Shoutarou Mizuki



Demon King DAIMAO


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STEAMY


KORONE
A type of humanoid android called a Liradan, dispatched by the government. Constantly stays by Akuto's side, protecting and observing him.
JUNKO HATTORI
The straight-laced class representative. She's convinced Akuto betrayed her, and sees him as an enemy.
KEENA SOGA
She's an underachiever and a bit of a ditz. Becomes friendly with Akuto after a chance encounter.
AKUTO SAI
Our main character, the future Demon King (supposedly)
DOWN THERE


"OH, S-SORRY...!"
Akuto suddenly realized he was on top of Keena and moved to get up.
"EEK! H-HOLD IT!"

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It was 2:00 AM — the dead of night, when most people were fast asleep.

A small light raced across the night sky.

If any resident of this world looked up and saw this light, they would immediately know exactly what it was. It wasn't a falling star, a bird, or an airplane. It was the light emitting from the mana that a magic user had used for their flight magic.

Cleaving through the air as if it was frozen was a black-haired woman clad in a magnificent, long coat. Judging by the mist forming behind the woman from the sweat running down the cheek of her stiff face, her tense expression was not simply because of the cool night air.

There was a shining silver symbol on the breast of her coat — it featured a snake holding an apple in its mouth, wrapped around a double cross. It was a symbol worn and favored by the black magicians of this continent.

And, a small hand appeared from the inside of the coat and played with the symbol. She was holding a baby in her arms.

As the woman soothed the baby, she looked behind her. It was impossible to fly without disturbing mana, so if she was being pursued, she would able to sense their presence. Right now, there was no sign of anyone. Even so, the woman was heavily disturbing the mana around her mid-flight, so even from far away, her position must have been pin-pointedly clear.

"I have to ensure they don't figure out where this child came from..." the woman muttered. To stay unnoticed, she flew to the ground just before her destination and walked through the darkness without using any sort of light magic to guide her way. From the air, she had confirmed that there was a small town at the end of a narrow road through the thicket. This was an unknown land to her, but from the layout of the town and the symbol engraved on the front gate, she was certain this place would serve her purpose.

The town was dead silent. Despite the fact there were only a few hundred odd residents, the church near the entrance into town was far bigger than that number would imply, and seemed to be equipped with the necessary facilities to perform baptisms. This child absolutely had to be baptized. Even though it

was difficult to part with the child, the ruling god here was Ko-Roh, and benevolence and love were the main tenets of his faith. It was the most suitable place to entrust the child.

Entrust the child... She thought this, and finally an emotion close to reassurance welled up inside of her. *That's right. Our child, our long desired child, will be entrusted to live with the people under the sunlight.*

"Grow healthy, and grow strong for the day you realize your destiny." As she chanted the words of this ancient prayer, she took off her coat, gently wrapped the child in it, and laid him down in front of the church.

"The child of our hopes and dreams..." As she ran away, she looked back at the child, the look of a mother fearing for her child in her eyes. But—

—No!

Her face clouded as if she had immediately realized her own mistake, and she quickly turned back to face forward.

This feeling of failure had come from squarely meeting the eyes of the child through the darkness.

The baby didn't cry and had just returned his mother's look. A certain expression had surfaced in those eyes, one that did not suit the eyes of a baby not even a year old. They were the eyes you'd see in a timid man in his twenties who'd been dumped by a woman. It was as if the baby was sulking, or had simply given up.

—Well, nothing can be done, it's my fault anyway...

That was what the baby's eyes were so eloquently saying.

"Your destiny might be different than predicted... No, that might be exactly what we are hoping for..." The woman muttered to herself to try to put herself at ease as she disappeared into the trees.

The extremely precocious abandoned baby looked up at the sky, as if it was brooding over its next move.

Ten years passed.

The baby that had stared up at the stars had grown into a young boy who was

now vacantly gazing up at the midday sky. Akuto was his name, and others had a hard time understanding his personality. Reaching his mental peak at the age of five, he was a child with an astute understanding of the world and great self-awareness.

When he was five years old, as the orphanage teacher was going over the timetable on how the children were to spend the day, he looked at it perplexed from the side. “Will you get mad if we don’t obey this schedule?” he asked. “Is it that we need to be supervised because we’re weak?”

Once, when they went on a scenic outing to the mountains and they were given an especially lavish lunch, upon eating it Akuto said, “This is by far the fanciest thing I’ve eaten since living at the orphanage. Even though I haven’t done anything to deserve it, I’m thankful for this happiness that was given to me. But unless I go out into the world and work, this will be the greatest thing I ever experience.” With this sudden realization, he began to cry.

In this way, Akuto quietly spent his days at the orphanage. Despite being a strange child, he tried to not cause any trouble for others. It seemed he had the strong urge to be a good person, and while he displayed eccentric behavior now and again, it never caused any major incidents.

Around halfway through elementary school — at the age of ten — there was a small disturbance when he left the orphanage to live with a foster family. A young girl who was the same age as Akuto came to the orphanage to take his place.

All of the children at the orphanage had come here because their parents had died and they had no relatives to stay with, but this girl did nothing but cry. Seeing this, Akuto stopped in his tracks. Even though it was his big day, the reason that no one had come to see him off was because they were preoccupied with this girl.

The teachers at the orphanage were using their usual comforting tactics. It’s not as if there was a manual for doing so, but they were used to cheering up children this way. They would play with stuffed animals and use soothing, gentle words. Rather than put their heart into it, in most cases it was more effective to use superficial methods instead.

Akuto had already experienced this firsthand, but with a personality like his he couldn't help but consider it unpleasant. What was even more displeasing was the fact that, despite the deep sorrow they must have felt, this interaction with the teachers was enough to make every single one of the orphans cheer up and smile. But before long Akuto realized that this girl was no normal child. Even when she was given a piece of toy jewelry, she'd only show interest for a split second before continuing to cry without end.

Akuto decided to stop the girl from crying. After dropping his things off at his new home, he needed to return the orphanage's suitcase. He left it in the entrance way, and walked to the market area in the center of town, where he entered the only accessory shop that sold jewelry. Emptying his wallet of all his money — a few months' worth of adult living expenses — he purchased a jewel-encrusted hair ornament and returned to the orphanage. The young girl was still crying, and the teachers were wondering what to do.

Akuto slipped past the teachers, and as he stood in front of the crouched girl he tugged on her hair, pulling her head up. The teachers were shocked and scolded Akuto for his behavior, but Akuto remained silent and thrust the hair ornament out in front of the girl's face.

It took quite some time for her to notice what was happening, but despite the unusual situation, her crying stopped. She returned Akuto's gaze with swollen, red eyes, and a dumbfounded expression.

Round eyes and a round face. She had several clumps of frizzy hair that stood up on end, which swayed back and forth every time she rubbed the side of her eyes with her balled-up hands. Her hair was a bright, fiery red, so those clumps of hair gave off the impression of a flame flickering in the wind. Anyone would think she was cute for a girl her age, though with her features it seemed that she'd always keep that child-like quality no matter how old she was.

Akuto averted his eyes from the girl's face and forcibly thrust the hair ornament into her hand. The girl didn't resist, but when she noticed that there were jewels embedded in the eyes of the bird-shaped ornament, she looked at Akuto with a frightened expression. Even children understand what the real thing looks like. Of course, it was far too extravagant a thing for a child to have. Without giving the girl as much as a glance, Akuto faced the teachers and

declared that while this ornament was expensive, it was still hers, and that no one was to steal it, nor should the teachers try to hold onto it for her.

“Th-Thank you...”

The girl said with astonishment, looking back and forth between Akuto and the ornament. She acted like an explosive had been placed in her hands.

“I intend to work from now on, so I don’t need anyone else’s money. You can sell this when you leave the orphanage, or you can keep it. It is yours. But I want you to remember that, in the end, simply receiving something is usually enough to stop a person’s tears. Even so, it took something very expensive to make you stop crying, so that might mean that you’re quite an incredible child. You could even be a match for the Demon King.”

As he spoke these words, Akuto returned to where he dropped off his suitcase, and once again donned the long coat he was finally able to wear without it dragging on the ground.

“Where are you going?” the girl asked.

“I’m leaving.”

“Wait. We could have been friends.”

“That is unfortunate. But I believe that your time in this orphanage will be over in a few years. I’ll remember you if you keep that ornament, and one day we’ll be able to meet again, right? See you later.”

Then, without listening to the girl’s reply, Akuto left the orphanage.

After this, another five years passed.

The house that took Akuto in was a typical knight’s household. Taking care of an orphan was normal for a knight, so the knight’s interactions with Akuto were very businesslike. For Akuto, this kind of relationship made it easy to live there, but at the same time he realized that this dynamic made it difficult to form a relationship with his foster parents. Due to this environment and Akuto’s personality, the five years he spent living there was a difficult part of his life. His daily schedule began with waking up before dawn to deliver milk, after school he would work at a café, and at night he would study to prepare for his

entrance exams.

During this period, Akuto grew into a handsome young man that would catch the eyes of any girl his age. But with his personality and daily life as they were, nothing ever came of it. Even as he advanced to middle school, he never had a single close friend, let alone any romantic relationships.

If any girl was charmed enough by his features to approach him, he'd say in a distressed voice, "As humans, we should associate with people free of discrimination and favoritism, and forming a special bond with someone naturally results in some kind of discrimination. I'll concede that no one can get along well with everyone, and seeing a beautiful girl getting along well with someone else is somehow particularly vexing. However I still believe that getting close to a beautiful girl just to ease that vexation is wrong. What do you think?" This attitude made it difficult for his female classmates to become interested in him, and the boys didn't want to befriend another boy with that kind of attitude towards girls.

Personality aside, there was a reason that Akuto led such a life. Akuto intended to go to a high school that granted scholarships — the prestigious national high school, Constant Magical Academy — and become a qualified magician. Even if living through this dark time in his life without any friends only worsened his odd disposition, it was all worth it to become a nationally qualified magician.

The top-ranking state magicians — without a doubt, these individuals were the ones who ran this country of Japan. In this society that had just past the year 3000 of the Gregorian calendar, these magicians bore the core responsibilities of the government. Because they worked to serve society, they were the only people that had no limits placed on the use of their magic, and were active participants in a number of different fields.

Akuto genuinely wanted to help people, so in order to become a productive member of society, his goal was to become a state magician. He had an argumentative side, but he was a fundamentally good-natured person. Furthermore, his life as an orphan had convinced him that his purpose in life was to support others.

At long last, the day he was accepted into the Academy had come. Akuto was so happy that he jumped for joy. Now that he had been accepted, he would be able to live in the campus dormitory, and because he had also received a scholarship, he was able to completely escape from being under someone else's care.

Akuto had hoped that this would be his chance to start his life anew, and now it was really happening.

However, his brand new life unfolded in a way he never could have imagined.

1 - A Demon King Is Born

Akuto got off the whale-like long distance bullet train onto the white platform. A mana screen materialized in front of him via specialized train magic, which he used to confirm the time schedule before making his way through the station, dragging his suitcase beside him. The station was packed with people of a wide variety of races and social stations. There were stands selling the capital's famous green onion-shaped sweets, bookstores, and more lined up inside of the station. One could even compare it to the hustle and bustle of a market. Despite the crowds, it seemed that there were no disturbances to speak of — in the middle of the concourse, a blue-uniformed security magician was swaying the shock baton on his waist back and forth, looking bored.

—The capital is incredible... Even with so many people going about their business like this, it isn't chaotic at all. Are they accustomed to each other's movements? No, each person is headed towards their own destination, towards things they want to see or buy, so that can't be it. I see, maybe the architects of this station knew exactly what people want to do and see. So they designed the station with these desires in mind, so the crowds would flow properly through the station. The magic of high-ranking state magicians truly is impressive.

Giving it far too much serious thought, Akuto followed the mana screen floating in the air and headed towards the station for the non-stop air bus to Constant Magical Academy. The bus stop was built on the highest floor of the towering Central Capital Station, and faced up into the sky. There was a long staircase that led there. Quickly after he started to climb the stairs, Akuto saw an old woman who seemed to be struggling in the middle of the staircase.

The old woman was wearing a kimono and had a large, heavy-looking bag.

—That kimono means she must have been baptized by the god Suhara.

Akuto quickly rushed up the stairs and called out to the old woman from behind.

"Do you need a hand with your bag?"

The old woman glanced back with a surprised expression before replying, “I suppose if it’s not too much trouble...”

There was a reason for the old woman’s surprised reaction, just as there was a reason for Akuto speculating about her faith. In this society, it’s a given that every person is faithful to a god. So the way the followers of Suhara displayed their faith in such a conspicuous manner indicated a stubborn, proud devotion to their god’s doctrine. As such, they were known to be extremely difficult to interact with. These followers oversaw national defense, so you could describe them as either proud or arrogant depending on your perspective.

“My family serves the government. That’s why I don’t often receive any help in town,” the old woman said, and looked at Akuto like he was a rare creature.

“I think it’s only natural to help someone with something heavy. By the way, you said ‘serves the government?’” Akuto asked about the unfamiliar words.

“It means that we are public servants, who are devoted to Suhara. I suppose you could say that we are knights, and hold titles.” The old woman replied calmly.

“Is that so...”

“By the way, are you a student at the Magic Academy?”

“Yes.” Akuto nodded and the old woman smiled, like she was embarrassed.

“That bag is my grandchild’s. She’s a student at the Academy, too. She returned home over the break, but ended up forgetting all of her things when she left.”

“She forgot everything?”

“Strange, isn’t it? She must have thought she was heading off to school as usual and left with nothing but the clothes on her back.”

Akuto and the old woman laughed, and a figure appeared at the top of the stairs as if drawn by their voices.

“Grandmother! I thought that was your voice!”

The voice came from a young girl the same age as Akuto. With a surprised look on her face, she looked back and forth between Akuto and the old woman.

She wore a Constant Magical Academy uniform.

“You forgot this.” The old woman grinned.

“Huh? Forgot? No way... What the—?!”

The girl’s eyes grew even wider in surprise and she covered her mouth with her hands. She had shiny hair and almond eyes, and a beautiful face that was slightly intimidating. Nonetheless, her current expression clearly showed what was going through her mind.

—She hasn’t had her bags this entire time, and still goes “No way?”

Akuto was surprised. Despite the impression of being a beautiful, cool-headed girl, it seemed that she was somewhat of an airhead.

Then as she looked at Akuto, the girl’s face suddenly grew red and she cleared her throat.

“Grandmother, who is this?”

“Ah yes. This boy carried your heavy bag for me. Kids like this are rare nowadays. It seems that he goes to the same school as you, so look out for him, okay? Although, more than likely you’re the one that will need looking after.” The old woman giggled like a child.

“D-Don’t be stupid, Grandmother!” The girl automatically shot back at her grandmother like a child being teased, but after realizing that Akuto was watching her, immediately stiffened and she cleared her throat.

“*Ahem...* I haven’t... I haven’t seen you at school yet, which means you’re a transfer student. Nice to meet you, I’m the representative of Class A, Junko Hattori. For taking care of my grandmother, please allow me to thank you.”

Junko gave off an air of a samurai as she bowed. Unlike before, her behavior gave off the cool and level-headed impression that her appearance would suggest.

“It’s not something you need to thank me for.” Akuto was quick to say.

“Here she goes again, always trying to show off. Well then, I’ll be heading back.” The old woman bowed to Akuto and headed down the stairs.

Junko and Akuto were left at the air bus stop.

A few awkward moments passed, until Junko decided to break the ice.

“...It’s rare to have a transfer student start from high school.”

“I heard there are a few other people who are coming in at the same time. Normally all of the students come straight from the Academy’s middle school, so it seems that they don’t allow transfers without extenuating circumstances.”

“Yeah. Unless you’re returning from abroad or a foreign research student, they seldom accept you. What country are you from?”

“Oh no, I’m a scholarship student. From passing the exams.”

“Really...” Junko said, impressed. “I’ve heard that there have been years where no one has passed the exam before. That’s quite a feat.”

Akuto’s face softened self-consciously.

“Thank you,” he said. “I don’t mean to pry, but are you planning to become a state magician?”

“Yes. After all, I have to do my best for my family, which means doing my best to defend the country.”

The previous look of foolishness had entirely disappeared from Junko’s face. She was certainly a capable class president, and looking at her now, you could get a very clear impression of the distinct stubbornness and nobility of Suhara’s followers.

—It’ll be nice if we’re in the same class.

Akuto thought to himself. Until now, he had never had a friend who was his equal. There wasn’t anyone in his rural town who even thought about serving the country and becoming a magician, so his lack of friends wasn’t entirely his fault. But now that he’d met Junko, he realized that the Academy was a place where students who felt the same he did gathered to study. This thought made Akuto feel a surge of excitement about his upcoming life.

The air bus arrived. Akuto and Junko were the only two who got on. They sat down opposite each other in the middle car of the bus.

“Where are the other transfer students? I thought that I wasn’t the only one.”

“I believe that the international students should have arrived at the Academy a little earlier. You will probably meet up with them after your body measurements are done.”

“So that’s why... Ah.” Akuto exclaimed as he saw the view outside the window.

The air bus flew up, and Akuto gazed out at the imperial capital below them, and in the distance he saw the entirety of Constant Magic Academy.

The campus was spread out with several buildings peeking out in the middle of a vast forest. The main campus building had two magnificent steeples, sparkling white.

“You probably know this already, but the school is an old fortress from the war with the Demon King one hundred years ago. The older school buildings just use the fortress as it was, and there are still many kilometers of underground tunnels. Although they have turned into a sort of underground labyrinth now. There have even been reports of people going missing down there, so be careful.”

“I will be. Though I don’t intend to go anywhere dangerous during my life here. I came here to study. I want to change the course of society to be good and just, and in order to do that, I want to study at the best place possible.”

“Change the course of society?” Junko’s eyes lit up with curiosity.

“In other words, I am going to become a high priest, someone who shapes society.”

Junko let out a sigh of admiration as Akuto said this.

“This is the first time I’ve heard someone say something like that. Although they say that the gods see all actions taken against their will, nobody gets punished for those actions. But... that’s right, if you are going to become a high priest... no matter which religious order you follow, violating any taboos is strictly forbidden.”

“I know, I know.”

Akuto’s reply was so nonchalant that Junko’s eyes widened as she gave Akuto one more look. She double-checked Akuto’s expression to make sure he wasn’t joking, and then gave him a strong, affirming nod.

“I’ve heard that even littering can become an obstruction on the path to becoming a high priest. It’s a difficult thing to prepare yourself for. I don’t know what order you follow, but if that truly is your goal, then I’ll help you achieve it.”

“I’d be grateful for your help. I think adjusting to school life will be tough.”

—It seems that when you meet someone with the same values, you mysteriously get along. Either man or woman...

Akuto reached out for a handshake. Junko put her hand up as if she was refusing him, but then with a smile, she pulled a small sword out of her uniform.



“In our order, we have a ceremony used to bond two people in friendship. We grip this short sword together and move the hand guard to make a sound.”

“That’s a good custom.”

“You think so? It means that both parties swear that if one of them betrays the other, then the other has no choice but to cut them down.”

“That’s intense. I like it.”

Akuto and Junko brought their hands together and gripped the short sword. Junko grabbed the hilt with her other hand, and when she moved it up and then down, a dry noise rose from the hand guard.

“This is the most basic friendship seal, but you’re the first man I’ve made one with,” Junko said.

“It is an honor. This is also my first time meeting someone like you. You seem like a truly noble person,” Akuto replied, speaking from his heart.

“You’ll make me self-conscious, praising me like that. There haven’t been many serious students at the Academy recently, and a lot of them laugh when you go on about justice or helping others. We understand one another because we aren’t like that, I think.”

“Irresponsible students, huh...”

“It’s due to the school’s tradition of student freedom, really. That in itself isn’t bad, as it gives you the opportunity to gain useful experience for the future. But that also means that there are students who go around fighting monsters in the underground or the forest, and try to justify it by claiming it’s a necessary part of school life. They cite ‘real life experience’ as an excuse for messing around with their magic. All of the class presidents, including myself, have a tough time. We have to supervise the dorms, as well. The only time we can have peace of mind is during long vacations.”

Akuto flashed a teasing smile at the tired-looking Junko.

“And that’s why you left all your things behind?”

“Stupid, don’t make fun of me,” Junko said flatly, her face turning red. But she suddenly started to fidget and looked up at Akuto.

“That... That’s a secret... Don’t tell people at school... Okay? They know me as a strict class president.”

“Of course. I won’t do anything to betray you, right?”

The air bus landed on the roof of the main school building. Stepping off the bus, they felt blades of grass under their feet. The entirety of the vast rooftop was green, and it appeared that the area the air bus landed on was also used as a resting area and an athletics field. You could see the entrance down into the school building at the edge of the open rooftop area. It was a large gate with a bird and cherry blossom design on it.

“There are a lot of students who fly here and land on the roof. That’s why they also put a main entrance here.” Junko pointed out the gate. “Since no one else is around, I’ll be the first to welcome you to Constant Magic Academy.”

○

They walked through the blowing wind and into the school. As the sound of his shoes echoed loudly on the stone staircase, Akuto was thrilled.

“You have to head to the infirmary first, right? I’m going to my classroom, so this is goodbye for now. Even if we end up in different classes, get in touch with me tomorrow,” Junko said, taking her school handbook out of her pocket.

“Once you get your student handbook, if you open up the back page, you can bring up the Mana Communication console. You’ll have to get the hang of telepathic communication, but that shouldn’t take long. Just search for my name.”

The last page of the handbook was completely blacked out, but when Junko stroked it with her finger, shining letters appeared on the page. When she flicked the characters with her finger, a contact list floated into view.

“Once you get used to it, you can operate this just by using your mind. But if you aren’t careful, the mana will get agitated and there is a chance someone could eavesdrop on your conversation. Well, see you later!” After this simple explanation, Junko continued down the stairs.

—I wouldn’t call it love, but she’s a comfortable person to be around. It’s like all my hard work has finally paid off. This is the first time I’ve felt like my words

have been understood by someone else, and it's the first time I've formed an equal bond of friendship with someone. Finally, the wind has begun to blow my way.

Akuto thought as he continued on the route marked for transfer students. He soon arrived in front of the school infirmary where a crowd of students was gathered.

"Akuto Sai, correct?"

Noticing Akuto's arrival, a woman wearing a white coat over her suit called out to him from the middle of the group of people. The information on Akuto was reflected in the woman's big, round glasses, and she used her pen to put a check on the note in her hand.

"Right on time. With that, all of the transfer students are accounted for. My name is Mitsuko Torii. I'm the school physician. I'm a teacher too, so some of you might also have me for one of your classes in the future. For the rest of you, you'll want to come see me when you're not feeling well. But I suppose in that case the less you see of me the better, right?"

With a laugh, the tall, frizzy-haired Miss Mitsuko gave off an innocent and naive air. She seemed cheerful and friendly, and peacefully carefree.

"But in all seriousness, we see a lot of dangerous injuries at this school. You'll figure it out soon enough, but compared to the outside world, this is a pretty risky and adventurous place. If you focus more on researching magic than studying, you'll see some of the most incomprehensible things in the world here. I'm sure there'll be times when you will want to take risks of your own, but the healing process can be an arduous one, so don't be too reckless, okay?" Miss Mitsuko opened the school infirmary door and shuffled everyone inside.

Everyone besides Akuto was a foreigner. Comparing his skin color to the other students, it seemed that many of them were from the middle of the continent. Some had black skin and others were blonde haired with blue eyes. Akuto had read some material that said about fifty percent of the student body at the school was from abroad.

The school infirmary was massive in size compared to the one in Akuto's old middle school. The gym-sized space was separated into a number of booths,

including a room with beds lined up together and a room where they performed surgery. Even now there were people undergoing treatment with the other school doctors. Some were even groaning in pain, but with a sidelong glance, Miss Mitsuko explained:

"The death rate has been much lower lately, so don't worry about it, okay! Now, it's time to take your body measurements, so have a seat in that chair when your name is called."

Miss Mitsuko pointed to a large wooden chair in a corner of the room. The armrests and backrest were so high that it would be snug for a normal-sized person. Next to it was a cylindrical glass container as tall as the chair. The glass cylinder was giving off a dull light.

"Inside is an artificial spirit that is going to check your health. Don't worry, it'll be quick and painless. Most importantly, it's going to predict your future occupation."

Akuto, as well as the rest of the exchange students, all gave her puzzled looks.

Miss Mitsuko snorted conceitedly.

"*This* is one of the fruits of the empire's magic technology. It collects data on your personality, lifestyle up until this point, intelligence, and physical fitness and judges what kind of occupation you are most suited for. In coming to this school I assume you're aspiring to a position of vital importance for our country, but with this, we'll know which of those important roles you are best suited for. This isn't fortune-telling. Think of it as advice on what occupation best fits your personality and abilities, okay? Incidentally, there hasn't been a single student that hasn't ended up entering their predicted occupation. Nervous? Don't worry. Just by being accepted into this school, you've proven that you are all outstanding and distinguished students. Everyone ends up being able to enter into the profession they want." As Miss Mitsuko said this, it seemed to ease the minds of the international students.

—I see, it seems just by coming to this school, we're set to enter public service.

With this explanation, Akuto was satisfied.

"Well then, let's get started." Miss Mitsuko called out the first student's

name.

A nervous-looking boy sat in the chair. Inside of the glass cylinder, the figure of a crow-like black bird appeared. When the bird opened its mouth, a calm male voice resounded.

“Welcome. I am the artificial spirit, Yatagarasu. Through our contract, I will acquire your personal information and give advice on your future. Transfer Number 001: Yoh Lanly. Health: Normal. Future Occupation... Soldier.”

The boy beamed as he was informed that he would become a soldier. It seemed that the answer coincided with his desired occupation.

After this, the other international students went up one by one and each received Yatagarasu’s prediction. There wasn’t a single student that looked dissatisfied with what he said. Doctors, diplomats, teachers... All of them were occupations that were important to society, and these students had come from abroad because they admired these professions. It was the equivalent to being promised a future path, so on the whole every student’s expression was happy and bright.

Finally, Akuto’s name was called. He sat down in the chair and peered into the glass cylinder. The artificial spirit Yatagarasu looked at Akuto’s face and opened its mouth.

“Transfer Number 021: Akuto Sai. Health: Normal. Future Occupation...”

The international students around Akuto looked on with curiosity. They were interested in the destined professions of their soon-to-be-classmates, and particularly in Akuto, as he was the only transfer student who was an imperial subject. Everyone waited with bated breath for Yatagarasu’s prognosis.

Yatagarasu’s tone remained unchanged from his previous decree, but his words resounded in everyone with an unexpected gravity, to say the least.

His words were bizarre and unprecedented.

“Demon King.”

Everyone in the area looked confused.

Akuto was no exception. He remained in the chair, unable to move or

understand what he had just been told.

Miss Mitsuko looked at Yatagarasu suspiciously.

“What did you say?”

“Future Occupation: Demon King.”

Yatagarasu repeated the prediction one more time. Since he was an artificial spirit, his words didn’t have any particular emotion to them. On the other hand, Miss Mitsuko was flustered. She stood and walked up to the glass cylinder.

“One more time, please.”

“Demon King. Commonly known as the ruler of all demons. In this case, the occupation of Demon King means that he is the strongest and most powerful destroyer and threat to society.”

With Yatagarasu’s dispassionate words, Akuto began to realize what exactly he had been told.

“Hah... Haha?” Still, he couldn’t help but think that is must be a joke.

“Okay, stay put. One more time, diagnose him one more time.” Miss Mitsuko forced Akuto to remain seated and approached Yatagarasu.

“The diagnosis is accurate. He will become the Demon King. Both his character and his abilities indicate that this will be the case.”

The artificial spirit remained calm. Miss Mitsuko took her right index finger and stuck it in her ear. This was how magicians communicated telepathically. She didn’t *say* anything, but even Akuto could guess that she was most likely getting in contact with an expert on the system.

After a few moments, Miss Mitsuko took her finger out of her ear.

“Y-You’ll probably need to be re-examined but, it’s okay, don’t worry. Once you’re re-examined, you should get a normal result. Everyone, don’t be alarmed. We’ll quit for today. Don’t be late for tomorrow’s opening ceremony.”

Miss Mitsuko dismissed the international students. Nonetheless, they were loudly astir over the situation. Left behind, Akuto realized the gravity of what had happened, and was hit by a strong wave of unease and anxiety.

—It's obvious that this will lead to rumors about me being spread around the school. This is very, very bad. What is going on? This has to be just a bad joke. Yatagarasu was just confused, right? No, even then, the rumors will spread. I have to do something...

These worried thoughts spun around in Akuto's head.

Miss Mitsuko looked towards Akuto with a stiff expression on her face.

"I've contacted the principal. Stay in my office until we hear back from him."

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For Akuto, he could only think that this was a nightmare. However, after some time passed with him sitting awkwardly in Miss Mitsuko's office on the side of the infirmary, an unbelievable message arrived for him.

The mana screen on the desk opened suddenly. It displayed the figure of an old man, tucked away behind a white beard. His appearance made him look like a white ball of fur that sprouted up from a thousand-year old tree, and it was impossible to tell exactly how old he was. This old man spoke with a frank and candid voice.

"Somehow, it appears that you will become the Demon King."

"Huh?" Akuto exclaimed rudely, forgetting that he was speaking with the school principal.

"I said, it appears that you will become the Demon King. The Demon King is the one that started that war a hundred years ago. We really had a rough time back then, didn't we," the principal cackled in an old, withered voice.

"If you know the circumstances, then please tell me. What is a 'Demon King?'"

"He's a man that revolts against the world and seeks to annihilate it," the principal replied, casually.

"That's... That's not an occupation, right? Why do I have to be told to become that? If that's the case, then there should be ways to prevent it, right?" Akuto desperately refused to accept what he was being told, but the principal let out another dry, withered laugh.

"That was the exact lesson we learned a hundred years ago. With the

development of magic, when we gained the ability to ascertain a person's destiny, there was a debate as to whether or not to take measures to prevent that destiny. At the time, we decided not to. Rather, we decided we would even spare the lives of those who would cause others harm. We would keep an eye on them and observe them, but anything more than that we would leave it up to their free will to decide. Until they committed a crime, of course. That's why even though you might become a master criminal, cause wars, and slaughter and massacre those around you, until that happens you are still a student of this academy. I think that we should work hard to make sure no one ends up becoming like that, but no one truly understands what the end result will be."

The principal's verbosity did not match his appearance. Despite his cheerful tone of voice, the contents of his speech were serious. All he said was that Akuto would probably become someone who inflicts harm on other people, but until that actually happened, there was nothing they could do.

"That's..."

Akuto could only sit there speechless, but he was able to understand the logic behind why it had to be this way. In fact, if the principal hadn't been talking about Akuto, then he would have been satisfied with his explanation.

"Essentially, both your personality and your abilities are an ideal fit to become the Demon King. Nevertheless, I'm sure that in itself signifies your troubles from here on out, doesn't it?" The way the principal seemed to enjoy saying the word "trouble" caught Akuto's attention.

"By trouble, you mean...?"

"Many of our students can be quite hot-blooded and get worked up easily. Hm... I suppose you might even get attacked out of the blue, you know?"

"This isn't a joke," Akuto said as he shuddered in fear. If and when the students attacked him, they would naturally use their magic.

Looking at Akuto's troubled expression, it seemed that the principal suddenly came up with an idea.

"That's right. Hmm, if you'd like, we can send a request to the government to assign you a bodyguard for your time here at the Academy."

“Bodyguard?”

“A bodyguard, but they would also be an observer. They would become a student, and stay by your side. Of course, that is only if you desire one.”

—I see, so they could do that, huh... But, that would mean I would be under surveillance twenty-four hours a day...

“And if I don’t like that idea?”

“The Academy will do anything it can to help you, but you won’t be able to lead a normal student life.”

“It feels a bit like I’m being threatened...”

“If that’s how you feel, then for the time being, I think it would be fine for you to do as you like. Just let us know if a bodyguard becomes necessary.”

“I will try that,” Akuto replied.

The screen disappeared. Miss Mitsuko stared hard at Akuto, put her hand on her waist, and let out a long sigh.

“We received the data from Yatagarasu on why he concluded that you were going to become the Demon King, but the amount of data was so massive that only an artificial spirit would be able to process it. Even then, that data might not be correct, either...” Suddenly, Miss Mitsuko grabbed Akuto’s hand.

Akuto was startled. Miss Mitsuko’s eyes behind her glasses had a serious look to them.

—Oh, she’s worried about me.

Akuto was touched, and in a solemn voice, Miss Mitsuko continued.

“From here on out, you’ll experience difficulty and pain. The rumors must have started already, and you’ll attract attention as an extraordinary presence here at the Academy. I’m sure you’ll deal with harassment, too. The bullying will probably be so harsh you’ll wish you were dead. And there might be some students, burning with a sense of justice, who’ll try to assassinate you! It wouldn’t be strange for them to think that if you’re to become the Demon King anyhow, that it would fine to kill you now. But, killing you would be a crime, wouldn’t it? That’s right, there’s no doubt that there will be a clever and

ingenious murder, one that even a god would have a hard time passing judgment on. Maybe they'll force painful and difficult risks on you, under the assumption that it wouldn't matter even if you died, or hide your possessions from you, or take embarrassing photos of you and spread them around the world, or pressure you into committing suicide..."

Miss Mitsuko's tone was filled with enthusiasm as the conversation gradually veered off in stranger directions. Her eyes, too, had become filled with a frightening fervor.

"Um... Why all this talk of being killed and suicide..."

"Don't worry! If you happen to die, I'll quickly use necromancy to turn you into a ghost! If that happens, even if it is nothing more than a representation of you, your data will be left for future generations! I wonder if there is anything more fabulous for a researcher than to be able to completely analyze the data of someone who was born to become the Demon King. Well, of course, I'm not thinking about how if you live, your data will change day after day and become less useful. And I would never even think for a moment that I would *want* you to die. So it's fine, okay? But if you ever want to die, consult me first!"

—*The fact you're this excited is already worrisome.*

Akuto thought to himself that Miss Mitsuko had quite a blunt personality. However, it seemed that his hardships were never going to end. In the present situation, he was sure that allies would be few and far between.

Akuto managed to shake himself free of Miss Mitsuko, who seemed to have some kind of lingering attachment to him, and exited the (fortunately empty) main campus building. He headed towards the student dorms, following the directions given in the documents he received when he transferred.

Not to be outdone by the main campus building, the student dormitory was massive and looked like a large castle. Of course, it had actually been used as a fortress in the past, which meant that the garrison facilities that the knights used had been kept and used as a dorm. The Academy was a boarding school, so almost all of the students lived in the dorms. The castle was divided, with the boys' dormitory in the east and the girls' dormitory in the west. Walking in through the gate, immediately to the side was the dorm mother's room where

a receptionist window had been set up. Somehow it looked like the rumors hadn't spread yet, and Akuto was able to receive his room key and information about the dorm from the elderly dorm mother. Then he was able to escape to his room without meeting anyone else. Because he was a transfer student, his room was at the very end of the first floor.

With a desk, bed, closet, and storage cabinet, the room was simple but by no means uncomfortable. His student handbook was closed and sitting on his desk.

Akuto sat down on the bed and let out a sigh.

"Demon King, huh..."

He still couldn't believe it. Contrary to how he'd imagined the Demon King, it turned out that he was a real person. It was common knowledge that he was a villain who tried to bring about the downfall of society. His true identity was unknown, however the government announcement described him as a ferocious magician who was in command of a host of demons that he led in battle to conquer the world.

Even though everyone knew that demons existed, it was difficult to imagine that there were any with the intellectual capacity to be commanded by a human. Akuto didn't know what the demons from that time were even like. He had just heard that there were demons like the ones out of a fairy tale. Ever since that incident it seems that, just as the principal had said, *something* in the world had changed. But since it happened over a hundred years ago, it didn't feel real at all.

However, the impression left by the Demon King hadn't faded or changed at all. Especially at this school. As the students had come here to learn magic, they most likely had complicated thoughts about the Demon King as being a symbol of evil magic.

That being the case, just as Miss Mitsuko had pointed out, her desire for his data was practical. It was certain that, rather than bullying and harassment, these complicated feelings would manifest with Akuto being feared and antagonized.

—However, I've tried to do good for as long as I can remember. As far as I am aware, I have never done a bad deed before in my life. And as such there ought

to be no chance that I'll become the Demon King, and I'm sure everyone will understand that if I act properly and accordingly. In order to do that, the first impression is absolutely key. Even among my previous classmates, those who were good at lighthearted jokes and idle banter were the popular ones. I'm positive that if I greet them properly, they'll think that is no way anyone set to become the Demon King would act.

Akuto began to imagine how such a conversation would play out.

—Hello, nice to meet you. I believe you've all heard the rumors already, but I was told that in the future I'll become the Demon King. But if anything, rather than becoming a Demon King, I'd hope to become a Deviant King...

—No way...

—That's too stupid even for a joke... Anyway, I'm just not really cut out for these kinds of jokes. I'm already way too serious to begin with... Even if I tried to break out of my shell here in high school, those kinds of jokes are still impossible for me to pull off.

—So then, what should I do? If the good-humored approach won't work, then all I can do is make the most out of my seriousness. I'll try to speak my mind, and proactively work to benefit the Academy. I know, what if I offered to be on the cleaning committee? No one wants to deal with a terrible job like that. If I work hard, I'm sure I'll get in the teachers' good graces as well...

Akuto finished his inner monologue, and felt relieved. Just then, a message started being broadcast throughout the dorm.

"It is mealtime. Please gather in the cafeteria."

When Akuto entered the cafeteria, he soon realized that the situation had taken a quick and complicated turn, and in a much shorter time span than he had anticipated. The cafeteria had three long tables, wide enough to sit close to two hundred students each. The large gathering of students looked around carefully and suspiciously for an unfamiliar student — or rather, a transfer student. This was a natural reaction when someone new joins a group, but this atmosphere was something else altogether. If you had to draw a comparison, the air in the cafeteria was like a murder had occurred in a large mansion on a snowy mountain, and no one inside knew who the killer was.

—This is really bad...

Feigning composure, Akuto sat at the edge of the cafeteria table. The difference between the murder in the mansion and Akuto's situation was that the international students in the cafeteria already knew who was going to become the Demon King. Gradually, the other students followed the gazes of the international students and began to realize who the Demon King was.

"He doesn't really look that violent..."

"Yeah, but aren't the intellectual types the most cold-blooded and cruel?"

"He does look clever..."

Akuto could hear their whispering voices. This was shocking to him, and he couldn't just ignore it. However, it was against his nature to sit there and sulk about something like this. After he saw that all the seats in the cafeteria had been filled, he clapped his hands down on the table and stood up.

"To all of my new classmates, and my upper classmates, please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Akuto Sai. The rumors you've heard are correct, I am the transfer student who Yatagarasu claims has the potential to become the Demon King!"

The complete acknowledgment of the rumor, in addition to the suddenness of the outburst, had all of the students gathered in the cafeteria in an uproar. Akuto had raised his voice, but in a cafeteria this size, it was difficult for his voice to reach far. So, a young boy who had a clever, but exceedingly unruly look about him, quickly raised his right hand and shouted, "Speaker!" In response, an artificial creature that resembled a camera that had sprouted wings flew from the entrance of the cafeteria and came to a rest on top of Akuto's head.

The creature turned its head — or at least what Akuto thought was its head, looking out from the base of its wings — toward Akuto. There, he could see something resembling the lens of a camera. On the other side, there was also a similar lens-like apparatus on its behind, and as it began to glow, a close-up of Akuto was projected in the air near the ceiling of the cafeteria.

Akuto looked at the unruly-looking student, who gave Akuto a thumbs-up

with a big grin on his face.

“It is indeed true that I am the one who was prophesied to become the Demon King. It seems that that aptitude diagnosis has never once been wrong.” As he continued to speak, his voice was amplified and echoed across the entire cafeteria.

—I didn’t think this through, did I?

Akuto felt a twinge of regret, but it was too late to stop now. He thought that it would leave a worse impression if he simply stopped talking and left things unspoken. With his personality, he couldn’t feel closure unless he said everything that he wanted to say. *To hell with it*, Akuto thought and continued to speak.

“Nevertheless, I would like to point out the flaws of that very examination. A person’s destiny isn’t something that can be decided in such a way, right? Isn’t it more likely that, after hearing your prophecy, you decide to follow that path because of it? While it’s true that these predictions have been formed from the judgement of the gods, and from the data they have collected as they watch over us and how we’ve lived our lives up until this point. But the possibilities available to a person can’t just be limited to a single path! Isn’t it necessary to free ourselves from this limiting preconception? If not, it will be impossible for our world to progress and move forward!”

Although there was booing and heckling at the start, as his unprepared speech started coming together, the students became entranced. The booing gradually grew quiet as they all listened to what Akuto was saying. He raised his voice even further as he continued.

“Allow me to address those doubtful and suspicious looks you’re giving me... Actually, I want to condemn you for that very behavior — not a single person has tried to verify these rumors by directly asking me about it. Isn’t that the result of you giving into fear? If I was truly supposed to become the Demon King, then I suppose it would be wrong for you to associate with me. But avoiding me without asking about my side of things even once is just one-sided prejudice! You should feel ashamed for fearing me without knowing anything about me.

“There are many citizens of this nation who hold those who study magic in high regard. Even so, whether or not someone learns magic shouldn’t determine that they are inferior or superior to anyone else. These errors will continue as long as we magic-users are under the impression that we are the elite, and so long as these career aptitude examinations run our lives!” Wrapped up in the momentum of his speech, Akuto immediately began to question himself after blurting this out.

—Wait, have I ended up criticizing the very institutions of this school, and the magic policies of the country?

Since only the best students were accepted into this school, everyone there surely understood what Akuto had said. It seemed that some of them had studied the past Demon King, and they began whispering to each other that what Akuto was saying sounded exactly like the Demon King’s proclamation of war from one hundred years ago.

—What have I done?!

While relying on his momentum to keep his speech going, he’d said too much and expressed his true feelings. He had no idea things could go so wrong. To make things worse, the way he had given the improvised speech with such smooth confidence had made them think even worse of him.

“He’s way too eloquent, speaking like this without a script.”

“I was taken in at first, and I started to feel like I agreed with him... But then he started questioning the system. That line of thinking is dangerous.”

“It’s the Demon King’s ability...”

“The second coming of the Demon King...”

Akuto could clearly hear the buzzing murmurs.

—This is bad. I’ve gotten myself into an extremely dangerous situation. Why does this always happen to me? I’m just trying to do what I think is right. Why did it turn out this way?

Though Akuto stewed with regret, he didn’t realize that this persuasive ability came naturally to him, with his look as a shrewd and handsome boy as well as

his logical personality and baseless self-confidence. More so, his secret desire to impress his new classmates meant that even though he had gone too far already, he didn't even consider ending his speech there.

"It is true that I criticized our established way of life. But that does not mean I intend to destroy it! I came to this academy to change the system from within. I will prove that I won't become the Demon King. So I am seeking your support! Even if we don't agree with each other, I will not oppose you, because I believe that we can resolve our differences through open communication and tolerance!"

Somewhere along the way, his polite way of speaking had disappeared completely and he had started to speak like a dictator or a tyrant. Akuto was waving his hands around emphatically, and his hair had become disheveled as he gave his impassioned speech. Among the listening students, it seemed that some had been entranced by what he was saying. But the moment there was a break in Akuto's words, they would shake their heads and slap their cheeks in a panic, trying return to their senses.

However, Akuto's speech left a strong impact on the students' minds. They interpreted his words to mean that, though they were unsure whether or not he would become the Demon King, he would certainly propagate his way of thinking by focusing on challenging the discipline and order of the Academy. Of course, Akuto himself realized that this was exactly what he'd ended up saying.

—Will I be able to get through school like this...? Well, if I let this shake me up, things will just get even worse.

"That is all that I have to say. Please forgive me for causing such a disturbance. Let's enjoy our meal," Akuto said, trying his best to sound as subdued as possible. But his attempt only made him give off the image of an evil, wealthy aristocrat.

"I can't believe a transfer student would speak like that, let alone a first-year..."

"So he's not just a normal guy after all..."

"What are we going to do? It looks like he is going to divide the school and fight over it..."

“There can’t actually be anyone who would side with him, right? No way...”

“You never know, if he does have a talent for magic, maybe...”

The commotion in the cafeteria showed no sign of quieting down. As the center of attention, all Akuto could do was anxiously try to focus on sitting upright and eating his food properly. Indeed, by the end of the ordeal, he had no memories of what he had eaten or even what it had tasted like.

○

The next morning.

Akuto couldn’t sleep for almost the entire night. Breakfast was strangely quiet, which put him on edge. He finished the awkward meal and then made his way towards his homeroom class before the opening ceremony. Akuto arrived at the classroom five minutes early, but as he opened the door and went inside, he was met with the inquisitive gazes of the female students.

—That’s right, the girls...

Naturally, the rumors had spread to the female students. It was possible that Akuto’s broadcast had been audible in the girls’ dorm as well. In fact that must have been the case, as the girls seemed to immediately recognize Akuto’s face.

—I have to calmly smile back at them...

“Good morning,” Akuto said.

There was a brief uproar of responses, some voices sounding flirtatious and some disgusted. It seemed that there was an even split of girls who were impressed by him and girls who hated him.

But Akuto’s eyes were glued to a single female student in the classroom. A conspicuously beautiful young girl with glossy hair and almond-shaped eyes — it was Junko. At this point, Akuto remembered which class he had been assigned to.

—This is Class A... I forgot about my promise to get in touch with her yesterday...

Junko seemed to be intentionally trying to avoid meeting Akuto’s gaze. Since none of the other students were asking Junko about him, it would appear that

she had kept her bond with Akuto a secret.

—I'm screwed...

In order not to cause any trouble for Junko, all Akuto could do was pretend he didn't know her. Without meeting anyone's gaze, Akuto sat down at the desk that had been set aside for him, the one in the very back of the classroom. Then the door at the front of the classroom opened and Miss Mitsuko walked inside.

"Okay, everyone sit down. I'm Mitsuko Torii, I'll be your homeroom teacher for this year, too. Nice to meet you all. Although, for the most part this is the same class from the middle school, isn't it? I'll run through attendance. Absences are... Oh, looks like Soga is absent again, as usual. I wonder if she's off sleeping somewhere. Can someone give her a call?" Speaking in a half-hearted tone, Miss Mitsuko closed the roll book and looked towards Junko.

"With attendance over, normally I'd have you decide on a class representative. But since we mostly have the same students as before, it's fine if we just ask Junko Hattori again, right?" Just as Miss Mitsuko was confirming with Junko, who was nodding her head in agreement, suddenly a voice interrupted them.

"Miss Mitsuko! Electing the class representative without a vote would invite autocracy into our academy, and would hinder progress!"

Akuto felt a bad sense of foreboding at the sound of the voice, as it sounded like it was copying Akuto's own speech. When he looked towards the one who had spoken, his apprehensions proved to be correct. The boy who had called for the speaker the night before was sitting diagonally in front of Akuto. He was giving him a thumbs up with the same wild and unruly look as before.

"I nominate Akuto Sai to be our class representative! Everyone heard his speech, and I believe that he can prove to us that he won't become the Demon King by becoming the class representative and helping everyone!" The class was immediately in an uproar.

"Okay, quiet everyone!" Miss Mitsuko clapped her hands.

Akuto unconsciously looked towards Junko. She averted her eyes, but for just a second, Akuto was able to get a peek at her expression. Rather than anger,

her face looked like she had been unfathomably humiliated and was desperately trying to endure the shame.

—Suhara's followers take pride in their official posts, and value loyalty above all else, after all...

Akuto panicked. He had already betrayed Junko on several levels. Even though she had been the first friend he'd ever made.

"Miss Mitsuko, is my own will not taken into consideration? I refuse the nomination," Akuto said, raising his hand. "Instead... I would like to join the cleaning committee. If you have that here."

Miss Mitsuko's face had been carefree, but when Akuto said this, it suddenly stiffened.

The mood in the class completely changed as well. Up until then it had been a slightly unsettling atmosphere, but with Akuto's remark it was as if the temperature had suddenly dropped below zero.

"Wait... Akuto..." Finally, Miss Mitsuko opened her mouth. "Do you know what you are saying?"

"What?" Akuto didn't understand what was happening. He couldn't even hazard a guess as to what had made the air in the classroom become so tense.

Then, as if just speaking the words itself was revolting, Miss Mitsuko informed Akuto,

"When a war with another country or demons occurs, and the secrets of the Academy need to be protected, the cleaning committee is entrusted with 'cleaning up' the secrets of the school... in other words, they destroy the school and murder all the students. This committee existed only during the war, and now it is a loathsome group that exists in name only. I can't believe you'd say such an awful group's name..."

—What the hell?!

Understandably, Akuto balked at his own bad luck. Although he didn't know anything about the group the teacher mentioned, he had still ended up using the exact terminology to refer to it.

“No, no! I just wanted to become a committee member, nothing more...”

As he let these words out without thinking, the classroom froze over once again.

“No, I don’t mean like that—” Akuto tried to clarify, but it was already too late and his words didn’t reach anyone.

This was because at that moment, Junko let out a shout — closer to a shriek — and stood up from her desk.

“Akuto Sai! How dare you toy with my heart?!” She glared at him, hair disheveled and with a bloodcurdling expression.

Akuto thought it was natural for her to be angry, but...

—That’s a really awkward way to say it.

Still, Akuto managed to stay strangely calm. Even as the rest of the classroom looked back and forth between Akuto and Junko. As he’d feared, they seemed to be misunderstanding the situation.

“I thought I said that if one of us breaks our vow, that betrayal would be paid back in blood!” Junko pulled a wooden sword out from the side of her desk.

—If you start talking about vows and stuff, then the rest of the class is definitely going to misunderstand what kind of relationship we have... If she would just cool off a minute and think about it, she’d realize this isn’t good for her either...

“Right, the vow... but it’s not as if it was a vow of marriage or anything like that, right? Although it was between a boy and girl, wasn’t what we did in the empty bus together nothing more than two friends having fun?” Akuto said.

Everyone in the class suddenly had looks of comprehension on their faces.

—Crap.

At that moment Akuto finally realized his mistake, but it was already too late.

Junko was so beside herself in rage that Akuto could imagine a bright red aura emanating from her body, and she pointed the end of her wooden sword at Akuto. The sword was a magic item — an artifact — the light radiating off of it

was not Akuto's imagination this time, but a torrent of mana.

"H-H-H-How humiliating! I challenge you to a duel! Right here, right now!"

Junko pulled out another wooden sword from a bag hanging on the side of the desk, which seemed to be filled with them. She pointed the hilt at Akuto and threw it to him. He instinctively caught the sword, but without knowing what he should do, all he managed was a look towards Miss Mitsuko.

"She's a Suhara follower, right? They are allowed to challenge others to duels. It's in the school regulations," Miss Mitsuko said coldly. It appeared that Miss Mitsuko also thought of Akuto as an enemy of women everywhere.

"The winner can be the class representative!" the troublesome student behind Akuto's seat declared, looking excited. He patted Akuto on the shoulder and gave him a look of respect as he whispered to him.

"Name's Hiroshi Miwa. Please call me Hiroshi! And please let me call you boss! Boss! You're amazing! My grades here are super low and they treat me like a delinquent, but your ideas totally resonated with me! It made me think that someday I might be able to make somethin' outta myself!"

—Isn't it his fault we're in this situation right now?

Akuto thought, but he didn't have the time to be distracted by Hiroshi.

"Hiyaaaahhh!!" With a shout, Junko suddenly launched an attack at Akuto.

"Whoa!" Akuto had been sitting, but he fell backwards in his chair and managed to dodge the attack. It seemed that his work as a delivery man had trained his body and reflexes in a way he hadn't realized.

"Okay everyone, it's dangerous so please step back." Miss Mitsuko directed the class away from the duel and clapped her hands. Everyone except Junko and Akuto drew close to the walls of the classroom. Miss Mitsuko clapped her hands again, and a mana field enveloped Junko and Akuto. With her magic barrier, it seemed they would be able to fight to their hearts' content without damaging the classroom.

—Now I've really been backed into a corner. I have to figure out a way to get out of this situation... All I can do is to try and calm Hattori down...

Akuto glanced at Junko's face. Her eyes were burning bright red, and Akuto got the feeling she wouldn't listen to anything he had to say.

"Hyaaaah!" She attacked a second time. Akuto jumped backwards to avoid the attack.

"Fight hard, boss!" From outside the mana field, Akuto could hear Hiroshi cheer him on.

Akuto was seriously fed up with him.

—*How can I get Hattori to calm down...*

But no matter how hard he tried, he could only think of one method.

—*I guess this is all I can do.*

"Gwaaaahhh!" The third attack. In a strange move, Akuto moved forward to square up with Junko's attack.

Akuto stuck his head out in front of the wooden sword's downward trajectory. At the moment when it looked like his head was going to be smashed, Akuto twisted his body, dodged the sword, and moved forward to slip under the hand guard on Junko's sword.

"What?!" Her surprise caused the anger in her eyes to disappear.

The gazes of the rest of the class were glued to the action between Akuto and Junko.

An earthquake-like commotion erupted throughout the classroom.

Akuto had embraced Junko's body from the front. With both of them being such a good-looking, matching pair, it looked like the embrace of two lovers, reunited after a long period of separation.

"Calm down..." Akuto whispered in Junko's ear.

"Ah!"

Whether because she was ticklish, or just because it was the natural heart-thumping reaction any girl would have, Junko fell backwards as if her waist had gone limp. In order to prop her up, Akuto put a hand behind her back, and this pose made him look as if he was forcing her to kiss him.

“W-What are you... Let m—” Junko groaned.

“I won’t let go until this misunderstanding is cleared up,” Akuto said with a serious look on his face.

“What’s there to misunderstand... Everything up until now... And even now! What are you trying to do by embarrassing me like this? How humiliating!!”

“It’s all a misunderstanding. I’m not doing this on purpose to spite you, and I didn’t mean to embarrass you.”

“R-Really...?” Calming down a little bit, it seemed that Junko was ready to listen to Akuto’s words.

Akuto also felt slightly relieved, and gently spoke to Junko.

“That’s right. So please, let me re-swear our oath right here. I swore that oath to you because I truly liked you, and my feelings back then weren’t just superficial.”

However, the entire class clearly heard those words.

At this point, both Junko and Akuto finally became cognizant of the current position the two of them were in.

“Crazy... The Demon King sure is somethin’ else...”

“Junko’s known to be the strongest, straight-laced class representative, but he broke through her defenses... Not just that, but he made her fall for him...”

“Not even now, she had already fallen for him...” Everyone was whispering to each other.

In an instant, Junko’s face turned bright red.

“You’re only making it worse! How much more humiliation are you trying to put me through!” Junko yelled. After shaking her body to free herself from Akuto, she swung down at him with all of her strength. From his position, he couldn’t move away from the attack.

“Crap!”

Seeing that he wouldn’t be able to dodge, Akuto raised the sword held tightly in his hand. Even if he couldn’t avoid the attack, he could still block it. He braced

himself for the impact and put all of his strength into the hand holding the sword.

And then...!

BANG!

A power that even Akuto himself couldn't have imagined erupted from his right arm. There was a sensation of a burning mass of power flowing from his arm into the wooden sword.

—I have to stop!

Akuto thought instinctively, but it was impossible to stop the outpouring of power. The moment he thought the heat would be released from the sword, there was an explosion of light between Akuto and Junko.

The center of the classroom was filled with a pure white light. The blast easily broke through the mana field that Miss Mitsuko had put up, and spilled out into the classroom.

"Get down!" Miss Mitsuko shouted in surprise.

In the same moment, the roar of the explosion filled the classroom.

Miraculously, none of the students were injured. But the walls of the classroom had been blown apart on all sides. Akuto and Junko stood frozen and dumbfounded, in the middle of all the other students who were covered in ash and tile debris.

In the blink of an eye, this incident became known to the entire school. Based on this, the entire rest of the student body decided exactly what they thought of Akuto.

2 - The Odd Observer

“Well, it wasn’t your fault. You were just counter-attacking after being challenged to a duel, that’s all,” said Miss Mitsuko to Akuto in the school infirmary.

“I didn’t actually counter-attack, though...”

“It’s just a formality. If we don’t put it like that, then you’ll be charged the cost for rebuilding the classroom. Hmm, but in truth, you don’t understand anything that happened, right?” Miss Mitsuko said, looking troubled.

Just as she said, Akuto had absolutely no idea what had happened. As he racked his brains with a perplexed expression, Miss Mitsuko continued.

“Mana fills the air, and you create effects by shaping that air. Energy is poured into the Earth from the power plant at the center of the imperial capital, and mana resonates with that energy. That’s why on the surface, mana appears to be energy... This is all common magic knowledge, correct?”

Akuto already knew that much.

“But there’s more that you don’t know about mana and energy. After all, that’s what you came to this academy to study. You see, mana can be stored inside the bodies of living things, and energy can be extracted from them. It’s pure calorie consumption, essentially. The amount of mana stored differs from person to person. The more mana in your body, the easier it is to produce a large effect, even if it’s based on the mana present in the atmosphere. A person’s will is conveyed from the electricity in their brain. That electricity manipulates the mana in a person’s body, and resounds with the mana outside their body. This is the composition of magic. This is also the reason people have different levels of magic ability. The true indicators of magical ability are a strong will that is capable of managing the electricity in the brain and the amount of mana stored in one’s body. This information isn’t kept secret, but most ordinary people go their whole lives without knowing this.”

“Then, that means I caused that explosion?”

“You catch on quick, huh. That wooden sword collects mana to increases its durability, but you gathered too much mana and it discharged with an explosion.”

“So basically, I manipulated a non-standard amount of mana... An amount that a wooden sword used for martial arts couldn’t handle, is what you’re saying?

“That’s it. Incidentally, I also have to include that you destroyed my mana field. I’m not a teacher here just for show you know. In the past, people have said I have abilities only found in a person every ten years... It’s unbelievable that I would be bested by a student... Oh well, it’s in the past. You’re quite an unusual case.” Miss Mitsuko’s forced and hollow laughter didn’t even come close to sounding natural. It seemed that Akuto truly did hold an impossible amount of power inside of him.

“It’s a miracle that no one was injured. Somehow, it appears that you managed to unconsciously control the release of your energy, but...”

“But the next time things might not go so smoothly, is what you’re saying?” Akuto followed his words with a heavy sigh.

“That’s right. Our students quarrel a lot, too... So, I’m saying that we don’t know what will happen if you get into a fight.”

“Telling you that I won’t fight anyone probably isn’t enough of a guarantee, is it?” Even if Akuto didn’t want to fight anyone, there would definitely be students who would try to attack him anyway. Particularly, Junko. Akuto felt dejected.

“That’s not going to work. We’d need you to train and learn how to control your magic power. You also need to grow as a person so you can stop provoking people...” Miss Mitsuko trailed off into silence, like she was expecting a reply from Akuto. Sensing the answer that she was waiting for, he nodded.

“I understand. Please call for an observer.” Akuto sighed. Someone could observe Akuto as a student here, just as the principal had said. His daily life would be under surveillance, but it seemed that they would also act as his

bodyguard.

—Things weren't supposed to end up like this...

Akuto let out another sigh.

According to the message that Miss Mitsuko had received, it sounded like the observer would already arrive tomorrow.

"Hmm, this might sound harsh, but until the observer arrives, be on your best behavior, okay? Until then, if anything else happens, get in touch with me immediately," she said, then put her contact address into Akuto's student handbook.

"Finally... Hey," Miss Mitsuko added on, her eyes suddenly sparkling. "I was wondering if you'd sign a contract with me now, so I can have your body after your death?"

"Absolutely not."

o

Breathing a sigh of relief, Akuto returned to the dorm. But now, even the dorm had stopped being a place where he could relax. As soon as he entered, Hiroshi ran up to him and greeted him by bowing so low that it seemed like he was going to lick Akuto's shoes.

"Wai— Wait a sec, Miwa—"

"That's no good, boss! Please, call me Hiroshi!" Hiroshi voluntarily acted as Akuto's herald as he showed him into the dorm.

"Out of the way! Make way for the future Demon King!" Hiroshi threatened the onlooking students in the dorm.

—I need to do something about this guy...

"Hey, can you cut that out?" Akuto said, and Hiroshi turned around as if he was deeply shocked.

"B-But boss, why?!"

"What are you trying to do, make everyone scared of me?"

"I-I see! I thought you wanted to rule through fear, but I was wrong, wasn't I?!

I shoulda known! You're intending on gradually gaining control of the students' hearts, then!"

—Even if that was true, why the heck would you say that in front of everyone?

"Uh, that's not it. Anyway, can you stop with the special treatment?"

"I see, so you're going to take hold of this academy from the position of a normal student, I get it!" Hiroshi's eyes were sparkling and he was panting with excitement.

—What does he mean by "take hold?"

But knowing better than to voice his question, Akuto didn't say anything about it and spoke emphatically to Hiroshi.

"Look, I'm trying to live a normal life. It'll make trouble for me if you don't treat me normally. And I already stand out as it is, so if you don't stop threatening the people around us like that—" But while Akuto tried to explain, he suddenly heard a shout come from down the hall.

"Are you the guy who blew up his classroom?"

Two students walked up to Akuto, and out of the corner of his eye, he saw Hiroshi's face pale in response.

—That's why I told you to stop saying stuff like that...

The two students were large, and their sneering expressions made it clear they were the local delinquents of this elite academy. While they seemed to be bad characters, Akuto was no stranger to having an accidental warped and twisted first impression, so he couldn't fault another person for being the same.

"I apologize for the trouble I have caused. It was only an accident," Akuto said. At this, and the two started laughing mockingly.

"'I apologize for the trouble I caused!'" The two imitated Akuto's voice as they spoke, getting up in his face.

"Anyone with a little bit of sense can blow up a classroom. So don't be so full of yourself."

—Ugh...This is such a pain. I wonder why they're getting so worked up over

their petty sense of pride. Why are people this stupid even alive? I wonder if they're ever embarrassed by the fact they're still breathing?

Akuto thought this to himself candidly. But then without thinking of the consequences, it was Akuto in his irritation who tried to show off in front of them.

"If that's the case, then go ahead and have yourselves an explosion contest tomorrow. However, I want to study in peace so I'd like it if you could do it far away from me."

The two seemed a little flustered by Akuto's daring. But they still came up with a retort while laughing scornfully.

"You mean to tell me a guy who causes trouble like that wants to 'study in peace?'"

"I'm famous, so people can't get enough of me. Just like you two. There's a lot of guys like you who want my autograph, but aren't honest enough with themselves. So they try to pick a fight instead."

The faces of the two students changed color upon hearing Akuto's sarcastic remarks.

"This ain't the time to be talking all cocky like that. You know what's gonna happen to you with that attitude, right?"

"Let's see... Since there's two of you, does that mean you're gonna start showing me your two-person comedy routine?"

"You ass—" The two of them bristled in anger, but when Akuto raised his hand slightly to ready himself to fight, they flinched and backed off.

"A-Anyway, don't go actin' all high and mighty, is what we're sayin'." They turned around on their heels and walked away.

—At an elite school like this, THOSE are supposed to be the tough guys? They've got their heads up their asses! These kinds of fools have pathetic personalities that'll only lead to them being used by others. I wonder what would happen if I decided I was going to manipulate them.

After Akuto finished his train of thought, he realized for himself how

dangerous his thinking was. It was Hiroshi's words that pulled Akuto back to reality.

"That was incredible, boss!"

"Like I said, cut it out with that stuff..."

"Huh? But those two, they were upperclassmen!"

"I think it's pointless to get hung up on stuff like that. It just means they were born a year earlier, that's all. Though, I do think it's important to be polite and courteous."

Akuto spoke without thinking, and looking at Hiroshi, immediately knew that he had screwed up. Hiroshi's face was bright red, and he stared at Akuto with a look of respect.

—I see... Basically, deep in my heart, I have contempt for others my age who have no responsibility or proper understanding of social customs. When that attitude of mine comes to the surface, some people admire it, I guess... All the more so when I back it up with violence.

Akuto calmly introspected, but while he was now aware of the problem, he still had no idea what to do.

—I shouldn't have only focused on school and work while I was back home...

"Well, anyway, it's time for us to go our separate ways. I'm going to stay in my room until it's time to eat," Akuto said, trying to escape.

"Huh? That can't be, boss. I thought I'd show you around the dorm and the school," Hiroshi said, looking dejected. Upon hearing this, Akuto had another idea.

—Wait, if I understand my own shortcomings, then that means I can apologize to Hattori. She is like a mass of responsibility and social awareness. That's what made me like her, after all. It should be fine if I just properly explain myself.

"In that case, can you tell me how I can enter the girls' dorm?" Akuto asked. His intentions were completely innocent, though his request indicated the contrary. "I'm sure there are procedures to go through. I still haven't apologized to Hattori."

Hiroshi clapped his hand, looking pleased.

“Just as I thought, you really are amazing, boss! I can show you the girls’ dorm. You don’t need to follow any procedures or anything!”

“Thank you.”

“Now this is getting me excited!”

—Excited? Just from going to the girls’ dorm?

Although Akuto was a little confused by the fuss Hiroshi was making, as if they were going on a school trip, he followed his lead.

Hiroshi exited the dorm and began to walk along the exterior wall. The surrounding area consisted of a small grove of trees, and while there was a pathway, it didn’t seem to be used often as there was no light source to guide them.

“I thought there was a hallway that separated the two dorms,” Akuto said. The boys’ and girls’ dorms were in two conjoined fortresses, so there should have been a pathway connecting the two.

“You’re going to the class rep’s room, right? In that case it’s better to come from outside,” Hiroshi assured Akuto, grinning.

“Why?”

“Because her room is along the wall on the second floor.” Hiroshi took out his student handbook and opened it. A layout of the girls’ dorm room assignments appeared on the screen.

“The layout of the girls’ dorm is distributed to everyone?”

“Just to the girls.”

“Huh?”

“I worked hard to get my hands on it. C’mon, you know how it is! The information I have is popular with the other guys.”

—I have no idea what he’s talking about...

Akuto tilted his head in thought. After walking close to ten minutes through the woods, he saw that they had passed into the girls’ section of the dorm.

“We have to be careful from here on out.” Hiroshi lowered his voice and crouched.

“Wait, are we doing something—”

“Shh!” Hiroshi put his finger up to his lips and shushed Akuto.

“I didn’t ask you to help me *sneak* in,” Akuto said in a panic.

“Yeah but, you’re meeting the class rep, right? If you went in from the front, it would be a big scene!” Hiroshi grinned, as if he was proud of his cleverness.

“Yeah... That’s true.” Akuto was satisfied with the answer. Junko probably wouldn’t accept his apology if it was in front of everyone.

“That, and when a boy and a girl are meeting, it’s customary for the boy to go to the girl’s window.”

“Ah, I see. This will make less trouble than going in through the front.”

“Yeah, well... Okay, it’s that window.” Hiroshi pointed upwards. The wall stuck out around the side of the window, and along the way there were plenty of bricks that he could grab onto. So climbing up seemed to be feasible, at least.

“You’re saying I have to climb up there?”

“That’s right. After all, boss, you still can’t use flight magic, right?” Hiroshi replied matter-of-factly. “When you go to a girl’s room, the custom is to give three short taps on the window, followed by three longer ones.”

“So that’s how, huh...” Akuto nodded, and Hiroshi patted him on the back.

“Alright then, knock ’em dead, boss!”

“Huh? Uh...” Akuto was puzzled, but Hiroshi ran off with a chipper “bye” and a wave of his hand.

—What the actual hell... Well, if that’s the way it’s done, then that’s what I’ve got to do.

Akuto grabbed onto the wall. The window was only on the second floor, so he was able to climb up to it without much difficulty. Akuto began to peek inside but hesitated a moment.

—It would be rude to peek in if she’s in the middle of changing or something...

So Akuto removed his hand from the wall and knocked on the window.

Knock, knock, knock. Thud, thud, thud.

There were a few moments of silence before the window opened with a violent bang. Even from where he was, Akuto could feel a gust of wind caused by the slam of the window opening. Although he was looking from the side of the window, Akuto could still feel the murderous intent behind it.

—She's pretty angry. All I can do is apologize as sincerely as possible.

But when he saw the look of rage on her face when she looked out of the window, he was surprised by exactly how angry she still was.

"How *dare* you! You bastard, how far will you go to shame me?!" Junko was beyond anger — her voice sounded like a wail of lamentation.

"Wait, wait, wait! I came to apologize!"

"Why the hell would you come to apologize by using the signal a man would use to sneak into his lover's bedroom?!"

—That's what the two sets of three knocks meant?!

Akuto realized to his horror.

"W-Wait, I was tricked into thinking that was the proper etiquette for the situation!"

"That's because everyone is misunderstanding our relationship! You've made a fool of me! Now there's only one thing I can do! To clear this all up, I'll crush you!" Junko took out her wooden sword.

"I-I'm sorry, it's totally my fault! I didn't intend—"

"Then what did you intend to do, Demon King?!"

Akuto crawled around the wall of the girls' dorm as he dodged Junko's sword.

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, I'm not the Demon King or anyth—"

"If you want to prove you're not the Demon King, then let me crush you! If you lose, then that would mean that you aren't the Demon King!"

Akuto knew that she was probably right, but he couldn't afford to let himself

to be beaten to a pulp by a wooden sword with such a strong intent to kill behind it.

“That’s what I’m saying, it’s a misunderstanding! I like you and—”

“I said to stop saying things like that!” Junko shouted. The students in the other rooms nearby heard the uproar and began throwing open their windows one after another.

“Oh, that’s the transfer student!”

“Yeah... Having lover’s quarrel with Junko?”

“Is it true they tried to commit lover’s suicide in the classroom?”

The girls began gossiping from their windows. Akuto realized that this was getting pretty bad, and skirted down the wall.

“I-It’s a misunderstanding, just a misunderstanding! Once you’ve calmed down, I’ll come back to apologize!” As he said this, Akuto turned around and looked up. Flying into his field of view was a pair of pure white underwear, and not just normal underwear, but the loincloth that only the truest of Suhara followers wore.

Naturally, Junko had jumped down from the window without at all caring about her skirt flying up.

“Hiyaaaaah!”

“Crap!” Akuto just barely dodged the aerial attack by rolling into the woods behind him.

“C-Calm down!” Akuto pleaded, running away as he evaded the slashing attacks coming from behind him.

“Don’t waste your breath!” There was still murderous intent behind Junko’s sword.

—At this rate, one of us is going to get hurt...

Akuto then remembered that Miss Mitsuko had told him to contact her if there was an emergency. Taking out his student handbook, Akuto swiftly selected Miss Mitsuko’s contact address and held the handbook up to his

cheek.

“Hm? Some kind of trouble?”

“Y-Yes, Miss Mitsuko! I’m under attack by Hattori!”

“Why did you go see her...” Miss Mitsuko replied, sounding exasperated.

“I thought it would work out somehow!”

“...Well, alright. Don’t let go of your student handbook, okay? Your observer just arrived. If you have your handbook, they can trace your mana and head over to you.”

“That’s great.” Panting, Akuto looked behind him.

Junko seemed to be well-trained, and was vigorously following behind Akuto. He himself was an excellent runner due to his delivery job, so he was quite impressed by Junko’s stamina.

“...How long until they get here?”

“Who knows... I think it’ll be soon, though. They should be able to teleport there, right?” Miss Mitsuko said, and terminated the telepathic link.

“M-Miss Mitsuko...” As Akuto called out to her, the ground under his feet suddenly disappeared.

“Huh?” Suddenly, he was floating... and then falling. Naturally when you’re in the middle of the woods, the trees can prevent you from seeing cliffs.

Akuto felt his body slamming into things as he fell through the brush with rusting and crackling sounds. Before long, he felt his back impact the ground with a loud thud. For a moment, his breathing stopped and he felt numb. After that, a dull pain attacked his entire body.

“Uh...augh...”

Groaning as he inhaled, Akuto looked around the area to try and grasp the situation. It seemed that he was in some kind of bamboo grove. It looked like there was a break in the forest of beech trees or whatever else was at the top of the cliff, and bamboo was growing here in a colony.

—If the bamboo had been cut, I probably would have been stabbed. I was

lucky. And at least now I've gotten away from Hattori. The observer will be able to find me if I stay here, I guess...

Be that as it may, it seemed likely that Junko would find him quickly if he stayed there. Akuto checked that his wounds weren't too severe and then moved farther into the bamboo grove.

—Jeez. This sure escalated quickly. It's so frustrating that I'm stuck until the observer arrives.

Inwardly complaining, Akuto continued wandering aimlessly.

Suddenly, he noticed a human figure in the grove. The setting sun was almost out of sight, so all Akuto could see was a silhouette. He braced himself for a moment, but the silhouette didn't charge toward him to attack, so it probably wasn't Junko. Akuto sighed with relief, and it seemed that the figure had heard him and noticed his presence.

"Who has come to visit me?" It was a young girl's voice. The voice was exuberant and carefree.

"Who are *you*? You aren't my observer, are you?" Akuto said, thinking that shouldn't be the case, but he was met with an affirmation.

"Yes. I'm an observer."

"Phew, that's great. You came to me, right?" Akuto said, and then a lively voice echoed through the bamboo grove.

"That's right. We don't know if you came to me, or if I came to you, do we? Yes, it must be fate! Are you the prince? Could the wounds on your lovely face and body be from the thorn forest you crossed to come and see me?"

—Observers certainly have an interesting way of saying things. I guess she's right, for me, that school is quite like a forest of thorns.

"Yes, you could say that. I'm in a huge mess, and I was waiting for you. From your voice you seem to be a girl, but since you're an observer that means that you'll protect me, right?"

"You want me to protect you? That's true, protecting the prince has started to become the girl's duty, hasn't it? Besides, I'm an observer, right? I watch over

this school and this world! The changing of the seasons, the changes in people! Yes... Isn't the flow of history beautiful enough to leave you spellbound?"

"Does an observer need to be so poetic?"

—She's somewhat strange...

"Yes, I'm an observer. I am your observer," she said in a sing-song voice, or rather, she actually sang these words. Then the observer stepped forward in front of Akuto.

Long hair flowed through the wind in front of him. Akuto thought that she had stepped directly out of the evening sun. She had beautiful red hair, with several tufts on top of her head that were swaying back and forth as if her hair was a flickering flame.

"Okay prince, what should we do now?" She was wearing the Academy's uniform. She slightly lifted her skirt, greeting Akuto.

"Er, can you stop with the prince stuff? Besides, it's kind of dangerous right now. You know the situation, right?"

"There are quite a lot of situations at hand, you know. What I know is that you came here covered in wounds. Just from that alone, I know that there is danger." Clenching her fist tightly, she raised her head.

Her face looked unusually calm despite how fired up she was. Despite her well-defined and strong features, she had a gentle air about her. She wasn't drop-dead gorgeous, but her appearance gave off positive and comforting vibes. Her face made you feel sleepy just looking at it.

"Well it's fine as long as you realize I'm in danger, but—" An echoing shout interrupted Akuto mid-sentence.

"I found you, bastard!"

Akuto braced himself.

"Oh my..." The red-haired girl raised a calm voice and looked back and forth between Akuto's face and Junko, who had appeared in the bamboo grove. Then she turned to Akuto with a very soft smile.





“That’s the danger, isn’t it? If that’s the case, then I will protect you.”

—*Wow, she seems pretty calm.*

Up until then, Akuto had thought that she was somewhat strange, but with her attitude, he started to believe that she was an observer after all.

The girl stepped out in front of Junko, full of confidence. Courageously, she stood ready to defend with her magic wand.

“Out of the way! Idiot! What are you doing?!” Junko hurled insults at the girl.

The red-haired girl spread her arms out wide and replied with dauntless resolve.

“I won’t move! This person is precious to me!” It was a serious voice, as if she was about to protect her lover.

The color in Junko’s face changed from the original frenzied and enraged blood-red into a dark, hateful look. She looked towards Akuto and yelled.

“Bastard! Do you make a move on every woman you meet?!”

“You misunderstand, we just met each other for the first time!”

“Exactly! You would make a pass even at women you’ve met for the first time?!” Junko took up a fighting stance and brandished her wooden sword, then advanced towards Akuto. But the red-haired girl forced herself in Junko’s path.

“Move!”

“I won’t!”

Junko tried moving left and right, but no matter what, the girl stood in front of her. Looking impatient, Junko jumped backwards and took up a stance with her sword held at the ready in front of her.

“In that case I’ll slip past you!” Junko closed her eyes in concentration for a moment, and when she opened her eyes, it happened. Shockingly, Junko somehow split her body in two.

Akuto couldn’t believe what he was seeing. The only thing he could think was that there was a second Junko in front of him. Each of their movements were

separate from each other, and it looked as if twins were moving in front of his eyes.

“This is the magic that has been passed down through my family! One of these bodies is fake, but even the fake still has the same power as my real body!” The two Junkos split up, one going right and one going left, and tried to run around the red-haired girl.

Akuto didn’t know what to do. He had no idea what the red-haired girl planned to do next. One of the two Junkos was sure to slip past her, but since Akuto didn’t know which one that would be, he couldn’t ready himself for the attack. He tried to keep his eyes on the two Junkos, while also keeping the red-haired girl in his sights.

—An observer should be a pro in combat, so she should make her move before me... Wait, huh?

The girl was turning her head from right to left, looking unsure what to do.

Both of the Junkos slipped past the girl in the blink of an eye. Then the two of them both sidestepped at the same time and fanned out in an equal distance on either side of Akuto. They intended to launch an attack at Akuto at the exact same time so he wouldn’t be able to dodge.

“Hyaaaaah!”

“Haaaaa!”

Yelling, they leapt at Akuto.

—Huh? Does this mean she isn’t my observer after all? That means I’m on my own. In that case, if I dodge the right...and block the left with my arm!

Coming to a decision, Akuto braced himself for the simultaneous attacks. As expected, due to her overwhelming rage, Junko’s movements were simple enough that Akuto was be able to predict the trajectory of her attacks.

—If I can just estimate the timing, I’ll be able to evad—

“Augh!”

As Akuto was trying to time the attacks, he suddenly lost his balance as he felt a yank at his legs. It was an “attack” from an unexpected angle, from the red-

haired girl. She nearly bowled Akuto over as she suddenly clung to him.

“I’ll protect you!”

“Whaaat?!”

Akuto was caught off guard by the unexpected move. He couldn’t do anything about it in the moment, so he was pushed to the ground and tumbled down along with the red-haired girl.

Junko’s swords relentlessly swung down from the right and left as the two remained collapsed on the ground, looking as if they were embracing one another. It was already too late to try and evade the attacks. Akuto tried to tear himself away from the red-haired girl, but she was desperately clinging to him.

—All I can do is stop the blow... But, if I can’t block it, then it’s going to hit this girl, so... In order to completely stop the attack... I have to break the swords.

Akuto made his decision. He would break the swords with his arms. He remembered the sensation in his arm from when he had gripped the sword in the classroom, the mass of heat he’d felt radiating into the sword. That sensation was still there, and he had a feeling he could do it even without holding a sword of his own.

—If I can control the power and cause an explosion...

Akuto took a moment to focus his mind.

—This time, I’ll use the same kind of power that entered my arm from the wooden sword before, and take it directly out of the empty air!

The swords came down at the same time on either side of him.

“Hah!” Akuto let out a shout and he raised both his arms up. He could feel a mass of heat and power begin to flow through his arms. He trapped the sensation and made it erupt from the center of his arms. A violent flow of power poured outward.

“Ah?!”

“Eh?!”

Both of the Junkos let out yelps of surprise as the light radiating from Akuto’s

arms forced the swords back. Exerting even more power, the light grew exponentially brighter and smashed the wooden swords, and for a second he broke out into a smile.

—I did it...

But...

—Huh?! It won't stop!

Akuto panicked, realizing that he had lost control of his power.

An explosion just as powerful at the one back in the classroom — no, even more powerful — burst forth from Akuto's arms.

"Aaaahhh!" The real Junko let out a scream while her clone disintegrated into pieces and disappeared in the blast.

There was a swelling sphere of light, and then a loud, explosive bang. The cloud kicked up by the explosion was so huge that it could definitely be seen from far off in the distance.

When the flash of pure white had faded, Akuto looked upon a disastrous scene. It was like he was in a war zone, or at the impact point of a meteorite.

With Akuto at its center, a crater around ten meters in diameter had formed, and the surrounding bamboo had been cut down at the crater's edge. Junko lay unconscious on the ground. Her uniform was torn to shreds, and she had clearly been injured in the blast.

"Crap..." Akuto muttered. It appeared that, unlike last time, he had been so completely focused on breaking the swords that he ended up engulfing Junko in the explosion. Regret surged through him.

As he tried to get up, Akuto realized that the red-haired girl was still sitting on top of him. It seemed she was dazed from the impact, but it appeared that Akuto's movements had woken her. With a start, she surveyed the surrounding area.

"Th-This must be...!" The red-haired girl looked frightened.

"Yeah, s-sor—" Akuto opened his mouth to try and calm the red-haired girl down for the time being, but her reaction was completely unexpected.

“I’m sorry! Oh my! Goodness gracious! The power sleeping inside of me must have awakened! Faced with a crisis, my savage and ferocious power revealed itself!” As if she was the main character in a tragedy, she placed her hands on her cheeks and shook her head back in forth in lamentation. Dumbfounded, Akuto looked up at her.

“Uh... Um... That’s not quite...”

“Oh! Thank you, you gentle soul, for trying to console me! But it looks like I’ve hurt someone! My only choice is to live out my life as a priestess of Ko-Roh... It would take me the rest of my life to make up for this sin.”

“Sh-She isn’t dead yet... Hey, we have to go help her!” Akuto said in a fluster. At that moment, there was a strange phenomenon.

A few meters from where the two of them were lying, Akuto thought he saw the air shimmer like you would see on hot summer’s day. Then right before his eyes, the fluctuation began to take shape. It appeared that the air was solidifying into a transparent, four-sided object of some sort, like a sheet of glass.

Then, that sheet of glass opened like a door. As it opened, in a particularly surprising turn of events, a hand appeared and poked itself out from the door.

The hand was a girl’s hand — small and delicate-looking. Then, continuing after the hand, a lovely and petite young girl squeezed through the narrow door and appeared before Akuto.

It was as if the transparent space had forcefully materialized the girl. In other words, the girl had appeared out of thin air.

She seemed to be around the same age as Akuto and the others. Her slim body was wrapped in the Academy’s uniform. She had eye-catching green hair with matching green eyes. Her symmetrical features made her beautiful, but he couldn’t make out any sort of expression from her face. Akuto immediately recognized that she wasn’t human.

—A Liradan!

Akuto was amazed. She was an android known as a Liradan, rumored to only be owned by the rich and powerful of society. With bodies constructed from

mana, they can act like humans and hold a will of their own, but the one thing they were incapable of was having emotions and feelings.

“Akuto Sai, correct? I am your observer, my identifier is ‘Korone.’ I was assigned this task by the god Markt three minutes ago.” Korone bowed to Akuto. Both her movements and the way her rich hair swayed was exactly the same as a human. But as she raised her head, her expression was still blank like a doll’s. Akuto wasn’t sure how to react.

—So THIS is the real observer...

As Akuto sat there dumbfounded, Korone looked to her left and right.

“Verifying that within the last three minutes an incident has occurred. In which case, I carry responsibility for this situation. With regards to your dispute with Junko Hattori, I will begin questioning the both of you, after she has recovered,” Korone said, and then she thrust a hand into the small purse that hung at the waist of her school uniform. From her purse, she took out a white implement that was shaped like a pistol.

“Although I have not received consent, based on medical law, I will begin administering treatment.” Korone walked over to Junko, who was groaning in pain, and pressed the tip of her gun-shaped tool against her. The instrument began to emit a light as it used mana to heal her. The stains of blood and dirt didn’t go away, but the wounds on Junko’s body gradually began to disappear.

“Treatment complete. I have observed trace amounts of foreign bodies and bacteria that have invaded your body. Moving forward, I predict that you will experience a sudden onset of fever and feelings of fatigue. I recommend that you rest,” Korone said as she stood up.

It appeared that somehow Junko had returned to consciousness. But when she looked towards Akuto, the attitude she had up until then changed completely. She had an anguished look on her face. Rivers of tears fell from her almond-shaped eyes.

“Oh...!” Akuto tried to call out to Junko, but she quickly covered up her shredded clothes with her hands and ran off crying.

“W-Wait!” Akuto tried to stand up, but the red-haired girl was still on top of

his stomach. He lay down on the ground again, and remaining in this foolish position, looked up at the sky.

“I will question her about the events at a later time. First, I will start with you.” Korone peered into Akuto’s face from above.

“You’re the observer...?”

“Please call me Korone. I will be attending school as your classmate starting tomorrow, and I will defend you from situations like today’s. As I mentioned previously, I will be questioning you about this dispute. The understanding that I have of the situation is as follows: Junko Hattori became agitated from coming in contact with you, a quarrel ensued, you fled here, after which there was a struggle where you caused slight injury to Junko Hattori. Now, I would like to verify your intentions at the time of the struggle. Did you purposely intend to cause Junko Hattori harm? Please answer yes or no,” Korone said in a dispassionate tone of voice.

Akuto was annoyed by the overly business-like tone of her responses, but he resigned himself to the fact that this must just be how Liradans are.

“I had no intentions of harming her. I tried to break the sword and—” Akuto opened his mouth and began to talk, but suddenly from his side — or more precisely, from right on top of him — his words were cut short.

“You’re wrong! It was because my power awakened!” The red-haired girl, in the same tone of voice as before, again asserted her prior declaration.

“H-Hold on...” Akuto tried to interrupt her, but the girl wasn’t listening.

“I’m the one who caused that explosion! Oh no, what should I do? This is a sin, right? Yes, it’s definitely a sin! Hey, what do I have to do to be forgiven?”

“I will investigate fault after I receive witness testimony. While limited, I am able to communicate with the gods, and as such, I have limited special executive privilege.”

“Communicating with the gods! Oh no, that’s serious! That means that what you’re saying has to be true, doesn’t it? Can you forgive me for my mistake?”

“As noted, I will investigate fault after receiving witness testimony,” Korone

replied solemnly. Apparently Korone simply wasn't capable of having any attitude outside of her normal seriousness.

"That's right! I tried to protect him, the prince, as his observer! Please believe me!" the red-haired girl pleaded.

"Th-That's what I mean, wait a minute! You latch onto something and just don't let go, do you..." Akuto tried to get a word in, but in the end it was a fruitless endeavor.

"He acknowledged me as his observer, and I protected him!"

"I can see an inconsistency between the situation and your testimony. In addition, it is inconsistent with Akuto Sai's testimony. Testimonies given to me are recorded as formal statements. As such, they can be considered perjuries, so be careful," Korone warned the girl. Then, the insides of Korone's eyes flickered with light, and she spoke.

"Inquiry complete. Identity: First-Year High School Student, Class A, Keena Soga."

"P-Perjury?! I've gone that far?! Oh no, what should I do, I have no idea! On top of injuring the class rep in that explosion, now I've committed yet another sin?! And how did you know my name?!"

The red-haired girl — Keena — appeared to be utterly confused. She twisted her body while she was on top of Akuto's waist, so her skirt flipped up and she moved into a position where her panties were firmly rubbing up against Akuto.

"Wai..." Understandably, Akuto's face grew red.

Then, it appeared that Keena realized what type of position she was in.

"A-Aiyaaaahhh!" Keena rolled off of Akuto with a flop. She fell onto the ground making a flashy M-shaped pose with her legs. When she realized that her panties were again exposed, she hid them with both her hands in a fluster.

"Unh..." Her face red with embarrassment, Keena looked up at Akuto with eyes that looked ready to cry.



“So-Sorr—” Akuto began to apologize when Keena suddenly ran off. “Wait, please!”

Akuto ran after her, trying to call for her to stop. They were in a bamboo grove, so while visibility wasn’t great, there wasn’t anywhere you could completely hide yourself. So it should have been easy for Akuto to pursue her. However, after Keena ran behind a thick area of bamboo, he realized that he couldn’t make out her shape at all. The bamboo shouldn’t have been enough to hide her completely. He walked around to the back of the crowded growth of bamboo but there still wasn’t any sign of Keena.

“What?”

But when Akuto looked at the ground, he was surprised. Left behind there was a complete school uniform. Akuto went to pick them up. They were the exact clothes Keena had been wearing up until then, as there was still some body heat left on them. Just a few feet in front of them, there was a shirt on the ground, and even further past there, her underwear.

—*What the heck...*

Akuto was puzzled. He got close to the panties, but of course he dared not pick them up. When he got a glimpse of the white underwear with some sort of character printed on the back, he immediately heard a small “Eek!” whispered from nearby.

“Huh?” Akuto instinctively looked around the area. No one was there.

But he noticed a small floating light in the air. It wasn’t giving off its own light, but it was an insect-sized object that was reflecting and sparkling in the light from the evening sun. It was floating just a little bit above Akuto’s line of sight.

—*A stone?* Akuto thought he was looking at a small, shiny stone flying in the sky, but in an instant that object flew off into the distance.

Korone came up behind Akuto.

“She disappeared. I thought about trying to chase after her, but I am no longer able to track her location,” she said. “Unfortunately, it seems that Keena Soga’s student handbook was left back at the dorm.”

“Right, you can pin down someone’s location as long as they have their handbook, can’t you?”

“Correct. However, it does not apply to cases where mana has been manipulated to keep its disturbance at a minimum. The reason I was delayed in coming here was because you manipulated your mana and tried to mask your presence.”

“I didn’t do anything like that.”

“You were trying to escape, so you must have done so without realizing it. Keena Soga is doing the same thing right now. I cannot trace her mana. In her case though, I’m sure it is deliberate.”

“Deliberate?”

“It seems that she can completely mask her mana.”

“That’s amazing. But then, why did she leave her clothes...”

“I do not understand the reason for that.”

“Right? Why did she do that, I wonder,” Akuto said, then grew silent for a while. Something about having a conversation with Korone felt unnatural and artificial.

“...Hey. What should I do for now?” he asked.

“Please go about your daily life normally,” Korone answered clearly.

“...Normally?”

“Yes. I have been instructed to ensure your safety and your free will, to the maximum of my abilities. That is what observing and guarding you entails.”

“And if I happen to do something bad?”

“I have been ordered to immediately give you a suitable punishment.” Korone said, matter-of-factly.

—I feel like she just told me something terrifying, but...

Yet due to the girl’s appearance, Akuto didn’t feel scared of her.

“Alright, so for this incident?”

“I’ve verified that you had no intention to harm Junko Hattori. I have the right to trace the mana inside your body. You have given me permission to do so. Through this, I was able to analyze the feelings that you held in your heart in the past few minutes.”

“You’re saying you can read my thoughts?”

“Only your emotions. Up until a few minutes ago, the largest emotion you had was one of confusion. Other emotions include compassion and sexual arousal.”

“Y-You don’t have to go that far!” Akuto raised his voice in spite of himself. But Korone remained calm.

“I cannot follow that order when it is a necessary part of my duties.”

“...Is that so.”

“Yes. But I have been ordered to ensure that you retain freedom in your daily life. It is most important to eliminate danger. From that point of view, I recommend that you exercise caution with regards to your relationship with Junko Hattori. With Keena Soga, she is considered to have violated the law. Since her role in this event is insignificant, I believe her to be of no relevance. But after this, if she continues to pretend to be your observer, then a suitable response will become necessary,” Korone said. Akuto wasn’t sure how to respond to that.

“...I don’t really get it. But that girl is a classmate of mine, you said?”

“Yes. I’ve retrieved Keena Soga’s attendance records and it seems that she was absent today. I believe this is the reason that you two were not acquainted with one another.”

“Hmm, I wonder if I’ll see her tomorrow?”

“It is not possible for me to make those types of predictions.”

“No, I just mean... You know, her clothes. We will be able to get them to her?” Akuto pointed to the clothes that were spread out on the ground.

“All we need to do is bring them to the caretaker of the girls’ dormitory. If that task is difficult for you, then I will handle it.” Korone started to pick up and collect the clothes. “Well then, let us deliver these. Then I will escort you back

to the dorm.”

Akuto nodded along with Korone’s words, but part of what she said stuck in the back of his mind.

—Escort me back to the dorm?

He was quickly given the answer to his question. After delivering the clothes to the girls’ dorm, Akuto returned to the boys’ dormitory, but Korone was stuck closely behind him.

As to be expected, the other male students in the dorm were in an uproar. It was shocking to see a girl walk proudly into the boys’ dorm. Even more, it was inconceivable for a rare beauty like a Liradan girl to enter the dorm unnoticed. The dorm halls were in a commotion as students exclaimed that Akuto was fooling around with another girl again.

“Um... This may be a foolish question to ask, but how far are you intending to follow me?” Akuto asked, and Korone answered without paying any attention to the gazes of those around them.

“If I see an indication that you intend to escape, then I will follow you into the restroom, and the bath. If there are no such signs, then I will guarantee your privacy, but I basically intend to live with you.”

The boys in the dorm made an even bigger commotion upon hearing their conversation. At this, Korone raised her hand and summoned the speaker. Her broadcast echoed throughout the dorm.

“To all of you in this dorm. Please pardon the interruption. I am an observer dispatched by the imperial government. Please call me Korone. I have been charged with observing Akuto Sai. I ask for your cooperation. Being a female modeled observer in a boys’ dorm is slightly inappropriate but, my appearance was chosen based on what form would give the observed, Akuto Sai, peace of mind. I will respect the privacy of all those who are not under my observation, so please do not worry. However, be extra careful about any violence or untoward behavior directed at a Liradan. I have been given the authority to resist or hand out immediate punishment, if necessary.”

This time, the dorm fell silent at Korone’s broadcast.

“Um... By ‘respect our privacy,’ are you saying that you’ll keep everything you see a secret?” A nearby boy mustered up the courage to ask Korone shyly.

Korone nodded.

“That’s correct. Even the observed, Akuto Sai, will have a part of his privacy guaranteed, so it shall be the same for him, as well. He and I will be sharing a room, but I will be keeping our lives in there a secret, so I ask for your understanding on this matter.” With that answer, the inside of the dorm again erupted in noise.

She had previously mentioned living with Akuto, but it seemed that she was in fact going to be living with him in the same room.

A strange mixture of envious and pitying gazes focused on Akuto.

“M-Man, you really are so cool, boss!” The only one excited in a positive way was Hiroshi, who seemed to have run away from the girls’ dorm in a panic earlier.

“‘So cool?’ Aren’t you misunderstanding this situation?”

“Even if she’s an observer, I can’t believe you have your own Liradan! You’re incredible, boss!”

Akuto denied this, but Hiroshi was too excited to listen.

Meanwhile during all the commotion, dinner time had arrived. During the meal, Korone stood completely still and unmoving behind Akuto.

“Um... Korone? Aren’t you going to sit?” Akuto asked, meekly. As expected, he couldn’t help but feel anxious.

“There are no seats, and I do not eat food, so no.” Korone answered. In the blink of an eye, Hiroshi stood up and brought over a spare chair.

“Here you go!”

“Are you telling me to sit?” Korone asked, staring at the chair.

“Um... yes...?” Hiroshi replied, confused by her question.

Korone was silent. She was normally expressionless, but now a look of confusion could be seen on her face. After a few seconds, Korone opened her

mouth.

“This is what’s known as ‘kindness,’ isn’t it?” she said, as if she was satisfied with her conclusion. “This is generally analyzed as an action done with an expectation of sexual compensation, but I do not have the authority to analyze your emotions. So under the presumption that this expectation does not apply, allow me to thank you. Thank you.” Korone bowed her head and sat in the chair.

A strained smile appeared on Hiroshi’s face.

“Um... You’re welcome...”

Dinner ended and Akuto withdrew to his room, but he felt uncomfortable and awkward as Korone followed behind him as if it was a matter of course.

“Um... Coming into my room is kind of...”

“Is that so. If it is your wish, then I won’t enter your room,” Korone said, more obediently than Akuto had expected. Akuto felt relieved.

“Ahh, in that case, I’ll ask that you do that. It’d be great if you slept somewhere else. If you talk to the dorm mother, she could probably set you up with a room.” Akuto opened the door and went inside. Korone didn’t follow him in.

“Okay then, see you tomorrow.” Akuto said goodbye to Korone and closed the door. He sat down on the bed and let out a sigh.

A lot had happened already, but he knew that he was in for even more trouble from here on out.

—Hattori... And Soga...

Now by himself, Akuto held his head in his hands. But suddenly he was hit by a strange sensation — he could feel that there was someone outside of his door. Not just outside of the door, but sitting there, and staring at it.

Akuto got up and opened the door.

Green hair and green eyes jumped out at him.

Korone was standing at attention directly outside of the door.

Expressionless and standing perfectly still.

Akuto closed the door.

He waited a few seconds, and then opened it again.

Korone was standing right outside of the door. She hadn't even moved a muscle.

Akuto closed the door.

Then opened it.

Korone, standing at attention.

He closed the door.

Then he opened it.

Korone.

Unable to bear it any further, Akuto broke the silence.

"...Are you intending on staying here until morning?"

Korone nodded.

"Yes. I will observe you, without entering your room," Korone said, matter-of-factly.

"Won't you get tired?"

"I will not," Korone said.

"...Alright. Come in." Akuto had ran out of patience.

"Well then, I will come in." Expressionless as ever, and not looking the least bit pleased, Korone entered the room.

"Ugh..." Letting out another sigh, Akuto once again sat down on his bed.

Korone stood in front of him and stared.

"....."

"....."

"....."

“.....”

“.....Hey?”

“Yes?”

“Won’t you get tired?”

“I will not.”

“You’re interfering with the free will of your observation target, so I’d appreciate it if you could act like a normal roommate,” Akuto said, forcing a smile.

Then Korone grew silent, lost in thought.

“.....?”

“What’s wrong?” Akuto asked, and Korone looked startled.

“...Forgive me. I don’t know what exactly it means to be a ‘normal roommate.’”

“I guess there’s nothing you can do about that, huh. You don’t have emotions, right?”

“Incorrect.” Unexpectedly, Korone denied Akuto’s assumption.

“Huh?”

“I have emotions. Without them, I would be unable to analyze human emotions. To be precise, Liradans do not have an ego,” Korone said.

“Ego?”

“We only have our own identity and are self-aware during our mission. Whether or not expressing emotion is necessary is decided by the ego. If a mission goes on for a long time, then an ego becomes attached to us, and once that point is reached, we are able have functioning emotions.”

“You say some pretty hard to follow stuff...”

“It means that until I become accustomed to this situation, it will most likely be inconvenient for you,” Korone said with a nod.

“So you’re saying once you get used to me, you’ll be able to behave

emotionally?” Akuto said with comprehension.

“That’s correct,” Korone acknowledged. “As such, first I would request some advice on how to behave.”

“Hmmm... Usually, you can sit in my chair or on my bed. When you don’t have anything to do, you can just sleep,” Akuto said.

“Understood.”

“I take my bath in the morning, so I’m going to sleep now. You can go to sleep, too.”

“I see.”

Akuto took off his coat and laid down on the bed. Then, Korone flopped down on the bed next to him.

Laying on his side, Korone’s face was right in front of his. The two of them stared hard at each other.

Korone smelled like a real girl. Akuto’s heart skipped a beat, but Korone’s expression didn’t change in the slightest.



“...Hey.”

“Yes?”

“It’s kind of hard to sleep with you there...”

“I see. Did you become sexually aroused?”

“Hey! Don’t read my emotions!”

At Akuto’s protest, Korone stood up gracefully and looked down on him, without changing her face in the slightest, and replied:

“That was a joke.”

“...Eh?” Akuto looked perplexed, but Korone gave him a sidelong glance and then looked up at the cabinet that was above his closet.

“Yes, it seems that there is nothing currently placed in that storage space, so I will sleep there.” Korone skillfully climbed up to the cabinet and slipped inside.

—I feel like I won’t be able to let my guard down even though she isn’t human...

All Akuto could do was sit there, bewildered. Then he thought to himself that she could just sleep there today for all he cared, and closed his eyes.

“.....”

But for some reason, he felt a restlessness in the air. He opened his eyes and looked up at the cabinet with a start. There, Akuto saw a thin opening in the cabinet door, and from that crack, Korone’s green eyes were staring intently towards him.

“...Hey?”

“Yes?”

“...You’re not messing with me, are you?”

“A little.”

“.....”

“.....”

“.....”

“.....”

“.....Hey?”

“Yes?”

“Having fun?”

“A little.”

“...Well, good for you.”

“Yes.”

—*I don’t get it... I just don’t get it...*

Akuto covered his head with his comforter.

3 - The Scary Upperclassman

The next day, Akuto had an unsettling dream. He felt disoriented when he woke up, so he stayed in bed and stared vacantly up at the ceiling.

It was a dream about the past. All that remained in his mind were feelings of bittersweet nostalgia. The image of glittering jewels stuck in his mind, but he couldn't remember anything about what happened in the dream.

"What was that about...?" Akuto murmured. Just like always, he woke up early in the morning. He checked the clock on top of his desk, and it was still 5:30.

Akuto thought it was better to get up than try to go back to sleep. He stretched as he sat up, but then froze.

"Good morning," came a voice.

"Good morning..." Akuto replied.

Korone's green eyes stared at him from the exact same position she had been the previous night.

"...All night?"

"Yes, and?"

"...You aren't tired?"

"Of course not."

"...Oh well, whatever." Akuto had given up on asking her these kinds of questions.

Korone climbed down from the cabinet that served as her bed. With inhuman agility, she lightly touched down and stood on the floor.

"By the way," Korone suddenly said. "What did you mean by 'what was that about?'"

"I had a dream. I was trying to remember stuff from the past but I couldn't."

“If you wanted to search through your memories, all you need to do is ask and I will assist you. I might be able to glean some information from your brain.”

“I’m going to pass on that. Well then, I’m off to take a bath.”

Akuto made his way to the bathroom. Taking a bath in the mornings was allowed according to the instructions he was given. He left his room, and Korone followed behind him.

“I’m taking a bath.”

“I know.”

“...Uhh...”

“That was a joke. I will wait in front of the changing room,” Korone said with the same expressionless look as always.

Akuto heaved a sigh of relief and walked into the changing room.

It appeared there were a few other students taking a morning shower, as a couple baskets in the changing room had clothes in them. Akuto took off his clothes and entered the bath area. When he entered, two other students taking a shower calmly glanced towards him. Their faces grew stiff. The two students were the same pair that had been provoked by Hiroshi’s fanfare the night before.

Akuto knew that this was going to be irritating, but if he was going to live with them from here on out, the best he could do was to try and get along with them.

“Good morning,” Akuto greeted them and went to rinse his body. The pair called out to Akuto, looking visibly uneasy.

“Yo. You beat up the Class A rep?”

Akuto worried about how best to answer, so he just shrugged his shoulders and replied vaguely.

“It was kind of an accident.”

“C’mon, don’t be so tense. We’re being friendly here.”

“A strange thing to say, isn’t it?” Akuto replied defensively, but as he spoke he

realized that the pair's demeanor was slightly different than before.

"So we weren't aware of it last night, but if you really did beat the class rep... Nah, just the fact that rumor has started spreading around is enough, you gotta be careful."

Their threatening tone of voice hadn't changed, but it seemed they had a reason to say this. They looked like they were scared of something. That's why, to some extent, Akuto felt that they were sincere words of caution.

"I guess it's true then. You're saying people have it out for me?"

"That's not it."

The both of them shook their heads in unison.

"It's not that, it's that the class rep was seriously strong. She defeated all the other third-year middle schoolers."

"So what is it then? You said she defeated everyone else, so in that case, isn't it about people trying to fight me?" Akuto asked, thinking that they weren't making any sense. Then the two of them began to take turns in explaining an unexpected side of the Academy.

"I know it's weird for us to say this but, there are a lot of violent kids at this school."

"Because of that, there is an official system on the surface and an unofficial one behind the scenes that's been created among the students."

"Officially, everything is the same as normal, but unofficially, there are rankings determined by a student's fighting ability."

"Since it's unofficial, there's no one who really knows everything about it, but it's openly discussed between the punks and delinquents here."

—It seems like the same type of delinquents you'd find at any normal school... No, because they fight with magic, I'm sure there are girls in that group as well.

"In that case, the class rep... Does that include Hattori?" Akuto carelessly blurted out.

"She's rank two. The class rep and those guys... There are students here who

are devoted to black magic, or have already decided to use their magic for bad stuff. That's what they're like underneath the surface, man... Anyway, the class rep hates those guys. But she was strong enough to take them, so it all ended up working out for a while."

While the two weren't very eloquent, Akuto was able to understand what they were getting at.

"What you're saying is that no matter the reality of the situation, people are going to think that I'm higher rank than the class rep?" The pair nodded as Akuto finally understood what they were trying to say.

"Yeah. That's how you're going to be recognized. We wouldn't even think about tryin' to screw with you now. But, you gotta be careful. There are guys who aim to be number one."

"I'm not joking around here," Akuto said. "I truly don't want to get involved with that. Besides, I'm under observation by an imperial Liradan from now on." But they interrupted him.

"There are plenty of ways around stuff like that, you know? Anyway, you'd better watch your back. Also, you can think of us as fans, like you said before. If you win a lot of fights and take over the school, then we'll make sure to side with you." The two both clapped Akuto on the back.

"Aren't you just being opportunistic?"

"That's right. So?" With that, the two rinsed their bodies and went to leave the bath area.

"Oh, wait," Akuto called after them.

"What?"

"Who is rank one? You said Hattori was rank two."

"Well, that's..."

The pair both dropped their voices.

"We got no clue."

"You don't know?"

“That’s right. The third-year students are always off finding jobs, so the ranking applies to first and second-years but... We don’t know who’s number one. This is the first time in history it’s been like this.”

“The rank three guy got beaten to a pulp so it seems he knows the identity of the top ranked student, but he’s kept his mouth shut about it. I heard if you bring it up, he just starts trembling.”

“That’s absurd...” Akuto was at a loss for words.

“But, it’s true.”

“Well, it’s not something to stick your nose into. Though, I’m sure they’ll be coming for you.”

The duo laughed as they closed the door to the bath area behind them. As soon as it closed, he heard a deep male voice saying, “Noooo, don’t look!”

Akuto ignored it. Obviously Korone was peeking into the changing room. The voice continued by exclaiming, “Don’t smile with that blank look on your face! Are you saying I’m small?” which backed up Akuto’s theory.

—This school is an insane asylum... Anyway, what can I do to try and make my life here as peaceful as possible? It would be best if I had Hattori’s help getting by, but with the situation as it is... On top of that, even if I try to apologize, I’m sure Korone will forbid me from seeing her... What to do... As long as I’m unable to repair my relationship with Hattori, then the situation is just going to keep getting worse.

Akuto let out a long, drawn-out sigh as he soaked in the bath. After thoroughly soaking his body and rinsing it off, he carefully made sure the lower half of his body was covered before entering the changing room. Korone was peeking in from a crack in the door.

“Why are humans so particular about the size of their penis?” Korone asked from the door. A normal boy would certainly balk at that question, but Akuto was earnest and serious by nature.

“That’s because they say if it’s bigger you’ll have more sexual encounters, and be able to leave behind a lot of children. In the future, the children of these virile men will crowd out and snuff out the offspring of other normal men So

they feel threatened, or so I've heard," Akuto said with a straight face.

"I understand. In that case, please show me your penis. Each time I look at another man's penis, I will compare them and report to you their relative size."

"...That's not happening. Wait, are you teasing me?"

"A little."

With that, Akuto drove the expressionless Korone out of the changing room.

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"Boss! Let's go to school together!" Hiroshi yelled. He had followed after Akuto as he left the dorm.

"Go to school together? But it's right there."

"C'mon don't say that, I've already decided to follow you no matter how short the distance," Hiroshi replied flippantly. He exchanged morning greetings with Korone, who he seemed to have already grown accustomed to.

"That's right... You said you were the go-to person for information, right?" Akuto asked him. Hiroshi looked deeply touched that Akuto was relying on him, and took his hand in his, eyes tearing up with emotion.

"Ask me anything!"

"Listen... Don't get so worked up. It's just that I heard there are these hidden rankings."

"Yes!" Hiroshi replied instantly. "You're now rank two, Boss! That's incredible! I couldn't believe that you were going for a real duel yesterday! I was certain you were in love with her, but I would have never guessed your aim was to sleep with a strong woman, just to get her guard down so you could defeat her!"

—It appears it's been him spreading those rumors after all... I suppose assuming that much was only natural...

"I'm telling you, that's not it. Just forget about that stuff. A-Anyway, so no one knows what the rank one guy looks like?"

"That's right! Just as I thought, you're going to stand up to them so you can

take over the school, right? You always talk like you aren't interested, but you're actually ready to go, aren't you? Wait, are you telling me to figure out who they are? I'll do it! I'll absolutely do it!"

"Uh, no... That's a dangerous thing to talk about, so you don't have to do that. If you don't know, that's fine."

"R-Really? Okay, but you can ask me anything, okay?!" Hiroshi was looking up at something in the sky again, like he was deeply moved.

"So much talk," Korone said. "I won't intervene, but you will be punished for any acts of violence."

"You're telling me if I am attacked to just let them beat me up?"

"No. As long as they are the first to act, there will be no problems."

"Oh, that's what you meant..." Akuto forced a smile.

At that moment, he noticed the commotion that was happening around him. Akuto figured that he'd become the center of attention because they'd moved on to the road that leads from the dorm to the school. But the nature of the commotion was different. Akuto thought it was strange and turned around, where he was startled by the beauty of the girl who stood behind him.

Her long, beautifully well-kept hair reached down to slightly below her waist and looked as if it would start playing harp notes every time the wind blew through it. Her eyes were like something out of a dream, and she wore a gentle smile. Akuto could only describe her as the perfect image of a high-class, beautiful girl.

"Y-You're the idol of our campus, Fujiko Eto!"

Thanks to the transparency of Hiroshi's surprise, Akuto was able to figure out who this person was. What he didn't know was the reason this girl had come up behind him.

"Hello and good morning." Fujiko greeted Akuto. She didn't lower her head in a bow. Akuto judged from the badge on her collar that she was an upperclassman.



“Good morning.” Akuto bowed his head.

“U-Um, what do need from boss?” Hiroshi asked his question ahead of Akuto. Then, Fujiko put her hand up to her mouth and gave a pleasant laugh.

“Pardon me, but the reason I have so rudely interrupted your walk to school today is because I am currently the head of the girls’ dormitory.”

“The head of the dorm?” Akuto was surprised. At the same time, he realized that her reason for seeing him must be to admonish him for what happened yesterday.

“Yes. Yesterday, it seems you came and delivered Soga’s clothes to the girls’ dorm,” Fujiko said in a calm and gentle voice.

“Oh, that was Korone here...” Akuto was surprised that her reason was different from what he had thought, and when he pointed towards Korone, she nodded and started to explain to Akuto in a low voice.

“Yesterday I met Fujiko Eto and I explained to her the various circumstances regarding Keena Soga’s clothes and Junko Hattori’s injuries. Seeing how she’s the head of the dorm, I have provided her with all the necessary information.”

—Then, Eto must know the details of situation and came to talk to me about it. What a good person... And pretty, too. If this is the case, she might help me with Junko.

Akuto lowered his head. Then, he spoke to her in a hushed tone.

“Um, sometime later, could we talk about Hattori and myself?”

“What do you mean?” Fujiko asked quietly, cupping her cheek with a questioning look. Other than the two of them, only Korone and Hiroshi were able to hear the conversation.

“Well... I want to repair our relationship. It’s just, if I meet with her directly, it won’t end well...” Akuto glanced towards Korone. She heard exactly what he’d said and chimed in.

“I do not recommend a face-to-face meeting with Junko Hattori.”

“If that is the case, please allow me to assist you,” Fujiko said. “I will convey

your messages to her, and give you her reply. I have heard about what sorts of actions you have taken, and I don't believe there is the slightest chance that you will become the Demon King."

"Th-Thank you very much!" Akuto bowed his head once again.

"I haven't done anything to warrant such thanks. Please, have a good day." Fujiko passed by Akuto's side. Hiroshi, Korone, and Akuto all stood there gazing vacantly as they watched her walk away.

"Man, she's amazing! She really is elegant, isn't she?!" Hiroshi reaction was overly emotional.

"Jeez..." Akuto grumbled at Hiroshi's reaction. When he moved to start walking again, his hand brushed against something in his pocket.

"Huh?"

There was a piece of paper there.

—I think Eto was the only one who could have put this in here...

Akuto made sure that Hiroshi and Korone didn't see him take the paper out, hiding it back in his pocket.

"Still, you're amazing, boss! To think that Fujiko would come up to you like that!"

"That's not something to get so worked up about..." As Akuto was dealing with Hiroshi, they arrived at the school building.

Naturally, Akuto immediately became the center of attention when he entered the classroom. Yesterday's destruction was still fresh in everyone's minds. It was impossible to forget about, as workers were now busy repairing the outer walls. In addition, rumor had spread that Akuto had bested the class rep with cowardly and underhanded tactics, so the looks he received from the girls were cold and unfriendly.

—What a miserable situation...

It appeared that Junko and Keena were both absent. Their desks remained empty even as it came time for class to start.

“Hello, good morning.” Miss Mitsuko greeted them as she walked into the classroom.

“Looks like Soga and Hattori are both absent. Okay, let’s start class.”

Miss Mitsuko appeared to be in charge of teaching the elementary magical education review class. This was Akuto’s first time hearing it all, so he listened with great interest.

“The ability to summon magic itself is dependent on the way mana is connected to one’s mental state. The mana in your body and the mana in the environment are the same, but these are categorized as external and internal mana. As such, people are separated into those who are skilled at manipulating external mana or those skilled with internal mana. Thus, on the surface, there are two types of magic.

“In addition, the nature of the user influences the way that mana is manipulated. This is broken down into four different types. Energy waves, healing, necromancy, and illusion; each of these is different depending on whether the user manipulates external or internal mana, and this in turn creates eight different forms of magic. When you outline these onto a chart and find which type of magic you are best at, the type of magic directly across from it will be the one you’re least skilled with.”

Even as he tried to pay close attention, Akuto still couldn’t help thinking about the note that was in his pocket. He decided to write down everything that the teacher said — as long as he didn’t think about what each word meant, he could transcribe everything even while dividing his attention.

As Akuto started writing, he checked what Korone was doing. She was sitting in the seat directly behind him, but there weren’t any signs that she would move unexpectedly.

Akuto secretly took out Fujiko’s note. There were magical letters etched into the note paper. It seemed that Fujiko had jotted it down as she was talking with Akuto.

Come alone to the old war room underneath the main building tonight. The way to escape your Liradan’s watchful eye is simple. Liradans have a tail, if you pull on it, it will switch off.

—What?! Pull on a tail?!

Akuto was taken aback. Worried that Korone could see his surprise, he quickly hid the note.

—Anyway, it seems Eto is the only person I can rely on. So I just have to get away from Korone tonight, and head to the school's basement, I guess...

After that, Akuto focused his attention on class again. He spent every class break reading the note again, and went the entire morning without talking to anyone.

When it came time for lunch, Akuto was unable to turn down Hiroshi's invitation to join him in the cafeteria, and reluctantly decided to go with him. But he couldn't hold back the fidgety and excited feeling that bubbled up inside of his chest.

—So, Korone has a tail... and if I pull it, she'll turn off...?

Akuto inevitably ended up shifting his gaze towards Korone's butt.

Seeing that Korone wasn't human, her body was probably created to suit her creator's fancies. It seemed her creator had a preference for smaller butts, and the tight bulge that Akuto could glimpse from her skirt had a beauty to it that even those who didn't have a preference for petite women would be able to appreciate.

—I have to get the two of us alone somehow... Of course we'd be alone at night, but what if Eto is just messing with me about the tail thing? No, even if she's telling the truth, Korone is a Liradan dispatched by the government. She's probably a specially-made model. I need to confirm what Eto wrote somehow before tonight. I'd like to try it where there aren't any other people around... It would be bad if I have to tell Eto that I can't make it.

"Boss? What's wrong?" Hiroshi's words jolted Akuto back to reality.

"Nothing... Just thinking about something..."

"About what? Please tell me if there's anything worrying you!"

"It's nothing."

There was no way he could tell him that he was thinking about how to shut

down Korone. But Hiroshi's expression reflected his skepticism at Akuto's denial.

"No way, I can tell by your face that something's on your mind. We've been together a long time, so I can figure out that much, you know!"

"I don't think even two days have gone by yet, but... Anyway, if you're able to tell me, then I'd like to know."

"Tell you what?!"

Akuto wanted to ask a random question to try and change the subject, but Hiroshi held onto things too well. Because of that, he accidentally mentioned something that was really on his mind.

"What type of person is Soga?"

"Are you interested in her?" Hiroshi said, looking like it was an unexpected thing to ask.

"I'm not interested in her, exactly, but she's just always absent, right?"

"Boss, you really are something! You don't want to leave any of the girls out! You'll make them all yours, right?"

"Just stop with that stuff, okay... So, what type of person is she?" Akuto asked again, feeling somewhat embarrassed. Part of that was because talking about being interested in a girl was embarrassing. But it was more than that. Whenever he thought about Keena, he was bothered by an insistent wave of nostalgia.

"Well, she's a strange one. She's not someone that boss should waste his time on. She's not a bad girl, but she's completely hopeless with magic, and can't do anything besides flying. She has no talent. Because of that, she doesn't have any friends, and she's always off reading a book somewhere with her head in the clouds."

"If that's the case, how was she able to come here?"

"She's good at regular studying. It's just, if you can't use magic here, you get left by the wayside."

"Oh so that's it, huh..." Akuto felt an affinity with Keena. Their positions were

different, but they both had problems at this school, and had trouble making friends. Akuto was deep in thought when Hiroshi said something out of the blue.

“By the way, boss.”

“Hm?”

“You were looking at Korone just now, weren’t you? So you really are trying to make all the girls yours, aren’t you?! That must mean you also made a plan on how to make an observer Liradan yours as well, right?!” Hiroshi became excited and started raising his voice in the cafeteria. Naturally this drew the attention of the other students, and they glared at Akuto as if to say, “Again with this...?” and “Ugh, that guy is such a pig...”

—That’s not... But even if I tell him, it won’t change anything, will it?

Akuto bit his lip and then, having heard Hiroshi’s remarks, Korone suddenly spoke up.

“As an observer, even if I have sexual intercourse with my observation target, my emotions will not be swayed. Do you still wish to pursue this matter?” The bare frankness of her words sent the cafeteria into an uproar, and Akuto’s face turned bright red.

“It’s nothing! Cut it out with those kinds of jokes!” Akuto shouted.

“I am unable to cut it out with these jokes, and so I believe they will continue from here on out. Please just laugh at them and forgive me.” Korone was composed.

“Wow! I don’t really get it, but you’re super cool, boss!” Hiroshi was all worked up now.

Akuto thought he’d already resigned himself to every imaginable thing, and yet here he was, resigning himself to something else once more.

“...Incidentally,” Akuto asked Hiroshi as he started to eat his curry.

“Yeah?”

“Is there anywhere you can be alone here? No matter where I go it’s unbearably noisy.”

“Hmm, somewhere to be alone...” Hiroshi sunk into thought with his chopsticks in his mouth. “...Not many people head into the mountain behind the main building. It’s a little dangerous, but it shouldn’t be any trouble for you, boss.”

“Dangerous?”

“People don’t go back there because sometimes there are demons prowling around. They rarely show up, and you’re basically free to go back there, at your own risk.”

“I see...” Akuto looked at the clock. Lunch break was still only halfway over. He gulped down the rest of his curry all at once and stood up.

“Okay then, I’m going to go check it out.”

“I will accompany you, boss!”

“No, don’t. It’s dangerous, isn’t it?”

“But I made my decision to go along with you wherever you go.”

“I just want to relax, that’s all.”

“However, I will be following you, so no matter what, you’ll never be alone, right?” Korone interrupted the conversation.

After she said this, Hiroshi clapped his hands as if he had suddenly become aware of something.

“Forgive me for being insensitive.” Hiroshi bowed his head repeatedly with a vulgar smile on his face.

Akuto had little trouble in guessing what Hiroshi was thinking.

“I’m telling you, it’s not like that!”

“Say no more, say no more.” Hiroshi pushed their backs and tried to force Korone and Akuto out of the cafeteria.

“W-Wait a sec—”

“Don’t be shy, don’t be shy.”

After Hiroshi had gotten them out of the cafeteria, he took out a handkerchief

and waved it after them, yelling at them to take their time.

“It’s not like that, oka—!” Akuto still tried to resist what Hiroshi was suggesting, but Korone grabbed the sleeve of his shirt before he could. On top of that, she made her cheeks blush.

“It’s my first time, so be gentle, okay?”

“I’ve told you, cut it out with those jokes already!” Akuto shouted out, but the onlooking students had already made up their mind, saying things like, “I guess becoming the Demon King means you can’t keep it in your pants...” and, “So observer Liradans are also required to cater to the Demon King’s sexual urges. Even though she’s an android, that’s kinda sad,” and “I’m so jealous of the Demon Ki... I’m gonna hurl.” It had already gone too far for him to even try and correct his behavior.

“Fine, whatever...” Akuto began to walk off.

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“I don’t know what your intentions are, but it seems everything you do ends up backfiring on you, doesn’t it?” Korone calmly declared, following behind Akuto.

“You... You say that you’re just an observer, but you’re having quite an impact on my life, aren’t you?”

“Is that so?”

“Yes, it is...” Akuto grumbled as they made their way towards the mountain behind the school. As they went, the number of students they passed began to dwindle.

—I see, it’s just like Hiroshi said.

As he continued down the walkway in between the trees, the voices of the other students began to fade. Even if demons could show up at any moment, to Akuto it just felt like he was taking a walk along a footpath through a park.

“Man, this is great. It’s so quiet.” Akuto sat down against a tree next to the path.

“Is that so? That’s good.” Korone spoke as if it didn’t concern her and stood

next to Akuto.

“It’s been noisy ever since you showed up,” Akuto said, and looked up at Korone. Korone’s gaze seemed to be somewhere far away, but Akuto wasn’t paying attention to her. From his low angle, he could almost look up her short skirt.

—This might be my chance to see if she has a tail or not.

Akuto slowly began reclining his body down against the tree. His viewing angle gradually changed, and from behind Korone’s skirt, he started getting glimpses of her panties. However, he still couldn’t see the upper part of her butt, so he had to sink his body down a fair bit more in order to see if she had a tail or not.

—Just a little bit...

Akuto slid down until his body was almost completely flat on the ground. He wasn’t aware of it himself, but from the outside he looked like an absolute pervert.

—After a little...

Then, at that moment.

Whack!

“Ow!”

Something had hit the top of Akuto’s head. His body completely slid onto the ground from the impact. Now at this angle, his head was right underneath Korone’s butt.

—What was that?

Akuto was confused. He looked around the area, but no one was around.

“Did something happen?” Korone asked.

“S-Someone hit me... But...” Akuto blinked his eyes, not understanding what happened.

“There is no one around.”

“That’s strange...”

“I would say what’s strange is your appearance right now,” Korone said to Akuto, sounding puzzled.

Korone’s face was in Akuto’s line of sight. In front of it were her well-shaped legs and butt. Akuto had completely stuck his head in between her legs.



“Oh...”

“You’re a total pervert, aren’t you,” Korone spoke calmly, but she moved from her position quickly. She did say that she has emotions, so she was probably embarrassed. But at that moment, her skirt flipped up, and Akuto definitely saw it. Right above her low-riding panties, there was a small rabbit-like tail growing out of her.

—Oh, it’s a tail. She really has one.

Without saying a word, Akuto marveled at the tail.

“Did you come out here just to look at my panties? You’re a very strange person, aren’t you?” Korone’s words embarrassed Akuto, and he stood up. Now, he shifted his focus to who had hit him in the head just a second ago. He looked around, but there still wasn’t anyone there

“Never mind that for now... Is there really no one else here?” Akuto asked.

“You’re just dodging the question... No, I suppose there isn’t. Was someone here? The mana hasn’t been agitated at all.” Korone scanned the surrounding area with glowing eyes as she spoke.

“Okay... I guess it’s fine, then.” Akuto tilted his head in confusion. Then, Korone corrected herself.

“No, there is a disturbance in the mana. There is a life form approaching. It doesn’t seem to be human,” Korone shifted her gaze towards the inner parts of the forest.

Suddenly, a demon popped its head out from the trees. Korone explained,

“It’s a demon dog. A dog that has been deformed from absorbing mana into its body. This is probably its breeding ground.”

The demon was twice as large as a normal dog. It had long fangs, its drool leaking out between them as it breathed violently. Its eyes had a ferocious sheen to them, and they were fixated on Akuto.

“I do not require governmental authority to eliminate demons. I will exterminate it.” Korone thrust her hands into the purse that always hung at her side. A proper and stately-looking gun could be seen sitting in her purse, the

size of which made it hard to believe it actually managed to fit in there. Judging from the size of the weapon, it looked like a single shot could blow the demon dog's head clean off.

Looking at the gun, Akuto panicked.

"W-Wait a second. If that's a demon dog, that means it used to be an actual dog, right? Can't we get rid of it without killing it?"

"You do realize it is quite ferocious, yes?"

"If it's been deformed by mana, we just have to find some way to pull the mana out, right?"

"There has never been a magician who has disposed of something in that way."

"No one's ever done it before? In that case, doesn't that mean it's worth giving it a shot?" Akuto spread out both of his arms and walked towards the demon.

"It is dangerous," Korone warned him.

"Nah, I feel like I can do it. Don't ask me why. Besides, I learned the theory behind controlling mana in class today." Akuto took a step, and then another, slowly approaching the demon dog.

"If knowing the theory was all it took, the world would be full of magicians. As soon as I sense danger, I will eliminate it." Korone turned her gun on the demon.

The demon dog arched its body and looked ready to pounce at Akuto. Just when the tension in the demon dog's leg muscles was let loose, before Korone could even fire at it, a white light emitted from Akuto's extended hand.

—I did it!

In his innermost thoughts, even Akuto was surprised it had worked. Nevertheless, he was successfully controlling the outside mana with the mana he was emitting from his palms. The demon dog began emitting the same shade of white light, spilling out from inside its body.

"The mana is being pulled out of its body. Ninety percent... Eighty percent..."

Korone reported.

As she counted down, the amount of light coming from the demon dog's body decreased. Along with the light, the viciousness on its face disappeared.

"There's never been any magician who extracted mana from a demon as a way to deal with them. They said it couldn't be done. I will record this and report it," Korone told Akuto, and put the gun back in her purse.

"Just in case people wanna know what I did, right? It wasn't a big deal, though..." Akuto looked back at Korone.

The demon had returned to a regular dog. It was a shaggy dog with long fur. It sneezed as if it had been startled, and then started running around, wagging its tail.

"Since you haven't broken any laws, I will not punish you. However, this data will be studied. Even still... This is surprising." In a rare occurrence, Korone's words actually had emotion to them. Nevertheless, her face was still just as expressionless as always.

"Surprised?"

"I'm surprised that you saved the dog. Your behavior up until now has included hurting women, stealing their underwear, and looking up skirts. I'd pegged you as a lowlife..."

"You're just arbitrarily picking things out..." Exasperated, Akuto encouragingly patted the dog's side as it ran around. Now that the dog was nothing more than a stray, someone should pick it up if it went towards the school. As it seemingly began to head for the school, it suddenly stopped in its tracks and changed directions. For some reason it faced up towards the empty sky and ran towards whatever it had saw.

"Huh?"

Akuto watched, suspicious at the dog's actions. Then he suddenly heard a scream rise up from and echo through the forest.

"Kyaaaaahhh! A dog! Don't come near meee!"

Akuto couldn't see anything, but he knew what he'd heard. The dog was

playfully chasing after something.

The voice was familiar to Akuto.

—Keena... Soga?

Then, a girl's figure appeared where the dog's chase had come to an end. Red hair softly spread out in the air. White skin could be seen through the red hair. It seemed that Keena was completely naked.

—Huh?

Keena's figure flickered and disappeared in front of Akuto's startled eyes. But the dog kept chasing something around the same as it had before. In other words...

"I didn't think it was possible, but it seems that she can make herself disappear after all," Akuto said, trying to confirm with Korone.

"So it seems. I also received visual confirmation. When she disappears, it becomes impossible to trace her mana. If a Liradan such as myself is unable to trace her, then it means that she is completely invisible," Korone said with a nod.

"But if a dog is chasing her around, that means..."

"A small amount of her scent is still left behind. That and her clothes..."

"So she can't turn stuff on her body invisible?" Akuto tried to follow the dog's tracks with his eyes.

—If that's the case, why is she following me when she has to go to the trouble of getting naked to become invisible?

As his eyes followed the dog, he could glimpse a momentary flash of light. It was the same light he had seen the day before. In that moment, something clicked within Akuto.

It was Keena's hair ornament... The nostalgic feeling of something long past from his dream the night before... A memory of the ornament itself...

"Ah!" Akuto suddenly remembered something.

The jewelry that he had spent all of his money on. At the time, it had been

proof of his determination to earn his own money from then on out. But as Akuto thought back on it, he had to admit that he hoped that she would remember him.

—In that case, I understand the reason behind her following me.

With a start, Akuto began to run. Keena was running straight ahead. The dog showed no sign of stopping, and chased after her towards the school.

Akuto followed the small floating light. It would've been easy to lose track of her, but as long as he followed behind the dog, he could keep that shining hair ornament of hers in sight.

The dog rushed into the school building, where everyone was still in the middle of lunch period. The students were startled and confused as they made way for the dog and Akuto. Keena didn't seem to know where she was going, as she was rushing up and down the stairs, haphazardly racing around the school. She let out a scream now and then, but it got drowned out by the onlooking students who didn't realize that she was there.

—How did it end up this way... This is a problem... How can I make her calm down... Oh, maybe Keena hates dogs? Hmm, in that case I just need to do something about the dog, right? Once I do that, I might be able to talk to her...

Akuto scooped the dog up from behind. Then, he handed the dog over to one of the onlooking female students. Confused, the girl asked Akuto what to do. But she seemed to be an animal-lover at her core, as she tightly held onto the dog. Akuto told her he was leaving the dog in her care, and went back to tracking Keena, who was still running around in confusion.

Akuto began losing track of her as he was solely relying on the hair ornament to guide him, but Keena seemed to be losing steam. Now she was slowly making her way through the school building with a clear goal.

—I wonder if it's better if she doesn't see me?

Akuto hid himself behind one of the corners in the hall while he searched for the hair ornament. Keena seemed to think that she had given Akuto and the dog the slip, so she didn't appear very cautious as the hair ornament floated down into the school basement.

Akuto made sure she didn't notice him tailing her as he followed her to the rarely-used school supply room. The door opened, the hair ornament went inside, and the door slammed shut.

—There doesn't seem to be anyone else around there... If I step in there, I should be able to talk with her. No, if I walk in now, she'll still be naked... Oh, she must have gone in there because that's where she left her clothes. In that case, I just have to give her time for her to put on her clothes...

Akuto waited there for a while. Then, he walked quietly to the storage room, then quickly opened the door and slipped inside.

"Eeeeek!" There was a scream.

Akuto saw Keena's naked body standing there, holding her underwear as she was about to get dressed.

—Does putting your clothes on really take that long? Akuto's surprise paled in comparison to Keena's shock. She seemed to have forgotten that she could make herself invisible as she tried to make her escape from the storage room. Obviously, she remained completely naked during all of this. However, the only way out of the storage room was the entrance, which was where Akuto was standing, having just closed the door behind him.

"Aaaaahhh!" Akuto panicked. He watched helplessly as Keena she dived toward him.

Thump!

Bumping their heads, the two of them tumbled down onto the floor. Various piled-up rulers and spare blackboard erasers came crashing down, covering the both of them as they lay there, their bodies tangled together on the floor.

"Oh, s-sorry...!" Akuto suddenly realized he was on top of Keena and moved to get up.

"Eek! H-Hold it!" Keena yelped, and clung onto Akuto. She was holding onto him from below.

"Oof! C-Could you let go of me?"

"N-No... You'll be able to see me if I do!" Keena's face was crimson red, and

from below him she entwined her arms with Akuto's even further.

"B-But, isn't this even more embarrassing?"

"Then what am I supposed to do?!" Keena pressed her body against Akuto's as she began wailing.

"Uh, w-well, my eyes are closed right now, so you can let go. While they're closed you can put on your—" Akuto closed his eyes as he spoke but Keena shook her head vehemently.

"I can't trust you! I'm sure you're gonna open your eyes right away and start slobbering all over my body, and laugh at me, and say stuff like 'Heeey cutie, that's a mighty tight bod you got there!' I don't care how serious of a guy you are, it's just the way men get in situations like these and they'll never change."

"I'm pretty sure this situation's way more awkward, though..."

"But whatever, now is now, right? Nothing more's gonna happen if we stay like we are now, so it's fine. Plus, I know you're a kind person."

Akuto cocked his head in confusion at Keena's words.

"If you really think I'm a nice person, then you should know I mean it when I say I'll keep my eyes closed..."

"Those are two different things. Even nice guys become completely different when they think about dirty things."

"You know..." Akuto was exasperated, but somehow this hopelessly idiotic back and forth had gotten so comical that he let out a small chuckle.

"W-Why are you laughing?" Keena was puzzled, but Akuto's laughter soon started spreading to her as well. "He... Hehehe... Laughing like this is kind of fun."

Akuto got a good look at Keena's face up close and for a second, he was convinced that she was the girl from the orphanage.

"Hey, I'm not sure about this, but... Did we meet once before, a long time ago?" Akuto asked, and Keena stared at him in wonder.

"Huh? I don't think we have."

“Wai— then why did you try to become my observer when we first met and why do you keep following me around?” Akuto was taken aback from her unexpected response and asked her in utter confusion. Keena looked perplexed, as if she couldn’t understand what he was so confused about.

“Huh? Didn’t I already explain that to you?”

“You haven’t.”

“I told you, I like relaxing in that bamboo grove.”

“No, you never actually told me that...”

“What’s not to understand?”

“Eh?” Akuto gave Keena a blank stare in response to her odd remarks. “You like it enough to skip school?”

“That’s right. After all, my magic grades are terrible.” Keena spoke to Akuto as if she were deigning herself to explain the obvious to a complete idiot. “If a person like you comes to my resting place, then obviously that means there’s some deeper meaning to our meeting, right?”

“Meaning...?”

“Every encounter is a work of fate, don’t you agree? While sometimes it’s better to forge your own path, you have to try and let it guide you or you won’t be able to enjoy life to its fullest,” Keena rambled freely. “So if you thought of me as your observer, I figured that’s what I’d become. Although, I have no idea what an observer even is.”

“You don’t?!” Akuto said sharply, but it seemed to fly right over her head. Or rather, she seemed to have become exasperated at Akuto’s dull wit.

“There’s no problem even if I don’t understand it, right? If I’d like to become an observer, then I’ll become what I believe an observer should be. I don’t see any problems with that, do you?”

“That’s a strange theory...”

“It’s not a theory. It’s fact. I’ve always been known as a woman who can tell fact from fiction. Ever since I was little, I’ve worn a hair ornament with real jewels in it. It’s not just some toy,” Keena said, and shook her head to show

Akuto. Her hair ornament was shaped like a bird, and had real gems embedded in it.

—She really is wearing that hair ornament...

“That’s what I mean! Don’t you remember?”

“Remember what?”

“I gave you that hair ornament, right?” Akuto anticipated that this would jog her memories, but Keena remained dubious.

“That can’t be true.”

“Alright, then how did you get that hair ornament?”

“That’s...” Keena sunk into thought. “Um... I don’t remember.”

“Oh, come on!”

“What, I really can’t remember,” Keena calmly declared.

Akuto was at a loss for words, and Keena boastfully continued on.

“But I understand if you want to believe that you gave it to me. In other words, you want to believe that your encounter with me was fate, like I thought it was.”

“Huh...?”

—Now that I think about it, what was my reason for chasing after her again? She ran, so I followed? Was that it? No, I just wanted to determine if we had met before. If we haven’t, then she’s just some random person. But this is the first girl who’s responded to me like this... Wait, what am I even thinking?

Akuto had become confused.

“Thinking about it like that is more fun, right? I’m positive all people feel that way,” Keena said, smiling. Seeing her carefree smile, for some reason Akuto was convinced by Keena’s words.

After that, silence filled the room. The moment Akuto tried to say something to break the awkward silence, a voice suddenly rang out from above.

“Your behavior appears to be criminal in nature.” The voice was Korone’s.

Startled, Akuto looked up.

Korone was looking down at him. He hadn't heard a door open, which means she must have teleported here.

"C-Criminal?"

"I have a strong suspicion that you sexually assaulted her."

"Wai—I didn't do anything like that!"

"I don't believe you can dispute that, given the current situation."

"You know the situation perfectly well, don't you?! She can't wear clothes when she is making herself disappear—"

"That and how you've managed to force yourself on top of her are two different issues."

"Um..." Keena interrupted Korone and Akuto as they were arguing back and forth with one another. "If it's a crime, what will happen?"

"As a minor, he will be judged as to whether or not he'll go under juvenile probation. You have the right to judge his actions, and as such, whether or not he will be sent to a reformatory institution will be your decision," Korone calmly explained, but Keena didn't seem to understand her words.

"Huh? Oh... I see."

"Don't just agree with her! There won't be any issues if you just explain to her that I didn't do anything wrong!" Akuto had become desperate.

"Eh? Why do I have to?"

"Listen, if you just acknowledge that this was all an accident, then that means I didn't do anything wrong!" Akuto said this, and the previously blank-faced Keena finally understood what Akuto was saying and gave him a big grin.

"Okay, so if it wasn't against my will then that means it isn't a problem?" Keena asked Korone.

"That's correct."

"In that case..." Keena faced Akuto. "If I tell her that, will you do something for me in return?"

“Uh...” Akuto was at a loss for words.

—What could this be... Either way, I can’t afford to get involved in any more trouble...

“Well, how about it? Well? Well?!” Keena urged Akuto on with a smirk.

—Was she was aiming to trap me from the very start? She isn’t just pretending to have forgotten about our past, is she? What if she’s been watching me ever since we were little...?

Akuto was too confused. He didn’t know what to think anymore.

“Well? Well?” Keena still urged Akuto to make a decision.

Finally, Akuto gave in.

“Okay, fine. So just—”

“There we have it, I was the one clinging to him.” Keena said to Korone, who seemed to be immediately convinced.

“I understand,” Korone said, then brought Keena her clothes.

“You agreed to that awfully quick...” Akuto averted his gaze and stood up.

It sounded like Keena was having Korone help her get dressed. Akuto heard rustling sounds and Korone giving Keena instructions, like to raise her hands above her head. After she told Akuto that she was done changing, Akuto turned around and took another look at Keena’s face.

Akuto couldn’t make out whether it was innocence or plain stupidity, but her expression was incomprehensible to him.

—What the heck is with this girl... Now, I have to go along with her wishes... What am I gonna do if she tells me to use my magic to make her money or something like that...

Even though he had the face of a villain, these were the virtuous worries that crowded Akuto’s mind when Keena flashed a smile at him.

“Alright, so about my request...”

“Okay.” Akuto was tense.

“Will you be my friend?”

“Huh?”

“Please be my friend.”

“...Okay.” Akuto nodded mechanically, but after a few seconds he realized what Keena had just said.

—Well, I definitely wasn’t expecting that... If that’s really all she means, then that’s fine, but... It seems too good to be true. I can’t shake the feeling I’ve just saddled myself with a life-long burden.

Then, the bell rang to signal the end of lunch time.

During the afternoon classes, Akuto once again became the center of attention. After all, Keena had barely attended any classes, and yet here she was being led into the classroom by Akuto.

“That’s incredible! That’s just like you, boss!” Hiroshi was the only one profusely excited by Akuto’s appearance.

All Akuto did was force himself to feign composure.

With classes over for the day, Akuto returned to the dorm and had dinner. Now, he needed to somehow get his emotions in check and steel himself to face the major challenges ahead.

—Alright, this is going to be tough...

Out of the corner of his eye, Akuto looked at the ever-expressionless Korone as she relaxed in his room. He had confirmed that she had a tail. During his free time that night, he had to pull the tail and deactivate her.

Watching her with a nervous expression, it seemed that Korone had grown suspicious and looked towards Akuto.

“What’s wrong? Your breathing is irregular.”

“N-Nothing, nothing at all.”

“You do not seem to be ill, but psychogenic factors can cause illness as well. Please be aware.” Giving Akuto a casual but rude reply, Korone solemnly returned once again to lying on Akuto’s bed.

—Damn it, should I just pull her tail here instead?

In order to keep an eye on Korone as much as possible, Akuto moved from sitting on the chair to his bed. He could reach her butt from here.

—Still, now that the time has come, I'm nervous...

Staring hard at Korone's butt, Akuto began to feel like he was some kind of criminal. Lying on the bed, Korone's panties were completely visible to Akuto, and as he started to reach for them, all he could think about was feeling like he'd become a molester or a rapist.

—Just a little closer...

He began sweating profusely. As he wondered if he'd be able to do this, his heartbeat rose excessively.

—Just a little bit more...

Knock, knock, knock!

"Aaaahh!" Akuto jumped up in surprise at the sudden noise.

Something had knocked on his window. Looking over like criminal caught in the act, he saw that Keena stood outside with a smile on her face as she knocked on the window.

—That's right, this is the first floor...

Judging from her expression, it seemed that she hadn't noticed what Akuto was doing. Trying to act casual, Akuto walked over and opened the window.

"W-What?"

"A friend doesn't need a reason to come and visit, do they?" Keena said, hauling herself through the window.

"Ah, wait—"

"Friends, friends! Let's eat together!" Keena thrust the bag of snacks she was holding towards Akuto.

"Is it okay for girls to come here?"

"Everyone does it. As long as they're back in time, it's fine." Keena made

herself at home by sitting on Akuto's bed. Korone sat up and raised her hand to greet Keena.

"Welcome. All things considered, the fact that Akuto was able to make a friend is good for his mental health."

"Riiight? Yeah, yeah. Korone, you get it!" Keena opened up the bag of snacks and laid it down on the bed. They were rice crackers.

"Hey, careful, don't get crumbs on my bed."

"It's fine, I'll wipe them off later." Keena tore into the crackers with a crunching noise.

"Korone, want any?"

"While I'm able to eat food, expelling the waste is troublesome, so I will decline."

"Really? That's too bad." Clearly not thinking about what Korone had just told her, Keena seemed satisfied with the answer and nodded furiously before moving on and offering Akuto a cracker.

"Here you go~"

"...Okay, okay." Akuto took the rice cracker and ate it.

—Now it'll be even harder to try and pull Korone's tail...

As Akuto thought this to himself, Keena suddenly put her hand on Korone's butt.

"Korone, you can see your underwear if you lie down like that."

"Akuto told me he feels tense if I don't lie around when I'm in the room."

"But he was trying to feel you up just now." Keena looked accusingly at Akuto.

Akuto felt like his heart had stopped.

"It is not a crime to touch a Liradan's butt." Korone replied unexpectedly.

"It's a bad thing to do," Keena scolded Akuto.

—Now everything is even worse.

While Akuto continued to sweat over the plan inside his mind, he gave a faint

smile.

“I-I understand. Rather, it’s just a misunderstanding...”

“Well, as long as it’s just a misunderstanding,” Keena said as she continued to chomp down on her rice crackers. Akuto only had one cracker but they began to disappear right before his eyes.

“Hey Ackie, so—”

“Ackie?”

“It’s fine if I call you that, right? You can call me Keenie.” Keena continued talking with no regard for Akuto.

“Ackie, do you like rice?”

“Rice?”

“Rice.” Keena nodded. “I’m not talking about rice in general, but normal, white rice.”

“Um... Yeah, I guess...” Akuto gave a vague nod in agreement, when suddenly Keena leaned towards him in excitement.

“You do?! Hey! In that case, you should have a rice cooker in here! If you did, I’d come here every day! I’ve been banned from having one in my room. As long as it’s in your room, it should be fine, right?”

“I don’t really know if it’s fine or not... but why a rice cooker anyway?”

“There are times when all I want to eat is rice. I mean, isn’t rice fantastic? It’s white and glossy, almost like a jewel, right? Being able to eat something like a jewel is amazing! It’s like thousands of pearls are rolling around inside your mouth, and then when you bite into them, the immediate fragrance and sweetness...it’s just...” For some reason Keena seemed to be completely in a trance as she went on about rice.

“A rice cooker... Nope, not happening.” Akuto murmured, and then Keena lashed out at him.

“No way! I want it, I want it!”

“Why exactly do I have to do exactly what you tell me to?”

“If you say something like that, I’ll tell everyone how much of a pervert you are, Ackie.”

“Their misconceptions about me are already horrible as it is!”

“Oh, really?” Keena looked over to Korone to verify what Akuto was saying. Korone silently nodded.

“I see... That’s tough. Even though you’re so diligent and honest, huh.” Keena probably didn’t give much thought to what she said, but Akuto was grateful for her words. It had been the same when he’d first met Junko. He was vulnerable to people who actually understood what he was like on the inside.

“Th-That’s right...” As Akuto nodded like he had been moved from the bottom of his heart, Keena gave him a puzzled look.

“You want more?” She gave Akuto another rice cracker.

“Thanks.”

“Since I gave you some, how about that rice cooker—”

“Nope.”

“Whaaat? C’mon, rice is amazing!” Keena kept on talking about the wonders of rice for a while. Akuto had enough of it, but for some reason it seemed to hold Korone’s interest, and she even replied with comments of admiration, like “I can’t believe freshly cooked rice could have such an influence on a person’s mental state.”

“Man... if only everyone could eat rice together, I’m sure the world would become a peaceful place.”

Korone responded to Keena’s absurd statement by reaching into her purse and saying there was a way to do just that. She took out a long, cylindrical object with a switch attached to it. It seemed to resemble a kind of bazooka-type cannon.

“This is a military medicine dispersion device. With this, you can spray medicine over a large area, and administer medicine to your allies while poisoning your enemies at the same time. If we put the rice in this...”

“Just stop.” Akuto said, slumping his shoulders. Keena pouted in disapproval,

and their ridiculous conversation continued on from there. For Akuto, it at least meant he could lay his thoughts down to rest, but as the night wore on, he gradually grew impatient.

—I have to hurry up and go meet with Eto...

“Uhm, don’t you have to be going back soon?” Akuto said, breaking up their rice conversation.

“Huh? Can’t I stay for a little longer?”

“No, I mean, look... I need to study, too...”

“Oh well, I guess so then. Are you chasing me out so you can do something weird to Korone, is that it?” Keena pouted.

Akuto was startled by her strangely accurate intuition, but denied it with a stiff smile.

“Of... course... not...”

“Really...? Hmm, well then, see you tomorrow.” Keena stood up reluctantly. “You really better not do anything weird, got it?” After emphasizing the point, Keena hoisted herself over the window again.

Akuto closed the window after making sure she’d walked out of sight.

“Phew...” he sighed as he cleaned up after Keena and sat down on the bed. As soon as he sat down, Korone slid her body up against him.

“Well, now that the nuisance is gone, we can finally be alone,” Korone said, remaining expressionless.

“Alright, will you stop with those jokes already?”

“No, it would be most pitiable if you end up a sex offender simply because I neglected to deal with your sexual urges.”

“I told you, that stuff with Soga was a misunderstanding!”

“As long as that is the case, then it’s okay. However, you were still trying to touch my butt, were you not?” Korone’s words induced more unpleasant sweat forming on Akuto’s brow, but then he had an epiphany.

—This could be my chance...

“Is it wrong to try and touch it? It’s not a crime, right?”

“With regards to Liradans, that is correct,” Korone nodded.

—With this timing...

“If you really want me to that badly, I guess I could touch it.”

—Ugh, that was super lame... But...

While inside he thought he would die from nervousness, he reached out towards Korone’s butt. Even though she was an android, a soft sensation grazed Akuto’s hand, almost entirely like that of human skin.

“Ahn...” Korone blushed and an audible sigh escaped her lips.

Startled, Akuto’s hand stopped.

“Oh, so-sorr—”

“Got you,” Korone said rather expressionlessly.

“.....”

Akuto was speechless.

—That’s right, my goal is...

He quickly slid his hand in and up to Korone’s lower back. His hand brushed up against the small tail.

“Ah—” Just as Korone started saying something, Akuto grabbed and gave her tail a yank.

Fwooon

There was a faint sound, and Korone stopped moving.

—Did I really do it...?

Akuto peered into Korone’s eyes. Their color had in fact dissipated.

—Hmm...she really did shut down... This isn’t just a joke... right?

Akuto considered Korone’s behavior up until then, and there was a chance this was a ruse. Akuto raised her hands up and poked at her legs to make sure that she wouldn’t move.

—Okay. Now then...

With that, he climbed out of the window.

○

Akuto looked at the note again.

Come to the old war room underneath the main building tonight, alone...

Akuto felt uneasy about sneaking into the school at night, but fortunately he got in without being seen. He thought that people probably weren't walking around outside because it was dangerous at night. Seeing how demons would show up at the mountain behind the school, it wasn't farfetched to think that something would come down to the school at night.

As Akuto descended into the basement, his feelings of unease turned into a sense of determination. The first and second levels of the basement were normal parts of the school, but the old war room was even further below. The door to the lower levels was made of metal, and although you'd generally think such a door to be locked, it was slightly ajar.

Akuto opened the heavy door, and he could make out a dimly lit staircase before him. Beyond the stairs was a dug-out passageway that led down into the labyrinth with nothing but metal beams embedded into the walls to prevent the area from collapsing.

—This must be from the war...

If students were doing whatever they pleased inside of this maze, then it seemed that the school wasn't aware of what was happening down here.

It certainly was ideal for a secret meeting. The old war room's location was on the third basement level, and the metallic door had been left open. Light could be seen spilling out from inside. Knocking and peering inside, Akuto saw that Fujiko was sitting at the end of a large rectangular table.

"Welcome. I've been expecting you." Fujiko smiled gently. Akuto thought to himself how becoming the illuminating mana lights were on her beautiful and refined appearance.

"Thank you for going out of your way and meeting with me. You were right, it

did shut her off completely," Akuto said with a bow.

"If you pull it again, it will restart her. Her memories of the moments before and after she shuts down will be erased, so keep that in mind if you are ever in trouble." Fujiko motioned for Akuto to take a seat.

"Well, about the matter I wished to speak to you about..."

"This is about Hattori, yes? There are quite a few rumors floating around about the two of you."

"That's exactly why I am here, they're nothing but rumors. The real story is... well, things have gotten a little complicated."

"Hah hah hah..." Fujiko laughed. "Oh, pardon me. Hattori is quite stubborn, isn't she? But it's for that reason that she is trusted by everyone. Well then, that being the case, I am fine with accommodating you. Tomorrow, Hattori will have finished healing, so I will contact her and give you the opportunity to meet with her after school."

"Thank you very much."

"She is quite serious, after all. So if you show her your serious side as well, I'm sure it'll turn out fine."

"No... I tried doing that, but I didn't understand the committee system of this school at all, so I messed everything up..."

"That's right, I was told by someone from your class that you tried to join the cleaning committee. Well, allow me to introduce to you a committee that you would be suited for." Fujiko said, lightly clapping her hands. "How about you join the disciplinary committee? At this school, the disciplinary committee is a role for only the most diligent and earnest students."

"That sounds good. It's just that... sorry if this is a stupid question, but this disciplinary committee, it's like a regular disciplinary committee, right?"

"It is... however. Its role is to correct other students' behavior. And the only thing not normal about it is that the disciplinary committee is completely vacant right now."

"There isn't anyone on the committee?"

“It’s a sad story, but discipline has totally lapsed into chaos... forgive my bluntness, but school discipline is so awful that no one wants anything to do with the disciplinary committee.”

“I see...”

—*That does indeed seem like something Hattori would be pleased with...*

“Hand in the form to the school council at lunch, okay? Does it sound good to you?”

“Yes. Thank you very much.” With that, Akuto said his goodbyes and stood up.

“Please come to me whenever anything is troubling you. Oh, that’s right. If for whatever reason your conversation with Hattori goes south...” Fujiko placed two pills on the table.

“Is this some kind of... drug?” Akuto reached out and gathered the pills in front of him. They were featureless white pills.

“The main focus of my study is the research into magical medicine. If for some reason Hattori doesn’t lend an ear to what you have to say, I believe that these will be useful.” Continuing, Fujiko handed Akuto a small, gun-like object. It was small enough to fit in the palm of his hand. However the muzzle of the gun was long and thin.

“These pills contain magic medicine. And this is the tool used to administer said medicine.”

Akuto recalled a similar object that Korone had used before.

“If you fire one of each of these pills, the two people whose hearts have been administered this drug will be able to communicate with one another.” Fujiko opened up the clip of the administration device. Fujiko inserted exactly two pills into the two empty slots. After loading the pills, she handed it over to Akuto.

Akuto held it in the palm of his hand and stared at it.

“But using medicine is a little...”

“I understand. It’s only just in case. Just in case you absolutely need it. You see, I am well aware of how stubborn Hattori can be. This is for when it seems

like a fight will break out.”

“In that case, I will only rely on it then.” Akuto placed the administration device into his pocket.

—*What an incredibly kind person...*

Feeling very warm and grateful toward Fujiko, Akuto excused himself and departed the room. At any rate, it seemed that he would be able to resolve one of his problems tomorrow. All he had to do was find a way to clear up the other misunderstandings one at a time.

When he closed the door to the old war room, Akuto got the feeling like he had been caught by something. He stopped and checked the door. It seemed that he had just brushed against it.

“Is something wrong?”

“No, it’s nothing. Please excuse me.”

Once she had made sure Akuto was gone, Fujiko grinned.

A big, evil grin. Not a normal, sweet smile. This wicked grin suited her pretty face just as much as the gentle smile she had given moments ago, but it gave off a completely different impression. It was one only a villain who was wicked from the bottom of their heart could make.

“Well then, everything is going just as planned! Bwahahahaha...” She snapped her fingers while she laughed. At the sound, the wall behind her opened. There was a secret room even deeper within the tunnels. Slipping through the wall, Fujiko continued into the inner room. The interior was covered in purple velvet and silver decorations. The black furniture and glass laboratory instruments on top of them gave the room an eerie atmosphere.

“It appears that once again I’ll be able to reap my rewards without even having to lift a finger.” Fujiko sat down on the velvet-covered sofa and talked to herself out loud.

Actually, she wasn’t talking to herself. Next to the sofa there was a large glass jar completely filled with some sort of liquid. Inside it was the severed head of a handsome young man who closely resembled Fujiko. The severed head spoke.

“You’ve done something awful again, haven’t you?”

“How unpleasant. All you ever do is lecture me, brother.” Fujiko stroked the glass jar.

“Well, you never listen to what I say. Even after death, you just cause me to worry.”

“It’s not like you have a soul, so there are no worries or any other real thoughts inside your mind. It’s hard to listen to you when you’re like this.” Fujiko laughed.



Necromancy. Magic that can bring the dead back to life, reconstructing them based on that person's behavioral records kept by the gods. They can speak and recall any information from when they were alive, but new experiences will not affect their souls, which was the one fundamental difference between the living and the dead. However, they can still seem to act like a living person. So to avoid the very real possibility of the dead causing chaos, it was a forbidden type of magic only allowed for top magicians.

Those who still used forbidden magic as they saw fit, and broke magic law, were known as black magicians.

"Hey, brother. With this it seems that the future Demon King will become my slave."

"Oh no. What sort of trick have you used this time?"

"Anyone who is administered that medicine will be put under my control."

"In that case, wouldn't it have been better if he took it immediately?"

"Huh? That's no fun. I want to play around with them until the very last moment. Otherwise it's just not as entertaining. And it's important to note that I didn't lie to them at all. After all, if they both pledge their loyalty to me, then they'll be able to get along, won't they?"

"Ahh... That awful personality of yours sure is something..." The severed head grumbled. "That's the reason you're so lonely you only ever talk to me."

"It's simply because no one can measure up to my loftiness and nobility, that's all. Why is it necessary for someone to have the proper qualifications to practice magic? All the people at this school are fools who just blindly obey the government."

"I don't have an opinion on that. I couldn't come to a conclusion on that while I was alive. But I am hoping that your plan fails, Fujiko."

"Really? That's unfortunate. I'm sure it will go quite well. I've already made preparations, after all."

"Preparations? Such as?"

"That's a secret." Fujiko laughed tauntingly at her brother and took out a

black notebook, different from her student handbook.

“But if I can carry out the evil plan written inside this ‘Notebook of Malice,’ then it’ll be assured... Bwahahaha...” Fujiko turned the pages in her dark notebook and grinned.

“Fujiko... What a dark child you’ve grown up to be...” Her dead brother lamented.

“Oh get off my back, brother. No matter what I have to do, he will be mine. He holds within him the power we dark magicians yearn for. Without fail, he is the person who will end up destroying the world. I’ll do anything to get a hold of him.” Fujiko lovingly stroked the glass jar and pressed her lips against it. Her dead brother’s phantom made a troubled wince inside the glass.

4 - That Strongly Prejudiced Girl

“Is there no one on the disciplinary committee?” Akuto asked Hiroshi.

“Right now there isn’t,” Hiroshi answered.

They were on their way to school. Although she had been shut off last night, Korone was following behind the two of them. Just like Fujiko had said, when Akuto restarted Korone, she had no memories of the few seconds before and after. In other words, she didn’t realize herself that she had been restarted.

“Is there a reason it’s vacant?” Akuto wasn’t suspicious of Fujiko’s words, but there were many different historical customs at this school, and just to be safe, he asked Korone as well.

“According to past records, the previous representative voluntarily withdrew from the position. I don’t know all the details, but I would estimate it was due to a fight between the representative and someone who didn’t agree with their position.”

“Fight?”

“Yeah, I did hear that some of the punks had it out for them,” Hiroshi nodded. It seemed like a demanding job.

—*Well, I guess in that case Hattori will be pleased.*

Junko didn’t attend classes that day either. Akuto left Hiroshi behind during lunch time, and headed to the student council room, as its members gathered there during lunch.

As they welcomed him into the room, they seemed startled by his visit. All except for the student council president herself, who remained composed. Without showing any surprise, she asked Akuto about his business there.

A dignified, or one could say ‘intimidating’ air overflowed from the tiny young woman. Combined with her arrogant attitude, she gave off a strong impression of being above everyone else.

“Well well, what do we have here? The school’s newest celebrity has decided to grace us with his presence.”

“Please don’t call me that. Well... The reason I came here is because I want to become a member of the disciplinary committee.”

“The disciplinary committee?” The student council members were flustered. The three members present worriedly looked between the president and Akuto.

“The disciplinary committee is, well...” The student council president jabbed her finger at Akuto as she spoke. “It’s tough. Real tough. Are you good in a fight?”

“Hmm, I don’t know. I haven’t been in one before.”

The student council president smiled wryly at Akuto’s honest reply.

“I see. Well, whatever. Being on the disciplinary committee at this school is no walk in the park. But I guess you can quit as soon as you’d like, so just do whatever you think is necessary. The discipline rep works independently under the student council so you can just do anything you want.”

“Is that so? I don’t really understand, but I mean to take this job seriously.”

“You’ll take it seriously without understanding it? At any rate, do your best. At least it sounds like it’ll be interesting, so it should be fine, right?”

The student council president seemed to be directing her questions more to the other student council members than directly to Akuto himself.

After that, Akuto received the key to the disciplinary committee room. As Akuto exited the student council room, a surprising school announcement came in over the speaker system.

This is an announcement from your student council. A new disciplinary committee president has been decided. The president is Akuto Sai. If you wish to speak with him, please visit the disciplinary committee room.

The student council was vigilant. But Akuto didn’t yet know that there was someone even more vigilant than them. He didn’t realize this even when he received a telepathic message at the end of the lunch period.

“I’m sorry for reaching out to you like this so suddenly. Do you have a moment?” Right as Akuto finished his meal, Fujiko called out to him through their student handbooks.

“Yes,” Akuto replied, telepathically.

“Hattori didn’t attend class today, but she has promised to meet with you. It seems she will be in the old barracks in the underground labyrinth at 4:00 in the afternoon. Understand?”

“Yes, I understand. Thank you so very much,” Akuto said, then ended the communication.

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Meanwhile, in the girl’s bathroom, Fujiko was grinning to herself after the end of the telepathic link.

“Hehehehe... How delightful. I love a good scheme.”

Fujiko kept her student handbook open and entered Junko’s contact information next. Once the communication had connected, Fujiko’s expression completely changed back to her other self, putting on the image of a gentle, high-class girl.

“Hattori?”

“Yes...? Oh, Dorm Leader!” Junko sounded like she was startled when she’d realized who’d called her.

“Have your wounds healed?”

“Oh... Yes... I’m totally fine now!”

“I see, since you’re still missing school then it must have something to do with the incident with that transfer student, correct? I apologize if it’s a difficult subject to talk about.”

“Oh... Umm... Yeah... That’s actually why.” Junko spoke as if it was hard for her to admit. Her candid reply spoke to the trust she had in her dorm leader, Fujiko.

“Actually, the reason I ask is because that transfer student has proposed a

reconciliation.”

“Reconciliation? At this point, why would he...”

“Yes. Maybe, just maybe, it has something to do with becoming the disciplinary committee president?”

“The disciplinary committee president? But that’s...”

“That’s right. People still believe that defeating the disciplinary committee president will improve your ranking, so he’s gotten himself in yet another tough spot. There are a lot of people obsessed with trying to figure out who could be the rank one student. It’s quite a hassle.”

“Which is why no one has wanted to take up that role... But what does that have to do with a reconciliation?”

“That much I do not know. Maybe he’s planning something behind closed doors? I don’t know what someone like him could be thinking, but he might be aiming to gather power within the school?”

“You’re right... That must be it.”

Even though she was communicating telepathically with Fujiko, the displeasure in Junko’s voice was clear.

Fujiko chuckled.

“As the dorm leader, I was asked to be the intermediary, but I wanted to warn you. He chose the barracks on the third level of the labyrinth as a meeting place, at 4:30 today...”

“A large, open space, suitable for violent outbursts, huh? I will be careful.”

“Yes. Please do. Today at 4:30,” Fujiko emphasized the meeting time and ended their conversation.

Hurriedly, she then began communicating with her next target. A burly man’s voice answered.

“Yeah?”

“Oh? And since when are you allowed to speak to me in that tone, I wonder?” Fujiko sounded amused, as she received a flustered reply.

“M-My apologies!”

“I know it’s been a long time since we’ve seen each other, have you become forgetful? I could make you remember.”

“P-Please pay it no mind! What do you require of me, Mistress?”

“I’m going out of my way to give you this information. Be grateful. Do you know about the new disciplinary committee president?”

“You mean how some nitwit jumped into the position, right? I don’t blame him for not knowing the details, but it’s impossible for someone like me to see it as anything but a challenge. But isn’t that guy getting special treatment? A governmental Liradan follows him around everywhere, there’s no way to get a hold of him. It’s best just to leave him alone I thi—”

“Cease your sniveling!” Fujiko interrupted him sharply. “You want to be a black magician and you’re still talking like that, Takeshi? Do you understand what I’m saying? He’ll be going down to the third floor of the labyrinth today at 4:00. *Without* the Liradan. Take a hostage for all I care, just give him a hard time and make sure he knows who’s in charge around here! No matter how strong your magic or physique, everyone succumbs to mental pressure. Get it done.”

Before Takeshi could even respond, Fujiko cut off the telepathic link.

“Now then...”

After hanging up, Fujiko reverted back to her high-class, respected-by-all facade. However, her mind was still filled with dark and wicked thoughts.

“Everything is going according to plan. No matter how the chips may fall, he will definitely end up taking that medicine,” Fujiko chuckled to herself. As students passed her in the hall, they only felt praise and admiration as they saw Fujiko’s ever-gentle smile.

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When afternoon classes ended, Akuto sat at his desk, thinking about how he could shut down Korone without being seen and get down into the school’s underground area. In the middle of his thoughts, he suddenly realized that the atmosphere around him was strange. Everyone usually kept their distance from

Akuto, but this time he could sense fear in the classroom.

“Doesn’t something feel a little off?” Akuto asked Korone.

“It is unclear to me how you have come to this conclusion, but if you are referring to abnormalities, those two seem to be missing,” Korone said.

“Those two...” Akuto looked around the room. Now that Korone had mentioned it, he realized that both Keena and Hiroshi were gone. Keena had probably aimlessly floated off to someplace or another, which wasn’t strange. But as for Hiroshi, Akuto figured he must have gone to the bathroom or something.

—I guess with them gone, it’ll be easier to head down underground.

Akuto stood up.

“There’s a place I want to check out.”

“Where?”

“The underground.”

“Why?”

“I want to see what’s left over from the war.”

Making up an excuse on the spot, Akuto exited the classroom. Korone followed after him. He knew no one would follow him this way, and he’d be able to shut Korone down as soon as they got to the underground area. After heading down the stairs into the school’s basement, just before entering the underground labyrinth, Korone suddenly spoke up.

“By the way.”

“What?”

“While I won’t interfere myself, this doesn’t mean I’m hoping for your failure, so as your observer I have to point something out.”

Akuto cocked his head at Korone’s sudden remark.

“What do you mean?”

“Please don’t forget this fundamental rule: when someone attempts to

interfere with you, sometimes I may ignore them. But if I do, that in itself interferes with your life. So if I ignore something, I will take responsibility for the results.”

As usual, Korone was saying things that Akuto couldn’t understand at all.

“In other words?”

“It seems that you are unaware of the way people perceive you. However, I believe that becoming able to recognize this can be seen as ‘personal growth.’”

“Don’t say annoying stuff like that.”

Akuto spent a few seconds facing Korone, feeling slightly irritated. Due to this, Akuto didn’t pay attention to the mysterious metal clattering sound that echoed from the underground.

“Anyway, let’s go.”

The large metal door going down into the labyrinth was open. Akuto immediately turned around and closed the door upon entering. Doing this, he realized that Korone had her back turned to him.

Although he was still nervous, this was his second time around. So he pressed on, knowing he only had one shot. He immediately extended his hand towards Korone’s butt and stuck his hand under her skirt.

“Ah!”

Caught off guard, Korone yelped out in surprise. Her response startled Akuto, but he successfully managed to pull her tail. She remained upright, but her body stopped moving.

“Phew... I don’t think I’ll ever get used to this shutdown method...” Akuto sighed as he sat Korone down next to the door.

Akuto opened up his student handbook and brought up a map of the underground labyrinth. Apparently there was an exploration club who sold maps of the area. Of course, no one knew if these maps were completely accurate, but they did have the reputation of being absolutely perfect down to the fourth floor. This was because the upper parts of the underground area were often used by students for club activities. Come to think of it, as the girls’

dorm leader was using the old war room as a secret meeting place, it seemed obvious that other rooms must also be used by students.

According to the map, there were many entrances into the labyrinth. Akuto had figured that the entrance he'd come through was used the most because it stood out so much. However, it was far away from the various underground facilities, so apparently that wasn't the case. It seemed like you could also enter the underground through the dorms, and some classroom supply closets. Akuto hadn't properly checked out any of these other pathways, though.

Nevertheless, with the layout of the underground, it was natural that one section was being used as a hangout spot for delinquent students. Upon arriving at the third level, he was met with the gazes of students crouched along the side of the passageway, and eyes piercing through the darkness of open club room doors.

—If they're going to treat me like an enemy, they can't complain if I suddenly attack them first...

Of course, up until now he had never acted on thoughts like this. While that was partly his own good intentions, most of it was his inability to take on multiple opponents at once. But now that he had entered this school, and learned to control powerful magic, that was no longer a concern.

—Besides, Korone isn't here right now... So as long as I don't kill them, she won't be able to punish me.

Realizing this, Akuto became aware of the disconnect between his brain and his heart. He felt both disturbed and excited at the same time. He knew it wasn't okay to harm others, but he also thought about how nice it would feel to get back at these belligerent delinquents.

In the end, Akuto hoped that they didn't do anything to try and upset him as he made his way towards the barracks.

—I hope everything goes well tonight... But why did Hattori decide on such a dangerous meeting place? She will need to be on the lookout, too... But then again, she held the second strongest rank, right?

Akuto muttered to himself as he walked along until he arrived at the barracks.

He was met with a large sliding door, similar to what one would see at the front of a storehouse. It was closed at the moment, but it didn't seem to be locked. He put his hand on the door, and it appeared that it was often used, as it smoothly slid open despite its heavy appearance.

Cool air flowed out from inside the room. It was dark, but it seemed considerably spacious inside. Akuto could only make out the area directly in front of him that was lit up by the light from the passageway. Seemingly the only thing inside was a row of three-story steel bunkbeds.

—Ah, this must be because they were used as barracks. Anyway, where is the light switch...

Akuto took a step inside.

Suddenly, he felt the impact of something heavy hitting him on the head. In a matter of moments, he'd been struck down to the ground.

—Ow!

The lights came on. Akuto saw several pairs of legs come into view. He was surrounded.

Looking up, he saw several smirking faces. All of them held weapons in their hands. Shock batons and something square-shaped placed in a sock — all of them weapons designed to cause pain rather than actually kill someone.

"Well, got ya scared yet?" With a jeering voice, one of the students swung his baton down on Akuto.

—Ah!

Akuto wasn't able to bring his arm up to defend himself. Instead, he concentrated his mana into the back of his neck, where the baton aimed to hit him. Light flowed out, repelling the baton.

"Whoa!" The student who had attacked Akuto felt his hand go numb, like he had just slammed the baton into something hard.

—Have I gotten used to this already? No... It's because I've improved my focus.

Akuto was surprised by his own actions. He had pin-pointedly defended

himself from the strike without his mana going out of control. Seeing how he hadn't put in any practice, he began to grow slightly suspicious at being able to defend himself so well. But then, his doubts were answered. He realized that, instead of just defending himself in a blind panic like before, this time he had a clear and precise purpose in his mind.

—Well then, how should I go about obliterating these punks?

Thinking this, Akuto felt oddly at ease. He was in pain, but he forced himself to stand up and see what was going on. He stood on the edge of the barracks, which was about as wide as a normal school gym. There were six people surrounding him. However, those weren't his only assailants. On the opposite side of the barracks, there was a male student sitting on one of the beds, surrounded by a dozen of his henchmen.

Akuto couldn't find the right words to say to his attackers. He figured since they had come at him with violence, all he could do was respond accordingly.

Akuto took a step towards the student whose hand had become numb from his own baton attack. The attacker didn't back down and swung the baton down again, but Akuto stopped it with his arm. Akuto then grabbed and pulled on the baton, and threw a punch into his off-balanced opponent's face. But the attacker seemed to be surprised by how little power there was behind Akuto's punch.

—That's right, I haven't been practicing any martial arts or anything, after all.

Akuto realized that though he'd managed to use mana to protect himself from the attack, that didn't mean his body had gotten any stronger.

"He's actually pretty weak, you guys!"

The baton-wielding student grew arrogant and took another swing at Akuto. This time Akuto didn't punch him, but instead released a concentration of mana. With his right fist, he managed to strike and bend the baton. The mangled baton shot back and struck his opponent in the face. Without even so much as a groan, the student collapsed to the floor.

The faces of the remaining students stiffened in fear. Taking a few steps back, they now appeared to be primarily concerned with dodging Akuto's attacks.

—How repugnant can a person get.

Akuto picked one of the group and pointed his hand toward him. In an instant, a projectile of concentrated mana shot out from his hand. It struck the student in the stomach, and he collapsed on the floor in agony. Clutching his midriff, he rolled around, groaning in pain.

“Shit!”

The four remaining attackers were all facing Akuto, and just as he had done, they launched their mana towards him. Without dodging, Akuto gathered mana onto his body, and repelled the attacks. The four of them looked visibly dismayed.

—I’ve never been in a normal fight, so I never really understood, but... I guess this is what they mean by an inherent difference in mana... That’s right, from the start, their punches were stronger than their magic, and that’s why they came at me like that.

Akuto ignored the four students and continued towards the back of the room. It was obvious that the guy surrounded by henchmen was the boss. He was the person to settle things with.

This guy was big, and his face was so fleshy that his jaw was slack. His facial features were simple, but you could still tell that he had a violent nature. As such, based on a first impression, you could only describe him as “ferocious.”

“I’d like to ask your reason for this sudden attack.”

The student laughed derisively at Akuto’s question.

“What’s it to ya?”

“Understanding and peace of mind. I have to admit I’m a little upset.”

“Fine, I’ll tell ya. Whenever someone joins the disciplinary committee, people want to try their hand at crushing them and making a name for themselves. It’s a matter of pride. That’s why that guy gave you a little warning.”

“...Why do I need to be warned with a hit to the head? Now that I think about it, you haven’t told me your name yet.”

“Takeshi Kimura.”

The third-ranked student, Takeshi, introduced himself. He then faced Akuto, turning up his nose at him.

“Now that you understand, will you shut up and let yourself get tossed around for me?”

“Why should I?”

“You still don’t get it? I’m tellin’ you to quit this whole disciplinary committee president crap. Well, that and it’d be kinda fun if you just kept your head bowed in front of me.”

“So in the end you just want a fight, is that it?” Akuto was starting to get really irritated.

“It don’t gotta be a fight, right?” At Takeshi’s instructions, three of his henchmen dragged someone out from one of the beds, further inside the barracks.

The person’s limbs were tied up, and he looked like a dirty, worn-out dish rag. Akuto’s heart sank as he saw him.

It was Hiroshi. The area around his eyes had swollen up like a pair of baseballs. He had bruises on his arms from their attacks. Akuto knew he’d be covered in wounds under his clothes as well.

“B-Boss...” Hiroshi hadn’t lost consciousness. He spoke in an agonized voiced and looked up at Akuto. “Don’t worry about me... These guys...”

Takeshi and his henchmen started to laugh at his words.

“This guy sounds likes some kinda comic book hero, don’t he?” Takeshi waved to his henchmen and they dragged Hiroshi back. “Basically, if you stop resisting, we stop harming this guy. That’s the deal. I really wanted it to be that girl that’s always followin’ you, but we couldn’t find her. But if you put up a fight and run away, you know what we’ll do to her, right? Don’t forget, you’re at this school for a loooong time. You don’t wanna spend your days in fear, do ya?” Takeshi spoke as if he thought himself to be a clever adult.

“Actually, I still have a question,” Akuto said, calmly.

“Huh?”

“You said ‘like some kinda comic book hero,’ but... There’s always been something I’ve never understood about that.”

Akuto looked towards Takeshi and his cronies.

“Whether it’s comics or novels, or anything else, really... There are people who identify with the protagonist, or the antagonist. But they return to reality sooner or later, and give up on becoming a comic book villain, or a hero. Personally I can respect someone who’s given that up, and found their own way of life. But what I don’t get, are the guys who try to copy the sleazy, lowlifes of those stories.”

“What the hell are you ramblin’ on about?” As if Akuto had become a nuisance to him, Takeshi motioned to his henchmen with his chin. The henchmen approached Akuto with faint smiles on their faces.

“I thought times like these were when you’re supposed to lose control of yourself, but... it seems that’s not the case,” Akuto said. He waved his hand out in front of his waist, looking as if he was sweeping a broom at the feet of the people around him.

Suddenly, the henchmen approaching Akuto started collapsing and crouching down. They looked as if they had no idea what was going on, but then they started feeling pain in their knees and began to groan, as they were unable to stand up.

“All I did was manipulate the mana in the atmosphere and break their knees. Since I’m just manipulating mana, it’s a test of strength, right? At least try to fight back.” Akuto sounded bored as he spoke, and reached his hand out towards one of the henchmen standing by. He then made a turning motion, and the student’s arm twisted.

“I’m moving whatever mana is close to your body, get it? It’s easier to draw power from, so I guess you’re no match for me, huh? If you don’t at least try to beat me, I’ll just break it.”

An unnatural sound of joints being pulled out was heard, and the student was finally let go.

“Hey, you don’t seem to get the position you’re in.” Panicked, Takeshi had his

henchmen drag out Hiroshi.

“I know. I’m being backed into a corner. Not by you injuring me, but by injuring those close to me. There’s only one thing left to do once you understand that.”

Akuto smashed the bones of another student standing close to him.

“Y-You don’t know anything!” Takeshi yelled.

“I’m doing this *because* I know. I’m being calculating. I’m making sure whatever cronies of yours are still conscious can’t move, and then I’ll make them watch what’s going to happen next. I’ll have them watch their boss getting mercilessly tormented.”

Akuto held out his hand. Instantaneously, Takeshi got up, put some distance between himself and Akuto, and reached into his pocket to pull out a chain. It seemed to be used for fighting. It filled up with mana and began glowing.

Akuto used mana to try and break Takeshi’s legs, but Takeshi put even more distance between them and resisted with his own power. Sweat was pouring down his forehead, but he was putting up with Akuto’s pressure for now.

“Either way, I’ll make sure you’re last.”

Recognizing Takeshi as a formidable opponent, Akuto remotely manipulated mana to shut the door to the barracks, and looked towards the other henchmen. Their faces grew pale with fear.

“This is nothing personal. I just want to cut off your ability to fight back, so that’s why I’m doing this. Please don’t hold it against me. Actually, it’s fine. I’ll make sure to rid you of any feelings of resentment.”

A few minutes after declaring this, the only ones left standing were Takeshi and Akuto. Most of Takeshi’s cronies had collapsed along the walls. They had tried to get away to no avail.

Eventually, Takeshi was also driven up against the wall. He had tried to dodge Akuto’s oppressive mana manipulation, but was eventually backed up against the corner of the barracks and couldn’t retreat any further. Takeshi realized he had nowhere left to go, and with all of his might, he swung his chain at Akuto.

Akuto didn’t try to dodge the chain at all. It struck him in the face and coiled itself around his head.

“Did I get him?” Takeshi broke into a smile, but it quickly faded away. The chain was floating in the air, one centimeter away from Akuto’s face.

“You protected yourself...?”

“Don’t tell me you’re surprised?” Akuto grabbed the chain, removed it from his face, and tossed it behind his back. “Don’t even think about asking for mercy.”

Akuto concentrated his mana on one of Takeshi’s little toes, and twisted it backwards. There was a small sound, and the toe broke. Takeshi crouched down, crying out in pain. Then, Akuto raised Takeshi’s body up into the air in front of him. Looking as if he had been crucified, Takeshi floated in the air.

Akuto wanted to make sure that his immobilized cronies had a good view on their boss’s suffering as he rotated Takeshi’s ankle all the way around.

Takeshi’s screams lingered as they echoed all the way through the cavernous barracks.

“Stop!”



Akuto heard a voice call out to him from behind. Akuto reflexively gave his reply.

“You think I can stop now? It’s no fun unless I make him cry.”

After saying this, Akuto realized that the voice calling out to him was a girl’s voice.

—Crap!

Akuto turned around. The door to the barracks that he had closed was bent open. And standing in the doorway was Junko.

“You monster! So you’ve finally shown your true colors, huh?! I wondered what you were up to by calling me here!”

—Crap, crap, crap. Now what am I gonna do...

“You’ve got it all wrong! You see, they threatened me...”

Upon saying this, Akuto realized how blatantly unpersuasive his words were, and sweat began running down his forehead. Anyone would look at this situation and consider Akuto a villain, giving the third-ranked fighter of the school a beating as he’d forced him into a crucifixion pose, surrounded by close to twenty other delinquents who were sitting there, bleeding, their limbs broken.

“Liar! I can tell just from looking who is threatening whom!” Like a detective stepping onto the scene of a massacre, Junko steeled herself.

“I’m telling you, you’ve got it wrong! I was just protecting myself, and—”

“Don’t waste your breath! I finally get what you’re playing at! You became the disciplinary committee president so you could bring all of the school’s thugs under your control. Then, you’ll start taking over the school, and use your influence over students who’ll go on to positions within the government, isn’t that right?!” Junko pointed at Akuto accusingly.

“I-I’ve never even thought about anything like that. I swear!” Akuto had genuinely never considered anything close to what Junko was saying, so he started babbling as he tried to respond.

“You bastard! Why am I the only one you’re always trying to charm? I see, it must be because I’m the only one among the school’s upper ranked students who hates illegal activities, right? If you made me an ally, you’d be able to con honest and serious students as well, right?!” Junko seemed to be intensely convinced of these false impressions.

—At this rate, nothing will get settled...

Akuto remembered Fujiko’s advice. He put his hand in his pocket, and took out the medical dispersion device he had received from her. In it was the medicine she said would allow their hearts to communicate with one another.

—First, I’ll start with myself...

Akuto put the device up against his arm and pulled the trigger. But nothing happened.

—Huh?

Akuto opened up the clip and checked inside. The tablets were gone.

—What?

He hadn’t used the device at all, and it’s not like the tablets could have evaporated. There weren’t any holes in the device either. Akuto panicked, but without the tablets all he could do was give up on the medicine plan.

“Uh, um...”

At a loss, Akuto put Takeshi down. Takeshi hit the ground with an abrupt yelp. Akuto moved towards Junko, who readied her wooden sword with an expression as if she was being approached by a savage beast.

“D-Don’t come any closer! If you come near me, I will put my life on the line to defeat you! I might lose, but I’ll still kick the crap out of you! I’ll show you mankind’s pride, you damn Demon King!”

“H-Hold on just a minute... You don’t have to get so serious...”

As he advanced forward, Akuto held out his hands to signal he had no intention to fight, but Junko moved back at the same pace.

“Stay back! I realize I don’t have the power to stop you, but if it comes down

to it, I'll gather up volunteers within the school, and formally subjugate you!"

"Subjugate?"

"You don't know about the subjugation system?! Figures you wouldn't! Okay, fine! I'll show you! Justice will prevail!"

Despite her brave words, Junko was clearly quite scared. Her hands trembled as she took a round ball out from her inside pocket. Akuto immediately recognized it as a smoke bomb used by a combat group of Suhara followers known as the "ninja."

"Hey, wait—" Akuto moved in to try and stop Junko, but she just became even more distressed.

"Eeeek! I-I told you not to come any closer!"

Simultaneously trying to move backwards and throw the smoke bomb, Junko tripped on the arm of one of the unconscious henchmen, and fell backwards.

Then, the smoke bomb rolled out of Junko's hand.

"Oh... No..."

Junko had lost her composure, but the smoke bomb plopped down onto the floor, and after a few seconds it exploded with a loud bang.

"Eeeek!"

Upon Junko's shriek, white smoke started spreading around the area.

"Whoa!" Akuto instinctively tried to get away from the smoke bomb. All he could make out was white, as an irritating odor invaded his nose.

As they were underground, the air flow was rather poor. By the time most of the smoke had started clearing up, Junko was already gone.

"I really screwed this up..." Akuto scratched his head.

Around him were Takeshi, his henchmen, and Hiroshi lying on the ground. Almost all of it Akuto's doing.

—*Even so...*

Despite all this, what Akuto found most curious was the fact he hadn't lost

control of himself even once during the fight with Takeshi. He had intended on acting properly, and at the time, he had felt like there were no other choices.

—I really screwed up... I guess to anyone on the outside, I acted... like a Demon King, didn't I? But then, that means it's my fault, isn't it...? Oh man, I screwed up bad...

Lamenting to himself, Akuto returned to the entrance of the labyrinth and woke Korone up. Since Korone didn't register any memories while she was turned off, she spoke to Akuto without a clue in the world.

"Well then, shall we go take a look at the historical sites inside the labyrinth?"

Akuto had to confess to Korone that he had shut her off and gone to the old barracks, so she could go heal everyone's wounds. But now he had to explain the whole situation, and he had no idea how he'd be able to justify his actions to her.

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"Basically, you went off and got into all kinds of trouble while I was shut down," Korone said to Akuto.

"Sorry," Akuto bowed his head in apology.

They were inside Akuto's room. Korone was on the bed, and Akuto on the floor, kneeling with his head down. He had explained most of what had happened up until then.

"I have no record of it, so even if you apologize I can't pass judgement over you for your actions. However, generally speaking, I believe that you should take responsibility for your problem with Junko Hattori," Korone stated dispassionately.

"I feel like I'm trying to take responsibility for it..."

"Obediently allowing her to subjugate you is the way to do so."

At the Academy, there was something called the "subjugation system." Naturally it was Akuto's first time hearing about it and most of the other students didn't know about it either, but it seemed that it was a valid school regulation that had existed since the great war.

People who have committed particularly heinous deeds against the Academy have their crimes made public to the whole school and must accept duels from several people all at once. It was most likely a school regulation used to chase out and punish spies and traitors.

“Well, it might seem like being given opportunities to fight others is a manly way of settling things, but...”

“It’s certainly a custom from a more uncivilized time, isn’t it?” Korone agreed.

But since Akuto was eligible for the “subjugation system,” he was going to have to accept the challenges that Junko and the other students gathered by her would offer him — it would be more like an all-out assault than actual duels.

“My crimes... Well I suppose there are quite a bit, aren’t there?”

The injuries Takeshi and the others suffered in the barracks had been recorded by Korone, and even if that weren’t the case, Junko had reported everything to the teachers.

“That’s fine, but... If I win, then what happens? There really isn’t anything I can do, is there?” Akuto asked Korone with a serious look on his face.

“That’s why I’m telling you to obediently let yourself be subjugated,” Korone said with an equally serious look.

“So that’s all I can do, huh... I talked to Miss Mitsuko as well, but she didn’t have a solution, either...”

Akuto had immediately made sure to consult with Miss Mitsuko after he understood the situation he was in. Her answer was simple. She had replied with these words, her eyes sparkling as she spoke:

“Are you going to die? Do you think you’ll die? How terrible! Oh, I’m getting all excited! I’ll be there front row and center! After you die, I’ll be right there with my necromancy, so don’t let me down, okay?”

Akuto was unclear about her from the start, but ultimately the only thing that differentiated her intentions from black magic was the fact that she had permission.

Akuto didn’t think he could be any more confused and unsure about what to do from here on out.

“Ultimately, doesn’t this mean that anyone who’s strong enough can end up becoming the Demon King? Sheesh... What’s left for me besides spending the rest of my days cursing my fate?”

But there was someone else who had been doomed to their fate.

Junko.

She was sitting seiza style, legs tucked under with her back straight, on the tatami bamboo floor of her room. She was wearing a white robe and holding a writing brush in her hand, and she was concentrating all her mind on the paper in front of her.

“Father, Mother, Grandmother... Forgive me for how undutiful I’ve been. I am doing this for justice, and for the nation. I hope you rejoice at the fact that I’ll be able to defeat the person who I had the misfortune of meeting, who has sealed my fate... No, not just that, but I’ll be able to defeat the future Demon King, while he is still weak.”

She was writing a will, a farewell note in the event of her death. She quietly spoke the first draft out loud to herself. However, as she became overcome with emotion sitting here all alone, her words began to turn into grumbling and complaining.

“Here I was... Thinking he was a decent guy... Turns out he was actually evil... That’s right, even though I liked him so much at first... Even though it was the first time I had met a man like him... He’s almost certainly the Demon King. He definitely has the personality for it. Anyway, why does he get to me so much? Even though I’m a strong fighter, I’m clumsy, I’m weak-willed, I’m always bluffing. I usually hate the fact that I’m a good fighter to begin with, and even though I try to be responsible, I still let Takeshi Kimura and his cronies do whatever they like. I didn’t have the courage to become the disciplinary committee president... Why is he able to do it all so easily? And he’s strong... It kind of sounds like I’m worried about him when I put it like that, doesn’t it? How ridiculous. Ugh! I might die tomorrow... I have to write my final letter. Let’s see...”

Junko reached out towards the ink stone with her brush. But it was out of reach.

“What? C’mon...”

She stretched as far as she could, her head tilting up to look at the ceiling as the reached. Without her eyes looking away, she suddenly felt the ink stone touch the tips of her fingers

“Ah, here it is.”

Juno moved to grab it, but then realized that something was amiss. The ink stone was closer than she had thought.

“Huh?” Junko tilted her head.

The ink stone was clearly in a different place than when she had just looked. It had gotten noticeably closer to where her hand was.

“Huh?” Junko looked around her, but obviously there wasn’t anyone there. “Wha... What?”

Trying to ignore the strange occurrence, Junko returned to writing her farewell letter.

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Fujiko had also seen the events inside the old barracks on a monitor. It was a small hidden insect-type camera. Of course, this had been made by Fujiko herself, illegally. All of the details about what had transpired, from Akuto’s violent outburst to the disappearance of her medicine was displayed on a crystal ball within her secret room. Up until Akuto tried to use the medicine, everything had been going exactly as planned, but...

“It’s strange,” Fujiko spoke to her brother in the glass jar.

“It is?”

“Yes, it is. He lost the medicine... That puts a kink in my plans.”

Fujiko rested her hand on her chin, deep in thought.

“But... the way he was so calm while committing such violence... as well as the fact he hasn’t realized his own faults and his self-righteousness... Don’t you

think that makes him a perfect fit to be a Demon King?” Fujiko whispered to herself in a trance. “It would be so much better if he could just become my servant without using the medicine after all...”

5 - The Menacing Optimist

For Akuto, the next morning was particularly gloomy.

The entire school had been abuzz since before dawn. During the previous night, the news of Akuto's subjugation had spread, and become common knowledge thanks to telepathic communications, flyers, and many other distribution channels.

- Any number of students notified may participate.
- The time will be limited to the one hour lunch period.
- Should the target escape from the school, his crimes will be overlooked.
- Should the target die, participants will not be held accountable.
- Providing assistance to the target is allowed, however those who support him shall receive the same treatment as the accused.

"So I just need to successfully run away from all the students in the school during the lunch period."

Akuto had made up his mind overnight. As he headed to the cafeteria for breakfast, the crowd in front of him parted in two with an efficiency that would put Moses to shame.

—I've never been more hated — or feared — than I am now.

Akuto couldn't help but feel shocked by everyone's reactions. But when he arrived at his own seat, a voice filled with shrill excitement and affection almost bordering on worship, called out to him.

"Boss! I've got your back! Even if it kills me!" Hiroshi, despite his wounds, bowed his head down.

Akuto turned around and smiled, but immediately rejected Hiroshi's proposal.

“No, that’s not good, not good at all. You should give that up. I won’t die. It’ll be fine.”

“But I know that you actually tried to save me before...” Hiroshi looked remorseful from the bottom of his heart as tears welled up in his eyes.

“That’s precisely why I’m saying I won’t die. That, and it should be simple enough to escape. I can do that much, so I’m taking it easy,” Akuto said, trying to sound as comfortable and carefree as possible.

Hearing this, all Hiroshi could do was back down from supporting him.

However...

—I’m sure everyone around me will only take that as a challenge...

Akuto faced the cold glares around him.

Even after he left for school and classes began, everyone remained restless, Akuto included. As the class went on, he could feel himself growing more and more nervous.

—I have to get away from Hiroshi as fast as possible, don’t I...

Akuto ran a simulation on what to do in his head.

—I could jump out of the window... After all, I don’t want to injure the other people in the class... Oh, now that I think about it, Keena isn’t in class today either. That’s pretty cold...

As he thought this, Akuto looked around him.

Five minutes until the end of class.

His classmates looked completely tense. A majority of the students agreed that they didn’t want to get hurt, and had no intentions of joining in on Akuto’s subjugation. But there were others who were Junko’s admirers, some of the boys clearly looked set on taking Akuto’s life.

To make matters worse, even Miss Mitsuko was excited, and had apathetically conducted class by just reading straight out of a textbook.

One minute until the end of class.

Students from other classed had started to gather outside the classroom.

Their pre-lunch classes had either ended early or been canceled. The upperclassmen who looked raring to go were most likely friends of Takeshi that hadn't been underground yesterday, or those rank four and below.

—They're a little TOO excited, aren't they...?

A wry grin appeared on Akuto's face, but the countdown had already begun.

"Boss..." Hiroshi said to Akuto, looking worried.

"It's okay. I'll run away immediately." But just as Akuto said this, Miss Mitsuko made a distressing announcement.

"Wait for the bell, okay? You can't move an inch before it goes off. Five, four..." Miss Mitsuko counted down as she looked at the clock.

The bell rang.

"Now then, class is over for to—"

Before Miss Mitsuko could even finish her sentence, a barrage of throwing knives, blowguns, darts, and magic missiles came flying at Akuto. As Akuto put up a mana barrier around him, he kicked his own desk aside and jumped towards the window.

The mana barrier was able to stop quite a number of attacks, but the missiles that had been formed purely from magic managed to break the barrier and hit Akuto's leg. He lost his balance and plunged into the glass window. Along with the shards of glass, he started to fall towards the school courtyard.

—Even though I was able to easily stop the attacks before... I can't seem to focus my mind. Do I have to be angry like I was yesterday?

Akuto was confused, but he didn't have time to contemplate this now as his back impacted the courtyard below. He had more than enough magical power, but he hadn't learned how to use it at all, and now he became keenly aware of his own inexperience. The students all took aim from Akuto from the window and used flight magic to fly down to the courtyard.

—That isn't fair, I can't fly!

Akuto ran off towards the mountain behind the school. He was sure it would be easier to escape if he went in that direction. But that was a big mistake —

Akuto didn't think about the advantage the other students had by being able to fly. Instantly, the students above figured out his position and projectiles rained down on him from every possible angle.

—Crap, I get it, just hiding behind trees won't be enough.

Akuto tried to head back through the school building, but he had a number of pursuers on his heels, and ended up directly charging into them as he went for the school.

—Damn it, most of these people are just here to see the fight!

"Move! I don't want to hurt you!"

Akuto shouted out, and shot his mana out in front of him, causing a violent explosion. A number of them flew off into the air, but Akuto didn't have time to determine if they had actually been blown away, or were just trying to fly off and escape the blast.

Akuto dashed through the middle of the explosion and dove into the school building, where in addition to the spectators from before, there were even more students running around trying to escape. However, since his pursuers could only follow behind him within the confides of the hallway itself, it was easier for Akuto to narrow down who he should attack.

"Out of the way!"

As he focused his attention on blowing away his opponents, Akuto ran around the still-unfamiliar school building. It had barely been ten minutes, but Akuto was already out of breath. He searched for a place to hide himself, but no matter where he went, there was always someone watching him. Most of them were just spectators, but that didn't make them his allies.

Finding it impossible to keep running, Akuto began moving at a brisk jog, but then his pursuers began to close in on him. He had ended up stuck inside the school building like a hamster in a cage.

—Have they been plotting to gang up on me?

Akuto entertained these suspicions as he walked about aimlessly. A number of his pursuers were pretty strong, and knew how to aim their attacks at Akuto,

but their pursuit never lasted long. It seemed he was being led somewhere.

Before long, Akuto ended up on the roof. There was a spacious, turf grass athletic field, but it was still just a roof. He'd always end up running out of space.

—So I've been cornered, is that the plan?

Akuto needed to get ready for a fight. Reaching the edge of the roof, he turned around, finding himself surrounded by a crowd of people. His opponent would have to be an excellent strategist, who'd used the fact Akuto couldn't fly to corner him at this very location. That strategist was...

Junko stepped out from the crowd. Rather than wild bloodlust, her eyes were filled with a grim determination to fight to the death. Now she was brandishing a real sword rather than a wooden practice one.

"I'd like to say I'll fight you one on one, but after having seen your display of power, I'm not too embarrassed to call in for help. Know that even if you dodge my blade, there will be another right behind it."

Junko raised her sword up, ready for battle.

"I'd really like to put a stop to all of this... But I realize saying so won't make you change your mind, will it?" Akuto laughed weakly.

Junko nodded.

"Yes, it's futile."

Then, Junko began to recite an incantation. Her body seemed to blur, and just like before, she created a copy of herself. However, this time she didn't just split herself in two, but into an extra two copies.

Now, four versions of Junko faced Akuto and started advancing towards him.

—I can't dodge four people at once... And it doesn't seem like I'll be able to send them flying either...

Akuto thought that if he had been trembling with rage, or if his mana was going haywire like before, he would have been able to defend against her attacks. But in his current emotional state, he wouldn't be able to defend himself from the attacks of a real sword.

“Hiyaaaaaaaaah!” The four Junkos all jumped at the same time. Akuto was being assailed by four simultaneous attacks.



—Shit!

Akuto evaded one of the Junkos, and with his remaining mana managed to divert another one's sword away from him.

But Akuto wasn't able to completely evade the attacks. Scraps of his uniform and blood scattered into the air. One of the Junkos' swords had slid down the surface of Akuto's body.

"Ugh!"

Akuto stumbled and leaned back against the rooftop fence. The tips of the four swords were thrust closely up against Akuto's throat.

"This is the end," the four different Junkos said coldly and in unison.

"I still don't think I've done anything bad enough to warrant this..." Akuto said as he groaned in pain. Junko's face clouded over.

"You should change your outlook. No, you're already too far off the deep end to reassess your life. I've seen you try to rule over others with violence. Do you understand how serious of a crime that is?"

"Ah... So that's it," Akuto understood.

The fact that he didn't question his own actions meant that he probably did have the perfect personality to become the Demon King. If he had simply lost his temper and lashed out, no one would call him the Demon King, no matter how powerful he was. For the Demon King was a cold, calculating master of evil.

"But fundamentally, that's just how I am."

"It's unfortunate, but if that's the case then you have to die," Junko said. In disbelief at Junko's words, all Akuto could do was prepare himself for the possibility that he might actually die.

However—

"Someone's personality can't be changed, but their way of thinking can."

Suddenly, a carefree voice could be heard from above their heads. Akuto and the four Junkos jumped in surprise and looked up.

Above them was Keena, floating in midair. Realizing Akuto was looking up at

her, she pushed her skirt down in a panic and floated down onto the roof. Then she held both her hands together behind her back and gave a smile that wasn't at all suitable for the atmosphere around her.

"Keena?"

"W-What are *you* doing here, you idiot?!"

Ignoring Akuto and Junko's confusion, Keena spread out both her arms. Then, she spoke in a voice so entrancing it seemed like she was reciting poetry.

"The two of you are truly best friends. There's no reason for you to hurt each other."

"What nonsense are you going on about?"

"That's right, we're truly—"

"No. C'mon, don't you two really like one another?" Keena spoke with far too loud of a voice, as both Junko and Akuto were taken aback.

"Huh...?"

"H-Hold on a second—"

"No! I'm sure of this! Ackie, I know in my heart that you are an honest person, and you're really serious when you try to do something good for someone else. It's just... sometimes you want to show off how cool you are while doing that, which can backfire. That's all."

"Hey..." Akuto was startled.

"And Junko... you actually want to get along with him, but you're an earnest person, and are worried about your reputation. On top of that, whenever Akuto tries to do the right thing and immediately puts his ideas into action, you feel super jealous about how powerful he is. I know all of that!"

"W-Wait a minute!" The four Junkos' faces turned bright red.

"So that's why you two would make great friends! You're both just clumsy. That being the case, there's no reason for the two of you to fight anymore!" Keena spoke with a voice that reverberated across the rooftop.

Both Akuto and Junko were completely dumbfounded. Particularly Junko,

whose face was bright red and looking down at the ground.

“Jeez... She blew the wind right out of my sails. I’m putting away my sword.” Junko’s clones disappeared. She averted her face from Akuto’s.

“Don’t listen to Keena. She just says whatever comes into her head,” Akuto said with a wry smile as he held his wound.

“I won’t... I mean, I never intended to. Anyway... it doesn’t solve the situation at hand.”

Akuto looked around at the students that surrounded him. There were several who were giving him fierce, murderous looks.

“That’s right, their rage isn’t going to subside just because I’ve withdrawn from this fight,” Junko said. She didn’t seem to realize that the ones who wanted to kill Akuto were mostly her admirers.

—Either way, it seems like I’m going to end up being killed. Damn it...

Akuto groaned internally. There was no way Keena’s speech had fixed everything.

“Should I... help you out?” Junko said, tilting her head back at Akuto slightly.

Akuto shook his head.

“You’re joking. Weren’t you the one who sparked this fight?”

“I know, I’m telling you that I think I went too far, okay?!” Junko snapped at Akuto as she turned around. “So just get over yourself and accept my help!”

“Isn’t it getting your priorities backwards to get yourself killed like this?”

“I’m saying I wouldn’t let that happen!”

“C’mon, I mean you’re weaker than me...”

“Shut your mouth, you’re pissing me off!”

Junko and Akuto were quarreling with each other, but their back and forth only seemed to make those around them even angrier. Gradually the enraged crowd began closing in on them.

When—

“It’s alright!” Keena yelled.

“Huh?” Akuto and Junko both looked at Keena in disbelief. There was no way she had a way out of this, but Keena was full of confidence. With her hands on her hips, she spoke out.

“If everyone eats rice together, this whole matter will be resolved!”

Akuto and Junko couldn’t help but hold their heads in their hands in response.

“Just forget about that, okay...”

“You have to do something about that idiot...”

Despite this, Keena remained undeterred.

“No! Rice is the greatest thing in this whole world! Now, Korone!” Keena suddenly raised her hand and called out. Then she looked down. Korone was standing in the courtyard, aiming her bazooka-shaped medicine dispersion tool.

“Huh?” Akuto was surprised. Then, Korone suddenly fired something like a cannonball from the bazooka-shaped device. The shot rose up, followed by a trail of smoke, and exploded with a bang near the roof.



—That's what she said was used to disperse medicinal supplies over an area...

Akuto remembered Korone's words from her previous idle chit-chat with Keena.

"Are you saying that thing is filled with rice?" he said.

Keena nodded.

"Now everyone in the school can have rice together! Now everyone can get along!" Keena declared.

Both Akuto and Junko's faces grew dark.

"This... is useless, isn't it?"

"Yeah, we're doomed."

They were both ready to fight, facing a mob of students who were about to boil over in anger... or at least that's what they had expected.

"Huh...?"

The crowd seemed to have calmed down. All of them were spellbound by the glowing rice pouring down and washing over their bodies.

"You're kidding..."

"This is absurd..."

Akuto and Junko both stood there in blank amazement. Keena was the only one delighted by what was going on around them.

"I did it! I did it! Rice really can make everyone get along!"

—I don't know about getting along, it's more like...

Akuto realized something as he looked at the strange scene around him. He couldn't shake the feeling that the students who were hit by Korone's bazooka all seemed to be under the influence of some sort of drug.

"Ah, hahahaha, hahahaha!"

"Anyone else feeling kinda good?"

"Man... This is great! I feel awesome!"

Everyone gathered there started reacting to the rice shower.

“Wh-What’s going to happen now...?” Akuto decided to put up a mana barrier, covering Keena and Junko as well.

Dumbfounded, they watched the crowd as it started to move. They were all staggering around like a horde of zombies. They began to head down from the roof in droves.

“You want to try and follow them?” Junko put her arm across Akuto’s shoulder and helped him stand. Akuto held pressure on his wound as he stood up.

As they followed the crowd, their numbers gradually began to increase. It seemed that somehow or another, all of them were heading towards the girls’ dormitory.

“What is going on?” Akuto tilted his head. But the answer soon hit him.

The throng surrounded the girls’ dorm. The girls in the crowd started heading inside. Then, the boys who couldn’t go inside all started to yell one by one.

“Mistress Fujiko Eto! Please show yourself to us! Just a peek is fine, but please show us!”

Inside the dorm, the girls were clearly surrounding her room. Their coquettish cries of “Mistress Fujiko!” began to ring out from inside the dorm.

“Wh-What...?” Akuto and Junko were both perplexed, when Korone came up behind them.

“This is certainly some sort of drug. Keena, did you put anything else besides rice in that shot?”

“Yeah. I put in some medicine I found,” Keena meekly nodded her head in agreement.

—Medicine she picked up... It can’t be, was that the medicine that Eto gave me?!

“Where did you ‘find’ this medicine?” Akuto asked, and Keena again meekly nodded her head.

“Ackie’s room.”

Looking at Keena’s carefree expression, Akuto was at a loss for words. But what if Keena had known everything, and had taken the medicine out of his pocket?

—Did she steal it back when Korone warned me on the stairs? Could she have been invisible and followed me?

“What exactly does this medicine do?” Akuto asked Korone.

“It was never intended for aerial dispersion, so this is just conjecture, but its current effect seems to be making one fall in love with a specific target. The effect has weakened due to the fact it was sprayed, so I do not know what its original effect was supposed to be.”

—If that’s the case, then does that mean Eto tricked me? No... There’s no proof, but... I guess I have to be careful.

Various doubts began to well up in Akuto’s mind. If Junko and Akuto had taken a stronger version of the drug, wouldn’t that mean the two of them would have fallen under Fujiko’s control? If so, that meant Keena had tried to save them from that fate without saying a single thing about it...

“Why did you put the medicine in with the rice?”

“Huh? Isn’t it obvious? After all, I heard this medicine would make people get along.”

“Did you follow me?”

“Yeah. Sorry. I kept quiet about it, though. So don’t be mad, okay?”

“Alright, so then Eto wasn’t trying to trick me at all?”

“Why do you think that? Eto is a good person, you know?”

Akuto had absolutely no clue about how much Keena understood, or how deliberate her actions had been.

—Uhh... Whatever... Anyway...

“When will everyone calm down?” Akuto asked Korone.

“I anticipate that the effect will wear off tonight.”

Just as Korone had predicted, the girls' dorm remained surrounded until nighttime. Akuto couldn't even imagine what could be going on inside of the dorm. All he could hear were Fujiko's cries, and he watched on as the boys outside wept tears of great joy every time they heard her voice.

Of course, Akuto's subjugation remained unsettled. It appeared the medicine had a considerable effect on the minds of the students, and most of their memories from that day became hazy. This meant that even after all this, they reverted back to bitterly hating Akuto.

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Meanwhile, Fujiko realized that her plan had failed after a large number of students had surrounded the girls' dormitory. Naturally, she had been watching Akuto from her monitor and understood what had caused the situation. She had realized that Korone had scattered her own medicine into the air.

"He must have seen through my plan!"

This wasn't the case, of course, but it was natural for Fujiko to see things this way.

"As to be expected of the Demon King! Now that he has seen my true nature, I cannot hide behind my facade! I'll definitely make him mine, and sooner than later this world will be destroyed..."

Fujiko took out her Notebook of Malice and started to jot down her grudge against Akuto and her plan moving forward. But then she heard the uproar outside through her crystal ball, bringing her back to the situation at hand.

The girl students were already entering the dorm. Tearing her eyes away from the crystal ball and turning around, she saw that the door to her room was shaking from the girls' knocking, as if they were about to smash through it at any moment "Mistress! Mistress! Mistress Fujiko!"

"Mistress, take me!"

She started to hear the frenzied calls from the girls outside her door. It appeared that because of its aerial dispersion, the effects of the drug had taken a strange turn.

“I’ll need to calm down this disturbance first.”

Fujiko put her hands on the lock to her door. The drug was meant to make others listen to her orders, so although there had been an alteration to its effects, Fujiko thought that she should be able to pacify the mob herself.

But the moment she undid the lock on her door, the girls all stampeded into the room at once.

“Whaaaaaaat?!”

Before she knew, it she was mobbed by the female students.

“Oh, mistress!”

“I love you!”

“I’ve always wanted to be with you like this, my mistress!”

Hands reached out from all over the place, groping Fujiko’s body. Then, as they desperately tried to get their hands on her body, they began tearing off her clothes.

“Noooooooooo! Stop this instant!” Fujiko cried out, but for some reason her screaming seemed to only make things worse.

“Oh, what a lovely voice! Please, cry out more!”

The girls only got more and more excited.

“Stoooooop! Don’t touch me there!”

“Oooh! Yes! Yes! This is amazing!”

“Eeeeeeeeeek!”

Completely naked and mobbed by the other girls, Fujiko’s hell continued until night time.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

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“Anyway.”

After the uproar had died down, Akuto sat in his room, arms folded and deep in thought. He still couldn’t understand Keena at all.

“What are you thinking about?” Akuto asked Keena directly.

“Rice is delicious,” Keena answered. There was a rice cooker placed in front of her. She scooped some white rice out with a ladle.

The rice cooker was something brand-new that Akuto had bought. Akuto had seen it as an investment in order to figure out once and for all what exactly Keena’s intentions were, but he still didn’t know whether it would produce any results.

Then, there was a knocking at the window. Opening the window on her own, Junko thrust her head into the room.

“Girls shouldn’t be in the boys’ dormitory!” she yelled, pointing at Keena.

“You’ve come here too, haven’t you?” Keena complained.

“I’m not actually *in* the dorm! I’m just standing outside the door!”

“Huh? In that case, why did you come here in the first place, Junko?” Keena pouted her lips, and Junko’s face suddenly grew red, and began stuttering.

“Sh-Shut up! I have to be here since I’ve decided to rehabilitate this guy! I’m going to train you so you’ll never do anything bad again! I hope you’re ready!” Junko pointed at Akuto. Then, with the same passionate momentum, she turned towards Keena.

“More importantly, Keena! You made yourself invisible and snuck into my room, didn’t you?!”

“Why do you say that? You don’t have any proof, do you?” Keena scooped up some rice and brought it to her mouth.

“Proof? In that case, why did you know what I said to myself in private?!”

“Are you talking about what you were muttering to yourself about Ackie? I didn’t hear any of that.”

At Keena’s words, Junko blushed even more.

“You did hear! You totally listened in on me! No, don’t bother denying it! Shut up! Just forget about it!” Junko noisily rebutted. Keena also raised her voice, and the two of them began shouting back and forth at one another right in

front of Akuto, who put his head in his hands.

“Jeez, what will happen next...”

“If you knew that, I believe you’d certainly be able to become the Demon King, don’t you think?” Korone replied to Akuto, who had been talking to himself.

“Boss! Do you want to play a game or something, boss?!”

From the other side of the door, Akuto could hear Hiroshi’s voice.

Akuto’s life at the Academy had only just begun, but it seemed to him that it would be even more dramatic from here on out.

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There were other people besides Akuto who were interested in his life at the Academy.

Like the student council president and Miss Mitsuko, who were facing each other in the reception area of the staff room. Although she was petite, the student council president had an imposing attitude, which did not change even when speaking with Miss Mitsuko.

“Well then! It seems Miss Fujiko Eto herself has realized that her true nature has been revealed to Akuto Sai, and I believe that means more black magicians will find their way to the school,” the student council president said, as if she was complaining about the situation.

“I don’t know the details of what happened one hundred years ago, but I wonder if it will all play out like back then,” Miss Mitsuko said, pouting.

“I don’t know, either. But it’ll all work out somehow, won’t it?” The student council president laughed loudly.

“Anyway, whether he’s the Demon King or not, he doesn’t seem to be all good or all evil,” Miss Mitsuko said. “Take the appropriate steps to make sure he doesn’t take either side, okay?”

“Miss Mitsuko, that’s easier said than done. If Hattori’s parents come out and oppose the black magicians, won’t he then go along with Hattori and take her side?”

“You also need to adjust your actions accordingly around the feelings he’s developed.”

“Being the student council president doesn’t make me a god, you know! Anyway, there was one other thing I was curious about.”

“What?”

“Who exactly is Keena Soga?” The student council president asked meaningfully. Her teacher tilted her head at the question.

“Who knows? She’s just a normal student. Just a plain old, regular student.”

Miss Mitsuko gave a big grin.

Afterword

I don’t know whether to thank you for all your support or tell you that it’s nice to meet you all, but in any case, my name is Shoutarou Mizuki. Are you all living it up? As for me, hm... same old, same old.

This is totally random, but I used to know someone who was an absolute genius at finding restaurants with terrible food. And by genius, I don’t mean he just happened upon restaurants with awful food, or that he would remember to tell people about these places — that’d be bad enough in itself — but he’s the kinda person who’d say, “I found a place with really great food,” and bring you to this high-class, luxurious restaurant, complete with bronze statues and insane price tags... yet somehow everything they served you would taste awful.

Everyone has their own ideas of what tastes good, but no matter who he brought to the restaurant, remarkably, they all agreed that the food was bad, and yet expensive. Nonetheless, he thought it was delicious, which in itself is more proof that everyone has their own ideas of what tastes good. But you have to agree it’s kinda strange, isn’t it?

Anyway, if that was it the story would end there, but there’s a lesson to be learned here.

“Even if the food is bad, you have to just get over it and move on!” This is what I learned.

Things have gotten much easier since I came upon this realization. There are often people who agonize over where to eat, only to end up enraged over the taste of the food, the service, and so forth. But I’m sure their expectations are a large part of that. So if you get rid of those expectations, it’ll turn into a carefree and easy experience instead. In the end, you actually start welcoming bad food into your life.

“This is awful! I’m actually impressed that they were somehow able to make something so terrible.”

I started thinking this way, and ended up actively trying to search for restaurants with terrible food. It's better if it isn't a chain restaurant or somewhere cheap. I'm not looking for some café that just serves food out of the packages they came in. I want that sense of surprise I get when I ask myself, "Wait, did someone actually *make* this?"

I also want to avoid weird places that serve up things like "sweet dessert spaghetti," or foods that are an acquired taste, making it hard for many people to enjoy. If you eliminate places like this, it's surprising how few and far between bad restaurants are. For example, one of the restaurants I've found was... Wait, I can't just openly go on about them here!

Incidentally, all of these are from different restaurants, but I will announce some of the names I've given to those dishes that truly moved me after I had finished eating them.

"The Mysterious Cheesecake."

"Motsunabe from Hell's Caldron."

"Roadkill Hairtail."

These would be the top three.

Even now they are waiting for customers to come and order them.

If you should happen to find a restaurant like this, please tell me about it! Even better if it's around the Kanto region. Someday, I'm sure I'll go and eat there.

Anyway, about this book.

I hope you had a fun time reading it. There's no need to read too deeply into it.

Although, as the writer I have put a tremendous amount of effort into the story, so I hope you took your time and enjoyed it.

Relatively speaking, this book doesn't really require me to say much about it, so I'll leave it at that. I am delighted that you have purchased my book. While the schedule has yet to be decided, I would like to turn this into a series and give it my absolute freakin' best! I'm gonna need all your support in order to do

so! I won’t let you all down!

Now for my acknowledgments.

To the illustrator, Souichi Itou.

Thank you very much for your wonderful illustrations. Even from the rough sketches, those involved with the book had nothing but praise for them, and Keena is already quite popular.

To my editor, Ohashi.

Thank you for all the hard work you put in during the end of the year holidays. Going forward, I hope to get through my work fast enough so I don’t give you extra work on your holidays.

Finally, I want to thank everyone else who was involved in the making of this book.

Well then, let’s all enjoy ourselves!

Shoutarou Mizuki/Souichi Itou



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Demon King Daimaou: Volume 1

by Shoutarou Mizuki

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