



**ANOTHER WORLD'S
ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE
IS NOT MY PROBLEM!**

BY Haru Yayari ILLUSTRATED BY Fuyuki

Table Of Contents

- [◆Copyright](#)
- [◆Character Page](#)
- [◆Chapter 1: Where Am I?](#)
- [◆Chapter 2: Just When I Thought I Figured It Out...](#)
- [◆Chapter 3: Apparently, Small Zombies Exist Too](#)
- [◆Chapter 4: Grantz Kingdom](#)
- [◆Chapter 5: The Reigning King of Charges](#)
- [◆Chapter 6: The Holy Priestess of Spit](#)
- [◆Chapter 7: The Zombies Are Serious Now](#)
- [◆Chapter 8: Humans Are More Worrying Than Zombies](#)
- [◆Chapter 9: A Reliable Little Scholar](#)
- [◆Chapter 10: The Key to Ridding Exhaustion](#)
- [◆Chapter 11: Hi, I'm Boss Lady](#)
- [◆Chapter 12: Whenever Things Start to Go Well](#)
- [◆Chapter 13: Boneless Ham](#)
- [◆Chapter 14: Apparently, This Is What Happens When You Cram Meat Together](#)
- [◆Chapter 15: Signs of a Way Home](#)
- [◆Chapter 16: My Goddess](#)
- [◆Chapter 17: Believer Coalescence](#)
- [◆Chapter 18: Handshake Sessions and Ardent Fans](#)
- [◆Chapter 19: Separation and Reunion](#)
- [◆Chapter 20: The Number-One Person I Don't Want to See on a Day Off](#)
- [◆Chapter 21: Quest to Vanquish the Dark Djinn](#)

[◆Chapter 22: Divine Punishment!](#)

[◆Chapter 23: The Real One Appears](#)

[◆Chapter 24: A Lot Has Happened](#)

[◆Chapter 25: Even a Zombie-Filled World Can Be Good](#)

[◆Epilogue: In a Wonderful World](#)

[◆After Story](#)

[◆Afterword](#)

[Other Series Pt. 1](#)

[Other Series Pt. 2](#)

Another World's Zombie Apocalypse Is Not My Problem!

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“Goddess! Goddess!”

“Wh-What the heck are you doing?! Stop it! Quit it!”

“Gentle and warm like the sun... This is my goddess’s smell! Iris has it memorized now!”

I have never been smelled like this by someone before. My face is burning with humiliation. Iris finally pries her face from my chest, only to wrap her arms around my lap and start nuzzling me there.

...What is this woman’s problem?!

“Um, Iris? Why are you doing this?” I ask, trying my best to keep my voice calm.

“Doing what?”

“Confining me here, for starters...”

“This isn’t confinement. It is the natural order for Goddess Mizuha to be enshrined and worshipped at the Church of Our Lady Mizuha.”

Uhh, I can’t tell if we’re on the same page or not.

“When the world decayed, I thought the goddess I believed in had betrayed me. But she did not betray. She has descended from the heavens in human form to save the world!”

“Yeaahh, I’m a normal human.”

“No, you are the Goddess! Goddess Sadia was Goddess Mizuha all along!”

Nothing she says makes sense, but I now know she still mistakenly views me as the deity of this world. At any rate, I want to get out of here.

Lex said he didn’t know where Iris was hiding—he probably won’t be coming to save me anytime soon. In which case, I have to break out of here by myself. Even though I hate playing into this madness, pretending to be Iris’s goddess should help me escape.

“Um, Iris? Would you mind undoing these ropes? My skin hurts from them cutting into me...”

“No can do. You’re planning to run away, aren’t you?”

“N-No, I’m not. I won’t run away, okay?”

Holding back my twitching cheeks, I continue forcing my best smile through. Iris, however, stares hard at my face. I can tell she’s on guard. If only I could think of a way to make releasing me beneficial to her...

“I just wanted you to unbind me so I can pat you on the head. Haha.”

That was a horrible excuse, if I do say so myself.

“Very well.”

Seriously? She was convinced by that? She really is like a big dog.

“But please make it three pats on the head. And make them full-circle pats.”

“S-Sure.”

Is she cheeky or what? At any rate, I accept her conditions because she’s not asking for much. She quickly unties the rope. I’m finally free, but my liberation is short-lived. Since nothing about my current predicament has changed, my nerves are still on edge.

Iris lightly crouches in front of me and offers her head. “Okay, Goddess, please do what you promised.”

“O-Okay, I’ll do it.”

I cautiously begin patting her on the head. I’m touching her veil, so I have no particular comment on the feel. Eventually, I fulfill her request for three full-circle pats. Iris enters a prayer pose, smiling in ecstasy.

“Aah. I never believed the blessed day would arrive when the Goddess would pat me on the head... Supreme bliss!”

While Iris is in a state of rapture, I stealthily sneak away, breaking into an all-out run. Just a little farther and I’ll reach the door! And that’s when she firmly seizes hold of my arm.

“You promised you wouldn’t run away. You deceived me,” Iris whispers in a low, deadly voice over my shoulder.

“L-Listen, I really have to pee! That’s why!”

“A goddess should not lie.” She spins me around to face her and brings her emotionless face right up to mine. Her beautiful features make it all the scarier. “Please use that if you need the restroom.” She points to a wine barrel. It doesn’t even pass for a chamber pot.

“No, no, no, no. I can’t use that—”

“You will be living out the rest of your life here. If you can’t do your business there, you are welcome to use the floor.” Her voice is dispassionate but incredibly intimidating. This woman is dead serious.

“Your holy headquarters are going to stink.”

“I fully welcome anything that comes from the Goddess.”

“And I am fully repulsed...”

I can’t believe she is this infatuated with me. It’d be kind of cute if she listened to anything I said, but to my grave misfortune, she’s not that type.

“Come along now, Goddess Mizuha. Return to your shrine...” Iris leads me back to the center of the room by the hand.

The Royal Knights are actively searching for Iris’s whereabouts, but the capital city is large and complex. If worst comes to worst, I’ll be living in captivity for a long time. The silver lining in this whole mess is that I won’t be killed or tortured, but not even I’m optimistic enough to withstand being confined to this dank room forever.

If only Lex could come to my rescue like before. My hopeful thoughts are disrupted by the cracking sound of wood being smashed to pieces. I look over my shoulder at the damaged door. Did Lex really come for me?

That hope is dashed a second later, when three unfamiliar men barge into the room through the broken door. All three are clad in dull navy religious habits consisting of a tunic covered by a scapular and cowl.

“Sadia Fanatics, I presume?” Iris snarls, glaring at the men.

It appears these men are members of the Goddess Sadia Fanatics Lex told me about. They seem to have some sort of close connection to Iris.

“Stop calling us fanatics. We simply have a stronger faith in Goddess Sadia

than other believers.”

“Excessive faith only makes you blind.”

You’re the last person I want to hear that from, Iris.

“You have deified that woman and blasphemed Goddess Sadia. These actions are unforgivable. We will now purge you as a heretic.”

The fanatics pull weapons from behind their backs like they are drawing swords. Their weapons of choice: goddess statues the length of their arms. The divinity overflowing from the sculptures of the simply attired woman makes them look like goddess statues from any angle.

“I will take you on if you want to fight.” Iris rummages through a wooden chest in the corner. Just when I’m wondering what she’s going to procure, it turns out to be another goddess statue.

If I ever meet Goddess Sadia, I think I’ll tell her that there are people in this world brawling with her statues.

Both parties are facing off, prepared to go at it statue to statue. Now’s as good a time as ever to make a run for it. Pressed up against the wall, I gradually advance toward the exit, but then stop halfway. I can’t just leave them here to kill each other with goddess statues.

“Ahem... Why don’t you all stop this nonsense? Okay? Why don’t we peacefully talk things out—”

“We have nothing to say to this bitch!”

“I don’t want to speak with these bastards either! My ears will rot off!”

Instead of calming down, they’ve become more argumentative. It’s no use. They show no signs of stopping.

The floorboards creak, signaling both sides to commence the fight—but before they can clash statues, thundering footsteps can be heard pounding the ground, accompanied by crashing and clanging.

Five knights storm the room from the broken door. Without hesitating, they take down the fanatics, restraining them in the blink of an eye.

“Lady Mizuha!”

“Lex!”

Lex is among the knights.

“...I am very glad to see you safe and well, m'lady.”

“Thanks. I knew you'd come for me.” Though I didn't think he would come this soon. “How did you know I was here?”

“We tracked the fanatics to this place. They began acting suspiciously after you disappeared, which led us to believe it was somehow related.”

So they were able to show up here because of their observation of the fanatics' actions. This is one thing I should be grateful to the fanatics for.

“This is the holy headquarters of the Church of Our Lady Mizuha. Everyone, even Royal Knights, must leave if they are not believers.”

“Then I needn't leave, for I am a member of the Church of Our Lady Mizuha.”

“Uh? Lex? What random things are you claiming this time?”

“Y-You are my brother in the faith...?”

Oh my gosh. Iris even believes him.

Lex seals the deal with a daring smile. “I have been worshipping her since long before you.”

“A more mature brother in the faith...?” Iris jerks her head back as if she's been struck by a shocking blow. A fraction of a second later, she's giving her head a hard shake. “Y-You nearly had me fooled...! You are the heathen trying to steal Goddess Mizuha from Iris! That is, the enemy!”

Iris charges at Lex with the goddess statue. But Lex immediately seizes her wrists, curtailing her movement. Not even Iris and her superhuman strength are a match for Lex, who fights for a living.

“Quietly surrender... The crime of abducting Lady Mizuha, the savior of our kingdom, is a heavy one.” Shortly after that, Iris and the fanatics are bound in rope, their next destination: the dungeons. “This way, Lady Mizuha. Let us be on our way.”

“O-Okay...” With Lex leading the way, I try to leave the room.

“Give her back! Give Iris’s goddess baaaaaaaack!” Iris has begun violently struggling with such force the rope cuts into her bound hands and feet. Her skin bloodied from the ropes is too much for me to look at.

“Lex, give me a moment with her.” I return to where Iris is detained and crouch down until my gaze is level with hers. “Iris, you should know, I am not really the Goddess.”

“Liar! Goddess Mizuha is the Goddess!”

“You won’t believe me?”

“The Goddess is all Iris has! The Goddess will light up my world!”

Her crazed shouts help me remember she was raised in an orphanage.

People who grew up in orphanages aren’t the only ones who feel disappointed in the world. It’s probably presumptuous and wrong of me to pity her, but even so, the feeling that I shouldn’t just abandon her here is stronger than anything else. More than that, while Iris is physically older than me, she’s mentally closer to a child.

“Lex, is it possible you could free her?”

“That is a difficult request... First of all, you will be put in harm’s way again, Lady Mizuha.”

“It’ll probably be okay.” I return my gaze to Iris’s eyes and softly try to persuade her. “Say, Iris, do you want to be tossed in the dungeon?”

“No, I don’t. I won’t be able to see my goddess again...”

“Then are you willing to promise never to hurt another person again?”

“Can I start the Church of Our Lady Mizuha?”

“No. You must promise not to do that either.”

“Booooooooooo...” Iris continues moaning in mental anguish.

Ten seconds after I stifle my desire to make a joke about just how bad she wants to open a church in my name, she nods her head with pursed lips.

“I...promise.”

“Good girl, good girl.” As a reward, I pat her on the head in the same way she enjoyed earlier. Iris’s facial muscles slacken into a blissful smile. Her inherent qualities are good, but she can also be extremely cute. Anyone would take to her if she was always like this. What a shame.

“W-We will listen to anything you say, so please give us any punishment other than the zombie dungeons!” The fanatics start begging after Iris’s ropes are untied.

“Lex, go ahead and free them too.”

“B-But—”

“It’s not fair if Iris is the only one let off the hook.”

“...As you command, m’lady.” Lex reluctantly orders the other knights with a look to undo the ropes.

The freed fanatics regain their smiles. I hate to ruin their moment of happiness, but they must be warned with as much intimidation as I can muster.

“I won’t stop Lex and the knights from punishing you the next time you hurt someone. Also, you shouldn’t defile the goddess statues like that. You’ll only sadden her by doing such things.”

“But then how can we deliver divine punishment...?”

“It isn’t supposed to come from you guys, is it?”

“We are Goddess Sadia’s representatives on this land and—”

“You are forbidden from dishing out divine punishment. You swore to listen to anything I say.”

“W-We shall do as you command.”

“Good. As long as you understand,” I answer with a satisfied smile. I’m glad things ended peacefully. That sums up my feelings on the whole thing.

“Oi, Iris. It seems like you were right all along,” the fanatic leader concedes.

“There is no greater joy for me than you seeing the light. I leave the rest in your hands.”

“You can count on us...!”

Iris and the fanatic leader are exchanging a firm handshake over something or other. I’m not really sure what just happened, but I guess this is case closed with their reconciliation...right?

◆Chapter 18: Handshake Sessions and Ardent Fans

THINGS started going amiss after I finished purifying the outlying regions and returned to the capital with Lex.

“Zombies! Zombies in the city!” someone screams.

“No way! I thought we got rid of the city dwellers?!” I can’t believe my ears.

“Some may have slipped in overnight without our notice,” Lex frets.

“But they can’t get in except through the gates or over the walls. How could we miss that?”

“Zombies over here too!” comes a scream from another location.

“R-Run!”

The confusion proliferates, sending people running for their lives. Did several dozen zombies break in? Or has the infection found a new way of spreading? Whatever the case is— “We don’t have time to sit and chat about it...”

“Indeed. For now, we should hurry to where the zombies are running amok!”



“**HUMANS** have reverted into zombies?”

After handling the zombies that had suddenly popped up in the capital, Lex and I headed straight to where Pino was working in the Royal Library.

“Yeah. The witnesses all gave the same testimony, so it can’t be wrong. I took care of it on the spot since there weren’t too many and it’s daytime, but—”

“The people are disturbed by the discovery that some are turning back into zombies, right?” Pino concludes from where he’s sitting, reading a hefty book.

“A significant number of citizens observed it happen, so I want to put an end to the chaos fast,” Lex continues, uncaring that he’s interrupting Pino’s book time.

“And that is why you came to me?” Pino sighs while shutting his book and

shoots me a nasty look. “I’m very busy, though. Aren’t I, Miss Priestess?”

“I am beyond grateful and can never be grateful enough for what you are doing, Pino. Yes, indeedy.”

We’re adding this incident on top of his assisting me in finding a way home. I can’t argue with him.

“Well, it’s fine this time,” Pino relents, changing moods. “It could be caused by the addition of a new external factor, but... First, what information do you have on the rezombified people?”

“Everything we know is included in this report.”

Pino accepts the report from Lex and scans it. “Interesting. A lot of knights. And many of them members of the Royal Knights...” he mutters, suspiciously looking Lex over.

“Wh-What is it?”

“Nothing. By the way, Miss Priestess, is Her Highness in good health?” Pino swings his gaze from Lex to me.

“Yeah, she’s doing well. Why?”

“I see. So that’s what this is.”

“Did you figure something out?”

Pino nods confidently. “Zombie purification is very likely not a permanent solution. The effects weaken over time since they last touched you, eventually ending in them reverting to zombies. The reason there’s a high number of Royal Knights among the rezombified is that they were the first to be purified.”

I had saved the capital city full of normal citizens for last, starting my purification process with the knight-filled castle. Pino’s not mistaken in what he’s saying—except for one thing.

“Then why is Cia unaffected? I returned her to human long before the others.”

“Simple—because she’s often in physical contact with you.”

We wash each other’s backs during our baths, sleep together, and even hold

hands often. There's no question I touch her more than anyone else.

"Does that mean their time as humans can be extended by touching me?"

"That is what it means, yes."

"Ugh. Then I have to touch everyone constantly for the rest of my life? I'm not big on that idea..."

"According to my conjecture, if you repeat the process several times, the curse will diminish, and you won't need to purify that person again."

"I sure hope so, or else I'll go insane."

Girls and women are one thing, but I don't want to keep touching strange men I don't know. I've been doing it only because it's necessary to purify them; it's not like I'm perfectly fine with it.

"If that is the case, we must remedy the matter with urgency. How should we proceed?" Lex asks.

"It needs to be an efficient method that lets me touch a lot of people at once," I say, murmuring "Hmm" along with Lex.

"I have an idea," Pino says, smirking. "Let's hold a handshake session."



A tent is temporarily set up near the outer castle gate. The handshake session is going to be held there.

"We need to test and see first."

At Pino's advice, five hundred people have been gathered for the first session. This is fewer people than I purified on my first day making the rounds in the city, though seeing them all lined up like this makes it feel like there are even more. Thanks to the hardworking knights, people are waiting in an orderly line, but I shudder at the thought of them suddenly rushing at me in confusion.

"Please shake Priestess Mizuha's hand in order! Please be quick because there is a line behind you! Please don't push!" Lex shouts through his hands cupped like a megaphone. He isn't acting like I'd expect a knight to in this situation. He's more like a security guard cosplaying as a knight.

In any case, the handshake session has begun. Men and women of all ages have come. I spend less than ten seconds with each person, but they all leave different impressions.

“Thanks, Holy Priestess!”

“I am truly...truly grateful to you.”

Most people express their gratitude. I struggle with how to react to those among them who rub their hands together, prayerfully exclaiming, “Goddess be thanked! Goddess praise you!”

The knights did the most work bringing these people back, but I also worked hard every day to the point of dizziness. I can greet them with a genuine smile when I think their presence here is the result of what we did.

“Th-This girl’s saliva is... GULP!”

“I shall never wash the hand you touched, Priestess!”

“Haaah...haaah...haah...”

My smile accidentally slips a little—no, a lot—whenever the occasional heavy-breathing pervert slips into the line. Forcing my twitching lips up, I somehow manage to shake their hands.

“Hey, Lex? I’ve been thinking about this for a while now, but aren’t there one too many weirdos in Grantz?”

“That just goes to show how happy everyone is to shake your hand, Lady Mizuha.”

I believe there is a limit to what’s appropriate behavior when someone is excited! Still, though, I never thought the day would come in my life when I would be holding a handshake session.

For starters, I’m not all sparkly and cheery like an idol, and aside from a small group of perverts, the people coming to shake my hand are here with the wholehearted desire not to turn back into zombies. It’s still an unexpected development for me, though.

“Lady Mizuha, are you fatigued?”

“A little, yeah. But it doesn’t seem to tire me out as much as when I turn zombies back into humans. You can slightly increase the number of people starting tomorrow.”

Having said that, I’m burning out from shaking hands with more people than I had expected. It wouldn’t be right to greet them with a sour face, so I’m smiling and sitting up straight mostly because I don’t want them to see me slouching. I can’t ever put my arm down either. This is more tiring than anything else.

But it’s better than everyone turning back into zombies and having to go through that again, so I’ll push through it. Mentally encouraging myself, I lift my head and see someone familiar standing in front of me.

“Excuse me, weren’t you here earlier...?” I ask.

“You remembered me, MIZUHA!”

On top of his being first in line, he squeezed my hand for an awfully long time, so I remember him well from the horrible impression he left.

“Uggh,” I quietly whimper. Spotting my obviously uncomfortable expression, Lex deals with him in my place.

“My apologies, sir, but each person gets only one handshake.”

“Lex Irvine... You dare stand in my way?”

“Lord Rowadan. Even you are expected to follow the rules. Will one of you men escort Lord Rowadan away?”

A knight runs over and ushers the man out of line. “Dirty scoundrel! Unhand me!” The man struggles but is powerless against a knight. He’s dragged away until he’s out of sight.

After the commotion is over, I ask Lex about it. “Do you know that man?”

“Lord Keith Rowadan. He is the son of the seigneur of Lajina Seigneury located to the southwest of the capital.”

“You mean he’s a nobleman?”

“That would make him one, yes.”

“Heh,” I utter, indifferent. Between his mushroom-cut red hair and fancy

crimson vest, he had the exaggerated look of a nobleman, but he was so desperate, he came off as a totally inconsequential person.

...Well, it's not like I'll see him again, so it's not my problem, I think, but boy am I mistaken.

"Hi there. I've come to see you again, MiZUha!" Keith shows up a short while later looking all nonchalant and innocent.

Seeing his sunny smile, I dispassionately say, "Lex."

"As you command, m'lady." At Lex's orders, two knights seize Keith's arms and begin dragging him away.

"P-Please wait! I fell in love with you at first sight!"

"Ueehh?" I croak in a weird voice. His confession appears to send shockwaves through the crowd. I'm not the one who confessed my love in front of them, yet I'm drowning in embarrassment.

"How is that for a reason?!"

"Unfortunately, that is not a valid reason."

Keith is hauled farther away by the knights at Lex's ruthless judgment. But he hasn't given up yet, it seems.

"Damn it! You leave me no choice but to become a zombie to see you again!"

"You will only tire me out, so seriously, drop the idea." His extremely idiotic plan sweeps away my embarrassment. Annoyed, I put a question to him. "Why are you so obsessed with me? I believe today is the first time we've spoken..."

"But we met long before today! Indeed, it was on that day you saved me from being a zombie..." He takes an exaggerated pose like he's acting out a reminiscing scene in a play. "You were shining when I saw you!"

"That would be the purification light."

"My heart was pounding so hard my chest hurt!"

"Sorry about that. I probably punched you in the chest..."

"And I'm okay with that!"

What happened to his heart-pounding moment?

“I’m sorry. I can’t reciprocate your feelings.”

“Why don’t you understand how I feel for you...?!”

“No, I am rejecting your feelings because I do understand.” No matter how much I reject him, Keith won’t give up.

“You can play and live in luxury for the rest of your life if you become my wife. You can do whatever you want with the vast lands of Lajina!”

“Lord Rowadan, that region is still infected by the zombie blight.”

“.....”

This guy is a mess. I’m starting to pity him a smidge. Not that I’m going to accept his affections because of it, though.

“I see the truth now! This man is the reason why.” Keith, having arrived at what’s likely the wrong conclusion, throws off the knights and thrusts his finger at Lex. “Lex Irvine! Duel me right here and now!”

“What would you like me to do, m’lady?” Lex asks me with a troubled look.

“Hmm, he seems like the type to throw another fit if you refuse.”

“In that case, I shall quickly teach him a lesson.”

A typical tragic heroine would probably cry, “Please don’t fight over me!” Too bad I’m no damsel in distress—I don’t remember ever promising myself to the winner. They’re welcome to go at it all they want.

“Try not to put him in the hospital, though,” I say, voicing my one concern. “I can heal him with my left hand, but I’d rather not.”

“You can set your fears at ease on that front.”

I wouldn’t expect anything less of Grantz Kingdom’s number-one swordsman. He’s full of confidence.

And so, the sudden duel commences. They charge at each other with wooden swords, but it’s over in an instant, ending with Lex’s overwhelming victory. Without even swinging his sword, Keith is knocked to the ground a second after they start.

“Why?! Why has God bestowed this trial upon me?!” Keith pounds his annoyance out on the ground. What in the world is he fighting? “I’ll never give up! I will absolutely get you—”

“Boss Lady! Boss Man!” Rosso’s shout cuts through the noise as he pushes his way through the crowd to us.

“Rosso? What’s wrong?”

“Nothin’! I came because I heard you’re doing some sorta handshake thingy. Oh, here are some refreshments!” Oblivious to the tense mood, Rosso hands me the paper bag he was holding with both hands. A savory scent spills from the bag.

Could this be what I think it is? Full of hope, I check what’s inside. “I knew it!” I exclaim. “It’s bread!”

“You remember the wheat rations the knights distributed the other day? My kid sister baked bread with it.”

“Can I eat it?”

“Go right ahead. Though she said it doesn’t have much taste because she hurried with grinding the wheat into flour.”

I pull out what looks like a bread roll and take a bite. I was prepared for the lack of sweetness because of the difficulty involved in obtaining sugar and butter, but frankly, the hard, stiff texture makes it not taste very good. Still, since it’s a gift, I force a smile.

“You don’t hafta pretend,” Rosso informs me with an understanding grin. “My kid sister was prepared for it to taste bad this time.”

“...Sorry.”

“She’s gonna keep attempting it until she gets it right, so please try it again when she does.”

“I’d absolutely love to!” I enthusiastically exclaim, then suddenly remember the situation. We are still the center of attention. Rosso finally notices the unusual state of things.

“Somethin’ go down ’round here?”

“Yeah, a couple of things.”

It'd take too long to— Actually, it wouldn't take that long to explain. A nobleman is persistently trying to court me—that about sums it up. I just don't feel comfortable explaining it like that in front of the guy.

Meanwhile, said guy is trembling as he shakes his head. “Boss Lady... Boss Man... Could it be? Are they already a thing...? It can't be true...” Keith's face twists. “NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!” He finally runs off, wailing. The crowd moves away from him so fast, it's obvious they don't want to be involved in his affairs.

“He left.”

“What's that guy's problem?” Rosso watches Keith fleeing like he's observing a bizarre spectacle.

Lex stands beside me. “Mayhap he misconstrued me and Lady Mizuha as husband and wife?”

“He probably did.”

Considering he challenged Lex to a duel, the chances of that are high.

“Pardon the foolish question, Lady Mizuha, but is it all right for you to not go and set the story straight?”

“Hmm... I'd rather leave it this way since he's less likely to stalk me.”

“I see. Is that how it works?” Lex sounds convinced. His face doesn't show even a hint of a reaction. Does he think nothing of others believing we're married? Or does he accept it simply as a part of his job? Whatever the reason, I wish he would be a little shaken up by it.

“Oh? Is something the matter, Lady Mizuha?”

“Nope. Nothing.” I avert my eyes from him before furtively stealing a side-glance.

Well, I'd take Lex any day over that spoiled nobleman.

◆ Chapter 19: Separation and Reunion

“**WHAT** do you think he wants to talk about?”

I’m walking side by side through the castle corridors with Lex. About an hour ago, when I returned to the city after finishing up my daily purification of the outlying regions, Sir Oden summoned us, saying, “I have something to discuss with you both. Please come to the castle once you’re finished.”

“Mayhap it has something to do with procuring raw materials. We are burning through wood faster than we feared,” Lex explains.

“But is that enough of a reason to call us all the way back to the castle, and into the royal audience chamber at that? Couldn’t he have just put in his request when he saw us? Why this out-of-the-ordinary change?”

“Y-You make a valid point...”

Talking the whole way there, we arrive at the audience chamber. I’ve visited it on countless occasions since I started living in the castle, but I’m always stunned by its sheer size. Although traces of damage can be seen here and there from its time under zombie rule, you can still feel the majestic and solemn atmosphere it was built to inspire.

“I have been waiting for you, Big Sister.” Cia stands from the innermost throne and welcomes me.

Since we normally don’t stand on formality when we speak, this is a curious spectacle for me. But with no one aside from Sir Oden around, there’s no need for me to be unduly nervous.

Lex suddenly kneels on one knee and lowers his head. There’s nothing strange about that when he’s before his princess and within the formal setting of the audience chamber.

“Should I bow too?”

“No. Please stay as you are. Lex, please be at ease too.”

“Yes, Your Highness,” Lex replies shortly, rising.

Once he's on his feet again, I make my inquiry known. "Can we get down to business now? Why did you call us here today?"

"Allow me to explain," Sir Oden answers, stepping forward from his spot just behind the throne. "We have two matters to discuss. First, we would like to request your assistance in resupplying the overwhelming shortage of lumber."

"Then the shortage has indeed become a problem, as we predicted," Lex remarks.

"Veritably. Structures built with stone are still intact, but anything that used wood has faced severe erosion. Most wooden structures are in a state of needing to be rebuilt from the ground up. Lady Mizuha, I apologize for relying on you for everything, but...will you assist in this matter?"

"Of course."

Spitting on things still doesn't sit well with me, but it does no harm aside from the fatigue it causes me. I have no reason to refuse when it leads to a safer place for me to eat and sleep.

"You have my gratitude."

"Please accept my heartfelt gratitude as well," Cia says, expressing her thanks after Sir Oden. Being thanked is more uncomfortable for me than anything else.

"Uh... Please don't feel bad. You aren't asking too much of me. Anyway! You said there are two matters. What is the second?"

"Very well. I shall speak of it next." Sir Oden is about to tell me when Cia speaks over him.

"Captain Oden. I am against this—"

"Your Highness, this is necessary."

"...If you say so," Cia weakly concedes. Our eyes meet, but she quickly looks away.

I'm briefly worried that she's come to hate me, but that doesn't seem to be the case. Not only is she gnawing on her lower lip, but she's curled her hands into tight fists in her lap.

Whether he knows how she feels or not, Sir Oden cuts to the chase in a commanding voice. “Though the process has been slow, the kingdom has gradually regained a state of calm. The senate has decided to restructure the Royal Knights back to their former positions in order to speed along the restoration.”

“So that is what this is about...” Lex seems to have figured it out, but I still have no clue. Stuck as the only confused party, I watch as Sir Oden faces Lex with the most rigid, demanding expression yet.

“Lex Irvine, you are hereby relieved of your duties as the holy priestess’s guard. From henceforth, you are to serve as Her Highness the Princess’s knight.”



THE following morning, I’m waiting in front of the outer castle gate when two knights come before me.

“If I’m not mistaken, we’ve met before...” I venture.

“We are honored to be in your presence again.”

They are the two knights who volunteered to be bait when we were trying to take back the castle from the super-active night zombies. I’m not necessarily on familiar terms with them, but I’m relieved from the bottom of my heart that I was assigned people I know.

“I’m sorry you had to be reassigned as my guards.”

“Please don’t be sorry!”

“We applied for this assignment.”

They applied for it?

“Why?” I ask, earning a few blank blinks from them.

“Because of that, of course...yeah?”

“Y-Yeah.”

What are they talking about? It doesn’t help that they both have goofy grins. I feel bad saying this about people who volunteered to protect me, but they

creep me out. Noticing my eyes have narrowed in on them, they quickly straighten up.

“We haven’t introduced ourselves yet. I am Kurt Becker.”

“Julian Graz.”

Sir Kurt is a charming young man with short hair, while Sir Julian is a good-looking young man with long hair who gives off the impression of someone who’s a bit of a stiff. As I’m thinking about how their names sound German, both men tap their fists to their chests in salute.

“I may be inadequate to fill in Sir Lex’s boots, but...I will do my very best as your guard, Lady Mizuha,” Sir Kurt swears, his expression staunch.

Lex has been by my side since the day I arrived in this world. That’s why his being removed from my guard detail didn’t feel real to me, but...the reality has finally set in.

I slowly tip my head. “I will be counting on you both.”



AFTER joining up with the Raw Materials Harvesting and Transportation Squad, we depart for the forest. Meadows and grasslands abound in the nearby areas I had purified in the days prior. Thanks to that, I feel revitalized by inhaling deeply of the fresh, clean air, free of zombie stank.

“Excuse me... Has Lex always been Cia’s personal guard?” I ask Sir Kurt along the way.

“Yes, milady,” he answers, keeping pace with me. “You know of the Royal Knights, yes?”

“First, you have ordinary soldiers, then the Order of the Knights, and only a select few of those knights can become Royal Knights, right?” I confirm, repeating what Lex had told me before.

“Only the best of the best knights can become Royal Knights, to be precise. And it is only the strongest of the Royal Knights who can serve as personal guards to royalty.”

“Then what about Sir Oden?”

I've seen Lex in action enough times to know he's strong. Judging from his charge attacks alone, Sir Oden isn't lacking in the strength department either.

"Captain Oden's duties as captain of the knights take precedence."

"Then Lex isn't necessarily stronger than Sir Oden," I assume.

"That's open to debate," Sir Julian interjects, joining our conversation. "He is normally not all there, but"—so I'm not the only one who thinks he has a few screws loose—"I would say Lex is the far superior swordsman."

His normal behavior being what it is, it's never really stuck with me that Lex is a strong fighter, but they make it sound like he's much more amazing than I give him credit for. I'm starting to regret after the fact that I used and abused him a little too much.

And so, we continue walking for another thirty minutes or thereabouts, chatting about nonessential stuff until we arrive at our destination.

"This is the Great Oak Forest. Plenty of fine trees excellent for use as building materials grow here, but..."

"The zombie rot hit this place hard, huh?"

All the large trees growing amid swaths of venomous purple grass are peeling, crumbling, molting, and splitting down the middle, creating a lurid forest. Buildings using these trees as material will surely crumble.

"Looks like it's my turn now. Excuse me! Will you all please turn the other way?" I address the soldiers in the squad.

"I would love to witness the act of purification if you would so allow—"

"Please turn around." I flash a murderous smile, causing everyone to flinch and whirl around until their backs are to me. I inwardly sigh. Being around people I'm not comfortable with is tiring. Lex made my life a lot easier on that front. Wait, what am I thinking?

Shaking my head, I quickly spit on the ground. Purification spreads to the trees. Bark regrows on the peeling trunks, followed shortly by the rest of the tree flourishing until green leaves sprout from all the branches. Before long, greenery fills the forest, drawing sighs of awe from the soldiers and knights.

I spin around and entrust the rest to them. “I’m finished. Please take care of the rest.”

The soldiers set about harvesting trees, chopping them down left and right before piling them on the carts. Taking into account that the forest might rot again once we leave, the soldiers plan to take every tree they fell with them. We have a shortage of helping hands and few carts capable of transporting full-grown trees. It doesn’t take long before the soldiers have all the carts fully loaded.

“Phew...” I sit on a downed log and take a break. Most of the work is finished, aside from tying down the lumber to keep it from rolling out of the carts.

“We finished up much faster than I had expected,” Sir Kurt comments, taking up position at my side. “This, too, was only possible with your assistance, Lady Mizuha.”

“I’ve barely done anything, though. Ahaha,” I say with a dry laugh. The trees are far too heavy for me to carry, so I’d just get in their way if I tried. In the end, I could only watch the soldiers do all the work.

“Didn’t you fetch water for us?”

“Only because I had nothing better to do.”

I had discovered a low cliff a short walk from here. I purified the small lake that happened to be at the bottom of the cliff and made several round trips carrying buckets of water from there to where the men were working.

“The men were grateful for your thoughtfulness.”

“It was more me trying to find a job to do, but I’m glad it was appreciated.”

“OINK!” A pig’s snort interrupts our casual conversation. I sweep my gaze over the surrounding woods until I spot a pig several feet away. It looks exactly like the pigs in my world. Our eyes meet for a second before the pig quickly turns its rump toward me and trots away.

Why is there a lone pig here? I’m trying to figure it out, when all of a sudden my whole body shudders. Seconds later, I hear trees snapping and breaking. I’ve got a seriously bad feeling about this. Trees fall over in the direction the pig

disappeared in, revealing an enormous human-shaped zombie.

“Boneless Ham...!”

Boneless Ham’s roar echoes through the forest. Shock courses through the soldiers. Not only have some fallen to their knees, but others flee in different directions. And they call themselves soldiers?!

“Please calm down, everyone! It’s still light out! He probably can’t r—”

He can’t run—that’s what I was about to say, when Boneless Ham breaks into a sprint, his heavy feet pounding the ground.

“H-He can freakin’ run?!”

I’d assumed Boneless Ham couldn’t move fast in daylight, like the other zombies, but my assumptions were wrong! The soldiers I had just started to get under control fall into an even worse panic. They scatter every which way.

“Please run away too, Lady Mizuha!” Sir Kurt bravely steps in front of Boneless Ham’s path and throws rocks at it. Then he spins around and bolts in the opposite direction of everyone else. “Come here, fatso! I’ll take you on!”

Sir Kurt is trying to lure it away as bait, but Boneless Ham doesn’t even look his way as it fixates its charge on me.

“No way?! Why is it coming straight for me?!”

I whirl around and flee. Boneless Ham is so heavy, the ground shakes with its every footstep. I glance over my shoulder and see Boneless Ham smashing down trees and plowing through soldiers as it bears down on me.

I can purify him if I can just touch him somehow, but with his charging me like this, I’ll sooner turn into a Mizuha pancake than be able to get my right hand on him. I’m done for the moment he gets close. If I’m not squashed under him, I’ll be splattered all over by his hammer-like arms. On the bright side, he’s significantly slower than the regular zombies during their souped-up night mode. I’m just barely keeping ahead of it because of that. The question is: Just how long can I keep this up?

“Lady Mizuha!”

“Sir Julian! That THING is clearly after me! You’d better get away from me!” I

shout in warning to Sir Julian, who's running parallel to me. Instead of distancing himself, he runs closer. He glances once at Boneless Ham before returning his gaze to me.

"Draw him to the place where you purified the water!" he instructs.

"Good idea! I'll try to get him to fall in there!"

Zombies are weakened by purified water. Our last battle with a Boneless Ham proved they have the same weakness. I'll just keep running until I can dive off the cliff into the water, bringing the Boneless Ham down with me!

"Lady Mizuha!"

"Wha-?!"

Shoved from behind, I tumble on the ground. Confused about what just happened, I narrowly catch sight of a large tree crashing into Sir Julian. Boneless Ham must have thrown it! Sir Julian falls end over end, bouncing several times off the ground until he stops moving altogether.

"Sir Julian!"

"I am...alive...m-milady," he splutters between gasps for air. "Please! Run away!"

Blood is spurting from his head, and he can barely move. He's seriously injured. I can heal him with my left hand— Boneless Ham's ferocious roar immediately dissuades me. It's almost here. This freakazoid of a zombie is after me. One wrong move and I could get Sir Julian killed in the process.

Mind made up, I kick off with my right leg to run, but a painful sting in my ankle turns my run into more of a fast limp. I might have sprained it when I tried to catch my balance after he shoved me. Understanding why I'm hurt doesn't do anything to help me move faster, though. Boneless Ham is charging right at me from the closest distance yet.

I'm done for.

A horse's neigh echoes through the forest like a beacon of hope.

"Take my hand!" a familiar voice commands.



For a moment, my brain doesn't process in the confusion, but I reach out for that hand faster than I put the pieces together. My body is yanked into the air. As soon as I am on the horse's—Vianta's—back, I shout to the knight gripping the reins behind me.

"Lex...why are you—?!" *Here; I thought you were supposed to be on Cia's guard detail*—is what I'm about to ask when he speaks over me.

"Save your questions for after we take that monstrosity down!"

Boneless Ham remains in hot pursuit even after I'm escaping by horse. I have loads of questions for Lex, but I have to get my head in the game first so I can live to hear the answer!

"There's a small lake up ahead! We just have to drop him in it!"

"Will do, m'lady!"

Traveling by horse gets us to our destination in no time. I can't see the lake, but I do see where the ground falls off. The lake is below.

"Please hold on tight, m'lady!"

"What?! You aren't about to—"

"We are going to jump it!"

Vianta picks up speed and leaps off the cliff. A blue sky fills my vision that had nothing but trees and leaves in it until now. Just how high did Vianta jump?! After what seemed like being suspended in midair for a long time, the shock of impact courses from my butt up through my body.

Rather than feel relieved we've safely landed, I'm more surprised we leaped over the entire lake. Small though it is, it should've been impossible for a person—or even a horse—to jump over. Apparently, the horses of this world are capable of things not possible for horses in my world.

Three whole beats after we land, Boneless Ham charges onto the top of the cliff. Just when I thought it'd careen right off the ledge and into the lake, it skids to a halt at the last second. The sheer weight of it, though, works against it as the ground beneath its feet crumbles. It loses balance, the top half of its body swaying to stay upright.

“Fall on down, monster!”

Swinging its large arms through the air, it manages to hold its ground. Is it my imagination, or did Boneless Ham’s grotesquely big mouth twist up in a triumphant sneer? We almost had it too!

“URAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

Just as I hear that abrupt battle cry, Boneless Ham’s massive body pitches forward. Unable to catch itself this time, it falls into the lake! KER-SPLASH! Water sprays everywhere in a giant tidal wave. The area is soaked by droplets as if a sudden spring rain had fallen.

“Looks like I somehow managed to steal the show.”

“Sir Kurt!”

Sir Kurt is holding up a shield on top of the cliff. He literally had perfect timing! I shift my gaze from Sir Kurt down to the lake where Boneless Ham is lifelessly floating at the surface. Purification will be a piece of cake now.



SIR Julian fully recovered from his wounds with a touch from my left hand. It drained the energy completely out of me, leaving me exhausted, but I’d take that any day over letting him die. With the chaos under control, the soldiers are preparing for the journey home.

“Okay...time for you to spill. Why did you come here? Or rather, how were you allowed to come?” I ask Lex, who is standing at my side watching the soldiers put things in order.

“I was relieved of my duty as royal guard.”

“You were? Why?”

“I was there in body, but not in spirit. That mind-set seems to have been the reason.”

“Do you mean...”

What do I do if I get this wrong? With that fear in the back of my mind, I can think of only one reason why he wouldn’t be there in spirit. Seeing Lex’s

awkward smile gives me confidence that I have the right idea.

Lex takes on a serious expression and slowly goes down on one knee. "If it so pleases you, please make me, Lex Irvine, your knight, Lady Mizuha."

I can't help blinking at this unexpected turn of events. Honestly, a part of me rejoiced when I heard he was relieved from his duties as Cia's guard. Sir Kurt and Sir Julian are very good men, too, but somehow it just didn't seem the same with them.

That's why I'm delighted Lex has returned to my side again like this. I'm genuinely happy to hear he wants to serve me. But...while I don't know much about knights, I get the sense this isn't something I should accept with half-hearted feelings.

"Lex, there is something I want you to know."

"...Yes, m'lady?"

"Do you remember...when I told you how I came from another world?"

"Yes, around the time we first met."

At the time, I wasn't sure if Lex believed me or not from his response, "It only affirms you are our holy priestess."

"Yeah, that's the one. It's the truth. So you see, Pino is searching for a way for me to return to that world. That's why—"

—I might disappear from this world forever. Lex speaks sooner than I can tell him that, though. "In that case, I shall become your sword and shield for the duration of your time in this world, Lady Mizuha."

His declaration, without an ounce of hesitation, leaves me blinking in disbelief. And then, I giggle behind my hand. "Weirdo. You almost sound like a real knight, Lex."

"I am a real knight." Lex raises his head, another joyous smile gracing his handsome visage.

"I'm also...comfortable with you. Other people stress me out."

"Pardon the question, but is that something for me to be happy about?"

“I’ll leave that to your imagination.” I flash a teasing grin. I can see the expedition squad has finished preparations for the journey home; they seem to be waiting for us now. “Ready to go home?” On my way to join the others, I abruptly turn around and call his name. “Lex! I’m looking forward to our continued time together!”

“...Me too, m’lady!”

◆Chapter 20: The Number-One Person I Don't Want to See on a Day Off **SEVERAL** days after going on the expedition to harvest resources, I've received a day off from my purification duties. I didn't want a break—Cia asked me to take the time off. She seems to think I've been working too much. I feel guilty resting when everyone else is working hard toward restoration, but... the truth of the matter is that my body is aching and cracking all over from walking so much, so I gladly took her up on the offer.

That being said, I didn't have anything in particular I wanted to do with this free time. Wide-scale revitalization of the capital has only recently been undertaken, and they haven't gotten around to fixing up the entertainment venues. In the end, I woke up and left the castle like usual, and I've been spending my time since walking down the capital's main street with Lex.

"This has kind of become our routine, huh?"

"You mean...walking around the capital?"

"Yep. Well, I don't dislike doing it, so it's fine by me. It's kind of a relief to see the city gradually rebuild too."

The cityscape changes with every visit. Walls that were missing stones and crumbling yesterday are standing tall and strong today. Structures are erected on formerly vacant lots. And it's not just the buildings or the physical objects: as the number of people increases, so does the number of smiles. I don't know what this city looked like originally. Maybe being here isn't all that uncomfortable for me anymore because it feels like I am growing with the city.

"I wish you could see Grantz Kingdom in all its glory, Lady Mizuha," Lex says sadly.

“...Lex.”

He almost makes it sound like I'll never see the completely restored Grantz. I understand what he means by that. Even I want to see things through to the end. But— “Miss!”

I turn toward the familiar voice and find a face I know there. It's the first boy I healed. He's running up to me.

“This is my thanks for last time!” He holds out the bouquet he was hiding behind his back. Quietly swaying in his hand are flowers with four large petals the same bright red as roses.

“Wow! Those are beautiful!” I exclaim.

“They were growing near my house!”

“Thank you!”

“Ehehe! I'd better get going now. Mommy will yell at me if I'm late.”

“Okay! See you next time!” I'm quietly watching the boy leave when Lex steps next to me.

“Good to see him doing well.”

“Yeah... Purification is definitely useful, but the power to heal is really handy.”

Using either one drains the life out of me, but I can regain my energy by eating and sleeping. That's hardly a price to pay.

“And that is precisely why this holy power made its home in one with a pure and true heart—you, Lady Mizuha.”

“You think too highly of me. Even I might abuse these powers, you know?”

“I shall accompany you if you do.”

“Oh gosh, that'd make it hard to do anything bad...”

“It is that side of you, m'lady.” Lex laughs at me.

It's one thing for me to walk the dark path, but I'd have reservations about making someone my accomplice in it. Obviously, I don't plan to do anything evil with my powers, but I feel like I couldn't even on the off chance I wanted to.

“Sorry about today,” I apologize. “You could have taken it easy if I had rested.”

“Thank you for being thoughtful of me. However, you can rest assured that I am barely fatigued.”

He isn’t putting up a front; this is how he really feels. Lex is full of life.

“Whenever I see you like that, it really makes you seem like a knight.”

“I train on a daily basis, after all.”

“I’m pretty confident in my stamina, though.”

“You certainly are more active, or rather, more energetic than other women, Lady Mizuha.”

“Oh, I’m sure I’m far from being a lady. Hmph.” I grumpily point my chin the other way.

Flustered, Lex circles around until he’s facing me. “N-Not at all, m’lady! I swear I did not mean it in that way! I believe it is one of your charms and— L-Lady Mizuha?”

Darn. He saw me trying to restrain my laughter. Now that the cat’s out of the bag, I stick my tongue out at him. “Sorry, I was teasing you.”

“Th-That is not very nice...” Lex places his hand on his chest like he’s thoroughly relieved it was a joke. I wasn’t randomly teasing him for nothing, though.

“That’s payback for you suddenly showing up the other day.”

“Y-You don’t leave me much room for rebuttal when you bring that up...”

“Don’t get me wrong. I’m grateful you saved me. But this and that are different, okay?”

I wanted to get revenge for the real shock he put me through. I teased him for that, but I’m not particularly mad at him. Okay, it’s time to drop this.

Faster than I can change the subject, Lex drops into a deep bow. “I have been deeply reflecting on my reckless actions that had caused you such dismay, Lady Mizuha. I am sincerely sorry for what I have done...!”

“H-Hang on, hang on! Doing that in public will only draw unwanted attention!”

Case in point, many people around us stop what they’re doing to shoot us suspicious looks.

“No! Your knight Lex Irvine shall not back down until he receives Lady Mizuha’s pardon!”

Lex is totally serious, unlike me. And that’s exactly why this is in bad taste.

“Okay! I understand your point of view, so stand up already!”

“Pardon my rudeness, but I cannot accept your pity!”

“I’m really not angry at you!”

“Then you forgive me, m’lady?!”

“I forgive you! I *forgive* you!”

“...Thank you very much!” He finally rises.

Sheesh, I better be careful when I tease Lex in the future. At the very least, I’d better pick my spot. Having gained control of the situation for now, I sigh with relief.

“MiZUha...? Are you not, MiZUha?!”

I know of only one person who says my name in such a funny way. I can’t believe he’s showing up at a time like this. I look in the direction of that voice, feeling like a teacher just sprung a surprise test on me. The young man—Keith—welcomes my look with a pointlessly sparkly smile.

“What a coincidence, running into you here. Or mayhap, it’s fate.”

“You’re launching right into that drivel the second you open your mouth, huh?”

“You look down, MiZUha.”

Because I ran into you of all people.

“Would you like to join me for a meal?”

“I heard none of the restaurants are open yet.”

“How about a stroll, then?”

“Sorry, I want to take it easy today.”

“It can’t be helped, then. How about you join me at m-m-m-my m-mansion...?!”

What can’t be helped? Huh? Besides that, I seriously wish you’d not sidle up to me with a face that’s got your ulterior motives written all over it plain as day. Yick.

As I’m stuck between being exasperated and totally turned off, Lex smoothly steps between me and Keith.

“You are troubling Lady Mizuha, Lord Rowadan.”

“How am I troubling her? She looks terribly delighted to me.”

“No, not the least bit delighted,” I say, bluntly letting him have the truth. Unfortunately, Keith seems to possess the inconvenient skill of allowing what I say go clean in one ear and out the other, for he looks unfazed by my curt rejection. To make matters worse, he’s even threatening Lex, who’s blocking his way to me.

“You were here, Lex Irvine?”

“Yes, the whole time.”

“I see. Is that what’s going on here? MiZUha is dispirited because of your presence!”

Taking him seriously, Lex turns an unconfident gaze my way. “Is that...true?”

“No. Relax, it’s not true at all.”

“You heard what the lady said.”

“To protect this failure of a knight... How kind MiZUha must be.”

It’s no use. Nothing I say gets through this guy’s thick head.

“So be it. MiZUha and I are about to set off on a journey of *love*. Go somewhere else, fly.”

“I cannot do that.”

“You dare continue to interfere? I’ve looked into you. Turns out you have no connection to MiZUha whatsoever, fly. Do you have fair reason to stand in my way?”

“I do,” Lex asserts, proudly tapping his chest. “After all, I have become Lady Mizuha’s official knight.”

“Wh-What did you just say...?”

“I am Lady Mizuha’s knight, Lex Irvine.”

Is it just me hearing that hint of pride in his voice? I don’t know Keith’s true intentions, but he’s definitely suffering a great deal of damage from that admittance. He looks imploringly at me with misty eyes like he still can’t believe it.

“Does he speak the truth, MiZUha?”

“Y-Yes, for now.”

“AUGH.” Keith falls to his knees. I hope he’ll give up now. But I guess I thought that too soon, because he bounces back on his feet—literally and figuratively. “I will never, ever give up! You hear me, LEX IRVINE?!”

“I am a knight. I shall neither run nor hide.”

Overwhelmed by Lex’s imposing confidence, Keith resentfully says nothing more. He turns his back on us and runs.

“He never learns.”

“Lady MiZUha...”

“Lex, you’ve picked up his weird way of saying my name.”

Lex smiles wryly as he looks in the direction Keith left. “A mind of steel. It is one of Lord Rowadan’s good points as well as bad.”

“Whoa. Don’t tell me you acknowledge him now?”

“No, that was the nicest thing I could come up with after racking my brain.”

Lex can say some pretty cruel stuff too. Then again, since I’m of the same opinion, I agree with him. “You can say that again.”

“Good grief... I guess I should be thankful the holy priestess is easy to find,” an exasperated voice says directly behind me. I turn around to find just who I expected to be there.

“Pino!”

“I see you continue to excel at drawing attention.”

“Ahaha... It’s a coincidence. A coincidence, I say.” Ninety percent of it is Keith’s fault. “Anyway, what are you doing here? It’s rare for you to come all this way.”

“I had something I need to tell you now, so I looked for you myself.”

“Could it be—”

“Yeah,” he nods. “I’ve pinned down where the black fog is coming from.”

◆Chapter 21: Quest to Vanquish the Dark Djinn

UNDER the bright, pounding rays of the sun, Grantz Kingdom's Royal Army is preparing in the plains just outside the capital to embark on a campaign to take down the Dark Djinn. The eighty soldiers composing this campaign makes it bigger than any other expedition undertaken since reclaiming the capital. Because of that, it's awfully noisy for this time of morning.

"More soldiers are coming along than I thought," I mutter to myself, watching over them near the outer gate.

"More isn't necessarily better in this case either."

"Oh, Pino!" Pino had snuck up behind me without my notice. "Good morning," I greet him. He merely nods in return, as unsociable as ever. "What do you mean more isn't better?"

"Foolishly increasing our numbers could fatally increase the number of pawns falling into the enemy's hands. Our advantage in numbers could quickly become our disadvantage."

"Ahh. Good point."

"In the end, we're stuck relying on the only person who can stand against the enemy—Miss Holy Priestess. Do your best not to get everyone killed."

"You make it sound like it's just my problem..."

That being said, Pino is right. I'd love to list off my mountain of complaints, but that won't do anything to change the truth. Above all else, I'm the one who wanted this vanquishing quest to happen. It's too late to whine. I exhale and switch modes.

"Anyway, I thought it'd take more time."

“To pinpoint the fog’s source?”

“Yeah. You seemed to be having a difficult time with it.”

“The Raw Materials Harvesting Expedition was the clincher. It was easy to locate once I narrowed my search based on that hulking blob you happened across. Investigations of the site from a distance have proved my conjecture correct,” Pino explains, squeezing the strap of the double carry sack on his shoulder.

“Speaking of which, you’re coming, Pino?”

“Obviously.”

“It’s going to be dangerous, you know?”

“A worthwhile price to pay to see the Dark Djinn with my own eyes.”

“Hmm...”

As wise and talented as Pino is, he’s still a child. Is it really okay to knowingly bring him to a dangerous place?

“Miss Priestess. Let me be clear—you aren’t my guardian or anything of the like.”

“Yeah, I know that, but—”

“If you still plan to stop me from going regardless, I will sneak among the ranks and die in front of you.”

“Stop it. That’s the one thing you should never do.” It’s scary because he doesn’t sound like he’s joking.

“You needn’t worry. I’ll run away as soon as I perceive it’s dangerous,” Pino informs me in all seriousness after seeing how reluctant I am.

To be fully honest, I want him to stay in the capital, but it is Pino who created this opportunity for me. I can’t put my foot down more than I already have.

The sound of dozens of feet breaks into our conversation. I look in that direction to see a group of twenty approaching from the capital city. All are wearing hooded red robes. The vanguard of the group throws back their hood, revealing a fair and beautiful face.

“...Iris?” It’s the young woman who abducted me.

“I caught word that you are going on a quest to vanquish the Dark Djinn, Goddess Mizuha. As such, this is a holy war. The Church of Our Lady Mizuha cannot sit on the sidelines and do nothing.”

“Don’t tell me the people behind you are—”

“Yes, they are the Church of Our Lady Mizuha believers!” Iris proudly introduces the group.

My lips curve into an unforgiving smile. “Say, Iris? Didn’t I tell you to stop with this nonsense?”

“Ack...I made a mistake.... This is the Church of Nnn!” Iris amends by rolling the new name from the back of her throat.

“We’re the Church of Nnn!” the group behind her insists in support of her claim. What a pitiful excuse. Exasperation is the only reaction I’m left with.

“I see no reason not to let them come.”

“Pino...but...”

“We will absolutely become your strength!” Iris firmly asserts.

I’ve experienced Iris’s superhuman strength for myself. She’ll definitely be of more use than I will when it comes to a physical fight.

“Fine. But don’t be reckless.”

“Did you hear the good news, brothers and sisters?! We were bestowed holy permission to partake in this holy war! We shall rain divine punishment down on the Dark Djinn!”

Iris and her group take statues from their double carry sacks and hold them up in the air. No matter how you look at it, they’re statues of a high school girl wearing a school uniform. I’m the only person wearing an outfit like that in this world. In other words— “Hey, that’s—”

“Big Sister!”

Only one person calls me that. I spot Cia behind the believers, flanked by Sir Kurt and Sir Julian. Since Lex became my knight, they have been assigned as

Cia's temporary guard.

In the few seconds I was distracted by Cia, Iris and her cult disappeared. I search for where they went and see they've joined up with the soldiers. They sure are quick to flee.

"Cia, you came to see me off?"

"Yes!" Contrary to her energetic response, her expression is dark. "I wish I could go with you, though..."

"Everything would fall apart if anything happened to the princess."

"...I know. Please stay safe, Big Sis."

"Thank you for worrying about me. Let's have tea when I get back."

"I'd love to!" Cia exclaims before facing Pino. "Please be careful as well, Master Pino."

"I-I will..."

Pino's as curt as ever, but he's lacking his usual composure. It clicks in an instant after seeing that reaction.

"Hoho," I smirk. "So she's the one."

"Y-You're wrong! I don't know what misconception you're laboring under, but I—"

"Don't sweat it. I won't tell anybody."

"Like I said, I—"

Cia blinks in confusion when she sees Pino lose his cool. "Pardon me, but what are you talking about?"

"Nngh!" Pino turns his back on Cia to hide his bright-red face from view. "I'll head over first... Miss Priestess, I'll get you for this later."

I seem to have taken my teasing too far. I give a strained smile as cold sweat trickles down my back. At a complete loss, Cia tilts her head, bewildered.

"Lady Mizuha, we're all set!" Lex comes for me on Vianta's back. Sounds like the knights and soldiers are ready to go.

I turn and say one last goodbye to Cia. “I’m heading out now. See you later.”

“Okay. Please be careful... May Goddess Sadia’s divine protection be with you.”



ONLY a few horses were recovered by purifying the two Boneless Hams. The troops can move only so fast without steeds, which means we still haven’t arrived at our destination after two straight hours of marching. Exhaustion is showing on the soldiers’ faces.

“I feel bad for taking one of the horses.” I’m riding Vianta in front of Lex. Aside from my butt and thighs hurting from bouncing up and down, I’m experiencing little fatigue.

“We don’t know what is lying in wait for us. You are helping us by saving your energy now, Lady Mizuha.”

“I know, but I still feel bad.” It bothers me to be one of the few who can take it easy on the hard trek to our destination.

“Sit with your head held high because you deserve to take a load off during this part,” Pino advises. He’s in the same position as me on Sir Oden’s horse. The difference in size makes them look like father and son.

Sir Oden has his horse trot beside Vianta. “Master Pino is right. You are an exalted person in Grantz Kingdom, Lady Mizuha. No one will complain about you riding in comfort before going into battle.”

“My goddess is the Goddess!” a loud voice bellows behind us after Sir Oden’s remark. “You aren’t just the most important person in Grantz, but in the whole wide world! If anyone dares voice a complaint, your servant Iris shall—”

“Iris, can you shut your trap?”

“Yes’m.”

Sir Oden guffaws when he sees Iris wilt. “You’re loved.”

“Doesn’t what she said count as lèse-majesté?”

“I seem to be hard of hearing lately.” The corners of Sir Oden’s lips curl up.

Looks like he's going to overlook what Iris said. I'm relieved. As insane as she is, Iris is still someone who idolizes me. I wouldn't be able to sleep at night if she were arrested.

We enter the forest a short while later. Sunlight is blocked by a canopy of branches and leaves, dimming the surrounding area into a gloomy darkness. The area extending ahead of us is so dark there's almost zero visibility. The thing is, this is no ordinary darkness. I've seen it plenty of times to know—it's the black fog.

"I've never seen it this thick before."

Fear and unrest courses through the soldiers. I can't shake the bad feeling I have either. This fog is clearly different from the other black fog. Suddenly, a bird the size of a human head lands on a nearby dead tree. Rot oozes from its zombified body. After intensely staring at us with red glowing eyes, it flies into the black fog.

Just as I'm thinking how creepy that was, *something* human-shaped steps out of the black fog. It has four limbs and walks on two legs. Human it may appear, but human it is not. The body appears to be formed from rotten clay. But now's not the time to be focusing my attention on figuring out what makes up that *thing's* body.

"H-How freakin' many of them are there?!"

Around fifty clay zombie dolls are trudging our way from the black fog.

"Lex, protect Lady Mizuha!" Sir Oden's voice becomes the battle signal. Knights and soldiers intercept the clay dolls with their shields.

"AGHHHHHHHH!" one of the soldiers screams. He rapidly begins rotting from the spot on his arm where the clay doll he was fighting touched him. Zombies are going to propagate from our own men if we don't do something fast.

"Lex!"

"You've got it, m'lady!"

Lex navigates Vianta closer to the soldiers for me to touch the rotting men and clay zombie dolls. Soldiers regain their humanity, while the clay dolls

crumble into a pile on the ground. Looks like the clay zombies can be purified by my power just like normal zombies. I take a whiff of my hand to be sure.

“Yuck! It reeks to high heaven!”

“Their appearance and base material is different, but it appears they are zombies just the same,” Lex infers, then shouts orders to the troops. “Listen up, men! These clay dolls work the same way as zombies! Whatever you do, don’t touch or be touched!”

Our enemies lack fine motor agility. They don’t pose much of a threat as long as the troops are careful. I purify the clay zombies knocked down and immobilized by the soldiers. Their numbers took me by surprise at first, but we’re down to ten by the time it occurs to me to count again.

“I think we can handle this.” I’m taking a short break to wipe the sweat from my brow, when new clay zombies appear from the black fog. And if that wasn’t bad enough, it’s around the same number as the first time, if not more. My right cheek spasms. “...I *hope* we can handle this.”

Thereafter, I purify dozens after dozens of zombies without flinching. Problem is, even after I decrease their numbers, more are ejected from the black fog, resulting in their numbers never diminishing. When even more clay zombies pop out, Lex groans in frustration.

“Grah! More?!”

“I can keep going!”

“Yes, but at this rate there will be no end...!”

My stamina definitely won’t keep up if I have to take on a never-ending army of clay zombies. We need to come up with a strategy to break the deadlock. Not that I’m suddenly struck by any such genius idea when I need it. All I can do is survey our surroundings and reconfirm our situation. Meanwhile, another batch of clay zombies is popped out by the black fog.

“I wonder if the zombies will stop showing up if we get rid of that blasted fog.”

“It’s worth trying,” Lex says, responding to my muttered idea.

“But how?”

“By using your powers, of course, Lady Mizuha.”

“Right, that’s how it’s always gotta be, isn’t it?”

I knew it. I knew it was going to come to that before he even said it.

“The main problem is how do we make it to where you can touch the fog—”

“Then you have no problem! I shall cut open a path for you!” Sir Oden’s thundering voice suddenly cuts into our conversation from where he’s fighting nearby. He apparently overheard. He thrusts away the clay zombies he was taking on and holds his shield out in the direction of the black fog.

“Captain of Grantz Kingdom’s Royal Knights, Oden Jaxor, hereby charges!” Sir Oden propels forward while howling, driving his shield through the clay zombies in his way and sending them in different directions. Obviously, he isn’t holding back like he does with former-human zombies. A path to the black fog is being opened before my eyes.

“Here we go, Lady Mizuha!”

“I’m ready!”

Lex kicks Vianta into an all-out run. I’d expect no less of a warhorse—we’re rapidly closing the distance to Sir Oden. However, the closer we get, the narrower our path becomes. The repelled clay zombies have staggered their way back.

“Just a little farther! Hurry, Lex!”

Sir Oden has secured us safe passage to the black fog. Vianta advances, narrowly evading the clay hands reaching for her legs, until we finally reach our destination. Then, out of one of our blind spots, a lone zombie lunges.

It’s going to claw Vianta!

My fears leave just as quickly as they came, for Sir Oden charges the zombie with his ginormous shield. He powerfully slams into the clay zombie, knocking it far away.

“GO!”

“Thanks, Sir Oden!”

Vianta gallops past the rest of the clay zombies until Lex reins her in just alongside the black fog.

“Lady Mizuha, now!”

Even before Lex’s call to action, I was stretching my arm out as far as it could go. My fingers brush along the black fog. It feels like nothingness, except exhaustion washes over me like a tidal wave, a reminder that my power has activated. Several seconds later, the black fog unleashes a blinding light, instantly losing all color until it entirely disappears.

Clay zombies crumble where they stand, returning back to the earth from whence they came. Looks like my theory that the black fog was producing an endless supply of clay zombies was on the money.

“It appears we pulled it off.”

“Yeah.” Reveling in my momentary relief, I turn my attention on the place previously hidden by the black fog. An old log cabin stands there all by its lonesome.



“**WHY** is there a log cabin in a place like this...?”

Everyone, including myself, is staring in disbelief. I’d expected the Dark Djinn to be waiting on the other side of the dispersed fog, so now I feel like someone just pulled a fast one on me.

“Each and every one of you is an annoying pest.”

The cabin door opens with a loud creak, and out steps a woman. She appears to be in her forties and has a pretty homely, rustic look going on. Her black hair, long enough to touch the ground, is dull and splitting, and her clothes are not only tattered and in shreds but yellowed from age. In a sense...she almost looks like what would happen if Iris fell even further into the dark side.

“Say, Iris?” I ask over my shoulder. “Is that your mom?”

“She is not!” Iris frantically denies.

“So you’re the little brat who keeps getting in my way.” The woman shoots me a barbed glare.

“Getting in your way? Are you the one behind the zombies...?” I venture.

“Yes, it is I. I am the one who dyed this world in darkness with Lord Diallo’s powers!” she proclaims, throwing her arms wide. She’s boasting rather than denying it.

“Pino, who’s Diallo?”

“That’s the Dark Djinn’s name.”

By her own account, this woman is definitely connected to the Dark Djinn, and judging by what she’s admitted to, she’s the perpetrator of this curse. At any rate, we might be able to put an end to this chaos if we capture her.

Meanwhile, Sir Oden is scrunching up his face behind Pino for some reason. “I feel like I’ve seen her face before...” he mutters while stroking his beard, and then his eyes fly wide open. “I remember now! She’s the woman who used to stalk His Majesty! I think her name was Jela!”

“What lies are you spouting, old goat?!” Jela bites back less than a second later.

“O-Old goat?! ”

She speaks over Sir Oden’s consternation. “Stalked? I did no such thing. I was merely trying to inform His Regalness of the truth.”

I assume His Regalness refers to Cia’s dad—the king.

“The truth?” Sir Oden repeats. Jela nods.

“Yes. The truth about how that Lia woman was deceiving him. That wench approached him for money. She’s a devil who wormed her way into His Regalness’s magnanimous heart.”

“You’re the one deceiving yourself, lady. His Majesty is the one who fell for Her Majesty first and set up their meeting.”

“Lies! If he was going to pick a commoner as queen, he would’ve picked me! I mean, I’m far, far more beautiful than she is!”

Keeping one eye on Jela as she goes into hysterics, I quietly confirm the situation with Lex. “Sooo, she was just jealous?”

“So it seems.”

“Holy smokes...”

To involve the Dark Djinn and the world in her jealousy—Jela’s a woman to be feared. She whirls on me with a vengeful look.

“It’s not JEALOUSY, I say!” she shrieks in an ear-piercing voice. My ears are painfully ringing. “Forget you pestilences! Nuisances! Nuisances!” She’s raking her hands through her hair and pulling at it from the roots. “I’m in the middle of enjoying my life with His Regalness too! Your presence here has caused me to waste minutes of my precious time with him!”

“Does that mean His Majesty is here?!”

Jela answers Sir Oden’s question with her lips curled. “Yes, he is. His Regalness is living with me. You could say this is our love nest.”

Who would have thought the king was quarantined here all this time? No wonder we never found him among the city zombies.

“Cia’s dad is in there... Lex!”

“Yes, m’lady!” Lex pulls on the reins, drawing an eager neigh from Vianta. Sir Oden and the rest of the troops fall into battle readiness.

“You look all hot and ready to see some action, but have your flea brains already forgotten I have Lord Diallo’s powers?!” Jela drops on all fours and lets a wad of spit roll down her tongue.

After seeing that, Lex cries out, “Sh-She does the same act as Lady Mizuha?!”

“I don’t do that!”

I seriously wish he wouldn’t lump me in with her... Though I do spit on the ground.

Before we finish conversing, the saliva rolls off Jela’s tongue and hits the ground. Black fog surges up and blankets the land.

“Now go, my lovely! Protect our love nest!”

No sooner do bulges protrude from the ground than *something* bursts from it like an explosion. A fraction of a second later, darkness befalls the area, but not because of black fog. That SOMETHING is just so friggin' big it's blocking out the sun.

“BWOOOOHHHHH!”

A ginormous zombie stands in front of us.

◆Chapter 22: Divine Punishment!

“**YOU’VE** gotta be freakin’ kidding me!”

Giganta-zombie stands over a good thirty-five feet tall. It’s way, way bigger than Boneless Ham. Naturally, its feet are large enough to hold up all that bulk and will undoubtedly turn us into splatter pancakes if it steps on us.

“Get that little brat! The world will return to being ours if she’s taken out of the picture!”

“It just had to be me, didn’t it?!”

I knew it. I so knew it, but never have I wished so hard in my life that I was wrong. Lex kicks his feet against Vianta’s flank, pulling tight on her reins to change direction. KA-BAM! KA-BAM! KA-BAM! Footsteps that sound more like small explosions follow right behind us. Vianta is doing her best, but Giganta-zombie is only getting closer.

If someone could just take Jela down while her pet’s preoccupied!

My slim hopes are dashed by the woman being smarter than she looks—two clay zombies are protecting her on both sides. Black fog swirls around them, giving them a different aura from the clay zombies we fought earlier.

Meanwhile, Giganta-zombie bends down and sweeps out its right arm. I crush myself as close to Vianta’s back as I can go under Lex. Cracking, creaking, and snapping noises—the sound of trees and branches being mowed down—blare around me. The massive shadow passes over our heads. We just barely escaped a direct hit.

We are, however, hit by the raging gust that directly followed the attack. I’m knocked off balance, but Lex’s arms hold me up, preventing me from falling off Vianta. After a relieved breath, I shoot a weary look behind me. Giganta-zombie is still gunning for us.

“It’ll catch up at this rate!”

I don’t know what face Lex is making because he’s behind me, but his silence speaks volumes—he has no good ideas.

“Miss Priestess!” calls a young voice unbefitting of the battlefield. Sir Oden has his horse, with Pino on it, gallop parallel to Vianta.

“Pino?!”

“Go to that cabin! It shouldn’t be able to attack there!”

Jela did call that place her “love nest.” She’ll surely stop her Giganta-zombie from destroying it. I feel bad for putting the king in danger, but at the rate we’re going, my only other future is being squashed or catapulted to my doom.

“Lex!”

“As you command!”

Vianta reverses directions again. Giganta-zombie is so close I can see it only from the waist down, which makes me realize just how big it is all over again. I just know if I were using my own legs, I’d be too scared to run. I’m glad from the bottom of my heart that I’m riding Vianta. Or at least I was, until now. I wish she’d stop! Why is she running straight at Giganta-zombie?!

“Hey! Why aren’t you going around it?! We’re gonna die! DIEEEEEEEEEEE!”

“We are going to break through between its legs!”

“NOOO!”

Giganta-zombie lifts its right leg to stomp on us. A building-sized foot is descending over my head. A few seconds more and we’ll be literal toast—and we pass through just before that happens. As the ground shakes like an earthquake, we pass by the zombie’s left leg, which had become its pivot leg.

“My heaaarrt...”

My heart is hammering in my chest. The monstrous strength of Giganta-zombie makes this my closest call yet.

“You little ants! Hurry and smash them, my lovely!” Jela’s orders send Giganta-zombie into a frenzy after us.

We had distanced ourselves from that love-nest cabin during our previous escape. It’ll take some time to get back to it. That might give her enough time to figure out our plan to use the cabin as a shield and come up with a counterplan.

My fears are needless, though, because Sir Oden starts shouting at Jela, distracting her. “Listen to me, Jela or whatever you call yourself! You’ve probably blinded yourself to it, but His Majesty and Queen Lia were a very intimate and loving couple! So loving that they have gone down in history as the ultimate husband-wife team since Grantz Kingdom was founded!”

I get it. He’s trying to get under her skin by forcing her to hear about the king and queen’s lovey-dovey relationship. Oddly enough, it doesn’t have as much of an effect on Jela as I had thought.

“Are you trying to provoke me?! I won’t fall for such a cheap trick!”

“Allow me to relate to you the special words His Majesty used to propose to Lady Lia that I wheedled out of him when he was drunk! Ahem! ‘You are more beautiful than any other! In heart, mind, and body! I would have found you no matter how far you may have been from me—’”

“Damn old goat! Don’t lie through your yellow teeth! There’s no way that cow was more beautiful than me! I’ll kill you!”

For a moment, I feared his plan wouldn’t work, but it turned out to be easier than expected to get Jela worked up. While she is getting all “passionate” over Sir Oden, we almost get within reach of the so-called love nest. Being noticed won’t be a problem for us now. Actually, not being noticed will be the problem.

“Hey! Lady! Is it okay for Giganta-zombie here to keep going like this?!” I call out.

“HUH?! Of course it’s okay! Yes, keep going, my lovely! Crush that little twerp underfoot— Ack! No, it’s not okay! Wait! HOLD UP! MY LOVE NEEEEEEEST!”

Giganta-zombie’s already-lifted foot stops midair as Jela shrieks. It’s my little secret that my heart nearly jumped out of my chest when she didn’t notice what was happening right away. Jela exhales, thoroughly relieved that she stopped her pet in time too.

Vianta uses that opening to gallop over to Giganta-zombie’s massive foot.

“Take this!”

I smack my right hand along that foot. Blinding light radiates from the gigantic

three-story-house-sized body. The sheer size of the zombie means the light covers the whole area in bright white.

Too bad I can still clearly hear Jela's deranged shrieks of "You tricked meeeee, twerrrrrrrp!"

As the light disperses, seams run over Giganta-zombie's body like the outlines of puzzle pieces. Each piece falls away, and a variety of animals roll out, dropping onto the ground like it's literally raining cats and dogs. Every animal is covered in a thick pink mucus. My stomach turns just looking at that slime; if I can avoid it, I'd rather not go near them.

"Blurgh," I throw up a little in my mouth.

"For a moment, I thought we were doomed..." Lex admits.

"We somehow made it through," I agree, holding my hand over my mouth to stop from puking.

"Indeed. All thanks to Vianta here." Lex gently strokes Vianta's neck.

All of a sudden, the clay zombies guarding Jela rush at us with breakneck speed. They close the distance crawling on all fours across the ground and wrap around Vianta's legs. Spooked, Vianta bucks wildly, throwing both Lex and me off.

"Lady Mizuha!"

Lex protectively hurls himself under me. Thanks to quick thinking on his part, my body doesn't slam into the ground, but greater danger is already upon us. One of the black fog-shrouded clay zombies lunges for my throat. Lex brandishes his already-drawn sword, intercepting the attack.

"Lex!"

The clay zombie's onslaught has a lot of weight behind it. Lex's face is twisting with the strain. I have to get in there and purify the zombie before—

My thoughts are interrupted by an imminent attack.

"Everything will go back to the way it was if I kill you!" Jela, propelled from behind by the black fog, slips past Lex and is heading straight at me. Her long, sharp bladelike claws are within inches of my throat. She's coming in so fast I

can't escape.

Why now?! We've come so close!

Resigned to die, I slam my eyes shut. A dull thud comes immediately after. What in the zombie apocalypse happened?! I promptly open my eyes to find Jela collapsed on the ground in front of me. Out of the corner of my vision I see a statue of a high school girl—by which I mean a statue of me—rolling on the ground. Could it be—

“Divine punishment!” declares a clear, sonorous voice. In the direction of that voice stands Iris with her head held high and proud, triumph in her eyes.

◆ Chapter 23: The Real One Appears

“**SHEESH**, I told you not to hurt other people anymore.”

“How could I not when this old hag was trying to kill my goddess—”

“Don’t means don’t.”

“Boooo...”

After lecturing Iris where she sits kneeling on the ground, I exhale a small breath and change tack. “But you did save me, so...” I pat her on the head just the way she likes. “Thank you. Honestly, I might’ve died if you hadn’t intervened, Iris.”

“Ehehe... Iris is being shown favor,” she purrs.

It’s anyone’s guess if she actually understands, but it’s true she saved my life. I’ll spoil her to bits to show my gratitude. As I’m gently patting her on the head, the other believers timidly approach.

“E-Excuse me... W-we also threw goddess statues! So!”

“So?”

“Erm, a patting...”

I narrow my eyes on the group of restlessly fidgeting believers.

“Were you not listening to me earlier? I told you it was dangerous. And anyway, it’s way too risky if everyone throws them at the same time! It’s a good thing they all missed aside from Iris’s...”

“Tch! We shall practice throwing starting tomorrow—”

“Don’t.”

“Yes’m.”

They’re an unstable group from beginning to end. I overlooked it before, but a complete crackdown on them might be necessary for the world and all the people in it. Sighing, I glance toward the unconscious Jela being tied up with rope by the soldiers. Just to be safe, I healed her with my left hand, so we

shouldn't have to worry about her injuries.

"I found him! I found His Majesty!" Lex calls out from the "love nest"—also known as the rundown cabin. I had him scout it out first to determine if it's safe. I go inside with Pino and Sir Oden.

"It's crazy dusty in here."

"The stench of mold is overpowering too."

With only a plain desk and a chair covered in cobwebs, the cabin shockingly lacks any signs of being lived in. I'd never want to live in a place like this for any amount of time. It's in the corner of this drab shack that we find Lex. He's holding up a horribly emaciated man.

"Your Majesty!" Sir Oden rushes over to the gaunt man as if coal had been lit under his feet. Judging by that reaction, this man is unquestionably Grantz's king.

The king's parched, cracked lips slowly part. "Oden. You've done well coming here..."

"I couldn't have done it without the others, sire."

"Cia... Is Cia safe?"

"Yes, sire. She is safely waiting back at the castle."

"...Is she?" No sooner does the king crack a relieved smile than his expression turns serious. "Incidentally, Oden, did you enjoy announcing my once-in-a-lifetime proposal for all to hear? Hmm?"

"...Your Majesty, it appears you haven't fully regained consciousness yet. Please rest comfortably until we return to the castle—"

"*Oden*. Be prepared for consequences later."

"Y-Yes, sire..."

Even the brave and mighty Sir Oden is like putty before his king. Pino and I are quietly laughing when the king shifts his gaze to another corner of the room. A staircase descends from there.

"Below is Lia...and the Dark Djinn."

“Please leave the rest to us, sire,” Lex soothes. Mind set at ease, the king’s eyes close. He’s lost consciousness. Lex entrusts the king to the other knights and rises to his feet. “Let’s do this.”



ONLY two candles are burning in the cellar. It’s too poorly lit to make out every corner of the room. Then I see it—a lone woman chained to the wall like she’s being crucified there.

“Queen Lia!” Lex dashes over to her.

This woman must be Cia’s mom. She does share the same hair color, and I can see some similar facial features. Unlike the king, however, she is covered in blistering injuries. The wounds are so grotesque, I instinctively look away.

“Lady Mizuha.”

“Right.”

My healing ability does nothing for recovering stamina or curing disease, but it is capable of healing wounds. I place my left hand on Queen Lia and watch as the deep cuts carved into her body heal before my eyes. She hasn’t regained consciousness, but her breathing sounds calmer now.

“Jela lost, then?” inquires a voice that sounds like an ensemble of overlapping bass notes. An obscured shadow sways in the deepest part of the room where the voice came from. The shadow’s outline is hard to make out, but it has a humanlike shape.

Lex and Sir Oden draw their swords.

“Sheathe your blades. I don’t have the strength to resist you now.”

“...Another one of your tricks, monster?”

Contrary to Sir Oden going on high alert, Pino is calm. “That stupid woman failed to revive you in full?”

“I see the tiny one is capable of holding a conversation.”

Pino snorts. His snotty attitude doesn’t fail him even before the Dark Djinn. “Or perhaps it’s more accurate to say you could only use your power through

her as a conduit? It's no wonder your attacks were laughable."

"You would not be standing here if I were whole. Nay, Sadia never even let me net a countermeasure against her." In the middle of the swaying shadow, two purple glowing balls I assume are eyes pierce through me. "Oi, you there."

"M-Me?"

"Is there anyone but you who received Sadia's powers, woman?"

Pino once ran the idea by me that my powers might belong to the Goddess, and it seems he was right.

"Get this over with."

"Get what over with...?"

"Purification. What else?"

I stare blankly at the shadow. "Uh, are you sure? Don't you want to fight it out or something first?"

"I'd much rather vanish than be stuck in this shitty state."

Well, that's sportsmanlike of him. It's surprising after the underhanded, sinister picture I had arbitrarily painted of him in my mind. Maybe the Dark Djinn isn't so bad after all? That stupid thought briefly crosses my mind, but I shake it right out of my head. The zombie apocalypse would've never befallen this world if not for this malevolent deity. He doesn't need my sympathy.

I walk over to the Dark Djinn and reach out my right hand. "P-Pardon me, then."

"...Oi, woman. I won't go easy on you next time," he threatens.

I was so stupid for thinking for even a second that he might not be evil. That proves it—he's wicked through and through. Letting out a small cry, I stretch across the final distance and touch the Dark Djinn's shadow. The darkness around the back of the room pulses, until the light created by my right hand completely erases it.

When the blinding light filling the room finally fades, I open my eyes along with the others. A frighteningly beautiful woman is left standing in the back of

the room. She in no way looks like she's someone of this world. A halo of light radiates from behind her, giving credence to that idea.

"Thank you all for what you have done," the woman says in a clear, bell-like voice.

"Mayhap...you are Goddess Sadia?" Sir Oden asks in a trembling voice.

"Such appears to be the name you call me among your people."

Sir Oden and Lex sigh in awe at her response. Even the all-knowing Pino appears taken by surprise. As for me, I'm not all that shocked. Perhaps because I could sense she was the Goddess the moment she appeared.

"Excuse me, I have a question... Are you the one who brought me to this world, Goddess?" I ask her the number-one question I wanted to ask should we ever meet.

Her expression drops into a doleful smile. "Yes. I have put you through much strife."

"You sure have. You chucked me into a post-apocalyptic world full of nothing but zombies... I was nearly killed, then mistaken for a goddess and confined to a creepy hellhole against my will."

"Ulp!"

"Ah, I'm not blaming you for it. Sure, I had to humiliate myself on a constant basis, since the only way to purify water was by spitting in it. But I don't blame you one BIT for that."

"Ummm..." Goddess Sadia is gradually shrinking in on herself.

"Merciless," Pino whispers.

She put me through a hell of an experience, but I don't actually resent her for it. This is just my passive-aggressive way of getting back at her.

"I just wish you had explained things to me first," I huff.

"I-I'm sorry. It took everything I had just to summon you to this world and bestow my powers upon you."

"But why me? I know it sounds weird for me to say this, but I'm sure there's a

more suitable person than me.”

Goddess Sadia gives a placating smile as she slowly shakes her head. “No, there is none but you. Your heart is closest to mine.”

“I’m...similar to you?”

I don’t have some pure and noble heart like a saint. Even so, being told I’m akin to a goddess not only doesn’t sound half bad, it makes me a little happy too. As I’m reveling in self-satisfaction, someone pops their head out around my shoulder.

“See! My goddess is the Goddess after all! Iris wasn’t wrong!”

“Iris?! I told you to wait outside!”

“Eep. I was curious about the immense light spilling from inside...”

“Shut your mouth and keep quiet.”

“Yes’m!” Iris drops to her knees and covers her mouth with both hands.

She always kicks up a loud fuss when it comes to the Goddess. I had her wait outside because I thought something like this might happen, but it looks like my efforts were in vain.

“I have something to ask you,” Pino enquires of Goddess Sadia with a hard expression. “Did Diallo take control because your powers were waning? I just can’t fathom that stupid woman having enough power to wake Diallo up.”

“You have guessed correctly. Torstana and Ladan are the main causes.”

As that conversation is going on, I whisper my question to Lex. “Hey, what are Torstana and Ladan?”

“Two major powers on par with Grantz. Both countries have been at war for decades.”

Cia once told me about two countries that were currently engaged in hostilities, and it seems these are the ones.

“That’s what I thought. But I can’t believe a being worshipped as a god is influenced by what’s going on in the world.”

Goddess Sadia offers a troubled smile in reply to Pino’s cynicism. It’s fine for

him to be fearless and all, but he should at least be respectful to a goddess.

“The world should slowly purify itself now that I am back in control.”

“It won’t just come back at the snap of a finger?” I venture.

“As your friend mentioned, my powers are in a weakened state right now.” Goddess Sadia turns her attention to me, then changes the subject. “Now then, you successfully fulfilled your duties. If you so desire it, I shall send you back to your own world this instant.”

This was the topic I’d been hesitating to bring up myself. Really, though, I just wanted to know if it was possible to go back—I still haven’t made the final decision about what I want to do yet.

I look askance at Lex and our eyes meet. At first, his expression is a complex mix of emotions, but a smile immediately rises to the surface. He’s supporting my decision. I know that. I know it, but— “Excuse me! Is it possible for you to hold off for a bit?”

“Lady Mizuha?!” Lex cries in disbelief.

“Ah, well, how do I put it? It’s all happening too soon.”

Lex’s surprise is reasonable, considering I’ve only ever spoken to him about going home. I’m starting to feel uncomfortable, so I shift my gaze back to Goddess Sadia to avoid looking at Lex.

“I am presently capable of speaking and using my power of my own volition. However, my existence is normally a part of the world. All my powers are used to maintain world order.”

“In other words, you won’t have the leeway to send me home after this?”

“At least not until the entire world has been purified of the zombie blight.”

How much time will it take for the whole world to be cleansed? I can’t even begin to estimate it. The one thing I do know is that Goddess Sadia is weak. It’ll definitely take an extraordinary amount of time.

“I am responsible for dragging you into my world’s problems. I shall do whatever it takes to keep my present form for a whole day.”

Meaning, I have to come up with my answer by then.

“I have yet to ask your name.”

“...I’m Mizuha.”

“I am the last person you wish to hear this from, but...please think it over carefully, *Mizuha*. This decision will drastically alter your future.”

◆ Chapter 24: A Lot Has Happened

IT'S the night of our triumphal return to the capital.

"How are they?" I ask Cia as she steps out of the king's bedchamber. Pino, beside me, is waiting for her answer too.

"They have regained consciousness. They can't walk yet, but I think they should be just fine with time."

"I see. Glad to hear it!" Wholehearted relief washes over me. Though I had healed them, the king and queen were in a considerably emaciated state. I'm really glad to hear they're pulling through.

Cia drops into a deep bow. "Big Sister...I am thankful to you beyond words."

"I only smacked some zombies around. It's the people who came with me who did all the heavy lifting. We were able to take out the Giganta-zombie mostly thanks to Pino's quick thinking."

"Is that so? I would expect no less from our master scholar, Pino."

"D-Don't mention it. I simply offered advice."

"No, I cannot let your deeds go unrecognized." Cia shakes her head and wraps both hands around Pino's right hand. "Thank you very much. I will repay you for this favor someday."

"Y-You do that..." Pino is stiffer than a pole. He's so transparent.

"Um...Big Sister..." Cia steps away from Pino and looks questioningly to me.

"You don't have to say it. You want to stay with your parents right now, I'm sure."

"I still can't believe they are back with me."

"Go. Be with them. Your presence will surely be reassuring to them both."

"Thank you!"

That's a good smile. Cia must be over the moon about her parents' return.

"If you will excuse me here, then," she says in parting before returning to the

king's bedchamber.

Taking advantage of being alone with Pino now, I turn on him with a teasing grin.

"...What is that face for?"

"Hmm? Nothing!"

"I don't know what nonsense your brain has come up with this time, but I think nothing of her."

"Sure, let's leave it at that."

Pino clicks his tongue. Then he sighs and becomes serious. "Enough games. Are you sure you don't want to tell her?"

"Hmm? Tell her what?"

"Playing dumb?"

I haven't told Cia about Goddess Sadia pressuring me into deciding whether I want to go home now or not.

"Thanks," I say in place of a direct answer.

"Hmph. It has nothing to do with me. Well, I may find myself a tad bored if you do go, but...it's your life. Do with it what you will," he spits, turning his back on me and stalking away.

I smile dryly as I watch his small back retreat. "Someone's not honest with himself."



I'VE come to the garden located on the tower keep's third floor. I rest my arms on the balustrade and look out over the capital city. With the essential rule of keeping the lights out still in effect, not a single flame can be seen. My eyes seem to have adapted enough to make out the faint outline of buildings.

"Is this where you have been, m'lady?" someone asks from behind me. The voice belongs to Lex; I can tell without looking. "You are going to catch a cold."

"Let me stay here a little longer."

“...Have you found your answer?”

To whether I’m staying or going.

“I’ve been thinking all this time about what’s happened since I arrived here.” The night breeze blows, tousling my hair. I push it up and over my ears. “I woke up to a poisonous lake and a stench worse than anything I’ve smelled before. Before I could figure out my left from right, a zombie showed up. It was nothing but horrifying surprise after horrifying surprise.”

“To this day I have not forgotten that powerful blow to my chest.”

“Wh-What other choice did I have? You came at me out of nowhere!”

At the time, he stunk so bad I could barely hold it together. I was just desperate to get him away from me.

“However, that was the occasion that let us know you have the power of purification, Lady Mizuha.”

“What happened after that was the worst of the worse.”

“Your saliva?”

“It still embarrasses me to no end. Thanks to a certain someone, people like to call me the Holy Priestess of Spit.”

“They mean it as a title of honor, not an insult, m’lady.”

“Which makes it even worse...” I groan.

Grantz Kingdom is full of folks with more than a few screws loose, but they’re all good people anyway.

“Then I met Cia and headed for the capital, but... Here’s a question for you. I believe we did something INCREDIBLY reckless and foolish next, but, in retrospect, what do you think about that bright idea of yours, Sir Lex Irvine?”

“Th-That is...something I am reflecting on for my rash miscalculation.”

“You should be. All’s well that ends well, but we could’ve very easily been overwhelmed and turned into zombies at that point.”

“...I have no excuse.”

I don't blame him as much as my words and tone make it sound like I do. He just put me through the scare of a lifetime, so this is my way of getting back at him.

"Well, we still managed to regain the castle despite a stupid plan. It's what happened afterward that took me by real surprise."

"No one had any idea the zombies become extremely active at night."

"You can say that again. I'm really lucky to have escaped to a safe place with my life."

Memories of taking the secret passage from Cia's bedchamber flood my mind, the most poignant memory being Lex's broad back as he blocked the zombies from knocking down the door. And then there's the moment I returned to her bedchamber to find him protecting the secret passage despite turning into a zombie.

"You were kind of cool then, Lex."

"...Desperation was all I had going for me. Desperation that I had to protect you both no matter the cost."

"Thanks."

"No thanks necessary."

Another case of this being the natural course of action for a knight.

"Things finally calmed down enough after that for me to purify and increase our numbers exponentially."

"Though other problems did crop up just when we thought things were going smoothly. Such as the appearance of thieves."

"Like Rosso? Personally, I thought being abducted by Iris had more of an impact."

"I can never apologize enough for that one."

"It's all good. You rescued me in the end."

If you had told me at the time about how well-behaved Iris would become, I wouldn't have believed it. She occasionally—or rather, always if unwatched—

goes off the deep end.

“A lot has happened over a short time.”

“...Indeed, m’lady.”

“I’ll be honest with you—lots of horrible things having to do with stench and ever-present zombies happened, but to an equal degree— No, even more so than that, I’ve met a lot of great people.”

There’s Lex, Cia, Sir Oden, and Pino, as well as Rosso, Iris, Sir Kurt, and Sir Julian. I met even more incredible people during the handshake sessions too. My circle of friends has extended much further than I could have ever imagined back on Earth.

“It was fun. It was a ton of fun, actually. I’m glad from the bottom of my heart that I came to this world.” I look over my shoulder and convey those feelings with a smile. There’s no real reason; I just felt the desire to tell Lex to his face. “Okay, it’s time for me to sleep.”

“Very well. Good night, Lady Mizuha.” I walk past Lex, heading for the pillared corridor. “Lady Mizuha!” he abruptly yells.

I turn back to find him looking torn and flustered. I tilt my head. “Yes?”

“No...never mind.” Lex averts his eyes as he chews his bottom lip. He’s trembling. His hands are clenched into fists. What is Lex thinking right now? If I don’t have the complete wrong idea, it must be—

I take a small breath and pull my smile back up. “Can I trust my guard detail to you again tomorrow?”

“...Yes, of course you can, m’lady.”

◆Chapter 25: Even a Zombie-Filled World Can Be Good

THE next morning, I mount Vianta with Lex and ride to where Goddess Sadia is waiting. No one else is with us. Vanquishing the Dark Djinn drastically reduced the danger outside the city walls, removing the need to have a small squad of guards trailing after us.

I haven't spoken to Lex today beyond the bare minimum conversation necessary to do what needs to be done. Because of that, I can hear Vianta's hooves hitting the ground and the rustling leaves clear as day. Not long after entering the forest, we come upon the area where big trees have been cruelly ripped from the ground, knocked over, and split as if a tornado had passed through. Car-sized dents mar the ground in various locations. This is where Giganta-zombie rampaged yesterday.

Beyond the downed trees is Jela's cabin. Lex ties Vianta to a nearby tree and helps me down.

"I wonder if she's in the cellar still," I say aloud, breaking the silence between us.

"Good question."

As soon as I open the cabin door, I'm blinded by a searing light. "Yeow!" I cry, reflexively covering my eyes with my arm.

"You arrived sooner than expected."

Slowly lowering my arm, I see Goddess Sadia where the light had been. She's sitting with her legs crossed, elegantly sipping tea from the dainty teacup in her hand. A sweet, floral fragrance hangs in the air as though to demonstrate that she is drinking a delicious first-class black tea.

"...You seem to be very relaxed," Lex quietly observes.

"W-Well, I had too much free time on my hands, so..." Goddess Sadia quickly returns her teacup to its saucer on the desk and gives a discomfited smile.

I certainly didn't expect to find this world's goddess twiddling away the time drinking tea, regardless of how little there is to do out here in the middle of

nowhere. I'm just hankering to ask her where the tea came from. I stare at her hard.

"You said it'd be hard for you to hang around, but it looks to me like you're holding up just fine."

"That isn't necessarily true. I am just barely enduring this as it is." She pulls her shoulders back and sits up straight to maintain her dignified demeanor. Goddess Sadia might be worldlier than I thought. Made uncomfortable by my exasperated, pointed stare, she rises to her feet. "E-Enough about me! ...Care to tell me your answer now?"

She suddenly brings the conversation to a head. "Yes," I say. I arrived at the answer yesterday. I have nothing left to hesitate over. "My original world—"

"Lady Mizuha!" Lex interrupts, his shout so loud and abrupt that I flinch.

"...L-Lex?"

"F-Forgive me." Just when I think he's lowered his head, Lex lifts his chin and looks at me with seriousness gleaming in his eyes. "You have your own world, Lady Mizuha. I know that. Knights are meant to serve their masters. I am fully aware my conduct right now would normally never be allowed. However, even so, I..." After a three-second pause, he finishes with quiet firmness, "Wish to be at your side, Lady Mizuha."

I'm struck by the feeling of something piercing through me. Lex's gorgeous sapphire eyes are peering right into the depths of my soul. It's kind of embarrassing. But I can't take my eyes off him.

"If you are going to return to your world, Lady Mizuha, I shall accompany you there. Please allow me to come with you!"

"Lex..."

I never knew he was this attached to me. His oath to serve as my knight means more to him than I realized; it's taken root in his heart and has manifested in his conduct.

"That cannot be done," Goddess Sadia says in my place, bluntly rejecting him. A shadow instantly falls over Lex's gallant face.

“...Why not?”

“I’m the last person who has any right to speak of this after bringing her to this world, but transporting people between worlds is fundamentally taboo. I cannot break the taboo again to send you with her.”

“This cannot be true... Then what am I— What should I do...?!” Lex drops his gaze and shakes his head. Anguish painfully coats his voice.

I, however, do not feel the same sense of loss and urgency as he does. After all, I never thought of this moment as a lifelong separation. Feeling slightly guilty, I speak to him as gently as possible.

“I’m a little perplexed by this unexpected turn of events, but...hear me out, Lex.”

“...Yes, m’lady?”

“I don’t plan to go back, you know?”

“Is that...so? So it should be. It is only natural for you to care more about the world you were born and raised in. You would be ill in the head to grow attached to and think about lingering in a world you were in for only a few months— Wait! Did you say you are staying?!” After having his head stuck in the clouds for a few long moments, he finally catches on.

“Yeah. Sorry I’m ill in the head.”

“Ah, don’t be. About that part...I can only apologize. More importantly! Are you really, truly, positively staying?!”

“Yeah.”

“Wh-Why...?”

He still can’t believe it. To be perfectly honest, a part of me doesn’t believe it either. But this is what I had decided after thinking it through.

“I agree with you that it’s stranger to choose staying over going. While we have succeeded in purifying the zombies around Grantz’s capital city, this is still a rotten, post-apocalyptic world full of zombies. Frankly, the food, clothes, and shelter in my world are a thousand times better than what’s here.”

“Then is that not even more reason to—”

“But how can I explain it? I’ve grown attached? Or something like that. Partly it’s that I want to enjoy the environment I’ve finally secured after all the painful and scary experiences I went through. As I’ve watched Grantz Kingdom work toward restoration, it hit me that I’m a part of this place as well.”

What I want to do with my life—I’ve always hoped I’d figure out what that is. I’ve slowly gone through life without finding it—until now. Not that I had expected to find my purpose in another world, and one that has the worst possible circumstances to boot.

I’m the most surprised by my decision because I’ve always played it safe, avoiding trouble at any cost for my entire life. But I don’t regret this choice.

“But then you won’t get to see your family again...” Lex sadly reminds me.

“As for that part...” I face Goddess Sadia. “You don’t have the leeway to send me home because you need to focus on returning this zombie-blighted world back to normal. But, at the same time, that also means you will have plenty of leeway once you get the world back in order. Doesn’t this mean you’ll have spare energy to send me back and forth between worlds once everything is done and settled?”

“Y-You caught on to that part?”

“Mwhahaha!” I cackle.

I spoke confidently, but the truth is that Pino casually tipped me off this morning before I’d left the castle. Thanks, Pino!

“Nevertheless, as I told your knight, transporting people between worlds is taboo—”

“The woman who broke the taboo and ripped me from the comfort of my own bed to clean up her mess has little right to care about taboos when it’s convenient for her. Don’t you think so too, Goddess?”

“Ack.”

“Besides, you already broke it once to bring me here. You’d do it again to send me back. What’s a few more times?”

“Y-Your logic sounds like a repeat offender’s...”

She put me through hell and nearly cost me my life several times. This is a small price to ask in return.

“I won’t be able to send you and bring you back often. It takes a lot of my power, even when I am in tip-top shape.”

“Being able to make the trip is enough for me.”

“I do not know how much time it will take for the world to reorder itself. Are you still okay with waiting?”

“Yes, I’ve already made up my mind.”

“You sound firm in your resolve. Very well, then. However, under one condition.”

I didn’t think she’d have a condition. I instinctively prepare myself for the worst possible demand that she’d ask in return for what I want.

“The piece of my power that currently resides in you—I had originally planned on taking it back when I sent you home, but...I shall leave it in your care.”

“Um, should I take that to mean you want me to help you purify the world?”

“It helps that you are quick on the uptake.”

Oh, that’s all she wants? I’m internally relieved by her simple request.

“Okay.”

“That was...a quick decision.”

“Well, that’s what I planned to do all along anyway.”

If Goddess Sadia hadn’t requested it first, I would have asked her to let me help. It ties into what I want to do with my life.

Goddess Sadia smiles softly. “As I thought, I was correct to choose you.”

“I’m going to make full use of my goddess perks!” I make a joke of it, getting a giggle out of Goddess Sadia.

Yesterday, she told me my heart is closest to hers in the multiverse, and I kind of get why now. She’s not a complete stranger. There’s a familiarity between us

that makes me think that way.

“I shall be going, then.”

Not to any particular place—she is going to become a part of the world in order to maintain it.

“Until we meet again.”

“Yes. Until the day the world is right again.”

With those final words, Goddess Sadia’s body flashes. By the time the light settles, she’s no longer there.

“She left,” Lex says.

“...Yeah.”

For a time, we stare at where Goddess Sadia had been standing. Even if her disappearance is the right thing, it is still lonely to watch a person vanish before your eyes.

That being said, we can’t stay here forever. Plus, I’m dying to do something right now.

“Okay, shall we go home? To our country!”

◆Epilogue: In a Wonderful World

THE main street from the capital city to the castle is jam-packed with people. Since coming to this world, I have never seen so many living humans in one place before. When the capital was overrun by zombies, things were pretty crowded too, but even more people are in the city now.

“I’m amazed by how many people are here...”

“This is everyone who regained their humanity thanks to you, Big Sister.”

“It’s moving when you put it that way, but I think I’m more shocked than anything.”

I’m walking down the main street holding hands with Cia. At our sides are Lex, Sir Julian, and Sir Kurt. A dozen or so more knights are marching around us, eliminating the fear of being trampled by the crowds.

A festival that began at noon is being held to celebrate successfully vanquishing the Dark Djinn. Despite being called a festival, it’s nothing like the ones I know of. A few street stalls are set up here and there selling food, but circumstances being what they are, it’s nothing too extravagant. The portions aren’t big either. Even so, some people have set up shop for others to enjoy themselves, as everyone’s brimming with excitement.

“Everyone seems like they’re having a good time.”

“Optimism is one of the virtues of Grantz’s citizens.”

“I’m sure the kingdom will be rebuilt in no time if the people keep their spirits up.”

“Certainly! I also want to do everything in my power as princess to help!”

Time flies, as they say, and a month has passed since Goddess Sadia left.

Some sectors of the city are still in disrepair, but their restoration is steadily progressing. As for food supplies, my saliva is needed to hold us over for the time being, but it’s anticipated I’ll be out of that business once they can start growing and harvesting stabilized crops. I don’t plan to pester them into rushing, but I sure hope they go as fast as they possibly can in order for me to

salvage my dignity.

“Holy Priestess!”

Several people waiting on the side of the street suddenly call out to me.

“Thank you very much for always blessing us with delicious water...!”

“We are able to continue farming thanks to you, Holy Priestess!”

Words of gratitude come from many people along the street, not just them. They make such a big deal out of it that my reaction of “Th-Thanks” sounds kind of flat in return, but it leaves me feeling pretty good about myself.

Lex speaks to me over my shoulder while I wave to the people of Grantz. “You seem very at home in your role as priestess now.”

“It’s hard not to get used to it after people have been saying it to me for months...”

Shortly after parting ways with Goddess Sadia, I had an audience with the recovered king and queen...where they showered me with overwhelming thanks for saving Grantz Kingdom from the zombie apocalypse. As if their gratitude alone wasn’t enough, they even announced they officially recognized me as the holy priestess.

Of course, I begged and pleaded with them not to at first, but after Pino advised me that “you’ll be able to move around more freely with Holy Priestess as your title,” I gave in. After all, I wholeheartedly agreed with him that having a title to my name would grant me a level of freedom that would make things easier as I help Grantz Kingdom recover.

“Oh? Is that Boss Lady there?!” someone exclaims. I follow the direction of that lively voice to Rosso. He’s standing behind a large wooden table stacked with loaves of bread.

“Rosso? You opened a street stall?”

“Seemed like the right occasion to make a big score. Hehe.”

“Brother! Don’t say things that cause misunderstandings!” a girl standing beside Rosso scolds. She appears slightly older than Cia. Her shoulder-length red hair and big round eyes are striking.

“My bad. I haven’t introduced ya yet. This here is my kid sister, Maybelle.”

“I-It is a pleasure to meet you, Priestess! Thank you for looking after my big brother all the time.” She must be pretty panicked, because she bows so low she smacks her forehead against the table. She seems like a klutz. Her eyes water from embarrassment and pain. Is there any way I can distract her from it?

“Oh, right. The bread you gave me the other day was delicious!”

“Was it really?! Thank you! Thank yo—”

KLONK! She smacks her forehead again. Rosso roars with laughter as he watches Maybelle clamp her hands over her forehead and whimper.

“This girl has been your admirer ever since she heard about you from me, Boss Lady.”

“H-Hey! Rosso! Don’t...”

I thought she was going to punch Rosso, but instead she glances at me and bashfully lowers her gaze... Rosso was telling the truth, then.

“So, what did you tell her about me?” I ask.

“All ’bout your awesome open-handed slaps, of course. How you purify incomin’ zombies by slapping ’em so hard they catch air. Nobody normal is capable of pullin’ somethin’ like that off. I seriously respect you!”

“A-Ahaha... Hey, Maybelle? Just so you know, Rosso’s stories are exaggerated. I’m much gentler with my touch than that, okay?”

“B-But I caught some real air from your slap too!”

Who would have thought she’s experienced it for herself! I need to be more careful with how hard I hit in the future.

A commotion rises behind me as I’m reflecting on my actions.

“MiZUhaaaa!”

“Oh gosh, he’s here.” It’s annoying that I know who that is now without needing to check. With one cheek twitching, I ask Rosso, “Is it who I think it is?”

“Yep. It’s that guy,” Rosso tells me, shrugging.

Resigned to my fate, I look over my shoulder at who I expected to find there—Keith. The knights are preventing him from coming any closer, but he's struggling against them while holding up a bouquet.

"You are going to accept my love for sure today!"

"...You never learn, do you?"

"How could I when it is destined for you to marry me in the end?!"

Ever since the Dark Djinn was vanquished, Keith proposes once every two days or so. I give him credit for holding to his guns and not giving up yet.

I'm shooting him a frosty glare when Cia questions me with an utterly disgusted face: "Is that true, Big Sister?"

"No, no, it is not. Please don't believe this man's delusions."

"Has he been bothering you?"

"Yeah. A whole lot."

"All right. Sir Julian. Sir Kurt."

At Cia's orders, Sir Julian and Sir Kurt firmly seize Keith's arms.

"Wh-What are you doing?!"

"Following Her Highness's orders. Please come quietly."

"Do you think you can get away with treating me like this?! Dammit! Unhand me! MiZUha! MiZUhaaa!"

Keith is callously dragged out of sight. I can hear him howling my name for a while even after he's gone. I really wish he'd stop embarrassing me this way.

"Let us be on our way, Big Sister." Cia tugs on my hand, smiling ear to ear. My little secret is that I got chills from her dismissive behavior toward Keith.

We parade through the capital city for some time after that. I eat various types of food and talk to all different people. To be blunt, the entertainment provided doesn't vary, but they bring a smile to my face wherever I go.

After arriving at the end of the main street, Cia returns to the castle exhausted from all the walking, leaving me and Lex alone. I climb the outer wall

and sit dangling my legs off the ledge facing the city. Beneath the darkening sky, people can be seen here and there, enjoying the final hurrah of the festivities in the city.

“Do you not regret it, m’lady?”

“Hmm? Regret what?”

I know what Lex is trying to ask.

“Well, that is to say...”

“I don’t regret it,” I say, answering his original question while kicking my legs. “I mean, sure there are tons of things I’m upset I haven’t gotten used to yet. But there is so much more I have gained from this world.”

Like the strong connection between people as they work toward rebuilding Grantz. There might be places where you can find that back on my world too, but to me, that place is here, not there. I feel like I can grow as a person in this world.

“Why? Do I look like I regret it to you, Lex?”

“...You look like you are having the time of your life.”

“Don’t I?” I rise to my feet and dust the dirt off my butt with both hands. I spin around until I’m facing Lex. “Life would be perfect if we could just do something about that foul zombie stench.”

“I cannot do anything to help you there, but...I swear I will protect you from zombies.”

“Just from zombies?”

“No. I will protect you from anything that means you harm, Lady Mizuha.”

It’s so not fair that he can say embarrassing lines like that without blushing. I’ve got my hands full trying to hide my embarrassment behind my laughter. Suddenly, a warm, ticklish feeling fills my chest. I place my hand over my heart. The number-one reason why I chose to stay is...a frustrating one, so I decided to keep it to myself for the time being.

A scream suddenly rips through the air. It’s easy to find where it came from.

People are running chaotically, trying to escape from the main street. A lone zombie is staggering behind them. It's not nighttime yet, so it can't have come over the walls. With all the gates shut, there's only one reason why a zombie could be inside.

"Yeesh! I just did the stupid handshake session yesterday too!"

"Mayhap they arbitrarily assumed they would be fine without it because zombies haven't shown up lately."

"Whatever the case, we have to hurry and purify that zombie! Let's go, Lex!"

"Yes, m'lady!"

I race down the staircase behind Lex. I'm so used to it that a single zombie during the day isn't the least bit scary. But that's only because of the broad, reliable back in front of me.

"Hey, Lex! I'm counting on you from now on!"

"What brought that up out of the blue?!"

"I just felt like saying it right now!"

Lex looks over his shoulder as he continues running. "Of course you can count on me, for I am your knight, Lady Mizuha!"



I can't help laughing at his expected response. He has guts, being able to say that with a straight face. But it's because he is like this that I can move forward without fear. I know that won't change in the future either. Even in a post-apocalyptic world overrun by zombies.

"Yeah, I'm depending on you!"

◆After Story “**LADY** Mizuha! Happy birthday!”

“Happy birthday! Priestess Mizuha!”

“MiZUha! Happy birthday to you!”

I’m taking a leisurely ride in a carriage down the main street of Grantz’s capital, bordered on all sides by crowds of people.

Bands perform catchy songs around the carriage. Grantz Kingdom’s knights march in perfect step to the beat. What seems like a parade is being held entirely in my honor. Wearing a light-blue gown that doesn’t suit me hasn’t gone to my head and made me think this is all for me—it’s undeniably true that this parade is for me.

“I’m so glad we made it in time,” Cia says, sighing with relief where she sits beside me.

Cia asked me about my birthday the day before yesterday. I’ve had my hands full with the zombie apocalypse ever since I was launched from my bed into this world, and it’s not like there’s a calendar around. Because of that, I had entirely forgotten about my birthday until she asked, but since she did, I counted how many days had passed since being hurled here and realized that today is my birthday.

Once I told Cia that, it was decided on the spot that a birthday celebration was to be held for me, and things moved rapidly from there. It’s mostly thanks to Cia’s gusto, but the king and queen were surprisingly all for it, which is why it happened so fast. When they set their minds to it, this family can make anything absurd happen. This was the moment I worried about the future of Grantz Kingdom for the millionth time.

“Uh, but don’t you think this is going overboard...? I would’ve been happier with something small.”

“You are the holy priestess who saved our kingdom, Big Sister. Your birth should be celebrated on scale with your great deeds.”

Cia says that like it’s only natural, but this parade is hard to accept as someone who was just a normal high school girl up until recently. Lex rides

close to the carriage on Vianta, probably because I'm still frowning.

"Please put your mind at ease, m'lady. No one was compelled to be here. The soldiers gladly volunteered, and the citizens came because they wanted to."

I certainly don't see anyone who looks unhappy to be here. They are all cheering for me with broad smiles.

"Lady Mizuha, thank you for everything you do!"

"I am only alive today thanks to you, Priestess Mizuha!"

"MiZUha! I've awoken to love thanks to you!"

Countless words of gratitude, with the occasional weird comments thrown in, are showered on me from the crowd. The powers I have as priestess are not my own, but I've been through lots of horrible, scary, stinky...and stinkier experiences. That's why their gratitude feels like they are recognizing what I endured for them, and that honestly makes me happy.

"W-Well...I can accept that, then." I sheepishly look away from Lex, sweeping my gaze over the crowd instead.

A little over a month has passed since I met with Goddess Sadia. Many areas still haven't been repaired yet, but the rebuilding process is proceeding quickly thanks to everyone's hard work.

If we keep this up, it won't be long before I can see how beautiful the capital once— No, how much more amazing the capital will become than it ever was before.

I'm going to work even harder so as not to lose out to the others, because this is my problem now!



"**I'M** exhausted..." I dive face-first into my bed after the birthday festivities are over. I didn't do an intense workout or use my powers; this is simply a case of mental fatigue from being the center of a lot of attention.

Fortunately, they didn't want me to give a speech. In my world, people who are being celebrated during a big event like this would almost always be expected to give some kind of speech.

Would they have requested one if this world had some sort of PA system? Makes me shudder just thinking about it. I'm not proud of it, but I'm the type who got nervous when the teacher called on me in class. I'm confident I'd either faint or throw up if I had to speak in front of an ocean of people.

I suddenly hear someone rapping on my door. "Lady Mizuha," Lex calls from the corridor. "I apologize for bothering you when you are tired, but may I have a minute of your time?"

"Did something happen? N-Not another zombie, is it?"

"No. Several visitors are here with gifts for you."

We live in a city just recently liberated from zombies, with their threat always around the corner. Presents had completely slipped my mind to the point that I'm left blinking at the door. I feel guilty receiving gifts, but on the other hand, if you remove the part about my having priestess powers, this is my birthday. Excitement wells up inside me at the prospect of getting presents.

I hastily fix my sitting posture and respond to Lex. "O-Okay. You can let them in now."

"I shall let them inside in order, then."

And so, he allows Rosso into my bedchamber first. Rosso hands me a sparkling, glistening bracelet. I can tell at a glance that it's expensive, with diamonds the size of the tip of my pinkie finger decorating it.

"Wow! It's gorgeous. But how did you afford it?"

"It's obviously somethin' I prepared for you, Boss Lady."

"Are there any jewelry shops open yet? You didn't steal it, did you?"

"Whoops," Rosso groans, pulling a clearly guilty face the second I ask. His reaction says it all. "But I don't do it anymore..."

"It's still bad if you did it before. Gifting someone with stolen goods is low. And for that matter, you need to return the things you stole before. I'm going to have Lex look into whether you've returned everything or not."

"B-Boss Ladyyyy!"

This is the correct way to deal with him. Honestly, it wouldn't be strange if he wound up in jail for all his crimes. I know he's a good guy deep down, but I can't turn a blind eye on his compulsive thievery.

Iris comes next, after my first gift giver started off the occasion by making me sigh. I get a bad feeling about her present the second she enters my room because she's carrying something the length and size of her full wingspan spread from hand to hand, including the shoulders. I don't know what it is definitively because it's covered by a cloth, but it can be only *that*.

Iris yanks the cloth off with pomp, a smile bursting onto her face. "This is the newest goddess statue!"

"I told you to stop making those! Hold on, why does that look like the gown I wore today...?"

"I researched the design beforehand and rushed to finish it!"

"It's scary how well prepared you are."

Whether I want this thing or not, it's still a carved statue of me. Destroying it would be unsettling, so I accept—or rather, confiscate—the statue, but I honestly don't know what to do with it.

A surprising person visits me after Iris—Sir Oden, the captain of Grantz Kingdom's Royal Knights and the man befitting of the name "the Reigning King of Charges."

"Grantz—nay, the world—should prioritize your life above all else, Lady Mizuha. Therefore, I would like to present you with this shield."

He hands me a metal shield twice my size. This shield would definitely be capable of blocking charging zombies without breaking. However...

"Um, it takes all my strength just to hold it up..."

"Then you must begin training. Gahaha!" Sir Oden lets out a hearty laugh. Even if I train hard, this shield won't work with my physique. But I keep my mouth shut since I fear him countering my objections with "Then you have no choice but to put your back into it, lass!"

After Lex helps me move the shield aside, I welcome my next visitor.

“MiZUha! Today for sure you will wear this engagement ring—”

“Send him home.”

The door shuts in Keith’s face. I can hear his grating voice fussing in the corridor for a while before it’s gradually dragged away. The soldiers must have escorted him outside of the castle for me.

Sheer exhaustion crushes down on me. Heaving the loudest sigh, I slump onto my bed.

“I’m happy they gave me presents, but...I have little to say about it... Yeah...”

I don’t want to say anything rude when they gave me those gifts with good intentions. But not only are they all things I don’t know how to use, I’m worried about where to even put them. Frankly speaking, I wasn’t happy about any of it.

“H-Hey, Lex? No one else is coming with presents, right?”

“I don’t believe so. Lord Rowadan was the last I saw in line.”

“I-I see. Hmm.”

“Is something the matter?”

“Nothing is the matter,” I reply half-heartedly, glancing at and away from Lex several times. He frowns and cocks his head.

I actually want to ask him if he has a gift for me. But it’s too embarrassing for me to bring it up first. As I’m impatiently twitching and twiddling my thumbs, Lex works up the nerve to speak.

“Actually...I also prepared a present for you. Will you accept it?”

“Wha-? Y-You did?” I can’t tell him I’ve been super looking forward to what he got me. “Of course, I will accept anything that’s within acceptable bounds. As long as it’s not stolen goods, a creepy statue of me, or a shield so big I’ll be squashed under it.”

“Please rest assured that it is nothing special like what the others gave you. Please wait just a moment.” Lex leaves the bedchamber temporarily to retrieve the present he left elsewhere. He comes back a short time later with a flower growing out of a flowerpot small enough for me to hold in both hands.

“Oh, wow! This is so cute...!”

The flower petals are on the petite side and possess the same glamorousness as a fancy gown. Just like the people who brought me gifts earlier, Lex hasn't lost his weirdo image, so I had prepared myself for something strange to come, making this an unexpected surprise. A good surprise, of course.

“Say, what is this flower called?”

“Del... Delphi... My apologies, I forgot the full name.”

“Someone's unprepared! But I love it because light blue is my favorite color.”

“You once told Master Pino the meaning of your name, so I used that for reference.”

I had once mentioned to Pino in passing that my name means “light-blue flower.” Apparently, Lex remembered that conversation. For the guy who normally has his head in the clouds, he's uncannily a smooth operator when it comes to these things.

“Allow me to say it once again. A very happy birthday to you, Lady Mizuha,” Lex says, smiling gently at me from the other side of the light-blue flowers.

He told me this wasn't a special gift, but to me, this is the most special gift of all.

“Thank you...Lex.”

Making another world's zombie apocalypse my problem wasn't such a bad idea after all.

◆Afterword

HELLO, Haru Yayari here. This is likely—or rather, unquestionably—the first time we have met.

Now then, I really wonder what I should write. I'm actively putting out light novels and children's books in Japan, but this is the first time I'm being published abroad. You probably can't tell from the text alone, but I'm very nervous.

That being said, I'm also excited. After all, this is a rare opportunity for me to write with readers abroad in mind, instead of my usual afterwords written specifically to Japanese readers. This is a valuable experience. While our time together is short, I would like to fully enjoy this precious time talking with you.

Okay, okay, time to wrap up the talk about me and touch on this novel. First of all, I want to tell you about the clichéd series of events that led to this story's creation. Not that there's a particularly big reason for it.

In Japan, stories about being transported or reincarnated into another world are all the craze. Some of the initial frenzy has cooled down now, but there are still plenty of authors coming up with various scenarios and giving birth to new stories by the day.

As one of those authors, I struck upon the idea to drop a high school girl into a world crawling with zombies. I thought this scenario wouldn't overlap with other authors and would make for an entertaining story.

At the time, I let that inspiration direct my pen wherever it wanted to go... Thinking back on it now, that led to the heroine being dumped into a pretty cruel situation. That's exactly what makes it interesting, but I do want to apologize to her.

As for why zombie tropes are a key element to the story, it's definitely because I often play zombie games. However, right off the bat, I decided I didn't want to include extremely gory or grotesque scenes that are common in zombie games, such as blowing heads off.

My eccentric personality played a big part in my desire to create something

different, but it also came from the simple desire to make something fun. Zombies still have a very negative image in society. I thought adding in comedy elements would bring out an entertainment factor different from other stories. The result is what you have all already experienced.

On that note, I can say this only after having completed the story, but it's our little secret that I created one too many crazy characters, which made the story livelier than I had initially planned. Thanks to them, I was able to enjoy myself while writing, so I'm grateful to those characters.

...Whoops! Whenever I talk about my stories, I feel as if I can go on forever, so I would like to take this time to thank the people involved in publishing this story.

Thank you to everyone at Cross Infinite World for granting me this wonderful opportunity. Thanks also to those who assisted in the publication. Most of all, my heartfelt gratitude goes out to those of you who took the time to read this book.

I pray that if you ever find yourself turned into a zombie, you will be purified right away by the priestess's open-handed slap. Until we meet again.



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