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# *Seirei Gensouki: Spirit Chronicles*

The Silver Bride





Rio was sandwiched between Aishia and Dryas, each holding onto an arm of his. He had a rather uncomfortably strained smile on his face.

Aishia wore her usual absentminded expression, whereas Dryas' pleasant smile was truly impressive.







An anime-style illustration of two young women in a bath. On the left, a girl with long, flowing orange hair and large, pointed orange ears is seen from the back, looking over her shoulder with a wide, happy smile. She has red eyes. On the right, a girl with long, straight dark blue hair and a small white bow is looking towards the first girl with a gentle smile. She has purple eyes. They are both in a wooden bath filled with water. The background is a warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is warm and intimate.

"EHEHE,  
I SEE. THEN  
YOU'RE JUST  
LIKE ME."

"...YEAH,  
JUST  
LIKE  
YOU."

Latifa  
nodded happily.  
This time, Miharu  
was able to smile  
happily, and the  
painful stirring in  
her chest quieted  
down a little.



CHARACTER INTRODUCTION

OTHER WORLDERS



**Sara**  
Silver Werewolf Girl



**Orphia**  
High Elf Girl



**Alma**  
Elder Dwarf Girl



**Arslan**  
Werelion Boy



**Vera**  
Silver Werewolf Girl & Sara's Sister



**Dryas**  
High Class Spirit of the Spirit Folk Village



**Celia Claire**  
Daughter of a Count and Rio's former academy teacher. On the verge of an undesirable political marriage.



**Latifa**  
Werewolf Girl & Former Slave. Reincarnated from another world and fondly calls Rio "Onii-chan."



**Liselotte Cretia**  
Daughter of a Duke & President of the Ricca Guild



**Christina Beltrum**  
First Princess of the Kingdom of Beltrum



**Flora Beltrum**  
Second Princess of the Kingdom of Beltrum



**Rio**

A boy reincarnated into another world with the memories from his previous life. His current priority is to secure Mihar, Aki, and Masato's safety.



**Amakawa Haruto**

A young man who was Rio's previous life as a Japanese university student. Mihar's childhood friend and Aki's half brother.



**Aishia**

The contracted spirit that was sleeping within Rio. Is apparently an upper high class spirit, but has no memories.



**Ayase Mihar**

Haruto's childhood friend and first love. Doesn't know that her savior Rio is the reincarnation of Haruto.



**Sakata Hiroaki**

Young man summoned from another world as a hero.



**Sendo Aki**

Haruto's half sister and Masato's stepsister.



**Sendo Masato**

Bright and honest stepbrother of Aki.



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## Prologue: Latifa's Secret Diary 2

It is springtime.

Five months have already passed since I started writing in my diary. Today's weather was clear. A little too chilly to wear thinner clothes, but the gentle rays of sunlight were shining down.

In contrast, however, my heart was instead in a cloudy state... And I know the reason why.

I discovered that the people who used to be so important to Onii-chan have appeared before him.

I know about them, because Onii-chan himself told me about them over three years ago.

Onii-chan and I revealed to each other that we had memories of our past lives, and while I was surprised at the time, I also felt really happy. I heard lots of stories about Onii-chan's previous life, including ones about those people.

For example, Onii-chan had four people in his family, and other than his parents and little sister, he also had a female childhood friend who was practically family. His parents divorced when he was little, and he had to part with his mother, sister, and that childhood friend, too. After that, he lived with his father until he became a high school student, and he always remained in love with that childhood friend...

I haven't asked Onii-chan directly, but I think those people are very important to Onii-chan right now. Because when Onii-chan was talking about them, he looked so fond — yet somehow lonely.

However, Onii-chan asked me not to reveal anything about his previous life to those people, and I cannot understand the reasoning behind that. Just imagining myself in Onii-chan's shoes makes my heart hurt. At the very least, I think it'd be difficult to pretend like everything was OK. Being unable to inform your most precious people of your existence... it must be very painful. Especially



if you had never thought you'd see them again.

In that regard, I must be very fortunate right now: I was able to meet the person who used to be most precious to me once again when I was reborn, and have him know about my former self. That is a very fortunate thing indeed.

But what about Onii-chan? How is he feeling right now? Isn't it painful for him? When I think about Onii-chan like this, my heart aches.

I'm worried about him... but that's only half the reason. I'm anxious, too.

I wonder if Onii-chan can find peace and quiet with me, in the same way that he's become *my* source of solace. That's why I'm scared of those people coming to the village. Somewhere in my heart, I'm deeply terrified that those people will become more important to Onii-chan than I am. I'm so scared of seeing what Onii-chan's true feelings are, and it leaves me anxious. I'm a coward.

The bad part of me is absolutely terrified.

That's why, when Onii-chan departed from the village today, I sulked as I clung to him. In order to assert my place next to him, I hugged him super tightly. Then, Onii-chan hugged me even more gently than usual, patting my back softly.

As I was filled with relief, I noticed my cowardice, and felt greatly ashamed of my weakness. Even though I was worried for Onii-chan, I still needed to depend on him in the end. Even though I had told myself that it was my turn to do something for Onii-chan, after all that he's done for me...

That's why I'm reflecting. I have to think about the future... That's what I decided.

While I'm panicking like this, the situation is continuing to move forward. In two weeks, Onii-chan will bring those people to the village.

I can't sulk anymore. I promised myself when I first started this diary that I would no longer be timid, that I would become someone who can proudly call herself Onii-chan's little sister. That's why I have to think about what I can do for Onii-chan.

Because I'm worried about Onii-chan. Because I'm his little sister. That's why I



won't sulk anymore.

If they're people precious to Onii-chan, then they'll be precious people to me, too. I will face them proudly. I'll become super close to them, and on top of that, I'll work my hardest not to lose to them, fair and square.

That's what I've decided.

This is a declaration of my resolution.

Although it makes me nervous wondering what kind of people they are... Even so, I want to see Onii-chan soon. I want to meet Onii-chan's special people.

So, when Onii-chan brings his precious people to the village, I'm going to be the first one running to welcome them. As Onii-chan's current little sister, I won't give this role up to anyone.

I'll be waiting, Onii-chan!

— Diary, Day 153.

# Chapter 1: A Chance Meeting and Welcome

It was Year 1000 of the Holy Era, in early spring.

A giant eagle-like bird was soaring through the skies above the spirit folk village; it was Ariel, the contract spirit of Orphia, the high elf girl. Four girls in total were riding on Ariel's back.

"Orphia, faster! Faster!" Latifa, the werefox, urged Orphia to make Ariel move faster.

"Got it. Ariel, if you'd please," Orphia ordered Ariel, smiling with amusement. With a great flap of her wings, Ariel accelerated her flight speed.

"Hey, Latifa — there's no need to rush. It's not like Rio's going to run away," Sara, the silver werewolf who was also riding on Ariel, said with an exasperated face.

"But I want to be the first one to greet Onii-chan!" Latifa pouted her lips cutely.

"There he is." The dwarf girl Alma, who had been silently watching the ground from Ariel's back as they moved, spotted the people they were looking for and pointed toward them. There in the distance stood five boys and girls — Rio and his guests.

*Onii-chan. And those people must be...* Latifa enhanced her vision with spirit arts and focused her eyes on all of their faces. Rio and the others must have noticed their approach, as they were all looking back.

"The peach-haired girl seems to be Lady Aishia. Ariel is drawing back a little," Orphia said in awe.

"My Hel is also acting a little weird. Is it because of Lady Aishia? Alma, how about your Ifritah?"

"Same here. I'm not surprised — she *is* a humanoid spirit. Her rank really must be high." Sara and Alma also seemed to feel the abnormality from their



contract spirits residing within them in spirit form.

As they were speaking, Ariel closed the distance to Rio's group. Once they arrived in the skies above him, they began to slowly circle the area and lower their altitudes.

Latifa fidgeted impatiently while waiting for the landing, then jumped off Ariel's back while they were still a fair distance above the ground.

"Ah, hey! Hold it right there, Latifa! Good grief!" Sara immediately noticed and yelled for her to stop, but Latifa had already landed on the ground. She adjusted her balance and set her eyes on Rio before she took a small breath and burst into an energetic dash.

"Welcome back, Onii-chan!"

"Whoa, there. I'm back, Latifa." Rio caught Latifa gently, killing the force of her impact. Miharu, Aki, and Masato stared at the two of them, having been somewhat taken by surprise.

"Ehehe," Latifa grinned shyly. Ariel landed right beside them, and Sara, Orphia, and Alma all jumped down to the ground.

"Geez, Latifa. You know it's dangerous to jump from so high up, right?" Sara scolded Latifa with a hand placed against her hip.

"It's fine! I made sure to enhance my physical body beforehand."

"Geez! ...Oh, forgive my rudeness!" Sara was about to launch into one of her lectures when she noticed the eyes fixed on her. She bowed her head in a fluster, then cleared her throat with a small cough. She smiled brightly to hide her embarrassment and addressed Miharu and the others.

"Welcome to the spirit folk village — we are pleased to have you here."

Rio chuckled. "This is Sara. She's a werebeast of the silver wolf variety and from one of the more prominent families in the village."

"It's nice to meet you. I'm Sara," she greeted with a faint blush to her cheeks.

"This is the high elf Orphia, and next to her is Alma, a dwarf. Both of them are from prominent families in the village, just like Sara," Rio continued.

“Nice to meet you.”

“It’s a pleasure.”

Orphia and Alma both bowed politely in greeting.

“Umm, my name is Ayase Miharuru. Pleased to make your acquaintance,” Miharuru replied rather nervously.

“I’m Sendo Aki. Nice to meet you,” Aki greeted awkwardly.

“Whoa... They’re real.” Masato let out a squeaky noise as he stared at Sara and the others in a captivated daze.

“...You introduce yourself properly, too,” Aki said, poking Masato in the head roughly.

“O-Oww, that hurts. What’s your problem, Aki?” Masato complained as he held a hand up to where he was poked, but Aki didn’t bother responding to him.

“Please accept my apologies — this is my foolish brother, Masato. As you can see, he is lacking in many areas, but he doesn’t mean anything by it. I would appreciate it if you treat him with some level of tolerance,” Aki explained and bowed her head at Sara and the others in embarrassment.

“Fufu, that’s all right,” Orphia nodded with a giggle. Rio looked at the three Japanese visitors and introduced them to Latifa, who was still in his arms.

“This is Latifa. We’re not related by blood, but she’s my beloved little sister. She should be the same age as Aki.”

“I’m Latifa. Onii-chan’s little sister, and a werefox. Pleased to meet you.” Latifa adjusted her posture and bowed to them with a bashful smile, then raised her head and glanced at Miharuru and Aki’s faces.

“Hello, Latifa. It’s wonderful meeting you,” Miharuru said, returning Latifa’s grin.

“...Yes,” Latifa nodded hesitantly, enchanted by Miharuru’s smile.

“Now, I’ll introduce this girl to Sara and the others. You may have figured it out already, but this is my contract spirit, Aishia. Aishia, can you introduce



yourself to them?” Rio asked.

“Hello. I’m Aishia,” she said simply.

“It’s an honor to finally make your acquaintance, Lady Aishia. On behalf of all the spirit folk, we welcome you to our village.” Sara, Orphia, and Alma all kneeled respectfully where they stood. In response to their reverent reaction, Aishia tilted her head curiously. Miharu and the others also seemed taken aback.





With a faint smile, Rio explained why the spirit folk trio were acting with such humility. “Like I told you before, the spirit folk consider high-ranking spirits that have a humanoid form to be sacred, and worship them. You’re one of those humanoid spirits, Aishia.”

“I don’t need to be treated so stiffly,” Aishia said, shaking her head quietly.

“Well, I know you can’t just agree with that so easily, but it’d be nice if you could take appropriate measures for that. For now, please stand up,” Rio said to Sara’s group, the faint smile still on his face.

“...Okay.” The villagers nodded, standing hesitantly. “Umm, then... May I call you Aishia?” Latifa asked Aishia without faltering.

“Geez, there you go acting all overly familiar again. Try and follow the spirit folk ways for once...” Sara sighed tiredly and expressed her disapproval, but—

“Latifa can call me whatever she likes. I don’t mind if you call me Aishia,” Aishia answered nonchalantly.

“Oh.” Sara was immediately at a loss for words.

“Hmm... Then, Aishia, is it?” Latifa cocked her head and hummed to herself.

“Yep, that’s me.”

“Yay! I’m glad to meet you, Aishia!”

“U-Umm, Rio. Are you sure this is okay?” Sara looked at Rio worriedly for confirmation.

“It’s fine. Miharuru even calls her Ai-chan.” Rio gave Sara his stamp of approval with an amused smile.

“...Really?” Sara stared at Miharuru fixedly, as though she was seeing something awe-inspiring.

“Huh? Sh-Should I not have been doing that, by any chance?” Miharuru asked nervously, trembling with a start.

“You’re fine. Aishia herself told you it was fine, so please respect her opinion.” Rio shook his head cheerfully as he consoled Miharuru.

“Umm, by the way. When they say ‘Rio,’ are they talking about you, Haruto?”

Aki suddenly asked, having been listening silently for a while. At the same time, Latifa's ears twitched at the sound of Aki calling Rio "Haruto."

"Ah, that's right. I still have to explain the circumstances around that properly." Rio scratched at his head with a troubled expression, unsure of where to start. Latifa watched him silently at his side.

"I mentioned it indirectly when I first met you guys, but 'Haruto' is the alias I am using while I'm active in the Strahl region. My real name is the one Sara and the others have been calling me — Rio," he explained.

Sara raised her hand hesitantly. "Erm, may I ask why you need to use two names separately?"

"It goes back to several years ago, before I first visited this village. I was involved in some trouble with the royalty and nobility of a certain kingdom in Strahl. They made me into a scapegoat for a crime I did not commit. In the end, they even put out a wanted notice for me," Rio replied uncomfortably. At that, Latifa's expression fell with an apologetic look.

"Huh?!" The other girls all widened their eyes. Only Aishia remained indifferent to his story, having known what happened already.

*Ah!* Sara and the other spirit folk girls recalled how they had been told of Latifa's past as an assassin who had tried to attack Rio. Expressions of understanding fell across their faces as they began to suspect that the incident may have been related to how Latifa and Rio had met.

"Well, I know it doesn't sound very believable..." Rio said with a troubled face after a moment, the faces around him appearing dumbfounded.

"Of course we believe you. We're just shocked at how horrible it must have been." Sara shook her head in a fluster.

"It really is horrible. Is that wanted status still in effect even now?" Alma asked with a frown.

"Thank you for your concern. I'm not sure if the warrant is still active... I haven't returned to that kingdom yet, after all. However, the crime wasn't a light one, and its statute of limitations wouldn't have run out after a mere few years. Even if they aren't actively searching for me, I think it'd be best to



consider the crime as still pertinent.” Rio shook his head slowly.

“I see. So that’s why you decided to use two names and change your hair color with a magic artifact...” Sara said, comprehending his words with a conflicted expression.

“It’s also because black hair simply attracts attention in the Strahl region,” Rio added. “But its true purpose is to act as a precaution if that warrant from back then is still effective. So... I don’t mind what you call me while I’m in the village, but Miharuru, if you and the others ever return to Strahl with me, I’d like to ask you to only call me ‘Haruto’ there,” he said lightly, clearing the heavy mood. Masato cocked his head.

“Hmm... You’re still Haruto to me, though. It doesn’t feel right to call you Rio at this point, and switching names would just confuse me if we ever go back to Strahl, so I’m going to stick with calling you Haruto!” he said with a grin.

“I’d like to continue calling you Haruto, too, since I’m already used to it,” Miharuru agreed with a smile.

“Umm, then... me too.” Aki also nodded hesitantly.

“He has always been Rio to us, so it’s a bit curious to see him being called Haruto,” Sara said with a giggle.

“But it strangely suits him, don’t you think? His gray hair is lovely, too,” Orphia said, smiling cheerfully.

“It’s true... Rio’s aura is a little different when he has gray hair instead of black hair, but they both make him look handsome,” Alma agreed.

“Ah, I think it suits him too, you know?! When I said curious, I didn’t mean it was weird... Wait, what’s that look for, Alma?” Sara hurriedly added on to her earlier comment, but when she spotted Alma’s triumphant expression, she stopped to question the meaning behind it.

“Oh, no reason. Don’t you think it’s time to lead everyone now?” Alma smiled with a puff of laughter and calmly changed the subject. Orphia was giggling, too, as Rio’s guests watched their exchange with deep curiosity.

“I-I know that! And what are you laughing at, Orphia? We’re going to lead

everyone now. Hurry up and let them on Ariel's back." Sara's cheeks reddened with embarrassment as she urged Orphia into moving.



The entire group took to the skies and headed toward the giant tree house that was used as the village's town hall. Once they landed in the square just before the town hall, Miharu and Aki timidly dropped down to the ground, whereas Masato leaped down with enthusiasm.

"That was amaaazing! Flying is so fun! The village buildings are amazing too!" he shouted in high spirits.

Beside him, Aki shot him a look of distaste at his childishness, but she also greatly enjoyed the scenery during their flight, so she wasn't one to talk, either. Miharu chuckled at the sight of the two.

Just then, particles of light gathered at the entrance of the town hall, taking on the shape of a beautiful woman. "You've arrived. I've been waiting." The woman who had materialized was Dryas, the spirit of the giant tree.

"Great Dryas — you're here." Sara, Orphia, and Alma bowed at Dryas respectfully.

Dryas approached Aishia and spoke to her with a radiant smile. "Yes, I felt the presence of a powerful spirit appear within the village barrier. I flew over immediately, knowing it had to be Rio's contracted spirit. You must be the one. I'm Dryas."

"I'm Aishia. Hello, Dryas," Aishia replied in a monotonous voice.

Dryas stared into Aishia's face with a look of contemplation. "Hmm. You really are a spirit I don't know, then. Not to mention your... Well, it's fine. Let's continue this conversation inside. You're meeting the elders, right?" she asked, then immediately turned on her heel and faced the town hall.

"All right. Follow me, everyone." Led by Sara and the others, the party headed toward the top floor of the town hall.



Ten minutes later, on the top floor of the town hall in the council room, Aishia



and Miharu's group received a warm welcome from the elders of the village. The three head elders began with simple introductions.

"It is a pleasure to have you in our village, Lady Aishia. On behalf of all the spirit folk, we welcome you from the depths of our hearts." One of the head elders, the high elf Syldora, stood up from his chair and addressed Aishia sitting in the guest seat with reverence. The other elders also stood and lowered their heads at Aishia out of respect.

"Thanks," Aishia said shortly.

With a small smile, Syldora turned to greet Miharu, Aki, and Masato sitting beside Aishia. "Children from another world, you have done well coming this far. We welcome you, too."

"Y-Yes! Umm, thank you very much for agreeing to look after us. We are truly so grateful... I'm not sure what to say." In contrast to Aishia's composed manner of gratitude, Miharu bowed her head nervously.

"T-Thank you very much!" Aki and Masato bowed awkwardly after Miharu.

"Hahaha, there's no need to be so formal. This gathering is to merely exchange simple greetings and to see each other in person. I'm sure you have heard from Lord Rio already, but as long as you agree to several of our conditions, we will guarantee you a peaceful life here in our village. We will leave formal arrangements for another day." Syldora gave a good-natured smile as he spoke to the nervous group of humans.

"Hmm. We were told you would be otherworldly folk, but you look just like humans." The head elder dwarf, Dominic, gazed at Miharu and the others with curious interest.

"Hey, don't stare at them with your fierce mug. You're scaring the guests," Ursula scolded Dominic jokingly.

"W-What?" Shocked, Dominic was at a loss for words. The other elders in the room laughed in amusement, and Miharu and the others followed suit. The air the room became much lighter. Sensing that, Dominic let out a dramatic sigh to show that he wasn't upset.

"Now, there's no use in continuing this chatter with the boring elderly folk.

Sara, you and the girls can guide them to their lodgings,” Syldora said, turning to address the group.

“Understood. Everyone, follow me.” Sara nodded respectfully before swiftly making her way over to Miharu.

“Huh? Is that all?” Miharu asked in surprise, expecting the meeting to go on for a little longer than that.

“Indeed. Tonight was merely a modest greeting of sorts. Perhaps you could tell us stories of your other world some other time? But first, you should get some rest.” Syldora nodded warmly.

Miharu bowed her head deeply. “Y-Yes. Thank you very much!”

“There’s something I’d like to ask Lord Rio and Lady Aishia. Could the two of you remain here a little longer?” Ursula asked.

Rio nodded immediately, before looking over at Sara and Latifa. “Of course. Everyone, I’m leaving Miharu and the other guests in your hands. You too, Latifa.”

“Sure. You can leave it to me, Onii-chan!” Latifa puffed out her chest proudly.



After Sara and the spirit folk girls led Miharu, Aki, and Masato out of the room, Ursula spoke up.

“My apologies, Lord Rio. Lady Aishia. There are some more complicated matters we’d like to discuss with you, so please keep us old folk company a little longer.”

“Of course, it’s nothing to apologize for. If anything, we should be thanking you for your consideration,” Rio replied with a bow. He figured that the reason why Sara and the others were sent to lead Miharu’s group away was because the topic of the discussion to come was highly confidential.

Right now, the only ones remaining in the room were Rio, Aishia, the council of elders, and Dryas, the spirit of the giant tree. All were more than qualified to know what was being discussed, and to keep the information to themselves.

“So, what did you wish to discuss?”

“Hm. While there’s a lot to cover, we’ll start with Lady Aishia first. Great Dryas, if you’d do the honors?” Syldora immediately cut to the chase, seeking further instructions from Dryas, who sat next to Aishia.

“Let’s see. First, it’s clear that Aishia isn’t any spirit that I know of. From what I’ve heard through the elders, Rio’s mentioned a few odd points here and there, too... Aishia, is it true you don’t have any memory of what kind of spirit you are?”

Aishia nodded. “Yup.”

“That’s what I found odd. Normally, a spirit would retain their memories from before they ranked up to a humanoid state, but she doesn’t have any memories, not even of her name. It seems she has the awareness and intellect of a humanoid spirit, but her sense of self seems strangely weak... I suppose that’s because of the amnesia?” Dryas contemplated out loud.

“...I’d like to ask you something about that. Are all spirits capable of climbing the ranks up to a humanoid state, all while keeping their memories from the lower and middle ranks?” Rio asked.

“That’s a difficult question. I can only tell you based on what I’ve seen myself, so this may not be the correct answer, but not every spirit can climb to a rank higher than they’re already at. There are many components and conditions required,” Dryas replied. “I’m not entirely certain with regard to the memories, either, but I know I can’t remember anything from when I was a low-ranked spirit myself. Spirits are normally said to be mana that hold a clear sense of self, but low-ranked spirits are basically the equivalent of a human baby in terms of cognizance. I only have memories from after I became a middle-ranked spirit. Although, I couldn’t wander very far from the tree I resided in at the time, so I basically spent every day sunbasking,” she added, looking wistful as she spoke.

“Thank you for your answer. In other words, Aishia should have had a stage before she became a humanoid spirit, and she should have memories of that period.”

“That’s right. I should add that once a spirit reaches the upper-middle ranks, it takes many long years to strengthen their sense of self and gain individuality. Just like me,” Dryas said, smiling proudly.



“I see...” Rio nodded in understanding, then looked at Aishia. She indeed had a personality that was quite different compared to Dryas’. Unlike Dryas, who freely expressed her emotions, Aishia didn’t show many of her emotions outwardly.

“That’s why... How should I put this? Aishia... She almost seems like a young spirit that just ranked up from being a low ranking spirit to a middle ranked one. Her rank as a spirit is high, but her sense of self seems weak and irregular. Unless she’s actually a really eccentric girl beneath that exterior... but she isn’t, is she?” Dryas said thoughtfully, looking at Aishia with an incline of her head.

“Am I?” Aishia tilted her head, too, looking at Rio.

“Who knows. But, I think you’re already very charming as you are.” Rio laughed in amusement.

“Thank you, Haruto.” Aishia smiled faintly; Dryas watched their exchange.

“Fufu, it seems like your contract relationship is going well. That’s a good thing. I don’t have anyone I’m contracted to, so it makes me a little jealous,” she said pleasantly.

“Indeed, she does seem to have opened to Lord Rio a fair amount,” Ursula agreed. “However... Does she mean Lord Rio when she says ‘Haruto’?”

“Yes. Due to certain circumstances, I’ve been calling myself Haruto while in the Strahl region. I informed Sara and the others earlier, but this is a good chance to inform everyone here, too.” Rio said, then repeated everything he had told the girls earlier. The elders listened to him in silence, only speaking up once he had finished his explanation.

“I see. So Lord Rio had that kind of past...” Ursula murmured with a conflicted expression. The other elders wore similar looks on their faces.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to keep it a secret all this time, but I didn’t think it was a good story to spread around, so I kept quiet about it. With the circumstances as they are right now, you deserved an explanation... but it isn’t a very positive story, I admit. Please do not let it weigh down on you,” Rio apologized with a guilty expression. “There’s one more thing I need to explain to everyone that might not be very pleasant... It’s the reason why I was able to

communicate with Miharū. I'd like to ask you to keep what I'm about to say as confidential as possible — is that all right?"

The three head elders looked at each other with wide eyes. "...Are you sure? There's no need to force yourself to explain anything." Syldora asked, watching Rio's expression.

"I'm not forcing myself into anything. However, it isn't the type of explanation I expect to be taken seriously, so you may find what I'm about to say to be rather strange. If Miharū, Aki, and Masato hadn't appeared, I would have never told anyone about this," Rio said with a troubled expression.

"Does this mean you've told the otherworlders this, too?"

"Yes. The need for an explanation was unavoidable due to the course of events. That is why I think it would only be right if I gave everyone here the same explanation, since they will be under the care of your village from now on. I omitted my reasons from our talks the other day, but I am willing to explain everything today, if everyone so wishes."

"I see... Everyone, it is as you have just heard. If Lord Rio discusses this with us, it will be strictly forbidden to speak of this outside of this room. Those who cannot vow their silence should leave this room immediately," Syldora said. Once he confirmed that not a single person had left their seat, he spoke up again, smiling at the elders. "Then it is assumed that everyone present has sworn to strictly adhere to the aforementioned conditions. Those who break their word... Well, you all know what happens. Great Dryas, you are fine with this, too?"

"I don't mind. I have neither the interest nor gossip partner to do so," Dryas agreed with a nod.

"It seems we are all in compliance, Lord Rio. Now, would you please tell us what you have to say?" Syldora asked, looking at Rio.

"Of course. I am greatly obliged for your consideration."

Rio bowed deeply, then began to explain the reason why he could communicate with Miharū in Japanese — because he had memories of his own previous life — but only to the extent of what he already told Miharū and the

other Japanese visitors. Specifically, he told the elders how he had awoken to memories that weren't his own when he was a young child, and that those memories were set in a world that was coincidentally the same as the world that Miharū had been living in. He hid the fact that he had a connection to Miharū in his previous life.

"That's all," Rio said, wrapping up his explanation. The elders had remained silent for the entire duration of Rio's speech, but the moment he was done, they all inhaled at once — as though just remembering to breathe.

Syldora was the first to open his mouth. "Hmm. That is indeed an unexpected tale to believe... but it is the truth, no?" After a heavy moment of thought, he accepted Rio's words as truth.

"...You believe me?" Rio's asked in amazement, having not expected anyone to believe him so easily.

"It's because you're the one saying this, Lord Rio — that is enough for us to believe you. Not to mention, it seems to be true that you were able to communicate in their language. Even if you were to lie about it, there would be no need to make up a story this nonsensical to cover it up." Syldora nodded with a wry smile.

"However, it is indeed nonsensical. I can understand why Lord Rio wants us to keep this truth confidential... Being reborn with your memories is something I have never heard of before in my long years of life." Ursula said, also with a wry smile.

"Right..." Rio acknowledged how impossible it sounded.

Dominic placed a hand by his chin. "Hmm. Great Dryas, have you ever encountered anyone in a similar situation as this before?" he asked her, since she was the oldest living being in the village.

Dryas shook her head bluntly. "I haven't. As far as I know, no one like that has ever appeared in this village before."

"Is that so... Sorry, Rio. I was hoping there'd be a precedent that could provide you with hints, but alas." Dominic shrugged his shoulders at the hopeless situation.

Rio shook his head with a smile. “No, it’s still of great use to me to know that no one like this has openly appeared throughout the long history of the world. I wondered if it was possible my memories of my previous life had something to do with how I suddenly found myself contractually bound to Aishia without realizing it, but I’ll set that thought aside for now.”

He already knew of someone who had memories of their previous life, and another that he highly suspected to be the case, but he decided not to reveal that right now.

“Hmm... If only we at least knew what kind of spirit Aishia was... All I can say for certain is that she isn’t a part of the only high rank spirit network I know. By the way, what kind of element do you specialize in, Aishia?” Dryas suddenly asked.

“All of them,” Aishia replied calmly. At that, the elders all stirred noisily. Even Dryas, the one who asked the question, widened her eyes in astonishment. Rio was the only one who was confused, wondering why everyone was reacting with such surprise.

Dryas repeated her question nervously. “...Umm, I’m not sure I heard you correctly. Did you just say you specialize in all types of spirit arts?”



While Rio met with the village elders and the Great Dryas, Miharu’s group was being led outside the town hall by the spirit folk girls. In front of the town hall was a wide and spacious square that doubled as a playground for the children. They had missed them earlier, when they had first arrived, but there were young boys and girls running all over, now.

*“The scenery was amazing to see from above, but it’s just as amazing from below, too. The spirit folk really are incredible... They even made a tree house that looks like this. It’s almost like a skyscraper,”* Masato said in awe as he looked up at the tree house that was used as the town hall.

He had spoken in Japanese on the spur of the moment, but Orphia was able to pick up on the general gist of Masato’s statement through his reaction. She smiled pleasantly.



“Fufu, the giant tree of Great Dryas is several times the size of this one, you know?” she said in the Strahl tongue.

“Huh? W-Wow, even more... than this? Umm, I would love to see it, if that’s not too much trouble.” Sensing that he was the one being spoken to, Masato blushed, his reply awkward.

“Wipe that sloppy look off your face... Speaking like you’re someone you’re not.” Aki said, looking at Masato with disgust in her eyes.

“W-What’s your problem, Aki? This is my normal way of speaking,” Masato objected in a high-pitched voice, making Aki sneer with a laugh.

“You say that, but your true colors are showing already.”

Meanwhile, Sara and the others hadn’t quite picked up on what was happening yet, so they looked curiously to Miharuru for an explanation.

“Ah, umm. Masato is actually quite shy around strangers. I believe he was a little nervous when talking to Orphia...” Miharuru explained.

“M-Miharuru, you don’t have to tell them that!” Masato yelled in embarrassment.

“It’s not quite *shyness* around strangers... Masato’s weak to cute and beautiful women older than him — even more so when they’re strangers he’s meeting for the first time,” Aki explained bluntly.

Taken aback, Masato tried to drown out Aki’s voice. “Wah! Stop it, Aki!”

However, it seemed that the spirit folk girls were able to hear her anyway, as they started giggling.

“Ahaha, I see. Should I be saying ‘thank you,’ then?” Orphia smiled bashfully.

“Ah, geez! I’ll never be able to show my face again!” Masato covered his face and squatted down where he stood; he wanted to dig a hole in the ground and hide in it, but the gesture only made Sara and the other girls giggle even harder.

“What a funny child,” Alma murmured, smiling as she looked at Masato.

“You’ll be fine if you can make jokes like that. No one here will be bothered if they never see your face again anyway, so don’t worry about it. Come on,

you're blocking the way, so stand up already," Aki cracked a merciless verbal whip at Masato, who was still groaning with shame.

"Ugh, I know that. ...Wait, why are all of those people looking at us?" Masato put on a bold front and stood up, before noticing the village children staring at them from afar; their ages appeared to span from five years old to the early teens.

"They're probably curious about you, since we rarely have visitors from outside the village," Sara commented.

"Looks like their morning classes ended and they're using their time for training and exercise. Vera and Arslan are there too," Alma said, pointing at the children.

The silver werewolf Vera and werelion boy Arslan stepped out from the crowd and approached the group. "Sister! Are these three people the guests Rio brought along?" Vera asked Sara with a friendly smile.

Out of consideration for Miharuru and the others, she was speaking in the common language of Strahl instead of the language of the spirit folk.

"That's right. We're giving them a tour of the village." Latifa nodded with a smile.

"I knew it! They have black hair just like Rio, so I could tell right away. It's nice to meet you! I'm Sara's little sister, Vera." Vera faced the humans and bowed politely as she introduced herself.

"Hello there. My name is Miharuru, from the same hometown as Haru... as Rio. It's a pleasure to meet you," Miharuru returned without missing a beat.

For the record, the truth as to how Miharuru and the others had come from another world was information that was known only by the council of elders and certain individuals. Because of that, Miharuru had to explain that she and the siblings were all humans from Rio's hometown. In addition to that, she decided against calling Rio "Haruto" in this situation, since the explanation would be complex.

When Vera saw Miharuru's smile, she widened her eyes and nodded. "Y-Yes. Wah... Isn't she beautiful, Arslan?"

“D-Don’t ask me!” Arslan shouted with embarrassment from his spot beside her, having been put on the spot. Seeing him flustered, Sara giggled.

“This boy’s name is Arslan. He’s Vera and Latifa’s friend,” Sara said, introducing him to everyone on his behalf.

“...I’m Arslan. Nice to meet you,” Arslan said with a turn of his head, cheeks faintly reddened with a blush.

“I’m Masato. I’m twelve years old.”

“My name is Aki. I’m one year older than Masato, so I’m thirteen.”

“That makes Aki the same age as me, then. I love making new friends my age. I hope we can all get along well,” Vera said with a carefree smile.

“As you can see, the two of them can speak the Strahl tongue, too. They’re good friends with Latifa, so I’m sure you’ll have many chances to interact with them in the future. Please be good friends with them,” Sara added.

“Of course,” Aki and Masato said, nodding in unison.

“By the way, where is everyone heading to now?” Vera asked with a tilt of her head.

“We’re about to take Rio’s guests to the house they’ll be living in while he finishes his talk with the elders,” Alma explained.

“Aww, that sounds nice. I wanna go, too!” Vera replied with jealousy.

Sara shook her head sternly. “You can’t. You two have training after this, don’t you?”

“That’s right, Vera. Today’s the day Uzuma’s teaching us, so it’d be a shame to miss it. Let’s go and visit them later?” Arslan said impatiently, trying to persuade Vera against leaving.

“Hmph, fine then.” Vera backed down reluctantly.

“Hey hey, when you say training, what kind of training is it?” Masato asked with great interest.

“Combat training, of course. Our instructor is the warrior chief of our village, you know?” Arslan answered proudly.

“Combat training, huh...” Masato murmured in awe.

“I use two-handed swords,” Arslan stated. “Can you use any weapons, Masato?”

“No, I’ve never had any kind of training like that before... But I’m interested in it,” Masato replied hesitantly.

“Huh, so you want to learn how to use a sword?” Aki asked in surprise, eyes widening.

“Y-Yeah. We don’t move around much studying all the time, after all.”

“Hmm...”

“W-What? You got a problem with that?”

“As long as it’s not dangerous, I suppose... What do you think, Miharuru?” Aki suddenly turned to Miharuru with a contemplative look.

“Huh? Umm, I wouldn’t like it if it was dangerous, but I’d want to respect Masato’s choice, too, I think? Ah, but make sure you get permission from Haru... I mean, Rio,” Miharuru replied.

“Rio would probably make the ideal instructor. If Masato has the fighting spirit to learn swordcraft seriously, then it may be a good idea to discuss it with him properly,” Sara said in a somewhat resolute tone.

“So, would you say that Haru... that Rio is actually really strong?” Masato inquired, making sure his tone was polite.

“Yes. Not only is he strong in pure close combat abilities, his combat with medium and long range spirit art attacks are clearly strong enough to be the very best of the village,” Sara replied proudly.

“Sara’s even fought with Rio before,” Alma said with a huff of laughter.

“T-That goes for you, too!”

Just as Sara was about start arguing back in a fluster, Orphia stepped in with a gentle smile. “All right, all right. You two have both been working hard in your training, so make sure you show your growth to Rio again later in a proper manner.”



“Maybe I’ll get Rio to face me some time. If Masato learns how to use a sword, we can eventually spar each other, too. I’ll train you up to par,” Arslan said, challenging Masato with a smile.

“You still have a ways to go yourself. It’s far too early for you to be training a beginner,” Sara said to Arslan with an exasperated look.

“Haha, I’d love to spar, though. I’ll try asking Rio, but I’ll be looking forward to our match one day... umm... Arslan!” Masato said somewhat shyly, and Arslan nodded energetically in return.

“Yeah, I’ll be waiting!”



After bidding farewell to Vera and Arslan, the spirit folk girls led their three new guests to their new lodgings. The house — a tree house supported by several trees — was located toward the center of the village, several minutes from the town hall.

“You will be living in this house from now on,” Sara said to Miharuru, Aki, and Masato after the party stopped in front of the house.

“...That’s amazing. Is it really okay for us to live in such a wonderful place?” Miharuru asked nervously as she looked up at the tree house.

“Of course,” Sara agreed. “This house was vacant to begin with—”

“—as it’s the house Onii-chan and I used to live in together,” Latifa cut in happily.

“Hey. Putting it that way makes it sound like you and Rio lived here alone. We lived here, too, remember?” Sara corrected with a slightly sulky tone. Miharuru and the others were all rather taken aback, their eyes wide; Masato especially, who was most surprised of all.

“Umm, is something the matter?” Sara asked hesitantly, noticing the change in expression of the three humans.

“...When you say ‘we,’ do you mean Miss Orphia and Miss Alma, too?” Masato asked quietly. He still seemed rather resistant to acting overly friendly with Sara’s group and couldn’t quite call them by just their names yet. He would

surely get over that soon.

“Yes,” Sara replied, nodding curiously.

“T-The five of you?” Masato asked once more in a high-pitched voice.

“Y-Yup,” Sara confirmed, now faltering.

“Wow... I’m jealous,” Masato muttered to himself.

Beside him, Aki furrowed her brows unhappily; with a cold smile pasted on her face, she dug her nails into Masato out of view from Sara and the others.

“What? You’ve been living in a home with a skewed gender ratio until now. Do you have something to complain about?”

“O-Oww, that hurts, Aki,” Masato complained painfully, but Aki quickly withdrew her hand and turned her head away with a huff, ignoring him.

“Fufu, the two of you are close.” Latifa laughed with amusement, watching the two of them.

“No, we’re not. We’re always fighting.” Masato shook his head tiredly.

“That just means you’re close enough to fight,” Alma said with a faint giggle.

“Yup yup, just like Sara and Alma,” Orphia agreed with a cheerful smile, then casually directed her glance at Alma and Sara.

“...Or maybe not. I take that back.” Alma blushed red and muttered with embarrassment.

“Geez, what are you saying? Let’s go inside already,” Sara said tiredly, walking off briskly towards the front door of the house, though her cheeks were also faintly red from the side. Miharuru realized Sara was blushing from shyness and smiled to herself.

Latifa tugged on Miharuru’s sleeve. “Hm? What’s wrong, Latifa?” Miharuru asked gently, smiling at her.

“Umm, may I call you Miharuru?” Latifa asked, staring straight up into Miharuru’s eyes with a look full of anticipation.

Miharuru’s eyes widened for a moment before she happily agreed. “Of course you can.”

“Ehehe. Thank you, Miharuru. Tell me lots about Onii-chan!”

“Umm, sure... But wouldn’t you know more about Haruto than I would, Latifa?”

“Mm... that might be true, but I kind of want to hear what Onii-chan looks like from Miharuru’s point of view, too. I also want to learn lots about you, and I’d love for you to know more about us, because I want us to become friends quickly,” Latifa said, smiling innocently.

Miharuru also gave a relaxed smile. “Fufu. If that’s the case, then... gladly. Let’s get along, Latifa,” she said, nodding.

“Yup! Let’s, Miharuru!”

As Latifa and Miharuru stayed in place to converse, Sara and the others had already moved to the front door.

“Miharuru, Latifa. Is something the matter?” Sara asked the two girls.

“It’s nothing. Hey, when you’re done giving the tour of the house, I want to have tea with everyone! Are there any snacks?” Latifa held Miharuru’s hand and started to tug her along as she spoke.

“Yup, there are,” Orphia nodded.

“But only a little, it’s almost time for lunch,” Sara added without missing a beat. Miharuru watched their exchange from the side and giggled.

*Latifa is such a good girl. Sara and the others are so kind, too.*

Miharuru had hidden her concerns about moving to the village, so it was a relief to see everything going so smoothly. At that moment, it felt like something good was about to happen. It was just a feeling she had.

After that exchange, Miharuru, Aki, and Masato were given a tour of the house interior and chatted with the others until Rio and Aishia finished their discussion. Later on, Vera and Arslan visited as well, forming a close group of similarly aged kids with Latifa, Aki, and Masato. Before long, the time for the banquet was upon them.



Evening reared itself; lead by Sara and the spirit folk girls, Miharuru, Aki, and Masato were taken to the town hall once more.

They stepped inside the large dining hall on the bottom floor to find countless round tables set up, each one stocked to the brim with delicious dishes in a buffet-style dinner.

“Oooh, amazing! It looks so good!”

“That looks great! I’m so lucky I get to join in!” Both Masato and Arslan exclaimed at the dishes before them. The two boys got along well and hadn’t taken long to hit it off as friends.

“Masato, stop acting so childishly. It’s disgraceful. The families of the important people in this village prepared this for us today, so you should at least mind your manners,” Aki warned.

“Aki talks like she’s your mom,” Arslan whispered to Masato.

“Right?” Masato whispered back. “She’s always trying to tell me off for every little thing. I can’t stand it.”

“Hey, I can hear you,” Aki said to them, the smile on her face twitching.

“Th-There, there, Aki. Today’s a welcoming party for you, so there’s no need to act all formally, either,” Latifa consoled her, with Vera stepping in as well.

“That’s right. Please relax and make yourself at home.”

Next to where the five younger ones had gathered, Miharuru was talking to Sara, Orphia, and Alma. The four of them had also warmed up to each other, but there was still some awkwardness that remained.

“So, you prepared such a wonderful party for us too...” Miharuru was looking around the dining hall with widened eyes and a hint of surprise.

“It seems like most of the upper families of the village will be attending. Great Dryas and Lady Aishia will also be present, so it looks like those in charge of food preparation went all-out. That being said, everyone’s just happy to have an excuse to party, so there’s no need to be nervous, Miharuru,” Alma said, easing Miharuru’s worries. It seemed like she was looking up to Miharuru with the same respect she showed for Sara and Orphia.



“It’s exactly as Alma says. Once the alcohol comes out, it’ll become much noisier,” Sara said with a bittersweet smile.

“Ahaha. You might be surprised seeing it for the first time,” Orphia added with the same smile on her lips.

Alma looked around the hall. “Looks like everyone’s arriving now.”

Residents of the village had been streaming through the door continuously for a while now.

“If it isn’t Lady Sara, Lady Orphia, and Lady Alma. Good evening.” The werecat girl Anya appeared and called out to Sara’s group.

“Good evening, Anya,” they replied with a smile.

“Is this cute girl the rumored visitor? The one from Rio’s hometown.”

“Yup, this is Mihar. Mihar, this is Anya, the werecat.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Anya. My name is Mihar. Pleased to make your acquaintance.” Mihar bowed courteously.

Anya stepped closer to Mihar and shook her hand, smiling with amusement. “Nice to meet you, Mihar. Hmm... The girls around Rio are all so cute.”

“Eh, no, that’s not...” Mihar blushed in a fluster.

“The demand for Rio is rather high, after all. Feel free to come to me if you need someone to listen to your troubles.” Anya grinned mischievously, probing for details.

“N-No, umm, I’m fine... I think?” Mihar ducked her head in embarrassment.

“Anya. Stop teasing Mihar,” Sara sighed, warning Anya.

“Okaaaay,” Anya drew out, then spotted a friend of hers. “Oh, my friend’s here. Mihar, let me introduce her to you. Hey!”

After that, Mihar chatted with the girls of the village for a while. At the same time, Masato and Aki were also deepening their friendships with the other children that were around their age. The adults of the village watched the younger generation mingling across species with pleasant smiles on their faces.

Once all the guests had gathered, head elder Syldora spoke up. “Now, shall

we begin? Everyone, may I ask that you please be silent?” he said, his voice echoing throughout the room; he had amplified his voice with wind spirit arts. The bustling hall immediately fell silent. Syldora, Dominic, and Ursula presided over the dining hall, gathering all the attention of those present.

Once Syldora had the hall’s attention, he spoke with a wry smile as he looked out over those present. “Lady Aishia and Great Dryas will be entering the hall, now. I believe everyone knows already, but this is a reminder not to act too reverently.”

Events like this were always held without social ranks, so a natural laugh fell from the audience as the atmosphere of the hall became less tense.

“I don’t see Haruto...” Miharuru muttered as she looked around the hall. Sara followed her gaze, glancing around.

“Yes... maybe he’s attending late?” she said, though the head elder continued to speak without concern.

“Now, if the two of you could please enter,” Syldora said, summoning Aishia and Dryas, who had been waiting outside the room.

Upon closer observation, Ursula and Dominic both had wicked grins on their faces, but no one had noticed as of yet. The doors of the hall had already been opened by people assisting the process, and everyone present — including Miharuru, Sara, and the others — naturally had their gazes drawn by the doors. Immediately after, those in attendance stirred with noise.

While Aishia and Dryas certainly did enter from outside the room, they were accompanied by a third person who had been intentionally hidden away — Rio. He was sandwiched between Aishia and Dryas, each holding onto an arm of his. He had a rather uncomfortably strained smile on his face. Aishia wore her usual absentminded expression, whereas Dryas’ pleasant smile was truly impressive.

“Rio?!” Sara’s eyes widened as she accidentally raised her voice to the level of hysterics.

“O-Ooh...” Orphia and Alma also widened their eyes in surprise.

The spirit folk villagers present were half-surprised and half-speechless, in awe of seeing two humanoid spirits, Aishia and Dryas, walking together.

“Ahaha. Rio’s really something, huh?” Anya’s cat ears and tail flickered to and fro as she laughed with amusement.

Humanoid spirits ranked high class and above were practically regarded as sacred beings by the spirit folk; to be accompanied by two such goddesses on each side was an act of the highest honor to the spirit folk — or rather, an act of the greatest amusement to Anya. The three head elders watched the reactions of the attendees and smiled at how humorously their plan had succeeded.

Rio continued to escort Aishia and Dryas until they reached the stage beside the head elders’ seats.

“Now that the surprise has been revealed, I’d like to introduce everyone to Lady Aishia, who has come to visit our village today. I’m sure many of you are already aware, but Lady Aishia is Lord Rio’s contracted spirit. She was asleep for a long, long time, so her memories are still rather vague, but the chance meeting with a new humanoid spirit is a tremendously auspicious event to our people. That is why we have decided to hold a small banquet in celebration tonight,” Syldora said warmly.

“Tonight will also act as the welcoming party for the three new friends Lord Rio has brought to us. As our sworn friend, any friend valued by Lord Rio is a friend of ours, too. Let us welcome them to our village lavishly, so that they may enjoy the duration of their stay. Let’s see... How about the three of you come up to the stage?” Ursula said.

“Huh?” The three of them flinched and nervously looked around the excited hall. Rio chuckled at their reaction.

“It’s all right, Miharu. Please, come this way.” He called the eldest, Miharu, up first. She took a deep breath and timidly started walking toward the stage. Once Miharu had started to move, Aki and Masato soon followed.

“Welcome, Miharu,” Aishia said to her quietly as she approached.

“Y-Yeah, thanks. There’re a lot of eyes on us... ahaha. I might be a little nervous... Uhh...” Miharu said, grinning shyly as she turned to face the room. Once she made eye contact with the rest of the villagers, her face turned bright red, and she bowed up and down. Aki and Masato hid behind her, while the spirit folk villagers watched over the three with warm gazes.

“Gosh, your surprise went too far, Haruto,” Masato sighed.

“Sorry, I didn’t really understand the progression of things, either. They won’t do anything bad to you, so just go along with it,” Rio replied with a wry smile.

“B-But I’ve never stood in front of so many people before. It’s pretty nerve-wracking.” Even the usually cool Aki was speaking in quite a high-pitched voice. Rio nodded in understanding.

“You can see how they are, so please go easy on them, Syldora,” he said.

Syldora laughed heartily and nodded, looking over the room. “Hahaha, all right. Everyone: as you can see, our three new visitors are lovely people. Let us give them a warm welcome, so that they may adjust to life in our village as soon as possible. Please, raise your glasses.”

The audience raised their glasses in turn, and a waiter came over to Rio and the others on the stage with a tray of cups. Then, once everyone had a drink in their hand, Syldora raised his cup into the air and led the toast.

“It looks like the cups have gone around. Now, to celebrate this wonderful meeting of fate. Cheers!”

The attendees also raised their glasses in an uplifted manner. “Cheers!”

“Alright — it’s time to talk, drink, and make merry! The young ones should make sure to use this chance to humbly greet Lady Aishia and the other visitors. Go on.”

In order to enliven the banquet, the alcohol-loving Dominic took the initiative; he walked around briskly and relentlessly addressed the younger villagers, urging them toward the stage. Then, young boys and girls of the village — those acquainted like Sara’s group and those unacquainted — all started to move toward Aishia, Miharu, and the other visitors.

Sara and the other girls approached Rio first, offering to take on an assistant role for Miharu’s sake. “Leave Miharu’s support role to me. Rio, you support Lady Aishia.”

“That’d be a great help. Thank you.”

“Yup. All right, Miharu. Come this way.”



Sara and the others quickly took charge and led Miharū's group a short distance away from the stage. Having everyone gathered in one place made it hard to manage; Sara probably intended on splitting up the crowd a little this way. Her idea seemed to work, as a decent number of people gathered toward Miharū, Aki, and Masato.

The young children of the village actively started to talk to them, immediately starting a kind of cultural exchange. Thanks to Sara and the spirit folk girls acting as an icebreaker, Miharū and her group weren't as nervous as they could have been. It was a good atmosphere.

*Looks like that side will be fine. I'll have to do my best, too,* Rio thought in relief, then braced himself.

"Everyone, feel free to come this way. I will introduce Aishia to you." He invited those who looked eager to talk to Aishia to come closer. While they had set ranks outside of this event, they were still feeling inferior in front of their deity of worship. Then, the youngsters of the village gathered around Aishia, greeting her in awe. Aishia didn't respond with many words, but Rio kept the conversations going well in her stead.

Furthermore, the adults of the village kept the banquet lively during that time, turning the hall into quite the busy place. There were many laughs to be had as time passed.

Just like that, nearly an hour went by in the blink of an eye.

"Fufu, it's turned into a good welcome party. I'm having a lot of fun, too," Dryas said to Syldora and Ursula, who were watching over the banquet in a corner of the hall. For the record, Dominic was still actively heating up the banquet from where he was.

Syldora noticed Dryas' presence and happily addressed her. "It is a great honor to hear that you are pleased, Great Dryas."

Ursula nodded along happily, slowly turning her gaze toward where Rio and Aishia were on the stage. "However, Aishia's identity still remains a mystery... possibly even more so now than before. I thought she may have possibly been one of the upper high class spirits that disappeared in the Divine War, but..." she said a little uneasily.

“Hmm, good point. She does have a lot of latent power within her, I believe. I don’t know if it’s a side effect of her amnesia, but she doesn’t seem to understand how to use her powers properly as a spirit, and I’ve never heard of a humanoid spirit having aptitude for every element before. If we fought seriously, I wouldn’t be able to win.” Dryas had a rarely seen expression of contemplation on her face as she nodded.

Similar to how people had their own strengths and weaknesses in spirit arts elements, spirits also had elements that they had a higher aptitude for than others. This rule was more prominent in spirits ranked middle class and higher — that was common knowledge among the spirit folk, until now.

This was because a low class spirit — even if it didn’t have any strong or weak elements — could bloom in a particular element upon ranking up in class. From there, it would become a spirit that specialized in that element. It wasn’t as though middle class spirits and higher couldn’t use spirit arts of other elements, it was simply that their efficiency in those other elements was far worse compared to their specialty.

While humans who could use a number of different spirit art elements and people who could use all kinds of spirit art elements were a rare phenomenon, there had never been a confirmed case of a middle class spirit or higher. At most, there would appear the rare spirit with multiple elements that they had enough aptitude to specialize in at once. Presently, Dryas herself was a high rank spirit that mastered the element of earth, and even the six former upper high class spirits were said to each have their own specialty element.

And so, neither Dryas nor the village elders had expected the response from Aishia claiming to specialize in every element, so their earlier conversation had truly been shocking to them.

“For the Great Dryas to give this much praise, both Lady Aishia and Rio must be tremendously exceptional... Perhaps even more than the former upper high class spirits that vanished...” Syldora said with great awe for Aishia.

“The six upper high class spirits that formerly stood at the top of their element ability, and the single spirit that is at least high class who has the aptitude for every element... I wonder which is the more peculiar existence.”

Dryas smiled, showing a glimpse of her great curiosity.

“Well, it seems neither Lord Rio nor Lady Aishia recognize their own peculiarity yet,” Ursula said, laughing heartily.

People and spirits had elements they were strong and weak in. It was extremely rare for anyone to be proficient in every element — it seemed that Rio had a slightly warped understanding with regard to the history of spirit arts, as he wasn’t quite aware of how rare that occurrence was amongst humans and spirits.

In reality, low class spirits aside, any spirit middle class or higher would — without exception — form a specialty in a particular element, making it impossible to have aptitude for every single element. But knowledge of spirit ecology like this was a rather specialized field, which was why it was understandable that Rio had misunderstood until now.

“I’ll teach him all the knowledge he needs to know about spirits during his stay in the village this time. It’s been a long time since my curiosity has been piqued like this, after all,” Dryas said, watching Rio and Aishia as they continued to chat with the villagers.



The welcoming party for Aishia and Miharu’s group continued late into the night, but their lively time together was over in a flash.

“Now, let’s go home!” A slightly drunk Sara led the way happily, leading Rio and the others to the house they were moving into. They stepped out of the town hall and the cool spring night breeze wrapped around their bodies.

“Phew, I ate and drank to my heart’s content!” Masato said with a small burp as he patted his stomach.

“Geez, you’re like an old man, Masato,” Aki sighed. Miharu and Latifa laughed in amusement at the siblings’ exchange.

“By the way, I heard that you guys would be staying together during our time in the village...” Rio said to Sara and the others.

“Yes. The head elders have ordered us to stay together, saying it’d be the

fastest way to get them used to life in the village. Ah, we've already checked for Miharu's approval on this."

"Of course, I'll be staying with them, too!" Latifa said, clinging to Rio's arm tightly.

"I know." A soft smile pulled at Rio's lips as he gently petted Latifa's head.

"Fufu, it reminds me of those days we lived together. I'm looking forward to it... I'm sure it'll be so much fun," Orphia said, smiling pleasantly.

"It might get much noisier this time around," Sara said with a sigh, making Alma laugh teasingly.

"Sara's been looking forward to it for a while, now."

"A-Alma, too. Anyway... All the rooms have been prepared already, so once we get to the house, we'll decide who sleeps where." Sara turned away with embarrassment, then increased her walking speed; her faintly blushing cheeks were probably because of the alcohol.

"Ehehe, I want to try sleeping in the same room as everyone so we can all talk together," Latifa said with a cheerful smile.

"Huh? E-Everyone?" Masato replied in a fluster, but Aki shot him down.

"Everyone other than you, of course."

"D-Don't say that! Why is it okay for Haruto to do that, then?!" Masato whined in a pathetic voice, making all the girls laugh in good humor. They continued to chat noisily together and arrived at the house within a few minutes.

## Interlude: Talented Woman, Liselotte Cretia

Fast-forwarding a little bit in time, in the Strahl region...

The blue-haired noblewoman, Liselotte Cretia, was hosting four important visitors to her estate in the trading city of Amande — the city she governed — located in the southwest region of the Galarc Kingdom.

The important visitors were Sakata Hiroaki, the hero summoned into the world three months ago, and three members of Beltrum Kingdom royalty and nobility: Second Princess Flora, Duke Gustav Huguenot, and the noblewoman Roanna Fontaine. Not even Liselotte, daughter to the most prominent lord of the Galarc Kingdom and head of the Ricca Guild — which was renowned even in neighboring kingdoms — could afford to speak out of line in the presence of these guests.

Once Hiroaki and the others arrived in the afternoon, they were first led to the dining room for a meal and introductions. Numerous courses of gourmet foods were served to the delight of not only Hiroaki, but Flora and the others as well. Liselotte acted as the hostess during the meal, keeping the conversation going so that the group had a pleasant time.

Once everyone finished dessert, Flora spoke up. “That was a wonderful selection of dishes. The authentic pasta here is different compared to anywhere else, and that cake for dessert was very delicious, too.”

“Yeah... You must have a really skilled chef here. I never expected to eat pasta in another world, but... this I can say for certain: that was the best meal I’ve had since coming to this place,” Hiroaki, who sat next to Flora, said in satisfaction. In all honesty, Hiroaki hadn’t expected much from the food in this world, but he was now reconsidering that perception.

“Hero, Princess Flora — I am most honored to receive your compliments. Allow me to graciously thank you on behalf of our head chef.” Liselotte bowed her head humbly, showing gratitude with great respect.

“Yeah, you can tell him he’s so good that I’d love to scout him as my personal chef.”

“I’m afraid that would be a problem for me, but the thought is much appreciated.”

“Ah, well, it was good enough to make me consider that,” Hiroaki said with a huff of laughter. He had actually eaten two extra servings of pasta, so even if he had said it was bad, it wouldn’t have been very convincing.

“Fufu, thank you very much. I had heard that the hero hailed from another world, so I was worried that the meal wouldn’t be to your tastes. Your words just now have reassured me,” Liselotte said, smiling brightly with relief.

For a moment, Hiroaki lost himself in Liselotte’s smile. To hide his embarrassment, he brought up another topic. “Ah, I see. That’s good, then. Pasta is the local specialty of this city, right? There’s actually a similar food in the world I’m from.”

Flora widened her eyes. “Oh my, is that true?” she asked.

“Yeah. We also have lots of other similar plants and animals. Recipes and cooking skills aside, I’m honestly glad to see there isn’t that much difference in the food here,” Hiroaki replied, remembering all the foods he’d eaten since coming to this world.











































































































































































































































eventually become that leader. And you will be my wife,” he said, smiling at Celia expectantly.

“...” Celia was unable to find any words to respond with. The only thing she could do was keep up the smile on her face.



Meanwhile, a huge crowd of attendees closed in on the grounds of the Great Temple where the ceremony was to be held. They were all waiting eagerly for the arrival of Celia and the others in the magnificent outdoor garden.

A single road stretched from the entrance of the temple, continuing toward the outdoor altar where the ceremonial vows were to be made. The Great Temple itself towered over the altar a short distance away, and a party was to be held in the Great Temple and outdoor garden after the ceremonial vows were over.

Rio stood blending in with the crowd of attendees, Aishia resting within him in her spirit form. Only those formally invited were allowed into the temple grounds, but with over a thousand individuals invited, it wasn't that difficult for Rio to slip into the crowd. He stood waiting patiently for Celia's arrival.

*Haruto, Celia is approaching.* Aishia's voice echoed in the back of Rio's head.

*So it seems. I can hear the commotion,* Rio responded quietly. The noise of the music band and cheers of the crowd echoed from a distance, but Rio's heart was filled with silence.

*Haruto, you're very calm,* Aishia said in a flat tone.

*It's because I was able to understand the situation properly. My head's cooled in the time that has passed, and I know what I want to do about it, too. It's all thanks to you, Aishia.* Rio smiled gently. "Thank you."

*All I did was some research. It was no big deal.*

*That's not true. If you weren't here, I wouldn't have been able to fully educate myself of the sequence of events that led to Professor Celia's marriage. I would have been lost.*

*Even if you were lost, you would have moved forward anyway,* Aishia stated

with no hesitation at all.

*...Who knows. I'm a coward, after all. I may have run away.* Rio's eyes widened faintly, hesitating as he gave a strained smile.

*That's just part of being lost. Even if you get lost, even if you're wrong, you have the strength to move forward.*

*...Thank you. I feel a little more confident now with regard to what I'm about to do. Let's keep waiting... Professor Celia should be here soon.*

*Yes, let's wait.* Aishia nodded. From there, a lull in conversation fell between the two of them as they silently waited for the parade to approach.

Some time later, the parade squad finally entered the grounds of the Great Temple with quite a bit of hustle and bustle. The visitors that had been waiting on the temple grounds cheered excitedly.

The visitors in the temple grounds yelled at the carriage carrying Charles and Celia.

"Glory and honor to the Beltrum Kingdom sustained by the Duke Arbor family!"

"Hail the Duke Arbor family!"

"Glory to Sir Charles Arbor!"

Most of the attendees were nobles of the kingdom — nobles from Duke Arbor's faction, that is — which explained why the mood was welcoming of them. Charles looked down at the attendees from the horse carriage and smiled with satisfaction. They must have all been faces he recognized, as he waved his hand at each one in turn.

Meanwhile, standing beside him was Celia, who despite having a fleeting smile on her face, was still acting as the pure and graceful smiling wife.

*Professor...* Rio watched Celia with a pained expression on his face. However, he had completely blended into the crowds, so Celia didn't notice him. Rio wasn't about to yell "Professor" out loud to attract her attention, so the carriage Celia was on proceeded until the middle of the road.

*Haruto, should I go now?* Aishia asked through their telepathic connection.

Rio took a small breath and agreed. ...*Yeah. Please do, Aishia.*

*Okay.* As she responded, Aishia slipped out of Rio's body, still in her spirit form.

Rio was unable to see her, but he was already aware of where she was headed, so he directed his gaze in that direction without hesitation. She was headed for the carriage, where Celia stood.

Celia was smiling, waving her hand at the attendees, when suddenly, her entire body flinched. “?!”

She glanced around at her surroundings in a slightly suspicious manner, before completely freezing in place. Her expression changed with a gasp, and she shook her head in a fluster. Then, her eyes turned to where Rio was blended in with the crowd, as though she knew he was there from the very start.

Her gaze wandered around shakily as she searched the area, but she eventually locked on to the sight of Rio's figure among the people. Rio stared fixedly at Celia, and when their eyes met, he smiled gently.

“Wh... y...?” Celia's mouth moved minutely. Then, her expression twisted with pain as tears started flowing out of her eyes.

When Rio spotted Celia's crying face, he turned on his heel and left the crowd of people.



Just before Celia spotted Rio among the crowd...

Celia had eventually started to perceive herself as a puppet as she faced the parade, focusing on acting graceful and friendly so that she wouldn't mess up and bring trouble to her family. After all, the people congratulating her were all having fun and smiling with wonderful expressions. As she responded to them, Celia gradually felt as though she had been abandoned by the world.

Then, before she knew it, they had arrived at the Great Temple. At the end of the road, stretching straight forward from the entrance, were the stairs that reached up to the outdoor altar.



Next to the stairs were the VIP seats for people from inside and outside the kingdom. Among them were royals like Christina; the “King’s Sword” renowned for being Beltrum’s strongest, the commander of the Royal Guard, Alfred Emerle; and the Proxia Empire’s ambassador who had a personal connection to Charles, Reiss.

Last but not least, standing below the altar just before the stairs was a single boy clad in hero-like clothing, his blonde hair fluttering in the wind smoothly as he gave a refreshing smile. He was between his mid-teens to late-teens.

Celia knew who he was; though she had never met him directly, she had seen him once from afar when there was a commotion over a hero being summoned in the castle.

He was the hero who had been summoned by the spirit stone held by the Kingdom of Beltrum — Rui Shigekura.

His facial features and hair color were different from his friends that he had been summoned along with. According to him, it was because he was “half-Caucasian.”

Rui Shigekura was waiting at the bottom of the stairs to the altar because Charles had arranged for validity of the marriage to be solidified through having a hero — a servant of the Six Wise Gods — give his direct approval. As a result, once the hero’s acknowledgment was given, there would be no way to take back the marriage.

Even as she smiled and waved in a friendly manner, Celia cowered at the reality looming closer before her.

*Celia.* An unfamiliar girl’s voice suddenly sounded in Celia’s head.

“?!” Celia trembled with a start.

*I’m currently talking to you by directly connecting to your mind. There’s no time, so don’t be afraid.* The unknown girl suddenly started to speak.

*W-Who are you?* Celia looked around dubiously.

*My name is Aishia. Haruto... No, Rio asked me to talk to you like this.*

Celia froze. *R...Rio?*

*Look toward the back on your left.*

Celia's expression changed with a gasp as she looked in the direction as told.  
*Don't tell me...?!*

*A little further in front... Yes, around there.*

Celia moved her gaze, checking each and every face of the people standing among the crowd. ...*Rio*. Celia spotted Rio blending in with the masses. He smiled gently at her.

"Why...?" He had come. Even though she told him not to... Even though she hadn't wanted him to. Even though he was the only one she didn't want to have witness the sight of her being married to Charles.

Unable to look directly into Rio's face, tears started escaping from Celia's eyes before she knew it. Even though she knew she shouldn't cry, her tears wouldn't stop.

"...Hey, hey, what's the matter, Celia? Have you been moved to tears with happiness?" Charles was taken aback by the sudden sight of Celia's tears. He questioned her curiously.

*Just go along with him, Aishia's voice echoed.*

Celia faltered, rubbed her eyes furiously, and answered Charles. "...Ah, umm, I'm not sure. There's happiness, and a lot of other emotions, mixed together."

It wasn't a remark she made thinking that she had to obey Aishia's orders. If anything, they were words her confused head had blurted out.

They were her real feelings.

Happiness at seeing Rio's face again, anger at how he came when she told him not to, repulsion at how she was seen on display next to a man she didn't even like, and a complicated mix of other emotions, too.

Even so, the most prominent emotion occupying Celia's chest was happiness from seeing Rio's face. She had believed they would never meet again after she pushed him away, yet she was unbearably happy at seeing Rio's face again.

"Fufufu, is that so. So you wanted to be with me that much..." Charles misinterpreted Celia's emotional state in a way that was convenient for himself

and leered in a smile that was filled with narcissism. “Come now, Celia. Don’t be so down. Everyone is watching,” he encouraged, playing the good husband.

It wasn’t that rare for a new bride and groom to burst into emotional tears during the ceremony, so the attendees watched over Celia with gentle smiles.

*This is a good act. That must be how much Celia is delighted to be wed to me.* Charles chuckled, pleased with himself as he looked out over the attendees gathered around them. As he did that, the horse that drew the carriage they were riding on neared the stairs of the altar.

Here, Celia finally raised her head after crying for some time. She wiped her tears and looked toward the point where Rio had been standing earlier, but he was already nowhere to be seen.

*...Huh? Where’s Rio?* Celia’s gaze wandered in a panic.

*Hey, umm... Aishia? Can you hear me?* she asked within her head, but there was no reply.

*Hey, can you hear me? Where did Rio go?* Celia asked with a pale face, but there was still no reply from Aishia.

*Was it... an illusion? But that can’t be...?!* Celia suddenly felt very anxious. Feeling fear from Rio’s disappearance, she glanced around at the attendees to the rear, searching for him.

“Celia, we’ll soon be where the hero is.” Before she knew it, the horse drawn carriage Celia had been on had arrived at the stairs where the hero was waiting. It stopped a bit of distance away from Rui, and the knights on guard moved to attach a staircase to the end of the carriage. They would be moving on foot from here.

“All right, let’s get down,” Charles said, extending a pompous hand to Celia.

“Who are you?! Freeze!” A foot soldier that had been protecting the rear of the horse carriage suddenly raised his voice. The squads in the parade instantly became noisy. The attendees of the ceremony also made a commotion, turning their eyes to what was happening in the squads that formed the rear of the parade.

“What’s happening?!” The squad leader that had been guarding the front of Celia’s carriage yelled toward the rear from horseback. From the carriage, Celia also turned to look back in a panic. “I-Intruder! He suddenly slipped into our squad!” a panicked reply came from behind.

“Huh?” Celia witnessed a shadow weave through the crowds, closing in on the carriage. The horseback squad leader beside her also seemed to notice the black shadow.

“S-Spread to the side and form a single wall! Don’t let him approach!” he ordered in a fluster. The soldiers in the area hurriedly got into formation, forming a single horizontal line as a human wall, bracing the lances in their hands.

Meanwhile, the black shadow continued to weave in and out of the squad, steadily heading for the wall of soldiers. After the figure was at a certain distance to the carriage, he stepped out into an area that the soldiers had left open.

“Sorcerer Squad, apprehend him!” the leader of the knight squad ordered the sorcerers that were included in the parade. The sorcerers moved quickly, pointing their staves through the gaps between the soldiers forming the human wall and chanting to cast an offensive subjugation spell.

*“Photon Projectilis!”*

Immediately, magic circles of light drew the spell formula in the air at the tip of the staves, shooting an endless amount of photon bullets toward the black shadow. At the same time, attendees standing at the side of the road started to scream. Imagining what would happen next would have some people avert their eyes, whereas some gaze heatedly at the sudden commotion.

“Wha?!” Everyone present was struck dumbfounded. The black shadow skillfully stepped from left to right, lightly evading the rush of light bullets. Then, once he was several meters away from the wall of soldiers, he leapt high into the air and easily crossed over the top of their heads.

“H-He jumped?!”

The improvised line of defense broke into chaos, greatly reducing the number

of soldiers obstructing the black shadow from the carriage Celia was on. The black shadow landed on the ground in a squat to kill the force of impact and came to a stop ten or so meters before the carriage where Celia and Charles were, adjusting his stance. His isolated figure was clearly one of a human, but a black overcoat covered his whole body and the hood was carefully covering his whole face.

“W-What physical ability...” The soldiers in the area swallowed their breaths in fearful awe.

The depths of the black shadow’s hood stared straight at Celia. Celia’s gaze was also drawn into the depths of the hood, and she widened her eyes in shock.

The black shadow immediately adjusted his hood to secure it and started running.

The squad leader protecting the carriage snapped back to his senses first and gave orders to the other knights. “Protect the two of them! Get down from your horses! *Augendae Corporis!*”

“*Augendae Corporis!*” The other knights also returned to their senses and chanted the spell, jumping from their horses.

“You, slow him down!” the squad leader ordered the few remaining foot soldiers standing in the way in a harsh tone. He must have realized they were no match for the figure, as his orders were a roundabout way of asking them to buy time instead.

The nearby soldiers attacked the black shadow in a fluster, but sure enough, they were nothing more than an annoying obstacle to him. The soldiers had bought enough time for the knights to get into battle positions.

“Draw your swords! Surround him and capture him! I don’t mind if you take off an arm or two while you’re at it. We’ll teach this ruffian who thinks he can intrude on this glorious ceremony a thing or two about this kingdom’s prestige! Let’s go!” the knight leader declared loudly as he pointed his sword at the black shadow, and the knights began their counterattack with perfect movements.

The leader and another knight hovered in the back to watch out for his leap, while the remaining four knights surrounded the black shadow and attacked

him. Seeing that scene made Celia tremble with fear.

Charles looked at the black shadow with eyes that hid none of his disdain and spoke to Celia with strong confidence. “It’ll be all right, Celia. Like I said before the ceremony, they are the elite of our kingdom’s elite. Both their lineage and abilities have been proven to be true.” It showed how much faith he had in his subordinates.

“There’s no way the likes of a lawless bandit could overpowe... What?!” Charles’ mouth fell open in shock as he witnessed what was unfolding before him. Celia’s eyes also widened in astonishment.



The black figure showed no sign of cowardice as it took on six knights unarmed.

“Don’t underestimate me!” The four knights in front raged at the unarmed black figure, each exerting more strength into the hands that gripped their swords. They judged the space between them and tried to receive him from the front and sides.

“Wha... Gah?!” Of the two knights in the front, the one on the left was suddenly attacked without warning. The knight felt the gold armor protecting him bend before he was easily blown away, flying several meters. The display of speed and abruptness of the surprise attack left the three remaining knights in the circle formation frozen for a moment.

The black figure did not let that moment of weakness escape him. He stopped the sword the knight to the left tried to swing with his bare hands, then dispersed that kinetic energy as he twisted the blade sharply. When the knight unthinkingly let go of his sword, he immediately stepped forward and kned him in the stomach.

“Guh?!” In no time at all, the second knight was blown back and sent flying through the air. Immediately after, the black figure turned and ran toward the two remaining figures.

“I-I’ll back you up!” The two knights who had been standing to the rear as backup hurried to join the front guard in a panic, but the black figure had

already reached the two knights in the front.

The intruder carelessly closed the gap between them, but the two knights in the front guard no longer hesitated to swing their swords.

“Guh...” The black figure saw through the trajectory of the two knights’ slashing attacks and leaped boldly to avoid them, closing in on one of the knights and landing a kick to knock his opponent out in one blow.

“Gah...” In response, the remaining knight swung his sword vertically downward in an attempt to counterattack, but the black figure veered to the right to evade the sword and released an interrupting thrust with his fist. The knight was blown away, rendered incapable of combat like the other front guard knights.

Now, the only remaining knights were the two who had been standing by as backup. Seeing how the four front guard knights were wiped out before they could join them, the knights slowed down dramatically.

The black figure adjusted his hood more securely and broke into a run. He was headed for the carriage behind the two knights — where Celia was.

“Here he comes!” The knight squad captain, who had been in the rear guard, braced himself to block the black figure’s way.

“Haaah!” the other rear knight yelled as he started running. He passed the knight squad captain and went straight for the black figure.

“Fool, stop!” The knight captain yelled at his charging subordinate in a fluster. But it was too late.

The black figure jumped toward the charging knight and turned in the air to evade the knight’s attack, before tangling his legs around the opponent’s neck.

“Wha?!” The knight with his neck twined immediately lost his balance from the force and weight of the black figure. The black figure used the momentum of his jump to steal control of the knight’s posture and whip him around, throwing the knight’s body at the knight captain in front of him.

“Kuh?!” The knight captain leaped to the side in a panic, evading the body that came flying. However, the black figure used that time to land on the

ground and adjust his posture, immediately closing in on the knight captain and launching an elbow strike on him. The knight captain was blown away; he rolled on the ground, groaning.

Only a few moments had passed since he had come in contact with the knight guards, but there was no one left standing in the way between the black figure and the carriage Celia was riding on.

The black figure did not pass up on the opportunity to run toward the carriage once more. He leaped high in front of the carriage and landed gracefully right before Celia and Charles. “Y-You— Gah, hah?!” Charles went to punch the black figure, but he was easily thrown against the carriage floor. This left Celia and the black figure as the only ones standing on the carriage.

“Ah, umm... Huh?” Celia cowered where she stood, when the black figure took a knife out of his pocket. Then, he pinned her arms behind her back and held the knife to her neck.

“What?!” Those that witnessed the sight all gasped in terror. Celia was also unaware of what was going on, making her curl into herself even further.

“Y-You! Release Celia! What— Gah!!” When Charles noticed that Celia had been taken hostage, he yelled in shock. However, the black figure kept Celia held close as he stepped on Charles’ back, and with the impact of hitting his chest when he was thrown, Charles started coughing halfway.

“Celia, dear! Hey, someone save my daughter!” Celia’s father, Roland Claire, jumped up from his position in the family seating area near the stairs leading to the altar and yelled, expression paling.





“Tch, that fool, bringing shame to the family...” Duke Arbor came over too, twisting his face in annoyance at the disgraceful sight of his son.

“W-Wait, please! It’s too dangerous. Don’t provoke the bandit!” The soldiers hurried to halt Count Clare and Duke Arbor in their steps.

“Argh, release me! Didn’t you tell me your security measures were perfect?!” Roland wailed, breathing roughly. In the meantime, the black figure confirmed the situation around them through his hood.

*Professor Celia — it’s me, Rio. I apologize for the fuss, but I wanted to take the chance to talk to you while our surroundings are doused in confusion. If you could remain silent for a moment, I would greatly appreciate it,* he spoke to Celia through telepathic spirit arts.

“?!” Celia gasped and stiffened in the face. However, she seemed to have built some resistance to the shock of telepathy through her encounter with Aishia earlier, as she seemed to accept the situation without much of a reaction. She waited for Rio’s words with a worried look.

*First of all, I am communicating to your mind through a method called telepathy. This cannot be used without direct contact with the other, so please remain restrained like this for a while. It’ll act as a control to our surroundings too. If you think your thoughts strongly and clearly, they’ll reach me too, so if you have any questions...* Rio began to explain to Celia while being wary of their surroundings.

*So it really was your doing, wasn’t it?! What is the meaning of this?!* Celia questioned Rio without a moment’s hesitation. But before Rio could respond, Charles grew tired at their feet and started to make a fuss.

“Y-You! How long do you intend on using me as a footrest?! Who sent you? What do you want?!”

Rio sighed quietly. “Silence. I have a vendetta against you. I’m considering my options right now, and I don’t mind simply crushing your spine like this, honestly,” he said, putting more force into the foot on Charles.

*W-Wait, Rio?!*

*Don't worry — I won't kill anyone. It's an act to make a distraction, because he's a bit nosy.*

Y-Yeah... Celia nodded timidly at Rio's explanation.

"Ngh..." Charles must have sensed how the weight on his back was threatening his life and immediately fell silent.

Meanwhile, the surroundings were in extreme chaos, with people trying to evacuate the attendees while also trying to surrounding the horse carriage. However, they appeared to fear for the safety of Celia and Charles who had been taken hostage, as they didn't try any bold actions.

Rio decided to take that time to continue his explanation. *There's no time, so let me say this quickly: I want to hear what your true feelings are one more time, before you get married. That is why I have come*, he said flatly.

*Wh-What do you mean, "that is why"? What are you thinking, doing something like this?! You'll be captured, you know!!* Celia yelled in her head in a panic.

*I said I wanted to hear what your true feelings are, Professor.* Even so, Rio showed no sign of impatience as he spoke in a firm tone.

*T-That's... I told you, I...* Pressured by Rio's determination, Celia's face fell with chagrin.

*You can't fool me. I came here knowing roughly the whole story behind this political marriage. About how the Count Claire house was placed under a certain suspicion, which the Duke Arbor house half threatened. I understand why you were put in this situation, Professor.*

*Huh?! W-Where did you hear that?!* Celia gasped, her expression changing.

*I crossed a dangerous bridge... But none of that matters right now.* Rio dismissed her question curtly.

*I-It should matter...* There were many things she wanted to ask about in that short exchange just now, but Rio's forceful attitude rendered Celia speechless.

*...Won't you tell me, please? Assuming there was no need for you to sacrifice yourself, would you still want to marry this man, Professor? That's all I wanted*

to ask, Rio asked smoothly as he looked down at Charles below him, almost as though he could see right through Celia's heart.

*What will you do... after I answer?* Celia asked in a weak and timid way.

*If you so desire, I will bring this wedding to a halt. Just like how you readily accepted this political marriage, I readily accepted my choice to do that before coming here,* Rio said with determination.

*...You're being too overbearing.*

*I am fully aware of how overbearing and forceful I'm being. I've already overstepped that line by interfering with your wedding in the first place, Professor.*

*If you understand that much, why... Why are you doing such a thing?* Celia asked timidly.

*Because I couldn't accept it. You're important to me, Professor — if I hadn't come today, at this moment, I would have regretted it for the rest of my life. I don't want to lose the people who are most important to me without doing anything about it... I've already lost important things to me and regretted it quite a bit. Once something is lost, you can never get it back, but... there's still time before you lose it.* Rio's declaration was almost gallantly self-centered.

*...!* For some reason, Celia felt a certain weight to it; Rio's words deeply resonated in her chest. *I am unable to just sit back and watch as your dignity is trampled on for the rest of your life, Professor. Will you eventually become happy in this marriage? If you can tell me that you will, I will quietly leave this place. I'll never appear before you again,* Rio said simply.

If Celia had the resolution and confidence to assert that she would be happy, then Rio was just as ready and determined to back away. But if she faltered... Well, that was a different story. It was an overbearing and forceful approach, but Rio would have it his way.

*That's...!* Celia was clearly faltering.

*You're hesitating, Professor. That's what it looks like to me,* Rio declared bluntly.

*B-But it may just be that my thinking process is wrong. I may cause so much trouble for other people if I prioritized my own feelings... Is that really the right thing to do?!* Celia said, desperately appealing for her own indecision. In a way, she was confessing her true thoughts about how she didn't want this marriage to happen in a somewhat roundabout way.

Rio showed the faintest hint of a smile and shook his head. *...I do not know. However, if this marriage really was the right thing to do, then you wouldn't be making that face, Professor.*

*Um...* Celia's heart was struck deeply by his words, as her face distorted on the verge of tears.

*Professor, please tell me. I will grant your wish; even if it's a forceful way of doing it, I have acquired enough power to see it through. So, please... don't give up,* Rio said reassuringly.

*What's... with that...* Even Celia couldn't help but laugh bitterly, as though she was astounded by his words. *If I said I didn't want to get married, what would you do?* she asked weakly.

*...I'd kidnap you and run away from here. I don't know if the Count Claire house's position will rise because of it, but at the very least, it won't cause them to be pursued for responsibility. With the bride being kidnapped before the general public, the cancellation of the wedding would be inevitable. There would be no logical way to put that blame on the Count Claire family. If anything, the responsibility would fall on the shoulders of the security, which would result in Duke Arbor's family receiving the brunt of the criticism,* Rio explained.

*You've already made this much of a mess of the situation... It seems you really do have the confidence to be able to pull something like that off,* Celia said, biting on her lower lip. She didn't feel any doubt toward Rio's statement about kidnapping her, but her expression showed faint hesitation. She must have felt guilt at the idea of abandoning her responsibilities to her family and the noble society after all.

Rio seemed to see through those worries of hers. *Don't you think you've already fulfilled the bare minimum of your original goal of marrying Charles, Professor? Of course, you'll be isolating yourself from your family and the noble*

*society if you leave this kingdom, but I will assist you as much as possible to reinstate your noble status and reunite you with your family, if you so wish*, he said. Even if Celia were to be kidnapped here, a certain level of social connection had already been formed between the two families, and though it wasn't impossible, it would definitely be difficult for the Arbor family to abandon the Claire family at this point.

*Ahaha... to run away from here and then try to restore everything the way it was... isn't that a little too hopeful? Or rather, too convenient for me, I wonder...* Celia laughed weakly without any confidence.

*No. If it's you, Professor, it's definitely possible. You'll be able to put everything back where it should be*, Rio stated in a certain tone. It was dazzlingly straightforward, expressing his trust and clear expectations toward Celia.

Celia was so happy she could cry; it was as though her gloomy heart had cleared up in an instant. She certainly felt like anything could be done in this very moment.

*...That's all I had to say. It was a long-winded conversation, but in the end, your life is your own, Professor. Even if I choose to speak up against it, I won't force you to do anything. So, please — you make the final decision. Although... those aren't words I should be saying with a knife pointed at you.* Rio smiled faintly.

*Hey, Rio.* Celia said, her heart having already decided.

*Yes?* Rio replied, awaiting her answer.

*Take me away from here. All the way outside of the capital.*

With that, the caged bird was set free. Those words were, unmistakably, Celia's true feelings.

*Leave it to me.* Rio nodded with determination, happiness flowing from the depths of his heart.

## Chapter 6: Against The Beltrum Royal Army

“I’ve decided,” Rio suddenly murmured to Charles below him.

“Huh?! D-Don’t tell me you plan on killing me?!” Charles’ body shook as he wailed in a high-pitched voice.

“No, you disgrace. I’m going to abduct this girl — she’s your bride to be, no?” Rio said, clearly provoking Charles, who turned bright red.

“Y-You! You think you can run away unscathed in this situation?!” he yelled in a rage. The carriage was already surrounded by the great army of the Kingdom of Beltrum; their numbers were easily in the hundreds. Once the reinforcements arrived, those numbers would multiply.

“Try and catch me, then. If you can, anyway,” Rio sneered, putting away his knife and lifting Celia, bridal style.

“Gah! Wait, huh...? Ah, u-umm... Sir Charles?!” Celia called in confusion, flushing scarlet when she was lifted.

“C-Celia?! Shit, you bastard!” Still being trampled on, Charles began to struggle in frustration.

“Celia?!” Celia’s father, Roland, yelled. He was being held back by soldiers, unable to bear the sight.

*I-I’m sorry, Father. I will definitely come see you again...* Celia’s face’s fell with sadness, but she mustered the best smile she could toward Roland.

“...What... Celia?!” All the strength drained from Roland, leaving him standing in a daze.

*Here we go!* Rio called out to Celia through telepathy, jumping down from the carriage.

“D-Don’t let him get away!” Charles yelled in a panic, scrambling to his feet. However, Rio had already landed on the ground with Celia and was running toward the soldiers with their lances braced.

“Don’t move!”

“What are you all standing around for?! Move!”

The commanding knight and Charles both yelled in tandem. While the soldiers were confused at the contradicting orders, most of them reacted to Charles’ order and moved in on Rio with their lances ready. However, Rio steadily accelerated toward the soldiers that had fallen out of step without an ounce of fear in his steps.

“?!” Afraid, the soldiers with their lances at the ready eased up on their approaching speed toward Rio. They suddenly pointed the tips of the spears toward the ground.

“N-No! He’s going to jump over the crowd of people! Brace your lances!” The commanding knight yelled, but it was too late. Rio had built up enough of a pace to leap before he stepped within range of the soldiers’ lances. He easily soared over their encirclement.

“...W-What are you doing?! Are you all incompetent?! Get him already!” Half-dumbfounded, Charles yelled at the circle of soldiers in a panic.

“*Photon Projectilis!*” The sorcerers who had been on standby in a corner of the circle started chanting their spells and fired their photon bullets at Rio above them. However, the bullets did not make contact.

“Fools, don’t shoot! What if you hit Celia?! Chase them! Capture them! Use griffins to chase them from the skies! Mobilize the Aerial Knights!” Charles raised hell as he sent out order after order.

Rio who had easily leaped two meters, landed gracefully outside the circle of soldiers. It was a jump distance easily two times as large as a knight that had enhanced his physical abilities with magic, leaving the soldiers in the circle stunned. Rio took that chance to start running again.

Caught off guard, the soldiers simply watched Rio’s retreating back. However, the Aerial Knights, who rode their griffins, responded immediately and began their pursuit.

“Listen up! The Aerial Knights have already begun their pursuit. The entire army will now be mobilized to immediately encircle the capital. The



transmission soldiers will first set up long-distance communication through magic artifacts and promptly spread the following information: the wanted is carrying a girl dressed in a wedding dress with a high chance he's in possession of an ancient magic artifact with ability-enhancing sorcery. A regular soldier stands no chance against him. Only knights that can enhance their physical ability should attempt combat!" the commanding knight yelled loudly to the confused troops, making the flustered soldiers return to their senses with a gasp.

"Y-Yes sir, right away!" The transmission soldiers also began to move in a flurry.

"Those present should continue to guard this area. For now, Vanessa, you will be left in charge. Coordinate with the squad leaders and position them well," the commanding knight said to Vanessa Emerle, the female knight beside him.

"Understood, brother!" Vanessa saluted him with a quick action.

Charles came over from the carriage and flared up at the knight in charge, Alfred Emerle. "Y-You! Alfred! What are you doing conveniently trying to give orders after you allowed the infiltrator to escape?!"

Alfred sighed quietly. "The one conveniently giving orders is you, no? Earlier, when I was sending orders to the soldiers under my command, did you not send your own orders and disrupt everything?" he objected.

"I-I don't recall leaving you in charge of the security on scene in the first place!"

"Indeed, I believe that was you and your unconscious subordinate's responsibility. With both of you unable to make the order, in terms of position, I judged myself most fit to take command."

"Guh..." Charles must have realized he was at fault, as he fell speechless with a hateful expression.

Alfred ignored Charles' blame shifting and moved the conversation on quickly. "Well, whatever. More importantly, did you gain any clues on the bandit's motives? What is his goal?"

"...He said he had a vendetta against me," Charles answered with a click of his

tongue.

Alfred sighed quietly. “I see. Well, that leaves quite the number of suspects, then.”

“S-Silence! You should be pursuing the culprit, too! Go and seize him!” Charles yelled.

“That’s what I intend on doing. The prestige of this kingdom has been tainted as much, after all. Vanessa will be left in charge of this area, but I assume you will be able to take control of the overall situation from here, right?”

“Of course!”

“Then I’m leaving it to you. I’ll be going now.” With that, Alfred kicked off the ground and broke into a run. He hadn’t chanted a spell, but his speed was far above an average knight with enhanced physical abilities.

“Go already! Shit, shit, shit!” Charles shouted, stamping his feet on the ground without watching Alfred’s back. Because of this, he failed to notice the hero, Rui Shigekura, running behind Alfred secretly.

Meanwhile, in a corner of the garden among the gathering of attendees, the Proxia Empire ambassador Reiss watched the chaos on the temple grounds pleasantly.

*While things have taken quite an interesting turn, this is quite vexing indeed. As an ambassador under their protection, it would not look good if I snuck away here. An assailant bold enough to attempt such a thing, and the spirit who never revealed itself... How interesting...* Reiss sighed, lamenting the fact he could do nothing but watch in silence.

His interest was strongly piqued by the duo who had never revealed their identities — Rio and Aishia.



Meanwhile, Rio was running over the rooftops in the noble district, heading toward the western side of the capital. As most of the nobility were attending Celia’s wedding, the only people remaining in the district were the servants in charge of watching the houses. The security knights and soldiers patrolling the

ground would spot him at times, but were unable to catch up to him. Only the Aerial Knights riding on the griffins could keep Rio within their sights, and continued to give chase.

*H-Hey, wait, Rio! This is so fast! Aren't you going too fast?!* Celia's head was spinning.

*Yes. Just make sure you hold on tight. The griffin squad in the air is a bit of a problem, so I'm going to increase my speed a little more,* Rio said, increasing the strength with which he was holding onto Celia.

*A-All right!* Celia replied hesitantly.

His body was more muscular and sturdy than she had expected, revealing the growth that had happened in the time since they'd been separated.

*You've grown into a wonderful young man, Rio,* Celia couldn't help but think out of happiness.

*Thank you very much,* Rio replied shyly.

*...Eh, ah, did you hear that just now?!* Startled, Celia blushed crimson red. She hadn't expected her sudden thought to be conveyed, so she wondered if she had thought something rather embarrassing.

*Ahaha, it's because we've been in continuous contact for so long, it seems like our sensitivity to each other has temporarily strengthened. So even if you don't think a thought clearly, it still gets conveyed.*

*Geez! Ah, hey... I wasn't thinking anything else that was weird, was I?!* Celia started to make excuses for herself in a flurry.

*...No, there was nothing strange.*

*Hey, what was that pause just now?*

*Haha, it didn't mean anything.* Rio laughed in amusement.

*Geez!* Celia pouted her lips in embarrassment.

*Have you gotten used to this speed a little?* Rio asked out of concern for Celia.

*Yeah, I'm fine. I've gotten used to it, so feel free to speed up all you want.* Celia sensed that her earlier fluster had caused him to take more care and

consideration around her, making her smile happily.

*Then, don't mind if I do.* Rio raised his running speed by another level.

*Just how fast can you run?* Celia asked timidly.

*If I really wanted to, I could go faster, but that would require a flat path. This speed is perfect for running across obstacle-ridden rooftops.*

*I see. I wonder what kind of sorcery it is...*

*That explanation can come later. Even if we run at this rate, it'll take some time for us to lose them, so we're going to descend to the alleyways for now. There, I'll pass the baton and meet up with you later.*

*P-Pass the baton? Meet up later...?* Rio's sudden explanation left Celia tilting her head dubiously.

*That's the plan. There's a place I prepared in advance with my accomplice... She's actually the girl who spoke to you first, Profes... Oh, there it is.* Rio suddenly jumped down from the rooftops. Celia curled up in preparation for the landing, but Rio used his wind spirit arts to land softly in the alleyway.

They were in an area for the upper middle class that served nobility, located relatively close to the castle walls that enclosed the noble district. The alleyway had been confirmed to be a dead end in advance, and with the closely packed buildings around it, it was difficult to spot from the skies.

"Aishia." Rio hid in the shadow of the buildings and called out the name of his partner, who had remained in spirit form this entire time. The particles of light gathered to form the figure of a beautiful girl. At the sight of Aishia suddenly appearing, Celia's eyes widened in shock.

"Wha?!"

"Aishia, take Professor Celia and get out of the capital, as planned. I'll buy us some time."

"Got it." Aishia nodded once, taking Celia from Rio's arms.

"E-Eh? Wait, what is the meaning of this?!" Celia protested from how she was being carried bridal style in Aishia's arms.

“It’s exactly as I said. I’m going to become a decoy to buy us some time, so that you can escape the capital with Aishia. I’ll definitely meet up with you later, so don’t worry. As for an explanation about Aishia... Ask her yourself as you’re on the move. She’s trustworthy.”

“Eh, w-wait! It’s dangerous! You might be strong, but your opponent is an entire army...?!” Celia yelled in a panic to stop him.

“It’s fine. There’s plenty of ways it can be done in an urban area. Look after Celia for me, Aishia. I’d rather we concealed ourselves as much as possible, so if you fly in the air, make sure no one sees you,” Rio said lightly, before turning on his heel and walking away from the shadows.

“Yup, leave it to me.” Aishia nodded deeply.

Rio glanced back and gave a short nod. Then, he smiled gently once more to Celia, who was trying to say something, before jumping back onto the roof and running off.



After handing Celia off to Aishia, Rio resumed running across the rooftops like an acrobat. The Aerial Knights patrolling the skies immediately spotted Rio’s figure.

“There he is! There’s no mistaking it!”

“But Lady Celia is nowhere to be seen!”

The captain of the Aerial Knights gazed down at the alleyway Rio came from and analyzed the situation immediately. “Hmph, he must have gotten desperate after being backed into a corner. The alleyway he came out of was a dead end... Tell the ground units to search the area, including the interior of the residences. Signal flare!”

Then, around half of the number of patrolling griffins circled back and released a powerful blast of light magic from the air.

*“Signum Ignis!”*

Rio gazed at the griffins in the sky above and focused himself with a deep breath. *...They called for reinforcements, huh? I’m not surprised. All that’s left is*

*for me to distract my pursuers in a noisy way...*

*“Photon Projectilis!”* The knights in the air all fired magic toward Rio on the rooftop in one go; a barrage of countless light bullets rained down on Rio. However, Rio moved about on nimble feet to evade the attack.

“I-I can’t hit him!”

“Damn it, how stubborn is he?!” The knights frowned with impatience.

“Keep your wits about you. He probably has an ancient magic artifact with a powerful ability enhancer. We simply have to nail him down to one spot. In that time, ground reinforcements should arrive. Continue attacking,” the captain in charge of commanding the squad instructed calmly.

*“Photon Projectilis!”*

Obedying their commander, the knights began to fire light bullets at Rio once more. Rio did exactly what his opponents wanted by lazily evading the attacks until the ground reinforcements could come running. About a minute later, the reinforcement knights — ten of them — arrived. The buildings were packed together tightly, but the roads were wide and allowed for a large view, helping the reinforcement knights immediately identify the alleyway Celia had been hidden in.

“There it is. Let’s go!” The knight who seemed to be the leader of the squad headed straight for the alleyway.

*I won’t let you!* Rio sensed the movements of the reinforcement squad and jumped down from the roof, blocking the way into the alley.

“Wha?!” The knights were taken aback Rio’s sudden appearance. Rio did not allow that moment of weakness to escape him, charging at the knights before they could draw their swords. Caught off guard, the leader took a palm thrust to the stomach before the rest of the tightly crowded knights came under a one-sided attack. Thus, six knights were rendered out of commission in an instant.

However, the next group of reinforcements could be seen approaching in the distance. *I guess there really are a lot of them.* Rio took out two daggers from his overcoat and stepped back for now. More photon bullets started raining down from the skies above.

“...Whoa.” Rio moved around in a zigzag pattern, evading the shower of bullets as he retreated to the alleyway, but the four ground knights took that chance to launch a counterattack on him.

In response, Rio stepped forward boldly and charged into the knights head-on. He swung the daggers in his hands to deflect the slashing attacks of the knights and twisted his body to land a roundhouse kick to one of them. He then widened their distance once again, using a hit and run tactic.

“Kuh! Don’t give him time to rest! Our reinforcements will be here soon! Tire him out as much as possible!” one of the remaining knights yelled, exchanging looks with the other two knights and splitting up to attack Rio from three sides at once.

“Yes, sir!”

It was a tactic that placed their willpower on the line. However, even Rio was standing there resolved to fulfill his role as the decoy. He had no intention of backing down. Swinging his daggers, he skillfully deflected the onslaught of attacks coming from the knights.

Unwavering before his disadvantage in numbers, Rio knocked his opponents out cold with his blows — first one person, then two, then three; every time they crossed weapons. However, the next knight squad arrived with no time for him to rest.

*It might be a little tough... to get out of this one without causing casualties.* Rio’s expression was grim. He hadn’t wanted to cause any casualties in this fight because of Celia, but it was difficult to hold back and fight against such an overwhelming number. If reinforcements continued to flow in like this, he may need to resort to using his spirit arts specialized for group combat.

*But I’ve already made my declaration. I don’t want to do anything that’ll leave a foul taste in my mouth at the slightest.*

Rio didn’t give up. He was the one who told Celia not to give up, after all. He had already decided to push his ideals through to the end, even if they were too perfect to be realistic.

“?!” Rio felt an unpleasant stinging presence from before him and suddenly

stepped to the side. Immediately after he did, a flash; a light strike that would have knocked him out if it had made contact flew by, striking the ground behind Rio and cracking it.

*That's...* Far in the distance was a towering steeple, and on top of it, Rio could see a boy with a bow held at the ready.

That boy was Rui Shigekura — the hero that the Kingdom of Beltrum had summoned.

Rui seemed surprised that his sudden shot hadn't made contact, as he was standing there with his eyes widened in a slight daze.

*It'll be a pain if he continues to fire this way from that distance,* Rio thought calmly. For a moment, he considered revealing his hand and firing a sniping shot back with spirit arts, but there was no need for him to resort to that.

“That’s enough. I will now proceed to apprehend you.” A single knight stood before Rio’s way. The knights immediately knew who the knight was, as a light sparkled in their eyes.

“S-Sir Alfred!” they called out.

*...Alfred? That's the name of the King's Sword. He does seem strong indeed.* Rio could immediately see that Alfred wasn't your average fighter. In fact, whether he intended it or not, he had begun to release an awe-inspiring aura toward Rio.

“The number of casualties would only increase. All of you — step back and ask the Aerial Knights above to give the hero my gratitude for his cooperation,” Alfred said to the knights. He looked at the knights collapsed on the ground, before glancing up at the steeple in the distance where Rui Shigekura stood. Rui gave a strained but refreshed smile, shrugging his shoulders.

“Yes, sir. Understood!” The knights behind him nodded promptly, creating distance from Alfred.

“Hmph...” Alfred closed in on Rio in an instant. Then, drawing his sword in one smooth movement, he started with a lightning-fast attack.

A sharp metallic clash echoed; Rio had stopped Alfred’s sword with his dual



daggers. The instantaneous offense and defense left the spectating knights gulping.

However, Rio and Alfred's battle had only just begun.

The two first drew back their own specialized weapons, then the next moment swung them again, exchanging blows of offense and defense too fast for the eyes to follow.



Alfred's weapon had weight, reach, and more power behind each blow, but Rio challenged him with his sheer number of attacks. Rio swung his daggers to beat Alfred's blows to the punch, continuing to evade the sharp and heavy slashes. Every time the blades clashed, fireworks sparked and scattered.

Then, after they had exchanged blows for a while, the two parties paused.

*...He's strong. His sword hand is good, and he has no trouble keeping up with my movements that are enhanced by spirit arts. Is there a powerful body enhancement sorcery imbued in that sword?* Rio observed Alfred, analyzing his combat abilities. Alfred also observed Rio without letting his guard down, his expression looking somewhat dubious.

Immediately after, the two of them jumped at each other once more. The battle had resumed. From outside Rio's space, Alfred launched a vertical strike which Rio stopped by raising his daggers upward. The two powers struggled for several creaking moments when Rio pushed out his daggers and thrust Alfred away. Alfred suddenly backstepped away to retreat. Rio used the opportunity to step forward firmly and corner Alfred. Then, swinging the dagger like a dance, he ran freely around Alfred, attacking incessantly.

Alfred only barely managed to block the endless numbers of blows approaching him with his single sword. The knights in the area gulped as they watched over the fierce fight before them. The battle between the two had already reached inhuman levels of strength, leaving no room for third party interference.

"S-Sir Alfred is being pushed back..." The sword flashes of the two parties were already impossible for the human eye to perceive, but the knights beside them could tell that the exchange of offense and defense was beginning to lean in Rio's favor.

The trigger had been Rio cornering Alfred. When they both put each other within reach, it was obvious that Rio using the flexible and multi-hitting weapon had the advantage.

If Alfred tried to swing widely, the moment Rio evaded him, a fatal opening would inevitably reveal itself. Since Rio had been attacking him persistently for a while now, Alfred was unable to swing his sword at will and was being pressed

to handle Rio's attacks.

That being said, Alfred showed no panic in his eyes, using his long years of battle experience to move his body optimally, calmly waiting for the chance to counterattack.

Then, at one point, Alfred went for the match. While blocking Rio's swinging daggers, he first leaped backward to widen the distance from Rio. There, Rio stepped forward, immediately trying to close the gap between them. "Hah—" Alfred also stepped forward with force, accelerating as he charged toward Rio. The move backwards had been a feint — his true aim was to create an opening in Rio and land a sharp slashing attack there. However, Rio decelerated as though he had foreseen the counter, coming to a stop just outside of Alfred's reach.

"?!"

The next moment, Alfred's sword slashed through thin air, passing just a hair's breadth away from Rio's face. Immediately, Rio countered the counter by closing in on Alfred, swinging both his daggers and slashing from both left and right. Alfred's forward leaning stance created an opening that was by no means small. Rio's slashing attacks tried to catch hold of Alfred's body as though they were being sucked in. Alfred reflexively deflected the slash coming from his front left with his sword, then stepped left and slipped away from the slash coming from the right.

However, Rio turned his body, then used that force to strike Alfred with the grip end of his left dagger.

"Kuh..."

Alfred promptly moved his left hand, which was equipped with a gauntlet, and directly stopped Rio's powerful blow. Though he had avoided a fatal wound, he still felt the impact, a pained expression on his face.

Rio tried a followup attack; he pulled back the dagger in his left hand temporarily and rotated his body once more, swinging his left and right daggers at Alfred.

Alfred leaped backward to avoid Rio's attack, but his left hand appeared to be

injured, as he held his sword with only his right hand. Rio closed in from a low angle, when suddenly, Alfred's sword started to emit a bright light.

"Haah!" Alfred slashed the glowing sword vertically downward, slamming it against the ground before him. The moment of impact caused a tremor and a shockwave to spread. At the same time, even though it was only afternoon, the surroundings were basked in a bright light. The knights watching nearby couldn't help but close their eyes. Then, once they had endured the torrent of light and pressing shockwave, they opened their eyes just a bit.

"Wha..." The knights watching the scene were rendered speechless. The stone paving Rio had been running across moments ago had its ground bored deep in a wide area, kicking up a cloud of sand and dust. Before that damaged area stood Alfred, who didn't see Rio in the area.

*...I've been underestimated. Did that assailant have no intention of killing me?* Alfred thought with a bitter expression. He couldn't figure out Rio's intention in pointing the grip end at him when it should have been the blade. However, no matter how much he wondered, his opponent was gone.

*There was no resistance... Did he run away? But it didn't seem like he ran into the alleyway. Where did he go?* Alfred thought to himself.

"Sir Alfred!" A single griffin from the patrolling aerial squad descended. The other ground knights that had been standing by also swarmed over.

"I don't see the bandit in the area. Where is he?!" The knight clearly had the same question as Alfred.

"I don't know. Though if that attack just now was a direct hit, there wouldn't be much left of him..." Alfred shook his head with a dark look.

"I-I see..." The knight nodded and gulped, looking at the deeply upturned ground. As far as they could see from the aftermath of the destruction, there was no way Rio could be alive.

Alfred put his doubts aside for the moment and prioritized the search of the alleyways. "All ground units will immediately conduct a search of the alleyways. Squads who come later should take care of the injured. The Aerial Knights will continue to search the skies. He may still be lurking somewhere. Do not let your

guard down!”

“Yes, sir!” the knights all replied at once, immediately taking action. However, the knights were never able to locate Celia in the alleyways.



Roughly one hour later, in a hillside area off the road that extended east from the royal capital of Beltrant, Aishia and Celia stood waiting. Celia was holding onto the hem of her skirt and watching the sky nervously, sometimes glancing at Aishia as though remembering her presence.

“Hey, Aishia. Will Rio really be all right?” she asked her for the umpteenth time.

“He’ll be fine.” Aishia nodded calmly. “...He’s coming,” she added, suddenly looking up at the sky toward the capital.

“Huh? How do you know...” Celia looked at Aishia’s face in surprise at her statement. Rio then landed on the ground softly, removing his hood and announcing his return as though he had come back from a leisurely walk.

“I’m back.”

“...Huh?” Celia’s eyes widened in shock.

“I’m sorry for worrying you, Professor. Everything is fine now.”

“Y-Yeah.”

“Thank you, Aishia,” Rio said.

“No, I didn’t really do anything.” Aishia shook her head in her usual way.

“Now, shall we get moving? I’d like to get away from the capital as soon as possible.”

“Okay. But where will we go?”

“I’d like to find some clues about the heroes, too, so I think we’ll head toward the Galarc Kingdom in the east? If you don’t mind, that is,” Rio said, looking at Celia.

“...Huh? Ah, nope. The Galarc Kingdom sounds fine.” Celia nodded readily.

Rio noticed Celia's awkward behavior and questioned her curiously.  
"Professor, is something the matter?"

"N-Nothing. It just hasn't quite hit me yet, so I'm wondering if this is really okay..." Celia replied with an expression that showed her heart wasn't quite present.

"...Do you want to return to the capital? We can still make it if we leave right now," he asked hesitantly, observing Celia's face.

"Huh? N-No, no, that's not it! Don't misunderstand! I was just wondering if I was really allowed to be so happy. It just doesn't quite feel real!" Celia denied Rio's misunderstanding with panicked gestures.

"Oh?" Rio tilted his head in question.

"Y-Yes... For a moment there, my future was so dark I thought my life was over. But now you're here and we'll be able to be together for some time... Just the thought is..." Celia said before she realized she was trying to say something extremely embarrassing and gasped, but it was too late to take back her words at that point.

"O-Obviously I'd be happy about this, don't you think?" she continued, averting her eyes.

"...Is that so?" Rio smiled happily with a noncommittal response.

"Y-Yeah. That's why... there might be some things that are on my mind, but there's no way I'll regret anything. If anything, I have to think about what to do from here!" Celia stated with motivation.

"Yeah. Let's talk about things slowly. For the time being, I have no intention of letting you live uncomfortably, so don't worry about that," Rio said respectfully.

"Ahaha, really now? But I want to repay you properly, too, Rio. Well, I only have this dress right now, but... I wonder if it'd be worth something if you sell it?" Celia looked at her silver dress and thought contemplatively.

"No, I'd never ask you to sell that. There's no need for you to worry about money. Just let me look after you for the near future. I am capable of doing that much."

“But... are you sure?” Celia asked hesitantly.

“Of course. Let me look after you, okay?” Rio replied jokingly.

“...Thank you. Then, I’ll accept your offer and rely on you for a while.” Celia grinned, bowing her head.

Rio nodded acceptingly. “Of course.”

“Same here.” Aishia joined in on the conversation, making Celia nod happily.

“Then, let’s get a move on,” Rio urged.

“...Understood. I’m counting on you for a safe flight, Rio.” Celia held onto the fabric of her dress and stood before Rio nervously.

“Yes. Then, if you’d excuse me...” Rio nodded, lifting Celia awkwardly in the bridal style once more.

“Fufu, let’s talk lots while we’re moving to make up for all the time we couldn’t see each other, okay?” Celia asked with a faint blush, but her smile was radiating brightly with happiness.





## Epilogue: The Cerulean Lady

That night, in a room of the guest building inside the Beltrum royal castle premises, the noble daughter of the Galarc Kingdom's great lord Duke Cretia, Liselotte, was eating her dinner alone.

"The business talk that was planned has been placed on hold, so it looks like our return to Amande will be delayed," Liselotte muttered listlessly.

She had been invited to Celia's wedding as a noble and great merchant of the Kingdom of Galarc, but with the ceremony suspended, she had been forced to stay in the guest house until now. Because the Kingdom of Beltrum was in an uproar over Celia's kidnapping, she had been forbidden to step outside under the name of protection.

"We'll be able to leave the guest house in a few days, but with the situation being what it is, please forget your work and allow yourself some time to relax," Aria, the attendant standing next to Liselotte, said.

"You say that, but there isn't really anything to do. The current collapse of the Arbor house is fairly interesting to the Galarc Kingdom... Or rather, something to be thankful for. You think the same, no?" Liselotte said with a giggle.

"It is indeed exhilarating to witness. Although, I *am* concerned for Celia." Even the usually emotionless Aria showed some conflict in her tone.

"...Who do you think the culprit is?" Liselotte suddenly asked.

"Considering the options, I believe it is very likely to be one of the opposing forces to Duke Arbor's faction."

"If that's the case, then I don't think she'll be treated badly, since there's still value in using her... But the number of people who could make such a mess is fairly limited, no? Would you be able to pull something like this off?"

"It may be possible for me if I had a powerful magic sword imbued with physical ability enhancement like an ancient artifact... But honestly, it would be a struggle. There would be a high chance of failure," Aria explained.

“Even someone as skilled as you would hesitate at the risk?”

“If I were to plan an ambush, it should be easy to gain the advantage and reach the carriage. The problem is how to take Celia and run away successfully. It would be one thing if the opponent only had ground units, but when the pursuers can cover the skies, it gets quite troublesome,” Aria said, giving an orderly answer to the question.

“I see.” Liselotte nodded, sighing in thought.

*All of the kingdoms have been acting so shady lately. I don't know if its related to the incident this time, but the Proxia Empire in particular cannot be ignored. It feels like they're planning something big.* While Liselotte wondered such things, Aria stood silently beside her, waiting for her master to speak up.

“Well, like you said... let's enjoy this short break and relax. Tell those who accompanied us here that they should rest once in a while, too. Things will get busy once we get back to Amande,” Liselotte said, giving a small shrug of her shoulders.

“Understood.” Aria nodded respectfully.

*The Galarc Kingdom will have to work harder. The hero that was summoned in the castle, Satsuki Sumeragi, is going to be announced soon, too,* Liselotte thought as she took another sip of her slightly cooled soup.

## Afterword

Hello, everyone. This is the most indebted Yuri Kitayama. I'd like to thank you all for picking up *Seirei Gensouki: Spirit Chronicles Volume 5: The Silver Bride*.

Like the cover illustration depicts, this volume features the long-awaited full return of Professor Celia since volume 1. It took eleven months from the release of volume 1 to the release of this volume 5, but... personally, the time passed felt both long and short to me. Perhaps it felt much longer to those who were patiently awaiting Professor Celia's return.

However, I was only able to write volume 5 because of the ample space that volumes 2, 3, and 4 opened. The contents of volume 5 greatly differed from the web novel, but how was the sight of Professor Celia in her wedding dress? If you thought it was well worth the wait, then I would truly feel blessed as an author!

By the way, I'm currently in the middle of plotting out volumes 6 and 7. The contents of those will be vastly different to the web novel, too. Or rather, it may be best if you considered the light novel and web novel to be independent and separate stories developing in parallel worlds. For now, it seems like there's an announcement for volume 6 at the end of the book, so make sure you check that out!

Ah, that's right — thankfully, a character introduction will be added from volume 5 onward. Unfortunately, there are many characters that appear in this story, so I had it created laboriously and extravagantly. Hopefully it will be of use in triggering your memories.

One more thing: I have an important announcement.

I mentioned this in the author profile on the cover sleeve, but the manga version of *Seirei Gensouki: Spirit Chronicles* has been decided! The wonderful character designs by Riv will now take life in a manga world. Just imagining it makes my chest burn hot.

I expect there'll be many new readers coming from the manga in the future, but I consider that to be all thanks to the readers who have supported *Seirei Gensouki: Spirit Chronicles* until now, as well as all the related parties that participated in the editing and marketing departments. I'd like to use this space to offer my sincere gratitude to you all. Thank you very much!

Just between you and me, I admire both Riv, who is in charge of the illustrations, and tenkla, who will be taking on the manga, so much. I am most obliged to them.

Furthermore, I appreciate all the love I have received from the readers as the number of volumes increases. My editors, and all other involved parties working where I can't see have really been so reliable. I truly feel so blessed. I would have never been able to stand here of my own power alone. I'm still a newbie, and I'll be working my hardest not to drag anyone else down, but I would greatly appreciate it if you continued to support me. Thank you very much.

Now, as for details regarding the manga version, I believe there will be various announcements made on HJ Bunko's official website and blog (it's possible that by the time this volume is released, some information will have been announced already), so please do check those out if you have the time.

Also, I occasionally tweet announcements and things on my Twitter account to my followers, so feel free to check there, too.

Finally, I still have some space left, so allow me to take this chance to tell a story from a party held by HJ Bunko the other day. I got the reaction of "Eh, you're Kitayama?!" from the people I met, but what kind of image do you all have of me? (laughs) I felt kind of bad for being your regular old average Joe. (laughs) Well, then — I hope we can meet again in volume 6. Please continue to give your support to *Seirei Gensouki: Spirit Chronicles*!

— 2016, end of July, Yuri Kitayama

# Bonus Short Stories

## At the End of a Long Road

In a world somewhere far away from Earth...

Rio once had his happiness snatched away from him unfairly, leaving him as an orphan in the slums. In his life without salvation, in a world without mercy, there was nothing but despair for him. There was no hope.

Despite this, he struggled through every day, no matter how unsightly it was.

After all... even if he had no hope, he still had a wish.

One distorted wish that he wanted to see through no matter what.

That single wish was why Rio wanted to live. Why he scavenged for leftovers. Why he begged on the streets. Why he endured all the violence from the strong.

Perhaps then, it was some twist of fate that Rio regained his memories as Amakawa Haruto, a former university student from Japan, and started attending the Royal Academy of Beltrum, a place of learning for royalty and nobility.

Rio gained an enormous power in acquiring knowledge and education. He was discriminated against, but it was a much better lifestyle than his days as an orphan.

However, there was no salvation in this world — even when he had turned twelve, he thought this way. Even now, he continued to hold his distorted wish within his heart.

And yet, despite that...

“Rio, Rio.”

Rustle, rustle.

Rio opened his eyes a crack, raising his head. Apparently, he had fallen asleep in the self-study area of the library.

“...Professor.”

There was a girl there, smiling gently. Her name was Celia Claire. She was five years older than Rio, the daughter of a count, and a genius sorcerer-lecturer who left her name in the history of the Royal Academy of Beltrum.

“Fufu, were you asleep?” she asked with a soft laugh.

“Yes, so it seems,” Rio nodded shyly.

“Then how about we have a cup of tea in my laboratory? It’ll wake you up.”

“...I’d like that.”

At Celia’s invitation, the corner of Rio’s mouth twitched upwards.

Rio, who had lost everything in the past, found happiness in moments like this.

In the middle of an unfair, irrational, long, and painful road, Rio found himself thinking that maybe there *was* salvation in this world after all.

## **Pet Pet**

Several days had passed since Miharuru, Aki, and Masato began living in the spirit folk village.

Rio and the others were seated on the sofa in the living room each doing their own thing. For example, starting with Miharuru, the Earth group were earnestly playing a game connecting words in the Strahl common tongue to help memorize them. Aishia was leaning on Rio’s right side and sleeping soundly.

“Onii-chan, Onii-chan.”

Latifa, who had been studying by herself, suddenly paused in her studies to snuggle up to Rio on her left.

“Hm? What’s wrong, Latifa?” Rio replied gently, moved his gaze from the book he was reading to Latifa.

“Will you pet my head?” Latifa had a carefree smile on as she sought Rio’s affection. She would sometimes act playful with Rio like this; since it was normal behavior from her, Rio petted her head in a familiar manner.

“Ehe... Ehehe.” Latifa grinned happily, sticking her body close to Rio and rubbing her cheek against him like a needy dog.

Rio smiled and continued to pet Latifa’s head. The others present in the living room glanced over at them repeatedly.

“Latifa, Miharuru and Rio’s other guests are here, too, so be a little more considerate of them.” The silver werewolf Sara cleared her throat quietly and warned Latifa with a scornful look.

“Eeh? But my time with Onii-chan is limited. And Aishia’s also clinging to Onii-chan, too.” Latifa pouted her lips and complained.

“L-Lady Aishia is simply taking an afternoon nap.”

“I’m only taking a break, too. Then I guess I’ll take a nap like this too.”

“Kuh...”

Unable to argue when an upper high ranked humanoid spirit like Aishia was brought up as comparison, Sara found herself at a disadvantaged loss for words.

“Mm...” Aishia stretched cutely and opened her eyes.

“Ah, were you awake, Lady Aishia?” Sara said hesitantly.

Aishia rubbed her eyes sleepily and nodded, before snuggling languidly into Rio. The movement was almost like that of a graceful cat, natural and charming.

“Wah...” The high elf Orphia widened her eyes as her gaze was captivated by the sight of Aishia. The elder dwarf Alma was also staring at her fixedly.

“Me too, me too!” Latifa clung to Rio from the opposite side.

“Ahaha...” Even Rio was unable to move any further, closing the book in his one hand as a troubled look fell over his face.

“Geez...” Sara sighed sulkily, but the look she sent Rio and the others was somewhat envious.

“Onii-chan, pet me!” Latifa begged for Rio to pet her head. Rio complied.



“Ehehe. Ehehehe.” Latifa grinned as happily as ever. Then, Aishia who had been watching Latifa get petted from the other side. “...Haruto, me too,” she said bluntly.

“Eh?” Rio asked in return, taken by surprise.

“Pet me?” Aishia asked, looking up at Rio’s face from point blank range. Her clear eyes were very beautiful and held a power that was hard to say no to. Aishia would often cling to him out of the blue, but she had never requested for her head to be petted before. She may have been influenced by Latifa.

“...Umm, like this?” Rio hesitantly petted Aishia’s head.

“Yup, good.” Aishia’s mouth turned upwards gently. She normally didn’t show any emotions, but in this moment, her expression was very warm.

## **I’m an Elemental Fox, You Know?**

*Ding dong, dong ding.*

At a private elementary school somewhere in the city, the bell rang to signal the end of lessons. The class of 6-1 wrapped up their end of day greetings.

“Stand! Bow! Goodbye!”

“Goodbye!”

Endo Suzune ran out of the classroom, letting her pleated skirt flutter behind her.

“...Hah, hah.”

Panting for breath, she took short and quick steps as she ran towards the school gate. Her goal was the bus stop beside the gate. It was the exact timing just as the bus arrived at the stop —

*Ugh, class ended a little later than usual today! Ah, the bus is here!*

Suzune increased her running speed.

“Hah... hah... I’m getting on!”

She briefly paused to catch her breath and got on board.

*There he is, the Onii-chan!*

Suzune immediately cast her gaze throughout the bus and spotted the person she had been looking for.

His name was Amakawa Haruto, a third year in high school. He was an agreeable young man who had helped Suzune out two years ago, when she was still in 4th grade and had fallen asleep, missing her stop.

Suzune headed towards the back of the bus nervously, sitting down two rows behind Haruto. She wanted nothing more than to sit beside him and chat, but they were unfortunately not that close, only knowing each other's name and faces from that past incident.

Several months after Suzune had been saved by Haruto, another high school girl had started sitting next to him. She was incredibly beautiful.

*She has to be his girlfriend, right? Yeah, she must be his girlfriend.*

Suzune sighed quietly at the intimacy between the two. But she was okay with this for now; she was happy just being able to watch the Onii-chan she so admired.

The short ride together was over in no time at all, and Suzune got off at the stop near her house. Her house was only a few minutes walk from here, but today she was in a sentimental mood and wanted to walk more.

She purposefully took a detour and headed to the large park in the neighborhood. There was a walking path in this park, making it a popular spot for all kinds of people during the day, but —

*Huh? There's no one here?*

Suzune was all the way inside the park when she noticed there was no one else around. Or so she thought, when —

**BOOOM!**

A tremendous noise roared.

“Kyaaaah! W-What was that?! Are they filming a movie?!”

Suzune shook with a flinch and hunched over, glancing around at her

surroundings. But there was no set equipment of the sort, nor any staff members. Then, after a moment, a girl's voice could be heard from the skies above.

"No way, I thought the barrier was put up?!"

"...Huh?" Suzune raised her head timidly. There was a foreign-looking magical girl with silver hair fluttering about her. She looked to be around middle school-aged.

*S-So they really are filming a movie. She's even flying...*

Suzune was completely dumbfounded by how unrealistic the scene before her was.

"Watch out!" the silver-haired girl yelled in a panic.

"Eh?"

*BOOOM!*

The moment Suzune tilted her head, another tremendous roar could be heard. Squeezing her eyes shut on reflex, she opened them to see the silver-haired magical girl, who had collapsed.

"Fweeeeh?! A-Are you okay?!"

*Celia?! She thought she heard a girl's voice.*

"...Celia? T-This person here?" Suzune looked down at the silver-haired magical girl nervously, but she seemed to have lost consciousness.

*Y-You... If you can hear my voice, pick up that staff!*

"M-Me?! T-This?!"

*Yes, quickly! Otherwise you'll die!*

Die?! She didn't want to die. Pushed into a corner, Suzune picked up the staff as ordered.

*W-What is this incredible magic essence?!*

"E-Eeh?!"

A bright light flowed out of the staff, covering Suzune's entire body. It made

her feel like she was floating gently in an anti-gravitational space. Before she knew it, light of the staff had formed an outfit.

“A s-shrine maiden?”

Suzune has transformed into a magical girl wearing a fancy shrine maiden outfit. For some reason, she had fox ears and a tail, too, but she hadn't realized it herself.

The life of Endo Suzune, a regular elementary school student, had definitely changed.

To be... continued...?





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Seirei Gensouki: Spirit Chronicles Volume 5

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