# 2 - Homecoming

"Where were you guys?"

"Well, we just went out for some fresh air...?" I was caught.

I had sneaked out while Stella was sleeping, but as soon as I returned, Stella woke up and asked where I had been.

If I had known I would be caught like this, I should have taken Stella with me.

"[I'm sorry, Stella... I didn't want to wake you, so I just went out secretly.]" "Ah... is that so?"

"[Would it be better to just wake you up next time?]" "Um..."

At my question, Stella seemed to glance at Evan for a moment before answering that it was okay.

Why did she suddenly look at Evan before answering? 'It can't be that she likes Evan.'

Before, I might have indulged in wishful thinking, wondering if they liked each other, but I already knew that Evan liked me...

More than that, I belatedly realized that there wasn't much reason for Stella to like Evan.

I thought that Stella didn't seem to like Evan that much anymore...

'Hmm... or is she?'

Considering that she wouldn't be so concerned about Evan otherwise, I felt confused. What if Stella actually liked Evan, but was bothered by the fact that Evan and I went outside alone together?

'It could be confusing.'

I didn't think Stella would do that, but if she felt jealous that I secretly took only Evan out and something happened between us, wouldn't it just be a hassle for me?

I don't want any trouble.

I turned from Evan to Stella. I don't want that...!

"[Don't worry, Stella, I went out with Danas.]" "Oh... uh, okay."

Stella replied with a somewhat flustered expression at my words. That's enough.

From what I said, it might seem like I was telling her not to worry about us going out alone, but the underlying meaning was that Danas was with us, so nothing like what she was thinking happened.

Stella would understand.

Couldn't I tell just from the flustered expression she was giving me? That should be enough, right?

Even if not, Stella, being smart, would quickly realize why I was saying this.

"..."

Stella, however, was looking at Evan for some reason.

She seemed to be giving him a strangely pitiful look, but I didn't know why. Well, it didn't seem like something I needed to worry about.

"It's been a while."

"[It's been a while, Grandpa.]"

Since it was a private meeting, I smiled brightly and hugged him as if I were meeting my real grandfather.

I always think this whenever I'm hugged like this, but it's a strange feeling.

No matter how much I look around, no matter how much I touch him, he only looks like an ordinary grandfather, but his true identity is actually the Light Guardian Dragon.

Even I, who am directly seeing it with Divine Power Detection, can't believe it, so how much more would the people around me? Perhaps the only people who know his true identity are Argent and me, who naturally found out while playing the game in my past life.

But even I, who already know his true identity, honestly just see him as a grandfather when I look at Grandpa now, and I don't see him at all as the top-tier SSS-class Guardian Dragon beauty hiding his identity, so I feel confused.

I've become so used to bypassing the All-Seeing Eyes that she possesses, so I smiled brightly and asked if he had finished his work well.

"I should have come sooner, but things took longer than I thought. I'm sorry."

"[It's okay. I'm going to rest for a long time anyway.]"

Since I came to the Holy Kingdom, I should rest for a long time. I was also thinking of looking around the capital.

It's Barkhan's capital, so there are probably few people desperate enough to need my help, but there's also the off chance...

When I was in the capital before, I was so busy training my powers as a Saintess that I didn't get to look around properly, so I wanted to do some sightseeing.

"How is your body? I heard you were seriously injured when you caught the Demon King Army executive..."

Grandpa asked with a worried voice. It felt very new.

Especially being worried about like this directly by Grandpa, of all people.

Until now, I had been worried about by the other knights of the Demon Realm or by my friends at the academy.

It felt different than usual. "[It's okay. I'm used to it.]"

After saying that, I felt a little like I messed up because I said I was okay because I was used to the pain...

But there shouldn't be a big problem.

As Grandpa said, I was seriously injured this time.

If my body was torn apart or disappeared without a trace, I could say that I was less injured.

For ordinary people, this would be a bigger wound, but for me, who can heal it easily, it's not a big problem.

As long as I'm still in the Saintess state, it's not a big problem to be injured to that extent.

Regardless of mental problems, wounds can be healed easily.

But this time, I was dealing with a high-ranking existence, none other than a Demon King Army executive... If I had tried to stop Maleficent with my own power instead of the Relic, I would have been much more seriously injured than I am now.

I might have been lying down until the end of the vacation.

It was only thanks to obtaining the Relic beforehand and gathering Holy Power in the Relic to neutralize the heart that I didn't go that far, so it's just a guess.

Anyway, as Grandpa said, it's true that I was seriously injured, but I replied that I was okay.

If I, of all people, caught a Demon King Army executive with just one injury, wouldn't that be a huge gain?

Of course, there are people who don't think so, but at least I think it's a huge gain.

I can't tell people the reason why, though.

Who would say that they don't care because they like being in pain? Even if I'm someone who likes being in pain, at least I'm not...

Well... if I get that kind of attention, it would be enjoyable in its own way, but I'm currently playing the role of a Saintess.

My future plans would be fundamentally twisted. I don't want that to happen.

That's all.

"... That's not true, Aria." "[Huh?]"

"Just because you're used to it doesn't mean the wound disappears." Grandpa put his hand on my head with a pitiful expression.

A subtle and warm sensation passed by. "You can rest if you're tired."

"[G-Grandpa...?]"

"I sometimes think. When I first met you back then, shouldn't I have brought you as a Saintess?"

Oh, I didn't know that at all.

Of course, it's probably because I showed potential as a Saintess that he took me.

Otherwise, there would be no reason to take me.

Of course, he has such a kind heart that he would have taken in a child with a disability walking on the street out of pity, so if I didn't have the potential to be a Saintess, he would have allowed me to live as a nun in the cathedral.

Well... not being able to see wouldn't have been that difficult to live with since he would have made it so that I could hear with Thought-form and distinguish my surroundings with Divine Power Detection, like now.

But...

"Blinded by your potential as a Saintess, I might have plunged you into the abyss... It's an impious thought that I shouldn't dare to have towards the Goddess... but she's a generous person, so she'll surely forgive me."

"[Ah...]"

"I'm always sorry to you, Aria, for making you carry such a heavy burden."

Seeing him say that with a truly self-deprecating expression, I wondered if I had made him like this.

'Did I overdo it?'

Come to think of it, as soon as I became a Saintess, I was blinded by lust, no, pleasure, and wandered around without caring about what happened to my body...

I didn't care at all at the time that it might look strange.

But unlike my enjoyable inner thoughts, Aselina, who always saw my body being damaged and in pain, seemed to have developed a sense of skepticism.

He even made Aselina, who was directly created and had absolute faith in the creator, have such impious thoughts.

'Was I... that bad...?'

Suddenly, I had that thought and briefly looked back on my past actions, and I nodded slightly without anyone knowing.

'It's plausible enough.'

Even if I looked for past Saintesses, there was no Saintess who saved everyone they saw...

Of course, who wouldn't be afraid when their own body is hurt that much and they feel pain?

Somehow... I feel sorry for everyone... Tch.

# 3 - Homecoming

“[Please don't say things like that, Grandfather.]” “That’s… I’m sorry.”

He seemed to realize how impious his words were just now and apologized to me.

Hmm…

It doesn’t seem like I’m the one he should be apologizing to, so why is he apologizing to me?

No, maybe he thought it wasn't appropriate to say to me, who believes in God and receives His power.

Like I said before, if I were a normal Saintess, I would have been angry and said it was nonsense, because it was such an impious remark.

Well, I only know about the existence of God and don't really care whether I believe in Him or not.

Still, I had to show that I was a little uncomfortable so that he would understand, and thankfully, he seemed to understand his mistake when I showed it.

But something…

‘Now that I’ve actually met him, I have nothing to say…’

I used to think I wanted to meet him… but now that I've met Aselina, or rather, my grandfather, who is the Pope, I don't have much to say.

It's obvious, but it's like neither of us has anything that can be called daily life… Especially in the case of Aselina, who is working hard as the Pope,

most of the conversations will be about work, so there's nothing to talk about in daily life.

I was wondering what to do, so I thought about telling him stories about what happened at the academy.

Well… if I talk about how I'm getting along with my friends and what happened, he'll enjoy listening to me, apart from the fact that I'm using my abilities to save people.

What story should I start with…

“[Ah… well… let's start with what happened at the academy! How I met the Hero, Stella, and Uriel!]”

Thinking about it now, there were a lot of fun things that happened.

Well, it wasn't all fun, and there were a few things that were fun for me but were like nightmares for them…

‘Should I exclude those stories?’

Even if I exclude that, there are still many stories to tell. I thought so and started telling the story.

Aselina was a little confused.

When she first heard Aria's story about her time at the academy, she thought she was having a good time, just like she said she wanted to go to the academy at first.

Of course, she knew about some of the things that had happened there, but she didn't say anything because Aria was avoiding mentioning them.

She hadn't met her for long, and she was a Guardian Dragon with a duty to protect humanity.

Even if she had affection for one human being, the Saintess, there was no reason to have much affection for her. She had been close to the previous Saintesses, and had even shared the end with some of them…

‘This is really the first time I’ve met a child like this…’ Aria was different.

She was very different from the Saintesses she had met so far. She had never told those children about her identity.

She had been acting as the Pope by gradually changing her face and appearance and pretending to be the next Pope.

But…

‘I don’t want to deceive her…’

She wanted to reveal her identity to this child.

She wanted to face Aria as her true self, without being ashamed.

She had thought several times that it would be okay to tell her her identity now, because Aria wouldn't reveal her identity, wouldn't she?

In Argent's case… it was just a special relationship.

Back when the Hero party of salvation existed, it was a time when the survival of the world was at stake, beyond national borders, so it couldn't be helped.

But now it was different.

Even though there was no reason to reveal her identity to Aria, for some reason she wanted to tell Aria everything.

The reason was simple.

‘Is this… what they call maternal love?’

When she first met Aria, she looked so precarious.

If she hadn't watched over her… if she hadn't grabbed the child who had fallen to the floor, she was just a fragile life that would have faded away.

But the child's heart was so kind and bright.

She didn't complain about her situation and was determined to live somehow.

Was that why?

Without realizing it, she reached out her hand for the first time.

Even forgetting that her appearance was not the Pope's, but her original female form.

Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, she wasn't caught because the girl had hearing and visual impairments, but it was something that would have shocked her.

She knew that she had the qualities of a Saintess, but she didn't bring her in hoping that she would become a Saintess.

She brought her in because she knew that if she left her alone, she would end up in a bad situation and die.

To raise her as a nun… yes, in a way, it could be seen as adoption. But the girl was different.

She acted as if she had been chosen by God, as if she had a destiny. She declared that she would do asceticism, which most nuns and priests didn't even bother with, and then she went on a journey with the adventurers.

She was shocked when she heard that she had saved a person as an apprentice nun who couldn't even handle Holy Power properly, squeezing

out her life force to save him.

It was impossible for an ordinary person.

No matter how devoted they are, there are few people who would give their lives to save a stranger they don't know.

She used up all her life force and gave her life to save the man's acquired disabilities and his dying body.

She had performed a miracle.

Could it be that God couldn't stand to see that? Aria was revived.

Becoming a Saintess.

It was as if she was born to be a Saintess.

Aselina closed her eyes, recalling the words of the adventurers who had seen the extinguished flame of life rekindle, filling the surrounding life with flowers.

Should she tell this child?

If something happens to this child, which she hopes doesn't happen, will she regret not telling her then?

‘It’s right to tell her.’

She didn't want to be seen as family in the guise of the Pope, which was just a facade, not her true self.

She wanted to become a true family and embrace this child. ‘Not now… but.’

She wasn't going to tell her right away.

Just because she decided to do it doesn't mean she can tell her right away. She needed some time.

It might sound a little strange to say that she needed to prepare herself, but she didn't know how Aria would react when she revealed to Aria, who had been living as her grandfather for a long time, that she was actually a Guardian Dragon… a non-human being.

If she showed fear of being a dragon, not a human, she might be shocked and bedridden for a while.

Well… she had to hope that wouldn't happen.

But there was something more important than that right now. ‘Evan… the Hero of this generation…’

She knew a lot about him.

Of course, she hadn't met him in person much, and most of what she knew was from Argent, but she heard that he was growing the fastest of all the Heroes in history.

That might be thanks to the necklace that even she didn't know about, but that doesn't mean that the Hero's qualities can be underestimated.

But…

‘It seems like… there are a lot of mentions of that Hero.’

Aria mentioned the Hero named Evan so often that it was strange.

She even smiled as if she was enjoying herself every time she talked about the Hero, so she couldn't help but be shaken.

‘Could it be… that she likes that child…?’

She knew that humans could become lovers and have children.

But the thought that her granddaughter, the child she cherished and loved, was in that kind of relationship with the Hero made her angry.

‘…I need to see what kind of guy he is with my own eyes.’ In fact, she knew.

She had heard it so much from Argent that there was no man more suitable for Aria than the Hero.

But she wanted to confirm something. She felt like she had to.

“[And there’s more, Evan…]” All about the Hero named Evan.

“[I feel a little sorry, but he’s a good person who always believes in me.]”

“[I don’t really have any serious injuries, so he doesn’t have to come, but he’s always the first to visit me in the hospital…]”

Crack

She had to… she had to…

# 4 - Homecoming

It had been a week since Evan started living in the Holy Nation of Varkan. 'What is this…?'

Suddenly, Evan felt a threat to his life. He didn't know the reason.

When he first arrived, he felt the hostility in the eyes of the paladins who looked at him strangely.

But lately, he felt a chill that went beyond hostility, as if they were after his life.

Naturally, he was curious about the reason, so he asked Danas, but all he got was that they were like uncles and there was nothing he could do, and that he should somehow earn their recognition.

Saying to earn recognition was usually taken to mean that they were wary of him.

In other words, Evan's head understood their reaction as being wary of an outsider.

He wondered why they would accept the Hero as an outsider, but it was an understandable reaction.

No matter how much of a Hero he was, he was just a stranger to them… No matter how long they had been together, even if the Saintess directly said it was okay, they might not believe it unless they saw it for themselves.

That wasn't all.

"You are the Hero, aren't you?"

A gentle and kind-looking grandfather.

The greatest leader of Varkan, whom all the people of Varkan looked up to and respected, the Pope. He tilted his head in confusion for a moment… but he felt a strange hostility in his eyes.

'Did I… do something wrong?'

They wouldn't be people who would do something right away.

Aria introduced them with a smile as her grandfather and her knights, so he didn't think they would do anything secretly.

But even so, he couldn't help but feel wronged.

He hadn't done anything, but everyone was giving him this look. If it was just one or two people, it would be one thing, but even the Pope was doing it, so he wondered if he had done something wrong.

'But I'm here for the first time today…' Of course, he had been to Varkan before.

Even before he started attending the academy, he had briefly stopped by with his teacher, and Varkan was the first place he visited when he went to take the Trial of Wisdom with Aria.

When he first came to Varkan for the Trial of Wisdom, there were knights who looked at him with hostility, but not as much as now.

Now it was as if they had become mortal enemies. 'Aria… what did you say about me…?'

There was only one reason why they were looking at him with such hostility.

Whenever Aria was seriously injured, what on earth was the Hero doing? He suddenly wondered if they had animosity because of that.

'So that's why…?'

He had seen Aria get along with the paladins and even the Pope like family.

There could be enough resentment left over from the fact that he became a Hero and made her sacrifice every time without properly protecting her.

Once he thought that far, he finally understood why everyone was giving him that look.

Evan clenched his fist tightly. Of course, he still felt wronged.

It was hard to think that everything that happened to Aria was entirely his fault.

Ever since he started attending the academy, unbelievable and huge incidents had been happening one after another, and most of them were major incidents that he couldn't handle alone.

The first time Aria had to sacrifice was when he hadn't even properly awakened to the power of the Hero, when he faced the high-ranking demon who was secretly hiding and preparing to attack the academy.

And then, two executives of the Demon King Army appeared and threatened not only the academy but also the lives of the Hero and the Saintess Aria.

Frankly speaking, if Argen Isis hadn't been around them, it would have been impossible for them to survive.

And…

'If Aria hadn't been there… I wouldn't be alive like this.' It's all thanks to that child.

His heart ached so much for this world… this reality where that child had to sacrifice herself.

It's not that he's not at fault.

What is he doing as a Hero, not even sharing the burden of the Saintess who is covering everything and suffering?

He felt self-loathing. He felt guilty.

He was so confused about what he had been doing, what he had been holding a sword for, and what he had been training for.

That's why… "I'm sorry."

Evan bowed his head to the Pope, no.

To the grandfather of a girl… to her family.

The Pope, who had been showing a strange hostility until just now, looked flustered at Evan's sudden action.

'A, an apology?'

He was apologizing to him directly, even bowing his head.

As the Pope and as Aselina, the Guardian Dragon, she couldn't help but feel embarrassed.

But…

'Why is he apologizing?' Let's hear him out first.

With that thought, she sat still and faced Evan.

Evan, who had clenched his fists tightly, carefully began to speak.

"I am still very lacking. The Hero is supposed to save everyone and lead the world to peace… but I am so pathetic that I can't even bring happiness to one person."

The happiness of one person.

Aselina's eyes widened at those words.

Only then did she understand why Evan was trying to apologize to her. 'He hates himself for not doing anything even though he likes Aria…'

Suddenly, Aselina wondered why she had such hostile feelings towards the Hero.

Yes, she thought that the idea of her family-like child falling in love with a man she didn't know and having a child was like that child was drifting away from her.

But maybe that wasn't the only reason.

'I heard that this generation's Hero has great qualities…'

Just because they are her family doesn't mean they are stupid people who can't tell right from wrong.

The life she has lived as the Pope is only a small part of her life as a dragon.

She was the Guardian Dragon, who had lived for an immeasurable amount of time on this land… a living fossil, or even history itself.

Therefore, if she put aside all her personal feelings for Aria and looked at the Hero from an objective point of view, it would be hard to find someone as unhappy as this generation's Hero.

He had the strongest and highest qualities, but unfortunately, he had to go through too many incidents in a short period of time.

He entered the academy to develop his strength, but he clashed with a high- ranking demon who was secretly hiding and preparing to attack, and in the process, he watched Aria selflessly throw herself to save him and Stella, and suffer serious injuries.

That wasn't all.

When they went to the Demon Realm for a trial run, the Doom Magic beast that had been sleeping under it happened to wake up at that moment.

Evan would have been able to do nothing with his strength, which was far from enough to face the executives of the Demon King Army.

If he hadn't awakened, that is.

During Maleficent's attack, the executives of the Demon King Army and many demons attacked together, so even if Aria had sacrificed herself, it would have been difficult if he hadn't succeeded in the second awakening.

Aria had neutralized the Life Vessel, effectively weakening Maleficent completely, so she was able to capture her easily, but if it hadn't been for Argen Isis, she wouldn't have been able to capture her like that.

She later learned that she had installed a magic circle in the basement of the academy to create a place for her to descend.

If she hadn't been there, it would have been impossible to defeat Maleficent even if she had destroyed the Life Vessel.

In other words, this generation's Hero had done his job.

But…

"Maybe I don't deserve to be a Hero." To say such a thing?

Aselina was speechless. "But…"

However,

That's why Aselina had no choice but to dispel her doubts about this generation's Hero.

"But I promise you. I will protect Aria… I will defeat the Demon King for Aria's sake. I will make Aria happy, no matter what."

A sincerity that came from the bottom of his heart.

The Hero was sincerely declaring that he would make Aria happy. In front of her, who was her mother-in-law and Pope grandfather. "That is… the atonement I can make for Aria."

Aselina met Evan's unwavering eyes. Then, she smiled and bowed her head.

'I guess I have no choice but to acknowledge him at this point.' How could she not acknowledge him when he said that much? He passed.

'I'll support you.'

Hoping that the two of them would get along, Aselina decided to return to being the Pope.

She thought that would be enough.

# Return Home (Interlude)

For some reason, I suddenly felt a shift in the atmosphere. However, Evan had no regrets about what he had just said. He spoke the truth, all of his thoughts.

Perhaps it was thanks to that declaration, filled with resolve, that the Pope, who had been giving Evan hostile looks just moments ago, now wore a softened expression.

I didn't know why, but I was relieved that the hostile gaze directed at me had subsided. Receiving such a look from the supreme leader of the Holy Kingdom, Varkan, was mentally exhausting, even for the Hero.

Who knew what might happen…

Of course, as long as Aria existed as the Saintess, I wouldn't be attacked, but the subtly hostile gazes I felt whenever I went outside made me think I wasn't exactly welcome in Varkan.

'The citizens weren't like that though…'

The people walking around and the nuns didn't show any hostility in their eyes when they looked at me.

It was strange that I only felt that way from the Pope and the Holy Knights. Those who could be called the greatest power in Varkan.

But…

'That's a relief.'

They say sincerity gets through, right?

Perhaps by telling the Pope how much I cared for Aria, I was pardoned on the condition of defeating the Demon King, despite my wrongdoings.

I couldn't know what he truly felt, but I decided to be grateful that the hostility in his gaze had disappeared.

As I thought that, closing my eyes and bowing my head, the Pope, who had been silent, carefully called out to Evan.

"Hero." "... Yes?"

What was it?

I raised my head and met the Pope's gaze, which was now filled with worry, unlike the hostility from before.

Was he worried about Aria?

"I've told the Saintess this before… but sometimes I wonder. Was it right to bring that child here and raise her as a nun?"

"..."

"The Saintess says she's fine, but the thought of that pure girl having to sacrifice herself… I wish I could step in instead, but…"

The Pope shook his head.

Unfortunately, the Pope is chosen as the one most suited for the position among all humans. In other words, the most respected among the priests rises to the position of supreme leader.

Of course, faith is important, but talent for Holy Power and the ability to wield it aren't always proportional to faith, so not every Pope possesses overwhelming Holy Power.

The current Pope does have strong Holy Power, but it's nothing compared to the Saintess, who was directly chosen by God and granted divine authority.

From the start, the Saintess's power itself was an extraordinary and powerful force that could change the world, so it was only natural that the Pope, who was still just a regular human, couldn't perform the same miracles as the Saintess.

It was impossible to step in for the Saintess.

"I also… wish Aria didn't have to participate in defeating the Demon King, but I suppose that's impossible…"

No matter how pitiful Aria was, if the world were to be destroyed, everything would be over, pity or not.

Right now, the only way was for the Hero and the Saintess to step up and defeat the Demon King.

It was unfortunate, but I had no choice but to ask Aria to defeat the Demon King with me.

It was fortunate that she didn't refuse…

If anything, she was too eager, which was the problem. The Pope sighed and continued.

"As you know, Hero, Aria doesn't know much." Of course, that would be the case.

She hadn't been in the world for long, and unlike us, who could see with our eyes and hear with our ears, Aria couldn't.

There must be more than one or two inconveniences. "I entrust Aria to you."

The Pope bowed his head to Evan. "..."

Evan thought of Aria.

He thought of the pure girl who smiled brightly, simply from rolling around in the snow.

And he thought of the girl who, even while playing those games, remembered the memories of the Demon Realm, where snowstorms raged.

Someday… to prevent her from recalling those painful memories ever again.

"Yes, I will make her happy, no matter what." "... That's all I need to know."

Even if he couldn't be with Aria, if that was the happiness she desired, Evan would secretly erase the affection he held for her.

He wanted Aria to be happy, not just to love her. Yes, he would make her happy.

He would, without fail.

The time spent in the Holy Kingdom was enjoyable in its own way.

Every time I met the Holy Knights, the only stories I could tell were about what happened at the academy, so I would bring up fun memories of what happened, which led to the minor incident of them glaring at Evan with even more fiery eyes, but I took care of that myself.

Evan wasn't that kind of person, so I told them not to glare at him like that.

Of course, if they asked how I knew about the glares when I couldn't even see, unfortunately, when they sent gazes filled with so many emotions, I could tell what they were thinking just from the Thought-form flowing out.

After all, Thought-form changes depending on how well a person hides themselves.

It's not all-powerful.

Even Aselina's Divine Eye showed me as a pure girl to Aselina, just because my deep desire to purely obtain pleasure was pure.

Most abilities have their weaknesses.

Even the Thought-form I'm currently using as a means of communication can receive false information from people who are good at connecting with it.

After all, Thought-form is just saying what you're outwardly thinking, so if you're thinking of a lie as if it's the truth, I have no choice but to accept it.

Well, it's hard to say that's a weakness. Don't people often lie when they're talking normally?

It's similar to that.

And it's just how I communicate…

"[How was the Holy Kingdom? I thought it might be a little boring for you all.]"

"It was fine. All the things that have happened so far have been so shocking, like the Demon Realm, that it felt healing…"

Stella said it didn't matter, and that she was glad she could rest, but Evan was a little different.

"Sorry… I feel a little sick…"

Evan sighed deeply, saying he felt sick. 'Seriously…'

Thanks to me telling them to stop looking at him like that, he wasn't getting hostile looks anymore, but since he had received those looks at first, he didn't seem to have a very good impression.

I think this happened last time too, but it's happened again. It's unfortunate.

"I apologize. I will educate our people separately later." "[Please do, Danas… I hope you scold them severely.]"

"Yes, I understand. And to the Hero… I truly want to apologize." "I-It's okay…"

Danas offered Evan an apology, looking genuinely sorry.

"But I hope you can understand. Most of our people are worried about the Saintess. The reason they glared at the Hero like that was probably because of their concern for the Saintess."

"[Please tell them that… they don't need to worry that much in the future.]" "I will keep that in mind…"

Danas bowed his head in response.

Well, since I wasn't the one who was directly affected, it's not something I need to worry about that much.

But the fact that they sent such a gaze to the Hero who was going to save the world seemed offensive, so I reacted sensitively without realizing it.

It's not something I need to worry about that much.

'No… is it not something I need to worry about that much…?'

After all, it's my hometown and a country I should be proud of, but when I took a guest there, they greeted the guest in such an absurd way.

This is something I should be ashamed of.

"[I'm sorry, Evan. Danas said he would educate them well, so can you please forgive them?]"

"I said before, I'm not that worried about it. And it's not like I don't understand why they're sending those looks…"

Why is he so understanding? Is that why he's the Hero?

I feel sorry for no reason. "Ah… we're here."

Did we arrive already?

"This is the Imperial Capital…"

"I said I didn't want to come, but you dragged me here by force…" I chuckled at Stella's grumbling voice.

We had now arrived in the capital of the Empire. Invited by Uriel.

# 1 - Vacation at the Royal Palace

"I've been waiting!"

It was none other than Uriel who greeted us first.

When I told her that I would stay in the Holy Kingdom for a while before going to her as soon as I was invited, she was so happy that I could feel her excitement in the letter.

I don't think she was like this before the Trial, but I could feel that her personality had become much more active since she received the Trial.

Well, I prefer her with this kind of personality.

Before, she tried to maintain a dignified appearance because of her position, but frankly, that kind of appearance didn't suit Uriel at all.

I think the image of a tomboyish princess suits Uriel the best. Everyone else seemed to think so too, except for me. "[Ahaha... Heh!]"

"I've been waiting, Aria~!!"

As soon as I came out, Uriel hugged me and jumped up and down.

I don't think she used to be like this, but I guess she was so sad that everyone went to the Holy Kingdom except for her at that time, that as soon as she saw me, she hugged me without caring about the eyes around her.

"P, Princess!"

"Maintain your dignity!"

The knights around us were shocked and said that because she suddenly hugged me in a place where other knights were watching, but the fact that the Saintess of Barkan in the Holy Kingdom and the princess of the Empire were hugging each other like close friends was not a big problem.

More than anything, it looked good, so they were just telling her to keep her dignity, but everyone was smiling happily.

Anyway, Uriel, who finally remembered her position at the knight's words to keep her dignity, stepped away from me again and asked if I had a hard time coming all the way here, looking around here and there.

Well, there's no way I'd have a hard time with just this. I answered that I was okay and laughed softly.

I wasn't really having a hard time either. "Let's go in quickly! Father is waiting!" Ah.

Hmm...

At first, I thought I should listen to Uriel, my friend, as much as possible since she invited me, but as soon as I arrived, I wanted to go back home right away when I thought about meeting the Emperor.

Stella, in particular, seemed to know what I was thinking, and carefully asked Uriel if we could go back.

Of course, it was virtually impossible to go back at this point, so Stella had to meet the Emperor half-crying.

'Well... it wouldn't be a problem to meet him...' How many imperial citizens have I saved?

Of course, I saved them more out of pleasure than out of a pure desire to save people who were dying in front of me.

Most of the time, I lived in the Demon Realm, so even if I saved a lot of people in the Demon Realm, ordinary imperial citizens would only know about me through people who are interested in me or through the statues that are made.

'Wow...'

Even so, considering that all these people came out to welcome me and Evan, it seems like I haven't lived my life in vain.

Evan was also expressing his doubts as he looked around at the people who were sending him friendly gazes.

'Isn't he going to like it more here because no one is glaring at him here, unlike in the Holy Kingdom?'

Anyway, those idiot uncles are going to ruin the country's image.

I don't know if they didn't like the fact that their idol was just acquainted with a man, but they kept glaring at Evan from beginning to end.

I told Danas, so I believe they won't do that next time, but I wonder if I'll ever go to the Holy Kingdom with him again.

"The Holy Kingdom and here are completely different..." He's already wrong just by saying that.

It seems like he doesn't want to go to the Holy Kingdom anymore.

After I defeat the Demon King later, I don't plan to settle down in the Holy Kingdom either, so maybe we're even.

The Holy Kingdom, of all places, is really not a good place to settle down because there's not much to do. It's not really wrong to live in the Empire, considering my original hometown, and it's actually closer to the answer.

I was thinking that and walking inside for a moment, '... Huh?'

What was I just thinking?

I don't plan to settle down in the Holy Kingdom, so maybe we're even? It's really not a good place to settle down because there's not much to do? Live in the Empire?

'Uh...'

No matter how I look at it, aren't those things that someone who is going back to their original world wouldn't think about...?

I said I was going back to my original world, but what I'm thinking about is where to settle down after defeating the Demon King, so I wondered again.

I wonder if I really plan to go back. "We're here!"

In the meantime, Uriel, who seemed to have arrived, smiled brightly and opened the door to guide us inside.

"Uriel!"

"Papa!"

"It's been a while! Hehe!"

Looking at that, it seemed like there was no need to worry.

After all, even in the game, the Emperor didn't show such a dignified appearance in private, so I didn't have to worry about anything troublesome happening.

"Come here. I prepared it for you." The Empress smiled at us and said.

Evan looked back at me and carefully walked inside.

I don't know why he looked back at me before going in, but I decided to think that he was doing that because this was his first time in this kind of situation.

'Wouldn't anyone be confused if they saw that?' A daughter-obsessed Emperor.

To be honest, I'm a little confused too.

The Emperor narrowed his eyes and looked at the two people in front of him.

'The Hero and the Saintess...'

The Emperor felt a little complicated as he looked at the young girl with blonde hair and closed eyes and the black-haired man standing in front of him.

No matter how much he is the Emperor of this country, he didn't like the fact that these young children had to bear the duty of saving the world...

He didn't like the fact that they were carrying such a heavy burden.

It was definitely the duty of adults, not children, to step up and solve the problem, but unfortunately, it was almost impossible to fight against those who were trying to destroy the world unless they received the duty of Hero and Saintess.

'It's unfortunate...'

It's really unfortunate.

It's unfortunate that these young children have such a heavy burden of world peace on their shoulders... and that they have a sense of duty to do it.

It was unfortunate, but as someone who had to take responsibility for countless imperial citizens, he had no choice but to turn a blind eye to this sacrifice.

He had no choice but to pray that they would do it. The Demon King was such an existence.

"..."

Apart from that, he always felt sorry for the Saintess.

Although it was for the sake of creating a new center for the imperial citizens, he didn't like the fact that he was using that young child for propaganda.

On top of that, he felt even more that he was undermining the spirit of the child who had sacrificed herself for the sake of the people.

But he had no other choice. There is no commoner in this world who is not enthusiastic about the story of the Saintess who saves even ordinary imperial citizens.

In fact, there were as many imperial citizens who respected the Saintess as there were people in Barkan in the Holy Kingdom.

It was true that the relationship between the two countries had narrowed to an incomparable degree compared to the past thanks to the Saintess.

"I am always grateful, Saintess."

Originally, they were from different countries, and he was the Emperor who ruled this country, so it was fair to say that he was in a similar position to the Saintess.

In other words, originally, there was no need to treat her with such courtesy that distinguished between superiors and inferiors, but...

'I respect her as a person.'

How could he not be polite to a girl who is younger than him, who has disabilities in her eyes and ears, and who is sacrificing herself for the world?

There is a reason why the people of Barkan are so protective of her. So...

"I hope you can rest as much as you want and go back." "[T, Thank you...?]"

The Emperor smiled at the Saintess, hoping that this Empire that he had built would be a little bit of a haven for her.

Aria tilted her head at the sight, but soon bowed her head, thanking him.

Everyone smiled and watched the heartwarming scene, and soon everyday stories began to be exchanged and a flower of conversation began to bloom.

From the story of how his daughter's personality had changed a lot since she went to the academy, to the story of what happened there.

The story of the Demon King Army executives and the story of defeating them.

There were many stories to tell.

Of course, in order to maintain this pleasant atmosphere, most of the stories that were usually enjoyable were brought up.

The story continued until the sun went down.

# 2 - Vacation at the Royal Palace

Ugh… that was a bit tiring.

Dining at the same table as the emperor who governs the country turned out to be more burdensome than I thought.

I don't usually care about such things, but I guess it's because things from the game keep popping into my head.

After all, the emperor did appear a few times in the game…

Is it fortunate that he's an emperor with a conscience, unlike most emperors?

Well, if he weren't, a youngest daughter like Uriel wouldn't exist, so…

Still, there was quite a difference between knowing the setting and actually meeting him.

Even just Evan, Stella, and Uriel, whom I met after coming to this world, were quite different from what I knew as settings and game characters.

Of course, it's more about learning things I didn't know in the game than personality differences.

The difference is felt in those minor things.

One thing I've realized while living in this world is that settings and information from the game should only be remembered for reference.

The information I knew from the game isn't omnipotent. 'That was tough…'

The conclusion is that it was tough eating next to the emperor.

Then, as if I wasn't the only one feeling it, Evan and Stella were clearly showing signs of discomfort.

Of course, Uriel wasn't perceptive enough to notice such subtle atmospheres, so she just smiled brightly and asked if it wasn't delicious.

Seeing that no one answered, I sighed inwardly and answered for them.

"[It was like a feast I've never had in the Holy Kingdom. It was really delicious.]"

It was actually really delicious.

I dare say it was no exaggeration to say that they were the most delicious foods I had ever eaten.

I feel a bit bad for putting down my own country, but it's hard to say that the food in the Holy Kingdom is delicious, even as a polite remark.

I guess it's because most of the people in the country believe in God, so… how should I put it… unlike the Empire, they have a simple eating habit.

Because of that, the food isn't generally that delicious. 'Honestly, I was a little touched…'

Compared to the high-end food I ate in the modern era, the quality is a bit lower, but it was definitely delicious compared to what commoners eat.

It feels like it's been a long time since I've eaten something like this…

Anyway, since it was true that it was delicious, I smiled brightly and said so, and Uriel, looking genuinely pleased, put her hand on her hip and said confidently that I could tell her anything I wanted to eat.

That might be a bit difficult…

I don't know much about food, so it's hard to specifically ask for something I want to eat.

Above all, we're invited guests, so it's weird to ask for what we want to eat…

"It's a bit late today, so shouldn't we rest soon?" "Ah… finally…!"

Stella's face lit up, as if she was so happy to finally be able to rest. Unlike Evan and me, Stella didn't really like going out and doing things. In vulgar terms, she's a hikikomori, a shut-in.

Well, most magicians are like that.

The development of magic is quite advanced, so it was the perfect time to do more magic research.

But…

"Why don't we all go take a bath together?!" "Eh…"

"What…" Oh.

It's the bombshell declaration I half-expected.

Evan and Stella looked flustered at Uriel's innocent suggestion.

Stella then turned to Evan, who had made a strange noise at Uriel's suggestion.

'Evan…'

What kind of imagination did Stella's words spark?

Surely he didn't imagine us all going into the bathroom together like that. 'He's old enough to think that way…'

Besides, he hasn't relieved his desires while living as the Hero, so he's even more likely to.

But…

'Something… feels strangely dirty…?'

Is it because he's imagining me like that, or is there another reason? I don't know why, but I'm a little annoyed.

'Why am I like this these days…'

Of course, it's not in my nature to get annoyed to their faces, so I moved towards the bathroom so they wouldn't notice I was annoyed.

Regardless of what Evan was imagining, I definitely wanted to take a bath soon.

"Ah, Aria?"

"[I'll go to the bathroom first.]" I said that and left the room.

Fortunately, no one stopped me.

The moment I completely left the room, as soon as the door closed, I suddenly had a thought.

'I don't think I heard which direction the bathroom was in…' Come to think of it, the castle was very large.

It wouldn't be easy to find the bathroom we were going to use here.

If I had at least heard which direction it was in, it wouldn't be impossible to find it while looking around, but I didn't hear which direction it was in.

I can't use Holy Power detection on the entire castle. 'I messed up…'

I hesitated for a moment, wondering if I should wander around alone, but I soon gave up and went back to the room.

After all, it would be foolish to wander around this vast space without any information.

"Aria?"

"What's wrong?"

Stella and Evan asked what was wrong when I came back as soon as I left.

Unable to answer, I hung my head, and Uriel said as if she had just remembered.

"I'm sorry, Aria! Come to think of it, I don't think I told you where it was!" "Ah."

"Come to think of it…"

This is her first time here, so there's no way she'd know the way.

Stella and Evan looked at me, as if they had realized that I had said I would go to the bathroom first without properly hearing which way it was.

"Pfft…" "…"

Unlike Evan, who was somehow maintaining his composure, Stella was already half-suppressing her laughter.

"[I'm sorry…]"

My appearance of going out first and then coming back… Honestly, I think it's funny too.

Of course, I didn't laugh.

It's more embarrassing than funny to me. Damn it…

Eventually, we arrived at the bathroom and took off our clothes as if we were used to it.

Of course, Evan, the only man, separated from us and went to the men's bath alone.

It's called the men's bath, but it's more like he rented another bathroom all to himself.

Of course, it's definitely enviable that he rented that large space all to himself, but if I thought about being alone in that large space, I'd rather have this.

No matter what, wouldn't it be better to wash with several people than to wash alone?

"But what was Evan thinking?" "What do you mean?"

"Earlier, when you said we should all go in together, Evan made a strange face."

"Oh, really?"

Come to think of it, what was he thinking?

Well, usually Uriel and Stella, and… 'Would he… include me too…'

He probably thought of my naked body.

But…

"Doesn't Evan have someone he likes?"

"Well, then he probably only thought of that person's naked body." "I guess so…?"

Ears perked up.

Listening to the two people's conversation, I fell into thought again. They don't know what they're talking about.

No matter how much a man likes a woman, isn't it natural to imagine everyone's naked bodies in a situation like that just now?

I would have done the same, even if I'm a woman now.

In the first place…

'What is there to imagine about my body…'

With this meager body, even if there's some fantasy, no matter how much he likes someone, would he only think of me in a situation like that just now?

I dare to guess that even if Evan is a pure guy, he probably wouldn't. I heard that pure guys are even more like that.

'Something's annoying me.' It's starting to get to me.

Why is my body so meager?

I used Holy Power perception to look down at my body. Of course, my body was still a meager girl's body. 'Wish…'

Continuing my imagination for a moment, I shook my head wildly, saying it was a ridiculous thought.

I must be crazy.

How can I make a wish for something like that? This isn't it, really.

Ugh…

I don't know anymore. Tsk.

# 3 - Vacation at the Royal Palace

It's been a while since we've all come to wash together like this.

I think I said the same thing last time, but for a man, a situation like this would be nothing short of blissful, but unfortunately, I was a woman now.

Now, I could appreciate the beauty of a woman's naked body, but I didn't feel excited or sexually aroused.

In that situation, especially since I wasn't seeing it with my eyes… I guess that feeling was even stronger.

'It's obvious, but I'm really small.' I could really feel that I was small.

I wouldn't normally care, but now that the time to compare myself to everyone was approaching, I felt strange.

More than that, I was somehow more curious about Evan.

It wasn't that I was curious about Evan's body, but I was curious about what it would be like for him to use that large space alone.

I want to use such a large bathroom all by myself too… Evan's body…

Hmm…

I haven't seen it directly, so I'm not sure, but I've been seeing it through Divine Power Detection, so I know what it looks like.

I can see clear muscles, enough to know that he's worked hard.

Well… it's covered by clothes, so I can't see it very well, though. "Haa…"

At first, I was going to wash my body thoroughly before going in, but I suddenly got lazy, so I just purified my body and went straight into the bath.

Thanks to purifying my body with Holy Power, there was nothing particularly dirty on my body now.

In other words, there was no big problem with going straight into the bath.

Of course, the gazes of others around me would be unfavorable, but there were only two people here who knew about my abilities, so it wasn't a big problem.

I entered the bath and lay down with a happy expression.

If I had to pick a good thing about not being able to see, it would be that I don't fall over.

When I could see and walk around, it was easy to fall if I couldn't see well, but now I just walk around constantly looking around with Divine Power Detection, so I don't fall at all.

You might say, isn't it good to fall… but aside from the fact that it's not that painful, what could be more ridiculous than the Saintess falling in the bath?

I can't let that kind of image take root! "I'm going in too~!"

"What…"

No, what is this.

"Wow… Aria's skin is so smooth…" "[W, wait a minute…?!]"

No, what are you doing?!

I was startled and tried to protest, but Stella followed in even faster and scolded Uriel.

Unlike me, who had purified my body before entering, she had entered the bath without properly washing her body, which was impolite.

Who would see this woman as a princess…

Stella was also dumbfounded, saying not to say such nonsense in a somewhat hollow voice and forcibly dragged Uriel out.

In fact, it would be a problem that could be solved by simply giving Uriel purification, but I want to be alone right now.

I watched Uriel being dragged away with an awkward smile and sighed. I really can't catch a break when I'm with these two…

Hmm…

'Come to think of it…'

I heard that there's a men's bath right next door.

To be precise, it just feels like they arbitrarily divided the men's and women's baths, but anyway, isn't that also a bathroom used by the imperial family?

One side is used by the butler, and the other is used by the maid? 'Anyway, it's right next door.'

I remember that the doors were not that far apart when I entered, but why does such a large bathroom appear when I come inside?

What kind of structure is this place that makes that possible?

Well, since I don't know anything about the castle, I can't help but wonder what kind of place this is.

I wondered what the structure of this place was like, so I first looked around.

When I look around, it doesn't seem like there are any connecting paths. That's a natural thing.

Just the fact that it's divided into two sides like this is practically to separate men and women, so is there some kind of space distortion magic?

I thought I might be able to figure it out if I looked at the structure, so I carefully put my hand on the wall and used Divine Power Detection. This makes it easy to check the overall structure of the building.

I think I've used it like this before.

Anyway… if I do this, the Holy Power will spread along the wall and tell me what the overall structure of the building is like.

After sitting still with my hand on the wall for a while, the appearance of the building gradually began to emerge in my head.

'Hmm…'

I can feel it.

Ah, this is it.

'Ah, it looks like this…'

So this is the structure, I thought, and tried to expand the Divine Power Detection a little more.

'Huh…?'

I felt the shape of a person.

And… '…!!!!!'

As soon as I felt something that was a little different from what I had seen so far… something that was different from ordinary people, something reminiscent of a long object, I reflexively took my hand off.

'What, what…'

I just used Divine Power Detection because I was curious about the structure of the building and wanted to find out.

That was my mistake. '…'

I ended up seeing something I shouldn't have seen.

I was stunned with my hand on the wall, and Stella, who had come up to me and was watching me, tapped my body.

"What are you doing, Aria?" "[Y, yes!?]"

"Huh?"

Stella tilted her head at my surprised words. No…

I didn't see it wrong, did I…? 'I, I didn't mean to…'

It's easier to think of Divine Power Detection as detecting along the outwardly exposed curves.

So, you can think of it as spreading around me and flowing along the object.

To explain it a little more, it's closer to scanning by groping around like a wave.

That's why I can read things that are written directly on the outside.

In the case of books, it's impossible to distinguish them with Divine Power Detection because they are so thin, so I read them by reading the Thought- form.

If there was a book with letters that protruded on the outside, there would be no difficulty in reading it for that reason.

If I had shot Holy Power and read it by penetrating it, I wouldn't have been able to look at my friends with the same feeling as now.

It would just look like a non-rendered 3D model with clothes on. But I was overlooking one thing.

The structure I was looking at now was the bathroom. And Evan was next door.

Even if I was just spreading Holy Power to check it out because I wanted to know the structure of the building, eventually, if it spread out, Evan's body would also be subject to scanning.

In other words, Evan's raw, unclothed appearance would be naturally visible, even in a 3D model.

'What the hell…'

I immediately stopped detecting with Holy Power and took my hand off, but what I had just seen kept flashing back in my head.

"Aria?"

Stella didn't notice anything and was asking me if something was wrong, but I tried to calm my complicated feelings and gasped for breath.

Really…

For a moment, I thought I was a pervert.

I was fine even when I saw Stella or Uriel, but just… Just…

'It's not just…' It wasn't just.

Of course, it wasn't unrealistically absurd, but I think it's safe to say that it's up to the level of wondering if this is right.

To put it bluntly, would it be the average of doujinshi?

I only felt it as a shadow, in the form of a 3D model with no color, but the shock was indescribable.

Forget it.

I have to forget it.

I have to forget it…

'I guess… he's not a Hero for nothing…' I suddenly thought that.

It was an unforgettable sight…

Honestly, I was sure that anyone who saw it once would never forget it.

But the fact that it was Evan, not anyone else… and the fact that I saw it, made it even more absurd.

I wondered why I did that.

I also wondered if something like that could exist. I have all sorts of complicated thoughts.

'Am I going to die…?'

I don't know why I'm worrying about this, but I could imagine that anyone who saw what I saw earlier would think the same way as me.

I didn't expect it, but it was a mode-applied version on page 19.

Well, the original work wasn't a 19-rated game, so if you set the settings in that direction, it's reasonable to bring in a mod.

I didn't think much of it when I saw it in the illustration, but when I saw the actual size, I was speechless.

…

I suddenly wanted to die.

# 4 - Vacation at the Royal Palace

“Are you really okay? Is something wrong?” You can say that again.

Something seems to be wrong.

Honestly, if they had seen what I just saw, I think they would react like me.

The aftereffects of seeing that huge Holy Sword were longer than I thought, lasting until I finished my bath and came out.

“Aria?”

As soon as I came out, Evan kept avoiding my gaze, tilting his head and asking me. But the more he did that, the more I wanted to avoid him.

Every time I see Evan, that memory comes back to me.

That huge, shadowy Holy Sword that I couldn't see anything of… Of course, I'm not talking about the Holy Sword he usually carries around, but the Holy Sword that every man carries around.

“[N-Nothing… It’s nothing…]”

I couldn't meet Evan's eyes as he approached with a worried expression, and I turned my head away as I answered.

He looked at me with a questioning expression, but he seemed to think better of it and went back to his room, telling me to tell him if anything happened.

‘Did he… notice I used Divine Power Detection?’

I wonder if he knows that I accidentally saw his… thing.

Personally, I hope he doesn't.

However, judging from his reaction to my question, he probably didn't notice. But I can't rule out the possibility that he's pretending not to know because he thinks I'll be embarrassed.

Anyway, it's not certain, but even so, he's as sensitive as Aselina and I are when it comes to Holy Power…

Even if he's putting on that clueless face, I can't help but be suspicious.

Maybe he already noticed that I saw his body with Divine Power Detection, but he's pretending not to know because he's worried I'll be embarrassed, and he's embarrassed too?

Or maybe he didn't notice that I saw his… thing.

If it's the latter, wouldn't I be the only one embarrassed if I mentioned it here?

Anyway, I can't be sure if he noticed or not, but the other person is none other than the Hero, so it would be strange if he didn't notice that I used Divine Power Detection.

‘Hmm…’

Why did I do that?

I'm starting to regret it.

That regret lingered even after I parted ways with Evan and returned to the room with everyone.

“I've always dreamed of sleeping with my friends like this!” “Sigh…”

At Uriel's words, Stella sighed and lay down next to her as if she couldn't help it.

“I wanted to be comfortable when I sleep, but…”

“Ah… Am I bothering you…? I can give you a separate room if you want…”

“It's okay, we can share a room. It's not like I'm a VIP…” “S-Stella…!”

Uriel's eyes welled up with tears as if she was touched by Stella's words.

As someone with a Doctorate in Stella Studies, I can tell that Stella is deliberately grumbling and acting like she can't help it because she's embarrassed.

Speaking of a Doctorate in Stella Studies, it feels a little strange.

“[That's right. Now that we're here, why don't we talk about things we haven't been able to talk about until now?]”

This is good for getting closer.

Just as I was about to start talking, Evan suddenly came to mind. ‘Isn't it a bit much to be talking like this with just the three of us…?’ Does that mean Evan isn't a friend?

As soon as I thought that, I felt like I should call Evan. “[Um… Should we call Evan too?]”

“Huh?”

“Ah! Now that you mention it, Evan was here too!” Uriel giggled and left to call Evan.

After Uriel disappeared, Stella turned to me.

Judging from her expression, she had a satisfied smile as if she didn't expect me to call Evan here. I don't know why she's smiling so contentedly, but it feels a little different from usual, like a creepy expression.

“[Why, why are you looking at me like that…?]”

“No… I just felt like you were more proactive than I thought.” “[What do you mean…]”

Even as I said that, I was dumbfounded that I understood what Stella was thinking when she said that.

I didn't want to know…

While I was talking to Stella, Uriel brought Evan back.

Evan seemed embarrassed to be dragged to a place like this so suddenly, and he kept trying to get away, asking if it was really okay for him to be here.

Escape?

Are you trying to escape? Absolutely not.

“[It's okay, Evan. When we say talk, we're just going to have a conversation that friends can have.]”

Evan looked dazed at my words.

In reality, it's not like we're going to have a secret conversation between girls, so it's not a big problem for Evan to join in.

Rather, we're trying to have a conversation to get closer to each other, so wouldn't it be more of a problem if Evan wasn't there?

“W-Well, then…”

Evan sat down, looking at us with a dazed expression. ‘Cute.’

Is this guy feeling burdened by the fact that he's sitting in a room with only girls at this hour to have a conversation?

‘… What?’

What was I just thinking?

While I was smiling and looking at him, I suddenly wondered why I was thinking that Evan was cute.

I was thinking that about Evan, of all people? ‘Ugh…’

What am I thinking…

I feel like I've been having strange thoughts lately. I shook my head so that no one could see.

“But what are you guys calling me here for?” Evan asked, as if he was curious.

To be honest, there's no real reason why I called him…

I just thought that if we're going to have a conversation to get closer as friends, it wouldn't be right not to call Evan.

“[Not really… There was no real meaning. We were talking about having a conversation to get closer as close friends, and I thought it would be strange if Evan wasn't there…]”

“That's right. So Aria said we should call you.”

“!!”

Oh, no.

I turned to Stella with a surprised expression, and Stella smiled gleefully and chuckled.

If you say it like that, it sounds like I called him for some reason.

I didn't call him for any big reason… “Uh…”

Evan turned to me, so I turned my head away as if I had nothing to say.

“Hmph, don't get any weird ideas, Evan. You have to go back to your room after the conversation is over anyway.”

“I didn't have any weird ideas!”

“What… It's not something to brag about, but if it's me, Uriel, or Aria, we're pretty beautiful, so you didn't have any weird ideas? Don't tell me…”

“No!”

Evan shouted, telling her not to say anything ridiculous, and Stella laughed gleefully.

Uriel, on the other hand, didn't understand what she had just said and tilted her head, wondering what she was talking about.

‘Not much time left.’ Next year.

The last Relic.

The final awakening.

It would be great if Stella and Uriel could get stronger too, but unlike Evan, there's nothing I can do to help them grow.

At best, I can get them some useful weapons, but even then, it's not easy to get them secretly.

It's not like I have a lot of money, even though I look like it. Well, it would be strange for a Saintess to have a lot of money. Usually, clergy don't carry that much money around.

Danas is probably the same, even though he's the commander of the Holy Knight Order.

‘Relic…’

The location of the last Relic.

It'll be in the Forest of Enticement, the location of the first semester's Trial. If I can get that, there'll be nothing to worry about in the future.

If you have three Relics, there's a set effect. ‘I wonder if that'll still apply.’

I hope so.

Well, nothing has changed much even when it's turned into reality so far, so even if the effect I know doesn't appear as it is, it'll probably appear similarly…

I don't know.

It's more important to have a good night than to think about these things right now.

“Looking for someone to go to the Imperial Capital tomorrow!”

At Stella's words, I reflexively raised my hand and answered. “[I'll go~]”

I can't resist going out to play.

Not only me, but Evan and Uriel also answered that they would go out to play together.

Uriel, in particular, had a happy smile, saying that it was her first time going out of the castle with everyone like this.

‘Wasn't going to the sea a trip…?’ Well, it wasn't a trip, it was a Trial. I guess that makes sense.

# 5 - Vacation at the Royal Palace

'How did this happen?'

I thought we were having a good time chatting at first, but as bedtime approached, the conversation gradually died down, and then I dozed off and ended up like this.

We were up late, having fun and playing games, so I must have dozed off and fallen asleep. I can't exactly wake him up and tell him to leave, can I?

That's not like me.

It's weird to care too much…

I was getting sleepy and lazy too, so I just didn't interfere, as if telling him to leave on his own.

And then… 'Eeeh…'

Evan just settled into the room and fell asleep.

The comfort of the bed was beyond imagination, making it impossible to even think about getting up and going back…!

I understand.

Honestly, it wasn't just Evan who felt like he didn't want to get up again after lying down here.

Everyone felt that way.

And everyone except me told him to just sleep here instead of telling him to go back.

Evan, already half-asleep, nodded, and ended up sleeping here.

Besides, the bed was wide enough that it wouldn't be cramped even if Evan lay down, so there was even less of a problem.

The problem is this.

Stella and Uriel took up so much space on the bed as if they were aiming for it, so there wasn't much room left.

'Umm…'

Moreover, because they were so close to each other, I naturally ended up next to Evan, and the two who were taking up so much space created a synergy, leaving me stuck next to Evan.

Why does it have to be next to me?

Evan himself probably didn't plan to fall asleep here.

He looked really sleepy earlier, so he probably didn't care where he slept.

He probably didn't want to go back because he would have to travel that long distance without knowing the way, and the two of them told him he didn't need to go.

He probably just decided to sleep here.

The problem is that there wasn't much space left, so I was forced to be next to him.

'It looks like these two were aiming for this no matter how I look at it…' It was too deliberate to be a coincidence.

Stella and Uriel conspired to deliberately take up a lot of space on the bed and make me and Evan stick together.

'Should I tickle their feet?'

I had the urge to tickle Uriel's feet, which were reaching out to me, but the Aria I'm currently playing isn't the type to do such a thing.

I knew that best.

So, even if I wanted to do such a thing, I couldn't.

Even so, seeing Evan sleeping in a room where girls are sleeping like this made me feel strange.

I thought I would only see such a scene in a harem story. 'Well… even if I say that, it doesn't look that way to me.'

Evan, Stella, and Uriel… their forms are different, and I can definitely distinguish whether they are pretty or handsome, male or female, but that's it.

My sense of aesthetics has disappeared… 'I miss the Trial of Wisdom…'

At least at that time, I could see and hear well. In the end, it's just a matter of mindset, so coming outside wasn't a big problem, but I sometimes miss it.

Having a visual and auditory impairment is extremely inconvenient.

People who have never had them feel unfair, but they don't know how convenient it is to have them, so they don't know the sadness.

People often say, don't they?

The sense of loss and sadness is much greater when kind parents who were originally there pass away for some reason than for orphans who never knew their parents' faces.

It doesn't change just because of the presence or absence of a body.

'It doesn't matter much now, but…'

I sometimes miss it in situations like this.

Isn't it natural to want to see the protagonists of my favorite game sleeping together like this with my own eyes?

Is it just me who feels that way? 'Haa…'

Anyway.

'I should go to sleep.'

Everyone except me seems to be asleep, and it's weird for me to be the only one awake.

But…

'If I slip out of here and sleep somewhere else, I feel like I'm losing.'

Normally, I would have thought, "Don't do anything weird and just sleep," but it's a little different now.

I felt like I was losing if I just did nothing and went to sleep. Now that it's come to this, I was going to tease Evan for sure. 'Should I just sleep next to him?'

Of course, I wasn't planning on being completely embraced just because I was sleeping next to him.

I was just going to lie next to him.

I wasn't going to be too close, but just in the middle, or a little closer to Stella and Uriel. I don't know for sure, but if Uriel thrashes around a lot, I

might get hit and wake up in the middle, but who cares about that when they're sleeping?

'He'll be very surprised when he wakes up, right?' Now that it's come to this, I'll do as you want.

Anyway, I can only sleep here or somewhere else, and I don't want to move to another place.

More than anything…

'If I end up hugging Stella or Uriel, that's a really big deal.'

It's okay up to Stella, but if I was hugging Uriel, or even just showing myself sleeping quietly next to Uriel, I might be treated strangely.

Maybe the kind emperor from yesterday could suddenly become a crazy person who is after Evan's life. After all, he's a daughter-obsessed emperor, so wouldn't it be troublesome if rumors spread that Uriel was hugging and sleeping with a strange man?

I can't let that happen.

Sleeping next to Evan is only for that reason. There are no other ulterior motives.

I lay down next to Evan and quietly closed my eyes.

…

It was more comfortable than I thought, so I slept well.

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'Ah… did I fall asleep…?' When did I fall asleep?

Evan rubbed his eyes and slowly woke up.

But…

'What is it…?'

He felt something in his arms. Something warm, small, and fluffy. 'Uh…?'

He opened his eyes and looked down… "Ah, Aria…?"

There, a small, cute, familiar girl with tousled blonde hair was sleeping soundly right next to him for some reason, breathing quietly.

It was Aria.

Aria in her pajamas was sleeping with regular breaths. “…!!!”

It was too stimulating for Evan.

Evan was almost screaming at Aria's fatal surprise attack, but he barely managed to hold it in and wondered how to overcome this situation.

'I have to get out of here…!'

I can't stay here any longer.

I have to get out of here right now.

Evan thought so and was about to carefully get out of bed so that Aria wouldn't wake up, but…

"Uuum…"

As if she had been waiting for it, as soon as he tried to get out of her arms, she reached out her arms like a child looking for her mother and grabbed Evan,

"Ugh…?!"

And went straight into his arms.

She was just hugging something next to her, but unfortunately, it was driving Evan crazy to experience it directly.

If he was in a relationship with Aria, he would have hugged her as much as he wanted and rejoiced.

'I said I would defeat the Demon King and confess at that time…!'

If it was revealed that he was hugging her like this behind the scenes, he would be too embarrassed to face Aria.

I didn't want that to happen. This feeling right now.

No, this isn't it.

No matter what, this isn't it. But this is the only way.

Now that it's come to this…!

'I'm going to sleep again…!'

If I'm sleeping, can't I get a little absolution?

It was a very effective method, even though it was a petty thought for a Hero.

It was a decision made with a subtly calculated thought that if he clearly appealed to Aria that he was sleeping, she would have no choice but to not notice at all, so he would be scolded but not too badly.

Evan, who had been thinking that, stopped trying to get out and was about to close his eyes when,

'What is it…!!'

Unfortunately, Aria was awake as well.

Aria, who had woken up for a moment when Evan was struggling to get out in surprise, realized that she was hugging him and was continuing to pretend to sleep with her eyes closed so as not to get caught.

Of course, she had no choice but to know that she was hugging him.

Evan was trying to get out, but she was reaching out her arms and hugging Evan's body, so it would have been strange if she hadn't noticed it unless she was an idiot.

In the end, the strange confrontation between the two to avoid being caught by each other could only end when Stella, who woke up late, patted Evan and Aria, telling them to get up now.

Is it fortunate that Stella was the only one who saw the two hugging and sleeping?

Well, it wasn't helpful at all.

# Vacation at the Royal Palace (Intermission)

They say it's the time when the sun, brighter than ever, illuminates the world.

To put it a bit difficultly, or rather, to put it simply… it's the New Year, though it feels a bit strange.

Saying it's the New Year here feels odd. I didn't even see the sunrise.

'Hoo...'

Since I first came to this world, I haven't had the chance to spend the New Year leisurely like this… As soon as I arrived, I was busy growing my Holy Power and saving people here and there, and later, I spent all day rolling around in the Demon Realm.

I've hardly ever had the chance to sit back and relax on New Year's Day without anything to do.

'So much has happened.' It was tough.

A lot happened last year.

Of course, unlike Stella, I met Uriel a bit later, but we went through the Trial of Wisdom, Magic beast subjugation, Maleficent subjugation, and so on together, so it's fair to say she's a member of the Hero party, even if she joined a bit late.

Everyone has become stronger than before.

Stella has become incomparably stronger.

On the first day of the entrance ceremony, she seemed to collapse immediately after using high-level magic without chanting, but she learned from Argent, and her skills naturally grew as she developed her own new magic.

Originally, you gain more from developing your own new magic than from learning someone else's magic… If it's Stella, who is a genius, her skills would only increase, not decrease, from developing her own magic.

And…

'It seems like it will be soon.'

Looking at Stella, it seemed like she would become a Great Mage soon. Fast.

Incredibly…

I don't think it was this fast in the original story, but what made Stella work so hard?

When I first met her, she didn't do the magic research or studying she was supposed to do and just locked herself up to sleep, but at some point, she stopped being so laid-back and only showed herself continuing her magic research whenever she had a spare moment.

If someone who knew her saw that, they would be shocked and wonder what on earth had happened.

Even I was shocked by her completely different appearance from the beginning and wondered what was going on.

Still… Considering that we have to subjugate the Demon King, isn't it better for her to work so hard?

It would be much harder to subjugate the Demon King without Stella.

'If this story flows as it is… it might not be long now.'

It wasn't exactly intentional, but Evan's awakening was faster, and Stella's magic growth speed was incomparably faster than in the original story.

It's so fast that I'm even feeling anxious that the future I know might have changed.

Of course… Now, I'm not so worried about the future changing that I think we're doomed; it's too hopeful now.

Evan's growth is so outstanding that he can handle most enemies.

Stella is close to becoming a Great Mage, and Uriel seems relatively weak because she hasn't awakened the blood of the Imperial Family yet, but if she awakens the blood of the Imperial Family, she will become an excellent tank.

'No… maybe not a tank.'

She's a tank role in the game, but now I should call her a proper knight. She's weaker than Evan, but she's definitely not weak.

She's incomparable to other kids her age.

'I wish just one more person would come…' I don't know if that person will come or not.

There are many characters, but there was one person who would be most helpful in our current combination.

Though they are not human.

The problem is…

'They'll definitely come next year if they come…'

I know they're supposed to enter Class A in the first semester of the academy this year… but the problem is that it's not certain.

That person entering is practically a matter of luck, so whether they enter or not was completely gacha in the game.

It's not because I, a veteran player, don't know the conditions.

Even if you clear the achievements, whether they come or not is still a matter of probability.

'It's a relief that saving and loading changes whether they come or not.'

If not, I might have committed the crazy act of restarting the game from the beginning just to see one high score.

I'd be completely insane.

They should just come if I cleared the achievements, but the setting is that they secretly re-enter the academy after a lot of 고민, so I wonder if they make different decisions in each parallel world created by saving and loading.

Does that make sense?

The decisions should always be the same if there's no influence. 'It would be great if they just came.'

That elf would be really helpful in subjugating the Demon King. I have no choice but to hope they enter the academy.

"Suddenly, I wonder what the second year will be like." At Evan's words, I fell into thought.

Not only that, but Estel and Uriel also looked curious and pondered for a moment.

"[I know, I'm a little curious about what kind of classes we'll have next year.]"

"I think it will be the same for me." Evan chuckled and said.

Well, that's how the swordsmanship department is.

Of course, you'll learn more detailed things compared to what you learned in the first year, but it'll still be swordsmanship… I don't really know if there's anything Evan, who is already walking the path of a Hero, can learn.

Maybe Uriel is the only one…

"Hmm… Honestly, I don't think I'm learning much at the academy… I've learned a lot about monsters, though."

That's true.

All the academy can teach is the basics.

Because there are different paths for each person. That's why they focus on sparring.

Unlike magic, where the path is set, swordsmanship is based on freely controlling one's body, so the posture changes slightly depending on factors like height and build, and the way you apply force is also completely different.

Even if you're an instructor, it's impossible to teach all of that one by one. That's why the classes focus on advice and sparring.

Even Uriel, who said that, has already far surpassed the level of a student.

Considering that Uriel's swordsmanship achievement has already surpassed the level of a student from the beginning, it could be said that her

achievement is rather slow because she hasn't learned much and hasn't awakened the 'Blood of the Imperial Family' yet.

Above all… It's not for nothing that so many students come to me for treatment.

The problem is that if they're going to get treatment from me, they should come properly injured, but there are quite a few who feign illness because they want to talk to me.

But I can't refuse to treat them, so I just make them healthy and send them back.

I can handle all the miscellaneous diseases.

It makes me sick, but it doesn't matter because it's all resolved with Holy Power.

"I want to spar with Evan if possible." "I can do it right now?"

"Oh, really? Then shall we go spar right away?" What are these guys… suddenly saying?

"Are you guys… thinking of sparring at this hour?" Phew.

Thanks to Stella saying what I wanted to say, Uriel and Evan finally realized what time it was and apologized and sat back down.

"[What about Stella?]"

What kind of classes will Stella take?

Well, her level is incomparable to other students to the point where she creates her own magic, so the methods she learns at the academy are

probably useless.

Judging from the fact that she doesn't even go to class because it's not fun, that's the only way to explain it.

As expected, Stella explained that she doesn't really learn anything at the academy, and it will probably be the same in the second year.

Rather, Argent is teaching Stella. "[I hope this year is peaceful.]"

"Isn't the Demon King supposed to be caught to be peaceful?" Oh, I shouldn't have said that.

I hope we're not going to catch the Demon King in the second year…

…

No, right?

It shouldn't be…

Surely nothing more difficult than what I've been through so far will happen in the second year…

Surely… not…?

I said with an awkward smile.

"[It may not be something a priest should say, but… I don't really want to go back to the academy.]"

"Argen Headmaster would be sad if he heard that…" Evan smiled at my words and chuckled as he replied. Hmm…

I don't think he'd be sad.

The reason I don't want to go back to the academy is just because I get a headache thinking about trying to recruit that elf into the team.

Um… maybe not.