

Chapter 3

Signs of Unrest

I wasn’t expecting such a drastic boost to our military forces, but at the same time, I was genuinely glad at the prospect of more companions joining our ranks.

I urged Diablo to discuss new work arrangements for the demons. The three demonesses were in attendance as representatives of the new personnel. I was interested in hearing their opinions as well.

“Right now, there are three vacant positions I want filled as soon as possible. There is the military attaché who will act as my plenipotentiary, the chief prosecutor of the public prosecution office who will seek out any great evils (unlawful activities) within the nation and bring forward charges, and the chief justice officer of the supreme court who will judge the fairness of tribunals. Since there’s three of you here, do any of you wish to fill in these roles?”

It felt as if I was forcing the girls to accept, but I casually brought it up as an option, nonetheless.

The jobs weren’t as simple as they seemed. If they were to take them, then there might even be backlash from my executives. However, that would be Diablo’s problem to deal with.

You also needed to refrain from committing illegal activities, such as accepting bribes, while on the job. That was why I wanted to appoint trustworthy people close to me, just in case. If these demons wound up doing anything illegal, I would naturally ask Diablo to purge them. Things would be quite straightforward that way.

“Then, please allow me to act as the military attaché.”

“A greater evil than me? This gets my blood pumping!”

“I shall judge with utmost fairness. I hope to meet my lord’s expectations!”

Testarossa, Ultima and Carrera declared, respectively.

Oi oi, why are you already agreeing without even listening to the details of these positions first?

“Can you guys really? The tasks involved with these jobs could be very challenging…”

“Please leave it to us.”

“Mhmm! I’m really good at detective work!”

“Allow me to grant them the fair verdict of death.”

Hold on a second. Something is off here, especially with that last one.

Their answers filled me with an eerie sense of unease.

I turned to peek at Diablo. He had a smug grin plastered on his face. No matter how you looked at it, his facial expression all but screamed: “It’s so good to be free from such troublesome duties!”

Ah, I supposed that would be the case. Diablo would, surely, have rejected the offer of military attaché.

“Listen now. As the military attaché, you will act as a representative for the Western States Council and speak on my behalf. Not only that, if we are to deploy military forces to foreign nations, you will also be responsible for commanding those armies. It’s a really important job.”

“Yes, I understand,” Testarossa replied with a gentle smile, promising that there would be no problem.

“Testa is a smart woman. I can assure you that she will never make any decisions that aren’t in Rimuru-sama’s best interest,” Diablo reassured.

Uhm, aren’t you saying that because you don’t want to do the job yourself?

Although Diablo’s guarantee was in no way reliable, Testarossa may very well be highly intelligent.

“By the way, you’ll also need to familiarize yourself with our nation’s laws, but those aren’t set in stone yet. Furthermore, you will also be responsible for informing other nations about them—”

“Please rest assured, Rimuru-sama. I have memorized them all.”

As if to back up her claim, Testarossa immediately began to recite the experimental decrees of our nation, even going so far as to point out some problems she found with them.

“Hired! You are, without a doubt, hired. Sometimes, you may find yourself thoroughly pissed off during the council meetings. However, you must keep in mind that you are carrying the honor of our nation. Remember, never act on impulse. I’ll be counting on you.”

“Please leave it to me. If anything were to happen, I will make sure to destroy all evidence of my involvement.”

No no no! You’re looking at this completely the wrong way!!

But then again, Testarossa did make the impression of being capable enough. I couldn’t find any other suitable candidates and, given my unruly behavior during the last council meeting, I was better off not casting stones in a glass house.

We will see how it plays out.

Even though Testa was the one who got the job, that didn’t mean the other two were unqualified either.

“It’s my turn now!” Ultima shouted, and also effortlessly started to repeat the major codes of law as if she were reading from a script.

Similar to Testarossa, she appeared to be pretty sharp.

“My liege, we are a race that holds contracts in the highest regard. We are well versed in the craft of exploitation, so there is no way we’d lose to foolish mortals. You can also rest assured that we won’t fall victim to bribery. One can only bend us to their will through a clash of strength. Even among the demon lords, there are only a few that could stand against us.”

—Well, she didn’t say no one could stand against them.

Given that to be the case, there probably were demon lords stronger than them. It was presumably that guy—the red-haired one. Well, that was none of my business.

After all, the important thing was that Carrera would take on the role of chief justice.

“Then, I shall hire you all. Ladies, I will be in your care from now on!”

“ “ “Please leave it to us!” ” ”

As provisional personnel, I decided to hire the three demonesses.

It proved to be the right call. The Tempest Federation would later become a state featuring a legal system like none other. Its legal structure would be esteemed throughout the generations that followed.

By the way, I wasn’t above the law. I gotta be more careful so I don’t end up being arrested for bribery.

Our nation finally possessed the framework of a constitutional country. Even though we were still in a trial period, we had the foundations for a system with separation of powers.

Ultima and Carrera were both extraordinarily diligent workers, though, perhaps I should also give credit to their many outstanding employees. They all got along and worked together, which enabled them to demonstrate their full potential as a team.

Ultima was assigned to learn from Rogurd. She would always call him ‘Uncle Rogurd’ and listened to whatever he had to say. Rogurd would then call Ultima ‘missy.’ He cared for her like she was his own daughter.

Although, Rogurd was unaware of Ultima’s true identity. Rogurd may have been bold, but had he known that Ultima really was a demon peer, he would definitely have been far more reserved around her. With that in mind, I only told him that she was one of Diablo’s recruits and nothing else. At the end of the day, it was her work performance that mattered, so there shouldn’t be any problems.

Chief Justice Carrera was also handling her new responsibilities well. Rugurd was the attorney general and had since returned to the executive branch’s legal department. The judicial department was now officially its own independent branch, separate from the executive branch. However, this didn’t mean the judicial branch had free rein. The judicial, legislative, and executive branches would all monitor each other.

Rugurd was responsible for observing and supporting Carrera, whom I had appointed. From his report, her behavior notwithstanding, she was doing an excellent job. She would not yield to violence or bribery. Rugurd seemed to approve of Carrera.

This was fantastic.

There was no such thing as a perfect political system, so we’d just have to wait and tackle problems as they arose.

And so, all that remained was to send out the drafts of our legislation to the council.

“That’s everything. Testarossa, have you prepared everything properly?”

“Yes, Rimuru-sama. Moss handled all of the procedures.”

Testarossa was resting elegantly in front of me. She had personally poured me a cup of black tea. It was delectable.

Shuna’s black tea was superb, and Shion’s black tea was nice too. While their teas were exquisite in their own right, Testarossa’s black tea was no slouch either. The fragrance was profoundly sophisticated, and it lingered in your mouth. It didn’t even leave the slightest trace of a bitter aftertaste. There was also a hint of sweetness despite its lack of sugar. Overall, it made for a very refreshing drink.

Diablo stood behind me, eyes wide. “Testa, I never imagined you would personally make tea for others. How surprising.”

“Hehe, indeed. I obviously need to give Rimuru-sama special treatment. And of course, there’s no tea for you.”

“—I don’t mind. As long as you treat me as your superior, I can turn a blind eye to things like these,” Diablo responded, preparing some black tea for himself.

I couldn’t tell if they were close or spiteful of each other. Although the air wasn’t tense, they didn’t appear cordial enough to be labelled ‘friends.’

“By the way, the reactions from the nations were rather intriguing too,” Testarossa suddenly divulged. “Some nations want to get on our good side, while others are trying to exploit us for their own benefit. About half of the nations are welcoming, and it seems that the majority of them are still paranoid.”

Her tone implied as if she had seen this for herself…

“Where did you obtain this information?”

“My apologies, I ordered Moss to investigate a little in order to be of help to Rimuru-sama.”

Moss again. It looked like he had some outstanding talents. I recalled that he was a powerful individual whose strength was second only to the three demonesses. He was also one of the demons that evolved to become a demon peer, and he seemed to be stronger than the other demon peer, Veyron.

So this Moss was even capable of collecting intelligence.

“How accurate is this information?”

Did he acquire it using magic? Or did he see and hear things for himself?

It’d be great for us if the information were reliable. However, if it wasn’t, then we’d have a bunch of other problems on our hands. With that fact in mind, I questioned Testarossa.

“Moss holds a special ability which enables him to split into multiple small ‘Clones’ and travel to different locations. Acquiring and analyzing intel from various places at the same time is a piece of cake for him.”

That would make him truly impressive. I was quite glad to have gained such fortuitous talent.

“Then that’s really convenient. I’ll introduce him to Souei next time and let him help with information gathering. They may have different suitabilities, so hopefully they can complement each other.”

“Ara, how I yearn for such praises from Rimuru-sama. I am almost jealous of Moss,” Testarossa commented, cracking a smile when she finished.

“S-surely you jest…” behind Testarossa was Moss himself, who was standing by, previously unnoticed due to his weak presence. As he spoke, a cold sweat suddenly ran down his cheeks.

Veyron had the appearance of an old gentleman with a handlebar moustache. Moss, on the contrary, looked like an adorable, run-of-the-mill young boy. From appearances alone, he seemed to be in fifth or sixth grade of elementary school. I saw no evidence of him being strong; was he really that exceptional?

“Is Moss’s information valid? We did eliminate a couple of hostile councilors recently. It’d be reasonable if people were paranoid, but are there really nations still trying to exploit us?”

While it was sort of bold for me to say this, our nation was quite the dangerous one. And just what type of overly optimistic leaders would want to exploit a country this unbelievably dangerous? It was only natural to doubt the accuracy of Moss’s intel.

“Moss, explain the situation to Rimuru-sama.”

For some reason, it was Diablo that gave this order as opposed to Testarossa.

“Y-yes sir. The nations neighboring the south of Tempest, centered around the Kingdom of Blumund, were all in favor of our nation. Yet, relevant knowledge of our nation has not yet spread to the northern realm. It seems that many noblemen there are skeptical about the rumors. As for the now decommissioned councilors, their words, regardless of their veracity, lack credibility. Although this part was purely speculation from said rumors, it is difficult to determine the authenticity of the matter. With that being said, among several kingdoms, some of their royal family members undeniably hold ill intent towards us.”

On a side note, Moss’s power allowed him to directly eavesdrop on the conversations that he wanted to hear. That explained why it was up to the receiver of the information to determine its legitimacy. Nevertheless, his power was quite handy.

“If we can detect suspicious activities ahead of time, we can plan accordingly before anything bad happens.”

“Indeed.”

“Testarossa, can I trouble you to take care of the matter?”

“Most certainly. Regarding the method, however, should I destroy their entire nation?”

No no, that won’t do.

“That’d be overkill! Just make sure to hold the people in charge accountable.”

“Understood.”

“Remember to avoid methods that will lead to casualties.”

“As you wish. At the very least, I will not do anything that results in the world condemning Tempest,” Testarossa promised, smiling brightly. Despite that smile, I found her terrifying. I was kind of worried about whether or not it was really okay to let her handle it.

But hey, there’s a first time for everything.

After all, you couldn’t run a country by always sucking up to other nations. This was an irrefutable fact. If other nations looked down on us, it would only lead to unnecessary complications.

“Good! You must work hard towards those goals without damaging the reputation of our nation. However, should the need arise, you should also be prepared to show off our might.”

And so, I saw Testarossa off to the council.

Now that the major problems were resolved, from today onward, I could throw away the worries I had in the past few months and live a peaceful life.

Eh? You’re telling me that not everything was stressful since I was actually enjoying the research?

Well, you’re right. Though I did have to occasionally act as if I was trying my best, lest I be viewed as a slacker. This was what we called adults’ art of socializing. It was never a good idea to invest maximum effort at work. If you were to do that, then the amount of work you did would be viewed as the norm. Naturally, it would seem as if you had no problems with it, and thus you would be prone to be assigned more responsibilities.

A capable man must be able to distinguish how much work was suited for the amount of effort devoted. At the end of the day though, what mattered most was enjoying your work.

—Despite framing it in such flowery language, ultimately, that was just idealism at its finest. After all, I was satisfied with where I was now. Working under these circumstances made me realize again just how fortunate I was.

In any case, I planned to inspect the newly constructed school today. The children I brought from Ingracia were studying here too.

I mentioned this once while chatting with Yuuki: letting the children socialize with each other would be the fastest method for them to learn human common sense. In a school filled with only monster kids, there was a possibility that they would never learn about the norms of human society.

Be that as it may, you wouldn’t have to worry about such things at this school. Many adventurers and migrant laborers, family in tow, had immigrated to our town. Naturally, there were many children among them.

In this world, it was the norm for children of low-income families to be part of the labor force. However, our nation had laws prohibiting child labor. After all, a kid’s job was just to have fun and enjoy their childhood. Anyway, they only needed to study things they were interested in.

Both humans and monsters would be subject to the same standards of education. Surely, they would grow a sense of camaraderie this way. That was the objective.

By the way, the students in this school weren’t limited to just children. Adults would come here to learn writing and mathematics, too. Mastering these subjects was essential, so they were eminently enthusiastic to develop their skills. The lack of these skills would no doubt close many doors for them. They may also make simple mistakes that could trouble their coworkers. Since the adults were all evidently aware of this, they had been studying hard.

Not knowing whether or not anything you learned would be applicable to the real world was probably one of the biggest reasons why people were never motivated to study. However, that wasn’t a problem here. Furthermore, the hard work of the adults would inspire the children to put in similar effort towards their studies.

With that being said, putting aside mathematics, the focus was mainly on reading and writing. To be honest, even I considered the curriculum difficult, and Masayuki was of the same mind. Being proficient in reading and fluent in conversing was one thing, however—writing was the difficult part.

In my case, I could rely on the automatic translation of Wisdom King Raphael to bypass the issue. Without that, even I didn’t have the confidence to score full marks on a language exam administered here. I figured that as long as it didn’t cause any problems, I could simply play dumb about it. Although, this did feel like cheating.

Getting back on topic, the children were excelling in their studies. Serving as a wonderful incentive to boost their eagerness for learning, I had translated manga into this world’s language. It was a huge success. It seemed like everyone in the school was a fan of the manga, to the point where some even carried it around with them, apparently turning it into a highly coveted status symbol. Kenya, being both adept at combat and a holder of manga, somehow became the boss of the school.

“You stinky boys! Stop playing all the time and help clean the classroom!”

Ah, Alice just lost it.

She was shaping up to be an extremely competent class representative.

“Huh? Why do we have to bother with that—”

“Wait Ken-chan, we’ll be in a world of hurt if we make Alice angry!”

“Shut up, Ryota! I’m gonna beat Alice today and become the real boss around here!”

Such a brat!

—Hold on. I guess they were still just kids.

I realized that Alice was the real boss around the class, not Kenya. Were they fighting because of this? Kenya wouldn’t want to admit it, which is perhaps why he wanted to fight Alice.

So, that’s how it is, huh?

A boy would intentionally infuriate the girl he liked to make her look his way. However, this tactic wasn’t always effective in reality. Besides, it was liable to mess up and cause the opposite of the intended effect. It was best to treat the girl you admired gently.

Kenya was still too naive and thus presumably lacked this insight. Fighting Alice wouldn’t win her heart; instead, it would doubtlessly serve to only piss her off.

“Didn’t I say this already? I’ll show you how scary I really am!”

Alice was no different, showing not a single shred of femininity. She may have seemed mature, but that couldn’t be further from the truth. But to be fair, Alice was only eleven years old. Didn’t all sixth graders behave this way?

Everyone else’s reaction implied that they were accustomed to this scene.

“Oi, who do you think will win today?”

“Of course it’ll be the Empress.”

“I suppose so. She’s our empress, the youngest and the strongest. While Kenya is strong too, he’s no match for her.”

“It’s because he’s in love with Alice; that’s why he can’t win.”

They were all adding their own two cents.

“Oi, Gail! Don’t talk nonsense!” Kenya complained.

“That’s right! How could Kenya have a crush on me? Is your brain fried or something?” Alice, on the other hand, laughed it off as the ramblings of an idiot.

Gail had very casually revealed Kenya’s secret.

Uhhh—looks like it’s too early for these kids to get in any sort of relationship.

That was okay in my book.

Both the monster and human kids found the two interesting. Everyone knew that they weren’t really on bad terms despite what appearances suggested.

Gail was the oldest boy and seemed to be covertly monitoring the two, ready to intervene if any real problem were to arise.

It would have been interesting to continue observing this silently, but today was not the day. Hinata was due to come by later.

“All right, that’s it! No fighting in the classroom!” I scolded as I entered the classroom to greet the kids. At that same exact moment, Chloe jumped in from the side and latched onto me.

“Sensei!” Chloe joyfully exclaimed.

I somehow didn’t sense her aura, which suggested that Chloe’s skills had improved dramatically. Moreover, it looked as if she knew I was coming very early on.

“Ah, Rimuru-sensei?! Chloe, that’s cheating and…and cunning!” Alice protested, but wasn’t one to be outdone. Just like Chloe, she came running and hugged me.

Mmmhmm, cuteness is truly the best.

Someone emerged from behind them, exclaiming: “Rimuru-sama, long time no see arinsu!”

A cute girl with the cliché bob haircut jumped in front of me. She was wearing an elegant kimono and appeared to be a little girl around the same age as Alice. Her most eye-catching features were her fox ears.



Hmm—I didn’t remember seeing a beautiful little girl like this…but I also felt like I’d seen her somewhere before.

Could it be—

“Are you Kumara?”

“It is me arinsu!” the young girl with the bob haircut energetically replied—I mean, Kumara replied.

Right, Kumara was a high-level monster. She had successfully evolved, after I had bestowed a name upon her. That must be why she had a human form.

I recalled that I left her in Hinata’s care along with the rest of the kids. Once the school was constructed, Kenya and the others began walking to and attending classes. I had always thought that Kumara was staying in the labyrinth all this time. But to my surprise, it seemed that she was going to school with the children as well, and even made some friends. I believed that this was a good thing.

“Eh, Rimuru-sensei has come—”

Kenya and Ryota’s reactions were slower than the girls,’ as they only noticed me just now. However, their words were overshadowed by the cheers of the other students.

“W-WOAH—Rimuru-sama!”

“It’s actually him! Awesome—!”

“I’m gonna brag about this to my dad later!”

And so, a commotion broke out in the classroom.

Catching wind of the excitement, the teachers that came to investigate soon formed a crowd of their own.

“H-His Majesty himself has graced our facility?! Had you contacted us first, I would’ve shown you around!”

“What silliness is that?! I am the vice-principal, I should have been the one to show His Majesty Rimuru around!”

“Nonsense! You are just a mere vice-principal, begone! His Majesty Rimuru has granted me the position of principal, I should have the special privilege!”

They were getting riled up as well.

We hired teachers by paying monthly salaries. They were retired adventurers, merchants from the Kingdom of Blumund sought through Myourmiles’s arrangements, and more.

The principal of this school was a chief from one of the goblin villages. Even though he couldn’t teach, he was able to promptly handle any conflicts that broke out. He could also keep an eye out and prevent monster children from being discriminated against.

Other than the principal, the rest of the staff were all humans. The Holy Knights acted as special lecturers, taking turns to hold classes; Hinata would spend time with the children when she could as well.

Everything was going very smoothly.

At first, the Holy Knights all seemed rather confused, but they didn’t treat the monsters any differently. Rather, they gave the same level of care and guidance to both humans and monsters. They genuinely helped out a lot.

“Ahh, don’t worry, I just snuck out on my own today. I actually have something to discuss with Kenya and the kids.”

“I see, then please visit and observe the children’s progress next time!”

“Indeed, if you inform us of your arrival, we shall present you with the perfect learning conditions!”

The teachers and children simultaneously nodded in agreement.

But hold on a second… What the hell did ‘perfect learning conditions’ mean? Wouldn’t you guys be guilty of trying to deceive me? Didn’t that make the whole visit meaningless to begin with?

“Oi oi oi, His Majesty Rimuru is really troubled by this,” we were interrupted by Holy Knight Fritz, who was handling today’s lecture. If he hadn’t, this commotion probably would have continued for a while. Speaking of which, having a commander of the Holy Knight Order as their lecturer was honestly incredible.

“Is Fritz-san the lecturer for today?”

“Oi oi, please stop with the ‘san,’ Your Majesty Rimuru. You can drop the honorific.”

“Ah, really? In that case, Fritz, drop the ‘Your Majesty’ too.”

“That would be inappropriate.” Fritz smiled and added, “please allow me to call you Rimuru-sama at the very least. Or else, every citizen in this nation is going to look at me differently.”

This guy seemed to be someone that wasn’t mindful of social statuses, yet he was still cognizant of the fact that he couldn’t directly address me by my name. To be fair, I would’ve acted the same way if I were in his shoes. Unless a person had some respectable background, to call another kingdom’s ruler by their name directly would take a really pure-hearted moron.

“You have a point. You’ll need to wait until you’re out of the public eye in order to relax honorifics. It’s a bit inconvenient here.”

“Thank you for understanding,” Fritz said with a wink and gave a somewhat playful smile.

You shouldn’t be happy seeing a man wink at you, but it felt like Fritz was somehow naturally affectionate.

“All right, putting that aside, thank you so much for assisting the school activities.”

“Please don’t say that. Seriously, compared to the rigorous training assigned by Hinata-sama, a mission like this is honestly heaven. You get food until your tummy is full and, more importantly, the children’s respect. All the knights have been fighting over the gig.”

I see.

I caught wind of unexpected hardship.

Fritz’s straightforward attitude naturally made him exceptionally affable, but I didn’t want to be oblivious of the time and place as he, unfortunately, had been. After all, my ‘Magic Perception’ was sending me feedback.

“Ho, con-gra-tu-lations then, Fritz. Was my training too rigorous, hm? I fine-tuned the training based on your strength, but apparently it is getting in the way,” a cruel voice drenched Fritz.

Hinata entered the scene. Suddenly, the whole area was filled with a tense aura. The children, and even the adults that had gathered, all straightened their backs and didn’t dare to move a muscle.

The teachers had the same reaction; I wasn’t sure whether to laugh at this or not. It went without saying that Fritz was tonight’s biggest loser.

“E-eh—H-Hinata-sama?! Misunderstanding…yes, it’s all a big misunderstanding! That was just bureaucratic talk…”

Fritz tried his hardest to save himself given the conversation, yet I could already tell that he was irredeemable at this point.

That’s why Rimuru here is to remind all readers that it is very important to ensure the safety of your surroundings.

I hurriedly made myself scarce and sought refuge; hopefully Fritz wouldn’t suffer any ill fate in the future.

We went inside the labyrinth. Hinata joined me, coupled with the five children and Kumara. As for Fritz… Ehh, best not to disturb him.

“I have been awaiting your arrival, Rimuru-sama and Hinata-dono,” Hakurou came out to welcome us.

“My,” Hinata exclaimed, “you look as lively as ever, how wonderful.”

It appeared that the two of them had formed a friendship before I knew it. The two greeted each other amicably.

“My apologies for asking you to come out here when you are already so busy,” Hakurou admitted.

“Not at all, not at all. The major issues have all been resolved,” I reassured.

“I see, have you decided who to send to the council?”

“Yes, a newcomer recruited by Diablo. I named her Testarossa. I’ll introduce you two next time.”

“…Named her?” muttered Hinata. “There’s a lot I could say to that, but it’ll take forever, so I’ll do it another time.”

“I-I see.”

“I know you like to drop your head out of the loop, so I won’t bother anymore. Besides—”

I’ll just get a bigger headache listening to you explain—she quietly complained.

It was best to pretend that I didn’t hear that last part.

“The reason why I invited you today was to show you the progress of the children’s growth. Hakurou-dono and I both have been instructing them, so I wanted to update you on their current situation.”

Uh… I didn’t quite get what was going on, but I figured the conversation should continue first.

“Since you said it like that, they have grown a lot?”

“‘Grown a lot’? I guess. You’ll find out when actual combat starts. The labyrinth is really convenient. You can fight at full force with no risk of actually dying,” Hinata reminded with a smile, terrifying as always.

She had the dark aura of a sadist around her.

“I get it. Then I’ll use my ‘Clones’ as their opponents,” I suggested, splitting my slime body from my main body. The slime looked like a knock-off version of me, but it had the actual me inside. My humanoid body on the other hand would be handling the battle trial.

“YEAH! I haven’t fought against Rimuru-sensei in forever!”

“This is awesome. Sensei, please observe how much I’ve improved!”

The bellicose couple Kenya and Alice rejoiced at this news immediately.

The normally reserved Gail started to warm up to the proposal as well. Ryota resembled his usual fussy self, though his eyes were glittering with light that conveyed his anticipation. Since he hadn’t called quits yet, it meant that he had acquired a level of confidence already.

Now the other two, Kumara and Chloe.

“Then I shall go first arinsu!”

“Ehh? But I want to fight Rimuru-sensei as well!”

They were both particularly enthusiastic.

“I see that everyone is full of energy. It’s fine if everyone comes at me at once, but since we are training, we should try one-on-one fights.”

Hearing this, everyone gave a smile. They seemed to be looking forward to dueling with me. It wasn’t a bad idea taking them on occasionally.

With this naive thought, I began to battle the kids in a simulated arena.

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—One hour later—

“Y-you guys, haven’t you gotten a little too strong?!” My voice echoed throughout the labyrinth.

Kenya had indeed become more powerful than the average Holy Knight. He synergized beautifully with the light spirit. Using bizarre stances that you would only see in manga, he brought out these phantasmagoric sword techniques.

Ryota’s swordsmanship was not as strong as Kenya’s; despite that, he could use both water and wind ‘Spirit Magic’ strategically.

Gail, conversely, was well balanced. His cautious personality made him focus more on defense, and he utilized his shield and sword cleverly. He also incorporated earth elemental ‘Spirit Magic’ to make his defense almost indestructible.

While the boys surprised me, the girls were even more impressive.

First, Alice. No wonder people called her Empress. She pulled out a number of dolls from thin air, which were made of magisteel like Beretta. They snarled at me as if they were alive. Her puppeteering skill was getting stronger, and this time, the puppets were no play dolls. If she had faced anyone else, it could have been dangerous.

Moreover, Alice had one more card up her sleeve. There was a massive number of swords floating in midair that targeted me constantly throughout the battle. Scary. There was no pattern to their trajectories. If I didn’t have ‘Predict Future Attack,’ I probably would have taken a couple of hits. In a few years’ time, she may be able to rival a Holy Knight commander.

Let’s not forget about Kumara.

“Come out everyone, demonstrate your power before Rimuru-sama arinsu!” she shouted while unleashing her power.

Her nine tails began glowing golden and twisted behind the cute girl. The next instant, her tails turned into beasts.

Eh, I should have seen this coming, but the creatures that flew out startled me, nonetheless. As expected from Clayman’s ace in the hole. She was already tremendously tough with the beasts summoned from her two tails—and there were eight of them this time. Her ninth tail seemed to be her own, while the rest were all magical beasts. Each creature was over rank A. An average Holy Knight, in all likelihood, wouldn’t even be able to touch one of them. They could also share their combat experience, making their coordination flawless.

Based on what I saw, she had the potential to beat Fritz and the others. This little girl was on par with the ‘Ten Great Saints.’ I know it may sound like I was joking, but I was telling the truth. Once the beasts from her tails gained more combat experience, she would definitely become an unbelievable force. She may eventually live up to the name of the ninetieth-floor guardian.

The last one was Chloe.

“Hiiyaaaa!”

Her yell was very cute, whereas her sword was not, even in the slightest. She was faster than Kenya. In fact, much more than that. I battled against six people in total this time; however, Chloe was the only person that I fought seriously.

Actually, I was treating the situation too lightly. Chloe was so strong that had I not fought her earnestly, I honestly would have been in danger. Obviously, I wouldn’t have died even if I had gone easy on her, but it was definitely humiliating if I lost in front of the kids.

I really didn’t want to embarrass myself here. That was why I had to fight seriously—please don’t call me childish. I would never hold back to preserve the little dignity I still had.

“I can understand your feelings.”

“Indeed, I was just like Rimuru-sama. I needed to show everything I had battling against lil’ Chloe.”

Seriously…? Even Hinata and Hakurou, who were both more skillful in swordsmanship than me, had trouble fighting Chloe?

I was genuinely shocked. Knowing the innocent Chloe was so powerful made me shiver.

“Ahh, you guys are so good!”

“Right? Hearing sensei say this fills me with confidence!”

“But Chloe-chan was the really strong one. Even though everyone calls me the Empress, I’ve never won against her.”

“Yeah, Chloe is so different. She looks so gentle at first glance, but she’s super scary when angry. An angry Alice isn’t scary at all, but when Chloe gets angry, we have to pray.”

Alice jumped up, furious, and shouted, “What did you just say?!”

Ryota and Gail simply nodded in agreement.

It looked like the boys were all on the same page.

“Kenya was quite strong as well,” I remarked. “Although, your stance and swordsmanship could use some work, consider them your weak points. If you can refine those, you will move even more fluidly.”

His moves felt like they were inspired by manga. Although they looked wonderfully dashing, it was detached from traditional swordsmanship, and he made many unnecessary moves. If he could fix this, Kenya would become stronger too.

“That’s precisely it. No matter how I teach him, Kenya just won’t budge…” Hinata sighed, baffled.

She had noticed it as well.

“I can’t help it either! That pose was taught by Masayuki-san himself!”

Huh?

Did that idiot have to teach Kenya such superfluous sword techniques?

I mean, it did look pretty cool in hindsight, so it wasn’t entirely useless…but knowing Masayuki’s actual skill, it suddenly made me think that such a stance was completely trivial.

No wonder the stance looked like it came from manga—it clearly was.

“All right then,” Hakurou interjected, “there’s no use talking. I shall instruct you personally to remove your bad habits. I’ll train you well and make your movement as smooth as flowing water.”

Hakurou’s method was different from Hinata’s in the sense that he wasn’t entirely faithful to traditional swordsmanship. It seemed that he was keeping some of his more heretical techniques to himself, which was why if he found some skill useful yet non-traditional, he would focus on refining those techniques in secret.

Thankfully, it appeared what Kenya learned was not entirely wasted. I left the rest to Hakurou.

As opposed to that—

“Chloe’s swordsmanship was quite similar to Hinata’s. Your moves were very beautiful and effective.”

Chole smiled happily at my praise.

“Yeah! It looked just like Shizu-sensei’s, that’s why I have been working hard to imitate it!”

“Even though you call it imitation, it’s not that simple to learn. It may be a different case if you learn by using Skills like I do, but you’ve mastered this entirely through your talent and hard work. You should feel proud!”

“Indeed. I have had all sorts of disciples in the past, yet I’ve never seen anyone rivaling the talent of this young girl. Your future is very promising.”

Hinata and Hakurou were both rigorous teachers, yet they were both praising Chloe.

It sounded like she was extraordinarily talented. Considering how young she was, there was no telling how much she would progress if training continued. On one hand, I was looking forward to it, but on the other hand, I couldn’t help but feel a tinge of fear.

All right, back to the focus of today.

Hinata seemed to have other goals during her visit here.

“The reason why I called you here, for one, is that I wanted to show you the progress the children have made. These children are all very adept, but they are still young. In order to prevent them from straying off the right path, I hope you will get to know about their current states.”

It went without saying that I had been keeping an eye on the matter as well. Nevertheless, I decided to heed her advice. Hinata was treating these children, who were previously tended to by Shizu-san, as her siblings.

“I understand. Hakurou will take care of them too, plus there are a lot of seniors who can help them in this town as well. I will do the same so that they won’t go down the wrong paths in life.”

“Hehe, I knew you’d say so. I brought up what I said just in case.”

This gal really worries too much.

Hinata really did have a gentle side despite her usual, frigid demeanor.

“Well then, what were your other reasons?” I asked Hinata while peeking at the children who were in a group fight against Hakurou.

“Well actually, the main reason why—”

Hinata paused upon saying so and turned her eyes to the children.

Even though this was Hakurou, taking on all five of the children at once was still tricky. Although he could see through the children’s intentions, if he had reacted just a tad bit slower, he would have sustained a fatal injury.

If just considering their constitutions, the children completely outmatched Hakurou. Naturally, he could not be careless.

By the way, Kumara did not participate. Had she joined and fought seriously, they would have won against Hakurou with sheer numbers. Nonetheless, the team had Chloe right now, so the children had the upper hand. I thought they had wonderful team composition. It was as if they were putting on a martial arts performance. It honestly was captivating.

“She’s so young yet so strong,” Hinata muttered, her eyes fixed on Chloe.

While Kenya, Ryota, Gail and Alice were also very strong, Chloe was abnormally powerful. If she were absent, Hakurou could have ended the battle already rather than being in knee deep mud right now.

And soon, the simulated battle ended.

The children were all catching up with their breaths as Hakurou began doling out advice. It was no wonder why the children had all grown so fast if the training was this harsh every time.

Hinata returned her attention to me and got back on topic.

“I got mesmerized by their fight halfway through our conversation. Have you scheduled the music exchange that Luminas-sama has been pestering for yet? I knew she’d be interested, but by the look of things, she seemed to really enjoy it. That’s why I came to bring the matter to you.”

How surprising—but I had been swamped with work, so I was planning to postpone it.

“Oh, I guess Luminas genuinely liked our concert. I told Takt and the band to continue to practice, and as a result, the number of pieces they can perform has also increased.”

“Your memory in that area is really amazing. I can’t even read music notes, and writing scores from memory was obviously impossible.”

Ahh, so there were things that even Hinata wasn’t good at. She hadn’t been all that interested in the concert either; she was probably terrible with music.

I enjoyed a momentary internal feeling of superiority. With that being said, I had to rely on Raphael-san too.

“Then, please anticipate our visit soon.”

“Very well. Moving a whole band is a huge project, so allow us to send our Holy Knights as escorts. We will use Elemental Magic ‘Warp Portal’ to send them in groups.”

“Wonderful. Since there’s going to be a lot of luggage with so many people, I figured that going there by horse-drawn carriages would be a hassle.”

I recalled that Lubelius was protected by a ‘Barrier,’ meaning we couldn’t just teleport there. This was why we needed a more comfortable method of transportation.

The problem would be resolved when the train was complete. But that would be a long time away from now. You couldn’t ask for things that didn’t exist yet.

Transporting the whole band wasn’t only about moving the performers themselves. Each player had to carry their own instrument for the performance, which was quite cumbersome. If we were to travel by horse-drawn carriages, we might be forced to go down some unfinished roads as well. Riding on roads that were in poor condition could damage the instruments, and we wanted to avoid that type of situation.

I was super envious of the dragon ship owned by the empress of Sarion. Traveling by train might be fun, but in order to reduce the travel time, aircraft were obviously more convenient in that regard.

You could navigate by sea or land for logistical transportation, but for sightseeing or other purposes, air was the fastest and comfiest method.

This was the reason why Hinata’s proposal was very beneficial to us. I promised that I would help too, and so we worked out the detailed matters regarding the travel plans.

As I was halfway through my discussion with Hinata, the children, who were on break, gathered together.

“Rimuru-sensei, where are you going with Hinata-oneechan?”

Since Chloe had inquired, I explained the music exchange that would be held at Lubelius to everyone.

“I want to go too!”

“Me too!”

“I might fall asleep during it, but since Chloe and Alice are going, I’ll go too!”

“Yeah me too!”

“In that case, I’m going as well. The fact that these guys are coming and the possibility of them causing problems is what worries me.”

Because of Chloe’s words, Kenya and the others began clamoring about wanting to go to Lubelius.

Uhh—what should I do?

It was good to let them see more of the world as a form of social experience. But if you were to ask me whether there might be danger or not, I couldn’t confidently rule that out.

Raising her head to look at my troubled expression, Kumara opened her mouth and timidly said, “I-I wish to go too arinsu…”

Kumara’s presence was needed as the guardian of the ninetieth floor. The way she spoke indicated her regret; it appeared that her senses were telling her not to beseech such a request from me. But as a child, she naturally yearned to go on a trip with her friends. It went against my way of doing things if I were to turn her down.

“You don’t have to be so courteous. If it’s only a tiny, selfish request, ask and I may just approve it.”

It was gonna be a headache if she were to grow up to become as stubborn as Milim, but that was better than losing her innocence as a child. Based on these considerations, I told her my thoughts while patting Kumara’s head.

Similar to her small fox form, it feels smooth and fluffy. Her warmth seems to have nothing to do with her human or monster form…

Ehh, Kumara had gone through transforming into a humanoid being; what happened above was purely sensible imagination conducted by yours truly, Rimuru.

“Awesome! Now we can officially travel and skip school!”

“But you always looked happy at school, Ken-chan, did you really want to skip classes?”

“Idiot! Attending classes is fun, but if we get to play while everyone else has to study—how should I say this—it makes us really special.”

“Kenya, I understand what you mean, but I don’t want to get corrupted by your mindset. On the other hand, I feel very excited too.”

“Right? That’s exactly it!”

The children were all fired up about going before I had even given them permission. They even went on to declare something about skipping school. It wasn’t like I didn’t understand their feelings. And although I could sympathize, I would never put such a thought into action…

“Right, it won’t matter. Instead, please have the teachers assign them more homework.”

“Eh! How can you do this, sensei!”

I ignored Kenya’s cries.

Everything doesn’t always go your way, and many things in life were ultimately unfair. I intended for them to learn about this point while they were still young. This was a demonstration of my fatherly love, and they would surely grow stronger from the experience.

This was definitely not me picking on or punishing them. Hopefully, the children would come to understand my justification behind it.

“I just want to be with sensei.”

Chloe, who started the whole thing, seemed rather satisfied.

All right, I suppose it’s fine as long as they make some good memories together.

“Your heart goes soft so easily.”

“Ah, could it be that Hinata-san is against the idea?” I retorted and signaled with my eyes—‘You are so cold.’

“Tsk—” Hinata clicked her tongue “—I never said that,” she answered with irritation. But she didn’t appear to object.

Then we are all good to go.

And so, the plan was settled.

We would be attending the music exchange in Lubelius. The day that we sent out our band, the children would tag along as well.

We arrived at the Holy Empire of Lubelius.

On our tour through the city’s streets the children were overcome with curiosity as they took in all the sights with wonder. On the contrary, Takt and the band members were practically shaking in their boots.

Diablo was by my side, acting as my secretary. Shion was here as well. Since I had let her guard our town last time, I decided to bring her. Instead, Veldora would be keeping guard.

You have an important task as the master of the labyrinth—I convinced him with this line. That was why he didn’t follow us during this expedition. It might have been a different case if we were heading to another country, but it was simply too dangerous to let Veldora meet with Luminas.

«Warning. Probability of problem occurring—100 percent.»

I also received such advice from you-know-who.

It was an obvious landmine to avoid—one that must be avoided—at all costs.

Our guide was Hinata herself.

“Welcome to Lubelius. His Majesty the Pope welcomes you all too,” she introduced in a tone that sounded remarkably disrespectful towards the pope. Although I was aware of the secret that the pope was merely a role Louis played, Takt and the others knew nothing of it. This was, of course, highly classified information. Obviously, I couldn’t tell the children, nor could we tell the members of the band.

I gave an improvised response and confirmed our later schedule with Hinata.

“First off,” she announced, “tonight, we will be hosting a banquet to welcome everyone. Tomorrow, we will invite you all to complete soundchecks. The following day is scheduled for rehearsal and the concert will take place in three days’ time.”

“What do you think, Takt?”

“Y-yes sir! There’s no problem, Rimuru-sama. Even though we require magic to transfer the instruments, I don’t think it will affect them very much. We will need to make slight adjustments depending on the size of the venue, but since there are bands here as well, I don’t think there will be a problem.”

Then it was okay to perform.

“You only have one day to rehearse though.”

“Hahaha, that is indeed true. However, we’ve been practicing every day back home for this concert. All of the members can guarantee that we will not disappoint.”

Excellent!

It must be thanks to their diligence that they possessed such conviction. Despite the fact that hard work was sometimes unable to measure up to natural talent, it was still a reliable method. With hard work, you could build up confidence that subsequently made your heart stronger. Plus, this newfound resilience would also prove itself useful in all manner of other everyday activities. If you persevered every day, you would obviously be confident in your work.

I gave full marks to Takt’s answer.

Now, I am very much looking forward to the concert—I thought to myself, nodding with satisfaction.

Fast forward to later that night.

The members of the band were being treated like nobility. But this only made them more confused and nervous.

“M-may I ask, Rimuru-sama? We are mere common citizens of the Tempest Federation. Are we really allowed to stay in such luxurious rooms?”

This great expedition involved more than one hundred participants, yet each person was assigned their own room. They also got a personal maid, who was on standby next door, to respond the moment they were called.

Moreover, there was a bar that even rivalled ones in a five-star hotel. You could access it regardless of species, human or monster. This, nonetheless, made everyone rather nervous.

The banquet was excessively grand as well. They continuously served bite-sized appetizers, which were both delicious and arranged to be aesthetically pleasing. While portion sizes weren’t too large, the flavors more than made up for that deficiency. Furthermore, the dishes were extraordinarily creative in order to satisfy everyone’s varying palates.

In the beginning, the children were complaining about the small portions and appeared unsatisfied. But, by the end of the banquet, they all seemed quite full as they patted their round bellies.

Since I was a slime, it was impossible for me to be “full” by any measure. The children’s stomachs, on the other hand, had their limits. Regardless of how small the portion of each serving was, if they ate a bunch, then naturally it would eventually add up until they couldn’t eat another bite.

In contrast to the innocent kids, the band members’ feelings were a lot more complicated.

There were many delicious cuisines in Tempest as well, but none of them were like this—made with extreme attentiveness and served exclusively to nobles and royalty.

Not only had they never tasted such luxurious dishes, they also received accommodating services that they had never experienced before. It was unreasonable to expect them to not feel skittish.

“In any case, don’t be so constrained. This is all a token of appreciation from Lubelius for your performance later.”

I was tremendously grateful that I didn’t have to perform.

I hadn’t shown dedication like they had, yet even if I did and was in the same position as Takt and the band members, the crushing performance anxiety would’ve been enough to drown out my enjoyment of the dishes. Not being able to savor delicious food was a huge loss in the pleasures of life.

That was the main reason why I hoped Takt and the band members would appreciate it as much as they could.

The banquet soon ended without a hitch, and the band members made their way back to their rooms.

The children went to sleep too. They were quite excited after spending the entire day seeing new and interesting things. They were undoubtedly exhausted after all the fun they had.

Everyone quickly fell asleep, leaving me the only one awake. I was planning to use my special skill of sleepy boi, but apparently it wouldn’t be necessary.

Knock, knock—I heard the door being gently rapped on.

“My apologies for disturbing Your Majesty at this hour, but our master would like to invite Your Majesty Rimuru to join her. Is it convenient for you to convene?”

Someone ran up to me almost silently. It was one of the attendants that served Luminas—a ‘Surmounter.’ Unlike the ones who came to our research facility, the attendants appeared to be very outstanding individuals. Although I was under the impression that Luminas would not show herself this time, the attendant’s presence suggested that she intended to meet me.

I accepted the invitation without hesitation.

I only brought Shion and Diablo along, and we had the maid guide us to the venue.

“Long time no see, Rimuru. I see you did not bring that evil dragon with you, that’s commendable.”

I figured that “evil dragon” was referring to Veldora. Considering all the bad stuff that guy caused in the past, Luminas definitely had a right to call him that, but I thought she was being a little too harsh.

Nevertheless, it was none of my business.

“Indeed, it’s been a long time. Obviously, I wouldn’t bring him along. That guy’s a walking troublemaker. Letting him come to an event such as this would only give me a headache.”

“Kukuku, so you do understand.”

With just a short exchange, I suddenly got the feeling that Luminas and I had a lot in common.

It turned out Veldora could be useful on occasion.

Three people, including Luminas, were waiting for me in this opulent room. Gunther, with the appearance of an old butler, stood to Luminas’s left while Louis the Pope stood to Luminas’s right. Since Roy, who was acting as Luminas’s body double, had died, all that remained of the ‘Three Archdukes’ were gathered here.

I was somewhat perplexed by Hinata’s absence on this occasion.

“Aren’t you going to call Hinata?”

To my question, Gunter and Louis helpfully replied.

“I was planning to. Even though she’s evolved from a sage to a ‘saint,’ she was still human once. While she doesn’t need to sleep anymore, she apparently could not get rid of her old habit as a human.”

“I went to call her, but she mentioned something about how insufficient sleep would be bad for skin and some other bizarre things…”

Indeed, it was already past midnight, which explained why they didn’t drag Hinata along.

As I was going to take their word for it, Luminas cracked a small smile and told me something unexpected.

“Ara, her bodily structure has evolved close to that of a spiritual life-form, so there’s no way her skin could get worse. But Hinata does require sleep. Even though she’s a ‘saint’ now, her body is still the same as when she was human. It will take a long time before her body fully evolves as well. This has been a misunderstanding, Hinata is not some superwoman,” she smiled again upon finishing her explanation.

Humans were different from monsters in the sense that their bodies would not change drastically like the latter’s—that was the gist of her description. In other words, Hinata still retained all of her human qualities, and in a way, that could be considered her Achilles’ Heel.

I noticed the way monsters evolved was quite beyond common sense too.

Incidentally, this went without saying, but Diablo didn’t need any sleep either. And while Shion still required some rest, she only needed three hours each time. She could also go without sleep for more than seven days straight. Benimaru and Souei were the same, which was perhaps a sign that monsters had stronger adaptability to different environments.

If Hinata wasn’t here, I just had to accept it. As the one being invited, it wasn’t something I should be worrying about anyway.

“In that case, I have a gift for you guys. This is a new dish made by Shuna and Yoshida-san: brandy apple pound cake,” I offered.

Since Hinata missed out on my donation of this delicious dessert, she would no doubt complain. But snacking on sweets at night was probably bad for her beauty. Hinata enjoyed eating this type of stuff, but since she was oblivious of this fact, she would not have hesitated for a single moment to eat it.

How caring of me.

“Your courtesy impresses me! You are a smart one after all,” Luminas praised aloud.

It was thanks to Shuna that I could bring these gifts. The two people who claimed to be my secretaries, on the contrary, were not nearly as considerate. Diablo was definitely the most careful when it came to behaving around me, but he didn’t seem to focus on anything else. A lot of the time, it was like those two had a screw loose somewhere.

Putting that aside for now, I asked, “Right, so why did you call me here?”

“Umm, I was deliberating over whether I should tell you this or not, but now I’ve decided to share this information with you. Granbell has been planning something sinister. I am looking forward to the concert in three days and don’t want anyone to get in the way. That’s why I want your help.”

She cut to the chase without skipping a beat.

Shouldn’t you stop eating cake when discussing something serious like this—I really should have mentioned this to her.

Shion nodded as if she had a clue of what was going on, yet my intuition immediately told me otherwise.

Diablo was giving off a “It’s none of my concern” vibe, probably thinking along the lines of “Just kill the enemies when they come.”

Well, to be honest, I felt awfully conflicted.

It might be a different case had this land been under my administration, but this was another person’s entire nation. Even though I could summon Souei’s subordinates and scatter them around the continent, along with some demons, I did not want to stir things up too much.

That was why:

“If it’s something so important, shouldn’t you call Hinata?”

Indeed, this was the time for Hinata to shine. Compared to us, who were merely guests here, she was more qualified to uphold the security of this nation.

While I thought this was a sensible approach, Luminas wouldn’t buy it.

“Hmph, don’t you look down on us now! Even if those trash come and instigate a fight, Lubelius’s defense is indestructible. We’ve completely fortified our borders to fend off that evil dragon. However, no matter how flawless our defenses may be, intruders could still sneak in by utilizing secret tunnels that we are unaware of and launch an attack.”

I could see glimpses of her confidence from what she had said. The city was an iron fortress even against an entire army. That was to be expected of a city built to withstand attacks from Veldora. A ten thousand strong army, in all likelihood, wouldn’t be enough to conquer it.

Even so, this was not what Luminas was worried about.

“Secret tunnels that even you don’t know about… Right, I recall that Granbell Rosso was the head of the Seven Luminary Clerics…”

“You are correct,” added Louis. “They’ve been operating behind the scenes on this land for a long time. Surely, he had prepared one or two secret passages. Humans are exceptionally skillful at such trickeries.”

“The most unfortunate thing is that man used to be the Hero of ‘Light,’ and even fought against Luminas-sama in the past,” continued Gunther. “If he were to hide his aura, we wouldn’t be able to detect him.”

Their eyes glimmered as they spoke.

This sounded like a challenging task to handle. Isn’t this what you’d call an “inside job”? Granbell knew better than anyone else about this nation’s composition and geography. He had previously proven his strength as well. I heard that he was stronger than Clayman, and therefore could not be underestimated.

That was how I saw it.

“How boring. Please don’t trouble Rimuru-sama with menial chores like that,” someone suddenly interjected, disgusted.

It was Diablo.

Just when I was thinking he had been behaving nicely, he abruptly interrupted with this line. Seriously, couldn’t he be more mindful of the time and place?

Louis and Gunther’s expressions darkened drastically, but fortunately, Luminas’s laughter made the two hold back.

“Kukuku. Black Primordial, Rimuru has truly made you quite the obedient pet. It’s still rather unbelievable despite witnessing it with my own eyes.”

Luminas sure was odd to laugh under these circumstances. But thanks to her jovial reaction, the atmosphere smoothed over once more.

“Please don’t call me that. Rimuru-sama has already given me a wonderful name—”

“Back off, Diablo. Luminas and I have already established an alliance, and I intend to keep it that way.”

I publicly rebuked him, partially to apologize to Luminas.

“Apologies for my intrusion.”

Diablo did not challenge Luminas any further and instead remained silent at my command. It looked to me that he was simply putting on an act. Seeing how he had apologized to Luminas and the others, I’ll let it pass. Luminas had some requests for us guests, and I didn’t want to make the scene any more awkward…

“No, that guy—Diablo—has a point too. It’s not very courteous of me to ask a favor such as this from you. On the other hand, I still wish you will agree since I have good reasons.”

Luminas sure had a big heart. She even considered Diablo’s feelings and directly called him by his name.

…Even though she addressed him without any honorifics.

Luminas wouldn’t get mad over trivial things such as these. Thus, she calmly revealed why we had been invited.

“I brought this up when I mentioned that Hinata needs to sleep, but when humans evolve, their bodies won’t adapt right away. It takes a long time before they can mature.”

From a sage that possibly rivalled a ‘Demon Lord Seed,’ a human could grow to become a ‘saint’ which was the equivalent of an awakened demon lord. Yet, if this evolution required some time to activate before coming into effect, then a newly risen ‘saint’ would not pose too much of a threat. Even if they gained enormous power, it was still meaningless if they couldn’t properly command it.

Hinata’s control over her powers was masterful; unfortunately, it relied entirely on her techniques. It wasn’t something as natural as breathing, so it would burden her body and mind.

Speaking of which, why did Luminas bring this matter up when Hinata wasn’t around—ah, I understand now. It was actually because Hinata wasn’t present that she found the confidence to discuss the topic.

Humans would evolve over eons. Could it mean—

Luminas continued with her explanation:

“Regarding Granbell, he is not a ‘saint,’ but ‘A Bearer of The Hero’s Egg.’ When the hatchling grew its wings and left the nest, even I have no idea just how strong he has become.”

Didn’t this imply he was a legitimate Hero?

The term ‘Hero’ was used here and there, but had different connotations to it. Some would proclaim themselves to be a Hero, but only people bearing the ‘Hero’s Egg’ were acknowledged by the world. In other words, the latter were the real deal, possessing sufficient strength to even seal away Veldora.

Just like how ‘Demon Lord Seeds’ were still considered demon lords, ‘Hero’s Egg’ bearers would be considered Heroes in conjunction. Their sources of power were very similar. ‘Heroes and demon lords are bound by causality’—this saying really hit the nail on the head. And deducing further from this knowledge, I could tell that Granbell’s power was presumably on par with an awakened demon lord.

“—Could it be that he is more powerful than Hinata?”

“When I heard that Gran was killed by Nicolaus alone, I thought I had misheard. ‘Disintegration’ is truly the strongest magic spell, but Gran would not be stupid enough to take a hit like that head on. And, to answer your question—”

Luminas stared straight into my eyes.

I see, so that’s why she didn’t call Hinata.

“—You are correct. I tried convincing him to join me, which is why I fought against him in the first place. As a result, this is why I can confidently declare him to be stronger than even the older demon lords,” Luminas concluded without hesitation.

Not only me, but Luminas’s servants, Louis and Gunther, were shocked by her words. It was likely due to the fact that they had always looked down on Gran in the past.

“Indeed, we’ve never challenged Gran head on before…”

“Is he really that strong?”

“Certainly. The reason why I allowed Gran to do as he wished was so that I could have him in the palm of my hand. We did not have any conflicts of interest, and I only proposed a deal with him out of curiosity. I allowed him to create the Seven Luminaries and granted him the highest authority. If I had to justify why, I wanted to make him one of my trump cards,” Luminas reluctantly admitted.

Yet this trump card backfired before it could be exploited.

Did he become a hostile dagger at her throat?

On one hand, this was her miscalculation, but on the other, I was also partly responsible. However, no matter how you put it, my role was simply a small percentage of the cause and therefore shouldn’t be held accountable.

“The girl was precious to the Rossos. This is all happening because that ‘Mariabell’ died,” I quickly surmised.

For Granbell, who was constantly cautious, to act now during these turbulent times, that must have been the reason.

“Was it the little girl I saw during your nation’s founding festival? I did not know her either, yet I could tell she was a remarkably strong foe. If Granbell treasured her so much, then she might have been the key to his ambition.”

Mariabell was indeed tough to deal with. She definitely would have continued deviously planting seeds for even more trouble in the future had she not revealed herself and her underhanded scheming.

In contrast to enemies you can face head on, it was the hidden villains that were so much harder to eliminate.

But now that she mentioned it—

“By the way, what is Granbell’s goal? He hadn’t made any moves until now, so it doesn’t feel like he is exposing himself just to avenge Mariabell…”

“It could be—no, it’s nothing.” Luminas swallowed her words. She closed her eyes and pondered for a few seconds before calmly explaining, “That man has always dreamed of bringing peace to the human world in the past. He battled vile fiends and eliminated vicious beasts in an effort to safeguard humanity. Furthermore, this stubborn guy fought me several times until he learned that I had no intention of killing all humans, but instead wished to coexist in peace. Afterwards, we created a pact, and the Western Continent became a place of peace and prosperity. Various kinds of familys united together, and nations were founded. Some smaller countries flourished and became larger. Gran manipulated these nations from the shadows, eventually spurring the birth of the Western States Council.”

Listening to this firsthand, I realized that Granbell—Hero Gran—seemed to be a bona fide legendary figure. He justified his decision to remain the holder of the head position of the questionable Five Great Elders as a way to protect humanity. Putting the morality of his actions aside, judging from the results alone, humanity was given a thousand years of peace because of Granbell…

“Sarion, led by the ancient elven tribe, lacked the ambition to expand their territory. While ‘Continent’s Wrath’ Dagruel and ‘Storm Dragon’ Veldora fought on the land, us in Lubelius handled the defense. The demons from the frozen realm of the north attempted to invade several times, but they were merely toying with us. If Guy were serious, this world would undoubtedly have already perished. And in that case, there would only be one more human circle left. To prepare ourselves for such a possibility, we allied ourselves with the dwarves and had merchants gather information for us. Granbell had been handling all this by himself the entire time,” Luminas finally finished.

Upon learning these new details, I couldn’t help but think that Granbell was quite impressive.

No, no, this is no time to resonate with Luminas’s words.

“And so? If Granbell-san is this powerful, what is he attempting to accomplish?”

“Kukuku, don’t get so hasty now. Gran has no reason to antagonize me—although I wish I could boldly claim that, actually, I thought of one possible goal he might have in mind. However, I do not intend to tell you about it.”

Ah, just as I thought.

She was trying to avoid giving too much away, so I half guessed this outcome.

“Regarding his motivation, there was one piece of information that concerned me. Have you ever heard of the name Yuuki Kagurazaka?” inquired Luminas.

“Yes. Didn’t you say that he had an ominous aura around him? Not only did he instigate the Kingdom of Farmus to raise arms against my nation, but the late Demon Lord Clayman was also doing his bidding.”

“Ara ara, so you noticed that as well. Good, then it’ll be easier for you to understand. You see, this Yuuki had contacted Gran in the past. The two appear to have interacted with each other and even formulated somewhat of an agreement.”

It’s Yuuki again, huh? Enough is enough. I’m getting pretty tired of being jerked around by that guy…

Had it not been for Raphael-san, I would have been easily fooled by him again. If I were to allow this individual to continue his pernicious acts, then there would be a ton of problems to deal with in the future. Perhaps it was time that I confronted him directly.

“Could it be that Gran was operating due to Yuuki’s manipulation?”

“Indeed, I am afraid a part of their plan is directed at you.”

I see.

They must’ve thought that now was the perfect time to strike since I was away from Tempest.

“I get it,” Shion suddenly interjected, “that brat’s goal is to make Gran and Rimuru-sama fight each other!”

I was so shocked that my eyes automatically focused on Shion. And here I thought she was ignoring the meeting because she didn’t understand. Turns out she understood everything just fine.

“Kufufufufu, he thinks that just because we left the country with a few guards, this is an opportunity that can’t be passed up? How naive. There are two Heavenly Kings guarding Rimuru-sama; no matter what he is planning, it will be meaningless.”

Diablo was up to his usual antics.

Please stop. I felt tremendously embarrassed every time someone mentioned the Four Heavenly Kings.

“In any case, as a precaution, we should stay alert. There are three more days before the concert, and after those three days, it won’t be a problem of yours anymore. Just like what I said in the beginning, I merely wish to enjoy the concert.”

Luminas wasn’t shaken either. While she labeled Gran a threat, she still prioritized her entertainment.

I wanted to learn from her how to be this calm and collected.

On that thought, the secret meeting deep into the night concluded.

Next, would we see if Granbell really took action? Would Yuuki take advantage of this as well? Despite our worries, the second day of our visit to Lubelius began.

Today, we were preparing the venue. We moved around the instruments and started setting them up.

We were led to the cathedral. This was an enormous building that could hold a large number of believers and, at the same time, a major structure that was the vital point of defense for the path leading to its interior.

I didn’t have anything in particular to do. Tasks like tuning instruments were best left to the experts. I would proceed with the schedule as planned and bring the kids on a field trip.

Of course, as Luminas made abundantly clear, it was important to remain vigilant. To that end, we summoned Diablo’s direct subordinate, Venom, and brought him along as a bodyguard.

Venom must have been quite shocked since he was summoned without any prior warning.

“Diablo, you will be in charge of supervising the band members’ work—”

“Rimuru-sama,” I was interrupted mid-sentence by Diablo, “please wait a moment. I knew this would happen, which is why I’ve already made arrangements last night.”

This guy just had to eliminate all possibilities of us being separated. I suppose this was the reason why he had called all his subordinates here, though I couldn’t necessarily blame him for doing that.

Diablo even threatened Venom with “Show up within ten minutes.”

It was one thing for Venom to actually carry out the order, but for Diablo to demand that without batting an eye, it just proved his heartlessness. Oh well, he wouldn’t have a heart to begin with. He was a demon after all. While impressed by Diablo’s efficiency, I also felt sympathy for his subordinates with how tiresome his orders must have been.

Before I could blink, the one hundred demons under Venom’s command had already begun helping the band members. These majins were all over rank A, and Luminas’s subordinates would also stay alert. Now, I could rest assured that the bodyguard detail was flawless.

Under Hinata’s guidance, I toured around the city to examine Luminas’s legacy. And taking it all in, I felt that the Holy Empire of Lubelius was the direct antithesis of the Tempest Federation.

This was not to say, however, that they didn’t have their merits. Although the citizens lacked freedom, it was a blissful society because the people here didn’t compete with each other. The only work they needed to do was to follow the procedures already set for them by their superiors.

In a sense, everyone had essentially relinquished their independence, but in return, they would never experience hunger or pain. Those who couldn’t bear such a society had already left the country, whereas the remaining people had all adhered to these rules since birth. Naturally, this would seem unbalanced to a bystander.

Ignorance is bliss.

People wouldn’t be dismayed if they never knew how less fortunate they were compared to others. Conversely, this discontentment could also inspire people to work harder for greater aspirations. After all, a society without competition would become stagnant.

“For some reason this feels really boring,” Alice muttered to herself.

“Yeah” Kenya voiced his agreement. “People our age here are all working. Aren’t there any schools?”

While the rest of the children did not speak, they still remained confused at the bizarre sight in front of them.

“There are no schools in this country. Everyone is under someone’s command. Everyone is equal under the glorious name of God. People come to this nation to enjoy peace and prosperity,” Hinata said proudly.

But I had to wonder, did she really think that was the right thing to do? Did they have no qualms about the fact that the upper echelons of society had monopolized all luxuries for themselves?

But on the contrary, she still had a point. It didn’t feel right to teach the unknowing commoners about luxury when they didn’t need to know anything about it in the first place…

“No matter how hard one tries, there will always be some things that are impossible to acquire. If people never know about the existence of these things, then they won’t feel the need to obtain it and suffer as a result.”

“That’s true as well…”

Kenya wasn’t dumb either. He understood what I meant.

“Living in an extremely regulated society like this, we maintain a high standard of happiness for our citizens. That’s why when communicating with other nations, everything must all go through the Western Holy Church first,” Hinata explained.

That made sense.

If their people were ignorant of things like luxury, then they wouldn’t be allowed to have contact with other nations in fear of them learning about the inequality they were living in.

“They sound like fish raised in a fishbowl.”

“If they feel like they are happy, then we should not interfere.”

“I suppose so. Human happiness cannot be satisfied by materialistic desires alone. A society that pursues spiritual happiness definitely isn’t a bad idea either.”

Although, I probably wouldn’t be able to tolerate it. I believed that my knowledge of these luxuries granted me the right to pursue that prosperity.

A long, long time ago, I used to run around the neighborhood playing hide and seek with friends. Perhaps if it were me from back then, I would have found this society to be very comfortable.

Everyone has a different definition of happiness. You don’t have the right to criticize others and call their ideologies false. Think for yourself and do things your own way.

I thought that should be sufficient. Even so, there was something else that I was mindful of—

“—But the people here won’t be able to survive on their own. If they are to sustain a life like this, they need protection—”

—Chloe’s mutter was just what I was thinking.

Children’s observation skills can’t be underestimated sometimes.

Her words seemed to have gotten a reaction from Hinata as well, seeing how she rapidly blinked her eyes a few times.

Looks like she noticed it too.

This society was twisted, in a sense. Without its ruler, its citizens, unknowledgeable of the outside world, were unable to do anything. Losing their personal freedom meant that their lives were entirely in other people’s hands. A life like that would be no different from livestock…

“—Indeed. But we have been working hard to improve the situation to prevent such things from happening.”

“Oh—I see. But I still think it’s better if everyone can work together. Then they won’t just rely on Hinata-oneechan’s hard work. Everyone can help out!”

That was an idealistic take because things were not as simple as “working hard.”

Everyone was born with different talents, and so the amount of responsibilities they could accomplish were unequal as well. The word “equality” sounded wonderful, but everyone would still come to experience cruel and unjust reality.

Idealism and realism.

The two locked in eternal conflict with each other. When one of them stands valid, the other will not. So there was never really a right answer. As long as you walk down the path you believe in, that was enough. The unknown was what made life so interesting.

The children appeared to be troubled over something the rest of the day. It made me realize again that happiness wasn’t just about fulfilling our material needs. Even though I knew this, I couldn’t stop emphasizing it. Regardless of the conclusion, I didn’t think the day was wasted.

I suppose that the Holy Empire Lubelius’s approach was another valid method. This diversity allowed for life to have infinite possibilities.

I reflected upon my life again and pondered carefully. I figured not limiting myself intentionally was the correct path for me. I was reincarnated as a slime after being stabbed to death in my previous life. There was no telling what would happen in the future. And if that were the case, not living in the moment would be a shame.

I couldn’t help but ponder after considering all these thoughts.

And thus the wheels of fate began to turn…

“Did you just say that the Yellow Primordial has disappeared?”

“That’s right. It’s honestly baffling, but after we detected an enormous surge of mana, all the dormant demonic aura in the area had disappeared—”

“…Unbelievable.” Having listened to Alrose’s report, Leon couldn’t help but think he’d misheard.

Leon’s domain crossed paths with the spiritual world known as the ‘Realm of Demons.’ It was a land covered in a thick, impure aura of magicules, and powerful demons occasionally roamed the territory. If it were a demon without a host, Leon’s knight order could handle them, even if it were an archdemon.

However, they had discovered the presence of some ancient demons dwelling within the area. One of them was an overlord that even Leon could not ignore. That demon was the Yellow Primordial, Jaune. Since she had yet to obtain a physical body, she had a limited range of activity. Consequently, Leon could not leave this land. She was simply too dangerous to be left alone. After all, no one else would be able to handle that vicious demon.

“She’s a psychotic demon that fires off nuclear magic for fun. There’s no way we can coexist with her. Any attempts at negotiation were ignored as well. If not for Leon-sama’s presence, I would not have been able to handle it…yet you say that such a foe has gone missing?”

“Yes, Claude. I couldn’t believe it either, that’s why I came to verify. I found that the area overlapping the demon’s realm was somehow dimensionally modified. The only logical explanation is that someone shut down the ‘Gate of Hell.’”

“Is that even possible…?”

Hearing the words of Leon’s top knight—Black Knight Claude, the strongest knight of the Golden Valley of El Dorado—Silver Knight Alrose responded with agitation.

Not only Leon, but all of this land’s inhabitants were troubled by these demons. The fact that the culprit, the Yellow Primordial, had disappeared was incredible news. It was so unbelievable that they were all in shock.

Moreover, even the ‘Gate of Hell’ had disappeared. They couldn’t help but suspect that this was a prelude to something much more ominous. The ‘Gate of Hell’ was the door where the physical world and spiritual world overlapped. As a result, demons without physical bodies could still influence the physical world for a short period of time.

In the past, Leon had sent out his knight order several times to try and seal the gate, yet their efforts were foiled by demons on every occasion. There had been regular skirmishes ever since he founded his nation here.

The most frustrating part was that Leon was unable to destroy the source of their problems, thus enabling spiritual life-forms to revive endlessly. For the demons, their battles with Leon were merely to pass the time in their immortal lives, but to Leon and his people, it caused tremendous harm.

For Leon, the ruler of this rich land, demons were the root cause of his worries. Had he been more serious, he probably could have wiped out the demons. The only issue was, if he weren’t careful, he could inadvertently wake up the Yellow Primordial.

Actually, even if it were to come to that—

If Leon were to battle an awakened Yellow Primordial, he could still win following a fierce battle. But clashing with her would result in the continent sinking to the bottom of the ocean.

In hopes of preventing such an outcome, Leon avoided conflicts with her.

What the hell happened? Yellow Primordial… According to Guy, she can’t be reasoned with like Mizeri or Raine.

Leon carefully weighed the pros and cons of keeping the demons there, and even when sacrifices had to be made, he chose to maintain the status quo as it was.

Yet this threat had suddenly disappeared.

There is no way something this fortunate would happen in this world—this thought weighed not only on Leon’s mind, but everyone else’s as well.

A clearly shaken Leon received more information:

“I have something to report. There was a total of five kids who were hidden in the Tempest Federation. I have confirmed with sources within Ingracia and investigated further on the matter. Demon Lord Rimuru seems to have made a secret agreement with Demon Lord Luminas to sell the children.”

“Is this true?”

“Lubelius and Tempest both formed an alliance. The two demon lords are on good terms. We deduced that Demon Lord Rimuru might have deceived Yuuki Kagurazaka and made the children, who all possess a large quantity of magicules, his bargaining chips for the alliance.”

The Magical Knight of the Blue Knight Order had been investigating Tempest, and now he shared what he had discovered with Leon through ‘Magic Communication.’

Leon couldn’t help but wonder at the surprising news. He had met Rimuru during the Walpurgis Banquet, and he didn’t seem to be the type of person who would do something like this.

“Have someone monitor the source of this intelligence. They are likely tied to some other party, or worse, being manipulated.”

“How could this happen…?”

“Could this have been Demon Lord Rimuru’s bidding?”

“No, it shouldn’t be. Demon Lord Rimuru has no reason to lay a finger on the children.”

“Then what could possibly be the reason?”

“Perhaps they wanted us to fight among ourselves and profit from it. Demon Lord Luminas may have been a victim of this plot as well, or perhaps she was the conspirator herself.”

“—Uh!”

“Who could have…?”

Based on the current situation in the Western Nations, who is the most likely suspect?—Leon pondered silently to himself.

The answer seemed both obvious and obscure.

“—The secret organization ‘Cerberus’?”

The only people who knew Leon was collecting ‘Otherworlder’ children were those suspicious merchants. Actually, there were others, those being the people who originally provided the merchandise with summoning magic.

Could it be that the Rossos discovered the secret behind their summonings? Or perhaps they had secretly allied with the merchants…

Once doubt took hold, it started to rapidly grow. However, based on the new information, it just didn’t make any sense. If the situation simply involved five mere kids, then there was no reason for Leon to act—or at least, that should be how anyone involved in the matter should view it…

For a demon lord, you normally avoided interfering with the affairs of your peers. Moreover, imposing yourself on the affairs of other demon lords when it didn’t involve you in the first place would be an extraordinarily foolish act. If you did not tread carefully, you might end up antagonizing two demon lords at once. That was the reason why the smarter choice for Leon was to ignore this information. Luminas might have been up to something, but it was in all likelihood directed towards Rimuru and therefore of no consequence to Leon.

There is no reason for me to act—Leon finally concluded.

Yet this time, it was difficult for him to justify his decision. Likely realizing the validity of what Leon said, his subordinates began expressing their opinions too.

“I see…so someone is trying to take advantage of Leon-sama, no?”

“Shall we eliminate them?”

Leon spoke up to stop them. “No, without concrete evidence, it’s not wise to make a move against ‘Cerberus,’ since they enjoy quite the standing with the Eastern Empire. It was probably instigated by those guys, but it might also be the Rossos who betrayed us. Furthermore—”

Leon calmly made his decision and gave his instructions when a sense of unease crossed his mind.

He recalled the name Kroba Hale.

Could it be…

Yes, there was no reason for him to act, and moving now would be the same as stepping into someone’s trap. Despite knowing this, Leon was still extremely anxious.



Had the Yellow Primordial stayed, he would not have been able to leave this territory and follow through with such a foolish decision. He probably would have made the logical choice without hesitation.

Yet today—

This is unbelievable, but for some reason, I feel like I must act this time…

Leon had stopped in the middle of his sentence as his subordinates watched on. Alrose and Claude spoke up.

“Your Majesty, we are all your loyal knights. We will heed and obey your every command.”

“Indeed. Even if you were to be more stubborn, we would not have any complaints. Please give us an order. We shall fulfill your wishes without delay!”

“Everyone…”

The rest of the knight commanders followed their lead and voiced their loyalty to Leon.

“—The disappearance of the Yellow Primordial may be purely coincidental, but…” Leon closed his eyes as he muttered.

The next time he opened his eyes, a firm smile had emerged on his face.

“Then I shall heed your advice. I will attend to the matter myself. I’ll trouble you all with the task of staying guard here.”

“ “ “YES SIR!” ” ”

On this land—the prosperous Golden Valley of El Dorado—the situation had changed drastically. ‘Platinum Saber’ Leon Cromwell broke his long-held silence and raised his sword once more—

“That’s it! Demon Lord Leon is on the move. As I’ve predicted, this ‘Chloe’ isn’t just any kid. She might turn out to be—”

Leon’s end goal was not the children, but a specific someone from the ‘Otherworld.’ If this was bound by causality as well, Chloe was most likely the person who Leon was searching for.

“But, Yuuki-sama, even if Leon is going to take action, it doesn’t mean that he will dance to our score. He should be heading to Lubelius now, but I don’t think he’ll believe all the information we’ve leaked. He might get suspicious instead.”

“I thought as much. However, the tradeoff is worth it now that we’ve identified Leon’s target,” Yuuki revealed, seemingly satisfied.

Kagali and the others couldn’t catch up with Yuuki’s train of thought. Unable to figure out his scheme, they were rather disgruntled.

“I agree that Chloe is very suspicious, but do we really have enough evidence to make her our trump card? It’s not really Yuuki-sama’s style to wager on such uncertainty.”

“Ya have a point. Besides, we had to perform really dangerous acts just to get the words out, ain’t that just telling him to suspect us? What’s the point in doing that anyway?”

“Right. I wouldn’t think Boss would make bad calls, but wouldn’t this make Cerberus a public enemy of Leon? How would that benefit us in any way?”

While Footman seemed pretty unconcerned about the situation, Laplace and Teare both expressed their doubts to Yuuki. And even the intelligent Kagali remained silent this time.

Misha, the “Lover” of Cerberus, gave off a frivolous smile.

“It’s understandable that fellow members of the Moderate Clown Troupe would find it confusing. After all, such an ordeal promises no benefit for us whatsoever. There’s only one reason to do it, which is because we won’t be able to trade with Demon Lord Leon in the future anyway—that’s why the Boss made his decision.”

Upon hearing her explanation, Kagali suddenly understood everything. “So that was the reason! In reality, it’s not that we didn’t want to trade with him, but rather we can’t anymore in the future…”

“What are you on about?”

“W-what does that mean, Kagali-sama?”

“Kukuku, you wouldn’t understand even if you asked. We should simply follow orders—”

“Footman, shut up for a second! It’s fine if you don’t understand, but I still want to ask!” Teare interjected, cutting Footman off.

He seemed a bit upset. Being good friends, Footman was far more affected by Teare’s words.

There’s no need to listen to all this convoluted stuff, just obey your leaders—in other words, comply with Yuuki and Kagali’s orders, and everything would turn out fine. Footman earnestly believed that by doing so, the plan proceeding smoothly was all but assured. However, it seemed that he was the only one holding onto the idea.

While the others had faith in Yuuki and Kagali as much as he did, they wanted to be sure of the rationale supporting their actions before accepting them.

Glancing at his companions, Yuuki gave a wry smile. Considering convenience alone, men like Footman sure are easy to use. But to be honest, in order to raise the chance of success for our operations, Laplace and the others are the better candidates. Frankly, there aren’t that many reasons behind our actions anyway, he thought to himself.

Thus, Yuuki chose to explain the matter to his subordinates in greater detail.

“It’s more than enough that Leon is on the move. Didn’t I order you guys to move the top-secret merchandise to him? That’s because I no longer wish to make deals with Leon anymore. And that’s why I gave you guys the last opportunity to take a look at your archnemesis.”

“Eh, but doesn’t that mean we could’ve wreaked havoc while we were there that day and not gotten chewed out for it?”

“Indeed, it would’ve been okay under the condition that everyone made it out alive, of course,” Yuuki said with a grin. His smile was brimming with so much confidence that it calmed the clowns down. “Even though they are all just children, it’s not easy gathering ‘Otherworlders.’ Do you guys know the reason why we continued selling children to him despite knowing it would only increase his strength?”

Laplace thought for a bit. “Because Boss wanted to stay in touch with him, right?”

“Yes, that’s correct. Then what would be the necessary condition for that?”

“Is it the secret merchandise—the kids from the ‘Otherworld’?”

“Indeed. But right now, we no longer have the means to acquire them. Do you know why?”

“Because the Rosso family is in charge of summoning the kids—eh…I get it, so that’s wha’ it is!” Laplace excitedly exclaimed.

“Eh, what and what is?”

Teare was still very confused, while on the other hand, Laplace seemed to have pieced everything together.

“To put it simply, Teare, we plan to frame the Rossos and let them take the fall for the entire ordeal. Since we can’t acquire merchandise anymore, that also means we won’t be able to make deals with them. That’s why we have to take the initiative. We will stop all dealings with Leon and only contact him when it becomes necessary in the future,” Kagali clarified.

“But even if that’s the case, we don’t have to intentionally do something that suspicious…” Teare mumbled.

“That ain’t the case. It’s so that we could make the Rossos look like the masterminds behind all this. Boss sure is one cruel lad.” Laplace groaned in amazement, as if he had finally noticed the truth.

“Ahahahaha! I’ll take that as a compliment. Laplace is right. I intend to push all responsibility to Elder Granbell.”

“Leon is annoying,” commented Kagali, “but more importantly, he’s extremely cautious. He will definitely suspect us, but he won’t think that ‘Cerberus’ would employ such a crude tactic. Furthermore, he’ll probably clear Demon Lord Rimuru or Luminas of suspicion and wind up with no one to blame. As for the Rosso family, he probably wouldn’t even consider them suspects.”

Yuuki voiced his agreement. “While Leon is indeed cautious, he’s also overconfident in himself. To him, the only value people have is so they can be exploited, and he would never think that they could harm him. That’s why he never investigated the Rosso family in the past. Thus, he probably doesn’t realize that is exactly where the real threat lies.”

“Indeed, the Five Great Elders aren’t really that impressive to be honest, except for those two,” Kagali remarked.

Kagali’s offhand remark confused Teare again. “Two? I thought that Mariabell had already been taken care of. Wouldn’t that leave only Granbell?”

“Looks like you guys didn’t know. Within the Rosso family, there are three people that you cannot underestimate,” Kagali quickly corrected.

Mariabell had died, leaving two remaining. They knew this from information gathered by ‘Cerberus.’

“Well, technically this last person isn’t one of the Five Elders. The rumor is that the Count of the Cidre Border has a subordinate, a real tough character,” Yuuki divulged, smiling wryly as he shared the information with his companions.

The Count of the Cidre Border was in charge of safeguarding the northern realm of the Kingdom of Ingracia. The land had been protected by a guardian for generations.

This guardian wore a mask and armor that covered him from head to toe. No one knew about his true identity, and he was a mystery who answered directly to Granbell. Even though he was not one of the Five Great Elders, anyone who knew about him wouldn’t dare cross him.

Yuuki originally heard about this masked man from Damrada. “Even Damrada said ‘though I haven’t actually fought the guy, I’m not sure I would win.’ It’s quite telling of his strength. After all, Damrada had only spoken highly of Hinata and no one else.”

To Yuuki’s knowledge, there were only three people within the Western Nations that Damrada was wary of: Hinata, Mariabell, and that man.

From Damrada’s viewpoint, compared to the head of the Five Elders, Granbell, that mysterious man was much more difficult to deal with.

Damrada of ‘Wealth,’ was one of the leaders of the secret organization ‘Cerberus.’ Yuuki trusted him as a good companion and leader, so if he said that the man was rather powerful, then they definitely couldn’t ignore him.

Laplace tried to make sense of everything. “What’s the deal with this guy then?”

“I’m not sure. I’ve never met him. But apparently the north is peaceful all thanks to that man. According to Damrada, he had witnessed him fighting against the demons from the northern realm.”

Yuuki’s words shocked everyone.

While Kagali and Misha caught wind of this information beforehand, they still couldn’t help but be shocked, nonetheless.

It was absolutely mind-blowing.

“I heard that that man’s name is ‘Razul.’ Elder Granbell gave him this name personally.”

“You mean Elder Granbell—”

“Named him?”

“Eh, then could it be…”

“Looks like Kagali-sama did not know this either. Indeed, Damrada claims that Razul apparently is not human,” Misha explained.

Yuuki added some more information. “Yup, that’s what Damrada told me. Apparently, his mask and armor aren’t equipment, but his actual body.”

However, this meant nothing to Laplace and the other clowns.

“That really doesn’t matter though. Just to clarify, when ya said demons from the northern realm, you aren’t talking about that demon lord’s lackeys, are ya?”

“R-right, if it’s that demon lord—‘Lord of Darkness’—the western continent would be in ashes already…”

Laplace and Kagali normally wouldn’t look so panicked, but no one made fun of them. Neither did Yuuki.

“Don’t be so nervous. I guess you are really afraid of Demon Lord Guy Crimson. That aside, regarding your question, the demons from the northern realm are obviously Demon Lord Guy’s men. It seems that Guy has permitted his subordinates to go off and invade human society for their own amusement. To demons, it’s like a game, though the ones being attacked would hardly agree to that sentiment. However, Razul made it so that they were blocked outside Ingracia’s border.”

That man had managed to defeat armies of demons by himself and protected human society.

Listening to just how powerful the man was, everyone went fell silent and still except for Yuuki. “While I also found it rather unbelievable, I still think it’s true. That being said, Demon Lord Guy never fights seriously, which is why the Western Nations are at peace. Regardless, this ‘Razul’ does pose quite the threat.”

“He seems pretty reckless. I’d never be able to do something like that,” confessed Laplace. Everyone slowly started to recover from the onslaught of shocking information.

“W-well, now that we know this guy is strong, what does it have to do with Leon? Are we planning to lure Leon to the north and fight that guy?” Teare asked.

Hearing this, Yuuki smiled happily. “Well, about that, let’s get back to where we left off. Just as I’ve said, the Rossos have always held on to their trump card ‘Razul.’ Since they never knew when the demons would attack, they couldn’t move their pawn away from the north because it was acting as a deterrent.”

That was the reason why Mariabell didn’t account ‘Razul’ in her plan. After all, he was a strategic piece who served Elder Granbell directly. He was not someone that even Mariabell could order around.

It wasn’t like Yuuki had only found out about that man recently. The reason why they didn’t utilize this ‘Razul’ despite knowing his strength was because an opportunity never emerged.

If they were to use him without carefully considering it first, then Guy’s men could decimate the western continent. Yuuki wanted to avoid this possibility and therefore insisted on not doing anything about the northern realm.

However—

The situation had changed.

“Now let’s get to the crux of the matter. I had a meeting with Granbell and made a deal with the old man. I’ve informed you all of what we spoke about before.” Yuuki’s smile disappeared after he finished talking.

Everyone nodded, and Kagali spoke in his place:

“The true identity of that God everyone worships in the Western Holy Church is just who we suspected. Furthermore, Granbell was extremely saddened by the passing of Mariabell. This is why he has decided to collaborate with Yuuki-sama.”

“What a foolish old man.”

“Quiet now, Laplace. Yuuki-sama was asked to do a job, we are preparing according to this plan!”

Yuuki and Granbell’s secret meeting.

Its content was—

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Yuuki informed Granbell of Mariabell’s death.

Mariabell attempted to challenge Demon Lord Rimuru and suffered a major defeat. As a last resort, she attempted to overload the magic power core and due to the subsequent explosion, she was killed on site.

It was the same story that Yuuki told Rimuru. He had thought about lying on the matter before, but he figured it was best not to. Since Rimuru no longer suspected him, Yuuki didn’t want to accidentally disrupt the status quo.

Even though Yuuki couldn’t predict how Granbell would react upon learning of Mariabell’s death, he believed that he could still handle him in a fight. Even if Granbell was the guardian of humanity and one of the Seven Luminaries, at this point, he was nothing more than a sad old man drowning in his desire for power—or at least that was how Yuuki saw it. Although Granbell was still a force to be reckoned with, he was a shadow of his former self, someone that Yuuki could defeat.

There were, however, guards at the venue where they met. In addition to that, there were also some otherworlders among them as well. It would be unwise to antagonize all of them. Still, even under these circumstances, Yuuki was behaving very calmly.

Now that Mariabell was out of the picture, he only had to worry about ‘Razul.’ With all these factors, Yuuki no longer planned to hide his true nature and decided to confront Granbell directly.

“Is that so, Mariabell has died…”

“Indeed. We are quite troubled as well. I was controlled by Mariabell and forced to fight Demon Lord Rimuru. Even though my association is a subsidiary to the council and is run from the council’s funds, wouldn’t that be a violation of our contract? Honestly, I could demand compensation from you guys for stripping me of my free will.”

Granbell completely ignored Yuuki and demanded an explanation instead. “What happened between you and Demon Lord Rimuru?”

Yuuki was expecting this sort of reaction to some degree, so he wasn’t too displeased.

He simply shrugged and continued, “Nothing that bad. He might suspect you, but he likely thought everything was instigated by Mariabell. I intentionally created this illusion; I hope you won’t blame me for that.”

“Hmmm…”

Contrary to what Yuuki had predicted, Granbell looked tired.

He closed his eyes and fell silent for a while.

“—I suppose that’s it then, Mariabell is dead. The hope of the Rossos has disappeared. In that case, we must use that lord’s secret treasure and seek vengeance against Rimuru.”

“‘That lord’? ‘secret treasure’? I have no clue what you’re talking about. Please do not drag me into this anymore than you already have.”

“Kukuku, now, now, Yuuki. You are a smart man, surely you’ve figured this out already.”

“…Figured what out?”

“Hmph! The God of Luminism is Demon Lord Luminas-sama.”

“Oh…”

Yuuki had more or less guessed that already, but he was still shocked to hear this from Granbell. Moreover, he was curious as to why Granbell would suddenly disclose such an important secret.

“What’s your intention for sharing this with me?”

“My intention, you say? That’s a harsh way to put it,” said Granbell. He rose from the sofa, and speaking gravely, “I am acknowledging you. Now that I’ve lost Mariabell, there’s no better candidate for us to entrust the task of safeguarding the Western Nations and humanity’s future than you.”

Yuuki sneered at his words. There was no way he would buy that.

“What nonsense is this? Even if I don’t do anything, Rimuru-san will certainly figure something out. That man really wishes to coexist with humans.”

Negotiations had failed. However, Granbell wasn’t finished.

“Naive, oh how too naive you are. Mariabell has seen the future, but based on what you’ve said, you don’t seem to have the same foresight. That demon lord—that demon lord called Rimuru—I cannot let him live in this world. Luminas-sama has no interest in the human world, and that’s why she can coexist with humanity. But Demon Lord Rimuru is different. That demon lord will make humanity fall and cast the world into chaos. Much blood will be spilt when that time comes.”

“Wow, what incredible foresight you possess. Do you have any evidence to back up your claims?”

“Instinct.”

“Huh? What a bizarre reason.”

“My instincts as an ex-Hero tells me that I must eliminate Demon Lord Rimuru.”

His words surprised Yuuki quite a bit, causing him to scrutinize Granbell.

Granbell said that he used to be a Hero, yet no matter how you looked at him, he appeared to be nothing more than a dying old man. The luxurious clothes, his sharp eyes; he had an overwhelmingly dominant aura that sent shivers down one’s spine and the charisma of a great leader. Yet, when Yuuki looked at Granbell, he could not feel any ‘strength’ from him that could surpass Mariabell’s.

“You say you are a Hero? You shouldn’t joke around like that, you know.”

“Hmph, believe it or not, just answer me this. Are you willing to eliminate Demon Lord Rimuru?”

“Haha, you want my help? Doing something that dangerous serves no purpose at all. I wish to maintain my relationship with—”

“You fool! Now that Mariabell has died, we cannot afford to dally! Even if we let the Empire handle everything, all their higher-ups are overly mysterious. Even those merchants you associate with have little to no credibility.”

“Oh…”

Who’s the fool here—Yuuki internally mocked.

Unlike Granbell, Yuuki never placed humanity as his priority. He didn’t mind what human society became as long as he gained everything he desired in the end.

There was something bothering him, however, and that was the ‘secret treasure’ Granbell mentioned. It appeared that he intended to use this to defeat Demon Lord Rimuru. It piqued Yuuki’s interest and he wanted to know what it was.

Granbell didn’t care about what Yuuki was thinking and continued to try to rope Yuuki in further. “I’m not asking you to believe me, but we can form a temporary alliance and fight together.”

“I’ll be honest with you, what’s in it for me?”

“I can give you Luminas-sama’s secret treasure.”

“And the treasure is—?”

“The ultimate weapon that was used to seal Veldora.”

“—UHH!”

This revelation came all too suddenly, and Yuuki couldn’t just ignore it.

“From what I’ve gathered, that person is known as the strongest Hero. I never had the opportunity to make direct contact. However, the person is being protected by Luminas-sama in the ‘Holy Ark.’”

“A demon lord protecting a Hero? What kind of a joke is that…”

“Guhaha, don’t be so quick to judge. I was confused at first, but every few hundred years a great war would occur, and I personally witnessed that person in action—a supreme existence capable of eliminating all monsters.”

“Is this person stronger than you at your prime?”

“I was nowhere near it.”

He sounded genuine. Yuuki thought himself as pretty talented at seeing through lies and knew that Granbell spoke the truth. Moreover, he also had a hypothesis as to why this particular Hero left Shizue Izawa behind.

—That Hero is probably restricted by something. Maybe a limited life span? No, the reason doesn’t matter. If I can take the ‘Holy Ark’ from Luminas, I could control the strongest pawn—

Granbell’s mention of this ultimate weapon implied that the Hero was under the control of Luminas. Thus, Luminas must have used some sort of spell to control the Hero.

If that was the case, then if Yuuki could crack the spell…

“How interesting, but I’m not naive enough to take your word for it.”

“I thought as much. I have a proposal. I shall lead the attack and create a distraction inside the Grand Cathedral. It will probably plunge Luminas-sama’s headquarters into chaos, which gives you an opportunity to steal the ‘Holy Ark.’”

This was quite an attractive proposal.

However, it was way too beneficial for Yuuki, which made it suspicious.

“What do you get out of it then? Isn’t Demon Lord Luminas your master? Are you willing to avenge Mariabell even at the cost of betraying Luminas?” he asked doubtfully.

Granbell gave his response with a chilling look on his face.

“Of course. I used to be on good terms with Luminas-sama, but now she has abandoned me. At the end of the day, our relationship was only maintained because of her agreement with me to never antagonize humanity. If she is to collaborate with Demon Lord Rimuru, then Luminas-sama—no, Demon Lord Luminas is nothing more than my enemy.”

There was a sense of animosity in his words.

Even Yuuki felt that. His resolve was quite impressive.

And here I thought he was just a dying old man, but turns out he is still useful. This proposal may be pretty decent after all…

With that thought in his mind, Yuuki began to analyze the situation.

The condition for this to work was that Granbell had to strike first. Therefore, Yuuki could immediately confirm if Granbell had held up his end of the bargain before acting. As a result, there was little chance of being betrayed. On top of that, he would gain access to the strongest pawn in existence. If Granbell had lied, Yuuki had no reason to commit himself to this operation. He could just flee right away.

The worst-case scenario was that Granbell planned to deceive Yuuki and his men and frame them. But, as long as they had eyes on the battle started by Granbell, they could tell if it was real or fake. If they couldn’t even tell whether Granbell was really fighting or not, then they only had themselves to blame.

“Interesting, this all sounds very interesting. I still have some doubts, but considering the gains from this, I suppose it’s fine to take some risks.”

“Guhaha, I knew you’d agree. This is a temporary alliance, and likely our last act together as well. Can I expect you to put in some work?”

“Of course. Since you’ve made all these grand plans for us, I shall give you some trust. What do you intend to do to start this operation?”

“Well, about that—”

The two began to discuss the plan in detail.

And so, the old man controlling the Western Nations and the majin attempting to rule the world forged an alliance.

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In the Grand Cathedral, a battle with the full force of the Rosso family would take place.

This plan included the agents of the Foreign Intelligence Agency of Siltrosso and the surviving members of ‘Blood Shadow.’ Among them were many otherworlders summoned by the Rosso family. Moreover, ‘Razul,’ would be recalled from the northern border as well.

“I am curious how strong they will be when all of the Rossos move out,” Kagali muttered to herself with an evil grin.

Everyone present wondered the same thing. “Then, Yuuki-sama, do you know where this ‘Holy Ark’ is hidden?”

“Granbell has already given me comprehensive information about it. But considering that he may be deceiving us, we have to be cautious.”

“I’ll take the honor. Although I ain’t too sure about doing this one alone, can I bring Teare and Footman along?” asked Laplace.

“While I want to say yes, I have another job for Teare.”

“All right, Footman alone should be enough, but what do ya want to do with Teare?”

“She has the most important job this time. By the way, avoid fighting as much as possible. Prioritize the goal of our visit,” Yuuki reminded everyone.

“Since there is the possibility that it’s a trap, you must retreat immediately upon encountering danger,” Kagali added, like a concerned mother fussing over her children.

“We ain’t kids, ya know? We got that covered already,” Laplace replied, full of confidence.

Footman silently nodded along, agreeing with Laplace.

“That’s the spirit. Demon Lord Luminas is Demon Lord Valentine’s master. Since Valentine’s power could rival mine, Luminas’s strength goes without saying. She’s probably stronger than I was during my prime. Do you have a rough idea now, Laplace? Our primary goal isn’t to steal the ‘Holy Ark,’ but to gather as much information as possible with the least amount of risk.”

“Don’t ya worry. We don’t owe that ol’ man Granbell anything. He never hired the Moderate Clown Troupe either, so we’ll just do our best within our abilities.”

“You have a point… I’ll be at your aid as well this time. After all, this ‘Holy Ark’ is what Granbell considered the weapon for the final battle.” After Kagali shared her concerns, Laplace and Yuuki quickly reassured her.

“Ya don’t have faith in us? That hurts a bit…”

“No, that’s not what I mean. It’s only natural for the place to be highly guarded and secured with traps. I’m only doing this to be certain.” While Yuuki had confidence in Laplace and the others, he had no idea what could happen this time. If he didn’t strategize appropriately, the entire plan would fail. That he could not accept. “I will secretly trail behind everyone. The operation shall commence at your own pace.”

“I see, so we are supposed to stall the enemies! That’s quite smart.”

“Worst case scenario, you guys escape in the midst of chaos while I grab the objective.” At that, Yuuki cracked a smile.

The plan was flawless. He had discussed it with Granbell several times and confirmed that Granbell was indeed serious. This was an opportunity of a lifetime, and they wouldn’t get something like this again in the future.

No matter the cost, we must get our hands on this ‘Holy Ark’—Yuuki thought decisively.

“By the way, is this thing really that good? What even is this ‘Holy Ark’…” Laplace questioned, somewhat dubious.

“Ah, I heard it contains the Hero—the one that sealed Veldora. She is under the control of Luminas, so I plan to analyze the spell on the ark and make her my pawn.”

“Hah?”

“It can’t be… Is this real?”

“Eh, what is this all about?”

“Hehehe…”

Yuuki’s next comment stupefied his audience. “This prize is immeasurably valuable. Now that we have settled on moving to the East, I shall figure out the secret to dominating the ultimate Hero.”

Now understanding just how valuable the ‘Holy Ark’ was, they were all excited. Misha received orders to prepare for their move to the Eastern headquarters, yet even she was flustered at the news.

This was to be expected.

If they could control that Hero, the individual strong enough to seal a True Dragon, the strongest species in the world… ‘Cerberus’ and Yuuki’s ambition—world domination—would no longer be a far-fetched fantasy.

“No wonder Boss is still cautious,” Laplace mumbled.

“Indeed, if that’s the case, please allow me to join you in researching the matter.”

“Haha, you are getting ahead of yourself, Kagali. It’s dangerous to believe everything Granbell says, even if I personally think it has decent enough credibility. Anyhow, failure is not tolerated.”

Kagali was confident in herself. “Yuuki-sama can rest assured; don’t you guys drag him down now.”

“Gotcha.”

“Hehehe, just leave it to me!”

Laplace and Footman knew the full weight of their duty and became motivated. Seeing the two in this eager state, Yuuki felt very satisfied.

He then turned to Teare. “Now, Teare…I didn’t expect Demon Lord Leon to join in on the matter, but it’d be rude of us to not welcome him with a warm gift.”

Due to Leon’s involvement, Yuuki made additional plans to account for this factor. Had Leon not moved out, they would have only observed the situation and made minor contributions to the fight.

But now that Leon was heading to the holy land too, the battlefield would be chaotic.

That was undeniable.

“Since we lured Leon in, we must make him think that the Rossos are using ‘Cerberus’ as well. This way, we can misguide them into thinking that we are trustworthy—”

“And we should go and give Demon Lord Rimuru the impression that Leon is a cruel tyrant that wanted to capture the children?”

“Yep. For that to work, I need the kids that were meant to be given to Demon Lord Leon.”

“Ah! So you want me to handle that?”

“Correct. Although you will have to use your real identity, if it’s you, I’m sure you won’t mess it up.”

“Umm, I got it! I’ll throw Demon Lord Rimuru off with my excellent acting skills.”

Teare was exceptionally enthusiastic, yet Yuuki shook his head dismissively.

“I’ll be looking forward to it, but that alone won’t be enough. Demon Lord Rimuru is extremely calculating, and he has abnormally sharp instincts. He might realize that we were behind all this. That’s why I’ve discussed with Granbell beforehand—”

Yuuki lowered his voice and gave Teare her orders.

The majins’ malice grew day by day.

The day of destiny was closing in.

Not a single shred of light illuminated the room. Deep within it…

“Obviously, I need…I need to eliminate Demon Lord Rimuru, and Demon Lord Leon, and…Luminas-sama too—” Granbell muttered to himself. His eyes darkened, filled with bottomless hatred.

Granbell dedicated over a thousand years of his life to humanity. Even though his goal in life had changed, aiming to become the ruling class and gain absolute power and domination, Granbell still wished for ‘peace to human society.’ His resolve was unquestionable.

Over time, he had to endure countless betrayals, the deaths of his companions that supported him and endless suffering. But despite everything, Granbell’s tenacity enabled him to overcome every single challenge he had faced in order to protect humanity in this world.

While he had Demon Lord Luminas’s aid, Granbell’s own effort was irreplaceable. In the distant past, he used to talk about dreams and ideals with his companions. Making promises with the people that gradually passed on to the other world.

When the hope of his family, Mariabell, was born, he was just one more step away from accomplishing his dream.

Even then…Granbell had lost hope.

The East and the West.

Humankind needed to stand united against the demon lords, or else, humanity would not survive.

Nowadays, the demon lords had formed the ‘Octagram,’ and their power was at its prime. Although the ‘Ten Great Demon Lords’ were reduced to eight, their power hadn’t diminished but rather increased instead.

The demons let loose by the ‘Lord of Darkness’ Guy Crimson plundered the northern lands like it was their playground.

‘Continent’s Wrath’ Dagruel had his eyes set on human society as well, because of his ambition for territorial expansion. As of yet, he had avoided conflict with the ‘Queen of Nightmares’ and did not act against her. However, it was unknown how much longer he could tolerate it.

In addition, power beyond human comprehension was intervening within the Eastern Empire.

Granbell suspected that it was the doing of the ‘Sleeping Ruler’ behind the scenes, but he had no evidence to back it up.

Facing against all these powerful beings, Granbell needed to protect humanity from harm.

Yet this wish of his was also—

“That brat had some boring goal too. He could take the reins if he wants. I am already tired…”

Granbell didn’t know how much longer he would live either. Now that Mariabell had died, there was no one qualified enough to take on the role of Granbell’s successor.

Without a mediator, humanity would soon walk the path of destruction. They would show their true nature and desires, even beginning to slaughter each other. That was simply how humans were as a species.

A long, long time ago, Granbell’s wife, who Mariabell resembled a lot, was killed by these kinds of people.

All for the sake of the children who survived, Granbell suffered his pains and sorrows alone this entire time, yet his life was about to come to an end.

“This world has taken everything from me…it is best that it falls—”

His quiet but passionate words were genuine. This was Granbell’s heart speaking without a single false pretense.

He had already been consumed by insanity.

And so, he had made up his mind.

Granbell had gone mad.

