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I arrived in front of TenniPara's clubroom.

—Knock! Knock!

I knock on the clubroom's door.

"Come in~."

"Wai-!? Senpai, please stop." (Saori)

The voice of a man that joked around on the other side of the door, and Saori's voice as she holds him back.

—Knock! Knock!

"Is it fine for me to come in?" (Rina)

I knock a second time and call out to those inside.

Once I do, the door opens, and a largely-built man shows up.

"You're Saori-chan's friend?"

"Yes. I'm Sayama." (Rina)

"And your first name?"

"...Rina, but what about it?" (Rina)

I feel repugnance towards the man in front of me who asked for my name without even telling me his own.

"Rina-chan, huh...? Best regards! By the way, knocking twice is the toilet knocking, you know. It might be convenient to remember if you go job hunting, I think?"

The big man speaks to me familiarly in a casual manner. No matter what, I didn't like the frivolous atmosphere here. That's also the reason why I didn't want anything to do with TenniPara.

"Yuuya. Please stop it already." (Saori)

Should I go back for real? As I'm worrying about that, I heard a voice admonishing the large man in front of me — Yuuya from inside.

"I'm sorry for having called you over. I'm Anzou Hideya. More or less I'm the president of TenniPara." (Hideya)

The bespectacled, intelligent-looking man — Anzou Hideya, who emerged from inside, holds out a hand towards me.

"Ah, okay. I'm Sayama Rina. Please treat me well." (Rina)

Anzou-senpai is probably a 3rd or 4th year. As a 1st year I bowed my head to show my respect.

"Ahaha...I look forward to working with you." (Hideya)

Anzou-senpai reveals a somewhat awkward expression, but still bowed his head lightly.

"Hey! Hey! Hideya, you wanting to shake hands has been completely ignored by Rina-chan."
(Yuuya)

Yuuya mocks Anzou-senpai.

"Ah!?" (Rina)

Realizing the situation, I looked downwards.

"Yuuya...please be quiet." (Hideya)

Once warned by Anzou-senpai with a freezing cold voice, Yuuya stayed silent.

"Umm, so, Anzou-senpai, I heard from Saori that there's something you'd like to discuss with me...
What kind of business do you have with me?" (Rina)

"Indeed. I heard from Kayama-san, but...Sayama-san, she says that you're an expert at kendo. Is that true?" (Hideya)

"——!?" (Rina)

After hearing his words, I become speechless.

I'm certainly experienced at kendo, I'm a black belt holder at that. My grandfather runs a dojo, and father, mother and my elder brother are all black belt holders, too. They are such masters that people in that line of sport know of their names.

But, I didn't have any talent.

Since my early childhood I made an effort while being taught the way of the sword, but — I was talentless.

I entered various small and big tournaments in my childhood, but no matter which, the result was always 2nd place.

The stigma which was attached to me is — Uncrowned Queen.

Uncrowned. An average person who not once reached the summit.

The dojo is decorated with trophies, certificates and championship pennants collected since the generation of my grandfather, but there was not one among them that bore my name.

That's why I abandoned the sword.

"It's true! Rina is amazing! She was 2nd place in the prefectural and countrywide inter high school kendo tournament!" (Saori)

Saori shouts without understand my feelings.

"Anzou-senpai, I'm terribly sorry, but I have already retired from kendo." (Rina)

I bow and try to leave this place.

"Why!?! Why do you say something like that!?! Rina, you were wonderful! It's 2nd place in the whole country! You're the second strongest in Japan!" (Saori)

Saori yells at my back as I'm about to leave.

"That's right! It's 2nd place! I'm just 2nd place! An uncrowned average person who could never win any championship...that's me! Leave me alone!" (Rina)

I shout back, giving my emotions free reign.

"Uh oh. Both of you, calm down."

A man shows up, thrusting himself between me and Saori who is shouting from inside the clubroom. I realized that I acted shamefully, blushed and faced downwards.

"Umm, nice to meet you, I think? Tentatively we are in the same year. Since we are also taking the same classes, I think that we have seen each other already, but..."

The one who wedged himself between us, a man with an unrefined face that still had traces of being a senior high school student looks at me with upturned eyes.

"E-Excuse me. You...I remember having seen you." (Rina)

"Phew. That's great. Glad to meet you. I'm Iguchi Kazuya." (Kazuya)

"Nice to meet you..." (Rina)

Having calmed my emotions, I answer back quietly.

"Umm, Sayama-san, you're not the uncrowned 『average person』, but 『queen』, right? Hehe. As a matter of fact, I did kendo as well. Having said that, my best result was being defeated at the inter high's qualifiers." (Kazuya)

Iguchi-kun smiles innocently.
I stay silent as I'm troubled how to answer that.

"Uncrowned...certainly, that might have a bad image. But you know, in my eyes 2nd place is awesome! Almost god-like! Therefore, don't abase yourself so much. If you feel so depressed over being 2nd place, I, who didn't even appear at the inter high's, will look like an idiot, don't you think?" (Kazuya)

"I'm sorry..." (Rina)

"Wai-! There's nothing to apologize! Got it? So, now that you calmed down, I'd like you to listen to what our president has to say." (Kazuya)

"What he has to say?" (Rina)

"Yeah, well then, president, the ball's in your field now." (Kazuya)

"Thanks. You were a big help. Let's change the topic, Sayama-san. What do you think about the current world?" (Hideya)

"Current world...you say?" (Rina)

"Yes. The current world is overrun with despair. 25% of Japan's soil, and if you limit it to urban areas, 75%, has turned into inviolable areas. I think at this rate humanity will decline in near future." (Hideya)

"Decline, it is...?" (Rina)

"Indeed. The current world which had our sphere of daily lives drastically reduced. According to some researchers, the world's population will become 10% of what it is now within less than 10 years. 10%...or in other words, 9 out of 10 people will die in 10 years. What do you think is the method to break out of this hopeless situation?" (Hideya)

"Method? ...The Goddess' revelation — the 『World Salvation Project』, you mean?" (Rina)

"Yes. As you say. 『World Salvation Project』. Strange powers granted to us — humanity by a goddess. I believe that this is the very means to break through the current situation. For example, Suzuki-san and Tanaka-san over there can use the unscientific, unknown ability called magic." (Hideya)

Ahead of Anzou-senpai's look two women are smiling.

"In the same way I acquired a special ability called 《Analyze》. Its effect is...to know a target's details. It's still an unverified ability, though. And, the goddess bestowed yet another two big powers upon us. Level and Status." (Hideya)

Anzou-senpai's speech has a tinge of zeal.

"Level and Status. Completely like a game world, right? Ahaha. If we had been sent to a different world, we could have retorted with "Is this a fantasy novel!?", but this is Earth. I believe that Level and Status are the key points to survive and overcome the current situation." (Hideya)

"Key points...?" (Rina)

The existence of the concept of Level indicates that we will continue to grow stronger. Yet, that produces a question. Is it only us who will become stronger? Or, could it possibly be that even the monsters inhabiting the Domains will become gradually stronger with the passage of time? Or, does the concept of level not exist for monsters? Or — it's an urban legend circulating on the net, but...Demon Kings live in the deepest part of the Domains. Those Demon Kings might be able to level up as well." (Hideya)

"Demon Kings...you say?" (Rina)

I end up dumbfounded because of Anzou-senpai's crazy hypothesis.

"In other words, what I want to say is...it's obvious that we need to raise our levels to survive. Promptly adapting to a quickly changing world is a crucial trait for being able to survive. According to the information investigated by me, it's possible for humans to win against monsters. In reality reports about senior high school students, and what's more, junior high school students having defeated monsters are popping up all over." (Hideya)

"Hideya...your preface is too friggin' long~" (Yuuya)

Yuuya makes fun of Anzou-senpai's fervent speech.

"Humph. This is the reason why men with nothing but muscles in their brain are...well, whatever. In short, what I want to say is, Sayama-san, can you invade a Domain together with us!? Having you, a master at kendo, join us will be extremely reassuring. Since the day referred to as 『Cataclysm』 the opinion that there's not much difference in combat ability between men and women has been advocated. That's why I'm asking you. Please, can you invade a Domain together with us?" (Hideya)

Anzou-senpai requests earnestly from me while deeply bowing his head.

What's going to happen if I refuse? ...I might lose this university as temporary shelter. What will I do if that happens? Evacuate to my family in Suzu? How could I even after all this time?

I lived while going with the flow of the world. I wonder, is accepting this invitation possibly part of that flow?

I nodded while showing a vague smile.

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As I was unable to decline, it resulted in me joining the raid of a Domain.

For the first time in a while I clad my body in the kendo uniform my mother forced me to keep, and linked up with the TenniPara members while holding a shinai.

"Uh huh. As expected, a kendo uniform suits you, Sayama-san." (Kazuya)

"Right!? Right!? That appearance of Rina is sooo cool~" (Saori)

Kazuya-kun and Saori praised me extravagantly. I felt somewhat embarrassed.

Nonetheless, it's been really a long time since I last held a shinai and wore a kendo uniform.

I felt uncomfortable.

My body is light...?

Since that day when the 『World Salvation Project』 had been installed on my smartphone, my body was strangely light. At first I thought that it might be my imagination, but I realize after doing some practise swings with the shinai in my hands.

My physical ability has been enhanced...?

Is this also a blessing from the goddess?

I was perplexed by the change in the sound of cutting the wind audible during my practise swings. This time 12 people are participating. 8 members from TenniPara, and 4 members that were invited from outside the club like me.

It was decided that we would head by car to the targeted Domain.



"Damn, it's such a pain to drive here..."

The man driving our car complains.

The car didn't only travel along maintained highways, but also muddy footpaths between rice fields. Only the rough shaking of the car and the complaints of the driver could be heard.

Most of the infrastructure for transportation was completely destroyed by the Domains' appearance. The numerous Domains manifested as if severing the railway tracks and highways connecting the prefectures. Busses and trains, which were supposed to run regularly, were forced to shut down. The inviolable areas are also - albeit unbelievable - infringing the air space. Nowadays planes can't fly either.

Only barely cars, which run by electricity, were left as means to traverse trackless paths.

Around one hour by car. The distance of a nearby place we might have reached within 15 minutes if not for the Domains. Then we finally arrived at the Domain we wanted to raid.

The participants get out of their cars one by one. Once everyone had assembled, Anzou-senpai surveys everyone and speaks up.

"We will invade the Domain from now on. According to my research, only low-ranking monsters such as rats and slimes infest the entrance area. Let's first succeed in defeating our first monsters by working as a team. After that we will check the situation and proceed further in. If there's danger, we will retreat right away." (Hideya)

Anzou-senpai explains calmly as if holding a speech.

"Well then, let's go!" (Hideya)

""""Yeah~!""""

A huge monolith, so big that it might be mistaken for a mountain, extends in front of us. At a part of the rock there was a big, gaping hole, looking like a cave.

Concealing the big worries and fears, as well as the faint anticipations and hopes in my heart, I challenged the Domain.



Two hours later.

The result of our first Domain was a disaster.

Suzuki-senpai and Tanaka-senpai, precious members who can use magic, and also Iguchi-kun ended up dead.

According to Anzou-senpai it seems to be an outcome that should be called success rather than a disaster.

The survival rate is 75%. 9 people have leveled up. And, a Rank D item.

If you only look at the numbers and gains, it appears to be a major success.

Major success...? Like where? Even though the people with whom you chatted and laughed together just two hours ago died?

Anzou-senpai delivers the final blow to me who is stricken by despair.

"Sayama-san, do you have a moment?" (Hideya)

"What is it?" (Rina)

"It's about the Black Iron Sword..." (Hideya)

Anzou-senpai shifts his eye to the unrefined sword with its black luster — the Black Iron Sword in my hands.

Aah... I see. This sword had been entrusted to Iguchi-kun, but it's not mine. It's a weapon we acquired by teamwork.

"Ah!? ...I'm sorry." (Rina)

I feebly mutter and hold out the Black Iron Sword to Anzou-senpai.

"No, the owner of the Black Iron Sword is...Sayama-san. It's you." (Hideya)

"Eh?" (Rina)

I'm bewildered by the unexpected reply.

"You can handle this sword more skillfully than anyone else. Besides...I'm sure that Iguchi-kun wishes for you to hold onto it as well." (Hideya)

Anzou-senpai mumbles the latter part with a voice that's about to vanish.

"But, is it fine to post about this sword through SNS?" (Hideya)

"Eh?" (Rina)

"Sayama-san, do you know that 『Liberators』 are supported by the government and some corporations?" (Hideya)

Anzou-senpai calmly speaks to the confused me.

『Liberators』 — a coined word that popped up most recently. It refers to those aiming to liberate Domains.

The government and some enterprises supporting and promoting people, who accomplished level ups, and people, who obtained very rare items in Domains, was something I was aware of from the news and posts on the net.

"In that case, if we carry the Black Iron Sword to the municipal office..." (Rina)

"I think that's a stupid idea. We are young. Although we are already adults, we are still students. It's possible that they will take advantage of us. Therefore I believe that it's a good idea to wait for offers coming from their side instead of going to them." (Hideya)

"Offers?" (Rina)

"Yes. By waiting for their offers, we will be able to suggest better terms. Receiving support from the government or some enterprises will be a plus for our future activities." (Hideya)

"Future activities?" (Rina)

"Yes. Right now there are probably companies that will give offers to level 2's. But, if this was one month later? What if it was two months later? Very likely the standard level for receiving offers would be higher. For the sake of survival we need to constantly enter better environments. That's why I want to post it on SNS this time and wait for offers. How about it?" (Hideya)

I'm troubled. If I accept his proposal, it will spell my fate of daily Domain invasions from now on, whether I like it or not.

"Gah, Hideya, your words are so damn stuffy! For now it's a day where we should take a commemorative photo and celebrate our first successful Domain raid, ain't it? You guys, come close~ Look here? Rina-chan, you too, and smile, okay?" (Yuuya)

"Eh!? Wai-!? P-Please wai——" (Rina)

Yuuya took a commemorative photo against my will.

"Next..."Rank D weapon get!" Okay, that should do it." (Yuuya)

And then he released the commemorative photo into the sea of the net alongside those casual words. At that time there was no reason for me to know that Yuuya's rash act turned into a junction grandly influencing my future.