

Chapter 275 - Friend and Goodbyes

"You're right. In the past I was a Japanese on Earth." I answered in Japanese while looking at Akemi-san's face.

Her small ears were peeking out from in-between her hair. Her pretty, glossy hair quality told me that she used proper shampoo and hair conditioner.

Bathrooms and such exist inside a labyrinth? And then there's the middy uniform...how cute.

"Super...I'm also a Japanese from Earth. My name is Suzumiya Akemi. As you can see from the middy uniform I'm wearing below, I was a first year high school student attending the military faculty."

First year? That means she's around 16 years old, huh? But, military faculty? Some kind of religious school? I don't quite get it.

Without touching onto that question, I spoke with my fellow countryman.

"...I'm quite glad that we're from the same country. Going by your way of speaking, you come from the Kanto region?"

"Yes, east Japan. I originate from Imperial Capital Tokyo of Great Kanto."

Imperial capital? I recall Kazane having mentioned something about a Great Kanto as well.

『Shuuya-san, judging by your dialect, I guess you also lived in east Japan's Great Kanto region, in your previous life?』. Kazane also said, 『A few. All of them reincarnated from modern Japan with a subtly different history. And, they suddenly remembered their memories as Japanese due to sickness or the impact of hitting their head in their childhood. The commonly shared points are to that extent, I think. Everyone that was born and brought up in this world, Sela, was scattered after all』.

Did Akemi-san transfer from a Japan similar to Kazane and her friends? Or did she possibly transfer from a Japan that went through a totally different history...? She might be a transferee from a completely different Japan than the reincarnators Kazane and the guys from 【Club Ice】.

"...And then you became a labyrinth master?"

"Correct. During our military drill class...the scenery in front of my eyes suddenly changed, and once I came to, I was in the control room with the dungeon core... Moreover, I was all alone. Back then I was totally confused. It was way too weird and realistic for me to consider having been trapped in a magic barrier... On top of that, some mysterious message boomed in my mind, telling me that I fused with the dungeon core or something like that..."

Did Akemi-san recall painful memories of the past...? Tears welled up in her pretty eyes, and then she started to cry for real. But, military drills? Magic? I suppose she's a transferee from a strange, modern Japan that's actually being at war.

Without asking about that, I showed her my sympathy.

"...I fully understand your feelings right after being transferred. I ended up in a deserted underground space...plunging me into a situation where I could only rely on my own strength..."

"Underground, you say? That's almost the same as me!"

Seemingly happy that she could find a common point between us, her expression brightened up all of a sudden, albeit having cried only moments ago. She stared at me, with her nervousness having apparently come undone.

"Underground...you mean a place like this first floor?"

"Yes. At first it was only one inner floor."

"At first...means it has expanded?"

"Yes."

"I see."

Once I answered like that, nervousness dyed her face again. Considering her age...I should speak more friendly with her, huh?

"That middy uniform is really cute, you know? Do you possess any other Japanese items like that uniform?"

"T-Thanks. I'm glad you like it..." Akemi-san's cheeks flushed. "Ah, I have other things as well! The textbook for the next lesson, which I hadn't stashed away in my desk, a bag with my notebook, my cell phone, writing utensils, and similar. Wanna see? I've got a cute eraser my friends envied me for, fufufu."

What's the point in looking at an eraser...? The textbook might contain hints on how to make a big amount of cash, but I'm rather curious about her mention of having fused with the dungeon core.

"...No, it's fine. I'd like to hear about the fusion with the dungeon core. Is it a feeling like having an awareness as a labyrinth master from the very start?"

"Yes. When the message boomed in my head, I was surprised and confused, but it's like a sensation I've known since I've been born. I guess you could describe it as something natural, similar to breathing... It's a natural ability, just like being able to use all fingers from the start, with the Extra Skill <Dungeon Core> dwelling in me."

"I can completely relate to that. When I acquired my skills, I experienced such a sensation as well."

I smiled naturally, causing her to return a smile.

...Isn't she quite the cutie?

"Using that skill, I was able to enslave the slime called Sliyo."

"Mistress, are you talking about me in that unknown language?" Looking up at her from below, Sliyo didn't understand Japanese.

Or rather, probably no one besides Akemi-san and me understands this conversation.

I looked around. Sazihali was glaring at us with a terrifying look that seemed to emit rays of mysterious light from her eyes. Balmint waited behind Sazihali, and Catiza was happily playing around with Rollo after creating cat teasers by finely manipulating her hair. It was a game that woke the urge in me to join in as well.

Akemi-san's subordinates were also paying attention to us. The blood bone knight standing close to the slime samurai and knights simply looked at us with her handsome, or rather, boney face in silence. The ink-black hearts in front of her chest were mysterious as they moved around.

On the other hand, the brain arm monster with the name Soju had drawn close to me while continuously floating. She had invoked many objects looking like demonic eyes on the surface of her brain... Dominating eyes, calmly watching eyes, eyes drawing yellow-silver spirals, eyes baring their emotions, eyes blinking repeatedly, eyes with mysterious colors, and eyes releasing some kind of mysterious tear juice, each and every single of those eyes had different appearance and mana qualities. Those eerie eyes were fixated on Rollo and me.

All kinds of eyes... Just how many demonic eyes does she possess in her brain...? Akemi-san, who possessed such subordinates, was a beautiful girl at a first glance, but...there's actually no big mouth opening at the back of her head or something like that, is there? Or is she keeping a bug inside her body...I'd like to avoid being startled.

Besides, if we're talking about labyrinths, Sabid of the demonic labyrinth in Hekatrail's outskirts comes to mind. She's a transferee, but is she possibly connected to the gods of the spirit world like that demon? Should I check her with my Kaleidoscope?

As I was staring at her while having started to jump at shadows, Akemi-san crouched down, matching her line of sight with that of Sliyo's.

"...That's right. Right now I'm having an important conversation with Shuuya-san, so stay silent for a bit, okay Sliyo?"

She held up a finger in front of her small lips, obviously telling Sliyo, who was adorably looking up at her, to not disturb.

"Okaaay."

Sliyo is cute. But, I wonder, should I rather address Akemi-san with a -chan...? Well, I guess -san will do.

I noticed the surface of her nail on the finger she had raised. A manicure emitting mana? It had a beautiful color.

"Oh, you're curious about this nail art?" She asked while standing up.

She had apparently noticed my close scrutiny.

"Yep, it's pretty make-up."

"T-Thank you. But, it's not a normal nail art." She showed me her hands while looking bashful.

Apparently she was manipulating her mana as it was gathering in all her fingers. At the same time as tiny characters I had never seen before appeared on the surface of her fingers, hexagrams manifested on all her nails.

Small magic crests?

And then something transparent came out from the nail on her right index finger as if oozing out of the hexagrams. The transparent mass, which reminded me of mucus, extended towards the air, turned into a single, spherical object, and then transformed its shape into that of a sharp blade. That transparent blade flew in a straight line for the cave's wall, running into it. It had fully stabbed into it while still vibrating.

...That might be the reason why Sazihali refers to her as black-haired magician.

Using this opportunity, I scanned her with my Kaleidoscope. Although it seemed as though the placement of her organs was different, there was no bug in her, and she didn't seem to be some kind of monster either. It gave me a peace of mind.

Still, I felt like the magic she had used was somewhat different. It was chantless as well, so I guess I'll ask her about it.

While returning my right eye's visual field to normal by touching the attachment, "...Void or wind attribute? It was chantless, and I got the impression that it felt slightly different."

"Yes. This is a unique sorcery I can use as a member of the Suzumiya family. I can apply sorcery compatible with my fingers."

"You can use that sorcery because you're someone of the Suzumiya family?"

"Correct. Sorcery, magic. Since I was raised by the Suzumiya family, one of the 12 distinguished families, I believe that I possess the basic groundings in sorcery. But, I ended up being transported to this world before I could form a contract with guardian-sama, so..."

So there's something called 12 distinguished families. This is definitely not the Japan I know of.

"Wow, magic, eh? Do the distinguished families all have unique sorcery skills or something?"

"So you knew? It's something similar to the magic stones in this world. There also exists sorcery using gems as intermediary."

The world, where she had lived before, sounded quite interesting. But, since she doesn't have any relation to it anymore, I'm going to ask her about the reason for the battle next.

"...On another topic, what's the objective of the Hazarn folks, which we fought just now, in this labyrinth?"

"There's another power called Geronas besides Hazarn, but both have the dungeon core as objective. A demonoid I caught in the past told me that it can be used as part of a demonic tool."

So the Millennial Demonoid Empire Hazarn or whatever wants it as an energy source...

"...I see, I've already heard about demonic tools." I replied while pitying her a bit.

"I hear they're using it for various applications. I think their gate magic might be one of those."

I nodded at her words, "Sazihali had also mentioned that this magic has a bad usability."

Switching from Japanese, I used the language which Sazihali understood.

"Oh, finally words I can understand as well. Leaving that aside, you guys were acquaintances?"

Sazihali jumped across the pitfall, drawing near.

"No, it's our first meeting. It's just that we come from the same planet by chance."

The same country, albeit with different histories.

"He's right. It's the same island country. Though, the internal and external wars are quite intense."

Internal and external wars? I suppose I'll be honest here.

"...Akemi-san, to be honest with you, the Japan I know was peaceful without having taken part in any battles for a long time. It's the same planet called Earth, but I think the Japans you and I know are different. It seems they both share the part about being an island nation, though." I told her in Japanese.

"R-Really...? So the prime minister isn't Kikuchioka Takazou who attained glory in the Type 89 War, huh?"

"Definitely not."

Akemi-san looked flabbergasted, revealing her shock over the fact that it wasn't her Japan.

"...It really pisses me off, you know? Stop speaking in that language. I don't understand it."

"Nn, nyaa."

"Gaooo."

"I also don't comprehend Emissary-sama's words at aaaall."

"Me too. Just what kind of language is mistress using...?"

"..."

Everyone except for us two looked as if confronted with gibberish. I suppose I'm going to return to the common tongue then.

"You heard them. I'm going to speak the standard language again then. You okay with that?"

"Understood...u-umm, S-Shuuya-san?"

The instant she asked that, she looked embarrassed with her face blushing so strongly that it looked like steam would rise from it.

Does she feel shaken after hearing that I came from another Japan?

"Mmh?"

"It might be abrupt, but...please become my friend!"

Her face and fingers had completely dyed crimson. Next she extended her hand as if confessing her love to me.

She didn't feel shaken, but simply embarrassed, huh? Well, with Akemi-san being such a cutie, it's actually me who wants to be her friend. Let's shake her hand here.

Just as she had hoped, I grabbed her soft hand.

"...Whoaaa, this is...a strong...man's..." Akemi-san mumbled under her breath while squeezing my hand.

She seems to be excited. Well, if it makes her happy, sure, why not. Have we become friends with this?

"...Sure, we're now friends, right?"

"Yes!"

"——Nyao." Rollo placed a bean-sprout-shaped tentacle atop our clasped hands.

It looks like she wants to join in as well.

She had come to me after having stopped playing with Catiza.

"Fufu, how cute...is it fine for me to touch her?"

"Go for it, as long as Rollo allows."

"Nya?"

Rollo tilted her head, but didn't start her usual hard-to-get play. She allowed Akemi-san to caress her head.

"...It's very soothing..."

With a knee on the ground, she continued to stroke Rollo from her head, down her spine while being at the same eye level as Rollo. The red bone knight, who saw that scene, smiled and then approached us. Her face was skeletal, but since it had a tinge of blood red, it looked as if she was smiling.

I had wondered about it earlier as well, but the black heart crests seemingly floating out of her chest kinda piqued my interest. Moreover, I felt a blood scent which I seemed to have an affinity with...

Is it because she's a woman, albeit a skeletal one?

"...Akemi-san, your subordinate sure is unique."

I wonder how my Burning Knights would react to this bone knight?

Akemi-san stopped her flirting with Rollo, stood up, and replied, "Sorry for being late with the introductions. She's my servant, one of the guardians protecting the third floor. Her name is Mirei Halzelmar. Given that she's a former vampire lord, she's taught me a lot about the history of this continent."

...Halzelmar, she says? And a vampire lord...? That's a surprise. She looks like a crimson skeleton, but I guess she belonged to a vampire house following a different line than the Valmask family. So that means Mirei was originally a member of the 12 founding families, huh?

"...A vampire albeit being a skeleton?" I asked something simple.

"Ah, it's strange, isn't it? First...I need to explain about me. As you know, I'm the labyrinth master. Moreover, as a labyrinth master, I'm the same as this labyrinth housing the labyrinth core..."

Umm, Akemi-san, you're placing a hand on your own chest, but...are you saying the labyrinth core is your heart? So it's not the head, huh?

"...You're saying you have unified with this labyrinth?"

"You could describe it like that——"

Akemi-san placed a hand on the floor, and poured mana into it. In the next moment, the floor close to the entrance, which had been destroyed by Catiza, renewed itself, becoming just as before. As if filling just the place where the big hole had been, the floor's color changed into being brand new.

"Ooohh, wow...this is different from the Suzumiya family's magic you showed me earlier."

"Nyaaaao."

"Gaoo——"

Rollo was surprised as well, running towards the place that had been buried. Balmint followed her. However, the other people present here, including Sazihali, looked as if that was only natural.

"Yes. It's unrelated to the Suzumiya family. It consumes quite a bit of mana, but if it's within the labyrinth, I can freely tamper with the ceiling, pillars, and narrow rock walls in various ways."

"I see, makes sense."

She nodded, "...Immediately after I was transferred, I was totally lost and unaccustomed to this power as dungeon core which I had unified with...at first, I couldn't accept it, but after meeting Sliyo...I used a skill called <Creation> in a place called control room, allowing me to gradually learn how I could crossbreed monsters. I also learned that I'd lose my life if the labyrinth core dwelling in me was to be stolen. Afterwards, I desperately acquired a unique fighting style, capitalizing on the Suzumiya family's sorcery, and as result of fighting of the people coming to challenge the labyrinth, I've increased the number of reliable subordinates, reaching the current situation."

That Sliyo had his abdomen showered with cat punches by Rollo who got tired from running across the new floor. Each time she hit, a boing, boing could be heard.

Soju tried to protect Sliyo, but Catiza drew close to her.

"That's why I can create new subordinates by using <Creation>."

"I see. Even subordinates that are no more than brain and arm?"

"Yes. She's also one of my cherished aides. There were situations where her presence was a big help as she closely knows the spirit world's 493 writings. Though it looks like Lady Ancient Dragon doesn't like her overly much..."

"That's only natural. She's got that silly illusion magic, and in the first place, she looks gross, doesn't she? Just what the hell is that dripping juice-like stuff wriggling around the surface of her head? However, it seems your apostle is getting along with her quite well, Shuuya Kagari..."

Soju's hand had been gently brushing Catiza's hair.

Is that going to be alright? Catiza has an expression as if she's caught in some illusionary magic...

"Soju-san, it feels really niceeee♪"

"Hahaha, right? My arm belongs to a hero who led the black dog mercenary band which the Sky Emperor desired as well."

Catiza's hair got into...Soju's palm mouth as it was speaking fluently...not bad to be able to talk under such circumstances... However, the girls - if you can call them like this - have opened up to

each other as they please.

"Gao, gao."

"Nya, nya, nyaaan."

"My body is no toyyyyy!"

Balmint had left Sazihali's side, and nuzzled his head against Sliyo's surface, as if to imitate Rollo. Rollo undauntedly continued her cat punches against Sliyo's belly. Once again a boing boing could be heard.

Sliyo is screaming, but I want to check the touch as well...

At that moment, weird laughter erupted from Mirei Halzelmar. She was a former vampire lord possessing four, long arms. Four bone swords were hanging at the sword belt at her waist, which had a crow-shaped buckle attached to it.

Is she a quad-sword master like Rulizeze? I think I'm going to talk a bit with her.

"...Mirei-san, there's something I want to ask you."

"What is it, abnormal spear wielder?"

"I heard that you used to be a vampire lord in the past, but..."

"That's right..."

The color of the circulating blood in her ink-black heart, which floated while being connected to her chest, became deeper.

Is it linked to her emotions? Going by her voice, it's a bitter feeling.

"...Do you know of the Valmask family?"

"You sure know of a fairly distant Vampire family, don't you? I've heard of the Valmask family of the **【Blood Court of the Great Tomb】**."

Her just having heard about them is only natural considering how far away from here they are, I guess. Rather, I think it's already amazing for her to know about them.

"Why did you, who used to be a vampire of the Halzelmar family, come to this labyrinth?"

"The Halzelmar family perished in a strife with the hateful Ancient Wolf race and the Pylon family, which is another vampire family. And as result I, who was the sole survivor of that battle,...continued to wander for a long time."

"...I see."

Silence dominated the place. I turned my eyes towards Sazihali. She was examining the contents of the bags she had received from Akemi-san.

"Lady Ancient Dragon, your face looks a lot younger."

"Oh, magician, you can tell? It's a reaction that's easy to understand by Shuuya Kagari."

Sazihali looked my way.

"Of course. I'm a man, and I like pretty women. Rather than that, I've got a question. What are those labyrinth core fragments you received from Akemi-san?"

"These?" Sazihali showed something like a crystal fragment shining like a rainbow to me, holding it between her index finger and thumb.

A great amount of mana was contained in that beautiful fragment that also looked like a glass splinter.

"Yes..."

"It's simple. If I absorb this, I can gain power, mana. Well, this time I plan to give the whole batch to Balmint as food, though."

"Gao!" Bal roared, obviously looking forward to it.

I see, for Balmint, eh? The future Bal might have an imposing figure surpassing that of his mother, Ronbalua. The sole dragon possessing the blood of a Lucival...

Now then, I think I asked everything I wanted to know. ...I've also wrapped up the greetings with the female magician, Akemi-san, so it's about time to go back home, I'd say.

"Well then, Sazihali, Bal, we're going back home now."

"I see. You did say that you'd go back after meeting with the magician... However, I'll feel lonely, my Shuuya Kagari."

Sazihali showed a truly miserable expression. Going by her look, she probably wants me to live with her...

But, I have a place to call home. I also got Leyleba's Flute, so we'll definitely meet again.

"Kyugaoo!" Even Bal, who had been playing around, came up to my feet, and cried at me with a cute voice.

"N, nyaa." Rollo also cried in a slightly sad manner.

"Shuuya-san...even though a precious man at long last...no, albeit we've just become friends...you're already leaving?" Akemi-san dropped the tone of her voice, looking disappointed.

"Sorry. I just came along to see how Bal would live. I'm sure we'll be able to meet again someday."

"Please wait. A-At the end, I'd like to have one more handshake with you." Akemi-san extended her hand.

I shook it, just as she wished.

"...Fufu, Shuuya-san's manly hand..."

"Well, I'm a guy after all. Akemi-san, your hand is soft and very womanly."

At that point, I released her hand.

"Ah..."

Is she reluctant to part with the touch of my hand?

Akemi-san sighed in regret. I could sense her womanhood from that voice.

But, such a cute girl is flung all of a sudden into a different world, huh...? I'm sure she must have experienced hardships that can't be described with the word 'difficult'.

Thereupon, Akemi-san started to fiddle around with the magic tool looking like a gauntlet. She retrieved something like a cobble from it. That gauntlet is an item box?

"Shuuya-san, please accept this!"

I took the cobble from her. Its surface was oddly beautiful with its jewel-like hue. I also sensed mana from it.

Is it a high-class item? Her thanks for me having saved her?

"What's this?"

"According to Soju, it's an item related to the space-time attribute. Twin stones. It will exhibit its true worth if you have both of them. It appears to be rare."

"Okay, I got it. Thanks."

"Sure, that's great as I can't give you anything else as a thanks right now."

"Don't worry about it. It's the feelings that count. Also, I was able to hear Japanese for the first time in a long while."

"I was also super happy! To be honest, I want to talk more with you. Shuuya-san, please meet me again when you can, no, you must come back."

She stepped up in front of me while throwing out her slightly bulging chest. It was a distance where we could kiss. It made my heart throb.

"S-Sure."

"Hoh, magician...you plan to make a move on my Shuuya Kagari?"

"Lady Ancient Dragon, I'm still a woman after all..."

"How cheeky...should I crush you together with this labyrinth?"

"Hi—"

"Mistress!"

Soju immediately reacted, deploying a defense barrier around Akemi-san. Mirei drew her four swords, and stood in front of Akemi-san, who revealed her willpower as a woman, getting ready for battle with a unique stance.

"—Gaoo."

At that moment, Bal rammed himself against Sazihali.

"Oh my, Bal, I see, I see, I understand. You'd like me to look at your wings, huh? Good grief, you're an adorable child..."

Sazihali touched Bal's back with her mood cheering up instantly. ...For an instant, she nonchalantly clad herself in a dangerous aura.

"Bal, I leave Sazihali to you from now on."

"Gaoo!"

Bal left Sazihali, and bumped his head against my shin.

"Somehow I feel like it should be the other way around, though." Sazihali's voice reverberated, but I ignored her.

"Haha—Bal! My bloodkin also felt lonely while wishing for your growth. Hence, do your best with the training under your new mum!"

I lifted up Bal, who had become quite heavy, and peered into his round and cute dragon eyes.

"Gaoon."

Bal might have gao'ed his approval. The next time we meet... I might not be able to lift him up like this anymore, I guess... It's a saddening parting, but that's also a part of growth...

Alright, time to go back. Ah, before that...let's check the corps commander's corpse on the surface, and loot it.

After gently putting Bal down on the stone floor, "Okay, Catiza, return to being my finger. Rollo, we're going outside for a sec."

"Okaaay."

"Nyaa."