

Some time at night, Kanae awoke sore all over. More specifically, her breasts pulsed with pain and looked like they went through the ringer. Dried semen caked into her skin and hair. Some dribbled out of between her legs.

When she tried to get up, a rough hand large enough to hold her body kept her pinned to a mountain of muscle. Thume. Kanae was lying on top of him. Judging by the room, they were in a dormitory. Probably his room in particular. The ogre was so large, he took up the entirety of the bed and then some. His legs even extended far past the foot of the bed.

"Ugh... When did I... pass out?" Kanae muttered to herself.

"Oh, you're finally awake!" Lua, the bovine woman and Thume's mother, casually greeted her like this wasn't an extraordinary situation.

The two of them laid side by side on the ogre's broad chest. They were in the same boat, seeing as Lua was also naked and drenched in cum.

"Lua! I haven't seen you and Thume since Talahurah. Are you enrolled in Knights' Academy, too?" Kanae asked.

"Heavens, no. Fighting terrifies me! High Priestesses Erin and Taileen made a call to arms for abled citizens to come, so I enrolled Thume. I'm only here to placate his lust for the sake of other women," Lua explained.

That must also be Lilith's doing. In Kanae and Arenade's absence, Erin and Taileen would be heeding the First Sister's orders.

"Thume miss queen..." Thume mumbled in his sleep, shifting a hand down to Kanae's ass. He pressed a thick finger into her pussy, forcing all the cum out and sending her into a convulsing bout of pleasure.

"Nngh! I'm... I'm flattered, but I really need to get up..." Kanae tried to pat the ogre awake, but that only succeeded in making him finger her.

Fresh memories of being fucked all day came rushing back. Kanae didn't have time for this. It was precisely because an entire day had passed right by that she needed to get up.

"Here, let me help. Mommy has milk for her sweet little boy~" Lua pinched the nipples of her enormous bovine breasts. White nectar sprayed out, some of it landing on Thume's face. Still fast asleep, he licked it up and searched for more.

Thume let Kanae go. She rolled off and fell to the ground, only then seeing that the legs of the bed had collapsed under the ogre's weight. Meanwhile, large hands found purchase on Lua's breasts. He pulled her up to suck on both, fondling them gently to coax more milk out. The massive cock slowly became erect and pressed against her pussy.

"Now's your chance unless you want to join," she whispered.

"Maybe another time. I appreciate it!" Kanae said.

It took a little bit of searching before Kanae realized that her clothes weren't in the room. A chill ran up her spine, thinking that the Matron's Regalia was lost. By the time she left, Thume and Lua were full on having sex again. Kanae hurried away before giving into the temptation of joining them. She emerged from the room and ran smack into Esta.

"Ow... Have you been waiting out here the entire time?" Kanae rubbed her aching nose.

"Of course, I have. I wouldn't miss the sounds of ecstasy and joy coming from you for the world," Esta said, revealing the Matron's Regalia hanging on her arm like clothes drying on a line.

"I'm glad you had fun, too... So, what happened while I was getting railed all day?" she asked as they traveled down the quiet evening corridors of Aidenhall.

Esta recounted that the training sessions continued even as Kanae and Thume were connected at the hips the entire time. However, it became very obvious that the other trainees had a tough time focusing. They cut the day short. Thume brought Kanae back to the dormitory, Lapis returned to the Illuminant Repository, and Edina went her separate way.

"I'm impressed, Master. The ogre race possess incredible stamina. For you to last as long as you did, even for a succubus, means you're quite durable. Unquenchable sexual appetite aside, Thume's ogre strength will be a great asset should he become a knight." Esta nodded approvingly.

"At the cost of me getting fucked all day, huh?" Kanae fantasized a harem of ogres to treat her roughly. "Maybe we need to find more ogres... An-Anyway, I'm going to retire to the manor tonight. What about you?"

"Actually, I was informed to bring you to the Illuminant Repository. Eliza and Marwin wish to speak with you. Concerning Lapis and Edina," she said.

They wasted no time heading up to the laboratories. The four of them were waiting in the brightly-lit chamber when Kanae and Esta arrived. Eliza was in the middle of scribbling something into a tome. Edina, Marwin, and Lapis surrounded a table, upon which the Pillar of the Damn rested.

"Good of you to join us, Amethyst." Marwin folded his arms.

"Urk. I know that look. Am I in trouble?" Kanae hid behind her drakeling knight.

"Oh, nothing. It just seems that you've been smitten by a certain newcomer ogre. I'm surprised you two managed to separate yourselves from each other," he said mockingly.

"HmMMM. I seeeeeee. You're jealous~" she teased him.

"Am not!"

"Will you two stop thinking about sex for one minute?" Eliza peeled away from the tome and joined them at the table. "We may be coming to a breakthrough regarding the Pillar of the Damned, all thanks to Lapis here."

The dwarven automaton twirled her hair and smiled shyly.

"I-I really didn't do much other than make a suggestion!" Lapis exclaimed.

"Can someone fill me in already?" Kanae asked.

"Hasn't the ogre filled you up plenty?" Marwin sneaked in a snide remark.

Kanae shot him a side-eyed glare.

"We're trying to separate the staff from me," Edina began, her eyes fixed on the Pillar. "These nerds found out that the staff and I are connected by a curse— That curse is the undispellable Death Attribute which made me undead."

Eliza continued, "Curses are a two-way street. Unlike a *Cursemark*, something or someone must continue to feed it magic. Otherwise it disappears. Thanks to the succubus, Daya, we know that now."

"And what better way to nullify that magic than... anti-magic." Kanae lifted her gaze to Lapis.

"Not just any anti-magic either. It must be *meisterium*. What we have in the dungeons to contain the likes of Minestra and Hilde isn't enough," Marwin explained.

"My anti-magic field is like a magnetic field. If I focus, I can bend it, manipulate it, and even strengthen it. I should be able to enclose the staff like a box," Lapis said.

They would be able to save Edina's soul and return her from undeath then.

"Edina, are you sure about this? You really wanted the Pillar of the Damned, didn't you?" Kanae asked.

"I wanted to be strong... to protect you guys. But I almost hurt your little rugrats, and I'll never forgive myself for that. Pan keeps coming to check on me. Can't get away from the little bugger. If I gotta give this up to make sure she doesn't get hurt, then it's a gamble I'm willing to take. Besides, I'll still be the greatest necromancer to ever exist without it." Edina flashed a reassuring smirk.

Kanae returned the smile. As long as they had each other, Edina didn't need the staff.

"Let's do it," Kanae said.

Everyone watched with bated breath as Lapis hovered her hands over the Pillar of the Damned, the staff which housed the souls of past necromancers and a deep well of mana. The brazier ignited. Every skull on the staff lit up.

"What are you doing, fool?" Cyrus groaned.

"You'll damn us all!" Samhill howled in pain.

"Edina... even after all we taught you... You would reject our wisdom and power? We were not in this together?" Matilda asked hurtfully.

"I already have people I'm in this together with. A succubus, a snooty high elf... a bunch of little tykes that are taller than me but still call me auntie. I don't need you when I have them!" Edina yelled.

A burst of energy erupted outwards, throwing everyone except Lapis and Esta off their feet. Kanae crashed into a bookshelf. Tomes and grimoires fell onto her. Edina and Marwin flew into a work table across the room. Eliza was lying on the ground, clinging to her witch's cap to keep it from flying away.

"What's going on?" Edina asked over a raging storm within the lab.

"I... I'm unsure! They may be fighting back?" Marwin exclaimed.

"If we think of magic like water, then anti-magic is a dam. The staff is flooding the room with volatile magic to fight back," Eliza explained.

"It's so strong, I can barely contain it..." Lapis winced as loose papers flew all over the place.

"Esta, keep Lapis on her feet!" Kanae ordered.

Esta braced Lapis from behind with her own back.

"I know what this is..." Edina climbed to her feet and trudged forward. "It's you, isn't it? Hax'gorah!"

Ashes and smoke billowed out from the staff's brazier, forming a cloud with two piercing red eyes within it.

"Trying to break our pact, Edina Hackett?" a deep and resentful voice asked.

"I'm not one to shy away from a big gamble, but the stakes are too high. You should know better. If you bet too high, some are gonna call it quits. This is where I fold my cards!" Edina shouted.

"You're forgetting something, little necromancer. You already bought in. There is a price to pay for folding!" Hax'gorah bellowed, shooting a trail of smoke into Edina's chest and yanking her towards the staff.

"Edina!" Kanae rushed over to hold her back.

Marwin and Eliza pushed from the front. However, they continued to inch closer bit by bit. Kanae tapped into her character sheet and toggled on the nipple piercings. She stood in front of the smoky apparition of Hax'gorah, then tugged aside her clothes.

"Stupid succubus. You intend to stop me by flashing your fat tits?" Hax'gorah cackled.

"That's exactly it," Kanae said.

A bright flash of light surged from the piercings, blinding everyone in the room. Hax'gorah recoiled backwards. He squeezed his eyes shut. The smoke that made up his body retreated back into the staff. Calm returned to the lab.

"It's... sealed." Lapis sighed, the orb in her chest flickering.

"Edina isn't breathing!" Eliza exclaimed.

Kanae whirled around and dropped down next to Edina. She pressed a finger to her wrist. There wasn't a pulse.

"A healer! We need to bring her to a healer!" Marwin yelled.

"W-What do I do with the staff?" Lapis stammered.

"Stay with it! Don't follow us or you might render healing magic useless!" Kanae ordered, lifting Edina into her arms and flying out a window.

Where to? The Grand Eye? Would the Saint Priests even let them see each other this late? Kanae cursed under her breath and flew to the manor instead. She crashed through the window, startling Arenade awake.

"What the hells?!" Arenade cried.

"Edina needs healing! Can you help her?" Kanae asked desperately.

Arenade jumped out of bed and gasped as soon as she laid her hands on Edina.

"Why isn't the ratwhore breathing? She's colder than ice!" Arenade channeled magic that flowed from her arms, to her hands, and into Edina.

"We separated her from the Pillar of the Damned... Something Edina called Hax'gorah appeared and tried to stop us," Kanae explained as best she could.

The bedroom door swung open.

"Is everything alright?" Gretchen was standing in the doorway with a sleepy Kanade and Suvee, peeking in from the sides.

The two kids' eyes snapped open, seeing Edina unconscious on the floor. They scrambled in and tried to shake her awake.

"What happened to auntie? Is she going to be okay?" Suvee asked.

"Nothing happened. She's going to be fine," Kanae said, drawing them both into her arms.

Gretchen entered and kneeled down across from Arenade to begin administering healing magic, too. Two high elves crowned as Priests combined their faith and magic, but even then Edina didn't stir.

"Come on, Edina!" Arenade growled. "There's no gambling in the afterlife... You wouldn't like it there!"

"Her soul has been torn apart like a hare tossed to a pack of wolves. What in three hells did this?" Gretchen muttered.

Kanae rested a hand atop Gretchen and Arenade's shoulders, imbuing them with Bond. Their magic intensified, lighting up so brightly that the room must have looked like a lighthouse outside.

Suddenly, Edina drew a sharp breath and grabbed Arenade's wrist.

"No... gambling, huh? Doesn't sound like... heaven to me..." Edina croaked before passing out.

Gretchen checked for a pulse, then nodded to Kanae. All the tension vanished from her shoulders at once. A nice long rest was in order.

The very next day, Kanae, Esta, Marwin, Eliza, and Lapis reported to the Grand Eye regarding last night's incident. Suffice to say, she was *not* in a good mood.

"For all we know, you could have unleashed an unspeakable evil right into Aidenhall." Analise sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose.

Marwin cleared his throat and spoke up first after her verbal lashing. "Ehm... With all due respect, your grace, removing the Pillar of the Damned from Edina Hackett's possession prevented a potential tragedy. In the past, necromancers who wielded it eventually lost their minds and almost brought great kingdoms to ruin."

"And who was it that aided in putting that accursed weapon in her hands? You also haven't fully removed it from her possession either, have you?" she asked.

Since Marwin clammed up, Eliza took the floor.

"No, your grace." Eliza shook her head. "Edina and the staff are very much still bound together. Lapis has sealed it within a barrier of anti-magic. We then entombed it within a chest

enchanted with dampening magic and vaulted it. Our theory is that keeping them apart long enough will remove the Death Attribute curse on her in time."

"And if the theory doesn't pan out?" Analise raised a brow.

"We will find another solution," she promised.

"Another solution, you say. It's been one threat after another lately. Perhaps some good news is in order. We received a missive from the Knight of Copper."

Kanae and Esta gasped.

"A missive, sent by a pigeon." Danito handed Esta a letter with just the words 'Hellfire Badlands'.

That was it. Nothing else.

"I don't understand. Is Copper telling us of his location or something of interest?" Esta asked.

"Unsure." Analise shrugged. "You will go and find out. Perhaps you may also learn more of the Queen-Mother and Lord Charron's potential unionship."

Satisfied *for now*, the Grand Eye dismissed them from the archbishop's office.

"Looks like we have our next destination. I'll go prep the Arcen. It may be a few days before we're off. The Hellfire Badlands is vast. We may be there for some time, so you should lay to rest any matters that need tending to." Eliza bid them goodbye and took off on her broom.

Marwin departed to conduct lessons for the new knight trainees, leaving Lapis in Kanae and Esta's care for the time being.

"I'm going to go check on Edina. You guys don't have to follow me if you don't want to," Kanae said.

"It's a given that I follow you, Master." Esta smiled.

They turned to Lapis, who appeared eager to go anywhere with them.

Deeper inside the Basilica of Saint Rue were a series of rooms. Back here, the cathedral served as a hospice. Hundreds of sisters belonging to the One and The Many cared for the elderly, the sick, and mothers in labor. In one of these rooms, Edina rested in a coma.

Kanae opened the door and found Pan by Edina's bedside.

"You told me Auntie Edina was going to be okay." Pan rose from the seat, tears staining her cheeks.

"She will! You just have to trust me—" Kanae reached out to comfort her daughter, but she slipped past them and out the room instead.

Deciding against going after her, Kanae sat down where Pan was just sitting and stared at Edina who hadn't woken up since last night. Arenade and nurses of the cathedral believed her body shut down in an attempt to mend its shredded soul.

"It isn't your fault, Master. Edina made the choice to go through with it," Esta said.

"I know. I just wish there was more I can do." Kanae sighed.

"Uhm, I'm still new to all of this but... Is now an appropriate time to pray for Edina? If I remember right... people did... this?" Lapis folded her hands in all manner of strange gestures and grew increasingly frustrated.

Kanae got up and held her hands, guiding the palms flat against each other.

"Like this. And thanks. Though... if Edina were awake, she'd probably ask why in three hells we're wasting our time with that. But it's the thought that counts." Kanae smiled.

"When I see your friendship, I get envious. It's like a weird tightness inside me. These feelings are so confusing, and it bothers me that I don't understand them. If there is any way for me to help, please include me. Maybe, I can slowly start to understand my purpose other than to have sex!" Lapis exclaimed.

Kanae and Esta stifled their laughter.

"What's so funny?" she asked.

"Nothing. I'll be outside." Esta excused herself and left the room.

"Edina wanted to show you around to some casinos. We didn't really get a chance to the other day. How about it? I'm Queen of the Commonwealth. That means I have a lot of money to blow," Kanae offered.

"Hmm... For some reason when I appraise your emotions, there is a revulsion towards gambling, yet you also find it... enjoyable? I would like to know more, so yes!" Lapis beamed.