thus, if I don't get some repayment from you, my puppetry will be dissolved. But, right now, Serena-sama doesn't have any money, so I have to get my repayment through your body."

"!?!?!? I-Is that so? No, wait, isn't it odd? I mean, that adventurer earlier said he'd give the money to me... I attracted such gazes and even lost a puppet... It's like I just set myself up... ?"

Leaving Serena-sama who was saying some incomprehensible things behind, I headed over to the counter to rent a room for the night.

“—Sigh... Did I get myself a trump card, or did I not... I don’t even know for sure right now...”

Letting out a sigh, Serena-sama closed her eyes and collapsed onto the bed.

Is she worried about something, I wonder?

She does look tired. Perhaps I should give her a massage.

“You seem exhausted, Serena-sama. Would you like me to give you a shoulder massage?”

“Hmm? Ah, sure, go ahead...”

Serena opened one of her eyes and lazily gazed up at me...

“... Wait, why are you in this room?”

And suddenly asked something weird.

“Well, the money we got is only enough to pay for one room... Ah, I won’t complain even if the bed is narrow, so don’t mind me.”

“I will mind! I will mind it very much! What’s with you!? Why are you climbing into my bed like it’s only natural? Weren’t you more of a coward when it came to women!?”

“Serena-sama, you were the one who ordered me, didn’t you? ... Throw away your restraints, your common sense, your morality, your conscience. Throw them all away... I’m simply following your orders. It feels like I’ve been reborn.”

“So that’s it!!!!”

Serena-sama jumped from her bed and cradled her head between her hands.

Then, in a tired voice, she said.

“... Say, if I rescind that order, will you still feel like you owe me a huge debt?”

“Thanks to you removing the limiters on my heart, I’m actually enjoying life quite a bit right now. If you ask me to regain my senses again, that blow probably couldn’t be smoothed over by just letting me fondle your breasts for a bit.”

“Gurk...”

Serena-sama groaned and curled up into a ball while still clutching her head.

“You know... Why do I have to prepare a place to sleep for you? Just go find a place to sleep on your own... The other puppets all see to their own accommodations.”

“My circumstances are a little special. Unlike the other adventurers, thanks to Serena-sama, I can’t go back home right now. You need to properly support me there.”

“Gurk... B-But, well, now that I have brought you over to my side, my victory is more or less assured. I’m going to work you to the bone! Be prepared for some hard work tomorrow!”

After hearing my reply, Serena-sama clenched her fist and raised her voice as though she was trying to convince herself.

3

A GODDESS'S PROTECTION
UPON THIS PUPPET!



Part 1

O Month, X Day

Serena-sama said that there's something strange with the state of my puppetry.

First off, it seems like she is dissatisfied with the way I haven't done any work at all.

I seem to be obedient, but am strangely rebellious and have done nothing but get in the way, or so she says. That made her unreasonably angry, for some reason.

She ordered me to keep this diary in order to understand what's going on in my heart.

Demanding to show my diary to someone else would require substantial compensation.

Thusly, I've asked her to call me Kazuma-sama while pushing her breasts onto me every night before bed.

Serena-sama made a face like she just lost an important part of herself in the process.

Still, Serena-sama reads this diary every day.

In other words, I will be able to harass her with what I write in this diary.

Thusly, I'll write an erotic short story every day after each entry.

Right, then, let's get to it...

O Month, Δ Day

Serena-sama told me to stop writing erotic stories.

I told her that making such an unreasonable order will require compensation, and she cursed me before giving up on the matter.

Her face is still on the verge of tears right now. It's quite a precious sight.

I think I'll use Serena-sama as the main character for my erotic story today.

She keeps saying that there's definitely something wrong with the state of my puppetry.

That it's impossible for a puppet to speak and write so fluently and such.

... Well, let's leave that aside and continue with my entry.

What should I write about today...

"Just then, I felt something soft press against my back. Yes, a naked Serena-sama is currently pressing both her peaks against my body. 'Kazuma-sama, I can't hold myself back anymore...' Oh dear... I carefully embraced Serena-sama who was looking at me with puppy eyes..."

Oh, come on now, Serena-sama. Don't look over the shoulder of someone writing his diary and raise a fuss about it.

I'll require a great amount of compensation, you know?

O Month, O Day

Serena-sama came to me today and tearfully begged to stop writing erotic stories involving her.

The moment I said that obeying such an unreasonable order would require compensation, she punched me.

But a mysterious phenomenon happened when she did that.

A bruise appeared on Serena-sama at the exact same spot where she hit me.

Serena-sama was in a panic trying to figure out what happened, but as compensation for having hit me, I asked her to do a hundred squats with her hands behind her head while clad in nothing but her underwear.

She repeatedly cursed me, but her sweat-drenched form as she did squats in front of me was a really beautiful sight.

Let's have her do push-ups next time.

△ Month, X Day

I discovered a really serious matter today.

Apparently, Serena-sama was involved in agitating the Moguninnin, the ninja-like robot that I fought with at the Crimson Demon Village.

It seems like she tried to put it under her control, but it was too strong to be easily bound and went berserk because of that attempt.

In other words, I went through all those troubles because of Serena-sama.

Doesn't that mean that Serena-sama owes me big because of what I went through?

As I was musing about what exactly I should get her to do this time, she punched me on the head. For some reason, that caused the same bump to appear on her head.

Serena-sama seems really confused as to what's going on.

Seeing her rolling around in pain and holding back tears with a confused expression was yet another lovely sight.

X Month, X Day

Serena-sama came home with tears clinging to her eyes.

It seems like she ran into Vanir when she visited the guild to gather more puppets.

Apparently, he threatened her, saying that he opened a consultation office first and whatnot.

Serena-sama really doesn't deal well with Vanir, so she quickly paid up to resolve this territorial dispute and once again came home penniless.

Thanks to that, she wasn't able to eat anything today.

Or so she told me while crying.

Seeing her miserable form while I was eating dinner made tonight's sukiyaki stew taste really delicious.

Δ Month, O Day

It seems like Aqua, Megumin, and Darkness were asking around for my whereabouts.

Come to think of it, I had amazing comrades who would look out for my well-being.

I told Serena-sama that if I had to be kept away from them, that would require its own compensation as well.

Serena-sama went 'Just paying for your room is giving me a ton of trouble as it is, so why do I have to deal with nothing but your selfish requests as well!?' and finally broke down in tears.

She said she was considering renting a cheaper place now that she has lost her consultation office at the guild.

I told her that I was used to living in a mansion, so if she tells me to live in more squalid conditions, that'll require its own compensation...

She fell silent and went back to doing her side jobs.

I told her that she could just work as an adventurer and earn easy money with those skills she had as a priest, but she said something about her job being listed as 'Dark Priest' on her adventurer's card, so she can't earn money through questing.

That's why she has never accepted a reward from the guild until now.

Plus, it'd be some time before the Demon King's army is ready to make their move, so she'll have to stand by in this town for quite a while yet.

In the event of an attack, I and the other puppets would be assisting them from the inside.

Serena-sama was staring enviously at the high quality roasted meat that I had for dinner.

Of course, I couldn't just give it to her.

If I did so, the puppetry on me would be cured.

Yes, I'll keep owing Serena-sama more and more, and eventually become her devoted right hand.

Incidentally, her dinner for today was a single cup of corn soup.

□ Month, O Day

It's been quite some time since I started living with Serena.

Recently, Serena-sama has really started snapping under the pressure.

It seems like she's been going through a lot to afford me my luxurious lifestyle.

But Serena-sama was the one who told me to cast away my restraint in the first place.

There's nothing I can do about that.

She had to borrow money from all her formerly puppeted adventurers, so it seems like the only person she can count on as her underling right now is me.

Recently, she's even started flashing passersby her panties to puppet them so she could take their money, and this has run her afoul of the police.

They lectured her about adult business laws and such and took away all the money she earned.

Right now, Serena-sama seems to be getting quite close to her limit.

I told her she could just repay me with her body, and she asked ‘How much would it take for you to live on your own?’

When I asked her to go into more detail, Serena-sama said some really strange things.

She’ll remove the puppet status from me, so I can go wherever I please.

Serena-sama mentioned that I can resist if she gave me an order I really disliked.

I endured quite a bit of pain in order to resist that order, and at that moment, Serena-sama started acting oddly as well.

When I asked her what she was doing, she said she was offering a prayer to Regina-sama and was in the middle of forcibly removing the puppet status from me.

It seems like Serena-sama has lost her mind.

I fiercely resisted Serena-sama’s attempts and offered a prayer to the goddess I hold deeply in my heart as well.

O great Regina-sama, please grant me strength...

X Month, O Day

Someone threw a rock at my window.

The culprit was a somewhat familiar-seeming blonde member of the Axis Cult.

It seems like she wasn’t happy with how Serena-sama was spreading her faith within the town.

Serena-sama turned red with rage and flew out of the inn, but the Axis Cultist managed to escape by the skin of her teeth.

It seems like she had been accusing her of being a ‘whore who gains followers by flashing her panties’ and spreading such rumours about her.

The neighbourhood housewives and such seemed to be always gossiping about Serena-sama whenever I pass them by as of late, so the rumor definitely managed to take root.

Serena-sama started saying something about how the good name of Regina-sama was besmirched and such as she broke down in tears.

She was looking at me with teary eyes, so I grabbed her hand and nodded.

“Comforting you will cost 5000 eris and your breasts.”

O Month, X Day

Serena-sama has been acting very strange lately.

She’s been giving me a lot of immensely reckless orders and paying no heed to any compensation, almost as if she wants to break me from my puppetry.

As a devoted follower of Regina-sama, and as an excellent subordinate of Serena, I naturally asked for her to repay me with her body.

Serena-sama would be troubled if the puppetry were to be removed.

In response to my gentlemanly teasing, Serena-sama tiredly said that she’ll be taking me somewhere tomorrow.

Does she plan to finally cross the line?

I'm way too excited to sleep right now.

Just in case, I'll give my body a thorough wash tomorrow.

Part 2

“...”

Serena-sama raised her head from the diary I wrote.

Closing it, she let out a sigh.

“I was thinking of returning you to that Priest today-”

“I refuse.”

Upon hearing my immediate reply, Serena-sama let out another deep sigh.

She has slimmed down quite a bit since when I first met her.

In contrast, I look particularly healthy.

It must have been due to how I've been living my life to its fullest these past few days.

Serena-sama wordlessly took my hand in hers.

And then...

“Ow!”

She suddenly stabbed the tip of my finger with a toothpick that she had in her other hand.

Of course, blood flowed from the prick.

At the same time, blood flowed from the same spot on Serena-sama's finger and dripped to the floor.

“You really didn't believe in anything before? You've completely become a Regina cultist!”

The blood drained from Serena-sama's face as she said that.

What are you saying now?

Is it bad if I am a Regina cultist?

“I’ve said it all this time, didn’t I? I didn’t believe in anything before, but now I only worship Regina-sama.”

“As if such a person could exist in this world! Whether it’s a god or a dark god or a devil, most everyone here will have their faith in something!”

“Well, I wasn’t from this country in the first place. Plus, it’s not that unusual where I come from. There are plenty of people who don’t subscribe to any particular faith where I used to live.”

“Wha-!?”

Serena-sama seemed at a loss for words.

“S-Seriously?”

“I’m serious. Ah, though perhaps it’s slightly inaccurate to say they don’t have a faith. Most of my countrymen throw a big celebration for the birthday of a major prophet for one of the sects, then the next month they’ll ring the bells of a different sect to welcome the new year. And when they get older, they’ll follow the traditions of a sect known as Shinto to pray for their well being for the next year.”

“Is your country picking a fight with the Priests?”

Even if you say that...

After a moment of silence, Serena-sama took in a deep breath.

“What should I do... How do I break the puppetry on you? Even if I try to repay what you owe me, you stubbornly refuse to accept it. When I order you to get out of the room, you start resisting fiercely

despite the pain. And now that you're a Regina Cultist, if I try to lay a hand on you, the curse of vengeance will..."

She's saying some really dangerous things.

"Ah, dammit! What should I do! What should I... Hey, what can I do to get you to stay away from me!?"

"Because of what you did when you asked me to follow you, my relationship with my companions is in tatters. It'd be troublesome if you don't take responsibility for—"

"AAAAAAA! I CAN'T HEAR YOU! I CAN'T HEAR YOU! ... Ah, right! Hey, didn't you get a potion that cures puppetry along with that forbidden potion series that Vanir gave you? What happened to that?"

Serena-sama tearfully clung onto me. .

If I recall...

"I gave it to that priest with the ability to turn any liquid she touches into water..."

"Aaaaaah! Of all the people in the world, why did you have to give it to someone with such a power!?"

Serena-sama dashed out of the room as she said that.

"How did it end up this way... It was going so well, so where did I go wrong!? Dammit, I was so close...! The puppeting of the adventurers was proceeding smoothly, and I would've completed my preparations with just a little more time...! Just where did I go wrong!?"

As she ran, she angrily muttered to herself.

I chased after her.

“It’ll be fine, Serena-sama. You have me, don’t you?”

“You are the cause of all of my problems!”

As though something finally snapped within her, Serena-sama suddenly started strangling me.

“You...! You wouldn’t listen to a word I say and made nothing but selfish requests! That’s why I... Gurk!”

“Gurk! ... S-Serena-sama, if you strangle me, then you’ll also...!”

She grabbed my throat and started strangling me, but started sputtering and coughing herself not too long after and let go.

“Dammit...! Dammit...! Dammit all! Why...!? Why did you become a cultist so easily...!? Choosing a god to serve is a once in a lifetime decision, so at least put some thought into it!”

Serena-sama smacked me repeatedly in the chest before collapsing to the ground.

Judging from the waver in her voice, she’s probably crying.

“Even if you say that, there were a ton of different faiths in the country I came from... They say there are eight million gods in the country I used to live in... So adopting a faith isn’t really that heavy a decision. I heard there are even people who worship a flying spaghetti monster or something.”

“I hate your country... I hate it so very much...”

Serena-sama was lying on the ground, shaking and covering her face.

I flipped up her skirt and took a peek underneath.

I need to make sure to get compensated after she strangled me just now.

“... You like black, I see.”

“... Naaaaaaaaagh!”

Serena-sama stood up and batted my hand away.

“I’m going to your mansion! You’ll probably follow me even if I tell you not to, so just hurry up!”

“Is that an order? Then, I would need some compensation—”

“Then fine, stay here!”

“You want me to watch the house all by myself? Putting me through such boredom would require a really large amount of compensation.”

“No, no, just shut up! Shush! Talking to you right now makes my head hurt!”

Serena-sama shouted without paying any heed to keeping up appearances and set off in the direction of my mansion.

After recent events, her reputation in this town is in complete tatters.

Even rumours like her being a slut who flashes her panties in public have taken root in the town.

I have no idea how she has fallen this far, but she certainly has my condolences.

Serena-sama sped down the streets without any attempt at keeping her true personality hidden, and before long, we found ourselves in front of my nostalgic mansion.

She barely took a moment to catch her breath before banging on the door.

“Open up! You’re in here, right!? Open up! I’m here to return your precious companion! Open up!”

However, no one responded to her calls.

It seems like the house is empty at the moment.

“Dammit! Why now of all times...! Hey, come on, let’s go! They might be at the guild!”

Saying that, Serena-sama ran off.

... As I moved to follow after her, for some reason, I was taken by the urge to look back towards the mansion.

...

A currently empty and uselessly large mansion.

Whenever I look at it, it feels like something is trying to get my attention...

“Hey, what are you doing!? Stop standing there and hurry up...!”

Serena-sama started agitatedly lecturing me once she noticed I wasn’t following her.

Constantly chasing me to hurry up and whatnot... she really doesn’t know how to take it easy.

I took one last look at the mansion...

... ?

“Hey, come on, hurry up and get over here! Seriously, why the hell do you never listen to my orders!?”

“No, it’s just, Serena-sama, there’s a girl standing at the window...”

I felt like I just caught a glimpse of a young blonde-haired girl peeking out from the second story window.

They should have told me such a cute girl was staying at my mansion. I would've considered coming home if I knew that.

"What are you saying? A girl? Are you starting to hallucinate now? ... No, wait, I can smell the scent of ghosts hanging around this mansion... You didn't gain simple priest powers in addition to the protection of Regina, did you...? No, wait, who cares about that right now? Come on, hurry up."

....?

Something's weighing on my mind.

I took another close look at the mansion, but I couldn't catch even a glimpse of that blonde-haired girl.

... This really bothers me for some reason.

It felt like I saw someone whom I've spent a lot of time with gazing forlornly at me, but...

With one last look at the mansion, I tore my gaze away and chased after Serena-sama.

Part 3

“Huh? Outside the town?”

“Yeah, especially around this time of day.”

Upon reaching the adventurer’s guild, Serena-sama made to dash out again almost immediately after confirming that Aqua wasn’t here, but,

“Why would they go out of town for? Is there something out there?”

“Well, not particularly. It’s more like our mage’s daily routine. They most probably all headed out together. It’s about the right time for it.”

“Tell me about these sorts of things earlier!”

Serena-sama shouted in an anguished voice, paying little regard to all the glances being sent her way.

She might be reaching her limit, in a lot of ways.

Anyway, more importantly...

“Serena-sama, now that we are here, I want to get something to eat too.”

Saying that, I moved to take a seat by a table.

Serena-sama stared enviously at me.

“... I’m not paying for it. I no longer have any need to keep you in my debt.”

“Excuse me, give me everything on the menu, and put it on her tab.”

“I’m not paying for it! I really am not! ... Ah, I’ll... I’ll have a cup of water, please...”

Serena-sama ordered a cup of water to keep up appearances, but she grew increasingly antsy as she waited.

“Hey... Hey, you know where your companions went, right? Just tell me the location. I’ll head on over by myself, you can stay here and enjoy your meal while I do that.”

“I refuse. There’s no way I can let you head out of town on your own. My party consists of an Archmage famous for having a screw loose, an Archpriest whose power possibly exceeds your own, and a girl whose only merit is being tough. I find it very unlikely that my party will sit there and hear you out. If you run into them outside of town, it’ll most likely end in a fight.”

Serena-sama fell silent for a moment.

“... Right, then come with me after you’re done eating what you ordered. There’s something I can try if they are outside of town... I’m going to have to put you to some proper work for once.”

Eventually, Serena-sama confidently said that with a fearless smile on her face—

“—You are quite late, Serena-sama. I almost grew bored waiting for you. What were you doing? You treated me, but with all that waiting, I’d say the balance sheet is just about even now.”

“... Y-You... You really are...”

Serena tiredly grumbled at me upon seeing me sitting on the ground.

Right now, we are at the public cemetery outside of town.

She said to hurry on over to the cemetery after we had our meal, so I quickly ate my fill and headed over ahead of her.

I ordered quite a bit, so, as her subordinate, I gave the remainder of the food to Serena-sama who hadn't eaten anything decent recently.

I told Serena-sama that I needed to use the toilet before sneaking out and leaving the bill to her.

That brings us to now...

"Did it taste good?"

"Yeah, it did! It would've tasted better if I didn't had to wash dishes until now in order to pay for my food!"

She snapped at me.

"Aaah, I don't have time for this! Come on, Kazuma, hurry up and dig up the corpses buried under here! I'm going to puppet them and turn them into my soldiers! I'll start from here, so you go over there!"

"My apologies, for religious reasons, I cannot do something so blasphemous."

"Aren't you a Regina cultist!? What religious reasons could you have!? If you just don't want to touch a corpse, then just say so! Just do it! Stop saying selfish things and start putting in some work for once!"

"Seriously, spare me."

Digging up corpses and the like is definitely out of the question.

As I started enduring the pain to resist her orders, Serena-sama let out an anguished scream.

"Fucking fine! Forget it! Just stand there and watch!"

Almost on the verge of tears, Serena-sama picked up a shovel and got to work.

Because of her delay, it's already close to evening.

They should be returning to the mansion right about now.

Meaning they would already be behind the walls of the town, so if Serena-sama was planning to attack them with an army of puppet zombies...

I wanted to tell her that she wouldn't be able to make use of the corpses she was digging up, but I'd end up repaying part of my debt if I were to give her advice.

Thus, I simply hardened my heart and watched her work.

"Pant... Pant... Y-Yes, I got one! I just need to puppet this guy and let him dig up the rest... Marionette!"

"But you don't have enough puppet points."

"What!?"

Serena-sama turned around with a surprised look on her face.

And, just as I said, the corpse didn't move at all.

"H-Hey, what do you mean by puppet points!? What exactly is going..."

Serena-sama mused for a moment, before bringing her hands together in realization.

"You're talking about the amount of control power I have invested in you! Don't give it such a flippant name! Hey, Kazuma, don't resist, you hear? I'm going to pull back a bit of the power I have invested in you to keep you a puppet. Really, don't resist, you hear!? I really

want to get rid of you, but if I release you from my hold right now, you'll definitely get in my way. So, really, you get it? I'm reducing my hold on you to increase the number of puppets under my control, so, seriously, don't resist."

"You know, with how insistent you are about this, it almost sounds like set up for a punchline. Is it fine for me to take it as such?"

"Of course not! Seriously, don't resist. Right, here goes... I just told you not to resist! You're my puppet, so listen to my orders already!"

I fought fiercely to hold on to Serena-sama's power as it tried to flow out from my body.

She already has me. She has no need for any other puppets.

Eventually, Serena-sama tearfully grabbed me by the collar and started strangling me.

"G-Gurk... W-Wait, Serena-sama, please listen to me! After all the time you spent washing dishes, it's already close to evening... Those three would probably be back at home by now—"

"Tell me that sooner! In the first place, whose fault do you think it is that I had to spend all that time washing dishes!? Fuck this shiiiit!"

After screaming something that no respectable woman should say, Serena-sama started back towards my mansion without bothering to wipe the tears flowing down her face—

—Serena-sama looks utterly wiped out at the moment.

Seeing a beautiful girl with such an exhausted look on her face isn't too bad either.

Serena-sama tiredly walked up towards the door of my mansion and started beating on it.

It seems like she's too exhausted to even raise her voice right now.

Eventually, a soft voice came from the other side of the door.

"Who is it at this time of day? I'd welcome you if you're a salesman, but if you're a religious solicitor, go elsewhere!"

That's Aqua's lifeless voice that I hadn't heard in some time.

"It's me. I'm here to return your man to you."

The mansion fell silent after Serena-sama said those words.

After a short while, the door opened just a crack.

And peeking out from beyond that crack was Aqua's doubtful gaze.

"Kazuma-san? ... Really? Are you really...?"

In a voice filled with trepidation, Aqua said while peeking through the door.

At the same time, a loud bam could be heard from behind her, followed by the stomping of rapidly approaching footsteps.

Serena-sama leaned over to my ear and whispered.

"Don't do anything to mess this up, you hear? If you end up back inside, I'll definitely give you a worthy reward."

"Why don't you just give it to me now?"

An anguished expression flashed across Serena-sama's face for a moment before she clasped her hands and stood back up.

Not long after, the front door opened, and standing behind a somewhat fidgety Aqua were Megumin and Darkness.

The two of them brightened up upon seeing my face.

And then...

“... Can I ask what that man is doing?”

Megumin sternly asked.

By that man, is she referring to...

“Don’t worry about that. Actually, I’m here to return him.”

Yes, she’s probably referring to me who’s currently kneeling besides Serena-sama and brazenly taking a look up her skirt.

The three of them stared dumbly at us.

After a short pause, Megumin approached us with barely concealed anger written all over her face.

“... Kazuma, what exactly are you doing? It really is strange for such a spineless person to be doing such acts in broad daylight. I know you like doing this sort of things, but at least try to pass it off as an accident or cover it with an excuse. You use all kinds of underhanded tricks when doing such things with me, but now...”

Something bothered me about Megumin’s hesitant words.

This is... I wonder what it is?

“... Even when I make advances on him, he always gets scared and chickens out before long. This is both his good point and a bad point. Just what did you do to get him to act like this? In the first place, there’s been a lot of rumours about you and Kazuma these past few days. Just what do you mean by you’re returning him? Rendering him into such a pathetic state... This... This is...”

Darkness continued where Megumin left off.

This is... Just what is this feeling?

“... Actually, we don’t need such a Kazuma. If you’re going to return him, put him back in his original packaging. Taking something from someone and returning it after you broke it is quite horrible, don’t you think?”

And finally, Aqua said that...

There’s plenty I want to say about her referring to me as unneeded and broken and whatnot, but Serena-sama forbade me to speak right now.

I’m a little too busy looking at her panties anyway.

Just then, Serena-sama extended a hand towards Aqua.

“Let’s strike a deal. I’ll return him to normal. In return, you’ll give me that potion he gave to you. If you do that, I’ll properly bring him back to his senses and give him back to you.”

At those words, Aqua looked down towards the potion she was clutching protectively against her chest.

And then...

“I refuse. This is something Kazuma-san gave me before he collapsed from stress. There’s no way I will give it to you. What are you going to use this potion for? What did that strange devil say to you? Tell me what you intend to do with this potion.”

Serena-sama’s teeth made a *krit* noise from how strongly she’s been clenching them.

She’s probably really close to her limit after everything I’ve put her through.

“... You should listen to what I’m saying before I lose it. It wouldn’t do for you to look down on me. I’m still a—”

Serena-sama softly started, but before she could finish,

“It’s something Kazuma gave to me, so it’s really important! I refuse!”

“Fine, very well. Our negotiations are over. Eat this!”

Serena-sama jabbed a finger towards Aqua and shouted.

Seeing that, Darkness ran to place herself in front of Aqua.

“Death!”

A purple glow emerged from Serena-sama’s finger.

However...

“... Huh?”

It lasted barely an instant before fading away, seemingly without accomplishing anything.

“Get her!”

Aqua shouted, and quickly leapt onto Serena who was still in shock.

Part 4

After Serena-sama was pushed to the ground, Darkness straddled her.

Darkness isn't wearing any armour right now, but her well-trained body gave her more than enough strength to subdue a priest.

"Dammit, my magic...! Why!? Regina-sama! Regina-sama! Grant me strength—"

Serena-sama struggled to escape Darkness's grasp, but she just couldn't compete with her strength.

Seeing that, Darkness tightened her hold on Serena-sama's neck and demanded.

"Now, release your curse on this man... W-What's this? I can't breathe...?"

Taking advantage of Darkness's distraction, Serena-sama wrenched one of her hands free and pointed at Darkness.

"Death! Death! Dea—"

She repeatedly chanted, but nothing seemed to befall Darkness, who eventually pushed her hand over her mouth.

Now then, what should I do?

I should probably step in on Serena-sama's side right now, but...

"... Say, you two, I really don't think we need such a thing..."

"Er... Er, well, we probably don't want this thing either."

Could they be referring to me who's peeking up Serena's skirt after she's been restrained, I wonder?

Just then, I felt a slight tug on my sleeve.

Turning around, I saw Megumin, who was smiling for some reason, standing behind me.

She grabbed the hem of her dress and slowly lifted it up...

“... Girls really like black, huh?”

I muttered as I admired the panties Megumin displayed for me up close.

“M-Megumin!?”



“When did you become so bold, Megumin!?”

Ignoring the other two, Megumin cheerfully placed a hand on my head.

“Right, if no one wants him, I’ll be taking this man for myself.”

“Ah!?”

As Megumin triumphantly declared, Darkness let out a flustered squeak.

... Still, this is a really strange situation.

There’s Serena-sama who’s being held in place and gagged by Darkness who’s straddling her.

There’s Megumin who’s gently patting my head as I admired her panties.

And lastly...

“... Oh, I see. The blessings that the minor goddess Regina has been granting you were cut in half, wasn’t it? The blessings of a god are divided amongst their followers. That goddess of yours must be so minor that you are her only true follower, right? All of her powers used to be granted to you, but that’s no longer the case now that Kazuma has become her follower too.”

“!?”

Serena-sama, her mouth still gagged, shot a murderous stare at me.

It seems like turning me into her puppet and converting me to the Regina cult has actually ended up weakening her.

Still, even if you glare at me like that, it’s not going to do anything.

Aqua crouched down next to Serena-sama and motioned to Darkness to loosen her grip on her mouth a little.

“Now, turn Kazuma back to normal.”

“... He’ll return to normal if you give that potion to him. He might resist you, however.”

Serena-sama told Aqua in a resigned manner.

Just what is going on here?

What should I do as Serena-sama’s devoted servant?

Plus, right now, Megumin held onto me with a death grip even as she was still stroking my head with her other hand.

I’m still kneeling while staring intently up Megumin’s skirt, but...

“Fufu, it’s been some time, Kazuma.”

Megumin chuckled. There’s a slight blush on her face, but that was definitely a chuckle.

I would really like to head off to help Serena-sama, but when faced with the devilish temptations of such a happy looking Megumin...

Since Serena-sama unshackled all of my inhibitions, I’m currently unable to go against my instincts.

So there’s really nothing I can do about this. Please forgive me, Serena-sama.

“Still, how did he end up like this? Just what did you do? What’s so fun about turning our Kazuma into such a brazen pervert?”

“I didn’t expect he’d turn out this way either! I just sought to turn him into my puppet. I unleashed his true desires and removed his

inhibitions... But he turned out being way more wilful than I expected."

Serena-sama tearfully bit her lip.

"... It was really horrible, these past few days... He refuses to work no matter what reasons I give, and does perverted stuff whenever he can. He's just been indulging in his desires to live a decadent life..."

"... That doesn't sound very different from how Kazuma was originally... But, nevermind. He'll recover if I use this potion on him, right?"

Saying that, Aqua approached me.

"... I don't really mind if he remains like this..."

Megumin blushingly said even as I continued to look up her skirt.

Though, she still retained her death grip on me, so I couldn't run away even if I wanted to.

If you're really fine with me as I am, I'd really appreciate it if you could let go.

Aqua guardedly approached me and said.

"Hey, Kazuma, I'm going to turn you back to normal now, so don't do anything, okay?"

"This is fine."

Ignoring my instant reply, Aqua crept ever closer to me.

"We can't have that. Just stay right there. Right there is fine..."

"Hey, Priest, don't let your guard down! That man is definitely up to something!"

Serena-sama gave out such a warning, but Aqua responded as though she was stating the obvious.

“I-I know that. How long do you think I’ve been with Kazuma? Megumin, make sure to keep a tight grip on him! Right, then...”

“Steal.”

“Ah!” x3

I briefly averted my gaze from Megumin’s panties and thrust my arm towards Aqua.

Shortly after, Aqua’s potion popped up in my hand.

And then.

“Eat this!”

“Waaaaah!”

I casually threw it at the ground.

Just before the bottle hit the ground, Aqua managed to catch it with a marvelous sliding save.

“That’s why I told you! That man is definitely up to something!”

“There’s nothing I can do about that! You should know this after being on the receiving end of his antics! There’s no telling what this man will do! Megumin! Megumin! Do something!”

Aqua cried out towards Megumin as she cautiously approached me again with the potion clutched tightly to her chest.

Additionally, Serena-sama shouted at me.

“Satou Kazuma! As my puppet, I order you to stay right there! Just stay still for a moment!”

“Oh fine. I don’t really mind him staying this way, but... Here, Kazuma, let me give you a hug... Just stay right here... right... ? Hey, wait, stop squirming and stay still! Aqua! Quickly! The bindings on my chest...!”

“Megumin! Just keep him right there and turn him towards me!”

Something cold splashed against my head as I rubbed my face into Megumin’s chest.

I can feel something leaving my body as that cold liquid flowed down me.

Hey, cut it out. I like being this way.

There’s still stuff I want to do with Serena-sama.

To do that, I need the power of the Dark Goddess of Vengeance, Regina-sama...

“... Huh?”

Why do I need the power of a Goddess of Vengeance again?

And, actually, Serena-sama?

Why did I start addressing a Demon King’s General with -sama...?

Why did I suddenly start worshipping a random unknown goddess in the first place?

... Ah, right.

Just before I lost consciousness, I recall earnestly yearning to take vengeance on the Demon King's General for the wounds she inflicted on our useless goddess...

Part 5

“Kazuma, did it work? Are you healed?”

Something was slapping me.

When I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was Megumin’s face, right in front of me.

… …

“I think I’ll get healed a lot more if you hug me a little more tightly.”

“It seems like you are back. Now... H-Hey, if you’re healed, then please let go of me!”

As Megumin started pulling away from me, I had no choice but to stand up.

It feels like I was having an amazing dream.

And it feels like I had a really wonderful God looking out for me...

... Well, nevermind that.

“Kazuma-san, Kazuma-san, are you okay? If you’re going to worship a minor goddess like Regina that I’ve never even heard of, it’d be better for you to worship me. If you convert right now, I promise you’ll be able to get better with your handwriting and a whole host of other benefits too.”

“I don’t need it. In the first place, why do you think I would worship a minor goddess... Hmm?”

… …

What was it again?

“Hey, what was I worshipping?”

Aqua gave me a shrug.

“Who knows? I don’t really know the details.”

I don’t really know myself, but now’s not the time for that.

“Yo. Seems like you’ve regained your senses.”

Serena greeted me, still pinned to the ground by Darkness who was straddling her.

How should I deal with her now...

“... It’d be a problem to take care of you here.”

“Then, what about letting me go? We lived together for a time, didn’t we? I think that’ll definitely make the both of us happy.”

Serena casually said as she raised both her hands.

She’s very much aware that I can’t do anything to her right now.

... Still, there’s something crawling at the edge of my mind.

For instance, since Aqua can revive me even if I was killed by the curse of vengeance, I could simply take her far away from the city and—

... No, murder is impossible for me.

If I could do such a thing, I wouldn’t have a reputation for being a coward.

Perhaps I could tie her up and abandon her in a dungeon...

No, no, that’s just the same as me murdering her...

Dammit, after spending that last few days together with her, I've gotten somewhat close to her...

Still, just letting her go like this would be...

"Seems like you're conflicted... Say, Kazuma, would you suffer at all if you let me go? If you let me go, I'll make changes to the plan to attack this town. I really want nothing more to do with a town where you live. Really. ... Plus there is that Demon King's Generals in name only, Wiz, and Vanir living here. If we attack this town, there's no telling what they would do. I'll rethink the operation when I make it back to the castle. If you let me go, I won't ever lay a hand on this town again. What do you think? Let's strike a proper deal this time."

Seemingly figuring out what is going through my mind, Serena gave me a slight smile.

"... Hey, Kazuma, just who is this woman? Is she part of the Demon King's army? Should I kill her to protect the inhabitants of this town?"

I grabbed Darkness's shoulder as she started saying some dangerous things.

Darkness is a noble and was, for a time, the lord of this town.

In order to protect the inhabitants of this town, she might very well go through with it.

Hearing Darkness's words, I steeled my resolve.

"... Hey, what is that? Why do you still have that with you?"

Serena's expression fell upon seeing what I retrieved from my bag.

"Sorry Serena, our deal is off. It hurts me too, but since we both broke it, let's just call it a mutual default."

What I retrieved from my bag is the set of forbidden potions that Vanir gave to me.

Most of the stuff in that set is useless, but I'm pretty sure there was a level reset potion or something along those lines amongst them.

I always relied on the power of my companions to get through these troublesome situations, but, just this once, I would like to see things through to the end.

If I use the potion on her, my level would probably be reset as well thanks to her curse of vengeance.

"What are you planning... Hey, Kazuma, don't do it. Aren't we friends who've lived together for a time? Come on, let me off."

But, between a NEET who has the weakest class and a General of the Demon King's army, it's fairly obvious who would suffer more if both our levels were reset back to one.

I retrieved the level reset potion from the case and knelt down next to Serena.

"Sorry, I'll have you redo things from level one together with me."

"!?"

Serena started struggling upon hearing that, and Darkness delivered a punch to her stomach.

"Gurk!"

"Uck!? W-What's this? Hey, Kazuma, when I hit this woman, my stomach..."

I quickly instructed Darkness who seemed taken aback.

“If you attack her, any damage you do will be mirrored upon you. Whatever you do, don’t kill her. It seems like a death curse will befall a large area around here should she die.”

“... I see, so that’s why you fell unconscious after you gave her a drop kick that one time.”

Megumin muttered after hearing my explanation.

Darkness, however, wordlessly started pulling on Serena’s cheeks for some reason.

“Ow ow ow! What are you doing!?”

“Aah... You’re still hiding something, right? Come on, out with it! You can’t fool me that easily! *Pant pant...* I-It hurts...! Kuu, but I’m not the sort of person who’d give up so easily...!”

“What are you saying!? Kazuma pretty much knows everything! Ow! Hey, cut it out, there really isn’t anything more I haven’t already told Kazuma! OW! Cut it out! The pain would just go right back to you! Seriously, stop! Stop!”

Darkness started enjoying herself with the effects of Regina’s protection, and Serena desperately struggled under her grip.

I held out the potion in one hand.

“Hey, Kazuma, stop this wom—... W-Wait, stay back! Your level will drop too, you know? Think about it. It’s not like you’d personally benefit if my level drops, right? Seriously, think about it!”

“Well, I’ll just slowly earn my levels back. I’m pretty close to reaching my stat cap anyway, and I have enough money to live comfortably, so there’s no need to rush... Let’s go all the way to the end with your loyal subordinate, Serena-sama. Come on, let’s start over from zero.”

Serena managed to free one of her hands and grabbed Darkness who was pulling on her cheeks.

“You really are the greatest threat to the Demon King’s army.”

“You are exaggerating. I’ll be living a laid back life from now on, so if you ever make it back to the castle, please relay that to the Demon King.”

In response to my seemingly jovial words, Serena pointed her finger at me.

What is she...

... Ah.

“You really are too dangerous to be left alone. If you’ve regained your senses, that means I’m back to being the only worshipper of Regina. All my powers must have returned to me. Farewell, my wilful puppet.”

I grabbed the hand that Serena was using to point at me.

Darkness moved to place her hand back over Serena’s mouth, but Serena was faster.

“Death.”

4

A PROPOSITION FOR
THIS ADVENTURER!



Part 1

“Welcome home, master!”

I found myself in a very familiar white room.

The moment I opened my eyes, a cheerful Eris-sama was standing in front of me.

“... You seem to be enjoying yourself, Eris-sama.”

“You’ve gotten used to coming here by now, so if I didn’t do this, you wouldn’t have a sense of novelty, right? Though, sorry, I suppose it’s not really something I should say considering your situation.”

Saying that, Eris-sama gave me a wry smile.

“... Can you do that one more time?”

“It’s a little weird to say this since I’m the one who did it first, but I won’t be doing that again.”

And she’s always so agreeable whenever she’s Big Boss.

“... S-So what happened to everyone else after she casted Death on me?”

“Darkness punched her in a fit of fury, so both of them are out of it at the moment. Senpai is working on resurrecting you, and Megumin-san is attending to Darkness after tying up the Demon King’s General... Please be at ease. Everyone’s fine.”

I let out a sigh of relief after hearing Eris-sama’s words.

That means that it’s my turn to shine once Aqua revives me.

Honestly speaking, going back to level 1 is quite a heavy price to pay, but it’s the best way I can think of to render Serena powerless.

I've considered several other methods, but I really want to settle things with my own hands.

Feeling the tension bleed from me, I collapsed to the floor and sat crossed legged.

... Still, it's been quite some time since I last died...

This unreasonable world holds no mercy for those that are weak, so such is only to be expected, but is there really nothing I can do to stop dying so often?

I can't help but feel down after being killed so easily.

Getting used to dying isn't something that brings me much joy either.

Eris-sama silently smiled at me.

Just seeing her stand in the center of the room with her hands clasped together made me feel revitalized for some reason.

It's like I'm being released from all my worries.



I thought back to what brought me here.

Why do I have to fight against the Demon King's Generals? Why do I have to deal with nothing but strong enemies ever since I came to this world?

Even after gaining a fortune, I still had to deal with the Demon King's daughter planning an attack on the capital and a hit squad attacking the town and what not...

Ahh, what a pain...

Perhaps it's because I just died, but I can't help but feel depressed.

Still, I have to go back.

Right now, the only one who knows about the Demon King's plans to attack the capital or the hit squad coming to the town is me.

And my level has gone back to one along with Serena's...

Just thinking about what's to come made me heave a sigh.

Eris-sama gave me a worried look.

"Are you alright? ... Well, of course you aren't. You're dead after all..."

Saying that, Eris-sama crouched down to bring her head down to my level and stared at my face with that same worried expression on it.

"Big Boss really is cute, you know? Have you ever considered quitting your work as a goddess and eloping with me to a remote world somewhere?"

"You're going out with Megumin-san. You're going to get divine punishment if you say such things to a goddess while having a partner."

Oh, right, Megumin!

“Eris-sama, you’re not pulling any kind of strange strings to make something get in the way whenever Megumin and I are about to cross the line because you harbour secret affections towards me or anything, are you?”

“Of course not! I wouldn’t do something that stupid! Ah! What’s with that expression? Do you doubt me!?”

Ah, just seeing Eris-sama react to my teasing is breathing life back into my battered soul.

“Kazuma-san! Kazuma-san! Everything’s done on my end, so hurry up and come back.”

And right in this calm moment, the voice of the goddess who isn’t the slightest bit calming broke into the room.

I don’t want to go back to that unreasonable world just yet, so I buried my face in my knees and covered my ears.

“U-Um... Senpai is calling you... I do understand how you feel, but...”

Eris-sama seems quite troubled by my attempts at running away from reality.

“... After dying so many times, I can’t help but be depressed. And when I think that I might die again, I just don’t feel like going back anymore. I’m thinking that maybe it isn’t so bad to get reborn into a new life.”

“That’s... Well, I suppose that’s only natural. Simply dying once is already a pretty big shock... Well, Kazuma-san has died fairly clean deaths so far, so the shock should be quite minimal...”

Eris-sama made a troubled expression for a moment, but eventually, she gave me a warm smile.

“... But, you’ve found wonderful companions in this world and created a quite a few happy memories with them, haven’t you? Don’t you still have things you need to do? There, there, try and remember those happy days...”

I casted my mind back to the experiences I had in this world.

The harsh times I spent living together with Aqua in the stables back when I first came to this world.

The huge debts I got unreasonably burdened with.

Meeting companions who are good at nothing but causing problems, and cleaning up after them.

The town that’s full of weirdos...

And me repeatedly dying as a result.

There’s also the bit about how even though things have been going well with my companions, I still haven’t managed to cross the line.

“... I really think I’d like to be reborn again...”

“Ehh!?”

Maybe I’d ask to get reborn as the pet cat of a rich person back on Earth.

Then I’d leisurely sleep and eat my life away.

“Kazuma-san! Hurry up! Hurry up!”

Aqua's irritating voice broke into the room again.

I gave it my all.

I really gave it my all.

Even if I head back, I get the feeling like I'd end up back here in a jiffy.

"I've decided to be reborn! I'll leave the rest to you! Please tell the other two that I wish them happiness!"

"Eeh!?"

Eris squeaked in shock as I shouted that to no one in particular, but she eventually fell silent.

And then...

"That man is saying stupid stuff again! Stop messing around. Why do you say such stupid things every so often? Do you really like troubling me that much? Are you stupid? Are you really stupid? Is that why you ended up at the beck and call of that priest?!"

"Ah!"

Aqua's reprimand cracked through the air.

"You stop messing around! For whose sake do you think I picked a fight with a Demon King's General in the first place!? I kept fighting with that priest behind everyone's backs to protect this town, you know?! I got brainwashed at the end of that intense battle—"

"Eh, wait, Megumin, what are you doing? Huh?"

... Hey.

“That won’t work on me anymore! I don’t care what kind of pranks or whatever else you do with my body! Unless you start crying and begging me to come back...”

“Megumin, what are you doing!? No, wait, what are you doing!? Kazuma-san! Kazuma-san! Hurry up and come back! If you don’t hurry up...!”

... I won’t be fooled so easily. No matter what you do with my corpse now...

Yes, those kinds of threats will no longer—

“Kazuma-san! Megumin is...! Megumin is saying something about taking your first time or whatever and is doing something really amazing right now! Actually, Megumin, you really shouldn’t be doing that sort of thing in broad daylight!”

You’re tempting me with erotism?!

“... ...”

Seeing me squirming on the ground, Eris-sama seemed to grow colder for some reason.

Ah, what should I do? If I don’t go back, I’ll miss the moment I become an adult...!

But if I go back now, I’ll get teased as an easy guy who fell for Megumin’s seductions easily... No, no, no, but...!

“Hey, Megumin, I don’t think something that big will fit for Kazuma-san’s first time. Kazuma-san’s Kazuma-san’s will definitely break.”

... ...

“Hey, by first time, you mean that!?”

“Megumin, you can’t do that! That’s food! You can’t do that sort of things with food! You’ll get punished!”

“Cut it out! Aqua, I’ll head back right away, so stop her right now!”

“Aaah! Megumin! Megumin! You can’t do that! He said he’s coming back right now, so hurry up and pull his pants—!”

I immediately stood up.

“Anyway, Eris-sama, I have some urgent business to take care of, so I’ll take my leave here.”

I rushed over to the gate and pushed it open...

“Ah, have a safe trip... Wait, no, Kazuma-san! Sorry to bother you when you’re in a rush, but there’s something important I need to say—”

“Right now!? We had plenty of time before this, so why did you wait till now to tell me!? Just come see me as Big Boss after I’ve made it back!”

“Megumin, why do you always do such brash acts!? Come on, he’s coming back soon, so hurry up and get rid of the evidence!”

I briefly turned back to Eris-sama.

She gave me an apologetic look and said,

“The truth is, that world is—”

“Megumin, don’t remove it, put it back on! Oh no, we don’t have enough time—!”

“Sorry, Eris-sama, I really can’t afford to stay right now! Aqua! Stop her! I’ll give you some pocket money later, so stop her!”

There's just no way to maintain any sort of serious atmosphere with Aqua's voice constantly breaking in like this.

"I mean, there's a lot of stuff you can't show to Kazuma...! Ah, Megumin, you can't! You can't! Aah!"

"Don't give up! Don't you dare give up, Aqua! I'll head back right away!"

Eris-sama, her face bright red, shouted as I pushed through the gate.

"That world is currently facing a crisis! At this rate, it's highly possible that the Demon King really will end up wiping out humanity! Please listen to me—!"

—The first thing I saw when I came to was Aqua and Megumin staring at my face.

"Ah! Welcome back, Kazuma! It really was a close one, wasn't it?"

"W-W-Welcome back."

Megumin was blushing slightly and seemed out of breath.

Additionally, she also seems to be hiding something behind her.

When I looked into her eyes, she quickly averted her gaze.

My trousers are in disarray and seemed to be hastily put on.

That really isn't something that puts me at ease.

And behind the two of them were Darkness and Serena lying unconscious across the yard.

"I-I'll go continue seeing to Darkness, okay?"

Saying that, Megumin quickly moved to Darkness's side, almost as if she was running away from me.

I turned my gaze to Aqua who was exceptionally fidgety right now.

"Hey, Aqua."

"What? I stopped her, alright? The two of us looked at your little Kazuma-san, but we didn't do anything, alright!?"

... This-This girl...

After calming myself, I said to Aqua.

"... Say... Do you still want to return to heaven?"

Part 2

“Kazuma! Come on, wake up! It’s morning! Hurry up and wake up!”

The next day.

Without even a single knock, Aqua cheerfully bounced into my room and started pestering me.

I lazily poked my head out from under my blanket, and noticed it's still dim outside my window.

“... What time is it...?”

“It’s just before five.”

It’s too early for this...

When I crawled back under my blanket, Aqua leapt onto my bed.

“Why are you crawling back into your bed!? Come on, wake up! Get dressed and we’ll head to the guild to pick up some quests and raise your level!”

“Spare me~ I was up late drinking last night, so I really want to sleep until evening today... I was celebrating taking down another Demon King’s general yesterday.”

—Yesterday, after I passed Eris-sama’s message to Aqua, I proceeded as planned and reduced both Serena’s and my levels back to one.

I then left the unconscious Serena with the police and told them about everything I knew, but...

Now that she’s been weakened, Serena should no longer be able to cast all those strong curses she was using in this town.

The Knight said that she'd be thoroughly interrogating her.

They'd also be coming up with countermeasures against the Demon King's daughter's invasion plans and the sneak attack on Axel and what not.

I received quite a sum for capturing a Demon King's general and stopping her plans.

... That said, now that I've been reduced back to level one, there really is nothing more I can do.

There's nothing I could've done about the attack on the capital anyways, and the adventurers that Serena puppeted were released from their state, so her plan of helping the invasion force from the inside is a complete non-starter now.

Without aid from the inside, it'd be quite difficult for this town to fall to hostile forces.

Plus, now that the mastermind behind the plan, Serena, has been taken out, it's quite possible that the entire operation would be scrapped.

So that's why I put myself at ease and celebrated my success until the wee hours of the morning...

"Wake up! Wake up! Come on, hurry up and wake up! For the sake of humanity, and for the sake of the future, we're going after the Demon King!"

But Aqua starting saying such things before the sun has risen while repeatedly slapping me on the back.

Defeating the Demon King.

There's a reason why she suddenly started saying such stupid things.

Yes, it's the message from Eris-sama.

"Some hero chosen by the goddess will take care of the Demon King before long... Anyway, good night..."

"The goddess is right here, you know!? I choose you as the hero, so hurry up and wake up!"

—The crisis that Eris-sama mentioned is the same thing that I heard from Serena: The fact that new potential heroes have stopped appearing in this world.

It was originally Aqua's job to give the people from Japan cheat-like powers and send them to this world.

However, ever since the angel took over, it seems like there hasn't been a single person who accepted that deal.

Apparently, the new angel is far too honest and doesn't attempt to dress things up at all.

She tells them about the fate and survival rate of the people who have been sent over, the possible side effects of learning the language, how hard life is in this world, and all kinds of other details.

... In other words, it's only because the person handling the recruitment is Aqua that anyone would accept the deal to be transported to this world.

"You were the one who sent people like me here without explaining everything. I'm sleeping till the afternoon to protest!"

"You always sleep till noon anyways! Come on, a goddess is making a request of you! A beautiful goddess is making a tearful request of you, so why don't you ever listen to me!?"

There are a lot of threats in this world.

Even if the Demon King weren't here, there would still be plenty of threats to humanity.

It seems like heaven realized the value of a goddess that's good at scammi— no, I mean, persuasion, and wants her back as soon as possible.

"Say, is heaven really that short on manpower? Couldn't they just grab a goblin from somewhere to do your work?"

"I won't let things slide if you keep poking fun at me. I'll use voice mimicry magic to imitate that strange devil's voice and laugh for an entire day by your bed."

It'd be one thing if it was back during my time in the stables when I wanted to get her out of my party as soon as possible, but now that I've gained a measure of stability, what possible reason could I have to go after the Demon King?

More to the point, it's way too reckless.

The only reason why I managed to foil Serena's plans and defeat her was because of multiple coincidences conveniently working out in my favour.

And she's considered one of the weakest amongst the Generals.

Not to mention, even as weak as she was, I still got killed at the end.

And you're telling me to go attack her boss in his castle filled wall to wall with his powerful underlings?

Are you an idiot?

I turned my head to look at Aqua who was still straddling me and repeatedly hitting me on the back.

“... We’re talking about the Demon King, you know? There’s no way I can defeat someone like him. Do you really think I look like someone who can defeat the Demon King?”

“Of course not. Even I’m not that delusional.”

... This girl.

“Then what do you want? Even if I raise my level and we head off to the Demon King’s castle, if we aren’t taken out by strong monsters on the way, we’d be surrounded by his forces the moment we reach his castle and get taken out. You, Megumin, and Darkness will end up in a really bad way at their hands. The only one who’d be happy with that is Darkness, you know?”

“Of course I know that. I’ve put some thought into it myself too, you know? All I need you to do is to raise your level enough to bring me close to the castle, that’s all.”

... Oh?

“Well, if you have a decent plan of some sort, I don’t mind hearing you out.”

“Listen well. There was a time when we wanted to head straight for the Demon King’s castle, didn’t we? But then they told us that there’s a barrier around the castle. A barrier maintained by his generals.”

Hmm?

Was there such a thing?

I didn’t feel like it concerned me back then, so I didn’t really pay attention.

Taking my silence as understanding, Aqua continued her explanation.

“And you neutralized another General yesterday. A level one General can’t possibly maintain the barrier. That means that the only generals left supporting the barrier are... how many of them are left now?”

“... There were originally eight of them, right? The first one we encountered was that dullahan Beldia. After that, there’s Vanir, Hans, Sylvia, Wolbach, and now Serena... So, including Wiz, that just leaves two of them.”

“Yes, there are only two generals left! With my amazing goddess power, I can probably destroy a barrier maintained by only two generals if I put some effort into it! It’d be best if I can take down the barrier entirely, but even if that’s impossible, I should be able to open a hole big enough for someone to go through.”

....

“Well, that’s good and all, but how exactly are we going to defeat the Demon King?”

Aqua confidently replied.

“Once the barrier is down, the rest is simple! I’d recruit the help of my precious Axis Cult, the Crimson Demons, and the people running this country! We’ll use those connections you forged in this world and tell them that the barrier around the castle is down!”

So she intends on leaving the hard work to others.

But, well, it’s true that without the barrier, the Demon King would need to station a large amount of his forces around the castle for defence.

Just that alone would heavily shift the tides of battle.

“But what happens if you can’t break the barrier entirely?”

“Then I’ll have to leave it to you.”

Oh?

“Tell me more about that.”

“Using Enemy Detection and Lurk, you can sneak right up to where the Demon King is sleeping and assassinate him.”

“Screw off.”

Ignoring the fuss Aqua is making, I once again covered my head with the blanket.

Part 3

I was having lunch together with Darkness and Megumin in the hall of the mansion.

“Hey, Kazuma, can I have a moment?”

Aqua, a serious expression on her face, slid up to me with her hands behind her back.

It feels like she's about to tell me something important.

“... What’s wrong? You have a really serious look on your face.”

I looked up from the leg of roast duck I was eating and met Aqua’s gaze.

“Please listen to me! I really don’t think it’s good for us to remain like this!”

She gulped before suddenly saying that.

I’m still chewing on the roast duck, but I suppose I should hear her out.

“What do you mean by that?”

“This self indulgent lifestyle! Are you really okay with this? Sleeping until noon and doing nothing but eating and sleeping! You’ve changed! You really have changed, Kazuma-san!”

Where did this come from?

Megumin and Darkness put down their utensils.

“This man has pretty much been this way since forever.”

“Yeah, that’s how he was. Besides, haven’t you been living the same way, Aqua?”

... ...

“Yeah, he might have been the same way before, but I really want the old Kazuma back! The one who was burdened with debts and worked hard every day to earn just a little bit of money!”

“Right, come at me. I’ll turn you into my experience points.”

I stood up with fork in hand, and Aqua guardedly took up a boxing stance.

“What’s wrong? You normally laze around just as much as Kazuma, so where did this come from?”

“The fuss from that priest just got resolved not long ago, so I understand not wanting to go on any quests for a while... Just what brought this on, Aqua?”

Aqua gulped when faced with the questions of those two.

“That’s... well, you know, the duties and responsibilities of an adventurer...”

... ...

“... Or something...”

Aqua trailed off in the face of our disbelieving stares, practically withering as she did.

“As adventurers, we have a responsibility to the people of the world... Gurk... Waaah!”

Being unable to stand our gazes any longer, Aqua wailed and ran away.

“—What’s up with Aqua?”

After finishing her meal, Megumin asked as she helped herself to some after lunch tea.

Darkness was also hanging around, surreptitiously wiping her mouth with her napkin.

“Don’t worry too much about it. She just got bitten by a strange bug that made her want to defeat the Demon King, that’s all.”

“Demon King!?”

The two of them shouted the moment I mentioned the Demon King.

“The Demon King, huh? Very well, in order to cement my status as the strongest, let’s go defeat the Demon King. You pretty much defeated Serena on your own, and the battle against the Ninnin was over too quickly. Plus, the victory felt somewhat hollow anyways.”

Since when did you become the strongest?

And don’t propose doing something like that in the same tone of voice you would use to ask someone to pick something up at the convenience store.

“... The Demon King, huh... He must have a really strong attack... Perhaps strong enough to destroy my precious armour in a single blow...”

And this pervert is staring off into space with a dreamy expression and flushed cheeks.

It’s been some time since I was last reminded of this, but, yeah, these are the sort of people these two are.

“I’ll just say this up front, I’m not heading out to fight him. Don’t misunderstand me just because we happened to take out a few of his Generals. If I have to say, our party is more on the useless side,

so... Even if you give me those puppy dog eyes, I'm still not heading out."

"—Seriously, what's up with her?"

That night.

I was laying in my room, using my hands as a pillow as I mulled over things.

Seriously, just what is she thinking?

Sure, I forcibly dragged her into this world, so I can understand her wanting to go back now that it's a possibility.

Still, I'm a little taken aback by how quickly she came to this decision.

Is our relationship really that shallow?

... Well, from what Megumin told me, it seems like she got really depressed recently after the actions of the puppeted adventurers made her feel unneeded.

I'm sure that has some influence on what she's trying to do now.

She's an idiot, but even she's not that carefree...

... ...

Or perhaps she's just blinded by how heaven needs her and hasn't thought about how she won't be able to see us again if she goes back.

Well, goddesses have their own thought processes and values.

She might be that way, but she's still technically a goddess with ardent believers of her own.

If she puts her mind to it, even a Demon King...

A Demon King...

... Nah, that's impossible.

How long was I asleep for, I wonder?

I heard a voice coming from quite some distance away.

“... Chosen... goddess...”

That was a very calming voice.

It felt like it brought strength flowing out from the bottom of my heart...

“Chosen of the goddess, the legendary...”

Yes, I'm the chosen of the goddess, the legendary...

... Legendary?

I opened an eye.

As I did so, I felt someone's breath tickle my ear, along with a fair amount of whispering.

“Chosen of the goddess, the legendary hero Satou Kazuma... The fate of humanity is in your hands... Now, rise up against the Demon King... Grant the wish of the beautiful goddess!”

Turning my head, I came eye to eye with Aqua who was creeping around and whispering something into my ear.

“... What are you doing?”

“... I-I wanted to see Kazuma-san's cute sleeping face...”

I leapt out from my bed.

“Darkness, Megumin, come quick! Aqua came here on a night raid—!”

“Waaaah! I’m sorry! I was trying to brainwash you!”

Part 4

“Hey, Kazuma, please take a look at this.”

It’s been three days since Serena was captured.

From what I’ve heard, it seems like they managed to wring some information out of her and are planning on transporting her to the capital’s prison.

Also, I finally remembered where I’ve heard Regina’s name before.

She was the same goddess that the ghost we were hired to vanquish that time, Lucy, looked up to.

Lucy thought she was the last worshipper of Regina, but to think that there was still one amongst the Demon King’s forces...

I’ve now defeated two of Regina’s followers. I really hope she forgives me for this, if nothing else, at least because I was also her worshipper at one point.

Right now, I’m sitting cross-legged on the sofa in my mansion as I sorted through my equipment.

I’ve been buying scrolls and potions to bring with me whenever I set out on an adventure as of late, but I haven’t had the chance to use them once.

Even back when I was on Earth, I was the type of person who’d hoard powerful healing items in games and not use them even when I was facing down the final boss.

Just when I was thinking of a way to make good use of the forbidden potion set that Vanir foisted onto me, Aqua, walking by Darkness who was sitting next to me and looking at my items with interest, gave me a piece of paper.

...?

I stopped working on my stuff and took piece of paper off her hands.

Darkness joined me as well.

The title was written with elegant penmanship.

“What do you think of the Demon King? Survey results.”

“... The title of Demon King sounds kinda cool (Baker). Seems like the sort of person who'd feed stray dragons while keeping it a secret from his underlings (Pet shop owner). Nevermind that, I'd rather you just lend me money (Delinquent). When I told him I'd be leaving the castle to set up a shop, he said it was a good idea and lent me some money (Pale-looking Shopkeeper). Nevermind him, Moi is stronger (Obvious). My god is the Demon King (Tired-looking man).”

.....

“What the hell is this?”

“Ahh! That's not the right one! That's the one with the answers that shouldn't be shown to you!”

Can you really call it a survey then?

“Look at this one! This one holds the opinions of the residents of this town who are suffering and fearful of the Demon King!”

Saying it, Aqua shoved another piece of paper into my hands.

“... We set up a store in this town, but business just isn't picking up. I don't really understand why, but the Demon King probably has something to do with it (Owner of a skeevy shop). I'm too afraid of the Demon King to sleep at night, so I have no choice but to sleep during the day. I can't hold down a proper job thanks to that, and it's all his fault I'm still living with my parents. (NEET). Because the

Demon King exists, our god just isn't popular at all (Worshipper of the god of destruction). Yeah, yeah, he's totally scary. He's just as scary as a cup of chilled neroid (Person in the theatre). It's the Demon King's fault that I can't get together with her (Middle-aged man). It's the Demon King's fault that I can't get a boyfriend (Guild lady).

...

"I'll repeat what I said, what the hell is this?"

Aqua reacted with obviously feigned shock and surprise.

"How could you say that!? Kazuma, do you really not feel anything ever after hearing about all the troubles the people in this town face because of the Demon King!? That's why people are calling you the gigolo NEET of that shameless woman!"

"H-Hey, I can't ignore that. Is that the nickname they gave me when I was being puppeted by that woman?"

Aqua ignored my words and thrusted a finger at me.

"Don't you feel any shame as an adventurer? Even as you are fooling around with Darkness here, the people the world over are living in fear of the Demon King! Apologize! Apologize for calling yourself an adventurer! Apologize to everyone in the world!"

"W-We're not fooling around or anything, I'm just curious what Kazuma is doing with those items!"

At Darkness's words, Aqua seemed to finally notice what I've been working on.

"What are you doing?"

“Those are the set of forbidden potions that Vanir gave me. This potion causes monsters to attack you for the rest of your life, this one heavily increases your magic power but kills your hair follicles in exchange, this one makes your levels shoot up in exchange for reducing your mana to zero, and there’s this one that attracts the opposite sex but makes you smell like a goblin. I was just thinking if there’s any way to make use of them.”

The only one that seems useful is taking the level up potion along with the balding potion.

If I use both of them in that order, I’ll be able to gain a lot of levels at once while still having magic power.

Of course, I’d end up bald as a result.

I wonder if healing spells works on the hair follicles destroyed by that potion...

Just as I was thinking that, Darkness shoved her face in front of me.

“Hey, Kazuma, can you sell me the potion that attracts monsters—”

“Absolutely not.”

Part 5

Shortly afterwards, we received a request to escort Serena to the capital.

However, it seems like it will take some time before the preparations and paperwork for her transfer would be finalized.

With such a reason in hand, I could go back to my NEET life without any shame at all.

“Cockadodledooo!”

... Or at least, that's the plan.

“Cocka! Cockadodledooo!”

“No, Emperor Zell! You shouldn't make noise right now! That man has been saying a lot of stuff about turning you into dinner as of late! He'll do it! A man as brutish as Kazuma-san will really do it! So please go back to your quiet and gentle self! Seeing your unruly side is quite beautiful too, but you can't make such a fuss this early in the morning. We need your power as a dragon to take down the Demon King, so before you grow big enough to fly us all the way to the Demon King's castle, you need to quietly build up your power.”

“Cockadodledooo!”

“No, Emperor Zell, please be quiet!”

“Oh shut up! What are you doing so early in the morning!? Keep it down already!”

I leapt out of my bed and yelled through the window.

Directly below my room is the coop where we keep Zell, and it's at that place where Aqua and Zell are currently making a ruckus.

“Wasn’t he supposed to take a long time to grow up because of his high mana!? When did he suddenly become a rooster!?”

“Emperor Zell is a lifeform steeped in mystery! He’s a dragon, after all. He must have gotten fired up over fighting the Demon King and awakened to some kind of mysterious power!”

Zell has somehow changed jobs from a chick to prime chicken meat.

“What kind of nonsense are you saying!? If you don’t shut that chicken up, I’m going to turn him into dinner!”

“Emperor Zell, I’ll stop that fiend here, so hurry up and run! Don’t worry about me, just run! Live free and grow strong! Once you’ve fully grown, we’ll go fight the Demon King together! Be careful of the butcher on the third street!”

“Cocka cock...!”

“Aah, Emperor Zell! Are you saying you won’t leave me alone? Very well, let’s face down that fiend together! As your mother, I’ll definitely protect you!”

After saying some strange things, Aqua took Emperor Zell from his coop and hugged him close to her chest.

“I don’t care what you do, just let me sleep in peace. Seriously, I’m begging you.”

“Then, will you promise not to say stuff like turning him into dinner and such?”

“Yes, yes, I won’t say that anymore. In exchange, please move his coop to someplace else.”

Saying that, Aqua held Zell in front of her and said something about getting Darkness to help her move the coop later.

“... Still, are you still going on about the Demon King? Just give up on him already. The last General, the Demon King’s daughter, is still hanging around his castle, and so are a whole bunch of elite monsters. Just leave that kind of dangerous stuff to the actually strong people and enjoy our lives here. Don’t worry, someone will definitely take care of it. We should be enjoying our lives now that we have fame and fortune.”

Aqua hugged Zell and shook her head in an exasperated manner upon hearing my words.

“This is why Japanese that are used to peace are... Why do you always think of this as someone else’s problem? It’s because of your naive way of thinking that you end up dying more often than a guy playing spelunker.”

Aqua looked at Zell and went “Right~?”.

This girl... The main reason I die so often is because of you.

She’s saying whatever she wants because she thinks I can’t touch her from the second floor.

“Leave such thoughts back on Earth. Right now, this world is at war. The Demon King’s daughter is about to lead a large army against the capital, right? And there’s still a chance that they will attack this town...”

Even if you say that, I can’t help it. I just don’t get that sense of urgency.

Perhaps it’s because spent my entire life growing up in Japan...

...?

“What’s wrong? Why are you opening and closing your mouth like that? Are you imitating a fish now? If it’s some kind of party trick, it doesn’t look impressive at all, you know?”

Aqua hastily returned Zell to his coop.

“That’s not it! Yes, right, the Demon King! Kazuma, now’s the perfect time to take down the Demon King!”

She’s still going on about that?

“Ah, ah, wait! Don’t go back to sleep, Kazuma-san, please hear me out! If the Demon King’s daughter is leading a large force to attack the capital, that means that the castle is empty! And if they attack this town on top of that...! They have the barrier, so they feel safe sending such a large force out! If we attack them while their armies are out, if we are lucky, there might only be the Demon King in the castle! After all, there’s no need to keep a powerful force in reserve when they have that barrier of theirs, right!? This might be the perfect chance to launch a raid on his castle!”

... True, it certainly does seem better than attacking while he has all his forces in the castle...

“Even if you say that... Ah, I’ve been meaning to ask you, but can healing magic cure baldness?”

“Leaving aside cases where the hair has been burnt off, that normally wouldn’t work... I’m sorry I can’t help you, Kazuma.”

“I’m not going bald yet! There’s a potion in that forbidden set that increases your magic in exchange for turning you bald, right!? I was just thinking of drinking that along with the potion that increases your levels in exchange for your magic, that’s all!”

I quickly explained myself to prevent any misunderstandings, but...

“There isn’t one.”

“... Huh? What do you mean?”

Aqua picked up Zell and raised him high as though she was showing him off.

“I gave the potion that increases your levels in exchange for your magic to Emperor Zell. Look at his beautiful body. At this rate, it seems like he will be able to eat the Demon King in a single glup in about ten years, don’t you think?”

... That means...

“What!? You used that potion that could’ve been my trump card on him!? Why!? Why are you so stupid!? Why do you always ruin my plans!?”

“W-What, you don’t have to get that angry! I just thought that if Emperor Zell gained a few levels and grew larger, he’d be able to do something against the Demon King! Come on, look! Don’t you think he looks a lot stronger now?”

I looked at the chicken that Aqua was holding in her hand.

“... Pfft.”

And snorted.

“—What are the two of you raising such a fuss about so early in the morning? Kazuma, breakfast is ready, so... Y-You look like you’re having fun...”

After entering my room, Darkness said such carefree things.

“Cut it out! You’ll let mosquitoes in if you break a hole in the window! If you break it, I’ll use your room until the window is fixed! Wind Breath!”

“Using magic is cheating! If you don’t want your window broken, then help me out with taking out the Demon King!?”

Aqua picked up a rock from the yard and threw it up at me, which I intercepted with my wind spell.

However, it’d be bad for me if things continue like this.

“Create Water!”

A ball of water appeared above Aqua’s head and splashed down on her.

But, even though she was soaking wet, she seemed completely unperturbed and looked triumphantly up at me.

“So you’re giving the goddess of water a refreshing shower now? Did you forget? I can be completely submerged in water and it wouldn’t do a thing to me. Even if it’s getting cold out, this is but a reward to me—”

Before Aqua could finish her sentence.

“Create Earth.”

“Wait, no, stop—”

I threw a shower of dirt at the soaking wet Aqua.

—After satisfying myself with Aqua’s cries, I went down to the hall.

Sitting right on the sofa was Megumin, sipping a cup of tea. She was dressed in her Crimson Demon robes and had her staff by her side.

“I’ve been waiting for you, Kazuma. Would you mind heading somewhere with me once you’ve finished breakfast? There’s something I need to do, and I would like you to be my witness.”

After being smothered in mud, Aqua is currently in the bath, and Darkness is helping her wash her hagoromo...

“Well, I don’t mind... But witness? That makes it sound like you’re headed off to a duel or something.”

Part 6

“But aren’t we friends!? Aren’t we bosom friends!? We just declared an eternal rivalry in the Crimson Demon Village not to long ago, so why did it turn out like this!?”

“It’s precisely because we are eternal rivals! You were the one who gave me the letter to meet you in the forest because you had something important to talk about! Now come on, bring it!”

The forest close to the town.

Megumin was guarding herself with her staff as she faced off against a frantic looking and teary eyed Yunyun.

“And here I was wondering what was going on... So Yunyun challenged you to a duel again?”

“That’s not it! That’s not it at all! It’s not a duel! I just had something to discuss with Megumin!”

As the two of us had this exchange, Megumin waved her staff around in a threatening manner.

“Then why did you call me out to such a deserted place!? If you had something to discuss, you could just pay me a visit!”

“Eh!? B-But... If I walked in when you and Kazuma-san were having a good moment, you’ll definitely tell me not to come back... Friendship between women is as flimsy as tissue paper when romance is involved... I read that in a book...”

Yunyun’s voice slowly faded as she went on.

“We’ve been interrupted a lot of times by loads of different people by now, so I wouldn’t get angry over just that! Plus, if you really did come in at a bad time, I’d just chase you out for that day, that’s all!”

“Eh!?”

I think what Megumin said just made things worse.

“So, anyway, what was the thing you needed to discuss with Megumin?”

At my words, Yunyun offered a letter to Megumin.

“This is something the Crimson Demon villagers sent...”

Megumin received the letter and started reading out loud.

“... The Demon King’s army is marching on the capital in force. All Crimson Demons, in preparation for when the Kingdom calls us to their aid, please gather at the village... Fufu, so the time has finally come when my power is needed. Very well! Yunyun, let’s go show the Demon King’s army what we can...”

Megumin, who started out so confidently, suddenly trailed off as she continued reading.

Yunyun seemed somewhat uncomfortable as she said.

“Umm... They wrote to show the letter to you too, so...”

I moved over to Megumin who has frozen and looked over her shoulder.

“... Oh, so Yunyun is in charge of the first squad. As expected of the future chief. Now, Megumin is... She’s at the corner of the second squad. Substitute is written next to her name...”

“Megumin can’t use advanced magic, so that’s probably why she’s benched-Aaah!”

Megumin folded the piece of paper into an airplane and sent it flying into the forest.

“What are you doing!? I still have to show that letter to the other Crimson Demons!”

Yunyun angrily shouted at Megumin, but the person in question seemed to pay it no heed.

“Who cares about that. More importantly, what are you going to do? You just came back to Axel recently, so are you heading back to the village again?”

Yunyun started to say something, but she bit her lip before she could.

It seems like she has something to say, but is too afraid to spit it out.

Just as she started nervously glancing around,

“Seriously, you’re going to be the next chief, so why are you still so hesitant!? If you have something to say, just say it!”

“Ow ow ow! I got it! I’ll say it, so please stop pulling on my hair! ... U-Um... I’ve heard that minions of the Demon King will be coming to this town too... I’ve made a few f-frien... acquaintances in this town recently...”

Yunyun, glancing at the ground and fiddling with her thumbs, said in a soft voice.

... Ah, I see.

“The people back home are calling you back to the village, but you have friends in this town too, so you want to stay and protect the people of the town, right?”

“Eh! A-Ah, yes... Friends... I’ve made a few friends in this town...”

By friends, does she mean those people?

I’ve heard that Yunyun has been spending quite a bit of time with a certain blonde delinquent and a certain masked assistant of a magic item shop.

They probably aren’t exactly what I would call good company, but, well, I can’t really say anything about that.

After nodding to herself several times, Yunyun finally raised her head, her face shrouded with pensiveness.

“But a gathering of the entire village is not something that happens often. As the future chief of the Crimson Demons, I can’t possibly ignore the summons when the village calls for a gathering...”

... I see, so she came to talk to Megumin to figure out what she should do.

And the person she came to consult with, Megumin, was facing in a completely different direction...

Wait a minute!

“Hey, Megumin, what are you—”

Before I could complete my sentence, Megumin called out.

“Explosion!”

And sent a blast of Explosion right into the woods, in the same direction where she sent the letter flying a few minutes ago...

“Ah! What are you doing, Megumin!? There are still people I haven’t shown that letter to! What should I do!? What should I...”

Yunyun grabbed her head and started panicking.

Megumin, after unleashing her spell, collapsed to the ground and flashed me the smuggest grin I’ve ever seen on her.

When I gave her just enough mana to stand, she shot right up and confidently declared.

“Did you see that, Kazuma? This is the true power of a Crimson Demon that is worthy of being placed in the first squad!”

Yunyun screamed at her with tears in her eyes.

“W-What should I do!? Really, what should I do now!? Why do you always keep causing trouble for me!?”

“Oh, stop panicking, you spineless girl! Just say the delivery man got captured by orcs on the way or the letter got eaten by your pet Goat Devil or something! You want to protect this town, right? Rather than spending time thinking about such useless stuff, you really should be bolder!”

Megumin said some completely irresponsible things, but Yunyun blushed and made a strange expression that seemed like a mix between being troubled and joyous.

It seems like she’s a little happy that the letter has been destroyed beyond repair.

Well, I do think that Yunyun could stand to learn a little from Megumin’s brashness.

I do think that, but...

I walked up behind her.

“You just don’t want her to go back just because you aren’t happy with how you’re treated, right?”

“Wha—!”

And Megumin stiffened in shock.

5

A FAREWELL TO THIS
BEGINNER'S TOWN!



Part 1

“...nii-chan...chan...wake...”

My blanket feels heavy.

On top of that, I can hear a voice gently calling to me from afar.

It's a line I've been hoping to hear for a very long time...

“Onii-chan, wake up! You'll be late! Come on, wake up!”

Onii-chan.

Roused by those sweet words, I opened my eyes.

“Good morning, Onii-chan! Now, let's go take down that Demon King like we always do!”

And my self-proclaimed little sister whose age I don't know cheerfully said while straddling atop my blanket...

“Get off!!”

“Oniiii-chan!!”

I grabbed the edges of my blanket as I sat up, flinging Aqua off from my bed and sending her rolling across the floor.

Without wasting a beat, I rearranged my blanket and collapsed back onto the bed.

As I wrapped myself in my blanket again, I took one last glance at Aqua.

“... Today's awakening was kinda nice.”

“I knew it. Using ‘Onii-chan’ on the lolicon Kazuma really does work best.”

—For the past few days, Aqua’s been trying all kinds of schemes to persuade me to go take down the Demon King.

“Hey, Kazuma, isn’t it about time you give in already? You might whine and grumble, but you’re the kind of person who always pulls through in the end whenever one of us is in trouble, right?”

“Do you think I’m some kind of blue cat robot who can do anything? In the first place, you are the actual goddess here, so shouldn’t you be the one to resolve such issues?”

Despite my biting remarks, Aqua seemed completely unfazed as she got back to her feet and nonchalantly sat on my bed.

“The only things I can do are purifying water, dealing with undead and devils, and resurrecting people. Goddesses aren’t exactly that great of an existence, you know?”

“So you finally admit it. Can’t you seal away the Demon King or something? Sealing evil existences away is what goddesses are supposed to do, right?”

Aqua hugged her knees close to her chest and stared at my lower body underneath the blanket.

“The only sort of evil I can seal away right now are the kind coming from your pants.”

“D-Don’t stare at it... I can’t help it, it’s morning! Anyway, nevermind that.”

Changing the subject, I looked up at Aqua’s face.

“Right now, it isn’t a guarantee that you would be able to bring down the barrier, right? But if another General would be taken out, you’d definitely be able to bring it down, so let’s wait until then, alright?”

There’s still one more Demon King’s General hanging around.

“The last General is the Demon King’s daughter, right? I don’t know how strong she is, but it’s hard to imagine her coming out without a scratch after attacking the capital. The capital is swarming with those cheat holders, and above all, there’s my sister, the strongest in the world, at the capital as well. Once the attack on the capital fails, I’ll ask the people at the top to send a strong escort with me to take down the barrier. If they fail, well, we can think of another plan when that happens.”

This plan relies a lot on other people doing the hard work, but that’s really the extent of my abilities right now.

This is completely different from what happened in the past where we were just winging it and counting on my luck to see things through.

I’m not a hero or anything.

In fact, my party is one of the worst parties ever put together.

It’s really strange that our party has never been wiped out before this...

“General... If there’s only one general left...”

Aqua was muttering about something.

...?

“Hey, what exactly—”

“Yeah, if there’s only one general left, I’ll definitely be able to take down the barrier! Once the barrier is down, someone will eventually take the Demon King out! Yeah, definitely!”

Aqua suddenly stood up and exclaimed...

Wait, she’s not thinking about...!

“I’m heading out for a bit!”

“Hey, no, wait! Wait a minute!”

Aqua ignored my words and flew out of the room.

—After going out on a morning sprint to chase after Aqua, I finally saw my destination.

I hate to admit it, but Aqua is just much faster than me. The difference in our stats is just way too large.

“Wiz! Where are you!? Stop hiding and come out already!”

“Are you deaf? Moi has already told you that the slacking shopkeeper isn’t here! That shopkeeper orders a whole bunch of useless stuff the moment you take your eyes off her, so Moi is also—
... Hey! Remove your hands from my mask!”

As I feared, the sounds of a scuffle can already be heard coming from Wiz’s magic item shop.

Seems like Wiz is out at the moment.

Walking into the shop, I saw Aqua struggling with Vanir, her hands on his mask as she tried to rip it from his face.

Despite being occupied with resisting Aqua’s efforts, Vanir managed to notice my arrival.

“Graaaa-Welcome! Handler, do reign in your rabid hound of a goddess!”

“Don’t call me a handler. Is Wiz out? Actually, this makes it really hard to talk, so cut it out.”

Hearing my words, Aqua reluctantly released her grip.

“Hey, strange devil, if those powers of yours aren’t a scam, hurry up and use them to determine Wiz’s current location.”

“Hmph. Don’t lump my powers together with that of the goddesses who claim omnipotence but are in fact unable to accomplish anything at all. Besides, Moi has already told you, the more power a person has, the harder it is for me to see through them. That defective shopkeeper has no talent for business, but the one thing she does have is power.”

Vanir disgruntledly replied as he straightened up his clothes.

“You talk a big game, but at the end of the day, you just don’t know, do you? You really are completely useless whenever it’s important. This is a little weird coming from me, but doesn’t that make you even worse than me?”

“... Very well, it has been some time, but perhaps it’s time for me to get serious. It’s best that you leave the store. Moi shall settle the score with those irritating gods today.”

These guys really don’t get along...

Just then, I felt someone’s presence behind me.

I turned around, and standing at the doorway was...

“Ah, Kazuma-san, Aqua-sama. Welcome. You came in at just the right time. I just got my hands on an interesting item...!”

Happily saying that, she smiled and motioned towards the paper bag that the penguin following her was holding.

Vanir stiffened up upon seeing that.

Seemingly unable to hold back her curiosity, Aqua wandered over and curiously looked into the paper bag.

Ignoring the penguin who seemed completely petrified with fear, I asked in place of Vanir who was similarly motionless.

“So... What did you buy?”

“I’m glad you asked!”

Wiz happily reached into the bag and took out...

“... A teru teru bozu?”



{TL Note: .}

“What’s a teru teru bozu? This is a powerful magic item that can control the weather. Simply hang it at the front of your house and they will forcibly clear up the weather! Normally, controlling the weather requires a long ritual and the use of many rare components, but that can be done with just this item! What do you think? Isn’t it amazing!? It’s amazing, isn’t it?”

It is amazing.

It is very amazing, but...

“... So, does that thing has any side effects? Like using it will cause it to not rain for ten years... Or it requires a large amount of mana...”

“There aren’t any side effects. I’ve learnt after getting lectured by Vanir-san so many times! To use it, all a person needs to do is pour a reasonable amount of mana into it and hang it by the eaves of your house. And it can only be used during a specific season, so there aren’t any downsides at all! What do you think? Isn’t it an amazing item?”

Vanir stiffly walked towards us, and raised the teru teru bozu-like item that Wiz seemed so proud of towards the light.

“And what exactly is the season that you can use these things?”

“It’s right now! It can only be used during this season! I’m not foolish enough to buy something that couldn’t be used. You really are a worrywart, Vanir-san.”

“... Dear customer, do come here for a moment.”

Ignoring Wiz who was smiling brightly, Vanir grabbed me by the shoulder and led me towards a corner of the store.

“... I’ll just say this up front, I won’t buy it.”

“Don’t say that. Moi can definitely feel strong magic coming from this piece of— this wonderful product. Its capabilities are definitely the real deal.”

I see. Well, if he says so, then this item must be the real deal.

I’ve heard that Wiz would prefer buying items containing a large amount of magic whenever she goes out shopping.

Still, there is one last thing that’s bothering me.

“... I don’t recall it ever raining recently. Does it even rain around these parts in this season?”

“... There was a day when it rained around this season twenty years ago.”

“I won’t buy it.”

Vanir moved closer in response to my refusal.

“Don’t say that. This world is very large. There might be a place in the world that’s troubled by extreme rains around this season. If you bring it into such a region, it shall definitely be treated as a prized treasure. If you buy it now, Moi will even throw in the forbidden potion set: number two as a free gift.”

“I won’t buy it. Besides, Aqua can make a similar item on her own. She made a Teru Teru Megumin or something a while back.”

“On top of that, Moi shall throw in a pre-release product that Moi has been developing in secret, the life size body pillow of the erotic shopkeeper.”

“I won’t... Tell me more details.”

Just then,

“Um... Is something the matter, Aqua-sama?”

I heard Wiz hesitantly say—

“—Come to think of it, it’s been over a year since we met, hasn’t it? How ironic... I’m a goddess and you’re a lich. Normally, the two of us could never have such a cordial relationship.”

“Has it already been that long? ... Ah, I bought some cookies along with that magic item. Would you like some, Aqua-sama?”

“I’ll have some... No, that’s not it. Say, Wiz, we’ve become way too close to each other. Normally, it would only be natural for me to purify you the moment we met. Yes, a god and an undead. Those are two entities that should never get along this cordially...!”

Aqua said that while nibbling on the cookie she received from Wiz.

Sensing this tense atmosphere, Vanir walked briskly to place himself between Wiz and Aqua.

The shop mascot penguin— no, I mean, the former count Zereshrute was trembling slightly in fear, but he also moved to Wiz’s side.

... I really hope Aqua isn’t serious about this, but...

Standing in front of Wiz as if to protect her, Vanir sternly said.

“There’s a really dangerous aura around you for some reason, Goddess of Violence. Moi doesn’t know what happened, but if you intend to go wild here, Moi will be forced to bill you a tremendous amount for the damages. If you’re prepared for that, then feel free to go ahead.”

Saying that, Vanir pointed his finger at Aqua as a challenge.

But Aqua ignored him and focused on Wiz.

“Wiz... Please understand! We can’t protect this world without defeating you! It pains me to hurt a friend, but, please, Wiz, I want to return to heaven! I’ll make it quick, so please go back to the earth!”

After saying such dramatic words, Aqua took up a combat stance.

As for Wiz, she simply stood there with a blank expression on her face.

After a while, Wiz nodded and said jovial manner.

“... If I return to the earth, will Aqua-sama be able to go back to heaven?”

“Yes, exactly! It’s a pity, Wiz, but there are reasons why I can’t let you off! I don’t mind if you hold a grudge against me, but, as a goddess—”

“Very well.”

“As a goddess...! ... It’s fine? No, wait, Wiz, you can’t give up on life so easily! What do you think your life is? You’ll get punished, you know?”

What are you saying? You were the one who was talking about returning her back to the earth and what not in the first place.

There’s a lot I wanted to say, but now’s not the time.

As for Wiz, she still had that blank look on her face as she said,

“If you purify me, you’ll be able to go back to heaven, yes? I don’t understand the details, but something must have cropped up, right? After spending so much time together, I know very well that Aqua-

sama is a benevolent and kind person... If that Aqua-sama wants to purify me, I'll go along with it."

This time, Vanir is the one to raise a fuss.

"What are you saying, Wiz? Have you forgotten the promise you made with me!? You really are gutsy if you think you can break a contract with a devil! If you go back into the earth, who will create my dungeon for me!? Everything I've done for this shop is in service of that goal!"

Wiz seemed taken aback, but regarded Vanir with a smile.

"Vanir-san, you actually called me by my name. I'm sorry I couldn't keep my promise... Um, he's asleep in a mansion deep in the forest right now, but I do know another lich. I'll introduce you to him, so please make do..."

Vanir gritted his teeth upon hearing that, but in the end, he still resolutely stood between Aqua and Wiz.

Wiz turned away from Vanir, clasped her hands together, and smiled at Aqua.

"Normally, it would've been natural for you to purify me the moment we met. Thank you for letting me off until now, Aqua-sama. Thanks to that, I was able to manage this shop together with Vanir-san and get to know a lot of other people. I've lived a long time, but this past year has been the most enjoyable year of my life. That's no exaggeration. So nevermind holding a grudge, I should be grateful to you."

"... ..."

Hearing those words, Vanir wordlessly stepped back.

Judging from the way he's gritting his teeth, it doesn't seem like he agrees with Wiz, but is rather respecting Wiz's decision.

"I originally set up this shop to be a place where my old adventuring companions could come back to. But, just the other day... Yeah, it was back when Vanir and I were talking about our past and Aqua-sama fell asleep. I managed to tell my companions, 'Welcome home,' when they came to visit on that day... So I have no regrets."

And Aqua...

"U...uuuu..."

Seemed like she was on the verge of tears as she retreated, being completely caught off guard by those words.

Seeing Aqua in her state, Wiz called out to her in the same tone of voice one would use to comfort a crying child.

"Aqua-sama, I will have to be purified by someone someday, or I'll be around forever. If I have to be purified by someone, I would choose to be purified by Aqua-sama. It'd help you, after all. Plus..."

Wiz gave Aqua a pure, unblemished smile, as if to put her at ease and remove any guilt she might be feeling.

"I enjoyed being your friend, Aqua-sama"



In the face of Vanir's, Zereschrute's, and my stares.

And Wiz who seemed more worried about Aqua than her own well-being.

"U...uuu... Waaaaah!"

Aqua broke down into tears before fleeing the store.

Part 2

... To think that the kindest person in this town, and the most respectable person, is a lich...

Such thoughts occupied my mind as I headed back to the mansion to search for Aqua.

Darkness and Megumin were playing a board game while lounging on the sofa in the main hall.

“Say, did Aqua come back?”

“Aqua? She came rushing back in not too long ago and shut herself in her room. I told her dinner’s ready, but she didn’t come out at all. Just what happened?”

I fell into deep thought upon hearing Megumin’s words.

What should I do? Should I just leave her alone for a while?

... No, that’s probably not a good idea.

“It’s, well... Just give me Aqua’s portion of breakfast. I’ll bring it up to her.”

After receiving a tray from Megumin, I headed up to Aqua’s room.

“—Hey, I understand how you feel, but don’t just go home without me. Megumin made breakfast, so open up.”

“... Leave me alone. I just lost a little bit of my confidence as a goddess right now.”

... Just a little bit, huh?

I called out to Aqua through the gap in the door again.

“Say... Isn’t it fine to put the Demon King out of your head for a while? Is there really a need to rush back to heaven right now?”

“... ...”

At the end of the day, Aqua doesn’t hate Wiz.

She does constantly pester her and accidentally purify her when she gets into a fight with Vanir and the like, but, when all is said and done, the two of them have a fairly close relationship.

I called out once again.

“... You know that you won’t be able to see Wiz again if you go back to heaven, right?”

Of course, she wouldn’t be able to see any of us too.

... No, wait, Eris-sama does occasionally come down here to play as Chris, so that might not necessarily be the case.

But would that be the case for Aqua?

From what I recall, Aqua was the goddess in charge of Japan.

Will she be able to pop up here whenever she wants, I wonder?

Aqua was still silent.

I called out one last time.

“... I brought the dinner Megumin made up with me. If you don’t want it, I’ll take it down.”

“... Just leave the food here.”

“—What’s wrong with Aqua? She’s usually the first one at the table. Does her stomach hurt?”

When I returned to the hall, a worried-looking Megumin asked that of me.

Judging from the way Darkness was frowning as she glared at the board, Megumin seemed to be winning in their game.

“Don’t worry. She seems like she’s willing to eat the food I brought up. Give her some time. She’ll definitely come back down once she gets hungry again.”

I casually said that, but in the end, Aqua spent the entire day holed up in her room.

Part 3

I can't sleep.

It's probably around midnight right now.

It's an extremely quiet night today, to the point where even the usually ever present humming of the bugs were absent.

This morning's ruckus isn't anything particularly unusual.

Aqua goes out, causes a ruckus, creates some trouble, and comes back home in tears.

That's something that happens every day. It's nothing unusual.

But for some reason, today's incident weighs really heavily on my mind.

Aqua didn't respond when I asked her if she'd be okay with not seeing Wiz again after she goes back.

It wasn't Wiz that I wanted to ask about back then, but something far more personal.

"Are you really fine with being separated from us?"

That's what I wanted to ask.

... ...

...

"AAAAAAAH!"

I rolled around on top of my bed.

What kind of embarrassing thoughts are running through my head right now?

I buried my face into my pillow.

No, no, what I actually wanted to ask was:

“Do you really want to go back after staying here for so long?”

After living together with these three for so long, it’s difficult to imagine life without Aqua.

What exactly does it mean if Aqua’s gone?

Living together with just Darkness and Megumin.

Even if I have the mansion and my fortune, Aqua will no longer laze around or cause trouble, nor will she barge in just as things are going well...

... Wait.

What was I so worried about? That doesn’t sound like such a bad life.

... No, no, no.

Aqua will definitely cry if she hears that.

Plus, it feels like life would be pretty boring without her around.

Sure, she won’t be creating problems for me every day, but it feels like I’ll have too much free time to know what to do with.

Still, what does Aqua think about this?

Actually, why the hell am I losing sleep over it in the first place?

This is getting on my nerves.

Yeah, there’s a clawing feeling around my chest...

“... ...”

I threw my blanket aside and got up.

It's quite late, but I'll go wake her up and interrogate her.

And properly lecture her while I'm at it.

I'll explain to her exactly what the risks are in going to take down the Demon King, and how little we stand to gain from it.

I crept out of my room and moved down the corridor as quietly as I could.

They are most likely sleeping now, but I really don't want to get caught by Megumin or Darkness and have them think that I'm trying to launch a night raid on Aqua.

Yeah, that kind of misunderstanding would haunt my name for the rest of my life.

Activating my Lurk skill, I started stealthing my way over to Aqua's room.

But before I've taken more than a few steps.

I spotted Aqua gazing up at the night sky.

There's a balcony on the second floor of the mansion, just above the entrance, and Aqua is currently sitting there.

There's a very beautiful full moon out tonight.

Aqua was wearing her usual blue hagoromo and was seated hugging her knees against her chest.

I intended to wake her up and give her a stern talking to, but...

Aqua really does look like a goddess when she's just sitting there, silently staring up at the sky.

Come to think of it, back when I first died, I instinctively knew that she was a goddess from the moment I laid my eyes on her.

She was really beautiful, I thought.

If only she acted like this every day...

As I watched her from afar, she suddenly seemed to have noticed my presence and turned to face me.

"... What are you doing over there? You couldn't sleep?"

I walked out onto the balcony somewhat guilty.

I can't possibly tell her that I got up to look for her, so what exactly should I say?

And I definitely can't say I was taken in by her form as she was moonwatching.

If she heard that, it would definitely go to her head.

That's why I said something that wasn't remotely related to what I was thinking just now.

"... Well, I slept a little too much this afternoon... Anyway, what are you doing here? You're going to end up feeding the mosquitoes, you know?"

"You really are as trashy as usual, aren't you?"

Aqua listlessly said as she turned back towards the sky.

... ...

"The only thing you have on your mind is food, so what are you doing out here moongazing? Is heaven on the moon? Are you guys like Princess Kaguya or something?"

"Of course not, I'm just looking at it because it's pretty. You know, I've been wondering about this for quite some time, but what exactly do you think I am? Even I have times where I want to admire something beautiful, you know? What do you think? Isn't a goddess looking up at the moon absolutely picturesque?"

It certainly is.

To be honest, seeing her like that got me thinking that, oh yeah, this girl really was a goddess.

Of course, I'm not going to say any of that to her.

"... Say, do you really want to go back to heaven so badly? You've been here for over a year now, right? You've gotten to know a lot of people, so don't you ever think that it might be lonely not being able to see them again?"

"... ... "

Aqua simply stared silently at the moon.

Eventually, she turned her back on me and started monologuing.

"It's only been just over a year, hasn't it? It feels really strange. I've known the other gods and angels in heaven for far longer, but life on this world is, how do you put it, stormy and full of drama?"

The one who made our lives here so stormy and full of drama is you, though.

That line was on the tip of my tongue for a moment, but I bit it back.
Instead, I said...

“You’ve been in heaven for far longer? That means you really are an old—”

“If you say anything more, I’ll put a seal on your lower body such that it will never stand up straight again.”

For the first time in my life, I’m honestly afraid of Aqua.

Aqua continued with her monologue.

“In heaven, every day is the same. It doesn’t change the slightest from day to day. To be honest, it’s quite boring... Well, on the flip side, it does mean that I don’t end up with any unpleasant memories.”

Unpleasant memories.

Is she talking about what happened a few days ago when the adventurers suddenly turned against her?

“Ever since then, I’ve gotten several apologies from the adventurers. Though, as a goddess, I wasn’t really affected by those acts.”

You liar. Megumin told me you were pretty depressed for a while after that.

... Then, Aqua, looking up at the moon, muttered in a voice almost too soft to be audible.

“... I want to go home.”

Her face didn’t particularly look sad or lonely or anything.

It’s just that, her face looks like that of a lost child gazing forlornly at the place she used to call home.

Those words weren't directed towards me.

It wasn't a demand, nor was she whining. It was simply her expressing her desire, one held close to her heart.

I don't know how long she lived in heaven.

I don't know if she had any friends or acquaintances over there.

I don't even know anything about her lifestyle in heaven.

Nothing at all.

... I was the one who forcibly dragged her here with me, so if she herself wants to go back, the duty of sending her back should really fall to me.

Also, I don't really want to dwell too much about this, but it's also kinda my fault that no new cheat users have been appearing for the past year.

But still, the Demon King...

... I should probably say something here.

"... Well, you know, I've been putting a little bit, just a little bit, of thought into how to take down the Demon King too... But just so you know, I'm not about to head off right now to take him down or anything, alright? For example, I could buy a large amount of explosive potions from Wiz and create a large amount of explosives with them. Then we could bury them around the Demon King's castle like landmines and starve them out. Alternatively, I could have Yunyun register a teleport point right in front of the Demon King's castle, and launch an explosion against it every day..."

“... Heheheh. You were so against this earlier, but you’ve finally started! See, I told you. Kazuma-san always finds a way to deal with it in the end... But, it’s fine. You were originally pretty weak to begin with, but if you take an attack from the Demon King at your level, it’s possible that there might not even be enough of your body left to perform a resurrection.”

T-This girl!

She always, always has to add an extra line.

I stepped onto the balcony and said towards Aqua’s back.

“The reason I’m weak is because I got you in place of a cheat. If I’m weak, that’s because you weren’t pulling your weight, so those words apply to you too. Do you understand, you useless goddess-sama?”

“Hey, I want to put a seal on you, so come a little closer, will you?”

“I’m sorry.”

If I spend anymore time around here, she might really just decide to put a seal on me.

I told Aqua that I should probably go back to sleep and started heading back to my room...

Aqua, clutching her knees close to her chest, called out to me without ever taking her eyes off the moon.

“Kazuma-san, Kazuma-san.”

I stopped in my tracks.

“... What is it?”

“Satou Kazuma-san. Are you glad that you’ve come to this world? Have you ever regretted it?”

Aqua innocently asked.

Back when I was in Japan, I was an unrepentant hikikomori with nothing to look forward to.

It’s nothing compared to what I’ve achieved in this world. I have a fortune, I own a mansion, and above all, I have the affections of several beauties from this world.

I did briefly consider reincarnating back when I was killed by Serena, but, even if I’m not exactly thankful to Aqua, there’s no way I can have any regrets right now.

Even if this place is a harsh world filled with all kinds of nonsense.

“I don’t regret a thing. I’m glad to have come here.”

Aqua seemed genuinely relieved upon hearing those words and let out a soft “Oh?” along with a sigh.

Just like how I feel a little guilty over forcibly dragging her with me to this world, she might have been concerned in her own way about sending me over to this world.

“That’s good then... Good night. Don’t do anything strange back in your room just because you were captivated by my beauty in the moonlight, okay? You’ll get divine punishment if you do that.”

“That’s utterly impossible.”

I instantly replied.

Aqua seemed a little miffed at how quickly my answer came and started muttering "Maybe I really should put a little seal on him..." and other such dangerous stuff under her breath.

I hurriedly back to my room and collapsed onto my bed.

But, as I expected, my head was still too full of thoughts for me to sleep.

... The Demon King, huh...

Yeah, no matter how I look at it, it really is impossible.

If only there was a way for me to easily defeat him...

... No, no, there is a limit as to what I can do.

But, if I take some time to think about it, I should come up with a good plan or two...

Just then, I noticed something.

Why the hell am I seriously thinking about taking down the Demon King?

I closed my eyes to shake away such stupid thoughts and went back to sleep.

Just before sleep took me, a certain desire dreamily flashed through my mind.

I've never really wanted such a thing before now, but,

—I really want a cheat power that'd allow me to go toe to toe with the Demon King—

Epilogue

“Hey! Kazuma! Kazuma! Wake up! Wake up already!”

I woke up with a start.

Perhaps it's because I fell asleep not too long ago, but I came to my senses very easily.

Darkness was violently shaking me while screaming my name...

... ...

I closed my eyes once more, wrapped my arms around Darkness, and pulled her onto the bed with me.

“I can't eat another bite...”

“H-Hey! You're awake, aren't you!? Aah, wa-wait!”

... I just wanted to play a little prank on Darkness, but feeling her slowly go limp in my arms brought a sudden halt to my thought processes.

“... What are you doing? ... I just asked you to wake Kazuma up! Seriously, the moment I take my eyes off you, you're back to seducing him! You really are a slut!”

“Ah, n-n-no, that's not! I haven't done—!”

Seems like Megumin is in the room too, so I opened my eyes.

And of course, the first thing that I saw was Darkness's eyes.

“... Did you come to attack me again!?”

“Aah! Y-You little—!”

After separating myself from Darkness whose cheeks turned red under these false accusations, I stretched and said

“What’s the matter, you two? Why are you raising such a fuss so early in the morning?”

“It’s already noon! More importantly, this is really serious! Please read this!”

Rising up from my bed, I accepted the envelope that Megumin handed to me.

Inside it was a letter written with an extremely exquisite penmanship, and I wasted no time in reading it.

“Dear everyone,

The light breeze heralds the refreshing breeze of autumn. How is everyone doing?

Darkness, don’t go overboard with that game you play where you repeatedly stub your toe against the dresser.

Megumin, if you don’t reign in how often you use your Explosion, I’m certain your actions will eventually be counted as one of the factors contributing to the greenhouse effect.

Kazuma, I know that you’re a young man with a healthy libido, but please stop laying out everyone’s laundry on the floor and rolling through them.”

I crumpled the letter I was reading and threw it into the corner of the room.

“Ah!”

Megumin picked up the letter from the floor.

“I understand how you feel, but please read it all the way to the end.”

Well, I couldn’t exactly refuse her request, so I continued reading.

“Now then, the Demon King is currently spreading chaos and destruction throughout this world. Do you think that the beautiful and lovely goddess that I am could simply stand by and let the Demon King do as he wishes?

No, I cannot do that.

For the sake of my beloved Axis Cultists spread throughout the world.

To answer the wishes of the ten billion people who believe in me I’m heading out on a journey to become a legend...”

I raised my head.

“... Are there really ten billion Axis Cultists in this world?”

“... There’d probably be about a few hundred at best.”

Hearing Darkness’s words, I let out a relieved sigh before continuing to read the letter.

“Thus, in order to turn this lofty ideal into reality...

I'll be going out for a bit to take down the Demon King."

I leapt off my bed.

"That idiot...!"

Towards the flustered me, Darkness started

"... Aqua has been saving up the allowance you've been giving her. She should've saved up quite a sum by now, so she might be trying to hire a few skilled adventurers right now..."

I rushed to grab my jacket.

If I don't hurry up and chase after her...!

—Then, just as turned back towards the two, I noticed something off about their expressions.

I gave them a questioning look, and Megumin pointed towards a corner of the letter.

I'd probably miss it if I wasn't paying attention, but right where her finger was pointing were a few words that seemed to be crossed out.

She probably wrote this but canceled it out because it sounded stupid or something.

I leaned in for a closer look.

"PS: Please come after me."

... Wasn't it supposed to be "Please don't come after me"?

—That idiot!

AFTERWORD



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Aqua-sama thinking about what to write.

Afterword

First of all, thank you for picking up this book.

This is the volume where the protagonist, Satou Kazuma, launches a counterattack.

Normally, he's the kind of person who avoids picking fights, and relies upon his friends to bail him out when he does get into a brawl.

However, looking upon Aqua's sorrowful form, he challenges the general on his own, and continues struggling even when facing the enemy's mind control...

I don't think that there are that many people who start reading from the afterword, but if you want a summary, that's pretty much the gist of it.

Anyway, I was only able to get this book published thanks to: The illustrator Mishima Kurone-sensei, manager I-san, Design-san and Proofreader-san, many people from the editorial department and various people involved, and, of course, all of my readers who have been cheering me on.

That's why I always do this in every volume...

My deepest thanks to everyone who worked on this project, and to each and every one of my readers!



Hey, Megumin, this is bad! I can't get rid of this stain on the toilet without Aqua here...!

Hey, Kazuma...



Things are bad here too! Without Aqua here, it takes a really long time to fill the bath with hot water!

W-Wait Megumin...



How could this be... It took until she's gone before we realized her importance...

At the end of the day, we really relied on her abilities..



You two, Aqua is still outside the door...!

COMING SOON!!

.....Waaaaah!!
I'm really going on
a journey!



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this WONDERFUL
WORLD with BLESSINGS! 16

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