

### n = 3: Dämon (Demon)

The ringing of the city's university church bells indicated that it was Sunday. Like every Sunday, Alice came to Mass with her parents. Shinku was in Alice's arms, attending as well.

The church's chapel seemed to reach Heaven. Underneath the high ceiling, brightly-colored stained glass depicted scenes from the Bible and legends of British kings. Shinku liked attending Sunday worship. The townsfolk would gather here, sing hymns, and fall silent when the priest read the Bible out loud. The chapel's magnificent build created an appropriately solemn atmosphere for a place of prayer. Shinku watched Alice and the other people kneel and pray.

*I never did that in the miniature garden.*

Shinku and the other Rozen Maidens didn't know what prayer was while they were in the world of their miniature garden. One could consider Shinku and the other Rozen Maidens' pleading for their creator, "Father," to have been similar to praying for God. Shinku recalled the emotions that compelled her back then, and looked up at the ceiling. The miniature garden's ceiling had had celestial bodies painted on it, an imitation of the real sky. The vault supporting the church's ceiling had diagonal lines connecting the pillars that served as its foundation. The lines were surrounded by geometric patterns.

*What mind came up with this design?*

Gazing at the desert rose pattern, she suddenly felt someone's presence.

*Is someone up there?*

She closely surveyed the area around the windows near the ceiling, but found nothing.

*Was it just my imagination?*

It was a nostalgic presence she felt. A presence that felt just like one of her sisters. *It couldn't have been*, she corrected herself and looked up at the ceiling again. The high, majestic ceiling has been standing strong for many centuries. There wasn't a single trace of movement up there. Shinku looked at Alice again. Her lovely attire was completely different than her usual tomboy getup. She fondly watched Alice seriously clasp her hands together.

The worship over, people went outside one by one. An especially loud boy's voice echoed within the chapel.

"So there really is a demon here. God, who created the universe, also created demons."

### *Demons...?*

Reminded of what Mr. Dodo said a few days ago, Shinku strained her ears to listen to the boy.

"It says so right in the Bible, so demons are real. Or could the Bible be mistaken?" The boy pressed on with clever-sounding remarks. Even though the surrounding adults scornfully told him "There's absolutely no way a demon is in the church," the boy showed no sign of shutting up.

"Demons are evil, yes? It's not like they chose to set foot in this world, after all. If you hate them, I just hope you won't be tempted by one. I despise them, for I am well-aware of what a weak, easily-persuaded person I would be if I were."

Alice looked over her shoulder and frowned.

"Kittredge's always so annoying. He's argumentative and stuck-up. He enjoys putting everyone around him on the spot like that," she whispered to Shinku, insulting the boy. He was slightly older than her, and apparently, Alice hated him. Eventually, she grew impatient and approached him.

"Shut up with your 'demon this' and 'demon that.' If you keep going on and on about demons, you might as well make a contract with one."

"A contract...with a demon...? Shh! A demon will come if you say stuff like that. Terrible things happen to kids like you when they act cocky."

"Aren't you a kid too!?"

Kittredge grew annoyed. He and Alice argued, but their parents immediately broke them up.

Alice left church, and on the way back home, she looked at Shinku in her arms and continued to insult Kittredge.

"Kittredge's full of himself because he's kind of clever and his grandpa's the president of a university. I hate him. He always brags about how he's taking lessons from professors. He acts as if he's a college student."

"You...look ridiculous talking to a doll by yourself," whispered Shinku, who had been silently listening for a while.

"Well, I can't help it. You're not talking back."

“The agreement was I’d be an ordinary doll when outside, correct?”

“Er...yeah, but there’s no one else here to listen to us. You’ll listen to me, right?”

“I shall.”

“Heh, you like listening to me talk after all.” Alice hugged Shinku and hurried back home.



It grew late. Alice was sleeping quietly in her bed. Shinku slowly got up from her case and headed for the mirror in the corner of the room. After she reached for the Rococo-styled, old-fashioned mirror, its surface rippled like water and swallowed her up.



In the empty church, the lit candles slowly melted. They illuminated the statues of Jesus and the apostles on both sides of him. Their wavering shadows were projected onto the walls of the chapel.

“Well, it couldn’t hurt to ‘pray,’” murmured someone high above the church, overlooking the altar through some stained glass that depicted an archangel.



It had been a long time since Shinku had returned to the n-Field. It was where many worlds intertwined, a place that was both everywhere and nowhere... Shinku picked one of the countless numbers of doors. She finally reached it, her case alongside her.

“Oh, Lady Red, it’s been so long. Why have you returned?” greeted Laplace’s Demon as he took off his hat.

“Forget about me. I’m interested in how my other sisters are doing.”

“Oh, have you finally brought yourself to play the Alice Game in earnest?”

"I don't intend to. Who's here now?"

"The twin sisters are sleeping soundly."

"Suiseiseki and Souseiseki, huh? They're really close. They're always together."

"The first and second sisters are still busying themselves in the outside world. There's no sign that they'll return to the n-Field."

"Suigintou and Kanaria found good masters, then."

"Hmm, I'm not so sure about that. Is there any master alive that can tame Lady Black? Heh heh."

Shinku was taken aback by his words. "What do you mean? Are you saying Suigintou's been in the outside world without a master?"

"Why, I'm just the fool who comes and goes between nebulous spaces, after all. I really can't tell you for sure."

His peculiar wording both unsettled and irritated her. "Fine. I know those two aren't here. There's just one more sister I'd like to know how she's doing."

"Oh, Lady Chick?<sup>1</sup> She left this place a while ago. I considered her the most helpless, but somehow she's flapping her fledgling wings. She might unexpectedly be the toughest opponent once the Alice Game begins."

"I won't be taken in by such a cheap provocation."

Shinku turned to leave.

"Leaving so soon, milady?"

"I'm done here."

"I gather you're satisfied with your new master?" he called out, stopping her from leaving in a hurry.

"You have good hearing."

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<sup>1</sup> Laplace uses the character 「雛」 (Hina) here, the first character in Hinaichigo's name.

“Due to these.” He pointed to his slender, erect ears. “I don’t know when all the Rozen Maidens fully blooming in the outside world will become involved with one another and quarrel. You had best be careful.”

“You don’t have to tell me twice.”

Without looking back, Shinku took her leave. Her conversation with the difficult-to-deal-with Laplace’s Demon over, she headed back to the world she came from, feeling relieved.

“I’m not particularly scared of him or anything, Hollie. He’s just impossible to have a conversation with.” Shinku looked for the door to exit the n-Field as she conversed with the artificial spirit Hollie flying around her.



Night visited the city of Oxford. The streets that were bustling with many horse-drawn carriages in the afternoon were quiet now. The sound of shoes stepping on the stone pavement echoed forlornly. Nighttime was apt for those who moved in secrecy: thieves, detectives, and even secret lovers... The darkness of night shielded them from the public eye.

Someone wearing an overcoat weaved their way through the back streets as it drizzled. The individual hurried ahead and slipped into the university grounds. They entered the chapel and headed toward the altar. At the foot of the altar, they crossed themselves, still wearing their overcoat. Head kept down, they motionlessly waited for something.

Someone else entered the chapel. A lightly-dressed young man looked around and came across the person who entered earlier. They rushed to one another and immediately embraced.

“We can finally be together, Kyle...”

The person who came in earlier unwrapped the scarf covering their head, revealing braided red hair. The young lady’s smile matched the man’s.

“It breaks my heart that we can only see each other like this.”

“We don’t have a choice. But someday, they’ll definitely understand...”

“They will...?”

The two tightly embraced each other once more.



Another visitor arrived, and the young man and woman left in a panic. The visitor carefully went up the stairs at the entrance with their head down. They overlooked the chapel from the second floor. After glancing at the statue of Christ, they went up even more stairs. Once they ascended the narrow, clockwise-spiral staircase that was barely big enough for one adult to go through, they soon reached the roof of the chapel. The ornamentation of the extraordinarily high-looking vault when viewed from below was up close. The light didn't come from outside; instead, it came from the lit candles on the first floor. The stained glass looked dull, and one could slightly make out the design, unlike during the day.

The visitor, Kittredge, carefully looked around the gloomy roof.

"...There really isn't a demon here," he tsked, hoping to be proven right. He looked toward the center of the chapel.

"Where can I enter the steeple?"

The chapel was a longitudinal building with a steeple in the middle. The ceiling was higher where it was.

"How can I get up there?"

While Kittredge was going back and forth along the narrow walkway, he found one that could take him even higher. The walkway was narrower than the stairs from before. It had scaffolding that slightly stuck out of the wall which only ran vertically. Undeterred, he grabbed the scaffolds and climbed up. Once he got onto the walkway, he saw before him that there was nothing under the steeple all the way down to the first floor.

"It's a dead end?"

He struck the wall, frustrated that he couldn't enter the steeple part. It echoed throughout the entire chapel. When he happened to look at the wall, he realized the unstable scaffolding from before kept going. However, if he fell off now, he'd end up head-first onto the first floor. Kittredge continued to carefully climb along the wall, one step at a time. At last, he entered the inside of the steeple and reached a dead-end.

*The inside of the clock tower is over there, right?*

Kittredge grabbed the last step and peered into the attic. And then, he saw someone standing there. They were too small to be human. He was horrified.

“A-Are you...?”

They were wearing a black dress. They slowly approached Kittredge.

“Are you...a demon?”

“Oh my, a demon? What a rude human you are.”

They were so beautiful, they looked out of place in the gloomy, cluttered space. They gave off a supernatural aura.

When they lifted their arms, he saw the design on the skirt of their dress. “Inverted crosses...! If you’re not a demon, then what *are* you!?”

“Child, you dare speak like that to Suigintou, first of the proud Rozen Maiden dolls?”

“You’re a doll...? Impossible...”

Suigintou took one of her feathers and set it on fire. When she gently let it fly, it ended up lighting a candle left by a pillar. The dark attic illuminated, she came into view. After Kittredge finished climbing into the attic, he strained his eyes and stared at her within the flickering light. She had black wings, a dress with many frills, glistening, silver hair, and cold, red eyes. It was impossible to believe she was a doll by the look of her white skin. Kittredge impulsively reached for the doll with both hands. Suigintou slipped past them, spread her wings wide-open, and lightly flew into the air.

“...You can fly!?” Kittredge clung to a pillar, having almost fallen down. He instinctively cowered, gripped with fear at the display of supernatural power before him. Suigintou smiled at him groveling on the floor.

“That’s it, good boy...” While looking down on Kittredge cowering in fear, a bitter memory suddenly flashed in her mind.

*“I don’t need God or my father. I trust no one but myself. I’ll be fine on my own. Understand?”*

“Do you believe in God and Satan?”

“...Yes,” he replied meekly.

“So, you fear me as you would Satan?” Suigintou asked in response. His head bowed down,

Kittredge grimaced painfully and looked up at her.

“Yes.”

“Heh heh, that’s a good boy.” She smiled contently.

“...The truth is, I have a wish I want granted no matter what, so I came here. I want you to lend me your power.”

“Oh~? What on earth is your wish?”

“Well...” Kittredge faltered.

“I ask what your wish is, but you refuse to tell me. How selfish,” she said, showing her contempt. She was about to take her leave.

“Wait, I’ll talk! ...I want to get my special someone back. We used to always be together, but...someone got in the way.”

“Oh~? Your special someone? Heh heh, I wonder what they mean to you.”

Kittredge was silent for a moment.

“That’s why I want...to make a contract.”

Suigintou’s face turned grim.

“A contract? You think you can gain power if you enter a contract with a demon, hmm? Even I’ve entered a contract with a human before. However, I don’t feel like doing that at all right now.”

“But...!”

“You think you’ll gain power just like that if you make a contract? It will cost you very dearly.”

He nodded. “No problem.”

“Are you stupid?” Her smile, mixed with contempt, looked divine in his opinion. “I can’t trust a human who doesn’t take contracts seriously.”

“But...!”

“You go on and on about contracts, but if your ‘special someone’ was taken by someone else,

then we should discuss how to bring them down.”

“Bring them down...?”

“You’re a dim-witted boy, aren’t you? Shall we accuse them of some crime, or compel them to bring about their own ruin? You’re capable of doing that much, right?”

“Oh...yes...I’m certain—I am!” he shakily confirmed. A plan suddenly came to mind. He had thought it out terrifyingly quick.