

Yuri Kitayama

Illustrator • Riv

10

Seirei Gensouki: Spirit Chronicles

Forget-Me-Not of Rebirth


Yuri Kitayama

Illustrator • Riv

10

Seirei Gensouki: Spirit Chronicles

Forget-Me-Not of Rebirth



"YOU
MIGHT NOT
REMEMBER
ME, BUT WE
ACTUALLY MET
ONCE WHEN I
WAS IN MIDDLE
SCHOOL,
AMAKAWA-
SENPAI."

Rio extended his
hand to escort
Liselotte. She took
his hand gently and
the two of them left
the dance floor,
all while stealing a
glance at Rio's
side profile.



“Ahaha...” Rio smiled with his eyes closed, not bothering to reply.

Meanwhile, Masato watched that exchange happen from the side. *Hmm. It doesn't seem like the right time for me to interrupt. How nice it must be, Haruto. But I never imagined Aki would have a past like that...* He crossed his arms with a contemplative look and hummed.

“What’s wrong, Masato?” Rio brushed off his embarrassment by speaking to Masato.

“Nothing, I was just thinking that if you and Aki were siblings in your past life, then that kind of makes you my older brother as well, though we’re not related by blood. Aki may have said what she said, but I think of you like a real older brother.” Masato rubbed his nose shyly as he spoke to Rio.

“Oh. Thank you, Masato.” Rio’s eyes widened before he thanked Masato with a gentle smile.

“Hmph! It’s my job to be spoiled by Onii-chan, though. Got it, Masato?” Apparently that had fired up Latifa’s desire to monopolize her brother.

“Ahaha. I know. I’ll just have him look after my sword practice.” Masato shrugged with a laugh.

“Good.” Latifa nodded in satisfaction. “That aside—Onii-chan.” She suddenly looked up at Rio’s face.

“What is it?” Rio tilted his head in response to Latifa, a gentle expression on his features.

“I can smell the scent of women I don’t know on your body.” Rio froze as Latifa’s nose twitched as she sniffed. She was a werefox with sharp senses, after all. Sara the werewolf had also noticed, as she made a face that seemed to say: “Oh, she actually asked.”

“...Oh, that’s because I danced with lots of people at the banquet,” he answered shortly to Latifa, who looked up at him as though to ask who. At the back of Rio’s mind, he recalled how Charlotte had clung to him constantly all night.



Meanwhile, Aki closed the door and entered her room before falling onto the bed. Moments later, the door opened once again as someone entered. The door clicked shut behind them. Because the house was made of stone, it was completely soundproof with the doors closed and no one outside could hear their conversation.

“...What is it, Miharuru?” She knew who it was without turning to look.

“It’s about Haruto. Also, I feel like I have to apologize to you, Aki.”

“...You? What would you have to apologize for?” Aki asked, deciding to touch upon the latter topic first.

“I had no idea how to interact with you after you closed your heart off to Haru-kun, so I always ran away from it. I used the fact that our relationship might break down as an excuse, when in reality, I didn’t have the courage to face it head-on. Even though I’m like your older sister... I’m sorry,” Miharuru said in shame. The more prejudice Aki held towards Haruto, the more strongly Miharuru felt aware of how precious Haruto was to her. However, Miharuru had never been able to confront those feelings with Aki.

She had been worried that confronting Aki would have ruined their relationship. However, if she had confronted her, then she may have been able to shed some positive light on those ill feelings. Instead, her avoidance had resulted in making Aki even more upset now, Miharuru thought.

“That’s not... true. Even after that person disappeared, you were the one always by my side. You didn’t run away at all. You stayed with me. So, don’t apologize. What are you apologizing for? There’s nothing to be sorry about!” Despite being on the verge of tears, Aki mustered a smile and poured her heart out.

“No, I have to apologize. I will no longer run away,” Miharuru said resolutely.

“Huh...? No longer run away?” Aki asked in a tearful voice.

“Yup. I’ve decided I’ll voice my own opinions from now on. Until now, I’ve always yielded to you whenever my opinion utterly clashed with yours. But I’ve realized that doing so wasn’t benefiting you, and most of all, it wasn’t benefiting me, either.”

“Uh...” Aki bit down on her lip so hard she nearly drew blood.

“Do you hate this Haruto, Aki?”

“...The one I hate is Amakawa Haruto.”

“Those are illogical emotions. You know that yourself, don’t you? That Haru-kun was just a child like us at the time. If anything, he tried to return to us when he entered high school,” Miharuru said, expressing the feelings she had kept pent up until now to Aki.

“...” Aki fell silent, her expression bitter.

“But that means you don’t hate Haruto, then...” Miharuru said, sounding slightly relieved.

“...I don’t know,” Aki muttered.

“You don’t know?” Miharuru asked carefully.

“Haruto is our savior, and I’ve respected him until now as a wonderful person, so I can’t hate him. But I hate Amakawa Haruto. That’s why I don’t know what to do... Whether I like him or hate him, I just don’t know. That’s right—it’s illogical! I’m illogical! But I can’t help it! Even the mention of his name pisses me off!” Anger rose in Aki as she spoke, causing her to start yelling.

“Aki...” Miharuru’s face clouded over with sadness.

“I’m sorry. Please leave. I don’t think I can speak calmly even to you right now,” Aki spat out in a prickly tone, as though she was suppressing the simmering rage within her.

“...” Miharuru had said what she needed to say, but she gave pause anyway, wondering if there was something more she could say.

“Get out, please!” Aki yelled, her anger exploding.

“Will you talk to me again after you’ve calmed down?” Miharuru asked softly but firmly.

“Fine!” Aki’s response was near-hysterical. Without saying another word, Miharuru turned on her heel and left the room.

“I want to see you soon, brother...” Aki muttered to herself sorrowfully once

she was alone.



The first thing Miharuru saw after leaving Aki's room and returning to the living room was Rio being pressed against Aishia and Latifa, who was sniffing his body as she clung to him.

Miharuru's eyes widened in shock. It was the usual warm, pleasant scene of their daily lives. However, it was a scene she couldn't see while they were at the castle. Even though they had only stayed in the castle for a few days, she had missed seeing this so much.

Ah, if I lived apart from Haruto, I wouldn't be able to see this anymore, either... Miharuru watched the ordinary scene unfold before her, cherishing the sight of it. Her mind had been so occupied with the problem between Rio and Aki, she had forgotten how precious everyone here was to her, too.

She knew that, realistically, it would be difficult to stay with everyone forever. But she didn't want to lose the life she had here. Miharuru felt strongly about it.

"Miharuru, are you done already?" Sara noticed Miharuru standing at the edge of the living room and walked up to her.

"Yeah. What was that commotion out here?" Miharuru watched Rio and the others with a smile.

"Latifa suddenly brought up how the scent of unknown women was hanging on Rio's body. According to Rio, they were just his dance partners at the banquet," Sara sighed tiredly.

"Ahaha. If it's an unfamiliar scent, it might be Princess Charlotte's. She was sticking fairly close to Haruto the whole night..." Miharuru remembered how she hadn't been able to dance with Rio at the banquet and smiled a little sadly.

"I see. More importantly, this is something everyone told Rio just now, but we'll always be here to listen to your worries. Don't be a stranger and lean on us, too. We're a family, after all." Sara made use of all her natural leadership to appear dignified and reliable to Miharuru.

"...Yeah. Thank you." Miharuru broke into a happy smile, nodding obediently.

“Good. Now, shall we go back?”

“Yup,” Miharuru replied. Sara brought her to the middle of the living room.

“Miharuru, Sara, come sit here.” As usual, Orphia took the initiative to beckon them into seats nearby. Having just had that exchange earlier, they were feeling strangely conscious of each other, so they were very grateful to carry on without worry or awkwardness. A normal interaction—it was a very precious thing.

Then, once Miharuru and Sara sat down—

“Miharuru, how did it go with Aki?” Rio asked. He must have been worried. Whether that worry came from Haruto, or whether it came from Haru-kun, Miharuru still didn’t know...

“...Right. I said what I had to say, but her heart hasn’t adjusted to it all yet, so she’ll talk to me after she calms down. I’ll try to talk to her again later, too.” The issue would be solved one day for sure, Miharuru decided as she informed Rio of Aki’s state. Rio gave a slightly weak smile as he bowed his head at Miharuru.

“...I understand. Thank you.”

After that, they discussed how they would bring Aki and Masato to the castle the next day. Aki refused to look at or talk to Rio, up until Rio and Miharuru returned to the castle.

Chapter 4: A Family Reunion

The next day, Rio followed the plan they had arranged the night before and received permission to leave the castle in the morning. Aishia and the other girls had brought Aki and Masato to the capital already, but they couldn't go to the castle quite yet.

The purpose of Rio's outing was to create a cover story for King Francois, to prove that he had met with Aki and Masato to confirm their intentions. They couldn't possibly give him the explanation that they had snuck out of the castle at night to meet in secret already, after all. Rio spent two hours outside of the castle before returning to finally set things in motion with Satsuki and Miharuru.

After requesting an audience with King Francois in one of the castle's drawing rooms, they told him there were people they wanted to invite to the castle. Takahisa and Lilianna were also summoned to the room, and Michel and Charlotte were present as well. Satsuki took the lead on explaining, being that she was the hero.

She spoke of how Rio had been looking after Aki and Masato together with Miharuru, about how they wanted to see Takahisa, and as a result, they wished to summon the two of them to the castle. They weren't brought to the castle in the first place because the two of them were too young to attend the banquet.

"I understand. You may invite them to the castle immediately. If they are Sir Takahisa's siblings, then I presume it would be fine for them to lodge in your quarters?" Francois approved once Satsuki had explained everything to a rough degree.

"Yes!" Takahisa nodded eagerly, and so it was decided that Aki and Masato would be brought to the castle. After that, Rio left the castle in the company of an official and headed straight for Aki and Masato. Miharuru went with him, after offering to go as well.

They went to the meet-up location they had decided on beforehand and safely brought Aki and Masato back to the castle, then headed straight for the

drawing room they'd occupied before.

"Takahisa!" Aki yelled in delight as soon as she entered the room and spotted him. Masato stood right behind her with a shy smile on his face.

"Aki! Masato!" Takahisa jumped out of the chair he was sitting in and ran towards the two of them, overcome with emotion.

"It's you! I can't believe it's you!" Aki dashed forward to hug him. Takahisa opened his arms to catch her.

"Aki! I'm so glad you're safe, seriously...!" Takahisa squeezed her tightly.

"Ahaha, that hurts," Aki said, though she was hugging her brother just as strongly.

"Oops, sorry." Takahisa reflexively tried to loosen his hold.

"Nope, this time it's my turn. Hehe... it's really you." Aki squeezed her arms even tighter. She buried her face in Takahisa's chest. Even a normally cool-headed girl like her had a childish side.

"How have you been, Aki? I, uhh... heard you were nearly made into a slave..."

"Yup, I've been good. Haruto... He saved me," Aki replied with a shadow over her smile. She almost looked at Rio, but stopped herself partway.

"I see. Well, you're safe now—I'll protect you."

"...Yeah." Aki nodded vaguely. Seeing her unhappy expression made Takahisa's face cloud over with frustration. He bit down on his lip and looked at Rio.

"...Umm. Thank you very much, Haruto. For protecting the three of them. Really."

"Not a problem," Rio replied shortly, shaking his head.

"How have you been, Masato? Come closer—show me your face," Takahisa said to Masato, who was standing a distance away.

"I'm fine. Don't be embarrassing about it," Masato replied awkwardly.

"You've grown so much in our short time apart," Takahisa said in a brotherly

way.

“Really? Well, I’m still growing,” Masato huffed shyly and looked at his own limbs.

“You siblings get along so well. But I really am glad the five of us could reunite like this safely. Long time no see, Aki, Masato.” Satsuki had been watching the family reunion warmly until now, when she decided to address them. Only Rio, Miharuru, and the two siblings involved knew that Satsuki had snuck out of the castle to go see them before the banquet, so she needed to pretend she was meeting them again for the first time.

“Long time no see, Satsuki,” Aki said.

“Yeah, it’s good to see you’re safe as well,” Masato chimed in. They gave their replies as they had planned—as though they were meeting again for the first time.

“If you have all been reunited safely, then we shall take our leave. It would be impolite for us to intrude on such a long-awaited reunion,” Francois said, looking at Lilianna.

“Yes. We shall give our proper greetings at a later time,” Lilianna agreed immediately.

“If you don’t mind, Sir Haruto, could you please accompany me?” Charlotte suddenly asked Rio.

“Of course.” With no reason to refuse the request of a princess, Rio nodded readily. Thus, everyone other than the five people from Earth left the room. The door clicked shut, leaving the five of them alone.

“How about we all sit down first? Miharuru, you can sit next to me,” Satsuki suggested.

“Right.” Takahisa nodded happily, guiding Aki to the sofa for them to sit together. Masato sat down on a sofa a slight distance away, while Miharuru seated herself beside Satsuki.

“I know we’ve finally reunited and are in high spirits, but we already have a general idea of each other’s circumstances and it’s quite difficult to find time for

the five of us to be together, so how about we discuss the things that need to be said first?" Satsuki said, looking around at everyone's faces.

"Sure. But what do we need to discuss?" Takahisa looked at Satsuki and cocked his head.

"The serious matter of our future. Everything's really complicated right now, right? Neither Takahisa nor I can leave our kingdoms easily, and we'll probably be separated again in the future. Looking at things in the long-term, shouldn't we decide on what to do in order to return to Earth?" Satsuki said, summarizing the agenda succinctly.

"That's true..." Takahisa nodded, glancing over at Miharu opposite him.

"There's something you should know involving Haruto first. It's heavily related to our future, too. I've received permission to tell you about it, but you have to keep what I'm about to say an absolute secret from anyone else. Can you promise me that?" Satsuki looked directly at Takahisa.

"If you're talking to just me, then the others..." Takahisa looked around.

"They know already. If you can promise me you'll keep it a secret, then I'll tell you too. If you can't make that promise, then I'll just tell you the conclusion with the detailed explanation omitted, so keep that in mind. Just don't ask the others to tell you, because they've promised already and would be troubled by that." Satsuki's explanation was so abstract, there was no way of telling what the matter was about. However, Takahisa didn't want to be the only one left out of the loop.

"...All right. I promise. Please tell me."

"Okay. To start with the conclusion... We may not be returning to Earth within the next four years." Satsuki stated.

"...Four years? How do you know that?" It was a strangely specific number.

"There's someone who died in Japan four years after we disappeared on our way home—and was reborn into this world. That person heard from your own mother that Miharu was still missing four years later."

"...What?" *What is going on?* Takahisa made a dubious face.

“That person is now Haruto, and he used to be Aki’s older brother in his past life. His name was Amakawa Haruto. He was separated from Aki when his parents divorced. Masato wasn’t aware of him, but perhaps you know of this, Takahisa...” Satsuki asked, but Takahisa’s eyes were completely blank with shock. The words being said were entering his head, but he couldn’t quite accept them as reality so readily.

“Aki, you had an older brother other than me...” Takahisa turned his head to the side, straining himself to ask Aki.

“I do not. You’re the only brother I have right now. The only one...” Aki furrowed her brow and squeezed Takahisa’s hand.

“As you can see, Aki has feelings of reservation towards Amakawa Haruto. This is just my speculation, but the reason why your parents didn’t tell you two about Haruto’s existence was probably related to that.” Satsuki sighed quietly.

“Aki...” Takahisa squeezed Aki’s hand back to reassure her.

“Amakawa Haruto was also Mihar’s childhood friend. He was separated from her as well when his parents divorced when they were seven years old,” Satsuki continued.

“Mihar’s...” Takahisa’s eyes widened as his expression stiffened.

“That’s right. Haruto is the reincarnation of my childhood friend.” Mihar verified Satsuki’s statement with a serious expression.

“Uh...” Takahisa paled as his heart throbbed unpleasantly. He didn’t understand why, but he couldn’t help but feel terrified that there was a part of Mihar he didn’t know about.

“Let’s get back to the topic at hand. According to Haruto’s memories, Aki’s mother said that Mihar was still missing. However, she also said that Aki was doing well when asked about her.”

“...Does that mean Aki returns to Earth while Mihar doesn’t?” That was ridiculous. Takahisa couldn’t believe that Aki and Mihar would be separated. He looked dubious.

“Yes. Whether this was a lie to prevent Haruto from worrying or whether it

was the truth—and what this could mean if it was the truth—there’s just no way of knowing,” Satsuki said thoughtfully, a troubled shadow over her elegant face.

“...W-Wait a minute! I can’t believe Aki and Miharuru would be separated. Was Haruto unaware of the fact that Aki had disappeared? If so, wouldn’t he know that Mom lied when she said Aki was doing well...?!” Takahisa insisted in a heated panic.

“...Haruto was unaware of the fact Aki had gone missing. After his parents divorced, Haruto’s father completely cut off any information about Aki and their mother from reaching him,” Satsuki replied, glancing at Aki for a moment. Aki’s mouth was twisted in a bitter frown at the mention of her father.

“But... I just can’t believe it. There’s no way Aki and Miharuru could’ve been separated. Couldn’t Mom have been lying to stop Haruto from worrying?” Takahisa said, this time causing Miharuru to be the one to retain a bitter smile.

“...True, that’s another likely possibility. I find it hard to believe that Aki wouldn’t go and find the past Haruto once she returned to Earth, too...” Satsuki looked over at Aki. “At any rate, it doesn’t seem like we’ll be returning to Earth anytime soon. Reluctant as I am to admit, that’s practically been confirmed now. And so, we should have a proper discussion about how we’re going to live in this world from now on, instead of having just a vague idea. Wouldn’t you agree?”

“Yes,” Miharuru nodded firmly in approval.

“To be honest, for me... I was pretty panicked until Haruto appeared with Miharuru. I was lonely. I had wondered if Miharuru and the others were also summoned into this world, but I had no proof, and I just wanted to go home as soon as possible. But you know, I’m more optimistic now. Everyone’s here. I’ve made a very reliable friend in Haruto. So I can’t remain pessimistic about this forever, you know? If we’re not going to be able to return for a while—or even ever—then I want to get a proper footing in this world and live a meaningful life.” Satsuki looked around at everyone as she gave her own thoughts.

“Until now, we’ve only discussed things vaguely. We wondered what we’d do if we met up with Satsuki and Takahisa. We all have our own thoughts on

things, but we kind of ended up avoiding that discussion... But I think it's something that should be discussed properly, now that the five of us have gathered," Miharuru stated her opinion clearly.

"Right. It may be impossible for the five of us to live together, but as long as we know we're all safe, as long as we know we can see each other again... I think we'd be able to manage." Satsuki nodded.

"The five of us together, huh... True, with Satsuki as a hero of the Galarc Kingdom, it'd be difficult for her to live in the Centostella Kingdom." Takahisa looked at Satsuki with a frown.

"Well, yeah..." Satsuki nodded awkwardly.

"...Are you going back to Centostella right away?" Aki tugged at Takahisa's sleeve and asked.

"Yeah. I'll probably be able to come out again, but I don't think I can stay for long. That's why I thought about what I wanted to do all night. I want everyone to come with me. I want to stay with you all forever. I'll protect you. I'll definitely protect you all." Takahisa's face was pulled into a tense expression to convey his determination as he looked at Aki, Masato, and finally—Miharuru.

"I also want to stay with you..." Despite replying with that, there was a faint touch of hesitation in Aki's voice. She did want to stay with Takahisa. However, she may have been troubled by whether it was okay to throw aside the bonds she had made living with the others in the stone house up until this point.

"Hmm..." Masato hummed. He seemed to be indecisive and unwilling to answer.

"I'm sorry. I won't be going to Centostella Kingdom." Miharuru made her refusal loud and clear.

"W-Why..." Takahisa asked hoarsely.

"Because I intend on staying with Haruto..." Miharuru replied immediately.

"Wha..." Takahisa made a face as though he had been shoved off a cliff. Speechless, he looked at Miharuru imploringly, but she had nothing more to add.

Meanwhile, when Aki heard Miharuru's clear intention to stay with Haruto, her

mouth twisted reflexively into a sullen frown.

“I also want to stay with Haruto, I think. I wavered a bit, having you in front of me, but I still want to stay with Haruto for now,” Masato stated.

“But why...” Takahisa was clearly enraged as he mumbled in a quiet voice.

“U-Umm! I want to stay with you!” Aki seemed to have heard Takahisa mumbling from her place beside him, as she hurriedly declared her own position.

“Aki...!” Takahisa’s expression brightened as though he had found an oasis in the desert.

“It’s not that I don’t want to stay with you, bro. It’s just... Haruto’s looked after us so much and I can’t imagine walking away just like ‘Okay, thanks, bye...’ I know you’re ignoring Haruto right now, but you understand how it feels too, right, Aki?” Masato asked her.

“...” Aki seemed unable to be as honest as Masato and held her tongue. However, that was the greatest proof that she felt the same way.

Was Haruto that big of an influence on Masato and Aki? They had only been separated for a few months... Takahisa fell into the illusion that his precious bonds were being stolen and clenched his fists tightly.

Masato sighed at Aki’s lack of a response and voiced his own thoughts once again. “Also, in my case, I have my sword training, too... I don’t want to lose my progress. That’s why I can’t go with you right now, bro. Not until I’ve grown up enough to stand on my own.”

“Sword training?! You— You’re learning how to use a sword?” It was a comment that couldn’t be ignored.

“I am...” Masato was slightly taken aback by Takahisa’s excessive reaction.

“Why are you learning it? It’s not fun and games. Swords are used to kill people in this world.” Since he was learning to use swords at the castle himself, he understood that fact well. Or rather—he was being made to learn it. That was why he showed such an extreme reaction to the knowledge that Masato was learning as well.

“I know. Haruto’s teaching me everything. And if you know that much, that means you’re learning how to master the sword yourself, no?” Masato pointed out how hypocritical that was.

“It’s fine for me to. I’m already in high school, and I understand things. But you’re still in elementary school. Your sense of morals and ethics aren’t developed yet.”

“I understand things, too!”

“D-Don’t tell me you’ve actually killed someone before.” What if he had? Takahisa suddenly paled.

“No way! But there are monsters out there, and the world is what it is. I have to be able to protect us if anything bad ever happens. We were nearly abducted the moment we came to this world, after all,” Masato objected in a rough tone of voice.

“That’s why I’m saying I’ll protect you from now on. You won’t need to set foot anywhere dangerous of your own accord. As long as you stay in the castle, nothing bad will ever happen. It’s safe there.”

“I’m telling you, I’m not going with you! I don’t want to just sit there and be protected.”

“If you fight, you might end up getting killed! Ever think of that?!” Takahisa scolded him harshly.

“Haruto’s taught me that already!”

“Guh...” There was that name again. Haruto, Haruto, Haruto. He’d made his way inside of everyone’s head while Takahisa wasn’t around. Even though that place should have been for him...

“Calm down, you two. I know I said we should discuss things, but I didn’t say we should argue,” Satsuki interrupted in the time that Takahisa fell silent.

“I... I just don’t want Masato to live a dangerous life. It’s safe in the castle, and as for learning swordcraft... If he absolutely had to, he could learn properly from the knights in the castle,” Takahisa said sullenly.

“Oh? Safety of the castle aside, Haruto’s an honorary knight himself, you

know. He's stronger than your average knight," Satsuki noted.

"Exactly." Masato nodded smugly.

"Masato, you have to try and understand how worried Takahisa is about you too, okay? Just imagining you running off somewhere and dying... anyone would feel uneasy," Satsuki said to calm Masato, showing a smile with a bit of gloom to it. She had also been alone when she first came to this world, so perhaps that was why she could understand Takahisa's feelings.

"Hmm... Well, yeah, I guess." Masato nodded reluctantly.

"So, in conclusion... or rather, to summarize for now, Aki will be going to Centostella Kingdom with Takahisa, Miharuru and Masato will stay with Haruto, and I'll remain in the Galarc Kingdom—does that sound right?" Satsuki didn't have any objection to the choices made as long as they were what the person in question decided for themselves, but it didn't seem like Takahisa and Aki were as accepting. With that in mind, she looked at the two of them.

"...Are you okay with this, Aki? About leaving your ill feelings unaddressed and separating from Haruto like this," Miharuru asked her.

"...Who cares." Aki averted her eyes from Miharuru, giving an indifferent answer to hide her irritation.

"If you're going to go with Takahisa, you should talk to him properly beforehand. Even if you're going to move away from him, I hope you'd reconcile first." Miharuru placed a hand over her chest. At that, Aki ground her teeth and sneered in return.

"You're completely on his side now, aren't you? You're not my ally anymore," Aki replied sharply.

"...No. That's wrong. I've always considered you special to me. You're like my real little sister," Miharuru denied with great sadness.

"Then why aren't you coming with us?! Don't go with him—come with me and my brother! Stay with me!" Aki yelled at Miharuru in grief.

"I... can't do that. I'm sorry." Miharuru looked extremely distraught, but nevertheless expressed her intentions.

“I-Is it because you love him, Miharuru? Is it because you love him that you can’t stay with me? You’d choose him instead?” Aki’s voice shook terribly as she spoke.

“It’s not like that...” Miharuru gasped in shock. She wanted to stay with Haruto, not Aki. That may indeed have been the meaning of her choice, but the nuance was completely wrong.

“...Aki. It might not be my place to say this, since I’ve only heard of what happened through other people—but don’t you think that was too much?” Satsuki had been watching quietly as an outsider, but even she couldn’t let this conversation go on any longer.

“That’s right, Aki,” Masato also agreed indignantly.

“Love...” When Takahisa heard the possibility of Miharuru being in love with Haruto, he fell speechless. That shock gradually shifted into panic.

“W-What does Haruto think?!” Takahisa asked loudly. Think about what? The implication of his question was too broad.

“...He says he’ll entrust the matter of who stays with who up to Miharuru and the others themselves. He didn’t seem too enthusiastic about the thought of Miharuru following him, though,” Satsuki replied.

“...That part is settled now. We talked it out, and I asked him. While he’s still reluctant about it, he accepted it.” Miharuru looked at Satsuki and nodded.

“There you have it.” Satsuki smiled with a huff and looked at Takahisa. “Well done, Miharuru. Though the fact that Haruto’s still reluctant is a little...” She sighed tiredly. Miharuru simply smiled shyly.

“T-Then Haruto can just go with you...” Takahisa said in a great panic.

“...That’s not possible. Haruto has things he needs to do, too.” Recalling what Rio was trying to do, Satsuki’s face clouded over a bit.

“I-Is that the reason why he’s reluctant to bring Miharuru along, perhaps?” When it came to the topic of Miharuru, Takahisa had sharp instincts. His comment was right on the mark.

“Well, you could say that...” Satsuki nodded begrudgingly. Takahisa saw his

chance in that and gulped before speaking.

“If Haruto doesn’t want you to follow him, wouldn’t forcing him to take you along just cause him trouble?”

“...You might be right. But I think that’s fine, too. He’s trying to live apart from a path of peace, so he needs someone beside him to pull him back into a regular life,” Satsuki said wearily, a knowing look on her face.

“He’s trying to live a turbulent life?” Unaware of the circumstances, Takahisa and the others cocked their heads dubiously.

“Hmm... Why doesn’t Haruto want Miharuru to follow him in the first place? He’s fine with me going?” Masato asked Miharuru and Satsuki, tilting his head.

“That’s... because...” Miharuru couldn’t find the right words.

“Probably because Haruto was Amakawa Haruto in his past life, and Miharuru was his childhood friend, I guess. I can’t speak for Haruto any more than that, though. Right, Miharuru?” Satsuki gave an ambiguous but simple explanation to avoid going into detail, before seeking Miharuru’s agreement in a kind voice.

“...Yes.” Miharuru nodded quietly.

What’s... the deal with that... Takahisa was overwhelmingly flustered, but he grit his teeth to force that feeling down.

Even though I decided I would be the one to protect her... I would... Things had taken such an unexpected turn in the mere months they had been apart, he couldn’t accept that he would be separated from Miharuru again.

Were they saying he was being kept out of the loop from the beginning? He didn’t want to feel the fear of losing someone important to him anymore, so he had decided he would tell Miharuru his feelings.

Yet, before he could even tell Miharuru his feelings, this happens...

I have to do something... something... Takahisa was grinding his teeth when Aki squeezed his hand. His expression changed with a gasp and he squeezed her hand back.

“It’ll be okay. I’ll be with you,” Aki whispered so that only Takahisa could hear, before speaking up. “All right, Miharuru. I’ll do it. I’ll talk with Haruto.”



Meanwhile, after Rio had left the drawing room and bid farewell to the others, he walked with Charlotte down a hallway of the castle.

“Where might we be headed?” Rio asked with a chuckle.

“The people from the main Beltrum government are leaving to return to their kingdom today, so we’ll be seeing them off first. After that, I have promised to have tea with Liselotte and was hoping you would be open to joining us,” Charlotte answered in a strangely cheerful mood.

“Is that so...” Rio didn’t know why she was in a good mood and watched her expression as he responded.

“Thank you very much, Sir Haruto,” Charlotte suddenly said.

“For what, may I ask?”

“For Aki and Masato. You brought them to the castle because you could trust us, no? That means Lady Satsuki has also decided to trust us to some extent. We’re very delighted about that. Perhaps you have already told her of our conversation during the dance at the banquet last night?”

“...Yes. However, I don’t believe my passing of the message had any influence on the outcome.” If Aki and Masato had desired it, they would have ended up coming to the castle anyway.

“You may claim that, but I don’t believe that to be the case. Father was also extremely delighted and praised you highly for it, Sir Haruto.” Charlotte smiled with a giggle. As they conversed, Rio and Charlotte walked towards the geometric garden that led to the castle gate.

Several horse carriages were waiting there as members of the Beltrum Kingdom royalty and nobility prepared to depart. They would be traveling to the Beltrum capital by enchanted ship, but the horse carriages were to take them from the castle to the harbor.

“It seems like they’ll be departing soon. Princess Christina and the hero are over there, too. I’m glad we made it in time. Now, come this way, Sir Haruto.” Rio followed Charlotte’s lead towards the nobility of the Beltrum Kingdom.

Considering their past, he wouldn't have approached them by choice, but the chance of his identity being discovered was extremely low. If anything, he wondered how many people from there actually remembered him.

"Are Princess Christina and Sir Rui available? I'd like to greet them and see them off. I'm the Galarc Kingdom's second princess, Charlotte, and this is the honorary knight, Sir Amakawa," Charlotte said to the knights guarding the horse carriages. It felt strange to have himself introduced as a knight, but it was certainly useful in how it made nobles more accommodating towards him.

"Please wait a moment." A knight left in a fluster at the arrival of figures of such high status. Less than a minute later, Christina and Rui appeared with their guards in tow.

"Thank you for coming to see us off, Princess Charlotte, Sir Amakawa," Christina greeted them gracefully.

"We probably won't be seeing each other again for a while, so I wanted to at least bid you farewell. I had hoped we could talk more while you were here, but our positions make it difficult, after all. I'm happy we made it in time to see you off, though," Charlotte said with a grin, glancing away from Christina nonchalantly. At the end of her gaze was Charles Arbor, who had accompanied the rest of the Beltrum Kingdom here.

Christina also shot Charles a glance before replying with a gentle smile. "We may be able to meet again sooner than expected, but you're right. There's always the possibility we won't see each other again, so I'm glad we're able to greet each other properly like this." Then, she proceeded to direct her gaze at Rio. "Sir Amakawa, thank you for seeing us off, too. Sir Rui had also wanted to talk to you some more."

"That's... I'm honored." Rio bowed his head deeply at Rui.

"I'm the one who is pleased to be able to see you again, Haruto. Like Princess Christina said, I wanted to speak with you," Rui said, giving a refreshing smile.

"While it would be my pleasure, may I ask why?" Had he done something to attract his interest this much?

"It was because of what you said about your parents, I suppose. Your name

sounds very similar to those of my hometown, so it made me feel a sense of familiarity, like you came from the same place as me. It seems that besides Satsuki, the other two heroes would rather be distanced from me, so if we ever have the chance to meet again, would you be willing to speak with me as a friend?" Rui said with a bittersweet smile, offering his hand to Rio for a handshake.

"Of course—I would be happy to." Rio immediately shook Rui's offered hand.

"Thank you." Rui's handsome face broke out in a happy smile. Then, Charles Arbor—who had been watching their exchange—approached.

"Are you two done? It's almost time to depart," he said to Christina and Rui.

"Yes. See you later, then," Rui said and turned on his heel.

"Oh my, Sir Amakawa. You have some dust on your shoulder," Christina suddenly pointed out.

"Oh, how embarrassing." Rio reflexively moved his hand to pat away the dust.

"No, not over there..." Christina said, then took several steps towards Rio and whispered in Rio's left ear so only he could hear.

"Thank you for saving Flora."



Charlotte was standing on Rio's right side, so she probably missed what happened.

"...Pardon me." Rio's eyes widened faintly, but he immediately bowed his head.

"There, it's gone now. Goodbye." Christina said no more than that, showing only a fleeting expression before she turned to head to the carriage.



Having seen Christina and the others off, Rio and Charlotte went back inside the castle, to the rooftop garden that was limited to royalty and a select few others to meet up with Liselotte for a casual chat. There, they told Liselotte about Aki and Masato's existence.

"I apologize for not informing Lady Liselotte of the two of them in advance." Liselotte had been the one to bring Rio and Miharuru to the banquet. Despite that, they had kept Aki and Masato a secret from her, and for that, Rio apologized.

"It's fine, I kept you and Lady Miharuru's existence a secret from His Majesty up until we came to the capital myself, after all. Don't let it bother you," Liselotte said with a soft smile.

"I am most grateful for that." Rio bowed his head deeply. He had lost track of the number of times he had lowered his head since coming to the capital, but this time he felt true gratitude for her.

"I wonder what the five of them are discussing right now?" Charlotte brought the teacup to her mouth elegantly as she voiced her question.

"...Wouldn't they be discussing what to do about the future?" It was information that would soon be revealed whether he hid it or not.

"Lady Satsuki is with our kingdom while Sir Takahisa has been taken in by the Centostella Kingdom, after all. And you will be continuing your travels. Perhaps they're troubled by the issue of who will be going where?" Charlotte took an accurate guess at the situation Miharuru and the others were in.

"Yes," Rio confirmed shortly.

“Hmm... Our kingdom would be in hot water if we didn’t keep our friendship with Lady Satsuki ongoing, so unfortunately, that part cannot be avoided...” Charlotte tapped her index finger against her mouth, pondering.

“...I would have thought the most natural process would be for Sir Takahisa to take in Aki and Masato. Is there a problem with that?” Liselotte asked.

“Yes. There are... many things to consider.” Rio confirmed evasively.

“Sir Takahisa appears to be infatuated with Lady Miharuru. Could that possibly play a part in things? That, or Aki adores Sir Haruto so much, Sir Takahisa is opposed to it.” Charlotte put on an air of curiosity as she suddenly brought up specific examples. But even the sharp-minded Charlotte felt that she was slightly off the mark somehow.

“I wonder.” Rio evaded replying with a wry smile.

“My apologies for interrupting your gathering...” A visitor had arrived at the gazebo in the garden where they were talking. It was Satsuki, the very person they were discussing.

“Oh, Lady Satsuki. Are you done with your discussions already?” Charlotte addressed Satsuki on behalf of the three of them.

“No, we’re still in the middle of our talk, but I was wondering if we could borrow Haruto.” Satsuki looked at Rio and bowed her head awkwardly.

“Oh my, is that so? Of course, if Sir Haruto is willing, then we have no reason to refuse. Isn’t that right, Liselotte?” Charlotte turned to her in a cheerful tone.

“Yes, of course,” Liselotte agreed immediately. Thus, Rio took his leave with Satsuki.



Roughly ten minutes later, Rio arrived at the drawing room where Miharuru and the others waited.

“Sorry about this. Just sit anywhere that’s open, Haruto,” Satsuki prompted with a rather tired expression before sitting next to Miharuru herself.

“Sure.” Rio obediently sat down on the empty sofa. Directly across from him was Masato, and diagonally opposite were larger sofas, which sat Miharuru and

Satsuki on one side, and Aki and Takahisa on the other.

For the record, the reason why he was summoned and the discussion that had occurred up until now had been explained to him on the way there.

“I’ve told Haruto that Aki wants to speak to him, but if we’re in the way, we can leave. Though it may be better to have Miharuru present...” Satsuki looked between Rio and Aki before settling on Miharuru.

“I don’t care if you stay or not. Only if Haruto has things he can’t say in front of everyone else, I suppose,” Aki said in a rather sharp tone, as though she was testing Rio.

“...I won’t know until I’ve heard from Aki what she wants to say, but I don’t mind if you all stay. As long as you promise to keep anything said here confidential from the others,” Rio replied calmly.

“Of course. This is a private discussion, after all. Is everyone else fine with that?” Satsuki looked around at everyone. Miharuru and Masato confirmed immediately, but this confirmation was actually directed at Takahisa. When his gaze met Satsuki’s, he froze and nodded stiffly.

“Now, what do you want to say to me? Does it have something to do with Amakawa Haruto?” Rio asked Aki himself.

“You speak as though he’s a stranger to you,” Aki replied reproachfully.

“He’s not a stranger, but he is someone else. I cannot act as though I’m Amakawa Haruto.” His words had a sense of resolution in them that made Aki gulp. However, she couldn’t back down.

“Does that mean you think nothing of me?”

“That’s not what I said,” Rio replied in a pained tone.

“But I’ve heard that you didn’t really want Miharuru to go with you. Even though you used to call her Mii-chan and loved her so much in the past. Does that mean you don’t love Miharuru anymore? Do you hate her now? Is that why you don’t want her to follow you? And me as well...” He didn’t call her name in the same affectionate way that he used to. While she swallowed those words at the end, Aki was becoming more and more emotional.

“I don’t hate her.”

“Then why don’t you call Miharu ‘Mii-chan’ anymore? Why don’t you want her to go along with you?”

“...I won’t call Miharu by the nickname in my memories. I can’t. I’m not Miharu’s childhood friend anymore,” Rio answered, making Aki grind her teeth. Miharu had a miserable look on her face, and Satsuki was frowning sullenly.

“I don’t want Miharu to follow me because I still consider her important to me, though I am now a different person to Amakawa Haruto. That’s why I believe the best option would be for her to live somewhere safe. The same goes for you, Aki. Also, it’s precisely because I am a different person now that I believe it would be better for those of you who know the Amakawa Haruto within me to stay away,” Rio continued, his expression dimmed.

“...I don’t understand what you mean at the end there.” Aki tilted her head with an unimpressed look. The same went for Takahisa and Masato.

“For you and Miharu, who know Amakawa Haruto, wouldn’t you unconsciously think of me as him, or otherwise let your opinions of him overshadow how you think of me?”

“...” They couldn’t deny it. After all, Aki was presently seeing Amakawa Haruto in Haruto as she used him as an outlet for her illogical rage.

“But I’m not Amakawa Haruto. Amakawa Haruto is dead, so I am unable to respond to you as him,” he said with a smile of resignation, and Aki’s expression clearly stiffened—as though she was a child who had realized what she had done wrong.

Rio felt guilty for his inability to word things better. However, he had to tell them like this—because he was Rio, not Amakawa Haruto.

Amakawa Haruto had values cultivated by living a comfortable, quiet life in peaceful modern Japan. Knowing that and understanding that such a life was out of his own reach, Rio held that preciousness in contempt and decided to push on down the path of revenge. He had already sullied his hands numerous times, even without the revenge as a factor.

That’s why Rio thought he had no right to enjoy living in a peaceful world

where Miharuru and Aki placed themselves beside him as Amakawa Haruto. He didn't think he belonged there.

"Even if you say that, though... Haruto still has the memories of Amakawa Haruto, right? So isn't it a little sad to call yourself a different person? You're still the same Haruto. Do you really feel nothing with Miharuru and Aki in front of you?" Masato's shoulders and voice trembled as he spoke.

"...I do. That's why they're important to me. That's why I don't think they should be near me." Rio's voice was truly calm, conveying how he had given up. That much was clear.

"If they're important to you, then I think that's all the more reason why you should keep them near you. If I were you, I'd rather have them beside me," Satsuki said, unable to help but give her opinion.

"...That's why I said I'd respect Miharuru's decision. I may be traveling about in the future, but I intend on keeping a safe living environment for them like I have until now," Rio replied with his gaze averted from Satsuki.

"No, that's wrong. Didn't I say I wanted to stay beside you? Didn't you accept that, Haruto?" Before she knew it, Miharuru's words were coming out hoarsely. Rio was going to use his travels as an excuse to be scarce around her, she feared.

"You'd be continuing to live as you have until now. Wouldn't you call that being together?" Rio replied quietly.

"No. I wouldn't call it that at all," Miharuru stated bluntly.

"..." Rio didn't say anything, letting the silence drag on instead.

...How could he treat what I want so desperately like something he doesn't need... And yet, he's taking what I need... away from me! Listening to the conversation made Takahisa feel like he was going mad. With his shoulders squared, he bit down on his bottom lip and frowned.

"However reluctantly, I was glad to hear you had approved of Miharuru's desire to stay together because I thought that meant he had accepted her feelings a little... But I see that wasn't the case at all." Satsuki stared into Rio's eyes with disappointment and exasperation.

“...” Though he had a logical objection to that, Rio said nothing.

“Haruto, come with me for a moment,” Satsuki said quietly, standing up with determination.



Rio held a glaive for mock battles in his hand, facing Satsuki, who held the same weapon in hers. They stood on the parade grounds of the Galarc Kingdom castle.

“Umm, how did things come to this?” Rio asked as he checked his grip on the glaive.

“Because I’m not happy with you.” Satsuki furrowed her brow, her answer short. A bit too short, as the point completely flew past Rio.

“For what reason?” Although Rio had a faint idea, he asked anyway.

“Haruto!” Satsuki jabbed her finger at him.

“I suppose it’s all about me, right?” Her answer was a little off from what he’d expected—it seemed like Satsuki was quite angry, so he gave a pained smile in an attempt to smooth things over.

“But I don’t want you to get the wrong idea. This isn’t me trying to force my opinion onto you. I think your points are correct, and I know you’ve made them after giving them a lot of thought and consideration. I can also sympathize with your fears.

“However, you can’t come up with the answer alone. Miharu’s also given this a lot of thought, gone through and settled her own conflicts, and come up with an answer to give to you. Don’t run away from her. Face her head-on. Masato said it already—don’t act like a stranger, or they’ll be sad. He’s definitely still within you. He’s no longer anywhere except within you. So don’t... don’t...” Satsuki said, appealing to Rio with sincerity. Watching over their conversation right beside them was Miharu, Aki, Masato and Takahisa.

However, as they were using the parade grounds for knights and soldiers to train on, some of them were also watching the two of them from afar. They were out of hearing range, so they couldn’t overhear their conversation, but the

tense atmosphere was apparent.

Furthermore, news of the duel between the hero Satsuki and honorary knight Haruto must have spread throughout the castle, as members of royalty and nobility were crowding the parade grounds. Among them were Charlotte and Liselotte from the Galarc Kingdom, the Restoration's Flora, Hiroaki, Roanna, and Duke Huguenot, as well as Centostella Kingdom's Lilianna and her female knights.

"...Just so you know, I fully intend on becoming better friends with you in the future as well. We haven't known each other for long, but I already consider you a close friend of mine. That's how much you mean to me already. That's why I won't forgive you if you try to run away. This time, I'll show you how much you mean to us. If it won't reach you through words, then I'll beat it into your body. I'll beat you until you break." Satsuki's passionate but eloquent speech left Rio staring in a daze, but he eventually smiled.

"...Wouldn't it be bad if you did that?"

"S-Shut up! At any rate, you never know until you try!" Satsuki yelled, cheeks reddening at Rio's teasing.

"Lady Satsuki!" Two groups of people approached them. One was Charlotte and Liselotte, while the other was Lilianna and her female knights. Charlotte was the one who had called Satsuki's name as she hurried over. Meanwhile, Lilianna headed towards Takahisa.

Ah, had they come to stop them after all? They had asked a knight nearby, but they were using the parade grounds without permission from the main person in charge and had paused training because of it, Satsuki thought.

"Honestly! If you're going to do something so interesting, please let us know first. I can prepare a referee for your match if you so wish, as well. How about it?" Charlotte was unexpectedly on board with the whole thing.

"Ah, no, that's okay..." Satsuki replied through her surprise.

"Understood. All right, everyone. Come this way." Figuring they should get out of the way of the match, Charlotte led everyone—including Lilianna's group—to a safe location. With that, the match was ready to commence without

issue.

Satsuki faced Rio and looked at the glaive in his hand. “Do you know how to use that?”

“Yes—it’s similar to a naginata. I am familiar with it.” Rio spun the glaive once, showing he knew how to handle it.

“That’s good to hear. Then, I’ll just warn you in advance—there’s no holding back just because I’m a hero. I’m going to come at you with my all, so I expect the same from you.” It wasn’t a match for show; Satsuki made sure to emphasize that first.

Rio nodded in resignation. “...I understand. What will we do about the rules? And sorcery?”

“Let’s have a one-hit match with no time limit. Releasing your weapon won’t count as a loss, and victory will be decided by either stopping before a decisive finishing blow, or striking somewhere vital other than the face. The only sorcery allowed is physical enhancement. That okay with you? My divine arms automatically activates a sorcery that enhances my body... If you can only enhance your strength with magic, then I’ll hold back a little,” Satsuki explained, looking at Rio for his reaction.

“That’s fine with me. I can enhance my body using this enchanted sword,” Rio said, drawing his sword from the sheath at his waist. After his promotion to an honorary knight, he was now permitted to walk around inside the castle with his sword.

“Hmm... so that’s the enchanted sword that drove back the demi-dragon’s breath. If you’re more used to using swords, shouldn’t you use that instead?” Satsuki looked at the sword in Rio’s hand with interest.

“No, that’s okay. But it’s a little annoying to have while holding the glaive.” Rio made a show of using the sword to activate the body enhancement, when he was actually using spirit arts to do so instead. Then, he stabbed the glaive into the ground and instantly moved over to where Miharuru and the others were.

“...?!” The group froze in shock. Even Lilianna’s knights were slow to react.

“Masato,” Rio called out.

“Y-Yeah?” Masato replied hesitantly.

“Could you hold onto this sword for me? It’ll get in the way of the match,” Rio said, handing the sheathed sword to Masato.

“Got it. Leave it to me!” Masato accepted Rio’s sword enthusiastically. With a parting thanks, Rio returned to face Satsuki.

“Whoa, what was that magic essence... It’s pouring out of him, yet there’s no waste at all. It’s beautiful.” Alice, the youngest of the knights guarding Lilianna, stared closely at Rio with a grimace.

“...It may be better to stand further back.” The eldest knight also had a stiff look to her face.

“I’m ready.” Rio returned before Satsuki and picked up the glaive he’d stabbed into the ground, assuming his stance.

“It really seems I won’t have a chance of winning if I don’t come at you with the intention to break you,” Satsuki said with a smile, seeming to sense the gap in their abilities after seeing Rio’s movements just now. However, she couldn’t back down here.

Rio picked up a pebble on the ground. “How about we signal the start of the match with the moment this hits the ground after I throw it?” he asked in a tone that showed his ease.

“...Sure. I’m ready whenever.” Satsuki tensed her expression and agreed, taking one step forward with her left foot and holding her glaive at the ready halfway. It was the basic stance of a glaive that was easy to move with, making it suitable for both offense and defense.

“Here goes, then,” Rio said, throwing the pebble straight up and readying himself similarly to Satsuki in the middle. Several moments later, the pebble landed on the ground.

“Hah!” Satsuki called out a battle cry and charged with her full speed. She came within a short distance of Rio and made a fast strike. But Rio entangled the tip of Satsuki’s glaive and cleanly parried it.

However, Satsuki expected that much from him. She maintained her stance that was faithful to the fundamentals and brought her abilities past the limits of her body to make a persistent attack. However, Rio's experience in real battles far surpassed Satsuki's. He parried all of her attacks with skill.

Satsuki stepped back to widen the distance before shouting at Rio. "What was that about being somewhat familiar with a glaive?! I wanted to finish this in the first hit, but you've been dealing with all my attacks so easily!"

"I could see right through you," Rio said with a bold smile.

"That's enough!!" Satsuki resumed her assault. She made an overhead attack with all her energy—as a feint. She rotated the handle of the glaive to flip the blade of the tip in a tricky maneuver.

However, Rio easily stepped to the side to avoid it. Satsuki immediately swung the glaive to the side, performing a followup attack.

Rio lowered his glaive, knocking the side-sweeping slash Satsuki had released straight to the ground. He proceeded to hold Satsuki's glaive to the ground just like that. Before the blade could be buried into the ground, Satsuki promptly pulled the handle of the weapon to avoid having her movements fixed. In the next moment, she cut around to Rio's side and swung the tip at his feet.

Rio had foreseen that move, as he used the leg she was aiming at to step on the tip of Satsuki's weapon with rapid reaction speed. He placed his weight onto that foot, sinking the blade into the ground. Then, he proceeded to make a rather weak side-sweeping attack.

"What?!" Satsuki released the handle of the glaive on the spur of the moment, barely retreating in time to avoid Rio's attack. However, she was astonished by the guts behind Rio's acrobatic defense and gaped speechlessly. The same applied to the gallery of spectators.

"...The glaive is indeed a similar weapon to the naginata. However, this isn't a competitive match, but a real duel. The accuracy of each individual strike is important, but if you aim for a single finishing blow like in a competition, I'll be able to read your timing easily." Rio temporarily moved out of the stance he had assumed to speak to Satsuki.

There was no issue in using the fundamental stances for competitive naginata, but in a real battle, where the only condition was to make contact, there were no rules. For example, attacks that didn't need to be avoided in a competitive match absolutely had to be avoided in this duel, and focusing on attacks with contest rules in mind would only become a disadvantage to oneself.

"I-I know that! Are you going easy on me?!" Satsuki's tone roughened as she objected to Rio in a sulky tone. Indeed, she was aware of it. Some of the movements she had made just now were definitely removed from the typical naginata moves for competition. However, there was still a part of her that was being influenced by it. Rio had seen through that with his defensive move just now.

"That is not my intention. But if the match ends too quickly, then you wouldn't have beaten anything into me."

"Ugh..." Satsuki grimaced, feeling like she had been insulted. However, Satsuki knew Haruto wasn't the kind of person to make these statements without thinking. She felt uneasy about it.

After she digested Rio's next words, she realized that his statement hadn't come from a place of insult.

"In other words... I also want to come at you with my full strength. That's what I mean. You asked for me not to hold back, so I thought I could inform you of the factors you may be insufficient in at the moment."

"...You know, you really are a clumsy person." Satsuki felt like clutching her head and groaning. If that's what he felt, then he could have just confronted her with his words from the start.

He must be the kind of person who was awkward with words.

Even though he's stubborn enough to constantly argue back logically... Being only able to communicate with the language of the body was rather extreme.

"Ahaha..." Instead of replying, Rio used the tip of his own glaive to release Satsuki's embedded glaive and throw it towards her.

"Honestly, you're..." Satsuki accepted the flying glaive and glared at Rio

reproachfully. How obnoxious. It was such an infuriating action, yet for some reason, she didn't feel any anger rise within her.

Instead, she actually found it attractive. To a despicable degree, really...

Ah, I think I get why Miharu fell for him... It was like she couldn't leave the boy in front of her alone, which made it all the more irritating that he had such perfect, superhuman-like abilities.

"...Haruto. Give me one more chance to cross swords with you. I won't show such disgraceful behavior next time." Satsuki held back the urge to react bashfully, instead raising her head to boldly speak up.

"That was my intention from the start," Rio said, readying his glaive. Satsuki was captivated by that sight until she readjusted her own glaive.

"...I'm ready," she said with a serious expression after taking a deep breath and spending several moments gathering her wits about her. In that time, Rio had picked up the pebble again. He threw it into the air.

A pause, before the pebble hit the ground.

"Haaah!" Satsuki charged towards Rio with even more vigor than before. It looked like she was strongly conscious of the naginata stances for a competition, but the rushing strike she made had a different flavor from earlier.

She aimed straight for an area not normally aimed for in competition. Or so she feigned, immediately moving to aim at a typical spot for competition instead—she had adjusted her plan of attack to be unpredictable to Rio.

I'll definitely make him eat his words! Satsuki decided, retreating momentarily to use both hands to spin the glaive at high speed. Immediately after, she charged straight at Rio. By randomizing the trajectory of the spinning, she could attack from all different angles.

"Your movements are completely different now." Rio evaded the dance of Satsuki's glaive lightly, a smile on his face. Satsuki's fundamentals had been well built to begin with, so even her non-traditional movements had good form. She had few openings, too.

"It doesn't feel like a compliment when you say that with such a relaxed

face!” Satsuki made full use of her strengthened body to stop the spinning of the polearm at once, making a surprise strike. But Rio retreated and twisted his body to avoid the thrust calmly. Then, by sliding his left hand slightly up from the bottom of the glaive, he aimed to knock Satsuki’s feet out from underneath her using the tip.

“Whoa!” Satsuki jumped at that moment, evading the swing. But the tip of the glaive Rio was swinging came to a complete stop after piercing through empty air, immediately turning the blade over and drawing a well-aimed path towards Satsuki.

“Kyah?!”

“Nice reaction speed.”

Satsuki braced her polearm on the spur of the moment, stopping Rio’s glaive with the handle. However, Rio shook off the glaive with his enhanced physical abilities, blowing Satsuki away alongside it. Satsuki landed on the ground heavily, backing off as she regained her balance. She proceeded to distance herself from Rio.

But at that moment, Rio moved onto the offense. He closed the distance between them and launched a series of endless strikes.

“Guh...” Satsuki set her eyes on Rio and handled the blows with a pained expression.

This was bad—she had to do something. Just as she thought that, Rio feinted a thrusting strike aimed at Satsuki, before pulling back to swing it sideways.

Satsuki lowered her posture to neatly evade the incoming glaive from the side, making a swift counter strike.

“Got you!”

However, Rio used his skillful footwork to move, barely evading Satsuki’s thrust.

“Ooh!” The fierce exchange of offense and defense that left no time to blink made their audience cheer excitedly. However, their voices didn’t reach the ears of the two locked in battle.

“Haah!” Satsuki made an uppercut swing. However, Rio blocked Satsuki’s attack before it came down and parried her strength skillfully, directing it in another direction. Satsuki staggered backwards, the momentum disrupting her balance.

However, she somehow managed to hold out, resolutely aiming a strike at Rio’s torso. Rio beat her to the punch by swinging his glaive, deflecting the incoming tip with great force.

“It’s... not over yet! I won’t give up!” Satsuki persisted, adjusting the trajectory of the deflected tip and forcefully swinging it at Rio. However—

“Huh?!” Rio had predicted Satsuki’s attack from the moment she held out, leaping lightly to step on the tip of Satsuki’s glaive once again. He proceeded to place his weight on it.

“Kyah!” The pressure placed on the tip of the glaive from above made Satsuki lose her handle of the weapon. The blade was buried into the ground again. It only took a moment for their gallery to stir over the acrobatic feat.

“...I yield.” With Rio’s glaive pointed at her neck, the fight seeped out of Satsuki as she announced her defeat.

“Thank you very much for the duel.” Rio had a gentle smile that almost looked content.

“Thank you as well. Ah, I couldn’t win in the end. Defeat, utter defeat!” Despite her words, Satsuki looked rather refreshed. During that time, the gallery applauded their tremendous match in praise.

“I think it was a close match.” Rio looked around at the audience applauding from afar.

“You say that, but you weren’t going all-out at all. Rather than an even fight, it was just me coming at you with my all. I can tell, you know,” Satsuki said in a huff, glaring at Rio.

“Ahaha, who knows.” Rio tried to brush it off, but Satsuki’s glare remained.

“But do you know now? What I was trying to tell you, and how serious I was about it.” Satsuki sighed tiredly.

“...Yes, I suppose.” Rio nodded with an awkward look.

“Then, to cap it off, I’ll give you one word of advice. Whether you want to listen or not is completely up to you.”

“Sure, what is it?” She was a very careful person, passing on a message with words and not just body language this time. Thinking that, Rio’s mouth turned up into a smile.

“I think all the logical-sounding fears you have are correct. That thoughtfulness will be extremely important in the future, I’m sure. But thinking so much that you can’t act when you need to—to put it negatively, is the action of a good-for-nothing.”

“How harsh...” Rio said deprecatingly. But, strangely enough, he didn’t feel like he was being lectured.

“That’s right. It was only for the one day of the opening ceremony, but I was still your upperclassman. It’s my duty to advise a lost underclassman,” Satsuki said, smiling softly. “Other than that... Well. This is more of a personal request.” Satsuki began to say something before closing her mouth, staring at Rio without moving.

“What is it?”

“I’m sure you’ve realized already, but Takahisa’s in love with Miharuru.” Satsuki glanced over at Takahisa standing with Miharuru at the others before looking to Rio and nodding.

“...Yes.”

They seemed to have realized that Rio and Satsuki were discussing something important, as they didn’t come over. Following their lead, Charlotte and the others also remained there and simply watched.

“Miharuru, Aki, Takahisa, Masato, and myself. The relationships between the five of us have greatly changed since the days when we were on Earth. I fear that there may be no recovering some of those relationships. No, I fear the situation we’re in will inevitably make that unavoidable,” Satsuki said with a quiet look.

“...” Rio listened without saying anything.

“Whether the relationship between the five of us worsens beyond repair, or whether it worsens to a salvageable extent is, I’m sorry to say, dependent upon you, Haruto. It’s beyond my power. Even Miharuru, who holds the key to Aki and Takahisa’s emotions, can no longer do anything. Actually... No. I think something can be done about it if Miharuru sacrifices her own needs. Do you understand what I’m saying?” She was, in other words, talking about Miharuru following Aki and Takahisa. That was exactly the future that the two of them desired, but it was in opposition to what Miharuru wanted.

“...” Rio held his silence with an even more vexed look.

“Do you believe that Miharuru could truly be happy that way? Do you believe Miharuru will find happiness in suppressing her own wish to stay with you, sacrificing herself instead? I think you know the answer to that, don’t you? You’re kind, but you’re clumsy, so you may be holding yourself back out of consideration for Aki, but...

“If... If you understand what I’m saying, then I’d like you to listen to my request. Just like our match right now, there are things you’ll only know if you clash head-on with them. There are things that won’t be conveyed otherwise. I want you to do the same with Aki and Takahisa, without any reservation. Then, I want you to secure a future for us, where we’ll all be able to laugh together. I know what I’m saying is completely unreasonable. Of course, I’ll also help as much as I can, but that’s my request. If... If you can do that, then—” Satsuki paused. She stared at Rio without blinking.

“I’ll do anything in my power to thank you. My hero—Haruto,” she said shyly but clearly.



Chapter 5: A Duel and the Result

The night of the duel with Satsuki, Rio informed her and Miharu that he would be stepping out for a moment. Then, he headed by himself to the guest rooms where Takahisa was staying with Aki, Masato, and Lilianna.

He didn't bring Satsuki and Miharu along because he felt it was appropriate to speak to Takahisa and Aki alone.

Thus, he arrived before the rooms where Lilianna's female knights stood guard. However, the two knights seemed more like young girls than adults. One was the petite Alice, who looked to be in her early-to mid-teens. The other was Kiara, who seemed similar to Rio's age, in her mid-teens.

"Oh, it's the really strong guy. Wow, he looks even cooler up close. Ah, my name's Alice. The second daughter of a duke in the Centostella Kingdom." The petite girl, Alice, introduced herself in an overly familiar way. She had a rather wild personality for a knight serving a member of the royal family.

"Hey, Alice!" Kiara immediately scolded her.

"F-Forgive me, Miss Kiara!" Alice apologized in a vacant voice.

"I'm not the one you should be apologizing to. Please forgive the rudeness, Sir Amakawa." Kiara sighed tiredly, bowing her head at Rio.

"No, it doesn't bother me. In fact, I should be the one apologizing for dropping by without warning, as I'd like to meet with Sir Takahisa. Could you pass on the message for me?"

"...Understood. Please wait a moment. You come too, Alice." Kiara thought for a moment before entering the rooms with Alice, leaving Rio alone outside.

"Welcome. Please come inside." Lilianna's attendant, Frill, came out to invite Rio inside less than a minute later. Rio followed Frill into the room.

"Excuse me." He bowed his head deeply as soon as he stepped in, his hand over his chest. Sitting on the high-class sofa inside the room was Takahisa, Aki,

Masato and Lilianna.

“Welcome, Sir Haruto,” Lilianna greeted on behalf of the others.

“Thank you very much for agreeing to meet with me, despite the late hour.” Rio turned to Lilianna and bowed his head once more.

“I heard that you have business with Sir Takahisa.”

“Yes—Aki and Masato as well, to be precise. Princess Lilianna is welcome to sit in as well, if you so wish,” Rio said respectfully.

“...What is this about?” Takahisa asked Rio warily.

“The continuation of the conversation the six of us had today. After our match, Satsuki said some things to me. I have come here to inform you of my thoughts and opinions of the future.”

Rio’s answer made Lilianna close her eyes and think for a moment, before speaking up. “...In that case, please use the room over there.” She would probably hear the details from Takahisa later. Rio’s past life aside, Lilianna would have been informed about their plans for the future and who would be staying with whom.

“I am most grateful for your consideration.” Rio bowed deeply to express his gratitude.

“What are you waiting for? Let’s go.” Masato stood up first, prompting Takahisa and Aki to move as well.

“...Yeah. Let’s go, Takahisa.” Thus, the four of them moved to an adjacent bedroom. This was the bedroom where the three members of the Sendo family were staying. The room’s furnishings consisted of three beds, a desk, and four armchairs.

“Let’s sit down. I’ll sit beside Haruto.” Masato sat down on an armchair with a thump.

“Okay. Then, if you don’t mind.” Rio huffed with a smile and sat beside Masato. Takahisa and Aki took the seats opposite them. Once Rio confirmed that everyone was seated, he immediately began to speak.

“First, you should know that my thoughts are generally the same as what I

told you during the match today. However, I no longer have the reluctance that I previously did. As long as everyone has thought about their answer, I have decided that I will respect that.”

“...What are you trying to say?” Takahisa asked with a dubious look.

“If Miharuru and Masato say that they want to remain in my care as they have until now, then I will no longer try to stop them. As long as they have made that decision after hearing my thoughts, then they can do as they wish,” Rio said with a strangely discerning expression.

“...B-But you should! You should refuse them! Didn’t you say that you didn’t want them with you? You still think that way, don’t you?! So why have you changed your mind so suddenly? Refuse them more firmly! Stop stealing my family away from me!” Takahisa yelled in shock. Because Rio had openly indicated his intention to welcome Miharuru and Masato, the negative feelings he had suppressed until now exploded.

“Takahisa...” Aki’s face fell as she watched the sudden change in her brother.

“I cannot,” Rio stated bluntly.

“...Why not?” Takahisa asked resentfully.

“Would my refusal change their minds? And if it did, would the two of them be happy to accept that? In the end, that wouldn’t be respecting their opinions. That’s why,” Rio answered smoothly. Masato smiled, looking somewhat happy about that.

“...Coward,” said Takahisa. “You’re a coward. Even though you say you don’t want Miharuru with you, you don’t want to refuse her either—that’s cowardice! How does doing something like that equal respect?”

“You have a point. I thought the same. However, if it doesn’t count as respect whether I refuse them or not, then I at least want to show my acceptance. It’d be better than completely running away by refusing to accept them—that’s what Satsuki told me. So I decided I’d face them properly.” Rio explained his thoughts in a calm voice.

“But that’s—!” *That’s just convenient for you*, was what Takahisa was about to respond with.

“...Then are you running away from me, Haruto? If you let me go to Centostella Kingdom like this, wouldn't that be the same as avoiding the problem with me?” Aki added to the conversation in an aggressive tone.

“I have no intention of doing that. That's why I came here alone. I wanted to face you without Miharuru and Satsuki present. If you allow it, I'd like to talk to you properly, one-on-one.” Rio didn't falter as he answered Aki.

“...” Aki was rendered speechless for a moment.

“Aki!” Takahisa reflexively called the name of his stepsister, looking at her pleadingly. Was this man about to steal Aki from him as well? He couldn't allow that.

“...Because Miharuru and I knew Amakawa Haruto, we unconsciously see you as Amakawa Haruto instead and overlap their existences. That's what you said, right?”

“Yes, I did say that.”

“Do you dislike being overlapped with him?”

“That's... not quite right. What I don't want is to be overlapped with a different person and compared to him.” And consequently, disappointing their expectations. Making them regret staying with him. That's why he wanted to reveal himself and keep his distance before such a thing could happen. Even now, he still had the desire to stay away from them.

“I can only see that 'different person' reasoning as nothing more than a convenient excuse to run away.” Aki glared at Rio with a look of contempt.

“It's true that we're different people. I do things that Amakawa Haruto would never do. Deeds that Amakawa Haruto would feel greatly opposed to committing, I would do without batting an eye.”

“...What, for example?” Aki asked doubtfully.

“Killing people.” Rio indifferently stated what a Japanese person would feel the most disgust towards committing.

“...” Aki was at a loss for words. Takahisa had also fallen speechless, out of shock. Only Masato was less surprised than the two of them, though his eyes

did widen faintly.

“When it comes to a battle, I will kill. If I can only protect myself by killing, if a battle can only be ended through killing, then I have no choice but to do so. I’ve come to accept that. Even at this very moment, there’s someone out there that I must kill.” Knowing the morals of Japanese people was precisely why Rio considered himself incompatible with Miharuru and the others. In general, he thought of Japanese morals as precious things to keep, and while he was greatly influenced by the values of Amakawa Haruto during times of peace, he considered those values to be a lie deep down inside, where he was cruel and repulsive.

“Have you ever killed someone before?” Takahisa asked with a look of complete contempt.

“I have,” Rio said without any shame. He felt it was better to answer directly.

“So you’re a murderer...” Takahisa muttered with spite.

“Indeed I am.”

“...Killing just because it’s necessary doesn’t make it right. It’s unacceptable on a human level. I can’t leave Miharuru or Masato in the care of a person like you,” Takahisa said with a cold calmness, having found an excuse to justify himself.

“Hey, bro!” Masato tried to intervene.

“Shut up! As if I could leave my precious brother in the hands of a murderer!” Takahisa yelled over him.

“...You’re going too far,” Masato muttered, his shoulders trembling with rage.

“Miharuru won’t be happy being with you. It’d be better for her sake to be with me, the hero. I would be able to protect Miharuru,” Takahisa claimed, as though convincing himself he was the better one between them.

“Huh? As if you’d be able to beat Haruto, bro,” Masato sneered.

“H-Haruto, you also felt the same way when you told Miharuru she was better off away from you, no?”

“...Indeed.” Rio nodded once.

“Then... You’re a coward! If you know that much, you’re a coward for refusing to reject Miharū! Miharū only wants to follow you because she doesn’t know you’re a murderer. Probably because she sees you as a different person, like you said. She’d definitely feel disgusted if she knew,” Takahisa said fiercely.

“...She is aware.”

“What?” Rio’s quiet statement made Takahisa lose all his fervor.

“Miharū knows I have killed people. I’ve told both Miharū and Satsuki everything.”

“Wha...” And she wanted to be with him despite that?! Miharū would choose someone so selfish? Not to mention Satsuki, who was an upperclassman he had always respected...

“Is she a fool? Miharū...” Aki muttered bitterly in disbelief. However, this meant there were no more means of stopping Miharū as they had wanted to.

“Do you really, truly intend on accepting Miharū like this? Even though you know Miharū may come to regret everything. No, she’ll definitely regret everything!” Takahisa seemed to have the same thought as Aki, as he objected in a panicked state.

“If she wants to come along in spite of that, then I will no longer refuse her. Although, I don’t know if I’ll be able to respond to her as Amakawa Haruto...” While Rio looked a little guilty at that, he stated his opinion clearly.

“...I won’t stand for this,” Takahisa murmured, then raised his voice. “I absolutely won’t stand for this. As if I could leave Miharū in your hands!” His heart was already backed into a corner, making him act on pure desperation, but he couldn’t afford to back down here.

“...Then, what would you like to do?” Rio knew things would come to this. He had come here prepared for it.

“Duel with me. If I win, you must reject Miharū’s wishes. I’m going to win and prove your dishonesty. Watch me!” Of all things, Takahisa challenged Rio to a fight. No matter what the pretense for it, it was a request to fight him.

“...Your actions seem to be an attempt to bend Miharū’s will to suit your own

desires, in my eyes,” Rio pointed out.

“A-Are you trying to justify yourself?!” Takahisa yelled back, guilt laden in his voice.

“No, nothing of the sort. If you wish to have a duel in order to treat Miharuru like some kind of object, then I definitely will not lose. At the very least, I won’t attempt to bend Miharuru to my own will. That’s all.” Rio gave his stance indifferently.

“...Sorry, but I’ll be supporting Haruto,” Masato suddenly said.

“What?!” Takahisa glared at Masato with a frown.

“I’m willing to bet on it, too. If Haruto loses to you, I’ll do whatever you tell me to do. How about it?” Masato glared back in a challenge.

“S-Stop it, you two...” Aki watched the relationship between her two brothers break down helplessly.

Masato frowned as he looked at Aki, before he stood up brusquely. “...Let’s go, Haruto. It’s already late, so you should just settle the match first thing tomorrow. Sorry, but could you let me stay in your room? I can’t deal with sleeping here anymore.” He wanted to leave the room now.

“...” Takahisa seemed to accept Masato’s challenge, as he didn’t bother to stop him. He furrowed his brows as he sat silently. There was nothing more to say here.

“...All right. Let’s go.” Rio sighed and stood up. He proceeded to guide Masato out of the room with a hand on his back.

“...” Aki looked like she wanted to say something to Rio’s departing figure, but her mouth didn’t move. Thus, Rio and Masato left the bedroom and came face-to-face with Lilianna in the living room, seated on the sofa with a frustrated expression.

“Please accept my deepest apologies for causing a stir so late at night.” Rio bowed deeply to Lilianna. Even if she hadn’t heard every word of the conversation, she must have been able to overhear the yelling from the bedroom.

“Not at all...” Lilianna shook her head slowly.

“Also, I know this is extremely selfish of me, but Sir Takahisa and I have decided to have a match tomorrow morning, just like with Lady Satsuki. Of course, I will forfeit if Princess Lilianna has any objections, but may I have your approval?” Rio requested politely, hanging his head.

“As long as it is Sir Takahisa’s will, I will not stop anyone. If possible, I would also like to entrust Masato to Sir Amakawa’s care tonight, though it may be inconvenient for you. In regards to the match, I shall arrange everything with His Majesty for approval.” Lilianna dropped her gaze slightly, her beautiful face clouding over fleetingly.

“...I am most grateful for that. Then, if you would excuse me.” Rio placed his right hand over his chest and bowed his head once more, before returning to Satsuki’s quarters with Masato.

The next morning, in the arena that was adjacent to the castle and away from the parade grounds, Rio faced Takahisa. It wasn’t only the venue that differed from his match with Satsuki yesterday—to prevent this match from becoming a spectacle, the audience seats were filled with only a select few people who were involved.

Among them were, of course, Miharu, Satsuki, Masato, and Aki, as well as Lilianna and Charlotte.

However, Aki wasn’t seated together with Miharu, Satsuki, and Masato; instead, she was seated beside Lilianna a short distance away. Her eyes were fixed on Takahisa.

Meanwhile, Miharu and Satsuki had been brought to the arena after being informed that the discussion resulted in a duel.

“Hey, Masato. How did things end up like this?” Miharu asked him—Masato was seated beside her.

“‘Cause my brother’s an idiot. Well, just think of it like a fight between men. You can ask Haruto yourself after the match is over.” Last night, Masato had returned to their rooms with Rio and immediately gone to sleep in a huff. He acted like this every time Miharu asked him for the details. She knew that Rio

went to have a discussion with the Sendo family and could tell that some kind of argument had resulted from it, but Rio awkwardly avoided giving her any details, leaving Miharuru at a loss.

“Haruto’s probably trying to communicate with us in his own way, don’t you think? There are things we won’t know without clashing, and I’m sure he’ll do the same to you one day, Miharuru. So let’s just believe in him and just watch over the match for now.” Satsuki didn’t know about the details of Rio and Takahisa’s argument either, but her mouth was curved into a gentle smile. She had kept what she had discussed with Rio after their match yesterday a secret, but Miharuru had a feeling that their conversation played a part in this.

“...Okay.” Miharuru nodded with a sigh.

“Well, at least there’s no need to worry about the result of the match. I can’t imagine Haruto would ever lose, after all. If you still think you can win after watching Satsuki’s battle yesterday, then you’re too naive, bro!” Masato said, huffing through his nose.

“Seems like they’re about to begin.” Satsuki seemed to agree with Masato’s statement as her lips quirked in a smile, before she turned her attention to the field. The referee had just started to explain the rules for the match.

“The only permitted weapons are training swords. Victory will be decided purely on sword technique. The hero, Sir Takahisa, is permitted to use divine arms to enhance his body, and Sir Amakawa is permitted to do the same with his enchanted sword. The match will be decided by either stopping on the verge of a decisive blow or landing a telling blow on an area other than the face. Please restrain your attacks to a nonlethal degree. Being disarmed alone will not count as defeat. Are these rules agreeable?” A young knight named Kyle was acting as the referee. He looked at Rio and Takahisa in confirmation of the rules.

“Yes!” Takahisa nodded eagerly while Rio inclined his head in a relaxed manner.

“Understood.”

“Both sides, distance yourselves and ready your weapons,” the referee said, raising his hand in the air. Then, once the two of them had enough distance

between them, he confirmed that they were holding their weapons at the ready.

“Begin!” he yelled, swinging his hand down to signal the start of the match.

“Hah!” Takahisa yelled angrily as he approached Rio. The physical enhancement of a divine arm was powerful and his speed easily surpassed human limits. Though not by much, his movements did show signs he had been training with a sword. However, from Rio’s point of view, he was full of openings.

I could end the match in an instant, but... In order to whittle down the stubborn Takahisa’s hostility a little, defeating him easily wouldn’t be enough. He had to make him surrender after pushing Takahisa to give him everything he had. With that decided, Rio took on his opponent’s ferocious attack head-on.

“Raaaagh!” Takahisa launched a countless number of sword attacks at Rio. Rio moved after every one, swinging his sword to divert the course of every attack made his way. Roughly ten seconds passed in this way.

“Kuh...” Takahisa felt like his attacks were having no effect at all—he didn’t even feel like he was swinging his sword at Rio anymore. He made eye contact with Rio’s all-seeing gaze and involuntarily retreated to put distance between them. However, Rio remained still. He stood there, waiting for Takahisa to make the next move; in part to restrain himself and not inadvertently defeat him.

“Do you plan on standing there the whole time?!” *What arrogance!* Takahisa made full use of his vastly-improved physical abilities to throw Rio off balance. Even then, Rio did not move to attack him. Takahisa ran in circles around Rio before launching an attack from behind, seeing that Rio was the most open there. “Gwah?!” It was as though Rio had eyes on the back of his head. Without even sparing a glance, he turned around and swung his sword, immediately knocking away the sword Takahisa was swinging. The recoil made Takahisa stumble backwards. When he made eye contact with Rio’s cold gaze, he grimaced in humiliation.

What was that look in his eyes?! Is he looking down on me when he’s a murderer himself?! All while preaching about how he’s trying to respect Miharu’s opinion, this hypocrite! I won’t... I won’t let a murderer look down on

me! How could I leave Miharuru by the side of a murderer?! Not my... my Miharuru...! He didn't want Miharuru stolen away from him. With that single thought in mind, Takahisa was overcome with an almost overwhelming sense of paranoia as he moved.

He wanted to win. To fight—and win. Against this man... This hypocrite! He had to win to prove to Miharuru that he was stronger than Rio. However, that was an impossible feat, to a degree that he was unaware of. To him, as long as he won, as long as he emerged victorious, Miharuru would understand. Takahisa believed that beyond a doubt. No, that belief was the only thing that kept him going. However—

“Dammit, at this rate...!”

He couldn't win. Takahisa had the faint hunch that was the case.

But he didn't want to lose. He couldn't lose. That was how much resolution he had coming into this battle, putting his pride and his life on the line.

“Haaaah!” Takahisa heightened the ability of his divine arms enhancement and charged directly at Rio. He moved at the speed of a flying arrow, shooting straight for Rio.

However, Takahisa's passion had caused him to make a mistake. Both he and Rio had increased the strength of their physical bodies so that a hit from a training sword would hurt, but wouldn't be life-threatening. But Takahisa's current speed was creating enough kinetic energy to ignore the increased body strength, packing enough of a punch to deal a fatal wound.

With this speed, I can do it! Takahisa was certain of his victory and rejoiced. Without any hesitation at all, he poured every ounce of strength he had into the sword clutched between both his hands and swung it at Rio.

“Wha...?!” His swinging sword cut through the air, leaving Takahisa speechless. There had been no resistance at all. There wasn't even a trace of Rio left before him. Why?! Takahisa felt a sense of doubt that was closing in on anger, when—

“Guh!” Takahisa felt a light impact on his back, and in the next moment, he toppled off-balance. He had been thrust away by Rio, but the attack had clearly

been held back. It wasn't enough to be considered a telling hit. The referee hadn't spoken up, either.

"What?!" Takahisa frantically scrambled to turn around with his sword at the ready, yelling in the direction of the contact. However, Rio was nowhere to be seen.

"Your field of view is too narrow," Rio's calm voice echoed through Takahisa's back.

"Wah!" Takahisa swung his sword in a panic.

"In a battle where you've already become hot-headed, hastening your speed past the point of control will only make you lose sight of your target. That's why your field of view is narrowing. The same can be said of you and Miharu..." Rio leaped backwards in a relaxed manner, avoiding Takahisa's attack as he spoke.

"...Is that sarcasm? You have no right to be saying that!" Takahisa spat hatefully.

"Perhaps," Rio agreed easily. To Takahisa, it felt like Rio was infuriatingly showing off the difference in their capabilities through his relaxed attitude. He charged at Rio vigorously.

"You're not worthy of Miharu!"

"I know."

"You murderous hypocrite!"

"I know that too."

"I absolutely won't allow it!"

"Do I need your permission?" That was true arrogance.

"That's why I'm going to win this match!" Takahisa declared, swinging his sword at Rio. The drawn sword drew a sharp arc downwards towards his opponent.

"Wha?!" Of all the things to do, Rio released his sword. He stabbed the tip into the ground, letting it stand vertically. However, there was no stopping Takahisa's blade any longer.

It was at this point that Takahisa finally feared that he might end up killing Rio. Suddenly, Rio stepped forward of his own accord.

But it wasn't as though Rio intended on dying, either. Aiming for the moment when Takahisa's fervor weakened slightly, he caught the blade of the sword between his hands.



It was the god-like move any Japanese person would be familiar with. An impossible acrobatic feat that nobody sane would attempt in a real battle.

“Shirahadori?!” Satsuki yelled from the spectator seats. The group who had come from Earth—as well as Liselotte, who had been reborn into this world just like Rio—were obviously horrified, but even Charlotte and the others, who didn’t know the technique name, reacted similarly.

“Urgh!” When the movement of the blade stopped and Takahisa stiffened, Rio took the change to twist his wrists and arms to steal the sword from Takahisa. He then threw it on the ground beside them.

However, the rules said that disarming your opponent wasn’t enough to count as a victory. Despite that, one would normally lose their will to fight in this situation. Rio had been aiming for that outcome.

“Will you still continue?” Rio asked. If he wanted to pick up his sword, he was welcome to, that was what was implied.

“Don’t... look down on me!” Takahisa roared and frantically picked up his sword. He paid no attention to how his posture had collapsed when doing so, instead swinging at Rio again. He stubbornly refused to give up.

So he still won’t fold. Then... Rio grabbed his sword and leaped high, retreating for the moment.

“Are you running away?!” Takahisa ran at full speed in pursuit. He proceeded to brace his weapon overhead and swing it down, but that was exactly what Rio expected.

Rio stood still, sharpening his senses to see through Takahisa’s incoming sword. Then, once he had predicted its path, he held his own sword low. With precise timing, he kicked off the ground with great force, swinging his sword at an extreme speed. The result was the fierce clashing sound of metal echoing throughout the. In that moment, Rio and Takahisa both finished swinging their swords and had their backs facing each other. Then, one beat later, the sound of something stabbing into the ground reached Rio and Takahisa’s ears. It was the sword that had been in Takahisa’s hand.

“Uh. Ah...” Takahisa opened his mouth, looking between the blade stuck in

the ground and the handle in his hand. Takahisa's sword had been smashed to pieces—smashing with it the heart of the one holding it.

"If you still want to continue, we can go barehanded next," Rio stated flatly.

"Ah... D-Damn it!" Takahisa readied his broken sword awkwardly, but he soon threw it against the ground. Rio suddenly started slowly walking towards him.

"I won't accept my defeat," Takahisa said to Rio, his whole body trembling in frustration. Rio unfalteringly continued to close the distance between them.

"I won't give up!" Despite those words, Takahisa seemed to have accepted defeat, as he didn't try to attack with just his bare hands. Rio pointed his sword at Takahisa indifferently.

"...Match, set! The victor is Sir Amakawa!" The referee announced victory loudly.

"I won't accept it, I won't accept it... I won't. You cannot be with Miharu. She's being fooled. I have to... I have to do something..." Takahisa hung his head as he muttered bitterly, as though he was reciting some kind of curse.



After the match, Takahisa left the arena alone, heading for the castle guest rooms as though he was running away from Miharu and Satsuki. However, just as he was about to open the door to the guest rooms, Aki and Lilianna caught up.

"Wait, brother!"

"Please wait a moment, Sir Takahisa."

The three female knights were with them.

"You...!" Takahisa finally came to a stop, turning around.

"Where do you think you're going?" Lilianna asked with a sigh.

"...I was going back to my room." Takahisa replied in shame.

"What were you going to do after returning?" Lilianna asked, as if she was soothing a pouting child.

"...Think of a plan to keep Miharu away from him," Takahisa mumbled in

response.

“So you still haven’t given up after all.” Lilianna sighed again, heavily this time.

“He’s... dangerous,” Takahisa muttered bitterly.

“Why do you say he’s dangerous?” Lilianna asked calmly.

“Because he’s a murderer!” Takahisa yelled.

Lilianna checked that there were no knights around them before exhaling in relief. “Please don’t utter such words in such a loud voice. He is an honorary knight of the Galarc Kingdom. Your silent departure after the duel was already uncommendable—the other party is an important honorary knight of another kingdom. Even if you are a hero, leaving without a word shows disrespect, which could cause an international incident.”

“But it’s the truth!”

“Whether it’s the truth or not is... Let’s go inside first. We can talk after you calm down. You three, stand guard outside the room. Refuse entry to all non-important visitors.”

Thus, the three female knights stood guard outside the room as Takahisa entered with Lilianna and Aki. Inside, Lilianna’s attendant was waiting. “Frill, tea for everyone.”

“Understood.” Frill moved to the kitchen under Lilianna’s orders.

“Now, please sit down.” Lilianna prompted Takahisa and Aki into the seats opposite her.

“...” Takahisa threaded his fingers and looked down in thought.

“I’d like to ask one thing first—Sir Takahisa, is your desire to be together with Lady Miharuru? Or would you be content as long as Lady Miharuru is no longer by Sir Amakawa’s side?” Lilianna began, her question getting straight to the core of the matter.

“...If she had to go with him, then I believe she’d be better off being together with me.”

“Wasn’t the match just now to decide who Lady Miharuru would be going

with?”

“No! It was so he’d refuse being with Miharuru if I won! I wasn’t trying to force Miharuru into where she’d go!” As long as Rio refused to be with Miharuru, Miharuru would have followed Aki, who was coming with him. That was his ulterior motive—but he didn’t say that out loud.

“If you wish to be with Lady Miharuru, would it not be best to just ask her sincerely?” Lilianna replied, giving a sound argument.

“T-That won’t work out, which is why we had a match!”

“And you lost that match.”

“Ugh...” Takahisa grimaced at the shot she’d taken at him.

“I believe it would be best to ask her honestly. If it doesn’t work, then you’ll have to give up.”

“I told you already! If I could do that...!” He wouldn’t have suffered so much. Miharuru was already firm in her decision to be with Haruto, after all.

“Lady Miharuru’s feelings are already so certain, neither you nor Lady Aki can convince her anymore. Is that correct?”

“Ugh...” Takahisa’s expression fell grimly. Lilianna took that as affirmation.

“In that case, how about we temporarily return to our kingdom to cool your head? We could even depart today, if you so wished. I believe it would be best for you to distance yourself from Lady Miharuru for the time being.”

“I can’t do that!” Takahisa declined immediately.

“However, there’s no way to solve this through a discussion. A match... No, the duel you had couldn’t solve this either. Doesn’t that leave you with no other solution? You wouldn’t forcefully bring Lady Miharuru to Centostella unwillingly, would you?” There was no way such a selfish action would be approved of. That’s what Lilianna had wanted to imply by saying that, but—

“...I see. I could always just bring Miharuru to Centostella first. It’s a fact that he’s a murderer. Whatever reason he gives to justify it doesn’t make it forgivable. And if I tell her my feelings and talk to her properly, she’ll surely understand...” he started muttering to himself. It seemed like Takahisa took her

words as a realistic option.

“That option is impossible. If it’s discovered that you forcefully took her, it would truly become an international incident,” Lilianna stated in a harsh tone.

“But there’s no other option!”

“Yes, there is. There must be. The Takahisa I know would never resort to such cowardly actions. I have been looking after you over these last few months, after all. And, as royalty, I’ve come into contact with many people before. Which is why I know that you may be inexperienced in some areas, but you are definitely not a bad person. If you followed through with this action right now, you’ll be fraught with guilt for the rest of your life.” Lilianna’s usual gentle demeanor was nowhere to be seen as she warned Takahisa with the look of a royal leader guiding others away from the wrong path.

“Lily...” *What do you know about me after just a few months?* He couldn’t say that because he understood how devoted Lilianna had been to supporting him in that time.

“From what I can see, Sir Amakawa is an outstanding individual. That is why Lady Miharuru, Lady Satsuki, and even Sir Masato have so much trust in him, no? And the fact that Sir Amakawa brought Lady Aki and the others to the castle for your and Lady Satsuki’s sakes is the biggest proof of this, is it not?”

When Lilianna praised Rio, Takahisa’s face turned bitter again. Aki’s too.
“...You don’t know, Lily. You don’t know him.”

“You can’t believe in him? In the man your precious Lady Miharuru trusts so much?” Lilianna asked Takahisa.

“If I did, I wouldn’t be suffering so much right now!” Takahisa yelled as though he was seeking some kind of salvation.

“...I think it would be best for you to temporarily distance yourself from Lady Miharuru after all. Won’t you return to the kingdom with me? Our kingdom may be closed off, but as long as you desire it, Lady Miharuru would be welcomed to our kingdom as a guest at any time, even if she isn’t affiliated with us,” Lilianna suggested as a compromise.

“That’s not— That’s not good enough! If I can’t bring Miharuru with me, then I

won't be going back to Centostella at all! In fact, I'll quit being a hero and take Aki and Miharuru with me to live by ourselves!"

"Wha..." Takahisa's self-centered statement left even Lilianna wide-eyed in shock. Aki, who had been listening silently, also blinked in surprise.

"Did you not say that you would become the hero for our kingdom? You promised me that you would return to Centostella even if you were to reunite with Lady Miharuru and the others during our visit to Galarc, no? Didn't you promise that you would work together with me to make our kingdom better? Are you telling me that the promise was all a lie?!" Lilianna's face twisted with sadness. The defection of a hero was the biggest loss that could happen to a kingdom, but even before that, she had believed she had built a relationship of trust with Takahisa.

"It wasn't a lie! I don't want to make it into a lie, so don't make me a liar! I don't want to do such a thing! That's why— That's why I want your cooperation!" Takahisa used his trump card—his position as a hero—to petition the first princess of the kingdom. It was practically coercion at this point.

"...Why are you so insistent that Lady Miharuru cannot be with Sir Amakawa?" Lilianna asked after hesitating for a moment.

"Because there's no way that Miharuru, someone born and raised in Japan, could find happiness being with a man who kills people without batting an eye. And anyway, once Miharuru— once I tell her my feelings, she'll surely understand." Takahisa gave a terribly biased answer. To Lilianna's ears, it was a statement of pure ignorance.

She was a little curious as to what he meant by saying that Haruto was someone who could kill without question, as many knights had killed one or two people when driven by the need before. If he had cursed those knights by calling them murderers to their faces, it would have been taken as an affront.

"Do you believe there is any realistic possibility in your statement? Even if I were to cooperate with you, there'd be no way of hiding the fact Lady Miharuru was taken away by force. And it would be impossible for you to live freely with Lady Miharuru and Aki by quitting your post as a hero without my cooperation."

"I can do it. No matter how it plays out, I'll make sure I succeed. I have to,"

Takahisa answered with bloodshot eyes. He was dangerously unstable, held captive by his own intense egotism and belief that his thoughts were absolute. There was no way of telling whether he could be persuaded in this situation, and at the same time, he was at risk of losing himself, which would obviously be an issue. If he used the power of his divine arms to run wild, he could cause terrible damage.

“Reality is far more harsh than you realize. If you were to choose that option, your feelings of regret would be inevitable and you will also understand how amazing it was for Sir Amakawa to have kept Lady Miharu and the others in his care until now.”

“...I won’t know until I try.”

Where was that confidence of his coming from? “There are some things you can know without trying.” Lilianna sighed for the umpteenth time, shooting him down resolutely.

“You know, though, Lily. About the heroic power hidden within me. That my power can protect the people closest to me.”

“You just lost to Sir Amakawa moments ago. The special ability hidden in your divine arms is indeed powerful, but if someone as experienced as him faces you, then even a hero would lose. Please understand that. There are evil deeds in this world that cannot be dealt with simply through power, too. And a plan like this would fall apart the moment Lady Miharu or Satsuki caught word of it.” Lilianna raised her voice so that she could be heard clearly in the kitchen beyond.

“Even so, my answer is that I will protect them. We won’t reach an agreement like this, Lily.” Takahisa said, watching Lilianna with determination.

“...Lady Aki, do you have nothing to add to persuade Sir Takahisa?” Lilianna sought salvation from his little sister Aki, who had been observing the situation carefully. Aki ducked her head, hesitating for a moment.

“I’ll... I’ll be there, Takahisa... Is that not enough?” she asked, lifting her face slowly.

“...” Takahisa frowned painfully, but he had no choice but to shake his head.

No, no it wasn't enough... His fists shook.

"I see..." For a moment, Aki lowered her eyes as though she'd cry. But, after a while, she mustered a smile with everything she had.

"Then let's kidnap Miharuru together. Masato would object, so we'd have to leave him behind..."

"Wha..." Lilianna was speechless. Who were these siblings? How could they be so selfish for their own sakes? Perhaps that was simply human nature...



“My family was destroyed once by that boy’s disappearance. The one who became my new family after that was you, brother. And the new family I’ve built up is going to be broken again... by none other than the same person. That’s why... there’s no other option. If you’re going to be serious about this, then I will, too,” Aki said, smiling brokenly.

“...Where are you going, Frill?” Takahisa turned around and called out to Frill, who was trying to quietly leave the kitchen and go outside. Frill came to a trembling halt.

“Ah, umm... We were out of tea leaves...”

“That’s fine—forget the tea. Come back.”

“O-Okay...” Frill dragged herself back to the middle of the room.

“Lily, were you trying to inform Miharuru and Satsuki of this?” Takahisa seemed to think that Lilianna had given Frill the order herself, as though saying he was ready to begin his plan right away.

“...Will you not yield at all, Sir Takahisa? About returning to the Centostella Kingdom with me. The only thing waiting at the end of the road that you are trying to go down is destruction. There is no way you can fool your way through,” Lilianna said with a resigned sigh.

“I have to fool them! Because I have to protect everyone. So that they can all be happy!” Takahisa said resolutely.

“That’s just your...” Lilianna was about to say something, but broke off with a bitter face. She realized if she said it out loud, she could truly break the relationship she had formed with Takahisa.

No, it was already broken by Takahisa himself. Craving the happiness he’d lost, witnessing it fold into the hands of someone else before his very eyes made him struggle hideously. However, reality wasn’t going the way he wanted—so much so that he had temporarily, or perhaps permanently, gone crazy.

Oh, what a pitiful person, Lilianna sympathized with a frown. But after several seconds passed, she spoke up.

“...I understand. As long as you don’t mind taking sole blame for running wild

when you are caught, then I give you permission to use our enchanted ship to take Lady Miharuru away. However, no matter what kind of end awaits you, you will be the one to take full responsibility. This you must accept. I will also have you accept several other conditions in advance. If you break these conditions in the future, I will punish you without mercy. I may not be able to save you when you have your regrets later. Are you still willing to choose this option despite all this, Sir Takahisa?" Lilianna asked coldly, as though questioning Takahisa's resolution. For a moment, even Takahisa was overwhelmed by how she pressured him.

"...I am. I choose this," he answered.

"I have received your word. Ensure that you do not go back on it." Lilianna's tone was sharper than usual.

"Lily, I'm sure you know already, but telling Miharuru and the others..."

"I will no longer attempt such a thing. Now that things have come to this, I must prepare myself for the worst, too. I will guide you through to the end." Lilianna shot down Takahisa's distrusting words immediately.

"...All right." Takahisa nodded his head, a bit frightened.

"Now, this is a reckless attempt to begin with, so please give me several hours at the most to make my preparations. There's no guarantee that we will succeed even with that, but I shall tell you the outline of the plan. Lady Aki will have an especially important role, so please be prepared," Lilianna explained. There was no turning back now.



Three hours after Takahisa had formed his reckless abduction plan with Lilianna, Aki went to visit Satsuki's quarters alone to tell them that Takahisa would be returning to the Centostella Kingdom urgently.

"Huh? Takahisa's going back already?!" Satsuki yelled in shock. Five people were currently in the room: Rio, Miharuru, Satsuki, Masato, and Aki.

"Umm, he was rather shocked that he lost to Haruto in the match..." Aki explained, glancing at Rio momentarily. When they made eye contact, she looked down guiltily.

“Hah... That’s so pathetic, bro...” Masato said in exasperation, but he did feel sympathy for his brother as he sighed worriedly.

“I’ve decided that I will be going with him,” Aki declared. They all stayed silent with uncomfortable expressions on their faces.

“Neither of you will be coming along, right?” Aki looked at Miharuru and Masato to confirm.

“...Yeah. I’m sorry,” Miharuru refused sadly. It was something she had decided long ago, yet when it was time to say goodbye, it felt like her chest was about to burst.

“I... It’s a tough choice, but I’m not going either.” Masato didn’t think it would benefit his brother if he changed his mind here and went with them, but he didn’t say it out loud. Right now, he just wanted to run away.

“...I see.” Aki’s voice sounded both relieved and upset at the same time.

“But I’ll come see you off,” Masato said resolutely.

Aki took a deep breath and lifted her head, speaking clearly to them all. “Okay. Takahisa wants to apologize to everyone before we leave. Will you come with me?”

Rio and the others left Satsuki’s quarters to follow Aki through the castle. They arrived at a section of the garden that surrounded the castle and spotted Takahisa standing there.

“Bro!” Masato called out and ran forward first.

“Hey, everyone. And Haruto, too...” Takahisa gave a shady smile as he responded to them all.

“We heard the news. You’re returning to Centostella?” Satsuki asked a little unhappily.

“Yes. I’ve caused enough of a stir... So Lilianna said it would be best for me to leave everyone and cool my head temporarily. I’m sorry.” Takahisa bowed his head, biting on his lower lip. On top of that, he called out their names one by one and lowered his head, saying over and over again how truly sorry he was.

...Why is he here alone, though? Rio found it strange. Had he been waiting for

Aki to bring them here this whole time? There had been no hesitation in Aki's steps, which was also a little curious.

"Haruto, I'm sorry. I've said so many rude things to you." Takahisa bowed his head at Rio as well. Had he calmed down in these few hours? Just as Rio thought that, he caught a glimpse of a murky darkness in Takahisa's eyes as he bowed his head. It gave him an eerie feeling.

Despite feeling something unsettling, Rio bowed his head in return. "No, I acted out of line, too. May I ask what you were doing here already?"

"...The horse carriages are waiting in the center garden to take us to the harbor, but Lily's currently talking to the king. I thought I'd take a short walk while I waited," Takahisa answered with a slightly stiff face. He seemed a little uncomfortable about something. However, that did answer the question of why he was here.

"There you are, Lady Satsuki, Sir Haruto." Charlotte appeared, calling Rio and Satsuki's names. At that moment, Takahisa and Aki's expressions clearly stiffened. Seeing that, Charlotte gave a pleasant smile.

"Is something the matter?" Being called out by name like this meant that she needed something. However, the fact she came all the way to the gardens outside the castle herself seemed a little strange. Well, it wasn't that strange if she had been guided by those who had spotted them in her search...

"I have something important to discuss with you two. May I have some of your time?" Charlotte tapped her right index finger against her mouth and batted her eyelashes up at Rio and Satsuki's faces.

"Umm, Takahisa and Aki are about to head to the Centostella Kingdom, so if it's not urgent, we would prefer to talk to the two of them a little more first..." said Satsuki. It was difficult for Rio to refuse because of his social position, but as a hero, Satsuki could refuse the princess without backlash.

"Oh, we're about to head off anyway, so it's okay. I'd rather not drag out our farewells too long, otherwise I'll be reluctant to leave..." Takahisa said with a slightly awkward, uneasy look.

"...I see. Then, this time we'll be saying farewell—and it's a bittersweet one.

Next time, we'll be in a much better place. Everyone finally reunited again, thanks to Haruto. We have to take a moment to appreciate the good that came from that. Let's meet again soon, no matter what." Satsuki didn't seem to doubt that they would meet again, though her face darkened as she spoke.

"...Yeah." Takahisa and Aki both looked down and nodded, making their expressions hard to read. However, it seemed as though there was a shadow over their faces.

"See you later then, Takahisa. Aki," Satsuki said, lightly embracing the two of them.

"We'll see you again someday soon," Rio also said to them in parting.

Takahisa responded with a slightly stiff "yeah," but Aki averted her gaze in silence. Seeing Aki's reaction made Miharu want to say something, but—

"Now, shall we go?" Charlotte said, prompting Rio and Satsuki to move.

Aishia. I know we're in the castle, but I'm a little worried about the lack of guards. Could you stay beside Miharu and the others in your spirit form and let me know if something happens? If something happens, you can materialize too, Rio said to Aishia within him.

Okay, got it, Aishia replied immediately. In that time, Charlotte took up her place to his left side while Satsuki, looking reluctant, moved to stand at Rio's right side.

As a result, with the exception of Aishia in her spirit form, the only ones left were Takahisa, Aki, Masato, and Miharu. Just then, Aki let out a noise in realization.

"Ah!"

"What's the matter?" Masato asked Aki after his small body flinched.

"I forgot something in my room. I have to get it before we leave. Come with me." Aki grabbed Masato's right arm.

"Ah, hey! Aki! What are you doing?!" Masato asked as he was dragged towards the castle.

"Try and be tactful for once. You've noticed too, haven't you? Just five

minutes is enough.” Aki glanced back at Takahisa and Miharuru.

“Ugh. Fine, then.” Masato looked at the two of them before scratching at his head with his left hand and sighing. Meanwhile, an awkward air hung over Takahisa and Miharuru, who had been left behind.

“Do you want to go for a walk?” Takahisa asked Miharuru.

“Sure, okay...” Miharuru nodded awkwardly, then followed Takahisa’s lead around the garden. Miharuru left a bit of distance between them as they walked. One, then two minutes passed in silence; their conversations didn’t last long even back when they were in Japan, but their extended silence now was probably influenced by how their relationship had become stilted since their reunion here.

“Hey, Takahisa. How far are we walking?” Miharuru asked after a while. They had come all the way to the outskirts of the castle grounds. There was no one in the area and they were right next to the wall that surrounded the castle.

“Ah, umm. I hadn’t decided. Sorry...” Takahisa came to a stop and said awkwardly.

“Umm, should we go back? We’re pretty far from the castle now...” Miharuru suggested.

“No... Say, Miharuru. Why do you want to be together with him?” Takahisa suddenly asked.

“Why... Why...? Umm, because I want to, I guess.” Miharuru thought seriously before giving a redundant answer.

“That isn’t a reason.” *So she would choose him over me after all.* Takahisa felt painful emotions swirling in his chest once more, but he feigned composure as he spoke to Miharuru. His voice was shaking.

“But that’s what it is. I can’t explain it well in words.” No, there was one accurate way of expressing it, but it wasn’t something that should be admitted to others lightly. However...

Perhaps she needed to tell Takahisa after all. Miharuru hesitated for a moment, but she decided to say it herself.

However, Takahisa was the one to mention it. “Umm... Do you like him? Is that why you want to be with him?”

“Err... Yeah. That’s right—I like him. That’s why I want to be with him.” Normally she would be too embarrassed to admit it out loud, but for some reason, she said it now without feeling any hint of shyness.

“Is that because he’s Amakawa Haruto? Or because of his current self?” Takahisa’s expression stiffened. He had been too embarrassed to talk about love to Miharū while they were in Japan, but he was being fairly intrusive with his questions now. Miharū’s eyes wavered in surprise, but she soon smiled and answered.

“It’s both. I think I love both of them. The Haruto from before he was reborn, and the Haruto now. I fell in love with the same person twice.” Because Haru-kun exists, she could love the current Haruto even more. Because Haruto exists, she could love Haru-kun even more. That was her thinking.

However, that answer gouged a hole in Takahisa’s heart. It was unacceptable. There was absolutely no way he could accept it. He gritted his teeth.

“But... but...” he began to say, his shoulders shaking like a cornered criminal.



Meanwhile, Charlotte brought Rio and Satsuki to the rooftop garden, which was reserved for royalty.

“See? Isn’t it a lovely view of the outside of the castle? You can just see the enchanted ship harbor from here, too.” Charlotte walked to the outskirts of the rooftop garden and turned back to smile at Rio and Satsuki behind her.

“It certainly is lovely, but... What was the important matter that you wanted to discuss, Char?” Satsuki asked, despite being impressed by the view from the garden. In Satsuki’s case, it was a scenery she witnessed every day from the top floor of the tower she resided in, which was even taller than the garden, so she wasn’t that impressed.

“Hehe. Now now, there’s no need for such haste. I’ve prepared somewhere for us to sit over here, so let’s take a seat first. Now, come this way.” Charlotte brushed them off in an aloof manner, leisurely inviting them to the seats that

had been prepared in a spot to oversee the scenery.

Haruto.

Just then, Aishia's voice echoed in Rio's head.

...What's wrong? Rio walked behind Charlotte as he answered immediately.

Takahisa is taking Miharu outside of the castle.

Is he trying something?

I don't know. They're talking right now. Wanna hear?

Huh, I can do that...?

You and I are connected, so I can share the things I see and hear with you.

As soon as Aishia said that, muffled voices that didn't belong to her filled Rio's head. It was Takahisa's voice.

"Umm... Do you like him? Is that why you want to be with him?" Hearing him suddenly say something like that startled Rio.

Hey, Aishia. We should respect their privacy... He didn't think that he should be listening in on this conversation, but before he could say anything more to Aishia, someone else spoke up.

"Err... Yeah. That's right—I like him. That's why I want to be with him."

It was Miharu's voice. Rio swallowed his breath with a gasp. He was filled with an indescribable sense of guilt for eavesdropping on someone else's conversation like this—and felt the same about Aishia.

"Is that because he's Amakawa Haruto? Or because of his current self?"

"It's both. I think I love both of them. The Haruto before he was reborn, and the Haruto now. I fell in love with the same person twice." While Rio's thoughts were occupied, Miharu and Takahisa's conversation continued. He was now certain they were discussing him.

Aishia, I really shouldn't be listening to this conversation after all. I think you should also stay out of hearing reach and just watch over them from a distance, too. Rio passed on a message for Aishia to suspend her transmission of the conversation, but—

“But— But he’s a murderer!” Takahisa began speaking of Rio in contempt. The situation was taking a suspicious turn.



“But— But he’s a murderer!” Takahisa released the emotions he had been forcing down as he spoke ill of Rio in front of Miharuru.

“...” Miharuru looked extremely sad.

“Hey, Miharuru—open your eyes! You’re being tricked by him!” Takahisa objected in frustration.

“So your apology to Haruto earlier was just for show.”

“That— I had to. I had to do what was necessary.”

“What was necessary?” Miharuru stared intensely at Takahisa, making him lose his nerve at the illusion of being seen through completely.

“T-That’s irrelevant right now! I’m asking you to come to your senses and come with me instead!” Takahisa’s voice trembled as he yelled, at his wit’s end.

“I won’t be going with you. You’re the one who needs to open your eyes, Takahisa,” Miharuru said firmly.

“You’re being deceived, Miharuru! He’s a murderer!”

“I’m not being deceived.”

“You are! He acts like a good person, but he’ll turn around and kill people if he needs to. He said there’s someone he wants to kill. Is that not hypocritical of him?! You’re being fooled into staying with a murderer, no matter how you think about it!”

“So what? He saved me. Aki and Masato, too—we were all saved by him. When we were abducted by the slave merchant, he was fighting out of our line of sight. Someone may have died in that battle. Haruto may have been the one that killed them. Would you still insult Haruto, knowing that?”

“I’m saying this with your well-being in mind, Miharuru. We live in different worlds compared to him! He’s a person from this world, and we’re people who lived in Japan. We may return to Japan someday. He would be nothing but a

dirty criminal in Japan.”

“...How can you say such horrible things?” Miharū’s shock made her back away from Takahisa to create distance between them.

“It’s because I love you, Miharū! I’m in love with you! And I always have been! From the moment we met until now—all this time!” Takahisa confessed his love for Miharū at the most inappropriate moment.

“...I’m sorry. There’s just no way.” Miharū’s fright caused her to reject him in a short tone.

“Wh... Are you saying you’d choose him?! When he wouldn’t choose you?!”

“H-He doesn’t need to choose me! I know there are lots of people around Haruto who are more attractive than me! I’ve accepted that already! But I... I...!” Takahisa’s insensitive statement made Miharū raise her voice angrily.

“You’re my number one! If Lily is number two, then you’re number one by a landslide! I always have you at the forefront of my mind, I’m always thinking of your well-being the most...!”

“You say what you’re doing is for my sake, but in the end it’s all for your own! Isn’t that the hypocrisy you hate so much?” Miharū pointed out Takahisa’s contradictory behavior.

“I’m different! Don’t lump me in with him! I’m not a murderer! I wouldn’t ever kill a person!”

“...I’ve had enough,” Miharū muttered in disbelief. Her emotions had surpassed shock and moved on to disappointment. She weakly turned on her heel to depart.

“Even after everything I’ve said, you still won’t come to your senses?” Takahisa said to her back, suppressing his anger.

“I don’t want to talk to you anymore. Not until *you* come to your senses and apologize to Haruto sincerely. Honestly, I don’t want you to take Aki with you, but she adores you so much. Make sure you don’t make her cry. Now... goodbye.” Miharū came to a stop but didn’t look back. Takahisa’s entire body trembled.

“Huh...?” Miharuru felt a strong impact against her back. Then, she felt a floating sensation—like something was carrying her.

“T-Takahisa?! W-What are you doing?! Stop it!” Takahisa had picked her up, holding her as he stood looking up at the castle walls.

He had only been a few meters away from Miharuru earlier. Aishia was lying in wait in her spirit form, but taking into account the time lag of turning from spirit form to materialized form, it was impossible for her to interrupt Takahisa’s sudden movement boosted by his divine arms’ physical enhancement.

“I thought— I thought you’d understand after I told you my feelings. But if you still don’t get it, I’ll just move on to the next step of the plan!” Takahisa said with Miharuru in his arms, then made a full-powered sprint towards the wall. His eyes burned with a hollow light.

The castle walls were roughly 10 meters tall. They were generally constructed to look shorter on the inside and taller on the outside, so it wasn’t that difficult to break out from the inside.

However, to Miharuru, who had her movements restricted as she was being forcibly carried, the looming wall approaching nearer incited nothing but fear. Just before Takahisa leaped, Miharuru curled up and squeezed her eyes shut.

I can’t just let this happen! Miharuru knew she needed to inform someone of this situation, so she frantically tried to do something. She thought of making something happen using the spirit arts she learned from the spirit folk.

Bang!

“W-What?!” The sound of something tearing exploded loudly, making Takahisa flinch for a moment and stand on top of the castle wall. Because her spirit arts weren’t fully-developed yet, she had only created the sound of exploding air.

The thought of Miharuru creating that sound didn’t even cross Takahisa’s mind, so he looked around in confusion.

“Hey. Who’s that up there?! There’s someone on the walls! He’s carrying a girl!” One of the soldiers on guard had heard the explosion and spotted Takahisa on top of the wall. Miharuru took the chance to create a ball of light in

her hands and float it high into the air. It would only last for a minute, but it served as a landmark.

“Gah, what?! Damn it!” When Takahisa spotted Miharuru making the ball of light in her hands, he paled. But he couldn’t afford to stand around and be caught, so he proceeded to jump off the castle wall and run at full speed towards the harbor where the Centostella Kingdom’s enchanted ship waited.

This section of the castle wall was the closest to the lake, and Lilianna had told him of the shortest path to the harbor. It would take less than a minute to get there.

“I’m bringing you with me! I’m bringing you with me no matter what!” The preparations to depart were completed already, so as long as they reached the ship, the plan would succeed. Takahisa believed that as he charged ahead at full speed.



Meanwhile, a few moments before that, Rio and the others stood in the rooftop garden. Rio had seated himself with Satsuki and Charlotte, but his ears were turned towards Miharuru and Takahisa’s conversation. No—it would be more accurate to say his entire mind was occupied with it.

He hadn’t wanted to eavesdrop, but the conversation took such an unsettling turn that he couldn’t help but listen to the conversation that was being transmitted to him in installments.

Aishia, what’s the situation right now? He asked Aishia around when Miharuru rejected Takahisa’s confession.

It’s as you hear. The two are arguing with each other.

Is everything okay?

No threatening moves have been made yet. I cannot materialize and appear to them yet, so I’ll continue to observe like this, Aishia answered flatly.

I-I see... Rio felt relieved for the time being, but that moment didn’t last long.

“T-Takahisa?! W-What are you doing?! Stop it!” Miharuru’s voice echoed in his head. Rio flinched.

Aishia, what happened?! Rio asked instantly. Aishia's reply came immediately.

Takahisa suddenly grabbed Miharuru and picked her up. He's climbing the castle wall now. In the direction of the ship harbor.

Right after that—*Bang!* A sound echoed throughout the grounds.

"What... was that..." Satsuki reflexively leapt to her feet, looking in the direction of the sound.

"Wait, Miharuru?! And Takahisa?! W-What is this?!" Satsuki reflexively cast her physical enhancement to see Takahisa carrying Miharuru on top of the castle wall over a hundred meters away. Rio also stood up and confirmed just that.

"...Has something happened?" Charlotte stood up and asked Satsuki.

"Takahisa grabbed Miharuru and is standing on top of the castle wall! They just jumped down from it! He said he was going back to Centostella earlier!" Satsuki's tone was rough due to her confusion.

"Indeed, the enchanted ship harbor is right outside of the castle wall over there, but..." Charlotte replied, giving her geographic point of view.

"Is he trying to kidnap Miharuru?! What is he thinking?!"

"You can't say that for sure... but what is that ball of light? It's being fired into the sky continuously. Is it some kind of signal magic? It's getting closer to the harbor," Charlotte said, analyzing the situation.

It's dangerous to attack while they're running. You can simply secure Miharuru after they've boarded the ship and let down their guard.

Wait, they're at the harbor already? Rio was already exchanging orders with Aishia, but in that short amount of time Takahisa had arrived at the harbor.

"Miharuru's sending out a signal. I gave her a magic artifact that could do something like that. They're probably at the harbor already," Rio explained.

"Sir Takahisa has probably enhanced his body with his divine arms, so if he's at the harbor already, I fear the ship will depart at any moment. No doubt the workers at the harbor are unaware of the situation, so we cannot stop them if they depart now," Charlotte pointed out.

“W-What do we do?! This is no time to be chatting leisurely!” Satsuki yelled in shock.

“There’s nothing we can do from here...” said Charlotte. It seemed like there were no options left.

“...I’ll go.” Rio thought silently for a moment, before volunteering himself to pursue. No sooner had he said that, he retreated from the outer perimeter of the rooftop garden. Then, he drew his sword from the sheath at his waist.

“Just what do you intend on doing... Wha?!” Charlotte had been staring at Rio suspiciously when Rio suddenly burst into a dash, making her flinch. Her usual age-inappropriate coquettish attitude fell silent as she let out a cute shriek the moment Rio burst past her.

“A-Are you trying to kill yourself?! Even with the physical enhancement of your enchanted sword, you...!” She soon snapped back to her senses and yelled at Rio, who had already leaped from the rooftop garden and fallen out of hearing range.

However, after Rio had leaped and soared through the air for a while, he poured a tremendous amount of magic essence into his sword and used wind spirit arts to create a large gust of wind, propelling him forward through the air.

Satsuki stared with a dazed smile for a few moments before bursting into laughter at the sight of Rio leaping over the castle wall. She cheered him on even though he was out of earshot. “Ahaha... Go for it, Haruto! I’m leaving it to you!”

“His actions make no sense at all...” Beside Satsuki, Charlotte watched Rio fly through the air using his sword in a daze. However, her gaze gradually grew heated.

“...How wonderful.” Forgetting her position as the second princess, she was simply captivated by the sight of the Black Knight, whose very existence seemed to turn the tables everywhere.



Meanwhile, one of the enchanted ships in the possession of the Centostella Kingdom had just made an emergency departure by Takahisa’s forceful order

and was now gaining altitude over the water. On board, Miharu confronted Takahisa on the deck of the ship.

When Miharu had been abducted from the castle, Aishia had suspended the transmission of their conversation to communicate with Miharu telepathically. Aishia could indeed materialize and rescue Miharu from here, but that would make the explanations to follow quite difficult. They decided she would observe quietly as long as Miharu's life and body were not infringed upon. However—

If Miharu's screams reach your heart, then you come and save her.

The message that Aishia telepathically sent to Rio may have assisted in his decision to act of his own accord.

Miharu, Haruto will reach this ship soon, Aishia encouraged.

Okay! Haruto was coming. Haru-kun was coming. Miharu was incredibly happy to hear that, and used it to encourage herself. However, she had to first condemn Takahisa for his barbaric act.

“What were you thinking, doing something like this? Did you really find it so unforgivable that I would be beside Haruto?” She asked, trying to find the true intention of his actions.

“Unforgivable? Of course it is! Didn't I just tell you I've been in love with you from the moment we met? And yet, he's the one that's always occupied your heart. There's no way I can forgive it! For what— For what did I...!” Takahisa had been cornered with nowhere further to go and started to panic. The instability that he had rarely shown in Japan had been exposed by the stress of a single person's pursuit in this world, awakening into a deep-rooted delusion.

“I am not your property, Takahisa.” Miharu witnessed her friend from Japan turn into a completely different person before her and felt helpless. Although he had completely transformed out of jealousy and greed, Takahisa was still Aki and Masato's older brother. Though she had never seen him romantically, that didn't change the fact he was a close friend of hers.

“Ngh... Argh! Fuck! Lily's not on board... Aki's not on board, either. It wasn't supposed to go like this...!” When Miharu voiced her clear rejection of him, the pain caused Takahisa to escape into another reality. However, there wasn't a

single reality left that favored him right now.

The ship's crew were scrambling in a panic on the deck, discussing whether they should turn back and land on the water again as Lilianna was not on board. It was then that someone landed on the deck. It was Rio. The crew froze in utter shock.

"Haru-kun!" Miharuru yelled.

"Wha..." Takahisa's eyes widened in shock, before he glared at him, enraged. For him, Rio was the root of every problem he had. He would never approve of his existence.

"I came... to save you." Rio smiled awkwardly as he spoke to Miharuru in a gentle tone. He wore the same expression as when he first saved Miharuru from the slave traders.

"...Right." Miharuru nodded in a daze. Then, Rio walked towards Miharuru slowly, showing no care or caution towards Takahisa at all.

"Coming all this way...!" *Just to steal her away?! What a nightmare!* Takahisa grit his teeth before yelling "Laevateinn!" and summoning his divine arms. It was a sword with a beautiful red blade—a one-handed sword that was roughly one meter long. Takahisa swung the sword and slashed at Rio, but Rio flicked his sword without even a glance, deflecting Takahisa's incoming blade.

"Gah?!" Takahisa was blown backwards and stumbled. In that time, Rio stood before Miharuru, but Takahisa's eyes had yet to lose their aggressive light as they fixed on Rio with loathing.

"...Do you think it's okay for me to injure him?" Even Rio questioned Miharuru with a fed-up look on his face. He was finding Takahisa rather persistent.

"H-Huh?" Miharuru was unsure of what he had asked and just blinked blankly. The next moment, Takahisa once again tried to close in on Rio to attack.

"Get away from Mi— Guh?!" Rio closed in on him instead, landing a counter on his face with all his might—Takahisa flew across the deck and crashed into the wall. His nose was twisted rather unnaturally, blood flowing out. He seemed to have cut the inside of his mouth too, as a fair amount of blood was streaming from there as well.



A normal person would have had their neck snapped, but his physical enhancement meant he got off with just a broken nose. Damage that could be restored with healing magic.

Rio had punched a hero on impulse, but it was an emergency situation, so he deemed it justifiable. It was one of the rare occasions where Rio had acted without thinking.

“...Shall we return? Come this way.” Rio drew near Miharu and walked along the deck at a leisurely pace. The ship crew had trembled in fear at the sight of Rio punching the hero, but after a moment, they exploded in cheers and applause.

“Well done!”

“If you’re going back down to the ground, we can assist!”

“What kind of hero would forcefully kidnap a young lady like that?!”

The ship’s crew seemed to have their own thoughts about Takahisa’s rampage, as they praised Rio highly.

“Haha. We’ll go back like this. Hold on tight, Miharu.” With those parting words, Rio leaped down from the enchanted ship with Miharu clinging to him. The crew rushed to lean over the side, watching them fall in a panic. But, once they spotted Rio soaring nimbly through the use of his sword, they cheered even louder for him.

Epilogue: Rebirth of Childhood Friends

Rio had his left arm wrapped around Miharuru as he used his right hand to skillfully control his sword, making a gentle return to the Galarc royal castle.

“...I wonder what will happen after this,” Rio asked Miharuru with a half-resigned expression as they approached the castle. How could they explain the circumstances to the people of the Galarc and Centostella kingdoms?

“Yeah... I wonder what’ll happen.” It felt like the situation would grow completely out of hand. Miharuru imagined it with a stiff smile.

“Perhaps it was excessive of me to punch Takahisa.” Despite his words, Rio had a slight smile on his face.

“I think that was fine. Violence is necessary sometimes...” Violence didn’t seem to be her strong point, as Miharuru was nodding as though to convince herself.

“I’ll make sure you’ll never be in a situation where you need to act violent, so don’t worry,” Rio immediately interjected.

“But I think I’d like to defend myself, at least. I want to learn properly. From Haru-kun... Ah, umm. From Haruto.” Miharuru requested timidly, watching for Rio’s reaction.

“...I don’t mind,” Rio suddenly said.

“Huh?” Miharuru gasped.

“I don’t mind if you call me Haru-kun sometimes. I’m sure there’ll be times where you want to reminisce about the past.” Rio’s voice was a little bashful as he spoke.

“Is that because you see me as your childhood friend?” And did that mean he would face Miharuru as Amakawa Haruto? Miharuru lifted her face right up to Rio’s.

“Ahaha.” Rio laughed, trying to brush off Miharuru’s question. Come to think of it, the Miharuru that Amakawa Haruto knew always brought her face close like

this when she asked questions, even without her knowing of it.

“I think the way that you try to laugh off questions is a bad habit of yours, Haru-kun,” Miharuru pouted a little.

Rio looked up at the sky before returning Miharuru’s close-distance gaze. “I can at least promise to do my best to meet your demands, seeing as you say you want to be together in the future as well. Will that do for you?”

“...Y-Yes. We can start there...” When Miharuru made eye contact with him up close, she ducked her head out of embarrassment. Such actions were exactly reminiscent of the girl that Amakawa Haruto knew.

Your feelings reached Haruto properly. It was worth transmitting your conversation with Takahisa, Aishia’s voice echoed.

“My... conversation with Takahisa...?” Miharuru cocked her head in suspicion for a moment. “Y-You were listening?! You heard my conversation with Takahisa?!” She remembered what she had said to Takahisa and turned bright red.

“Ahaha.” Rio once again laughed to gloss over the situation. Miharuru once again unconsciously drew her face near Rio’s.

“Answer me!”

“Speaking of which, weren’t you discussing things with Aishia before I ever named myself with the Amakawa family name?” Rio suddenly remembered.

“Huh?! T-That’s not... true...” Miharuru’s eyes were clearly wavering.

“Well, I’ll ask Aishia for details later. We’ll consider it even with that.”

“It’s totally not even at all!” *I basically confessed to him! No, but I didn’t say it in front of him, so maybe it doesn’t count?* Miharuru tried to persuade herself as her face flushed red.

“Then forgive me, Mii-chan.” Rio gave a shy smile before uttering Miharuru’s nickname teasingly.



Afterword

Hello everyone. Thank you for everything, as always. This is Yuri Kitayama. Thank you for picking up *Seirei Gensouki: Spirit Chronicles Volume 10 — Forget-Me-Not of Rebirth*.

Since Volume 1 went on sale in October of 2015, this series has finally achieved the ten volume mark. The story also reached a turning point at the same time, and in this volume I crossed one of the multiple story mountains I had planned from when I first started writing. This was one of the stages I wanted to write up to when the novelization was decided, so it's an emotional moment for me.

However, *Seirei Gensouki* hasn't ended as of this volume. The next goal is Volume 20! How far I can release will also depend on the sales of the series, so I would be most grateful to everyone for sticking through with the story until its completion.

And now, to change the topic abruptly: I will be releasing a new light novel through Kadokawa's MF Bunko J called "Miryou Sukiru de Ikinari Sekai Saikyou" on March 24th, one week before this volume goes on sale.

This will be my second work and first time writing in first person, and it will have a lighter tone than the dramatic style of *Seirei Gensouki*, but I hope you will find it an interesting read of right versus wrong in a fantasy world battle summoning story.

With that aside, as the two release dates are close, HJ Bunko and MF Bunko J have worked together to make a collaborative release of *Seirei Gensouki* Volume 10 and *Miryou Sukiru* Volume 1 come to fruition.

The specifics involve purchasing both volumes to receive a bonus collaborative short story of roughly 20,000 characters, so please check out *Miryou Sukiru* (the bonus will not be available forever, so apologies in advance).

The collaborative short story features the strongest characters in *Seirei*

Gensouki—Rio and Aishia— traveling through the Wilderness when they wander into the world of Miryou Sukiru and get involved in the story there. For the enjoyment of the readers, I've included quite a number of factors that relate to the main story of Seirei Gensouki too, so I believe it will stir up quite a number of theories.

Now, I must wrap up here, so... Hopefully we'll meet again for Volume 11!

Yuri Kitayama

March 2018

Bonus Short Stories

You Pervert!

Rio had finished his chores for the day in the stone house and was taking a breather on the sofa in the living room. Draped in his favorite blanket, he felt a light drowsiness overcome him and napped for half an hour or so.

“Hmm...?”

At some point in time, Aishia and Latifa had sat down on either side of him and fallen asleep against his shoulders. It was just the three of them in the living room.

...I can't get up at this rate.

Seeing the two of them sleeping so soundly made him reluctant to stand up and wake them. But at the same time, they'd have cricks in their necks if they continued to sleep like this.

Maybe I should carry them to bed instead? Rio pondered.

“Oh, you're awake, Rio,” Celia said, walking in along with Sara.

“Yes. Where has everyone else gone?” Rio asked, looking around the living room.

“We were just having tea in Orphia's room, but we ran out of snacks, so we came out to restock,” Sara replied with a giggle.

“I see. While you're here, could you take this blanket off of me? I can't seem to move right now.”

“Sure, hold on.” At Rio's request, Celia approached to take the blanket off him.

“...Mm. Morning.” Aishia slowly blinked her eyes open.

“Morning, Aishia. Still sleepy?” Rio asked, watching Aishia rub her eyes.

“Yeah...” Aishia nodded, still half asleep.

“Can you change into your spirit form and enter me for a moment? I’m going to carry Latifa to bed.”

“All right.” Aishia immediately disappeared. With that, Rio was free to move.

“Okay. I’m going to take Latifa to bed, then.” He turned to her and lifted her up in his arms in a familiar manner. Latifa’s mouth relaxed into a happy smile as she entrusted herself to Rio.

“She sleeps so happily.” Celia watched Latifa’s sleeping face and smiled.

“She sometimes feigns it, though,” Sara said with a sigh.

“She is a fox werebeast, after all,” Celia laughed in amusement.

“I’ll be going, then,” Rio said, and started walking towards Latifa’s room. Meanwhile, Sara went to grab snacks from the kitchen and headed back to Orphia’s room with Celia. Orphia and Alma were waiting inside.

“Welcome back, you two,” Orphia called out to the two of them with a warm smile.

“...What’s with the blanket?” Alma asked, seeing Celia.

“Ah, it’s Rio’s...”

The blanket was still warm from Rio’s body heat; she had folded it while Sara had gone to get the snacks. Rio hadn’t returned, so she ended up carrying it with her—almost as though she couldn’t bear to part with it. Sara, Orphia, and Alma’s gazes naturally gathered on the blanket.

“Now that I think about it, there was no need to bring it with me. Rio might be back already, so I should go leave it in the living room,” Celia said with a high pitch to her voice. She felt embarrassed for some reason.

“Hehe, why don’t you take the opportunity to try sleeping with Rio’s blanket? It’s still warm, right? I’m sure it’d feel wonderful,” Orphia said to Celia with a mischievous smile.

Celia blinked a few times before blushing red. “Huh? I-I can’t do that!”

“Then how about you, Sara? Alma?” Orphia asked the two of them.

“W-What are you saying, Orphia?” Sara asked bashfully, seemingly shaken by that. Alma pretended that she hadn’t heard to avoid digging her own grave.

“Really? Then I’ll borrow it and sleep with it,” Orphia giggled, looking at Celia.

“Y-You can’t do that! Pervert!” Celia hugged the blanket to herself tightly.

“Hehe, it was just a joke,” Orphia said in amusement.

“...Geez.” Celia’s cheeks remained scarlet as she pouted.

“Orphia looks serious, but she can be quite the prankster,” Sara sighed tiredly.

The longer she held onto it, the more likely the conversation would take a strange turn. That thought made Celia stand up. “Ahaha... I’m going to leave the blanket in the living room. Rio might be back by now.”

“Too bad for you, Sara.”

“It’s not like that!”

Leaving the bickering girls behind her, Celia returned to the living room alone.

“Rio’s still not here...”

No one was in the living room. Celia headed towards the sofa Rio had been sleeping on earlier. She was about to place it down on the sofa, when—
“...Hmph.”

The warmth of the blanket was so comforting, she hesitated to let go. Celia stared at it. After several seconds, she suddenly hugged it close and buried her face in the blanket.

“...Warm.”

And it also smelled like Rio, probably. Sara and Latifa would know for sure...

Wait, what am I doing?! Stop! Now I’m the pervert!

Celia snapped out of it and hurriedly brought the blanket away from her face. But even then, she couldn’t help yearn for that warmth, feeling envious of Aishia and Latifa, who always clung to Rio without reserve.

“O-One more time, just one...”

Celia gently brought the blanket close to her face again. But when the door to

Latifa's room opened with a *clack!* she flinched upright and froze.

"...Huh? Professor? You're still here."

Rio cocked his head curiously at Celia standing alone in the living room. Thankfully, he hadn't seen any of what Celia had herself dubbed perverted.

Celia exhaled in relief and controlled her thumping heart as much as she could to give a calm answer. "Y-Yeah. I accidentally took your blanket to Orphia's room, so I was bringing it back."

One Scene of the Banquet

On the first night of the banquet hosted by the Kingdom of Galarc, when Satsuki was first introduced, Miharuru stood beside Rio with Liselotte, the three of them moving together.

There was a constant stream of nobility coming to greet them, so they had yet to move since the beginning of the banquet, receiving one noble after another on the upper floor.

The main guest of the night was the hero, Satsuki, so she had been gathering the most attention, but Miharuru had gathered nearly as much attention from the nobles. While part of the reason was because she was Satsuki's friend, her elegant beauty also played a large part.

"Goodness me, what a wonderful sight. That black hair on such a maiden..."

"Indeed. Both Lady Satsuki's radiance and Lady Miharuru's elegance—there must be plenty of young men falling for them."

The middle-aged nobles with families praised Miharuru in awe. Many of the nobles had fallen for her exotic beauty, which was rarely seen in the Strahl region, and were staring at her with heated gazes. But at the same time, Rio was garnering envy for being waited upon by both Miharuru and Liselotte, one of the most beautiful bachelorettes of the Galarc Kingdom.

The gazes I can feel... are probably not just my imagination.

Rio could guess the reason behind most of those gazes and mustered a pained smile. Liselotte must have noticed, too, but she was used to such situations and looked perfectly calm. Meanwhile, Miharu hadn't seemed to notice the heated gazes yet.

"What's the matter, Haruto?" Miharu immediately noticed Rio looking at her and spoke up. He was a little surprised at how aware Miharu had been of his gaze, but smiled anyway.

"It's nothing. Are you tired?"

"I'm fine," Miharu replied with a grin. Seeing her smile from close-up made an indescribable emotion swell within Rio. Whether it was Amakawa Haruto or Rio's, he didn't know.

"That's good to hear," Rio replied with a smile, hiding the feelings residing in his heart.

Magic Words to Make Omurice Taste Better

Not long before Miharu was to attend the banquet at the Galarc Kingdom, Rio had left the stone house on his own, so Miharu, Latifa, and Celia prepared lunch a little later than usual. Once he returned, Rio waited in the dining room for them to finish cooking.

"Thanks for waiting, Onii-chan!"

Latifa appeared with a tray, accompanied by Miharu and Celia.

"Ta-da! Onii-chan's favorite—omurice! Miharu taught Celia and I how to make it in a delicious way! What do you think?" Latifa showed off the omurice on the tray with a carefree smile.

"Thank you—it looks delicious. And thanks to Miharu and Professor Celia too."

"I-It was nothing. I was just a little curious about how it was made after hearing omurice was your favorite and finding it delicious when I tried it. I didn't do anything in particular," Celia replied shyly to Rio's gratitude.

“That’s not true. Celia made most of the chicken rice.” Miharuru added with a giggle.

“Hey hey, Onii-chan. Can I put ketchup on top of your omurice?” Latifa asked, eyes sparkling.

“Yeah, sure.” Rio nodded easily. Latifa proceeded to write “I love you” in ketchup over the soft, half-cooked egg.

“Done. It’s filled with our love, so make sure you eat it all up!” Latifa grinned, looking into Rio’s face. Celia and Miharuru both looked embarrassed at her words.

“Got it,” Rio replied awkwardly. He picked up the spoon to hide his embarrassment.

“Ah, wait! This isn’t finished yet,” Latifa called out.

“...Huh? Really? Didn’t Miharuru just say it was complete?” Celia cocked her head, looking at Miharuru.

“Yes. Because we still haven’t said the magic words to make it taste even better,” Latifa huffed proudly and puffed up her modest, still-developing chest.

“Magic words...?” As a sorcerer, Celia’s eyes widened in interest.

“Hehehe! I’m going to say them now, before it gets cold.” Latifa grinned mischievously.

“Make it delicious, ruff ruff kyun!”

Her fox ears twitched as she used both hands to make a heart shape and poured her love into the omurice.

“W-What... is that...?” Celia asked, her face a deep red.

“They’re magic words to add love to the omurice. Now it’s your turn, you two! Let’s see...”

Latifa brought her face up to Celia and Miharuru’s ears, whispering something into them. She was probably teaching them the magic words.

“N-No way! I can’t say something that embarrassing!” Celia was taken aback, still flushed red. Miharuru tried to smile to cover her shyness.

“I-It’s a little too much for me too...”

“Hmph, I can’t believe you two won’t give Onii-chan their love.” Latifa pouted a little.

“I-I didn’t say that!” Celia objected in a fluster.

“Really? Then let’s see you do what I taught you, Celia.”

“Ugh...”

“Professor, there’s no need to force yourself to do it.” Rio tried to offer a lifeline to Celia, who had effectively dug her own grave.

“I... I’m not forcing myself. M-Make it delicious, lovey-dovey kyun.”

With a bright red face and whisper of a voice, Celia made a heart shape with her hands. But she soon reached the limit of embarrassment she could take and buried her face in her hands with a groan.

Latifa excitedly turned to Miharuru. “Now it’s your turn!”

“Umm...” Miharuru was doused in anxiety, her voice more high-pitched than usual.

“That’s enough. You’re upsetting Miharuru, so just leave it at that. Miharuru, you don’t have to go along with her,” Rio sighed tiredly, then picked up the spoon to begin to eat.

“Ah, w-wait a minute!” Miharuru called out to stop Rio.

“I-I’d feel bad for Celia if I-I was the only one who didn’t do it... So... M-Make it delicious, moe moe, kyun... Wah.” Miharuru mumbled, making a heart with her hands.

Elemental ☆ Admission

In Japan, somewhere in the city...

It was springtime, and pale pink petals danced in the wind during the entrance ceremony for schools. Haruto was visiting the campus of the parent university of his affiliated school.

He wasn't there because he was starting his tenure at university, but he was there to celebrate his upperclassman's entrance.

"Congratulations, Satsuki."

On the afternoon of the entrance ceremony, he waited a little earlier than their meetup time to offer words of congratulations to Satsuki, who arrived later.

"Thank you, Haruto. What do you think of my hakama? Does it suit me?" Satsuki giggled, lifting her arms lightly to show off her hakama.

"Yes, it's beautiful. Both the hakama and you in it," Haruto praised with a wide smile.

Satsuki's cheeks reddened with embarrassment, before she turned her slightly reproachful eyes to Haruto. "...You sure don't have any hesitation saying things like that. And yet, it doesn't sound smug or fake at all."

"Umm, did I say something wrong?" Haruto asked awkwardly at Satsuki's gaze.

"Nope, you were completely on point. Thanks." Satsuki sighed lightly but thanked him happily anyway.

"But if you say that to every girl, you may make some people misunderstand your intent, so make sure you choose who you say it to even if it's just flattery," she pointed a finger at Haruto and added.

"It wasn't flattery. And I said it because it's you, Satsuki."

"..." Satsuki blinked for a few moments before turning her face diagonally away from Haruto.

"I really will misunderstand, stupid," she muttered so that Haruto couldn't hear.

"...Satsuki?" Haruto called out to her, wondering what was wrong.

"It's nothing, I'm just fed up with your inability to learn. Are Miharu and the others still on their way here?" Satsuki stated bluntly, looking around at their surroundings.

“Y-Yeah. There’s still a little while before the meetup time.” Haruto winced a little, glancing at the public clock nearby.

“Hmm. I guess we’re on our own until then,” Satsuki said casually.

“So it seems,” Haruto replied normally.

Satsuki pouted a little before she suddenly watched the people passing by and turned to Haruto. “...By the way, does it feel like we’re being stared at?” They were currently within the university campus, on the grounds right next to the affiliated school Haruto attended. Because of that, there were fewer people visiting for the entrance ceremony, but there were still bustling groups here and there.

“Isn’t it because of you, Satsuki?”

“Me?”

“Because you’re beautiful in your hakama,” said Haruto.

“...T-That’s not true!” Satsuki was clearly embarrassed, but she must have been discontent with being the only one feeling embarrassed. “There aren’t many chances to be alone with a girl in a hakama. Good for you, right Haruto?” she asked him with a glare.

“Yes, indeed,” Haruto agreed with an amused chuckle.

“...For some reason, I just want to see you looking embarrassed, even if it’s the last thing I do.” Satsuki puffed up her cheeks and stared at Haruto.

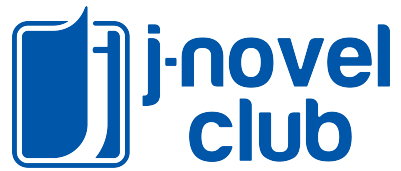
“Why? Please, don’t.”

“Take that!” Satsuki cheekily hugged Haruto’s arm as he backed away warily. They were the spitting image of lovers, making the male students passing by glare at them with envy.

“Wha—Satsuki?!” Haruto finally felt embarrassed and blushed.

“It’s rare to be hugged by a girl in a hakama, so isn’t this great? If you want, I’ll even wear it again—just for you,” Satsuki said, looking at Haruto with a carefree smile.





Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!

[Newsletter](#)

And you can read the latest chapters (like Vol. 11 of this series!) by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:

[J-Novel Club Membership](#)

Copyright

Seirei Gensouki: Spirit Chronicles Volume 10

by Yuri Kitayama

Translated by Mana Z.

Edited by Joi

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © 2018 Yuri Kitayama Illustrations Copyright © 2018 Riv Cover illustration by Riv

All rights reserved.

Original Japanese edition published in 2018 by Hobby Japan This English edition is published by arrangement with Hobby Japan, Tokyo English translation © 2020 J-Novel Club LLC

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC

j-novel.club

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Ebook edition 1.0: July 2020