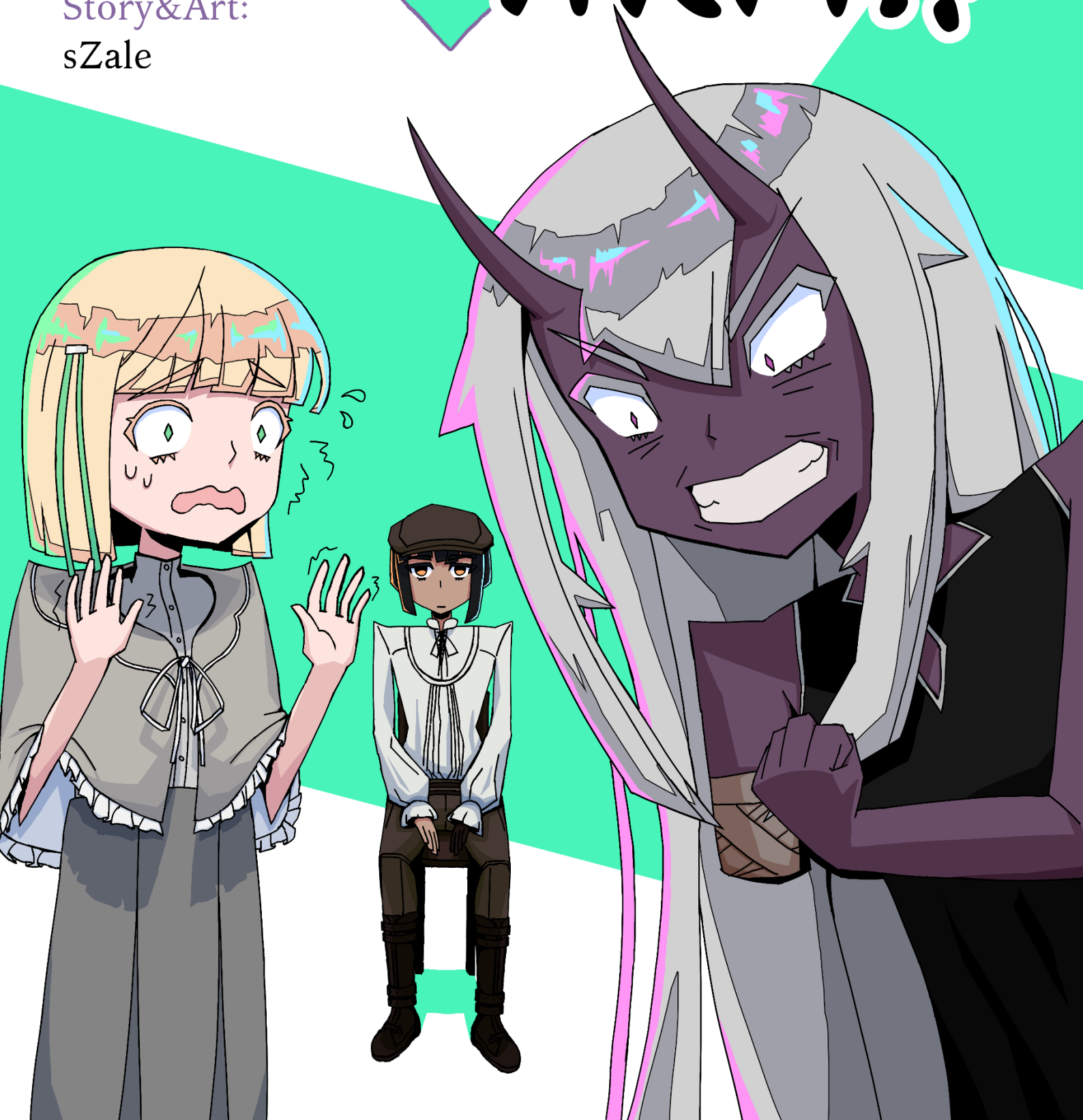


MY EX-GIRLFRIEND STOLE MY ARM!!

Story&Art:
sZale



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Devil & Demon

Calista

Ridiculous! absolute nonsense! how could anyone accept this crap as reality?!

It was the middle of the night and I awoke to the sight of my girlfriend standing over me, blade in hand with a gaze like ice. Before I can react my arm is gone and she's out the door taking my arm with her! It sounds like a joke! I looked down and only half an upper-arm was left! My brain caught up and pain and panic flooded over me. I tried to heal myself with magic but nothing happened, "Are you kidding me!?!?" I bandaged the wound with clothes off the floor and ran to the local healer.

Were I human, I would certainly have bled out but demons have a bit more vigour than that! So I did manage to get to the healer who closed the wound, Though I think I was passed out at that point.

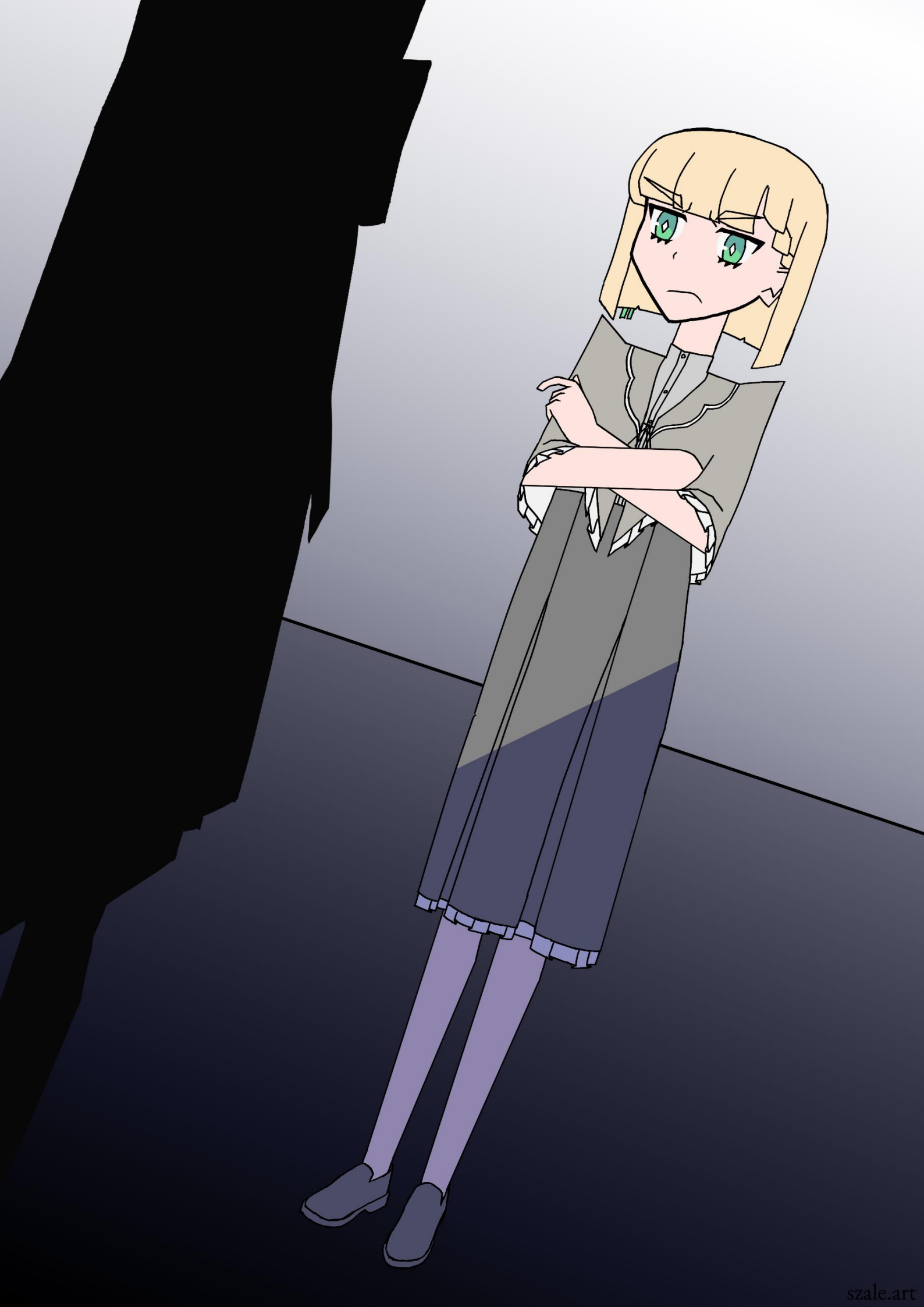
Now dear reader, hopefully you're thinking '*wow that's totally messed up, what a totally mean bad person*' but perhaps you're thinking '*oh she's a demon? I bet she totally did something bad and deserved it*' this would be a very wrong and a very mean thought, I may be a demon however I am but a kind maiden; not any eviler than anyone else is.

With your perception of me repaired, let me tell you about the arm, because it isn't just a regular old store-brand arm, it's a magic arm; covered with demonic tattoos that grant the owner magic of great potency. As it happens each and every tattoo I had was on that arm, so now I am nothing! I was a feared and powerful mage! The elements were mine to control! with but a flick of the wrist I could level a mansion (not that I'd do that hehe). As such I need that arm back! It'd also be lovely If I could get some revenge on the woman who'd just become my *ex*-girlfriend.

For a about a week I laid alone in my blood-stained bed, plotting, scheming, sulking , trying to figure out how to get my arm back; as I am I'll need help to achieve my revenge quest. I'll need to draw on every favour I'm owed, leverage every crumb of guilt, and use my feminine charms to gather allies for this grand revenge quest!

First on my list is Aikaterini (aka Rini) we've been close for years so she shouldn't be too hard to persuade, and she happens to be able wield powerful mind-control magic as well as decent healing magic, in theory I just have to recruit her and she can mind control as many allies as we need!

"Absolutely not! mind control magic is evil! It shouldn't even exist! And don't talk about it so loudly." Aikaterini folded her arms.



I'd met Aikaterini behind the Puldark council building—a building too bland to describe. Aikaterini had an appearance that stood out in pubs: she seemed awfully young. Blond hair settled just above her shoulders—part-braided on one side, with a green ribbon clipped into the other. Frills lined the end of her grey skirt and beige short-cloak. Quite fancy for dirty ol' Puldark but surely nothing to the folks in The Capital.

“Cmon Rini~♡” I said. “It’s for a wonderful cause~♡”

She speared me with green eyes. “Two wrongs don't make a right Calista.”

My name is Calista by the way.

“Ok but what if our wrong is just a wee bit bad but her wrong is very deeply super evil.”

“Wee bit? Mind control is perhaps the worst possible violation of one's autonomy and selfhood, I cannot begin to conceive of a situation in which it's usage would be permissible.”

“Yeah but hey, what if they agree to be mind-controlled? then it's fine right?”

Aikaterini hmpf-ed. “If they trust you that much then there's no need to mind control them.”

“Haha that is so true, you're quite the thinker Rini.”

“~*Sigh*~...As your friend I obviously want to help, doubly since you lost your arm.”

Ah such a kind soul my dear Rini has, at this rate it will be less than an effort to recruit her to my revenge quest.

“I, I mean with one arm it's probably hard to cook right? so maybe I could-” Aikaterini turned away blushing, “go to your place, and help, and stuff...”

I hugged her. “Aww Riiiiiiii~♡”

She let out a panicked sound.

“Hm? what's up?”

She lept out of the hug “Nothing! all good!”

“...”

“So... mind control?”

“No.”

“...”

“Well uh, you're pretty good with healing magic yeah? you could be the group's nurse.” I said.

“Sure but,” Aikaterini twiddled her fringe. “I can't just pack up and go like that, I'm a council member here—a community representative and all. And I know it's expensive but wouldn't it be easier to have a healer regrow your arm rather than going after the one you lost?”

“There's no-one in Puldark with that level of magic. And as I am I wouldn't be able to get the money. Besides, she intentionally took the arm with all the magic tattoos so she must have some stupid evil plan for it, or maybe she just wanted to disarm me heh.”

I swear, I'll [REDACTED BY THE DECENCY BOARD] that woman.

“...I suppose her reason for taking it are concerning, but It’ll still be easier to find money for a healer...” Aikaterini said.

“*Ughh* I just want my arm ok! can’t a girl feel attached to her arm?! you only ever get two!” Well some demons have more, but whatever.

“Also! It’s not much of a story to just rock up and have my arm grown back! If I find Elaine and do revenge things to her that’s much more of a story! she’ll be all *noooo I am totally facing the consequences of my actions right now and I totally completely regret making such an innocent maiden suffer and also oof my face really hurts.*”

I smiled towards the heavens.

Aikaterini sighed. “How bold I was to think I could steer you away from the bluntest approach.” She glanced to the horizon. “Besides, what use is revenge. Wouldn’t it be better if you just forgot about her?”

Psh, what rubbish. Like hell I could play saint with an arm thief.

I smiled. “No.”

“...”

“Well, um, what’s the plan for getting your arm back anyway?” Aikaterini said.

“If you’re asking does that mean my dear Rini will be accompanying me?”

Aikaterini blushed. “Eh?! nothing like that! I’m just curious about your plan...” Aikaterini played with her fingers.

“Indeed indeed, though I think I know what I’d have to do to motivate you.” I smiled.

Aikaterini grew redder. “I-I couldn’t possibly imagine what you mean by that! just tell me the plan...”

“Well uh... step one was to get you with your mind control onboard... but uh, generally the plan was to gather allies, pack supplies, and head to The Capital.”

“The Capital?? you know how far away that is right? It’ll take months to get there! besides how do you know she’ll be there.”

“Well before she was with me she lived in The Capital, probably in some dumb fancy house. And she wouldn’t have a reason to hang around Puldark, especially since I’m sure she knows she’s pissed me off, not that a demon with no magic would scare her.” I sighed. “Anyway, that’s where she’ll be.”

“I see.”

“...”

“So... Rini... how about it?” I made an extravagant gesture. “Become my partner in this revenge quest!”

Aikaterini folded her arms, blushing. “As if I’d accept so easily... but I suppose I’ll think about it...”

“Rini you’re the best!!! such a sweet girl!” I gave her a leaping hug, she stumbled and after recovering broke away.

“W-well I’m going back to work, bye.” Aikaterini turned to walk back to the council building.

“Oh, uh, I’ll come back when you finish work!”

Aikaterini

That woman I swear, I don’t know how to process her at all. Suddenly appearing in the middle of work hours with talk of a revenge quest. ~Sigh~ I guess I can’t be too hard on her though, after all her girlfriend did suddenly attack her like that; that’d be traumatising for anyone.

I feel a bit selfish saying this, but I can’t say I’m sad that those two aren’t together anymore, I never particularly trusted Elaine, n-not because I was jealous or anything I just had that sort of feeling. I mean a rich girl from The Capital suddenly showing up in a run-down town like Puldark! It’s unusual! It’s suspicious! Well, ‘A rich girl from The Capital’ could perhaps also describes me, but not I’m rich anymore...

I do wonder what Elaine plans on doing with the arm, it’s definitely concerning. Oh well, for now I’ve got to figure out how to deal with this revenge quest thing. Maybe I could join for a week or so, during which she can confide in me... Let her feelings out... And so on... *Ahem*, then we can go home, and work on finding money for a healer.

I snapped to attention; a member of the council had called my name. Oh no I’d spaced out, how embarrassinggg~

What a mess this all is...

Glass Sun

Calista

What would a rousing revenge quest be without an awesomely agonising armament with which to massively mutilate a malicious meanie?

To that end I was at a local weapons store, hoping to find such an armament. My skill with a blade is roughly zero but I figured having a weapon would be better than not. I'd *acquired* a few weapons over my years of conquest but they were far too elaborate—I just needed a stick with painful bits on it.

I peeked inside, just one person staring at the ceiling; —probably a bored employee.

Heh, too easy. I'll grab something and get out—would've been easier with a magic arm but whatever. I crept inside and over to an area of wall mounted items; shooting a glance or two at the employee as I went. A particular sword caught my eye, it looked like the sort of thing that you could stab someone a couple times with and they'd regret becoming an arm thief; it was also small enough to sneak out.

As I reached out towards the sword I heard a sound behind me:

“Ahem.”

I spun around; it was the employee.

“Ask before touching the stock. Valued customer.”

Deep orange eyes gazed into me.



She had black hair tied in a bun, wore a brown flat cap and gloves on both hands.

Hmm, she's kind of cute.

"A^{ha}ha my bad I didn't realise, it looked neat is all." I said.

The girl pointed silently to a sign beside her on the wall.

I read the sign. 'Please ask our friendly staff before touching store items.' "Oh^{hhh}, oopsie whoopsie huh, ehe^{hehe}..."

"Were you looking to purchase a weapon today?" She said.

'Purchase', heh, I should probably play along though.

"Hm yes certainly a weapon would be wonderful."

"Please tell me the use-case such that I may assist in finding something appropriate."

Bitter, violent revenge, but I suppose I shouldn't say that.

"Oh you know, I want one that stabs good."

"..."

The girl stared at my severed right arm.

"..."

"I could do something for your arm."

I looked at what remained of my right arm, was she planning to strap a sword to it or something?

"Look." The girl took the glove off her left hand. Woah, she's got two metal fingers.

She wiggled the metal fingers. "My hand is like this, so I do prosthetics. As a hobby."

She can even move them?! Something like that'd be neat...

"It would cost you."

Is she a mind reader or something?? *Ughhh*. Really don't have money at the minute. Do I even need a prosthetic? The plan is to get my arm back after all—though that'd take at least a couple months...

"Alright well I did say I was looking for a weapon so..."

"The prosthetic would be modular. You'll be able to replace the hand with various weapons: casting source, blade, buzzsaw—"

U h w a h, so cool! Mate you're hired! gotta play it cool though, I'm sure I can't afford the thing.

"Well um, how much will it cost?"

"It'd take me a few months to build. So fifteen thousand."

Quite the unholy number. *Ughhhhhhhhhhh* not happening. And months? I'm not gonna hang around Puldark that long; I've already wasted a week.

"Hmm, Hey pal do you like guns?" I said.

The girl's face twitched.

"Yes." She said.

To most Puldark residents 'a gun' was a thing of rumour; another weird contraption of the rich cities.

I began to formulate a plan.

“Heh, heh, heh... nice nice nice... Alright! we’ll discuss payment over dinner!” I named a restaurant for us to meet at tonight.

“.....Ok...”

“Sweet as. I’m Calista by the way, you?”

“Noel.”

With that I booked it out of the store, I’d have to get home then back to Aikaterini before she finishes at the council.

Stars & Steel

Aikaterini

~Ughhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh~ I'm finally done for the day.

Oh my, it's already dark out. A meal and a warm bath would be lovely...

I picked up my bag and headed out but when I opened the door... Calista?!

She was slouched against the building, staring into the sky. I totally forgot that she was going to wait for me! Has she been waiting long?! awawawa o^h no oh no I can't believe I made Calista wait she must have been so bored staring into space like that. I breathed in and steeled myself with the thought: 'It's not like I asked her to wait!' I then walked towards her.

"Oh hey Rini! have fun with your pietistic pals?"

"As a kindness I was going to ask if you'd been waiting long, but I now no longer care, who taught you a word like pietistic anyway?"

"How harsh Rini, you should know I only ever pretend to be stupid."

"Then I suppose we're both abandoning pretence."

"Ah it must be a sign of our closeness for us to be so open to each other." Calista looked at me with intoxicating eyes and smiled.

"I-in any case what did you come back for?"

"Oh! I found an ally!"

"Huh?"

"This cute girl from the weapon store! She's gonna build me a cool prosthetic, if I play my cards right."

Cute huh?

"And why would this so called '*cute girl*' have a reason to help you."

"Her name is Noel by the way."

"Ah so you do learn people's names on occasion."

"Hehe, Only the cute ones, Rini~" Calista smiled again.

I felt myself blush. "S-so what's her deal?"

"Well you see my dear Rini from my stash I dug out an item with great motivational properties, I think she'll like it."

Calista shook the bag she was carrying.

"What is it?"

"You'll see at dinner."

"Dinner???"

"Indeed! The three of us will be discussing my master plan!"

We started walking to the restaurant, stopping to drop my bag off along the way. Calista had never invited me to dinner like this before, I wish this were under better circumstances but I'll take it.

Oh my, quite the incident this is becoming...

Noel

I sat at a wood restaurant table. Waiting for the strange woman. She was late. She had the aspect of someone who is not often on time. I'd ordered tea and was watching the flecks dance as I stirred it. Hm, Pleasant.

Voices pierced the ambience. The strange woman Calista and a blonde child had arrived. Calista waved. As they approached my table I greeted them:

"You're late."

"You made her wait? unbelievable." The blonde faced me. "With great heart we apologise for making you wait."

"Hehe~ I must have been having too much fun with you Rini."

The blonde blushed. "I-I didn't know when we'd need to be here, if I knew I would have hurried us along..."

I looked at Calista. "Payment?"

"*Hehe*- excited are we?" Calista shook the bag she was carrying. "But before that let's eat!"

"By the way my name is Aikaterini, pleasure to meet you."

"My name is Noel."

"Ah what a lovely name." She smiled.

"..."

With that they sat down. Calista put her bag beside her chair. She said that dinner was 'on her'. I ordered eggplant pasta. Calista ordered a duck burger with blue cheese, as well as a green tea. Aikaterini ordered a barramundi fillet—grilled with ginger, chilli, and coriander, as well as a salad. She also ordered a bottle of white wine. I watched her pour it. The apparent youngest among us was the only one drinking. Interesting. Aikaterini noticed my gaze.

"*Eheh*, don't worry I'm older than I look~☆" She smiled.

Aikaterini took a sip and then walked over to Calista.

"Um uh Calista, I can cut up your burger if you want—It'd be easier to eat then."

"Oh indeed, good thinking Rini you're such a dear, please, go ahead."

Aikaterini blushed with a complicated expression and bent down to cut the burger. Which she did with much care.

"Thank you Riiiiii~♡"

“A—, I—, um, yes, no worries.”



I began eating. Strands of pasta revolved around my fork, carrying specks of eggplant. I brought the weave into my mouth and felt a pleasant warmth. The pasta was firm but not raw. The eggplant soft but retained the skin's grilled texture. I washed it down with tea and ate some more. Pleasant. Despite this restaurant being nearby I hadn't known of it. I normally cooked for myself.

"You know~" Aikaterini waggled her fork. "Lots of people don't like coriander, I really don't get it I think it's tasty... Noel do you like coriander?"

".....Sure."

Aikaterini mmm-ed and nodded profoundly. Her drink was already half gone.

Calista appeared to be in a state of bliss. Eyes closed. Grease across her mouth. She threw the last chunk of burger down her throat. Took a long drink of tea, and slammed the cup down.

"Yummo eh?"

Calista then suddenly switched to a serious look.

"SO!—HERE'S THE PLAN TO MAKE MY EX-GIRLFRIEND EXCEPTIONALLY REMORSEFUL AND GET MY ARM BACK!"

She'd startled some patrons with that.

Aikaterini gave a gentle clap. I sipped my tea.

"But before that. I need to persuade Noel." Calista smiled and kicked her bag along the floor so that it was beside me.

"Look inside but don't take it out."

I narrowed my eyes at Calista and then picked up the bag. I pulled the string loose and opened it.

"Huh?"

Aikaterini craned her neck. "Oi I wanna *seeee* what is *ittttttttttt???*"

A sniper rifle. In perfect condition.

Retractable. Intricate. Drenched in Attachments. High class. A bag of ammo too.

Where could a weapon like this possibly have come from? It was far from military standard. By which method could Calista have acquired this? Not by way of law I'm sure.

Calista's smile grew.

"What did you get her??? Did you steal it? Is it something weird?" Aikaterini said.

"A-haah~ of course not I just got her something nice."

"Sure but what is *ittttt???*"

"It's a gun." I said.

"*EH!?* really!?!? what? why?!?"

"I thought she'd like it, and I think I was right."

"..."

"Now. shall I continue with the plan?" Calista said.

I nodded

“*Ahem.* we’re going to The Capital!”

The Capital? of all places...

“I have a job here.” I said.

“When I found you you were bored stiff! As if you’re desperate to hold onto that. Building me an arm sounds more fun yeah?”

I didn’t hate my job. the owner is nice to me.

Calista caught me up on everything. How she’d lost her arm. What we’d need for the trip.

“—So even if Elaine isn’t there we could still torture her family for her whereabouts!”

“Calista! you can’t just torture people!”

“*Psh,* torture smorture. We’ll be nice about it.”

“Calista!!” Aikaterini made the sternest expression she could through all the drink. Calista returned an apologetic smile.

“Due to our limited budget we’re going on foot. We’ll have to hunt food along the way which’ll be fine since there’ll be plenty of rabbits, birds, wild cats—”

“I don’t want to kill cats!! I like cats...” Aikaterini said.

“I too. Have a fondness for cats.” Aikaterini comradely looked at me.

Calista grouched her face. “—Cats aside, there’ll be bandits too. For which our defence is Noel’s gun, Aikaterini’s healing and her mind-control magic.”

“Oi! Don’t be talking about that public! Besides I said I wouldn’t already!”

Mind-control magic? Its existence had been rumoured but—

“If I was in danger would you really do nothing Rini?” Calista pouted.

Aikaterini’s face contorted. “Mean! Mean Mean Mean Mean! that’s not fair at all! I’ve never had to worry about something like that, since you were so strong and all... Oh my... I’ve never fought anyone...”

uuuu”

Aikaterini sank her head to the table. She looked about to cry.

“...”

“Calista. What makes you make you think I can use a gun?” I said.

“Ah I figured you’d figure it out.”

“Reckless woman. What if I can’t use the gun? Then if Aikaterini didn’t use her magic we’d be defenceless.”

“*Hebe*~ well the protagonist _(me) always scrapes by somehow don’t they?”

Stupid woman. Beyond reckless.

“*Anyways*~ question time’s over so who’s on board?”

Aikaterini was asleep. Or crying. Perhaps both. Calista ignored her and looked straight at me. Smiling.

“...”

“I’ll think about it.” I said.

Calista’s smile disintegrated. Instantly she’d yanked the bag back.

“Then I *~suppose~* I’ll hang onto this for the time being. Let me know when you make up your mind.”

“...Come to the store in three days.”

Calista nodded.

“I-I have thought much a-a-a-and I suppose I have no choice so I will go I suppose.” Aikaterini supposed.

So she was awake.

We went on to finish our meals, Aikaterini seemed to fall asleep completely. Mouth open. After a time. Calista went to wake her up with poke to the cheek.

Aikaterini let out an interesting noise as she woke. After a moment she advanced a stage of awareness, panicked, and blushed a deep red. Upon advancing to the next stage of awareness she jostled Calista’s cheeks and made many angry sounds. Some were comprehensible.

“Will she be alright to get home?” I said to Calista.

“*Hebe~* I’ll take care of her.” She replied.

No Light In My Veins

Calista

I was heading to Noel's store as promised. In the time since the dinner I'd been able to arrange supplies; due to my *history* the stores in Puldark don't trust me but long story short my lack of an arm and by extension magic seemed to convince them I wasn't a threat. I had to sell a few of my past spoils to afford it all *grumble grumble*, and said spoils aren't exactly things you can sell in the usual places.

I'd bought a crossbow, a hatchet, and inscribed a basic fire tattoo onto my right shoulder—boring survival-type junk I'd've never needed before *sob-sob*.

Speaking of suffering, on the road I won't have my luscious home-tattoo-setup so I'll be using a time consuming and painful travel kit for future tattoos. My oh my, I haven't had to use that thing since I was a wee lass.

Well dear reader I'd made it to the store—recap over. I was punctual this time, hopefully Noelzie will notice. I brought the gun, I figured flashing it would be a good bit of motivation.

I entered the store and saw Noel up the back. Her glare shifted to me from the knife she was wiping down, It's lovely how ominous that girl can be.

"I'll speak with you in a moment. Calista."

Hebe~, who's late now?

I shuffled around the store like a gran at a fruit market—inspecting the various weapons and mechanical thingies. Noel occasionally glanced at me; perhaps employee instinct or perhaps she still didn't trust me. Little did she know I was a changed woman! I'd seen the light and turned from the darkness! I now loved law following—*especially since I can't get away with it now*.

Noel began putting away her things so I drifted towards her. I reached her as she closed a drawer; she looked to me and spoke:

"I'll go."

"*w-e-b?* really!?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I thought about it. And decided."

"Yeah sure mate but you must have a pretty good reason if you're going along with *my* nonsense."

"I don't trust you enough to tell you further."

Ouch (*oof*). I guess that's locked up tight...

Noel told me what she had planned for my prosthetic: it would start simple, constructed from a light metal, tongs at the end for picking things up, and to move the arm and tongs I would channel magic into the prosthetic.

The crusty books reckon that one's magic originates from somewhere in the torso—perhaps the heart. Magic can be channelled out of any part of the body but when emitted closer to the chest it is spread out, chaotic. but as it is channelled away from the chest it becomes concentrated and potent—a running jump will take you further than a standing jump so to speak, as a result casting tends to be done with external limbs like arms, legs, tails, tentacles—even the head/mouth if your neck is long enough. As a matter of culture and pride demons rely on their bodies for magic and cast from arms, tails, etc. whereas humans like channelling through crap like wands and staffs to increase the distance from the torso (they have casting sources on the end that let them channel out of them like a body part). That she-devil (my ex) had spoken of massive artillery units in The Capital that took that principal to an extreme.

Noel continued to explain her plans: the tongs will be able to be replaced by a blade, then later a casting source, which would allow the prosthetic to be used as a staff with mechanisms to lengthen the prosthetic. *UGH*. I really don't wanna cast like a human but I'll suffer if I really really have to. The revenge'll be worth it. Also, the plan is that the prosthetic will be built up in stages using scrap metal found, bought, or *acquired* along the way.

Noel disappeared into a backroom and came back with something like a metal lid with leather straps hanging off it.

"This is the base it'll attach to. Can I put it on?" She said.

"Sure."

She held the metal part against my arm and tightened the straps, it was a weird sensation—the original bandages were still on by the way—not sure if that's a bad thing...

"I'll get the prosthetic."

She left and came back with a metal rod that had tongs attached to the end, it really didn't look like much. Noel lifted my arm with one hand and aligned the rod with the other before screwing it in, then twisted and clicked some bits and bobs to secure it (having two arms seems pretty convenient eh? *sob-sob*). With the rod added the total arm still only reached up to where the middle of the forearm would've been—no articulation at the elbow either...

"Channel some magic through it to close the tongs."

Oh wow I haven't channelled magic since I lost my arm have I? I still remember how of course, after all I was quite the mage.

I channelled magic through the prosthetic, I could feel it flow through and into the tongs.

"..."

I was staring at the tongs. Noel too.

“...”

I think I saw them wiggle, might just be dodgy construction...

“...”

Ok this is kind of very bigly embarrassing, there's magic going into those tongs but wow, what a piss-all amount. It must be restated: very bigly embarrassing, it's like forgetting how to walk, Noel knew I'd lost my magic but figured I'd at least be able to close the tongs—and so did I by the way! I must be sure to schedule a cry later.

“^{bae}... I don't think I can close them... “

“Oh. Wow.”

I know ok!! uaa^{aaaa}aaaa^{aaaaaa}aaaa^{aa}UGH!

“^{he}_{heu}... I think if I add a uh mana tattoo then I should be able to close the tongs.” I said

“Yes. Do that. If you can't even close the tongs then nothing else has a chance of working.”

I know^{wow} I'm ^{sorryy} Noelzie~

“I'll be working hard on my mana Noel! I won't let you down!”

“Ok.”

awawa~ this is the ^{worst}. This means I can't even use the fire tattoo I already got! UGH!

Noel was saying something but I was too focused on sulking to reply. What a mess! hopefully this'll work out somehow ^{sob-sob}.

And Thus the Curtains is Raised

Calista

‘Tis the day! the day to be beheld! The day when ink hits the page of our (my) grand conquest! The masses will say of this day: “Indeed this is where it all began! The genesis of an era! Bask in the glory of this day of days! The glorious inception that will henceforth be spoken of as pure molten legend for eons upon eons!” Then the descendants of those masses will say of our story “Woah. This is epic.” and then the same of their lineage also.

Rini eyed me with this *‘I know what you’re thinking and I’m very grumpy-wumpy about it’* type face. Whatever, she doesn’t actually know what I’m thinking—unless she does that is, considering that her crazy family developed those mind powers there’s bound to be some bonus secret weird thing about them.

Foreshadowing aside Rini was still giving me that look—arms crossed.

“You know you’re cuter when you’re drunk.” I said

Rini made a noise and waddled away.

Such a nice girl.

Oh whoops I should set the scene. Aikaterini, Noel, and I were on the edge of town double checking our things, in particular Noel was making sure the packs I bought weren’t going to fall apart, Rini was sulking or something, and I’ve been monologuing. To our sides and behind us are some dinky buildings and in front of us an even dinkier ‘road’.

By the way I got a tat off-screen, I wanted to take advantage of my proper kit at home while I still could and got a mana tattoo, now I can produce a dainty match-flame and close the tongs of the prosthetic. Beyond gutted that this is what I’m reduced to. Back in the glory days I could’ve reduced these depressing shacks to charcoal with naught but a sneeze.

Noel looked blankly at me; I think it was a signal. Rini had now returned to her pack and was fiddling with it, I sauntered over.”

“They’re fine. We’ll be ready soon.” Noel said.

I looked to the packs, they were organised relative to our strength, Noel had the largest of the packs since she said she could handle it; I guess she hits lots of metal with hammers or whatever but dang she must be pretty strong. I used to use magic for everything and never built up any muscle so my pack comparatively light, then naturally Rini’s is the lightest since she’s all adorable and tiny.

Rini was once again giving me a look, maybe she really could read minds...

Actually you can read minds can’t you dear reader! maybe you’re secretly Rini! wouldn’t that be a cool twist! ...or maybe not. I’m not much of a writer, which is why there’ll be scribes to create a record of this legendary adventure!

“Can you really carry all that? I’m sure I could carry more in my pack.” Rini had a concerned look.

“I can handle it but I appreciate your concern Aikaterini.” Noel replied.

Oh they’re getting along how lovely~

I pulled a store-bought map of the region out of my bag, held it for the pair to see, and pointed as I talked.

“Right so to recap here are our stops: there’ll be two minor settlements: Grungevista then Washste, next is Bitterwall which is a city, then The Capital. Between those stops we’ll have to rest in our tents, we may also run into settlements not on the map or random huts where we can ask nicely to stay (scab a snooze).”

I’d also drawn copies of the map for both Rini and Noel. I put the map back in my bag and continued: “We have food packed but most will need to be hunted, bought or foraged ~~or stolen~~ along the way, like I said the first stop is Grungevista, it’s apparently a dump but so’s here so whatever. I was also told there’s a cool cliff in town, if there’s time maybe we can see the cool cliff.”

“We don’t need to see the cool cliff.” Noel said.

“Fine fine. I bet the cool cliff isn’t even that cool anyway.” I said.

“...”

“It would be very convenient to have horses.” Aikaterini said.

“Yes well, unfortunately we didn’t have the budget and no-one breeds horses here anyway, I doubt a place called ‘*Grungevista*’ will have horses either, maybe they’ll have giant cockroaches we can ride ^{hehe}”

Aikaterini flinched. “*aa!* I’d rather walk.”

With that we headed out for real.

Aaaaaaaah... It won’t be long now before I have my powers back, those glory days will be reborn! vengeance will be mine!!



...Hopefully I can get over my break-up too.

Afterword

Hi hi, I'm sZale.

I started writing this story on my phone during the lunch breaks of my nine to five office job back in 2020 (a wonderful year for all). I'd been interested in writing for a little while before that, but nothing ever got past the planning stage, so I forced myself to just start writing something without much planning, and after 2+ years here we are. I don't really have a good excuse for it taking me that long to write and edit 5 chapters, and it's a bit silly to write an afterword for something so short but I'm doing it anyway.

I also drew all the illustrations (what an upstart little Yuu Kamiya I am) with the first one started in April of 2022, and even just from then til January 2023 when I finished the cover my art style has changed noticeably, which ruins some consistency and all that but really it gives the book character don't you think? :)

All that said, glad to be done with this thing. I have another story in the works (including illustrations) and with any luck you'll be reading it long before 2026.

I'd like to thank my friends who gave me feedback on the book, the light novel authors I ripped off to make this book, the creators of all the podcasts, books, lectures, and online videos I consumed to improve my writing, and my cat. This is all your fault <3

And finally thank YOU in particular for reading this silly little book.

You can view my illustrations and other fun things on my website:

<https://sZale.art>

I also have a mailing list so you can keep up with any exciting future developments:

<https://szale.ck.page>