

(2回目)

【ぶたのればーはかねつしろ】

逆井卓馬

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豚のレバー

は

加熱しろ

Heat the pig liver

the story of a man turned into a pig

電撃文庫



Illustrations & Character Pages



—That being said, I’m quite envious of you.

(Er, envious of what?)

—Mr. Lolipo’s nickname, you know, “scrawny four-eyed shitty virgin.”

(It’s a pretty degrading nickname that I accidentally established when I called myself that…

What’s there worth envying?)

—Wrong. Isn’t it quite rare to have an innocent girl call you a shitty virgin?

“Um, is it good thing to be called a shitty virgin by a girl...?”

(There are some otakus in the world that would enjoy being scolded by girls.)

Celes – A thirteen-year-old Yesma that lives in Bapsas.

Black Pig – An otaku friend the pig met at the offline meeting. His handle name is Sanon.

Pig – A scrawny four-eyed shitty virgin. His handle name is Loli Pork.

Rossi – A perverted dog.

今日は炎の魔法を教わる
予定なのですが……
危ない魔法を使うのは初めてなので、
ちよつとドキドキです。



ジェス [NAME]

profile

豚がガチ恋する少女。
現在は王都で過ごし
魔法を学ぶ。

I'm supposed to learn fire magic today, but...
It's my first time using dangerous magic, so I'm a little nervous.

Jess – The girl that the pig has wholeheartedly fallen for.
She is currently at the capital spending her time learning magic.

闘技場には牙を剥いて
唸る獅子が三匹。
——狩人の前で、
獣は肉の塊にすぎない。

INAMEI ノット

profile

解放軍のリーダー。
北部勢力に
拘束されている。



Inside the arena, three lions bared their fangs and roared.
—However, beasts are but lumps of meat before a huntsman.

Nott – The Liberation Army’s leader.
He’s currently held captive by the Northern Forces.



THE OBLIVIOUS MAXED-OUT CHEAT MAGE, JESS, WAS BORN!

"...Sorry, I'm still inexperienced..."

(No, that's fine... But isn't your magic power strange?)

“...You mean it was too weak?”

(Why are you saying something that a protagonist from another world would say?)

...I was almost turned into a roast pig.



[NAME] シュラヴィス

profile

イーヴィスの孫。
ジェスの婚約者とな
っているが……。

ヴィース [NAME]

profile

シュラヴィスの母。
ジェスの教育係を
務めている。

[NAME] イーヴィス

profile

メステリアを統べる王。
最高の魔法使いと呼ばれる。

Shulavis – Evis' grandson. He's Jess' fiancé, but...

Wies – Shulavis' mother. She serves as Jess' educator.

Evis – The king of Mestria. He's been called the greatest mage.

Fragment 1 – An Important Something

There are times where I'm suddenly reminded that I can't seem to remember something.

Like when I stare at the distant mountains, or when I look up at the night skies.

When I remember that I once had something irreplaceable, tears feel like they'll well out.

But even I don't know myself what's tormenting me so.

The bookmarked pages are stuck together, unable to be opened.

After I responded to her knock, Ms. Wies entered the room. Her long blonde hair swayed like a calm stream. She's a tall, slender, graceful, and very beautiful woman. Ever since I arrived at the capital, she has been my teacher.

I'm supposed to learn fire magic today, but... it's my first time using dangerous magic, so I'm a little nervous.

I sat at the desk by the window and had a basic magic book open. Beyond the window was a cloudy sky, and a dark forest was visible far below it. This was the uppermost area of the capital – the palace where the king and his family lives. Lately, however, it's mostly been just me and Ms. Wies here.

That's because the men have been running around preparing for and fighting the Northern Forces.

Ms. Wies sat down next to me and immediately directed a question towards me.

“So let’s hear it. What is fire?”

My lessons always began with a question.

“Erm... it’s something warm and bright.”

“Then as long as we create something warm and bright, it’ll become fire?”

Since she asked me that, it means I was incorrect.

“...No, there needs to be something flammable. When something flammable is heated up in the air, it will catch fire.”

Ms. Wies raised her eyebrows, seemingly impressed.

“That’s correct. To create a fire, you need to provide it with something to burn. So, what could be good to ignite with?”

“How about... firewood?”

“Are you able to create firewood?”

“No...”

I can only create simple things at the moment. Though I say that, it’s just water, air, and the likes... What can I say, they’re really basic things.

“Let’s think about what you’re able to create.”

“I haven’t tried it yet, but I might be able to make oil.”

“Because you’ve learned how to create water?”

If she asks to confirm the reasoning behind my answer, it means my answer was wrong. I prepared myself for my idea to be dismissed as naïve, and nodded honestly.

“Yes... that’s right. I figured oil would be similar to water...”

“That kind of thinking is too superficial. Oil has a very intricate structure. To create something complex, you need the appropriate knowledge, the experience

with handling it, and a rich imagination. But your approach is correct. Let's start by creating something combustible today."

After Ms. Wies traced a circle on the desk with her slender finger, a plain glass vessel appeared in its place. As she gradually raised her hand, a clear liquid gushed out from inside the bottom of the vessel.

"Here, go ahead and give it a smell."

I followed her instructions and positioned my nose close to the glass container. Immediately, a sweet and stinging stimulation filled my nostrils, making me gag.

"What... is this?"

Ms. Wies smiled mischievously and raised her index finger.

"Take a guess. You should have drunk something which contained this in the past."

"Something that contains this...?"

I was completely stumped. Is it even possible to drink something this dangerous?

"It's liquor," Ms. Wies revealed while I was wracking my brain.

"Erm... that's right."

"What's the matter?"

"It's nothing. I just don't remember ever drinking liquor before..."

Ms. Wies' head shifted slightly in reaction to my reply. She appeared a little perturbed. However, mages are well-versed in preventing others from sensing their thoughts, so I could only guess what she was thinking.

But this is what I suppose:

Could it be that I had drunk liquor before?

Could it be that, although I drank it in the past, I just forgot that I did?

There's a reason as to why I suspect this.

The king of Mestria, Evis-sama, has sealed my memories, so I'm unable to recall anything from when I left the Quiltlin family as their maid to when I arrived at the capital. It seems like there was a proper reason for sealing them, but I'm still curious about those memories that I can't remember. Perhaps it's something that I'm better off not remembering, but...

As if having sensed my thoughts, Ms. Wies cleared her throat.

"Anyway, alcohol is what makes liquor, liquor. This liquid evaporates well and burns easily."

Ms. Wies pointed a captivating finger at the vessel, and an orange flame began to flicker inside.

"If you're able to accomplish this by today, you will have done very well. But if you still have energy to spare, try modifying your creation as well. This will also affect how it burns."

"How it burns?"

"Correct. As stated in the magic book, alcohol can be divided into water content and oil content. By reducing the oil content, it will result in a more water-like substance which will create a dark blue flame when burned; on the other hand, increasing the oil content will create flames that burn more intensely."

>TL Note: I don't think saying alcohol is oil + water is quite correct. It's more of a simplified explanation for the purpose of the story.

Just listening to her made me want to try it.

It's fire after all!

Ms. Wies smiled at me.

"Then let's head to the laboratory after you've finished reading the book, Jess."

Suppressing my excitement, I began scanning through the book.

It was while I was still in the laboratory researching how to create oil that I heard a loud thud come from the corridor outside. It sounded like someone had just shut a door nearby.

Looking at the clock on the wall, it was already two time-hour. The day had passed and it was after dark. It's already late-night. Who could it be?

When I exited into the dark corridor, I spotted a figure leaning against the stone wall nearby. He appeared injured or rather unwell. As I ran up to him, I was shocked.

“Evis-sama!”

His white hair and beard were smeared in dirt, and his pale face was extremely apparent. The king of Mestria, in his muddied black robe, appeared barely able to support himself by his trembling limbs.

His grey eyes, filled with the light of a sage, looked at the dazed me.

“What happened, Jess? Why is your face covered in soot?”

It was a hoarse voice that made him feel much older than usual.

“S-sorry, I was in the middle of an experiment...”

After blurting out those words, I realized that the concerns were being directed in the opposite direction.

“I should be the one asking that instead. What happened to you, Evis-sama?”

Evis-sama adjusted his posture. His right hand was unnaturally dyed black, and a strange mesh pattern covered his skin.

“Looks like I made a blunder. I've been cursed.”

“Cursed? By who...?”

The only people in Mestria who can cast curses, in other words, mages, are those from the royal family.

“I don’t know. But the situation is quite serious, because a mage with clear murderous intentions towards us has started to act somewhere. It’s a mage we have no knowledge of – a surreptitious sorcerer.”

Chapter 1 – Curiosity in Moderation

I don't think there's anything more pointless than writing about an otaku offline meeting, so I'll just summarize the situation up to this point.

I became a pig when I arrived in Mestria, a country of sword and magic, and embarked on a grand oinking adventure to reach its capital with a cute, angelic blonde girl called Jess. But after our journey, I reluctantly parted from her and went back to modern-day Japan.

When I returned, I resumed being an ordinary otaku and even started to believe that the matters regarding Mestria and Jess were but simply a dream.

However, it was by no means a dream.

Because I met three glasses otakus that claimed to have also experienced being transported to Mestria as pigs.

It's a bad habit of otakus that we call each other by our handle names instead of our actual names.

Let me introduce them to you.

The first guy is Sanon, he's a mechanical engineer. He's bearded man in his thirties, and is particularly fond of anime that feature young girls. He's a kind but perverted otaku.

Next is Kento, he attends a prestigious private boys' high school. His original handle name is †The Dark Knight Who Dances Till His Demise† keNto, but let's not delve into that. Putting aside the uniqueness of his handle name, he's just an ordinary, proper otaku.

Lastly, there's Hiropon, a female medical student. I won't get into her dangerous-sounding name, but she's someone that likes social games, tends to

laugh a lot, and is a princess-like otaku.

>TL Note: *Hiropon (Philopon) is the brand name for methamphetamine in Japan...*

By the way, my handle name is Loli Pork. To avoid any kind of misunderstanding, I'd like to clarify how I got this name. I'm neither a young girl, nor pork chops. I'm just an insignificant science college student. When I wrote my oinking adventures in Mestria into a slightly naughty, flirtatious, fantasy in another world novel and posted it online, I changed my Twitter handle to "Scrawny Pork," but it got shortened at some point and became "Loli Pork." Lately, that got condensed further into "Lolipo," and this strange abbreviation seems to have slowly been adopted by my readers.

>TL Note: ヒヨロガリポーク (hyorogari pork) → ロリポーク (rori pork) → ロリポ (roripo)

Also, regarding the slightly naughty, flirtatious, fantasy in another world story, now that I know Mestria is real, I privatized the novel online to protect the royal dynasty's secrets. As a final tribute, I sent it in to a certain newcomer award contest, but its title is quite strange, so I doubt it'll win anything.

>TL Note: *Fourth wall break. Heat the Pig Liver won the 26th Dengeki Novel Prize "Gold Award" and didn't get its title changed when it was published.*

But I digress.

Sanon couldn't forget about his experience in Mestria, so he used his extraordinary searching skills and the power of parfaits to call upon his kindreds, which led to us four glasses otakus gathering. After several meetings, we drafted a plan to be transferred back to Mestria.

And today is the day we execute that plan.

...You're wondering how we're going to be transferred? Well everyone, no need to rush me.

We glasses otakus put our heads together, combined our knowledge, deduced the principle behind transferring to Mestria, and crafted a plan based on it.

Fundamentally, we believe that the transferring of otakus began because of me. When my consciousness was brought to Mestria, it seems like some kind of magic trace was left behind. Ever since then, if a nerdy glasses-wearing otaku lost consciousness at the station where I collapsed from a stomach ache, the unusual incident of that person's consciousness possessing a pig from Mestria would occur. The result is that Hiropon, Sanon, and Kento were transferred there. And when their pigs died, they returned to modern Japan.

To put it simply, if we pass out somewhere near the station again, our consciousness might be brought over to Mestria!

Here's the plan:

Hiropon's father actually owns the large hospital near the station in question. We were all taken to that hospital the last time we each were transferred, so we're going to take advantage of that fact.

We'll be doing whatever it takes. Hiropon will threaten her father to re-examine his patients, who, like her, have been unconscious for an abnormally prolonged period of time. Under that pretext, the three of us, excluding her, will be each provided a bed. Hiropon will then use a genuine stun gun that Sanon procured via suspicious means to make sure we faint. If we're able to arrive in Mestria without any problems and not wake up, her father will be held responsible for taking care of us. This is the strategy we came up with.

As a side note, it seems like Hiropon was transferred to Mestria soon after I got food poisoning, but because she didn't have fond memories of there and didn't want to leave her younger sister, who had an uncertain future due to her incurable disease, she won't be participating in this re-transfer. However, she's a key person, as she agreed to and willingly became the cornerstone of our unreasonable plan.

"Are you ready, Mr. Lolipo?"

While wearing a pair of rubber gloves and holding the stun gun, Hiropon looked down at me lying on the bed. She had a gentle expression on her short bob hairstyle and red-glasses-wearing face; it didn't suit what she was about to do.

"Yeah, thanks."

I squeezed my eyes shut, pressed the side of my head against the pillow, and only thought about one thing.

—Jess.

Will I be able to see you?

None of the three who have transferred to Mestria after me have seen, nor heard of any news regarding Jess. That's not surprising since she's at the closed off capital. Her happy life as a relative of the king should be just starting.

Darkness enveloped my eyelids, darkening my vision further. I felt something press against the back of my neck.

Jess.

Is it alright for me to meet you?

Is it okay for a scrawny four-eyed shitty virgin like me to step back into such a wonderful girl's life again...?

“You can't...”

I heard the voice of a girl speaking Mestria's language.

I woke up. The pain was only momentarily. As I wondered where I was, I looked at my surroundings.

It was a dim place. I felt mud on my cheeks. When I inhaled, the pigpen's mixture of scents stroked my olfactory epithelium. This means...

“Stop, if you lick that much, I'm going to be all sticky...”

I listened to the voice that came from beyond the haystack and stood up. Looking at my feet, I saw two split pink hooves. It was a nostalgic feeling.

Although it's weird to be able to say this, I turned into a pig without a hitch. After three months, I've succeeded in becoming a pig in Mestria again. Be it my color vision or body senses, everything seems to be as perfectly adapted as they

were back when Jess healed me. Her magic appears to still be in effect.

I trotted on all fours towards the direction of the voice, and the first thing I saw was a large black pig. A slender girl in a dark brown one-piece dress was sitting on some hay, and the black pig was licking her cheeks like a dog.

“Ah... it tickles... not the neck... hya...”

“Oink oink...”



That pig and girl's playful voices resounded through the pigpen.

Uh, what's going on here? What am I looking at right now?

The girl that was being preyed on by the black pig suddenly looked at me. She had short blonde hair, a slender neck, a small face, and large eyes. On the corner of her right eye was a tear mole, and around her neck was a dimly glowing silver collar.

“Snort.”

I tried to speak and ended up making an otaku noise. Right, I forgot.

(...You're Celes, right?)

I used parentheses to indicate that this was my dialogue and silently conveyed it to her. The other party is the same race as Jess, a Yesma – it's a race that can communicate via their thoughts without using their mouths or ears. She serves the innkeeper lady who ran the inn at the first village Jess and I had stopped by during our journey.

Celes, who gave the impression of being a timid girl, and whose cheeks were wet from pig saliva, appeared a little surprised. The black pig immediately settled down dejectedly.

Celes finally opens her mouth.

“Erm... you're from back then...”

(Yeah.)

“Mr. Shitty Virgin, right?”

.....

Well, she's not wrong, so I'll let it go.

(That's right. I'm the scrawny four-eyed shitty virgin that was with Jess. Long time no see.)

The black pig that was observing the situation turned his head towards Celes. She nodded at him.

“Yes. The Mister Pig over there is also... Right, that seems to be the case.”

The black pig’s mouth was half open, making an obvious “oh fuck” expression. Ah, I see.

(Sorry for asking you a favor so soon after my greetings, Celes, but do you mind relaying our thoughts? I have something I want to say to that black pig.)

Yesmas can relay other people’s thoughts like a router. That’s why, as long as a Yesma is around, even people who have turned into pigs that can only oink are able to communicate with each other.

“Erm... Understood.”

Celes nodded at me. I stared straight at the black pig that had stopped moving and bluntly asked him a question.

(Why were you so eagerly licking a thirteen-year-old girl, Mr. Sanon?)

.....

The black pig didn’t respond.

(Admit it, Mr. Sanon. I can tell it’s you even if you’re pretending to be a pig.)

—Y-you’re wrong, oink...

I heard the guy’s voice in my head. His verdict: Guilty.

(How could I be wrong, oink?)

—No, um, it’s a misunderstanding. It was an accident.

The black pig acted suspiciously while pleading with me.

(Mind explaining to me how any of that was an accident?)

—I didn’t do it on purpose. My tongue just accidentally touched her a little, I

definitely wasn't licking her eagerly...

Do you really think it's possible to accidentally lick a girl until her face is all sticky and wet?

(No matter how you look at it, there's no way this was on the level of just an accident.)

I looked at Celes. Her fine strands of short hair were clinging to her face due to pig saliva. She had a troubled expression as she smiled with an "Ehe."

—It's that thing. You know, a pig's habits...

It's an excuse that I heard from somewhere else before, and it left me dumbfounded, so I gave up arguing.

(There's a lot I want to say, but... for the time being, it looks like we managed to arrive in Mestria without any issues.)

As I conveyed that, the black pig's ears twitched.

—That's true... Although I was certain that Mr. Lolipo would've been transferred to where Jess-taso was...

This incoherently speaking black pig was Sanon.

I was told that this lolicon bastard was previously transferred near Celes. Since she was here this time around as well when he was transferred, it's reasonable for him to assume that I, who was transferred near Jess last time, would also be where Jess is this time too. For some reason, the situation where I also arrived close to Celes was outside of his expectations.

Of course, this was unexpected for me as well.

I wasn't transferred to Jess' side. I won't be able to meet her just yet...

Well, it can't be helped. It's not like my purpose for coming back was so I could wholeheartedly lick Jess-taso. And of course, it's also not so I could lick Celes-taso. I returned to Mestria because I had left behind some unfinished business.

According to Sanon and the others when I was eating my parfait during the offline meeting in Japan, the situation in Mestria had completely changed after I left, and it was thrown into an unprecedented chaos. It was during this time that a hero stepped forward to save the Yesmas who have been forced to bear such cruel fates.

It was none other than the handsome huntsman, Nott.

We came back to help Nott and save the Yesma girls.

So I didn't return for the sake of enjoying a flirtatious fantasy story with Jess. Honestly. You all believe me, right? Who'd want to get all lovey-dovey again with a cute blonde girl whom they had a tearful goodbye with? It's not like I'm an otaku that has fallen in love. It would be nice if we were to meet – that's the extent I'm willing to admit. Well, with any luck, we'll probably meet each other again somewhere in this country.

I felt a gaze on me and turned around before realizing Celes was watching me. The air in the dim pigpen felt suffocatingly stagnant.

At this time, I still didn't know how many twists and turns were on the path to being reunited with Jess.

We checked the other pigs one by one, but Kento, who should have arrived with us, was nowhere to be found. Although I was concerned about where he could have gone, we had to worry about ourselves first. It's good that a familiar face found us, but the place we woke up in was Bapsas, the village where I met Celes for the first time. It's a peaceful village nestled in the southern forest, far from the frontstage of Mestria. Let alone Jess, even Nott was no longer here.

Our first objective was to borrow Celes' strength and reunite with Nott. That was the plan.

...But before that, we had something else to take care of. We pigs were covered in mud. And even though we're pigs, as the bare minimum etiquette for receiving skinship with a cute girl, we had to keep our bodies as clean as possible.

Therefore, we decided to have Celes lead us to a stream to take a bath. It was autumn season in Mestria – the grass had withered and turned golden yellow, glistening under the afternoon sun.

Jess and I had arrived at the capital three months ago during the summer when the greenery was still lush.

I was told that on that day, after Nott separated from us at the Forest of Needles surrounding the capital, he successfully killed the muscular guy whom he held a grudge against.

“But Mr. Nott didn’t immediately return.”

Celes dipped just her feet into the stream as she scooped up some water with her hands and carefully washed her nape while explaining.

“I heard he was attacked by assassins on the way back...”

We discussed Mestria’s current state of affairs while washing ourselves.

(It sounds like the big guy that Nott killed was an important figure in the underworld.)

“Yes. It seems like even the royal dynasty kept tabs on him as he was the leader of the underworld. He was known as En the Dismemberer and was very influential. That’s why Mr. Nott ended up being chased by those from the underworld.”

>TL Note: *King of Hell (En)* - [Wiki](#)

You’re quite familiar with this, I thought.

While bathing in the water, Sanon the black pig conveyed this to us.

—No-kun continued to flee while avoiding the ruffians’ relentless pursuit, but running away wasn’t all he did. During his escape travels, he gathered companions that also hated the Yesma hunters and would sometimes fight against his pursuers... After overcoming many deadly battles, he became a household name as a hero in less than a month.

The battles between Nott and his assassins would engulf their surroundings and end up rapidly escalating the situation.

While I was doing my otaku activities when I returned to Japan, that handsome guy was accomplishing an unbelievable feat behind the scenes. Why was there such a wide gap between us? Complacency and difference in environment...

(Nott formed the Liberation Army after that, right?)

When I confirmed it with Celes, she nodded.

“After the battles became evenly matched and the situation stabilized, Mr. Nott finally returned here. But during this time, the underworld’s actions became more and more radical... so to push back against it, he founded the Liberation Army.”

A single attack from a young man can lead to a massive conflict that involves the entire country.

Perhaps the gathering of the underworld’s forces was brought about in an attempt to kill Nott. In the northern region, which was already a hotbed of ruffians, a gem merchant by the name of Arogan proclaimed himself to be the new king and declared independence from the royal dynasty’s ruling. The northern region is now under the control of the Northern Forces, which is comprised of underworld ruffians.

And Nott, being who he is, formed the Liberation Army to fight for the Yesmas with the support of his comrades and the populace. As a result, the three forces in Mestria – the royal dynasty, the Northern Forces, and the Liberation Army, were in a deadlock, creating a three-way standoff situation.

(That’s when Mr. Sanon arrived.)

The black pig turned to face us.

—Yeah. I collapsed from overwork, and when I woke up, I met an angelic lo-... girl, and discovered I became a pig. That’s how we met, Cele-tan, right?

When the black pig snuggled up against Celes, she shyly petted him. His tail danced with joy.

“Yes. Mr. Sanon listened to my selfish wish and came with me to where Mr. Nott-, no, where the Liberation Army was. After that, we acted as members of the Liberation Army for a while.”

I often heard Sanon talk about those times, and how he made full use of his little grey cells to support Nott as a member of the Liberation Army. Of course, judging by his unusual expression of affection towards Celes, his mind wasn't the only thing that was active. I had no doubts about him having thoroughly enjoyed his life in another world with a girl that was less than half his age...

>TL Note: “*Little grey cells*” is a phrase from the fictional detective *Hercule Poirot*.

However, his activities ended in under a month.

(During this time, there was the battle at the Rocklands, right?)

Celes hung her head with a gloomy expression.

“Yes. The Liberation Army lost the battle against the Northern Forces and everyone was scattered.”

Her eyes slowly shifted towards the black pig.

“I thought for sure Mr. Sanon died in the battle at the Rocklands, but...”

—The pig certainly died, but my consciousness was able to return to Mestria. No matter how many times this body may die, my soul will forever follow Cele-tan, so everything's alright!

The black pig shook his body to fling off the water. It didn't seem like he was alright to me.

Well, whatever. Let's return to the subject at hand.

(Hey, Celes. Nott was captured during the battle at the Rocklands, right?)

She slowly nodded at my question.

“Yes. Mr. Nott is currently being held captive by the Northern Forces... I heard

he's been forced to become an arena gladiator.”

It's the same as what the Dark Knight Who Dances-, correction, what Kento explained before.

After Sanon returned to Japan, Kento appeared to have inhabited the body of a pig being raised by a Yesma called Nuris near the Northern royal castle. While Nott became a slave for the people's entertainment and his life was being toyed with, the Northern royal castle attempted to enlist Nuris. But when the Dark Knight Who Dances Till His Demise stood up against them, he was killed and sent back to Japan.

He then met Sanon and me, and informed us about the situation in the north. Though his current whereabouts are unknown, since he tried transferring here with us, he's probably somewhere in Mestria.

After bathing, our previously mud-covered bodies came out of the stream all cleaned up, and we dried ourselves in the autumn breeze which faintly carried the sweet fragrance of the forest.

Celes gently sat on a rock by the riverbank and gazed at the northern sky. Her eyes moistened in the wind. I approached her while glancing at the black pig who was innocently chasing a butterfly – he was probably overjoyed at being freed from being a corporate slave.

(Celes... I'm sorry. This all happened because I took Nott with us...)

In response to my apology, she lightly shook her head as if she had already given up.

“It's not Mister Pig's fault. Mr. Nott has always dreamed of changing Mestria in this way. He was destined to leave, sooner or later.”

Celes looked at me attentively.

“Um...”

(What's wrong?)

“How is Ms. Jess doing?”

(Ah. With Nott's help, we managed to make it to the capital safely. Jess should be living happily over there.)

For whatever reason, I wasn't in the mood to say much. I-It's not like I was shocked about not being able to meet Jess or anything like that, you got it?

“Oh... I'm sorry! Um, you don't have to talk about it if you don't want to.”

She read my monologue! Speaking of which, this was that kind of world, wasn't it?

(Don't worry about it... Oh right, I know the trick to getting into the capital, so once you turn sixteen, I'll help you enter it.)

“To the capital... Yeah, it'll be reassuring with Mr. Shitty Virgin around.”

Is that way of addressing me already set in stone...? While I was thinking about that, the black pig suddenly approached me and snorted loudly.

—No, Cele-tan has plans to live together with No-kun and me. Ok???

(Okay... Well, that works too...)

Although Sanon in many ways is kind of, you know... he's still a kind guy with integrity, and quite smart too. Since he said that, it might not be a bad idea to leave Celes up to him.

After all, I have someone el-

—There's only one thing left for us to do now. Mr. Lolipo, you should know what it is as well.

Sanon's voice resounded in my head, snapping me out of it. Did he notice the uneasiness in my heart?

I nodded firmly and dispelled those dark thoughts.

Just as there was a good reason for why I was transferred to Jess last time, there must be a reason why I was transferred to Celes instead of Jess this time. The one who needs help the most right now isn't Jess. It's Nott – the guy who

became a gladiator in the north and whose life is being toyed with, and Celes – whose loved one was pulled away because of a shitty pig, resulting in them being separated.

(Of course. Let's go rescue Nott alongside Celes.)

* * *

As soon as I raised my eyelids, the midday sunlight scorched my eyes.

The sandy arena was extremely large. Thousands of ruthless spectators sat in the stone-built audience seats that formed a slope. Today was a clear blue sky. In front of me were – that's good, it's not humans this time – three lions, baring their fangs and roaring, chained up and waiting.

Though the arena is kept clean and tidy, people die here every day. The dry sand on this wooden stage is replaced after the performance is over, and they discard the sand that's been soaked in blood.

I came face-to-face with the lions inside the dry arena. A low-pitched bell rang, and I could hear the sound of their chains becoming undone. A deafening cry echoed through the arena. Were they bellows, or perhaps cheers?

My left hand didn't move. I held one of my twin daggers with my right hand and took a fighting stance.

Beasts are but lumps of meat before a huntsman.

“Sure enough, that was amazing! You were so cool, Master!”

A cheerful fourteen-year-old boy beamed from the other side of the gold-plated cage. His name's Bart. He happily brought over the fodder for this prisoner that could die at any moment. Today's a clump of husk-filled grains. I silently grabbed it and sank my teeth into it. I haven't eaten in a day.

“When you were being trampled on, I thought, even for Master, it was all over. However! I couldn't have imagined that the blade you tucked underneath your arm would pierce the lion's foot! That must've meant you read your opponent's

movements, right? I must say, that move made me feel pretty disgusting.”

He’s a chatty guy, almost like a puppy. I was told his job was to feed the prisoners in the basement of the arena. He seemed to like me a lot and would often talk to me. It’s not like I had anyone else to talk to, so it didn’t bother me. As I swallowed the grains, the husks scratched against my esophagus.

“A huntsman’s skill is defined by how far he can predict a beast’s movements. For that reason, it’s important to accumulate a lot of experience to be able to go up against any number of different animals. Keep at least this in mind if you want to be able to stand on your own.”

Bart’s eyes sparkled.

“I see! Master sure is amazing.”

His response remained unchanged. It made me wonder how well he actually understood my advice. He seemed to be around the same age as Celes, but at that age, I think girls are more thoughtful than this.

“Hurry up and get back to work. If you keep dawdling around this cage, you’ll end up rousing unwarranted suspicions.”

“Got it! I’ll see you tomorrow, Master!”

Bart grinned and skipped like a rabbit as he disappeared into the darkness. I was pulled back into the pitch-black solitude again.

This was the arena basement. Slaves like me are confined here until death. The sun doesn’t reach here, and rats scurry across the cold damp floor. The only light around here comes from lanterns; the only way to tell time is by sensing the presence of the prison guards who bring the slaves to the stage, and by hearing the commotion caused by the audiences above. It’s a dark and damp place made of wood, stone, and iron. My cage alone is ironically decorated with gold. For some reason, I appear to be given special treatment.

Since Bart left and I finished the fodder, there was nothing left for me to do as my eyelids drooped down.

“Get up.”

As I laid on the floor about to doze off, I heard a low female voice. I plucked the pebble stuck on my arm and peered into the darkness outside the cage.

She was a girl with long blonde hair. She looked to be fifteen or sixteen, and was dressed in dirty rags. She had thin limbs, freckled cheeks, and emotionless eyes. She wore a silver collar. She's a Yesma.

"...What is it?"

"I've been ordered to take you with me."

"On whose order?"

"The new king's."

"King?"

"Yes."

"Who are you? Why is Arogan asking for me?"

"I am Nuris. I am one of the Yesmas working in this arena. I just happened to be ordered, so I don't know the new king's intentions."

She coldly spoke in an emotionless and indifferent tone. She didn't seem to be lying.

Nuris inserted a yellow rista into a rusty and heavy-looking chain and shackles before dropping it over here through the cage's gaps. The shackles slid across the floor and restrained my hands and feet from where I sat.

"I will guide you to the castle," she said while unlocking the cage with the key that was linked to the shackles.

I dragged my chains across the dark path and was forced into a carriage just like that. The Northern streets had few pedestrians and gave off a gloomy feel. Through the iron-barred window, I spotted a house whose plaster, which must have been a soft color, had peeled off, revealing the earthy color walls underneath. Nuris sat opposite of me and maintained her expressionless freckled face as she wordlessly gazed at the scenery outside. I doubt this was a pleasant

job.

It didn't take long for the Northern royal castle to come into view. The Ground Spider Castle. It's a sturdy stone castle built atop a barren mountain with deformed towers haphazardly built from wood and clay. After climbing the barren mountain, the carriage passed through a black gate and entered the castle. I was dragged off the carriage and led through the corridor by Nuris before stopping in front of a large iron door.

“My job here is done.”

Nuris said formally and stepped aside.

The door opened, and two prison guards with leather masks covering their faces led me inside.

“Raise your head.”

I heard a hoarse voice and turned to look at its owner.

An emaciated man sat on a stone throne. He had dry and grey skin, eyes so sunken that they could hardly be seen, and wore a silver crown that looked like it was stuck to his temple. It was like a mummy being forced to dress up.

“You should have died in agony. But you're tougher than I expected. You're still alive.”

“Does it bother you?”

“Of course not. You'll only prolong your suffering before death.”

The shoulders of the new king Arogan shook as he laughed unpleasantly. It was like he was having a convulsion and a coughing fit at the same time.

“However, it won't do to keep this as is. It's been exactly a month since you arrived here. I can't have you becoming the arena's hero, now can I?”

“What are you planning?”

As I said that, Arogan pointed to the side using the long staff in his hand.

The door opened, and I could see into the next room. There was a strangely reclined chair full of protrusions. It was a torture chair. It's something that holds a person in place with restraints and continues to inflict pain on the target through its physical shape and via rista magic without injuring them.

I could feel my arms convulse like they were having a seizure as they were being held by the guards.

Standing next to the chair was a tall old man in a grey robe and hood that covered his eyes. He gave the impression of being a shadow. A piercing gaze came from the pair of golden eyes glowing beyond this shadow.

I was carried into the next room and tied to the torture chair. The shadowy old man peered at my face, but all I could see was his long nose and golden eyes.

A low and terrifying voice came from underneath the hood.

“Now then, Nott, leader of the Liberation Army, just how much pain can you endure?”

* * *

—That being said, I'm quite envious of you.

Sanon directed that at me while we were en route towards the mountain behind the village. We had accepted Celes' request to help her find something.

(Er, envious of what?)

—Mr. Lolipo's nickname, you know, “scrawny four-eyed shitty virgin.”

(It's a pretty degrading nickname that I accidentally established when I called myself that... What's there worth envying?)

—Wrong. Isn't it quite rare to have an innocent girl call you a shitty virgin?

Celes, who was relaying the otakus' pointless conversation, suddenly tilted her head.

“Um, is it good thing to be called a shitty virgin by a girl...?”

An awkward silence followed after an innocent thirteen-year-old girl asked us that.

(There are some otakus in the world that would enjoy being scolded by girls.)

Confused, Celes tilted her head further at my explanation.

“Eh...? Scolded...? Is ‘shitty virgin’ a bad word?”

I seemed to have dug my own grave. I turned to Sanon for help, and he nodded confidently.

—Cele-tan, it doesn’t mean something bad, but there are times where it can come across as bad. There’s nothing wrong with calling this guy a shitty virgin, so there’s no problem for you to worry about.

...? Forget it. Since I do call myself that, I’ll have to accept his point.

Just when I figured the topic would end here, another question came up in Celes’ mind and she asked, “By the way, what exactly makes someone happy when they’re scolded by a girl?”

Urk. This girl is a lot trickier than I expected. Would you be able to provide a specific and logical explanation as to why you would enjoy being scolded by a girl?

“Specifically what... huh.”

I handed off the onus of explaining things to Sanon again.

—To scold someone, Cele-tan, is to establish an asymmetrical relationship where there’s a scolder and a scolded. There’s a clear hierarchy in this relationship, which, in other words, makes it a domination relationship. As long as they are dominated, they are free from all expectations and responsibilities. And by being dominated by someone that they long for – a girl – a guy can bask in the fundamental desire of a man being cared for by a girl, while also reveling in the feeling of being liberated from the stress that they endure every day. That’s why they enjoy it.

After hearing an otaku’s fast-talk explanation, Celes pondered for a bit.

“Then... should I also be scolding Mr. Sanon as well?”

—I agree with that. I’d happily-

(Nonono, let’s forget about that. After all, it’s not in Celes’ character to be scolding people, right?)

“That’s true,” Celes smiled and agreed whereas the black pig snorted in dissatisfaction.

That being said, his explanation was quite incisive. Is Sanon the type of person that’s into this sort of thing? Well, it’s not like I have the right to say anything since I oinked from excitement when Jess called me a pig...

While we were having this conversation, we arrived at the monastery ruins. This was once the Bapsas monastery, but after the fire, only the stone foundation and parts of the destroyed walls remained.

(So what are you looking for, Celes?)

At my question, she averted her eyes briefly before responding.

“Erm... I’m not sure what I’m looking for.”

Hm?

“It’s something that Mr. Nott hid when he first returned to Bapsas. He said it was something important, and that I should dig it up if he were to disappear...”

—So this was before I even met Cele-tan. Do you know where it’s roughly located at?

With a lack of confidence, Celes pointed at the grassland next to the monastery in response to Sanon’s question.

“It should be somewhere there.”

—Any markers?

“Um... I forgot. There probably isn’t one. That’s why I wanted to ask Mister Pigs to help me find it.”

She forgot?

(Without any clues, it'll be hard to find it in a meadow like this. Can you remember anything?)

“Mr. Nott’s hands were smeared in dirt... so I believe he must have buried it in the ground with his hands...”

That’s a pretty weird clue. I guess it’s fine, it might serve to help us find it.

(Okay, so Nott must’ve buried it. As for when he first came back...)

“It was about two months ago.”

...Then it might be difficult to find via burying traces or Nott’s scent.

—Mr. Lolipo, let’s start by performing a pig wave attack and sweep across the meadow.

>TL Note: *Human wave attack, except they’re pigs, so it’s a pig wave attack.*

I nodded at Sanon’s suggestion. It was evening already, so it won’t be long before it gets dark.

Doubts arose while I was searching. Isn’t it odd that Nott told Celes to dig it up if he were to disappear, but she forgot about the most crucial marker? Yet she appears to remember it was located around the meadow next to the monastery ruins. What kind of half-baked memory is this?

Not to mention, Celes doesn’t even know what the important treasure is. Why didn’t he tell her what is it?

Something didn’t sit right with me.

I should put that aside and stop nitpicking. I owe Celes, so let’s focus on figuring out its burial spot.

Nott came to the monastery ruins in order to hide “something important.” This place burned down five years ago, and as a result, his loved one – Ys, was kidnapped and murdered...

I get it now. He chose this location which held a special meaning to him as his hiding spot. The monastery ruins is quite far from the village hub. Since he came all the way here, wouldn't it be more fitting for him to choose a symbolic place rather than some random grass patch as the spot for burying something?

I tried looking around us. This meadow was facing the monastery ruins.

(Hey, Celes. Is there anything left of the monastery ruins that carries traces from the past?)

She came over to me and replied, "Hm... it hasn't been used in a long time, but there's an underground passageway that leads to the village."

(No, that's not what I meant... I'm asking if there's something that could act as a marker for hiding things. Even a trace will do.)

"In that case, it could be..."

Celes trotted towards the monastery ruins. Sanon and I followed suit.

"I was told nothing survived the fire from five years ago. It was as if everything had been burned down by magic... but this tile-

As she said that, Celes pointed at a square stone tile that was about 50 centimeters wide. There were similar tiles strewn elsewhere, but this was the only one with a circular mark left on it.

"It's said that someone's collar fell here and wasn't burned away, so only the spot where the collar covered remained unscorched. Other than that, there's not much worth mentioning..."

I see. Although it doesn't meet the condition of Nott having buried it in the ground with his hands, it's worth a shot.

(Mr. Sanon, would you be capable of removing this tile?)

The black pig nodded.

—The tile next to it is gone, so it should be possible to move it to the side with No-kun's or a pig's strength.

Sanon pushed against the tile with his big nose.

Pigs are animals that dig up dirt with their snouts. They carry enough strength to easily create holes in even the hardest soil.

The tile rumbled as it loosened. It grinded against the fine gravel and was smoothly moved aside. Then-

(Celes, look! There's something there!)

The dirt that should have been underneath the tile was instead a deep hole, and in it contained a jar of some sort.

Celes' eyes widened and approached the hole before carefully taking the jar out with her slender arms.

“This is...”

The white porcelain jar had a lid on it. The container was stout shaped, but the upper part was slightly shrunken and had a pitch-black loop around it.

I had a bad feeling about this.

(Is this...?)

“It's... a collar. It's someone's... It's a Yesma's silver collar.”

—Cele-tan, I think it's best not to open that lid.

However, Celes still placed the jar on the ground and opened its lid.

We peeked inside. It contained white ashes and some obvious bone fragments.

Looking unnerved, Celes placed the lid back on. The porcelain rubbed against each other, creating a whinny-like noise.

“I-I'm so sorry. I was curious, so I couldn't help myself...”

Is this cremation urn the thing Nott hid? Judging by this blackened collar... the bones belonged to a Yesma.

(May I take a closer look at it?)

I informed them before moving my face close to the collar.

Suddenly-

As if it had been submerged in a reducing agent, the blackened collar instantly regained its silvery luster.

I took a step back in surprise.

(Sorry, what did I...?)

Celes looked at me with her large eyes.

“This collar... It was probably worn by someone that Mr. Shitty Virgin knew of.”

(How can you tell?)

“Once a collar has lost its bearer, it will only regain its luster if someone adored by the Yesma who wore that collar comes near it...”

I shuddered. Don't tell me Jess... No, that's impossible. That's because her collar was split in half in front of me...

In other words, by process of elimination, this silver collar-

(I believe this belonged to a girl named Brace. She's a Yesma whom we met during our travels, and just before arriving at the capital, she lost her life at the Forest of Needles.)

She was a taciturn girl that liked to pray and had big breasts.

(Nott likely brought her collar and ashes back, and buried them here.)

Celes remained silent for some time, possibly out of shock, before muttering “I see...”

“Mr. Nott likes women with big breasts.”

She lowered her head and her gaze traced her upper body that lacked curves down to the tips of her feet.

I didn't understand what she meant until I realized, she read my monologue!

(T-that's not it, Celes! Nothing happened between Nott and Brace...)

“I-I'm sorry... Um, I get it. Sorry for... saying something so strange.”

While Celes apologized to me with her ears red, Sanon asked.

—What do we do with this, Cele-tan? Do we take it back to the inn?

Hearing this, she vaguely shook her head while appearing a bit troubled.

Now I understand.

Judging by her confusion, it doesn't look like this urn needed to be dug up. I had something I needed to confirm with her.

(Hey Celes, I was wondering about this, but... Nott never actually told you to dig it up if he were to disappear, did he?)

—Um, Mr. Lolipo.

Sanon tried to stop me, but I persisted regardless.

(We're your companions, Celes. I'm sure we'll be sharing many secrets with you from now on as well, so let's not lie to each other. I won't be mad, so can you tell me the truth? You spied on Nott hiding something around here and you got curious, so you wanted to find it, right?)

After a while, she nodded.

“...Yes. After Mr. Nott left with Jess and Mister Pig, things got very serious, and when he was finally able to return to Bapsas... he was furtively carrying something, so I asked him what it was. He then told me ‘It's something important, but it's better that you don't know about it.’ ...It bothered me, so... I secretly followed him. I spotted him standing near the grass over there, but I was worried Mr. Rossi would notice me... so I...”

Nott had his dog partner, Rossi, with him. Celes must've ran back in a panic because it seemed like Rossi was going to notice her. When Nott returned, his hands were dirty from soil, so she tried searching the meadow. However, she couldn't find anything because it was hidden under a tile.

—I get it. If the person you love is hiding something, you'll naturally worry about it.

Sanon tried to smooth things over.

“I-It's not because of love or anything! It's just that, when I think about how I might never see Mr. Nott again, I get scared... I wanted something connected to him, even if it was ever so slightly, so I... I'm so sorry, I... lied so Mister Pigs would help out...”

Celes' eyes filled with tears.

(You don't have to apologize. I understand how you feel.)

When I found out Jess was hiding something from me, how restless was my heart? When Jess and Nott were alone at the inn where Celes worked at, how did I feel?

Celes kept denying it, but I know the truth behind those helpless emotions. Even if you tell yourself not to worry about it, there are just some things that you can't do.

That's why I must help Celes.

We placed the urn and collar back under the tile.

When we returned to the inn that had no guests, Celes' mistress was there to greet us.

“I didn't expect Mr. Sanon to return – and with Jess' pig, no less.”

She was a plump redhead lady called Martha. She was also the mastermind behind hiding the Yesmas in the monastery five years ago. She appears to know

Sanon very well, but I don't believe we spoke to each other at all when we last met, so I carefully avoided the words "shitty virgin" and introduced myself.

Despite her gentle demeanor, Martha clearly denied our request to take Celes to Nott.

"It's not happening. I understand how you feel, but I can't leave Celes with you again."

Celes' shoulders dropped in dismay in front of Martha, who had crossed her arms.

"It's not because I have a problem with it... Of course, I also don't want to put Celes in danger again, but at the end of the day, a Yesma is supposed to be bound to the 'house' that she serves until she's sixteen. This is part of the contract with the royal dynasty. As long as this house still stands, it's normally not possible for Celes to leave her job and travel far away. I lost to Sanon's enthusiasm last time and ended up agreeing, but... there won't be a second time."

Celes hung her head and was more withdrawn than usual. We weren't able to come up with anything persuasive enough to convince Martha either.

—Thank you. Let's head back to my room.

Celes conveyed that to us and guided us two pigs to her room.

Her bedroom was the corner room of the inn, and it was much cleaner than the guest room that Jess had stayed in before. Although it didn't contain much, there were some neatly arranged girlish and fashionable furnishings.

The moment she entered her room, Celes walked straight towards her bed and dove head first onto it with a thwump.

The pig and black pig silently exchanged glances.

Even without Celes' help, we knew what each other wanted to say. She couldn't leave Bapsas. In which case, why did we arrive here? To become a thirteen-year-old girl's baby-sitter?

"Uu..."

A muffled voice broke the quiet atmosphere in the room.

It felt really awkward, but leaving the room wouldn't do either. I would've liked for us two to have a conversation to mask Celes' voice, but unfortunately, we couldn't talk.

“Oink?”

“...Oink.”

As expected, it was no good. We couldn't have a conversation.

I then noticed Celes sit up and turn towards us. Her tears appeared to have been absorbed by the pillow, but her large eyes were red from hyperaemia.

“It might be a boring story, but... would you two be willing to listen to it...?”

(Sure, tell us.)

—Of course I'll listen.

We responded.

Celes slowly opened her trembling lips.

“Um... it's something that happened five years ago, when I just came here. At the time, I was only eight years old. I was in an unfamiliar place, I wasn't good at work, I was always nervous, and I kept causing trouble for everyone.”

(That's only natural. Or rather, it's abnormal for someone to be working at the age of eight.)

Celes lightly turned her head before continuing.

“I was a nuisance. Everyone laughed at me and called me a skeleton or tree branch because I was thin and bony. I was... really sad.”

She suddenly started monologuing, and I could only listen fixedly.

“Then one day, a man returned to the village. He brought back the abducted Ms. Ys' collar, and gifted it to Martha-sama.”

I didn't need to ask who he was. He's the pride of this village, and currently the revolution's hero – Nott.

“When we first met, Mr. Nott told me, ‘Your eyes remind me of the person I liked’ before roasting some delicious rabbit meat for me. ‘But you’re too skinny, your boobs won’t grow like that.’ He said after.”

Don't you think you like boobs way too much, young man?

“Ever since I met Mr. Nott, the people in the village looked at me differently. Everyone began doting on me. Mr. Nott is a hero. He's the subject of conversations, and someone that determines the atmosphere. I'm sure it's because he cared for me that everyone else did the same.”

Celes' voice began to tremble again after finally managing to calm down.

“Ever since then, I've always admired Mr. Nott. I know that as a Yesma, and as a child, I don't have the right to fall in love. But I can't forget about Mr. Nott... Even though he's somewhere far away and could die at any moment, there's nothing I can do here...”

She looked straight into my eyes.

“I can't stand this.”

Celes abruptly ended her monologue, and after a wave of tears, she fell asleep from the exhaustion of crying.

Fragment 2 – An Important Person

In addition to Ms. Wies and I, Evis-sama's grandson – Mr. Shulavis, also came to the king's bedchamber.

Evis-sama is the king of Mestria, and the greatest mage. His bedchamber was lavishly decorated with gold and silver ornaments, and warmly illuminated by magic lights.

He was lying in a large canopy bed. Despite his old age, he still had a personable appearance – with lush and wavy white hair, and a long and elegant white beard. However, the dark circles under his eyes were severe, and he had lost significant weight. He was like a sick patient.

“How is your condition?”

My question wasn't answered for the moment.

Evis-sama turned slightly towards Mr. Shulavis.

“...The proper answer, perhaps, is that I don't know.”

“You don't know?” Mr. Shulavis blurted in an extremely shaken tone.

Mr. Shulavis inherited his finely chiseled face from Evis-sama, and has curly blonde hair. He's eighteen years old, and is an honest and sincere person.

“Yes. I haven't been cursed before in my life, so I won't know if I can be cured without investigating.”

“Is it really a curse?”

Ms. Wies also appeared unnerved as her voice trembled.

“I wasn’t able to completely eliminate this with my magic.”

Evis-sama stuck his right hand out from under the bedding. On the back of it was something that resembled a blackened bruise with black lines entangled around it like ivy.

“In other words, this means a mysterious mage has placed a curse on me.”

Magic has the power to supersede anything that isn’t magic. It can be used to purify poisons and infections, and if done by an experienced mage like Evis-sama, it can even eliminate pseudo-magic from ristas. If Evis-sama isn’t able to remove it with his power, then it could only be magic from another person.

“But Grandfather, if we’re talking about mages besides the four of us here...”

Evis-sama lightly lowered his head at Mr. Shulavis’ anxious words.

“Right. There’s only Markus and Hortis.”

“Then my uncle...”

The three of them had heavy-hearted expressions. And even though I felt apologetic for doing this, I had to ask.

“Who is Mr. Hortis?”

“Evis-sama actually has two sons – my husband, Markus, and his younger brother, Hortis.” Ms. Wies explained.

I’ve heard a lot about Mr. Markus. He’s Evis-sama’s eldest son, Ms. Wies’ husband, and Mr. Shulavis’ father. Evis-sama is the greatest mage, but on the other hand, I’m told Mr. Markus is the strongest mage. Naturally, there are very few mages that can freely use magic to begin with.

“Mr. Markus should be infiltrating the north under Evis-sama’s orders, right?”

Ms. Wies confirmed my inquiry with a nod.

“Yes. He changed his appearance and is investigating the vicinities of the Northern royal castle.”

“And Mr. Hortis is...?”

“He disappeared.”

Evis-sama spoke.

“Five years ago, he opposed our policies and disappeared from the capital. His whereabouts are completely unknown. I always believed he had died, but...”

“I never would have expected my uncle to cast a curse upon Grandfather.”

“That’s hard to believe.”

Ms. Wies shook her head, and Evis-sama nodded lightly in agreement.

“I don’t think Hortis would do such a thing either if he were alive. But if it’s him, he might be able to remove the lock magic.”

“Lock magic?”

I tilted my head in confusion, to which Evis-sama explained.

“The Yesma collars and the blood rings of the capital’s citizens are protected by a special magic called lock magic. If you don’t know the key magic – which is the unlocking method, then you won’t be able to remove it. However, for a skilled mage like Hortis, it’s not impossible to pry open the lock magic. If Hortis removed his collar and blood ring using an undetectable method...”

He frowned deeply.

“We cannot ignore the possibility that an unknown mage was set loose into this world.”

The bedchamber immediately fell silent.

The Yesma collar is a tool used to seal away the magic power of Yesmas, who are originally mages. I was told it could only be removed by Evis-sama or Mr. Markus. It’s protected by special magic, so the only way to remove it besides the proper method is by... chopping the wearer’s head off.

As for the blood ring, it’s a ring that is attached to the heart of each person that

lives in the capital, and it functions like the Yesma collar by greatly limiting their magic power. It's not visible from the outside, and the only way to remove it outside of the proper method is by... severing the blood vessels which carry blood from their heart to their entire body.

If Mr. Hortis was able to remove these... If the girls who were treated as Yesmas and the capital's citizens whose magic powers were restricted had their magic powers released somewhere unbeknownst to the royal dynasty... Then the order that Evis-sama has protected up until now will be completely disrupted.

Something I had learned before surfaced to mind.

The Dark Ages.

It was an era where mages fought one another, and a lot of blood was shed. It was an era where the world was almost destroyed by the endless violence clashing against one another.

I was taught that Evis-sama's great-grandmother, Vatis-sama, brought an end to that era. It was said that she weakened all of her allied mages, and sought out and executed all the other surviving mages. She allowed only her family to be able to wield their original strength.

Those reforms were the origins of the Yesma race.

The Yesma race are people from the capital who were born with magic power, given collars that seal those magic powers, had their memories erased, and sent outside the capital to work as slaves. The Yesma race are girls who, at the age of sixteen, are released into the wild and forced to journey to the capital; should they not make it with their own strength, sooner or later they will be killed.

These girls, whose magic power, aggression, and ego were sealed at the same time, were distributed as slaves to support society from the lowest caste since the Dark Ages. Moreover, by having them exist and then be weeded out, it also accomplishes the goal of maintaining the source of the royal dynasty's authority – the mages race.

I was also once a Yesma. However, I was fortunate enough to reach the capital. Furthermore, Evis-sama discovered my talents, and as the future queen – Mr.

Shulavis' fiancé, I am now receiving education.

But-, I thought.

I can't recall how I journeyed to the capital at all.

After the talk about Mr. Hortis, we discussed our strategies for the future.

To begin with, this battle was not supposed to be losable. There shouldn't have been a mage on the opposing side, so the difference in war power was obvious. As long as Evis-sama steadily destroyed the cornerstone of the Northern Forces' strategy – their govern camps, in each area, it will be possible for us to regain control of the region. And since Mr. Markus has infiltrated near the Northern king, Arogan, the enemy will suffer a complete defeat after he has ascertained the ruling situation and annihilated the Northern dynasty.

I have been taught that this monarchy cannot be shaken.

However, is that truly the case? So I asked.

“If there was no chance of winning in the first place, why would Mr. Arogan rebel? Is it possible that he waged this war precisely because he had something that could even retaliate against the royal dynasty's mages?”

Evis-sama muttered, “Given my current situation, I can say that possibility is very high.”

A curse that even Evis-sama isn't able to remove. In other words, this confirms the existence of the unexpected mage who he referred to as the surreptitious sorcerer, and that that person is the Northern Forces' chance at victory.

After pondering, Ms. Wies spoke.

“Forgive me for saying this, but... Evis-sama, you may have been caught by their trap.”

“Hm. You're saying that they set up a curse with the expectation that I would appear in person. That's quite probable. I was cursed at Niabel. Among the

areas controlled by the Northern Forces, this one stood out and was on the verge of collapse. When I went there, their defenses were lacking. But if we look at it under the assumption that they had no intentions of defending Niabel, and was just using it to lure me out and curse me, then it makes sense. We may have played right into the surreptitious sorcerer's hands."

Mr. Shulavis voiced his concerns in a flustered manner, "So... the enemy's side has at least one mage; on our side, Grandfather has to withdraw from the frontlines due to stepping into a trap, and Father is currently infiltrating Arogan's place. If we don't change our strategy, won't our territories be invaded one after another?"

"Right. But even if we wanted to call Markus back, it needs to be at a good timing. We haven't fully grasped the north's ruling structure, so even if Arogan is defeated prematurely, a second king may just appear. Assuming there's a mage on the enemy's side, laying waste to the Northern dynasty without knowing the true culprits would only be a last resort. It would be best to call him back as soon as possible, but that would still have to wait."

The surreptitious sorcerer is powerful enough to resist the royal dynasty. It would likely be very dangerous to try and use force to seal them when there are still so many unknowns.

A tense atmosphere dominated the bedchamber.

"Grandfather, let me go in your p--"

"You may not. If you die, Shulavis, who will succeed the throne? The purpose of your training is not to participate in this war, but to instead take care of returning peace back to Mestria after the war is over."

"Returning peace... You mean like what Father did?"

"That's right."

Mr. Shulavis glanced at me awkwardly. I had no idea what he was thinking.

"...Is that so? Understood."

Ms. Wies appeared somewhat restless and changed the subject.

“For the time being, let’s think about fighting without Evis-sama. How many soldiers do we have currently?”

“We have around 30 squadrons spread around, with about 200 soldiers per squadron... Unless they’re well trained, they won’t be able to fight against an Org, so I don’t think we’ll be able to increase those numbers.”

Evis-sama has always believed in an absolutely peaceful world, so only the smallest necessary army was ever readied. On the other hand, it seems the Northern Forces increase their military strength by forcibly conscripting people from the lands they control, and by using powerful monsters known as Orgs. I’m told they’re large, human-like creatures that excel in everything, be it agility, strength, or endurance; it’s said that if you’re not a seasoned soldier, you won’t pose a threat to it at all and will be killed in an instant.

Mr. Shulavis, with his head still facing downwards, spoke.

“I heard the Liberation Army’s main force which lost the battle at the Rocklands had around 300 people. Although their numbers aren’t large, they should be a group of brave elite youths. If we fought them half-heartedly, we would only increase our casualties.”

“That’s right. We would need around 500 of our soldiers to take a city. However, if they encounter a place where the enemy forces are concentrated at, there’s a good chance they would be wiped out.”

Ms. Wies then suggested, “The Liberation Army was routed, but you mentioned that their leader was quick-witted and allowed their survivors escape. Even though they lost their head, their remnants should still be in hiding, and there should be more than a few citizens that sympathize with them and are willing to fight. Is there any way we can take advantage of that?”

“Wies, do you mean to borrow the power of those who oppose the royal dynasty? Those people attacked our distribution centers and surveillance posts in the name of saving Yesmas. They’re only accepted by some citizens, and are just the same as Arogan. I have no intention of borrowing strength from those that threaten the current system.”

“...I apologize for my thoughtless words.”

“It’s fine. As a possibility, I’ve also considered it before.”

I heard the leader of the Liberation Army is a person called Mr. Nott. Was it just a coincidence that, around the same time I entered the capital, he suddenly came into prominence with the goal of “destroying this world that exploits Yesmas” and gathered comrades one after another. A large number of hunters, who call themselves free people, joined him, and their numbers became something that neither the royal dynasty, nor the Northern Forces could ignore.

However, their momentum ended after about a month. They were defeated in a battle, and Mr. Nott was captured. According to Mr. Markus’ report, Mr. Nott has become a gladiator for the people’s entertainment, and that his fate was to be sealed very soon.

I wonder what kind of person Mr. Nott is like? Rumor has it that he’s a flaming swordsman with first-rate skills, and that he’s willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of Yesmas... Perhaps I’m also indebted to him, even if it’s not directly.

The memories from when I left the Quiltlin family to when I entered the capital are sealed by Evis-sama’s magic. He told me there was a legitimate reason for doing so, but I think, perhaps-

Perhaps Mr. Nott is...

I have someone that I can’t forget. I was protected by someone very important to me – that’s the only thing I could remember clearly.

However, the bookmarked pages are stuck together, unable to be opened.

...Huh? I seemed to have closed my eyes before I knew it.

I tried to raise my head, but everything went white before my eyes. I felt my body slide off the chair just like that.

Chapter 2 – Don't Miss Your One Chance

The barking sound of a dog woke me up. On the other end of the bed, which Celes was sleeping on, a dim red light poured in from the window. It was probably the sunrise.

As I snorted drowsily, I could hear the barking gradually coming closer. What's this all about?

The bedroom door made a loud banging noise, and woofing could be heard from the other side. Sanon and I jumped, and we watched the door knob clatter. Celes sleepily murmured "Nn...?"

Click. The door opened. What flew inside was a white-

A large dog leapt into Celes' bed and began mercilessly licking her half-asleep face. The intensity of it was unmatched, even when up against Sanon's.

"Ah, Mr. Rossi... I get it, I get it already..."

Celes raised her upper body and hugged Rossi. Rossi is Nott's partner, and is a large dog.

(Did Nott return...?)

As I asked that, Celes answered while trying to escape the rampaging dog.

"No. When Mr. Nott was captured, only Mr. Rossi escaped and returned to Bapsas... Ah, stop... that's too much..."

I see. Then why did Rossi suddenly come and attack Celes...?

—Mr. Lolipo.

Sanon conveyed to me in a serious tone through Celes. Prompted to look outside, I realized that the red light was definitely not from the sunrise – the forest was on fire.

There was a whistling sound, followed by an explosion nearby. The red glow intensified. This is...

(Celes, let's get out of here!)

We rushed out into the pub and spotted Martha removing the silver coat of arms – a magic-like item made from a silver collar and two swords – from the wall.

“The village is being attacked! I'll use a horse, so you should run away first, Celes!”

“But, Martha-sama...”

Celes' eyes wandered in confusion.

“Don't worry, let's meet at Munires. Go visit Cloyt from the Sleeping Foal Inn.”

Martha disassembled the silver coat of arms and placed it in a leather bag. Outside the window, something fell and exploded from across the road. There was a loud noise as the pub's glass windows shattered.

I immediately went to protect Celes, but Sanon and Rossi were already shielding her.

Martha, who had been thrown onto her bottom, waved her hand as if to drive us away.

“Hurry up and leave! I'll be out soon as well!”

We two pigs nodded, and Rossi dashed out as if he had understood her words.

—Let's go. Follow after Ro-kun.

Sanon conveyed that towards me while nudging the crouched Celes' back with his snout.

Celes stood up as if she was being dragged by us. Rossi was waiting for us at the turn corner, and we followed him out the inn through the backdoor.

The inn wasn't burning yet, but the trees surrounding it were already ablaze. Even if there was some distance between them, depending on the direction of the wind, it could prove dangerous to be in this building. The black pig saw the fire and stopped as if he had a flash of inspiration.

(What are you doing Mr. Sanon? We need to hurry up and get away from here.)

The black pig slowly turned towards us.

—Sorry, I just remembered there's something I need to take care of. Please take Cele-tan to a safe place, Mr. Lolipo.

(Eh...? Why are you saying something that's like a death flag from a mystery novel? You need to escape with us, Mr. Sanon. I don't know when we'll be able to meet again if we get separated.)

—Then please wait for me at the stream a little further ahead.

After conveying those thoughts, Sanon turned around and ran towards the flames.

What's going on? At a time like this, what's worth prioritizing over escaping...? Did he suddenly want to become a roast pig...?

However, I can't dawdle here and let Celes become a roasted loli.

(Celes, do you know the direction of the stream that Sanon mentioned?)

“Yes. The stream, right? Let's go.”

Rossi, who was looking at me, started running in reaction to Celes' words. Celes and I followed.

...Hm?

I suddenly realized a certain possibility and stopped. Don't tell me Sanon is-

Turning my head around and squinting, I saw the scene I was expecting.

The black pig was using his mouth to drag along a tree branch, full of burning leaves, that was twice the size of himself.

And the direction he was moving towards was Martha's inn, which hadn't caught fire yet.

The stream water flowed between the rocks without any disturbance. Due to its rocky surroundings, the fire hadn't spread near the stream. As we patiently waited, the black pig came running back from the inn.

—Thanks for waiting. Let's head out.

(You didn't get burned, did you?)

In response to my discreet questioning, Sanon carefully nodded.

—I didn't get burned. I accomplished what needed to be done.

We stared at each other. This was for Celes' sake. If it were me, I definitely wouldn't have done that, but... I could sense Sanon's level of commitment through the black pig's gaze.

The entire forest was ablaze. The roaring gusts of wind and the crackling of the trees were unbearably loud. If we're not careful, the smoke will get into our eyes. I don't know what's attacking the village, but we better escape quickly. I have a bad feeling about this.

Rossi pricked up his ears and looked around nervously. Unlike before, he didn't immediately dash ahead. His nose was constantly twitching.

(What's up with Rossi?)

When I asked that, Celes placed a trembling hand on Rossi's back and answered.

“He appears to be on guard... it looks like it's something bad...”

I also tried sniffing the wind. A pig's sense of smell is as keen as a dog's. Since Rossi can smell something, I might be able to figure something out as well.

...I could smell the sea. It smelled like a fish market, and like a beach. There was an unpleasant, sweaty odor, and the smell of alcohol. There were many slightly varying odors mixed together, so I would imagine that there are many sources to those smells.

I felt like I could hear clattering noises from beyond the roar of the burning forest.

(There's a group coming from upwind.)

—This place is under the rule of the royal dynasty. If it's their army, they would never carry out this kind of scorched earth tactic. I can only imagine that the Northern Forces' army has arrived.

(But why would they suddenly choose to target this southern village?)

Is it a coincidence that Bapsas was attacked after we had arrived?

—We can figure out their motives later. This is war, Mr. Lolipo. Let's get out of here first.

As the black pig conveyed that to me, he nudged Rossi and urged the dog forward. However, Rossi didn't move.

—What's happened to him...? He's normally quite eager to find the way, but now...

Seemingly on edge, Rossi turned and looked everywhere. It's not that he won't move, he probably can't move. Under the dawnlight, no matter where we look across the 360 degrees, the sky was covered in black smoke.

(We're practically surrounded by flames. If we want to avoid the fire, I'm afraid the only way out of the village is in the direction of the group approaching us. No matter where we go, danger awaits us.)

“How can that be...?”

Celes let out a sad and feeble voice.

Think, pig. There's no way you can let a delicate girl like her die here. And it's

not like you have time to obediently become a roasted pig here. There's still the capital...

I shook my head and collected my thoughts.

If we're surrounded on all sides, the only escape routes I can think of are... above or below. But it's not like we can fly out of here. If it's below, however...

(Celes, you mentioned that the monastery has an entrance to the underground passageway that leads to the village, right?)

"Yes."

(Do you know where that underground passage's exit is?)

Celes suddenly raised her head.

"Erm... It's near Martha-sama's inn, but it's no longer in use, so I don't know what the situation inside is like..."

(The monastery is located outside the village on the mountainside, so it's unlikely for the fire to spread that far. If we take the underground passage to there, we might be able to avoid the flames.)

"I see!"

The black pig also nodded.

—Since it's decided, let's get going. It looks like the army is just around the corner.

A girl, a dog, and two pigs. This strange group rushed back towards the inn. Along the way, I turned my head towards the approaching noise and spotted something terrifying beyond the trees.

A giant humanoid monster that looked to be three meters tall was walking along the village's main street. It was extremely muscular, its entire body was covered in a thick, rhinoceros-like grey skin, and it held a log-like spear.

—That monster is called an Org.

Sanon informed me that they're said to be powerful soldiers used by the Northern Forces. It didn't look like an opponent that a pig or an ordinary person could contend with. Its hands and feet were unusually large, and had a webbing-like structure to them.

We lowered ourselves and ran through the woods to avoid being detected by the army.

Martha's inn was completely engulfed in flames. Seeing that, Celes' eyes widened slightly.

—Cele-tan, where's the entrance to the passageway?

Sanon asked as if to draw her attention away, and Celes pointed at the cliff behind her. Several battered planks were blocking the hole in the rockface.

This was not the time to be hesitating. I charged forward and smashed the planks into pieces.

* * *

I was surprised to find that it didn't hurt very much. The hopeless exhaustion was the only thing that pressed me against the ground inside this prison cell.

The torturer was an unusually tall old man. His bony hands were adorned with several rings, and his fierce, gleaming, golden eyes made me shudder. I felt an unusual aura from him, and wondered why this person was a torturer. However, I only had those first ten seconds to think about such superfluous thoughts.

I was tied to the torture chair with my body arched backwards and forced to endure an unbearable amount of pain for a long time without involving any interrogation. The torturer stood nearby and silently observed as I groaned.

“How unsightly.”

I heard a female voice. I shifted my head and looked up to find a skinny Yesma with emotionless eyes standing just outside the golden cell – it was Nuris, who had taken me to the castle. Her tattered underwear was visible from the hems of her dirty clothes.

“Are you pent up?”

I’m inside a prison. I would prefer if she could at least overlook these vulgar thoughts that won’t ever happen.

“What is it?” I squeezed out.

“Don’t you want some water after being tortured? Or do you prefer raping a Yesma?”

I didn’t realize it until I was told, but Nuris was holding a leather mug.

“Don’t underestimate me. What do you take yourself for?”

“A slave. An obedient slave that was born for the convenience of others.”

Nuris’ indifferent assertion without any changes in her facial expression angered me, and I raised my upper body.

“That’s why-”

I pressed against the ground with my elbows and lifted my head with my right hand.

“That’s why you people will be like that for the rest of your lives. Is that what you’re saying?”

“Wrong.”

Nuris responded apathetically.

“Whether it’s for this or that, the role of Yesmas does not change. Just like how livestock exist to be eaten.”

I couldn’t think of an immediate rebuttal.

“...Since you brought it over, could you please hand me the water?”

Nuris didn’t move in the slightest.

“I am a slave. If you want to ask a slave for something, try ordering me in a

befitting way.”

What’s wrong with her? I thought. It’s like she’s trying to distort my convictions.

“In that case, I’m also a slave – a death row prisoner whose life is being toyed with. Why don’t you try giving me water in a manner that’s suitable towards slaves?”

She quickly walked over towards the cell and slipped a bony leg through the gap. She then pressed the leather mug against her thigh.

“Then drink the water from my leg.”

As she said that, she tilted the mug and started pouring water down her leg. Without hesitation, I placed my face against Nuris’ inner thigh and let the water pour into my mouth. It relieved my parched throat.



“Don’t you feel any shame?”

Nuris asked after the cup was emptied.

“I have my hands full just from trying to survive. There’s no point in acting cool when you’re the only one watching.”

There was a brief silence.

“Why do you go to such lengths to survive?”

“...That’s because I have something I want to accomplish.”

“What is it?”

“I’m going to annihilate those bastards that earn money off of killing Yesmas, and then destroy the very system that brought about the Yesmas’ misfortune.”

Ys’ smile involuntarily came to mind. The clever, mischievous, and kind Ys. Ys, who was kidnapped, raped, and then beheaded.

“Ys. In the end, it’s still a matter of personal obsession.”

“So what? Isn’t it because a lot of people respond to this kind of obsession that I received this type of special treatment?”

Nuris stepped back slightly and looked at the gold cage.

“You certainly seem to be under an extra strict confinement. The interrogation must have been rough.”

“It was nothing like that. I was just being tortured in silence.”

“They didn’t ask you anything?”

“That’s right.”

“Then why were you released from being tortured and sent back to this underground prison?”

Hearing that, I recalled something. It’s a fragmentary memory, but...

—*The escapee from the govern camp...*

—*A wild boar rampaged...*

—*Bring that captured Yesma over here...*

I heard this voice come from the throne room adjacent to me, interrupting the torturing. I couldn’t remember anything after that. I probably fainted.

“I see. So the Yesma I passed by while carrying you was an escapee from the govern camp.”

Nuris muttered while reading my thoughts without my permission.

I was probably brought back to the arena’s basement by Nuris after I had lost consciousness.

“She had bruises all over her face and her back had welts. She looked wretched. That one doesn’t have long to live.”

Nuris took a few steps back while talking like it was someone else’s problem.

“Excuse me, I shall take my leave.”

She left the scene. Even though all I did was drink some water, for some reason, I felt a little less tired.

* * *

The underground passageway had cave-ins here and there, but we managed to pass through thanks to the two pigs’ digging abilities. After reaching the monastery, we had Rossi guide us north along the mountain paths and arrived at

the Valley of Oil, just north of Bapsas. The sun was high in the sky now.

The Valley of Oil is a white rock canyon that's nearly 100 meters deep. Although there was a large suspension bridge built over the canyon, Rossi walked in the opposite direction from it without any hesitation and descended a steep slope down to the bottom of the valley.

—The name of this place comes from a battle during the Dark Ages. I heard it had a cute name in the past, but after thousands of people died in the battle that took place here, the valley was dyed in their blood and looked as if oil was flowing through it. That's why it's called the Valley of Oil now.

A nostalgic voice resurrected in my mind.

Sensing Celes' gaze, I shook my head and appended parentheses.

(We should be fine now that we've walked this far.)

“We shouldn't let our guard down, but I think so too.”

(We've been walking non-stop for a while, so let's take a quick break.)

At my suggestion, we stopped between some bushes in the middle of the slope to rest our feet.

—It sure helps to have Ro-kun around. His escape routes are solid. What a clever boy.

The black pig drew near Rossi, and his snout was licked by Rossi.

(Did Rossi stay in Bapsas the entire time? Even after Nott was gone?)

When I asked that, Celes, who was wiping her muddy face with her hands, dutifully explained.

“Yes. He appeared to have been captured alongside Mr. Nott, and they were taken quite far north. But along the way, Mr. Rossi managed to escape... He's always been around to protect me since then.”

—Ro-kun was standing guard outside earlier, right?

“Yes. He’s a little dirty and isn’t wearing any visible equipment so that in case a bad guy spots him, they’ll think he’s just a wild dog.”

That certainly seems to be the case, but then...

(What about the metal bracelet on Rossi’s foreleg?)

I have a bad habit of worrying about the details. I feel like Rossi also wore that back when we were traveling with Jess. It’s a metal ring that’s tightly wrapped around the end of his left foreleg. It isn’t rusted black, so I wonder if it’s made of silver.

“That, I’m not sure about. From what I was told, he had it even before he met Mr. Nott.”

(Met? He wasn’t raised as a puppy?)

I figured he was raised by Nott because he was so well disciplined and trained.

“I heard they met five years ago while Mr. Nott was journeying to rescue Ms. Ys. It’s a bit of a strange story, isn’t it?”

—The fact that No-kun is so reliable and good at hunting must mean his previous owner was likely a skilled hunter as well.

I see, that sounds reasonable.

(Oh, just one more thing.)

“Okay.”

(You said Rossi “isn’t wearing any visible equipment.” Does that mean he has something that’s not obviously visible?)

“Yes. Please take a look at this.”

Celes opened Rossi’s mouth to reveal his teeth. His sharp canine teeth glistened in the moonlight, and I spotted a metal dental-appliance-looking thing attached to them.

“Three small ristas are stored on the roof of his mouth. When Mr. Rossi bites

something, the rista's magic will provide it with an additional effect. Fire fang, which burns; ice fang, which freezes-

Hm? Where have I...?

“And thunder fang, which shocks and paralyzes.”

I see. It's devised to be effective against various opponents.

With that said, it's quite an amazing invention. If you're able to pour the magic power onto your tongue instead of your fangs, wouldn't you be able to numb your opponent via some no-good licking?! I want one too!

“Um... I don't think that's a good idea...”

Celes was taken aback and placed her hand on the back of the black pig who was sniffing her like mad. Personally, I think it's better to be more wary of the pig over there...

Anyway, now's probably not the time to be idly talking.

The black pig wagged his tail and looked at me.

—Now then, Mr. Lolipo, let's figure out what our next move is. After all, I didn't expect this to happen as soon as we got here.

(Yeah. In order to save Nott, we'll have to head north and find his comrades. Martha said to meet up at the Sleeping Foal Inn at Munires, but...)

Munires is a large commercial city that's about a day's walk north of Bapsas. Jess and I also stopped by it the night after Nott joined us as a traveling companion in Bapsas.

Celes explained while stroking Rossi, who was sniffing her legs. “Munires is a key location in the south, so it should be well protected by the royal army. I think it'll be safe. I also heard that a considerable number of the remaining Liberation Army members that were led by Mr. Nott are hiding there.”

—Hang on, Cele-tan. Then where did the soldiers that just attacked Bapsas come from?

Sanon points out.

That's true.

(Assuming the army came from the north... There's no guarantee that the area north of here will have remained the same. We don't know what might've happened to Munires.)

—Right. It doesn't make sense for them to suddenly attack Bapsas only. It's just a small village. I think it's best to assume the places north of here have been invaded.

Celes appeared uneasy, but she spoke firmly.

“But... Munires is a large city. If it was attacked, there should have been some kind of news, and I'm sure people would have fled past here. Yet, up until Bapsas was attacked, it's been very peaceful around here...”

—Yeah... Something just doesn't add up.

It's certainly hair-raising, but it's not like we can keep oinking around here either. So I conveyed to these two, (For the time being, let's head north while keeping an eye on the situation. If we don't rendezvous with Martha or the Liberation Army members, Celes won't have anyone to rely on.)

—You're right. No-kun is also located somewhere north, so I'd like to avoid moving south. Let's take a short break before we cross the river and head towards Munires.

Sanon earnestly conveyed that while copying Rossi's actions and sniffed Celes' legs.

“Um... do my legs smell that much?”

Celes asked curiously, to which the black pig snorted and panicked at.

—No, that's not it, Cele-tan. Rather than saying it smells, it's more apt to say it's fragrant...

Officer! This guy right here!

Celes tilted her head.

“Come to think of it, Mr. Shitty Virgin used to stare at my legs as well... Is there something wrong with them?”

On second thought, give us a moment, Officer!

(No, uh, there’s nothing wrong with them... I just happened to look at them...)

At my inarticulation, Celes, with her face full of innocent curiosity, drove another nail in my coffin.

“If there’s nothing wrong, then why were you interested in my legs...?”

Does this girl specialize in pressing guys to explain things that are difficult for them to do so, or what? Do you think you’d be able to spell out why you’re interested in a girl’s legs?

In a panic, I turned towards Sanon for help.

The black pig’s sparkling eyes looked up at Celes.

—You know, Cele-tan, a person’s skin is an important indicator of health. If it’s pale, it means their blood circulation is poor; if it’s flushed, it means their blood is circulating more than usual. How much they sweat is also a good point of reference. That’s why it’s very important to pay attention to the parts of your leg where your skin is exposed in order to understand your physical condition.

Celes lightly placed a finger over her lips and responded, “Then... couldn’t you just look at my face?”

Sanon was left speechless. We had no excuses left to hide behind. It’s our loss.

Even while Sanon was make excuses towards Celes, Rossi mercilessly sniffed her bare legs. Please don’t misunderstand me, everyone. It’s not like I’m jealous of that dog or anything.

I averted my eyes and gazed down at the river at the bottom of the valley. Now’s not the time for me to be sniffing Celes’ legs.

—Mister Pig sure is fickle.

—That's alright, I don't mind. Please feel free to look at what you like.

Just remembering her voice made my heart ache.

Nott's plight, Celes' dearest wish, and this twisted world – it's obvious that these are the problems I need to be concerned about, but there's someone I can't forget about above all else.

Jess.

If we can meet again, how should I face her? After parting like that, would a simple "I'm back" resolve everything? To begin with, am I even in a position where I'm allowed to see her...? In fact, is it even possible for me to meet her?

Someone suddenly touched my back, startling me. It was Celes, who had escaped from the perverted dog's attacks and came right next to me.

"It seems like there are various circumstances around this, but... I hope Mr. Shitty Virgin's wish comes true."

She smiled an awkward but gentle smile.

I should probably tell her what "shitty virgin" means.

* * *

"...ter ...aster ...Master! Don't tell me... Master didn't kick the bucket, did he?"

I slept on the prison floor like a dead man and was woken up by Bart's voice. It was dark, as usual, so I didn't know what time it was.

"I'm not gonna die."

When I turned to face him, I spotted the innocent kid laughing in relief.

"That's right! You're the indomitable hero that stands back up no matter how many times it takes."

Bart handed me a rotten apple through the gaps between the bars. This seems to be today's meal.

I thanked him and accepted it. I leaned against the cage and bit into the apple. I felt like I was being revived.

"Hey, Bart."

"Yeah?"

"How are Yesmas treated in the govern camps around this region?"

Bart's face tightened.

Govern camps. The secret to the north's ability to expand its power lies in this scheme. By confining the vulnerable people, such as women, children, and elderlies, in these places called govern camps, they become hostages and turn the remaining people into puppets. Naturally, if anyone resists, cruel death awaits the hostages related to them.

Maintaining control of the govern camps is essential for the Northern Forces. However, managing a large number of hostages requires a lot of effort, and if the hostages die, it will inevitably lead to those who have lost their loved ones rebelling. As a result, they use the slave-class Yesmas to maintain the camps. Since they're of a lower status than the hostages, Yesmas also seem to help keep the hostages' mind at ease.

"Well... it's terrible. The govern camp here is very big, so there's naturally going to be a lot of male hostages. Therefore... yeah, you know."

The pain in my chest was unbearable. Nuris said that a Yesma escaped from a govern camp and was then caught. I recall her saying the girl was whipped and bruised. What did that girl do wrong?

"...Hey, Bart. Don't you think it's rotten?"

"Huh? The apple? Sorry, that's all I got..."

"No, I meant this world. Don't you want to tear it all down?"

“O-oh. Well, yeah, but...”

He didn't seem opposed to it. While he may act cheerful in front of me, Bart must have family members held hostage as well. That's why he's been working to feed the prisoners in the basement of this arena.

“Hey, if I disappear... can you promise me this? You don't have to act on it, but I want you to never throw away your feelings of unrighteousness in this world... Can you do that?”

This boy's the only person I can entrust my wishes to while I'm in this prison. He's the only person I'm able to relay to that this world should be destroyed.

While deep in thought, I turned towards Bart and saw him standing still in the darkness as if he was terrified.

“Whether he can fulfill that promise will be up to you.”

A hoarse voice that was like a ghost came from the darkness.

Bart appeared to be grabbed by the scruff of his neck.

That torturer – the shadowy old man, was approaching this golden cage.

“How are you doing, young man? You seem awfully fine even after going through that torturing.”

“What are you doing? Let go of that kid.”

“That I cannot do. This one's an important stage prop after all.”

What is he saying?

“What business does the king's torturer have for him to come to such a bloody place?”

“No need to rush, I'll tell you. After all, I came all the way here to make you despair.”

It was a chilling voice. The torturer's golden eyes, as if they were the only things emitting light, shot at me from underneath the darkness of his hood.

“Let’s start with the good news. This morning, we burned down the village that you used to visit often when you were a hunter.”

I felt the blood drain from my face. Bapsas was...?

“That’s right, it was Bapsas. However, it seems the Yesma that you cared for managed to escape.”

I was thrown into disarray. Was he talking about Celes? How does this guy know about Celes? ...No, wait, calm down.

“...Don’t lie. Bapsas is a village south of Munires. The territory you control hasn’t reached that far yet.”

“Even if it’s not near any territory we control, there are ways to dispatch soldiers there. But rest assured, that Celes whatever should still be alive. Naturally, we’ll kill her as soon as we find her.”

The old man appeared to be laughing as his shoulders shook. Bart was stiff and didn’t move.

“...What the hell are you trying to do? Why did you attack Bapsas?”

“I’ve been searching for the best way to kill you. Swordfights and torturing won’t do.”

“Why don’t you just feed me to some beasts?”

“That would be too lenient. Even if you perish, your heart won’t have died. I want you to die amidst despair. You’ve killed someone important to me in the Forest of Needles. I’m sure you haven’t forgotten... the man called En. Do you know how it feels to have something precious stolen from you?”

Who do you think you’re asking? I thought. On the other hand, there was something that puzzled me. Wasn’t I going to be executed as the head of the Liberation Army? Why does my execution involve a torturer’s personal grudge against me?

“You’ve got a good intuition, kid. It’s probably not a good idea to say too much, so I’ll keep it concise and tell you the bad news next.”

I was wondering where the clacking noise was coming from before noticing Bart's teeth were chattering.

"I thought of something interesting, so we're going to have a special performance this afternoon."

I had such a bad feeling about this that I couldn't even open my mouth.

"I'm going to make you and this Bart kid have a swordfight. Only one of you will survive. If you delay it until there's a tie, you'll both be publicly executed."

I had goosebumps. How can this be...?

"Why, isn't that a nice reaction? Worry your heart out. If you want to live, you'll have to kill this kid. If you want the kid to live, then you'll have to die. How's that for suffering?"

Even if I wanted to retort, I had no words to say.

The old man took the helpless Bart away and disappeared into the darkness.

The feeling of despair enveloped my body. I still wanted to live a little longer. I still had a lot I wanted to do.

But I can't let the boy die. I have no choice but to take my own life first.

As I thought about the person I once loved, I felt my tears flow silently.

* * *

—Something... just doesn't seem right.

Sanon relayed to me while eating grass from the roadside.

(Yeah. It doesn't look like it was attacked, but the tense atmosphere is probably due to Bapsas going up in flames.)

It was evening. After a careful reconnaissance, we entered the city of Munires. It's a large-scale commercial city with pastel-colored buildings lining the large cobbled main street. However, it didn't carry the same unrestrained liveliness as when I came here before. Instead, soldiers in red leather armor and armed with

sharp, polished spears roamed the streets. According to Celes, they're the royal army.

“I'm a little worried that so many soldiers are out and about, because the members of the Liberation Army who are in hiding will find it difficult to stay here...”

Celes looked around anxiously, and Rossi stuck to her bare legs while he walked. Sanon and I watched the rear and followed while pretending to be pigs – or rather, we were already pigs.

Celes mentioned she visited the Sleeping Foal Inn once before, so she led us there. After arriving, it dawned upon me that this was the inn in which Jess, Nott, and I stayed at in the past. It was a tidy building with decorative flowers on its light brown exterior walls, and it had a pub just like Martha's inn.

Upon entering the pub, I spotted a silver coat of arms on the wall – a Yesma collar decorated with two swords crossing the center of it. It's protected by a special magic and serves as proof the owner is a Yesma guardian.

“Ah, thank goodness! You're Celes, right?”

The one who spoke and walked towards us was a countryside-looking old man with a grey beard. His hair was covered by some cloth, and his glittering eyes carried smiling wrinkles as they spotted Celes' figure.

As I was wondering who was barking, Rossi pounced onto the old man and started licking his face after he kneeled down. It looks like this old man is quite close to Rossi. Although, three months ago when we stayed here with Jess, they didn't seem that close...

Celes bowed and greeted him.

“It's Mr. Cloyt, right? Good evening.”

“You're safe. Phew, that's a relief.”

Cloyt smiled at Celes while wiping his saliva-covered face with his sleeves.

“Yes... we somehow managed to escape.”

“I see, I see. That’s good.”

He breathed a sigh of relief before tightening his expression.

“Celes, it’s about Martha...”

“...Yes?”

“Come with me.”

Cloyt invited Celes to the back as he spoke. Rossi accompanied them, and Sanon and I followed suit. Whatever was waiting for us ahead wasn’t going to be something good.

We were led in front of a guest room. When Cloyt knocked, a hoarse voice came from inside saying “Come in.”

When the door was opened, I spotted someone lying down in bed. There was a burnt smell coming from somewhere.

“Martha-sama! Are you alright?!”

Celes exclaimed as she ran towards the bed.

“I managed to save my life and the collar.”

The person in bed was Martha. Her gaze was directed at the leather bag near her bedside. It was the bag with Ys’ collar.

“Your life, and...”

Celes stiffened as she looked at Martha. On closer inspection, Martha’s hair was shorten to a hideous extent. It was burnt. And everywhere around her face was red and blistered.

“How foolish of me. I tried to cross the flames with a horse and ended up getting severely burned. I pushed on desperately and was somehow able to arrive at Munires.”

“How can this be...?”

A weak voice spilled from Celes.

Cloyt offered something to the crestfallen girl.

“You don’t need to pay for it. Go ahead and use this.”

Celes received a black rista – it’s a source of magic power for prayers, which only Yesmas can use.

“Hold it. Cloyt, we can’t accept this. Give it back to him, Celes.”

Celes handed the rista back as instructed by Martha, but Cloyt crossed his arms behind his back.

“I happened to be given that rista for free today. I don’t have a Yesma in my house, and even if I did, there’s nothing to use it on. Go ahead, take it and treat Martha quickly.”

For free? Ristas should be fairly expensive, so is that even possible? That said, if he doesn’t have a Yesma, he has no reason to keep a black rista that only Yesmas can use. Hm.

Celes turned towards Martha. Martha smiled and nodded.

“Then let’s accept his kind gesture. I’ll repay the favor someday.”

As soon as she heard that, Celes approached the bedside and kneeled on the floor. She wrapped her hands around the rista and pressed it against her forehead. Her large eyes slowly closed.

Silence.

After a while, Celes’ eyes opened and Martha lifted her upper body. While Martha’s hair remained burnt, before we knew it, the burn traces on her face were nearly gone. Only a bit of redness remained, but since Martha originally had a red face anyway, it wasn’t very noticeable.

Martha stroked Celes’ head.

“Thank you. That was really well done. Thanks to you, I’m all good now.”

“I’m glad. It’s because Martha-sama has been kind to me...”

Celes looked back at Cloyt, who was leaning against the entrance.

“Thank you so much, Mr. Cloyt. Thanks to you, I was able to heal Martha-sama.”

“That’s alright. The rista’s yours, Celes, so use the remaining magic power however you want.”

Cloyt responded while grinning and prepared to leave the room. However, as if he had just remembered something, he turned back around to face Celes.

“Come to think of it, I have some good news. Have you hear about it, Celes?”

“...Erm?”

“You already knew Nott was captured, right? Well, it sounds like he managed to escape from the arena this noon.”

“Eeeeh?! Mr. Nott escaped?!”

Celes’ voice squeaked in surprise. Sanon and I glanced at each other. This was shocking news.

“I just heard about it from the streets. Although people don’t dare say it out loud, it’s made a big commotion behind the scenes. After all, the Munires merchants favor the Liberation Army.”

Is that so? Our transmigration, the attack on Bapsas, and Nott’s escape – it’s hard to imagine this series of events all being coincidences. I’m not able to wrap my head around everything, but this is definitely good news.

I truly think he’s a tenacious guy. His flames are still burning.

“Um, where is Mr. Nott right now?”

Celes leaned forward and asked. To which Cloyt, seemingly bewildered, responded.

“I’m not quite sure... Rumor has it that Nott suddenly disappeared from the

arena, and no one knows his whereabouts. It makes me wonder what he'll do in the future.”

Celes could be seen clenching her small fists.

Cloyt continued, “Even so, we citizens can only continue on with our normal lives here. But this is definitely a joyous event. Now then, time to get back to work. I still have to clean up the basement too. Celes, please stay here and take care of Martha.”

The old man glanced at the three docile animals and readied himself to leave.

Hold on a minute – I thought.

“Oink oink oink oink!”

When I cried out loudly, Cloyt looked back in surprise.

“Oh my, what’s the matter Mr. Pig?”

(Celes, I want to talk to this old man. Can you help with the relaying?)

—Erm... Understood.

After Celes revealed us pigs’ true identities, I got straight to the point.

(Can you please tell us where the remnants of the Liberation Army are headed towards?)

Cloyt look at me with an expression that was a mixture of surprise and bafflement.

“Wait, wait. What are you talking about?”

(Mr. Cloyt, you were hiding people from the Liberation Army in your basement, weren’t you?)

He stared at me suspiciously.

He seemed to be wondering how I knew, but it’s something that could be inferred just by piecing together a few bits of information. According to Celes,

it seems certain that the remnants of the Liberation Army are – or perhaps were – hiding in this city. And Rossi, who wasn't so familiar with Cloyt when he last came with me here, was very attached to Cloyt when they met today. This implies that during the three months after I left Mestria up till my return, Rossi, or more specifically his owner, Nott, had met Cloyt many times.

And then there's what Cloyt said.

—I happened to be given that rista for free today.

First of all, it's not possible for an expensive rista to just fall from the sky. And since he doesn't have a Yesma, there was no reason for him to buy one. In that case, it's possible that he received it as compensation for something. So who could have given it to him? What happened today?

—Now then, time to get back to work. I still have to clean up the basement too.

Think about why he has to “clean up the basement” at this time. What if he was hiding people from the Liberation Army in his basement, and they set off in a hurry after hearing the news about Nott's escape? The royal dynasty has their eyes set on the Liberation Army, so in order to destroy the evidence, he needs to clean up the basement as soon as possible.

Sanon oinked with his nose.

—Please. Celes-chan wishes to meet with Nott-kun. We'll take any leads you got that could let us get in contact with the people from the Liberation Army.

Appearing troubled, Cloyt bit his lips under his grey beard. My instincts told me we just needed another push to make it work.

Then, the bed creaked and Martha turned to face us.

“Sanon, shouldn't you be asking me, Celes' master, about this first before requesting that?”

It was a gentle, reproachful tone that was difficult to tell whether it was supportive or opposing.

—You're right. Ms. Martha, by all means, please agree to this.

“I believe I’ve said that I can’t allow Celes to travel far away.”

Celes casted her eyes down. Beside her, the black pig resolutely stared at Martha.

—That was when Celes still had her workplace, the inn. However, due to the recent attack, the inn has burned down.

Sanon’s brazen and proud assertion carried such intensity that it was hard to imagine he was a pig.

“Indeed, that is correct. But I hope you didn’t forget what happened last time after I allowed you to take Celes to join the Liberation Army’s battles. Not only did Celes not provide much help, she was almost killed during the battle at the Rocklands.”

—No, Celes-chan was helpful. The Yesma girls, who are able to relay thoughts remotely and heal people through prayers, are very important existences as logistical support in battles. In order to be able to work closely together, it can be said that no matter how many Yesmas there are, it’s never enough. And when it comes to the ability to heal Nott-kun, Celes-chan is by far the best at it. She’s a necessary existence for the Liberation Army.

Hm? What does he mean by Celes having by far the best ability to heal Nott?

I looked at Celes and noticed her cheeks were dyed pink for some reason.

Martha kept silent for some time, but eventually called out, “Celes.”

“Do you really want to go?”

Celes looked at Martha and nodded affirmatively.

“You might die, you know? And based on the current situation, if you’re caught by the Northerners, it wouldn’t be strange if you were raped to the point of losing your mind, or if your stomach was sliced open without anesthesia. Even so, do you wish to go?”

“...Yes. It’s much better than sitting here waiting.”

Martha raised her eyebrows in resignation.

“Is that so? ...The house seems to have burned down anyway, and I can't let you stay with a homeless person like this forever. Nott and the others are doing something very noble. If Celes can become their strength, then that's something worth being proud of.”

“Then, Martha-sama...”

“Yeah, go ahead. Cloyt, tell these kids where to go.”

Cloyt's grey brows furrowed, seemingly troubled.

“Well in that case, I'd love to help... It's true that I hid them in my basement. But even though I support those children, I'm just like Martha – an ordinary citizen who lives a quiet life under the rule of the royal dynasty. I may have secretly taken care of them... but I know next to nothing about their activities. I haven't heard where they're headed either.”

Sanon enthusiastically appealed.

—But you've been in contact with them, no? It's clear that the people of the Liberation Army have left to rendezvous with Nott-kun. Do you have any ideas as to which direction they might be headed towards?

Cloyt shook his head.

“Those children have gotten very cautious these days. It seems like their information is shared only to a small group of people. I was only told ‘Thank you for taking care of us.’ After they left in a hurry, I heard rumors of Nott's escape a little later before finally realizing what was going on. If it's them, I suspect they're already quite far away by now.”

It sounded like he was admonishing us and saying: just give up and live your life peacefully here.

Celes dejectedly dropped her shoulders.

“Is that so? ...I guess there's nothing we can do then.”

Well, it's clear as day that Celes would be safer here.

However...

I recalled when I visited Martha's inn with Jess. Celes wanted Nott to stay, but for the sake of Jess, I half-tricked Celes into letting Nott accompany us. At the time, she accepted my proposal and saw us off with a smile.

—I hope your wish comes true as well, Mister Pig.

I thought back to Celes' words.

Now it's my turn to grant Celes' wish.

(Mr. Cloyt, could you please show us where the people from the Liberation Army were staying?)

"It's already empty," Cloyt remarked as he guided us to the back door leading to the basement.

The spacious area had long since been vacated. Six wooden triple-bunk beds were tucked against the wall side by side, and a few tattered sofas were strewn across the place. In the center was a large square table.

Leaving the party of a girl and three animals behind, Cloyt went back to work.

(Alright, it's time to solve this mystery.)

I motivated myself.

"Mystery... Are you saying you're going to figure out where the members of the Liberation Army have gone?"

(That's right, Celes. And I'm absolutely confident about this.)

When I said that, Sanon looked at me.

—Why... do you claim that?

(It's the smell. We just need to roughly guess their location, and the rest can be handled by the smell of their beddings.)

—I see!

Sanon caught on, but Celes was drawing a blank, so let me explain.

(Celes, dogs and pigs have a very sharp sense of smell. A human's nose can't compare to it. They can perceive odors that are infinitesimal faint, and are good at differentiating varying scents. For example, if Celes were to leave here, even if you were to walk for a whole day, we would still be able to get to you by following the faint smell left on the ground. We're also able to tell where and what you ate, and know exactly where you picked flowers.)

>TL Note: Some Japanese girls use "picking flowers" as a metaphor for going to the toilet.

Celes' expression hardened. Oops, I let that accidentally slip from my mouth.

"Mr. Sanon, at that time, you really were..."

—N-no, Cele-tan. I just happened to sniff it...

The black pig started panicking. I don't know what had happened, but once we return to Japan, the first thing I need to do is turn this lolicon in to the police.

(Anyway, what we need to do here is get a rough idea of where the Liberation Army is headed, and collect as many things that carry their smell as possible. Should be simple.)

As I conveyed that, I walked around the room.

(Hm, this string was cut...)

I found a piece of cut-off linen string on the ground that was knotted and had traces of having been used, so I tried sniffing it.

(Celes, do you use birds for communicating in Mestria?)

"...Yes. Especially if it's urgent."

(This string smells of a bird. It was probably used to tie the paper that delivered the news of Nott's escape to the bird's feet.)

—Really?

The black pig approached and sniffed the string I had smelled.

—It really does smell of a bird.

Celes smiled wryly while pressing her hands between her legs. Seriously, what happened?

Rossi came towards us while wagging his tail and mimicked us sniffing the string. He left soon after and began sniffing around the room.

I was astonished, because this was exactly what I was planning to do. If we look for same smell as this, we might find a clue. If Rossi acted knowing this, his thinking abilities are far beyond that of normal dog.

“Ruff!”

Rossi barked and brought over a small scrap of paper with his mouth. I looked at it as he placed on the ground. It was a piece of paper that was slightly larger than a postage stamp, and had creases from having been rolled up. Only a double circle was drawn on the center.

I quickly sniffed the paper. Was it parchment? It had a strong animal odor to it. But beyond that, I could definitely smell a burnt scent, and the smell of something like a birdhouse.

(Celes! Mr. Sanon! Look at this!)

I called the two over, and Celes picked up the piece of paper.

“This is...”

As Celes said that, Rossi brought over another similar piece of paper. A double circle was also drawn on it.

—This is a code that No-kun and the others use a lot. It means “convene.”

I thought about it.

(There seems to be a lot of the same piece of paper. They probably used several birds at the same time to send them to multiple people. Whether it was because it's an urgent matter, or because they wanted to make sure it was delivered, we can assume both. Considering the remnants of the Liberation Army left in a hurry on the same day Nott escaped, we can speculate that this means "convene where Nott is ASAP.")

—It looks like they purposefully charred the parchment instead of using ink.

Sanon noticed.

Is that what the burnt smell was?

“Mr. Nott probably scorched it with the flames from his twin daggers.”

We two pigs nodded in agreement at Celes' remark. Sanon then pondered.

—So now we need to figure out where this place is, and we only have the double circle to work with.

(Let's look at it from the other way around. The remnants of the Liberation Army determined their destination based on the double circle only. It's extremely risky to transmit the destination via birds, so where's the most reasonable place the scattered remnants from various places will gather at based on this message? – It should be fine to think along these lines.)

—I see. Then let's think about it rationally.

I nodded.

(First of all, Nott should be wanting to get out of the area controlled by the north as soon as possible. Naturally, he'll prefer to flee to a place with more Liberation Army members and supporters.)

“With regards to the capital, which is located at the center of Mestria, the people supporting the Liberation Army are concentrated southeast of there. Since there's no reason for them to head west, they should be headed somewhere further east from the Forest of Needles which surrounds the royal dynasty. How

does that sound?”

(Nice one, Celes. Speaking of which, what’s the current situation regarding the borders between the areas controlled by the Northern Forces, and the areas controlled by the royal dynasty?)

“I heard the royal army recaptured a large port city in the east called Niabel very recently. When it was captured, I was told it was a geographically isolated place, so... I believe the frontlines are located near Matto, a mountain village located a little further north of Niabel.”

I was impressed by how informed Celes was. It means she was just that concerned about the world outside.

(For the Liberation Army, their priority should be meeting up with Nott as soon as they can outside the areas under the Northern Forces’ control. However, the frontlines is dangerous because the royal army is concentrated there.)

That was my hunch. Sanon seemed to agree with me and nodded in my direction.

—For a “convene” message... If a lot of people are going to appear, it would be better to choose a big city, right?

“In other words...”

Celes’ large eyes looked over here.

(Yeah. We should head towards Niabel.)

Martha sat on her bed with a serious gaze.

“Celes, are you really going?”

“Yes... I’m very sorry.”

Celes frowned apologetically.

After a brief moment of silence, Martha spoke.

“It’s a pity I won’t be able to accompany you with this body.”

“Martha-sama...”

“Take care of your life.”

“I will.”

“As for the Mister Pigs over there.”

At Martha’s beckoning, the black pig and I trotted to her side.

“Pork dishes are my specialty. If Celes doesn’t come back safely, you know what’ll happen, right?”

EEK.

(I will risk my life to protect her.)

Following my lead, Sanon also conveyed.

—Me too. I won’t take my eyes off Celes-chan for even a second.

Is that alright...?

“Please.”

It was OK’d?!

Since the sun had already set, we decided to set off for Niabel tomorrow at sunrise. If Celes rode on the pigs’ back, we should be able to arrive in about three days.

On the day of departure, dark ominous clouds loomed over the clear blue sky.

* * *

It was Nuris who came to pick me up. She held a pair of daggers – the set of daggers made from Ys’ bones. I will use Ys’ burning flames to return to her side.

—There's no time, so I'll make it simple. Don't look at me.

I could hear Nuris' indifferent voice in my mind.

—These two daggers are equipped with special ristas. Just one is enough to release a large amount of magic power at once.

Nuris expressionlessly restrained me. I looked at the daggers. The ristas were red in the center, and clear around the peripherals.

—By swinging either dagger towards the ground, you'll be able to fly high into the sky. It should have just enough magic power to be able to handle taking that boy named Bart as well. When you land, swing the other dagger towards the ground. It should cancel out the speed from falling and allow you to land without dying.

We headed towards the lift that led to the stage. I couldn't believe it. I was going to escape.

—Thanks, I owe you.

—Failure is not allowed.

—Understood.

We arrived in front of the lift. A prison guard was holding a small knife. I wondered why.

Nuris, who had removed my shackles, reacted with a twitch and looked at the guard. The guard grinned underneath the helmet covering his face, threw Nuris and me together into the elevator, and tossed the knife he was holding next to Nuris.

The chains rang, and the lift raised the two of us onto the stage.

Their message was clear. They won't let me take the easy way out and have it end with just me committing suicide. Only one person will be allowed to survive. Even if I die, either Bart or Nuris will have to die. Perhaps it was for this cruel act that they were stationed around me.

However, that's not the problem. It's that this rista only has enough power to barely allow me and Bart to fly.

That means one person will be left behind in this arena.

The lift inevitably neared the sand-covered stage, and I squinted.

It's sunny. The wind was strong. Dust clouds were being kicked up. The sunlight from above was reflecting off of the sand.

The circular arena was filled with thousands of spectators. The audience seats surrounding the elliptical stage were like rising walls, towering over us.

These faceless citizens – were they forced to watch, or did they come here seeking bloodshed? Do they wish for my death, or do they wish for my cruel victory? No one was speaking towards me – all that entered my ears were unintelligible yelling, cursing, and cheering.

When the lift stopped, Nuris emotionlessly picked up the knife and walked away from me. She spoke with her back turned.

—Leave me.

I bit my lips. There's no way I could do such a thing. What should I do? How can I save everyone?

Sanon's figure appeared in my mind. That guy never gave up, no matter how unfavorable the situation was. He saved me. In the end, he staked his life so that Celes and the others could escape.

Think. Think!

—You should stop that boy first.

Nuris' voice resounded in my mind.

The arena was wrapped in cruel cheers. On the other side of the dust cloud, the opposing elevator gradually rose, and Bart, standing in a daze, appeared on stage. The blade he held in his small hands glowed faintly.

It didn't take long for me to interpret Nuris' message. Under the enthusiastic gaze of the audience, I ran straight towards Bart. He slowly raised his thin arms, and thrust the blade against his neck.

“Stop!”

I screamed as I neared him. I grabbed Bart's blade by the hilt and twisted, pulling it away from his neck. I then thrust the blade towards the ground, and Bart fell forward as his posture broke. With my elbow on his shoulder, I picked up the blade. Bart then fell on the ground.

I threw Bart's blade far away. Though the stage is covered in sand, there are wooden boards underneath, and the blade stabbed beautifully into the ground.

I could hear jeering. They probably wanted me to kill him.

“Don't worry, Bart. We're escaping from here.”

I tried informing him without moving my mouth as much as possible. Bart's eyes, which were filled with tears, widened. I raised the corner of my mouth and smiled at Bart, who had fallen unsightly onto the ground. I've told him that it's alright now, and that I'll save him.

All that's left is to figure out what to do so the three of us can escape.

No, wrong.

I realized then – when it was too late – just what kind of race the Yesmas are.

I quickly turned around and spotted Nuris' body suddenly collapsing. A knife was stuck in her abdomen. Even from a distance, I could see the blood spread across her ragged clothes. She had stabbed herself. On the other end of the dust cloud, a Yesma had lost her life. The cheering and cursing faded away, and it felt like time had stopped.

The girl's body fell face down, and after that, she stopped moving.

The arena was enveloped in a storm of jeers. As I suppressed my anger and despair, tears began flowing. Are you watching, you senile old torturer? This is what you wanted to see.

But there was no time for me to grieve. Unsheathing a dagger, I held it in my right and looked up at the sky. It was a blue sky. The gateway to the future.

...Hm?

For a moment there, a strange shadow appeared in the blue sky. It had large wings and a long tail. Don't tell me...

The next second, the sound of stone masonry collapsing could be heard from the outer parts of the arena. Something roared. Its body color, which was the color of the sky, gradually returned to jet black, revealing its true identity. Its gigantic appearance was unmistakable.

It's a legendary creature that I have only seen in book illustrations. It's a dragon, a tyrannical monster that breathes fire.

Its huge mouth, which looked like it could swallow a human whole, was densely lined with sharp fangs. It had a large, narrow body that was covered in hard scales. It had broad wings, and a long tail covered in spikes.

The jeers in the arena turned into screams.

The dragon stopped at the edge of the arena and opened its mouth wide.

Shit!

I immediately pulled Bart to my side and tried to dodge. No, it's too late. At this rate, we're going to be hit by the flames directly. We had no choice but to escape to the sky.

"We're gonna fly, hold tight."

Saying that, I hugged Bart tightly.

Bart, who had a dumbstruck look on his face, also hurriedly wrapped his hands around my neck. I held Bart with my crippled left hand and swung the dagger in my right.

Along with hearing the sound of the wooden floor being ripped apart, I felt as if my internal organs were being pulled against. Bart and I cut through the wind at

an incredible speed and began rising towards the sky. Suddenly, my field of vision was dyed black. What happened?

The black stuff disappeared. Looking down, I saw the entire arena shrouded in black smoke. The dragon must have spewed out black smoke instead of flames. But why wasn't it flames? Only the mages from the royal dynasty are capable of controlling a legendary creature such as a dragon. The royal dynasty should be trying to kill me, yet the dragon spat out smoke that was incapable of killing. Why was that? In fact, why did a dragon come here?

We flew diagonally, tracing an arc and crossing the outer edge of the arena. It was more than enough height. With this, I might have even been able to take Nuris with us...

But it was too late now. We started descending. I returned the dagger in my right hand into its scabbard and pulled out the other dagger. We were going to land in the forest. The direction was calculated. The trees were approaching.

I swung my dagger before hitting the branches. My body was wrapped in a strong repulsive force. I squinted at the pain that followed.

I writhed in a whirlpool of shock that resulted in me being unable to tell up from down.

We rolled on the ground and seemed to have hit a tree trunk. I opened my eyes and saw that we were inside the forest.

“Bart, are you alright?”

I tore away my arm that was clutching his neck and got up, only to see the boy on the ground rubbing his eyes.

“That was crazy. What was that just now?”

I breathed a sigh of relief.

“I used a special rista to escape from the arena through the sky. Is your body fine?”

“Yeah. I'm fine, but...”

As Bart got up, he looked at me in the eyes with a strange expression.

“Why is Master crying?”

Fragment 3 – An Important Moment

When I woke up, I found myself lying in bed.

A clear blue sky stretched outside the window. It looked to be noon already.

How long have I been asleep for? I can't seem to remember when I went to bed, no, I was thinking about Mr. Nott while in Evis-sama's bedchamber. All of a sudden, everything before me became white...

That must be it. The sealed pages probably contained something about Mr. Nott. That's why, when I tried to remember, I lost consciousness.

I got off the bed, and when I slipped my feet into my slippers, I heard a bell ring from somewhere. As I wondered what that was for, there was a slam, followed by the sound of footsteps rushing over, before my bedroom door was opened.

"Jess, you're awake... Thank goodness..."

It was Ms. Wies. I understood the meaning behind the bell sound. There was probably magic placed on my slippers to notify Ms. Wies when I woke up.

"I'm sorry, how long have I-"

"You've been asleep for over a day now. It's because you pushed yourself too hard..."

"Erm... What did I overdo?"

"Your fire magic. When I took a look at the laboratory, I found that you made enough fuel to burn down the entire room. The ceiling was also covered in soot... It's a miracle you didn't suffocate."

"I'm sorry... But I did learn from the book that combustion requires the same

airflow as breathing, so I made sure to manipulate the wind and circulate the air; I also created dephlogisticated air and added it to the fuel. I never found it difficult to breathe...”

Ms. Wies stared at me with a surprised and dumbfounded look.

“Um... that wasn’t the problem, was it? ...I’m really sorry.”

Ms. Wies sighed heavily.

“It’s good that you’re so full of curiosity. But since you had ecydessa so soon, you’ll need to be more careful from now on.”

I immediately gasped.

Ecydessa (magic depletion).

Young mages sometimes faint when they release a lot of magic power, or when their magic power increases. And the next time they wake up, the quality and quantity of their magic power will be incomparably higher than before – this phenomenon is called ecydessa. It doesn’t happen very often. I’ve heard Mr. Shulavis has experienced it three times, and even Ms. Wies has only experienced it seven times.

As an aside, Mr. Markus, the strongest mage, has had ecydessa nineteen times, and Evis-sama, the greatest mage, has had it twenty one times. And though I don’t know if it’s true or not, according to the history book records, it’s said that the legendary mage that ended the Dark Ages – Vatis-sama, had undergone ecydessa forty-three times.

“Jess, go report to Evis-sama. I’m sure he’ll be pleased.”

That’s right. I suddenly collapsed in front of Evis-sama and fell asleep just like that. He must be worried. I should go and report to him immediately.

I answered with an “Understood,” and hurried to the king’s bedchamber.

Evis-sama appeared more haggard than before. The ivy-like tangles of black streaks that were only on his right arm were now visibly near his collarbone.

When I arrived, Evis-sama was blankly staring out a window.

“Are you feeling better, Jess?”

A chair moved by itself to the side of his bed, but the motion was a little slow.

“Thank you for your concerns. As you can see, I’m perfectly fine. I apologize for worrying you, Evis-sama.”

“It’s fine. That being said, you are as talented as I had hoped. It’s already your second ecydessa...”

Huh?

“Erm... This is my first time experiencing ecydessa.”

“Have a seat. Let’s talk.”

Hearing that, I sat down in the chair. I was worried Evis-sama might have misremembered because his condition was deteriorating.

“Jess, you already know that I sealed your memories, correct?”

“...Yes.”

“Your memories were actually sealed right after your first ecydessa. Immediately after ecydessa, all magic leaves the mage’s body. Their self-defense mechanisms are also halted. In other words, they become defenseless. It was at this moment that I sealed away your memories – from the time you left the Quiltlin family up until the day of your ecydessa.”

“I... see.”

“This time, when you experienced ecydessa, my sealing magic was also lifted, so I reapplied the seal again. You must be wondering why I am so particular about those memories. It’s normal for you to have those thoughts. In fact, I wouldn’t be surprised if you were angry that I hid away your precious memories.”

“How could I be angry...? I was told there’s a reason for it, and based on

everyone's characters, I understand that it must have been a sensible decision."

"You have a wonderfully kind heart. However, as someone who is brimming with curiosity, you still wish to know what the contents of your sealed memories are about, do you not, Jess?"

"...To be honest, yes."

"That's only natural. But I don't intend on breaking the seal, nor will I inform you of its contents. However, allow me to tell you one thing. Jess, your memories were not erased. They've only been sealed. Once your excellent magic power and endless curiosity is able to break the seal, we will not stop you."

I noticed. Evis-sama was telling me, who had just welcomed her second ecydessa, that someday I'll be able to recover my memories with my own strength.

"...Of course, even with your magic power, Jess, I can tell you that it's not enough to break my seal. You will need to experience ecydessa once or twice more before you're able to reach that level."

"I see. I understand."

I could clearly feel my shoulders drop.

Only the hoarse breathing from Evis-sama resonated across the quiet bedchamber.

"...Um-

There was something that really bothered me, so I opened up.

"Evis-sama says I'm talented, but I'm not able to use various types of magic yet, and I'm not particularly smart either. May I ask what made you determine that I was outstanding?"

A smile appeared on Evis-sama's haggard face.

"There are two reasons. Number one is Jess' unparalleled curiosity and

inquisitive mind. I don't know who you got it from, but you always give it your all and try to determine the truth of things, even in this day and age where we don't need to discover new things for ourselves. That kind of talent is invaluable."

"I see."

Though I answered that, I wasn't very convinced.

"You don't seem to believe me, which is understandable. There's another reason as to how I discovered Jess in this era of Yesmas."

I swallowed nervously and nodded.

"Jess, the power of your earnest prayer has brought about an unprecedented miracle."

For some reason, the image of a beautiful starry sky came to mind.

"What did my prayer do?"

"I cannot answer that. It's directly related to the reason why your memories have been sealed."

"Is that... so?"

I was a bit disappointed, but I suddenly remembered something that someone once said to me.

—Even if you were being selfish, so what? Everyone has the right to pray to the stars.

But no matter what, I couldn't seem to remember who told me that.

It was at this time that the crystal ball placed next to Evis-sama's bed suddenly glowed red. He placed his hand on it and closed his eyes. After a long chat with someone using magic, he summoned Mr. Shulavis over while I remained by his side.

"Grandfather, did you call for me?"

Perhaps he was still in the middle of training, Mr. Shulavis rushed into the bedchamber wearing his black leather armor.

“Markus contacted me. Sit.”

Another chair was moved next to me. It almost fell down halfway through, but it managed to arrive by my side. Mr. Shulavis anxiously looked at Evis-sama’s face before sitting down next to me. Mr. Shulavis’ sturdy arm seemed like it would bump into my shoulder at any moment. When he noticed my gaze, he pulled his chair away before sitting down again.

“What did Father say? Has he finished his preparations for destroying the Northern Forces?”

“No, that doesn’t seem possible yet.”

“Then what’s...?”

“The situation has taken a sudden turn. It became difficult for him to continue infiltrating, so it appears he had no choice but to disrupt them by using his dragon. Markus intends to remain there and quickly expose the north’s ruling structure through Arogan’s actions.”

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Well... it’s said that Nott escaped during the commotion.”

“Escaped?”

Mr. Shulavis’ and my voice overlapped.

“Markus successfully set a location magic on Nott. I’ll create a map that responds to it, and I’d like for Shulavis to conduct a reconnaissance of Nott for the time being.”

“So you want me to keep tabs on the rebels?”

“Correct. This will be your first task out there, but you won’t need to kill or fight. The Liberation Army will no doubt join up with Nott in the near future. I just want you to monitor them from a safe place. Markus will handle the

aftermath. Can you do that?”

“I can, but... it’s kind of sudden...”

“Are you worried?”

“...No, that’s not it.”

Mr. Shulavis shook his head with a serious expression. He looked worried.

Although I was just listening, I made up my mind and decided to speak up.

“May I... go as well?”

Stillness. Evis-sama and Mr. Shulavis were both looking at me in surprise.

“Do you wish to go, Jess?”

From the depths of Evis-sama’s sunken eyes, his grey irises gazed at me.

“No, I just wanted to be of help to Mr. Shulavis...”

“You shouldn’t lie to the king, Jess. Even if I may be old, cursed, and weakened, my magic power is still well and functional.”

“I-I’m sorry!”

Evis-sama laughed hoarsely.

“That was just a joke. No need to be so frightened, my granddaughter. It’s normal for you to be interested in Nott and the outside world. It won’t do for you to hide those feelings. Being honest is Jess’ virtue.”

“...Right.”

My heart was pounding. Did I say something unnecessary?

“I was debating on whether to send Wies with Shulavis, but... this works out, so let’s leave it like so. It’s time for Shulavis to become independent too. Jess, if you wish to go, then go.”

“But Grandfather, the outside world is...”

“I understand that it’s dangerous. I can say the same about sending you out. From my standpoint, if you and Jess are together, I can rest assured. Besides, this will be a good opportunity for you two to deepen your relationship.”

Mr. Shulavis’ chair rattled. His face was clearly dyed red when I looked.

“Grandfather, we’re in the middle of a war. Please lay off those types of jokes...”

“The fact that you can’t take a joke is a flaw that both you and Markus have. Perhaps Hortis took all the humor with him.”

Evis-sama’s laughter sounded like the winter wind blowing through a crevice.

“I’ve decided. Shulavis and Jess, you two get ready and set off before dawn tomorrow.”

Although I proposed it half expecting to be refused, it was surprisingly accepted. And so I enthusiastically replied with an “Okay!”

Mr. Shulavis nodded a bit after.

“Understood, Grandfather.”

But then again – I thought, if Mr. Nott is related to my memories, wouldn’t sending me to where he is acting against the purpose of sealing my memories? Does Mr. Nott have nothing to do with me? Or is Evis-sama deliberately trying to stimulate my memories?

Evis-sama simply smiled silently.

Chapter 3 – You Never Know What’ll Happen in Life

Niabel is a black stone city. Stone fortresses lined its coast, and during the evening, sailboats of all sizes crowded the dark sea. The port houses, mottled by the sea breeze, were built using dark grey stones. A labyrinth of stone-paved roads ran between these houses, and the lanterns hanging from their eaves began glowing a warm color. The cool sea breeze stung our bodies, which were exhausted from the journey.

It was a large city, but there weren’t many people relative to its size.

A strange party comprised of a loli, a pig, a black pig, and a dog finally arrived at their destination – Niabel, after a three-day journey. Celes let the black pig smell the black panties that she was holding.

“...How is it?”

—Smells ni-, I mean, the street has the same smell, but it’s not a straight path, so it’s difficult to narrow down.

Sanon conveyed while sniffing the pair of panties. No matter how you look at it, he’s being a pervert, but there’s a good reason for this. We found several clues in the basement of the Sleeping Foal Inn. From those, Sanon identified the possessions of Nott’s most trusted allies. They were a pair of socks and panties that belonged to a woman named Itsune, and a pillowcase which belonged to her younger brother Josh. I’m not a shameless pig, so when we decided that the three of us should divide the smell-searching task, I chose the young man’s pillowcase first. Sanon then said “Well, I guess I don’t have a choice,” and chose the panties. Leaving Rossi in charge of the remaining socks. No one asked why Sanon chose the panties instead of the socks.

Next to the perverted panties-sniffing black pig and perverted socks-sniffing

dog, I sniffed the pillowcase. It smelled like a high school boy's pillow with an added citrus scent to it. It was just as Sanon had said, the scent could be found on the streets here, but the smell would sometimes break off or diverge – it wasn't a straight line, so it's difficult to determine where the owner of the smell is.

If they had a place they used as their base, it wouldn't be strange for their scent to gather near the surroundings of that location, but for some reason, there wasn't such a place.

The sun was setting. As we racked our brains and wandered the streets, the black pig suddenly began sniffing a restaurant's terrace seats. The smell of seafood wafting in the air made my stomach tighten.

—Mr. Lolipo, come over here.

I headed over there after being requested.

(Did you find something?)

After sniffing the chair again, the black pig looked at me.

—I can smell Tsune-tan's butt from the seat of this chair.

(Oh, okay...)

—I was right to have chosen the smell of her panties. Tsune-tan seems to have visited this store.

That makes sense. Because one would sit on a chair with their butt, it's not a bad idea to use the panties' smell as a clue for pinpointing the places they've stayed at for a lengthy period of time. I felt like he was trying to justify his peculiar tastes after the fact, but the stakes are high right now, so I should give it some serious thought. For the time being, I brought my nose to the foot of the chair.

This is...

(It's the smell of tar. And it's quite strong.)

There was also that citrusy smell. The strong tar smell seemed to overlap with it.

“Tar...?”

Celes doesn't appear to be familiar with it, so I explained.

(I'm referring to a viscous liquid that is produced when wood is isolated from air and heated. It's often used as an antiseptic or as an insect repellent... but for this city, I suspect it's used for waterproofing.)

This would also explain why we couldn't find the location that was their base in this city.

Large quantities of tar is used to waterproof ships. The Liberation Army officers, the siblings Itsune and Josh, have a high probability of using a ship as their base.

The Broken Collar is a large wood sailing ship. Its black hull swayed gently on the calm waves, and the folded white sails reflected the bewitching reddish purple hue of the post-sunset sky. The faint smell of gunpowder drifted over from beyond the smell of the sea and tar. On the hull were the words “Broken Collar” in Mestria's language – it was in white and appears to have been painted recently.

Finding the ship was easy. We went to the most guarded pier, found a swordsmith who was acquainted with Celes and Sanon, and were soon able to meet the officers. As we had speculated, the core members of the Liberation Army were in the Broken Collar. There were around 30 warriors on board, and about 10 times as many comrades were said to be lurking around the streets of Niabel.

When we were guided to board the ship, Celes appeared hesitant.

(What's wrong, Celes?)

At my question, Celes looked up at the ship nervously.

“Nothing, um, it’s just my first time boarding a ship...”

Hearing that reminded me that, according to the royal dynasty’s laws, Yesmas are punishable by death for riding any form of transportation, and those who allow them to ride it are sentenced similarly.

As Celes wavered, the black pig used his snout to push Celes’ small buttocks forward, urging her to board the ship.

—If the royal dynasty enforced their laws, everyone in the Liberation Army would’ve been sentenced to death by now. They understand that if they forcibly punish us, there’ll be strong backlash from their citizens, so they won’t carelessly interfere. We’ve come this far already, there’s no other choice but to get on.

I was a bit reluctant to listen to a guy who was burying his nose in a loli’s ass, but in the end, we trusted Sanon and boarded the Broken Collar.

We were immediately welcomed into the captain’s quarters.

“Ah hah, so you’re that sleazy pig Nott talked about.”

The interim captain, Itsune, was a tall woman around the same age as me, with black hair tied in a ponytail. She’s characterized by her tanned skin and sharp, aggressive eyes. She also carried a greataxe on her back that could chop a pig in half. She was sitting boldly on a wooden crate with her legs open, leaning forward slightly, and resting her hands on her knees. Her chest was slovenly bare, revealing a sight that, had Nott been around, he would’ve been happy to see.

Celes gave me a discontented look. Why's that?

A girl with long braided hair placed a plate of water in front of me, Sanon, and Rossi. She wore a simple green dress, and because she had a silver collar, I could tell she was a Yesma.

“It’s fine, Litis. You don’t need to care about those animals.”

Itsune asserted before beckoning to the girl called Litis. “Ehehe,” Litis smiled with her freckled cheeks and sat down between Itsune’s legs. A pair of tanned

arms wrapped around Litis' belly from behind.

...Nn?

“Anyway, I’m surprised you found us, Sanon. For future reference, tell me how you figured it out.”

Itsune asked after placing her chin on Litis' shoulder.

With Celes' help in relaying, Sanon answered.

—It was through smell. We asked Mr. Cloyt from the Sleeping Foal Inn to let us search the room in his basement.

“The Foal Inn?”

Itsune's black eyes turned towards Celes before focusing on the black panties Celes was holding. Celes quickly hid it behind her back, but it was too late.

“Pa...n...”

Itsune's face flushed bright red. And seemingly sensing something, Litis quickly got up.

“Oy, Sanon. It seems I better lop off that nose of yours which smelled a lady's panties.”

Itsune took out a yellow rista from her waist pouch and clicked it into the greataxe on her back.

—I-It's a misunderstand, Tsune-tan. Ro-kun was the one who smelled your panties...

The black pig panicked.

But when Itsune glared at Rossi, the dog slowly shook his head.

The lie was exposed. Guilty.

Itsune stood up and readied her large axe. Electricity crackled around the axe, and the peculiar smell of ozone drifted towards here. Is this woman's axe an

electric-type weapon? Upon closer inspection, I noticed that a part of the handle seem to be made of bone, just like Nott's twin daggers.

It was then that the captain's quarters' door, which had been left open, was knocked on.

“Calm down, sis. You're the one who forgot to collect your belongings. It's your fault for being so messy.”

A black-haired and fair-skinned young man walked in while commenting. He appeared to be the same age as Nott. Though his long bangs covered his eyes, his well-defined nose and narrow chin implied he had a good-looking face. He was carrying a very long crossbow on his back, and as if to reinforce the wooden frame, two bones were set on it perpendicular to each other.



“Quit your nagging. We had to leave in a rush, so there was nothing I could’ve done.”

Despite grumbling, Itsune put away her axe and sat back down on the crate.

As the bangs-covered, gloomy-looking guy passed by, a citrusy scent entered my nose, and it dawned on me. Judging by the fact that he called Itsune “sis,” no doubt this young man was Josh.

“It’s been a while. How have you been, Celes?”

Celes bowed politely in response to Josh’s smile.

“Um... Yes, I’ve been doing well. Thank you.”

“Good. By the way, I heard something about Sanon...”

As he said that, Josh looked down at the two pigs.

“Huh? Just when I thought you had disappeared; did you split into two, Sanon?”

(No, no, you’re mistaken. I’m the scrawny four-eyed shitty virgin.)

When I introduced myself as such, Josh raised his chin with an “Ahh.”

“So you’re that sleazy pig. I’ve heard about you from Nott.”

I feel like they’ve been calling me a sleazy pig for a while now. What exactly did Nott say about me? Why does it sound like the information they were told was extremely biased? I’m not sleazy at all, y’know?

“...Are you familiar with the royal dynasty’s internal situation?”

His black sanpaku eyes emerged from underneath his bangs, and peered at me piercingly.

(S-sorry, but... I don’t remember much about it. My memories might’ve been erased.)

After I conveyed that to Josh, he turned towards Litis. Litis, who was once again in Itsune's arms, nodded with a smile.

"I see. Well, you probably have your own reasons, so I won't probe you any further."

Josh shook his head lightly and adjusted his bangs.

"Anyway, sis, it looks like we'll be able to arrange for the remaining ships. We should be ready by tomorrow morning. Let's depart at sunrise."

Itsune frowned while fiddling with Litis' braid.

"Morning? Won't Nott be arriving soon? He won't be happy about needing to wait."

Celes immediately looked at Itsune.

"Mr. Nott will be arriving soon?"

"Yeah. I'm glad you rushed over here, Celes. We were planning on leaving the port and setting off to the south as soon as Nott arrived."

Celes' large eyes appeared to be shining brightly.

It seems the Liberation Army intended to leave via the sea immediately after joining up with Nott. It felt like we just barely made it in time, so I could only consider us lucky.

Josh sighed.

"You say that, but we haven't gotten all our supplies yet, sis. Even if we were to mobilize everyone on the streets, we still wouldn't be leaving until late at night. We don't want to cause a disturbance and draw people's attention."

"If it's the middle of the night, then the middle of the night it is. Don't say something as naïve as leaving in the morning. We need to get ready as soon as possible."

"Okay."

“Go on then. Litis, go help assign a hammock to Celes.”

Itsune promptly gave out orders. Josh looked at her, somewhat irked, when he heard the name “Litis.”

We walked down the stairs to the floor below, and Sanon spoke to the braided Yesma girl guiding us ahead.

—Is your name Litis?

The freckled girl turned around and smiled.

“It is currently, yes.”

Perplexed, the black pig tilted his head.

—Did you have another name before this?

“Sorry... I lost my memories half a month ago, and when I was wandering around, Ms. Itsune and the others picked me up... I don't remember my previous name. That's why Ms. Itsune gave me this wonderful name – Litis.”

—I see. So that's what happened. Thank you.

The girl called Litis gave Celes a hammock with ample space in the corner so that us animals could sleep together, and trotted back towards the captain's quarters.

(Mr. Sanon, why did you ask to confirm that girl's name?)

When I asked that, the black pig gave me a strange look.

—The Yesma known as Litis is already dead.

The hair on my pig skin stood on end.

(...Eh?)

—You saw the bones on Tsune-tan and Josh-kun's weapons, right? That's Litis.

I thought back to their greataxe and crossbow. They seemed heavy, but the two

of them still kept it with them while on board the ship. It was just like how Nott always carried his twin daggers made from Ys' bones.

(The Yesma connected to those two, huh...)

—Yeah. It seems the two of them came from a family of high-ranking members from the royal army. That's why their martial arts abilities are so outstanding. However, Litis, who served their family, was unreasonably executed... At that moment, they defected from the royal dynasty and would later become No-kun's companions.

Celes skillfully sat on the hammock and quietly watched us while swaying. She would look around restlessly from time to time, perhaps because she couldn't wait for Nott to arrive.

Despite seeing Celes blush from reading my monologue, I continued the conversation.

(So Itsune decided to call the girl they picked up by another, already dead girl's name...?)

This grotesque reality made my pig stomach churn.

—Yeah, it seems like it... It's a little unsettling, but that just goes to show how strong Tsune-tan's feelings are. If you watch her fight, you'll understand.

(Watch her fight?)

—Tsune-tan's greataxe becomes wrapped in a fierce electric shock that will knock down an Org in one blow, no matter how heavily armored they are. After that, the next swing is guaranteed to behead them. As for Josh-kun, the arrows he use on his crossbow gain a special wind protection which lets him accurately pierce their hearts from hundreds of meters away. Both display results that are beyond the magic power contained in their ristas. If the soul of the wielder and the soul of the bones aren't completely in tune, it's impossible for this to be actualized.

I recalled the flames from Nott's twin daggers. Their shockwaves could be used to slash at enemies in the distance, or boost himself into the air with the recoil. I always thought of them as very convenient weapons, but...

(I see. Does that mean the strength of a weapon made with a Yesma's bones is directly linked to the bond between the wielder and the deceased Yesma?)

—I believe so. Only those who have lost a loved one are able to wield the most powerful weapons... It's ironic really, but that's also the Liberation Army's strength.

A memory was resurrected.

—Are you okay with Jess being killed by those Yesma hunters? Do you plan on retrieving her collar and making another blade with her bones?

It was something I said back in Bapsas to convince Nott to become our companion. At the time, I provoked him with the intention of making him lose his cool so the negotiations would go well, but I definitely said something I shouldn't have – I reflected on it. One of the reasons why a countryside huntsman like him became a hero was because he held such strong feelings for Ys.

I quickly turned to look at Celes. The girl in love was looking down at the black wooden floor. As soon as the black pig noticed her behavior, he fled to somewhere else while saying he suddenly remembered he had something to take care of.

Even though we were finally able to meet Nott, I thought about some unnecessary things and ruined Celes' mood. What should I say at a time like thi-

“Um, Mr. Shitty Virgin... Please don't worry about me too much. I'm totally fine.”

Celes smiled powerlessly. Yesmas have a bad tendency to insist that things are okay, even when they aren't so.

(Hey, Celes, there aren't many in this world who can read other people's minds. If you don't properly speak up and say you're not okay when that's the case, you'll only make it harder on yourself by keeping it all in.)

Celes' large eyes looked at me. As I returned her gaze, she spoke.

“I'm actually... a little scared.”

(I see. What are you scared of?)

“I’m worried Mr. Nott’s already forgotten me...”

...?

(Why would he forget? It’s not like you’re the heroine of an amnesia story.)

“I didn’t mean it like that... Mr. Nott is currently facing an adversity that I can’t even imagine, and putting forth effort that I could never have dreamed of. During all of this, how much of a presence do I hold to him? Is it a nuisance that a little girl like me decided to meddle in his affairs?”

Celes, who had come this far only to be hesitating now, has surpassed being pitiful and was now incomprehensible to me.

(Even if Celes’ presence isn’t big, it definitely shouldn’t be small. I’m sure Nott would be pleased to see an old familiar face coming all the way here.)

“Do you really think so?”

(Of course. You haven’t even met yet, so don’t worry unnecessarily. If you always shy away, you’ll remain small for the rest of your life. If you’re afraid of being forgotten, then don’t let him forget. Just like how you gave it your all to find Nott and get here, do your best to be by his side. I’m sure over time, Celes will become a big presence in Nott’s life.)

Celes seemed conflicted as she pondered for some time before speaking.

“But... I don’t want to hinder Mr. Nott’s actions. I’m scared of being forgotten, but I don’t want to be too pushy either... As long as I can support Mr. Nott from behind...”

You didn’t have to phrase it like what a conventional idol otaku would say...

(It wasn’t easy getting here, so don’t say things like supporting him from behind. Celes, you’re able to use your power of heart and prayer to assist Nott, so just stick by his side and help him however you can. In doing so, some day he’ll definitely look your way.)

Slowly, Celes nodded.

“Thank you... You’re right, what’s important is that I do everything I can to help.”

As I nodded in agreement, Celes smiled cheerfully.

Some time later, Sanon returned. And for some reason, he was carrying a glasses-like metal frame in his mouth.

—Cele-tan, I brought you an item that will cheer you up.

Celes tilted her as she received the glasses-like object from the black pig’s mouth.

“What’s this?”

—It’s a model of something we call glasses, which I requested from Al-kun a long time ago. Without getting my hopes up, I asked him through the braided girl just now, and it seems he actually made it and kept it for me. Here, open it and hook the curved part onto your ears.

Celes did as Sanon asked and curiously put on the fake glasses.

“Is this alright?”

The glasses-wearing Celes looked at us.

Oink! I oinked honestly! This girl definitely looks good in glasses!

I was just thinking about why it was so noisy, it turns out the black pig beside me was breathing heavily. What an outrageously perverted pig.

The fact that my own nose was snorting was probably just my imagination.

—That’s great, Cele-tan! It fits you perfectly! Try facing us while slightly lifting it with your hands!

Celes lightly lifted her glasses as Sanon requested. Woah, this was definitely...

The black pig stomped his feet beside me, expressing his emotions with his whole body. Jeez, I can't take this pervert. Good grief.

—Go on, Mr. Lolipo. Don't you have any requests?

I thought about it after Sanon's inquiry. Yeah, alright, this is a rare opportunity after all, I might as well ask her to say a line.

(Celes, try saying this to me...)

After I conveyed the contents to her, Celes, despite her extreme embarrassment, spoke in a small voice.

“N-... naughty Mister Pigs will be punished.”

Oooiink!

(Omega good job, Mr. Sanon.)

—I know, right? Ever since I first met her, I've always thought that it would suit her. The intellectual silver rim tightens the contours of her youthful round cheeks! She's the ultimate glasses loli!

.....

Seriously now, this pervert's a lost cause. When I'm next to him, I feel like I'll catch his perversion.

(Oh right, Celes, how about this?)

Celes was a bit puzzled by my suggestion, but she did it anyway.

With her upturned eyes looking at me...

“O-onii-chan.”

Buhyaaaaaa!



Have any of you ever been called “onii-chan” by a thirteen-year-old, glasses-wearing, blonde cute girl? No? What a pity! Sucks to be you! You didn’t do enough good deeds in your past life!

Seeing us oink excitedly, Celes shyly smiled.

“Um... Is this metal accessory really that good?”

—It’s the best!

Due to his overexcitement, a disgusting otaku-like laugh spilled out from the black pig’s mouth.

>TL Note: フォカヌポウ is an internet onomatopoeia for an otaku’s disgusting laughter.

“But... when I put this on, what good does it do specifically...?”

The black pig stiffened. Certainly, if someone asked what’s good about glasses... That’s quite hard to explain. Would you be able to describe the beauty of glasses with words?

After pondering, Sanon carefully began his explanation.

—Glasses, Cele-tan, are meant to correct your eyesight, and are often used when reading or studying, so they carry an air of intelligence. Moreover, the glasses are located where your eyes are, and since eyes play a big role in the impression you give to others, not only do they append an intellectual image, they can also act as a tool for changing the atmosphere – and even create a gap moe. This is what I believe makes them good.

“Gap moe...?”

Celes thought about it for a bit, and after seemingly regaining some of her spirit, she said, “Then I’ll keep it on until Mr. Nott arrives!”

We fell asleep from the exhaustion of the journey, but were woken up by Rossi's barking. In my half-asleep, eyes-half-open state, I saw a white body zip up the stairs like a bullet. The next second, I understood what had happened.

I can only think of two things that would excite Rossi this much: Jess' bare legs, and his master.

Either one is important to me, so I quickly followed Rossi. The glasses-wearing Celes and black pig also came running from behind me.

The sky had grown completely dark. Rossi wagged his white tail forcefully on the deck, as if he was trying to smash it, and was on top of someone while licking their face. Josh held a lantern, and next to him stood an unfamiliar, honest-looking boy that seemed to be near the same age as Celes. The boy wore drab and loose clothes, and looked confused by the sudden appearance of a party of animals.

“Calm down, I get it...”

I felt nostalgic when I heard a handsome-sounding-guy's voice.

It was Nott. But when he got up from underneath Rossi, I was shocked.

Tattered clothes. Sunken cheeks. A limply dangling left arm. A blackened bruise around his larynx. A large cut wound that ran from his right cheek to the side of his head. And long, wild blonde hair. – How should I put this? He's completely different from how I remember him. His change was akin to a certain genius high school student's after having stumbled across a notebook.

His gaze first turned towards Itsune, who ran here from the captain's quarters.

“You seem to be doing alright, that's good.”

Itsune let out a sigh of relief.

“I really thought we wouldn't be able to see you again.”

“Don't be stupid. There's no way I'd die.”

As he said that, Nott patted Itsune's shoulder with his right hand. Itsune then

gestured with her head at the boy behind Nott.

“Who’s the kid?”

“He’s Bart. He looked after me while I was in the arena. A lot of things happened, so I brought him with me.”

“Hm, so his name’s Bart. That’s a nice name. Are you going to make him your apprentice?”

The boy’s eyes gleamed with anticipation as he looked up at Nott.

“Maybe someday.”

After that, the wound-covered huntsman finally turned to face us.

“Celes, so you came.”

Nott walked over. Celes replied with an excited “Yes!” but Nott’s stern expression remained unchanged.

“It’s going to be a dangerous journey. If you ever want to go home, just let me know.”

“...Um... Er... Thank you.”

This guy... You have no idea what kind of feeling Celes held to make it this far.

When I snorted in anger, Nott looked down at me. I instinctively recoiled. His eyes were no longer the eyes of the pure-hearted, breast-loving huntsman I knew of.

“It’s been a while, you sleazy pig bastard. I heard from Josh.”

After a slight pause, he asked in a low voice, “Is Jess alive?”

I looked at Celes. Despite the fact that her eyes were moist underneath her fake glasses, she nodded lightly.

With Celes’ help in relaying, I conveyed, (Yeah, she should be doing well – inside the capital, of course.)

Nott's expression still didn't change. He appeared to be thinking about something for a while before responding.

"I see, good job."

Without asking anything further, Nott then crouched down in front of the black pig and started chatting with Sanon.

From the dark deck, we entered the bright captain's quarters. Inside, the girl called Litis was waiting nervously.

Nott, who was discussing his plans with Sanon, immediately froze when he saw her face. His expression finally changed as his eyes widened in surprise.

"You... Aren't you supposed to be dead...?"

The girl tilted her head with a smile that indicated her confusion.

Nott acted. With his right hand, he pulled out one of his twin daggers, and in that same breath, he approached Litis. His blade flashed bright red and drew a beautiful arc right towards the girl's neck.

Clang.

A metallic sound echoed. Everyone froze at that moment, but Nott calmly put away his dagger and used his arm to support the girl whose knees had buckled. His handsome face moved near her neck. It looks like he was scrutinizing the part of her collar that his dagger had hit.

"It's real? ...Sorry, guess I made a mistake."

Nott shook his head and let the girl sit down. If it's a real Yesma collar, it can't be damaged in any way. From that, he must have determined that this girl was a real Yesma.

Itsune hastily ran over there and pushed Nott away.

"What are you doing all of a sudden?!"

“My bad. She just looked kind of like the Yesma who helped me escape from the north... So who is she?”

“She’s Litis.”

“Litis...?” Nott asked back doubtfully.

Josh then clarified, “She lost all her memories up until recently and was wandering around this area. Although she has a northern-like accent, she’s a genuine Yesma, so we took her in. We didn’t know her name, so sis called her Litis.”

“That so? ...Man, it’s just been one crazy thing after another.”

Nott sat down on a nearby wooden crate before suddenly turning back towards Celes.

“Celes, is it true that Bapsas burned down?”

Hearing Nott’s question, Celes answered immediately.

“Yes. We were attacked by the Northern army three days ago in the morning...”

“So there were Orgs?”

Celes nodded. Nott averted his eyes from Celes and sighed.

“Looks like it’s my fault Bapsas was burned down. I’m really sorry.”

Silence. Feeling concerned, I interjected.

(What do you mean by “it’s my fault”?)

His cloudy eyes looked over here.

“Remember that big guy we met at the Forest of Needles?”

(I believe he was called En the Dismemberer?)

“Right. It seems he had some kind of deep ties with the new Northern king’s personal torturer, and since I killed him, that torturer held a bitter grudge against

me. I was tortured without being interrogated, and even Bapsas, which is related to me, was... Those guys from the north are still after me. I seem to be treated like a thorn in their side.”

Torturer...? Does he mean to say that the grudge of a mere torturer was able to mobilize the Northern army?

While I was concerning myself with the details, Celes placed her hands on her chest and loudly asked, “You were tortured?”

Nott glanced at Celes.

“Don’t worry, there won’t be any long-term effects. My torture was interrupted half-way because a wild boar was rampaging in a govern camp and a Yesma escaped or something.”

“But it must have been painful.”

“Don’t underestimate me. Compared to the pain I suffered five years ago, physical pain doesn’t...”

“Oh... um... s-sorry...”

Celes’ voice instantly wilted.

I contemplated. We already know why Bapsas was singled out and targeted. It’s because the village is closely related to the Liberation Army’s leader, Nott, and they deeply resent him. However, how was it possible for the Northern Forces to only attack Bapsas with pinpoint accuracy without damaging any of the cities north of Bapsas? And one other question remains. Was it really a coincidence that Bapsas was attacked the morning after we were transferred to Mestria again?

While I worried about that, Josh walked in-between us and handed something to Nott.

“Since Celes took the effort to come here, Nott, take this and use it.”

In his hand was a black hexagonal column – it’s the source of magic power, a rista.

Nott laid down on the wooden floor. Celes knelt beside him, held the black rista with both hands, and pressed it firmly against her forehead. She closed her eyes tightly.

When a Yesma prays with a black rista, they are able to perform miracles that only mages can do. The most notable example is healing injuries and illnesses.

The cut on the side of Nott's head steadily disappeared in no time.

We watched them from a distance.

Josh whispered towards Sanon and me.

“I'm jealous of Nott. With Celes around, no matter how serious the injuries are, they'll be healed.”

I had the girl Litis act as my relay and asked Josh.

(What do you mean? Is Celes good at healing?)

“It's not like that... What's the best way to put it? Sanon, please explain.”

—A Yesma's ability to heal a person through their prayer depends heavily on the intensity of their feelings. It's not a matter of knowledge or skill. If the person is a complete stranger, they might not even be able to heal a hangnail. Only when they're healing someone important to them will the prayer have a great effect. When it comes to No-kun, Cele-tan's feelings are strong enough to heal wounds as severe as those.

I was reminded of what Sanon said to Martha back at the Sleeping Foal Inn.

—*When it comes to the ability to heal Nott-kun, Celes-chan is by far the best at it. She's a necessary existence for the Liberation Army.*

I was then spontaneously reminded of the Yesma girl who healed me when I was stabbed at the Quiltlin family's farm. The pig, which had been injured so badly that it almost died from blood loss, made a full recovery. That was how much Jess cared for and needed me.

And yet, I...

Maybe that was why Brace had given up on her life. I thought that, as long as we had a rista, Jess might've been able to heal the wound on Brace's abdomen. But that wasn't the case.

I took it for granted and misunderstood the Yesmas' abilities. I self-servingly assumed that, no matter the injury, it would be straightforward to heal. However, that wasn't so.

I shook my head and pushed aside these unnecessary thoughts. Seriously, what am I thinking about over here?

After a few minutes, the prayer was finished. Nott got up and rotated both arms. Though the bruise-like mark on his throat hasn't disappeared, everything else seems to have healed up.

"Thanks, Celes. You must be tired. Go and get some rest downstairs."

Celes stretched her hand out towards Nott, but then withdrew it after thinking about something.

"Um... Can't I stay here with you?"

Nott frowned, appearing puzzled.

"Well... I appreciate the sentiment, Celes, but your help isn't really needed while we're preparing for departure. You only need to come and help relay the conversation when I need to talk to Sanon or the sleazy pig about our plans. You must've had a long journey, so rest up until your next task."

"R-right, I understand..."

Whoa, whoa, whoa. What are you, a fucking thickheaded light novel protagonist? This definitely got on my nerves.

Celes rushed over here and gave me and the black pig a smile.

"...That looks to be it, so let's get some rest downstairs for the time being. Mr. Sanon and Mr. Shitty Virgin must be tired after walking all this time."

The fake glasses hanging above her clumsy smile, which were never mentioned in the end, gleamed in vain.

“He didn’t seem to like it very much,” Celes remarked with a forced smile. And after taking off the fake glasses, she laid face down on the hammock. However, she didn’t sleep and helped relay the conversation between me and Sanon.

—What happens from here on out is important, Mr. Lolipo. We were able to safely reunite with No-kun and the others, but this is only the first step. We must now do our best to lend them our knowledge and change this world.

There was no trace of that happy lolicon otaku in the voice that reached my mind.

—Let’s focus on defeating those despicable bunches, the Northern Forces, first. Though we don’t share the royal dynasty’s ideals, we may eventually need to fight alongside them in order to accomplish this. When that time comes, Mr. Lolipo, as the only one who has had contact with the royal dynasty, you will become a key person-, or rather, a key pig. You understand, right?

(Of course. Leave it to me.)

—After defeating the Northern Forces, our next objective, naturally, will be liberating the Yesmas. As of now, I have no idea how we’ll tackle the root of the problem – the royal dynasty; but even so, Mr. Lolipo remains a key pig for being close to the royal dynasty. Worst case scenario, you might end up on the side of the royal dynasty, and I on the side of the Liberation Army; it’s possible that we’ll be pulled into their conflict. But our goal remains the same – it’s to save those unfortunate girls. Please let me confirm that with you again.

(Right. There’s no doubt about that. Let’s do our best.)

I then deliberated over things. The liberation of Yesmas – this goal, which is Nott’s earnest wish, is of course mine as well. There’s no way I can just say “it can’t be helped” to those girls who are tormented and killed like Brace was.

That being said, however... The maintenance mechanism which uses Yesmas can also be said to be the linchpin of the royal dynasty’s policies to prevent the

return of the Dark Ages. And Jess is now a member of the royal dynasty. If I, by any chance, was forced to weigh the liberation of Yesmas against Jess' happiness, would I really be able to choose to free the Yesmas?

I was the one to ask Jess to live as a member of the royal dynasty. Do I really have the right to say something like "I'm going to destroy the royal dynasty after all"? When Nott's wish is fulfilled, will I be able to make sure Jess can be happy once we're on the other side of the world that I destroyed...?

The black pig snorted. Was my hesitation transmitted to him?

—Mr. Lolipo, can I ask you a question?

In response to his serious tone, I replied earnestly.

(Please.)

—Why do you think the Yesma girls wholeheartedly express their thoughts towards Mr. Lolipo and me?

I was expecting to be admonished for my hesitation, so I was relieved.

(That's... probably because we're always snuggling up to them?)

—No, that's not why.

(Erm... then what do you think, Mr. Sanon?)

—It's because we're pigs.

The black pig appeared surreal and somewhat terrifying as he stood still and stared at me.

(Because we're pigs...?)

—Yes. The reason why the Yesma girls open their hearts towards us absolute creeps is not because we're reliable nice guys. It's because we're pigs. We're the only ones that they, who are at the bottom, can trust, because we're existences that aren't even qualified to be at the bottom.

I was caught off guard. Jess, Celes, and Brace... they shared their sincerest

feelings with me. Even though we had just met, they would cry and hug me... As if the floodgates had been opened, they would tell me about their sufferings and desires. It wasn't because they concluded I was trustworthy. It was because they had no one else to talk to – no one but a pig.

Because I was the first existence that was lesser than they were.

I'm sure it's the same for everyone. Those girls who supported society without any complaints must have suffered to the extent of having given up, but they had no one to confide in, and lived only to be exploited and killed.

“T-that's not true.”

Celes raised her head and interjected.

“Mr. Sanon and Mr. Shitty Virgin are both wonderful people. It definitely wasn't because you two are pigs. I never thought of it like that...”

The black pig's eyes remained bored into me. His message was clear.

Consider why we're pigs. That's why we came to Mestria. It's the worth of our existence, as well as our mission-

Midnight. Rocked by the gentle waves, I was sound asleep on the ship when Celes poked me awake. I passed by the black pig that was curled up sleeping and followed her to the deck. The cool sea breeze blew away the smell of tar, and the gentle sound of waves echoed rhythmically.

Josh sat cross-legged and was dozing off on the lookout point at the main mast (crow's nest). Looks like the preparations for the Broken Collar were pretty much done, and now they're just waiting for the other ships to be ready for departure. Celes sat behind a temporarily placed wooden crate with her hands over her knees so that Josh wouldn't be able to see her, and invited me to sit beside her.

—I'm sorry for waking you up while you're resting.

(It's fine. Did you want to consult me about something?)

—Um... half so, half not so.

(Anything is fine, go ahead.)

—What Mr. Sanon said earlier... It might have been true. If Mr. Shitty Virgin wasn't a pig, I don't think I would have confided in you about Mr. Nott that night three months ago.

(Yeah, I think so too. I didn't misunderstand anything about that, so don't worry.)

—But Ms. Jess was different.

Celes' large eyes locked onto me.

—I didn't tell you at the time, but... Ms. Jess likes you. It's similar to the feelings I have for Mr. Nott. It definitely wasn't because Mr. Shitty Virgin was a pig that she trusted you. I just really needed to let you know this...

Her large eyes watered, and she turned away from me.

—To be honest, I'm really, really envious. To think that there's two people who could reciprocate each other's love like that... To think that there's someone who's willing to be by her side no matter what... I'm really jealous of Ms. Jess... That's why, even though I don't know why you two separated, I hope that one day you'll be able to return to where Ms. Jess is. Because I believe Mr. Shitty Virgin belongs by her side.

Celes' small hands were tightly clenched in front of her shins.

—Um... Sorry I didn't say it very well...

(Thank you. I got what you wanted to say.)

And I knew exactly what I needed to say to her.

(The other half is consulting about Nott, right?)

—...Yes.

Celes didn't seem to have any intention of looking at me.

(Mr. Sanon's a kind guy, but his vision's too grand, so it's probably hard to confide in him.)

Celes shook her head vaguely. Though that guy's a serious lolicon, at his core, he's still a person with a sense of responsibility. Rather than Celes' feelings, he's someone that cares more about future of Nott and the Liberation Army. So I doubt she can ask Sanon for any personal advice.

(Nott... that guy really is a bastard. Even though such a cute and dedicated girl in glasses came to see him, how dare he treat her so coldly?)

—Um, I'm not cute at all...

(Nonsense. Your cuteness is only second to Jess.)

Celes smiled a little and conveyed a thank you.

—I'm fine with this. Mr. Nott is only looking ahead now... I know he can't afford to look at me. As long as I can stay by his side and be helpful to him, that's enough for me.

Tears fell from Celes' eyes onto her knees.

—But, it's still really painful... What can I do to get rid of this pain?

(Who said Nott won't look at you, Celes?)

As I conveyed that, Celes turned to me with a resigned look.

—It's obvious to anyone that looks at us. We don't match at all. Mr. Nott is a hero that's loved by everyone, whereas I'm just a small countryside maid... Besides, I don't have any breasts to speak of...

(Come on now, what's a thirteen-year-old girl saying? It could grow bigger in the future.)

—Does it look like it will...?

Well, I certainly can't imagine a Celes with big boobs.

—See...?

Um, that was my monologue...

(But let me say this. I don't think Nott likes women with big boobs, he just likes big boobs.)

I felt like I just said a very philosophical sentence.

—Why do you believe that?

(After all, the girl he liked – Ys, her boobs weren't that big, right?)

—Erm... How are you so sure of that...?

(It's simple. Martha and Nott both said that Jess and Ys look alike.)

—.....

Huh? Did I say something weird?

Celes giggled.

—If you say that, won't you be scolded by Ms. Jess?

Though it took some sophistry, nothing beats having her laugh like this.

(It'll be fine. No one other than Celes is listening.)

—Really now?

Suddenly, a different voice resonated in my head.

When I looked around in surprise, I spotted someone in a black robe crouched behind Celes. The figure was wearing a hood, so I couldn't see its face. It quickly covered Celes' mouth. She jerked for a moment before she closed her eyes and her head went limp. Her hands loosened around her knees.

What. Don't tell me...

“Snort! Snort!”

I hurriedly cried, before the suspicious, robed individual jumped in front of me

and held my nose with both hands.

The face hidden beneath the hood was now visible. It had a sculpture-like chiseled face, and curly blonde hair.

It was the king's grandson, Shulavis.

—Please be quiet. I don't want to be discovered. The girl's fine.

After letting go of me, Shulavis gently hugged Celes, who was about to lose her balance, and laid her down on the deck. Confused, I couldn't move.

That's when I heard a whistling sound before something hit Shulavis' back. Did he have iron plates underneath his robe? Because that "something" bounced off with a clink.

I looked at what fell on the floor. It was a crossbow arrow.

Shulavis quickly stood up, and without looking, he held his hand towards the direction the arrow came from. A bluish white electricity shot out from the tip of his fingers and hit the crow's nest. I watched as Josh collapsed on the spot.

The next moment, a thunderbolt-like flash and explosion noise occurred, and part of the deck was torn apart. Amidst the wood splinters, a figure jumped up from the floor below with a greataxe in hand.

With the dark sky as the background, I could see the axe was enveloped in electricity. The figure that leapt up into the air spun and used that momentum to line up the blade of the axe with Shulavis-

Watch out!

—Get back.

Shulavis' voice echoed in my mind, and I took a step back to protect Celes.

Clang!

The greataxe's blade landed firmly onto Shulavis' arms, which were crossed in front of his face, but it was repelled as it gave off an intense spark explosion.

Despite not being injured, Shulavis staggered and took a few steps back due to the impact.

Flames flashed from the corner of my eyes, and a figure leapt behind Shulavis.

It was Nott. He was already behind Shulavis. He had his arm around Shulavis' neck, and pointed a glowing red dagger at Shulavis' throat.

“Surrender now, and give us your name.”

Threatened by Nott, Shulavis remained still. Itsune regained her posture after her attack was repelled and pointed the tip of her greataxe at Shulavis.

It was a perfectly executed teamwork of wave attack. Josh diverts their attention, Itsune uses a big move to break their balance, and Nott slips in. Naturally, any normal human being would've died three times over by now.

“Sorry, but I won't be giving you my name, nor will I be surrendering.”

It was a calm voice.

“To be able to knock aside a greataxe, you must not be human. Are you a mage?” Itsune questioned.

“And if I said yes?”

“I'll kill you.” Nott answered immediately.

“Can you kill me? Think about the situation you're in.”

Shulavis pushed aside the dagger at his throat and stepped away from Nott. Nott was frozen in his posture from where he stood behind Shulavis. He appeared immobile.

Clad in his black robe, Shulavis controlled the scene with an overwhelming presence.

“Sorry for the disturbance. I have no intentions of fighting you all. The girl and the archer on the crow's nest are simply unconscious. I don't intend to fault you for letting a Yesma on board your ship, nor do I intend to inform the royal army

about this ship. All I ask for is this pig.”

Before I knew it, I was pulled by an invisible force and floated in the air.

“Perhaps we’ll never be able to understand each other completely, but I hope that one day, we’ll be able to make Mestria a better place together.”

After plainly saying that, Shulavis walked over to the edge of the boat, and jumped over the railing into the sea. My body also moved to follow suit. About ten meters below, on the surface of the sea, Shulavis was waiting on a boat next to the ship as a matter-of-factly.

During my float down to the surface of the sea, I honestly thought I was going to piss myself.

“Let’s go.”

After I boarded, the boat began to glide on the surface of the sea like a jet ski.

Shulavis brought me to a coastal fort that was said to be managed by the royal dynasty. A row of soldiers from the royal army stood lined up at the entrance gate with guns and spears.

The stone-built fort was a rectangular, horizontal structure that was built as if to hug the Niabel coastline, which was a cliff. Its interiors were also just exposed, rugged grey stones with torches dotted everywhere to light its long and dark corridors. Through the corridors’ barred windows, you could look down and see the pitch-black sea.

“I must’ve been imagining things, but were you talking about the size of Jess’ breasts earlier?”

While speed walking through the empty corridor, Shulavis asked that as if he was suddenly reminded of the subject.

(No, of course not... I wouldn’t dare talk about the future queen’s boobs like that...)

Shulavis shrugged as I tried to fool him.

“Forget it. In exchange, answer me this: why did you return?”

He asked without looking at me.

“Why,” you ask...

“Is it because you can’t give up on Jess?”

(Wrong.)

I immediately denied that.

“Is it because you can’t forgive Grandfather’s policy – the way the Yesmas are treated?”

(...What would you do if I said yes?)

“I’m not the one who needs to think about that.”

Shulavis stopped and opened the door to his right.

Don’t tell me..., I thought, as I peeked into the other side only to find it was just an empty room.

“Jess isn’t here. She’s on stand-by in another room.”

Hearing that, my heart skipped a beat. Blood rushed through my body, and I felt my liver beginning to heat up. Jess is here in Niabel?

“The situation’s a bit complicated. If you accept my terms, I’ll let you meet Jess.”

Shulavis stated as he sat down in the chair placed near the wall. And behind me, the door closed on its own.

(Terms?)

I asked while calming my breathing down.

“I have three conditions. First, become my ally.”

It was then that Shulavis finally removed his hood, revealing his fair skin and western-sculpturesque chiseled features. His thick brows furrowed forcefully, further reinforcing his seriousness.

(You want this kind of powerless pig as an ally?)

Without nodding, Shulavis continued.

“There are times where even I want to rely on a pig for help. The situation in the royal dynasty has changed. Grandfather – King Evis, was cursed by someone and is currently bedridden in the capital. The next in line to command is my father, Markus.”

(Wait, the king was cursed? By who?)

“If we knew, we wouldn’t be having such a hard time. One thing I can say for certain is that Grandfather doesn’t have long to live.”

Shulavis spoke indifferently.

“Although Father is a man of conviction, he’s also ruthless and not as thoughtful as Grandfather. If the politics are left to him, Mestria will definitely change for the worse. I can’t ignore this, so I want you to cooperate with me.”

(Is your father that unreasonable?)

“He’s short-tempered and very extreme. He was the one to burn down the entire Bapsas monastery. Even now, after disobeying Grandfather’s orders and burning down the Northern royal castle, he’s currently flying around without any clues on the Northern army’s location. Grandfather clearly told him not to attack until after we’ve figured out their chain of commands...”

Hold on, hold on. Shulavis’ father was responsible for burning down the monastery? And he also burned down the Northern royal castle? What is he, an arson specialist performer?

After organizing my thoughts, I conveyed, (I understand that you have some qualms about your father’s reign. I have no objections to your viewpoints so far,

but what can I do as a pig?)

“That’s the second condition. I want you to act as our intermediary with the Liberation Army.”

(Intermediary... Couldn’t you do that yourself?)

“You already saw what happened. The Liberation Army hates us enough to want us dead, since the royal dynasty is the root cause of the Yesma system. In fact, they almost succeeded in killing me... I honestly thought I was going to die.”

(Really...? You seemed to have fended them off with ease.)

“If it wasn’t for this robe that Grandfather made, I would’ve died for sure. If that fire-wielding swordsman had stabbed my throat in one go, I would’ve been finished there. I’m-, the royal dynasty is not in a position to negotiate directly with them. That’s why I want you to play that role.”

(I see. I should be able to do that if that’s the case. But I don’t know what you plan on negotiating with the Liberation Army. Do you think it’ll go well, fighting alongside people who don’t get along with you?)

“That... To be honest, I don’t know yet. But one thing’s for certain – if things continue the way they are now, neither the royal dynasty, nor the Liberation Army will survive. While we’re confronting each other, the threat from the north looms. They’re an unidentified, powerful foe, and no matter how many times we defeat them, another military force springs up. At this rate, we’ll both be annihilated; even though we both share the same desire to make this country a better place... For the future of Mestria, I believe there’s a better path than the current situation. I hope that you can find it with me.”

On closer inspection, Shulavis’ seemingly calm eyes were filled with anxiety. Unforeseen events must’ve happened one after another. That’s why he turned to this pig for help.

(Understood. So what’s the third condition?)

When I asked, Shulavis averted his eyes from me and pondered briefly before answering.

“This might be the hardest thing for you, but...”

Shulavis’ eyes were staring straight at me.

“Grandfather has completely sealed away Jess’ memories – from the time she left the house she served up to when you left. Naturally, she doesn’t remember you at all. I want you to pretend that tonight is your first time meeting Jess, and that you’ll never reveal your true identity.”

What...?

“Grandfather seems to have his own plans, and even I’ve been forbidden from touching upon the blank areas of Jess’ memories. I hope you’re able to respect the king’s wish. If you can’t abide by it, I can’t let you meet Jess.”

My mind went blank for a moment, but I calmed down and reconsidered.

Isn’t this convenient for me as well?

I wanted to see Jess, but I’m also someone that once withdrew from her life. And since she’s now a relative of the king, Jess is in a position where she’s guaranteed a future. To be frank, I didn’t know what kind of face I should put on if I were to meet her.

Isn’t the perfect answer already prepared for me here? Right? Don’t you all think so too?

I’ll be able to see Jess again without getting in the way of her life-

(I’m in. Alright. I just have to become your ally, act as the intermediary with the Liberation Army, and pretend to be meeting Jess for the first time, right? It’s more interesting than I expected, so let me help.)

Perhaps my over-enthusiasm caused him to be suspicious, Shulavis cautiously spoke.

“Great. But can I ask you one more thing?”

(Sure.)

“Even though it’s currently in name only, Jess is supposed to be my fiancé. And I know how you think of Jess. That’s why I want to ask: don’t you hate me?”

...Hate? Did he really think I would hold those kind of feelings?

(Are you misunderstanding something? I don’t like Jess. Jess is simply my oshi. A good otaku is someone that silently supports their oshi. By no means will they ever reach out to their oshi, nor will they ever become jealous over their oshi. They simply root for their oshi from behind and wish for their oshi’s happiness.)

>TL Note: 推し is commonly used to describe an idol that someone actively supports. A more suitable English equivalent here would be waifu, but that sounded too weird here.

You guys are like that too, right? A virtuous otaku is someone that will never fall wholeheartedly in love with their oshi.

Shulavis watched me for some time, but before long, he smiled as if he had understood something.

“...I see. Then let’s treat it like that’s the case. I can trust you, right?”

(Of course. If I break my promise, I don’t mind if you boil me, grill me, or eat me raw.)

“No, I’m not stupid. I won’t eat a pig raw...”

Oh, alright.

(Then it’s decided. If you’re convinced, let me meet my oshi.)

I walked silently down the dark corridor. My pig heart wouldn’t stop thumping. After all, I was about to meet my oshi.

I looked out a window and spotted a large ship with its sails extended out, about to leave the port. It was the Broken Collar. Looks like they’re finally ready. Since they were discovered by someone from the royal dynasty, they were

probably feeling uncomfortable and looking to leave Niabel as soon as possible.

Niabel's port was between two promontories which protruded out like the jaws of a stag beetle. The dark ocean extended beyond the promontories. Where will the Broken Collar take Nott, Celes, and Sanon?

...Hm?

What's this uneasiness? Is it because I'm about to meet a cute blonde girl? No, this bad feeling is more like...

I recalled Nott's words.

—Those guys from the north are still after me. I seem to be treated like a thorn in their side.

And then there's what Shulavis said earlier.

—Even now, after disobeying Grandfather's orders and burning down the Northern royal castle, he's currently flying around without any clues on the Northern army's location.

Am I overthinking this? It seems that the Northern army, which placed killing Nott as their top priority, is no longer near the capital, and is nowhere to be found. I doubt that huntsman is accustomed to the sea. I just hope they don't encounter the Northern army while they're at sea...

I then remembered how, when the Northern army attacked Bapsas, there was the smell of the sea drifting from their direction, and the monsters called Orgs had webbed things on their limbs...

Finally, there's the question I had while on the ship.

—How was it possible for the Northern Forces to only attack Bapsas with pinpoint accuracy without damaging any of the cities north of Bapsas?

It can't be explained if they were advancing on land. But what about from the sea? Aren't those webbing-like structures on the Orgs' suitable for traversing through the sea?

(You know what, hold on.)

When I called out, Shulavis stopped. He placed a finger against his lips and thought hard about something.

“I’ve heard your conjectures. I was reminded of something that Grandfather found mystifying. Despite its size, the Northern army is rarely spotted by the hecklepons’ surveillance network. This is on top of the fact that the hecklepons are currently concentrated on the north side. Why do you think that is?”

(...Because there are no hecklepons in the sea?)

“Yeah, that possibility seems very likely.”

Shulavis looked towards the sea. The fleet led by the Broken Collar appeared ready for departure.

“It’ll be bad if this continues. If they’re surrounded in the sea, the Liberation Army might even be annihilated.”

(Then you should hurry up and warn them. The ship might’ve already set sail.)

After thinking about it for a while, Shulavis spoke.

“...Understood. I’ll deliver the message to them quickly. Jess is in the room at the end of this hallway. Please wait there with her.”

As he was about to leave, he turned around again.

“Make sure you don’t forget about your promise.”

Shulavis put on his hood and ran back through the corridor he just came from.

I looked at the end of the stone corridor where there was an old-looking wooden door. The door was made from glossy amber-colored wood. I averted my eyes. On the black sea in the distance, the ship began slowly moving.

Well, I can’t just stand here. Shulavis already left. If I don’t have someone I can communicate with, I’m just an ordinary pig. Yeah. I have no choice but to open

that door.

The pig's heart – my heart, wouldn't stop pounding. I slowly walked forward.

I reached the end. The door handle was too high. I can't reach it with my feet.

The last time I was this nervous about opening a door was probably when my high school homeroom teacher told me to "come to the staff room later." I was so worried at the time, because I thought they had caught on to the fact that I was reading an erotic light novel during class.

No, no. What am I thinking? Hurry up already.

Taking the plunge, I slammed the door with my snout. Bam! The door rattled.

"...Mr. Shulavis?"

A nostalgic voice came from inside. No, I can't. I can't do this. I'm still not-

The door opened. An unbelievably cute girl was standing there.

.....

"...?"

Our eyes met.

"Oh, what's wrong? What are you doing here?"

.....

"Did you get separated from your owner?"

The girl crouched. Her knees were defenselessly open, and a white...

"...?"

This won't do. She can see through all my monologues.

"Mister Pig..."

Her brown eyes peered at me.

“Are you crying?”

Hearing that, I realized cold drops of water were running down my cheeks. No, these are...

“Um... By any chance, is Mister Pig able to understand what I’m saying?”

(T-that’s right, oink! I’m actually a pig fairy, oink!)

“Eeeeeeh?! You’re a fairy?!”

You really bought that? What are you, an innocent light novel heroine?

“...Light novel?”

Puzzled, the cute girl tilted her head. Wait, no. That’s not what I wanted to talk about.

(E-erm, to answer your question from earlier, pork! The reason why I’m shedding tears is not because I’m happy or sad, pork! If a foreign object gets into your eyes, tears will reflexively come out to try and wash it away, pork!)

“Your sentence ender changed...?”

Oh no. I was too shaken, so I messed up my character.

“Um, you don’t have to force yourself. Besides, real pigs don’t make sounds such as oink or pork...”

True. I’ll pursue realism from now on and end my lines by snorting.

“What a strange Mister Pig.”

The cute girl giggled.



“Speaking of which, why did you come here?”

That’s right. I didn’t come here to admire a cute girl’s panties.

After an “Ah,” Jess quickly stood up and lightly pressed against her skirt with her hands.

“I-I’m sorry for showing you something so unsightly...”

A white blouse and a navy blue skirt. They were clothes I felt like I had seen before.

(Shulavis brought me here. He told me to wait here until he returns.)

“I see! In that case, please come in. It’ll be difficult to talk here.”

Jess led me inside the room. It appeared to be a living room. Two chairs were facing each other with papers spread across the small wooden table in-between them.

She must have spent time with Shulavis here. Probably just the two of them together.

Jess sat down in one of the chairs and looked directly at me.

“Um... do you happen to know me, Mister Pig?”

(Eh? No, I don’t know you at all...)

I’m just your loosely acquainted person B.

“Oh, I see. You seemed to know my name, so I thought...”

(I heard it from Shulavis. He said that his fiancé, Jess, is in this room, and that we should wait here together.)

“Mr. Shulavis said that...?”

Jess tilted her head. Did I say something strange?

“No, you didn’t. It’s just that, Mr. Shulavis never once asserted that I was his fiancé before...”

(I see. By the way, I would be glad if you could pretend to not hear my monologues, and only respond to those with parentheses in them.)

“Parentheses... Okay, I understand.”

Great. Now I don’t need to worry about being asked the subject regarding Shulavis mentioning Jess’ breast size.

Jess’ cheeks instantly flushed red. She placed her hand on her chest as if she minded, and turned away. However, she didn’t broach the subject of my monologue. It really helps that she’s so understanding.

“How... how are you able to understand what I’m saying, Mister Pig? Were you originally a human?”

Jess tried to steer the conversation away.

(That’s right. I was born and raised in another country, but after eating raw pig liver, I fainted and somehow became a pig in Mestria. Sounds kinda stupid, doesn’t it?)

“So that’s what happened... I was taught that pork shouldn’t be eaten raw. I don’t know how it was in the country you came from, Mister Pig, but it might be best to heat it up before eating from now on.”

Jess turned to face me and smiled awkwardly.

“Though I don’t think this is something I should be saying to Mister Pig...”

It can’t be helped since Jess already said it. Did everyone get that? Heat the pig liver.

If it was properly cooked, I wouldn’t have had to experience these kinds of emotions.

“Um, Mister Pig, if you have something in your eyes, would you like me to get some water for you to wash them?”

(It’s fine. Don’t worry about it.)

I closed my eyes and shook my head to shake off the tears. I’m not good at dealing with amnesia.

(...How are things lately? Doing well?)

“Eh? Are you asking me...?”

(No, sorry, that’s not what I meant. Why would I care about you? I’m talking about Shulavis.)

“Oh, sorry... you were asking about Mr. Shulavis, right? He seems quite healthy.”

(I heard that the royal dynasty is having a rough time. Including you, everyone must be very busy.)

“Yeah, erm...”

Jess hesitated. Well, that’s no surprise. It’s not like she can just talk about the internal affairs of the royal dynasty with an unknown pig.

(Well, I’m sure there are some things you can’t talk about, but I’m on good terms with Shulavis, so I have a relatively good idea of the royal dynasty’s internal affairs. I even heard about Evis being cursed, and that Markus is searching everywhere for the Northern army. You can tell me with confidence. When Shulavis comes back, you can check with him, and if what I said was wrong, feel free to sashimi or grill me.)

“I don’t think eating you raw is a good idea, but... what you said makes sense.”

With a convinced look, Jess started speaking without any prompt.

“Everyone seems to be busy due to the war... But I’ve only been learning magic, so it hasn’t been particularly hard on me.”

(I see! So you've learned how to use magic?)

“Y-yes...”

Jess responded questioningly.

(Oops, sorry. It's because I heard you were a Yesma up until three months ago, so I was surprised to see that you're already able to use magic so soon, that's all.)

“Oh, so that's what you meant. Naturally, I still can't use any powerful magic. It's only to the extent of being able to start a fire... It's completely useless in battle, and I feel really sorry for letting everyone down.”

(I see. So you're not participating in battles, and are here instead to assist Shulavis?)

“You can say that. But even if you call it assisting, it's more like being a burden... I was interested in the outside world, so I asked them to let me leave the capital.”

(You're interested in the outside world? That's a good thing.)

“Is it...?”

Towards Jess, who had lowered her head in disheartenment, I conveyed.

(There are a lot of people in this world who are only interested in themselves. It's commendable for a ruler to try and understand the world, even when it means putting themselves at risk.)

“Ah, no... It's not for the sake of the world or anything like that...”

(Oh, really?)

“Yes. To be honest, my precious memories from when I left the house I was serving up until I entered the capital were sealed away by Evis-sama... But I'm still really curious about them...”

Her pure eyes were directed at me.

“Mister Pig, do you know of a person called Mr. Nott?”

Nott?

(Yeah, I know him well. He’s a friend, and the Liberation Army’s leader.)

“I see... Um, I heard that Mr. Nott started coming into prominence around the same time I entered the capital... I think that might not have been a coincidence, and I may have been helped by him... Perhaps something happened while Mr. Nott was sending me to the capital, which led to him being pursued by the Northern Forces... This matter bothered me, so... I asked to be allowed to accompany Mr. Shulavis on this surveillance mission regarding Mr. Nott.”

What incredible perceptiveness. Are you a high school detective?

(So that’s how it is. Well? What did you think when you saw Nott?)

“Actually, I didn’t get a good look at him yet. I’ve been waiting here in Niabel. When Mr. Nott arrived, I approached the Liberation Army’s ship with Mr. Shulavis, but Mr. Shulavis noticed something and brought me back here... Then, while I was waiting here, Mister Pig showed up.”

I see. I got a grasp on the situation.

“Um, Mister Pig. You know Mr. Nott, right? What kind of person is he like? Could you please tell me?”

Jess asked enthusiastically, and somewhat clingingly. Are her past memories that important?

(He’s a good guy. Strong, brave, handsome, and hates Yesma hunters more than anyone else... He’s also someone that likes big boobs.)

“Big...”

Jess looked down. I think I might’ve included some unnecessary information out of personal feelings.

“Erm, what part was out of personal feelings?”

Jess didn't let that escape her ears.

(Never mind, it's nothing. Speaking of which, you seem to care a great deal about your sealed memories.)

"Yes, well... Um, I know what I'm about to say is strange, but I feel like I'm forgetting something very important..."

(How can you tell?)

"By the bookmark."

(Bookmark?)

"If all my memories are like a book, my current state feels like the pages, from when I left the house to when I started living in the capital, are all wet and stuck together. But there's a bookmark firmly placed inside, and only the feeling that I must revisit it remains..."

Jess blushed suddenly and shook her head.

"This isn't right, I shouldn't keep blabbing about such personal matters... I wonder why? I feel like I can talk about anything if it's with Mister Pig."

(Perhaps you still have your habits from when you were still a Yesma. You once lived as a human of the lowest class, so if the other party is a person, you aren't able to discard the impression that they're superior and probably didn't open up to them. Because of this, it's understandable that you would confide in non-human beings.)

"I see... That certainly makes sense."

After saying that with interest, Jess hurriedly corrected herself.

"Oh, but I don't think Mister Pig is inferior in the slightest! I just think that you're someone who's easy to become intimate with..."

(I understand, don't worry. I'd be happy if you could just think of me as a pig fairy and get along with me easily. Snort.)

Jess giggled.

Even though I intended on rendezvousing with Nott, the situation suddenly became like this.

When it comes to fate, it really is hard to know what'll happen.

As Jess and I started to worry about Shulavis, who never returned, a large explosion occurred at the sea. The loud noise drew our attention towards the flames burning at the port.

“A ship's on fire...”

Jess peered into the telescope and informed me.

Don't tell me... he didn't make it in time?

No, they still have Sanon. If Shulavis had properly informed them of the danger, the Liberation Army wouldn't have set off into the sea like that. Something must've happened.

(Please explain the situation to me in more detail.)

“Okay... A large ship is falling apart and burning... It looks like some of their other ships are also being affected. A lot of sailing ships are coming from the other side-. Oh.”

(What's wrong?)

Jess peered into the telescope so intently that I was worried it would dig into her eye socket.

“Those aren't sailing ships coming from the other side... They're strangely shaped... and seem to be moving towards us at an incredible speed.”

At that instant, rays of light burst all across the open sea, and in less than a second, explosions occurred all over the streets of Niabel. Are we being bombarded from the sea? Does that mean it's the Northern army? Are they here

already? Does this mean Nott's location was already exposed...?

Jess left the window, pressed her hand against her chest, and anxiously looked over here.

“W-what do we do...?”

(It'll be alright. They've already been warned in advance. The Liberation Army and Shulavis should have had some time to prepare for a counterattack.)

By the time I conveyed that, the shelling from Niabel's side had begun. Pillars of water rose up from the sea after the roars of cannon fires.

(What's happening now?)

Jess did her best to look through the telescope and inform me of the situation.

“Because the burning ships are blocking them, the oddly-shaped ships don't appear to have entered the port yet.”

I see, so they intentionally set fire to their ships. They likely blew up those ships with no one on board to purposefully entangle the enemies into it, and delay the enemies' invasion of the port.

Once the battle gets to this stage, there's not much left that Jess and I can do. It's best that we try and find a safe place to hide.

(Is this place safe?)

“Um... I don't know. Although it's not possible for people other than those from the royal dynasty or royal army to enter, I'm not sure how many attacks from the sea it can withstand...”

While we dawdled in worry, an explosion rang. Nearby, the sound of structures collapsing reverberated.

Not good. It looks like this fort is also under attack.

(Let's evacuate to somewhere that's least likely to be bombarded. Jess, do you have something like that max defense robe?)

“Eh?” After a brief confusion, Jess brought over the black robe hanging on the wall.

“Do you mean this? Evis-sama’s robe?”

(Yeah. Put it on, and let’s get out of here.)

“Understood.”

Jess wore the max defense robe over her clothes.

(Pull up your hood as well. We don’t know when we’ll be hit.)

“Right, but Mister Pig doesn't...”

(Don’t worry about me. Let’s go, quickly now.)

After urging Jess, I left the room and spotted the dark and long stone corridor was wrecked about 50 meters ahead.

“Mister Pig, this way.”

Jess headed towards the stairs leading down. If we head this way, won’t we end up in the sea? Are we going to be alright?

“There’s a coastal cave ahead. We shouldn’t be hit there.”

After reading my monologue without permission, Jess descended the stairs. I frantically chased after her.

We dug through some rocks and squeezed through a narrow passageway like moles before eventually reaching a large open space. It was a wide cave. The cave’s wide mouth was open towards the sea, with even the pale moonlight reaching inside. The innermost part where we stood consisted of a waterfront formed out of pebbles, and a stranded, battered boat facing us.

Is it alright for the fort to have this kind of backdoor? As I wondered that, Jess smiled and looked back. To my surprise, I could no longer find the passageway exit we just came from. Only a black rockface remained.

“Only those who know the method are able to enter from the outside. It’s a

secret backdoor.”

(I see. Then we should be fine for now.)

In the unlikely event that we’re spotted from the outside, we just need to go back the way we came before they catch us. Once we’re in the passageway, they won’t be able to pursue any further.

This kind of thinking was too naïve.

As I noticed something was moving underneath the distant waters, it approached us at a terrifying speed and leapt into the air like a flying fish. It was a huge body that was at least three meters tall-

Without hesitation, Jess and I dove in the same direction to dodge the attack.

“It’s an Org!”

The same time Jess shouted, the Org collided into the place we were standing – the rockface that was the fort’s exit. And shockingly, like a shounen manga, the rock collapsed.

The Org slowly got up. Its silhouette seemed to be twice the size of a body builder’s. Its dark grey skin was wet with seawater, and it had long fingers with sturdy-looking webbings on them.

I was convinced after seeing its swimming speed. By using these guys to pull their ships, the Northern army acquired mobility that can escape even the royal dynasty’s pursuits.

While I held these out-of-place thoughts, the Org turned to face us. Though it had a male human’s face, its entire body was terrifyingly swelled up.

“Ug... Dah...?”

A deep growl came from the gaps of its jagged teeth.

I looked at Jess. Her face was pale, and she was slowly backing up. Shit, I’m out of options. But Jess has her max defense robe on. Maybe I can act as bait and hope that she’ll be willing to escape in the meantime?

—Don't. Please come over here. I'll do everything that I can.

Although Jess' eyes were filled with fear, she looked straight at the Org's face.

I backed off and ran towards Jess' side. She spread her arms out and quickly twisted her wrists in the direction of the Org. Splash. I heard a large amount of liquid being spilled.

When I turned around, I saw the Org, which was about to attack us, had suddenly stopped. A smell – like the inside of a car when it's being refueled – drifted here aggressively.

I recalled.

—Naturally, I still can't use any powerful magic. It's only to the extent of being able to start a fire...

Sensing what Jess was about to do, I immediately pushed her down and covered her petite body in an attempt to shield her. The next moment, a bright light enveloped my vision, accompanied by a violent explosion.

That smell just now was very much like gasoline. It's a volatile fuel that, when ignited, not only burns where the liquid is located at, but its surrounding area as well.

It's gonna be heated thoroughly for sure this time – As I had this stupid thought, I noticed a pair of slender arms tightly hugging my head. It wasn't hot.

Jess had quickly covered me with her max defense robe. The tip of my nose was stuck between her breasts. I'd love to describe the feeling in detail, but now's not the time for that.

After the explosion subsided, I rolled off of Jess and stayed vigilant of where the Org was.

The Org, still wrapped in flames, was thrashing around the water's edge until it stopped moving.

(...Are you alright, Jess?)

“Yes. And you, Mister Pig?”

(I’m fine.)

“I see, that’s good... Sorry, I’m still inexperienced...”

(No, that’s fine... But isn’t your magic power strange?)

Jess, sitting upright, was dumbfounded.

“...You mean it was too weak?”

(Why are you saying something that a protagonist from another world would say? What I meant was that it was too powerful. It’s dangerous if you don’t control it. In this scenario, there was no reason for you to use volatile fuel. Not to mention in such an enclosed space. We could’ve ran out of oxygen, and I was almost turned into a roast pig.)

“You’re right, I’m sorry...”

(Well, it’s fine. Thanks for protecting me. This place has become dangerous, let’s find an opportunity to use the boat and escape.)

The boat appeared to be specially made as it moved forward just from Jess touching its rim. We abandoned it at a nearby shore and fled into the pine forest that stretched across the coastline.

Just as I figured we should be fine after making it this far, there was a clanging sound as something bounced off of Jess’ robe. I heard the sound of twigs being trampled on. At a glance, there were three men looking at us. One held a crossbow, and the other two each carried a spear. They were wearing dirty leather armor, and didn’t appear to be soldiers from the royal army.

“What are you doing in a place like this, missy?”

—Let’s run away.

As Jess telepathically convey that to me, she turned her back on the three men

and ran. Another clang filled the air as the robe blocked another arrow from the crossbow. I followed Jess into the dark pine forest.

The three men laughed scornfully while chasing us, and Jess, panting, continued to desperately run away.

I'll never forgive them for pointing their deadly weapons at Jess-taso. And so, I made a suggestion to Jess.

(This is an open space. How about you use that move from earlier towards those guys behind us?)

—But they're humans...

(You're not able to burn humans?)

—Sorry...

(You don't have to apologize. Not being able to kill people is a good thing. I'll go disrupt them and make them stop so you can start a fire between yourself and them. Make a wall of fire to block them. It's a pine forest, so it should burn easily.)

—But-

Without giving Jess a chance to stop me, I turned around.

I locked onto the oncoming pursuers and charged with all my might.

“Snort, snort, snort!”

I dashed forward while snorting loudly. Our pursuers paused in surprise, and I used that opportunity to slip by them and disappear under the cover of darkness. Mission complete. I stopped them in their tracks. All that's left now is to take a detour to avoid getting entangled, and return to my owner. As I ran through the pine forest, I conveyed to Jess.

(Don't look at the flames. Your eyes take time to adjust to the darkness.)

—Okay. Here I go!

Splloosh. I heard the sound of a larger than expected amount of liquid being spilled.

The next moment, I heard an ear-splitting explosion and instantly shut my eyes. The hot air blew on my back, and when I opened my eyes, there was a huge mushroom cloud that rose up as if to pierce the heavens.

I finally joined up with Jess again.

(You know...)

When I conveyed that, Jess, with sweat on her forehead, responded with a worried look.

“Um... Did I do something wrong again?”

Are you sure you're not the protagonist of an otherworldly story?

(No, it's fine. I just don't think it needed to be that extreme. In fact, if you start a fire that big on a dark night like this, it'll end up drawing people's attention, even from far away.)

“Y-you're right...”

(Let's move quickly. Nothing good will come from drawing people's attention.)

It looks like we already lost our pursuers. Or rather, it wouldn't surprise me if they were accidentally roasted. Well, it's their punishment for attacking Jess-taso.

“Um... what's -taso?”

Jess inquired while dripping with sweat.

(It's like an honorific, don't worry about my monologues. ...By the way, are you feeling alright?)

“Erm... sorry, I'm okay.”

We continued running. I looked at Jess – she was running with her left hand on her chest and a desperate expression on her face.

(Let's stop for now.)

As soon as I suggested that, Jess immediately stopped and sat down at the root of a pine tree. She didn't seem alright.

(What's wrong? Are you not feeling well?)

"No, I'm okay... I'm doing fine!"

Jess clenched her hands tightly and made a small guts pose as if to say "I can do this!" Her face was covered in sweat during this cool night – she certainly didn't seem to be doing fine.

(Hey, how about riding on my back?)

"Eh...?"

(You must be tired from not being accustomed to using magic. Just sit on my back. I can carry you.)

"But won't that..."

(I've carried someone on my back once before. As long as you don't make a mistake with your riding posture, it'll be fine. It won't be that much of a burden on me either. C'mon.)

"In that case..." Jess obediently straddled my back.

(Sit towards the back, and tightly squeeze against me with your legs. Put your weight on your hands... Just like that.)

I tried walking. I didn't hear any inappropriate sounds like "Nn." Judging by that, it was probably fine, and I dashed through the pine forest in the direction opposite from the coast.

(How is it? Comfortable?)

"Mhmm..."

Jess' vague reply made me glance at her. She was frowning, seemingly in pain.

(Are you not feeling well?)

“No, it’s nothing of the sort... I just have this strange feeling...”

I panickingly stopped. Did I rub against somewhere that I shouldn’t have?

“That’s not it. It’s just, why...?”

I could feel Jess’ hands faintly trembling on my back.

“...Why am I crying?”



Jess cried silently. You're asking me? That's what I want to know.

(Did something get in your eyes?)

After casually making that joke, I regretted it and corrected myself.

(You're probably feeling insecure. Don't worry, I'm here by your side. Let's get through tonight and return to the capital.)

“Okay.”

I kept running. I honestly didn't know where I should be headed towards. My only mission was to get this girl to a safe place, no matter what kind of danger approaches-

“Oogh... Aaaaugh.”

I heard a low growl. Not again. I didn't even have time to think about it before an Org sprinted at us. However, probably because they're adapted to the water, its steps were clunky in the pine forest.

The Org's end was upwind. Beyond its unpleasant stench also drifted the smell of multiple humans and gunpowder. This is bad.

I turned and ran away from the Org, towards the center of Niabel.

(Jess, leave the front to me. Can you aim at that Org?)

—I'll try.

Avoiding the pine trees, I ran in a zigzag pattern. I heard the sound of several large masses of liquid bursting, and each time, my olfactory epithelium was stimulated by the strong smell of gasoline.

—Sorry, I'm not able to hit it...

(That's fine, don't be hasty. And don't light the fire yet.)

Crap. We're downwind. If we ignite it now, it might serve as a distraction to some extent, but we'll definitely be caught up in it as well.

My center of balance suddenly shifted, and just as I was wondering what happened, Jess slipped off of my back. You've got to be kidding me right now. I stopped to look at Jess, her pale face illuminated by the moonlight. Although sweat was pouring out of her, Jess had peacefully closed her eyes. She was still breathing, so she seemed to have just fainted.

The Org was quickly closing the gap that we had worked hard to build. This isn't good. We're screwed.

I lifted Jess with my snout and turned her over, laying her on her stomach. She seemed to be having trouble breathing, so I turned her head slightly to the side and covered up her pretty face with her hood. This might be my last chance to see Jess' face. But that's okay. Just being able to see her again and know that she's doing well is good enough for me. Even if this pig disappears from the world tonight, I'm sure Jess will be fine. I'm sure she'll grow up splendidly as an oblivious maxed-out cheat mage.

Bring it on.

I turned and rushed at the approaching Org. I rammed into its right leg to kill its momentum, and spun around to bite its left Achilles tendon. It was a lot tougher than I imagined. It was like biting on lumber.

Even if that didn't do much damage, I still managed to draw its attention. I ran in the opposite direction of Jess while snorting, and the Org chased after me. It helps that it's so simple-minded.

Ahead, six armed men were running towards this direction. As I had surmised from the smell of gunpowder, one of them had a gun.

I was surrounded by the heavy smell of gasoline. It looks like I reached the place where Jess was randomly throwing out fuel earlier.

I would like to believe that in Mestria, the basic rules regarding fuel haven't permeated to the masses yet. For example, you shouldn't light a fire in a place that smells of volatile fuel...

“Snort snort snooort!”

Shouting as loudly as I could, I charged at them and crashed into a spear-wielding man who was running next to the person with the gun. The man lost his balance and fell onto the ground.

“What’s with this pig?!”

I heard someone curse.

“Snort heh.”

I snorted at them like they were idiots and ran back towards the approaching Org. I was sandwiched between the men and the Org.

“Snooort?”

I turned towards the man with the gun and snorted provocatively. To which he pointed his gun at me, as if he had had enough.

“Die, you fucking pig!”

I darted away from the Org and the men. Time to put the pedal to the metal. Pigs are able to run as fast as athlete sprinters. I can definitely escape from them. I’ll make a headlong dash!

Bang.

A gunshot rang. At that moment, my vision turned white and I felt my body float in mid-air. I wasn’t sure if it was the sound or the wind pressure that made my eardrums feel like they had burst. I was blown away by the blast and fell onto the ground.

Thanks to the soft, needle-like pine leaves piled on the ground, my bones didn’t seem to have taken any damage. However, my butt was struck by a literal searing pain. Looks like I got burned.

I turned around and saw that the surrounding area had been burnt to crisps. Neither the Org, nor the men’s figures could be seen. I mean, from where they were standing, I doubt they could’ve survived. That was more than just a

barbeque.

Thankful for still being alive, I rushed back to where I had left Jess. Searching for a girl covered by a black robe in the woods was a daunting task, but in the end, my nose helped solve the problem. There's no way I would miss such a nice scent. I wonder what kind of soap she uses.

The wind changed directions, so the fire wasn't blown towards us. I flipped the cute girl's body over with my snout.

(Are you alright?)

No response. I placed my ear close to her face. She was still breathing. What caused her to faint like this? I hope she's not sick.

Did she overuse her magic? She did throw around a lot of fuel after all...

"Oh, aren't you a cute young lady?"

When I came to my senses, I spotted a tall man in a dirt-colored robe walking towards us. He was holding a billhook-like blade. This was a battlefield. Even if she isn't a Yesma, who knows what he'll do to such a cute girl who's collapsed on her own...

Give me a break. I've ran out of cards to play here.

"Sorry piggy, but I'll be taking your owner."

I hurriedly lifted Jess up to try and put her on my back. Despite her being a slender cute girl, it was too difficult to carry her lifeless body. I could try throwing my body at him, but if he uses that dangerous-looking blade, I'll just end up as meat cubes. I'm not able to move my hind legs that well either.

But I've got to do this. Even if I were to die, as long as there's a chance for Jess to survive-

Just then, what looked like a giant raptor swooped down from the sky and slammed into the robed man. He received a powerful blow to the head and was sent flying. After landing, he stopped moving. His head was twisted in a crazy angle.

“It appears I was late. Welcome back, brave young man. I shall acknowledge your courage.”

I looked at the voice. What I thought was a raptor was actually a man on his knees. Large bird wings grew from his back.

When he stretched his black hand towards me, I could feel the pain in my butt subside. Is he a mage...?

He wore a purple robe with gold embroidery. I recognized that face which turned to look at me. He was an old man with white hair, and a long beard. His face may be covered in a mysterious black mesh pattern, but he was unmistakably the king of Mestria, Evis.

“Jess experienced ecydessa and fainted. She won’t be waking up for some time.”

As I was overwhelmed by the sudden turn of events, Evis directed his hand towards Jess. What was he saying about ecdysone? Is he going to heal Jess?

“No. I’m redoing the seal on Jess’ memories.”

Evis retracted his hand, but Jess didn’t move. Is it that important to be sealing her memories at a time like this?

(Um, Evis-sama, what should I be...)

“Just because she won’t wake up doesn’t mean you can play around with her. Wait here for a while. If you run into any trouble, snort your nose. I’ll be back soon.”

As he said that, Evis staggered to his feet, flapped against the air with his wings, and clumsily took off.

I mean, there’s no way I’d play around with Jess-taso...

Come to think of it... wasn’t Evis cursed and supposed to be bedridden? Is that black pattern on his face what that’s about? Don’t tell me he flew all the way here from the capital in that state.

With everything happening so suddenly, I was thrown for a loop. As I sniffed Jess' neck to calm down for the time being, I saw a nuclear-bomb-like bright flash as an explosion occurred in the direction of the port. The incredibly bright light penetrated the pine forest, creating black and white stripes on the ground.

After about ten seconds, the light faded, and shortly after that, a person fell in front of me.

Thud.

Rather than calling it a landing, it was more like a crash. It was the figure of a weakened king covered in pine needles.

“Don't worry. I've annihilated the Northern army's main force. The Northern army, which has invaded Niabel, will now have no choice but to retreat.”

In just that moment? This isn't just on the level of you being overpowered now, is it?

“This is Mestria's greatest mage's, Evis', technique. Let them tell tales of it.”

Evis, still in his crashed posture, weakly laid there with his back to the ground.

(Um, Evis-sama, are you...)

“Do I look fine?”

Evis responded, still looking at the sky. I moved close to his face.

(Sorry. Is... is there anything I can do to help?)

“You saved Jess. That alone is enough, but... ah yes. Brave young man, are you willing to send me off?”

What...?

(I don't quite understand what you're saying.)

“I’ve already exhausted all my strength. I no longer have the magic power to suppress this curse. It’s an irreversible, lethal curse to begin with, and it looks like it’s progressed to the stage where it can finally fulfill its purpose.”

Evis’ face and hands were covered by a horrific black mesh pattern.

(So you were cursed. Who-)

“I don’t know. This mage hides a fairly strong obsession... It’s a curse from a surreptitious sorcerer – someone not from the royal dynasty, and who we have no idea of.”

Isn’t the king’s family the only mages whose magic powers aren’t being restricted? Isn’t that why there’s been no conflicts, and how the royal dynasty has been able to maintain its overwhelming dominance?

“Mestria is on the verge of facing its greatest turmoil since the end of the Dark Ages. The surreptitious sorcerer, the Northern rebellion, the formation of the Liberation Army, and the appearance of you otherworlders – the more I think about it, all of this is perhaps the royal dynasty paying the price for creating this unsightly hierarchy that is the Yesmas.”

(I believe that’s the case.)

Evis’ chest lightly rose and fell. He seemed like he wanted to laugh.

“Brave young man, you certainly have the guts. Can I put my faith in that spirit of yours?”

(What do you mean by that?)

“I wish to change course in these last moments.”

Evis took a deep breath, which sounded like wind blowing through a crevice, and spoke.

“You may have heard from Shulavis already, but my son, Markus, is an extreme man. If he becomes the king like this, he might get out of control. Even though I told him to only keep an eye on the Northern dynasty and not interfere, he broke his promise and burned down their castle. He’s wallowing in power and

believes that power can solve everything. But look at the results. The Northern army still remains, and we don't know who their central figure is or where to attack."

(So how do you plan on changing course?)

"I've given up on sending you back to your world. I want you to remain with the royal dynasty to support Shulavis and Jess. Please guide them in the direction you believe is right."

Me...?

"There's definitely a reason for why you all have once again returned to Mestria at this point in time. Surprisingly, it seems the power of that innocent girl's wish still persists. I wish to believe in that power."

I pondered. Jess' wish still persists, making it possible for glasses otakus to be transferred from modern-day Japan to Mestria. It didn't just call upon me once.

And then there's my transfer destination this time around. Why did I transfer to Celes instead of Jess? Now that I think about it, is it because that's the best way to save Mestria...?

I tried thinking about what would've happened if I was sent directly to Jess. I would have never seen the Northern army in Bapsas, nor would I have heard about the Northern Forces' situation from Nott on the Broken Collar. As a result, I wouldn't have been able to predict the Northern army's attack that just occurred and relay it to Shulavis. Under those circumstances, the Liberation Army could have actually been wiped out from this battle.

—At the time, Mister Pig had no choice but to go to the capital with me in order to turn back into a human, right? I'm not smart, so I didn't think much about it when I was praying, but I realized it after we decided to go to the capital together. If Mister Pig was a human, you would have had the option of not accompanying me. But you weren't. The reason why you became a pig instead of a human was because my wish came true.

I recalled those words that were once spoken.

Jess' wish was clearly beyond the scope of her understanding, and it worked out

very well. So it might not be that crazy of an idea to go along with it.

(Understood. From my standpoint, I'd be happy to be able to protect Jess and her fiancé.)

It's just...

(Can I ask you a question?)

“Ask anything you'd like. I'll answer them until I die.”

(Evis-sama, you referred to the pigs as “you all.” That means you are aware of those besides me, correct?)

“That's correct. Analysis and prediction magic is my specialty, so I am able to observe substantial magic surges. There have been a total of seven otherworldly transfers since yours, and there now seems to be three pigs in total that are able to think.”

So it's as I had expected.

(There's me, the black pig with the Liberation Army, and one more – that last one, might it be the wild boar near the Northern ruler?)

“I'm not certain to that extent, but I do know it's in the north. Why do you think that?”

(The three of us tried to transfer here again at the same time, but one of us was missing. That guy was transferred to the north last time, so I figured that might've happened this time as well.)

I recalled something that was incomprehensible to me before.

—And one other question remains. Was it really a coincidence that Bapsas was attacked the morning after we were transferred to Mestria again?

The attack was too well-timed, and there was something about Nott's words which caught my attention.

—My torture was interrupted half-way because a wild boar was rampaging in a

govern camp and a Yesma escaped or something.

Pigs are domesticated wild boars. As you can tell from the fact that boar-pig hybrids exist, the two are capable of crossbreeding and are quite similar animals. A wild boar rampaged and let a Yesma escape? Could it be that the other glasses otaku, Kento, is that wild boar?

Kento, who was transferred to the north the same time we were transferred, immediately caused a ruckus to let a Yesma escape. But because of this, he was captured by the Northern leader and spilled the name of the village, which was connected to Nott and where the other pigs might have been transferred to. The Northern Forces then hurriedly dispatched their army, which was in the open sea, towards Bapsas. Since the other party halted the torturing of their hated Nott to devote all their attention to this matter, they must have been in quite the rush. And then the day after our transfer, their troops arrived at Bapsas.

“That sounds quite right. I believe your deduction is not far from the truth.”

An ominous sound, like that of a frog’s croaking, began mixing into Evis’ breathing noise.

“It looks like my time is nearly up. I’ve already told the royal family everything that needs to be said. You may interrogate me until my last breath.”

(Don’t say that... Evis-sama, do you have anything you want to say to me?)

“If I had to say... it would be about Jess.”

(Jess... Is it about her memories?)

“Yes. The reason why I sealed Jess’ memories was, of course, because your existence was a political hindrance. She was so depressed that she became useless. That’s why I sealed those memories away. – Although it’s correct to say that, it’s also quite a misleading explanation.”

(Did you have another purpose?)

“That’s correct. My primary goal was to develop Jess’ magic power.”

(Magic power?)

“Magic is an unfathomable thing, and its driving force, above all else, is one’s desires. Jess cares greatly for her sealed memories, and her desire to regain those memories is very strong. Thus, in order for her to recover her memories, she must break through my magic. What do you think will happen then?”

(Her magic power will grow because of her desire to make her magic stronger.)

“That’s correct. Jess was born with the potential to become the greatest mage since Vatis-sama. Her efforts to regain her memories by her own strength will be the first step. I would like for you to understand my intentions and to never reveal your secret until she regains her memories on her own.”

.....

(Conversely, does that mean it’s possible for Jess to recover her memories?)

“It’s plenty possible. And it may happen much sooner than I expected.”

Evis turned his face towards me. With his face covered by the repulsive patterns, he looked past the pig and gently gazed in Jess’ direction.

“Even if I may be the greatest mage in Mestria, I have absolutely no idea what will become of this country in the future. In such a situation, I wish to entrust the future to Jess’ earnest prayer, and to you, whom the prayer has summoned.”

(...Okay.)

“I have one last thing to tell you.”

I held my breath and waited for him to continue. Evis then said in a whisper-like voice, “The bond between your world and Mestria is as unstable as a bubble. If your pig dies, I’m afraid there won’t be a next time. Furthermore, should you stay here for too long, the two worlds will separate, and you will have no choice but to die here as a pig.”

Evis looked at me.

“O brave young man, until that critical moment comes, cherish your life; and when that critical moment arrives, go back.”

I see.

(Understood. I will engrave your words into my heart.)

—Good.

Evis finally stopped moving his mouth and conveyed his thoughts directly into my head.

—How ironic, young man, that I'll be parting from you using the same magic as when we parted the first time.

Evis' eyes closed. His right hand moved weakly to rest on his chest.

—I leave this country in your hands.

These were the last words of the man who was the source of those girls' misfortune.

Fragment 4 – An Important Item

Before dinner, Evis-sama summoned for me.

I was dirtied from top to bottom after practicing various magic techniques, so I quickly cleaned myself before heading towards the hall as instructed. It's a large hall with beautifully colored paintings on the high domed ceiling, numerous large plaster sculptures placed in front of its pillars, and a large round table surrounded by soft chairs.

Evis-sama sat in the seat closest to the entrance, waiting for me.

“Come here, Jess.”

I walked over there swiftly. Though Evis-sama's arms and legs were thin, he was sitting upright. I wondered if he was supporting himself with magic.

I sat down right beside the king.

“Are you feeling alright...?”

“Don't worry. I'm tired of eating in bed all the time.”

“I see... Speaking of which, did you need me for something?”

“I have something I want to give you.”

“Okay.”

When Evis-sama looked to the side, two objects unsteadily floated over from there and landed on the round table. They were a silver box small enough to fit in one hand, and a gold key that was too large to hold in one hand.

“What's... this?”

“I had a foresight, and I’ve started seeing a future where this should be used, so I’ll give it to you.”

“Future...?”

When I asked back, Evis-sama smiled kindly.

“When I sealed your memories, Jess, I also took away something that you treasured. That thing is inside this box.”

“Is... that so?”

“Indeed. However, this box will not open without this key.”

Evis-sama pointed at the gold key next to it.

“That’s not all. If the one to use this key to open it isn’t the right person, the moment the key is inserted, the box will burst into flames and be destroyed – with any chance of finding out what was inside lost forever.”

There was no one else in the hall. It was extremely quiet.

“Um... what do you mean by the right person?”

“What’s inside is proof that you were once with someone. Unless that person uses this key, this box will not open. And any actions other than the one I just stated will result in the proof being lost. You only have once chance to try this.”

“...I understand. But why is the key so big?”

After hesitating for a while, Evis-sama replied.

“You will have to think about that for yourself.”

Although I had no idea what the reason for it was, since it was something that Evis-sama said, I simply nodded.

“Okay, thank you.”

“Keep it safe in your room. You can take it now and put it away. Let’s have dinner once you return, Jess.”

That night's dinner was especially luxurious. There were large, fragrantly roasted prawns, tender veal stew, and a variety of colorful vegetables. I might have eaten a bit too much.

Evis-sama, Mr. Shulavis, Ms. Wies, and I chatted happily, and enjoyed some tea after our meal. After spending some time leisurely, we returned to our bedrooms.

Was it because Mr. Shulavis and I were leaving the capital the next morning? In the end, I didn't know why we held a special dinner party.

Chapter 4 – Express Your Thoughts As Soon As Possible

The morning after the naval battle, we were contacted by Shulavis, who had gone missing.

Inside the king's office with old-fashioned interior decorations, there were three people plus one gathered: King Markus, Queen Wies, Jess, and a pig. At present, the center of the royal dynasty was just this group.

Markus sat at the well-worn wooden desk, Jess and Wies sat on the sofa in front of it, and I sat on the rug on the floor. I felt like a pet that was caught up in a serious family meeting.

Last night, Markus arrived in Niabel after the battle was over to retrieve me, Jess, and the late Evis, sending us back to the capital using his dragon.

However, Shulavis was nowhere to be seen. For some reason, the location magic that Evis had casted on Shulavis was also dispelled.

Perhaps due to his own failure, Markus was in a foul mood and didn't even go out to look for his only son, Shulavis. He seemed to have sat in the office all night, waiting for Shulavis to contact him. When he finally made clear of the news, he gathered us here.

Markus was a slimmer man than I had expected. I heard he was short-tempered, extreme, and liked to set things on fire, so I figured he must be a muscle head, but that wasn't the case. He's a slim, middle-aged man with slicked-back hair. He seemed like the kind of guy that would be playing money games on Wall Street. His thin lips always appeared to be smiling nervously, but his eyes, peeking out from underneath his thick eyebrows, were not smiling. His grey eyes always shone fiercely.

“Shulavis...”

Markus spoke in a low, indifferent tone.

“After he disobeyed Father’s order and fought alongside the Liberation Army, Shulavis underwent ecydessa and appeared to have been taken prisoner by the Liberation Army. The Liberation Army sent a letter addressed to me asking that I form an alliance with them in exchange for handing Shulavis back.”

Markus threw the small piece of paper onto his desk.

“I’m so sorry that... Mr. Shulavis became a prisoner of war.”

Jess apologized while appearing shaken and overwhelmed. Wies placed her hand on Jess’ shoulder.

“It’s not your fault. It’s that child’s fault for acting on his own.”

“To begin with, there’s no way Father would entrust you, an inexperienced woman, with safeguarding Shulavis.”

With his index finger, Markus went tap tap tap tap on the desk. What are you, a woodpecker-type power harassment boss?

“Shulavis doesn’t know that Father died, and yet he still sent the letter addressed to me. In it, he asks that I proceed with the matter while keeping it a secret from Father. How sly of him. He probably knew that Father would never form an alliance with the Liberation Army. He wants the Liberation Army and the royal dynasty to join hands.”

Markus grinned.

“He also dispelled the location magic himself. He wrote that it disappeared because of ecydessa, but Father wouldn’t have set it on Shulavis himself, it would have been on his robe, so that was definitely a lie. And most importantly, it’s strange that he, who has gone through ecydessa four times now, has become a prisoner that can’t act. He just needs to reduce those non-mages into ashes. In other words, he’s deliberately not escaping. He intends to use himself as hostage to take advantage of his father.”

I see. So that's what happened. ...Excuse me for interjecting even though I'm not part of the conversation.

(Markus-sama, what are your opinions on the alliance?)

A pair of cold eyes looked down at this pig.

“I am different from Father. I'll use whatever means are available. That includes the Liberation Army. I plan to make full use of them as long as they're useful. Therefore, even if I'll be annihilating them in the end, I have no qualms with establishing a mere superficial alliance. ...Besides, I was the one to let Nott escape from the arena.”

“So that's what happened...!”

Wies exclaimed in surprise. I was also shocked. I thought a Yesma girl allowed Nott to escape.

Markus glanced at me and continued.

“Though I never asked Father about his strategy, I believe his plan was – even if we are to ignore the Liberation Army because they have a strong influence on the people, we must not soften our attitude towards them; and we should make thorough preparations to wipe out the Northern Forces on our own. He probably had no intention of joining hands with those who objected to the royal dynasty's system. I, too, was severely restricted from interfering with those from the Liberation Army. However, Father is no longer here. I intend to take full advantage of the Liberation Army, and the enthusiasm of those who support them.”

Hope was in sight thanks to Shulavis' actions.

(Then, Markus-sama...)

“Yeah. Putting aside how they'll be handled in the end...”

Markus finally stopped moving his index finger.

“We will announce an alliance with the Liberation Army in order to wipe out the Northern Forces.”

Jess and I entered the bathroom together.

Sorry to those that were expecting something, but the purpose of this wasn't to have a lovey-dovey bath. It was because, when I told her I wanted to talk in a place where no one could eavesdrop, Jess chose the bathroom.

The bathroom was tiled in shades of blue and navy blue, and in the center was a large circular bathtub. After taking off her socks, Jess entered the bathroom with her bare legs, sat on a small stool with the waist attached to her bare legs, and brushed me while her legs were still bare.

“Although this can't be considered a thank you gift for last night... Um, this is all I can offer, so... please let me do this while we talk.”

While saying that, the barelegged Jess slowly poured hot water over me with a bucket.

“By the way, does Mister Pig like bare legs...?”

How did she know...?

(How could I have that kind of perverted interest? I don't just like a girl's legs, I like their entire body.)

Jess placed her hands over her chest with a shocked expression.

“Um... my entire body is a bit... embarrassing.”

???

(I mean, it's not like I'm telling you to show it to me?)

“T-that's right. Sorry.”

Is she an airhead? Jess' defenselessness made me really worried. It was to the extent where it seemed like she would take everything off if I requested her to. I better do something about this danger as soon as possible.

“U-u-um, that's not the case at all! I will only show my naked body to someone

special to me!”

I see. So you’ll only show it to someone that’s special to you.

(In that case, that’s fine. Thanks for brushing me.)

“You’re welcome.”

Jess lightly smiled.

When Jess finally woke up in the morning, she seemed to have a hard time accepting Evis’ death and Shulavis’ disappearance. However, this idle talk appeared to have cheered her up a little, which is good.

“So what did you wish to talk about?”

Jess asked while brushing behind my ears.

(To start with... what’s ecydessa?)

“Ecydessa (magic depletion) is something like a mage molting. When you use a large amount of magic, you’ll temporarily lose consciousness and magic power... Once you awaken, your magic powers will be strengthened further.”

(I see, so it’s kinda like leveling up. That’s neat. Was yesterday your first time, Jess?)

“No, it was my third time.”

Didn’t Markus say that Shulavis underwent ecydessa four times?

(Does this mean that the Jess today would be able to fight on the same level as yesterday’s Shulavis?)

“Erm, I don’t think so. Because there’s a large gap between the types of magic we can use and the experience that we have... Mr. Shulavis has been trained in magic ever since he was born.”

Is that so? Anyway, let’s put that aside.

(Once ecydessa happens, you’re left defenseless, right? That’s why Markus

thinks Shulavis was captured during that time.)

“Yes. After ecydessa occurs, your consciousness and magic defenses are gone temporarily... I don’t remember anything that happened after we were chased by that Org in the pine forest yesterday...”

That’s good. It looks like the fact that I secretly sniffed her nape went unnoticed.

“Eh?”

Oh.

(...Anyway, let’s move on to the main topic. We’re going to have a serious discussion now.)

“Y-yeah!”

Jess blushed and combed through her hair as if to fix it.

(I have one more question. Even if you become defenseless temporarily, once you wake up, your magic powers will be restored, right?)

“Yes, that’s correct...”

(I see. Then what Markus said is a bit strange.)

“Huh? E-erm, is that so...?”

Right, I was the only one from the royal dynasty that saw Shulavis’ encounter with the Liberation Army.

(Shulavis was afraid of coming in contact with the Liberation Army. When he grabbed me from the ship, he was nearly killed. So even if he kept his distance and fought alongside them, it’s hard to imagine that he’d willingly become a prisoner of war. The danger of being killed is too great.)

“I... see. Then it must have been because of ecydessa that he was unwillingly captured?”

(That shouldn’t be it either. As Markus said earlier, even if he had become a prisoner unwillingly, since he’s able to send a letter, he’s able to use magic,

which means he can escape at any time with his powers. Looking at it this way, only one conclusion can be drawn. Shulavis was never taken prisoner in the first place.)

“Eh? Then why-”

(He’s been worrying about how to get the Liberation Army and the royal dynasty to work together. He probably put on a show for that first step. Perhaps he really did experience ecydessa. By mixing in some truths with lies, its credibility rises.)

“So that’s what happened... But then, the fact that the Liberation Army wants to form an alliance is a lie...”

As expected of Jess, it helps that she’s able to catch on quickly.

(That’s right. The problem lies there. Far from seeking an alliance, the Liberation Army is filled with a burning desire to overthrow the royal dynasty. Even if we were to announce the alliance, it won’t be established so easily. On the contrary, they might find it suspicious and think that it’s a trap.)

The royal dynasty, which kept their capital’s affairs a secret, naturally treated Evis’ death as a top secret too. Therefore, the Liberation Army will definitely be suspicious of the royal dynasty’s sudden change in attitude.

“Then what should we do...?”

(A friend of mine – or rather, a fellow pig of mine – is in the Liberation Army. He has a lot of influence there, and also believes that it may be necessary to form an alliance with the royal dynasty, depending on the situation. The problem is, he doesn’t know the inside situation here, so he probably won’t agree to the alliance so easily. That’s why I want to tell that guy – er, pig – that the royal dynasty really intends to form an alliance.)

“I see, in that case...”

(Think you can do that?)

“Markus-sama already set the location magic on Mr. Nott. If it’s just sending a letter there, I might be able to do it.”

Jess stood up on her bare legs and rinsed my back. That's nice.

But... I had to wonder, was it okay to service someone like me this much, even though I'm not someone special?

Jess wrote down everything I told her to on a piece of paper in Mestrian. Thanks to the treatment I was given three months ago, I was also able to read the text here. Jess' handwriting was very beautiful, and it gave a knowledgeable impression.

After finishing writing the letter, Jess took us to the birdhouse. I say birdhouse, but its interior was large enough to be the size of a zoo, with a bunch of different kinds of birds flying around freely. It had large windows, was well ventilated, and all the birds chirped happily.

As we walked to where the raptors were, Jess pulled out a map that Wies had given her.

"I was told that the dot on this map indicates where Mr. Nott is."

Jess showed me a solid black map that contained the red dot. However-

(Hey Jess, why are there two dots?)

"Eh? Two?"

Jess looked at the map again. It's hard to tell, but there were two red dots next to each other.

"Oh, you're right. I wonder why...? This red dot is supposed to move according to the location magic set by Markus-sama."

(Maybe he split into two people.)

"I see!"

After exclaiming, Jess followed up with a mutter, "It's not like he's a starfish..."

It looks like she didn't only learn about magic. I'm impressed she even learned

how to play along with jokes, and what echinoderms are.

That aside, why are there two dots? Maybe he accidentally casted the magic twice or something...? Forget it, it's not worth worrying too much about. It's more important that we get this letter delivered quickly.

(Looking at it seriously, if the two dots are next to each other, it shouldn't pose a problem. It should be fine to tell the bird to aim for either one of them.)

“Right. After all, Mr. Nott is going to be one of them... Oh, over here.”

There was a wire mesh to prevent the birds from coming and going, and beyond it were the large raptors. Jess opened the simple door and invited me inside.

“There's Mr. Goshawk, Mr. Golden Eagle, Mr. Falcon, Mr. Buzzard... There's also Mr. Owl.”

Jess looked to be enjoying herself as she introduced them to me. A white-tailed eagle that was so large I thought it would eat me was looking down at me from atop its perch. I avoided eye contact and hugged Jess' leg while walking.

“Don't worry, he won't eat you. Which bird should we use?”

Jess asked like she was going shopping. I looked around and spotted a snowy owl staring at me with its perfectly round eyes.

(If we're talking about delivering letters in a world of magic, then it has to be owls. How about that snowy owl over there?)

“Mr. Snowy Owl it is!”

Jess headed over there and gently stroked its fluffy white feathers. The snowy owl closed its eyes in rapture. Hey, no fair!

“If Mister Pig wishes to be petted, you only have to tell me.”

While giving me a mischievous-like laugh, Jess showed the owl the map. The birds here are said to have been trained in magic, so they're able to understand location magic. After talking to the owl a lot and completing the procedures, Jess rolled up the letter she wrote earlier and prepared to tie it to the owl's leg.

(Actually, hang on a minute. We have to make sure they know it's from us.)

“But it's already written on there that it's from Mister Pig.”

(Anyone can make that sort of thing up. We need to show them that this letter isn't fake. I have a good idea.)

“What is it?”

I thought of an absolutely cunning idea.

(Rub that letter on your thigh.)

Jess raised her eyebrows in confusion.

“Erm... mine?”

(That's right. That's all you have to do. Trust me.)

“Well, if Mister Pig says so...”

Jess lifted her skirt slightly and let the letter touch her absolute territory.

>TL Note: *Zettai Ryouiki*

“Is this alright?”

(Move it a little higher.)

Without the slightest doubt in her mind, Jess obediently lifted her skirt further and placed the letter on the far top of her thigh. I was focused on the letter. The letter, okay?



It went just as planned. Stupid owl, you won't be able to see this kind of view from the top of your perch. What a shame!

"Um, is this alright now...?"

I came to my senses after hearing Jess ask that with a seemingly flushed face.

(Sorry, I think that should be fine. You can send it now.)

After I conveyed that, Jess tied the letter to the owl, placed it on her shoulder, and we left the birdhouse. The owl even cheekily bit Jess' ear a number of times.

"Stop... Mr. Snowy Owl. It tickles."

Hah!? No fair! I want a nibble too!

Jess released the owl into the sky, and its white back immediately melted into the clouds.

After we saw it off, Jess crouched down in front of me.

"Mister Pig... I don't mind if it's just my ear."

Jess held out her ear as she said that. Whuh?

(No, that's no good. Sorry, please ignore my monologues.)

As I hastily conveyed that, Jess mischievously responded, "But you like to smell my nape, and look at my legs, don't you, Mister Pig?"

(That's not true, that's just a pig's force of habits...)

"Is that so? Then please endure it because it's very bad manners."

Jess ended it curtly and got back up.

Huh? Wait a minute, how could this happen...

I was flustered, and Jess gave me a blooming smile.

“I was kidding. It can’t be helped if it’s a pig’s habits. I can’t thank you enough for last night, so... please let me know if there’s anything you want me to do for you.”

Nn? Well, if you insist.

“U-um, of course, there are limits as to what I can do, but...”

Towards Jess, whose ears had turned red after muttering those words, I gentlemanly replied.

(Don’t worry. I’m not that kind of pervert. As a pig, I think I like being petted the most.)

“I see. In that case...”

Jess quickly crouched and started stroking my head. Ah, that’s real nice.

My neck, shoulders, loins, tenderloins, ribs, and thighs. Jess’ hands gently caressed my body. I lost my strength and fell flat on my side.

My chuck eye, heart, stomach, and liver. All of a sudden, I lost my wildness and was rolling on the ground with my belly exposed.

Have any of you ever been buck naked while having a cute blonde girl caress your entire body? You haven’t had that experience before, you say? Sorry to say this, but I have. Well, that’s probably because of the difference between how I spend my day-to-day compared to you.

I kept tumbling around, eventually throwing all four of my legs in the air. Jess found it funny and laughed.

“To be so happy just from being petted, Mister Pig sure is strange.”

(It’s not like I’m usually this happy. It’s only because Jess is petting me.)

When I answered that, Jess quizzically tilted her head.

“Eh? Because of... me?”

(Uh, no. Rather than saying it’s because of Jess, it’s more correct to say it’s

because you're a blonde girl.)

As soon as I said that, Jess stopped her hands.

“Mister Pig likes blonde hair...?”

(Yeah. It's always been a dream of mine to have a blonde girl to rub my whole body like this.)

Jess stood up with an expression that seemed both satisfied but also unconvinced, and her cheeks appeared to be puffing out slightly.

“I get the feeling that Mister Pig sure is fickle.”

* * *

“Master! Master!”

Just when I thought I heard a jumping-like voice, Bart, who was playing outside, entered the tent. We were having a quiet discussion while sitting around a shabby table when the outside sunlight shone inside and made us squint.

“What is it, Bart? We're in the middle of a meeting.”

At my question, Bart held up what looked to be a piece of paper.

“I was talking to Litis when a white owl flew towards us! It had a letter tied to its leg, and I saw it was addressed to someone. What was it again...?”

Bart narrowed his eyes to look at the recipient's name, and a girl with braids suddenly peeked out from behind him. She looked exactly like Nuris, someone who had helped me in the north, but unlike Nuris, this mysterious Yesma girl had a soft expression. This girl is now called Litis by most of us.

Bart looked up and grinned.

“It says, ‘To the older-women-loving hecklepon killer, and... the lolicon bastard?’ I mean, doesn't hecklepon killer refer to you, Master?”

Who's calling me an older-women lover? Whatever. It looks like it's addressed to me.

“Well, who’s the sender? How did the owl know about this place?”

“It says it’s from ‘The sleazy pig.’”

Next to me, Sanon snorted with his pig nose.

—Let’s read it. It might a letter from the royal dynasty. I don’t quite know what lolicon bastard means, but it’s probably referring to me.

Celes stood across from Sanon and helped relay his conversation. She seemed to be concerned about something, as she would occasionally glance at me – As I thought that, Celes quickly averted her eyes and started petting the black pig. The black pig’s curled tail started swaying slightly.

I walked over to Bart to receive the letter and patted him on the shoulder.

“Thanks. Go play with Litis for a little while longer. The meeting will be over soon.”

After watching Bart leave, I immediately opened the letter and read it.

“What’s on it?”

Itsune asked from the other side of the table. After I finished reading the letter, I showed it to Sanon while explaining.

“That frizzy hair guy’s plan worked, and it seems the royal dynasty changed its attitude. In order to fight off the threat from the north, they’ll be announcing an alliance, and he wants us to accept it. He says we won’t regret it.”

“Alliance?”

Josh’s black brows were raised, and Itsune’s face contorted in disgust.

“Of course we won’t accept it. Why do we need to work with the royal dynasty?”

Naturally, that’s how they reacted. Itsune and Josh hate the royal dynasty to death. In fact, their resentment might even be worse than mine.

“Well, to be honest, I don’t want to agree to this either...”

“Right? Just ignore them.”

That’s what Itsune says, but if that sleazy pig wrote that we won’t regret it, it’s worth considering.

“What do you think, Sanon?”

Sanon conveyed his response after my question.

—I think we should agree to this alliance.

“Why?”

Itsune glared at Sanon intensely.

—Because we won’t survive at this rate. No matter how much support the Liberation Army garners, there’s only a limited number of people actually fighting. In contrast, we still haven’t seen the limits of the Northern Forces’ power. If we keep fighting like this, we’ll eventually be worn down and suffer severe losses like the battle at the Rocklands.

No one spoke for a while, but eventually, Josh opened his mouth.

“I understand what Sanon is saying, but it’s not like we don’t have any other choice. There are people who can fight, even among those that support us. Shouldn’t we be relying on those guys first, instead of teaming up with these fucking bastards?”

Sanon shook his head.

—Do you really think an ordinary person would’ve helped had they joined yesterday’s battle? It’s thanks to the support of the royal army and mages that the Liberation Army was able to survive with little to no losses. The letter on the glowing arrow which informed us of the danger was also clearly sent via magic. Even after what had happened on the ship, that frizzy-haired mage acted to save us. Due to whatever reason, the powerful royal dynasty has offered to work with us. We can’t miss this opportunity.

Itsune crossed her arms and rebutted.

“I don’t like it. The fact that they’re trying to borrow our strength means that the royal dynasty is also in trouble, right? Then if we leave them alone, they may crumble on their own. That way, we’ll profit big. Right, Nott?”

I pondered after the question was thrown at me. To be honest, I’m not very good at thinking about the complicated power relations.

“I’m fine with anything as long as we win in the end. If it’s for the sake of winning, I’m willing to eat dirt and even pretend to ally with the royal dynasty. If Sanon thinks we should ally with them, I’ll comply.”

Around two months ago, Sanon showed up before us with Celes, gave us, who were young and inexperienced, a lot of strategic advice, and helped immensely to develop the Liberation Army. Even that crushing defeat we suffered a month ago, he sacrificed himself to pave the way for our retreat, minimizing the damage done to the Liberation Army.

That’s why I put my full trust in Sanon.

Sanon looked at me and slowly nodded.

—As Tsune-tan stated, it’s very likely that the royal dynasty is weakening. Now look at it this way. What if they collapsed just like that? Those who support us might end up falling under the control of the Northern Forces. In that situation, we’ll also be worse off. Do you think the Yesma girls will be happy if the Northern Forces ruled over Mestria?

Sanon snorted before continuing.

—There’s an order to this. First, we join forces with the royal dynasty. After we destroy the Northern Forces, we can then find a way to take care of the weakened dynasty. I think it would be wise to put aside the sentimentalism and cooperate for now.

His reasoning was sound. Itsune and Josh both reluctantly nodded in agreement. It’s decided.

—It’s just...

I questioned the seemingly uneasy Sanon.

“‘It’s just’ what?”

—This only applies if that letter is the real deal. I do think that the written contents, including the recipients’ names, are very much like Mr. Sleazy Pig’s style. However, it’s not out of the question that a mage could have forcefully extracted the information and pretended to act like him. So if it really is him, I’m sure he would’ve used a method that’s just like him to let us know if the letter is genuine or not...

Sanon suddenly noticed something and started sniffing the letter.

—Can you call Ro-kun over for a bit?

Without hesitation, I whistled to Rossi with my fingers. Rossi, who was standing guard outside, immediately entered the tent.

“What is it, Sanon? What do you want Rossi to do?”

—I want Ro-kun to smell this letter.

What is he talking about? Despite my doubts, I handed the letter to Rossi, who was sitting in front of me, and let him smell it.

Rossi then wagged his tail, barked, and started shaking his head vigorously while jumping.

What kind of scent did this letter from the royal dynasty have to make Rossi this happy?

“Sanon, what did you smell from the letter?”

—It smelled of a young girl’s legs.

Why does this guy know what that smells like?

But thanks that, the mystery was solved. The fact that the smell of someone’s legs would make Rossi this happy must mean...

“The smell of Jess’ legs are on there.”

The black pig nodded. I see, it’s like that sleazy pig to think of that.

I glanced at the delighted Rossi and declared.

“It’s decided. We’re accepting the alliance.”

* * *

The morning after we sent the letter, the royal dynasty put up notice boards all over the country acknowledging its alliance with the Liberation Army. As a result, the Liberation Army was allowed to live in cities ruled by the royal dynasty, and they were able to openly purchase items distributed by the royal dynasty, such as ristas. The Liberation Army immediately agreed to the alliance, and Nott came to visit the capital by himself in the evening. Allowing an outsider to enter the capital seemed to be an unprecedented special treatment.

Shulavis returned unharmed on the royal dynasty’s dragon, but he had no time to be stricken by his grandfather’s death, as Nott was coming to the capital. Shulavis joined Markus and headed towards the meeting place, the Golden Sanctuary.

Jess and I were allowed to observe in secrecy from behind a sarcophagus near a wall. I was all too familiar with this place, where the setting sunlight shone through the stained glass windows. I felt a little uneasy wondering what this sanctuary was meant for.

Be it the height, width, or depth of this hall, they all looked to be over 100 meters. The floor had a geometric pattern that used marbles of varying colors, and planted in the center of it was a single golden throne. The last time I was here, I didn’t really get the chance to observe this place, but now that I got a closer look, I saw that there were several altars along the walls, each with their own grand sarcophagus. The altar opposite of the throne as seen from the entrance was especially large, with an eye-catching statue of a young woman placing her left hand on her chest and stretching her right hand upwards. That’s Vatis, the progenitor of the royal dynasty, and the female mage who ended the Dark Ages.

Markus was sitting haughtily on the throne, and Shulavis was sitting on a wooden chair next to him, when Wies led Nott in front of them. Nott appeared to be wearing basically the same clothes he wore yesterday. He didn’t have any injuries, and looked to be healthy, but he was wearing what looked like a black stole around his neck. His twin daggers were held onto by Wies.

Jess and I held our breath as we watched the situation unfold.

“Welcome. No need to be polite, you can take it easy here.”

Markus encouraged from the throne. However, Nott still knelt on the ground and lowered his head slightly. It seemed like a small defiance against the king’s order to take it easy.

—That’s Mr. Nott... It’s the first time I’ve seen him up close.

Jess placed her hand on my back and told me telepathically.

(Told you he’s handsome. Is he your type?)

Jess’ ears turned red in silence. That wasn’t right, that was sexual harassment.

—I-I don’t know... I’ve only seen his appearance after all...

That’s true. Jess isn’t the type of person to judge a guy by his appearance.

“I know you resent us. Do you truly intend to agree to this alliance?”

Markus asked in a low tone of voice.

“Both my feelings of resentment and my intentions to form the alliance are real.”

Nott also responded in a low voice.

“This is nothing more than a strategic alliance. Compared to the Northern Forces, the Liberation Army has weaker war potential, lacks intel, and frankly speaking, we can’t see a way to win. The same goes for you, the royal dynasty. Even though you could just annihilate them quickly, you’re dragging your feet. It looks like you’re in trouble, so for the time being, let’s put aside the sentimentalism and cooperate to eradicate the Northern Forces – that’s the offer.”

“Put aside the sentimentalism,” huh? That sure sounds like something Sanon would say.

Markus nodded with a cold look in his eyes.

“Understood. We have no objections, so the alliance is established. Let’s shake

on it.”

Markus rose. Nott appeared a little wary and quickly took a stance.

“What? Did you think I was going to kill you?”

“Sorry, but it looks like, deep down in my heart, I still can’t let go of my caution.”

Markus sneered.

“No need to worry. If I really wanted to take your life, it would be easy enough to do it at this distance while sitting. Like so.”

Markus returned to his throne and crossed his legs. Immediately, the marble around Nott exploded one after another, drawing a perfect circle with Nott in the center. It looks like the floor was quite deeply dug into.

Nott was frozen in place, unable to move.

“Well? Actually, let’s not shake hands. The best way to deepen a relationship of trust is to have a heart-to-heart conversation.”

Nott frowned, and he sat cross-legged on the spot with a sour expression.

“I agree. By the way, you probably already know this, but if you kill me, a number of citizens will revolt, and a second or third leader will appear. Your population, which was reduced because of you during the Dark Ages, will decrease even further. Don’t think that you’re the only one with the upper hand here.”

Nott glowered at Markus unyieldingly.

—He’s a very brave man.

Jess conveyed to me.

(Did you fall for him?)

—Yeah, just a little.

Even though I knew she didn't mean it in that way, I regretted making that joke.

“A man of unwavering principles, huh? Fascinating. Now, is there anything you wish to talk about?”

Nott thought about it for a few seconds before answering Markus' question.

“Is Jess at the royal capital right now?”

I could feel the hand on my back react with a twitch.

“Sorry, but I can't tell you anything related to the secrets of the royal dynasty.”

“Shouldn't it be alright to tell me the fate of my travel companion?” Nott said defiantly.

Markus then chose his words carefully and spoke.

“Did you develop feelings for that Yesma?”

Nott's ears turned red immediately.

“Don't be stupid. Who would-”

“No need to be so agitated. I know you're obsessed with another Yesma. After all, I already heard your impassioned speech from across the gold cage.”

Nott raised his head suddenly.

“Don't tell me... you're...”

Although I wasn't clear on what they were talking about, I was impressed by Markus' conversation skills. If they were to delve into the matter of Jess, there was a chance that the connection between mages and Yesmas would be suspected. He cleverly played his hand and diverted Nott's attention away from the problematic topic of Jess.

—Mister Pig, do you know the story behind Mr. Nott and me?

Hearing Jess ask that, I remembered she could listen to my monologues.

(...I've heard about it, but I don't know the details.)

—What did you hear?

(...That Nott had some involvement with Jess' journey to the royal capital. I don't know anything other than that.)

—I see... Please fill me in on the details later.

While we were talking, their conversation had progressed onwards.

“That means, you must've planted some kind of tracking magic on me during that time.”

Nott pointed out.

“As soon as I arrived in Niabel, that frizzy hair guy found our ship, and even the Northern army attacked us. I can't see this as being a coincidence at all. You must've used magic to know where I am, right? That feels disgusting. Can you remove it?”

Markus switched leg positions in admiration.

“How perceptive. That's right. There's two location magic casted on your body right now.”

“Two?”

“Yes. One was set by me, and the other is from someone I don't know.”

The space filled by the setting sunlight was wrapped in silence for a while.

“...What do you mean?”

“It's time consuming to explain everything in detail... Location magic is normally only able to be detected by the person who set it, and anyone who was taught the detection method by that person. It's impossible for the Northern Forces to arbitrarily pinpoint your whereabouts using the location magic that I casted.”

“...Does that mean the Northern Forces have their own mage?”

“Correct. And that person is likely the real mastermind. That mage brought together the underworld, incited them to defy the royal dynasty, and created those monsters called Orgs. We call that one the surreptitious sorcerer.”

“Isn’t Arogan the gem merchant the leader of the Northern Forces?” Nott pointed out.

Markus rubbed his chin in irritation.

“Arogan has already been dealt with by my own hands. He’s been reduced to ashes alongside the Ground Spider Castle.”

The sanctuary fell silent. Nott didn’t seem to understand.

“You killed him? Then why is the Northern army still able to act without any trouble when their king is dead?”

“I already told you. The true mastermind behind the Northern Forces is the surreptitious sorcerer. I was planning on killing Arogan after you escaped, but he was already dead some time ago. Do you understand what this means?”

“He was being manipulated. That explains why he looked so awful.”

Markus responded with a monotone “Haha.”

“That looked to be the case. My blunder was that I burned down the Ground Spider Castle without getting a hold of any clues regarding the surreptitious sorcerer. That’s why it’s come to the point where I need to borrow your strength.”

Nott lightly nodded in understanding.

“I see. Then, Mr. Mage, can you please remove both of the location magic casted on me?”

Markus faintly nodded.

“As proof of my trust, I shall remove the one I set on you. However, can you wait on the other one?”

“What, you can’t remove it?”

“Don’t underestimate me. If I wanted to, I can erase as many of them as I wish. It’s a rather weak magic casted by some old coot.”

“Then why not remove it?”

As if he were introducing an investment plan, Markus raised his index finger close to his face.

“Look at it this way. We’re up against an enemy who we have no idea on their whereabouts. Wouldn’t it be easier if they showed up on our doorsteps instead?”

“...You mean to use me as bait?”

“Are you scared?”

“Hell no. But when we come face-to-face with the surreptitious sorcerer, there might be times where we’re not able to deal with him. I’m sure the great mages will take responsibility and show up to the battlefield in person, right?”

“Of course. That’s the point of this alliance. For our first joint effort, I’ll have you participate in the frontline battle in the east. There, you’ll lure out and kill the surreptitious sorcerer. How’s that?”

For the first time since coming here, Nott showed his teeth with a grin.

“Alright, then let’s get this party started.”

Nott was led outside the sanctuary by Wies. When Jess saw that, she told me, “Please follow me,” slipped out the sanctuary’s back door, and started running in Nott’s direction. Even though I thought this was a bad idea, I chased after her.

Jess caught up to Nott beside the dark cemetery, where the sanctuary was blocking the evening sun.

“Mr. Nott!”

Wies and Nott turned around towards us as I ran up to Jess’ side.

“What’s wrong, Jess?”

Wies asked in surprise while stopping Nott with her hand. Nott furrowed his brows as he looked at Jess’ neck, which didn’t have a collar. Rather than her chest, he seemed more interested in that.

“Um, Ms. Wies, sorry... There’s something I want to ask Mr. Nott, no matter what.”

After sprinting at nearly full speed, Jess’ breath was ragged, but her voice still came across clearly.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea to be talking to an outsider here...”

“Please, just give me a moment.”

Was it because she ran here? Jess was asking with tears in her eyes, as we watched her solemnly. It’s rare to see Jess acting so willfully.

“I see. Alright then.”

Wies made eye contact with me and Nott. The meaning of that was very clear.

Jess looked at Nott and asked.

“Mr. Nott, did you travel with me before?”

Silence. Nott frowned and looked into the distance for some time.

“Sorry, but I can’t answer that. This lady over here has forbidden me from talking about the past with you.”

“But Mr. Nott, you said I was your travel companion back at the sanctuary.”

“You heard that?”

It felt awkward, and the situation was not good, but I could only continue being an ordinary pig next to Jess.

“You know something after all. Could you please tell me, even if it’s only just a bit?”

Jess stepped forward from my side and approached Nott.

Nott lightly clicked his tongue, seemingly out of frustration.

“Don’t you understand? I can’t talk about what I can’t talk about. Let me ask you this instead. Why do you want to know about what happened in the past when we’re all here thinking so hard about the present and future?”

His unusual gaze led Jess to be briefly at a loss for words.

However, she muttered back.

“...Because I care about it.”

What are you, an insatiably curious heroine?

>TL Note: *Hyouka*.

(Jess, let’s leave it at that. I don’t think Evis wished for you to recover your memories through a backdoor route like this.)

As I said that, Jess abruptly covered her mouth.

“That’s right... I... I’m sorry...”

Nott looked at me incomprehensibly. Without anyone relaying, the voice in my mind won’t be able to reach Nott.

(Jess, I have a favor to ask. I want to ask Nott something. Can you convey my words in parentheses?)

Still under Wies’ watch, Jess nodded.

(Hey Nott, for the sake of the future, I’d like to confirm one thing about the past, okay?)

“...What is it? Tell me.”

Urged on by him, I quickly gathered my thoughts. There was one thing that bothered me as well.

—My bad. She just looked a bit like the Yesma who helped me escape from the north.

This was what Nott said when we were at the Broken Collar. He noted that a Yesma allowed him to escape from the north.

—Besides, I was the one to let Nott escape from the arena.

This was what Markus mentioned yesterday morning. He stated that he enabled Nott to escape from the north.

And there's the topic of location magic from earlier. The conclusion that could be drawn from this...

(The Yesma who helped you escape from the north's arena was actually the king disguised as a Yesma, wasn't it?)

“Yeah. He called himself Nuris. We can't be careless around mages. If they can change their appearance at will, then there's no way to watch out for them.”

Hearing an unexpected name made my heart beat rapidly. Doubts became conviction. Nuris should be the Yesma that Kento met in the past. She should have been conscripted to work at the Northern royal castle. That means-

“For your reference-”

Wies interjected.

“Magic that transforms one's appearance is not something that can be used so easily. Based on the royal dynasty's analysis of the quality of their location magic, the surreptitious sorcerer hasn't reached that level yet. Please rest assured.”

“I see. So that means we only have to be on the lookout for the royal dynasty's spies.”

Whether he was being sarcastic or sincere, Nott's words carried thorns. Wies looked down towards me and conveyed.

—Let's end things here.

She was telling me not to reveal to Nott the truth that I had arrived at.

(Thanks Nott. That helped a lot.)

Nott sighed after I conveyed that to him through Jess.

“Couldn't you have just asked the king directly? Well, whatever. I'm leaving the matters there up to you, stupid pig.”

After Wies signaled Nott with a nod, Nott obediently started walking alongside Wies. We stayed behind and saw them off.

“Um... Mister Pig.”

Hearing Jess talk to me, I looked over to her.

(What is it?)

“Did you realize something?”

After a brief hesitation, I decided that it would be fine to discuss this with Jess.

(Yeah. I figured out why there were two location magic when we sent out that letter.)

“Why? I'm curious!”

The way you said that is kinda...

(When Markus infiltrated the north, he used magic to disguise himself as a Yesma. He then let Nott escape, allowed the Liberation Army to be revived, and even formed an alliance with them. So far so good?)

“Yes.”

(Then there's what Nott told me – Markus used to call himself “Nuris.” And lastly, based on the information I received from a certain source, I know that there really was a Yesma called Nuris who was conscripted to the Northern royal castle. Therefore-)

“The question becomes: Where did the real Nuris go?”

I'm glad she caught on quickly.

(Right. And I know where she went.)

“Really?”

(Yeah. It was when I met the guys from the Liberation Army while on board the docked Broken Collar in Niabel. Nott said there was a Yesma who looked just like the Yesma that helped him escaped.)

—She lost all her memories up until recently and was wandering around here. She seems to have a northern accent, but she's a genuine Yesma, so we took her in. We didn't know her name, so sis called her Litis.

(According to the others, that Yesma had no memory of anything up until recently. She didn't even know who she was. Her memories had been erased. Only a mage would be able to do that sort of thing.)

“That means Markus-sama erased the memories of the real Ms. Nuris and let her escape.”

(Likely so. If she was released into the wild while she was still aware of the fact that she's Nuris – someone who was conscripted to the Northern royal castle – there was a chance that he would be discovered as the fake Nuris. That's why he wiped her memories.)

“And then, the people of the Liberation Army happened to pick up the real Ms. Nuris...”

(It would be nice if that were the case.)

“Was I wrong?”

(Yeah. Let's return to the first mystery. Why was Markus' location magic displayed twice on the map?)

“Ah... So the real Ms. Nuris also had location magic set on her...?”

(I'm sure of it. I believe Markus deliberately let the remnants of the Liberation Army pick up the real Nuris. He casted location magic on her so he could track

their whereabouts.)

“Then, when he said he’ll remove the location magic on Mr. Nott...”

(Although Markus said it was as proof of his trust in front of Shulavis, that wasn’t true at all. To begin with, since Nott and the others aren’t able to detect magic, I don’t think they would’ve known whether it was removed or not. It’s because he had also set a location magic on the real Nuris that he could afford to do this.)

Sure enough, Markus didn’t trust Nott at all. He must be intending to thoroughly use them before finally using his power to force them to submit.

Sanon and I might have just steered us all in an outrageous direction.

It was night time. Nott returned to the Liberation Army’s camp, and the three members of the royal family were busy with general affairs. After dinner, Jess invited me to a square with a large fountain. Rosebushes were planted in a designed manner, creating a garden-like atmosphere. This place is managed by Wies, and appeared to be the most comfortable place inside the palace. The night breeze was blocked by the brick buildings surrounding three of the sides, and the remaining side plus area above us had a beautiful starry sky pasted across it.

Jess sat by the edge of the fountain pool and spoke while aimlessly swinging her non-bare legs.

“Mr. Nott... knew me after all.”

(Yeah.)

I sat close to Jess, but not close enough as to be able to see her out zones.

“So the bookmark in my memories existed for Mr. Nott?”

Jess questioned in vexation.

“Evis-sama told me that, inside my sealed memories, there was a certain

someone who was with me. Is Mr. Nott perhaps my bookmarked person?”

Did Evis say something like that? Despite my surprise, I agreed with her.

(...Perhaps that’s the case.)

Jess showed a regretful expression.

“Actually... I had a small thought. I have no basis for this, but... I was thinking that maybe Mister Pig is my bookmarked person.”

Jess looked at me with her slightly tired eyes. I quickly denied it.

(No way. How could I be? On the contrary, I’d like to know what made you think that.)

“Um, like I said... I don’t have any basis for it, but I just think so.”

Jess had a lonely look on her face.

“If there was someone that stayed with me during my dangerous journey... If there was someone I cared so dearly for as to place a bookmark so that I would never forget about that person... I’m sure that person would be by my side during this very difficult time. This is what I believe.”

.....

“S-sorry. This is just me being selfish and delusional, isn’t it? Please forget about it.”

Jess, who denied it herself, was very strong, and very pitiful.

(Maybe that guy thinks Jess can live on her own now. Maybe there was something else even more important. Or maybe he died. Don’t be mistaken. I’m by your side only because I happened to come here by chance.)

“You’re right. Sorry, I really thought...”

Jess hesitated to speak.

(I told you, didn’t I? I’m a human from another country. Over there, I still have

a super cute, angelic girlfriend with boobs that aren't too big. Although I can help Jess currently, I'm a pig that will eventually disappear and return to my original country.)

“Oh... I see...”

Jess' legs moved a little further away from me. This is how it should be.

“I-if... she's Mister Pig's lover, then she must be a very wonderful person.”

Jess looked at the ground some distance away from me, and spoke in a shrill-sounding voice.

(What makes you think that?)

“Because Mister Pig is a very wonderful person.”

That's not true at all.

(How about I ask you this instead... If the “bookmarked person” Jess mentioned really exists, what kind of person would he be like?)

Jess thought about it for a moment, before returning a sad-looking smile.

“Right... I'm sure he would also be a wonderful person.”

...?

(Again, why do you think that?)

“Because he was willing to accompany someone as worthless as I am... he must be a kind and wonderful person.”

(Worthless? Don't be silly. Shouldn't it be more like flawless?)

“Is that really so...? I think I have plenty of flaws...”

As if my oshi was being insulted at, I got pissed off from Jess' doubtful head tilt.

(Then what are they? Go ahead and say them.)

Jess swallowed.

“I... only wish for things in my heart, and can never decide anything on my own.”

(That just means you're patient, because you prioritize other people's judgements. Not forcing yourself onto others is a form of kindness.)

“I'm a hopelessly curious girl.”

(Curiosity is the driving force behind learning. It's only right for you to want to pursue the truth. There's nothing wrong with that.)

“I don't have any friends.”

(I think it's weirder to have friends in this kind of situation, but if you're dissatisfied, I'll be your friend.)

“I'm not good at magic.”

(It's only been two or three months, right? If it was a baby, she wouldn't have even been able to crawl yet.)

“And... I have small breasts!”

(Well I prefer them at that size!)

“Eh?”

Oops.

(Sorry... you weren't asking for my preferences.)

Jess blushed so hard I could see it even under the moonlight.

“No matter what it is, Mister Pig always finds a way to compliment me.”

(I'm a good match, aren't I?)

>TL Note: In a contender sense, not relationship sense.

“I wonder why? Even though we’ve only been together for a few days... I feel like Mister Pig knows me very well. It’s as if we’ve been together for a long time...”

(Is it because I show up on the dinner table every night?)

Jess looked at me and seemed to want to say something, but in the end, she closed her mouth and vaguely smiled.

(Anyway, what happened in the past doesn’t matter. I’m a pig with my own reasons, and I came here at the request of Jess’ fiancé. Nothing more, nothing less. I’ll do my best to lend you my knowledge, so please lend me your strength as well, Jess – as a friend, of course.)

Jess nodded, seemingly convinced.

“Understood. We’re friends.”

Then, with an angelic smile, she said.

“I look forward to working with you, Mister Pig.”

The Crown Stone Castle is a sturdy mountain castle built around the mountain village of Matto. It’s said that its name came from the fact that it stands, surrounded by cliffs, like a crown atop the rocky mountain. Masonry towers in the shape of chess rooks were situated some distance away, and a fortified wall like the winding Great Wall of China stood between them.

Jess, Shulavis, and I departed from the capital and arrived at the tallest tower in the Crown Stone Castle. I had an overlook of the vast, dried-grass-colored wetland at the bottom of the cliff. This wetland marked the boundary between the territories controlled by the royal dynasty and the Northern Forces.

The weather today was gloomy and cloudy. Even though it was just before noon, it was too dark for shadows to be casted.

A team of people from the Liberation Army, including Nott, were making preparations around the wall. We were going to use Nott, who had the location

magic attached on him, as bait to lure the Northern Forces out to fight at this castle.

The basics of siege warfare dictates that the defending side holds the advantage. The Crown Stone Castle is under the control of the royal dynasty, so if the Northern Forces were to recklessly send in their soldiers, they run the risk of being completely annihilated by the royal dynasty's mages. This means, in order to attack Nott, they'll have to play a certain number of cards. In other words, it's highly likely that the mastermind, the surreptitious sorcerer, will appear. We plan to use that opportunity to crush him.

But just in case, for this battle, Markus stayed behind at the capital. If Markus were to be cursed like Evis was, it seems the royal dynasty might really be in danger of falling into ruins. Shulavis was also dispatched, but he was essentially ordered to stay in the innermost part of the castle.

Shulavis should only make his appearance after our opponent has played their trump card. The surreptitious sorcerer is an old coot after all, so as long as Shulavis doesn't get cursed, a surprise attack should easily take care of things – or so Markus instructed us.

Jess and I were also sent to this castle to act as the intermediaries with the Liberation Army in case of an emergency so that Shulavis doesn't get killed.

All that's left now was wait for the enemy to arrive. Despite being forbidden to do so by Markus, Shulavis took Jess and me to get in contact with Nott. Nott was sitting on the steps of the stone courtyard on the castle wall, munching on an apple. Itsune and Josh sat on both sides of him. Nott was equipped with his twin daggers, Itsune was equipped with her greataxe, and Josh was equipped with his crossbow. They were ready to fight at a moment's notice. Nott still wore a black stole around his neck.

Walking up to the three, Shulavis greeted, "Thank you for your help on that occasion."

Shulavis and Jess wore their max defense robes from before, and I was still naked.

The two siblings were surprised and drew back slightly, but Nott continued biting into his apple.

“I honestly didn't expect a great mage to show up.”

He then glanced at Jess and me.

“Why are these two here as well?”

“They're here as emergency food and the emergency food's caretaker.”

Shulavis replied coolly. Nn? Who did you just call emergency food?

Nott chuckled through his nose.

“Forget it. What do you want?”

Hearing the question, Shulavis placed the plastic-shopping-bag-sized cloth sack in his hand in front of Nott.

“Have a look.”

Nott pulled open the drawstring cloth sack.

“Wow.”

Josh, the reserved guy with bangs, peered into the bag and made that sound.

The sack was filled with large, medium, and small colorful gems – the crystallization of magic power, ristas.

“These are high quality ristas. Use them liberally for this coming battle, and keep whatever's leftover after.”

Itsune released her crossed arms, took out a yellow rista from the sack, and asked.

“Is this one with a lighter color around its sides defective?”

It was a transparent rista. The center was dark yellow, but its surrounding area was nearly colorless.

“That's-”

The one to answer her question was not Shulavis, but Nott.

“It’s a rista that releases a large amount of magic power in one go. If you use that with your greataxe, you’ll definitely send yourself flying.”

Shulavis reacted in surprise.

“I’m surprised you knew about it. It shouldn’t have been distributed outside the capital.”

“The king personally gave some to me.”

Nott replied while earnestly collecting the red ristas.

After an appeased sigh, Shulavis approached Josh, who was acting reserved.

“Are you good at shooting?”

Hearing that, Josh looked at Shulavis from behind his bangs. He pointed a slender finger straight at Shulavis’ right eye.

“I won’t miss next time. I’ll make sure to pierce your brainstem through your eyes.”

“I see. Alright. Lend me some arrows. I’ll put magic on them.”

After a brief hesitation, Josh took out a single arrow from the quiver attached to his waist.

“Will that be enough?”

“You’re using Nott as bait to lure out the bad guy, right? Then I only need one shot to hit him. I want to borrow a mage’s power as little as possible.”

Itsune smiled.

“What are you going to do if two bad guys show up? It’s better to have a few more handy.”

Josh resolutely refused to yield.

“Just one. So what are you going to do to it?”

“Freeze, shock, or explosion. I can add one of these effects to it.”

“Then freeze. These two can take care of the other two.”

“Understood.”

Shulavis held the arrow and closed his eyes for a moment.

“That should do it. There’s no point if you shoot something that doesn’t have water, so don’t miss.”

“Didn’t I say I won’t miss?”

Josh casually returned the arrow he received back into his quiver. Is he going to be able to distinguish it from the rest of the arrows?

Like a statue, Shulavis’ expression didn’t change. But whether it was because it was calculated, or out of goodwill, he showed a cooperative attitude towards the rebels. He didn’t intimidate them like his father did, nor did he give the impression that he was looking down on Nott and the others. He’s gruff, but he’s also a straightforward and sincere guy with a strong will. I honestly felt that he would make a surprisingly good husband.

When I glanced to my side, I noticed Jess was looking at me discontentedly. And from the corner of my eyes, a white mass flew towards us from almost directly behind me.

Crap. Before I could even think of the word, the white fluffy mass pushed Jess down. It panted excitedly.

“Eh? Um... Stop. Wait. Ah...”

It was Rossi. After licking Jess from the neck up one whole round, the perverted dog stuck his nose into the hem of her robe and began sniffing at her absolute territory.

I’m so envious- I won’t forgive him! Just because he’s an animal doesn’t mean he gets to do whatever he wants.

When I approached them to try and push him away, his fluffy tail wagged and slapped my nose.

“Rossi, that’s enough. Come here.”

After Nott’s command, Rossi stuck his head out from between Jess’ legs and sauntered towards his owner in a reluctant manner.

“Is he your dog?”

When Shulavis asked that, Rossi showed an interest in that direction.

“Yeah, he’s my partner... What are you doing? C’mere.”

For some reason, Rossi was sniffing at Shulavis’ legs extremely politely. After a snort, Rossi then returned to Nott’s side.

“It’s rare to see him interested in a guy’s legs.” Nott noted while scratching his jaw.

That dog definitely lacks discipline. I’ve never heard of an animal that’s interested in female legs before. What an unheard-of pervert.

(Are you alright, Jess?)

—Yeah, I was a little surprised... Is my face that tasty?

(Well... I won’t know until I’ve tried it.)

—Um, I was joking... You don’t have to actually try...?

Jess stood up, slightly put off, and wiped her drool-covered cheeks with her sleeves.

At the same time, the sun of destiny had set.

We were awoken, not by the sound of birds chirping, but by the alarm bell of an enemy attack.

“I’ll support the frontlines from the shadows so that our soldiers don’t get exhausted. You two stay here and keep an eye on Nott. If anything happens, smash that glass ball.”

As he said that, Shulavis left behind a glass ball about the size of a wind chime before dashing out the room. It was in the middle of the night. Jess and I were the only ones left inside this room in the deepest part of the castle. I should be able to see Nott from the window, but because of my height, I’m not able to – as I thought that, Jess, who had just woken up, moved a suitable desk over to the window.

(Thanks. Where Nott?)

I asked while getting onto the desk, before spotting Nott standing still with his arms crossed at the courtyard where we went with Shulavis to see him during the day. Itsune was sitting a little further away. Josh and Rossi were nowhere to be seen. They were likely hiding. And on the other end, far below in the dark wetland, numerous torches flickered. I could hear the clanking noise of countless armors approaching from afar.

“Mister Pig, what do we do...?”

(For now, we should be fine as long as we remain here. Stay calm.)

I also felt this during the naval battle, but it didn’t matter if I was with the main character of another world’s story, I was essentially useless at times like these. Celes and Sanon have also probably withdrawn to a safe place.

Our job is not to fight on the frontlines, but to fight outside of the battlefield.

(It’s not a good idea to stay by the window for too long. Let’s retreat inside and use a mirror to observe the situation below.)

I instructed Jess where to place the mirror so that we could observe Nott while sitting, and we sat still on the bed in the dark room. Jess donned her max defense robe.

“Mister Pig... um... may I sit closer to you?”

I eyed Jess. Because of how she slept, she had a slight bed head- that’s not the

point.

(Only to the extent where Shulavis won't get angry.)

As I conveyed that, Jess moved close enough that her waist would be able to sink into my pork belly that was laying on the bed. Her hands nervously caressed my back.

(Don't worry. It'll be fine, so you don't have to get so close to me.)

"Sorry... but, um... I'm scared."

Jess replied in a weak voice that seemed to taper off. Well, it's no surprise that she's scared.

(Do you know what the suspension bridge effect is?)

I changed the subject to divert her attention, and Jess rested a finger on her chin while thinking.

"I've read a book about how to use oscillation to effectively destroy a suspension bridge, but..."

Wait, what are you planning on destroying a bridge for?

(That's not what I meant. I'm talking about the effect where, if your heart is pounding from fear and someone else is nearby, you'll be under the impression that your excitement is caused by romantic feelings and end up actually falling in love with that person.)

Like when you're on a swaying suspension bridge, or inside a castle that's under attack. Those kinds of situations.

"Is Mister Pig's heart pounding right now?"

Well, of course. It doesn't matter what kind of virgin you are, if such a cute girl pushes her body against you, your heart is bound to be racing...

(Stupid, I'm talking about you, Jess. Even if it was by mistake, don't go and fall in love with this kind of pig.)

“Eh? Oh... you mean me? I-I won't. Don't worry...”

After staying quiet for some time, Jess murmured softly.

“So you're a virgin...”

That's right! I'm a scrawny four-eyed shitty virgin who hasn't had any experience with a girlfriend the same amount of time equivalent to my age! You got a problem with that?!

“N-no, I'm not complaining or anything like that. If you put it like that, then I'm also-”

The all-you-can-listen monologue happy hour is over now, okay?

“Ah, sorry... but Mister Pig, I thought you said you had a super cute, angelic girlfriend with boobs that aren't too big...?”

That's right.

(I only got her recently. Strictly speaking, they're certainly not equivalent, but my age, and how long I haven't had a girlfriend for, are both at nineteen years. Don't sweat the details.)

Not hearing a response, I checked on Jess and noticed her brown eyes studying me.

(What?)

“No, um, I'm not doubting you or anything, but...”

Jess was still staring at me.

“I thought Mister Pig was someone that worried about the details.”

(Why are you acting like a criminal investigator at a police station...? Y'know, I'm surprisingly crass.)

With an unconvinced look, Jess muttered “Is that so?” before smiling.

“So you're a crass Mr. Virgin, huh?”

.....

Was it necessary to link those two things together there?

While we were being preoccupied by our silly conversation, I saw two rays of red light reflected in the mirror. After that, the light flashed. That meant Nott took an evasive maneuver.

Before I had a chance to figure out why, a fireball-looking thing flew towards us at a terrifying speed and hit the room we were in.

There was a burst of light. Stones fell, smoke and dust hovered, and our surroundings changed from heaven to chaotic hell in an instant.

“Mister Pig, are you alright?”

I was relieved to hear Jess’ voice. My vision was pitch black. I could feel something soft on my back.

(Sorry, I think I’m fine, but what happened...?)

“Evis-sama’s robe protected us.”

My sight was freed from the darkness. Jess covered me, and we were protected by her robe. Stone fragments tumbled off of Jess’ back. We should have been inside a room, but when I looked up, I could see the black clouds reflecting the crimson color of flames. Broken bits of the bed was scattered around us.

(No, you protected me, Jess. Not the robe.)

As I conveyed that, Jess raised her eyebrows in a frown.

“I don’t think that’s the case...”

Anyway.

(Let’s evacuate while figuring out the current situation. Since the enemy has a weapon with that much firepower, it’ll be dangerous to be high up.)

Jess and I carefully treaded through the gaps in the rubble and moved towards the stairs which managed to keep its structure. From there, we hurried downstairs. There were no signs of pursuers.

(I wonder what that attack was just now.)

Jess glanced at me while we ran.

“I think it was probably an artillery strike that uses the magic power extracted from a Yesma’s collar. After all, ristas and gunpowder aren’t able to exert that kind of power... According to Evis-sama and Markus-sama’s analysis, when it comes to offensive attacks, the surreptitious sorcerer is only able to use weak magic.”

I was reminded of something I once heard. The reason why Yesma collars are traded for such a high price. – The reason why those Yesma girls are so mercilessly beheaded.

It was bone chilling just thinking about how the Northern Forces had amassed their forces.

(I see. I’ve learned something today.)

We ran through the winding corridors of the crumbling castle and made haste towards the ground floor. The surrounding masonry had collapsed, and bits of the fireball were burning here and there.

I heard a footstep from behind a broken wall.

(Someone’s here.)

I stopped and blocked Jess’ direction. From the sound of it, I knew our mysterious person had also stopped. Who is it?

“Ms. Jess...!”

I heard a whisper-like voice and dropped my guard. It was Celes.

A slender girl appeared from behind the wall. She still wore the dark brown one-piece dress that I saw from before, albeit slightly wrinkled. At her feet was a

large black pig.

The black pig snorted, to which Celes immediately covered her mouth.

“I-I’m so sorry...”

Jess approached Celes, who had just spoken softly to the black pig.

“Do you... know me?”

“No, um, er, I-I don’t...”

Just how bad are you at lying?

(Jess, she’s my acquaintance. Meet Celes.)

“Ms. Celes...”

I glanced at Jess muttering to herself, and asked Celes.

(Hey Celes, what happened to Nott and the others?)

“I lost sight of them while evacuating with Mr. Sanon... They should be at that courtyard with a good view...”

They shouldn’t be far from where they first took their positions then.

It’s good that we bumped into Celes and Sanon, but what do we do now?

As I was contemplating, I noticed Sanon approaching Jess while snorting heavily.

Oh shit! I have to protect Jess from this perverted pig bastard!

With Celes’ help, I conveyed to Sanon.

(Mr. Sanon, stop. Don’t you dare lay your hands on – or rather, your nose on my Jess.)

As I stood in his way and intimidated him with all my might, the black pig stopped and looked up at Jess.

—Oops, excuse me. It's because she was such a cute girl that I unintentionally... Oh, but don't worry, I'm a pig that knows how to restrain himself.

“My Jess...”

Hearing Jess repeat that, I realized my slip of the tongue.

(I meant it as in you're my precious pet owner. There's no other meaning to it.)

Jess, who had a bewildered look on her face, raised her chin in realization.

“I-I see. Don't worry, I understand.”

During that exchange, Celes kept her gaze on me.

(What?)

When I turned to look at her, Celes' cheeks loosened into a light smile.

—Mr. Shitty Virgin is the same as me.

What do you mean by that? I snorted while thinking that, and then conveyed to the three.

(I know we just met up, but there's no point in us sticking together. Celes is going along with Sanon to support Nott and the others, right? Sorry, but my job is to keep Jess away from any sort of danger, so let's part ways here for now.)

The black pig seemed to agree as he nodded at me.

—I hope everyone ends up safe and sound.

(Yeah. You better not die in a place like this.)

The black pig nodded, nudged Celes, and started walking in the direction we came from. Celes followed suit.

(Since Celes and Sanon headed towards that direction, we should be safe to go this way. Let's go.)

“...Okay.”

Jess nodded while letting her discontentment bleed into her words.

While we walked, I asked, (What’s wrong? Was there something that made you unhappy?)

Jess angrily puffed out her cheeks and looked down at me.

“What did Ms. Celes mean when she said ‘the same as me,’ Mr. Shitty Virgin? You’re hiding something after all, aren’t you?”

.....

(Please don’t call me by that. If the knowledgeable Jess says that, you’ll be breaking your character...)

“Are you trying to dodge the question...?”

It was too tricky to explain, so I chose to run away.

(I’ll tell you someday, so let’s focus on the current situation. Their soldiers haven’t reached this far yet, but we can’t let our guard down.)

Just as I said that, we arrived near the courtyard before I knew it. At the end of the corner, I spotted two red-glowing lights and stopped to hug the wall.

(This isn’t good. It looks like we went the opposite direction.)

I squinted. On the dark stone-paved courtyard, a swordsman wielding a pair of shining red daggers was confronting someone. The stole wrapped around the swordsman’s neck fluttered in the night wind.

“It was you after all. You’re the mage controlling the Northern Forces from the shadows.”

The figure that Nott was confronting was tall, and wore a grey robe that had several char and tear marks. His opponent was carrying a long, thin staff made of a brass-colored metal.

“We meet again, youngster. You’re looking well.”

A deep and icy voice that felt like it was mixed with the winter night chill transmitted clearly from afar.

Still glaring at the figure, Nott removed the ristas from his twin daggers with his left hand and threw them on the ground. Like that of a magician's fingers, he then slotted in the new ristas into his daggers in a smooth motion.

“Was it because you were manipulating the king that your personal feelings were involved in my treatment? Too bad you didn't kill me, old man. I still gotta pay you back for the torturing.”

Does that mean the torturer who was close to Arogan that Nott mentioned before is the surreptitious sorcerer?

They continued to glare at each other. I was wondering why Nott didn't just attack, but when I looked at his opponent's robe, I figured out the reason. Those scorch marks were probably caused by Nott's attacks. They weren't effective at all. I then quickly realized something. Oh shit.

(That's the surreptitious sorcerer, right?)

—That seems to be the case.

(That mage might be able to hear our exchange. Let's get out of here immediately.)

—Right, let's go back and-

“Looks like there's an ambusher.”

His voice sent shivers down my spine. For some reason, it felt like those words were directed at me.

“What if I told you those words were directed at you?”

Jess placed her hand on the back of my neck. Shit, we've already been caught.

(I'll handle this. Jess, you escape.)

—But...

(It'll be fine. I'm not the one who'll be fighting.)

After conveying that, I ran out. Jess' fingertips left my neck.

Once I reached Nott's side, I could finally see the other person's face underneath his hood.

He was an old man with an aquiline nose, deep wrinkles, and a terrifying face. He had long white hair covering his face, and his skin was pale like it had been bleached. For some reason, his outline was a bit blurry, making him seem like a shadow. Illuminated by the fireball remains, only his golden eyes shone brightly. He looked to be getting up there in age, yet also appeared to be full of vitality. How old is he exactly?

"Let me give you a hint. I'm the same age as Vatis." The old man read my monologue without permission and answered.

What? You've got to be kidding me...

But it made sense. Instead of assuming that a mage, unknown by the royal dynasty, came from somewhere, it's more reasonable to think a mage that Vatis failed to seal was still alive.

"You're that pig, aren't you? The one I failed to kill back in Bapsas. I suppose this is our first time meeting. I'd like to kill you too, but..."

After thinking about it for a moment, the old man said.

"I guess I can kill some time. Now die."

What do I do? What kind of attack is coming?

Due to the extreme tension, I watched the old man with all the hair on my body raised. As he raised his staff, I immediately bolted to avoid the attack. Through the corner of my pig's wide field of view, I saw the old man stick his staff into the ground.



“Snor-!”

I felt a sharp pain in my abdomen and fell to the ground. When I turned to look, I saw the sharp tip of his long staff sticking out of the stone floor like a bamboo shoot. My other eye spotted the old man’s staff stuck inside the floor. That kind of long-range attack is cheating.

It was at this moment that Nott acted. He must have aimed for the moment when the old man was in the middle of an attack. Leaning forward, Nott swung the dagger in his left at the old man.

A gigantic, crescent-shaped flame exploded from Nott’s left hand. The waterfall-like mass of fire engulfed the old man in an instant. The flames tore through the stone floor and flashily destroyed the battlement behind the old man.

“Mister Pig, are you okay?”

When I came to my senses, Jess was next to me. I was lying on my side due to the pain, and I looked at her.

(Don’t come here, it’s dangerous.)

“If it’s that kind of attack, it’ll be the same no matter where I am.”

I had nothing to say in response to her legitimate objection.

(Could you take a look at my abdomen? I can’t see it myself.)

“...It’s a stab wound. Don’t worry, I’ll heal it.”

When Jess placed her hand on my stomach, I could feel the pain fade away.

“But this black bruise...”

I glanced sideways at the skeptical Jess and got up. Some pain still remained, but I could handle it.

The old man was engulfed in flames for some time, but he was still standing when the flames were extinguished. His skin was charred black, and the whites of his bones were exposed. How anticlimactic. Was that all it took to defeat

him?

But things weren't that simple.

Ashes flew around the old man and returned to where they belonged. As I watched, his tall body regenerated. The fine ash weaved together in the air to become strands, then cloth, and finally the shape of a robe, covering his body.

We could only watch. In less than thirty seconds, the old man was back to his original appearance.

“This body has taken in hundreds of fruits. Don't think it'll be destroyed this easily.”

The old man spoke while turning his head. Fruit? Is he talking about Devil Fruits or something?

Nott responded to the old man while switching out his ristas.

“You sure talk a lot of nonsense. Are you trying to buy time for something?”

Nott slowly crossed his arms in front of his face. A moment later, he swung down his twin daggers and shot an X-shaped flame at the old man. That was the signal.

The old man blocked Nott's flames with his staff. Rossi then leaped out from the darkness and bit the old man's neck from behind. Sparks crackled from Rossi's mouth, and the old man lost his balance. The same time Rossi kicked off of the old man and jumped back, there was a whistle, and before I knew it, an arrow was lodged deep in the old man's eye. The old man's body fell to the ground. His head was starting to be covered in frost. The magic enchanted arrow seemed to have worked.

The attacks didn't end there. Just when I noticed the shadow of someone falling while holding a greataxe from the top of a tree, the axe was quickly swung down over the old man's head. In an instant, a thunderbolt-like flash and impact caused the surrounding area to become completely white.

When my eyes adjusted, I saw the ground, which was originally paved with stones, had caved in greatly, revealing the soil underneath; and the charred

fragments of a person was scattered everywhere. Nott then threw three walnut-sized metal balls into that hole.

Boom.

We peeked into the hole after the smoke dissipated. Nothing retain its original shape except for the long staff.

“Was that it?”

Itsune slung the greataxe over her shoulder and asked.

Nott silently stared at the hole without putting away his twin daggers.

It was then-

Something moved inside the hole. It made a creepy rustling noise. Nott made his daggers glow red, illuminating the hole. Something unbelievable was happening. The charcoal and ash began gathering in one place as if they had a will of their own.

“Get back.”

Everyone present obeyed Nott’s order.

Something stood up from the hole. The cinders swirled and gathered to form the shape of a person. It was as if a three-dimensional shadow was being projected into that space.

The shadow looked at us for some time before flying outside the castle walls and finally disappearing.

Inside the hole that Itsune’s thunderbolt made, only the metal staff remained.

“I see you weren’t able to kill him.”

A voice came from behind, and I turned around to find Shulavis standing there unharmed.

Nott clicked his tongue.

“Hey, why didn’t you come and help?”

Shulavis calmly approached the furious Nott.

“Don’t you understand why he came here alone, didn’t try to kill you, and fought so slowly? You’re no longer the surreptitious sorcerer’s target. The blood of the royal dynasty are. He was planning to lure me out and kill me. That’s why I didn’t show up.”

“You sure it wasn’t because you were scared? If you were around to help, we might’ve been able to finish him off.”

“Are you sure about that? My attacks are physical. If even his brain can regenerate after being pierced and shattered by lightning, there’s no point in me helping. That old man must’ve anticipated this already when he walked into our trap.”

No one refuted. Shulavis looked down at the wetlands from the ruined battlement.

“The Northern army appears to have retreated. We’ll be leaving the royal army’s soldiers here, so let’s withdraw. After taking that much damage, I doubt the surreptitious sorcerer will return any time soon.”

“That so? Then we’ll be getting some rest.”

Nott stated and withdrew with Itsune. Rossi appeared to be concerned about us as he chased after Nott briskly. Only Jess, Shulavis, and I were left in the crumbling courtyard.

“Um, Mr. Shulavis.”

Jess called out in a shrill voice.

“What is it?”

“Mister Pig’s... stomach...”

Shulavis swiftly walked towards me and crouched down to look at my abdomen.

“This bruise...”

(What’s this about a bruise?)

“There’s no mistaking it. It’s the same curse that killed Grandfather. He died because the black bruise eroded his entire body.”

Shulavis conjured up a metal disk in his hand and held it next to my eyes. Reflected on it was the appearance of a black bruise shaped like a brittle star spread across this pig’s flank. The bruise was larger than the size of a person’s palm, and continued spreading as I looked at it. An unpleasant, chilling pain began permeating numbingly.

(Is there... no way to cure it?)

“...Grandfather was killed by this curse.”

Shulavis repeated the same content. I understood what he meant. If this cursed defeated Mestria’s greatest mage, then there’s no one who could handle it.

“How can this be? This can’t be happening...”

Jess sank to the floor, placed her hand on my back, and lamented with teary eyes.

I couldn’t believe it either. It didn’t feel real to me. Am I going to die? In a place like this?

(I can endure the pain. Can you gouge out the bruise and regenerate it afterwards?)

Right after my proposal, a burst of sharp pain shot through me before quickly disappearing. However, the chilling pain remained.

“It’s no use, Jess. If it could be dealt with like that, Grandfather would have already cut off his right arm.”

“Mr. Shulavis, please. Please save Mister Pig.”

“I’d save him if I could.”

.....

No one said a word. As the night returned to tranquility, Jess' sobs began to fill the air. It was painful just hearing them.

(Jess, don't cry. You don't have to go this far for this pig-)

"That's because... Mister Pig was my first friend."

Jess responded with a tearful voice while sobbing.

(For a girl like you, Jess, you'll be able to make as many friends as you want to. Don't worry.)

"That's not it. That's... not why. It's because Mister Pig was always by my side, always thinking for me... That's why....."

It's only naturally. Since you're my oshi.

The pain continued to spread. Evis seemed to have held on for a while, but my curse progressed rapidly. Was it because of the difference in magic power? The pain had already reached my neck.

"Doesn't Mister Pig have a super cute, angelic girlfriend with boobs that aren't too big? If you die, then she'll definitely be saddened. So please... you can't die."

A super cute, angelic girl with boobs that aren't too big is shedding her tears in front of me. Yeah, I guess if I had a girlfriend like that, I'm sure she would mourn my death.

(Did I not tell you? If I die in this world, I'll be able to return to my original world. In fact, if I die here, I'll be able to see her sooner.)

Jess' eyes widened in shock.

"Is... that so?"

(That's why you don't need to feel sad for her.)

"But I'm really sad."

(You're so kind.)

“That’s not it. I don’t want you to die... I don’t want to see Mister Pig die, no matter what.”

Standing became too painful, so I buckled and laid down on the ground. Pain started invading my limbs.

“No! Mister Pig!”

Jess hugged me. I saw Shulavis’ feet turn away immediately.

“I beg of you, please don’t take away another important person from me...”

Jess’ voice didn’t seem directed at me, but towards somewhere far away. Perhaps at the starry sky stretched out beyond the thick clouds.

When my senses returned, the sky had brightened. The clouds were parting, and the red morning sun was shining from afar.

The pain was gone. Could it be...?

Jess released me. In front of me, Shulavis was still looking away.

(Shulavis! Can you lend me that mirror again?)

As I got up and asked, Shulavis turned towards me.

“Jess!”

Shulavis sharply yelled. I quickly turned my head to find Jess lying on the floor as if she had threw herself onto the stone surface. Her eyes were closed, she had her hands on her abdomen, and she seemed to be breathing in pain.

With a sudden gasp, Shulavis lifted Jess’ clothes to reveal her stomach. And...

A dense black mesh pattern was spread on there.

Don’t tell me Jess took the curse in my place...

This time, it was my turn to panic.

(Jess, get a hold of yourself!)

“Uu... ugh...”

Jess opened her eyes slightly and smiled only with her mouth.

“I’m glad... Mister Pig was cured...”

You’ve got to be kidding me. Come on, come on, come on. This wasn’t supposed to happen. No matter how you look at it, that development should’ve ended with me dying here. How could Jess... This can’t be happening, right?

(No, Jess, you can’t... you can’t die here.)

“You’re so kind.”

No. That’s not right. What kind of stupid talk are you saying?

(Don’t you have someone important to you? You wanted to remember that person, right? It’s not right for you to die before you remember who that is.)

The cursed bruise rose to Jess’ neck at the speed of paper being burned, and it extended its grasps towards her small chin. Shulavis’ eyes swam in a panic. Not knowing what to do, I just stood there beside Jess.

“Just having someone close to me who’s willing to mourn for me when I’m dying makes me more than happy enough.”

Jess shut her eyes, tears ran down her face and dripped onto the stone floor.

“I think I’ll pretend that Mister Pig is my important person after all.”

The black mesh pattern crossed Jess’ jawline and consumed her face. The curse continued to seep into her once-beautiful legs and slender arms.

This can’t be real. If I knew this was going to happen, then at least once, I wanted to...

(Jess, listen. I’m-)

Just then, Jess opened her eyes. They shone like she had realized something.

—I finally understand why the key was so big.

Her beautiful brown eyes simply stared at me. What did she say?

Jess' eyes closed seemingly happily, pushing more tears down her face.

Without stopping, the cursed bruise spread all at once and covered Jess' entire body.

There was nothing I could do.

Her small, tightly gripped hands, still covered by the pitch-black mesh pattern, lost their strength and loosened up.

Fragment 5 – An Important

The beautiful stars in the night sky were looking down upon me. I placed my hands together and closed my eyes.

—Please. I'm not capable of going to the capital on my own.

—I'm lonely. I'm scared. I can't handle it.

—So please. Please help me.

—Please bring me someone who's willing to travel with me, someone who's willing to help me.

After praying for my selfish wish, I opened my eyes.

Then, something unbelievable happened.

One. Two... A dozen... Two dozen...

Numerous shooting stars began soaring through the sky all at once.

And on the next day, I-

Chapter 5 – An Amnesia Love Story Won't Happen

The atmosphere of the funeral was too heavy.

A single coffin laid inside the vast Golden Sanctuary. The people inside the sanctuary were Markus, Wies, and Shulavis – the family of three; also a bothersome pig was mixed in as well. I had no choice but to attend the funeral. After all, this person was my benefactor.

King Markus proceeded calmly without expressing any particular emotion, and the funeral ended quickly. According to Shulavis, commanding the maintenance of Mestria alone is hard enough work, but now with the additional worries of the Northern Forces' invasion and the immortal mage's attacks, the king and queen couple are being strained to the extent that they'll go bald from all this stress. That's why they kept the funeral as simple as possible.

I was reminded of the evening on that beautiful sunny day when I first said my goodbyes here. Just like that time, the dazzling sunset streamed through the stained glass windows, projecting colorful images onto the floor of the dim sanctuary. I looked at them carefully, and for the first time, I realized they were depicting a kind-looking woman ascending to heaven.

“It seems like traces of the curse refuse to disappear no matter what, so the corpse will be burned until only the bones are left.”

Shulavis spoke plainly while we were returning from the funeral. Shulavis and I were climbing up the wide and long white marble steps that were decorated with sculptures. The capital's a stone city built on a mountain. Looking behind us from the steps, I could see the dark green color of the Forest of Needles spreading out beyond the grey cityscape below.

(...You normally don't burn them?)

“That’s right. Once, when I was a child, I saw Vatis-sama’s corpse during a ceremony... I still remember how it wasn’t dried up or decayed, but instead retained her lifelike appearance with frightening vividness.”

Shulavis was speaking faster than usual. Possibly to avert his eyes from death. I kept him company.

(But isn’t she someone from over 100 years ago?)

“Yeah. However, powerful magic can sometimes transcend even death... Though, of course, there haven’t been any instances of dead people coming back to life, barring cases like yours.”

Was it because it was just after the funeral? Shulavis conscientiously supplemented those words.

(There’s magic that prevents you from dying, isn’t there? Like what that surreptitious sorcerer is doing.)

“That looks to be the case. But what kind of magic it is, I have no idea.”

After a sigh, Shulavis continued.

“Having said that, knowing the enemy’s characteristics is a big deal. That old man is protected by some kind of magic and can’t be killed through physical destruction. On top of that, his curse can only be applied at a relatively close range. According to the analysis of the long staff that was left behind, I’m told it only has physical strengthening and basic transformation magic applied to it. There was a tunnel hole where the staff passed through in the Crown Stone Castle’s stone pavement and underground. That attack doesn’t ignore distance, which means he needs to have direct contact through something to be able to land the curse. In other words, you’re dead if you get hit, but measures can be taken to prevent it from hitting.”

Shulavis seemed to be talking to me, but he kept staring ahead while speaking. It looked like he was organizing his thoughts on his own. What a diligent guy.

(At the end of the day, it looks like that old man’s goal wasn’t to kill Nott, but to kill the mages of the royal dynasty.)

“That seems to be the case. Since he can’t die from physical attacks, from his point of view, Nott shouldn’t pose a threat at all. If he wanted to kill Nott, he could’ve done it at any time. His goal must have been to steadily reduce the number of pawns available to the royal dynasty first.”

Shulavis turned his head back towards the sanctuary.

“...And he’s already succeeded.”

(Right.)

Silence. Shulavis finally looked over towards me.

“Pig, how about we head to Jess’ room for a bit?”

(But she’s-)

“It’ll be fine. I have something to show you.”

I was guided by Shulavis, and the two of us headed towards Jess’ room. The living room with a study desk was empty. The window was open, and the breeze quietly blew into the room. Further inside was a bedroom with a bed.

Jess was there, slumbering peacefully.

(She still hasn’t woken up?)

“There’s no precedent for this, so no one knows when she’ll wake up.”

Shulavis answered while glancing at Jess. Her sleeping face no longer had the cursed bruise.

To be honest, it was a miraculous coincidence. Soon after Jess’ body was covered by the curse, Jess triggered ecydessa. Ecydessa is a phenomenon that can be considered a mage molting. All magic, including that of the person in question, becomes a blank slate at that time. The slow-acting death curse on Jess simply vanished as soon as her ecydessa happened.

“Though I don’t think it was a coincidence.” Shulavis commented.

(Huh?)

“That was my internal monologue. Ecydessa is something that suddenly occurs to young mages due to a rapid increase in magic power. The reason for Jess’ surge in magic power in the face of death was most likely because you were by her side. She was convinced that the sealed memories were about you, and wished to regain them, even if it was only for a moment before she died; in order to break Grandfather’s sealing magic, this resulted in a huge wave of magic power. That’s why ecydessa happened at that timing.”

Is that so?

(Don’t tell me your grandpa predicted this...)

“Who knows? The truth is already in the coffin. It’ll soon be turned to ashes.”

Shulavis and I exited the bedroom, returning to the living room. Shulavis then closed the bedroom door.

“...Though it wouldn’t surprise me if Grandfather predicted this a long time ago.”

A king with outstanding foresight. Because of his death, Mestria is once again plunged into an era of turmoil.

However, this is also the first step towards rewriting this failed world with our own hands.

(So what did you want to talk about?)

“Have a seat.”

Shulavis pointed at the floor while he sat down on Jess’ study chair. What are you, a super sadistic prince?

After I obediently sat down on the floor, Shulavis took out a book from Jess’ study desk. It was bound in a dark brown leather cover, and was about the size of a paperback book.

“You’re able to read our language, right? Have a look.”

Saying that, he opened the first page and placed the book in front of me.

Thanks to Jess' magic, I had no trouble with Mestrian.

Beautiful black pen lettering was adorned to the cream-colored pages. It looked to be a diary.

Year 129 Month of 7 Day 7 of the Royal Calendar

Memory, is a very unreliable thing. I felt that I should leave my memories at a definite place somewhere, so I started keeping this diary.

It felt like I was waking up for the first time this morning. A chain of surprises threw my mind into disarray. What I can be certain of, is that I have arrived at the capital before I knew it, I'm now able to use magic, and shockingly enough, I am being welcomed as the fiancé of the king's grandson. I could have never imagined such a warm reception, and I am overjoyed by it. But I get the feeling that I'm forgetting something important. Like there's a bookmark stuck in an unknown place in my mind. It's a very frustrating feeling.

The king informed me that, because of something he can't tell me, my memories were sealed.

Without touching the pages, Shulavis used magic to turn them.

Month of 7 Day 14

Today, I learned how to move objects using magic for the first time. It was

easier than expected.

As for my journey, I'm still not able to recollect anything. I can only recall that it's something I should never forget, yet I forgot what I should be able to remember. It's very painful. Why did Evis-sama do something so cruel, even though he's a thoughtful and kind person?

He flipped through a few pages.

Month of 8 Day 1

Starting this month, I will be learning magic for creating things. In order to do this, I will need to study the structure of things. Thinking about how complex the world is made my head spin.

During my self-study, I dozed off and had a strange dream. It was a dream where I was in a dark forest, and someone by my side promised to be with me forever. I was extremely happy, and just as I was thinking about how to thank that person, I woke up. I was by myself, reading a book.

A bunch of pages were flipped all at once.

Month of 8 Day 28

I managed to create dephlogisticated air today. Just as I had learned, when

I add a gust of it to the fire, it burns extremely brightly. I feel like the way my body relies on it to survive is similar to how the fire relies on it to burn. Could they be related? I will look into this tomorrow.

At night, when I looked at the beautiful starry sky, I started crying for some reason. Why was that? But I get the feeling that, no matter how much I looked into this, I won't be able to find an answer.

Several pages were turned.

Month of 9 Day 3

Today, I continued practicing how to manipulate water. It's quite hard to grasp, so I had a hard time.

Just when I was troubled over this, Ms. Wies brought me to the top of the capital where I could see everything far off in the distance. I was told that the dragon Mr. Markus created takes off and lands here. It was a beautiful view.

When I looked at the mountains in the direction of Quiltli, tears fell from my eyes again. I've been crying a lot lately. It's time that I become stronger, I thought to myself.

Dozens of pages were flipped in one go.

Month of 10 Day 9

I haven't been able to write because I traveled to Niabel, so it's been a while. Really, a lot of things happened. I can't write all of it down, so I'll only note one thing.

Yesterday, a Mister Pig suddenly appeared in front of me. Even though he's a man, he appeared to have been turned into a pig for some reason. He's a strange person. He seems to know a lot of things, and I get the impression that he also knows me. Although he himself denies it.

During the battle at Niabel, Mister Pig tried desperately to protect me. And when Mister Pig let me sit on his back, for some reason, tears began welling out then and there. It was the same strange feeling I got when I looked at the starry sky or mountains.

It seems like Mister Pig will be by my side from now on.

Shulavis picked up the diary and returned it to its place.

“Although there are a few pages that were only about her studies, most of what Jess wrote about is like this – it's about you. Isn't that touching?”

A pair of long legs turned back to face me.

“...Who would want to marry this kind of girl?”

His voice, with a sigh mixed in, made me raise my head.

(Are you planning on breaking off the engagement?)

Shulavis shook his head.

“We weren’t formally engaged in the first place, but... I don’t intend to end this relationship right now, for the sake of Jess. Now that Grandfather is dead, the only thing keeping her in the royal dynasty is the verbal promise to marry me.”

(Then why did you show me her diary?)

“Just like Jess, I’m a lonely person. It’s fine to keep me company with some small talk, right?”

Underneath those bushy eyebrows of his, Shulavis’ eyes didn’t smile; though his mouth smiled awkwardly. It felt to me like he was forcing himself to create a cheerful atmosphere.

(You’re worried about how to face Jess, right?)

“Yeah.”

He paused for a while before resuming.

“To be honest, if I could, I’d gladly be with a woman like Jess. There aren’t many who have such a serious, enthusiastic, and kind-hearted personality... Plus, her breasts aren’t too big either.”

Eh...? What did he just say?

While I was being dumbfounded, Shulavis blushed.

“That was a joke. You should’ve laughed there.”

Wow, what a terrible joke. For a moment there, I honestly thought that I found a kindred spirit and got excited over nothing.

Shulavis cleared his throat before speaking again.

“Let’s get back to being serious. Regarding Jess’ future, there’s one thing I need to decide on.”

(What is it?)

“I’m talking about her memories. The ecydessa triggered by Jess not only lifted the surreptitious sorcerer’s curse, it also dispelled the final sealing magic that Grandfather had placed on her. So the next time she wakes up, I’m afraid all her memories will have been returned.”

I see... that’s certainly true.

(So what’s the problem?)

“When that happens, is it really alright for you and Jess to stay the way things are right now? Do you think it’s okay for Jess to remain as my fiancé?”

.....

(Before he died, Evis told me to go back. He wanted me to stay by Jess’ side until the time is right, and to return to my world when that time arrives. If I don’t, I’ll never be able to go back. I can’t stay by Jess’ side forever.)

After a bit of hesitation, I firmly conveyed this to him.

(When I’m gone, I want you to take care of Jess. So please keep this as is.)

Shulavis’ eyes looked like they were wavering.

“I see. In that case, I have a proposal from Father.”

Seemingly restless, he repositioned his legs again and exhaled heavily.

“The ability to seal memories is a very advanced magic that only Grandfather is able to use. There’s no one left that can do it. However, if it’s erasing memories, that’s something done very often to Yesmas and the citizens of the capital. Father, Mother, and even some special citizens of the capital can cast that kind of magic.”

I got goosebumps.

(...So you want to erase Jess’ memories?)

“I’m saying that as a possibility. Jess’ memories with you is too heavy for her to bear with for the rest of her life. If you’re going to disappear, then it’s surely

better for her to not remember them. From the time you left until her memories were sealed, Jess was practically crippled. If her memories are erased, Jess won't have to experience those feelings.”

Shulavis let out a deep sigh.

“But it's different from the seal in that the erased memories will never return. No matter how much you regret it, they won't come back. And she won't recall that ‘something happened,’ like with the seal.”

I recalled the conversation about the bookmark.

—If all my memories are like a book, my current state feels like the pages, from when I left the house to when I started living in the capital, are all wet and stuck together. But there's a bookmark firmly placed inside, and only the feeling that I must revisit it remains...

Erasing her memories would be like tearing out the pages and throwing them away. The bookmark that's placed inside is also tossed out, so she won't be tormented by it.

I thought back to Jess' diary. I'm happy she thought about me like that, but on the other hand, the bitterness of not being able to stay by her side stabbed at my heart like thorns. And when I return to Japan, that pain will last until Jess dies.

If I could pretend it never happened.

If I could make it so that Jess and I never met.

I never could have imagined that my life would be given a pure-love-novel-like option.

However, the answer was already decided. I didn't return to Mestria to flirt with Jess and then go home. Isn't that right? Of course I didn't. I came back in order to make sure Jess achieves happiness, and to take care of my unfinished business.

I made up my mind and conveyed it to Shulavis.

(Erase it. Erase all the memories that Evis sealed away.)

“I see,” Shulavis muttered, and raised the corners of his mouth even further. This time it was a genuine smile.

“I’m relieved to hear you say that. I understand your determination and your feelings for Jess. I’ll advise Father to make sure he doesn’t erase her memories.”

That night, before the sky started to brighten from the sunrise, Jess woke up. I was curled up asleep next to the bed when Jess stirred with an “Nn...” and roused me.

In the dimly lit room, Jess, in her nightgown, silently got up from her bed and returned with a small silver box and large gold key. She stood in front of me with a serious expression.

“Um... Mister Pig.”

(What is it?)

“Could you take this key and insert it into the keyhole of this small box?”

Jess knelt down on both knees, leaned forward slightly, and handed me the key. She was wearing a thin, white negligee that would make anyone looking at her feel troubled. If the room was lit, it would’ve been a strikeout.

(Erm... I feel like I might see a lot of things, so can you get changed first?)

“I can’t wait any longer. Please.”

I figured it would be a bad idea if Jess leaned forward any further, so I quickly took the key with my mouth. Compared to the front half, its handle was so large that even a pig’s mouth could hold it easily – or rather, it felt like the key was made so that even a pig could hold it.

—I finally understand why the key was so big.

The words Jess said when she took over my curse crossed my mind. When she resigned to her death, she remembered this key.

The girl with disheveled clothes and hair held the small box in front of herself and waited. I walked over there and looked at her face. Her clear brown eyes stared straight back at me.

“...Please, come here quickly.”



Jess held the box further out towards me, pointing the keyhole at me. I took a step forward and clumsily lined up the key with the keyhole.

I felt strangely nervous.

I gingerly inserted the key. A soft click happened as the small box open.

Jess carefully opened the lid and immediately took out its contents. Inside was a folded, light green scarf, and a glass pendant.

She looked through the pendant. The image of a girl and a pig were reflected in her watery eyes.

With trembling hands, Jess wore the pendant around her neck. The memory on the glass touched the soft skin on her chest.

“I remember everything.”

A soft voice said.

“This is the box and key that Evis-sama gave me the last time he spoke to me. He said the box could only be opened by the one deeply related to my sealed memories.”

(The seal has been lifted, huh.)

While conveying that, I placed the key on the carpet. It must be Evis' kindness to prepare a special key that even a pig can hold.

“Um... I don't know what to say at a time like this...”

Jess said in a mosquito-like voice while still clutching her scarf.

I have to agree. It would be nice to say something witty, but it also doesn't sound right to be saying something like “Please don't eat me” here.

I simply conveyed what I thought at that moment to Jess.

(We meet again.)

Jess' eyes moistened, and she silently nodded.

—Sorry, I feel like I'm going to cry if I say anything.

(Me too. I feel like I'm going to cry if I raise my voice.)

>TL Note: *Pun with shouting also meaning cry.*

My inappropriate joke made Jess smile, revealing her teeth. However, what came out of her throat was not laughter, but sobbing.

“Mister... Pig...”

Jess touched my pork cheeks with both hands and pressed her forehead against mine. Her slender eyelashes before my eyes were wet. “Uu...” Her sobs were transmitted through my bones.

“...You were by my side after all.”

Hearing her say that in a trembling voice, I held back my tears.

(I figured it was too soon to say goodbye.)

Drops of water fell from the tip of her lashes and shattered on my nose.

“...That was so mean of you.”

Her voice sounded like it was being squeezed out from the back of her throat. And as if I was under a sleep paralysis, I couldn't move.

“Why... why did you have to leave?”

Her blunt question left me speechless.

(Well... it's as I had told you. In front of Evis, I had no choice but to accept that.)

My reply was anything but straightforward.

“No matter when, Mister Pig would always support me without giving up, so why...”

I had nothing to say in response to Jess' sobbing.

Jess rubbed her forehead against my hard skull.

“Do you understand how painful it was for me, thinking that I would never be able to see you again, Mister Pig?”

(Sorry...)

“Furthermore, when we met again... you pretended to not know me... How could you do something so cruel? You should have known what kind of feelings I was going through when I was trying to remember about you, Mister Pig...”

There was a reason for that – was not something I could say. There's a reason for everywhere. Her question was whether or not I was using it as an excuse.

(It's my fault. I prioritized my own convenience over Jess' feelings.)

“That's right, Mister Pig is the one to blame. It's all Mister Pig's fault. I've been-”

I didn't hear anything after that.

Jess didn't let go of my cheeks, and simply kept her forehead pressed against mine as she started crying her heart out. Surrounded by Jess' scent, I felt the reality of finally being reunited sink in, and all I could do was shed tears.

After breakfast, Jess finally calmed down, and she guided me to the laboratory. The laboratory was like a cave that was carved out from the rock, and was divided into a room with various things displayed on shelves, and a simple room with a stone desk and chairs. The light from the small windows and magic lanterns hanging on the walls dimly illuminated its rough interior.

“I've been practicing magic here during the three months that Mister Pig was away.”

Jess, who was touching the stone desk, had already changed into her daytime attire. Her hair was fixed, and her clothes were straightened.

“What’s wrong, Mister Pig? Do you prefer me in my sleepwear?”

(Of course not. I’m not a pervert after all... And don’t read my monologues.)

Giggling, Jess placed the glass cup in her hand onto the desk.

“I’ve been wanting to show off. I wanted someone to see just how much I’ve learned and become able to do... Is it okay if I ask Mister Pig to be that person?”

Hearing her say that so happily, I nodded.

(Of course. I’d love to see you use magic, other than the one which involves spraying fuel and making it explode.)

“Erm... but that’s the magic I practiced the most...”

I became concerned when she said that slightly sulkily.

(Why did you practice that magic so much?)

“Because, I want to become strong.”

You’re sounding like the protagonist of a shounen manga...

“‘Please use your own strength to find happiness.’ It felt like someone had told me that before, so I practiced a lot of powerful magic that could protect myself.”

(...So that’s why.)

Who’s the person that told her to use her own strength to find happiness in this kind of unreasonable world? Really now, what a totally irresponsible bastard.

Jess happily placed her hand over the glass cup, and a clear, colorless liquid gushed out from the bottom of the cup.

“This is water.”

Jess turned her hand in my direction, and the cup floated until it was directly over me.

“Like so, I learned how to move things without touching them. It’s not that difficult to manipulate objects with shapes.”

I had a foreboding feeling. Right after that, Jess tilted her hand slightly and flipped the cup over on me. The water that filled the cup poured over me – is what I expected, and pulled my ears back in anticipation, but the water swirled and floated just above my nose.

“I’ve also learned a little on how to manipulate things that don’t have shapes.”

When Jess extended her arms out, the swirling water above me became a thin stream which began to spiral around her. Wrapped in a veil of water, she stood on her toes and spun in place for one loop like a ballerina. Her fine blonde hair danced in the air. The water turned into fine droplets before disappearing without a trace.

“Mister Pig, your mouth has been open this entire time. Were you entranced by that?”

Hearing her say that mischievously, I closed my mouth.

(That’s amazing... It was pretty.)

“Thank you very much. I have other magic as well. Please take a look.”

With child-like excitement, Jess showed me a lot of her magic. Magic that heats up water and boils it in the blink of an eye. Magic that creates an orange flame by burning alcohol – also known as ethanol. Magic that creates a dark blue flame by burning a substance that is a mixture of alcohol and water – probably methanol.

“For this dark flame, if you mix it with salt, it can produce various colors.”

While explaining it like we were in an experiment classroom, Jess dyed the flames burning on the desk red, yellow, green, blue, and purple. The varying colors of flames flickered in the dimly lit laboratory and made Jess’ brown eyes sparkle.

(How beautiful... That’s an amazing skill. Do you enjoy studying magic?)

Jess nodded emphatically.

“I do! This world is incredible. It’s as if someone had decided on the rules, even the smallest of details have been meticulously determined. The more I learn, the more I’m able to utilize those rules for myself...”

Seeing Jess speak so fervently convinced me. She definitely isn’t someone that is fine with just being a slave. My expectation that she would become a brilliant scholar wasn’t wrong.

(If you continue working hard like this, I’m sure you’ll become a full-fledged mage in no time.)

Despite her shy but joyful-looking face, Jess slowly shook her head.

“No, I’m still only at the doorway. There are things in this world that can’t be learned within a lifetime. The library alone contains more magic books than I can finish reading... Not to mention how there seems to be worlds that can’t be explained through current theories alone...”

It’s probably been a long while since I’ve seen Jess looking this happy.

(That’s great. I’m relieved to see you living such a fulfilling life.)

“Yeah. I really enjoy studying.”

After answering that cheerfully, Jess slightly lowered the tone of her voice.

“...Um, I know I said some unreasonable things earlier, but I know it clearly in my heart. The happiness that I have right now, it’s all thanks to Mister Pig... I understand that it was necessary for Mister Pig to choose to leave Mestria so that I could stay here like this.”

Jess extinguished the flames and looked at me.

“Please let me thank you once again. From the bottom of my heart, thank you so very much.”

Jess bowed her head.

“...And, I’m sorry... I was a bit distraught earlier...”

Suddenly receiving a thanks and apology left me bemused.

(No... that’s alright. For me, I’m happy to hear that you’re able to convey your feelings so straightforwardly. If you don’t say it outright, an otaku like me that hasn’t taken any classes on a woman’s heart won’t get it.)

“Is that so...?”

Jess murmured before walking over to me, kneeling on the floor, and looking me in the eyes.

“Then, let me say one more thing.”

(Ok... go for it.)

“I’ll be alright from now on. Just as Mister Pig told me, I’ll use my own strength to find happiness. I’ll work hard to be able to live a proper life without relying on Mister Pig.”

(...That’s good.)

My heart was pounding because I didn’t know what she was going to say, but I was relieved to hear her say those words. Now that I’ve completed my mission, I won’t have to worry when-

Jess suddenly hugged me tightly.

“So, Mister Pig, please... don’t go anywhere.”

The laboratory door opened, and the silence was broken.

“Oops... excuse me.”

Wies’ gaze fell on Jess, who was embracing the pig. Jess hurriedly let me go.

“S-sorry, um, this is...”

Even though we didn't do anything bad, there was a strange sense of guilt. The prince's mother turned towards me with a nuanced smile that seemed to say "It's a good thing you're a pig."

"Jess, I've been looking for you."

"Sorry, it's because I suddenly wanted to practice a bit of magic..."

Wies looked at me.

(It's true. We weren't doing anything shameful...)

Wies placed her hand over her mouth and smiled elegantly.

"I understand. I didn't come to reprimand you for being here."

With a serious expression, Wies looked at Jess.

"Evis-sama's body will be cremated tomorrow. Since you weren't able to attend the funeral, Jess, why don't you go and say goodbye to him today?"

Following her suggestion, Jess and I headed to the Golden Sanctuary. The sacred building that enshrines the ancestors of the royal family is located at the bottom of a long flight of stairs from where Jess lives. It's a huge sanctuary with gold decorations on black stones, so it's hard to miss.

There was no one else in the sanctuary but us two. I was told the citizens of the capital are normally not allowed to enter. Underneath the large, domed ceiling, Jess folded her hands towards Evis' coffin. Next to her, I also lowered my head.

Jess closed her eyes and prayed for a long while.

"Shall we leave?"

As Jess said that, she started walking towards the main entrance of the sanctuary. The footsteps of Jess, and the clapping of the pig's four legs, echoed through the quiet hall.

"Evis-sama was an unfathomable person, wasn't he?"

(Yeah.)

“It felt like he had foreseen everything.”

I looked up at Jess.

(For example?)

“The most notable one is my memories. Evis-sama didn’t tell me why he sealed them, but... when I was cursed and on the verge of death, you tried to reveal your true identity, Mister Pig, and the key that Evis-sama gave me acted as a hint which convinced me that Mister Pig was my bookmarked person. As a result of struggling desperately to break the seal on my memories, ecydessa happened... If all of this was within Evis-sama’s expectations, then the fact that I’m alive right now is thanks to him.”

(That’s certainly true. And to be honest, I don’t think it’s out of the ordinary for him to have planned everything to this step.)

“To think a person as incredible as him allowed the existence of the structure known as Yesmas.”

Hearing that, I pondered. Evis was by no means lacking in imagination, and he held substantial power. But even with those in mind, he had assessed that the race of Yesmas must continue to exist in Mestria. Is it because that’s the foundation of this country? Or, more terrifyingly, the foundation of this world itself?

—I’m sure the same is true of your society. Provided that humans continue to exist, there will always be someone that is oppressed.

I recalled what Evis once said.

(Jess, what do you think of the structure of this country?)

When asked, Jess slightly lowered her head.

“I don’t think it can continue on like this, but...”

(You don’t know if it’s a good idea to break the current system either, right?)

“Yeah. Perhaps... there isn’t an answer to be found.”

(Maybe so. But that's all the more reason to question the status quo and continue to think of an answer.)

We reached the entrance. Jess placed her hand on the heavy metal door.

After looking back at the coffin, Jess lowered her gaze to face me and smiled.

“Yes. It would be nice if we could make the world a better place, even if only slightly.”

“While we're here, there's something I want to show you,” said Jess, as she led me to the cemetery next to the sanctuary.

It's still early morning, and no one was here. The cool autumn wind caressed the ground underneath the invigorating sunlight. White, black, and grey tombstones were neatly lined up on the grassy square that was a mixture of green and light brown color.

“Um... Mister Pig, can I ask you a strange question?”

Jess asked while slowly walking along the passageway that looked like stepping stones. A strange question?

(...What is it?)

“Erm... Mister Pig, you said that you recently got a super cute, angelic girlfriend with boobs that aren't too big... was that true?”

So that's what you wanted to ask, I thought, and looked at Jess.

(Of course that was a lie. It's rare to meet that kind of girl to begin with, and even if I did meet one, there's not a single chance in hell that she would be with a scrawny four-eyed shitty virgin.)

“Is that so...?”

Did she notice me looking? Jess quietly raised her left arm over her chest.

“Ah, over here.”

Jess stopped and pointed at a pure white tombstone. The epitaph was inscribed in golden letters.

Here lies Yris

84 ~ 124

Wife of Casey, and Mother of Ys & Jess

“I found my mother’s grave.”

Hang on a second, you’re-

(Jess, you're Ys’ younger sister?)

“Eh, Ys... Oh!”

Right. From the time she discovered the tomb up until today, her memory of Ys was sealed. It’s not surprising that she wasn’t able to link the two memories together.

Ys. The woman who Nott continues to endlessly yearn for. She was killed as a Yesma five years ago, and a lot of people regarded Jess and being somewhat similar to her. I didn’t think these were coincidences at all.

(That explains why Nott almost seriously fell in love with you. I didn’t expect you to be her sister.)

“...That was surprising.”

(Were you able to find Casey – your father?)

“No... I did some research, but I wasn’t able to find anyone who met the criteria...”

(I see. That’s a shame.)

That means there was no way to strictly confirm whether or not the Ys mentioned in this grave was Nott's beloved who was killed five years ago. It's possible another person had the same name. That being said...

(Hey Jess, this calendar is the so-called Royal Calendar, right?)

"That's correct. The Royal Calendar has been used in Mestria since the year Vatis-sama unified the land."

(It's currently the year 129, right?)

Though I won't say where I learned that from.

"Yes, that's right..."

(Jess' mother, Yris, died in year 124, which was five years ago. And Nott's beloved, Ys, also died five years ago.)

"You're saying my mother died the same year Ms. Ys was killed?"

(Right. Naturally, I can't rule out the possibility that this was all just a coincidence, but...)

If it's true, it's a big deal.

—He's short-tempered and very extreme. He was the one to burn down the entire Bapsas monastery.

I remembered Shulavis' words. Does Jess know? The one who burned down the monastery was-

"Yeah, I heard Markus-sama was the one to burn down the monastery."

.....

(Are you okay?)

"What do you mean?"

(I mean... if this is that Ys, then your sister died because of Markus. And you might have lost your mother as well because of the impact that it had on her.)

Jess gave me a troubled smile.

“But I don’t have any memories of my family at all... At this point, it doesn’t seem right for me to be feeling angry.”

(Is that how it is?)

“That’s how it is. Of course, I doubt Mr. Nott will be able to forgive Markus-sama...”

The alliance established through Shulavis and my quick wits, and a common formidable foe, the immortal mage – even with these important factors, we can’t forget the possibility of a fatal rupture between the royal dynasty and the Liberation Army. The royal dynasty is fighting to maintain the mages’ reign based on the Yesma system, and the Liberation Army is fighting for the Yesmas’ freedom.

And the cause of the leader of Liberation Army’s beloved’s death, can be attributed to the fact that the current king, Markus, burned down the monastery. The current alliance that was formed like forcing two repelling magnets together will crumble in an instant.

(If only there was a good solution to this. I hope some kind arrangement can exist so that the royal dynasty and the Liberation Army are able to work together in the future.)

While her hair swayed in the wind, Jess opened her mouth and blurted out an “Oh.”

“Speaking of which, I heard Markus-sama has a younger brother named Mr. Hortis.”

(Is that so? Does it have something to do with the Liberation Army?)

“No. I haven’t heard the details, but... it seems Mr. Hortis disappeared from the capital five years ago in opposition of Evis-sama’s and Markus-sama’s policies. If he was around, he might be a reliable person who could connect the royal dynasty and the Liberation Army.”

Five years ago? Don’t tell me...

“Yes, I’m afraid it’s probably about the monastery.”

(That guy called Hortis, is there any hope in finding him?)

“He might be dead already, or he might have changed his appearance... I was told that he was never spotted by the hecklepons’ surveillance network, so there’s no news of his whereabouts at all.”

Hang on a minute.

There’s two mysteries that both have a strange coincidence.

Have you all noticed it yet? It’s a fact that fits too well to be dismissed as merely a coincidence.

—It’s said that hundreds of years ago during the Dark Ages when mages were still fighting, they would use their power to turn people into vultures for spying purposes, or fat seals and punish them.

There exists magic that can transform people into animals.

—I heard they met five years ago while Mr. Nott was journeying to rescue Ms. Ys. It’s a bit of a strange story, isn’t it?

I thought back to Celes’ words. He had a miraculous encounter with Nott five years ago. He’s closer to Nott than anyone else. He’s incredibly smart, and very human-like. He showed interest in Shulavis for some reason.

Perhaps this was all just a coincidence. Nevertheless, I couldn’t help but want to be sure.

(Jess, it’s been decided what we have to do next.)

“What is it?”

Jess crouched down in front of me with great interest.

While staring at those panties, I was filled with mysterious confidence.

(We might be able to find Hortis. Let’s go meet him – that perverted dog, Rossi.)

Afterword

Long time no see. This is Sakai Takuma. It's been five months since the first volume. I've kept you all waiting, but we were able to successfully publish the second volume. I'm able to continue this story thanks to all the readers who read, promoted, and helped support Pig Liver. Thank you all so very much.

Since I was given four pages to write the afterword, I would like to start by introducing a few books that I recommend. It's going to be quite biased. There'll be six books in total.

First is “The Two Sides of Voice Actor Radio” (声優ラジオのウラオモテ) — It's an incredibly passionate work novel written by Nigatsu Kou. A gyaru and an introvert, two female high school voice actors that don't get along, unfortunately end up having to co-host a radio show together. While they argue non-stop, they also take their voice acting job seriously. Just reading about the two arguing is already fun enough, but seeing them both hide their dreams and aspirations from each other while desperately trying their best to become voice actors makes me feel passionate and really cheers me up. I highly recommend this.

Next is “Even if This Love Disappears from the World Tonight” (今夜、世界からこの恋が消えても) — It's a coming-of-age novel that's sure to touch your heart, written by Ichijou Misaki. A girl who loses her memories every day, and a boy who cares about others, pretend to be a couple... Although that's how it begins, it's not a normal love story. Your expectations will be betrayed. This tender and heartrending story made me cry (I really cried, so it might be best not to read this on the train). It's a warm work that makes you really want to cherish the present after finishing it. I also highly recommend this.

The third book is “And then, the Corpse Brayed – Letters from the Dead -” (そして、遺骸が嘯く —死者たちの手紙—) — It’s a brilliantly sharp war novel written by Sakaba Miyuki. The protagonist is a young soldier responsible for returning relics; he returns items left behind by the soldiers who died in battle to their bereaved families, and as he repeats this process, he delves as deep as possible into what “humans” and “death” are until everything has been discovered. The experience of reading this work is like watching a movie, and at the same time, it also shakes your core in a way that’s not sad or emotional. It’s truly a shocking work. This is yet another that I highly recommend.

The fourth is “Beyond the Broken World ~Girls’ Dystopian Survival Techniques~” (こわれたせかいの むこうがわ ~少女たちのディストピア生存術~) — It’s a cute dystopian novel written by Rikudou Retsuka. A lonely girl who learned how to survive from an educational radio program, and a mischievous girl whose true identity is unknown, they both try to escape from this dangerous-feeling world. The protagonist girls are very cute, but the world view is also quite heavy. I felt that there were many things in common with Pig Liver, and its passionate message touched my heart (though it’s a bit arrogant of me to say this). I really recommend this.

The fifth book is “The Girl Wished, This World Should be Destroyed ~Collapse of Eden~” (少女願うに、この世界は壊すべき ~桃源郷崩落~) — It’s a battle novel written by Kobayashi Kotei with a rich setting. The world is quite special and unique, so much so that I can’t even write an overview of it, but I personally like the protagonist. He’s refreshingly perverted (and for some reason he’s completely naked sometimes). And since a tsundere fox girl heroine appears, there’s no way nothing happens. The battles are cool, and the comedy is fun. It’s a very enjoyable work. I very much recommend it.

Finally, there’s “Overwrite – The Ghost of Bristol” (オーバーライト——ブリストルのゴースト) — A passionate mystery-solving novel written by Ikeda

Akiya. It's a story about graffiti as art, and it's set in the United Kingdom. The characters that devote their lives to art are really charming. Especially the heroine, she super cute. The theme of "overwriting," which is inseparable from the heroine, is also wonderful. The puzzle solving to decipher graffiti is also fast-paced and extremely fun. I recommend this with all my heart.

These six books were winners of the 26th Dengeki Novel Grand Prize, just like Pig Liver. And after adding this flirtatious fantasy pig protagonist story to the lineup, I think there's an amazing diversity. I hope that you'll continue to support Dengeki Novel Grand Prize winning works and the award-winning authors. (Who...?)

As an aside, there's another reason why I included this list of recommended works in the afterword. Those who pay attention to the details may have noticed.

Introducing those books took up more space than I expected. The last thing I wanted to talk about is something that's a bit more fitting of an afterword.

Since the release of Pig Liver volume 1, the world has changed a lot. In the midst of the chaos of life and death, all kinds of people advocated varying opinions, and conflicts on a national level have occurred. Those alone are terrible, but the malice that lurks in our everyday lives, and the usual natural disasters, still show no signs of stopping.

I'll be repeating what's already been said, but in this era, what each one of us can do is very limited. Changing a huge tide is absolutely never an easy thing. But to say that we're completely powerless? I don't think that's the case either.

Naturally, Pig Liver is not a novel that tries to tell you what you can do in these kinds of situations. It's just a slightly naughty, flirtatious, fantasy story. However, when describing how Mister Pig, who has no special abilities, played an active role in this world of sword and magic, there were many moments where I felt that this was not unrelated to my own life. After all, I myself am a weak and powerless individual in the real world.

Pascal once famously said, “Mankind is but thinking pigs.” (No he didn’t.)

I believe that we humans can only demonstrate our true worth by continuing to think. It’s precisely because we keep thinking and never stop imagining that we’re able to flirt with cute girls in another world.

So, what will happen to Mister Pig, who keeps thinking about naughty things?

I hope that you’ll be able to accompany them again on their story filled with turmoil and danger.

July 2020 – Sakai Takuma

