# 1 - New Semester

"Ugh… I'm finally back… at the academy." I nodded at Evan's words.

I can definitely feel that I'm back.

Seeing the other students returning to the academy one by one confirms it.

The vacation, which seemed like it would be quite long, had passed by in the blink of an eye.

They say time flies when you're having fun, and since I've only been playing around here, it feels like time is passing by strangely fast.

It's as if I've become a clergyman at heart, and I feel a strange sense of guilt.

Even if I don't know anything else, the fact that I feel guilty just for sitting around and playing means I've been living a pretty busy life.

'And I'm going to be busy again soon...' The vacation ended so quickly…

How long has it been since I had a vacation? Before I could even properly savor the sweet taste, the vacation was over, and I had to return to the academy.

The time spent is the same, but the quality is different.

Of course, if you were to ask me if I hated those days when I sacrificed my body all day to save people, I would say no.

Rather, it was enjoyable…

Considering that it was something I had to do, I would give myself full marks for enjoying the work I had to do.

"Come to think of it, the freshmen will be having their entrance ceremony soon."

Stella's words bring back memories of that time.

The first time I had an entrance ceremony… Actually, I never participated in the entrance ceremony.

I deliberately used magic to interfere in a fight and asked a professor to give me a punishment of confinement, and then I went to catch demons.

I don't know what I was thinking when I went to catch them alone back then.

'Now that I think about it, it seems like a crazy thing to do...' Is it because I've faced high-level demons several times?

Back then, Evan was so weak that he struggled to cut off the arm of a high- level demon, but now he has grown so much that he can defeat such a demon in an instant.

I'm almost sad that I can't see it with my own eyes each time. Even though I can't see it with Divine Power Detection. 'Because I was always passed out.'

Most of the time, I was just reveling in pleasure and going "Ehehe…" Hmm, now that I think about it, I really did a lot of crazy things.

I'm glad everything worked out, but there were so many things that could have gone wrong.

Thinking that I went through such a difficult year and became a sophomore…

"[I feel… deeply moved.]" Really.

"Didn't you say that before?" Oops.

"[D, did I?]"

I answered Stella with a flustered expression. But isn't it okay to say something like this?

After all, if I'm not happy to see my favorite characters growing up, wouldn't that be even stranger?

Well… even if I'm seeing them grow up, I'm not seeing them with my own eyes, but only seeing their outlines roughly with Divine Power Detection.

Since I've long given up on seeing the world with my eyes until I catch the Demon King, I'm satisfied with just that for now.

Well… what can I do?

I'd have to make a wish to solve a congenital disability.

The Goddess might be dumbfounded, wondering if I'm going to use a wish for something like that.

But I don't intend to use a wish for that.

As I was thinking about wishes, Stella, who was next to me, grabbed my sleeve and shook it, calling me.

"Hey, Aria. Um…"

"[Yes? Is something the matter?]"

"W, we'll… be using the same room, right?" "[Ah… the same room?]"

I think so?

If you want, they'll let you stay in the dormitory with your first roommate, so there shouldn't be any problems. When I told her not to worry, she nodded with a relieved expression, as if she was finally relieved.

Well, considering Stella's personality, it's understandable.

Unlike me, who is already used to being together, if you think about having to spend a year with someone you don't know at all…

But Stella was definitely holed up in the dormitory with a "whatever happens, happens" attitude at first, but somehow her personality seems to have changed like this.

I wonder if other people were the same. Hmm, I guess so.

Come to think of it, I've been living in the imperial palace like a VIP during this winter vacation, so I'm starting to crave simple home-style food.

The academy food is not as good as the food I ate in the empire, and it's all very fancy and greasy, so I'm starting to want to eat something simple.

Above all…

'I want to eat...'

When I was in the empire, even simple meals felt like Western food in my old world, so it wasn't easy to just eat deliciously.

It's just that I've gotten used to those kinds of foods since I transformed into this body and got used to this world, so I eat them well, but if you ask me if I like them, I can confidently say no.

"[Now that we're here, shall I cook something for you for the first time in a while?]"

"...!!"

Stella's eyes widened at my words. And then she nodded.

What is it?

I just mentioned it casually because I wanted to eat some Eastern food, but the reaction was more intense than I expected.

Is there any reason to react like that…?

"[Um… I don't think I'm very good at cooking… ]"

Divine Power Detection makes measuring not that difficult, but since I can't see, can't hear, and can't distinguish colors, it's very difficult to cook.

I've only been cooking with the senses I have left, so to put it bluntly, it's hard to say that I'm good at cooking.

But…

"But… I want to eat it."

Stella said that she didn't care about the reason, she just wanted to eat it.

Along with the fact that it became her favorite food because it was the food she ate when we first met.

'That… um…'

If you say that much, it's hard to refuse…

It's not just that it's hard to refuse, but I don't want to refuse.

It's not like there's a big problem if I make it… My friend wants to eat it, so I can make it for her.

"[I'll make it for you when we get back to the dormitory.]" "Oh! Thank you, Aria!"

You should be thankful…

Even though I look like this, I'm doing you a favor by cooking for you with my disability~

Of course, I'm just thinking that jokingly, I don't really mean it.

If I told Stella this, I could see that she would have a hard time for a while, so I didn't mention it.

I just thought about it myself.

But…

"That's not fair, Stella! You're the only one eating Aria's cooking!" "Huh? No, wait, that's…"

"Hey, Aria! Can I come along and eat too?"

I was speechless at the sight of her asking with a bright smile.

Usually, the first thing to think about is whether you can cook, but seeing her say it so casually made me wonder if I was thinking too much about it.

'Well… that's Uriel.'

She's always been like this, so there's no need to be surprised now.

Above all, if I wasn't going to make food for that reason, I wouldn't have even offered to cook for Stella in the first place.

"Um… that…"

Unlike Uriel, who had already declared that she wanted to eat, Evan had a very complicated expression, wondering whether he should say it or not.

Is it just my imagination that he would be worried all day if I didn't tell him to come and eat?

It might not be just my imagination, so I should tell him. "[Evan, you can come too.]"

"C, can I? Really?"

Why is he asking something so obvious?

I don't discriminate against friends with things like this.

I don't know why everyone is so eager to eat the food I make, but if they want to eat it, I'll step up and feed them.

It's just a matter of making a little more… Even so, um.

It's still embarrassing.

Ah, but I should warn them in advance.

"[Come to think of it, um… as you all know, it might be difficult to measure accurately. So, I might not season it enough, so if you think it's lacking, please tell me?]"

The two of them widened their eyes at my words.

Uriel nodded at my words and smiled, saying that she would tell me if it wasn't seasoned enough, but Stella and Evan stopped talking and froze in place.

'Huh?'

What's wrong with them?

That question only lasted for a moment, "Sorry… Aria…"

"U, um, sorry…" "…"

Unlike Uriel, the two of them were quite perceptive.

I never thought that these two would see the Talulah angle that even I didn't notice, so I just smiled and awkwardly laughed it off, saying it was okay.

I thought it was a joke earlier, but why am I feeling sorry?

Anyway, they say that the better you know someone, the more guilty you feel.

I wish they had reacted like Uriel. Ugh, seriously.

# 2 - New Semester

At Argent Academy's office.

The academy, which had been severely damaged by the Demon's attack, was quickly restored with the power of magic.

The classrooms, which had been so devastated that their original forms were unrecognizable, were rebuilt. Only the building housing the office, which was strongly protected by Argent's powerful Demonic energy accumulated over many years, managed to retain its shape.

Thanks to Argent's leadership, who already had every detail of the academy memorized, the reconstruction was a success. It was hard to believe that the academy had been attacked by Demons just a few months prior.

"You…"

And Argen Isis, the headmaster of the rebuilt Argent Academy and a member of the Hero's party, stared in astonishment at the woman before her.

Because this was someone who shouldn't be here. "Sorry for coming so suddenly, Argent."

"...I don't expect that from you, so there's no need to apologize." "Hmm… I have nothing to say."

A beautiful girl with long, light green hair and sharply pointed ears looked at Argent.

Argent clicked her tongue, looking at the girl who was slightly taller than her and still looked young.

"You Elves really don't age."

"Well, from a human perspective, it's natural for a long-lived race, isn't it? The prime of an Elf is very long. Of course, in a few hundred years, I'll start to age slowly."

"Unbelievable…"

"Speaking of which, Argen Isis, you haven't aged at all."

"I became a great mage, so I won't die of old age as long as I have Demonic energy, you know?"

At Argent's words, the girl who introduced herself as an Elf nodded. "Haa… So? Why are you here?"

Argent sighed deeply at her unchanging appearance even after hundreds of years and asked why she had come here.

As if waiting for the question, the girl opened her mouth.

"I heard that this generation's Hero and Saintess have come to the academy. And…"

…that they've already defeated two Demon King Army executives.

Argent's expression hardened at the girl's words, her eyes sparkling with interest.

Then, in a trembling voice, she said to the girl.

"You… you still haven't given up your lingering attachment."

The girl tilted her head as if wondering what strange thing she was saying.

Argent gasped at her reaction, as if she had heard something she shouldn't have from someone she never expected.

"Speaking of which… you gave a lot of help in defeating the Demon King Army executives, didn't you? We're still the Hero's party."

What on earth was she talking about?

The man who had been the center of their group had disappeared long ago.

Moreover, Argent had even found and raised her successor, practically her disciple, so she couldn't understand what her former Elf companion was saying.

Argent shouted at the girl in astonishment. "Get a grip, Mirnel! Our era is long gone…!"

"Argent… you've become dull. I came with expectations because I heard you defeated Demon King Army executives, but it's a pity."

Argent's face contorted at the Elf girl's words, which sounded genuinely regretful.

Then, with a pitiful expression, she said in a strained voice.

"Have you forgotten what he said? All we old-timers have to do is guide the younger generation so they can move forward."

"So that's why you've been the headmaster of the academy? Yes, that's just like you, Argent, always following that man because you liked him."

"…"

Argent hung her head.

"Still, thank you. Thanks to you, it will be easy to approach this generation's Hero."

Argent watched the girl leave the room after saying only that she was leaving, then trudged over to the sofa and sat down.

"Lingering attachment… I guess it's understandable."

The Hero and Saintess who had saved the world were dead.

The Saintess, who sacrificed her body to seal the Demon King for the Hero who was not strong enough to defeat him, and died.

And the story of the Hero who loved the Saintess, who was shocked and disappeared.

She searched all over the world, but she couldn't find him because he was as strong as her or even stronger and was determined to hide.

Eventually, hundreds of years passed.

Even the strongest human would have died long ago, unless they had twisted the laws with magic like her.

Argent sat on the sofa and buried her face in her knees. "You bastard…"

Remembering those days, when they continued their adventures happily even though the world was heading for destruction.

Remembering the man she loved… Argent wept silently.

'So, I'm back after all.'

Looking around the rebuilt academy, I felt anew how amazing the power of magic was.

There was a lot of talk about whether it could be rebuilt in this time, but in the end, they did it.

'I wish it had taken a little longer.'

That would have delayed the time I had to return to the academy.

…

Or not?

'Anyway…’

The thought of having to spend another year like this makes me feel complicated.

In my head, I think I've rested enough, but doesn't everyone feel that way after resting for a long time?

That they don't want to go back to work because they've rested for so long, but it's a pointless thought because they have to go back anyway.

That's exactly how I feel right now. 'Ah…’

I don't think it's bad.

The reason I think this way is that the Theology Department, where the classes are really boring, is bad.

Can't they make things like the Bible interesting to read?

Religious people are so sensitive that they'll get angry even if you change it a little, so I can't say it's for the sake of interest, but I personally think so.

The only thing that's bearable is confession…

Frankly, if I was healing kids in the Swordmanship Department, where there's no time to be bored, would I hate going back?

It's a bit of a greedy thought, but people want to live doing what they want to do.

I'm the same way.

Even though I've lived as a Saintess for a long time, I've only been living as a Saintess out of necessity, and I haven't completely become a Saintess in my heart…

So, things like reading the Bible or praying to God, which are natural things for other clerics to do, are too boring for me.

If I'm the only one acting bored while the other nuns are praying happily, wouldn't they be suspicious?

I'm only enduring it because it's not the way a Saintess should be, but I don't really like taking classes in the Theology Department.

I like healing injuries from sparring in the Swordmanship Department more than that…

"There must be some freshmen among them…" I nodded at Stella's murmur.

I'm looking forward to it.

For now, the most important thing to keep an eye on is the new Hero's party member, as I said before.

Well, it's a bit different to call it a new Hero's party.

'It's ambiguous to call someone who was already in the Hero's party a new member.'

Considering how hard it is to recruit someone into the party to defeat the Demon King together.

Especially since this is reality now, so it's even more frustrating. "I wonder what the freshmen will be like this year."

"I heard they have a lot of respect for their seniors." "Eh, really?! Then can I be respected too?!"

Uriel asked with wide eyes at the fact that most of the freshmen respect their seniors.

Well, that's understandable.

Maybe they have even more respect for the sophomores than the juniors? 'They even defeated a Demon King Army executive, after all.'

Even though they didn't do it directly, and they mostly just dealt with the grunts, it's still something to be respected for.

Most kids of this age probably never even see a Demon.

It's very difficult to see a Demon unless you go to a place with dense Demonic energy. Even then, it's not even certain that there will be a Demon. That's why that incident happened at the academy, which was thought to be the safest place.

Maleficent, who had not only attacked but had also descended here and intended to open a portal to the Demon realm in the empire, was easily defeated.

Even then, the life vessel, the most important element in the plan, had been weakened so much that the plan couldn't have gone as planned.

Moreover, I heard that Argent, a great mage, was there, so they reverse- calculated her location and forcibly dragged her here to defeat her.

Thinking about what happened last year, it was just an unusual year.

Anyway…

'I have to do my best.'

Right now, there's nothing I can do but make this resolution. I have to see if they've come to the academy first.

# 3 - New Semester

'There are so many people...' Is this the entrance ceremony?

I looked around at the hundreds of people sitting in their seats with a sense of wonder, then started walking to find my own seat.

"[Then I'll go first...]"

Since I'm in the Theology Department... my seat is in the Theology Department area.

I heard that in the first year, you can just sit wherever you arrive, but from the second year onwards, you usually sit according to your designated department to make it easier to distinguish.

'Can I find her here?'

With so many people, it's not easy to find just one person.

Even for me, who can detect everything around without being obstructed, it's still difficult.

But I should at least try to see if she's here, and then I can go find her later. The entrance ceremony will take quite a while anyway, so now is the perfect time.

I focused on Divine Power Detection. 'Hoo...'

What's really unfortunate is that if I try to find her faster and more accurately by putting more power into Divine Power Detection, other people will realize that I'm scanning the area with it.

Right now, I'm spreading it out so subtly that it's not easy for anyone other than Aselina to notice, but if I release more Holy Power here, they won't be able to miss it.

So, I have to spread it carefully around without being noticed by others, but also find her among all these people, which isn't easy at all.

The only fortunate thing is... 'That the other person is an elf.'

Since she's an elf, if I just check her ears, it won't be a big problem to find her.

It's not that elves can't enter the academy, but due to their unique reclusive nature, it's not easy for them to come all the way to the Empire's academy to learn something. So, if she's here, it's practically that elf who was a member of the previous Hero party.

I can't be completely sure, but it's unlikely that an elf who lived in the forest would suddenly go crazy and come to the Empire's academy to learn something if it wasn't her.

Thinking that way, I looked around diligently to find her as quickly as possible, but as time passed, I started sweating.

At first, I thought I could find her quickly, but it was much more difficult than I thought. The entrance ceremony started an hour ago, and I still haven't found her, so I'm starting to wonder if she didn't come at all.

'That can't be... she's definitely here...'

I should have achieved all the achievements, right?

All the raids in the game were successful, and the damage wasn't that great... In fact, in the case of the Maleficent subjugation, it was perfectly prevented with virtually no damage. So, it's very strange that the elf didn't come to find us.

I kept looking with the belief that it couldn't be, but as time went on, I kept wondering if she was really here.

I shouldn't doubt.

I satisfied all the conditions to call the elf in the game, and there's nothing more frustrating than failing in a probability game and not having her come.

While sweating, I kept searching, but after searching for the last student of the first year, I had no choice but to give up.

'She's not here...'

It's not impossible to subjugate the Demon King without the elf, but the difference between having her and not having her is huge...

Firstly, unlike Evan, Stella, and Uriel, who are gradually getting stronger, the elf is a member of the previous Hero party who once sealed the Demon King.

Of course, unlike the other growth-type companions, she is the only previous Hero party member who can join as a companion, a so-called secret member.

Naturally, she starts with her growth already completed, and it's also possible to grow further, so it's much easier.

Especially in the early and mid-game, you can pass through very easily!

If she's there, you don't have to worry about catching the Demon King's pet in the Forest of Enticement, the next final boss.

Because she's a crazy bitch who causes all kinds of natural disasters with just one bow.

'Well... it's meaningless to think about it now...'

It seems like I have no choice but to go to Plan B.

I have no choice but to go out to find the third Relic early and choose the option of sacrificing myself to induce Evan's growth while desperately raising my Holy Power.

As you can see from the name Demon King's pet, it's still weak against Holy Power...

'Does it, does it have to work this time too?' No, that's a bit...

The first time, I threw myself in confidently because I wanted to experience being eaten once, but after experiencing that going into the stomach wasn't a good idea, I didn't feel like going in anymore.

It's like a sulfur hot spring, and the smell is terrible, so who would want to go in?

I'd close my eyes and go in if it made me stronger, but it doesn't.

Anyway, assuming that the elf isn't there, I need to rethink my plans for the future.

'Annoying, really...' I have no luck at all.

When I think about it, I don't think I've ever had a lucky day. Hmm...

That's what I thought... 'What is this...'

What happened?

"Are you the Hero of this era?"

"Uh, yes? Who are you..."

As soon as she heard those words, the girl approached us and looked up at Evan.

"You... you look a lot like that person." "Uh, huh? Look like..."

Suddenly saying something incomprehensible,

Swoosh "What..."

"Eek..." "[...!!]" "!!"

A cute girl with pointy, light green ears hugged Evan.

Because of the difference in physique, it was closer to hugging his waist and chest, but that's not the problem.

It's absurd enough to hug someone you've just met... "What?"

"Is she his girlfriend?"

"Wait, isn't that an elf?! That hard-to-see elf!" "An elf came to our class?!"

"So, Evan's girlfriend is an elf?"

While the classmates were all watching openly, she hugged Evan.

The other kids were looking with dumbfounded eyes, saying things like she's his girlfriend and they're suddenly showing affection in class... Evan was backing away, stuttering as if he didn't understand the sudden situation, but the girl followed him, still hugging him and burying her face in his chest.

"!!!"

That, that, that crazy bitch, what is she doing now...! "I'm so glad to meet you... I missed you, Hero." "Um... I, I am the Hero, but can you let go?"

Evan said that while looking at me. Why is he looking at me?

If he does that, it'll look like I'm being treated like his girlfriend too, and he's a Casanova with two girlfriends.

Isn't there no reason for him to look at me? More than anything...

'Surely... a woman who likes Evan has appeared... shouldn't I be happy...?' When I think about it, that's right.

I've been wanting Evan to get a girlfriend all along.

Until recently, I was hoping that at least one of Stella and Uriel would fall for Evan. Unfortunately, for some reason, the two of them didn't fall for Evan.

Not only that, but there were no affection events in the game, so it was practically impossible.

So, I was half giving up, but now I don't have to give up anymore?

Evan said he liked me... but even in a situation where I don't give him my heart, if a beautiful girl with the appearance of an elf like her confesses her love, wouldn't any man have no choice but to accept it?

I can rest assured now. But...

Surely... 'Why...'

I put my hand on my chest and clenched my fist tightly. 'What is this stuffiness...'

What on earth is this frustrating, annoying, and maddening feeling that I've been feeling since earlier?

I wanted to tear those two apart right away, but as the Saintess, I couldn't do that.

If I did that, the image I've built up so far would collapse again. But I didn't want to watch them doing that.

In the end, what I chose was... "[... I'm sorry.]"

I left those words behind and ran out of the class as if escaping. I couldn't bear to see the two of them hugging each other.

Even with my eyes closed, I kept seeing it... It was like torture to me, who was constantly looking around.

I'd rather not see it, damn it!

Ugh...

I don't know anymore...

# 4 - New Semester

Fleeing the classroom, I went to a secluded corner where no one was around, bent my knees, and took deep breaths.

'Why did I run away...'

Actually, in that situation just now, I had no reason to run away at all.

Rather, as I said before, a heroine who likes Evan has appeared, so from my perspective of wanting Evan to be happy, I should have been happy, not run away like this.

That's definitely how it should have been…

Seeing the elf hugging him as soon as they met, I felt an unbearable emotion surge up, and fearing that I wouldn't be able to maintain my persona, I decided to run away for now and left the scene.

'Evan...'

It wasn't just Evan.

Stella, Uriel, and the other kids in the class must be wondering what they think of me now. That my-way elf wouldn't particularly care about me, but the others must be very worried because I suddenly ran out of the class.

Especially… I never thought I'd say this, but Evan, who likes me, is probably the most worried.

'Right…?'

He said he likes me, so he wouldn't suddenly like that elf instead of me just because she hugged him once.

Mirnel is pretty, though…

Evan isn't the type to be drawn in by looks alone. I can't be sure, but…

…

No, what am I even thinking…?

'Wouldn't it be better if Evan liked Mirnel…?'

I was definitely hoping he would build a harem until recently, so why am I thinking this way?

I'm so confused by the thoughts that keep popping into my head.

Come to think of it, I unknowingly flinched when Uriel got close to me last time.

I thought it was just my imagination back then, but this time, my reaction was practically an undeniable admission.

'Do I… like Evan…?' That's ridiculous…

I mean…

…

'It's not that ridiculous…'

Honestly, I can't admit it because I'm a man, but if I were a normal woman, I would have fallen for him a long time ago, considering how much I've received from him.

What woman wouldn't like a man who rushes to save her whenever she's in danger?

Of course, I'm not exactly in a dangerous situation, but if Evan doesn't try to save me, it's still dangerous for me.

Besides, I'm not invincible, just immortal, and considering the possibility of being kidnapped or suffering from Demonic energy and living a life of pain, Evan throwing himself to save me shouldn't be downplayed.

Above all, he's always considerate of me in small ways and is so kind that he yields everything without ever getting angry.

Just looking at the surrounding people's evaluation of Evan, they can't approach him because he's a Hero, but if he wasn't, he would be swarmed by women trying to woo him.

Of course, it's a bit unusual that Stella and Uriel aren't interested in Evan, but he's that charming.

So, I thought there would soon be a woman who would say she likes Evan, and Evan would eventually like someone and date them.

It was a problem that my expectations were completely off, and the person Evan happened to like was none other than me.

Honestly, until then, I was just troubled about what to do, and I didn't pay much attention to the fact that Evan liked me.

Of course, I couldn't have noticed because I wasn't even thinking about liking Evan?

…

No, it might not have been just trouble.

I felt a strange joy that he chose me, not someone else.

It's just that I didn't realize that I was happy that he chose me because I hadn't realized that I might like Evan at the time, so I couldn't even dare to think in that direction.

As soon as I realized that I might like Evan, all the thoughts I had been having were coming to the surface.

I wasn't sure.

I just couldn't tell if I liked Evan or not. But that alone was enough to confuse me.

I didn't want to remember why I had those thoughts, what I was thinking, but they kept popping into my head.

I leaned against the wall and sighed deeply. 'I need to go back soon…'

If I don't go back soon, class will start… I don't know why I'm doing this here. 'Ugh…'

I wanted to go back right away, but it was difficult to control my emotions right now.

If I go back now, I'll definitely show a confused appearance instead of my usual self.

That would be fortunate, but if I were to run into Evan here… "Aria! Where are you!"

"!!"

Screaming inwardly at the familiar Thought-form, I hid as if running away.

Entering an alley between the academy buildings, I hid myself so that Evan wouldn't see me.

I adjusted the angle while looking at my objective appearance with Divine Power Detection to make sure he couldn't see me, and fortunately, I was able to get through without being caught by Evan.

"Hoo…"

I wondered what kind of face I should make if I got caught.

I checked the time again through the clock tower using Divine Power Detection. Fortunately, there were still about 20 minutes left before class started, so I should calm down as much as possible here and then go back.

'Calm down…'

While calming down, I thought of Mirnel's face.

Even if others didn't, I couldn't help but think of Mirnel, the elf who hugged Evan as soon as she saw him in the game.

Green hair, pointy ears, and a very cute face…

As an elf, she was bound to be beautiful, but Mirnel was even cuter than that.

That's only natural… because she appeared as a Hero party member and heroine in the game.

I'm pretty too since I customized myself, but the grass is always greener on the other side.

"…"

She is pretty, damn it.

Ugh, that's why elves are no good. They're such freeloaders.

Ten minutes later,

Evan, who went to find Aria who had run out, ended up returning to the class without any success.

"Haa…"

It was a frustrating situation for Evan.

He confessed to Aria that he liked her and then showed her the sight of him hugging another woman, so even if it was Aria, the shock must have been great.

So, even if she ran away after seeing him, it wasn't Aria's fault.

The ones at fault in this situation were himself for not pushing her away, and…

“…Mirnel, was it?”

The elf girl in front of him. "Yes, it is."

"Do elves hug people they meet for the first time?"

"I'm sorry about that. I would apologize if you didn't like it, but… don't humans like it when a pretty woman hugs them? I don't understand why the reaction isn't better."

"Well… that depends on the situation… It's embarrassing when other people are watching."

"I don't really care about other people's opinions."

"More than that, aren't you blatantly saying that you're cute…?"

Stella said in disbelief, and Mirnel turned her head with her unique expressionless face and looked at Stella, saying.

"That's what I said when I looked at my appearance from an objective point of view."

"Uh… no… it's true, but…"

As Mirnel said, she was beautiful.

She was small because her body hadn't fully grown yet, but no one could deny that she was beautiful.

It was natural since she was an elf, but it was absurd to see her say it so blatantly.

"Anyway… Aria was surprised because you suddenly hugged her like that. You should apologize when she comes back."

Evan sighed deeply and said.

He was also thinking of apologizing for causing such a commotion when she came back.

However,

For some reason, there was no reaction from Mirnel.

When Evan raised his head and looked at her, she stared at Evan with a blank expression and said as if he was saying something strange.

"Hmm? I don't understand that, Hero. Isn't it stranger to be surprised by just a hug?"

"…"

"I understand that it's not something you should do when you first meet, but you should apologize to you about that, not to that girl, shouldn't you?"

Are you kidding me?

Evan slapped his forehead as he looked at the frustrating elf in front of him.

# 5 - New Semester

I barely managed to pull myself together and return.

Looking back now, I felt foolish for making such a fuss over Mirnel and Evan simply hugging each other.

It was something that could very well… well, not really, but anyway, it wasn't something I should have been so surprised about.

I calmed myself down by essentially brainwashing myself and returned to the classroom.

"Oh, you're back?" "Are you okay?" What?

It was chaotic just a moment ago, but it's quiet again?

Just in case, I looked around for Mirnel, but she was just sitting there, spacing out.

She probably has no idea what she just did, right? Thinking about it that way, I felt a bit resentful.

But there's nothing I can do just because I feel resentful.

Still, it seems Evan said something, so I don't think I need to step in and say anything.

I went back to my seat.

…

… Huh?

Wait a minute. 'Something's not right?'

Come to think of it, we're in the second year, so why is she in our class?

She wasn't with us in the first year, yet she confidently joined the second year, so it felt so natural that I didn't even notice.

'What… what is this?' What's going on?

I looked at Mirnel with a bewildered expression, but she didn't seem interested in me, only looking at Evan.

In the meantime, the professor came in, and the first morning assembly after the entrance ceremony began.

And…

"Ah, by the way, we have a new student. So… Mirnel Halberd?" At that, Mirnel raised her hand without a word.

The professor nodded and left the classroom, simply telling us to prepare for our next class.

It was a ridiculously brief introduction.

Well, it's only natural, but we don't actually take classes together here; it's just a class where students with similar levels are gathered, so this was normal.

We take classes in the departments we've chosen, so we're only in the same class in name only.

"Well, it's my first time at the academy, so I have high expectations." "Oh, really?"

"Hero, you must be in the Swordsmanship Department?" "Well… yeah."

That elf…

She's been ignoring Stella, Uriel, and me and talking to Evan since earlier, and I don't know why I feel like hitting her.

I don't think I've ever felt such intense anger in my life as the Saintess.

When I first saw her, I was just surprised, but after finally calming down and seeing her act like that again, I'm starting to get angry.

I wasn't the only one who thought so; Stella and Uriel also came up to me and started complaining about how rude that elf, Mirnel, was.

Even Uriel, who has a kind personality, looked sad, wondering why she was being ignored…

In a way, she was acting exactly as she was set up to in the game. In fact, she was famous for being a real bitch in the game.

Of course, if the player character was the Hero, she would actually approach me and show affection… Considering that Evan is the Hero, she's acting exactly as her character was set up to be.

But the fact that she's acting according to the game's settings and the fact that she's being a bitch and annoying are two different things.

Honestly, I wanted to beat her up.

But even if it was someone else, antagonizing her wasn't a good idea. She possesses more power than anyone else here.

Although she's weaker than Argent, that's no reason to belittle her power. In the first place, the mage had the highest potential in the game, assuming you were looking at the highest possible stats, so this could be seen as thorough historical accuracy.

Although Evan will surpass her soon, she's the strongest right now… and if she joins our Hero party, it would be incredibly helpful, so it's best to cater to her for now.

"I'm in the Swordsmanship Department too. Shall we go together?" "C-Could you please back off a little…?"

"Hmm? As I said before, there's no need to worry about the people around us. Isn't this better for you?"

"No, I mean, I…"

Evan looked at me, looking hesitant about whether to say something or not.

Evan, realizing I was watching, looked surprised and kept pushing her away, telling her not to cling to him so tightly, but she kept clinging to him like a leech.

"Come on, let's go quickly." "Please just get off me…!" Yeah…

Crack.

"Wow… she's a real psycho…"

Uriel nodded slightly at Stella's muttering.

Yeah.

She's a real psycho.

I'm starting to crave some hot World Tree stew.

If she's brewing water with a branch, is she a carpenter? "Aria… you look angry…?"

"Well, of course. Her boyfriend's about to be stolen." "[I-I'm not her boyfriend!]"

What are they talking about all of a sudden?!

Stella, saying that it would be stranger to maintain composure when her boyfriend is about to be stolen, giggled and I told her not to say weird things.

But Stella asked why I was getting angry if that was the case, and if a friend gets a girlfriend, shouldn't I be happy for them? I couldn't answer and just stammered.

No… it's a little different from that… This is…

Um…

This is that.

"[Th-That… when a close friend becomes happy, you become unhappy… that, that's what it is.]"

"Aria… you know that doesn't make sense, right…?" "…"

Damn it, that didn't work.

I feel like all the image I've built up so far is collapsing at once.

"You've always wished for other people's happiness, there's no way you'd think something like that."

"[That's…]"

"That's what you call love, you idiot." Gyaaaaah!

I screamed inwardly at Stella's words.

I didn't expect her to say it so confidently. Of course, I know that too.

It would be stranger if I didn't know.

Whenever I watch romance stories and see characters who don't understand their feelings for the other person, I always think, why are they so oblivious? Isn't it stranger not to know?

Of course I know about this feeling.

But the reason I'm acting like this is because I don't want to admit it. How can I admit something like this?

I wanted to argue with Stella right away, but I had nothing to say. I know it in my head, but I can't admit it in my heart.

Of course, logically, it wouldn't make sense unless I liked Evan, so I couldn't refute Stella's confident words and was KO'd.

Uriel, who was listening next to me, tilted her head and asked Stella if Aria liked Evan.

It's amazing that Uriel didn't notice it at all. Ah.

Damn it.

How did this happen?

At first, I was just planning to move as efficiently as possible, defeat the Demon King, and go home… I was a bad person who didn't hesitate to use other people's guilt for that purpose.

In fact… I knew. That this is reality.

A real world based on the world of the game, and if I give up here, the world will head towards destruction by the Demon King, who is no different from a disaster.

A disaster with the alias of incomprehensible unknown fear… What they worship as the Demon King is essentially a disaster.

A disaster that devours everything in this world when it descends.

Maybe the reason I haven't admitted it all along… is to avoid feeling these emotions.

"[I… I'm going to go to class.]"

No matter how much I try to sort out my thoughts, it's not enough.

Whether I like Evan, or whether it's just the feeling of looking at my favorite character.

In fact, I still understood it in my head, but I just couldn't admit that I had come to like a man…

That was all. "Aria…"

I turned my back on Stella, who was looking at me with a pitiful expression, and headed towards the Theology Department.

I wish I could get some advice from someone.

I'm not in a position to receive advice from someone, but rather in a position to give advice…

I could only sigh deeply.

It's all because of that damn elf…

# 6 - New Semester

“Haa…”

Evan sighed deeply, recalling what had just happened.

Ever since the elf Mirnel had arrived, he felt like he was going crazy.

She was a complete stranger to him, yet she was expressing affection as if they were well-acquainted, making him wonder if he had somehow become close to her without realizing it.

But no matter how much he thought about it, nothing like that had ever happened…

Elves were a completely new race to him…

And now that he had met an elf who was being so friendly, he was starting to wonder if all elves were like this.

Even now, she was ignoring his requests to back off and kept trying to cling to him, which was frustrating.

The elf, who introduced herself as Mirnel Halberd, probably didn't intend it, but Evan could easily imagine how it must have looked to Aria, whom he liked.

‘I need to apologize…’

He must have looked like a fickle man. Like he was two-timing.

He had confessed his feelings directly, yet was so afraid of hearing her answer that he even said he would wait until after he defeated the Demon King, only to show her such a sight.

It wouldn't be strange if Aria was disappointed.

The more he thought about Aria's expression of shock as she fled the classroom the moment she saw Mirnel hugging him, the more he couldn't help but think that way.

Wouldn't it be stranger if she didn't notice?

Even if Aria didn't know much about that sort of thing, if the man she liked was with another woman like that…

This wouldn't do.

It was almost time for class, but he couldn't let this misunderstanding continue.

He didn't particularly care about other people's opinions, but even if he was fine, he couldn't let Aria be misunderstood because of him.

He couldn't allow Aria to be hurt because of him.

Just then, Evan turned to face Mirnel, who was looking at him, and with a serious expression, he opened his mouth.

“I'm sorry, but I'd appreciate it if you didn't come any closer. We're strangers, and we're not in that kind of relationship, are we?”

Despite Evan's sharp tone, Mirnel remained unfazed, simply staring at him with her usual blank expression.

It was clearly strange.

Just a moment ago, she had been clinging to him, saying she liked him, but now she was only looking at him, not approaching any further, and not even looking at him with affection.

Evan felt a sense of incongruity at her behavior, and as a thought suddenly occurred to him, he shuddered.

‘Come to think of it, even when she hugged me earlier…’

Her actions were definitely those of someone who liked him, but it was a bit of a stretch to say that Mirnel was expressing affection towards him.

It was true that she had shown him a very friendly reaction, but as the person involved, he was even more certain of one thing.

When she hugged him earlier, and even now as she looked at him, there was something in her gaze…

Rather than a romantic feeling of loving someone, it felt more like she was longing for someone as she looked at him.

At the time, he was so overwhelmed by the thought of being seen by the other students, and especially by Aria, that he couldn't think deeply about it, but now that he had calmed down and thought about it again, there were many strange things.

Evan looked up and met Mirnel's gaze.

As expected, Mirnel was still looking at him with an unreadable expression. “Can you tell me why you acted like that as soon as you saw me?”

He asked Mirnel carefully, trying not to offend her.

Then, Mirnel met Evan's gaze and said…

“Hmm, I suppose it was unpleasant. My apologies.”

She bowed her head and apologized so easily that it was almost anticlimactic.

It was completely different from her behavior just a moment ago, when she seemed completely unaware of her wrongdoing.

Did that mean that all her actions earlier were intentional?

Evan was puzzled as to why she would do such a thing, even though she knew she was wrong enough to apologize so readily.

“There's no need to hide it, is there? In the first place… even if my grades are good, don't you think it's strange to start right away from the second year?”

“…!”

Evan's eyes widened at those words.

It was something he hadn't paid any attention to, but now that he thought about it, it was definitely strange.

Although he had only been a student at the academy for a year, he was not ignorant of the academy's common sense.

However…

“She could be a returning academy student, right?”

The fact that the other students hadn't questioned her much earlier was also because most of them simply saw her as a returning academy student.

Of course, it wasn't unreasonable to think that way.

But the very fact that she was bringing up this story meant that she was saying that she wasn't a returning student, so Evan didn't continue the conversation any further.

As expected, Mirnel nodded and said.

“Yes, Argent intended for most people to think that way.” “…You know about Argen Headmaster…”

Evan suddenly thought of Argen Isis's past.

If she was an elf who knew her, who had been in charge of the magic in the Hero's party of salvation, there was really only one person.

The archer who was in charge of scouting for the Hero's party of salvation.

She wielded a longbow that others couldn't even dream of handling as if it were an extension of her own limbs, and her nimble and quiet footsteps were so silent that no one could notice them, and it was said that there was nothing that her sharp blue arrows, forged with the magic of nature, couldn't pierce.

It was said that her prowess was unmatched even among elves, with rumors that she could shoot an arrow into the sky and turn it into a rain of arrows that pierced hundreds or thousands of enemies, or that a giant arrow forged with magic could pierce mountains.

“Mirnel… Hilberd…?!”

As he recalled that name, he was finally able to recognize that the elf in front of him had the same name as the legendary archer who had been known at that time.

If you told a normal human that they had the same name as someone from hundreds of years ago, they would assume that their parents had named them after that person, but it was different for elves.

They were a long-lived race that lived for hundreds of years as a matter of course.

That was not the case for them, who usually lived for a thousand years. “Y-you're really Mirnel Hilberd…?”

“You don't have to use honorifics. How else could I be called a companion of the great mage?”

Mirnel took out her longbow as if it were nothing special. “Will this do?”

Artume, the longbow favored by that legendary elf.

Evan shouldn't have been able to recognize it, but for some reason… Evan, as if possessed, took the longbow and looked around.

‘Why… does it feel so familiar?’ “…Is something wrong?”

Mirnel, who was watching Evan's eyes flutter with a strange sense of déjà vu, as if he had seen it before, asked if something was wrong.

“Ah, no… sorry.”

“Well… the reason I hugged you as soon as I saw you is none other than this. The Hero of Salvation… you and he are similar.”

Evan's eyes widened at those words. “…Me?”

Mirnel nodded at Evan's surprised reaction, a wistful expression on her face as if recalling that time.

“Your appearance is completely different, but… your aura was similar. As soon as I saw you, the Hero, I couldn't help but think of him. Well… it wasn't like I liked him romantically, and he already had someone, and to me, he was just a close friend.”

I see,

No, wait a minute. “…”

Then I don't understand even more?

Evan, who was listening to Mirnel's story, felt something strange in her words.

She was saying that she didn't like him, that he was just a close friend, a bosom buddy, but that was strange.

Wasn't it strange to hug someone of the opposite sex who was just a friend? Evan cautiously asked her.

“Then… why did you hug me if you didn't like me?” Mirnel tilted her head as if asking the obvious.

Was there such an obvious reason that she would react like that?

“Isn't that how humans express affection? Affection doesn't necessarily mean romantic love, does it?”

“…”

Evan was speechless at Mirnel's confident answer.

Elves, who only protect the World Tree, do not know the hearts of humans. That was also true of Mirnel Hilberd, a member of the Hero's party…

# 7 - New Semester

"Sister?"

I flinched at the sudden Thought-form voice calling me.

Turning around to see what was the matter, I saw a nun from the Theology Department approaching me with a worried expression.

Judging by her unfamiliar face, she seemed to be a new nun. Most people find me difficult to approach...

Of course, I was no different from the other nuns here, so it wasn't as if there were no nuns who treated me normally.

It was just that they had gradually become more comfortable with me over time, not that they had treated me so casually from the first time they saw me.

It was a strange feeling.

I didn't think there was anyone in the academy who didn't recognize me...

'Well... there's only one blonde girl who always walks around with her eyes closed in the academy, so...'

There may be many blondes, but not many blonde girls walk around with their eyes closed.

"[Thank you for your concern. I'm fine.]"

I didn't want to cause any unnecessary worry, so I replied.

Despite my answer, the nun still seemed worried and asked me to talk to her if I had anything to discuss.

I suppose she's a true cleric. Kindness is a basic requirement.

It's only natural since she's grown up as a nun. Sometimes when I'm here, I feel like I'm being purified... "[Thank you. So...]"

"I'm Teresa, sister."

"[Sister Teresa. As I said before, nothing's really wrong.]" "I-Is that so...?"

She seemed to have a lot to say, but when I kept saying that there was nothing wrong, she seemed to think that I didn't want to talk and left as if she were running away.

Nuns usually aren't this persistent, so seeing her act like this, I must have been sighing and looking too worried.

Only then did my vision clear a little, and when I looked around using Divine Power Detection, I realized that everyone except me was looking at me with worried eyes.

Ah... so many people were watching.

Well, I'm a celebrity in the Theology Department, so it's not strange that so many people are constantly watching me.

However, even so, it wasn't a pleasant situation to feel so much attention on every little thing I did.

Hmm... If I show that I'm shaken because of Evan, it might create bad rumors about him, so I should be careful.

The way I looked this morning could be seen as a woman running away in shock after seeing Evan having an affair with her own eyes.

Well... Mirnel was the one who did that, so maybe there will be rumors of a love affair between Mirnel and Evan.

Thinking about it that way made me feel even worse.

It's not like we've been friends until now and then confessed that we actually liked each other. It was absurd that he did that as soon as we met.

Even in the game, the Hero default character, or when I chose the Hero job, showed affection in that way, but I didn't know it would be to this extent.

'I need to be careful...'

I feel like my mask of hiding my emotions has become much thinner lately.

Things that I used to brush off without a second thought now make me overreact internally, and it seems to be showing on the outside.

I need to be careful not to show this side of me to other people I don't know, even if Evan, Stella, and Uriel already know...

Honestly, it would be best if they didn't notice either, but it seems like they've already caught on...

I want to maintain my image as the Saintess as much as possible, but it seems like that's going to be difficult.

'Should I really get counseling...'

It's not easy to make a firm decision by myself.

But telling this story to someone else is also a problem...

The reason I'm so worried is because I was originally a man, but I can't reveal that I was a man to other people.

In the first place, if the Saintess suddenly said that she was a man in her past life, who would believe her instead of thinking she was crazy?

It wouldn't be any different even if they were my friends. They would only worry about me more...

'Ugh...'

It's all because of that damn elf.

I think I said the same thing last time, but I'll just assume it's my imagination.

Sigh.

Aria has become strange. Stella and Uriel thought so. And Stella knew why.

'How can she not fall for a man who has saved her so many times?'

The way Evan has acted so far is enough to make any woman fall in love with him.

Frankly, Stella thought that Evan would be a very good match for Aria.

If it weren't for that elf who suddenly appeared, she would have realized it smoothly.

"Haa..."

After the first class since returning to the academy, Stella returned to the dormitory and saw that the room was unusually dark.

"Aria?"

Aria, who has a disability, always turns on the lights for me when I come back, but for some reason, the lights are not on.

I was a little worried that she hadn't come back yet, but Stella walked inside and checked, just in case, and saw that the blanket was bulging out strangely.

It looked like a snake had swallowed an elephant... T-This is...

'S-So cute...!'

It's deadly...!

She usually acts like a devout nun, but she sometimes shows these cute sides, so I can't help but like her.

In the first place, there's no reason to dislike Aria.

She probably already noticed that I was here with Divine Power Detection, but since she didn't greet me, I carefully approached and sat down quietly to let her know that I was here.

"Aria?"

I called out once, just in case, but there was no answer. She's not the type to ignore me, so if she's not answering... 'Could she be asleep?'

Aria is almost never asleep at this time, so I didn't even think about it. Stella lifted the blanket slightly to check Aria's face.

"..."

Aria was sleeping peacefully with her eyes closed.

But Stella, who had been with her for a long time, knew for sure. Aria wasn't sleeping, she was just pretending to be asleep. "You're not asleep, are you?"

So I smiled and asked if she was awake. Then Aria flinched.

"[...How did you know...?]"

"I've been with you for so long, of course I'd know." We've only been together for a little over a year.

But even though we've only known each other vaguely during that time, we've been eating and sleeping in the same room, so it would be strange if I didn't know.

More than that...

'Is she still heartbroken about what happened back then?'

Aria didn't seem to realize her own feelings at all, but that wasn't the case at all in the eyes of the people around her.

Well, it's only natural that she didn't realize it.

Aria, who has lived as a nun since she was a child and has lived a life of living for others, must be unfamiliar with the emotion of love itself.

Stella hoped that Aria would get along with Evan and be happy. Aria has sacrificed too much so far.

So I thought she deserved this much reward.

It would also be a friend's job to show her the right path and help her move forward.

'I've never done it before...'

Not only that, but as a friend, Stella only had Aria, Uriel, and Evan as people she could call friends.

Aria is the closest of them.

She was going to push herself to teach Aria what love is. '...I hope it helps a little...?'

She doesn't know much either, but she doesn't think she knows nothing about love because she's read various books.

She's just worried that Aria might change strangely because of her teachings.

There might be some wrong information, so I should lay the groundwork by saying that not everything is correct and that she should take it with a grain of salt.

Stella took a deep breath as if she was nervous and opened her mouth to Aria.

Hoping to comfort and help her even a little.

# New Semester (Interlude)

"Um… I'm not sure what to say… Isn't it because that Mirnel, the elf, and Evan were stuck together all day?"

"[…I don't know.]"

Stella chuckled at Aria's silent answer.

*I thought she was someone who didn't usually lie, but she's just a girl after all…* she thought.

She herself had never been in love, but she had read in various books that women change more when they are in love.

She didn't know if it was true or not, but just seeing Aria's behavior today, she felt like she knew a little bit about how much that feeling of love could change a person.

And since it was changing her for the better, she, as her friend, had no reason to refuse it.

"[…Stella.]" "Yeah?"

"[I have something I want to ask you. Can I ask?]" "What is it?"

*What could it be?*

Aria sometimes asked questions, but it was practically the first time she had ever asked her directly about something so serious.

Stella's heart began to pound.

"[Uh… well…]"

"You can tell me when you're ready. I'll answer anything." "[…]"

Perhaps she felt a little more at ease with her words, Aria nodded after a moment of silence and fell back into thought.

*Is she organizing in her head how to talk about the feelings she has?*

About ten minutes passed like that.

Aria opened her mouth again, as if she had finished organizing her thoughts to some extent.

However, she was still holed up in her blanket as she spoke. "[I'm going to give you an example…]"

"That would be better. It'll be easier for me to understand than if you were talking about the feelings you're actually feeling."

Aria thanked Stella for understanding and began to tell her story. "[If, for example, you suddenly became a man, Stella…]" "Huh?"

Stella was momentarily puzzled by the sudden talk of being a man, but she decided to go along with it for now, since she had decided to explain by giving an example to make it easier to compare her feelings.

"[You were originally a woman, and you'd still think of yourself that way, right?]"

"Um… I guess so."

Stella didn't really care much about her gender.

Wizards don't usually care about that kind of thing.

Some women who wielded swords as knights regretted being born female because of the physical differences between men and women, but magic was just a field of study, so there was no difference between men and women.

Those who were truly obsessed with magic didn't care if they were men or women.

"[But if… you had to date a woman, would you be able to date her with a normal heart?]"

"Ah…"

*I see what she's talking about.*

Stella was finally able to understand what Aria was talking about.

Clerics basically have a heart that loves everyone without discriminating against anyone, rather than having a heart that loves a specific person romantically.

However, even though Universal love is the basis, it is not frowned upon for priests or nuns to marry someone they have in their hearts.

Rather, marriage is considered a virtue, so it is not strange for nuns to have someone in their hearts.

However, they should not have such feelings for a man who is already in love with someone else… In other words, the Goddess would not look unfavorably on Aria, the Saintess, having such feelings for Evan, who does not yet have someone he likes.

But it seemed to feel a little different to Aria.

Aria, who had lived her whole life as a cleric, without regard for men or women, saving countless people, was falling in love with someone for the first time as a woman.

Moreover, she hadn't finished everything yet, so she thought it was absurd to have such feelings for Evan.

So, she had been trying to control her heart, thinking that she could never have such feelings while looking at a man and thinking of herself as a man, but that had burst out today when she saw the elf and Evan together.

It would be different from a real man looking at a man and feeling love, but she was thinking that it was similar to that feeling, so she was just guessing that she had used this kind of example.

It's not that everything she's said so far is true, but she's just using an analogy to talk about feelings that are as similar as possible to the feelings she's feeling now, so she's just guessing like this.

Even so, it was true that it was an analogy she had never thought of before, so she felt a little dazed.

"Um… so you're asking if I could date a woman if I became a man here?" "[Yes… or would you date a man even if you became a man?]"

"Um…"

This is definitely a difficult question.

It didn't seem like she could come up with an answer by just thinking about it a little.

In the first place, it was absurd to think that she could make a proper judgment since she had never experienced such a situation.

However, it wasn't too difficult to talk about what she thought about it, or to suggest how to think about it objectively, even if it was just a story to be told with imagination.

"I think it's just a matter of whether you care about social perceptions, or just your own feelings… or both."

"[That means…]"

"Well, that's it. If I care a little more about social perceptions, I'd probably date a woman since I'm a man now, right?"

It's not a country that looks favorably on homosexuality.

She, too, is a woman, so she'll probably fall in love with a man someday, but she honestly doesn't know if she could love a man if she became a man herself.

She'd have to become one to know, but she can't become a man, can she?

"On the other hand, if I only care about my own feelings… wouldn't I just date whoever I like, whether they're a man or a woman, whether I'm a man or a woman?"

If she only cared about her own feelings, it would be a declaration that she would just date whoever she liked, whether they were a man or a woman.

Aria's eyes widened at the open-minded words, but she closed them again when she realized that this was not Stella's opinion.

"If I care about both, I'd think it's better to date a woman, but if the other person is a man… I might break up for the sake of that man's happiness."

Everyone thinks differently.

That doesn't change whether you're a man or a woman, or if your gender changes.

If a heterosexual couple suddenly has one of them change their gender due to some incident, it could be called a tragedy.

If they continue to whisper love no matter how the other person changes, it could be called a beautiful love…

Unfortunately, love in reality is not such a beautiful story.

Appearance was as important as the other person's heart.

No matter how beautiful a person's heart is, it would be difficult to hear good things if their appearance is not good.

That includes whether they are a man or a woman, regardless of whether they are handsome or ugly.

But…

"I think I'd date a woman." That's what Stella thought. "[That's…]"

"Well, it's not like anyone else knows that I was originally a woman. Even if they did, what are they going to do about a man and a woman dating?"

"…"

"If I was originally dating a man… wouldn't it depend on how that man sees me after I turn into a man whether we stay together or not?"

If a man's woman suddenly turns into a man, can they really continue dating?

Stella doesn't really think so.

At that point, there would be no one who would like her as her original self anymore, so it meant that she would continue dating in the way that a man loves a woman.

In a way, wouldn't that be the most rational decision as a wizard? "I see… if I became a man here…"

Stella turned her head and looked at Aria.

"Should I just go out with Aria then?" "[S-Stop joking, Stella…]"

"Hehe, I'm not joking. Well… you don't have to think about it so complicatedly. Just do what your heart tells you to do. What does the old you matter? The present is the most important."

"[…!]"

Aria, who had been silent for a while at Stella's words, answered quietly as if she had finished thinking.

"[Thank you, Stella.]"

*Has she finally sorted out her thoughts a little?*

Stella smiled and nodded at Aria's answer. Hoping that everything would work out.

# 1 - Exam Preparation

A month had passed since I returned to the academy.

At first, everyone felt awkward about the sudden appearance of a new friend named Mirnel Halberd, but thanks to Uriel's efforts, they managed to become somewhat close.

Evan was someone I didn't need to get close to in the first place, so I'll set him aside. There were Uriel and Stella, but Uriel was naturally sociable, so there were no problems getting close to her. Stella was a bit of a problem, but Uriel handled that well too.

There was only one problem... "M-Maybe she's just shy..." "[Is that so...]"

Evan said with an awkward smile, but who would believe that?

The very idea of that elf being shy is absurd... I can't even imagine it. 'This isn't easy...'

It was hard to get close to me.

To be precise, she was trying not to get close to me. 'Why is she doing this?'

Anyone would think I couldn't even hear Thought-forms.

Is it because she's an elf and can't understand Thought-forms at all?

If that were the case, I wouldn't say anything, but ignoring someone's words when that's not the case is incredibly unpleasant to me.

I feel like I want to curse her out for ignoring me.

I've been living as a Saintess, suppressing my emotions, and I never thought I'd explode over something like this.

The others at least listen to me, but she doesn't even hear me. What am I supposed to do?

As you can tell from what I just thought, it's not like I haven't tried to approach her.

Rather, I'm the one who needs to get close to her, so I have to use every method possible to become friends.

Of course, I've tried talking to her first and being kind, but aside from a brief thank you, she avoids even talking to me, which is frustrating.

It seemed she wasn't very happy about getting close to me. 'What's the problem?'

I could understand if I had done something wrong, but she just answers me vaguely and sticks to Evan all the time, which is starting to irritate me.

Of course, Evan pushes her away every time she clings to him, but if she were the type to give up that easily, she would have given up a long time ago.

Anyway... I'm just annoyed.

I try to be friendly, but she doesn't seem interested in getting close, and yet she gets along well with everyone else.

She's never met me before, but she's showing so much that she doesn't want to be friends with me, which means I must have done something wrong in the past...

But I just met that elf for the first time.

In other words, it's only been a month since we met.

Of course, I've seen her a lot in the game, so I know everything from what she likes to what kind of past she has, but there's no way that elf knows that, so it's basically like she hated me from the moment she saw me.

I really don't know why. 'Why...?'

No matter how I think about it, I don't think I've done anything wrong, so it doesn't seem like she hates me because I did something wrong... And it's not like she likes Evan and is jealous of a rival, because she's not openly hostile, but rather just trying not to deal with me.

If she really wanted to be wary, she would have gotten angry or tried to harass me in some way.

'Not that she's the type to do that...'

Anyway, she wouldn't just ignore me like that... 'So there must be another reason.'

There wasn't really anything in the settings I know that would make her hate me, or rather, the Saintess.

There was almost no information about the Saintess from the time of the Hero of Salvation party.

All that was known was that the Saintess sacrificed herself for everyone and died after sealing the Demon King...

If something happened there that made that elf uncomfortable with me, it would explain the current situation, but it would only explain it, not make it understandable.

How can I understand if I don't know what happened...? 'I wish there was a way to win her over...'

All I know are the settings, so it seems impossible to win her over right now.

In the first place, that elf wasn't a character whose settings were revealed that much in the game, so it's even harder to come up with a way to win her over.

But I can't just let things continue like this.

So I need to do something... The problem is, as I said before, I don't have a good method.

'I guess I have no choice but to wait for an opportunity.'

I need to create as many opportunities as possible to get close to her, but all I can do right now is wait for an opportunity to get close to her.

I don't know what that will be.

Has time already passed this much?

It seems I'm not the only one who feels that time is passing too quickly. Uriel sighed deeply, saying that the exams were already approaching.

Come to think of it, she's always hated taking exams. "Hmm... Is it already exam season..."

I nodded at Evan's murmur.

As a month had passed, everyone was already preparing for the exams.

I heard that this exam would cover the parts that we couldn't take last time.

Of course, if the story goes as it did in the game... 'It'll be there, right?'

Forest of Enticement.

Argent is going, so there's no need to worry about safety, but the others don't seem to think so.

I guess it's inevitable that they feel uneasy, since something always happens every time they take an exam.

So much so that not only the other students, but also Stella and Uriel, who are supposed to be the Future Hero party, and Evan are worried.

I already know what's going to happen, so I just need to prepare for it...

'It's hard to tell them that something will happen in the Forest of Enticement this time...'

If I told them that I know everything that will happen in the future, it would definitely be better than anything else for preparing...

Unfortunately, it's difficult to explain this again.

Above all, what's going to happen this time is like a natural disaster, so it's even harder to say.

It's not exactly a natural disaster, since it's a dungeon that was created when the ancient Demon King's pet was sealed, but it's a bit far from being a natural disaster.

'It's just a matter of subjugating it now or later...'

Anyway, it will eventually pop out of the Forest of Enticement and try to attack us, so I decided that it would be better to subjugate it in advance while it's still less powerful.

If we subjugate it in the first semester of the second year, it becomes a hidden boss, and if we subjugate it in the second semester, it becomes a regular boss.

The problem is that.

If we don't go now, we won't be able to get the third Relic. The Relic of the Earth.

The so-called Relic of Sealing, 'Umdium's Gift'.

It's the Relic that was used to seal that Magic beast... 'With that, the three sacred treasures are complete.'

With these three, there's virtually no problem in subjugating the Demon King.

Of course, it's still dangerous because of who we're dealing with, but the difference between having this Relic and not having it is huge.

Anyway... This is something that needs to be resolved without preparing in advance.

Whatever it is, it's still something that needs to be subjugated. 'I need to make a plan.'

I needed to find a way to enter that secret passage with everyone, including Mirnel.

'If I can just lead them to that path, there's no problem with going in together.'

Leading them to the path...

In the past, I would have used dangerous methods that could have hurt someone to lead them there, but I don't want to do that now.

Even though it was unavoidable to become a Saintess back then, I almost killed Danas.

I will never let that happen again.

In the Forest of Enticement, you can form the team you want to enter, so I need to figure out how to lead these five people there and enter.

I just need to figure that out.

I quietly watched Mirnel, constantly thinking about how to lead them there.

# 2 - Exam Preparation

“[I heard we’re continuing the test from last time, right?]”

Since this test was a continuation of the one we were supposed to take last semester, the basics of what we had to do weren't much different from then.

Only the location where we were taking the test had changed. The Forest of Enticement.

Just the name makes it sound like it lures victims in to turn them into nutrients, and that's exactly what it does.

This forest is based on the concept of insectivorous plants that exist in reality, like Venus flytraps and nepenthes.

If you go in there without proper protective gear and preparation, you could die a sudden and miserable death.

Of course, that's only true for ordinary people with no power. Since we're talking about kids with enough power to attend this academy, there's little chance of dying, though they might get hurt.

Besides, we'd be going in wearing protective gear made by Argent himself, magical tools called Artifacts, so there wouldn't be any problems.

Just like last time, we'd all be wearing magical tools that use teleportation magic if something happened.

I never thought the magical tools we made to prepare for Maleficent's attack last time would be helpful in this way.

“[Did you guys decide on your practical exam teams?]”

Of course, teams had to be decided a month before the exam.

The information about the dungeon is mostly public, and the test involves planning how to clear the dungeon with your chosen team and then seeing if you follow the plan and whether you clear the dungeon or not.

So, the most important thing is the team.

It's about deciding how to form the team beforehand.

Stella answered my question as if I were saying something strange.

“What's there to decide? Can't we just go with five people including Mirnel?”

Uriel nodded in agreement with Stella's words. Well… that's true.

The team limit is exactly five people, and you can take the practical exam with a team of your choice, so if we're going to take the practical exam anyway, it's best to go with five people, including Mirnel, who we're all close to.

I was planning to recruit Mirnel anyway, so I want that too.

Because that's how we can defeat the monster at the very bottom and bring out the Relic, according to the original plan.

But one problem remained. ‘Will Mirnel join?’

The question was whether that elf would want to be on the same team as us. Of course, if I weren't here, she would definitely join…

The problem is that the elf dislikes me. More precisely, she's wary of me.

As I said before, this exam is all about doing it the way you want, so you can form a team or, if you're confident, do it alone. If that's the case, she can just not join and clear the dungeon alone.

She'll get a basic score for teamwork, but clearing the dungeon alone proves her ability, so she'll effectively get a score higher than the first-place team.

If I weren't here, she would have come to us and taken the exam with a team, but since I'm here, it's not clear whether Mirnel, who is wary of me, will join us for the exam or just take the exam alone rather than be on the same team as me.

From Mirnel's point of view, it's just a choice, but from my point of view, the story is a bit different.

If she doesn't come here and goes to take the exam alone, saying that she can do the exam alone anyway, then we have to go and defeat the Magic beast with four people.

It's not impossible, but the problem is that if Mirnel doesn't come, we have to go to Plan B, which is to bring the monster out and defeat it with Argent.

The opponent is strong for four people to fight, so someone could get seriously injured or even die.

Evan has already achieved his second awakening and has become much stronger, so it's not impossible to defeat it, and he won't get seriously injured, but Stella and Uriel are still too weak to face the Magic beast.

However, Evan can't defeat it alone, so the four of us have to fight with all our might, and if we fight like that, someone could get seriously hurt.

I'm the Saintess, so I can heal them, but I don't want to hurt Stella, Uriel, or Evan by choosing a difficult path when there are other good ways.

But if we defeat it later, there won't be another chance… Because we have to get the Relic.

There's only one answer. ‘Should I ask Evan to ask her?’

She wouldn't join if I asked, but if Evan earnestly asks, wouldn't Mirnel, who is a Hero-lover, have no choice but to join?

Even though I'm on the same team, she can just ignore me as usual. That's her problem.

Anyway… if I just tell Evan that the reason I want to be on the same team is that I want to get closer to her, he won't think it's too difficult to ask Mirnel.

Everyone knows that I've been making various efforts to get closer to Mirnel, so I think he'll grant my request to ask Mirnel to join our team because I want to get closer to her this time.

“[Hey… Evan?]” “Yeah?”

“[I have a favor to ask…]”

It's rare for me to ask for favors, but it's not like it never happens.

Perhaps because of that, Evan seemed to think it was a serious matter and asked what was wrong with a sharp expression.

…

Is it that important to make such an expression…?

Anyway…

“[Um… I want to become closer with Mirnel, so could you please suggest that she join our team? Please be sure to tell her that I'm there. I don't want to put any pressure on Mirnel.]”

It's not about the pressure, but I think it would be even more unpleasant if she came and suddenly said she didn't want to join after seeing me.

Usually, people don't cancel what they said at first, so they have no choice but to join, but that elf is different.

She's a my-pace crazy woman who will leave if she wants to, so it's better to say it in advance.

“It's Aria's request, so it's nothing. Just a moment.”

Fortunately, Evan didn't think it was a big deal and left, saying to wait a moment.

Actually, there's no guarantee that she'll join just because I asked Evan.

There's a good chance that she'll say it's too difficult and won't join as soon as she hears that I'm there. If that happens, I have no choice but to go to Plan B.

I don't like involving Argent, but it's best to defeat it during this Forest of Enticement exam because it's a future disaster that will become even bigger, and we're bringing the Relic of the seal while the seal is not fully released yet.

That was the official route to get a high score in the game. ‘I'm starting to forget…’

I should go back and read what I recorded again.

As I sat down and thought about the things that would happen in the future, I felt someone approaching.

Of course, it was Evan who had left earlier, and… ‘Already?’

He already brought Mirnel?

He even brought her? “I brought her.” “[Eh…]”

No way, he actually brought her? “[Are you joining…?]”

“Yeah. She accepted without hesitation when I said we should form a team and take the exam together.”

Evan answered as if he was also surprised.

He was even shocked by the fact that she didn't refuse even after he told her that I was there, but instead, she said that she would take the exam as a team and even tried to come in herself.

Meanwhile, I had a question. ‘If that's the case, then why…’

If she was going to join the team right away, then why didn't she try to talk to me and kept trying to stay away from me?

I wanted to ask Mirnel right away, but I decided to stay still because it would be annoying if she changed her mind again.

Anyway, I can't understand what elves are doing…

…

Wait a minute,

‘Isn't this the kind of thought that dwarves usually have…?’ Has my race become a dwarf at some point?

It's amazing that she's making me think like this after living as a Saintess for over three years.

I'm going to get elf-phobia.

Of course, I know that such behavior is only limited to Mirnel and that most elves are not like that, but since the first elf I met keeps acting like that to me, I can't help but feel disgusted.

I'm going crazy.

I sighed inwardly and decided to be thankful that she had joined the team.