
CHIROLU
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If It's for My Daughter, I'd Even Defeat a Demon Lord
5


"I WAITED FOR THIS TIME TO COME. FOR THE MOMENT I WOULD MEET YOU IN THIS PLACE, O ROSE-HUED MAIDEN."
IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL, WELL-FEATURED FACE. HER GOLDEN HORNS GAVE OFF A PALE REFLECTION OF THE LIGHT. AND ABOVE ALL ELSE, ROSE COULD NEVER FORGET THAT LONG, GLAMOROUS PURPLE HAIR. THIS WAS THE DEVIL WOMAN WHO HAD ONCE SAVED ROSE FROM THE SECOND DEMON LORD.


"I'LL DEFINITELY GET HER BACK."
THOSE WORDS MEANT THAT THE SEVEN DEMON LORDS WOULD BE WIPED OUT BY A HERO.


"IT SOUNDS LIKE SUCH FUN, KILLING A HERO!"
THE BLOND GIRL LICKED THE SWEET SHE HAD PICKED UP WITH HER RED TONGUE, THEN LET OUT A LAUGH. IT WAS POOR MANNERS AND THE ACT WAS SUGGESTIVE, BUT IT HAD A CAPTIVATING GRACE TO IT AND DID NOT MATCH HER YOUNG EXTERIOR.

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1: The Platinum-haired Maiden Meets the Golden King Once Again

Beneath a gentle, light-blue sky, a calm, pleasant breeze blew. It was a nice temperature, not too hot, so they had chosen a shop with open, outdoor seating as the place to meet up.

“Sylvia!” Latina said with a smile and a wave, and Sylvia waved back in response.

This cafe was near the temple of Akhdar. It was one of the shops frequented by Akhdar priests, who became so immersed in their work that they sometimes neglected eating and sleeping. Even now, looking about the tables you could see young priests who looked like the living dead gazing off into space and priestesses devouring thick sandwiches like little kids.

I wonder if she’s getting enough sleep?

Latina couldn’t help but worry every time she came to this part of town and saw this sight, almost like a heap of corpses, but for everyone there it was perfectly normal and not worth paying any attention to.

Sylvia looks like she’s her usual energetic self, though.

Her friend had been unusually good at going with the flow ever since they were kids, and that remained true even now.

“Long time no see, Sylvia. Have you been doing well?”

“Naturally.”

They took their seats in wooden chairs with slightly chipped paint and called over a waiter. After listening to Sylvia’s recommendations as a regular, Latina decided on an order. Since Sylvia said the black tea wasn’t overly sweet, she ordered it with a small open sandwich to accompany it.

“It feels like there’s something different about you, Latina.”

“Huh?” Latina couldn’t help but jump a bit at Sylvia’s statement. She had all sorts of ideas as to how she’d changed compared to how she was just a little while ago.

Just too much had happened lately, and Latina knew that she herself hadn’t fully come to grips with all of it yet. Just the fact alone that Dale had proposed to her would have been enough to keep her mind occupied, and then they had spent their “first night” together, which had her maiden heart on the verge of bursting. And then on top of that, she became a demon lord, and furthermore had made Dale into her retainer, which was something she hadn’t even imagined doing. It felt safe to say that even in the long life of a devil, such a ridiculous chain of events never occurred.

“Well, he finally made things clear. I guess it’s only natural that you seem a little different.” Sylvia looked at the engagement bracelet Latina had on with a broad, teasing grin. In Tislow, the fruit and flower design crafted into it traditionally symbolized “marriage.” “It’s a shame, though, that I haven’t gotten to see you as a bride.”

“We still haven’t made any plans,” Latina said with a shy smile, looking at the bracelet on her wrist. She was happy to be able to inform her friend, who had known of her crush since they were little, of her engagement, but on the other hand, it was definitely embarrassing, too.

Sylvia’s mission today was to hear all the juicy details about how Dale and Latina had gotten engaged.

Furthermore, the departure date for Sylvia’s trip was fast approaching.

“Where are you going first, Sylvia?”

“I’ll go somewhere closer to start with, accompanied by my seniors. I’m still not used to traveling, after all.”

She had trained for years in the temple of Akhdar, and now she was preparing to leave on her first trip as an official priestess. The time she’d been waiting for was so close now, and Sylvia’s expression was absolutely radiant.

“I want to say, ‘Take care,’ but I know you’ve been working hard for this, so I’ll say congratulations instead. Enjoy yourself, alright?”

“Naturally.”

For those with Akhdar’s divine protection, the ability to fulfill their own desire to visit unknown places and experience unseen things brought them more joy than anything else.

The pair chatted away about such things as their current circumstances and plans. Before she even realized it, Sylvia was down to her last sip of her black tea, which was now completely cool. She looked around for a waiter so she could order a refill.

It was in that instant that she realized a man in foreign clothing and wearing a hat was looking at them. More specifically, at Latina.

At first, Sylvia didn’t pay any attention to that fact. Her friend Latina had always been pretty, and lately a womanly beauty had been added on top of that, so passersby would often stop and stare at her. And since it was a man of the opposite sex, it was all the more natural.

Latina just tilted her head a bit, wondering why she was being stared at. But when the man immediately took a knee and bowed down before Latina, the two friends couldn’t help but look at one another in surprise.

“Wah?!”



“Huh?! Latina, do you know this guy?!”

“I-I’ve never seen him before!” Latina replied, but she jumped a bit when she heard his voice.

“*Platinum Princess.*”

Latina almost leapt up out of her chair as she looked at the man’s face, and her eyes soon grew wide and face pale. She squeezed out a trembling voice, unwittingly in a nostalgic tone, “*You’re...*”

“*So you remember me? I see Guru Smaragdi was successful in protecting you. Where is the guru now?*”

“*Rag... Smaragdi, he... a long while ago, he...*”

“*Is... that so... So the prophecy of her lady, the oracle, has come to fruition.*”

It was her friend’s voice that snapped Latina out of her conversation with the man.

“Latina?”

Latina looked taken aback as she looked at her friend’s face in response.

“Sylvia... Um, you see—” Latina said hesitantly, trying to smooth things over.

“*Platinum princess.*” The foreign-looking man called out to her again. “*My master has come to this place.*”

When she heard that, Latina completely forgot that Sylvia was present. Looking utterly shocked, she stopped and stared at the man.

“Why?” she whispered in a hoarse voice. “Why is Chrysos...”

Latina staggered forward. Sylvia hurriedly grabbed her shoulder. “Latina? Should I go call for somebody?”

“Sylvia...”

Sylvia looked like she didn’t grasp what was going on, and Latina finally realized that she’d been talking in the language of her old home.

At the same time that she remembered Sylvia was there, Latina also looked back at the man, who was now standing back up. When she looked at Sylvia

again, she wore a terribly sad expression on her face.

“I’m sorry, Sylvia... I have to go...”

“Latina?”

“Please, don’t tell *anyone* about what happened today. Or that I went with this man.”

Realizing from Latina’s emphasis that that included even the man she loved most, Sylvia furrowed her brows and frowned. However, she only hesitated for a second before nodding. “Got it.”

“Thank you, Sylvia.”

“You’ll be alright, won’t you?”

“Yeah... I won’t be in danger at all.” Latina stood up and awkwardly smiled. Having waited for her to do so, the man started walking. Maintaining a firm expression on her face, Latina followed after him.

After seeing Latina leave, walking a step behind the unfamiliar man, Sylvia quietly uttered a single word in question. “Chrysos?”

Then, without making a sound, she stood up from her chair.

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“*Why is Chrysos—the ‘Golden King,’ here?*”

“*My master has long been searching for you, who left Vassilios alongside Guru Smaragdi.*”

The man was heading towards the western district. Latina didn’t come there often and wasn’t familiar with the area, but she didn’t even think to glance around, and her gaze stayed fixed on the man’s back.

“*And at last, we were able to find you.*”

Latina jumped a little upon hearing that. She bit firmly on her lip and looked up at the man. “*Why?*”

“*There was no way we could mistake your appearance. We reported to our master immediately upon learning you were in this town, as it was only a matter of time before we found you.*”

It had been mere coincidence that they had stumbled upon a hint that she was there. The shard of a horn possessed by one of the residents of this town was imbued with the mana of the “princess” who should have been in Vassilios. If the person they were looking for had had something unfortunate happen to her, or the horn had been stolen, the mana about the horn would not be so gentle and warm. So in that case, even if they didn’t know how it had happened, the princess had freely given a shard of her horn to someone else. And despite the long period of time that had passed, the mana still remained pronounced.

At the same time, even though they didn’t know the details, there were rumors about this town of a “Platinum Princess.” The odds of the person they were looking for being here had been far higher than any of the places they’d been to before.

From the way that she was ghastly pale and faintly trembling, it was apparent that Latina was clearly not happy about this chance encounter. But the man thought that there was no helping that. After all, he knew that this “princess” had no intention of appearing before his master again.

The man was also intimately familiar with Guru Smaragdi, who had guided a great number of people, himself included. The guru would surely have given detailed instructions to this princess, his daughter.

The man’s master’s wish was to bring this princess back. However, the princess herself and the guru didn’t want that. This princess was prophesied to bring about disaster, and she didn’t want to harm the nation of Vassilios or its king.

It wasn’t as if the man didn’t have any fears regarding the precious prophecy of disaster the lady oracle had left behind, but his master’s orders took precedence over his own feelings.

His king claimed to not fear the prophecy; therefore, opposing those words would be opposing the very authority of his master—the leader of Vassilios, the Golden King who was like a sun. The king that the whole of the people had anxiously awaited. There was no need to doubt the king’s words, which like light itself would shine the way to a bright future.

The man stopped in front of a manor in the western district. As the western district was a high-class residential area, every building had an elegance to it that those of the rougher southern and eastern districts couldn't hope to match. But as Latina was used to the hustle and bustle of the cruder parts of town, the quiet nature of the area only amplified her unease.

From the chilly feel about the manor, like it was completely devoid of flame, Latina guessed that it was a vacant house, that nobody lived there. But at the same time, seeing the man insert a key into the door, she realized they must have been using it with permission. This must have been why she hadn't heard any rumors about devils in the southern district, where travelers tended to gather. Rather than staying at an inn, they were using this manor as a temporary dwelling.

Inside, it was deadly silent.

There was no sense of it being lived in. However, the spaces that were being used had apparently had the dust cleared away. There were no signs of it falling to ruin, either.

Following behind the man, Latina ascended the stairs. He stopped before a stately wooden door at the top, then opened it and let Latina go through. Beyond the wide-open door, a figure stood with their back to the dazzling sunlight coming in through the windows.

Latina stood frozen, so overwhelmed by emotions that she couldn't even speak. There was no way she could mistake the person she was looking at. That face still had marked features she remembered from when they were young. This person looked identical to how they had during their chance encounter in that other place outside of reality.

"*Chrysos...*"

"*Platina.*"

Unbefitting of their young appearance, they solemnly used the name Latina had been called in the past. Amongst her now distant memories of when she was little, she knew it as the name she was called by the adults other than her parents.

Before Latina realized it, she was being hugged so tightly that she couldn't even breathe. She was enveloped in a scent different from her own and those of the people she was close to. With a bewildered look on her face, Latina twisted her body, trying to escape the grasp that was binding her.

"*Please let go of me, Chrysos!*"

"*Why? We have finally met again, my beloved Platina. I shall not let you go again. Now that I have taken the throne, there are no longer any who can give me orders. I shall use all of the power I have to protect you...*"

"*Chrysos, let me go! I won't return to that country... Never again. I have a different place where I belong now!*"

With that response, the arms hugging Latina only grew tighter. As if reflecting their owner's emotions, Chrysos's eyes grew dark and clouded.

"*Just how long have I awaited this moment?*"

"*I... I also...*"

Latina held back the words "wanted to see you." No matter how much she may have truly felt that way, she couldn't follow this person back to her old home.

"*Do you know how much I searched for you?*"

Latina understood. As the king of a nation, entrusted with the whole of the country, one couldn't so easily head off to other nations. But that hadn't changed since when they were raised in the depths of the shrine as potential candidates to become king.

Latina had thought that just seeing each other in the space with the thrones was enough. She was satisfied just with having gotten a glimpse at this person who was so precious to her, whom she never thought she'd see again.

But she'd never expected that Chrysos would leave Vassilios and come looking for her in person. That fact made her happy. She couldn't help but feel gratitude that Chrysos still felt the same as back then despite all the time that had passed, and had come for her.

"*I... I have someone precious to me now... and I want to live with him... to stay*

with him forever... So I can't go with you, Chrysos..." And so, Latina clearly told the king that. Because Chrysos was precious to her, Latina didn't want to lie; she wanted to be honest.

"*I'm sorry. I can't return to your side anymore, Chrysos...*"

The arms around Latina now hugged her so tight that it hurt. The action clearly displayed Chrysos's desire to not let her go or run away, causing Latina's expression to darken more.

"*I refuse. I will not accept it.*"

"*Chrysos...*" Latina looked like she was about to cry, and Chrysos looked a little embarrassed, too. However, the hug didn't loosen up at all.

"*I would be able to protect you.*"

"*Chrysos?*"

"*Your existence overturns the natural order of demon lords. That is the one absolute power of the demon lord numbered zero, or perhaps eight. The other demon lords will naturally take exception.*"

"*My power isn't anything all that amazing, though.*" Latina wrung out, looking like she was about to break down in tears.

"*Your presence shakes the idea that the number of demon lords is established as seven and alters their state as unassailable. Just by existing, you are a threat to the other demon lords. The creation of a demon lord outside the natural is a system of control put in place by the gods for when the other seven are all established.*"

"*Why, Chrysos?*" Latina questioned, bewildered as to why Chrysos knew more about her power than she did. The amount of time since each of them had become demon lords differed, but Latina couldn't help but question how Chrysos knew so much more about the world.

"*After losing you, I strove my hardest in Vassilios in order to become a proper king. In the midst of that, I surmised that fact from my studies of our history, while investigating the cursed prophecy that you would bring disaster for the king.*"

“*Ah...*”

“*The Eighth Demon Lord, who is both a demon lord and not, only appears when all seven of the natural ones have appeared throughout the world. It is a different system for controlling demon lords than heroes, and the Eighth Demon Lord is able to wield powers normally reserved for heroes. Though it was hardly mentioned in our records, I considered it as one possibility.*”

All the while, Chrysos had prayed it wouldn’t be the case. Reading that from Chrysos’s expression, Latina’s eyes grew blurry with tears.

However, Chrysos still declared an intention to protect her. Even though so much time had passed since they parted ways. Even though Latina wasn’t able to grant Chrysos’s wish to live together.

But even so, Latina couldn’t deny her own feelings. Dale was still the person she wanted by her side, more than anyone else.

“*I’m sorry... I’m sorry, Chrysos...*”

And because she’d come to understand so much, Latina couldn’t accept Chrysos’s proposal.

“*Chrysos, you need to be the First Demon Lord. The devil race has been waiting so long for the birth of a new king, so...*” With her teary eyes, Latina looked straight at Chrysos. “*When the time comes, as king, you need to think of protecting your country above everything else. And I’m fine with that. I want you to be that way, Chrysos, so—*”

“*I don’t want to, Platina!*”

Seeing Chrysos speak out childishly with a raised voice and a shaking head, which Latina hadn’t seen since they were young, Latina’s grey eyes wavered despite the firm will behind them. A stream of tears flowed down her cheeks.

“*If I, the Eighth Demon Lord, am the enemy of all demon lords... then the First Demon Lord must treat me as one, too. You can’t expose Vassilios to the fires of war in order to cover for me,*” Latina said with a determination that could be called heroic.

Latina was a kind girl, and also one with a strong will. She couldn’t weigh

herself more highly than an entire nation. And that didn't just apply to the country that had once been her home.

"Saying I'm sorry won't be enough... and I can't ask for forgiveness... But I'm sorry, Dale..." Latina wrung out in a quiet voice, and once more the tears flowed from her closed eyes and down her cheeks. "I want to protect Kreuz and the people precious to me... So if the time comes... I'll..."

She couldn't let all the demon lords run rampant over the places that were precious to her in their search for the being who opposed them. She couldn't let those places become battlefields.

"*If the time comes when all of the demon lords are looking for me, then I won't run or hide. I'll handle things on my own. To me, this town... is a second home to me, and I'll protect it. You're the only one I can ask this of, Chrysos, so...*" Her voice was full of determination, and though it was quiet, it did not waver. "*If that time comes, destroy me.*"

Above even her desire to stay with him, Latina wanted Dale to be safe. She knew that he was famed for his skill as an adventurer, but even so, her heart always ached when Dale left for work, worrying if he was getting hurt or his life was in danger.

She remembered how she'd once been in that forest, powerless to do anything as she watched her father breathe his last. She knew what it meant to part forever.

Latina was always afraid that somewhere she couldn't see, while she could only pray, he was already in a state where he wouldn't make it back to her.

Now that Dale had become her retainer, a demon, his abilities had improved in all sorts of ways. But despite that, Latina couldn't imagine he'd be able to make all the demon lords his enemies and remain unharmed. Latina couldn't calmly accept the idea of him placing himself in danger for her sake, and there was no way she could ever ask him to head towards his own death for her. Latina was precious to Dale, and though he strongly wished to protect her, she wanted to protect him, too.

Even if he had become her retainer, Latina didn't control Dale at all. She felt truly relieved that he had remained himself. Even if, as his master, she were to

disappear from this world, he wouldn't follow after. He may lose the long lifespan he'd gained as a demon, but his natural human lifespan should still remain. He'd just return to his old self.

That was surely what would happen, right? That's what Latina thought, shutting a lid over her grieving heart.

There was no way she would do the same if their positions were reversed. She would struggle with everything she had to protect him, even if it cost her her life. The two of them really were similar at the core, so she knew that he'd do the same. That was exactly why she couldn't leave Dale the option of making that choice.

The only ones that could defeat a demon lord were their antithesis, one with the power to overturn the fate that shielded them. No matter how much of a first-rate warrior and magic user Dale may have been, he couldn't oppose the demon lords because of that fact. She couldn't let Dale take on such a reckless battle for her sake.

"I'm sorry... I'm sorry, Dale..." And then, she apologized to the other person for whom she was making this decision. "*I'm sorry, Chrysos...*"

If she had just wasted away in that forest, she wouldn't have caused the people precious to her to suffer so. Maybe she really was a being that brought about disaster.

"I'm sorry..."

And yet she had still wished for that happiness; that made her such a sinful being. Latina's shoulders quaked and her tears flowed forth.

"*Even so, I...*" Chrysos started with a trembling voice and sad expression. The expression on the king's face clearly showed a refusal to accept what Latina was saying. And yet, being in charge of a nation, Chrysos was unable to refute Latina's words.

Chrysos's expression was that of one torn between the post of a king and one's personal emotions, but with the clear ring of a glass bell from beyond the door, that expression disappeared.

Keeping a low posture as he entered the room, the man removed his hat,

revealing the horns that proved he was a devil. Seeing the golden, jewel-adorned ornamentation hanging from his horns, Latina remembered the customs of her old home and realized the man was Chrysos's retainer, a demon.

And yet, when she saw how Chrysos couldn't completely relax even around trusted subordinates, Latina's expression grew clouded. She realized that Chrysos was still young and had only just taken the throne, and thus needed to hold back a great many things.

Though the king was now hiding all emotion and inner turmoil, the moment before Latina was released from that tight embrace, she saw the pain in the king's eyes. Latina started to reach for those arms, only to realize that she mustn't. As if trying to hide her shaken heart, Latina put her own hands together tightly, as they now had nowhere else to go.

She had sought the one person to whom she had exposed her inner self.

Her choice had caused suffering to those precious to her. She'd betrayed her beloved, whom she only wanted to live together with, and she wouldn't be able to grant the wish of one who had kept the promise from when she was young.

"I really do bring about calamity, just like Mov's prediction said..."

That prophecy had been handed down by the highest-ranking priestess even in her old home—an oracle of the sort that only rarely appears. Unable to oppose it, Latina held her clenched hands to her chest and silently wept.

Latina didn't fully remember how she made it back to the southern district after that.

The reunion with Chrysos, who was tied to the few good memories Latina had of her old home, should have made her happy, even if she wouldn't have been able to openly show it. If only the natural demon lords weren't going to come eliminate her in the near future. Put another way... If only they didn't need to part forever.

Even so, thank you for worrying about me, Chrysos... She really was happy to know that there was someone who would weep for her back in her old home, where she should have lost everything.

Latina worried herself sick over the myriad of emotions and facts that felt like

they would crush her, sending her spiraling into depression.

In the days after, Latina tried to act the same as always so as to not worry the people around her. She decided that until that quickly approaching time came, she would indulge herself just a bit more with the time that she had left with the people precious to her.

Meanwhile, the people who had watched over her since she was young sensed that Latina was out of sorts.

“She’s been acting a bit strange lately, hasn’t she?” Even though Rita didn’t say who she was referring to, Kenneth knew exactly who she meant.

“That’s true. It seems like she’s trying too hard to make sure we don’t worry about her, but...”

“That girl ends up worrying about things pretty easily... Ever since she was little, she’s tormented herself and kept everything bottled up. That still hasn’t changed.”

“She got engaged to Dale, so things are changing in a big way. It’s only natural that she’d be out of sorts, right?”

“I can’t deny the possibility, but...”

Kenneth and Rita exchanged worried glances, but they couldn’t come up with anything but marriage blues, so they decided to just keep an eye on her.

But that wasn’t the case for Dale. He clearly realized that something was off with Latina.

No matter how many times he asked her about it, she brushed him off with harmless and non-committal answers, which only made him all the more worried. He couldn’t just turn a blind eye.

That night, Dale asked her again, having no idea how many times he had at this point. With just the two of them in the room and nowhere to run from his questions, he looked straight at her and asked in a stern tone, “Latina, did something happen?”

“Dale...” Ever since she was little, Latina had been awful at lying.

Dale stared at her for a long time, keeping a close eye on her clear

expressions and actions. “I’m begging you, please just tell me.”

“I’m fine, Dale... Don’t worry about it.”

“Latina!” Dale said in a firm tone; Latina jerked her shoulders in surprise. Her frightened expression made him feel guilty, but he couldn’t back down now.

“I at least get that you’re hiding something... so please, tell me. I’m begging you!”

“Dale...” Latina’s expression grew strained. The tears flowed from her blurry eyes. “I’m sorry... Dale, I, I...”

“I don’t want you to apologize, I just want you to talk to me. So...”

“I’m sorry... I’m sorry...” Even so, Latina remained stubborn and didn’t talk about what she was hiding. She just kept apologizing.

Latina bit hard on her lip; she really didn’t know what to do. However, she did know that the one thing she *couldn’t* do was open up to Dale. If she did, she’d end up clinging to him and relying on him completely. She’d end up entrusting everything to him as he told her it was alright and he hugged her tight and she felt his warmth.

But she couldn’t do that. She didn’t want him getting wrapped up in her own destruction. Just the fact that he wanted to live on together with her was enough to satisfy her.

Although she knew it was just her being selfish, she hated the thought of Dale disappearing from this world. And then there were those people and this place which were so precious to her. But above all else, what she wanted most of all was to protect the man she loved, no matter what it took.

And that’s why Latina obstinately shut her mouth.

Dale would surely never comply with Latina’s request to accept her destruction at the hands of the other demon lords. She knew that, so this was nothing but her own selfishness.

Feeling a presence of destruction right behind her, Latina looked up. She sensed that the time had come: if she didn’t say it now, she’d never have the chance.

“Dale... I...”

With tears still streaming from her eyes, she looked up at him. What she really wanted to do was smile, but she wasn’t able to do it properly. She wanted to look right at his face, but her vision grew blurry and she couldn’t see very well.

“I’m glad I met you, Dale. I really was happy.”

Dale felt a chill. Why was she saying that now? Why were her words... in the past tense?

He reflexively reached out, but right before his arms, which were stretching out to hug her, could reach her—

In the corner of her mind, Latina thought, *If only he could have hugged me that one last time...*

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The space she awakened in was not the warm place she’d grown so accustomed to. This place shouldn’t have been real. It was like she could feel a chill running through her mind and body, but she may have also been just imagining it.

It was a monochrome world composed of all of the colors. In the center of it existed a small, luxurious throne, and seated upon it, the demon lord outside of the natural order trembled slightly. She held the jeweled bracelet that had become her symbol to her chest as if to protect it, as if not wanting to part from it. She felt like she’d be swallowed up if it wasn’t there.

There were seven thrones placed around her, and each of them was filled with the presence of a lord. There was clear hostility in the numerous gazes pointed her way, as if they were examining her.

She couldn’t clearly make out what the other lords looked like. She could only feel their presences.

She realized that only the lord seated in the first throne was concerned about her; that’s why she didn’t look in that direction. After all, she mustn’t let the other lords realize that they knew one another. She wouldn’t let the malice

directed at her be pointed at that king as well.

What followed were “voices,” but also not. Rather, her mind was recognizing the thoughts of the others as voices, which was an easier concept to understand.

[So this is the one outside the natural order... the Eighth Demon Lord.]

[A being prepared by the gods to chip away at the power of we demon lords, despite also being one.]

[No, I don’t want to die! I was able to finally escape from death by becoming a demon lord...]

Hearing the numerous overlapping voices, she gripped the bracelet tighter. In her heart, she pondered the fact that, in her weakness, she had as good as deceived and betrayed him for the sake of her own selfishness, and yet she ended up relying on him here at the very end.

She wanted to become a strong, kind adult like he was. She was resolute and determined in that regard, thinking it would be nice if she could come even a bit close to that ideal.

The whirl of malicious “voices” swirling about her wished for her destruction. Exposed to that animosity that almost seemed to have mass, it became painful to even breathe.

[I’ll go ahead and kill her personally for all of you. It’s not often a chance like this comes around, after all.]

[Interesting. Perhaps I shall have a bite as well.]

When she heard what the voices were saying, she lifted her face.

[You won’t hide? Even though you should run and try to flee as hard as you can?]

She opened her mouth and raised her own “voice.” She loudly proclaimed that she wouldn’t do such things and was right here.

She was the only one who needed to be destroyed. She wouldn’t let anyone else get tangled up in this. Though she was weak, she was proud of that alone.

If the Demon Lords of Calamity made a move, mountains of corpses would pile up and whole towns would be burned to ashes. The people and places most precious to her would likely be all the more targeted. As incarnations of catastrophe, it was easy for the Demon Lords of Calamity to wipe out towns—even nations. Even a single demon lord wielded such immense power, so if more than one came after her at once, the things and people precious to her would all be stolen away, not a trace left behind.

And so, she'd chosen to offer herself up to them. Rather than struggling, she accepted the summons to come to this place and be judged.

[If you wish for my destruction, then do as you wish.]

She felt numerous presences grimace in response to her resolute "voice." But then, like a ferocious beast licking its lips, a voice like a sweet poison immediately and happily responded.

[Oh, my. Then in that case, go ahead and die atop that throne. It will be my first murder in this place, so it sounds exciting.]

Her own impending death grew all the more certain. Ignoring her own trembling body, she kept staring straight ahead, not even looking downwards. She gripped her bracelet tight.

[I don't believe that destruction is the best choice.]

The air shifted as this quiet voice resounded through the space. The master of the first throne remained calm as the gazes of the other lords shot their way.

[What do you mean?]

[The Eighth Demon Lord is born when the others have all gathered. Even if we destroy this one here and now, it will not be long before someone next sits atop that throne, yes?]

While hearing that "voice," which never lost its quiet tone, the tears she'd desperately been holding back fell, and something warm blurred her vision.

[If we are to deal with the Eighth Demon Lord, then we should use some method other than destruction.]

[There is no guarantee that the next Eighth Demon Lord shall be as docile as

this one. Is it not easier to deal with one who can be reined in?]

As other demon lords spoke up in agreement, the consensus in the space started to shift in that direction.

She cried, taking care not to make a sound.

Not wanting her to be destroyed, that person had, without risking their own position, managed to get their own opinion across. It was the greatest possible compromise.

That king had grasped at the slightest chance of saving her, even though she had asked to be destroyed. As one entrusted with an entire nation, it wasn't possible to oppose the Demon Lords of Calamity openly. The king had too much to protect, and thus couldn't live a life governed by personal feelings.

Yet that king had still tried to protect her.

[Then by our names, we shall seal her.]

The numerous overlapping voices arrived at that conclusion.

In response to her own "end," which was finally approaching, she closed her grey eyes overflowing with tears. Even though she intended to accept her fate without struggle, her heart grew heavy with fear.

And so...

"I really was happy," she muttered. "Just like Rag wished for at the end... I was happy."

She remembered the words her father had said with a gentle smile in his final moments, not wanting his young daughter to see his despair and sorrow as death closed in on him in that forest. He told her that she didn't need to worry, because he'd be watching over her from the other side of the rainbow, but all the while he had been troubled over how she looked like she'd be crushed by loneliness and the uncertainty of her own future. He said that she would definitely find happiness, because she was born with the gods of the seven colors watching over her.

Until his final breath, he'd prayed for the happiness of the daughter he was leaving behind.

“Every day has been truly happy for me in this country that worships the red god, Ahmar, which took me in when I had nowhere to go. This country in which I’ve spent more time than the one I came from... this town... is now another hometown to me.”

Rag had taught her that if ever she was in trouble, she should count on the temple of Ahmar; but before she could do so, the country of the red god, Laband—where these kind people lived—had offered her protection.

“In the wedding performed before the orange god, Quirmizi, the bride was so beautiful... And I went to see a ton of festivals. The world was overflowing with dazzling things, so many that I couldn’t have even imagined it back when I lived in the depths of the temple.”

Being brought out of the temple to see a Quirmizi festival was one of her few happy memories from her old home, as well as being together with her precious family. And her memories of seeing the fireworks with her friends, and walking hand-in-hand with the person she adored, were important and happy ones for her, too.

“Getting to spend each day with everyone and study when we went to school at the temple of the yellow god, Asfar, was really fun. And when I went on a trip, I got to see all sorts of things. I learned about a vast, beautiful world I never knew... And I got to hear all sorts of stories from the customers who doted on me as I spent each day in a place with a flag of the green god, Akhdar, which made me really happy... Will they worry about me when I’m gone? I wish I could have said a proper farewell...”

Back when the small, cramped depths of the temple where she lived was her whole world, she’d been taught that the real world was incredibly vast. When she saw it with her own eyes, those words proved true, and it was overflowing with beauty.

“Rag, you said I’d get a job, which the blue god, Azraq, rules over, once I become an adult, but I ended up working earlier than that. Kenneth and Rita were really kind and taught me a lot... I wanted to see Theo and Emma grow up. I hope Vint will watch over them for me...”

With the memories bubbling up in her heart, she remembered each word her

father had left for her and responded to them.

She wanted to be like Rag, wishing for the happiness of the people she was leaving behind rather than being crushed by despair.

“I don’t regret having broken my horn. When I was hugged tight in the clinic at the temple of Niili, the indigo god, I decided everything. Back then, I’d already chosen to live alongside the humans rather than as a devil.”

That decision had helped decide her fate. She would never become the king of the devils, the First Demon Lord. She hadn’t chosen the devils, so she couldn’t become the leader of her people.

Rather than the race from which demon lords were born, she lived for the sake of a different people. Back then, she had already fulfilled one of the requirements for becoming the Eighth Demon Lord.

“Just like the Mov—oracle of the violet god, Banafsaj—prophesied, I brought about disaster, but... I know that Mov was concerned about me, too.” Still holding the bracelet, she brought her hands together in front of her chest. “I really was happy.”

So that her heart wouldn’t break from fear, she called to mind the people and memories precious to her. And above all else...

“I’m truly glad to have met Dale.” The one she brought her hands together in prayer for was that person she loved most of all. Her heart was full of something other than hatred and sorrow, and until the very end, she remained herself—the person he had said he loved.

“I really, truly was happy.”

She hoped that he would at least be able to find happiness, even when she was gone. Powerless and small as she was, she prayed that as one seated at the foot of the table of the gods, her wish could be granted.

“And... I’m really... sorry...” she muttered at the very end, as her consciousness sank away in this colorless world.

2: The Young Man Sets Out

The hands he reached out with, trying to embrace her, found nothing but empty space. His eyes shot wide open in response to the impossible occurrence.

All of a sudden, that platinum-haired girl who should have been there had disappeared. She was gone, leaving behind not even a single strand of hair—like she had never even been there.

She had disappeared from this moment, from the very world itself.

He baselessly thought that if he had just been a bit quicker and had managed to grab her, he would have been able to hold her here. All the while, he also went over the facts, remaining strangely calm.

Such a phenomenon should have been impossible, even with magic. And even on the off chance that it was some sort of magic he'd never heard of, Dale didn't sense the presence of anyone else here. This being the result of some outside magic was just too slim.

Dale scrutinized each possibility that came to mind one by one and then denied them. The thing that bothered him above all else was the way that Latina seemed to know this was coming.

"...Demon lords," Dale muttered while unconsciously clenching his jaw.

Even with the many types of divine protection out there, which were fragments of the power of the gods, he couldn't imagine such a thing being possible. In that case, it was only possible for beings outside the races of man—beings that wielded even greater power.

Latina had said that demon lords were like lower-ranking gods. Miraculous power of that sort may have been impossible for mere men, but it was a different matter when it came to gods.

And Latina had said something else: the only ones able to harm demon lords were either other demon lords, their compatriots also similar to lower-ranking

gods, or their antitheses—heroes, the beings able to overturn the destiny that protected them. In other words, now that Latina had become a demon lord, the number of beings who could harm her were limited.

With the power of a hero, it wouldn't be possible to erase a demon lord without even knowing where they were. Dale knew that fact better than anyone. A hero's divine protection and powers were most definitely nowhere near that omnipotent. If they were, then Dale never would have needed to so desperately polish his skills and keep on slaughtering demons, even as it ate away at his own heart.

In that case, it only could have been a demon lord who had harmed Latina.

The gods of the seven colors didn't interact with the world directly. Latina had also stated that.

He didn't know the reason; the method was a mystery to him, too. But Dale was at least able to use that reasoning to deduce who the culprit could be.

"Latina..." The whisper that escaped from his lips dispersed into the darkness of the night lit only by the faint light of the stars.

Though it was late at night, Dale didn't feel a need to sleep, as his thoughts raced in the dark attic room. That was a change that he'd sensed vaguely since becoming a demon.

While he was able to keep on sleeping and eating like he had been up until now, it was no longer truly necessary in order to keep living. He did, of course, still require some. But compared to when he was a human, he required so much less that it wasn't even comparable. Both his body and mind had been strengthened in becoming a demon.

There was still time until morning. His thoughts looped over and over and were solely about that girl who was so precious to him.

His thoughts moved around and around.

What should I do? What should I be doing?

He didn't even know what had happened.

Even if he knew the culprit was a demon lord, he didn't know which one it

was or what reason they'd had for doing this.

He didn't believe he could take on the demon lords on his own. The part of his mind that was still being logical led him to that conclusion. He knew that because he'd spent so much time swinging his sword under contract to the nation of Laband.

There were several demon lords, and they maintained a strange balance among themselves, holding each other in check. If the Demon Lords of Calamity took hold of an opportunity to take action, that would be a huge disaster for many nations.

A single girl had disappeared. Just accepting it would be the simplest, most peaceful solution. But Dale's logic presented him with one choice: the decision that would make the fewest number of people unhappy.

At that moment, he saw something out of the corner of his eye. Normally, he would never pick it up. It was a single notebook with thick, cloth binding: her diary, which she'd occasionally hold to her chest with a smile.

He opened it up half-unconsciously. As if searching for traces of her now that she was gone, he was drawn towards this object.

Written in her small, easy-to-read, methodical letters, he found silly, trifling details of their everyday life. The length and style varied by day, and occasionally the dates skipped ahead. It was all "silly" and casual, but her world was full of a calm and gentle light.

Dale found parts that were written about him. So this was what he looked like from her point of view... She paid attention to things that were that trivial? That was what she thought?

Before he realized it, he'd grabbed the next volume, and the one after that. As the dates rolled backwards, he started to see a roughness to her letters, and it was like this girl he had watched grow up before his very eyes was getting smaller again.

His hands stopped when he reached the part about her "name." The role name granted by his grandmother was proof that one had become an adult in his clan. He recalled that he had never heard the name that she was given; she

had just given an embarrassed smile and said, “I’ll tell you when I’m an adult, alright?”

“Muto...”

That wasn’t a “rare” name at all in Tislow. In fact, you could say the village was almost overflowing with it. Most women, who protected their family and home, had that name.

However, that was also the most exalted name in Tislow. After all, Tislow valued the clan above all else. It could be said that those with the name “Muto” protected the clan itself, and its next generation, too.

Since Latina wanted to stay by his side, and Dale held the role of “Reki,” which involved going outside the clan, the name of “Muto” held further meaning: it was his grandmother’s blessing and said that she could choose her own place to belong.

Even if Latina couldn’t return to the place where she was born, she could create a new “clan” in some new place. That was a wish directed to her and her alone.

The letters grew blurry.

There was no way that he could just give up. *She* was the place where he belonged. The place that he returned to. He couldn’t possibly ever replace her, and he never would. She was the only one for him.

The time she’d spent with him till now was written out in this diary. And he’d spent that same time alongside her, thinking of her all the while. She was precious to him, and he adored her. He couldn’t cast her aside so easily. There was no way he could just accept that she’d disappeared.

It was then that he realized.

He recalled his own thoughts up until now. Unconsciously, he thought that she had disappeared. He’d been certain. He started to ponder why he had been sure of that.

He hadn’t once thought that she had been killed. What had occurred was an impossible phenomenon. Under these circumstances, it wouldn’t be strange for

anything to happen, so he should have considered that she had been killed, but he'd excluded it from the very start.

He looked at his left hand and concentrated his mana there. Characters appeared on the back of it. It was a clear link to her, his "master." Proof that he was her retainer and was receiving her influence. Therefore, it was also proof that she still existed somewhere.

"There's still hope..." He felt grateful from the depths of his heart that he'd become her retainer. He still had something to cling to. As long as this proof existed, she was still out there somewhere.

"If she's been stolen from me... then I just need to steal her back," Dale whispered as the rays of the sun shone down upon Kreuz, signaling the arrival of morning.

†

Rita walked down the stairs and called out to Dale, "What's with that getup?"

Dale had on his black, magical beast-leather coat that he had for traveling. It was his usual appearance, but Rita hadn't heard anything about him heading out for work so early.

It was rare for Rita herself to head down to the first floor at this hour. It was still too early for Theo and Emma to wake up, so she'd left them in their room to use this chance to let her hair down a little.

"Oh, Rita."

Hearing Dale's voice as he uttered that short response, a chill ran down Rita's spine. She'd never heard him use such a cold tone before.

That was Dale's work self, which he never showed at the Dancing Ocelot, a place where he could be himself. At work, he killed his emotions and exerted pressure on his surroundings. This was not the Dale that she knew.

"Latina has disappeared."

"Wha...?"

She wasn't even able to press him about just what he was saying. Considering his current state, not even someone as strong-willed as Rita could properly

speak up to him.

“I’ll definitely get her back.”

Rita didn’t understand what was going on. But she already sensed that it wasn’t some sort of joke. His expression and tone of voice remained steady, but it was abundantly clear that he was absolutely furious.

Without Rita having any idea it was happening, something that couldn’t be undone had occurred. That alone, she understood.

And so, Rita tried her best to act brave and spoke up. “In that case, come on back, along with Latina. We’ll be waiting for you.”

Without replying, Dale slipped out the rear exit. He looked down and spoke to the animal sprawled out by his feet. “Vint, are you coming?”

Vint shook his snout a few times in response, then lay back on the ground. “Wait for Latina. Hold down fort.”

“...I see.” After giving that short response, Dale didn’t turn back around.

The Eldstedt manor was located in the most prosperous town in their territory, and the Fourth Demon Lord was currently in a forest outside of that town. Gregor rarely let his emotions show on his face, but as they walked through the completely altered scenery of the town, the grief in his expression was clear.

“Gregor?”

“It’s nothing. The ruins written of in my brother’s report are this way. Let’s go.”

It wasn’t possible to send a scouting party ahead into this high concentration of magical element. The ones who marched forward now were only Dale, Gregor, and soldier priests who were especially skilled magic users and had a high level of divine protection. The other reason Gregor had accompanied them despite the danger was because there were no scouts, and he was the only one familiar enough with the lay of the land to show them the way.

“Are there traps or anything in the ruins?”

“Those won’t be an issue. When I spent time here as a child, I went there to explore plenty of times. I’m aware of them all.”

As Gregor walked ahead, leading the party, neither Dale nor anyone else was able to see his expression. He recalled the person who had walked this path beside him when he was younger was his older brother, causing the still-raw pain of losing someone close to him to ache in his heart.

The forest was unnaturally silent. They soon realized the reason behind that.

“Illness, is it...?”

There were rotting animal corpses scattered about. It had become a forest devoid of life, which was the reason for the silence. It gave a strange impression, the way that the corpses were collapsed on the ground without even bugs infesting them. It was a phenomenon that only occurred because the demon lord’s magical element was just too strong.

It was incredibly lethal, but was just too powerful, so its infective capability was limited. Because Gregor’s brother had realized that so quickly, he managed

to seal it away, even if only temporarily.

One of the warrior priests accompanying them lifted their staff. In response, another priest that had his staff lifted until now lowered his. Ever since entering the territory, they'd been continuously casting defensive magic in turns. After all, the power of a demon lord was just too strong for them to rely on their divine protection alone.

Compared to the crumbling entrance, the interior of the ruins wasn't overly disturbed. Based on the grey stone-crafted architecture, it seemed to be some form of ancient palace. From the way the statue of some ancient king was missing a large chunk of its head, it was easy to envision what had happened here in the past. Gregor walked on without hesitation. He readily turned a corner, headed down a staircase, and pointed out a trap with the light of his magical device.

"Up ahead is what seems to have once been a hidden passage. There are still traps left to ward off intruders."

"I see."

"...The demon lord wouldn't fall to such things, right?"

"Even if she triggered them, they wouldn't be able to cause a fatal wound. It'd be a different story if a hero was involved, though," Dale responded to Gregor's sudden question.

The humid air in the dark corridor was fetid, making it unpleasant to even breathe. The wall lit up by the magical device was plain, but it looked somehow gloomy. But perhaps that feeling was only natural, considering what lay ahead.

Gregor swung open the hidden door at the end of the corridor, causing their field of vision to suddenly grow bright. Even amidst the darkness Dale had sensed the steady slope, so he knew that this corridor would lead outside.

"...Is the path not connected from the outside?"

"My brother destroyed that first. It wouldn't be impossible to take that route if you were determined to do so, but considering the magical element, we couldn't."

The scenery of the forest, with gentle sunlight filtering through the trees, also had a strange, warped feel to it, making it almost look like the underworld.

In the middle of the forest was a black-haired woman. Well, one would almost want to add a “what was most likely” to that previous statement, as the figure, clad in clothes so filthy that it was impossible to distinguish their original color, lacked any of the usual curves typical of a woman, instead looking like some sort of apparition that was little but skin and bones. There was no luster to her long black hair, and there were no hints that she maintained it at all, rather just letting it grow freely. Her loose and disheveled hair made it hard to see her face and only added to her overall messy appearance, which elicited disgust. However, her crimson pupils, devoid of emotion, could be seen gazing at those who had intruded into her territory.

The woman was clearly malformed.

Demon lords were born from the devils, so they in turn had the outer appearance of that race. That preconception only made her distorted appearance stand out all the more. The woman only had a single horn. However, her other one hadn’t been broken, like a criminal’s. On one side she had brilliant, twisted white horn, but on the other was something like a small black lump.

“A birth defect...”

Dale and the others were humans, so they didn’t view horns as sacred, the way devils did, but even so they still found the woman’s appearance an ill omen. That wasn’t due to her physical appearance, though. Rather, her facial expression and general aura stood out more, prominently displaying her twisted, spiritless, horrible nature.

“*So you’ve come to mock me*,” the woman said. Her voice had an unpleasant ring to it, making all who heard it feel on edge.

Before the woman took a full step in their direction, Dale shouted out in warning, “She’s a demon lord!”

Those brief words were enough.

Gregor, who had been in the lead, unsheathed his scarlet long-sword and

closed the gap between him and the Fourth Demon Lord. Dale followed after while drawing his blade.

"*I don't want to die.*"

Faced with mana so great it felt like it had mass, Gregor stopped in his tracks. The chant of the priests made it in time, and a barrier made of light spread out before them. Immediately afterwards, the Fourth Demon Lord with her disheveled black hair unleashed her own mana, a plague that ate away at all living things. The wind made up of magical elements blew up against the barrier.

The Fourth Demon Lord gave a satisfied laugh. Anything that lived could do nothing to resist her power. She was like illness incarnate. There was no way that mere humans could do anything against her.

There was no way that they'd be able to make it out of this unharmed if they left the barrier. After giving a sidelong glance at Gregor, who was at a loss as to how to proceed, Dale took a step forward. His left hand ached. He felt a faint heat rising up in it.

"*Don't come any closer.*"

The demon lord swung her hand, as if striking him. With her overwhelming, absolute power to direct her own mana, she pointed it at the man arrogant enough to approach her.

Or at least, that's how it was supposed to go.

"*Why?*"

She couldn't understand what was happening. Completely dumbfounded, the Fourth Demon Lord looked down at her own hands.

"*Why, why, why?*"

Like a broken toy, the demon lord just kept repeating that question. She swung her hand downwards over and over. She simply couldn't comprehend what was occurring.

Ever since she'd become the Fourth Demon Lord, she'd used her power completely naturally, but now it was no longer working as she knew it to. Her

mana was being obstructed by something, and she couldn't wield it as she pleased.

As this was her first time facing her antithesis as a demon lord, a hero, she was unaware of their abilities. Up until now, she had taken down countless people with no trouble at all, so she hadn't even considered needing some kind of means of dealing with someone when her power was resisted.

The Fourth Demon Lord only had any interest in herself. There wasn't anything she desired, and she didn't need anyone else. She had only created retainers on a whim, because they were people like she herself once was: those afflicted with deadly disease, cast into the depths of despair. That was how she had been before becoming the Fourth Demon Lord. Her longing for life had drawn her to become deadly illness itself. By becoming what had once caused her such despair, the Fourth Demon Lord had been born.

While fearing deadly illness more than anyone else, she had no problem spreading it. It was because she was so twisted that she had been able to become a demon lord.

The Fourth Demon Lord had no interest in anything but herself and didn't try to understand those around her, so even the subject of "heroes" fell outside of her interests.

Heroes overturned the fate granted to demon lords by the gods, the fate to become and remain demon lords. But that hardly mattered. There was still nothing a mere human could do to her, when she was an incarnation of illness itself.

She had grown flustered when the woman calling herself the Fifth Demon Lord informed them of an Eighth Demon Lord that would destroy them, but they'd managed to readily deal with her. There was no need to fear anything.

And yet, somehow she was being driven into a corner, and she absolutely couldn't understand why.

The demon lord readied her magic, which she hadn't used in quite some time, and unleashed it upon the man before her.

Dale casually swept aside the ball of flame coming towards him. His sword

was a normal one rather than a magical device, but it still wasn't hard to divert magic that had been launched so blindly.

The flames hit the barrier behind him and burst apart. The demon lord then finished a second chant. Without growing flustered in the least, Dale once more dealt with the magic cast at him.

Looking at Dale, Gregor sensed that the Fourth Demon Lord's mana was having no effect on him, and he took a step forward to cover his friend's movements.

"*I don't want to die, I don't...*"

In an instant, Gregor closed the gap between himself and the Fourth Demon Lord, who was pathetically wailing about her desire to live. With the swipe of a single blade, the Fourth Demon Lord collapsed, eyes staring off into space.

After confirming the demon lord's death, the force cast Fire magic upon the corpse. They had no interest in taking her head. In all likelihood, even as a corpse the body of this demon lord of disease would be enough to bring about a calamity. They needed to burn her until nothing but ashes remained.

While looking up at the rising smoke, Gregor muttered with a sigh, seeming bewildered, "...That went quicker than I expected."

"Is that so?" Dale responded from Gregor's side. He looked at his own left hand. The sensation of warmth about it hadn't yet abated. He couldn't see his bare skin under his glove, but he figured that his "name" may be showing right now.

Gregor had been able to strike down the Fourth Demon Lord because he was within the range of effect of Dale's ability as a hero. Dale had the ability to fight on his own, but there were heroes in history who hadn't been able to do so. And so, such heroes had fought the demon lords by letting their allies skilled in combat take the lead.

As such, that wasn't what Gregor had been questioning.

"It seemed like the power of the magical element suddenly weakened... Was that thanks to your power, too?"

“...That’s right. It was ‘my power.’”

The flames died down, leaving behind what looked like charcoal in the shape of a person. It wouldn’t be easy to clear away the magical element that had infected the land, but with this, there wouldn’t be any further risk of an outbreak.

“...The ability to eat away at a demon lord’s power, huh...?”

“Did you say something?”

“...No, it’s nothing,” Dale replied bluntly, looking away from his left hand.

In all likelihood, that wasn’t just his power as a hero. As the only retainer of the Eighth Demon Lord, perhaps he was granted a power similar to hers: the ability to eat away at the power a demon lord used to remain as one, to exist.

If it would help him get her back, then he’d use any and every power at his disposal.

Clenching his left hand tightly, Dale headed towards the ruins once again, not turning to look back.

4: The Platinum-haired Maiden Awakens

Was it some sort of distortion in the overwhelming power that had been crushing her that caused it to come apart?

She opened her eyes.

Why...? she thought, but her head was still foggy. Her thinking was so muddled that she didn't even know why that question was coming to mind.

Her eyelids were terribly heavy. Like when she was dead-tired, she wasn't even able to move.

But, I can't... I can't... give up...

Within her dim thoughts, the one thing that clearly remained was that fact: she must never give up. While her consciousness felt like it was going to fade away, she desperately held onto that single thought.

I have to get up...

Over the course of a long, long stretch of time, she opened her eyes. The monochrome world before her looked like something out of a dream.

"Dale..." she muttered from atop the small throne in the center of this space where only demon lords could exist.

Where am I...?

Thanks to her head not working right, coupled with the otherworldly scenery, she simply wasn't capable of grasping her present circumstances. Feeling like her eyelids were about to shut again, she forced open her eyes with all her might and tried to remember just what had happened.

"Where's... Dale...?"

As that name flowed forth again without her even thinking about it, her mind cleared up just a bit. It was the name of someone precious to her. The one she loved more than anyone else and wanted to protect no matter what it took.

Why... am I...?

With that stimulating her thoughts, pieces of who she was began to surface.

She recalled the name that precious person had called her. The name indicated who she was, and by pulling at that thread bit by bit, Latina recalled what had happened to her.

She should have been sealed away by the demon lords who were part of the natural order. It was a sealing spell carried out by the combined will of all the demon lords, herself included. The result was incredibly powerful, so she thought she'd never wake again.

Why was she conscious right now?

Why...?

While she thought that, her hazy vision stopped on a single throne. It had a dead tree twined around it, and she had seen it before losing consciousness. That tree had completely split apart. It was awful enough to send a chill down her spine, a truly painful sight.

W-What...?

As her body still couldn't move properly, she started to move frustratingly slowly. With that, Latina finally was able to check the other thrones.

That hadn't been the only throne in such a terrible state. The thick books piled in the neighboring throne were torn apart, their pages scattered, and part of some of the covers looked to be burnt. The massive blade on the throne next to that one was cut apart midway through, showing a clean cross-section of its interior. Seeing its hilt fallen atop the throne for some reason caused her to tremble.

What has happened...?

Latina had no idea how long she'd been unconscious. However, she was certain that something out of the ordinary had occurred.

"Dale..." she muttered. She felt uneasy, realizing he was likely the answer. She didn't know anyone other than him who would do such a thing, and she couldn't think of anyone more capable of doing so, either.

What should I do...?

She tried to think it through, but her mind just wasn't working. Her brain was coated in several layers of haze like when in a dream, so she wasn't even able to manage a proper, logical train of thought.

What should I do, what should I do...?

While in the midst of confusion, Latina looked over the thrones as if to quell the question in her heart. She "knew" that the thrones in ruin were the fourth, fifth, and sixth. Next to them, the flag with an ominous dragon upon it at the seventh throne flew imposingly, even though there was no wind in this place.

Continuing along, there was the first throne. Latina's gaze stopped on it.

The symbol of that "king" was a royal scepter. The long, straight scepter hadn't changed at all since she'd lost consciousness. There wasn't a single scratch on it, nor did it seem to have bent in the slightest.

"Chrysos..."

After confirming that king's well-being, she breathed a sigh of relief. But then, Latina once more fell back into confusion.

What should I do...? Dale... Chrysos...

She didn't want the two of them to fight. Dale was undoubtedly the person Latina loved most, but Chrysos was also precious to her. And their positions were just too different that Latina couldn't possibly compare them on the same scale, anyway.

What should I do...? I have to protect them... I have to protect them... she repeated in her mind over and over, her thoughts spinning in circles.

Dale may hurt Chrysos for her sake. If nothing else, she couldn't let that happen.

They were both people that Latina wanted to protect. With her hazy mind, she desperately thought that she didn't want them fight.

"I need... to get out of here..."

Latina moved her body, so heavy it didn't even feel like her own, and looked

up at the sky from atop her throne.

“I need to stop Dale... I have to do something...”

Up until now, Latina had hardly had any understanding of the power and abilities she possessed as a demon lord. She hadn’t desired the great powers of a demon lord, just the ability to create her own retainer. And when Dale granted her wish, she had already accomplished all of her goals in becoming one. She didn’t have any interest in her other abilities and didn’t think she needed them. She’d thought she could just learn about them over a long stretch of time, half-neglecting them. In actuality, things had moved so fast and she’d gotten wrapped up in her present circumstances, so she didn’t even have the time to learn about it, but Latina was aware of that fact.

She brought the power within her under her control and started using an ability she could freely manipulate. Latina started screening out and refining her mana as a demon lord, which was separate from the mana she naturally possessed. She exercised extremely precise, delicate control as she did this over and over.

It wasn’t as if she thought about it and then did it. Rather, Latina was able to carry it out intuitively, even with her mind in such a haze. Mana control was her greatest specialty, after all.

Latina separated out the majority of her power as a demon lord, yielding most of her power to the seal on the Eighth Demon Lord and letting her own self rise to the surface.

Her eyes wouldn’t open; they felt heavy. Her body and eyelids were so heavy that she couldn’t even budge them. She was having a hard time breathing. She gasped and gasped, but she simply couldn’t get enough air.

There was something she needed to do. That idea alone is what kept her conscious, even though she felt like she was sinking away.

“Dale... Chrysos...”

She needed to go to them. That was what she thought, but her body wouldn’t listen to her.

The back of her unmoving eyelids gradually grew warmer. She felt a pressure

behind her eyes, and as she wondered why she wasn't able to do anything, the tears started flowing.

Latina had no idea how long that went on.

Feeling something wipe away her tears, Latina opened up her eyes just a sliver. She felt the soft grey fur on her cheek and the sun shining on her.

"Vint...?"

"Woof," he responded in his familiar voice, which made Latina break out in tears once again. Vint licked her tears, wiping them away.

"Vint... Dale... where is Dale?"

"Dale not here."

"Why...? When... is he... coming back...?"

"Dunno. Hasn't come back. Everyone says don't know."

With Vint's reply, her thoughts started turning round and around again. She didn't know how she could stop Dale when she didn't even know where he was. She had no idea whatsoever as to what she should do.

What should I do...? Why, Dale...? What should I be doing...?

Right now, even Latina's sense of where she was at the moment was fuzzy. Her mind was utterly overwhelmed, filled with unease and the need to do something, alongside the spiral of questions. What Latina managed to wring out from that chaos was the name of the other person precious to her. "Chrysos..."

"Woof?"

"Vint... please, take to me to Chrysos... to Vassilios..."

"Woof."

"To Vassilios..." Latina repeated, burying her face in Vint's fur. Immediately afterwards, her muddied mind gave up on thinking entirely.

If she didn't know where Dale was, then her only other option was to head towards Chrysos, whose whereabouts she knew. It took everything Latina's muddled mind had to reach that conclusion.

If any of the adults downstairs had heard what she'd said, they surely would have presented her with a more appropriate solution. If she were in a more proper state of mind, the idea of asking someone for help would have come to her, which is what she should have done.

"Woof."

"Vi, I know. The country big sis was born in is over that way."

However, the only ones who heard her were this faithful pup and the black-haired child.

After Latina disappeared, Vint had remained in the Dancing Ocelot the entire time. While caring for Theo, he carefully watched over this shop that was his territory every day. If something were to happen to Theo, whom Latina doted upon, while she was away, she'd definitely be sad, and he also didn't want her thinking he was just a fluffy pup who couldn't even serve as a guard dog.

As always, Vint was playing with Theo, who at five years old was at the peak of mischievousness, in the backyard of the Ocelot. Lately, the number of rowdy, ill-behaved adult humans around had grown, which he found somehow irritating. Still, Latina wasn't around, so there was no helping that, or so Vint thought.

Even though the public order in Kreuz was degrading alongside the worsening state of the world, the couple who ran the Ocelot, Kenneth and Rita, didn't feel the need to worry about their son playing with Vint. Even though the soaring wolf was still young, he was a mythical beast. His fangs and claws were plenty sufficient weapons for dealing with people, and he was able to use magic on top of that. Thugs at the level of novice adventurers wouldn't even be able to lay a hand on him. This dangerous beast would play-bite at their son and carry him around, but that wasn't enough to make the Ocelot's owners worried. What people could grow accustomed to truly was frightening.

While he was doing so, Vint suddenly picked up on Latina's smell. The scent was coming from Latina's room in the attic. He was surprised that it suddenly appeared, but he didn't think on the reason why. To a pup who moved at his own pace like Vint, more than the reason why, it was the fact that Latina was there that mattered.

Vint running off and leaving him behind left Theo in a bad mood. And so, he rushed after Vint to complain about suddenly being ditched. When he finally caught up to Vint, though, he realized that the missing Latina was there. To Theo, Latina was his beloved older sister. He wanted to hug her tight and ask her where she'd gone, but he saw that she didn't look well, and he restrained himself. As Emma's older brother, he'd learned to manage that much.

Theo thought he should help grant his beloved older sister's wish. She looked so pained as she made her request, tears streaming from her eyes. She was always so kind to him, and he wanted to return the favor. While he was young, Theo's sense of responsibility was strong, and he gave a firm nod.

"Vi, what should I do?"

"Woof," Vint replied, then approached the window Theo had pointed to. Realizing that, Theo opened up the attic window. Vint stuck his face out, and his nose twitched. His snout pointed toward the forest in the south, and his eyes narrowed as he thought about something.

"Vi?"

After a short while, Vint gave a satisfied nod. "Got it. There."

"Vi, are you gonna carry Sis on your back?"

"Woof."

Vint got down low, and Theo placed the now-limp Latina on his back. It was a big task for someone as young as Theo, but he somehow managed it. After thinking for a bit, he headed over into the storage space of the attic and returned with some cloth he had pulled out. It would be a serious issue if Latina were to fall off. Mimicking what his mother did when she had Emma on her back, Theo tied Latina to Vint's body. After having somehow managing to do it well, Theo looked satisfied with his work.

"Vi, can you get out through the window?"

"Nope."

"I see."

Theo stopped and thought for a moment. If he wanted to help her, he

couldn’t let his parents find out. After all, they’d done stuff like filling in the extra-large pitfall he’d made with Vint and throwing away all the nice pebbles he’d collected. Adults just didn’t understand anything.

“Vi, I’ll go take a look downstairs.”

“Woof.”

“If it’s clear, I’ll wave you on,” Theo said, then descended the stairs, being careful not to make a sound. Before heading all the way down, he glanced all around the kitchen his father was always in at the bottom of the stairs. Seeing that it was alright, he silently waved his hands at Vint in a big motion. Having had his physical abilities honed by playing with a mythical beast day after day, the five-year-old successfully acted as a scout and gathered information.

After safely reaching the backyard, Vint spread his wings wide. With a loud, clear sound, he put more power into flapping his wings than usual. Without Latina’s magical support, it was a difficult task to take off into the sky with a person on his back, but it wasn’t impossible.

Combining his Wind mana with the mana that gave his race that ability to fly through the heavens, he took off into the sky. Vint was plenty skilled when it came to flying, so though he swayed pretty heavily at the start, he soon found his balance.

There was quite a bit of distance before they reached their destination, but he could take as many breaks as needed, so he should be able to manage. Or at least, that’s what the pup thought, living up to his carefree reputation as he flapped his wings toward their destination.

“Take care!”

After circling around above Theo, who was waving his hands vigorously, Vint took off towards the south. The boy kept waving his hands until Vint was completely out of sight.

It was then that Kenneth, who had finished cleaning and had returned to the kitchen, noticed his son.

“What’s up, Theo?”

“I saw Vi off.”

“Vint...? Where was he heading off to?”

His son had a satisfied look on his face, like he’d managed to accomplish something, but unsurprisingly, Kenneth didn’t realize why.

And that’s how, despite being unconscious, the platinum-haired girl that the adults had been so desperately searching for departed on a trip to Vassilios with the help of a single pup and child.



5: The Young Man and the Slaughter

Amongst the languages employed by humankind, there were two primary tongues. The most used was Western Continental, which came from the region with the greatest population, and that was followed by Eastern Regional. Their names came from the places they were primarily spoken, with one being standardized on the continent that served as the center of the world and the other used in the nations to the east.

The region referred to as the eastern nations was primarily composed of small island nations to the east of the continent. Though they were few in number, the settlements on the mainland in that region all bordered the ocean.

This settlement was one that bordered the sea in the land to the south, and it made for an unusual scenery: almost all of the buildings were standing in the ocean itself. Perhaps because these stone structures had been constantly washed by the waves, there were smooth curves to them. Thanks to the tide, the buildings with their contours that made them almost seem like living organisms were more than halfway submerged.

Most of those living in this settlement were merfolk. Part of a merfolk's body was covered with scales, and thanks to the traits of their race, they were able to breathe underwater. The merfolk were known for being more active in the water than on land, and their homes were built as such.

This settlement, which could be called the capital of the sea, had a king: the Third Demon Lord, also known as the Demon Lord of the Sea. This lord had established coexistence between his own retainers and attendants, who were devils, and the merfolk. Though the devils were few in number, by taking care of landwork like farming, which the merfolk were bad at, they had maintained friendly relations for a long time under their gentle-natured king.

There was a building that looked out over the calm, quiet work of those people. It had neither the military fortitude to be called a castle nor the gaudiness to be called a palace, but a king lived there, so it was still a royal

dwelling. And in a section of that dwelling, the Third Demon Lord faced an uninvited visitor.

“I imagined you’d be arriving around now.”

The Third Demon Lord had the appearance of a man approaching old age. Devils spent most of their lives as young adults, so this showed that he had lived for quite a long time before becoming a demon lord.

The one this demon lord greeted with a cool and composed attitude befitting his apparent age was a young man in a black coat.

Through the large window behind the old demon lord, the ocean could be seen stretching out into the distance. Compared to the night sky full of twinkling stars, the vast sea looked pitch black. If it weren’t for the clear, far-off roar of the waves and the brilliant scenery that had been burned into his eyes during the afternoon, he may not have even known that there was an ocean there. The gentle smile on the face of the old man, who was seated deep in his comfortable chair and gazing out that window, didn’t disappear even with this young man who had clearly infiltrated this highest floor without any prior notice before him.

“My apologies for remaining seated. My legs don’t work so well anymore,” the old man said, speaking in the same language used by his people—Eastern Regional—as he took hold of the decanter on the table by his side. From that, he filled a goblet with a wine of a deep hue. Taking in the pale illumination of the lights in the room, it gave off a wavering crimson shine upon a deep brown.

“Would you like a drink? ...Well, I suppose you may not be in the mood for such things.”

The young man looked suspicious, seeing how the old man didn’t call for anyone or even ask who he was. He had intended to cut the demon lord down immediately, but because of the utter lack of hostility he was being shown, he became curious about the man’s intentions.

Finding the youth’s doubts only natural, the old man kept a gentle smile on his face, then took a sip from his goblet.

“I’ve wanted to talk with you. The Platinum Hero... as the one who defeated

the Fourth Demon Lord, you're of great interest to us other demon lords," the old man said while looking at the youth in a black coat. "And you also slew the Fifth and Sixth Demon Lords, yes...? I can't understand why a hero would need to harm them. And so, I assume you must be no mere hero."

"...What then?"

Despite the cold, quiet tone of the young man's voice, the old man's smile remained.

"With that, I assumed that you would come to me as well."

Seeing that things had turned out exactly as he'd predicted, the demon lord with the form of an old man gave a sigh. Demon lords had been killed one after another in such a short period of time. He couldn't be optimistic enough to write that off as mere coincidence. However, his doubts cleared up when, in the midst of that, amongst the affairs from other nations, he heard tell of news that a human hero had defeated the Fourth Demon Lord.

"Are you... perhaps related to the Eighth Demon Lord?"

"I'm..." At a loss for words for an instant, he tightly squeezed his left hand with his right. "...She's the person I love most in this world." In the end, he responded differently than he had to the other demon lords, to whom he referred to himself as her retainer. For whatever reason, he wanted to do so.

"A hero and a demon lord falling in love... Wonders never cease, do they?" Wetting his lips with the contents of his goblet, the demon lord looked straight at him. "I am indeed a target for your revenge. You can take my life if you wish... but will you let me ask a few questions of you first?"

Not dropping his guard in the slightest, the young man stared at the demon lord. His hand remained on his blade's handle, and he stayed at a distance where he could strike down the demon lord at any moment. No matter how much his opponent may excel at magic, his blade would be faster at this range. There was no way he would fail to slay his foe.

The smile on the face of the demon lord in the shape of an old man grew strained when he saw the youth like that. "The Eighth Demon Lord... was a lady, yes? First, let me apologize. There is truly no excuse that can be offered for the

way that we sacrificed her in order to save ourselves.”

Hatred appeared on the young man’s face as the demon lord spoke those words. The demon lord quietly took in the violent emotions he saw under the young man’s maintained composure.

“...I see. This is just a manifestation of my sense of guilt. I understand that a mere apology isn’t what you are seeking... Go ahead and forget I said anything, if you wish.”

“...Why did you sacrifice her...?!” Those words dripping with anger showed his true feelings. He understood. He knew that the Third and Sixth Demon Lords, as well as the king of the devils, the First Demon Lord, were in a position where they needed to protect their own people. Latina likely understood that as well..

For those with people they were sworn to protect, standing against the Demon Lords of Calamity carried a great risk. Despite any disadvantages this old man may have, he was still a demon lord, and so if he were facing another single demon lord, he would be able to employ methods to protect himself. But the circumstances were different this time.

The Eighth Demon Lord was a threat to all demon lords, so by taking her side, one would unfortunately make an enemy of all the others at the same time. There was no helping that the Third Demon Lord chose peace for the people he served to protect over protecting a stranger like the Eighth Demon Lord.

Because of that, Dale didn’t affirm his own actions as just. He didn’t believe he was flying the flag of justice. He would openly admit that his own actions were fueled by revenge and retribution. He realized that they were done only out of his own conceit, to satisfy his own emotions... that from another point of view, he was the villain.

But even so, Dale’s emotions screamed not to forgive this man.

“She...!”

He thought on why that warmth, which he’d felt in his arms so many times, was gone now. He questioned why that smile he’d always seen by his side had disappeared. Whenever he turned around, he instinctively looked for her without thinking. When he started to speak to her, the reality that she was

gone was thrust in his face.

To the demon lord he sought revenge against and the people he protected, Dale's actions were utterly unreasonable and violent. Even so, Dale remained true to himself and focused his hatred on the demon lord. If he didn't have someone to hate, he'd surely lose himself and be destroyed.

And yet, the expression on the Third Demon Lord's face showed that he accepted even those feelings of Dale's. With a stillness like the calm of the vast ocean, he accepted that hatred and anger as only natural.

Dale squeezed his left hand tight and clenched his teeth so hard that they made a grinding sound. There was no point in speaking further. Dale knew that, even though there was no need to tell the demon lord before him how precious the girl who had been stolen away had been to him.

Even so, Dale had expressed how much he cared for the girl he'd lost more eloquently than countless words could manage.

The old man had lived a long time both before and after becoming the Third Demon Lord, but it wasn't as if he didn't fear death. The contents of the goblet in his hand continuously rippled, showing his own trembling. Seeing this enraged hero before him, the demon lord felt fear for the first time in quite a while.

Even so... he thought.

At that time in the space with the thrones, when she was condemned by the demon lords who were part of the natural order, the Eighth Demon Lord's "voice" had trembled and been full of fear. Yet she had remained firm, accepting her fate until the very last.

She was the lover of the youth before him now, so she must have been a young woman. Compared to the Third Demon Lord, who had lived long enough to grow old even for a devil and then had spent a long time as a demon lord on top of that, the Eighth Demon Lord had lived for a far shorter period of time. And yet, she'd faced off against the Demon Lords of Calamity.

An old man like himself couldn't back down, either, for the sake of those he needed to protect. And so, the Third Demon Lord never let the calm expression

leave his face, even as he wet his throat, which had grown dry from nervousness, with wine.

“She was sealed away under the consensus of the demon lords. This has likely never happened before. Demon lords are granted the strength of lower-ranking gods by the gods themselves, and this was carried out by the combined power of all demon lords,” the demon lord said in a quiet voice.

He had apologized because he wanted to ease his own guilt, but it was also undoubtedly how he truly felt. He regretted not being able to save her.

So this time, he’d become part of what would save her.

“I would imagine that a consensus from the demon lords will also be necessary to break the seal. However, that will be impossible. The Demon Lords of Calamity will never agree to release one who eats away at their own power. And so...”

He would give the person who cared more for her than anyone else a push on the back.

He wouldn’t deny that his own desire was also involved in wanting it to be that way. He had no way of knowing for sure, so he could only speak based on conjecture.

“I see a possible solution in your actions. It’s difficult to call a sealing ceremony without any past precedent or preparation perfect. The demon lords forcefully eliminated her, so it wouldn’t be strange for it to come apart at the seams.” Seeing a calm resolve in the young man’s eyes, the Third Demon Lord finished drinking the contents of his goblet, then placed it back on the table next to him. “I know I am in no position to make such a request but, if at all possible, could you please defeat the Seventh Demon Lord next?”

The land ruled by the Third Demon Lord was under threat by the Seventh Demon Lord’s troops, as that demon lord’s stronghold was right alongside it. Thanks to the presence of the Third Demon Lord, the land had remained peaceful despite that.

The Seventh Demon Lord liked to trample others with overwhelming, absolute power, but when it came to a direct conflict with another demon lord,

victory was not a guarantee. No matter how unlikely it may be, he didn't want to face the unpleasant taste of defeat.

The Third Demon Lord—the demon lord of the sea—could employ a great enough power to contend with the demon lords who specialized in combat, as long as he was next to the ocean.

If the Third Demon Lord passed away, this land would be overrun in an instant. That fact alone was why he clung to life.

"My people have committed no wrong... It is a selfish request, but will you grant it?"

The slight expression that crossed Dale's face almost looked like a tearful smile.

"She..." Dale muttered, thinking of the grey eyes of that girl who was kinder than anyone else. "She loved children... so I don't want to do anything... that would steal away their future..."

That statement was enough for the Third Demon Lord.

"I see... You have my thanks."

After that, the night remained quiet. The far-off noise of the ocean sounded almost like it was sobbing in grief as it embraced this land that no longer had a king.

†

The unrest brought about by the Demon Lords of Calamity hung in the air of Kreuz, too. Though it hadn't suffered damage directly, the outbreak of disease in Laband caused by the Fourth Demon Lord was a big topic of discussion throughout town. And the amount of fear surrounding something like magical elements, which couldn't be seen, was naturally quite large. Though the town was open towards travelers, they were also accompanied by the concern that they may be unwittingly bringing in disease.

The Fourth Demon Lord had been defeated thanks to the hero. Even so, the plague that had been dispersed wouldn't come to an end so easily. It wasn't as if the defeat of the Fourth Demon Lord would cause all illness to disappear from

the world. Now that the Fourth Demon Lord was gone along with her inexhaustible supply of magical element, the affliction wouldn't be able to spread as quickly or far, but those who had already been afflicted by disease weren't healed, and the land that had been infected wasn't suddenly purified. Each and every problem needed to be dealt with separately.

Unease bred unrest in the hearts of man, and that air of unrest further tilted the situation in a negative direction. Unnerved hearts would in turn cause events that would normally seem like nothing at all to become serious incidents. That led to repeated trouble of the sort that would normally never occur.

And yet, things had been stopped at a mere "air of unrest" because of the great efforts of the temple of Niili, which served as a clinic, as well as the guards in charge of maintaining public order. Thanks to the temple's thorough illness prevention and control efforts, no one in town fell prey to this outbreak. And the second any of the embers that might erupt into serious trouble began to smolder around town, the guards got things under control. If it weren't for the trust the people about town had in these organizations that provided them security, they would have been far more ill at ease.

And at the same time, the way that the biggest of those "embers," adventurers, were largely united under a single flag also had a big effect there. With an emblem of a fairy with fluttering platinum hair, this group formed under the name of the "Platinum Fairy Princess," whose image had become known as the symbol of the Platinum Hero, and they occasionally helped the guards deal with the sort who would take advantage of this unrest and confusion to stir up trouble and commit crimes. As a result, Kreuz was able to remain comparatively stable and peaceful in contrast to the rest of Laband.

In a corner of the shop that served as a base for the group that gathered under the flag of the fairy princess, the owner, Rita, looked over information from the Akhdar's message board and gave a sigh.

"Apparently after taking care of the Fourth Demon Lord, next up is the Seventh. That idiot..." Rita said, her tone full of astonishment and unease. She bad-mouthed him, but if she honestly didn't care about him, she wouldn't keep checking on his movements like this. Rita's goal ever since Dale had

disappeared was to use the Akhdar's message board as a terminal and convey all the information she could find on how he was doing to everyone in the Ocelot.

Knowing that she used her sharp tongue to conceal her true feelings, her husband Kenneth broke out in an awkward smile. "Even if it wasn't anywhere near Laband, the Seventh Demon Lord has destroyed a number of countries, right?"

"That's apparently the case...They say that's how he expanded his influence in the past, but he had been locked in a stalemate for decades... only to suddenly start moving again."

It was said that when the Seventh Demon Lord suddenly appeared one day in a small northern country, he first expanded his influence bit by bit. He swallowed up everything around him and brought it into submission, until he had gained an army and territory befitting a king. His military rule was very appropriate for a demon lord.

"Apparently, refugees are fleeing to the adjoining eastern nations, and farther on here into Laband and to the east... It's been pretty confusing, but I've been hearing all this from customers."

"That'll have an effect on the flow of goods, too... I wonder when things will finally calm down..." Rita said, unease on her face as she looked down at her beloved daughter sleeping in her arms. Hearing her gentle, peaceful breathing as she slept only caused the anxiety in Rita's heart to grow.

That was because Rita was a parent. It was only natural for a mother to want her children to grow up in a peaceful world.

"I don't... want to leave everything up to that idiot..." Rita whispered, and then sighed.

Though she didn't want him to shoulder all the burden, as a mother who knew of Dale's abilities, she couldn't help but pray that his actions would cause the world her children would grow up in to be a peaceful one. If it had been some hero she didn't know at all, she'd be able to just irresponsibly thrust her expectations on him, but she wasn't able to do so as things stood.

With the pause in their conversation, the inside of the Ocelot fell silent, as there were few customers at the moment. The atmosphere reflected the gloomy feelings in their hearts.

Suddenly, a cheer rang out. It was Theo, who was playing out in the backyard. Even though the shop had lost the girl, who was like a blossoming flower and always brought a bright liveliness with her, the energetic young boy served as a cheerful topic to clear away the gloom. Seeing their son growing healthily and steadily day by day brought his parents, Kenneth and Rita, a joy that nothing else could replace.

“Welcome back!”

“Woof!”

“Huh?”

“Hmm?”

Kenneth and Rita both voiced their confusion at the same time. They got the feeling that the voice that replied belonged to someone they hadn’t seen or heard in a while. The couple looked at one another, and when they heard what their son said next, their faces both froze.

“Did you get Sis to her old home?”

“Woof!”

“Good job! You’re amazing, Vi!”

They understood from the way the color had drained from their faces that the other was also thinking, *Just what has our son done?! And what does he know?!* but they were just too astounded that they were at a loss as to just what to ask him.

They were having a bit of trouble understanding what had happened. They were well aware that there was one and only one person that their son fondly called “Sis.”

Looking around, the handful of regulars about the shop were making the same face. Thanks to the utter confusion of the adults, it had fallen silent inside the Ocelot, only for the voices of a single child and animal to ring out again,

caring nothing for the common sense of the grown-ups.

“Sis’s old home is called Vassilios. I know that!”

“Woof!”

“Is Sis there now?”

“Woof!”

“I’m gonna write a letter. Can you deliver it, Vi?”

“Woof!”

The couple silently came to the conclusion that they couldn’t turn a blind eye to this reality. Accepting what was going on, Kenneth called out to the few customers in the shop, “The situation has changed! Somebody go call for Sylvester!”

“We need to contact Sylvia, too!”

“Wait, before that... Theo! Theo! What exactly do you know?!”

The adults learned shortly after what the young boy and the pup had conspired to achieve.

It was a strange sight, seeing the adults—some of whom had scary enough faces to cause a sobbing child to clam up—heartbroken and hanging their heads, faced with a child without a hint of guilt about him puffing up his chest in pride. The chaotic state of the shop made the conversations of the more casual customers who happened to be in the Ocelot veer off-track.

As an aside, having been carried to Vassilios, Latina was extremely confused when she regained consciousness. She didn’t have a firm grasp of what she had said in her foggy mental state. If she had been more in her right mind, she would have been able to assess the situation more carefully.

And “normally,” it wouldn’t have been possible for what she had asked for to be granted. But Vint was no ordinary pup—he was a mythical beast, the first-born son of the strongest soaring wolf, Hagel.

Dale, meanwhile, was in a land far enough away that those agonized cries from Kreuz would never possibly reach him. Right now, the Dancing Ocelot was

just too painful a place to be. There were memories of that gentle time he spent with Latina scattered all throughout the place, and traces of her presence all over. For now, Dale couldn't bring himself to look at such things.

He had distanced himself from the people of the Ocelot and relied solely on his village's information network for a similar reason. That shop had been a place where he could be himself. Where his "big bro" Kenneth and his bicker buddy Rita were, and where he didn't need to force himself to kill off his own emotions. It was thanks to that shop that even before meeting Latina, even if his work ate away his heart, it wasn't destroyed.

So for now, he couldn't return. Right now, he couldn't be "himself." And he didn't want to show the people of that shop the him that he was now.

Dale never could have imagined that the information he wanted above all else was currently held by the young boy and soaring wolf living there.

†

The Seventh Demon Lord was also known as the Demon Lord of War. He loved war itself and sought to use overwhelming military might to trample down others. There was certainly a possessive nature behind that. And yet, this demon lord didn't think about protecting and ruling his own land. Rather, he saw it solely as something to be exploited to fuel his forces.

It was a failure in terms of his very goals. He wasn't waging war to expand his territory, nor to fulfill his desire to control. Rather, his expanding land and control as a ruler were just results. His goal was ultimately just war itself.

As a result, all of the lands ruled by the Seventh Demon Lord were impoverished and desolate. Even if one tried to surrender in order to avoid destruction, all that awaited them was the despair of waiting for their land and livelihood to be devoured.

Even for Dale, who was the antithesis of a demon lord and now possessed a power that could be called unfair, it would be incredibly difficult to face off against the Seventh Demon Lord on his own. After all, he was up against an army. When facing off against such a large force, rather than trying to settle things by his own power alone, it was necessary to employ tactics. And leading a war effort was outside of Dale's field of expertise.

For Dale, in a manner of speaking, the way that the Demon Lords of Calamity had made a move could be called convenient.

After the defeat of the Fourth Demon Lord, the country of Laband, with its "Platinum Hero," decided to ally with their surrounding nations and move to eliminate the Seventh Demon Lord. As those nations were smaller and weaker than Laband, if the Seventh Demon Lord continued to advance, they'd effectively just be waiting to be overrun. Meanwhile, having just suffered a blow from the Fourth Demon Lord, Laband didn't wish to fight a decisive battle with the Seventh Demon Lord within their territory. All of these nations' thoughts were united toward the same goal, which allowed them to promptly establish a pact. Not wanting to waste even a moment, the leading parties all expedited the decision.

Dale was currently in a unit on the front line. He was on horseback, clad in the platinum armor that had gained such great symbolic meaning. So as not to frighten the horses, Hagel was accompanying them at a distance. No matter how valorous the war horses may have been, the pressure coming off such a powerful carnivore of a mythical beast was just too much to bear.

"On paper, you're my subordinate. Refrain from running off on your own."

"Got it," Dale replied. He gave a fleeting glance to his side. The elegant jet-black horse was stunning, suitable for an animal owned by such a distinguished family. And straddling the beast was Gregor, who was clad in armor that similarly would bring no shame to the name of his ducal household.

Dale knew the swordsmanship Gregor specialized in possessed godlike speed, so seeing him in such heavy armor, no matter how high quality it may be, felt out of place to Dale.

However, Gregor was different than his friend. Even if he was just a third son, as a member of the foremost family in Laband, a country that promoted combat ability, he possessed both the technique and knowledge needed to lead an army.

As someone of great import to the country, Gregor's father couldn't leave its center, and as someone pivotal to national defense, the second son couldn't depart from the national border, so the duty of standing on the field of battle

under their household's name fell to him.

"You've got it rough, too."

"...Not really. As a Laband noble, I figured this chance would come eventually," Gregor responded to Dale, looking out over the forces he was in charge of. There was definitely an orderliness and discipline to the systematically advancing troops. In spite of the fact that they were heading towards a formidable enemy, the Seventh Demon Lord, the soldiers' expressions didn't look grim at all.

The champions who had defeated the Fourth Demon Lord. They were heading into battle being led by a member of the ducal family, Gregor, as well as a living legend, the Platinum Hero. The soldiers marching under flags with the emblems of the Eldstedt family and the fairy princess looked downright proud.

Dale made it look almost easy as he dealt with those around him, trying to act dignified enough to not shame the name of the Platinum Hero or let down the soldiers' excessive expectations. His presence clearly raised the morale of the knights and infantry, who thought with something a little different than ambition and closer to a wistful longing that they might become a part of his epic.

Looking out at these troops, Gregor found nothing to criticize.

That's not it... Gregor thought to himself, considering his friend on horseback by his side. *He just isn't feeling any pressure from the expectations of those around him. Does he have no interest in how others see him?*

There had been a dangerous aura around Dale ever since he lost his beloved fiancée, and it had only grown as the days passed. Gregor couldn't help but feel that ever since he'd put on the mask of the fool known as the "Platinum Hero," something worrying had been building up inside of him.

Gregor looked straight ahead so he wouldn't be seen sighing, and he kept advancing on his horse. He couldn't let the soldiers around them see that he and Dale were merely human. Their role was to act as symbols. They had to remain unshakable, to rouse the spirits of those around them.

To be human... is to want someone to support us...

Is it a sin, to want someone else to help hold our hearts together? Gregor thought to himself, placing his hand over the spot where the charm made by the girl who was precious to him hung inside his armor.

A great number of countries immediately became aware that the grand nation of Laband had moved to eliminate the Seventh Demon Lord. Even if they weren't directly involved, if Laband was defeated, these other countries would no longer have the means to stop the Seventh Demon Lord. Its sheer might as a nation was great, but more than that, without Laband, they'd need to wait for another hero as renowned as the Platinum Hero to appear.

With the Akhdar temples at the center, information had spread throughout the world.

As many countries watched on with bated breath, the allied nations with Laband at their core arrived in the Seventh Demon Lord's territory and commenced battle without so much as declaring the start of hostilities.

The battles taking place away from the center of the demon lord's command were overwhelming victories for the alliance. The terrible sights the knights saw as they advanced ignited in the allied troops a righteous indignation and sense of duty that they must not let their own nations end up like this.

The allied forces were surely advancing towards the Seventh Demon Lord. Before long, that news was delivered even to closed-off countries that didn't interact with humankind.

"*The human armies are facing off with the Seventh Demon Lord, you say?*"

"*Yes, my lord.*"

As the subordinate delivered this report, the "Golden King," seated on a throne behind bamboo blinds, closed their eyes—from which they had gotten their name—and contemplated.

Vassilios had a drier, warmer climate than Laband.

The place that served as the castle of the First Demon Lord, ruler of Vassilios, was the temple of Banafsaj.

The status of demon lord was granted to those who met the qualifications

and were chosen by the gods. Therefore, there were times when a king would reign for centuries, and others when the throne would remain empty for a similar amount of time. At times when there was no demon lord, the country operated under a political structure with the high-ranking Banafsaj priests at its core. The shrine was the center of the government and welcomed both kings and gods, and was where the will of the people gathered.

That could be seen from the construction of the town, too. It had been built up with the “castle” of their ruler, the massive shrine built of white stone, at its center. The townscape, which seemed to encircle the shrine, was constructed out of white stone and sun-dried bricks. The town was clean, and orderly, and felt almost like an extension of the shrine; it was more majestic than lively.

The devils had a notably smaller population than that of humankind. This town was the only one in all of Vassilios. In other areas, there were small settlements that would be best described as villages, but that was all. Geographically, it was isolated from other regions, making it easy for them to take a national policy of isolation.

In this world, not all land was divided into nations. The label “nation” was ultimately limited to areas ruled over by man. The land inhabited by magical beasts, which men could not easily enter or leave, was considered unsettled, but did not belong to any country, and while both regions ruled by demi-humans (which were humanoids outside of the seven races) and regions ruled by magical beasts were regarded as somewhat cultured and open to trade, they were not counted as nations.

Many nations crammed into the land where the conditions were suitable for people to live, and they fought over territory, even though the unoccupied regions were also vast.

Vassilios was adjacent to Laband, but there was magical beast territory between the two nations. Because it was surrounded by that territory as well as a vast desert, Vassilios stood geographically isolated from other countries.

It was still a rugged land, but because the devils were a hardy race, they were able to live there without being overly inconvenienced. They didn’t need to worry about other countries invading; they could simply live in peace as they

wished.

The great shrine of Vassilios had been built to have numerous sections. The inside of the shrine alone gave the impression of a small town. There were many structures on the grounds, but as you approached the center, it became a secured area where only a limited number of people could come and go.

Within that central area, a clean stream of water so crucial in this arid land moved, the flow sounding crisp to the ear. The waterfall, so thin it was like a strand, poured into a shallow man-made spring lined with jewels. The imperial villa was constructed within that spring.

The building itself was small, but it was a work of art, like a bundle of elegance. It didn't have a flashy or extravagant appearance. The devil culture didn't make a habit of surrounding oneself with luxurious fixtures. However, the materials that had been used to build it were of the best available, and each and every one of the fine engravings upon it had been made with the greatest care. Just by looking at it, one could tell that it was a structure of the utmost quality.

Normally, it wouldn't be so luxurious, but this royal villa was something the previous First Demon Lord had created using a fortune and the best techniques available to make it as chic as possible for his beloved queen. With the changing of demon lords this villa had lost its master, but now there was once again a beautiful maiden within.

Chrysos was walking through the center of the temple, what could be called the "inner shrine," clad in garb suited to this land, made of layers of thin, breathable cloth. A cool air flowed gently through the outfit. The pure, cold water surrounding this place known as the "Villa of the Favored Concubine" made the air cool no matter how warm the day may be. Seeing Chrysos walking down the hallway leading to the villa, the ladies-in-waiting bowed their heads.

The only ones allowed into this villa were the ladies-in-waiting serving the current master of the villa, the "princess," and the king, Chrysos. Fitting of the devil culture, the inside of the villa had only the minimum amount of furniture necessary: a bed that occupied most of the room. The silk hanging from the ceiling swayed gently with the breeze passing through, blocking the sunlight

streaming in and casting a light shadow on the bed. Within that shadow, a girl was lying on her side, and she stirred, sensing someone's presence there. She opened her eyes slightly, and seeing who it was with her grey eyes, the expression on her face softened.

"*Chrysos...*"

"*I see you have awoken, Platina.*"

The girl tried to move when Chrysos spoke, but she seemed to immediately run out of energy, only for her hand to fall back onto the bed.

"*You need not push yourself. You must still be in no condition to move.*"

"*I'm sorry...*" Latina finally managed to wring out something audible as she lay limply.

"*Still, thanks to you, Chrysos... I'm able to be awake for a little bit now.*"

"*Even if it was already coming apart, you still forced your way through the seal... I am glad that you made it through that all right, but you acted recklessly,*" Chrysos said, brushing aside the hair hanging down in Latina's face, then gently touching the remains of her broken horn. Horns were the identifying trait of the devil race and were seen as sacred. They were only allowed to be touched by someone incredibly close to them.

"*I beg of you, never again make a choice that will lead to me losing you...*" Chrysos said with a pained expression.

Latina frowned in turn. "*I'm sorry... Chrysos...*"

"*Never mind that. That you came back to me is all that matters.*" Chrysos said that with a faint smile, then put a hand on Latina's forehead. In that instant, there was a gentle shift in the surrounding air. Latina had been breathing weakly and shallowly, sounding pained all the while, but now she inhaled deeply. Her skin had always been pale to begin with, but it had grown more so to the point that her face looked sickly; but now, it looked just a bit like the blood was returning to it.

Latina had been asleep almost the entire time since Vint carried her to Vassilios. She'd have just brief exchanges with Chrysos, then lose consciousness

again.

The spell binding her—the Eighth Demon Lord—had been powerful. Because Latina had broken free of it in such an incomplete manner, she had in exchange left a great deal of her power with her throne. She had lost almost all of her strength, including what she needed to live. The one who had used their own power as a demon lord to supplement and support her was Chrysos. If Chrysos weren't the First Demon Lord, such a thing would have been impossible.

The First Demon Lord possessed the most demon lord-esque powers of all of them and was the most skilled at manipulating the power granted by the gods.

If asked, "Could you break through the seal like Latina did?" even Chrysos would have to respond that it was simply impossible. It was precisely because the Golden King was so skilled in manipulating such power that they knew just how much Latina had pushed herself and done the impossible .

Thanks to Chrysos's power, Latina had shown signs of recovering bit by bit and was no longer in the dangerous state she had been in when she first arrived in Vassilios. Though with that said, she was still far from being back to normal, and needed to spend nearly the whole of each day in bed, drifting in and out of dreams.

"*There's so much... I need to talk to you about... Chrysos...*"

"*Do not worry about that. Just leave everything to me. You only need worry about yourself.*"

Latina fell into the grips of a deep drowsiness, and the power drained from her body. When Chrysos heard Latina's rhythmic breathing as she slept, the First Demon Lord pulled their hand away from Latina's brow.

"*Is the thing which you must discuss with me your retainer, Platina...?*" Chrysos whispered emotionlessly, knowing that voice would not reach Latina in her dreams. "*That one who seeks to steal you away from me... I look forward to seeing just what sort of person they may be.*"

The Golden King's beloved other half had at last returned. How many years had been spent searching for her? Chrysos hadn't imagined the possibility (even logically understanding it, it was hard to accept) of being separated once more

so soon after finally reuniting, but it was unavoidable.

That time when she had gone away, it had been so painful that it felt like Chrysos's body had been torn in two.

As the First Demon Lord, it was essential to seal away the Eighth Demon Lord. In order to not have to kill that beloved girl, that had been the only choice. But making that decision had been so painful that it felt like being ripped apart from the inside.

Now that that precious princess had returned to Chrysos's side, the Golden King would do everything possible to protect her and never again do anything to lose her.

"*Do you not feel the same, oh Platinum Hero?*" With a determination hidden away inside, Chrysos spoke out to someone who was not there.

†

The number of flying dragon units in Laband's possession were certainly not few. The majority were currently being utilized in the war with the Seventh Demon Lord taking place in a faraway land. Flying dragons were magical beasts of the dragon variety, but if looking at raw attack power alone, they didn't stand out. It wasn't easy to kill one, but they also didn't possess enough strength to turn the tide of a battle.

The most important role of the flying dragon units was the transport of personnel and goods. The number of beings that could travel through the skies was limited, and they couldn't easily be replaced. Because there would be no replacements for them if they were dispatched to the front line and killed, they were mainly tasked with logistical support. Sending them out into battle lightly would carry a great risk.

One such flying dragon in service of Laband, a large male, casually stretched its wings. A rider was atop the brilliant red equipment on its back, the color of which indicated the nation they served. Furthermore, there was a box-shaped object hanging below its body... or it appeared to be a box at a glance, but it also resembled a boat. It was meant for transporting people and even contained a passenger cabin.

In front of the flying dragon carrying the “boat” was a smaller dragon leading the way. It was an escort meant to protect the passengers being transported.

“Just what is His Excellency thinking?” Rose, who was riding in the “boat” carried by the flying dragon, thought aloud while tilting her head. During her personal time, she would informally refer to Duke Eldstedt as “Uncle”, but considering her position, she needed to remain professional for now.

“He did not tell us anything. His Excellency only ordered us to protect you, Lady Rose.”

“I see...”

Those serving at Rose’s side were adventurers with personal contracts with the duke. Just like Dale, they faced off against demon lords and their demons, so they were trustworthy both in terms of ability and conduct. Rose hadn’t even been allowed to bring along a chamberlain, just these guards, due to the limited occupancy of the “ship.”

It was an inconvenient enough journey that it wouldn’t be at all unusual for any ordinary young noble to refuse outright to make it, but as someone who came from a lower-ranking family to begin with and was also used to traveling, Rose didn’t so much as bat an eye.

Without exception, all of the adventurers serving Rose were women. This unusually high number of women had been assembled out of consideration for the one they were guarding—Rose, a young woman.

Just what are you thinking at a time like this, Uncle...?

Thanks to the scars left behind by the Fourth Demon Lord, the temple of Niili that Rose belonged to was currently incredibly busy. She couldn’t understand the reason she, a high-ranking priestess, was being called out so far on a flying dragon at such a time. However, it was an order from Duke Eldstedt himself, so Rose was in no position to refuse. She was well-acquainted with how prudent the duke was, but she hadn’t the foggiest what he was thinking now, which only caused her anxiety to grow.

Is Lord Gregor alright...?

Rose’s expression grew clouded as she thought of Gregor standing on the

field of battle and leading troops. She couldn't help but feel frustrated knowing that all she could do was pray he was alright.

Through the window, she could see the blue sky with a gently blowing wind, but the beautiful scenery wasn't enough to clear away the clouds in Rose's heart.

Flying dragons weren't suited to flying at night. They had no night vision, so what they could see was greatly restricted after dark. And their riders were humans, which were no better in that regard. As long as they were able to do so, they landed and used the nighttime hours to rest instead.

For a flying dragon to land, they needed enough space to do so. By the time they came across a suitable spot, the sun had already set completely. Using illumination magic to see, the soldiers and adventurers made preparations for camping.

Because she was treated as someone of high status within the group, Rose couldn't help out. She pulled out writing materials and started composing a brief report addressed to the duke.

That was when it happened.

It wasn't as if she had distanced herself all that much from the adventurers guarding her. And no matter how much Rose may have been focusing on writing the report, she wasn't the sort to carelessly let her guard down.

"I have waited for this time to come."

Despite all of that, when that voice suddenly spoke out from the darkness, Rose was all alone. It was then that she finally realized she'd gone out on her own.

Rose lost her usual cool for a reason besides being surprised at the sudden voice: she recognized it. In fact, there was no way she could ever forget it.

"You're...!" Rose said, staring into the darkness. Sensing that vague presence start moving, she instinctively stepped into the shadows to follow it.

The footing in the forest was even worse than Rose had thought. She was aware that she was acting behind her traveling companions' backs, so she

followed the presence without using illumination magic.

Her sense of distance was being thrown out of sorts by moving forward with such poor visibility. She felt like she'd gone pretty far, but at the same time she also got the sense that she really wasn't all that far from the campground.

After advancing a ways into the forest, the presence stopped. It lit a small, gentle magic light above the palm of her hand, lighting up her face.

"So it *is* you..." Rose said. Now that she was sure of who it was, her voice was full of conflicted emotion. It was a beautiful, well-featured face. Her golden horns gave off a pale reflection of the light. And above all else, Rose could never forget that long, glamorous purple hair. This was the devil woman who had once saved Rose from the Second Demon Lord.

"I have waited for this time to come. For the moment I would meet you in this place, o rose-hued maiden."

Rose knew that the woman before her was a high-ranking priestess of Banafsaj, the god who gave their divine protection in the form of premonitions. And so, Rose naturally understood the meaning behind the devil woman's words.

"You... knew that you would meet me 'now,' yes...?"

That was why, during her chance meeting with the Second Demon Lord, this woman "knew" that Rose would survive. Having seen the future that lay beyond that, such a belief was only natural.

"There is no guarantee that things will play out according to the predictions granted to me by the gods. But meeting with you at 'this time' occurred along the path to the 'future' I've awaited... and finally... I have arrived at this moment..." The purple-haired woman's voice faltered a bit, but she calmly stared straight at Rose.

"The Platinum Hero will defeat the Seventh Demon Lord," the prophet informed her, her voice wavering so little that it was almost frightening. "At that time, the future will be decided. The Second Demon Lord will come to this place," she said, handing Rose a simple map—lines scrawled out on a scrap of paper, indicating geography on the outskirts of Laband.

“The Second Demon Lord conducts herself as she pleases, and it is impossible to guess how she will act. Her whereabouts are never fixed. Even if the Platinum Hero searches for her, it will be difficult to find her with normal methods... That is why I have waited for this moment. By handing you this map, o rose-hued maiden, that future will arrive for the Platinum Hero... and with this, my role will end.”

Though Rose was also a priestess with divine protection, she didn’t know how Banafsaj’s divine protection manifested. Even so, the woman’s words made her feel uneasy. There was a determination behind them that was so strong it was almost painful.

“...You told me something before: that a demon lord’s retainer yields their right to life and death to their lord... If the Second Demon Lord is destroyed, will you be saved...?”

“In a way,” the woman calmly responded. “If my lord is destroyed, then I shall be sacrificed alongside her.”

Rose’s breath was taken away, but the woman simply smiled and continued on. “I entered into this contract with my lord aware of that fact. I am entirely prepared for everything that entails,” she said, her emotions unwavering. She’d resolved herself to this fate a long time ago and seemed almost philosophical about it.

“If I let this chance pass, then my lord will surely kill a great many more people. My motherland has suffered greatly by my lord’s hands as well,” she said. She remained resolute, as if she were merely discussing her own work. It was almost beautiful, seeing her so unshaken.

“What would you do, if you knew that someone you wanted to protect so badly you’d die for them could be saved if you just offered up your own life?” the devil woman asked, then continued on without waiting for Rose to respond. “Surely, you would make the same choice, yes?”

Having said what she needed to, she ceased her illumination magic and turned her back to Rose, then walked off into the shadows of the forest. For a while after, Rose continued looking in the direction she had disappeared.

Rose then turned around, seeing the brilliant light of the camp, which was

illuminated by magic. Still too far away from that glimmering place, Rose stood frozen for a few moments.

“If... I entrust this to Lord Dale...”

The Second Demon Lord was an elusive monster who revelled in slaughter and whose whereabouts were never known, and chances to defeat her were exceedingly rare. Dale would surely head out to eliminate her, but at the same time, that would also mean the death of that woman, who had saved Rose’s life.

Rose stared at the scrap of paper in her hands, then shut her eyes and contemplated for a short while.

If I were in her place...

If she were offering up her own life to create the greatest possible opportunity, she wouldn’t wish for it to be wasted over simple sympathy. The woman had likely lived all this time for this reason. Thanks to Rose’s own beliefs, she couldn’t sully the pride of that woman, who was trying to carry out her task. If Rose had to make the same choice, that’s what she would do.

Rose opened her eyes and started to return to the campsite. As she walked, her doubts had already cleared away.

Around the time Rose had this unexpected reunion, in the northern lands, the war with the Seventh Demon Lord was entering its final phase.

With the Platinum Hero on their side, who possessed first-rate ability despite also serving as a symbol, the allied forces had continued to advance. All of the land they passed through along the way lay tragically in ruin. Seeing this and not wanting the same disaster to befall their own country, the allied forces remained firmly united. The mantra that they marched under—“defeat the demon lord”—remained utterly unsullied.

And because of that, the war with the Seventh Demon Lord ended in victory for the allied forces.

The ravages of the war were carved into the territory that had served as the battlefield, and no liveliness returned to that already trampled land. But even so, it was undoubtedly a victory, and the thought of not having to face any

further aggression or invasions brought hope to the hearts of the people. Even on the front lines, all of the allied forces were abuzz with excitement over the victory.

Compared to a war between nations, in a battle with a demon lord like this, victory was much more clearly defined. The Seventh Demon Lord's head was cut off and presented to the nations' kings; meanwhile, the demons who had served as his commanders perished alongside their lord.

The remnants of defeated forces had become an unruly mob, so in the future there may be a need to hunt them down, but at the present they posed no great threat.

In the midst of all this, Dale received a letter from Duke Eldstedt.

"They learned the Second Demon Lord's whereabouts...?"

The message had been delivered in secret by one of the duke's personal soldiers. What Rose had reported to Duke Eldstedt was written there, and the results of his careful investigation that had followed were also included.

Dale had used his home village's information network to search for the Second Demon Lord, but even though Tislow had connections the world over, they had failed to gather any concrete information, and Dale got the feeling they were slightly perturbed by that.

That fact led Dale to think that the duke must have had his own personal information network.

The only demon lords remaining were the First and Second. The First Demon Lord was the leader of Vassilios and thus had a fixed location. In that case, it made sense to prioritize the Second Demon Lord. In addition, the fact that the Second Demon Lord had snuck past Laband's borders made it a situation worthy of significant concern for the country.

Even if countless soldiers struggled with all their might against her, if the Second Demon Lord bared her fangs at the people of a nation that lacked a hero, they would never be able to land a decisive blow. Even if the damages were kept to a minimum, they would still be enormous.

But more than that, the greatest threat the Second Demon Lord presented

was the fear she inspired in the hearts of man. In terms of physical damage, the Seventh Demon Lord, who had overrun everything with his army, or the Fourth Demon Lord, who had spread about invisible illness in the form of magical elements, was greater.

Yet largely in part because of her disposition, the Second Demon Lord was no less feared than others. In addition to being elusive, she was a cruel and brutal murderer. It was difficult to predict what the demon lord who slaughtered for pleasure would do. You never knew when she may appear, and when she did, she would bury the place with corpses and the scent of blood. She was a being who inspired absolute terror.

Even Dale had yet to face off against the Second Demon Lord directly. He only had experience with fighting her retainers, and they were all beings who inspired pity even in Dale, their enemy. Even calling them “subordinates” was too much, as they were just pathetic “beings” who had had their bodies strengthened.

They wouldn’t break, nor would they die, but they could clearly still feel pain. Even when the agony passed the point of what they could bear, they weren’t allowed to break, because the right to die had been stolen away from them.

And yet, Dale killed them. They didn’t die easily, but he kept swinging his blade and casting his magic until they perished.

When they were on the verge of dying, the expression on their faces were always that of relief, but to Dale, killing them still felt utterly unbearable.

Having been absorbed in such thoughts, Dale looked up at the presence before him. Gregor was staring back at him with a look of fatigue on his face. It was the first time that Gregor had ever taken command of such a large force. Even though the advisor provided by the duke was excellent, Dale earnestly felt like he himself couldn’t handle that feat. If it came to taking command of a small commando unit on the front line, he thought he could manage, but something like this required the right person in the right place.

“Are you going, Dale?”

Even though it was partly in name only, Dale currently fell under Gregor’s command. That was how Gregor had also come to learn of the order Duke

Eldstedt had given Dale.

“Yeah... His Excellency ordered me to head there immediately.”

When he heard Dale’s answer, Gregor seemed to think about something. And then, his friend proposed something Dale had never expected.

“I’ll accompany you.”

“Huh? You’ve got to take command for the return trip too, right?”

“If it’s just the trip home, then I can leave that to a proxy. On the other hand, there aren’t many people who can head out to deal with the Second Demon Lord. And if we’re to travel by flying dragon, you’ll have to limit yourself to a small, elite group.”

“...That’s true.”

Dale took in Gregor’s words, his eyes surprisingly calm. As he was now, he thought he’d be able to keep pace with the Second Demon Lord. He hadn’t written off the possibility of going it alone. However, he couldn’t explain that to Gregor and Duke Eldstedt, who didn’t know that he had become a demon.

Gregor was plenty aware that he was asking the impossible. The responsibility assigned to him now wasn’t something that could be easily handed off to someone else, but he intuitively sensed that he shouldn’t let Dale go off on his own.

Now that the Seventh Demon Lord had been defeated, there should be no further threat here. In his head, Gregor was thinking things through, trying to decide how to best transfer the right of command to his advisor for the return trip.

It didn’t have to be him, but it was difficult to find people skilled enough to take on the Second Demon Lord. Therefore, if it had to be done so suddenly, he thought he should go.

As a member of Laband’s ducal household and as a friend, he didn’t want to lose this hero. He couldn’t let Dale go face the Second Demon Lord alone, especially in his current unstable state.

He couldn’t replace that person who was precious to Dale, nor did he intend

to. But he still felt a need to support his friend.

“...I have my own role to play, too.”

“I see... Then I won’t stop you,” Dale briefly responded and stood up, the grey mythical beast in platinum armor now in front of him. Seeing something similar in the beast’s eyes to what he was feeling, Gregor let out a brief sigh.

Gregor hurriedly entrusted the right of command to his advisor, then formed the small unit for the battle with the Second Demon Lord. Amongst the confusion in the aftermath of the war with the Seventh Demon Lord, Dale and Gregor, as well as a few elite magic users skilled at providing support from the rear, secretly departed on a number of flying dragons,

Even going as quickly as possible by using flying dragons, it took several days to return to Laband from their current position in the north-eastern part of the continent. Even so, their speed was now far faster than that of the advancing forces moving on the ground. And yet, Hagel kept pace with the flying dragons, which specialized in soaring through the sky. The partial armor Tislow had provided to Hagel was equipped with a saddle, which helped support Dale even when they were flying in more awkward positions.

This travel wasn’t a burden to Dale, as he could now swing a blade for many days on end without rest, but he couldn’t force those around him to do the same. He held back his anxious emotions and mingled with the others around the camp at night.

Gregor looked over numerous letters amidst the flickering light of the campfire. Despite the fact that the Duke was writing under such unstable circumstances, fitting to his personality, the writing was methodical and steady. The paper had been wrapped up tight, placed in a cylinder meant for such purposes, and sealed with melted wax.

Because Gregor was devoted to taking care of the post-war clean-up, he had been constantly sending correspondence back and forth with the mainland via messenger birds as they traveled. After checking over the contents of the unsealed letter numerous times, Gregor furrowed his brows slightly.

“What’s up?” Dale called out, wondering why his friend was so lost in thought.

“It’s nothing.”

“I see.”

Considering Gregor’s position, he couldn’t idly gossip about information from the homeland, even with his friend. Dale was aware of that, so he didn’t press him; he just let it drop and looked back at the crackling campfire.

Seeing Dale like that out of the corner of his eye, Gregor once more became lost in thought. It was the sort of document that needed to be destroyed after reading, so he threw it into the fire before him. The thin scrap of paper burned up and disappeared into the flames in an instant.

Laband was officially opening diplomatic relations with Vassilios, the country of the devils.

It was this report from back home, delivered with this timing, that was perplexing Gregor so.

Vassilios had been a closed-off nation, never seeking intentional exchange with other countries, for a very long time. But the leader of Vassilios, the First Demon Lord, had formally sent a messenger to Laband, conveying the wish to form a diplomatic relationship.

The First Demon Lord, leader of the devil race, was troubled by the acts of aggression by the Demon Lords of Calamity towards the humans. The will of the devils and that of the Demon Lords of Calamity did not overlap. But it was a fact that prejudice had spread amongst the humans in the long time that the devils had refused to interact with the other races, and now the belief that the devils and the demons lords shared the same feelings was common.

This demon lord was concerned that this aimless fear and misunderstanding would lead to a full-out confrontation between the devils and the humans, and so the king had sent a messenger to Laband, the nation that had led the charge in this great war.

Behind closed doors, Laband was making preparations to respond to Vassilios’s request.

Gregor’s thoughts raced as to why his father, “Duke Eldstedt, Prime Minister of Laband,” was sending him this information on such diplomatic matters now.

†

The place where the Second Demon Lord was hiding out was a particularly remote rural town. The manor in this tranquil country scenery had a luxurious and finely detailed appearance, giving it the impression of a noble's villa. The scarlet roof, which was typical of Laband architecture, used high-quality paints so brilliant that it almost looked translucent, absolutely shining beautifully in comparison to the pure-white walls and deep-green scenery.

The courtyard was occupied by a splendid rose garden. There were many varieties blooming profusely there, but most of them were a deep red. The garden existed in perfect harmony with the manor.

A metal table and chair were set up in the middle of the rose garden. Their elegant form blended into the surrounding scenery, and seated there was a beautiful young girl who only enhanced that feel of perfect harmony.

Her abundant curly hair had a beautiful golden shine to it. The velvet ribbons tying it up and the extravagant dress she wore were both the same deep crimson. The girl was like a blossoming flower, an incarnation of this rose garden.

With a joyful smile, she enjoyed the aroma of the tea as steam wafted from her white porcelain teacup, her actions having a grace befitting her appearance. Seeming to be truly enjoying herself, she let slip a small giggle, and then brought the teacup to her charming lips, which were like flower buds.

"This is fun. Oh so much fun. The Platinum Hero!" she said with a giggle, playing with the baked sweets on the table with her slender fingers. "He's killed almost aaaaall the other demon lords! How wonderful!"

The blonde girl's gaze fell upon several men and women. They didn't reply, but the lovely young girl known as the Second Demon Lord didn't even try to hide her excitement. She kept on talking.

"A hero, whom the gods allow to kill demon lords, and myself, whom they allow to kill men... How are we different, I wonder? Perhaps this hero will have the answer?"

The blond girl licked the sweet she had picked up with her red tongue, then

let out a laugh. It was poor manners and the act was suggestive, but it had a captivating grace to it and did not match her young exterior.

“I think I’ll gouge out that hero’s insides and see if I can find the answer in there. How dreamy! I’m sure they’ll be a beautiful color, since he’s a hero, after all. He’ll definitely be different from my other toys.”

The smile she broke out in then, however, was perfectly fitting to her young appearance. It looked pure, with just a hint of mischievousness behind it. And yet, there was also a deep madness behind that twisted smile.

“It sounds like such fun, killing a hero!” Her red lips curled into the shape of a crescent moon. “It was easy, killing the First Demon Lord. It was just over too soon. And killing the candidate for his replacement was simple, too. Though it was a little fun seeing everyone panic, I suppose.”

Amongst the men and women who lay collapsed before the blonde girl, a number glared at the demon lord with dark looks in their eyes. Those gazes full of hatred caused the young girl to tremble with passionate excitement..

“You’re still not broken yet? I’m glad. That means you’ll be able to entertain me even more, won’t you?”

She picked up the small, polished silver knife that was lying next to the tea set as if being placed there were only natural, then threw it without a hint of hesitation. The motion flowed naturally, and the blade didn’t miss its mark, piercing through the hatred pointed at the demon lord.

Holding back a shout of pain, a man held his eye that had been deeply impaled, blood and gore seeping out between his fingers.

“Despise me more and more. Just how great must your despair be, being forced to live as the toy of the hated target of your revenge?” the blonde girl said with a giggle, lacking even a hint of guilt. “Given time, that small child you all failed to protect would have become king, right? But you screwed up. Right before your very eyes, I carved him up while he was still alive. That made for a lovely, unforgettable memory, didn’t it?”

There is no way I could ever forget, thought the woman with purple hair as she watched the spectacle unfolding before her. It was nothing more than a

passing bit of sport for the demon lord.

In the past, Vassilios had lost its leader, the First Demon Lord, thanks to the murderous deeds of this Second Demon Lord in the shape of young girl. Time had passed, and a candidate for the next First Demon Lord was born at last. However, that child never had the chance to become king. Before he had met the qualifications to become a demon lord, he died at the hands of the Second Demon Lord, just like his predecessor.

The man who had just now lost an eye had been that child's bodyguard. The woman beside him who hadn't even tried to hide her hatred towards the Second Demon Lord was the child's wet nurse. They had tried their hardest to protect the child, but were oh so easily brushed aside, only for the murder to be committed right in front of them.

As she and the wet nurse were close in age, at night the purple-haired woman had watched the child who should have become the demon king, but she wasn't able to do anything. That was when she became painfully aware of how powerless she was, as even though she possessed high-ranking divine protection from Banafsaj, she hadn't been able to select a future where everything turned out alright.

The sight of fresh blood in reality had overlapped with the identical visions from countless futures that could have been. Those countless possibilities, the sight of all the ways that death could occur, caused her younger self to be left utterly paralyzed with horror.

As she sat there unable to do anything, the male guard and female wet nurse had had their freedom and their very ability to die stolen away by the demon lord. Toys that would easily break held no interest for the Second Demon Lord. That's why possessing a strong will led to earning her favoritism. Furthermore, because of the demon lord's sadistic nature, that was even more the case when that will was backed up by hatred.

They undoubtedly possessed strong wills, and that was precisely why they were able to keep hold of themselves even now.

It was impossible to imagine just how cruel and agonizing that was.

The priestess with a name that referred to the color of the gods, purple, hid

her eyes full of pity just a bit so what was in her heart couldn't be seen. Both her and the people before her now held the same, singular purpose, and so their hearts endured.

For the people in front of her, it was for the master they had lost. For her, it was so that she would not lose someone again, and for the sake of her motherland and the people living there.

She would strike back against this calamity. Without a doubt, this demon lord would die when the time came.

This time around, she wouldn't fail. She *couldn't* fail. The future she once saw when she was young and that sight soaked in fresh blood... she couldn't let them come true. With an unshaking will, she decided that in her heart.

Just... a little more. Then, I will also... she whispered in her heart, remembering that person who had comforted her when she was stricken by how powerless she was. That man she'd never see again, whose smile was gentler and kinder than anyone else's. And so, Mov brought her hands together in prayer.

The Second Demon Lord was still somewhat immature, fitting to her outer appearance. Having temporarily gotten her fill of playing with her "toys," her retainers, the girl seemed to lose all interest in them, and her gaze turned to her fingertips. Looking at her trimmed fingernails, she was struck with the idea of using nail polish to paint them the same deep crimson as her dress.

"Or maybe I should go with black... I'm very benevolent, so when I send so many to their deaths, it may be nice to have something that represents their lament." Thinking perhaps it would also be good to go with a black dress that was reminiscent of mourning clothes, the blonde girl stood up, her hair fluttering along with the motion.

The demon lord stood before the entrance to the manor, and then the door quietly opened. That was the work of a manservant, who normally never showed himself. Thanks to the silk hiding their faces, it was impossible to tell the manservants apart. The "name" made of symbols engraved in each of their necks was akin to the pillory about the neck of a slave. They were forbidden from so much as even speaking; they were merely living tools permitted to exist

solely to make things more convenient for the Second Demon Lord.

Once the demon lord had disappeared into the manor, the purple-haired woman quickly chanted a healing spell.

"*Oh light of heaven, grant this request by my name, and please heal those who have been wounded.《Healing light》*"

The properly activated magic stopped the flowing blood of the man who had lost his eye. With the mass of mana she possessed, which had led to her possessing a mana trait, she likely could have reconstructed his eye entirely. However, she didn't do so.

The demon lord would never allow something she had taken away to be restored without her consent. If she discovered that such a thing had happened, the man would be reprimanded in a far more repulsive manner. Knowing that, Mov couldn't let such a thing occur.

"*Are you alright?*"

"*Yes.*"

"*My Lady Oracle...*"

She was a priestess who possessed an unusually high degree of divine protection, so that was what the two before her called her. Even while they were falling apart, a light could still be seen in the eyes of the pair, displaying their strong will. In front of them, this woman who had once guided Vassilios, the country that lacked a king, remained resolute and told of her prophecy.

"*Just a little longer. We are bound by a curse, but we have not sold away our souls.*"

The people she was addressing made for an absolutely tragic sight. It wasn't just the man who had lost an eye. Others had lost body parts, and there were also those who were still bleeding, their wounds not fully healed. That was all the result of the demon lord toying with them.

"*Our role is to keep our lord in this place. We have endured being referred to as toys and treated as such all for this moment. Even so, our lives are still our own.*"

There was a strength in the eyes of those listening to her words. They were able to put up with however they were treated, no matter how poorly it may have been, because of the presence of this beautiful purple-haired woman.

This woman they called “my Lady Oracle” possessed the rare power to see countless possibilities and decide between them in order to lead them to the future she desired. Thanks to her prophecies, they were able to hold on, rather than having their hearts broken by despair. They lived on, believing the time would come when their hated enemy was repaid for her cruelty.

Everyone’s thoughts were as one.

“*We are most certainly not sacrificing ourselves for the sake of our lord.*”

That was one way of fighting.

†

It was such a refined and well-designed manor that it was easy to forget it was in a rural town out on the frontier. When he arrived there, Dale unconsciously knitted his brows.

While such extravagance was out of place out in the country, the building wasn’t gaudy, and it seemed to blend into its surroundings. There was a great sense of beauty to the manor, and it seemed to have been built with harmony with the surrounding scenery in mind.

Inside the delicately ornamented iron fence were brilliant red roses blooming profusely.

There wasn’t a single element of the manor that seemed unpleasant. And yet, there was an indescribable discomfort about the place. Dale was apparently not the only one who felt that way, as a look of displeasure crossed Gregor’s face.

“What... is this...?”

“Hmm... could it be...?” Suddenly, he realized. Dale sniffed, and in turn Gregor looked like he understood, too.

“The smell of blood... and corpses... So that’s the cause, is it?”

There was a foreign scent mixed in with that of the sweet-smelling roses. He sensed that was the source of that uncomfortable feeling.

Dale and the others had no way of knowing, but all throughout this beautiful garden and manor, the Second Demon Lord had amused herself by playing with those she called her “toys.” Through these cruel deeds, repeated over and over again, an unconcealable dark shadow had been cast over the place.

It was then that, from a completely different direction, a refreshing voice called out to the group who was checking out the manor.

“Welcome. Please, come inside.”

It was only natural that Dale and Gregor, as well as the rest of their party, put themselves on guard in response to a member of the enemy camp calling out to them. They were also left confused. It was impossible for someone to get so close without anyone noticing their presence. This was enemy territory, so they had been even more on guard than usual.

...Huh?

They knew this woman. Even at just a glance, they knew. The beautiful purple of her mana trait stood out so much that they could tell immediately this was the devil woman who had saved Rose, just from the story they had heard.

But what is this? There’s something about her...

The woman’s gentle smile caused those around her to feel at ease. She blended in like a small animal, and it felt only natural for her to be there beside them. Even though she gave off more of a presence than anyone else when she was acting firm... or that was the impression that Dale got, and he hesitated. He got the feeling that he knew this woman.

“I see that the rose-hued maiden listened to my request, yes? It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Platinum Hero,” the woman said, then hung her head in a polite gesture Dale wasn’t familiar with. “Please, I ask that you kill my lord. To do so would fulfill the dearest wish of those of us who have been forced to obey her.”

“Are you the one... who informed us of this place through Rose?” Gregor questioned.

“That is correct,” the purple-haired woman quietly confirmed.

As she was a retainer of the Second Demon Lord, they should first question if her inviting them inside was a trap. Dale and Gregor only knew the woman in front of them through what they'd heard from Rose; to the others accompanying them, she was nothing but a sudden intruder. There was no reason for them to trust her. They also couldn't deny the possibility that her saving Rose could have been part of some sort of trick. And yet, Dale was unable to distrust the woman who stood in front of him now.

Why... am I...? Is someone using Center magic to mess with my mind? Dale asked himself; the fact that he wasn't questioning any of this had him a bit shaken. He looked over the people accompanying him. This devil woman belonged to the enemy group, so they were treating her with caution and suspicion. It was a very ordinary reaction to have.

If they all had had the same friendly reaction he did, Dale would more strongly suspect magical interference. Center magic allowed one to control and enslave, and that wasn't just limited to animals and magical beasts. There were also those who could use it to meddle with the minds of men.

It was then that Dale noticed Hagel. The mythical beast seemed to be hesitating slightly, just like he was, and the soaring wolf wasn't showing any open hostility towards the woman. He didn't threaten her at all; his tail just slowly swayed, as if showing his uncertainty.

"Hagel," Dale called out, and the grey-furred mythical beast looked at him with quiet eyes. The gentle look in those eyes was similar to the one Hagel had when looking at *her*. In all likelihood, Dale and Hagel were probably feeling the same sentiment at the moment.

When he realized that, Dale decided to trust his instincts.

"We don't have much time. Can you show us the way?" Dale said, shocking Gregor as he showed that he intended to trust her. Gregor understood, since he'd known Dale for so long, but his expression still showed that he was a bit shaken.

"Dale."

"There's no guarantee that we'll get another chance like this. And even if this is a trap, we have no choice but to go along with it."

He'd wipe out everyone who stood in his way. That wasn't something he was avoiding to start with, and their options were limited. The initial plan had been a surprise attack, but since they were up against a cunning demon lord, they had also considered the possibility of a trap.

"I'll keep going until I've mowed everything down."

Now that he'd confirmed Dale's intentions, Gregor looked conflicted, but he held back his arguments and instead chose to support his friend. "If that's how you feel, then I'll keep going until I've completed my task, too."

Seeing that Dale and the others had settled the matter, the purple-haired woman pointed in a different direction than the manor entrance.

"In that case, come this way. There is an entrance that you can use without my lord realizing."

Noble manors were occasionally built with passages running throughout them. These weren't limited to just secret escape routes. They also included ones prepared so servants could move about without getting in the way of the family living there. She had indicated one such route.

"However, there is a limit to the guidance I can offer. My lord has been a demon lord for a long time. It will incredibly difficult to get in without her noticing."

"...We need a diversion, huh?"

"Those who share my will shall take action for the sake of your ambush, yes? Please, truly entertain my lord with a flashy performance." She sounded indifferent.

Gregor knitted his brows slightly in response. "Regardless of your intentions, we won't hold back."

"I do not mind. If my lord realizes that we are acquainted, it will all be for naught."

While Gregor agreed to the plan, he still hadn't discarded the possibility of this being a trap. Therefore, his foremost thought was to carefully whittle away at the enemy's forces.

Dale understood his friend's thinking, but at the same time, he also knew that even just he alone reaching the Second Demon Lord would be enough. "In that case, I'll head for the Second Demon Lord. Gregor, you take the rest of the group and create a diversion."

Gregor stared silently at Dale for a moment. Seeing Dale calmly prepared to fight without a hint of desperation or despair about him, Gregor made up his mind.

"Understood. Good luck."

"Leave it to me."

After that brief exchange, Dale followed the purple-haired woman into the passage leading under the manor. The entrance to the hidden route was in the backyard of the estate. Apparently, it was originally meant for escaping in the case of an emergency.

Only the *clonk, clonk* of their footsteps reverberated through the narrow corridor.

Somewhere far away, the earth shook. The intermittent rumblings were the sounds of battle being waged.

"To my lord, everything is a game," the purple-haired woman said, her pace as she led the way unchanged. She must have realized Dale was focusing on that noise. "Even a life-or-death battle between intruders and her 'toys' is nothing but a way to amuse herself and ward off boredom."

Gregor had infiltrated the manor head-on. The rumbling was caused by the fight between his group and the Second Demon Lord's retainers.

"She finds satisfaction in making those who harbor deep hatred for her fight to protect her."

"...That's in real bad taste." Dale hadn't intended to chime in, but he had ended up speaking half-unconsciously, surprising even himself.

"Yes, that's correct," the woman responded with a restrained smile. She stopped at a point in the middle of the passage where, at a glance, there didn't appear to be anything at all. Her hand approached a portion of the wall, which

then moved a slight bit to the left with a small click. She slid her fingers into that gap and moved the section of the wall. Afterwards, she continued the complex process of manipulating the mechanisms.

“The retainers are also aware of that. They cannot disobey our lord’s orders, but they’ll surely put on a splendid performance to draw away her attention even a little longer.”

Even though both sides had a mutual understanding didn’t change the fact that the battle in which Gregor and the others were currently participating was no less of a serious fight with their lives on the line. If they held back and the Second Demon Lord saw through the act, it would no longer serve as a diversion. They each carried out their role so that a blade that could defeat such monsters, that of the Platinum Hero, could surely reach the Second Demon Lord.

With a dull thunk, the wall at last opened wide. Beyond the opening, the gloomy corridor continued on. And after stretching straight ahead, it ended in a plain door.

“My lord lies beyond.” Then, with a terribly quiet gaze, she looked straight at Dale.

“What is it...?” Dale asked, sounding perplexed. For some reason, he was terribly weak to those eyes. Although the colors were different, this woman’s eyes and smile couldn’t help but remind him of *her*.

“You are the Eighth Demon Lord’s retainer, yes?” the woman confidently said. She knew that fact which Gregor and Rose were unaware of.

Dale voiced his conjecture, unshaken. “Did you learn that... through your premonitions?”

“Yes.”

“Does the Second Demon Lord know that?”

“No.”

Having heard her responses, Dale removed the glove on his left hand and showed her the proof of whom he served. The woman had remained calm for

the entire time up until now, but when she saw the name there, she looked surprised for the first time.

That expression looks a lot like...

Pretending not to notice how she was feeling, Dale looked at the woman.

"...I have a request," the woman stated with a bit of hesitation, after watching Dale put back on his glove.

"What is it?"

"Will you please kill me?"

What she said didn't surprise Dale, as he'd had a feeling that she held such a desire.

"If the Second Demon Lord is defeated, then I will follow in turn."

"She bound your life to hers, didn't she?"

"Yes."

It was very rare for a demon lord to not place any restraints on their retainers, like the girl who was Dale's "master" had done. Placing a condition wherein the loss of the master would result in the death of all their retainers felt like something the Demon Lords of Calamity would do.

"I... want to be free to at least choose my own end. I most certainly do not wish to sacrifice myself for my lord," she quietly stated, holding back her frustration.

"...Will that act as your salvation?" Even though he knew the answer, Dale still asked that question.

"Yes." There wasn't even a hint of hesitation to her reply.

"Is there... any other way to save you?"

"Such things cannot be overturned, at least without the intervention of the gods."

"I see..." Dale said, laughing at himself. Even if not by his hand, the woman in front of him would die. Defeating the Second Demon Lord would bring about the same result. She didn't want to be a mere toy until the bitter end. If he

wished to leave her pride and dignity untarnished, his only choice was to grant her one wish. “I’m powerless...”

“That is not at all true.” The woman’s gentle smile overlapped with that of the girl he wanted so badly to get back. “You have been my hope all this time. In that noble girl’s future, I saw the results that I sought... And at the end, I met you.”

Her voice was just too kind, and Dale felt like it was difficult to breathe. But even so, in order to save her, he gathered strength into his left hand. He felt the portion of the Eighth Demon Lord’s power embedded there.

“This is my final prophecy: You will see the girl soon.”

The one saving grace for Dale was that he didn’t need to swing his blade. The woman was being kept alive unnaturally by the power of the Second Demon Lord. Certain of that fact, Dale used the ability inside of him to negate that power, and with that alone, the life rapidly flowed from her. Dale caught her thin body in his arms as she collapsed, the strength leaving her.

There was a slight look of surprise on her face, but still she smiled, then silently closed her eyes. Her expression was peaceful and calm, without a hint of suffering. Just from looking at her, it was clear that she really had been “saved.”

Just before slipping off into an endless sleep, with her consciousness growing muddy, she whispered in a quiet voice, “Thank you... Smaragdi...”



†

“My, this is certainly something, isn’t it?”

She spun about the elegantly crafted opera glasses in one hand. Even without them, she was plenty capable of surveying the events that were unfolding and seeing even the fine details, but she’d taken a liking to the beautiful device and kept it at hand. The chance to use it only rarely came up, and she finally had a proper “performance” taking place before her to appreciate, so she gazed through the glasses, looking pleased.

“The lead performer is that swordsman, I suppose. I’d give him a passing mark both in terms of skills and appearance. The stage suits him well.”

The blonde girl giggled and leaned forward. Clad in a luxurious dress, she was in a place akin to a box seat in a theater. It was set up so it was possible to see downstairs, so it was furnished only with a table and sofa. The tabletop was set for afternoon tea, with a tea set and small, elaborate tea cakes.

If the girl had been watching a tragic romance, the sight wouldn’t have been the least bit out of place. But the “play” the girl was enjoying so greatly was a battle to the death between intruders and her own subordinates.

Each force only had one warrior at the vanguard. The black-haired swordsman leading the intruders was a cut above. His opponent, her own retainer, was a skilled enough warrior to hold an important guard position back in her old home, but now, he was on the defensive and being driven into a corner. He hadn’t been defeated yet, thanks to a woman who was supporting him with magic.

Those two, who hated her more than anyone else, were desperately carrying out their mission to protect her. The girl broke out in a grin, finding that more enjoyable than any comedy could ever be.

“The other side’s magic users aren’t bad, but their coordination is lacking. But look at that... At this rate, you’ll end up dead.”

The intruders unleashed attack magic at the devil woman who was the cornerstone of the defense. However, the demons had anticipated that. Those who couldn’t fight on the frontline despite their wounds threw themselves in

front of her, using their own bodies as shields. All devils were capable of using magic. If they cast several layers of simple magic barriers, that would be enough to make a wall that wouldn't be easily broken.

Even so, her own side was at a disadvantage in this clash between the two warriors at the forefront. Having lost an eye, the devil man's vision was limited, which put him at a great disadvantage.

"Oh, my. If only I hadn't injured you so..." the girl said, lamenting the misfortune of her subordinate.

While watching the bloodspray, she spread a suitable jam on a biscuit that resembled a bird-feed cake. Her tongue peeked out from between her red lips, and she seductively placed the dessert into her mouth. She then washed down the taste with her favorite black tea.

Hearing the door open, the blonde-haired girl turned around. She recognized the presence behind the door, and surprise that soon twisted into hatred crossed over her adorable face.

"Mov...!"

Unlike with her other retainers, the demon lord in the shape of a young girl had only placed the minimal possible restrictions on Mov. That had been to grant her room for betrayal.

The restrictions a demon lord placed on their retainers were absolute. However, there had been no binding force to the contract between Mov and the Second Demon Lord; it had amounted to nothing more than a vow. The Second Demon Lord and Mov had an agreement: as long as Mov did not betray her, the demon lord would not lay a hand on the woman's daughter.

That was why the demon lord had granted Mov freedom: so that she would betray her. If Mov begged to be free of her shackles, she would be permitting the demon lord to kill her beloved daughter.

If she were just going to kill her, then the demon lord could do that any time. But it would be a waste for her to not find a way to get more enjoyment out of her favorite toy so she could stave off the boredom for more of her long-lived life. With rules to restrict herself, it made for a much more exciting game.

However, that had backfired.

What enraged the demon lord more than anything else, though, was that she understood what that meant.

“You dare underestimate me...?!”

Mov, a high-ranking priestess of Banafsaj, had betrayed her and delivered this man to her. It wasn’t possible for anyone but her to have sent him here, and that meant Mov had done so because she was confident that wouldn’t mean losing the one she wanted to protect.

In other words, Mov had prophesied that this man, this hero, was capable of killing the Second Demon Lord.

The girl kicked off the floor. Her dress was made of countless frills and lace and she wore enamel pumps, but with a speed that was hard to imagine from her appearance, the Second Demon Lord intercepted the intruder. The second she stood up, she was already grasping drawn daggers in both hands. Even Dale hadn’t been able to catch the moment that she drew them. It was just too natural of an action, one she was so acquainted with that it almost seemed like breathing.

The Second Demon Lord had a petite build and favored short, easy to handle weapons. She was fond of the way that they let her feel the sensation of skin and bone being sliced and hacked through.

Despite his superior physique, she moved to slaughter the adult man before her. Even when her opponent was a hero, her antithesis as determined by the gods of the seven colors, she was still confident she could kill him.

She brought down her daggers in one absolute blow. Aiming precisely for his vitals, she attacked with both hands, with slight variations in speed.

The demon lord thought in the corner of her mind that it would be a waste to kill him right away. But she soon changed her mind. She had to make proper use of her time so she could show Mov the severed heads of this man and her beloved daughter.

Her long blonde hair drew an arc through the air, then fluttered back down with gravity.

The demon lord's thoughts were then suddenly cut off by a high-pitched metallic sound. In an instant, she grasped that the gauntlet on the man's left hand had stopped her blow and that he hadn't been thrown off-balance in the least.

There wasn't any fear or panic in the hero's gaze. That piercing stare that was pointed right at her made the demon lord tremble a bit.

However, she soon denied that part of herself. Since she became a demon lord, everyone else was weak and feared her, and she was strong and absolute. Even if her foe was a hero, it was impossible for her to be thrown out of sorts.

With her arms so trained that she could focus solely on that silver gleam, the demon lord in the shape of a young girl swung her blade with the intent to reap the life of the hero. As if trying to encourage herself, the demon lord absolutely refused to acknowledge her earlier reaction.

The silver shine darted freely left and right.

Dale was so focused on the blade that he didn't even have leeway to breathe. He wasn't misled by the Second Demon Lord's young appearance, but he still felt out of his element, fighting someone with such a small build. She turned her short reach into an advantage rather than a disadvantage, making use of the speed at which she could pull back. On top of that, each and every blow was so shockingly heavy that it was impossible to imagine them coming from her slender body.

The demon lord had polished her technique by indulging her desire for slaughter over a long, long time. Her skills had flourished to a frightening degree as a result of her thorough experimentation with the act of murder.

But... I can see it.

Dale could clearly pick out the blade in the midst of that silver gleam. He didn't leave it to his intuition, instead fully and accurately dealing with his enemy's attack, reacting to everything. The power he'd obtained by becoming a demon allowed him to see the demon lord's attacks and had given him the body needed to react to them. The equipment provided by his home village was able to endure the demon lord's blows, too. However, that was also proof of Dale's ability to skillfully turn aside his opponent's attack rather than just

receiving it.

The demon lord's dagger that had been deflected by Dale's gauntlet danced through the air. Something seemed ever so slightly off about that movement, setting off alarm bells in Dale's mind. Immediately afterwards, the demon lord's now-free left hand threw three thin knives, aiming for Dale's eyes. Once the hand finished its throw, the dagger that should have been flying through the air landed naturally back in her grasp.

The demon lord moved to once more attack with both daggers, only for her eyes to open wide with shock as her own knives came flying back at her; Dale had caught them with his right hand and thrown them back.

She had never imagined that the weapons meant to throw her opponent off-kilter would be used to do the same to her. She hurriedly moved to evade, but Dale landed a gauntlet blow to the demon lord's defenseless abdomen.



“Gah...!”

All of the air in her body escaped through her mouth.

“Ah...”

With that single strike, her legs started to shake. She fell to her knees, and her favored blades she held in her hands fell to the floor as she stared in an amazed daze.

For a long time, the demon lord had been an absolute being.

She had met the qualifications to become the Second Demon Lord and been reborn. Up until that then and forever afterwards, the demon lord had spent her time never feeling pain. But as someone absolute, her ego would not accept kneeling before someone and being looked down upon. And so, she took her blades in hand once more and leapt at the hero. She had become so enraged precisely *because* she realized she had overlooked such an obvious gap in her defenses.

She swung, and swung, and swung her blades. And yet, all of her swings were deflected with a dull metallic sound. Not even so much as the tips of her daggers reached the hero. Even though any one of those blows were more than enough to take a life, none of them reached their target. Still, she didn’t want to acknowledge that fact.

To Dale, those attacks from the Second Demon Lord felt like a child’s temper tantrum. Her honed muscles and cruelty weren’t fitting to her young appearance. However, Dale sensed that her mind *did* have some youthfulness about it still. She was terribly skilled, but he didn’t feel as fired up as he had during his one-on-one fight with the Sixth Demon Lord. Even though he was fighting someone who proudly basked in her own strength, there was nothing to be found there.

Her blonde hair was disheveled, her adorable face flushed, and her blue eyes tearing up, but her appearance didn’t make Dale feel anything. He just coolly looked down on her and observed. It was that gaze that so deeply wounded the demon lord’s pride.

Ever since taking that blow from Dale, her movements had clearly dulled. And

in turn, Dale came after her without mercy. If she were a normal devil, that attack would have broken numerous bones, starting with her ribs. Unfortunately, her bones hadn't shattered, so the demon lord stood up countless times, only to collapse back onto the floor.

As that pain wracking her body had been caused without him even drawing the sword at his hip, the demon lord looked up at the hero with hatred in her eyes. As if sensing the demon lord's thoughts, Dale launched a different kind of attack at her. A kick came flying at the collapsed demon lord's face. She tumbled several paces, then lay in that spot, not even able to scream out.

Anyone who saw this sight without knowing the circumstances would undoubtedly find fault with Dale. The girl he was tormenting was just that lovely, and he didn't show even a hint of mercy. And above all else, this was pure one-sided violence, with her having no chance to do anything in retaliation.

As the demon lord lay in a heap, no longer able to even try to get up, Dale finally spoke.

"Is that all?"

A chill ran through her. The only way to describe his voice was as completely lacking any warmth. His expression showed nothing but clear disdain. It was hard to say which one of them was more fitting of the title of "demon lord."

It was then that Dale drew his sword, deliberately and slowly. There was clear panic in the young girl's blue eyes. She didn't want to admit it, but she felt stupid for not having realized her own death was approaching.

The demon lord was aware that her own appearance was charming. She had used that to get her prey to let their guards down countless times in the past, only to slaughter them. Finding the need to reverse the current situation more important than her pride, she looked at Dale with teary eyes and intentionally used a voice meant to invite pity.

"Forgive—"

He didn't even allow her to reach the end of that plea. The girl's small head was pushed to the ground by the sole of his shoe. She heard her skull creak.

After inflicting further humiliation upon the demon lord, Dale made his final statement; in other words, he handed down her death sentence.

“Well then, let’s end it here.”

Not given even a chance to struggle in vain, the consciousness of the young girl known as a calamity sank into darkness.

Fresh red blood dripped from Dale’s drawn sword. Even when one became a demon lord, they still bled the same as anyone else.

He was calm and composed. However, he realized that his anger was definitely the reason he had tormented his opponent more than was necessary.

After thinking back over his actions, Dale sighed. He gave the young girl’s motionless body a kick. That was both because of his own resentment and to confirm she was dead.

The purple-haired woman... nothing could have been done to save her. Even so, he couldn’t help but reach out to her. He could never forgive the demon lord that had driven her into that corner.

Dale went to the place akin to a balcony, where the demon lord had first been. Looking down over the metal railing, he found Gregor looking up at him from downstairs. The room lay in ruin, the scars of battle leaving their mark. Smoke was still rising from the burnt rug, and a number of people who looked like devils had collapsed in a terribly unnatural manner. It was a strange sight, as if time had been cut off in the middle of the action. However, Dale was aware of what had happened downstairs, and Gregor also had a vague sense of it.

“Is it over?” Gregor asked, looking up at Dale.

“Yeah.”

With just that short exchange, Gregor had confirmed a lot of what he wanted to know. He gracefully sheathed his brilliant red longsword, signaling the end of the battle with the Second Demon Lord. Unlike the Fourth, the Second Demon Lord’s corpse would be presented to the king as proof. Everything in this manor served as evidence of the demon lord’s defeat and would require a proper investigation.

With the defeat of their lord, the retainers that Gregor and the others had been fighting had collapsed and lost their lives. Just as Mov had said, those who served the Second Demon Lord had all been sacrificed when their master passed away. And yet, though they had been forced to follow their master in death, their expressions were incredibly calm.

When Dale left the manor, a rose-scented wind blew up against him. With a deep breath, the unpleasant sensation that had permeated down to his lungs was washed away. However, it didn't feel like it would completely clear so easily.

Hagel was waiting outside. He hadn't been part of the assault team, but he possessed senses that far exceeded that of the races of man, so he alone was more than enough to serve as a lookout. That had been a big help, allowing them to move as a small unit and not need to worry about ambushes or reinforcements.

Having guarded the entrance in that manner, Hagel looked up at the sky while awash in the light of a pale sunset. He wagged his tail with a relaxed, steady rhythm. Dale had come to understand that that habit of his meant that he was thinking.

"What's up?" Dale called out.

"It's nothing..." He seemed to be at a loss, which was unusual for Hagel. He looked at Dale, and sensing the smell of blood about the man, he seemed even more troubled as he grumbled, "The young lady..."

With those words, the expression on Dale's face shifted.

"The young lady's smell... has appeared in a distant land."

"Where...?! Where is Latina?!"

Dale let his intense emotions show clearly, causing Hagel to avert his gaze a bit, feeling a little troubled.

"...My child is more skilled than I am at seeking scents in distant places. I cannot determine such things precisely."

"But Vint could...?!"

“Calm yourself, Dale,” Gregor said in a calm, quiet voice. He had come out of the manor after Dale, only to find him with an unpleasant look on his face.

“How could I, with things like—?!”

Dale felt like his emotions were about to boil over, but he somehow managed to rein them in. That was because with Gregor’s quiet gaze, he was able to look at himself objectively, just a bit.

“I’ve also received some information that has been worrying me. I still haven’t confirmed it for certain yet, so I’ve stayed quiet, but...” began Gregor.

“What is it?”

“Currently, Laband has received a proclamation from Vassilios that they are opening their borders, and our nation has begun preparations to officially enter diplomatic relations with them.”

Dale couldn’t hide what looked like impatience and hatred on his face. Unfaltering, Gregor continued on, “Apparently the leader of Vassilios is called the Golden King. That king... supposedly favors a beautiful woman known as the Platinum Princess.”

There was no agitation to Gregor’s voice, but in comparison, Dale was unable to hold back his violent emotions. If he were his normal self, he would have noticed that both Gregor and Hagel wore the same expression of discomfort.

Without so much as a word to Gregor and the others, Dale disappeared. Though it occurred late at night, Gregor still naturally realized what he’d done. He had leaked the information knowing this would occur and that even if he tried to stop Dale, he wouldn’t be able to with the way the man was now. Even though he’d decided to let Dale go without trying to interfere, he still had to hold back a sigh.

This uncanny timing... Should I see it as Dale being intentionally summoned...?

The moon shining in the heavens gave no answer, but even so, Gregor muttered a prayer to Ahmar as he looked up at the sky.

6: The Platinum Hero, the Golden Demon Lord, and the Platinum Demon Lord

Vassilios lay beyond the forest to the south of Kreuz. That was all that Dale knew about that nation.

Because it had taken up isolationism and rarely interacted with other countries for many years, there was barely any information about Vassilios. In fact, it would be best to say that there was just no opportunity to obtain it.

It was thanks to the fact that Hagel was accompanying him that Dale, without even knowing any details about its geography, was able to head forth into that country without hesitation. Though the mythical beast admitted that he didn't have Vint's level of precision, as they grew closer to Vassilios, Hagel was able to more clearly pick up on Latina's scent. And by following it, they were able to accurately find her location.

Vint made it seem perfectly normal, the way he always picked up Latina's scent... but it looks like he wasn't at all "normal" after all... Though he was rushing and getting impatient, that quip still floated across Dale's mind.

"For a normal soaring wolf, heading from our settlement to a town in the realm of men is an impossible task."

"Vint made it sound so easy..."

"For myself, it is possible depending on how the wind blows... but it is most certainly not simple."

Vint always said he could do anything he set his mind to, and apparently that wasn't just due to delusions of grandeur on his part.

Dale's gaze was filled with nature in the form of forests and rugged mountains, only for the silhouette of something man-made to come into view. When he saw the settlement that was so different from those in Laband and other nations, Dale sensed that they'd arrived at their destination.

“Hagel.”

“...The young lady’s scent is near.”

Dale had the mythical beast land.

If his only goal was to defeat the demon lord, then he could have infiltrated late at night, but he needed to find Latina, who was somewhere in that town. On edge and unable to sleep a wink, Dale waited for morning. The emotions swirling about in his heart didn’t feel like they could be sorted out easily.

At the break of dawn, Hagel took off into the sunrise-colored sky. Looking down from above, Dale saw that this town in Vassilios really did look like something he had never seen before. He wasn’t even sure which building served as the royal palace, as none fit his preconceptions of what one should look like. The way the town was constructed was just too different from what he knew.

Instead, he soon noticed a place that was strong in the power of the gods. Unlike the shrines built for the sake of man in places like Kreuz, it had been constructed in this place abundant in the grace of the gods, in reverence of them, like in his home village.

“A temple of Banafsaj...”

“That is where the young lady’s smell is coming from.”

Dale immediately made up his mind. “Head towards where Latina is.”

He’d mow down anyone and everyone who got in his way. Sensing those intentions that Dale wasn’t even attempting to hide as he rode on the soaring wolf’s back, Hagel made a low, conflicted sound in the depths of his throat.

Hagel circled around above the shrine several times. All the while, Dale got a rough layout of the building.

“Get us close to Latina.”

“Understood.”

Hagel suddenly descended from a great height, only to then take off high into the sky once more. In that instant in which he came so close to the building that he was almost touching it, Dale safely landed on the roof. Since he had cast

magic on himself to reduce his weight, he hardly made a sound when he touched down. His black coat fluttered down after him and touched the ground as well. From up in the sky, Hagel looked conflicted, seeing how naturally Dale undertook such covert actions reminiscent of an assassin.

Continuing onward, Dale descended from the roof of the building to the ground. He wouldn't be concerned about brushing aside or even slaughtering those who got in his way, but until he found Latina, he wanted to avoid causing any unnecessary trouble. He searched carefully for anyone's presence, but still hurried ahead.

I can sense the presence of people, but... what is this? What's this unnatural feeling...?

He could definitely sense people somewhere far away. However, Dale couldn't sense anyone in this central sector he was currently advancing into. He got the sense that an entirely desolate space had been opened up before him, to such a degree that it just wasn't natural.

Dale had snuck into the castles of other demon lords when he took their lives, but he'd never been this unimpeded before. And yet, the throbbing sensation in his left hand didn't leave him with the option to retreat.

Even though there were several structures on the vast grounds, Dale continued on with confidence. No matter what plots may have been waiting for him, such trivial matters were no reason for him to stop moving.

At last, Dale arrived at an elaborate royal villa. As a clear, cool breeze passed by him, he felt his heart overflow with emotion.

He squeezed his left hand tight. It wasn't based on logic, but he was confident: that part of himself that he had lost was here.

Holding back a warmth welling up inside him, he crossed the bridge spanning the shallow spring. Pushing aside the thin cloth that was swaying in the gentle breeze, Dale passed through the entrance.

And there was Latina.

He felt himself stop breathing.

Clad in attire he was unfamiliar with, likely in the style of Vassilios, Latina was wrapped in soft sheets and lying atop a bed.

Dale timidly approached. He held his breath as he stood by her side, unable to believe it even as he saw her with his own eyes, wondering if this was a dream and what he'd do if it was. He couldn't help but want to reach out and touch her. It was only natural that he wanted to hug her. But even so, he couldn't, fearing that she'd disappear again the second she opened her eyes.

He couldn't see her gentle grey eyes, which were hidden behind her long eyelashes. She looked thinner than he remembered, and her face had a sickly pallor. However, seeing the way her chest rhythmically moved up and down, he felt a strong sense of relief.

He timidly reached out, his fingers trembling. He gently touched her soft cheek, then hurriedly pulled his hand back. Once he was sure that she hadn't disappeared on him, he reached out again and felt her warmth.

Feeling that warmth, which in the past had been by his side like it was only natural, Dale let his logical side take charge. He held back the overwhelming desire to hug and kiss her. She was sleeping so peacefully, and it wouldn't do to frighten her. And so, Dale stroked her head like he had always done. Touching her smooth hair felt good, and he brushed his hand up against the base of her broken horn, which she had always thought felt nice despite her ticklishness.

"Mn..."

Latina stirred slightly. She let out a happy sigh, like a content kitten. Dale broke out in a smile when he saw that unchanged, charming action of hers, but that expression was wiped away in the next moment when she spoke.

"Chrysos...?"

Hearing her call someone else's name, his mind instantly boiled and seethed. Seeing her sleeping so defenselessly, clad in such thin clothing that the contours of her body could be clearly seen, then hearing her call out a name other than his own, all of his other emotions were washed away.

Even at a glance, Dale could tell that this villa was special. He hadn't thought about the feelings of the First Demon Lord hiding the Eighth Demon Lord, who

should have been seen as nothing but a harmful presence to the others.

A “princess” who was receiving favor... The instant he saw her, he had forgotten the dark feelings those words brought about in him. But he was reminded of all that with that single name.

Latina awoke from her slumber, finding both her arms being restrained with a force so strong it could be called painful. She instinctually twisted her body to try to escape, but that strong grasp didn’t slacken at all.

What...? What...?

She blinked her eyes, which were blurry from her frightened tears, and her vision focused. The strength drained from her body when she realized the being so shockingly close to her was a man. Her body couldn’t keep up with her racing mind.

While her body unconsciously accepted who this was, her mind couldn’t understand her present circumstances. She simply couldn’t grasp the fact that he was here.

“Dale...?”

What perplexed Latina further was the expression on Dale’s face. Her thoughts were racing so chaotically that the idea of saying how she wanted to see him, as well as the other things she wanted to talk to him about, that she *needed* to tell him, all fled from her mind. Unable to tell that the emotion Dale was openly baring towards her was intense jealousy, she felt suffocated.

Dale had always looked at her with a calm, gentle expression. Ever since she was young, she’d spent her time wrapped up in his warm affection. Dale was looking at her with a violent emotion akin to anger for the first time, and she couldn’t even comprehend the reason behind it. She looked up with a frightened expression at the man pinning her down. As he was now, even Latina’s reaction rubbed Dale the wrong way. He reasoned that she had reacted that way because there was a reason to feel guilty.

“Why...?”

“Latina.”

Dale’s questioning tone made Latina draw back. Normally, no matter how angry he may have been, Dale’s voice would soften when she reacted like that. But now, Dale’s anger showed no sign of abating.

“Who is Chrysos?”

“Dale...?”

Not even knowing how Dale knew Chrysos’s name, Latina was left at a loss for words. Once her words got caught in her throat, it was hard to get them moving again. She was frightened, and her eyes grew blurry with tears. In her current unstable state, more than the joy of reuniting with the person she loved, she was shaken by the fear caused by being exposed to his anger.

“...Is that the name of the First Demon Lord?” Dale’s glare remained firmly fixed on Latina, who couldn’t manage to speak.

Even if Latina was hiding something, she couldn’t lie; her trembling eyes clearly told her true feelings. Feeling that he’d obtained the answer he sought, Dale moved on to another question. “Where is the First Demon Lord?”

Latina’s eyes trembled. Through the direction in which her gaze darted, Dale found the answer he sought, and a dark smile crossed his face.

“Wait just a little longer, Latina... The First Demon Lord is the last one. Then you’ll come back to me, right?”

“D...ale...?” Latina called out in a hoarse voice, trembling as she was assailed by an unease so great she felt it would crush her. The emotion she saw in Dale now could even be described as a powerful madness gripping him.

“And then, I’ll forgive everything, so just be patient and wait.”

Seeing Dale get up and turn to leave the room, Latina at last realized that the thing she absolutely didn’t want to happen was happening.

“No... don’t...! Please, Dale... Chrysos is...!”

Latina didn’t realize the reason behind Dale’s anger, and by covering for Chrysos, she only served to fan those emotions further. Hearing her voice behind him, Dale didn’t even try to hide his hatred as he quickened his pace towards where Latina had looked.

From the sky, Dale had surmised where an audience chamber with a throne should be located. Latina's gaze had further supported that assumption. There could be an office or something elsewhere, but if he was wrong, then he would scour the place with a fine-toothed comb until he found this "Golden King."

If anyone stood in his way, he'd have no qualms about cutting them all down. Now that he'd confirmed Latina's presence, he'd have no problems doing whatever it took to get her back. But the one thing he'd never do is forgive the one who tried to steal her away.

His heart ached, wondering if she'd perhaps betrayed him, but he could never hate her. So instead, he despised his opponent. Even tearing them limb from limb wouldn't be enough.

Latina would surely be sad about that, and she may even come to hate him. However, he couldn't be stopped.

The room Dale reached was terribly desolate and dreary. As he was now, Dale didn't even register the delicate ornamentation on the walls and pillars. At the end of the wide-open space was a dais behind bamboo blinds that hung from the ceiling. Dale couldn't actually see the person behind them, but he sensed a moving presence.

The moment he sensed the dais was clearly a spot meant for someone in a position of power, Dale moved to draw his blade. His ears picked up a small metallic sound, and before he could even give it thought, he intuitively realized that a defensive wall had been erected with a quick chant.

"Something like this won't stop me...!"

Dale closed the gap between them. Relying on his power, he smashed the magic wall of light, which made a high-pitched sound as it was crushed. Then, his blade continued on, cutting the bamboo blinds at an angle. Dale kept going, prepared to cut down the person beyond them—

But he suddenly stopped.

"Wha...?!" Dale stood dumbfounded, forgetting all of his anger and hatred. He even forgot to move.

It was then that quiet, light footsteps came from behind him. Without even

needing to turn around, Dale knew who they belonged to..

Her breathing strained, Latina came rushing into the audience chamber and slipped past Dale and the bamboo blinds, hugging Chrysos tight as if to protect the Golden King.

“Dale, please, stop... Chrysos... Ryso is...!”

“...Platina,” the voice, lower than Latina’s, responded gently.

They were so close that their cheeks were almost touching and it was impossible to tell which locks of platinum hair belonged to who.. Their facial features and stature were so similar that if you said they came from the same person, it would be believable. And the silver bangles they both wore were the same shape and gave off the same shine.

The only difference was the color of those gentle grey eyes that were tearing up and the golden ones gazing into them.

There was no need to compare. Viewed side-by-side like this, they looked nearly identical.



“Twin... sisters...?” Dale muttered, dumbfounded, only for the strength to then suddenly drain from Latina as if her strings had been cut. Before Dale returned to his senses, Chrysos caught the utterly exhausted girl. With an anxious look, Chrysos placed her scepter to the side, then hugged Latina in her arms.

“From that reaction... it would seem that Platina has indeed not spoken a single word about me to you.”

Chrysos gave a slight strained smile as she looked up at Dale, who had even forgotten to sheathe his sword.

“Ah...” was the only thing Dale could get to come out of his mouth.

While Dale stood perplexed, Chrysos kindly wiped the sweat from Latina’s brow. It was then that Dale finally noticed Latina’s pained breathing.

“Latina...!”

“I wish to carry Platina to her bed. Will you lend me a hand?”

Dale dropped his sword to the ground with such vigor that it was like he was throwing it, and then he picked up Latina. She was finally, *finally* back in his arms, but she was a great bit thinner than he remembered.

Chrysos entrusted Latina to Dale, turned her back to him like it was only natural, then started leading the way. Her platinum hair that was the same color as Latina’s fluttered in front of Dale. There were splendid accessories made of gold and silver and adorned with shining jewels hanging from her black curved horns, which were like the one Latina once had. However, the way her glossy horns sparkled was even more beautiful than the gems around them.

Chrysos led Dale to the royal villa where Latina had previously been. That was when Dale at last realized that a cool breeze kept this place at a moderate temperature despite being in this hot, arid land. It would seem that when he had lost his cool, his field of vision had grown rather narrow, but it was still rather late for him to notice that this beautiful place was constructed to be rather comfortable to spend time in. That also made it well suited for recuperation.

After Latina was laid down to sleep atop the bed, Chrysos took a seat on its corner and reached a hand out towards her sister's head. There was a clear change in the surrounding atmosphere, and Latina's breathing stabilized.

When she was done, Chrysos looked straight at Dale once more. From the expression on her face, Dale could tell that she was a bit more strong-willed than Latina. The golden color of her eyes must have been the result of a mana trait. She surely possessed quite a lot of mana in comparison to Latina, who claimed that she was lacking in that regard.

Mana traits were a rare phenomenon that had no relation to genetics, so there was no guarantee that it would show up in both twins. Dale absentmindedly thought that must be the reason behind their differing eye colors.

He just couldn't understand the circumstances and couldn't collect his thoughts, causing him to react like a dolt. He sensed that the burning emotions he'd had just before had been completely off the mark, but he was unable to clear up the confusion plaguing his mind.

If the one Latina had let her guard down around so much was the girl in front of him now, then there was no helping that. It was unsurprising that this spoiled airhead would be pampered by her elder sister. (Even though they were twins, Dale half-decided that Latina clearly had the disposition of being the younger child.)

As Dale tried to sort out his feelings, Chrysos opened her mouth, saying, "I am Chrysos. I am the kin of Platina, and I have met the qualifications to become the First Demon Lord." Her voice resembled Latina's, but sounded quieter and lower.

"Platina..." Dale recalled how he had once heard that devils used nicknames when they were young, so he understood that "Latina" was also one. "Latina... never mentioned having a twin sister, not even once..."

While he spoke, Dale recalled something from the past that had weighed on his mind. It had been when he'd asked a young Latina about her friends. In response to Dale's question of if she had any friends she played with, she had responded with "family." But even so, she said after that that she didn't have

any siblings. Dale had written it off as Latina not quite having the right vocabulary, or she hadn't understood what he meant.

On top of that, Dale had also questioned why Latina had been with her father in the forest. According to what he'd heard from the devil woman Glaros, devil custom was for children to be raised by their mothers. It should have been a completely matriarchal society. And so, Dale had wondered why it hadn't been her mother who had accompanied Latina when she was exiled from her old home.

Latina's parents had one more child that they needed to protect. That was the answer.

"In order to protect both me and herself, Platina was forbidden from mentioning me."

"To protect you...?"

"Are you aware that my predecessor, the previous First Demon Lord, was murdered?"

"Y-Yeah... by the Second Demon Lord..."

Chrysos gave a small nod before continuing on. All the while, she kept gently stroking the place where Latina's horn had been with her fingertips. Now he understood why Latina had called out Chrysos's name when she felt him touching that spot. In this place, Chrysos was the only one who would touch her there. Latina hadn't even considered the possibility that Dale could be present. Thinking back on it, that was only natural.

"My predecessor was killed in this shrine. Furthermore, the candidate to become the next First Demon Lord who was born later on was also murdered by the Second Demon Lord. Someone must have betrayed our people, or so our parents feared."

"The guards..."

Dale was speaking as an intruder, but he had sensed that there wasn't any proper security in place. He had thought it strange, but he couldn't pinpoint the reason why his intrusion had been seen through.

“The mythical beast that is so attached to Platina informed me. It was a simple matter, once I was aware that you were coming.”

“Vint...”

There was only one animal who met those criteria.

Dale thought back on how lately, Hagel had acted strange. He had definitely known that his cub was here.

“I had no intention of letting anyone’s blood be shed, so I decided to meet you alone.” Chrysos then gave a slightly mean-spirited smile. “I believed that if you knew who I was, you would never do something that would harm me.”

Even Dale would be reluctant to make such an assertion in regards to someone he was meeting for the first time. However, it was true that Dale was finding it difficult to sustain any hostility towards Chrysos at the moment.

Chrysos was just too similar to Latina. Just looking at that face that was identical to his adorable, lovely, beloved Latina was enough to make all malice up and disappear. If he could clearly recognize her as an enemy, it would be a different story, but it seemed that Latina held Chrysos dearly. And Chrysos treated Latina as precious, too.

At any rate, Dale found it difficult to point his blade at Chrysos.

I think I could overwhelm her in terms of power, but... I don’t feel like killing her at all... Does that mean I’ve lost...?

While thinking such deplorable thoughts, Dale was rapidly returning to his normal, everyday self.

“Platina and I were raised in secret in the depths of this shrine. At the same time that it was prophesied that I would become the First Demon Lord, it was also foretold that Platina would come to be called a calamity. Even so, our parents accepted that prophecy and agreed to have her declared a criminal...” Chrysos stated, touching the spot where Latina’s horn had been broken, as if to comfort her. Nothing but the base of Latina’s horn remained, but it had the same jet-black shine as those belonging to Chrysos. “...because that was the most natural means of taking Platina out of the country.”

“Criminals... are exiled.”

“That is correct. To us devils, twins are considered auspicious, but also only very rarely occur. If the Second Demon Lord were to learn of the existence of my kin, Platina...” Chrysos started, her expression growing clouded. “Platina would be taken away, to be used as a toy to trifle with me. The unparalleled Lady Oracle prophesized as such.”

It was easy to predict that the Second Demon Lord would keep an eye on the next First Demon Lord. And if the Second Demon Lord realized that she had a rare younger twin sister, she would surely target the girl. Their parents were confident in that fact.

It was conceivable that she’d even set up a battle to the death between the two sisters in order to most effectively toy with the First Demon Lord. At any rate, she’d have something more terrible in mind than merely death.

As she didn’t inherit a mana trait or the massive mana that came along with it, Latina had been less capable of defending herself than Chrysos. And so, their parents had decided to separate and hide their daughters. As a result, the fact that they were twins was also hidden, which would be difficult to do otherwise in a culture where they were so rare.

“And so, Platina did not mention me to anyone. No one could be allowed to know that Platina and I are kin. That was the only thing that she was able to do to protect me, when I was in this far-off land.”

It was impossible to know where the Second Demon Lord’s retainers or traitors may be lurking. No matter how trusted someone may be, it was hard to tell who would spill information. It was best to keep those who knew the secret to a minimum.

Latina was told that when she was young, and she understood her parents’ intentions, so she made sure to keep her word. Because she wanted to protect Chrysos, who was so precious to her, she kept it a secret even from Dale. That was all that Latina could do, and it was also the final promise she had made to her family. That was just how important their familial bonds were to both Latina and Chrysos. There was a strong fellowship between devils by nature, and they tended to feel especially strongly when it came to their relatives. So that the

Second Demon Lord would not learn of both Latina and Chrysos, they were concealed in the depths of the shrine and raised being only allowed contact with a limited few who could be trusted. Having always been together in this small, narrow world for as long as they could remember, they became utterly irreplaceable presences to each other. When they were young, these sisters did anything and everything together, so they weren't even able to imagine being pulled apart.

And so, Chrysos had given everything she had to become king. She strived as hard as she could to stand as ruler even a day sooner, in order to bring back her twin sister being protected solely by her exile. Chrysos spared no effort, determined that this time, she would protect her sister by her own power.

"None knew where in Vassilios the Second Demon Lord's retainers had hidden themselves. And so, the idea was to have Platina run away to the land of the humans, where devils are few in number. I have only become able to officially hand down orders to subordinates since my enthronement as the First Demon Lord. Though I have been concerned about Platina, I have been unable to do anything." Chrysos's voice was so filled with her feelings for Latina that it felt almost heartrending.

"Why is Latina here?" Dale asked, finally arriving at the question that should have normally come to mind first.

On that day, Latina had suddenly disappeared from Dale's side. So why was she here now?

"Platina was... The Eighth Demon Lord was sealed away by a spell constructed by all of the demon lords." As Chrysos responded to Dale, there was an awkward, reluctant look on her face. Seeing that expression gave Dale the feeling that these sisters really were alike.

"When that seal started to come apart a bit... Platina used her strength to break through it."

"...Is something like that really possible?"

"Normally, it would not be," Chrysos replied, sounding astonished for some reason. Seeing the strange look on Dale's face, her expression grew more awkward. "Is it... something that Platina has done...?"

“No... It’s just that since we’re talking about Latina, I can understand...”

“Platina...”

“I’ve watched over Latina for so long... but she’d always kept on surprising me...”

Apparently, even Chrysos found Latina’s actions outside the norm. An understanding seemed to be somehow forming between Latina’s sister and the one who had raised her.

“With that said, the spell binding Platina has still not been broken completely. Platina is currently in a terribly unstable state. Through my power, I have just barely been able to keep her stable.”

However, a relieved smile then crossed Chrysos’s face.

“It is fortunate that Platina and I are so very alike. If it were anyone else, such a thing would likely be impossible. I am truly glad that Platina came to me, even though she lacked consciousness...”

Although Chrysos excelled at manipulating the power she possessed as the First Demon Lord, a lower-ranking god, she normally wouldn’t be able to act as a substitute for the power someone else had lost. However, Chrysos had realized that she and Latina differed from the other demon lords: In that space with the thrones that only demon lords could perceive, while it was possible to sense the presence of the other demon lords, they couldn’t be seen. And yet, Chrysos and Latina were able to see one another.

It went without saying that it was exceptionally rare for twins, who were rarely born to devils to begin with, to both become demon lords. In all likelihood, such a thing had never happened before.

Chrysos didn’t need a deep reason for giving Latina her power, though. All she cared about was that she could save her one and only sister.

“I love Platina so much, and yet she chose you.”

Chrysos’s sudden words made Dale’s heart skip a beat. Though she didn’t puff up her cheeks the way Latina did, her golden eyes glaring at him still made him feel nervous.

“She even said that she would not return to me.”

“L-Latina did...?” Dale was more than a little happy to hear that, but he felt that if he let that show on his face, Chrysos’s glare would only grow all the sharper, so he did his best to restrain his smile.

“I will not forgive you for stealing Platina from me.”

“Even if you say that...” Then he remembered something he had once heard: devils had no custom of marriage. Did Latina tell this girl in front of him that she would stay with him because they were married? And if she did, did Chrysos understand?

Humans hardly knew anything about devil culture, so it would not be surprising if the inverse also held true.

When Chrysos looked at Dale, the one who had stolen away her beloved younger sister, her displeasure clearly showing in her eyes, she looked akin to a cat with its hair standing on end. She had a feel about her that was somehow reminiscent of Latina.

Perhaps because he could see such resemblance to Latina in her, Dale completely forgot any need to keep up appearances in front of Chrysos, the king of a nation who he was meeting for the first time.

He had been thinking of slashing and cutting her up with his blade before, so the time had already passed for such things, but normally Dale was the sort of person who knew how to be appropriately polite in any situation. That he could freely be himself around Chrysos in spite of that was proof that he had naturally let his guard down around her, that girl who resembled Latina so greatly.

“Can Latina’s seal be undone?”

“The seal was constructed with confirmation from all of the demon lords,” Chrysos responded quietly, continuing to stroke the sleeping Latina’s head gently with her right hand. “I have waited for you to slay all other demon lords but the two of us,” She smiled, with just a hint of callousness about her grin, something that Latina lacked. “Currently, the only demon lords are Platina and myself.”

In that coldheartedness, Dale sensed that unlike Latina, she would make any

sacrifices necessary to obtain her goal. He felt like he understood why Chrysos had met the qualifications to become the First Demon Lord rather than Latina. Dale also realized that he had a similar drive himself.

“It may be difficult to remove it entirely. However, I am the first of the natural order of demon lords, the First Demon Lord, and Platina is the last, the Eighth Demon Lord who exists outside of that order... With our powers combined, we will surely be able to alter the spell.”

“...You were waiting for me to take care of the other demon lords?”

“At the absolute minimum, Platina and I would not have been able to come out into the open until the Second Demon Lord was defeated. Normally, it would not be possible to confront the Demon Lords of Calamity so easily, the way that you did.”

Chrysos gave an astonished sigh. “To make a hero a retainer and grant them great power as Platina did... one would normally never even consider such a countermeasure.”

“Ah,” Dale blurted out without thinking.

A questioning look appeared on Chrysos’s face. “What is it?”

“Nothing...”

It was then that Dale finally realized. *Latina... she doesn’t know that I’m a hero...*

It was also possible that that airhead didn’t realize that she’d granted Dale power that exceeded that of a normal retainer. While thinking on whether or not he should tell Chrysos that, he broke out in an awkward sweat.

“To take out the Second Demon Lord of this era, I... this country paid dearly. Even if it was done for my beloved Platina... it was also something I needed to carry out, for the sake of the future.”

Dale thought back on the innocent and adorable-looking Second Demon Lord, and then he remembered: he had overwhelmed her, but that was because he had become a demon. And he also recalled that the antithesis of demon lords, heroes, didn’t appear amongst the devil race. When the Second Demon Lord

had decided to make a target of the devils, the only ones who could stop her were the other demon lords.

Chrysos was skilled in magic, but Dale perceived that if she and the Second Demon Lord were to fight, it would end in the First Demon Lord's defeat. From the point of view of someone like Dale who excelled at close-range combat, that calamity's killing skills had been just that great.

Chrysos was in a position where she needed to carry out the wish the people of Vassilios had dearly held onto ever since her predecessor had been slaughtered.

"If a hero would carry out our long-held desire, then it was not a chance we could let slip by."

"So that's how it was, huh...?"

Now that he had regained his cool, Dale was able to grasp the situation. Looking back, Gregor had most likely also understood the reasoning behind that unnaturalness. That Dale had known to come here immediately after slaying the Second Demon Lord was thanks to that regulation of information.

When it came to as crucial a matter as Vassilios opening diplomatic relations, there was no way that the duke, the prime minister of Laband, would not be involved.

And in turn, Dale remembered what he'd felt when he'd gone to defeat the Second Demon Lord. Hearing the emotion invested in Chrysos's words bolstered the way he was feeling. While he felt hesitant and didn't want to say it, at the same time he knew he shouldn't hide it from Chrysos, and logic won out over his emotions in the end.

"I met a purple-haired high-ranking priestess... serving under the Second Demon Lord."

"I see," Chrysos responded, with little emotion in her voice.

"That priestess... I..."

"The Lady Oracle was fully aware of everything when she took her place under the Second Demon Lord," Chrysos said as if to cut Dale off, her golden

eyes trembling ever so slightly. Dale then understood that it wasn't that Chrysos wasn't emotional over the matter, but rather that she was skilled at hiding her feelings.

There was a great difference between Latina, who was permitted to earnestly display her feelings, and Chrysos, who needed to always exercise self-restraint and make firm judgments as the ruler of a nation.

"If I had had the power then so that I would not be shaken no matter how many I went up against, it would not have been necessary."

Those words were full of regret. For the sake of her child, Mov had offered herself up. That was because she realized the value of gaining the Second Demon Lord's interest and getting her to use up even a bit of her time frivolously. Mov had also gone forth knowing she was facing a torture wherein it was less that she was alive and more that she was unable to die. Her will had been so strong that the word "determined" didn't even cover it.

So that she could act as a guide for the hero that would clear away the calamity that threatened her daughters, Mov had bought time for Chrysos to take the throne to lead things to the future she desired.

"Normally, that should have been my task to carry out... You have my thanks."

Chrysos was well aware of the one and only means of saving her mother from that hellish torture. She also felt that the duty of fulfilling her mother's wish should have fallen to her once she had become the First Demon Lord.

The thin film of tears over her golden eyes started to tremble greatly. If she were the girl with grey eyes, she would have started bawling her eyes out a while ago, but Chrysos's voice didn't even waver. And yet, it certainly wasn't as if she wasn't feeling anything. It was because Dale knew Latina so well that he was able to sense that Chrysos was strongly holding back her own emotions and enduring.

"You saved her."

With Chrysos's words of forgiveness, Dale felt like what he had done had paid off at least a little.

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The monochrome world composed of all colors.

Latina looked around this space. She saw her precious, jewel-adorned bracelet giving off a lonesome shine from above the throne she would normally be sitting in. That was how she realized she was not currently in the seat meant for her.

I... think I was...?

She remembered back to before she lost consciousness. The shine of that drawn blade had looked terribly cold, making her feel as if all of the blood in her body had frozen.

"*Chrysos...*" she whispered without thinking.

"*What is it?*" a gentle voice responded from behind her.

Latina turned around to see the owner of that voice. The one there was just who she had expected. Latina was relieved to see that she was alright.

The face she saw was much like her own. Even though they'd been separated for so long, she knew at a glance that this was that precious person who had been with her since before they were born, whom she could never mistake for anyone else.

"*All this time... I wanted to see you, Chrysos.*"

"*It was the same for me.*"

"*Chrysos... um... Rag, he... his body broke down when he was protecting me...*"

"*Mov... said that it would turn out as such. Rag and Mov accepted everything, for the sake of our future.*"

"*Then... Mov also...?*" Latina asked, her voice trembling voice.

Chrysos held her younger sister in her arms. "*I no longer... have anyone but you...*"

"*Chrysos...*"

When they had been reunited in Kreuz, they didn't have time to talk about their circumstances. And after Latina arrived in Vassilios, she was never

conscious long enough for them to have a proper conversation.

During this conversation that they were finally able to have, Latina brought up the name of that beloved person she had only just reunited with. "*Um, Chrysos... Dale is the person who saved me.*"

It was because Chrysos was so important to Latina that she felt the need to tell her sister how she was feeling directly.

"*Dale saved me, and we lived together... and I fell in love with him.*"

Latina's feelings for Dale were completely different than those she had for Chrysos. Those feelings, which had driven her to want the power of a demon lord, not wanting to accept their fates, had become Latina's very core, her foundation.

"*You're very important to me, Chrysos. But I want to stay with Dale from now on... to be by his side.*"

Chrysos rubbed her cheek against her sister's hair, then gave a sigh. She didn't want to accept those words, but she wasn't able to negate them, nor did she want to affirm them, so she chose to avoid giving a response.

"*Then the first thing we must do is grant you your freedom.*"

"*Chrysos...*"

"*That was Mov and Rag's wish as well, after all.*"

There were no longer any other presences atop the seven thrones.

That was surely only temporary, though. Though the thrones were currently left open, when someone next appeared who met the qualifications, they would take their place there.

It was impossible to predict when that time would come, so Chrysos did not know how much leeway she had for setting Latina free.

The blood-stained blade had shattered, and the water jug had cracked. The tree had split apart, the books were burnt, and the large sword had snapped. The flag with the king's insignia had been torn up so thoroughly that it was impossible to determine its original shape.

Atop the only throne that had its proper owner, Chrysos tightly gripped the scepter that served as her symbol.

"*Chrysos... what happened? Just what happened... while I was asleep?*" Latina asked, sounding concerned, seeing the abnormal state of things around her.

Chrysos hugged her sister tight. "*We shall discuss everything after you awaken.*"

She pulled back the arms that were hugging her sister. Chrysos then lightly pushed Latina away. After that momentary *tap*, Latina was atop her own throne. Her big grey eyes blinked in confusion, only for Chrysos to make a clear declaration.

"*We shall break your seal. Let us proceed, Platina.*"

"*Huh...?*"

"*You managed to break through a gap in the seal. If you are capable of such control over your own power, then you should be able to accomplish it.*"

"*Chrysos...*"

Latina seemed uneasy, but Chrysos had a strict, firm expression on her face as she held up her scepter.

"*Act in sync with me, Platina.*" Chrysos stated in a tone that made it sound like a command, and then she began manipulating her own power as a demon lord. She composed a spell more complex and delicate than the one used when they had sealed Latina as the Eighth Demon Lord. It was a difficult technique, and she only had confidence that it was possible because as the First Demon Lord, she was skilled in manipulating her power. Latina seemed hesitant, but she moved in response to Chrysos, using the power in her own throne even so.

This complex spell was the reason that Chrysos had waited for the demon lords other than the calamities to be defeated. The means of unlocking the seal was to cast a spell using the agreement of all the demon lords who had created it. However, that had been impossible. The demon lords had united temporarily because they were dealing with the Eighth Demon Lord, who was a threat to them all, so it was unthinkable that they would agree to release her. And above all else, the seal had been established with the consent of *all* of the demon

lords. That included the Eighth Demon Lord herself. The consent needed to unlock the seal included that of the one who had been sealed. It would not have been possible to remove it through normal means.

And so, Chrysos knew from the start that she'd have to take an irregular approach and weave her way through the conditions under which it was constructed in order to break Latina's seal. With that in mind, she had created a technique to unlock the seal. Since it required far more delicate control than establishing the seal, whether or not the other demon lords could successfully pull it off had been nothing but a cause for concern for Chrysos.

If it was only Latina, she could offer support and guidance. But when it came to complete strangers like the other demon lords, such a thing wasn't possible.

Chrysos wouldn't deny that there was a cruelty to her, as she'd freely cast aside others in order to achieve her goal. That trait was normally meant to be employed in an official capacity as a head of state, but this time, it was seeing personal use. She had once cast aside her beloved other half because of her official standing, but this time she had sacrificed others to save her.

Chrysos took that power of hers that she had carefully woven and, with a movement like the sweep of a conductor's baton, she employed it as she wished. Latina followed along just a moment behind, using her own power that was of the same nature, yet also clearly different. Although she had hesitated at the start, Latina was already skillfully utilizing her power. The spell was coming together far more quickly and precisely than Chrysos had predicted.

Latina was so skilled at manipulating her power that Chrysos couldn't help but be surprised.

She then recalled her distant memories of when their father, Smaragdi, first taught them the basics of magic. She'd had quite a bit of trouble figuring out how to control mana, while by her side, Latina was easily manipulating her own.

Their parents couldn't help but smile when they saw that Latina had inherited her father's genius mana control, while Chrysos had received her mother's massive stores of mana. Though the two twins looked so much alike, they differed in many ways aside from just the color of their eyes.

That also presented itself in their natures as demon lords.

The prophecy that the coming child would become king had come before their birth, so when it came to light that they were twins, the temple in Vassilios was thrown into great confusion. Hardly anyone even knew that an Eighth Demon Lord could exist. Therefore, they couldn't help but be thrown out of sorts, as there were now two candidates for what was thought to be a single demon lord throne. However, in the country of Vassilios, where the birth rate was so low that the birth of any child was an honored event, the birth of twins was considered especially auspicious. And so, Chrysos and Latina were raised together in secret in the depths of the temple.

As a result, the prophecy had come true. Both Chrysos and Latina had become demon lords together. However, they each had done so by meeting completely different conditions.

A king to lead the devil race: Chrysos had become a demon lord in the truest sense of the title, an honored official who was expected to have a callous nature—the First Demon Lord.

A being whose heart stood with another race, not her own, and who served to negate the demon lords: Latina had become one who was a demon lord and yet the furthest being possible from one—the Eighth Demon Lord.

This was something that could only be done because they were completely different, and yet also so undeniably alike.

And so now, I will save Latina.

Their power as demon lords was invisible, but the force flowing between them was almost like a predetermined melody being played out. Chrysos sensed that their completed spells, like beautiful works of art, would succeed, causing her to break out in a relieved, gentle expression.

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When she opened her eyes, she saw the familiar ceiling of the royal villa. Without thinking, she took a deep breath, and she was a little surprised at how good it felt when the fresh air entered her lungs. Her weakened body felt rather heavy, but there was a clear difference from how she had been, unable to even move.

“Hngaaah...”

With that long breath, the people by her side realized that she had awoken, and they sighed in relief.

“Latina...!”

“Platina.”

“Dale... Ryso...”

Seeing Dale and Chrysos, Latina broke out in a smile, and the bracelet with flower symbols on her wrist sparkled.

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While Chrysos sent her own consciousness to her throne in order to break Latina’s seal, Dale had been left to grind his teeth at his own powerlessness. The fact that he may have obtained great power as a demon but still couldn’t do anything, since he wasn’t a demon lord, distressed him greatly.

In his head, he understood. Everyone had their own role to play and things they could and couldn’t do. But it was still terribly difficult, being unable to do anything but wait and pray.

I decided... that even if I needed to mow down everything, if it could be accomplished by my blade, that’s what I would do...

While thinking that to himself, Dale looked over at Latina and Chrysos. He had a desire to hug Latina tight, but Chrysos had thoroughly warned him that if he interfered unnecessarily, that would introduce an uncertain element into things. For now, all he could do was bear it.

Even though Dale was wracked with anxiety, when he saw the sisters sleeping side-by-side atop the bed, he found them so beautiful he couldn’t help but sigh.

Their platinum hair, spread out atop the high-quality sheets, gave off a gentle shine. Looking at them again, Dale saw that there were some slight differences in their physiques, each drawing their own soft curves.

Their greatest difference—the color of their eyes—couldn’t be seen now.

Platina... platinum, and Chrysos... gold, huh? Even their names form a pair.

He'd only talked to Chrysos for a short period of time, but he could tell that she cared so deeply about her sister that he felt comfortable trusting her with Latina.

When he asked himself if he had any resentment towards her for sealing Latina, he found it hard to say. But even so, he was glad that he hadn't cut Chrysos down.

The first one to awaken as Dale watched over them was Chrysos.

"You needn't make such a face. There was no way I would fail, yes?" She may have just been putting up a front, but Chrysos's voice had enough conviction that he believed it. She sat up and then softly stroked Latina's head.

"I cannot say that all the seals have been removed. As the cost for breaking it, Platina lost a great deal of the power she should normally possess as a demon lord."

"...I see."

"However, she should now be clear of the state she has been in until now, in which she has been unable to even move. If new demon lords appear and that power strengthens, it may have an effect on Platina... but I believe that this matter shall not endanger her life any further."

With that, the tension finally drained from Dale's shoulders. Chrysos was monopolizing Latina's head, so Dale instead gently held her hand, like he'd always done when they walked together. The degree of relief he felt holding this hand once more was so great that it was almost suffocating.

With Chrysos and Dale watching over her, Latina slowly opened her eyes. After gazing absentmindedly at the ceiling, she blinked a few times, then finally realized they were there.

"Latina...!" Seeing that soft, relaxed smile that was just like her, Dale called out her name in a trembling voice.

"Platina," Chrysos said, the joy and relief in her voice readily apparent.

"Dale... Ryso..."

When he realized that she had called his name before even the beloved sister

whose childhood nickname she had used, Dale hit his breaking point, unable to hold back any longer.

“Latina!”

“Uwah!”

He hugged her tight. Dale now possessed strength far exceeding that of a normal man, but even without consciously restraining himself, he didn’t squeeze her so tightly that he hurt her. Neither Latina, who had yelped in surprise, nor Chrysos, who pointed a dissatisfied gaze his way, could pull him away.



“Latina... Latina!”

“Dale, um, Dale...” Latina said, sounding troubled.

But just being able to hear her voice made him overjoyed.

“Dale... um... there’s something I have to say... that I have to apologize for...”

“Never mind that.”

Her voice got stuck in her throat.

Shrugging her shoulders a bit, Chrysos got off the bed. She quietly left the room, uttering a word of thanks to Dale in her heart. She didn’t want to leave Latina’s side either, but she gladly ceded that first bit of time alone with her to him.

“You’re alright... and you came back to me... That’s all that matters to me.”

As she realized that Dale’s voice was trembling, Latina’s expression shifted. All strength drained from her hesitant, struggling body, and she yielded it to Dale. “Dale...”

Latina put her arms around Dale, hugging him. As if consoling him, she stroked his back.

“Latina.”

Seeing Dale’s shoulders tremble, Latina held back her words and bit her lip. It was the first time she had seen Dale cry.

She was the crybaby, and he was always the one hugging and comforting her when she sobbed away. Latina desperately held back the agonizing feelings welling up inside of her. That had been far more difficult and painful to do than when she was the one weeping.

She couldn’t think of the words she needed to say. She wanted to be there for Dale the way that he had always been for her, but she simply didn’t know what to do.

“Dale... I’m sorry... I’m so sorry...”

From the wet sensation she felt on her shoulder, Latina knew that warm tears were flowing down Dale’s face. She finally managed to squeeze out an apology,

only for Dale to lightly shake his head.

“What scares me more than anything else is not being able to protect you... Please, let me keep you safe... Don’t make me feel the pain of not being able to do anything...!”

It hurt to breathe. Latina gasped when she realized what she had done, her chest assailed by a pressure greater than when she’d been hugged so strongly.

“I’m sorry...” No other words came to mind. She barely could hold back the tears, even though she knew she wasn’t the one who should be crying right now.

“I’m sorry...” She couldn’t think of anything else to say, and instead simply stroked Dale’s back to console him as he hugged her.

Dale soon raised his eyes, a smile on his face so it would be hard to tell he’d been crying, were his eyes not red. That crazed, cold nature that had been about him when he’d swung his blade and slaughtered one demon lord after another was now gone from his expression.

Latina smiled back, though it was hard to call it a smile that came from the depths of her heart. Her heart was thrown out of sorts with the realization of what she had done. Her chest ached, and she felt like she was about to cry.

However, Latina also thought that the only thing she could do for Dale now was to smile. She knew that was what he wanted, so she needed to meet his expectations.

“Dale...” She searched for something to say other than words of apology, which wouldn’t be enough, no matter how many times she repeated them. Those surely weren’t the words she needed to say for his sake. “I wanted to see you...”

“Me too, Latina.”

Realizing that Dale would never blame her and didn’t want to hear her apologies, Latina desperately held back her tears.

I keep doing the wrong thing... Why can’t I do things right...?

Although he could tell that Latina was worrying and condemning herself, Dale

was no longer concerned about anything at all. His thoughts were entirely occupied by the fact that he finally had her back in his arms.

Even though he'd defeated the Demon Lords of Calamity, and the world had suffered a great blow at their hands, he didn't care about any of that. He just wrote all that off as mere trivial matters, now that the precious girl he loved so much was in front of him. The mental state that he'd always had only served to affirm their position as a master and her one and only retainer.

He was the one who decided that, not her. That proof on his left hand was his greatest indulgence, telling him it was fine to give her priority in all things. It was the thing that constantly gave him a push on the back.

And so, everything was fine.

"Latina... I'm so glad... Don't go disappearing all on your own ever again..."

"...Right, Dale..."

Latina was in his arms, smiling. That was enough of a reward for everything he had gone through. That utterly natural warmth returning to him was what he had wanted above all else.

I was definitely... a lot more mistaken than I had thought...

Seeing Latina tremble as she tightly gripped the bracelet around her wrist, her thoughts racing about what she'd done wrong, Dale had no intention of criticizing her. Even though he knew that there were times where it was easier to be called out, he had no intention of doing so.

The idea of letting Latina go now was unbearable. However, the instincts he had honed in his line of business searched his surroundings. Considering the safety of the girl in his arms, he had no choice but to do so.

His gaze darted to the entrance of the villa. Normally, in his current emotional state, he wouldn't want anyone but Latina to enter his field of vision, but there was no helping it. The entrance didn't have a door, but just a thin cloth swaying in the wind. It was made in a way befitting this hot land.

Up until a bit ago, he had hardly sensed any presences about, but now there were several moving this way.

One, two... I don't sense any hostility. And that's... Chrysos, isn't it?

He surprised even himself, being able to recognize Chrysos so easily based on presence alone. Checking again, he realized that Chrysos's presence was similar to Latina's. They may have been similar, but naturally Dale would never mistake her for Latina. From the fact that they were accompanying Chrysos, Dale guessed that the other presences must have belonged to ladies-in-waiting.

Considering where this place that looked like an inner palace reserved for women is... it must be adjoining the queen's living quarters... There may be guards, but this area must be off-limits to men... Dale thought, putting aside the undeniable fact that he was an intruder. *Thinking of it that way... Latina's been kept isolated in a safe place.*

Latina was so adorable, and she had slept while weakened and utterly defenseless. It naturally fanned one's desire to protect her. It would be fine if that were all, but he also couldn't deny that it was also lighting up a wild desire inside of him, too.

Latina was just so cute that he wouldn't be surprised to find anyone and everyone feeling the same way. However, that didn't mean he would forgive anyone else for acting on such desires, naturally.

And at the moment, he needed to restrain himself, too.

He felt bad for her, with how she'd felt unwell for so long. She looked a bit thinner than he remembered, causing him to think that she'd lost that perfect huggability. It was hard, seeing her look so pitiful.

He wanted to pamper her, and pamper her, and pamper her some more.

They'd spend plenty of time together while she recuperated. He'd felt like he'd end up clinging to her as much as he could... No, that was what he *should* do.

Thinking about it, there was a different scent about Latina today than usual. Perhaps that was only natural, since she wouldn't have had access to the same perfume that she used in Kreuz. Still, sure enough, Latina definitely smelled good.

Dale had returned completely to his usual deplorable self, thinking such

things.

Just like he'd done when Latina was young, he placed her atop his knee and cradled her in his arms. He took in the scent of her hair, then buried his face in her shoulder and pushed his lips up against her. He felt incredibly soothed.

The one-two punch of her warmth and aroma had an immediate effect. In a very real way, Dale honestly didn't care about anything else anymore.

At this rate they'd end up rolling around on the bed, with him succumbing to his desire to meet her each and every desire, body and soul. But he didn't know how much he could trust his self-restraint when it came to "pampering" her, considering she was out of sorts.

That logical conclusion was the only thing holding Dale back at the moment.

But maybe just a little would be alright...

His logical side was in precarious state, teetering on the brink.

The strands of tension running through Dale suddenly snapped. He reflexively just wanted to laze around. To put it bluntly, all he wanted to do right now was be all lovey-dovey with Latina.

It's fine, right...?

The limits of his self-control turned out to be fleeting.

Around when Dale became imbued with the aura of some voracious carnivore, a refreshing, glass-like sound resounded from beyond the entrance to the villa.

When Dale started questioning that in his mind, Latina spoke up from within his arms.

*"*****"*

Hmm...? Was that a question?

What Latina said had been in the same language as that used in spells, the words of which formed the mother tongue for devils. Dale was able to use them for casting magic, but he couldn't quite say he was well-versed enough to hold a conversation in the language. Frankly, the most he could manage was picking

up the meaning of the vocabulary he knew.

The ones who entered the room were two women with delicate gold decorations hanging from their horns. In a gesture unfamiliar to Dale, they bowed their heads.

“*****?” Latina said, questioning the women in a quiet voice.

The devil women, wearing simple matching outfits, responded to Latina’s inquiry.

“*****, *****”

“**...?”

“**. **********”

Dale wasn’t able to comprehend even half of that exchange.

After talking to the women for a while, a look of sudden realization came to Latina’s face as she realized that Dale wasn’t able to follow what was going on.

“Um... In Vassilios, only the people from the temple wear decorations on their horns. By looking at those, you can more or less tell someone’s position. The demon lord, Chrysos, her demons, and high-ranking priests are the only ones allowed to use multiple colors in their horn jewelry. Unlike humans, demons don’t wear crowns.”

The women in front of him now, their adornments monochromatic metal, were attendants.

Vassilios was ruled by a demon lord; political power wasn’t hereditary. Dale guessed that the privileged class equivalent to kings and nobles were the demons that had been granted power by and held the trust of the First Demon Lord, whom they served.

“Apparently, there’s a guest here for me. Chrysos let them through, so there must be a proper reason... but I wonder what’s going on.”

“I see.”

After explaining the circumstances to Dale, Latina expressed her understanding to the attendants.

“******. ******”

“**”

With that, one of the attendants bowed her head and left the room. After looking at the remaining woman, Latina turned to Dale with a troubled expression on her face. “Dale...”

“What is it?”

“They say a guest is coming...”

“Right.”

“I’d like you to let me down...”

“I don’t wanna.”

Latina looked troubled as she sat atop Dale’s knees, restrained by a hug but he paid that no heed. Hearing that ridiculous response only made Latina look all the more concerned.

“Um... This is a nightgown.”

“I see. You were sleeping, so that makes sense.”

“I... want to change, but...”

“Uh-huh?”

“I can’t... unless... you let me go.”

“Ah, gotcha.”

Although she carefully, kindly, and thoroughly laid out these facts that should have been obvious, Dale still made no signs of letting her go.

Still, Dale also couldn’t let her be exposed to others in such an utterly defenseless state. In that case, he knew what he needed to do. He’d already decided, though, that he would never let her go again, even for a second, so he was left at a loss.

“You need to be able to change, right?”

“U-Um...”

“Then there’s no helping it. We’ll just have to do it together, while I keep

hugging you.”

To sum it up briefly, when Latina saw how much worse Dale had gotten, she trembled as she reflected on what she’d done wrong.

Latina had essentially no memory from after she was sealed by the demon lords. She had spent the majority of her time sleeping, and when she was awake, she was in a daze and not thinking straight. As a result, to Latina, it felt like only a few days since she and Dale had parted. But looking at Dale, she was starting to sense that it hadn’t been so short a period of time.

She couldn’t firmly refuse Dale and separate herself from him. On the other hand, this attendant before them now was a stranger. Latina was naturally shy about such things, so seeing the attendant standing there waiting and looking troubled was just far too much to bear.

Latina was well aware that the attendant was waiting here to help her get dressed. But she could hardly do that now, when Dale was hugging her tightly and rubbing his cheek up against her. Seeing that the attendant was mentally struggling to figure out how to deal with the situation, Latina’s eyes darted about nervously, in the hopes that a bright idea would come to her.

It was then that Chrysos entered, not even announcing herself. Paying no attention whatsoever to the bowing attendant, her gaze remained fixed on the pair embracing on the bed.

“*Chrysos...*” Latina said, sounding pathetic.

“*So this is indeed how things turned out, is it?*” Chrysos stated with a sigh.

“May I please have you release Platina?” Chrysos asked Dale in a low voice.

He clearly wasn’t concerned in the least about other people watching them. “I don’t wanna.”

“Is that so?” Chrysos relented surprisingly easily, then turned around. “That is the case. You may enter.”

Chrysos’s words shocked Latina, and she felt all the more flustered, but Dale wasn’t concerned in the least. But when he saw the visitor who entered the room, his expression shifted to one of surprise. At the very least, it had enough

of an impact that he was able to direct his attention towards that person.

“It has been some time, Sir Dale,” said Rose, her brilliant pink hair swaying. She had a gentle smile and the manners of a proper lady. “And above all else, I am glad to see that Latina has safely returned. I have received permission in advance from Her Excellency, the Golden King, but shall I refer to you as Princess Platina?”

“So the visitor was you, Lady Rose...” Latina said, looking surprised. In her present state, she wasn’t even able to bow her head properly. “Chrysos is king, but I don’t personally hold any power. Vassilios doesn’t have a hereditary system of passing down authority, the way that Laband does.” Latina continued on, looking a little troubled. “In formal settings, my full name should be used, but... I’m honestly not too used to being called that, so I’d prefer if you kept talking to me the same as always.”

“Understood. Then that is what I shall do.”

There was an age difference between Latina and Rose, and they felt more like sisters than friends. But the fact didn’t change that they got along well.

“My apologies for the delayed greeting, Lady Rose. I’m glad to see you again after so long. Also...” Latina looked at the beautiful woman standing like a servant behind Rose. “You seem to be doing well too, Ms. Helmine...” Latina said in response to the smiling woman who was wearing her blond hair up.

Meanwhile, with the sudden appearance of this beauty he was so bad at dealing with, Dale separated himself from Latina just a bit. Even so, Latina still remained atop Dale’s knees, and he most certainly hadn’t released her. And yet, even when pointed at someone like that, Rose’s smile wasn’t wiped away in the least.

“Sir Dale.”

“It’s been a while... Rose. So you came here to Vassilios?”

“That is one of the things I intend to discuss.”

“I see.”

A silence fell over the room.

Rose looked at Dale, her smile unchanged.

While Dale was stubbornly remaining indifferent, Latina was unable to bear Rose's gaze and was quite clearly flustered.

"Sir Dale."

"What is it?"

"You may be engaged, but are you not being overly intimate?"

"Not really. This is totally normal, right?"

Rose's smile remained unshaken. But that was precisely what had Latina in such a panic. Even Dale couldn't help but sweat a little.

"Sir Dale." Her voice was not at all forceful, instead possessing a calmness fitting to Rose. And yet, it felt hard to sit still in response.

"...What is it?"

"I have come here under order of His Excellency, the duke. At the same time, I was also entrusted with a letter addressed to you, Sir Dale."

"From the duke... for me?"

"No. It is from your home village. I am also aware of the contents."

"From Tislow...?"

"It discusses a desire for you to open a discussion with the First Demon Lord, acting in place of the clan head."

"Granny, huh...? Just how far ahead did she see things?"

"I am not aware of such things. In fact, I was hardly aware of anything before coming here."

Watching Rose as she said all this, Latina regained her calm, but Dale's hug did not loosen in the least. Latina gently touched Dale's arm.

"Dale..."

"I don't wanna let go," Dale said flatly.

"Right... I'm sorry for being so selfish," Latina said, holding back the tears that were trying to flow forth. "So please, let go for just a bit... So that we can stay

together, I need to be in a state where I can leave this room."

"Do I have to let go?"

"Um, I... I'm not really familiar with how to put on Vassilios clothing..."

Dale was taken aback a bit.

"The clothes I wore when I was little were all simple dresses, so that wasn't the case back then... but I don't really know what to do when it comes to clothing like what Chrysos wears... so I can't put it on alone..."

The clothing of Vassilios was made with an emphasis on breathability, differing greatly from that of Laband. It was hard to tell at a glance how this comfortable-looking clothing was fastened, as it lacked buttons or anything of that sort.

Since coming to Vassilios, Latina had difficulty even getting up until recently, so the ladies-in-waiting had been entirely in charge of taking care of her. She didn't even have any memory of what they had done.

"...I see."

Seeing Dale looking like his old self, with his awkward smile, made Latina feel a little relieved.

"So please, just wait for a little bit."

"Just a little bit...?"

"Right, just a bit."

With those repeated words, Dale finally loosened his grasp. His awkward movements made it look like he was being forcefully pulled away from Latina, which the girl pretended not to notice.

Every time she saw him act like that, Latina's heart ached. She had trouble breathing. But so he wouldn't pick up on that, she smiled.

"Well then... I'll be back soon, alright?" Dale emphasized.

"Yeah," Latina replied, still smiling.

Just before Dale started to follow after Rose and the others as they exited the villa, Chrysos leading them, he looked at Latina. Latina made sure to keep on

smiling, as if nothing were wrong.

As soon as Dale was out of sight, Latina suddenly collapsed onto the bed. Her chest moved up and down with painful breathing. She still hadn't recovered. It was her first time being up for so long in a while, so she was already listless, completely worn out.

However, the reason she was so pained right now wasn't because her body was out of sorts.

"Ugh... guh..."

The tears she'd been holding back started to flow. She understood just how much pain she'd inflicted on Dale in this short period of time. She'd wanted to protect him, but she'd completely failed to do so.

...I knew. I knew Dale would definitely suffer... and yet, I...

She wiped away the tears with the back of her hand and then got up. She couldn't keep sobbing like this forever.

"*Lady Platinum Princess...*" the attendant said anxiously.

"*It's alright. Don't worry about me,*" replied Latina, brushing away those concerns, then borrowing the woman's aid to start getting dressed.

She couldn't make Dale wait any longer, nor could she let him suffer any further.

What... should I have done...?

She didn't feel like she'd be able to find an answer to that question that was wrenching at her heart.

The room that Chrysos took Dale and Rose to was not the audience chamber in which she'd faced off against the hero not long before. Even though it was farther removed from the central section of the temple, it was still a room fit for greeting visitors. It was quite a high-class room by the standards of the devil culture, but looking at it from the point of view of Laband culture, it gave an extremely modest, plain impression.

There was a bench set up along the wall, and in front of it was a long table made of a cloudy transparent stone, with low chairs set up around it. They

seemed like simple pieces of furniture at a glance, but looking closely, there was engraving around the legs.

Suddenly, Dale realized something and muttered in surprise, “This stone... is unusual.”

Watching Dale slide his hand over the table, Chrysos let out a brief sigh. “You can tell?”

“Was it made by cutting crystal? It must have been pretty big to make something of this size, right?”

As such things were the specialty of the village where he was born, Dale was a little particular when it came to ores and minerals.

“Vassilios is a harsh climate without much land suited for farming, but we possess things such as this.”

Dale recalled that much of the town that he saw from the sky was made of stone.

Chrysos sat down on the bench and motioned for Dale to sit in a chair in front of her. Rose then sat down by his side. As Helmine was serving as a guard, she didn’t take a seat, instead remaining standing behind Rose.

“Vassilios seeks to open diplomatic relations with the country of humankind, Laband.”

Dale had heard of that matter from Gregor.

“The actions of the Demon Lords of Calamity have surely fostered distrust of the entire devil race. As the leader of my people, I must act to protect them.”

Since the devil race had remained closed off for so long, the knowledge of them had grown prejudiced amongst the other races. So that narrow viewpoint wouldn’t lead to persecution of her entire race, Chrysos had made a decision as the head of Vassilios.

Laband was the closest country to Vassilios and also had played a large role in handling the Demon Lords of Calamity. If Laband accepted, it would make things easier when dealing with other nations in turn. And so, seeing this as a good opportunity, Chrysos had sent an envoy to Laband.

“His Excellency the Duke sent me here to Vassilios in order to coordinate. Much of this is highly classified, though, so I myself only learned all of this after arriving,” Rose interjected.

“You’re a noble, but you’re not a diplomat, right, Rose? Why did His Excellency send you...?” Dale asked.

“It was because I was the most accomplished magic user of those he could dispatch immediately. The minimum requirement was being able to use magic, as those who call themselves ‘magic users,’ like myself, are able to pick up the meaning of words.”

“Ah...” Dale finally realized the obvious statement that Rose was making: the devil tongue was the same as the language for magical chants. However, it wasn’t as if everyone who could use magic understood the meaning of the words or the finer details of the language. Even without such understanding, as long as the spell’s contents were correct, the magic would activate. There were quite a few people who used rote memorization to only employ simple chants.

On the other hand, excellent magic users needed to be able to cast magic flexibly according to the situation, so they sought to excel at handling the language. Because of that, in terms of their language studies, first-rate magic users met the qualifications to serve as envoys to the devil race.

“Out of consideration for the First Demon Lord, a queen, the duke determined it best to send a woman. And as I am an acquaintance of Latina, His Excellency ordered me to take up the task.”

“Huh?” Dale was left dumbfounded. “Why did Latina matter...?”

“I am surprised that you were not aware, Sir Dale. It was apparently the Dancing Ocelot in Kreuz that informed His Excellency that the Golden King was related to Latina.”

“Huh?”

“In all likelihood, the Dancing Ocelot possesses more detailed information than anywhere else in Laband about Vassilios,” Rose repeated for emphasis, seeing how Dale had been caught even more off guard.

“...Huh?” It was then that Dale realized the Ocelot had done a great deal of

secret maneuvering without his knowing it.

Meanwhile, Latina had finished changing with the attendant's aid.

Even though she was concerned about Dale, Latina was aware that she had a great responsibility to Chrysos while she was here. Her memories of Vassilios etiquette were all from the distant past and had grown rather fuzzy, but she did at least remember what was considered taboo.

The clothing of Vassilios, made up of layers, looked extremely simple at a glance, but were hard to understand for those who weren't familiar with them. They weren't tightly secured anywhere, but instead tied together at key points. There was a meaning behind the way the visible knots were tied, and since Latina was being treated as the precious sister of the First Demon Lord, a style reserved for higher classes was used.

Latina's teary eyes had cleared up after she calmed down. The attendant had styled her hair and, as a final touch, placed a delicate veil that Chrysos had prepared.

For devils, horns were important, and that made broken horns something like a terribly graphic scar. The faint of heart would find it hard to look at, and it may even make some feel ill. In addition to those who had their horns broken because they were criminals, there were devils who lost them through injury or accident. In order to avoid the stares of those around them, such people wore this sort of thing on their heads.

Meant to complement Chrysos, the king, the veil prepared for Latina had jewels in seven colors dangling from gold and silver chains. It would be clear to anyone who saw her just how great Chrysos's affection for Latina was.

When Latina exited the villa, a different attendant was waiting for her. The woman gave a bow and started to lead the way, and Latina followed after without asking any questions. She remembered people serving her like this, hardly talking at all, when she was a child.

"Woof!"

Hearing that familiar voice, Latina stopped. Her vision was largely obscured by the veil, so she lifted her head a bit. The familiar grey fur she saw wasn't limited

to just what she had expected.

“Vint.”

“Woof!”

Vint’s limbs were splayed out loosely atop grey fur that was the same color as his own. Hagel had taken off his armor, and now his cub was riding on his back. With light movements that were hard to imagine coming from his massive frame, Hagel approached Latina’s side.

And beside him...

“Long time no see, Latina,” Sylvia, clad in the attire of an Akhdar priestess, said with a smile and a tone so light it was hard to imagine they hadn’t seen each other in such a long time.

“Sylvia...? Why are you...?”

“Why...? If I had to say, it was to look for you, I guess,” Sylvia said with a knowing grin in response to Latina’s surprise. “That pup there told me you were here, Latina.”

“Woof.”

“So this is where I came.”

Her tone was incredibly light. When Latina appeared before them along with Sylvia and the two soaring wolves, Helmine, who was acting as Rose’s bodyguard, couldn’t hide her surprise when faced with the full-grown mythical beast.

Vint suddenly leaped down from Hagel’s back and started walking at his own pace, then gave a single rub up against Chrysos. Then, acting as if he’d fulfilled his duty, he headed back to Latina, wagging his tail.

“Vint?”

Dale tilted his head at this behavior, which he’d never seen back at the Ocelot. It was then that Dale realized that though nothing was showing in Hagel’s expression, there was a subtle shift in the way he was wagging his tail.

Noticing Dale’s gaze, Hagel awkwardly stated, “Hmm... I had sensed this from

far away, but... the king of this land's scent is much like that of the young lady."

"Alike, so, well, no helping it," Vint agreed with a nod.

Dale had been surprised by the resemblance between Latina and Chrysos, and apparently the same held true for the soaring wolves. That scent that was so like Latina's was also the reason Vint had been able to travel from Kreuz to Vassilios without any trouble despite only having the vague direction of "that way" from Theo.

By nature, Vint would only ever listen to Latina, but with Chrysos in front of him, he made a face of *Well, I guess I gotta*. She was a different person than Latina, but with a condescending attitude, he apparently decided that he could put up with listening to her because of how similar they were.

Vassilios was a closed-off country, so it lacked a branch office of the "mail" association. Devils also had magic users with Center affinity, so they had methods for contacting others within their race. However, they lacked the means to make personal contact with people in Laband. And so, Vint's abilities had come in handy.

Vint's nose was more capable than even that of his father, Hagel. He had been tasked with serving as the means of contact between Kreuz and Vassilios because he could accurately find who he was looking for, even from far away.

While Dale and the others were in the midst of their battle with the Second Demon Lord, Vint had unexpectedly appeared before Hagel. He had been sent on this errand by Chrysos, thinking nothing but *Well, I guess I gotta*.

Hagel had been greatly troubled, having his cub suddenly appear and offer only a blunt, "Latina, devil country, go." Hagel ended up hurriedly restraining Vint with his front paw when the cub stated, "Told it, so Latina, head back to," and quickly tried to leave. The blunt, awkward story that Hagel had forced out of the writhing Vint was just too choppy, so he hadn't been able to fully grasp the situation.

"Bring Dale, probably good."

"...I see."

"Hard to explain. See, understand."

The reason Hagel had opted not to discuss the details with Dale after his child fluttered off was largely because of this confusion; he didn't know how to explain. Hagel didn't even know why his cub was aware of such things or why he had told him then. Vint said he would understand when he saw, so he decided to do so. At the very least, he assumed that he would meet up with his child once again in that country.

At his core, Hagel really was the father of that pup who tended to do things at his own pace.

While everyone else was caught off guard by the appearance of the two soaring wolves, Sylvia broke out in a wide grin.

"Back in Kreuz, everybody already knows that the king and Latina are sisters."

Both Sylvia's tone and attitude lacked the formality one would expect when before the leader of a nation. As Chrysos, the person in the highest position here, didn't rebuke Sylvia for her rudeness, Rose didn't say anything, either. Chrysos, Rose, and Sylvia had all already met several times, too.

"How...?" Latina said, completely shocked.

"You're the one who said 'Chrysos' in front of me, right? And you were called 'Platinum Princess' then, too. It was only obvious to think there was some sort of connection there, right?" Sylvia responded indifferently.

"'Then'...?"

While Latina stared blankly, Sylvia wagged her finger with a "Hehehe."

"Don't underestimate a disciple of Akhdar when it comes to having a nose for a scoop, Latina. If you're having an interesting conversation, it's only natural that I pay careful attention."

"U-um... by 'then,' you mean that time?! But Sylvia, you didn't seem to understand the language..."

"Hehehe..."

None of the others present could follow this conversation. And as she was now, Latina couldn't pay attention to those around her.

"And weren't you the one who taught me devil vocabulary, Latina?"

The tenacious way that this Akhdar priestess sought out information had exceeded Latina's understanding.

"That time" referred to when Latina had encountered a devil man who was visiting Kreuz under Chrysos's orders. Sylvia had also been there then. The two had spoken in the devil language, and Sylvia had acted like she didn't understand, so Latina hadn't worried about her being there. However, Sylvia had learned the basics of the devil language from Latina herself. It would have been too difficult for her to follow along entirely, but she had been able to pick up fragments.

Sylvia had divine protection from Akhdar. It wasn't all that strong, but that power dwelling inside her showed her the path that she should take. Following that instinct, Sylvia had followed after Latina and the man. She had been born and raised in the western district, so Sylvia was more knowledgeable about the layout there than Latina. Knowing how to tail someone was a crucial skill for Akhdar priestesses to start with, too. As Latina had been distracted and the devil man was a foreigner, Sylvia had had the advantage.

And that's how Sylvia had confirmed the presence of someone who obviously looked just like Latina, even from afar. It was only natural to believe that they must be related by blood. After Latina went missing, Sylvia had gotten help from Rudolph and had confirmed the presence of a woman who looked just like their friend.

In order to enter Kreuz, it was necessary to pass through one of the gates in the walls that enclosed it. Sylvia figured that even for the gatekeepers aside from the one who manned the south, who was acquainted with Latina, a beautiful girl with an unusual hair color like platinum was sure to leave a strong impression. And as a member of the guard corps, Rudolph was able to investigate that matter.

They were soon able to confirm the existence of a woman who met those qualifications. When a witness added, "She was such a beauty, she probably wouldn't even lose out to that rumored Fairy Princess," Rudolph had to hold himself back from disagreeing, realizing that would just further fan interest in Latina unnecessarily. At the same time, he also realized that if she really did look just like Latina, such thoughts would only be natural.

Mixed in with other customer gossip, Kenneth also heard talk of a traveler who resembled Latina. It was nearly impossible to spend time in a big town like Kreuz without anyone noticing, and trying to hide one's identity more than necessary only served to have the opposite effect and draw attention. In fact, with the scale of the town, it may actually be more effective to some extent to just walk out in the open if you didn't want others to notice you.

In another town, Chrysos's appearance may have stood out too much, but in Kreuz, there were countless rumors surrounding the Platinum Fairy Princess. Because the stories about Chrysos blended in with such rumors, they didn't really stand out. The sole exception there was when it came to the regulars of the Dancing Ocelot. One of the men who knew Latina had happened to see Chrysos entering through the southern gate. That tale, in which he thought it was Latina, but it turned out to be someone else, made its way to Kenneth's ears.

"It's impossible to think of her as a mere stranger. Rather than it being some chance resemblance, them being related by blood makes a lot more sense."

"The little lady hardly ever talks about her old home, after all."

"Though there's still no evidence to deny the possibility of them just being strangers."

In that way, the conversations in the Ocelot moved toward one conclusion: "Latina has a sister, and they're most likely twins."

It was determined that to figure out anything further, it would be necessary to head to Vassilios. Just when plans to do so were about to come to fruition, the bombshell from Vint and Theo—"Latina is in Vassilios"—was dropped.

Sylvia volunteered to head to that country of devils, but she had her doubts about being able to ride on Vint to get there. Vint himself had also said, "Huh, guess went well," a comment that didn't exactly inspire confidence.

The ones who then showed off their skills were the members of the Platinum Fairy Princess Protection Committee, who congregated in the Ocelot. The veteran adventurers amongst them took command, while the youngsters volunteered to help out, seeing this as a chance to build up experience. As the chaos and confusion caused by the Fourth Demon Lord showed signs of winding

down, the guardsmen of Kreuz declared that they would offer their assistance as well as strive to protect the town even better than before. Furthermore, the temple of Akhdar also offered their full support. Vassilios served as a whole new realm of information, so this wasn't a project that that god's disciples could simply ignore.

"We wouldn't want you to underestimate our potential."

"A job this big doesn't come around very often. And it seems like a real challenge, too."

The group of adventurers, the regulars of the Dancing Ocelot at its core, set off from Kreuz in high spirits. Their faces were brimming with confidence as Kenneth (who was also in charge of logistical support) saw them off.

"That's the path between Kreuz and the little lady's old home."

"It's not such a bad idea, letting the young folks experience such a history-making job."

The adventurers, who all saw hardships and danger as only natural, chattered away as they cut through the forest to the south of Kreuz. It was precisely because it was undertaken in Kreuz, the town where the foremost adventurers in Laband gathered, that they were able to tackle such a large-scale project.

Vint had also played a large role. Thanks to the highly capable radar the group possessed—Vint's nose—they would never be pointed off-course, no matter the conditions. And so, they were able to choose the safest paths while traveling the shortest possible distance.

It wasn't a trip that could be finished overnight, but even so, they traveled on foot through the forest to the south of Kreuz.

Beyond the forest lay what was effectively a neutral zone, not ruled by Laband or Vassilios. That was where they established their base of operations.

Even though the war with the Seventh Demon Lord was taking up so much personnel that it would currently be difficult to dispatch troops, if diplomatic relations with Vassilios were officially opened, the duke would surely do so. This place would become a strategic point for resupplying and rest for Laband. And later on, it would develop into a frontier town. But for now, it was just

defended by the adventurers.

Even though they knew Latina was in Vassilios, they lacked any more information whatsoever, so it would be too risky to have all of their personnel head into the country at once. And so, in order to both serve as an information-gathering scout as well as an envoy to make contact with Vassilios, Sylvia headed out with Vint.

At the time, Sylvia had the fragment of Latina's horn, which she had borrowed from Chloe, dangling from her neck. While she was fully aware that wearing such a thing would earn her hostility in Vassilios, she had also heard a very interesting story from Rudolph back in Kreuz.

"Out of that group of three, the one in the highest position didn't react with displeasure when he saw the fragment of Latina's horn that I have," Rudolph had recollected. Sylvia tilted her head, as that didn't fit with her understanding of such things.

"Really?"

"Latina said that maybe he could see her feelings around the horn."

"...You said he was in a high position, right? If he's the same guy I saw looking for Latina..."

Even though they were in public, that man who seemed to be a devil had taken a knee and bowed his head in front of Latina without hesitation. No matter how Sylvia looked at it, that had been the act of a retainer towards a noble.

"Latina, or maybe her sister, must hold a pretty high status in Vassilios."

"I'd heard similar things around the Ocelot, and we've had such thoughts before... but Latina may have come from some sort of noble household."

Rudolph had known Latina longer than Sylvia. Even before they started going to school, when Latina was still little and clumsy with her words, she had given Rudolph and his friends who had grown up in the rough part of town the impression of a princess.

As a member of a different race and someone from a foreign country, Latina's

lack of common sense and airheadedness tended to stand out. But her etiquette was firmly in place, and her thinking wasn't like that of commoners. Since she hadn't received any further training as a noble, Latina had steadily become more of a normal girl, so that impression was much stronger with those who had known her when she was little.

"No matter how I look at it, the way that man treated Latina wasn't how someone would handle a criminal," Sylvia said, voicing her doubts.

"I'd heard something similar in the Ocelot," Rudolph replied. By frequenting the Ocelot, he'd overheard a lot of discussion from the regulars, and as a member of the guards he'd had many opportunities to think on the matter of "crime."

"To start with, Latina was only seven when she was exiled. That's the maximum punishment for devils, and normally a child that age would never be sentenced to that, right?" Rudolph continued on.

Devil and human values weren't necessarily the same, but he had heard the devil race treated children as precious. In that case, it only made sense that if a child committed a crime, their parents would instead be the ones found at fault. And a kind child like Latina may have possibly done something on accident, but Rudolph couldn't imagine that a kid could have ever committed some heinous crime.

"Apparently, Latina's father hadn't been treated as a criminal."

Back when Dale buried the corpse of the man he assumed to be Latina's father, he confirmed that the man had both horns. Her childhood friends had heard that from Latina herself.

"So I was thinking, odds are that the 'crime' that got Latina exiled was religious or maybe political in nature. There's no way that sort of 'crime' would be tied to a normal child, so Latina's family must be the sort that could get caught up in internal squabbles, right?"

The right to rule in Vassilios was not hereditary, but they still ended up at a conclusion that wasn't far off the mark in that manner.

And so, Sylvia had borrowed the fragment of Latina's horn from Chloe. If

Sylvia could meet with someone who knew Latina, ideally her high-ranking sister, in all likelihood that fragment would serve as proof that she was someone close to the girl. She had also wanted to believe in what Latina had told Rudolph—that it would serve as a protective charm.

Chloe had said to Sylvia, to whom she now owed a debt, “Come back safely, Sylvia. And if you can, bring Latina back with you. I’ve got to slug her at least once, as hard as I can.”

In the end, Sylvia entered Vassilios riding atop Vint’s back. She gambled on the fact that she could at least manage the magic needed to travel a short distance. Vint knew where Latina was, and he was also recognized as a pup that was faithful to the “Platinum Princess.” There was no risk of being shot down with magic.

What Sylvia hadn’t expected, though, was that Latina’s sister, Chrysos, was the Golden King, ruler of Vassilios.

When Vint landed, the guards at Chrysos’s side saw there was someone riding atop him, and they were clearly unsettled. But then, a voice without even a hint of tension to it resounded, saying, “Sylvia, Latina’s friend.”

Under these strange circumstances in which she’d been introduced by Vint, Sylvia descended before Chrysos. To be honest, Sylvia was surprised herself. Even from the perspective of someone like Sylvia, who knew Latina very well, Chrysos looked shockingly similar to her sister, aside from her golden eyes.

Perhaps because Vint was accompanying the girl, Chrysos commanded her guards to stand down. Facing Sylvia, who was looking straight at her, Chrysos called out in a somewhat clumsy manner, “...Platina, human, friend?”

“*My name is Sylvia. I met Latina in Kreuz... a town in the nation of Laband.*”

Chrysos could awkwardly speak Western Continental, which was employed by humans, and Sylvia had a minimal grasp of the devil language, though she couldn’t manage complex vocabulary. And so, the basics were in place for communication.

A look of surprise crossed Chrysos’s face when Sylvia presented the fragment of Latina’s horn.

“*This is my proof.*”

“*Platina...*”

Chrysos could clearly see Latina’s kind aura about the horn. The mana about it resembled her own, but was gentler. The fragment was like the embodiment of a pure wish for the happiness of the one who held it.

“*I’ve come in search of Latina. Is she here?*”

While listening to these words from Sylvia, who had a strong gaze without any timidness about it, Chrysos sensed that this person was someone her sister would never want to be harmed. Also, Chrysos sought a link with the humans.

Day by day, presences were disappearing from the place with the thrones, which only demon lords could sense. Considering the timing, it was easy to surmise that it was the work of someone related to the Eighth Demon Lord, but Latina herself was still not in any state to hold a conversation. And to someone like Chrysos who lacked any connections to the humans, the information she could obtain was just too limited. This unprecedented state of emergency had brought about the end of the nation’s long-standing policy of isolation.

Thanks to the harm the Demon Lords of Calamity had inflicted upon the humans, the situation for the devil race was shifting in a bad direction. They had brethren outside of the nation of Vassilios. And if they sought aid, then as the king, Chrysos would need to provide it.

Laband was the nation that employed the hero who played by far the greatest role in the battle with the Demon Lords of Calamity. That, in addition to the fact that it was a neighboring country, was what made Chrysos feel the need to dispatch an envoy.

Sylvia had also acted as an envoy on behalf of Vassilios. By way of the temple of Akhdar, she conveyed the nation’s intentions to the governing body of Laband—that is to say, Duke Eldstedt.

From that time on, Sylvia played the role of messenger between the two nations. And providing support from behind the scenes was the Dancing Ocelot.

Dale had going missing, but even in Kreuz they knew that he was fighting the world over, fulfilling his duty as a hero. And yet, it was still difficult to get in

contact with him. Even employing the postal union that covered a great deal of the world, it wasn't possible to contact someone without knowing where they were. The most common method of contact, sending a letter, just wasn't possible.

People related to Latina were in Vassilios, and Latina herself, who had gone missing, was apparently also there. When that fact came to light, the folks at the Ocelot formed a plan for contacting Dale.

As a result, the Ocelot sent some of the information they had gathered to those they expected Dale was most likely to contact: in other words, Tislow and his employer, Duke Eldstedt.

"Huh?" Dale uttered without thinking, before continuing on a hysteric tone, "Wait a minute... Since when... did Kenneth and them know that Latina was here?!"

"Hmm... I think that pup there told them around when the war with the Seventh Demon Lord was getting started. That's when the shop should've learned about it," Sylvia declared.

Dale was left dumbfounded, and by his side, Vint gave a proud *ahem*. "Can do anything I try."

"...Vint... is the one who carried me here from Kreuz, right?" Latina's memories were hazy, so she asked while breaking out in a bit of a cold sweat.

"Yeah," Vint responded, clearly confirming that fact.

"Huh? Latina...?" Dale questioned, having known nothing of those circumstances.

"When... I came to, I was here in Vassilios... Apparently, right after I broke out of the seal, I was in Kreuz... but it seems I had Vint carry me here..." Latina responded, looking troubled.

"Ah..." Dale looked up at the sky and took a deep breath. He wouldn't say it was a heavy mental blow, but looking back, Dale realized that if he had returned to the Ocelot even once, it would have had a big effect on everything.

It wasn't as if he had underestimated the abilities of the people there, but he

should have relied on them more. He wasn't the only one who thought of Latina as someone precious. There were a great many people in that town who would want to do something for her sake.

"So did His Excellency accept Vassilios's requests that easily?"

"Of course. After all, for the sake of Laband, it was greatly advantageous to do so," Rose responded with a smile. "I came here without knowing the finer details myself. I had received a directive from His Excellency to hear the circumstances from Sylvia and the First Demon Lord."

When Rose entered Vassilios riding a flying dragon and with the bare minimum of guards, the one who had greeted her was Sylvia, acting as the point of contact between both countries.

The Second Demon Lord had been alive and well, and Vassilios was anxiously awaiting the coming moment that the purple oracle Mov had risked her life to bring about, so they had become overly cautious when it came to the control of information. The reason Duke Eldstedt hadn't even informed Rose of the details of the matter was out of consideration for that fact.

"My official role is not for diplomacy. It is to relay the differences between the two nations to His Excellency and adjust as needed. My first task in this role was to be accepted by Vassilios, and so I introduced myself as an acquaintance of the First Demon Lord's sister, Latina."

"The temple plays a large role in this country. And so, a priestess with Rose's level of divine protection would naturally be considered worthy of respect."

"Speaking of which, Sir Dale's divine protection is also great..."

In response to Rose's words, Chrysos gave a fleeting glance at Dale, then followed that with a scornful laugh. Latina appeared flustered, not knowing what to do in response.

"His Excellency is still coordinating things behind the scenes, and is being cautious in regards to dispatching government officials and members of the military."

"...My work was tied to such concerns, too."

Under Dale's contract with the duke that he had held for many years now, he stood on the field of battle as part of an undefined small group of adventurers when it wasn't possible to officially dispatch the army.

"Laband may be a large nation, but it also doesn't have especially good relations with other countries... Rather than dispatching formal envoys, he seems to prefer to keep things at the level of a personal connection, at least on the surface."

"There is still much I do not know in regards to the customs of humans. And before welcoming a group of envoys, there is a need for those of my nation to study Western Continental."

"The spell language can't be learned by those without the aptitude for it."

"I hear that Latina learned Western Continental soon after arriving in Kreuz, yes?" Rose said with a troubled smile while looking at Latina, who was sitting quietly by Chrysos's side.

"R-Right... In about a week, she was able to hold everyday conversations," Dale said, thinking back on how clever Latina had been, observing her surroundings and quickly learning how to hold a conversation, even if only awkwardly, and how big of a help that had been.

"Her Majesty, the First Demon Lord, has steadily improved while talking to Sylvia and myself... Now, she is more skilled in Western Continental than anyone else in this temple," Rose said in admiration, only for Chrysos to puff up her chest, slighter than Latina's, with pride.

"Those were the words needed to communicate with Platina. It would be unbearable to be unable to speak with my beloved Platina, who has been away from her home country for so long."

Dale had already vaguely sensed this, but apparently Chrysos had a hardcore sister complex.

Latina had initially intended to sit by Dale's side, but Chrysos had beckoned her over to the bench where she was seated, like it was only natural. With a scornful laugh and a gaze meant to irritate Dale, she then touched Latina as if it was perfectly normal to do so. Anyone else doing that would have angered him,

but Dale instead found it calming to see how well these twin sisters got along.

Of course, unlike Dale, it wasn't like Chrysos purely wanted to keep flirtatiously touching her sister, but rather was concerned about her twin, who was unwell. Latina knew that, so she occasionally shot a grateful look at her sister seated by her side, and Chrysos responded with a smile.

The warm aura this all gave off clearly communicated to those around them just how well they got along.

However, jealousy wasn't so easily restrained. Having been deprived of the best possible medicine for his "beloved daughter deficiency," Dale unsurprisingly let out an angry grumble.

After pulling himself back together, he turned to Rose. They still hadn't even broached the main issue at hand. "What was in it for Laband that made them so readily accept?" Dale asked.

"The conditions the First Demon Lord presented involved Vassilios's resources," Rose responded. "It is not my field of expertise, so I do not know the details, but... in addition to deposits of jewels, Vassilios also possesses veins of magical metal."

"So that's why Granny wanted me to discuss this stuff, huh...?" Dale said, his expression shifting.

"Magical metal" referred to metals with a high affinity for mana. It was possible to summon ores and minerals using Earth magic, but doing so became more difficult when it came to rare materials or those with a high affinity for mana.

A fragment of that could be seen in the silver used for both currency and to produce weapons that were highly effective against the undead, as well as the gold used in amulets because it was not easily damaged. It was necessary to directly dig metals like these out of land with such veins.

Laband also possessed mines, but the variety of minerals they produced was limited. If those resources, which had needed to be purchased from several far-off countries up until now, could be gained from their neighboring nation of Vassilios, then that benefit couldn't be ignored. The resources themselves may

have been the same, but the distance they needed to be transported had a huge effect on cost.

Magical metals were the raw materials for magical devices. This topic had a great deal to do with Tislow, whose livelihood lay in producing such things, so Dale, who had received training to become the next head of that clan, was much more knowledgeable on the subject than Rose.

“In Vassilios, we see value in stone, but do not have much interest in metals.”

“Enchanting is an ability limited to humans, after all... So there’s not much of a value in such things for devils, right?”

“That is correct... we use them for our tools for activating magic, but... we do not see as much value in them as humans do,” Chrysos responded, then looked at Sylvia.

The one who had offered the suggestion to leverage their mineral resources in order to make sure negotiations with Laband went smoothly, if not giving them an advantage, had been Sylvia, a human. Their ways of thinking differed, so it was an idea that couldn’t have come from the devil race alone.

All devils were able to use magic. More so than tools, they employed it in their everyday lives for all sorts of purposes. Their very lifestyles were different in this country, so the “common sense” of other nations fell outside of their realm of understanding.

However, if Laband tried to exploit them one-sidedly, they ran the risk of earning the hostility of the devils, a race in which each and every individual possessed great abilities. That was the reason for Duke Eldstedt’s apprehension and caution.

At the start of their negotiations with the long-lived devil race, it was important to find suitable common ground. That was a crucial requirement so that they could remain good neighbors for a long time.

“I see. So that’s why the duke... why Laband agreed to an exchange with Vassilios...”

While everyone else carried on with this conversation, Latina simply sat silently and listened. Though she was Chrysos’s sister, her authority in Vassilios

was effectively nil. She had determined that she was in no position to speak up.

Vassilios was a country ruled by the temple and the First Demon Lord determined by the gods. It was a nation whose faith in the gods was deeper than any other. As such, high-ranking priests and priestesses like Dale and Rose were not treated lightly.

Latina lacked any divine protection and had no intention of revealing her position as the Eighth Demon Lord, so in effect, she had nothing to grant her authority in Vassilios. However, being someone beloved by the First Demon Lord secured her a position that easily overturned all of that.

In this country, demon lords were the voice of the gods.

But that's just Chrysos's power. I'm nothing amazing... I have to bear that in mind... Latina thought to herself, concentrating on the conversation all the while. She tied together all of their words, and through them learned information she hadn't known. That was important to fill in the time she had lost.

Latina quietly breathed in as she watched Chrysos sit at negotiations as a ruler, for the sake of her nation and people. It reminded Latina of Mov's majestic appearance that she had admired when she was young.

You've worked hard, Chrysos...

It was something that Latina could never imitate.

But that's surely... because Chrysos wanted me to return...

But even so, the weight of an entire nation was just too much for someone as young as Chrysos to bear. Even if there wasn't anyone capable around her, it wasn't as if she wouldn't be granted subordinates.

It was only natural that Chrysos would want a place where she could just be herself. That she'd want someone who would accept her as herself, not some god.

Latina had Dale, someone who would treat her as just a girl, the one he loved more than anyone else. That was why, at her core, nothing had changed about Latina, even when she became a demon lord. She didn't lose herself as a

“person.”

For Chrysos, “that person” was her sister, Latina, who she had been separated from for life. Her sister had become something that supported her heart and soul, overcoming the pressure of being a demon lord, and the gazes of those around her, and everything else.

I... caused Chrysos to suffer, too...

There had been a loophole that arose in Chrysos’s desire to protect Latina, and she had come to accept the girl’s sacrifice. Looking back once more on how terribly painful that decision must have been made Latina’s heart ache.

It was no surprise that Latina tormented herself over the matter and over-thought it. Fundamentally, she wasn’t a queen or a princess, but an utterly normal young girl. With her kind nature, she couldn’t help but be concerned over the fact that she had caused the people precious to her to suffer.

But perhaps there was a sort of balance between the way that she worried so much over these things and that man she loved more than anything, who didn’t give a damn about anyone else but Latina if it meant that she was alright.

The Priestess of the Green God Thinks on Her Work and Her Friend

It had long been Sylvia's dream to visit Vassilios.

Latina didn't talk much about her old home, but thanks to Sylvia's intense, curiosity-driven pestering, she ended up discussing the matter bit by bit. It was just fragmentary information, but since it was all about a world completely unknown to her, it was enough to make Sylvia decide she wanted to see it with her own two eyes someday.

Sylvia had been granted a room for her personal use in the temple in Vassilios. Normally it would be a clean, simply furnished room, but it was currently buried under a jumble of documents. Though it had given a plain impression, in the Vassilios style, it wasn't as if she wasn't being properly welcomed as a guest. And to start with, as a highly rational priestess of Akhdar, as long as she had what she needed, no more and no less, then she couldn't want for anything.

Thinking back on it, Latina said she was raised in the depths of this temple... and that she didn't know much of the outside world... Sylvia thought to herself, her hands working away all the while.

In her breaks between carrying out her role of acting as Laband's contact there, Sylvia worked towards her primary goal: putting together a report on things like Vassilios's climate and state of affairs. She didn't overwork herself, but when strolling through town, she couldn't help but pull out her traveler's journal and write away in it.

She then dispatched this to the temple of Akhdar. The information would later serve as a guide for her fellow priests and priestesses, as well as a great many travelers and adventurers visiting this country. It was a jumble of information, but Sylvia was aware that there were those in the temple back home that were like starving hyenas, desperate for any information, no matter how trivial.

Well... for Latina, talking about her old home meant talking about her sister... so I guess she was right not to do so, Sylvia mentally muttered to herself.

She recalled when she first met Chrysos. Though she'd had some expectations based on the information she had gathered beforehand, she was frankly shocked.

She really does look just like Latina...

When Vint, who was recognized as Latina's loyal servant, returned to the temple, Sylvia had been riding on his back. Faced with such an unforeseen incident, Chrysos had left the interior and come out to the courtyard to meet with the soaring wolf.

From the stationing of the people around her, Sylvia had sensed that Chrysos was in some sort of high-ranking position, but back then, she had no idea that this girl was the "king." She could never have imagined that the ruler of a nation would personally greet a suspicious visitor.

Later, when Sylvia learned that Chrysos was the ruler known as the Golden King, she thought, *Ah. She really is Latina's sister.* She really did give the impression of being naturally aloof.

Since demon lords could only be harmed by heroes, she didn't need to be overly concerned about intruders. Since it was known that the Second Demon Lord and the Platinum Hero were in another country, the security around Chrysos was relatively lax. Therefore, Sylvia's thoughts regarding Chrysos were rather regrettable.

Sylvia's first impression of Chrysos was that she had a more chic, stylish appearance than even Latina. Latina lacked this sort of majesty, which silenced those around her.

Latina most certainly did possess something that could be called charisma. In fact, knowing the extraordinary way that her friend had ardent fans amongst the burly adventurers and guards of Kreuz and had even subdued mythical beasts with her natural virtue and skills, Sylvia couldn't think of any other word to describe it.

On the other hand, Chrysos had a feel about her more akin to that of a

“monarch.” Even the physique of this slender young girl wasn’t enough to weaken the impression. She had a different sort of charisma than Latina.

She most certainly wasn’t the cute, absentminded type that Latina was. She had gold and silver decorations hanging from her beautiful black horns and the outfit she wore was simple, but her stylishness still overwhelmed those around her. Perhaps it was thanks to the responsibility she shouldered that it felt more fitting to call her a beautiful queen more than a princess.

However, those were all thoughts that Sylvia had later. Even her “second impression” of Chrysos wasn’t something that should ever be said to the woman herself.

In turn, Chrysos and Sylvia came to become conversation partners, having many chats. Chrysos had wanted to learn Western Continental, the language of humans, but another big reason had been that Sylvia and Latina were childhood friends.

Chrysos had wanted to hear about Latina. She’d been concerned for her sister, whose whereabouts were unknown to her after the girl’s exile, so hearing that Latina had been living happily and peacefully in a foreign nation brought Chrysos great joy. Sylvia soon picked up on that fact and reminisced about her friend as the Golden King had wished.

“So Platina lives together with a hero...?” Chrysos asked Sylvia, looking surprised, after hearing about Dale. As a member of the information-gathering Akhdar temple, it was only natural that Sylvia was aware that Dale was a hero with divine protection from Quirmizi and Azraq.

“That’s right.”

“What sort of person is he?”

“Hmm, let’s see...” Sylvia then told Chrysos everything she knew about the harmonious relationship between Latina and Dale. By visiting the Ocelot many times before she left for Vassilios, she had learned that Latina used rather indirect expressions when it came to speaking about Dale. The truth far exceeded Latina’s words and proved rather ominous.

As she listened to Sylvia’s words, Chrysos’s expression steadily grew strained.

“Um, Your Majesty...?”

Even Sylvia wasn’t willing to refer to the ruler of a country by her first name, instead calling Chrysos “Your Majesty.”

“Are such actions considered normal in human nations?”

“No, that’s *definitely* not normal,” Sylvia bluntly asserted, only for Chrysos to make a face like she’d swallowed something terribly bitter.

While Latina slumbered away, knowing nothing of what was going on, her good friend disclosed the details of her overly affectionate everyday life with Dale in Kreuz. At the same time, that was precisely when Chrysos learned that the champion known as the Platinum Hero, whom she hadn’t even met yet, was in actuality an absolute doting idiot.

“...But I could also clearly tell that Latina was happy,” Sylvia tried to add that follow-up, but Chrysos responded with distant, slightly dead-looking eyes, saying, “I see...”

When Chrysos later heard more from Rose, that still didn’t wipe away that impression of Dale. Rather, hearing Rose speak ambiguously with a smile on her face seemed to only make things worse.

It was with such preconceptions that Chrysos had directly faced off with Dale. After meeting him, she felt his aura as a battle-hardened warrior and one who could easily give off terrifying bloodlust, and in turn she was left with the impression that he really was in essence a “deplorable hero."

That may have also been one reason why even though Dale had almost killed Chrysos, she wasn’t overly fixated on the matter.

†

With a *ring*, Sylvia’s journey through her past memories was interrupted.

In Vassilios, there weren’t often doors dividing each room, and there was no custom of knocking. She had only heard of the custom of ringing a bell set up near the entrance of a personal room before entering after she had come to Vassilios. It also wasn’t easy to recognize that the bell served that function at a glance. It differed in appearance from any that she had seen in Laband.

“*Yes?*” Sylvia called out in the language of the devils.

“Sylvia, it’s me,” said a voice back in Western Continental. “Can I come in?”

“Go ahead.”

With that light response, Latina’s head popped into view.

“Is it alright for you to be up and walking around already, Latina?”

“I won’t heal up properly if I just keep doing nothing but sleep. I’m just sticking to the temple, but I’m taking walks now to get my body accustomed to moving again, bit by bit.”

Sylvia cast a quick sidelong glance towards the entrance and saw an attendant, who was apparently waiting on Latina. Noticing Sylvia’s line of sight, Latina gave a troubled laugh. “To be honest, it’s pretty bothersome, but... I can’t be thinking that way...”

“So do the attendants handle your changing and bathing and everything?” Sylvia asked with a laugh.

“I firmly refuse their help in the bath,” Latina responded with a natural smile. “It’s troublesome, getting dressed and stuff, but I want to do it myself... But it’s also their job, and I don’t want to infringe on that because of my selfishness...”

“But how do you really feel?”

“It’s a bother... so I at least wanted to be able to relax in the bath...”

Sylvia felt like she understood what Latina was saying, but looking at her friend, who hadn’t even been able to move properly until a few days ago, her concern took priority. “That’s all well and good, but are you feeling alright?”

“I sank under once... but then I came to, so it was alright.”

“I think you probably shouldn’t call that ‘alright.’”

This girl really was just too much of an airhead.

Latina looked with great interest at the documents and material scattered about. Sylvia felt like she could understand that too, as there was hardly anything to serve as entertainment in this place, since it was a temple. Latina could borrow reading material the same way Sylvia had, but she couldn’t read

the devil language. And since she didn't have any duties to carry out or a job to perform like Sylvia, Latina was left completely and utterly bored.

It was then that Sylvia remembered that matter she'd just been thinking about, and she stared straight at Latina.

"What is it?"

"Hmm..."

As Latina tilted her head, her platinum hair and the delicate veil she was wearing both swayed.

"Nothing... It's just that you and the king really look alike. You're twins, right?"

"Yeah. Our eye colors are different because Chrysos is the only one who was born with a mana trait."

"Yours are grey, but the king's are golden, yeah?" Sylvia said, and Latina smiled back. From what Sylvia could see, that wasn't the only difference between them.

How should I put it...? Latina's more of... a beauty, I guess.

As a friend, those were her honest feelings.

In terms of what she had to work with, Latina certainly wasn't lacking, but that wasn't all. Having fallen for an older man back when she was young, combined with her low self-evaluation, she'd put in more effort than anyone else.

You really did work hard, Latina...

Latina had learned all sorts of things from the knowledgeable Sylvia—though that occasionally proved fruitless—and she had also received fashion lectures from Chloe. She proactively moved around for her job, and apparently did exercises she heard were good for one's beauty as part of her daily routine. She kept her diet balanced and healthy, and on top of that, she actively made sure to include foods that were said to be good for beauty.

Latina had put in so much effort to become the sort of woman that would make the man she loved turn around and look at her that, as a fellow woman,

Sylvia couldn’t help but admire her.

“So as twins, your base specs should be the same, right...?”

“Hmm?”

“I already knew that you worked really hard, Latina...”

“Hmm?”

While her friend tilted her head in confusion, not really understanding, Sylvia made a face a bit like she was looking at something far-off in the distance.

“Latina... it’s bugged me for a while...”

“Hmm?”

The second impression Sylvia had of Chrysos...

Ah. She really is just like Latina was...

Was that she was completely flat.

Currently, Latina had feminine curves. In comparison, Chrysos was reminiscent of how Latina used to be a while ago, with a somewhat childish appearance about her.

The difference in their lifestyles, with Chrysos being waited on by a chamberlain, while Latina was always running about, had a big effect there. And their eating habits likely were significant, too.

There were some things that Sylvia didn’t understand about that matter, but also some that did. Latina’s efforts really were tied to it.

“Good for you, Latina.”

“Hmm?” Latina repeated, not understanding what her friend was saying, and then tilted her head.



Afterword

“Death should not have taken thee, hero.” Hearing such lines from that RPG beloved nationwide over and over again was one of my starting points.

For most of you, this is probably our first time meeting. I’m CHIROLU, and I’d like to sincerely thank you for picking up this work, the fifth volume of *If It’s for My Daughter, I’d Even Defeat a Demon Lord*.

In terms of both personality and habits, I’m not good at the sort of games where you’re pressed for time. As a result, I instead enjoy playing through things like RPGs and adventure games bit by bit. I’m the type that prefers to do things at my own pace, so I struggle with online games, which never feel quite right to me. But still, thanks to writing taking up all my time nowadays, it’s hard to make time for games, so that’s become more of a realistic problem.

If It’s for My Daughter is a story that I started writing with a theme of trying to extract just the key portions and get straight to the point. However, I wasn’t satisfied with the way that even though the setting was one akin to that beloved RPG, I hadn’t yet managed to have a king make a request of the protagonist or have the hero set out on a dangerous journey, risking his life for a princess he had only just met.

And so, I thought I’d build things up, so that the protagonist of this work could risk his life to save a “princess.” But as I wrote more and more, it became something different than a to-the-point heroic fantasy, shifting into something that wasn’t quite what I intended, but... well, considering I’m the one writing it, maybe there was no helping that.

Thank you so much to everyone who helped make this book a reality. You drew an adorable “daughter” who has finally become an adult, Kei. And more than anything else, to those of you who chose this book out of so many options, you have my deepest gratitude.

As long as this book brought you at least a little joy, then I’ll feel truly blessed.

November 2016,

CHIROLU

Bonus Short Stories

The Adorable Second Demon Lord and the Purple Oracle 1

Her blond hair drew an arc through the air.

She stopped her elegant, dance-like movement on a dime, and a second later, a spray of blood erupted around the blades she held in both hands, then pooled in a circle on the surrounding floor.

She laughed, a charming giggle fitting to her adorable appearance. “How pathetic. They broke far too easily.”

Standing before the pathetic lamb trembling and unable to speak in the face of such unspeakable cruelty, the blond-haired girl known as the Second Demon Lord broke out in a smile reminiscent of a ferocious beast’s.

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“It is not possible,” a beautiful, purple-haired woman clearly said in denial to the girl, who was like pride and cruelty incarnate.

“Are you saying you will not obey my order, Mov?” the girl asked, a hint of anger in her voice. The rage of this demon lord known as a calamity gave off enough pressure to bring all those around her to their knees in terror and awe.

However, that anger simply washed over the purple-haired woman, who remained so calm that it almost seemed like she didn’t even notice it. “You killed them for sport the other day, did you not, my lord? The dinner simply cannot be prepared if there are no chefs.”

The blond-haired girl quickly averted her gaze.

“We had human chefs confined to the manor because you said that devil cooking did not meet your tastes. But you killed them as they were plotting an escape, yes?”

“That’s right. There was no helping that. That’s the natural end awaiting any

who defy me and try to run away, is it not?”

“Did you not consider the fact that as a result, we would be left with no one to prepare meals?” Mov asked, showing no hesitation even when facing a demon lord. “That is something that could have been foreseen even without my powers.”

The way that the demon lord averted her gaze and stayed silent when things were inconvenient for her was proof that she still had some childishness about her, appropriate to her appearance.

“A demon lord can’t starve to death,” she finally said, voicing a conclusion that was a little off-point and hard to think of as anything but mere defiance. A demon lord could not be destroyed without the interference of their antithesis, a hero, and because of that, as lower-ranking gods, they wouldn’t die of starvation.

“Then we can allow things to go as such.”

“How about just capturing another chef? It shouldn’t be all that hard to grab another weak human or two.”

No matter what conclusion the girl offered, Mov responded with a clear, bright voice. “We have only been able to arrange your tea.”

“Huh?”

“The chefs were also the ones who prepared the tea cakes.”

The expression on the Second Demon Lord’s face was far from what one would expect from a demon lord, much less one known as a calamity. Instead, it was more a young girl’s. To put it simply, it was the face of a child who had had her sweets taken away.

“Even if we dispatched someone to the nearest town, it would take at least three days,” Mov continued on, neither lecturing nor admonishing; she was simply stating facts. “In addition, it is only obvious that a town’s activity will grind to a halt and goods will no longer be produced if all of its citizens are wiped out.”

Mov had faced torture and violence each and every day based on the whims

of the demon lord in front of her now, but put another way, that meant at times like this, she felt no need to hold back. She'd be exposed to such madness even if she did nothing, so she saw no need to go out of her way to try to keep the demon lord in a good mood. And thanks to her contract with the demon lord—the rules of their game—no matter what Mov said, the Second Demon Lord would never take her life.

As a result, she was able to see this rare sight: a demon lord in tears, having lost an argument.

"Mo—"

"No matter how many times you order me, I cannot produce what we do not have."

Having been thoroughly shut down, the demon lord kept drinking her black tea until her stomach was full to bursting. There was a misery in what she did that was hard to call anything but pathos.

It was a fact not known to the world at large that after this point, if only for a little while, the Second Demon Lord used a little more discretion in her slaughter.

The Adorable Second Demon Lord and the Purple Oracle 2

"Your purple mana trait is beautiful like a jewel, but naming you 'Mov' seems kind of plain, wouldn't you say?" the girl known as the Second Demon Lord asked the woman with long purple hair. The woman stood there without showing any particularly strong emotion.

In their mother tongue, "mov" meant "purple." However, it was also a word that signified the principle god worshipped in their motherland. It wasn't a name that was given lightly. It was a name with precious meaning behind it, and it had been granted to her because of her rare, high-ranking divine protection.

The Second Demon Lord should have understood that, but that adorable bundle of arrogance had decided that all facts that were inconvenient to her were insignificant and cast them aside.

"My name isn't anything like that. It's one that suits me, because I picked it

out myself.”

“Yourself...?” Mov whispered.

In response, the blond-haired girl gave a complacent smile and continued on. “My parents were truly tedious beings, so I cut them down, ending them by my own hand. I also buried everything they had given me alongside them. That makes me quite the loyal child, wouldn’t you say?”

They had been separated for life, but even so, Mov was certain that her own daughter wasn’t a good-for-nothing like this monster, but rather an earnest, adorable child. And she was thoroughly glad that this girl in front of her now, who was like an incarnation of all evil and only looked sweet on the outside despite being rotten to the core, was not her child.

“Mov, are you... thinking rather rude things about me...?”

“No, my lord. Of course not,” Mov replied without a hint of hesitation or wavering to her voice. With her utterly unchanging expression, it was difficult to gauge what she was thinking. Her thought that it was pathetic to give oneself a cool name remained unnoticed.

Is this... a prediction...?

Not knowing who it applied to, the oracle kept that premonition—that there would likely be no chance to tell anyone the girl’s name—to herself.



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If It’s for My Daughter, I’d Even Defeat a Demon Lord: Volume 5

by CHIROLU

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