# 2 - The Nature of Water (2)

“So there was a place like this…”

Evan wore a surprised expression, saying he didn’t know a place like this existed.

Not only Evan, but Stella and Uriel were also in shock, saying they never imagined a Relic would be in a place like this.

I thought so too.

The fact that it was hidden in a place like this, undetectable, was quite astonishing.

If I didn't have the knowledge from the original story, it would have been impossible to come here in the first place.

If this place were easy to find, someone would have found it long before I did and taken the Relic.

The world is vast, but there are also many adventurers who travel around seeking treasures.

Even if they knew it was in this vicinity, they wouldn't be able to find it by trying to detect it with magic or Holy Power, as I said before.

‘Even now, I don’t know why the Relics that were said to have been lost a long time ago are in a place like this.’

Clearly, in the game, they were described as lost ancient relics, but usually, when something is lost, it's either with someone or hidden where no one can reach it.

But it's hidden in a well-made ruin of an ancient civilization, so it's just bewildering.

In the game, they probably wanted to create a slightly hard-to-find treasure, so naturally, the visuals had to match that feeling.

Since it was conceptually lost in the game, there's no need to question why it's hidden in this way.

Even if I questioned it, there's no way to find out why it's like this.

In fact, I'm the only one who knows that a Relic exists here, so how could anyone else know?

It's best to dismiss it as an unimportant fact and move on. “So, this is the Relic?”

“[It probably is.]”

Unlike the Holy Sword, Relics don't inherently have a feature that distinguishes their owner.

Of course, the stronger the Holy Power of the user, the more power it exerts, but that doesn't mean it chooses its owner.

Frankly speaking, Evan could take it and use it with the Holy Sword instead of me.

Well, as I said, it feels like a treasure, so it was meant to be used by characters of all classes.

Of course, the merits of using it differ for each class.

And the one with the most definite merit is none other than the Saintess. “[…]”

I used Holy Power to examine the hairpin in my hand.

I simply released a wave of Holy Power to check its form, but it accepted my wave, amplified it, and then emitted it again.

Thanks to that, or perhaps because of it, I can see waves occurring around the hairpin.

“[Shall we go back then?]”

Now that we have nothing else to do, let's go back.

Usually, places like this have something else hidden, but while playing this game, I never discovered anything else hidden inside.

If this reality is based on that game, then it's safe to say that there's no possibility of anything else being hidden somewhere here.

Instead of wasting time here, it would be better to go back quickly and enjoy the remaining vacation before returning to the academy.

Everyone nodded at my words to go back now.

I was worried that something might happen on the way here, so I suggested we go together… But honestly, what could happen just getting here?

Still, you never know.

We turned our backs on the ruins where the Relic was kept and moved our feet.

Making sure to return it to its original state so that no one could find it.

.

.

.

“I thought Relics would be hard to obtain, but this was unexpected.” “Y-Yeah, I guess so…?”

“…”

Uriel and Evan subtly agreed with Stella's words.

Goddess… Are you fully prepared to catch the Demon King in this generation…?

Even Estel was questioning whether this was right.

Indeed, considering that even she, who has lived as the Hero's Holy Sword for a long time, didn't know anything about the Relic, I think it's understandable that she finds it strange that I found it like this.

She might be thinking that if something like this existed, the previous Saintess should have been informed.

But well… I was only able to find it because it's me, but in reality, even if you kept wandering around this entire area, you wouldn't be able to find it.

In the end, finding it itself is difficult, so you can say it lives up to its name as a hard-to-find treasure.

It's a meaningless story since the Goddess didn't give a revelation to find it, and I simply found it because I knew where it was.

Even I find it absurd that I found it so easily… “So, there's nothing else we need to do now?” I nodded at Stella's question.

What else would we need to do?

We finished the Trial, found the Relic, which was one of the reasons we came here… We've finished everything we needed to do here, so there's nothing left to do.

So now what…

There's only one thing left to do.

“[Let's rest as much as we want before going back.]” It's time to rest now.

When we return to the academy, that hellish schedule will welcome us again… And even if we adapt and get along well, a big incident will break out before long.

It would be best to play as much as we can before that happens.

Of course, since they don't know about that future, everyone is just smiling brightly at my words, happy about the fact that they can play from now on.

“Okay, let's go~”

“Ah… Wait for me, Stella!”

“I need to put on my swimsuit again…” Ah, right, the swimsuit.

Come to think of it, if we're going to play at the beach, that means I have to wear a swimsuit again.

…

Suddenly, I don't want to play anymore.

I'll just sit somewhere and watch the others play instead…

I'll pretend to watch the others play while leisurely observing and thinking about how to use this Relic.

Well, anyway, it greatly helps in healing people, and it also increases efficiency so that my Holy Power doesn't run out easily.

It's an essential item for me right now.

So, I need to prepare in advance in case the moment to use it comes.

Not only does it increase efficiency, but it can also store some Holy Power, so I need to gradually leave some power in the hairpin.

As time flowed and flowed, how long has it been? It's now time to return to the academy.

Stella, who was looking up at the huge building in front of her, suddenly sighed deeply.

“… To be honest, I didn't really want to come back…” “Me neither…”

Evan sighed in agreement with Stella's words.

It wasn't that long of a vacation… Or maybe it could be seen as a long vacation for us, who spent two weeks in the Trial.

From my perspective, it feels like I've been playing for a very long time before returning.

If I feel this way, Evan must feel the same.

Anyway… The vacation that was disgustingly long only for me and Evan was slowly coming to an end.

We only came for vacation and now that we're going back to the academy, we'll essentially have to return to our original daily lives.

Everyone knows that they have to return to the academy, but they still seem to have a lot of regrets about playing until now, and they seem to have a lot of lingering feelings.

Of course… “…”

After Evan saw the paladins giving him strange eyes, no, eyes that were trying to kill him, I don't think I'll be able to take him to the Holy Kingdom often.

Seriously, even though no one was there, he keeps saying that there's a strange aura flowing and he's being strangely obsessive.

There's no way I would like Evan romantically.

Anyway… Still, we had a pretty enjoyable time before returning, so it's understandable that they're feeling regretful.

Well, what can we do?

We're ultimately students of the academy, so we have to go back when the time comes.

I also have to go back to the Theology Department and return to my usual daily life.

Not only me, but Stella also has to research magic, and Evan and Uriel also have to train.

That's how we can defeat the Demon King someday, right? I looked down at the hairpin.

I don't need it right now, but until now, I've only been testing it myself, and I've never directly used it on someone, so I think it wouldn't be bad to try using it this time.

‘Let’s work hard.’

There are only a few months left until the day of the attack.

Considering that they might launch an attack earlier because of me, there's even less time left.

I'll work harder to minimize the damage as much as possible… And I'll work hard to prepare so that I can catch the Demon King Army executives.

Definitely.

# 3 - The Sacred Object of Water

Several months had passed since I returned to the academy.

Fortunately, or perhaps I should say predictably, my expectation that nothing would happen until the final exam proved correct.

While some incidents were brought forward and triggered early due to my presence, I judged that the incidents planned for the exam were designed to exploit vulnerabilities, making it impossible to attack except on the day of the exam itself.

Even if they accelerated their plans, if those plans ultimately involved exploiting the gaps that arose when we started the exam, it meant they couldn't attack until we began.

That was the basis of my judgment.

And my prediction turned out to be accurate.

If they were going to attack sooner, they would have done so already. Despite the exam being so close, the academy remained peaceful.

"Hmm…"

Argen Isis, the headmaster of the academy, listened to my story with a serious expression.

This matter was too significant to be handled alone.

I tried to resolve things myself as much as possible, without involving others, and to prevent any harm. However, this particular issue was beyond my capabilities.

If I secretly stepped forward, I would only be throwing my life away. Even with my immortality, capture would effectively neutralize me, leaving the

academy to face a Demon King Army executive without me.

Furthermore, even if they succeeded in defending the academy from the demons, they would still need to rescue me.

Even if their attack failed, dragging me to the Demon realm and imprisoning me would be a successful raid in itself.

After all, neutralizing the Saintess, one of humanity's hopes, would be a significant victory for them.

However, even with that possibility, I couldn't stand by and let it happen, especially after the heavy losses in the game.

If I, the Saintess chosen by the Goddess, were to lead the world to ruin, I would have lost my powers long ago and failed.

And Argen knew this well.

If I were going to lose my powers, it would have happened already. So, I thought it best to risk some suspicion and ensure everyone's safety by facing the enemy at full strength.

And to achieve that, there was one person I needed to tell first. That was Argen.

"...If that's true, we can't just stand by." Argen Isis.

Informing her about the upcoming attack was the best I could do. "[You believe me?]"

"You wouldn't say something like this if it weren't true. As the headmaster responsible for the safety of all students, I can't simply ignore such a story."

That was true.

Of course, they might consider my words trustworthy to some extent because it was me speaking.

If an ordinary student suddenly barged into the office and claimed that demons were about to attack, who would believe them?

Argen's belief in me stemmed from the fact that I was the 'Saintess' directly chosen by the Goddess and granted divine powers.

"I understand what you want to say. You want us to prepare in advance to minimize casualties, right?"

"[Yes… ]"

"That's not difficult. But…"

Informing all the professors about this wouldn't be easy, Argen said. Only then did I realize my mistake.

We hadn't yet caught the traitor within the academy.

Moreover, we didn't know how many had betrayed us. If we prepared, we needed to do so without alerting the demons. But what would happen if we informed the entire faculty?

While I couldn't be certain, informing them with the high possibility of a traitor among them could trigger an uncontrollable situation.

To prevent that, for now…

"I'm sorry for being so incompetent." "[…That's not true. This is unavoidable.]" That's right.

It was unavoidable, and she had no reason to apologize to me.

In a place where so many people lived together, how could we possibly find one or two traitors?

How could anyone find them without being a god? She must be frustrated as well.

If the incident on the last entrance ceremony hadn't happened, she might have told all the professors about this.

That would have made things even more uncontrollable, so in some ways, it was fortunate.

However, considering that the best-case scenario was to inform everyone without traitors and have the faculty prepare, neither situation was ideal.

A mage is not a god.

Not even a great mage…

Not outside their own field, or even within their own field, were they worthy of being called gods.

I bowed to Argen. "[…Please take care of it.]"

The best I could do now was to hope that she would prepare accordingly. From now on, I would do everything I could.

I simply said I had to go and stood up, leaving the room.

"Haa…"

Argen glanced at the door and sighed.

She already had so much to do, and now a demon attack was imminent, leaving her feeling frustrated.

Especially… since the scale of this attack was said to be different, it was even more shocking.

A massive attack that could potentially cause casualties…

Even if the Saintess could exchange herself to save people, if their bodies and souls were too damaged or exposed to Demonic energy, even the Saintess couldn't save them.

Those were the words of the previous Saintess.

Many of the attacks on the academy so far had been anything but lucky.

Most of the time, the Hero and the Saintess had stepped up and resolved things on their own before she even had time to intervene.

However, as the headmaster, she couldn't keep letting those two handle everything.

They were still her students, after all. She had to start preparing now. 'How…'

The first thing she needed to do was gather trustworthy faculty members.

Gathering those with a near-zero chance of betrayal and preparing discreetly, without alerting others, was the best course of action.

And not only that, but it was also good to be able to continue the counterattack.

If Aria, the Saintess, was telling the truth… "Maleficent…"

Argen gritted her teeth.

The great mage of the Demon King Army who had been tormenting her since the distant past… Naturally, as a great mage herself, she had fought him many times.

She had even created spells specifically to counter him… She never imagined that their connection would last so long, even after hundreds of years.

But now that things had come to this, she had to do it properly.

She would crush him thoroughly so he couldn't cause any more trouble. How many generations had he been blocking them?

But this was the end.

She had already defeated one of the Demon King Army executives.

That Magic beast, which they had been unable to defeat for so long and had only managed to seal, was split in half by the rookie Hero with an unbelievable skill.

Even now, that attack… It was clearly an impossible feat for the current Hero, but that's why she could think of it as a possibility.

Perhaps… they could truly defeat the Demon King himself, surpassing the Demon King Army executives.

In the distant past, even the party of the Hero of Salvation, who was praised for saving the world, couldn't achieve the feat of defeating the Demon King.

And for that to happen, the roles of the people around the Hero were also important.

What she had to do. What she had to do.

She finally knew what it was. 'Maleficent… I will definitely capture you.'

Argen's eyes, as she stood up from her desk, were filled with a strong will.

She would definitely capture him and resolve this frustrating feeling that Marira had, and that she had unknowingly carried… a feeling that even her past Hero party members didn't know about, a feeling that she would only feel from a rival.

This time, she would definitely capture that damned undead and Marira. Argen secretly vowed.

# 1 - Confession

So, what tasks are left for me to do now?

I pondered for a moment, but nothing immediately came to mind.

Normally, requesting assistance from the Holy Kingdom would be a simple matter. However, the significance of this attack lies in catching the demons off guard. The moment I request support from the Holy Kingdom, the demons would realize we have information and likely avoid attacking or find a detour.

That would defeat the purpose.

Of course, one might argue that if they don't attack, isn't that a good thing? And that it's problematic for an academy, which exists to educate, to be attacked in the first place.

That's only seeing one side of the story.

It's true that if we avoid the attack here, we can safely move on. But let's remember that Maleficent, that lich, is supposed to be captured here.

Aside from me, no one else knows that Maleficent is supposed to be captured here, but the fact remains that his capture is virtually certain.

As long as that lich participates in this attack, he'll fight by exploiting weaknesses with Words of Power, piercing through the plot's loopholes.

Because he expends so much power in this attack, Argent will have difficulty helping from the second year onward. But by then, the kids will have grown significantly, so it shouldn't be a major issue.

That's what I intend to make happen. But this attack is different.

In a way, it's a transitional period.

The story is that amidst the war breaking out in the academy, the demons are defeated, and in the brief moment after Maleficent is barely found and his connection to the Life Vessel is forcibly severed with Words of Power, the Hero finishes him off. In other words, Argent helps to barely capture Maleficent, who has been a long-time nemesis.

This is the first reason why he must be captured here.

If he isn't captured here, and we show that we're aware of the impending attack, causing him to slip away, the future will change so drastically that I won't be able to prepare for it, no matter how much I want to.

At least the main story needs to follow its course to some extent so I can prepare. Maleficent, one of the Demon King Army's executives, surviving and returning alive at this point would create an enormous butterfly effect.

It would be no different from losing my only advantage: knowing the future.

In order to safely create a peaceful world, maintain my persona, enjoy my blissful masochistic life, and then return, I can't let that happen.

And the second reason.

This opportunity is virtually the last chance to capture Maleficent.

Perhaps "last" isn't the right word, since he's never shown himself directly before, so there's never been a chance to capture him. But since we don't know when or where he'll appear in the future, this is definitely the last sure opportunity.

So, even if this opportunity is a bit dangerous, I absolutely can't give it up.

No, in the first place... even though it's dangerous, I'm facing it with complete preparations, so it's questionable whether it can even be called dangerous.

It would be more dangerous to be attacked without knowing anything. If preparing and inducing the opponent's carelessness before launching an attack is considered dangerous, then shouldn't we avoid subjugating the Demon King altogether?

It pains me to use the students as bait, but...

'The current situation isn't good enough to worry about every little thing...' Failing to capture Maleficent would be a very painful blow.

I can be sure of that, if nothing else.

All the annoying elements shown in the game were due to that guy. "... Sister?"

So, no matter what, I have to seize this opportunity to capture him and grow comfortably in the future, so I can grow strong enough to subjugate the Demon King before he revives and crush him.

"Sister!"

"[... Ah? Yes?]"

"Are you alright? I was worried because you didn't answer for a while." I made her worry.

It seems she was worried because I didn't respond even when called in the same posture during prayer, of all times.

I smiled, saying I was fine.

Come to think of it, is it almost time? "[Then I'll go to the confessional first.]" I said that and moved my feet.

It's hard to say this, but confession, where I listen to other people's sins and apologize with them, is the easiest thing to do, compared to studying.

Well, I've never liked studying since long ago.

In the first place, I'm a Saintess, so do I really need to...? 'Hmm... it's a bit much if the Saintess is a dimwit, though.' It's not that I'm bad at studying; I just don't want to do it.

Even during my school days, when I was forced to study hard by my parents, I managed to maintain fairly high grades.

But I prefer not to do it.

Thinking that to myself, I entered the ever-changing confessional and sat down.

About five minutes passed like that, as I organized my future plans and meticulously checked again to see if I had missed anything.

Creak

Someone opened the door and came inside.

I was hoping no one would come in, if possible.

Even if I was hoping that inside, I have to do my best since someone came in.

A priest must not be interested in who the other person is.

In the first place, it's wrong to blab to anyone about what the confessor confessed.

I've heard all sorts of stories while doing this, so...

I could see how many sins people commit in their daily lives.

But...

Even people who have committed sins that I think are a bit too much come to confession, which is quite something.

Is it because God actually exists? "I have come to confess my sins."

The moment I heard the voice, my eyes widened.

In fact, confession usually involves listening to sins and apologizing to God.

There's more to it if you go into detail, but that's roughly how it works. Well... the reason I'm suddenly bringing this up is nothing special... 'Why are you here?'

It's Evan.

No matter how I think about it, this voice is Evan's. No, there's no way I wouldn't know.

'Why is he here...?'

Why on earth is he here?

No, why is he even coming to confession?

We've been together all this time, and I don't think he's ever done anything that would warrant confession.

Did he do something like that while I wasn't around?

"Recently... I went to the sea with someone I like and her friends."

Oh... right, he did.

It was to receive the Trial and get the Relic, but basically, it was supposed to be a trip for everyone to have fun.

We spent quite a long time in the Trial... but since we rested well in the Trial before returning, it was enough to say we went on a trip.

But someone he likes.

'I feel like this has happened before...'

I feel like I've heard Evan's confession before.

I tend to forget most confessions, so I can't remember if it happened or not...

Well, it's a trivial fact anyway.

"There... I saw the person I like wearing a swimsuit for the first time." "..."

Oh... I see.

"I know I shouldn't have these feelings... but I couldn't take my eyes off her."

No, why are you doing this? You're the Hero.

Are you allowed to come to the confessional and say these things as the Hero?

No, well, it's not a strange thing.

If I weren't the one on the other side, I wouldn't even know it was Evan, and since I wouldn't know Evan, I certainly wouldn't know that the Hero is

making a confession like this.

So, I know that Evan is talking without worry. I know that, but...

Why today of all days, when I just happened to come into the room to do confession, did he come into the room I'm in?

It felt like a trick of fate.

"Vulgar as it was... I couldn't take my eyes off her, but I couldn't even meet her eyes and kept looking away."

An even bigger problem was what happened during the last Trial. Before, I thought Evan liked either Stella or Uriel.

If my thoughts had continued as they were then, I might have been thinking, "Finally! At long last!" and my heart would have been in a festive mood.

But because of what happened in the Trial recently, I couldn't help but be suspicious.

The target he's mentioning about the swimsuit. Could it be...

"...///"

Is he talking about me?

I couldn't help but have such suspicions.

...

I'm so embarrassed I could die, damn it... "What should I do..."

I don't know either...

# 2 - Confession

What on earth is he thinking, bringing up a story like this?

What would he do if he found out that it was me he was confessing to? I don't understand why he's telling me all this.

Of course, there's a rule that priests who hear confessions should never be curious about who the person is.

But from the confessor's point of view, it's a different story...

Even if I found out, it's not like he's a complete stranger. He's someone I've known for a long time, someone who's going to be the Hero, and it's not easy to just listen to his story and ignore it.

Especially when it's not just any story... 'Is this... about me?'

If it were before,

Before receiving the Trial, I would have been happy and excited, thinking that he finally seemed to have a crush on Stella or Uriel.

Perhaps because I was also participating in the confession, it was generally conducted quietly, but there was one problem.

'I can't do this.'

I really don't think I can do this.

Since we communicate through Thought-form, most students were bound to realize that I was the Saintess.

I never really felt like they were avoiding me because I was randomly assigned to the confessional each time... but there were students who would ask if I was the Saintess as soon as they heard me speak.

But what would Evan do if he found out that the person he was talking to during such a sensitive conversation was me, someone he had been with all this time?

I'm not Evan, so I can't say for sure how he would react, but there's one thing I can be sure of.

'It's going to be hard to look each other in the eye...'

We wouldn't be able to look each other in the eye for a while.

Whether Evan avoids me or I avoid him, maybe we'll both avoid each other. What should I do?

How can I keep him from finding out that I'm the nun hearing his confession?

I pondered for a long time.

"At first, I didn't really know my own feelings, but I found out by chance." "..."

Somehow, I never really felt like he liked me.

Well, he was suspiciously interested in me, but since he was the Hero and I was the Saintess, I just thought it wasn't that strange for him to be interested in me.

But after going through the Trial and realizing that Evan liked me, or that I liked Evan, it became like this.

To be honest, I wanted to think that it wasn't like that, that it was just a setting in that world.

But since I knew most of the game settings, I could be sure.

The fact that Evan and I were in a relationship... meant one of two things.

Even though that was the only evidence, it was such solid evidence that I couldn't deny reality, even if I wanted to.

But isn't it a little funny?

'What's so good about a scrawny body like mine...'

To put it nicely, I have a doll-like appearance and am a beautiful girl, but there's such a big difference that people who prefer more mature women would call me a kid.

But instead of liking Uriel and Stella, who are much prettier and have much better figures, he says he likes me, so it's hard to understand.

How could he do that...?

Most of all, what's absurd and frustrating is my reaction.

In the past, I might have been a little surprised that a man liked me, but I wouldn't have been this flustered.

I would have thought, 'Well, maybe...' and might have been a little disappointed in Evan for liking a girl like this, but I wouldn't have shown any disgust.

But now, something... Something is very different.

I'm showing a completely different reaction than I expected.

Even now, I would have tried to hide the fact that I was Aria for Evan's sake, but now it's different.

I'm so ashamed that I want to hide.

If the fact that I'm in charge of this confession is revealed, I might just get up and run away from this spot without lying.

That's how burdensome and embarrassing the situation is. 'Hoo...'

But if I get up and leave right now, I'll be treated like a weirdo.

No, the problem isn't being treated like a weirdo, but the moment I run out of here, Evan will open the door and check who I am.

Then wouldn't running away be meaningless? I need to stay calm in times like this.

It was better to think about how to get out of this situation. 'Is there another nun around here...?'

Another... nun...?

At this point, I couldn't hear Evan telling his sins at all.

I was just sending out waves to find a nun to replace me.

Originally, the confessional was completely sealed off, so if an ordinary person tried to check with their eyes, it would be impossible to see who was passing by, but I was different.

Since I can't see anyway, I'm sensing the surroundings with waves, so I can easily see who's passing by beyond the wall.

I don't know if I should call this fortunate, but a nun who always greets me when she sees me was passing by here at that moment.

I didn't miss the opportunity. "[Sister Meryl...!]"

I sent a Thought-form that could only be heard by the nun who was passing by.

"... Huh?"

Since the confessional is equipped with soundproofing magic to clearly distinguish between the outside and the inside, Evan won't hear that I called a nun.

Unless I open and close the door here very loudly, there's no way he'll notice.

I have to run away right now.

"[If it's not too much trouble, well, it is trouble, but could you do me a favor?]"

"Are you perhaps the Saintess? What's going on all of a sudden..." "[I'm in the confessional right next to you, Sister Meryl.]"

At my words, Meryl was startled and turned her head to look at the confessional where I was.

Soon, perhaps because my voice was urgent, she asked what was wrong with a serious expression.

Okay... it seems like she's going to grant my request...

I'm a little scared that this story will leak out, but right now, the fact that I'm Aria being revealed is ten times more scary than the story leaking out and spreading rumors.

Anyway, that's it.

"[I'm really sorry to the person who's confessing to me right now, but I have to go somewhere for an urgent matter. If you're okay with it, could you take over this person's confession for me?]"

"Yes, yes?! But such a thing..." "[... Please.]"

I know it's not a good thing to do. But what can I do?

I want to say it's a lie, but if Evan really likes me, then he's telling me everything about what he was thinking and looking at when he saw me in a swimsuit, so I'd be lucky if I didn't commit suicide right away.

And that's not all.

He's been holding back all this time, and he's been telling me all sorts of things that he's been holding back, and the more I hear, the more dizzy I get.

To be honest, Evan will probably go about his daily life with a refreshed expression, but I'm worried about how I'm going to face Evan after hearing most of the story.

So please, let me escape from here... I begged inwardly.

Fortunately, Sister Meryl soon felt that I was desperate, and sighed and said she understood, as if she couldn't help it.

Thank goodness. Really, thank goodness.

"[I won't forget this favor... God will surely allow it.]" "Is it that important..."

"[...]"

No, actually, it's not.

It's not, but I don't know what she's thinking, but she opened the confessional door quietly with a tense expression, as if she had been entrusted with a very important task.

"[Please...]" I'm really sorry.

It's better for you to tell this story to someone else, Evan. Of course, I've heard most of the story.

I left it to the nun and ran away from the confessional.

...

I'm alive...

Hoo...

# 3 - Confession

Hmmm?

Estel, the spirit sleeping within the sword.

She was currently facing an entirely unexpected situation.

A spirit created under the Goddess's command, who had assisted countless Heroes over a long period and played a significant role in sealing the Demon King.

In fact, it was no exaggeration to say that all Heroes had grown significantly thanks to her, to the point where they could subjugate the Demon King.

However, one crucial fact remained.

That was none other than the Goddess making her a female entity.

And for her, who had to live a mostly dull life inside the Holy Sword except for her inherent duties for many years, the stories of the Heroes who appeared in each era were extremely interesting.

And the most interesting of all was… 'Sniff sniff… this is the scent of love.' The love stories of humans!

Considering that women, in general, greatly empathize with love stories, laughing and chattering about them, it was only natural that she, of all people, would be interested in the love story of the Hero, who was practically her own son.

Especially since the other party wasn't some wicked woman, but none other than…

'Love with the Saintess!!'

Do you know the word 'cliché'?

Having spent a long time as the Hero's Holy Sword, it wasn't as if she had never seen such a case before.

Of course, as history flowed, it was common to see Heroes and Saintesses falling in love and going through various things.

She had seen humans sharing intimate moments quite often.

While some Heroes were conscious of her presence, others were so in love that they forgot she was even there, engaging in passionate love. At first, she felt envious, but then she became intrigued.

Soon, it went beyond that…

Yes, these people are commonly called 'hardcore pure love enthusiasts.' 'Oh… my, my… I knew Evan liked the Saintess, but…'

She hadn't considered the opposite at all.

Although he had entered the confessional, weapons were not allowed inside, and Evan was desperately trying to hide what sin he was confessing, so she couldn't follow him in, unfortunately…

The Thought-form coming from inside completely blew away her boredom!

The reason was that the person he had gone to confess to was none other than Aria.

Judging by her embarrassed appearance, it must be a sensitive topic, but trying so urgently to change to someone else was unlike Aria.

It was as if the Saintess, who had been like a stone statue until recently, had changed from a certain day… She had felt like something had changed a lot, but when exactly did it change?

After a moment of contemplation, Estel was able to recall when it had changed.

'Come to think of it, I did feel a strange sense of difference after the Trial last time, didn't I?'

She had been normal before the Trial, but after the Trial, she seemed to be avoiding Evan.

At first, she had simply thought nothing of it when Aria suddenly said she was going to confession, but the moment she heard a Thought-form directed at someone from inside, Estel's thought circuits started turning.

That urgent Thought-form, and the request to change.

If it had been the usual devout Aria, she wouldn't have been embarrassed by Evan, let alone noticed that the person she liked was talking about her; she would have continued the confession as usual.

Since she couldn't write, she could only communicate through Thought- form… After one confession, rumors would spread that the Saintess was there.

But now, since it was her first confession after returning after a long time, there was no way she could know who was inside.

Especially since her first confessor was Evan. 'What a coincidence…!'

Even more shocking was…

That she, the Saintess, clearly knew that Evan liked her! In fact, this was the most shocking thing of all.

She thought Aria would definitely not notice.

She was a child who knew nothing about love, so even if someone looked at her with loving eyes, there was no way a child who couldn't see or hear would know, and she had never experienced anything that would make her realize love.

At least, that's what Estel knew.

That meant she had experienced something that made her realize love without her knowing.

'Something must have happened during the Trial.' Otherwise, there was no way to explain the current situation. 'Hmm… I guess I have no choice but to ask Evan?'

It's not like she's asking about anything else, just what happened during the Trial, so Evan wouldn't find it strange.

Rather, it would be stranger if he found it strange for the Holy Sword to ask about what happened back then!

Hmm!

…

Asking in detail, and privately, is a bit strange, but.

Above all, she had already asked him once, so it felt a bit awkward to ask again.

Back then, Evan had simply replied that it was a Trial to ask about his will to subjugate the Demon King while living in a happy world where everything had been achieved.

There was no way she could have known anything from that, right?

She didn't know about this situation back then, so she let it go, but seeing Aria's unusually conscious behavior towards Evan made her suspicious.

'Was I not interested enough…?'

She had fallen down not long ago and got up again, and the Trial was already over…

She was curious, but she didn't ask in detail because he didn't seem to want to talk about it much.

This won't do.

She'll have to hear it directly from Evan.

'I'm sorry for tempting an innocent child, but…' What can she do?

This is how they grow up!

She might even be able to help their relationship progress!

"Hoo…"

Evan~! "Hheok?! E, Estel?!"

As soon as the confession ended, Evan was startled by Estel's sudden voice and asked what was wrong.

So, what sin did you confess? "T, that's… I told you I can't say…!"

Hmmm? Well, just by looking at your embarrassed face, this older sister can tell, you know?

"... Oh, try saying it." Hoo, this guy,

Is he challenging me to a battle of pride right now? Estel suppressed a laugh inside.

'Aren't you too cute, Evan?'

Once he's all grown up and experienced all sorts of things, there won't be any fun in seeing this side of him, which is sometimes a shame… The current Hero, Evan, has such a fresh feeling that it's so much fun to tease him like this.

Okay~ let's see… What kind of sin would make the innocent Evan embarrassed and go to confession to be forgiven?

"...gulp."

Love? Desire? Having thoughts about someone you like? "T, t-there's no way?!"

Oh my, look at him. His reaction is perfect.

Estel's cheeks were rising as if they were about to tear. Anyone who didn't know her would think she was a demon.

Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, Estel was not currently in spirit form, so no one could see her like that.

Is that so~? Then what sin did you commit~ "T, that's…"

"..."

You can just tell me honestly, Evan. I know everything~

I even know who you like?

"H, how do you know that?!"

There's a way to know everything~

"You just heard the confession, right? Right? Tell me!"

How could I hear… There's a magic Barrier in place, unless it's broken, there's no way I could hear it, no matter how much it's me?

"..."

This was true.

No matter how much she was the Holy Sword, there was no way she could hear the voices echoing inside the soundproof Barrier on her own.

She had only heard Aria's words earlier because they were Thought-form.

So, Evan, who had no idea about the inside story, wanted to suspect that she had heard the confession, but he couldn't because there was no evidence to call it that.

In a situation that was so frustrating, Evan wrung his head with both hands and groaned.

I'll help you, Evan… Believe it or not, I've connected all the Heroes' loves in the past…?

That was a lie.

In fact, she had only enjoyed watching their agonizing appearances and had never given them any proper advice.

Of course, Evan, who had no way of knowing that, would have heard it like a Temptation from the devil.

Estel, who had lived for so long, might know a way.

After what seemed like a long time of contemplation, Evan finally… "... Okay."

He had succumbed to the Temptation.

# 4 - Confession

Wow… amazing…

“…”

Having heard the whole truth, Estel praised him with a pure and sincere voice, saying it was amazing.

“Are you teasing me…?”

Of course not! Why would I tease you with something like this?

Of course, she wanted to tease him if she could.

Estel thought that teasing him here would be like losing an even sweeter fruit.

So, rather than teasing him right away, she thought it was more important to listen to all the details from Evan and give him advice, thus giving him the impression that he could trust her sincerely.

Even if it wasn't the case, she wouldn't mind Evan dating Aria. Rather than women who might betray him, she felt relieved that Aria would be with Evan for the rest of his life, and they were a well-matched couple as Hero and Saintess.

Of course, there's also the fact that she personally supports the couple.

Anyway… there's no couple as well-suited as the Hero and the Saintess of this era, whom she is in charge of.

Of course, even so…

‘Aria looks a bit young, though…’

Aria looked too young to be dating someone her age.

Of course, she knew they were the same age, and even though Aria was small, she wasn't so small as to be like a child, so it was okay, but Evan was still growing.

Aria was also growing, but at her age, being that height meant there was virtually no hope… In the future, Evan would be incomparably taller than Aria.

He was already a little taller than when he first entered the academy, so who knows what would happen when that time comes.

‘Well… that's not a problem… it's a problem they have to solve themselves.’

The real problem is something else. ‘What should I do?’

She said she would help, but Estel had only watched over them her whole life and had never directly stepped in to help, so when she actually tried to help, she already felt overwhelmed, wondering what kind of advice she should give.

It was the karma she had built up from trying to tease the young Hero. ‘Let's calm down… there must be a way.’

She hadn't heard the whole story yet, but she had heard to some extent what had happened inside.

‘To think such a thing existed…’

How much does that Saintess know, anyway?

No, there was something wrong with the question of how much she knew.

There was no way Aria, who had only lived for a dozen years, knew all of that, so in fact, all of this must have been knowledge that the Goddess had directly given to Aria.

‘I don't know why she's giving it to her now, but…’ The effect of the Trial was amazing.

Estel looked at the necklace around Evan's neck.

He said that necklace, which he had obtained in the Trial of Strength, had clearly been "inherited."

In fact, after obtaining that necklace, Evan unlocked the Hero's power at a speed that was incomparable to before.

Unlike the previous Heroes, who became stronger through years of travel, Evan, who was living a peaceful life despite the various major incidents that had occurred, unlocked the Holy Sword and used the Hero's power faster than any other Hero.

And…

‘That attack back then…’ Judgment.

That skill, which summoned a giant sword and slammed it down, was clearly a Hero's skill.

But it was strange.

‘How could he use it when it's not a skill that Evan can use right now?’ A skill that Evan could never use in his current state.

The fact that Evan didn't seem tired at all after using it was enough to raise questions.

She highly suspected that the necklace had helped in some way.

She didn't know what it was, but…

‘He said he didn't get anything from the Trial of Wisdom?’

But for some reason, Evan said that it was easier to draw out the Hero's power, and that he seemed stronger than before.

It could only be described as an amazing skill.

The story seemed to have gone off on a tangent, but to summarize, it was a Trial that used that amazing skill to create a new world that fulfilled all the desires that existed in the subconscious, and brought them there to live naturally.

The Trial was to test whether they could face the Demon King and bring peace to the world even after losing everything.

And in that Trial…

‘They were in a relationship!’

Unfortunately, they were aware that they were in a relationship, but they also knew their original relationship, so they didn't act like lovers at all.

But that was enough!

It was more than enough!

Thanks to that, although it wasn't intentional, it became an opportunity for Aria to realize that Evan liked her!

It was a story full of speculation, with the word "probably" attached, but there was something that could only be said to be almost certain.

The Trial was a world that fulfilled everyone's desires, and the fact that they were set up to be in a relationship was enough to know.

Aria had never been conscious of Evan.

She had never been conscious of him as a man, at least that's how he had always felt.

And Aria must have known that fact as well, and the fact that they became lovers in a place where everything was fulfilled meant that someone must have liked them.

In other words, it meant that Aria had noticed that Evan liked her. There was no way such a setting could have been created otherwise. ‘So that's why she reacted like that~’

She had been expecting it to some extent.

As a hardcore romance enthusiast who had been imagining all sorts of things while watching countless loves for thousands of years, she couldn't help but know.

But after knowing the inside story like this, there was nothing more enjoyable than thinking about what Aria had done earlier.

‘Ah… how fresh.’

It had been a while since she had seen such a fresh sight. Of course, they still seemed far from being together…

More than anything, unlike Evan, who clearly had feelings for Aria, it wasn't clear whether Aria liked Evan.

Of course, she must have some feelings for Evan to show such a reaction.

The question was whether she would be able to recognize those feelings… and if she did, whether she would be able to accept them.

And…

“So? I told you everything, Estel?” ‘Hmm…’

In the end, I didn't think about what kind of advice to give at all. What should I do? Estel pondered for a long time.

If she just passed over it without saying anything, he might get sulky and not talk to her for a while.

How should she give advice so that Evan would take it seriously? After pondering for a long time, Estel decided that the only way to do it was to break through head-on.

Before I give you advice, there's something I want to talk about first… Do you have any plans to confess to Aria?

“… Huh?”

I mean… I want to give you advice, but you haven't defeated the Demon King yet. I'm asking if you intend to confess to Aria and date her in this situation.

Evan's eyes widened at Estel's words. Come to think of it, that was right.

He hadn't been able to talk about it because he was ashamed, but Estel was right a hundred times over: what would happen if he confessed to Aria when he had so much to do?

“…”

You need to think about this seriously. You can't abandon your duty. “That's… right…”

Only then did Evan realize the reality he had been ignoring.

Had he become too complacent?

He had been spending time in a peaceful world with Aria for only two weeks, but it seemed like his head had gone crazy.

He still hadn't decided on the most important thing he had to decide first.

Of course, I won't stop you from choosing either way. I'll support you whether you choose to do it before or after you finish your duty.

But she just wanted to say that if he was going to confess to Aria after defeating the Demon King first, then giving him advice now would be meaningless, Estel said.

“… Give me some time to think.”

Evan, who had a somewhat sad expression on his face, said that and left. Estel watched him go and let out a sigh of relief.

‘I made a mistake…’

Actually, it's a story that doesn't matter at all.

For some reason, she felt like she was tricking an innocent child again, so she didn't feel good, but she couldn't help it.

She couldn't think of a way to get out of that situation.

More than anything, she didn't want to drag the story on seriously, but… ‘Anyway, he has to choose.’

She had seen many Heroes who couldn't choose either way and ended up losing both and dying lonely, so it was advice she could give.

‘Should I talk to the Saintess?’

She should think about advice as well, and it seemed better to do that.

Estel smiled as she made plans for the future.

# 5 - Confession

“I need to think seriously…”

Evan walked to a secluded spot and sat down, pondering the things Estel had said.

‘I thought it was too early, but…’

Hearing it directly made it feel even more real. Isn't the world still threatened by the Demon King?

The reason he went to confession this time was ultimately to correct his relaxed mindset after spending two weeks peacefully in the Trial.

It was just that Estel happened to notice something was off and seriously questioned him about the Trial.

‘This won’t do.’

It was undeniable that he liked Aria, but he wondered if confessing now, before the world was at peace, would delay his growth.

He doubted whether he, who hadn't even alleviated Aria's pain, was qualified to confess to her.

‘Still…’

Wasn't it still a distant story?

The Demon King might revive at any moment, and if he focused too much on training, thinking the revival was imminent, he might lose Aria.

If it was already too late, would he regret it then?

Evan gritted his teeth. He couldn't allow that. Absolutely not.

Although he had been given the duty of a Hero, he was originally just a kid who picked up a sword after meeting his master.

Despite being suddenly burdened with the duty of saving the world, he hadn't refused and had come this far, even subduing that massive Magic beast, one of the calamities of the distant past.

Could he… rest a little?

He had vowed to defeat the Demon King, but he didn't want to do anything he would regret.

However, he couldn't abandon his duty either. From Evan's perspective, he couldn't give up either. He couldn't give up defeating the Demon King, but he didn't want to give up Aria either… That was his situation.

‘What can I do here…’

After thinking for a long time, Evan finally made a decision.

If he couldn't give up either, he would have to do both, even if it took a little longer.

But if he just let time pass without saying anything, he would lose this opportunity forever.

To hold onto both… ‘There’s only one way.’

Evan covered his face with his hands and sighed deeply.

“—Have you decided?”

Evan, who had returned, wore an expression as if he had made a “big decision.”

On the surface, it was advice to seriously choose whether to prioritize world peace or love, but Estel, who had intended to simply buy time, found it difficult to guess what choice Evan had made.

‘What is it…?’

Did he think about it seriously?

If he had decided to choose love, it was hard to imagine him making that face…

‘Did he put more weight on duty after all?’ It was a slightly disappointing choice, but… Estel also felt a bit of regret.

But it wasn't entirely unreasonable either… In fact, as the Holy Sword, she had seen many who tried to escape because they loved each other too much.

The Demon King was so powerful that he was mostly sealed away, and even if he was defeated, the Demon King would inevitably reappear after a long time. It was like a law of this world.

Sealing him away would bring peace for longer than defeating him, but it couldn't prevent a similar being from appearing again.

‘It can’t be helped, but…’

It seemed best to postpone the fun and focus on helping Evan grow for now.

That's what Estel thought, but… “I’m going to confess.”

Estel froze in place at Evan's sudden declaration. “—Oh… really?”

She hadn't expected him to prioritize love so much…?

From Estel's perspective, choosing love was an incredibly enjoyable and good choice, but she was also worried.

Aria and Evan weren't the type to give up on subduing or sealing the Demon King and choose to escape, but…

‘Hmm…’

As she had said before, she had originally brought up this story to buy time, so she couldn't help but be taken aback by Evan's appearance, having made a decision in just one hour.

She had expected him to ponder for at least a day or two… It was such a big issue.

Estel was sweating.

Of course, it wasn't like she hadn't thought about what advice to give.

It was just that it wasn't concrete, and…

‘Well… isn't the only way for a couple to deepen their relationship is to mate?’

Mating, or in other words, sex.

Frankly speaking, the humans she had been watching all along seemed to enjoy overlapping their bodies and doing this and that.

Having lived as the Holy Sword for thousands of years, she didn't know what was so enjoyable about it, but seeing them enjoy it made her wonder if Aria and Evan would do it too.

It was also called reproduction… and in reality, children were born from it. ‘Should I just tell them to do that?’

Although she had lived as the Holy Sword, she understood that openly talking about such things wasn't very appropriate, as she had lived for thousands of years.

Just from how extremely reluctant she was to be seen by others, she could understand that it wasn't something to be flaunted.

But the problem was that she wasn't human, so she didn't understand what kind of act it was or what kind of social image it had.

‘I don’t know.’

Anyway, now that Evan had decided, she couldn't tell him not to. Estel herself was the one who told him to choose one of the two.

“—Then are you going to confess right now? Whether Aria accepts or not is a separate issue, but I think it's fine.”

“…Not exactly.” Then what is it?

What was he talking about confessing for?

When Estel asked if he was saying something strange, Evan scratched his head with a flushed face as if he was embarrassed, and answered quietly.

“Well… I’m going to confess that I like her… but we have a duty to defeat the Demon King, so I’m going to ask her to wait until then…”

“—Oh… huh?”

“I’m going to promise to become a cool guy who is worthy of her by then. I’m also going to tell her that I want her to decide her answer by then…”

…

…

‘Oh my god.’

He ended up choosing both after all.

It might be a very difficult thing for both of them.

For Aria and for Evan… but it was definitely a choice that allowed them to hold onto both without letting go.

“—…Alright. That should be enough.” “So, um…”

“—Huh?”

“Will you help me become a man worthy of Aria, Estel?” “—Heh…”

No way.

Are all Heroes this pure?

Later on, they would eventually be weathered by the storms of the world, and their pure appearances would disappear, and they would be busy living blatant lives.

Well… of course, they were chosen as Heroes because they were pure…

Although they were chosen by the Holy Sword, strictly speaking, it wasn't her who chose them, but the miracle bestowed upon her that chose them, so Estel was going crazy seeing the pure Hero after so long.

‘Let’s work hard…’

I have to work hard to see this pure appearance for longer. That's how Estel felt.

.

.

.

“[…Pardon?]”

“Well… I have something to talk about, so I was wondering if you could come out for a moment.”

Evan approached and asked after I had finished my confession time and was resting for a while.

… Huh.

Could it be that he found out that I had confessed? It wasn't impossible.

I was too flustered at the time… Of course, it's hard to believe that I, who has been operating Thought-forms for so long, would make such a basic mistake of missing the target.

The Thought-form itself moves like my limbs, so it's not that difficult to concentrate and send it to only one person.

Most people can't notice it unless I directly send it through my head.

If he could figure that out, he would either be sensitive to Thought-forms or…

‘Someone who can operate Thought-forms…’

Evan wasn't that type.

Anyway, the fact that he's calling me is a fact. ‘T, this is bad…’

I'm already feeling complicated because Evan likes me, but if Evan finds out that I heard all those stories through confession…

Maybe this relationship that is barely being maintained will break down. That's the anxiety I felt.

‘Haa…’

It's so hard to keep up with the concept.

When will the day come when I can comfortably enjoy the pain?

I shouldn't say this as a Saintess, but Maleficent, won't you attack soon? It's too peaceful these days.

Really.

# 6 - Confession

Anyway, I couldn't refuse since he had something to say. Not that I had any reason to refuse.

'What should I do...'

I wish he would bring up something completely different from what I'm thinking right now.

Just the fact that he approached me right after I confessed and started talking to me, it can only be explained by him realizing that I was the one who took his confession.

Bringing up a different topic is practically wishful thinking. What a sad story...

'Ah...'

He's not going to apologize and confess right here, is he?

I don't think Evan would do that based on his personality, but if I were to receive a confession here, I have no idea how I should respond.

If I reject him, our relationship so far will be ruined, so I can't just accept it happily... but accepting it is also a problem...

'It's not that I dislike Evan...' I actually like him.

It's just that it's friendship, or camaraderie... the feeling of seeing my favorite character, seeing the protagonist... something like that, not a romantic feeling as a man to a woman, which is the problem.

There is a way to endure and date him to defeat the Demon King, but... that would hurt Evan too much.

The situation would escalate to the worst, to the point where all the sacrifices I've made to have these romantic relationships would become meaningless.

I can't stand to see that happen.

I'd rather try to genuinely love Evan than do something like that, it's crazy. It's not like I'm trying to destroy the world...

'If the world is destroyed, I can't go back...'

Even if I come to genuinely like Evan, I doubt I'll be able to return. 'Ah... how did it come to this...'

My original plan was to guide Evan to like Stella or Uriel, or another heroine who might come along.

But for some reason, instead of liking those two, he's telling me that he likes me...

And to make matters worse, I even found out about it.

I was hiding it pretty well, but it's not easy to hide what's in your heart, so it was revealed during this Trial.

It's unfortunate for Evan, but if he confesses here, wouldn't it be better to reject him with a heavy heart?

'No matter how I think about it, that seems like the best option...'

Because there are other better people... I'll try to persuade him that liking me, who could die at any moment, is a loss.

'Persuading him like this never works...'

In movies, novels, and animations, when you ask someone why they like someone like me, they always give all sorts of reasons and try to express their love somehow.

Even I think that if I keep putting myself down and telling him not to like me, to like someone else, he'll want to cherish me more...

But what can I do when it's actually true?

The reason I'm acting as the Saintess and adopting this persona is not because I have a preference, but to defeat the Demon King in the most efficient way possible without causing any harm and return home.

Right.

Since they said they would grant my wish... it's practically inevitable that I will disappear from this world when I return home.

Well, failing to defeat the Demon King and dying here is also disappearing, so it can be called inevitable.

Anyway, either way, I have to disappear by the end of this story, but if we're in a relationship where we like each other, wouldn't that be impossible?

I didn't want to create such a relationship.

If I go back, we'll never see each other again, so it would only hurt Evan. 'It's complicated...'

The current situation is too complicated for me...

As I walked to a secluded place to talk to Evan, I sighed inwardly. "...This should be good enough."

"[Ah... so we're going to talk here?]" "Yeah, is it okay?"

"[Yes... please tell me.]"

Well, maybe everything I've been thinking so far is just wishful thinking.

Maybe there's really something else going on and he simply called me out for that reason.

However...

"Well... um... I mean..."

He kept stuttering, struggling to say something, and started to wonder if he should say it or not.

If he's going to struggle like that, why did he call me out... I felt a little doubtful, but that doubt made me feel even more uneasy.

One of the things that's hard to talk about to someone is what I experienced this time.

'Could it really be...?'

That's why I can't help but be suspicious.

If it's something that's so hard to say, isn't it about him mentioning to me all the things he confessed about lusting after me?

Cold sweat trickled down my back.

Anyway, as I said before, nothing is certain until Evan starts talking, so it's better to listen to what Evan has to say and then judge.

If I jump to conclusions, I might be misunderstood as liking Evan... or something like that.

Wouldn't it be better to pretend I don't know anything...? Thinking that, I stood still in place until Evan started talking.

Evan, who had been unable to speak for a while, finally opened his mouth.

"Well... this might be sudden, but I called you out because I have something to say..."

"[...]"

Why are you being so serious about it...

If you're going to be so serious about it, it must be true...? The cold sweat trickling down my back started to increase. "You might have already noticed..."

Ah.

Uh oh.

Uh oh oh.

"I like you. Aria."

Why are you confessing so suddenly, you crazy bastard!!!

I did it.

I ended up doing it.

Now that I've come this far, there's no turning back. 'I've never seen Aria make that kind of face before...'

She always had her eyes closed and a gentle, subtle smile on her face, but the expression she's showing now is a little different.

It's like...

'That face from back then...' Was it during the Trial?

The first time Aria showed me her eyes. That's when I first saw Aria's eyes.

Aria's eyes that shone blue, her lively appearance...

That expression she showed when she saw a beautiful scenery came to my mind.

I don't remember it well, as if I was dreaming, but perhaps because Aria's faint smile was so impressive.

It's like I don't remember it well, but when I see Aria's face, it seems like I remember it well.

"[You... like me...?]"

"As a man to a woman... I love you." "..."

It's been almost a year since we met.

It hasn't been that long, but in that short time, Aria has become an unforgettable... indispensable existence for me.

It's all thanks to Aria that I was able to come this far. But...

"But I'm not confessing to get an answer right now." "[...?]"

What does that mean?

Aria tilted her head.

It's understandable that it sounds strange.

If I was confessing until just now and suddenly say that I'm not confessing to get an answer right now, anyone would react like that.

I chuckled inwardly at Aria's cute appearance and started to talk.

"We have a duty to defeat the Demon King right now. Confessing and dating each other during this time, or confessing and being rejected... I don't think either would be a good thing."

So I was planning to postpone the answer.

"I want you to think about the answer until I defeat the Demon King... I'll definitely become a man who is worthy of you."

After finishing everything I wanted to say, I took a breath and looked at Aria.

Aria's face, after hearing all my stories, was blankly facing me. I don't want to hear the answer right now.

Is that why? "...Then, I, I'll go!"

After finishing all the stories I wanted to say, I just left the words that I'll be going now and ran away from the spot.

'This doesn't feel right...'

Even as I ran away from the spot, I was filled with regret, wondering how I would face her in the future, whether I could talk to her properly.

I didn't want to confess like this.

I wanted to say that I'll be waiting for the answer in a cooler way and leave the spot coolly.

'I don't know...'

Haa... I'm such an idiot... Aigo...

# Confession (Intermission)

What on earth is he talking about?

I stared blankly at Evan's retreating figure, already gone from his spot. It felt like a typhoon had struck and passed in an instant.

'Uh...' So...

He does like me, but he has a duty to defeat the Demon King and save the world, so he wants me to think about my answer until he defeats the Demon King?

And all that stuff about becoming a man worthy of me... I didn't think he'd actually wait until then?

'Does he even understand what he just said...?'

In my old world, it's like saying, "I like you, but the country calls, so I have to go to the army, so I'm confessing now. Please think about your answer until I'm discharged, and please wait for me until then."

In a novel, there's nothing more romantic than this situation, but unfortunately, the difference from reality is that we're in a life-or-death situation right now?

No, not necessarily.

Going to the army is like risking my life to protect the country, so it's foolish to weigh the two differently.

If I had to compare, the army is about leaving to protect my country and my people, while the Hero's journey is about protecting this world itself.

Anyway, the fact that he confessed to me in a situation where it could take a year, five years, or even ten years is already amazing.

It's a bit much to say, but Evan is handsome, and he's pure and kind, so there wouldn't be a woman who wouldn't fall for him.

Frankly, if I were an ordinary woman in this world, I would have fallen for Evan's words and continued the exciting wait.

Unfortunately... if the other person wasn't me. 'Evan...'

I thought of Evan, who had already left, and felt sorry for him.

I don't want to hurt Evan... but if I have to live in this world forever, maybe I'll consider it.

Of course, it's only because Evan has saved me several times that I have some feelings for him, but I don't know if I'll actually date him or not.

At least, I don't have any strong aversion to being friends with him for life... I sincerely want Evan to be happy.

Stella and Uriel, and the characters who are going to join in the future, too. But...

'When all this is over, I have to go back to my original world.' That was the problem.

I was planning to return to my original world after defeating the Demon King.

That's why I hoped Evan wouldn't like me and sincerely wanted him to be with Stella and Uriel.

Because I thought that even if he liked me, we were destined to never be together.

And it's also uncertain whether I can like Evan or not.

Of course, if I have to like Evan to make this world peaceful and for me to survive, I have no choice.

A situation where neither is certain.

If I could make a wish to return to my original world after defeating the Demon King, I would probably make that wish?

I would have been sure of it in the past.

In the alley where Evan disappeared, I sighed and looked up at the sky.

Even if I looked up, I couldn't see anything, but for some reason, I desperately wanted to see the sky.

'Ah... I was more comfortable in the Trial...' Really.

To be going crazy now, I'm such an idiot. I can't see anything.

I can't hear anything.

This alone is too much stress for me. Is this how frustrating a disability is?

If you were born without it, you wouldn't know the inconvenience of not having it, so it might be better.

I'm not belittling the inconvenience of people with congenital disabilities.

Of course, they must be as hard as I am.

But... they probably don't know how much despair comes from losing something you originally had.

This feeling of not being able to see or hear anything, like being trapped in a dark box.

The feeling of never being able to see the world or hear the sounds of the world again.

I wanted to go back like that.

To where I originally lived... to my original self. Surely, that's what will happen.

Life after that wasn't much different from before.

Of course, Evan, who was full of embarrassment because of his confession, kept avoiding me.

I don't know if I should be glad about this, but Evan didn't seem to know that I was listening to all the stories in the confessional.

Well, if Evan had found out that I had heard all the stories, he wouldn't have been so quiet.

If it were Evan's personality, he would have come to me and made excuses that he didn't mean those things.

Or maybe not?

He might think that I'm pure, so I don't know much about that, so he might think it was nothing and move on.

I'm not Evan, so I don't know what kind of judgment he'll make, but one thing is for sure, most of the thoughts looking at me are probably that I

don't know much about the relationship between men and women. It's weirder if I know.

There's no one to teach me, and there's no way to find out, so there's no way I'd know how men and women do this and that to have a baby.

Well, to keep the concept, it's better to pretend I don't know anything. 'Call me a monster obsessed with concepts...'

But I don't want to show a strange side.

It's not like I've never shown anyone that I enjoy suffering.

It would be the end of the day if I showed that I was smiling and enjoying the pain, let alone if I was caught knowing about sex.

So, I continued to act while treating other people.

In the past, I sometimes failed to act, and people looked at me strangely, but at that time, I was so seriously injured that I thought I was a little out of it and moved on.

But every time, I felt too burdened by the gazes looking at me. I don't make those mistakes now.

I've been living this life for so long that I'm really used to it now. It's not for nothing that I'm desperate to find new stimulation. "[Hoo...]"

I don't know how they do swordsmanship training, but so many people come to me.

Fortunately, it's not a real sword fight, so only kids with broken bones or something come.

Personally, the pain of breaking a bone is very painful, so it's a kind of enjoyable, everyday happiness for me.

On the outside, I tell them to work hard because it's for you to become stronger, and if you think you're hurt, don't hesitate to come anytime.

I'm not sure if I made a mistake, but it seems like people don't come as much since I said that, so I'm a little disappointed.

"[I'll be going now, Sister.]"

"Ah, yes... Yes! Thank you for your hard work, Saintess!" The Theology Department doesn't do much.

How little is there to do that it's no different from when I lived in the cathedral before.

I think I talked about this last time. "[Not much time left.]"

There's really not much time left now. The academy's exam.

And... 'Maleficent.'

The chance to catch and kill that bastard. I've already made all the plans.

I have to be sure to do it without making any mistakes, but I've worked hard so far, and I have these Relics, so there's no problem.

Ah... of course, Maleficent's resistance might cause some PTSD to other people.

'I have to do it in a place where there are no people...' I should ask Argent about this separately.

She wouldn't want to show my friends a side that's not good for their mental health, either.

Neither do I. "[Evan...]"

How should I answer?

It's probably a long way off before I give that answer.

But to give an answer that Evan can be satisfied with, I should start thinking about it now.

I smiled bitterly and moved to my dormitory. "Oh, Aria, you're here?"

Stella, who was studying magic, greeted me when I returned to the room.

I'm sorry to Stella, but I wanted to lie down on the bed right now, so I answered quietly and went to the bed and lay down as if collapsing.

Stella asked me if I was okay and if I was sick, but I just said I was okay and curled up.

It's difficult.

Really...

# 1 - Last Exam of the First Year

A few weeks had passed since then.

I spent my days still in the Theology Department, as if I were living in the cathedral every day.

In fact, during that time, I continued to practice healing using Relics as well as my original abilities.

Unlike directly using my power to heal people, using Relics to heal someone didn't damage my body.

Of course, it would if the level got too high, but basically, Relics contained the power to heal someone, and they could even hold my Holy Power...

It wasn't my preferred method, but I had to use it to practice using Relics.

It was a disappointing time, but I had completely mastered the use of Relics, so it wasn't a bad harvest in its own way.

It was good to maintain my concept and enjoy myself, but what I had to prioritize above all else was catching Maleficent while minimizing damage.

But no matter how much I prepared, there would inevitably be victims when the incident occurred.

Of course, even if there were victims, I would save them all, and Argent would step in to prepare, so it would be less...

My goal was to reduce the number of people who died as much as possible. I had been practicing hard with that in mind.

Time flowed on.

Finally, the Trial day arrived.

"[Sister Stella? Wake up.]" "Ugh... I'm awake..."

What should I do with this sleepyhead?

I clearly told her to go to bed early because tomorrow was the Trial, but she ignored my advice, saying she would soon get meaningful research results.

In the end, she couldn't wake up properly even on the morning of the Trial. I can't believe it.

She's in a position where she has to maintain the highest grades possible to get a scholarship and continue living in the dormitory because she doesn't have money.

I sighed deeply.

But I couldn't leave her like this. It was like borrowing energy, so I shouldn't use it too much, but...

I had no choice on a day like today.

I gave Stella a Fatigue Recovery Blessing. "Ugh...?"

Stella, who received my Blessing, stirred for a moment and got up.

Her eyes were still full of fatigue, but she was much better than before when she couldn't even get up.

"What... I had a hard time getting up a while ago, but now I'm less sleepy..."

"[That's because I gave you a Blessing. You have to get up and go take the Trial quickly.]"

"Ah... right... that was today...?!"

She seemed to have completely forgotten because she was so focused on magic research.

I should have known when I told her yesterday that it would be good to go to bed early, but she said she was sorry because she had to focus on research.

"[You might not be able to take the Trial if you're late.]" "Ugh...!"

Stella, who made a shocked expression at my words, jumped up and said she would get ready soon.

I sighed as I watched Stella enter the bathroom, but I couldn't help but smile, thinking that she had become much more active than before.

Seeing this, it seemed that the Trial wasn't all bad.

She had become a little brighter since she became friends with me, but not to this extent... and she had become close to Uriel rapidly.

Of course, it was also very comfortable to live there...

I didn't think there was anything particularly good about it other than that, but seeing Stella and Uriel's changed appearances...

'I like you, Aria.' "Ugh..."

What am I thinking again...

Evan's appearance should clearly look like a normal 3D model to me now, but is it because I saw Evan's bare face for quite a long time during the Trial?

The events in the Trial still felt like a dream, but I felt strange because Evan's confession to me at that time was vividly recalled.

'Why is my heart so complicated...'

I wondered if I had really become strange, seeing that the memory of Evan confessing to me kept popping into my head.

"Aria? Aren't you going to wash up?" "[Ah... I'll go.]"

I should think about it after washing up.

I thought it might get a little better if I thought about it while washing up.

The last Trial of the first year. This time has already come...

"Hey, they say we have to wear this." "What is it... a bracelet?"

"Didn't they say we're taking a written test first today?" "Isn't it for preventing cheating?"

As soon as we arrived at the academy, the teaching assistants handed us something.

When I checked, it looked like a bracelet.

"Hmm... magic is applied, but the level is so high that I don't know what kind of magic is applied..."

Stella was trying hard to interpret the magic circle written inside, but it seemed difficult for Stella's level yet.

It was the first time I had seen Stella hit a wall like that. How great of magic did they put in?

'It's unnatural.'

It was obvious that this was a bracelet to prepare for Maleficent's attack. While I was expressing my doubts, a voice came from the bracelet.

The bracelet you are given now must be worn throughout the Trial period to monitor your safety and prevent cheating. It will not work outside of the Trial hours, so you don't have to worry about invasion of privacy.

The jewel of the bracelet is designed to light up while it is working, so there will be no confusion.

'Ah... this is it.'

I was half-doubtful at first, but I think this is it.

I couldn't help but be suspicious just by the fact that they were using it now after not using it until now...

'Maleficent's side won't suspect this.' There's no room for suspicion.

There are many magic that students can't identify, but that's natural because the person who used the magic was none other than Argent.

I heard that using this bracelet during the Trial has been confirmed since before, and they added elements to prepare for Maleficent, so there was even less to worry about being suspected.

The voice coming from the bracelet seemed to be heard by other students as well as me.

The students who had been questioning what it was a while ago had disappeared.

Then it's almost time. I got up from my seat.

Stella, who saw me trying to move somewhere, asked me where I was going, expressing her doubts.

"[I have someone to meet for a while. I'll be right back.]" I was thinking of having a final conversation just in case.

Stella was wondering who I had to meet at this time, but she soon thought so and carefully said to me.

"Um... do you have to come back quickly?"

It's hard to say this, but I think she's become cuter than before.

Despairing once again that I couldn't see this cute version of Stella with my own eyes, I greeted Stella as if nothing was wrong.

"[Of course.]"

With the answer that I would definitely be back soon.

After leaving the classroom, I looked around to see if anyone was following me, and then headed to the Dean's office alone.

I thought he would have done it well even if I didn't check it, but...

It's good to meet him in case something happens, right? Thump.

"Oh? You're here."

As soon as I arrived, he turned around and made eye contact with me as if he had been waiting.

Of course, I can't see.

"The preparations have already been made. If you activate the magic circle prepared in the bracelet, all the students will be evacuated. You're wearing it well, too, right?"

"[You mean this bracelet that you told us to wear for the Trial?]"

"Yes, that's right. It creates a shield that can protect the students to some extent in case something happens. These artifacts are less efficient, but my shield Barrier can greatly increase the efficiency. It will be able to block most attacks."

"[Wow...]"

"Not only that, but Teleportation magic that activates when I send a signal is also applied. Even if Maleficent attacks, no students will die."

He seemed to be very busy these days, so he was making these things.

He was making bracelets for each and every student... I could see how much he cared about the students.

"[Can I take off this bracelet in the middle?]"

"I want you to keep wearing it if possible, but..." "[It's impossible to catch him without me.]"

It can't be helped.

Argent asked me with a pitiful expression. "Are you really okay...?"

Am I okay?

...

I was okay.

Rather, I was happy, and I didn't think it would be difficult. Just...

"[Don't worry about me. You have to prioritize catching the executive.]" I was worried that it would be hard for other people to see me.

It may seem selfish, but I just hoped that they wouldn't have a hard time seeing me.

At my words, Argent sighed and nodded slightly. Okay, that's enough.

Really.

# 1 - Last Exam of the First Year (2)

As soon as I returned to the party, Stella approached me.

She wore a surprised expression, as if she hadn't known until now. "Is it true that the Theology Department doesn't take exams...?" Huh…

Why is she asking that all of a sudden?

If we're all attending the academy together, she should know that it doesn't make sense not to take exams…

She seemed quite envious.

Well… from her perspective, the academy exams wouldn't be very appealing.

She's only diligently preparing to receive a scholarship to attend the academy comfortably, and it was clear enough that she didn't particularly like it.

Anyway, since she asked, I should answer. "[It's not that we don't take exams at all.]" It's not that we don't take them at all.

Apparently, this exam includes not only written tests but also practical ones. The written part will probably just be answering questions about the Goddess's words, but the practical part won't be.

To work as a priest to heal someone outside, you need to be able to use Holy Power to heal or buff someone in any situation.

'Thanks to that, I've been cramming like crazy.' I have to memorize the Bible, of all things.

In the game, you didn't have to answer questions; you just had to have a certain amount of Faith stat, and you'd automatically get a perfect score. But this place where I live now is reality, so that couldn't possibly happen.

And if I get a low score on the exam, there will definitely be people who think it's not fitting for a Saintess, so to maintain the concept, I have to get a good score on this exam.

While leaving the preparations for Maleficent's attack to Argent, I had to practice handling Relics and study to maintain my exam scores.

I don't know why I have to do this just to maintain a concept. "So, you're saying you do take exams after all…?"

"[W-Well, yes…?]" "…"

Even after my answer, Stella still looked dissatisfied.

… Why?

I really don't know…

"Haa…"

Why are you sighing, Evan? "No…"

Evan glanced at Aria, who was talking to Stella, and secretly sighed again. "I haven't been able to talk to her at all since then…"

"…"

That's because you keep avoiding her, saying you're too embarrassed to face her.

That was true.

It was good that I confessed back then, but every time I saw Aria's face after confessing, I kept remembering that moment, so I couldn't even look her in the eye and just avoided her.

Now that I think about it, I regret confessing in that way.

"Would it have been better to confess after defeating the Demon King…?"

For Evan, who was experiencing liking someone for the first time, Aria was a really difficult person.

We always have to be together at the academy, but when I actually try to treat her like a friend like before, I keep remembering that moment, so there's an ambiguous feeling.

After all, once you've said with your own mouth that you like someone as a woman, you can't possibly treat them like a normal friend when you meet them again.

I thought I should confess because I was afraid that someone might take her away if I kept going like this, but after I did, it wasn't easy to be friends, so Evan couldn't help but feel frustrated.

I don't know what to do…

You could just go up to her and do what you usually do… Aria isn't the type to care about that kind of thing anyway.

"Ugh…"

It's nice that you're being innocent, but this is a bit too frustrating…

For Estel, it was a really frustrating situation.

Of course, the biggest problem is that she's not human but a Holy Sword, so she doesn't understand human feelings.

Even looking past Estel, Evan's actions were definitely frustrating.

Hmm… This won't do.

She was getting too bored to keep watching this.

After thinking for a moment about what to do, she suddenly remembered that Aria mainly uses Thought-form.

It was a fact she couldn't forget even if she wanted to.

After all, the only reason she knew that Evan liked Aria was because Aria used Thought-form.

If she hadn't used Thought-form, she probably would have never known unless Evan had come to her for advice or she had witnessed him confessing with her own eyes.

So…

'Should I ask Aria this time?'

If things continue like this, it's clear that they won't be talking to each other for a very long time.

She couldn't let that happen.

'I'll definitely connect them…'

Now that it's come to this, she made a strong resolution to turn Evan and Aria, who are currently awkward with each other, into a sickeningly lovey- dovey couple someday, even if it's just out of spite.

Estel immediately sent out a Thought-form.

Having been a Holy Sword for a long time, she was a master at handling Thought-form.

Of course, sending a Thought-form that only Aria could hear was nothing.

Aria, can you hear my voice? "[… Ah? Lady Estel?]"

I'm glad you can hear me.

'I'm the one who made their relationship like this, but…' Well, what can I do?

Now that it's come to this, I have to take responsibility, right?

'I'm happy because I can see them being lovey-dovey, and Aria and Evan are happy because they can date…'

Isn't that a good deal?

Do you remember Evan confessing to you last time…? "[Ah… you mean that time…]"

Huh?

Her reaction wasn't very enthusiastic. 'Does Aria not like him very much…?'

No, that wasn't it.

If she didn't like him, she would have reacted indifferently, not panicked about what to do like she did back then.

So, that reaction isn't because she dislikes Evan, but… 'It means she's worried…'

That worry isn't a happy worry, it's either worrying about how to reject him, or there's a reason why she can't accept his confession.

Either way, it wasn't a good situation. Aria might reject Evan's confession.

It's a bit sudden to say this, but if Aria rejects him right away, it might have a negative impact on Evan.

'I should at least hear what's going on…' If there's anything I can help with, I'll help.

Um, are you having a hard time because of Evan's confession?

"[Ah… no… rather, I'm happy that he said he likes someone like me. It's just…]"

Aria trailed off, hesitating.

She seemed to be wondering whether to say it or not. But…

If you don't say it, the situation won't be resolved.

Did she think that? Aria soon seemed to make up her mind, and a clearer Thought-form than before was conveyed.

"[I'm worried that Evan might have a hard time because of me… and that he might be sad when I disappear. Can I, who can't see or hear, truly love Evan… I'm worried about all sorts of things, so I'm wondering if it would be better to reject him.]"

Hmm…

"[But… I feel too sorry for Evan if I reject him. So I can't do either.]" Oh my…

How can she be so kind?

Estel was so impressed with Aria that she got goosebumps.

She had seen countless Saintesses in her life, but she had never seen a Saintess with such a pure heart.

Of course, most Saintesses have kind hearts.

Considering that it's almost impossible to be chosen as a Saintess without a pure heart, it's not that strange…

But I never thought she would be so considerate of others, considering her situation and condition.

Besides, this isn't a peaceful time, and we have to go on a journey to defeat the Demon King, so she's even worried that Evan might be sad if she dies, so she's even worried that it would be better to reject him strongly.

'Pass…' This is a pass.

I can't help but pass her.

Now that it's come to this, I'll do my best to connect them, Aria sincerely vowed, recalling the appearances of past Saintesses and Heroes.

Of course, Aria's true feelings were just that she was worried about how to reject him because she would disappear when she returned to her original world.

Estel, she had no way of knowing that.

That was all there was to it…