# 2 - Maleficent Subjugation (2)

"What... What do you mean...?"

Evan asked with a hardened expression in response to the man's words just now.

It means exactly what I said. I am your future self.

Future self.

Yes, somehow... Even though he thought it was nonsense, Evan finally understood why the man had an appearance similar to his own.

If he claimed to be Evan's future self, it would explain why he had such an appearance.

However, being able to explain something and being able to believe it were two separate matters.

Evan asked the man in a trembling voice.

"B-But... Does that make any sense? You clearly said just now that this necklace contains the thought-forms of past Heroes..."

Yes, that's what I said. If I didn't exist as a thought-form in this necklace, you would have encountered the ancient Hero who last inherited this necklace.

"Then why is my future self..." I don't know that either.

"You don't know?"

Who would believe him when he acted like he knew everything up until now, only to suddenly claim ignorance?

I was about to tell him not to say such strange things and to answer me immediately, but the man shook his head as if he truly didn't know.

The wish I made to the Goddess was... only to be able to return to the past.

"A wish...?"

Evan's eyes shook greatly at the word "wish." Wish.

There was really only one place where the word "wish" would come up. "Did you... defeat the Demon King?"

Yes, I succeeded in defeating the Demon King. Unlike sealing, it was a definitive defeat, so peace should have lasted for a long time.

"...!"

Evan smiled happily at that.

If the words of the man who introduced himself as Evan's future were true, it meant that he had actually succeeded in defeating the Demon King together with Aria.

He had thought that maybe it would be possible someday if he worked hard enough.

But...

The man who introduced himself as Evan's future self and delivered this good news was not smiling at all. Instead, he trailed off at the end of his sentence and wore a sad expression.

Come to think of it, that's how it was.

He had confidently said that he defeated the Demon King, but afterwards he had worn a sad expression.

Why...

Why...?

"Then why did you try to go back to the past...?"

Fe̐̚ ̀eling uneasy, Evan̐ asked,͌̆̅ but͂̊...

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He was clearly saying

not be heard. "What..."

something,

but for some reason the man's voice could

Just as Evan was about to ask what strange thing he was trying to say, the man clicked his tongue.

It seems I'm being prevented from saying anything more. "Prevented?"

If you became a Hero with the power to transcend the laws, I could convey everything fully... but unfortunately, it seems I can't say any more than this. I could break through the restrictions by using my power, but I used up a lot helping you last time.

"... Ah! That time with the magic beast..." No wonder.

It was an attack far too powerful to be a technique he could use himself. He had even wondered why he wasn't tired at all after using that attack...

The fact that I can even bring this up now is only because you've awakened your second power as a Hero.

The man muttered, biting his lip tightly.

To think that even my wish to turn back time wasn't granted properly... Is this all I can do, just dwelling in the necklace as a thought-form of a past Hero? Why can't I even properly convey this much!

Eventually, he shouted as if frustrated with the current situation.

I don't want to believe in something like fate... but to think the restrictions would be this strong...

Restrictions.

Fate.

It was full of incomprehensible words.

"If you defeated the Demon King... why did you try to come back to the past?"

... It seems I can't say that either.

"..."

Don't worry. You already have sufficient conditions to achieve the second awakening. Now that you've qualified, receiving that power shouldn't be too troublesome as long as I'm here.

But that was all.

Although he hadn't come expecting to receive any information, it was frustrating that the man seemed like he was going to say something but ended up not being able to say anything.

I apologize. Although it was said that all wishes would be granted, it seems that my future self changing the past was not permitted,

unfortunately.

However.

The man continued.

If I was going to give up just because of something like this, I wouldn't have attempted it in the first place.

"...!"

It wasn't that there was no way.

The existence of restrictions only applied to relationships between separate individuals.

Although Evan and the man were the same person, they had different years of life and experiences... they were the same person who came from a different time axis.

In a way, they could be considered separate individuals. But if they became the same person.

Because they were separate individuals but the same person, and because only a thought-form remained now, there was one method that was possible.

The man, who had already realized what he needed to do, stared at Evan with wide eyes.

It had to be done.

If it wasn't done here, it couldn't be done. The man shouted:

Listen carefully, Evan! From now on, you must focus on training and reach the final awakening as quickly as possible! You have one last chance!

And then he walked proudly towards Evan.

Looking up at the man who was now standing in front of him, Evan swallowed hard.

I'll awaken you now. And...

The man held out his hand.

Evan looked down at the outstretched hand, then looked back up as if to ask what this was.

I'll use up all the power I have now to dwell in your subconscious. "What? That's..."

Don't worry. I am you, after all... Nothing will change from now even if I enter your subconscious. What I want to give you is just the experience of my subconscious, and...

The man continued with a bitter expression.

I want to convey the memories I have to you. This is... the reason why I came back to the past, going to such lengths.

"..."

Evan couldn't continue speaking.

Perhaps thinking there was no more meaning in staying here any longer, the man smirked and then focused his consciousness towards Evan.

Eventually, all the energy in the man's body began to flow towards Evan.

Evan felt strength rising throughout his body as the power flowing from the man entered him.

It was real.

This was real.

The man was truly handing over everything he had.

Perhaps because he thought the man might really disappear like this, Evan called out to him in shock, over and over.

However, the man continued to hand over his power without paying any attention.

"W-Wait a moment...!"

Having handed over all his power, all that remained of the man was an extremely small portion of thought-form. Even in his transparent and faint state, he was still looking at Evan.

"Wait, don't go yet! There's still more I want to ask...!!"

You'll learn all of that. I've given you everything. Once you achieve the final awakening, you'll be able to figure out everything.

The man smiled wistfully at Evan, while also wearing an expression of relief as if he had laid everything bare.

Please... take good care of Aria...

Finally, his form completely disappeared, and the world inside the necklace slowly began to crumble.

Evan, who had fallen to his knees inside, For just a brief moment.

A short instant when he escaped the restrictions of the world. "... Ah."

Evan's expression changed as if he had realized something.

Then light burst forth and the world went dark.

# 3 - Maleficent Subjugation (3)

Argent wiped the cold sweat from his brow, surveying the devastated forest.

He distinctly remembered that just this morning, before this whole mess, it wasn't this ruined. What on earth had happened?

"What... what happened here?" The forest was utterly destroyed.

The academy's back mountain, once vibrant with the colors of nature, had become a place of decaying trees, completely melted down by the influence of Demonic energy.

"No way..."

Stella and Uriel, also surveying the forest, were speechless at the shocking sight.

"I was here last time... there's even less of how it used to be..."

Stella wore a look of utter dismay as she saw the ruined state of the back mountain's forest, which had been so beautiful.

How could this have happened? "Maleficent..."

It wasn't a particularly well-tended forest, but it was the mountain behind the academy where the children took classes, so a sense of loss was unavoidable.

"Evan... Aria, where are you?"

As Argent muttered Maleficent's name in an angry voice, Stella and Uriel looked around, searching for Evan and Aria.

However, the forest was vast, and the coordinates were strangely distorted due to the strong Demonic energy and Holy Power, making it difficult to pinpoint their exact location.

They knew they were somewhere nearby, but finding out exactly where was not easy.

But they couldn't give up here. "We have to find them..."

Just as Stella muttered that she would find them no matter what, Boom!

"Wh-what is that?!" "That explosion...?!"

Argent and Stella, startled by the sudden explosion, turned to look in the direction it had come from.

If they only felt a strong explosion of Holy Power nearby, it would be no different from before, so it was highly likely to be Aria's doing, but this was different.

"This feeling... this Holy Power isn't Aria's." Argent said, sweating profusely.

It was Holy Power that was too ferocious to be the Saintess's, and it contained a power closer to purifying everything.

Because she had been with the Hero for so long in the distant past, she couldn't help but know that the current explosion of Holy Power did not come from the Saintess.

How could she not know?

For her, Holy Power was the most familiar power after Demonic energy. "Hero... has he awakened?"

Argent muttered in astonishment.

At this point, she couldn't help but know.

Argent, sweating profusely, hoped that the situation would not unfold as she feared, and first moved in the direction where the Holy Power felt strongest.

And, "Evan...!!"

The three were finally able to find Evan. "Evan...?"

"Aria..."

With a bewildered expression, tears streaming down his face, Evan looked somehow different. Seeing Evan and Aria, who was crippled and lying on the ground, the three rushed over with surprised expressions.

"Why... why am I crying...?"

"What happened here! What happened to the Saintess...!"

And Argent's eyes widened at the decaying heart held in her melted hand, from which Demonic energy was flowing.

"Th-this is..."

Only after seeing that did she understand what had happened here. "Don't tell me... she tried to purify Maleficent's Life Vessel alone...?!"

Argent muttered in shock.

She had said that Maleficent would place a Life Vessel somewhere in the academy and use it to break through the academy's Barrier and invade, so finding the Life Vessel was the priority, but she never thought she would try to purify it alone.

Even that seemed to be half successful, as the decaying heart was considerably weakened.

"A, Aria..."

"Don't look... Uriel."

She covered Uriel's eyes, who was horrified at the sight of Aria, and said in a sad voice.

She knew it couldn't be helped.

She also knew that this was a golden opportunity to catch Maleficent, a member of the Demon King Army.

But...

This sight... she couldn't show it to Uriel, who wasn't yet used to seeing Aria like this.

"I'll cut it down right now."

While Stella covered Uriel's eyes and Argent was deep in thought, Evan, who had been looking down with a confused and complicated expression, raised his head and looked down at the decaying heart, the Life Vessel, in Aria's hand.

If only that was gone.

If only that was gone, Aria wouldn't have to suffer anymore. Thinking that, Evan raised the Holy Sword to strike it down, but,

Clang! "Ugh...?!"

Evan gasped and widened his eyes at the sensation of striking something hard. A Barrier had been erected in front of him for some reason.

"Wait. It's no use destroying the heart right now." "...But...!!"

"I know how you feel. You want to quickly cut down that Life Vessel that's tormenting Aria. But..."

Aria wouldn't want you to do things so rashly.

Of course, Aria's decision to come here alone was wrong, but now that things had come to this, they had to catch Maleficent for sure.

"I'm sorry to this child... but I hope she can hold on a little longer." "That's...!!"

Evan tried to argue with a distorted expression, but nothing she said was wrong.

Even if they purified the Life Vessel here, it wasn't certain whether she would die or not. The Life Vessel was important, but even if they purified it here, Maleficent was likely not to die.

The fact that it was placed in a place like this meant that they had prepared for the possibility of this Life Vessel being destroyed.

It wasn't that Evan didn't know that. But...

"I need to help her... quickly..."

He wanted to relieve her pain even a little sooner. Why was that?

He had always been worried about Aria and wanted her not to suffer, but now it was different.

A more... inexplicable poignant feeling, a sad feeling, kept rising, making him feel complicated.

"Don't worry. Aria seems to have fainted, so she won't feel any pain... and the Life Vessel has been weakened by that purification magic from before, so there's no need to worry."

Even with Argent's words that there was no need to worry, Evan looked down at Aria with a guilty expression, feeling that there was nothing he could do.

It was true that she was gradually weakening. Aria, who was receiving infinite Holy Power from the Goddess, was slowly returning to normal, but on the contrary, the Life Vessel was gradually weakening.

It meant that it was weakening due to the Holy Power continuously flowing out of Aria.

"But at this point, it's not difficult to find Maleficent's location." Argent approached the heart as if it were an opportunity.

Evan was horrified, wondering if she would become like Aria if she touched it, and tried to stop her, but she was faster to put her hand on the heart.

"Don't worry. This much is nothing."

As Argent said, it wasn't a big problem to put her hand on the Life Vessel, which had already been weakened.

Of course, even now, an ordinary person would be corroded by Demonic energy and die painfully just by getting close, but fortunately, she was no

ordinary person.

She was the Archmage who had reached the highest level in this era, the mage of the previous Hero party.

It was absurd to worry about this much.

It was unfortunate for Aria, but as she said, it was important to find Maleficent's location through this Life Vessel and then defeat her for sure.

If it was true that Maleficent was preparing to appear in the academy, as she was sure, then now was the perfect opportunity to defeat her so that she could never be revived.

It wasn't a good idea to interfere here.

Evan lowered his hand, which he had been about to extend to stop Argent, and watched her use tracking magic.

He thought that he would immediately give Holy Power to Aria when it was over.

And...

'I'll completely destroy it.'

When everything was over, he would shatter the heart so that it could never live again.

Evan vowed inwardly.

# 4 - Maleficent Subjugation Battle

Is this what happiness is?

I wore a blissful smile, surrendering myself to the sensation of floating through a dream.

Perhaps it was because I had been living peacefully without any particular suffering for quite some time, but it wasn't easy to come to my senses amidst the immense pain of Demonic energy eroding my body.

This is it…

This is what I've wanted all along. 'It's been a while…'

I had been constantly struggling with various issues, so being healed like this was a rare occurrence.

Of course, I did find joy in everyday happiness, like treating injured students from the swordsmanship department whenever they came to me, but I had never felt as happy as I did now.

I had experienced this level of pain before, but that was only when a high- ranking demon's arm directly pierced my abdomen, and I was eroded by the Demonic energy flowing in.

It was only similar, at best. But now it's different.

It's not just any Demonic energy, but the Demonic energy of Maleficent, a Demon King Army executive and Argent's adversary, the only great mage in the current Demon King Army, directly burrowing into my body.

I had never felt pain that gave me this much satisfaction.

It was around the time I was enjoying the sense of liberation and the delightful pain, as if swimming in the sea.

Amazing. To think you'd find my life vessel…

“…” Ah.

Who is it, really?

Who dares to interrupt my long-awaited moment of freedom and emotion?

As I was about to ask with a voice laced with displeasure, I instinctively recognized that the one speaking to me in such an arrogant tone was no ordinary being.

Judging by the mention of the life vessel… “Maleficent…”

You detestable doll of God…!

Why does she sound so angry? I looked down.

I don't know where this is, but my current state doesn't look good at all. It's clearly not the real world, but a world of consciousness, something difficult to explain theoretically…

But even in such a place, if my other half is shattered, it's clear that I'm in a very dangerous state.

'Hmm…'

But was I just smiling happily until a moment ago?

I couldn't help it.

A chance to enjoy myself to the fullest came along, and it would be wrong not to take it, right?

I've been working hard in my own way, so I deserve this much leeway, don't I?

Are you truly insane? Even if you are the Saintess chosen by the God you fanatically believe in, standing before you is the great mage lich who has lived for countless years. Did you not think that you would be devoured instead!

“Hehe…” I see.

I wondered why she seemed so angry, but it's because my actions completely blocked her plan.

Well, it couldn't be helped.

Even in the game, Maleficent's raid is considered cleared just by grabbing and destroying the life vessel hidden somewhere in the academy.

Of course, as a great mage who has lived for countless years, she wouldn't die immediately just because her life vessel was destroyed, and there would be ways for her to survive, so it should have been a tougher and more difficult raid, but we have a deus ex machina, the great mage 'Argen Isis.'

The story cutscene where the protagonist uses the destroyed life vessel to reverse-calculate Maleficent's location and drag her soul with incantations was truly a masterpiece…

Anyway… Even if I'm collapsed like this, my heart is already weakened to the point of breaking…

Even though it looks like this, I poured all my power into it.

No matter how great a mage she is, even if she's of a higher caliber than me, she couldn't have survived unscathed after taking my full power, including two holy relics that enhance my caliber.

Doesn't the lich before me, who I would normally find repulsive and lose my strength just by looking at, look like a complete idiot now?

I chuckled and asked softly.

“Isn’t it… your fault for… attacking the academy…?” You, how dare you…!!

Yeah, you must be frustrated~

How does it feel, being so powerful? Drives you crazy, right?

After hundreds of years of planning to completely destroy Argent, her long- time nemesis, to crush the empire's academy and cut off future sprouts, and to neutralize Argent, the main force. Do you think magic to deceive Argent, the Saintess, and even the Hero comes out with a snap of the fingers?

It's obvious that she's been preparing for a long time. And I effortlessly crushed it.

“Ku, cough… You don’t… even have time to be angry at me… do you…?”

…!!

“As you know… Evan, cough… if it’s the Hero… if it’s Argent… it wouldn’t be difficult to find… your location… through the life vessel… that I weakened… Keuk, kheeuk?!”

Haha, that’s rich coming from a damned slave of God…! “Kehk, kuehk…”

Along with the sensation of my body being further eroded, I felt an incomparable pain.

This… would be enough to drive an ordinary person insane with pain.

It was as if it was making me feel pain, but amplifying the sensation to feel hundreds, thousands of times more pain.

Now that it has come to this, I shall destroy your mind with pain and offer your soul to that person!!

Th, this. This is… Th.

This is… This is… Ugh… Haa… Hek…♡

This is… something I can't hide even if I wanted to… Deheet…♡

Why… are you smiling…? “Hoo, hooh…”

I wonder if my prediction that they would reverse-calculate my location and kill her was correct.

The lich's body, shown in my consciousness, was becoming more and more shattered.

Her power was also weakening.

I had already purified her heart, so she was weakened to the point where she couldn't possibly win, but it's happening faster than I thought.

“Ooh, heuaaaht…?!”

Unbelievable… This is pain that would drive a human insane, no, destroy their mind itself!!!!

“Haaang…♡” Feels so good…♡

More, give me more♡

Wh, what is going on… “More… please…♡”

H, hiik…?!

Oh.

She's scared now.

Was my appearance that shocking? The huge face that had been glaring at me with a fierce expression, determined to kill me, was now slowly being overcome with fear.

What… why… with this much pain, you shouldn't even be able to speak…!!

“M… more…♡”

Why, why are you making such a pleasurable face!!!!

The lich, who was panicking even as she was dying, looked at me with a terrified expression and shouted.

Masochism.

Masochism engraved in the soul was not easily overcome, no matter how strong the pain. Even if it was a normal human body with the existence of death, they would feel fear as death approached, but

I had an immortal body that wouldn't die unless the Demon King directly attacked my soul and completely annihilated it, preventing even regeneration.

I wouldn't die from feeling this much pain, and I knew that this wasn't the real world, wherever it was.

Probably self-consciousness…

It would be appropriate to call it the world of consciousness. It wouldn't be a problem no matter how much pain I felt here.

No one is worried, and it's a secret known only to me and Maleficent, right?

Th, this can't be…

Maleficent's expression, who was muttering as if it couldn't be true, began to harden in real-time.

Did she realize some possibility?

The lich then seemed to realize something, and with a blank expression, the pain that had been tormenting me disappeared in an instant.

N, no way… no way, you’re…!!!

Hmm,

Did she finally find out? 'Ha.'

But does it matter? The dead tell no tales.

It's not called an assassination for nothing if there are no witnesses. I gave Maleficent a smile full of satisfaction and said.

“You’re… helping me… until the very end…♡” Where else could I find such a helpful lich?

A final resistance, you could say.

The lich, who had been trying to kill me mentally until the very end, realized the reality and despaired.

How, how can such a perverted woman be a Saintess…? The Goddess… must be crazy… This can’t be happening…!

“But it’s true, you know?”

You're experiencing it yourself, even to the point of death, so what's the point of denying it right in front of me?

I sneered at Maleficent.

Looking at me, Maleficent muttered with a blank expression.

Crazy… bitch…

And with those last words, she disappeared.

It was an anticlimactic end for a Demon King Army executive who had driven the academy to the brink of destruction.

# 5 - Maleficent Subjugation (5)

“It’s tough…”

Argent said it was hard to face Aria, yet his gaze remained fixed on her heart.

His determination to do something with that heart was undeniable. “With this… we might be able to find it…”

Seeing the gruesome sight of the girl’s half-melted corpse, Argent’s eyes gleamed as he approached the heart in Aria’s right hand.

He was surrounded by a protective barrier of incantations to ward off the writhing Demonic energy.

“Argen… Headmaster…”

She didn’t have time to ponder what he was trying to do. Judging by his words about finding something, she was sure he was trying to locate the Demon King Army executive named Maleficent through the heart in Aria’s hand.

Hadn’t he said something like that just now? Using that heart to find the location…?

“…”

Evan wanted to stop him.

If finding it took time… wouldn’t Aria suffer more during that time? Rationally, he knew it was better to find the location and eliminate him for good, but he couldn’t shake that feeling.

However,

“Don’t you want revenge? On that damn skeleton who did this to Aria…” “…!”

Revenge.

He knew it was a thought a Hero shouldn’t entertain, but the moment he heard the word revenge, Evan’s eyes widened, and he fell into thought.

Was it really okay to do that? Was that what Aria truly wanted?

While he was struggling to choose, Argent, who had approached the heart, placed his hand imbued with magic close to it and began the reverse calculation.

“…”

Should he have stopped him?

Or should he have urged him to find Maleficent, the one who had turned Aria into this, and kill him?

Evan imagined slicing the Demon King Army executive with the Holy Sword, but he shook his head.

However, he agreed with finding him.

He couldn’t believe that it was being prioritized over healing Aria, but if she was still alive even after her heart was crushed, that was a bigger problem.

Yes, he didn’t particularly want to admit it, but Argen Headmaster was right.

‘What should I do…’

Evan was genuinely conflicted.

He knew it was impossible to stop her even if he tried, but he couldn’t bear to see her focusing on the heart in Aria’s hand, trying to find Maleficent’s location, instead of healing Aria, who was lying there almost like a corpse.

‘Now that it’s come to this…’

Evan gripped the Holy Sword tightly.

Evan…

Estel called out to Evan with a worried voice, but Evan couldn’t hear her anymore.

Now, all he could do was not miss the moment when that Maleficent revealed himself and strike him with the Holy Sword in his hand.

He wanted to use the skill he had used to defeat the Magic beast back then, but he didn’t know how to use it, and it wasn’t a suitable attack for this situation.

Then what should he do?

A technique suddenly came to Evan’s mind.

A technique that focused on one point by surrounding the sword with a powerful Holy Power sword aura.

It wasn’t a widespread attack imbued with Holy Power like the Judgment that summoned a giant sword from the sky or the Hero’s skills, which he didn’t know much about back then.

A technique that shot a sharply honed blade of powerful God of Purification Holy Power at the speed of light.

It was more appropriate to see it as an assassination technique rather than a technique to defeat someone.

Evan was very familiar with what kind of skill it was and how to gather Holy Power.

As if it were his own limb, he gathered the God of Purification Holy Power into the Holy Sword and created a sword-shaped aura.

It was a small sword aura the same size as the sword, but the power contained within was extraordinary.

‘With this…’

If he fired this, the weakened heart now…

He had a feeling that he might be able to defeat Maleficent, who would reveal himself through Argent.

“…!!”

At that moment.

Demons began to reveal themselves to us.

There were basic low-level demons and mid-level demons in various places.

And…

“Maleficent, you bastard…!!”

A high-level demon revealed himself in the distance.

Unlike them, who had to find the location through the heart, Maleficent could easily find their location.

To prevent them from finding his location, the demons throughout the academy were gathering under his command.

“Tch!”

Argent frowned as she reverse-calculated the location through the heart.

Of all times, the enemy appeared when she was focusing all her attention on the heart.

She could somehow handle the low-level and mid-level demons, but it wasn’t easy to deal with the high-level demons.

Just recently, on the day of the entrance ceremony, Argent had to appear in person to barely catch that demon, who was a high-level demon.

You could see how powerful that force was.

High-level demons were unharmed even after being hit with high-level magic.

Considering that you had to hit them with at least basic magic to inflict meaningful damage, it was already difficult to deal with the high-level demon in this place, but there were also low-level and mid-level demons.

Argent clicked her tongue and urgently called out to Stella, Uriel, and Evan. “Stella, can you help me? Yes, like that… stick close to me. And…”

Uriel and Evan.

Argent looked back at the two of them and raised her hand to cast a spell. “[Share the Power.]”

The Archmage of Incantations.

Argent briefly delayed the reverse calculation and linked Evan and Uriel together through a magical path.

Close combat was not easy against demons.

Even with magic alone, only professors could easily defeat low-level demons, while mid-level demons had to be taken seriously to be defeated,

and when a high-level demon appeared, several professors had to rush in to barely defeat it with difficulty.

But now the story was very different.

“I’m sorry… If I stop the reverse calculation here and fight that demon, I’ll never be able to find Maleficent again.”

Argent said with a sincere expression of apology.

If she stopped here, Maleficent, who was also an archmage, would definitely create a countermeasure to prevent her from finding him again.

Considering that the one who lost focus would lose in a fight between archmages, linking the two’s magic paths was a big gamble.

Fortunately, Maleficent’s condition wasn’t good, so the magic wasn’t cut off by a brief lapse in concentration, but it was no longer possible to focus on anything else.

“Uriel… if it’s you now, you’ll be able to use Evan’s Holy Power.”

At Argent’s words, Uriel looked down at her sword with a surprised expression.

Holy Power was flowing from the greatsword bestowed by the imperial family.

“Please hold on for a little bit. I’ll find him within 5 minutes.” 5 minutes.

It took 5 minutes in a time attack.

Having to endure for 5 minutes against the demons closing in from all sides was quite despairing, but…

“Stella will help you.”

“Yes…?! But I’m…!!”

“It’s okay. I’ll help you. It would be difficult if Maleficent was in his usual state, but he’s much weaker now thanks to Aria. I can afford to help you.”

Was it okay?

While she was thinking that, the demons had already come within reach.

Evan and Uriel stopped worrying and raised their swords towards the demons.

5 minutes.

They only had to hold on for 5 minutes.

Stella was helping them, so it would definitely be possible.

And…

“Something… feels familiar.” Was it because of the awakening?

For some reason, he felt like he could wipe them all out even without Uriel’s help.

“Wait a moment.”

Stopping Uriel, who was about to step forward, I stepped forward instead.

Unlike usual, he had achieved his second awakening and was able to use Uriel’s magic.

If it was now… “…!”

The blade imbued with Holy Power that he had been gathering until just now was shot out in an instant.

In an extremely fleeting moment.

The Holy Power blade, shot at the speed of light, was shot exactly in the direction the high-level demon was walking.

Soon, Splat! “…!!”

With a squishing sound, the body of the high-level demon, whose head had disappeared, collapsed.

Uriel, Stella, and all the demons who were watching the scene stared at the fallen high-level demon with hardened expressions.

“Next.”

A cold and heavy sensation.

Evan raised the Holy Sword in his hand horizontally and said, extending it towards the demons.

Kee, keeik…?

It was the beginning of the massacre.

# 6 - Maleficent Subjugation Battle

It was no exaggeration to say he had awakened.

Evan, cutting down the demons blocking his path, reveled in his newfound power.

It wasn't arrogance.

Considering how many times Aria had suffered because he was helpless, he couldn't afford to be arrogant even if he wanted to.

He was simply amazed by the strength he possessed, and determined to ensure that no one could ever harm Aria again.

His mind was solely focused on finding and rescuing Aria from that Maleficent, or whatever he was called.

Evan surveyed the demons before him.

Perhaps because they had witnessed a high-ranking demon fall with a single blow, they seemed hesitant to approach.

He had no intention of sparing any of them.

After all, they were enemies of humanity who had wreaked havoc on the academy he attended.

If they escaped, he would hunt them down and eliminate them.

Evan lowered his stance, holding the Holy Sword horizontally towards the demons.

"If you don't come… I'll go."

Feeling lighter than ever, Evan pushed off the ground and shot forward. Manipulating Holy Power became as natural as using his own limbs, and skills he barely knew surfaced in his mind one by one. He effortlessly sliced through the neck of a low-ranking demon directly in front of him.

K, ack…?

The demon didn't even realize its neck had been severed, collapsing on the spot. The intense Holy Power residue surged upwards, completely incinerating the demon's head. Only then did the other demons realize.

Kiek… K, krr… Kyaaak!!

They were not the hunters, but the hunted.

Kieeeeeek!! Krwooooooo! Kiik…

Another demon's neck was severed. The demons scrambled to escape.

Facing the Hero was no longer an option for them.

Having made that decision, the demons desperately tried to save themselves.

They had no sense of camaraderie.

The dead were simply weak, and the survivors were strong. They were just demons, not comrades, and they were willing to sacrifice each other to survive.

It was common for a mid-ranking demon to grab a low-ranking demon's head and throw it at the Hero.

Evan bisected the low-ranking demon's body flying towards him, then swiftly pursued the mid-ranking demon, severing its legs with a low sweep before slicing its neck as it fell.

Having been beheaded by the Holy Sword imbued with Holy Power, even a mid-ranking demon had no chance of survival.

Leaving the burning, disintegrating mid-ranking demon behind, Evan rapidly traversed the battlefield, cutting down demons one by one. The bewildered demons noticed Uriel, who was staring blankly at Evan.

Thinking they could use her as a hostage to survive, the demons swarmed towards Uriel.

However,

"W-what is it? The demons are coming at me…?!"

Uriel, flustered, raised her greatsword to cut down the approaching demons.

It was a blunt weapon, more suited for crushing than cutting, but she didn't care.

It had always been that way, and she had been using it for a long time. But…

Thwack!

K, eeeek…?

The demon couldn't understand.

She was just an ordinary human with no discernible power, so why did he sense Holy Power? It didn't make sense. He looked at his melting body with a bewildered expression and died.

"O-oh…? The demon…?" Was it her doing?

She had simply swung her sword as before, but seeing the demon's body bisected, Uriel stared at her sword in shock.

'Ah… Argent?'

Come to think of it, Evan had connected their mana paths earlier.

She felt a faint flow of Holy Power within her, and realizing that most of it was flowing into her greatsword, Uriel smiled faintly.

So her ancestor was such a great person.

Before, she could only barely hold on because her sword was ineffective, but now, even a casual swing could easily bisect her opponents.

Uriel raised her sword.

She had nothing to fear now. "I'll take you on!"

Uriel, filled with determination, dashed forward and instantly cut down another demon who was trying to take her hostage.

What made demons frightening was that swords were ineffective against them unless they were imbued with a proper aura.

In comparison, the power of a low-ranking demon itself was not particularly strong. With that barrier gone, even an ordinary person who didn't know how to wield a sword could accidentally cut them down due to their weakened physical durability.

Of course, ordinary Holy Power wouldn't achieve this.

It was the Holy Power of the 'Hero' that made it so effective.

“… Oops!”

Perhaps she was too focused on cutting down the enemies in front of her, but Uriel belatedly noticed something approaching from behind.

By the time she realized, a demon had already grabbed her from behind and was swinging its Demonic energy-filled claws at her.

At this rate, she would end up just like the demons she had cut down. Even as she thought that, she couldn't react.

Whoosh!

Kieeeeeek!!!

A massive flame engulfed the demon.

It thrashed around, trying to extinguish the fire on its body, but the fire melted it even faster.

Uriel stared blankly at Stella, who was watching the demon slowly melt and turn to ash.

Stella also looked surprised, as if she hadn't expected her magic to be so powerful.

“… I, I’ll cover you!” “Y, yeah!”

Still, the priority now was to eliminate the demons.

Whether the magic had become stronger or it had become easier to fight demons was not a big deal.

Yes, it was definitely not a big deal.

Krwooooork…

Meanwhile, Evan had even managed to defeat another high-ranking demon. “Hoo…”

The demons who had denied reality, thinking that the previous victory was just luck, could no longer deny it after seeing the high-ranking demon, who was incomparably stronger than them, fall so quickly.

Yes.

The human before them was someone they couldn't face.

Deciding that, the demons chose to flee completely in order to survive. The academy,

They had to return to the academy.

It would be more enjoyable to go back to the academy and humiliate and kill the weak humans to their hearts' content. Whether they died here or went back to trample on humans and enjoy a final feast before being killed by Maleficent, it was all the same to them, so they decided it would be better to play to their hearts' content before going.

However,

Kiek? Kik?

That they all had the same thought.

That they had chosen to fly away in order to escape even a little faster. That was their mistake.

“Where do you think you’re… going?”

Evan, who had been waiting for this, smiled as he gathered Holy Power into the Holy Sword.

It was a chance to use the next skill. With this, he could wipe them all out.

Convinced of that, Evan swung the Holy Sword imbued with Holy Power without hesitation.

“『Constellation of Purification』”

Immediately after swinging the Holy Sword, the Holy Power soared into the sky and exploded, then gathered into constellations and began to fall.

It was like a comet flying through space, splitting apart and falling as meteors.

And then, Whoosh!

Kik?

K, kiek? Kikik?! Krwo?

Meteors that would destroy the demons began to rain down.

Kieeek! Krwooooo! Kyaaaak!!

Countless low-ranking demons floating in the sky, and even the other demons fleeing in the opposite direction below, were either directly hit by the Holy Power meteorites falling from the sky, or swept away by the explosion of purifying Holy Power that scattered as they fell to the ground.

Evan, who had instantly eliminated all the demons, sheathed the Holy Sword and sighed.

'I've become stronger.' Incomparably stronger than before.

He had become strong enough to easily face low-ranking to high-ranking demons.

He wasn't sure about the highest-ranking demons, but he would probably find out if he tried.

“Let’s go back.”

All the demons who had been destroying the academy had been eliminated. Now, all that was left was Maleficent.

Evan, along with Uriel, who was just finishing off the last demon, headed towards where Aria was.

# 7 - Maleficent Subjugation War

"So it was the 2nd Awakening."

Argen, who had been watching Evan effortlessly subjugate demons with a satisfied smile, turned her head and looked down at her original target, the heart.

She could not forgive this damned lich who dared to attack her academy. It wasn't just a matter of a day or two.

Especially since she had encountered Maleficent so often during her active Hero party days, the emotions that had built up over hundreds of years were beyond measure.

*I will catch her, no matter what.*

Her mind was solely focused on finding Maleficent's location. Unintentionally, she had put Aria's safety on the back burner.

Normally, if she were making a calm and rational decision, she would have prioritized preventing Maleficent from harming Aria before trying to trace Maleficent's location.

But now, she was on the verge of reaching her goal.

An opportunity to end an enemy she had hated for hundreds of years. A chance to sever this tiresome connection.

The reverse calculation didn't take long. Maleficent's location was quickly found.

There was no more hesitation.

Argen thrust her fist out and shattered space. "Get over here, you son of a bitch!!!!"

With a shout of such intensity that it was unimaginable from her usual demeanor, Argen reached into the spatial rift and grabbed Maleficent with magic, pulling her out.

The Demonic energy flowing from the rift was extraordinary.

Evan, standing behind her, swallowed hard, realizing that this was finally the identity of the Demon King Army executive who had been tormenting them.

"Kuaaaak!!"

The space was forcibly torn open, and Maleficent's body was dragged out. "You again, Argen Isissss!!!"

*Thwack!*

"Keuh...!!"

Half of Maleficent's skull was brutally shattered, and she groaned.

As a lich, she no longer felt pain, and even if her body was destroyed, she could regenerate as long as her Life Vessel was intact, but the situation was different now.

The Life Vessel was currently being continuously purified by the Saintess.

Maleficent, who was constantly using her power to resist the purification, was not in a favorable situation.

In a situation where her power was limited, defeating an opponent of equal rank like Argen was nearly impossible.

That alone was despairing, but Argen, as well as the Hero behind her, were glaring at her with fierce eyes.

"You... you ruined everything because of you...!!" "That's what I should be saying?"

Argen said with an incredulous tone, a smile on her face as she finally caught her.

*It's really over now.*

There was nothing more to see.

Argen intended to end it right there and then, charging magic in her hand. However,

"Ha, hahaha...!! You better stop...!!" "...!"

Demonic energy flowed rapidly.

She hurriedly tried to cast a language magic to stop it, but it was already too late. The Demonic energy had already reached the opposite side of Aria's melted half-body.

"Of course, I've become weak... Even being cut by the sword of that weak Hero behind you would shatter my Life Vessel."

"..."

"I've become that weak... But even with the Saintess weakened by my Life Vessel, it's nothing to inflict extreme pain. No matter how immortal she is, her mind is just that of a lowly human. Do you think a fragile human mind can withstand this pain?"

"You, you bastard...!!"

*It was a misjudgment.*

She should have moved Aria to a safe place first, or prioritized protecting Aria.

Of course, she had ignored Evan's suggestion to prioritize Aria's safety, fearing that she might miss Maleficent if she did so, and had instead focused on finding Maleficent's location first.

Argen bit her lip tightly.

She thought she had improved a lot, but just hearing Maleficent's name made every nerve in her body feel tense.

*I ended up messing things up.*

'Saintess...'

Argen wanted to ignore Maleficent's threat and take his life. But Argen knew.

She knew firsthand how difficult the Saintess's life was, and what sacrifices she made.

And she knew how kind and good-hearted the girl named Aria was.

Could she, as the head of the academy, stand by and watch that pure child suffer such pain?

"... What do you want?"

"... Hahaha! Argen has mellowed out a lot. If it were your old self, you wouldn't care about that and just go for it!"

"Keuh..."

*I want to kill him.*

Argen's expression twisted as she felt her old self resurfacing, but there was little she could do.

It was easy for her to sense what Maleficent was secretly trying to do to Aria.

But the problem was that as a magician of the same level, it was also easy for him to detect any tricks she tried to use.

The moment she tried to do something, he would launch a mental attack. "Then first, let me go. The attack on the academy will be postponed." "Damn it...!"

For now, she had no choice but to follow his words.

Was it best to seize the opportunity to move Aria back and desperately attack?

As she pondered how to proceed, about to accept Maleficent's proposal,

*Shooook!*

"What...!!"

Something was flying towards them.

The moment Maleficent sensed it and tried to inflict pain,

*Paang!!*

The destruction of Maleficent's Life Vessel was even faster. "...!!"

Argen's eyes widened as she saw it. "The Hero... has many useful skills..."

There was Evan, raising his hand filled with the Holy Power of Purification, glowing red like flames.

"Kuaaaak!!"

The Life Vessel was destroyed.

It was now impossible for the lich to exist in this world any longer. It was only natural since what sustained his life had disappeared. 'Thank goodness...'

Argen muttered inwardly, thinking of quickly apologizing to the two of them.

Unlike an elder... Aria was almost seriously hurt because of her.

If it weren't for Evan, they might have missed Maleficent and only Aria would have suffered... It would have been the worst possible outcome.

However, 'What...'

*Something's wrong.*

She questioned, looking at Maleficent, who was still maintaining his form even though his Life Vessel had disappeared.

*Why is he still alive?*

The moment that question arose,

"Ha, hahaha, you foolish fools...!! Did you think I wouldn't have anticipated even this situation...!!"

"Maleficent...!!"

"Hero, from the moment your attack came, I have already inflicted extreme pain on the Saintess you cherish so much. Even if she is accustomed to pain, she won't be able to withstand it...!!"

*That can't be.*

Argen hurriedly turned her head towards Aria.

As he said, Aria was trying to move her body with a distorted expression.

Argen clenched her fist tightly at the sight of the pitiful girl struggling with her melted half-body.

"You bastard...!!!"

"Demon King...!! I will sacrifice this body to offer the Saintess's broken soul!!"

As he shouted that and slowly faded away, Aria's trembling body froze.

'Ah...'

She knew what kind of magic Maleficent had cast. Mind Crush.

A terrifying magic that stimulates extreme pain or mental trauma to shatter the mind and turn it into a blank slate.

He had used his remaining power to cast it on Aria just before he died.

It could be overcome if one had a strong mental fortitude, but the caster was Maleficent, a lich archmage who had lived for countless years.

Even a Saintess with a strong mental fortitude would not be able to withstand it.

Argen gave up hope. However,

"I, impossible...!!"

The voice of Maleficent, mixed with horror, was heard as he faded away. "This... This can't be... The Goddess must be crazy... How can this be...!!" "What...?"

"The pain a human can endure can't be like this!!" Argen hurriedly turned towards Aria.

The Holy Power, the proof of faith, remained.

If her soul was broken, the Holy Power should no longer be generated in that body. Since she was no longer the Saintess's blessed body, she would die with her melted half-body as it was.

But,

"It's... recovering..."

The Holy Power was getting stronger. The melting half-body was recovering. "This... This can't be happening..."

Argen, looking down at Maleficent, who had only a small part of him left, couldn't say anything.

The strength of this generation's Hero and Saintess was beyond imagination.

Especially that girl, Aria.

"Is this... what they call a miracle..." Faith in God.

Was the boundless love for humanity, that affection, the driving force that allowed her to endure the pain?

The girl, who had endured even the pain that would have instantly broken an ordinary person, was lying quietly on the floor with a happy smile.

The lich archmage, who had relentlessly spewed hatred towards God, muttered as he faced his end with a hollow expression.

"Crazy... bitch..."

He was looking at a pure girl that an undead who hated God could never understand.

# 8 - Maleficent Subjugation Battle

It's over… I guess.

I don't know exactly how things turned out since I came back after resting in the consciousness space, but the Maleficent subjugation was successful, and the academy is safe…

Above all, it seems that everything was resolved well without any harm to the students, thanks to me.

Well, even if I don't know about other things, I saw Maleficent die with my own two eyes.

I could say for sure that she was dead. Because she completely disappeared…

If she were still alive after all that, it would be amazing in its own right…

When I asked how they managed to catch Maleficent, they said that, as I expected, they traced her heart back to find her and forcibly dragged her to where we are now.

Well, that's a sure way to catch her…

Basically, a lich can only exist in the world if they have a mana organ called a life vessel, which can be called a heart for humans.

But if that gets destroyed, it's safe to say that most liches just die.

That's right, but since the opponent isn't an ordinary lich mage but a great mage, isn't it possible that she took some measures to avoid dying?

So, I just thought that if we were going to finish her off, it would be right to bring her here and kill her for sure.

I don't know how it happened because I didn't see it with my own eyes.

Anyway, it's a relief that the subjugation was successful and no one was hurt.

…

No, what did I just say?

'No one was hurt, which means there's no one I need to heal…' This is a sad and unfortunate story, not something to be glad about.

Of course, an ordinary Saintess would sincerely think it's a good thing, but I'm not an ordinary Saintess, am I?

I just want to heal as many people as possible. Did I prepare too much?

'I don't think I did anything.' I'm serious, not lying.

I really didn't do anything.

I just told Argent that it would be good to prepare for Maleficent's attack soon.

After that, Argent did everything on her own. That wasn't all.

'He's awakened.'

For some reason, Evan even succeeded in his second awakening.

I don't think he awakened this early in the game, so I couldn't believe he could awaken so quickly.

What is it?

Usually, even if you play with that necklace in the game, you can't awaken this quickly if you play normally.

Usually, the second awakening could be done in the second year.

He hasn't even finished the first year yet, but he's already awakened, so I'm surprised and also excited.

If it's Evan, he might really succeed in subjugating the Demon King.

Well… I don't know why I came to this world, but I know that I can't return to my original world unless I subjugate the Demon King.

If the world is destroyed, I'll probably die with it. That's why I've been running until now.

"Are you okay?"

Evan, who had come close to me, asked, holding out his hand to me. It wasn't just Evan.

Stella, Uriel, and Argent also came to me and were sending me worried glances.

"Ah… can't they see…?"

He asked me if I was okay and held out his hand, but after a while, he seemed to think that I had used up all my Holy Power, and he hesitated whether to take back the hand he had held out.

Well, if you see me collapsed from Demonic energy, you might think I've used up all my Holy Power.

I shook my head.

"[I can hear you… I'm glad everyone is safe.]"

It wasn't that I used up all my Holy Power and was hit by the life vessel, but that Maleficent's Demonic energy was too strong and I was pressured.

Of course, I didn't use up all my Holy Power.

Most of the Holy Power I used to purify the heart at that time was the Holy Power I had been collecting all along.

Since I can store Holy Power inside the Relic, I had been saving it in case I didn't have enough power now, but I almost had a big problem.

Seeing that my Holy Power is still at a precarious level, if I hadn't stored Holy Power in the Relic, I might have lost.

Of course, with Argent next to me, I wouldn't have lost, but I could have expected some damage.

Thanks to the thorough preparation that could be evaluated as perfect, I was able to wrap up this incident without major damage.

I'm glad.

I should be glad, but… "Haa… another big problem."

Argent, who had been standing on the side where Maleficent died for a long time, suddenly sighed and said.

When Stella next to her asked if there was any problem, she pointed to the academy as if asking what was obvious.

Only then did Stella realize why she was reacting like that. But…

"There aren't any students who were seriously injured, and none of the professors died, right? Isn't it amazing that we caught even a member of the Demon King Army without any damage like this?"

Stella explained to Uriel, who asked with a pure expression. Well, it's natural for Argent to react so sadly.

It's definitely something to be happy about that the incident ended safely without anyone getting hurt, but that doesn't mean that the incident itself disappears.

Anyway, the fact remains that a member of the Demon King Army, a great mage, directly led his forces to attack Argent Academy, where she is the headmaster.

The academy, which had set up a barrier and swore that it would never be attacked, has collapsed to this extent, so it's obvious how the world will think of Argent Academy.

It won't collapse immediately because of its reputation and because Argent, the mage of the Hero party that sealed the Demon King and one of the few great mages in the current era, is the headmaster…

But it was clear that she would be more annoyed. "I don't want to be bothered any more than this…" "Aha…"

"Haa…"

While Argent was sighing and Stella was explaining Argent's situation to Uriel, someone came to my side.

"Aria."

It was Evan.

"Can you stand up?"

Well, I can stand up, but…

'Evan probably doesn't want me to be able to stand up on my own.'

He didn't see what happened here with his own eyes, but it's also true that Evan awakened for me…

Above all, he explained it to me to some extent.

I heard that it was Evan who took advantage of Maleficent's weakness and broke her heart.

It would have been a disaster if it wasn't for Evan.

In the end, he made a sad expression, saying that he had no choice but to give me so much pain.

Um, actually, I felt really good, but everyone was so sorry that I had suffered such pain.

There's no need to be.

'But I can't say I felt good…'

I even heard Maleficent call me a crazy bitch, so it would have been a disaster if the opponent hadn't died.

Anyway…

'It's okay to give him a little service, right?' He did so much for me.

It wasn't even something to call service.

Rather, I felt sorry for him because it felt like I was burdening Evan with a troublesome load.

I chuckled inwardly and said to Evan as if I was really troubled. "[… I don't think I can right now… ]"

“… Is that so?”

I entrusted my body to Evan, who was carefully supporting me… Entrusted…

Ent…? 'Huh.'

What is this.

At first, I thought he was just trying to support me, but why does it feel like my body is being lifted higher…?

"How is this? Are you okay?" “…!!!”

I was being held in Evan's arms in a princess carry.

Uh… I didn't mean to say I couldn't get up on purpose to get this…

But I couldn't tell him to put me down right away because I had said that I couldn't get up until just now, and Evan's expression felt so serious that I felt guilty for joking around.

In the end, I couldn't tell him to put me down and just nodded slightly. 'I shouldn't play with these scenes next time…'

Still, something…

It's comfortable to be held like this, and…

'Is it because of the awakening…?'

It felt very warm, so it wasn't a bad feeling. Yeah… really.

# 9 - Maleficent Subjugation Battle

The Demon King Army executives' large-scale invasion of the academy ended absurdly, with a miracle occurring where not a single death occurred.

Originally, the story was supposed to be that the academy would suffer great damage from the countless waves of demons, be occupied, and slowly expand their territory until they finally found and barely managed to subdue Maleficent, but it had completely changed.

The academy could be rebuilt quickly if it was destroyed, and not only did all the students escape unharmed, but the professors, who had prepared in advance, responded well to the demons. The prestige of Argent Academy was soaring to the sky.

So much so that there was even a conspiracy theory that Argen Headmaster had deliberately orchestrated the whole thing to raise the status of Argent Academy.

Of course, the students who had been in the midst of the chaos dismissed it as nonsense, saying that there was no way the academy would be ruined, but the imperial family of the empire was overjoyed.

It is said that the best news is no news, but thanks to the appropriate response of the headmaster, students, and professors, they not only subdued Maleficent, an executive of the Demon King Army who had plagued humanity for many years, but also suffered no casualties except for the destruction of the academy building.

The prestige of the academy, as well as the empire to which it belonged, could only rise day by day.

It was already happy enough, but the prestige rose even further when it was revealed that Uriel, the imperial princess of the empire, had also participated in the subjugation of Maleficent.

She went around saying that she hadn't done much, but... how many people would believe that?

Most people just thought that Uriel was downplaying herself. "Haa..."

I'm lying in a hospital room again. Should I call this fortunate?

Most of the injured kids had minor injuries and could be treated quickly, and most of the students were transported to a safe place via bracelet, so there was no one I needed to treat.

In the first place, even though the academy was devastated by the large- scale invasion, it was only natural that there were no dead students, let alone professors.

It would be different if it was just one person, but several professors were together, and most of the students were teleported without having to go to save them, and the students outside were on the outskirts, so they only encountered low-level demons and had no problem escaping.

Although they had prepared, it was a situation that could be called a miracle.

If you ask me if it's a miracle for me, I don't know. The reason is simple.

My abilities get stronger and I can feel the small joys of everyday life when there are students to treat.

Well, still...

'This is satisfying enough...'

Maleficent gave me so much right before she died that I was satisfied enough not to feel any pain for a while.

I'd say it was the highest level of pain I'd ever experienced. It was hard to rate.

I was so happy that I lost consciousness on the spot.

I had never felt pain strong enough to make me faint before, even though I had felt all sorts of pain.

The most intense was when I was pierced by a high-level demon's hand and injected with Demonic energy on the day of the entrance ceremony, but this time I experienced something even worse.

I'm embarrassed that I'm dividing the levels of pain and being satisfied with feeling it...

'Is it because it's going to be peaceful for a while now...'

Nothing will happen until the end of the first year and the beginning of the second year, so I feel disappointed.

Of course, realistically, it's best if nothing happens... 'I should go to the Holy Kingdom this vacation...'

I went to the Holy Kingdom just recently, but I had things to do then, so I couldn't stay long.

Unlike then, I don't have anything to do now, so I can go back to the cathedral and rest for a long time.

After finishing thinking about what to do in the future, I turned to the side. "Aria..."

Seeing Stella, who took care of me until the end even though I told her I was okay, this is really...

It's a complicated feeling. "Huh...?"

Stella, who seemed to have just woken up, looked around with a dazed expression and looked at me.

I was already awake, so I waved at Stella. "Are, are you okay? How's your body?!"

Stella's eyes widened and she asked me urgently. What do you mean, how am I?

Even if the opponent is Maleficent, I'm still a Saintess... There's no way I, who is practically the incarnation of the Goddess, would suffer permanent disabilities from a mere lich archmage.

"[I'm fine. I'm just glad that Stella doesn't seem to be hurt.]" "...You really...!!"

"[Ah...]"

Stella's eyes welled up with tears and she hugged me tightly. She muttered that she was so glad.

Um...

'It's a bit late for me to say this, but I think I've shown her all sorts of things so far, so why is her reaction so extreme?'

I've seen things worse than my body melting from Maleficent's Demonic energy, so I don't understand why she's so worried about me.

Is it because of the opponent?

Well, my body's regeneration wasn't progressing for a while because of the Demonic energy, and I was resting in the consciousness space because of my melting half-body.

It's not like I wanted to go in, and I think it was because of Maleficent...

"[Did something happen? It's been a while since Stella has been so worried about me.]"

"Th, that's..." "I'll explain." Ah.

When did she get here?

The person who opened the door and rushed in was none other than Argen Isis.

Not only her, but Evan and Uriel were also walking in.

"You're finally awake. How's your body? Is there anything uncomfortable?" "[Of course. I feel rather comfortable?]"

"Hoo... I'm glad to hear that. You're showing such a normal reaction that I'm starting to suspect that you're lying on purpose."

Judging from Argen's reaction, it seems that Maleficent did something to me right before she died.

She gave me tremendous pain until the moment of her death, and then she found out my true nature and died with a hollow expression.

"[I guess something did happen.]"

"...Yes. There's no point in hiding it, so I'll get straight to the point. That guy cast Mind Crush on you."

Ah, I know that magic. It was in the game too.

It was a mental magic, and if you mastered it, you could collapse the mind of an opponent of a similar or lower level and cheese the boss battle.

Most boss battles have stronger opponents than me, so if you raise your character normally, you can't even learn the magic, let alone cast it.

According to the setting, you can manipulate the mind with magic to make them no longer human, erase their memories, etc...

You can do things that are chilling just to hear about.

However, you can't do delicate manipulations such as erasing a certain part of your memory.

And she cast that on me? 'No wonder I felt such pain.'

It was strangely strong to be called pain that normally gives me pain.

If it was a normal person, their mind would have collapsed in an instant.

Well, I almost had my mind collapse in a different sense because the pleasure was too strong.

I can say that I survived because the threshold for pleasure is higher than for pain.

"Before I explain, I want to apologize first." "[Yes?]"

"My desire for revenge caused you great pain. Although you endured it, it was pain that you wouldn't have had to experience if I had given up my desire for revenge."

Argen came to me, made eye contact with me for a moment, and then bowed.

"I'm really sorry."

The other kids around me were looking at Argen with shocked expressions, probably because they didn't expect her to come up to me and bow.

I was also flustered because I didn't know she would be so sorry to me. I felt a sense of disconnect from the Argen I knew.

I waved my arms wildly with a flustered expression and said it was okay.

Even though I told her to raise her back like this, she was still silent and continued to ask me for forgiveness with her back bowed.

"[It's burdensome...]"

Actually, it's not just that it's burdensome, but she really didn't need to apologize to me.

That is, if she hadn't been burning with revenge, I wouldn't have tasted that heaven.

'I'm really okay...'

I can't say that again.

I sighed inwardly, wondering what to do. It's so hard to maintain the concept, really...

# Maleficent Subjugation (Interlude)

"So, he said he had to save Aria first and tried to stop me from using tracking magic."

Oh, is that so?

If it were before, I would have thought, 'As expected of the Hero,' or 'He's such a kind friend who cares more about others,' but knowing the inside story, I couldn't help but interpret his words differently.

Ironically, it seems I'm the only one who knows that Evan likes me.

No, Stella is quick-witted, so maybe she already knows that Evan likes me. Argent, judging by his reaction, seemed to have noticed it a long time ago. "[Hehe… I see.]"

So that's how it is.

Seeing him care for me so much, I felt like I should start responding to his kindness.

Of course, I sometimes just call him Evan, but because of my persona, I usually call him Brother Evan.

Maybe he's unhappy with me about that.

I turned my head slightly to let Evan know that I was looking at him.

Well, even if I didn't turn my head to look at him, I could see everything Evan was doing, but there's a big difference between looking directly and not, right?

It's a habit I've had since long ago.

"[Evan…?]"

"Uh, uh?"

"[I heard you succeeded in your Awakening. Congratulations.]"

"Ah, no… If it weren't for you, I wouldn't have been able to Awaken in the first place…"

Well, I wasn't praising him to hear those words, but… It wasn't exactly wrong either.

It seems Awakening would have been impossible without me.

I listened to the explanation of what had happened since that incident and how the situation had unfolded. Apparently, he Awakened after seeing me collapse while trying to purify his heart.

I don't know what he was thinking when he Awakened, but anyway, it's thanks to me that he Awakened, and considering that we have to defeat the Demon King in the future, it's better for him to Awaken as soon as possible…

I should think of this as fortunate.

'At this rate of growth, he might actually fully Awaken around his second year.'

In the original setting, I know that Awakening takes a very long time.

Mental maturity, physical strength, and other factors need to reach a certain level.

Looking back at history, there are many Heroes with low aptitude who barely managed to defeat the Demon King after a journey of more than a decade, achieving their final Awakening. Considering that Evan was a novice Hero who hadn't even achieved his first Awakening until a little less than a year ago…

It's only been a year, and he's already finished his second Awakening and is on the verge of his final Awakening, which shows how hard Evan has been working.

Of course, it's a setting where his power becomes one step stronger, and he can use new skills in the game, so it's only natural that Awakening is difficult.

Thinking about it that way, Evan is working incredibly fast, even more diligently and desperately than I expected…

He has reached the point where he can defeat not only lower-level demons but also mid-level and high-level demons.

Now, Evan only needs to Awaken one more time. Three times was the maximum in the game.

'And all of this was to save me…'

The first Awakening was to weaken the Magic beast, but it was an Awakening to save me, who was directly eaten by the Magic beast.

The second Awakening was to save me, who sacrificed myself by throwing myself at Maleficent to weaken her heart.

'At this point…'

I carefully observed Evan.

Even now, Evan is looking at me with a worried expression. I don't know why he likes me so much.

Looking at what he's shown me so far… he feels like the Saintess herself, but if you ask me if I've had such a big impact on Evan that he would do this much for me, I don't know.

I can understand him feeling guilty or sorry for not being able to protect me, but…

Or maybe he's worried about me overworking my body.

Parts of my body flying away are basic, and I've shown him shocking scenes like my body melting, having huge holes in it, or even being torn to shreds so that nothing remains.

Even though I've shown him such shocking scenes that would make anyone want to throw up, he still likes me and is even Awakening to save me, so I'm starting to change my mind.

It's not that I dislike Evan. Honestly…

From a rational point of view, if I were really a woman, it wouldn't be strange for me to have fallen for Evan a long time ago, he's been so devoted to me.

The only reason that's not the case is, as it may sound cliché, because I was a man.

'A man…'

A man, huh?

I can't even remember it well anymore.

If I had tried to remember my previous world and lived peacefully after coming to this world, it might be different, but now it's been almost three years since I've been living as the Saintess.

It's quite a long time if you think about it, but if you ask me if I've forgotten my memories of my previous world, I can say that's not the case.

I still remember my previous world.

But…

'It's fading…'

Perhaps it's because the three years I've spent here have been so significant to me.

Well… it's been three years filled with pleasure, but it seems to have had a big impact on me, but it didn't feel that significant.

Anyway… there's no one waiting for me. 'Why… did I want to go back?'

What was the reason I wanted to go back? That thought suddenly occurred to me.

I vaguely set a goal to catch the Demon King and go back, but in reality, I had no reason to go back.

At best, it would be to enjoy the culture of my original world and play around.

I had a lot of money, so…

'That's why I played the game even harder, but…'

Now that I think about it, there's nothing good about going back. "Aria?"

Is going back the right thing to do? Is that really what I want now?

Of course, you could say, 'What about all the hard work you've done so far?' but…

'Anyway, if I don't defeat the Demon King, I'll die anyway…'

I worked hard to go back, but it was more about trying not to die. After all, the only way to find a way back is to defeat the Demon King.

Maybe everything I've been working on so far wasn't to go back, but to not die.

I feel pleasure from pain, but even I don't want to die. "Aria!"

"[Yes, yes?!]"

Ah, did you call me?

I was so lost in my own thoughts that I didn't even notice Evan calling me. "Sorry… I think I was bothering you too much when you must be tired." "[Huh? Ah, no. I was just thinking about something.]"

Evan looked relieved at my words.

However…

"Still, you must be very tired, so get some rest today." "[Ah…]"

Well… I am tired.

Maleficent's Demonic energy came directly into my body and messed around, so I still have some aftereffects.

Of course, it's not a serious aftereffect, just a little tired.

Evan got up from his seat and looked around, saying it was time to leave.

Stella, who had been nursing me until I woke up, didn't want to leave, but he forcibly dragged her out, saying that Aria would worry if she kept staying up all night.

Hmm.

Well, it doesn't matter if they're in the room, but… 'Evan…'

I also have something to think about.

I watched with my own eyes as Evan and everyone else left the room, and when the room became quiet, I turned my head back to the front and bowed deeply.

Evan likes me.

But… do I like Evan?

I put my hand on my chest.

Humans are said to rely heavily on sight.

There is a big difference between what you can see and what you can't, and I am experiencing it directly, so it's an undeniable fact.

Is the reason I don't want to love a man, the reason I can't love a man, because I don't find Evan attractive to my eyes?

But if that's the case, how can I perceive and judge such a thing when I can't see?

What is my purpose?

My purpose was originally to return home.

But now, I'm just acting like the Saintess, adopting a persona to pursue pleasure and return home.

On the one hand, I also want to save people who are suffering. The desire to save people and the me who enjoys pleasure.

Which one is the real me? I closed my eyes.

This question… seemed like it would continue for a while.

# 1 - Return Home

The daily life continued even after Maleficent's attack.

Maleficent's attack was certainly significant, but unfortunately for the Demon King Army, it didn't cause a major stir.

It was true that the academy building was damaged, but only the building was slightly ruined. There were no casualties, everyone was defeated, and even the Lich Grand Wizard, Maleficent, who had terrified the continent, was subjugated.

Most of the people in the empire cheered, chanting Argent's name and the empire.

The subjugation of a Demon King Army executive was a joyous occasion that warranted a celebration in itself.

Conversely, the academy building was indeed significantly damaged, so the headmaster, at his discretion, decided to suspend exams and bring the vacation forward, judging that it was impossible to continue proper classes.

So… thanks to this attack, the exams that were supposed to be taken disappeared, and the vacation started early.

The students were confused, but they acknowledged that it was a great thing that no one died, and exceptionally gave everyone full marks on their exams.

Some students liked it, while others didn't, but it couldn't be helped.

The academy was already completely ruined, so how could they continue classes there?

Holding classes elsewhere was not an option, as there was no place with facilities as good as Argent Academy, and traveling to another location for

exams and classes would be a major hassle, taking anywhere from a few days to several weeks.

Therefore, it was decided to continue the suspension of classes at their discretion.

As someone who never intended to take the exams properly in the first place, it was a good outcome for me.

As I walked, lost in thought, a vast plain unfolded before me.

Like a child who had discovered something amazing, I rushed forward eagerly.

"S, Saintess!"

"[It's been a while since I've seen so much snow~]"

I ran around outside like an excited child, saying that. It was now the last month of the year.

December 25th.

In this world, it was a day to commemorate the Goddess's creation of this world and the birth of the three sibling gods who shared her power.

"Saintess, please be careful not to fall."

"[Hehe, Danas, really. As if I would fall… Kyaa!]" Crack!

"..."

"Didn't I tell you…" No, this is a bit unfair.

I'm somewhat relieved… no, I can't say I'm entirely relieved because I didn't feel the pain of cracking my head when I fell, but anyway, I fell on a pile of snow, so I didn't feel much of an impact.

"[Umm… I'm sorry… ]"

I thought I wouldn't fall because I could easily detect things like rocks with Divine Detection, but when I thought about it, the fact that the snow was slippery didn't change, so if I wasn't careful, I would just slip and fall.

I didn't expect to slip…

I should have walked more carefully if I had known this would happen. "Are you okay, Aria?"

"[Ah… I'm okay. Thanks to the pile of snow, I'm not hurt anywhere.]" I smiled and answered Evan, who asked with a worried voice.

I wasn't actually hurt anywhere, so I smiled brightly and lay down on the ground again.

"S, Saintess?!"

"[I've always wanted to lie down in a fluffy snowfield like this!]" "Aren't you cold? I can give you my coat…"

"[I'm already wearing enough, so you don't have to worry, Danas.]"

My clothes were even enchanted with warming magic to prevent me from feeling the cold, so it was impossible to feel the coldness of the snow unless I touched it directly with my hands.

Geez… everyone worries too much.

I guess they didn't expect me to lie down in the snowfield.

"[Snow… it feels kind of strange.]" "Strange feeling?"

"[I've felt a lot of snow in the Demon Realm where blizzards raged… but I was too busy saving people back then. I couldn't even open my eyes because of the snow, so should I say I was too busy to even open my nose?]"

"..."

It was a hilarious joke, but Evan didn't laugh. Tsk, what an insensitive guy.

"[Lying here leisurely like this, I feel anew how fluffy the snow is.]" "... I see."

"[… Your reaction isn't very good. Do you not like being with me?]"

I asked in a somewhat sad voice, wanting to play a little prank, and Evan, surprised, hurriedly replied that it wasn't like that.

He had become much more gentle and somewhat colder after his Second Awakening, but seeing this, it didn't seem like that was the case.

Well… Awakening itself was said to be a maturation of the mind, so it wasn't that strange for his personality to change a little, but Evan felt different.

It felt like he had suddenly gained the experience of living several more years.

"[Then, would you like to lie down next to me?]" "Huh?"

"[Hurry.]"

"Ah, okay."

Evan answered with a bewildered voice at my words and lay down next to me.

I can't see the sky, but Evan can see the dark sky well.

As the Hero, he will be able to see the dark night as clearly as day. "[How is the night sky?]"

"... It's beautiful." "[Is that so… ]" I'm jealous.

I want to see it too.

I feel like I want to lie here with just the two of us.

I came outside with just the two of us, secretly from Stella.

If Stella finds out, she'll definitely make a fuss about why we left her out. I should stay for a while and then go back.

Ah, come to think of it, there was a hidden contributor to being able to sneak out like this.

"[Brother Danas. Thank you for indulging my whims today.]"

I offered my thanks to Danas, who was quietly watching me and Evan from behind.

Danas replied as if it was nothing.

"... I can't refuse what the Saintess asks. You are my life's savior, after all."

Life's savior, he says.

It's not the time to say that in this situation. I sighed deeply as I looked at Danas.

Danas probably didn't notice my gaze.

I feel like he's become more frustrating than before since he became a paladin and got married.

To put it nicely, he's become more gentle, and to put it badly, he's just become an old geezer.

Seeing him bow his head and say that he can't treat his life's savior badly in a pleasant situation, I was confident that everyone would think the same way I do.

It wasn't wrong, but I didn't expect that kind of answer, so I replied in a slightly sulky voice.

"[Hmm… Did I put too much pressure on you? That's not what I meant.]" "I, I was being presumptuous. I'm sorry."

"[Ugh… I don't know why everyone is so formal… ]"

Strangely, everyone fawns over me when I come to the Holy Kingdom. I didn't exactly want this when I returned home, so it's a shame.

"Aria." "[Yes?]"

"You know… if you subjugate the Demon King…"

Evan seemed to be about to say something, but he stopped for a moment.

I wondered if he was going to ask what I wanted to do after subjugating the Demon King, or if he wanted me to answer his confession back then.

"... It's nothing. Sorry."

Evan didn't say anything more and turned his head back to look at the sky, saying it was a slip of the tongue.

Well, he didn't seem to want to talk about it right now, so there was no reason to persistently ask.

"[It would have been nice if Uriel had come with us… ]"

"Well, Uriel is a princess… so she probably went back to the imperial family."

"[Seeing it like this, I feel anew that Uriel is a princess.]" Evan smiled and replied.

Uriel had initially tried to invite us to the imperial family, but Stella said that it would be a disaster if the people of the Magic Tower discovered her in such a troublesome place, and I had to return to the Holy Kingdom first, so we had no choice but to refuse.

Evan originally had nowhere to return to, and he had declared that he would follow me wherever I went, so unfortunately, Uriel had to part ways with us.

It must have been like a bolt from the blue for Uriel, who was planning to return to the imperial family together during this vacation and have fun.

You can tell just by how sadly she cried when we parted.

Well, I had already sent a letter saying that I would return to the Holy Kingdom, so there was no turning back.

"[Maybe it would be good to accept Uriel's invitation after we've had enough vacation in the Holy Kingdom. I think she must be very

heartbroken.]"

"That might not be a bad idea." I nodded at Evan's words.

I should do that for Uriel's sake. December 25th.

The night of the birth of the Goddess passes.

We are currently spending our vacation in the Holy Kingdom of Valkan. Except for Uriel.