

Author: Leonard
Illustrator: Won

The Poison King:

Now that
I've Gained
Ultimate
Power,

the
Bewitching
Beauties in
My Harem

Can't Get
Enough
of Me



2

Author: Leonard
Illustrator: Won

The Poison King:

Now that
I've Gained
Ultimate
Power,

the
Bewitching
Beauties in
My Harem
Can't Get
Enough
of Me



A full-page illustration of the character Tea from the anime Fate/stay night. She is depicted from the waist up, wearing a red lace bra and a matching garter belt. She has long, flowing silver hair and small green cat ears on her head. Her eyes are red, and she has a slight smile. The background is a soft, purple and pink gradient with some light effects. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

“How do I
look, Master
Caim? Do
they suit
me?”

Caim gasped at the sight. Tea, clad in bright red panties, brassiere, and garter belt, looked so bewitching he couldn't look away. The red underwear and Tea's silver hair went exceptionally well together. As for her soft twin mounds and her wonderfully round butt, the lascivious undergarments made them even more arousing than if they were completely bare.



Lenka

A swordswoman with a peculiar fetish working as Millicia's guard.

Millicia

A noble lady with special circumstances from the Garnet Empire.

Tea

A white tiger beastfolk who has served Caim since he was a child.



“That woman is strong...”

Caim sighed in admiration. Not only had her skill in effortlessly killing the two soldiers been impressive, but she had even sensed Caim's slight hostility as he watched her leave and looked back at him.

Table of Contents

1. [Cover](#)
2. [Color Illustrations](#)
3. [Prologue](#)
4. [Chapter 1: Boat Trip to the Empire](#)
5. [Chapter 2: The Town on the Opposite Shore](#)
6. [Chapter 3: Millicia's Crisis](#)
7. [Chapter 4: Toward the Imperial Capital](#)
8. [Chapter 5: Post Town and Hot Spring](#)
9. [Chapter 6: The Adventurers' Guild](#)
10. [Extra Story: Sister Millicia's Misadventure](#)
11. [Extra Story: Sister Arnette's Misadventure](#)
12. [Afterword](#)
13. [About J-Novel Club](#)
14. [Copyright](#)

Prologue

“Well then, let’s start today’s lesson,” said the black-haired woman with glasses who stood behind a teacher’s podium inside a square room. While she looked young and had lustrous skin, her vibe was oddly mature, making it difficult to guess her age. Her eyes were pleasantly narrowed, like a cat brimming with curiosity, but there was *something* about her that made it impossible to discern what she was thinking.

“Faust...” called the young man with purple hair and eyes sitting at the desk in front of the podium. His name was Caim, the son of the Master Pugilist, and he had been the central figure in a tragedy involving a certain poison curse. However, by fusing with the curse’s source—the Poison Queen, a Demon Lord-class monster—he had conquered it and obtained overwhelming power.

As for the woman called Faust, she was an extraordinary doctor and researcher. Though she was a leading mind in the fields of medical and magical knowledge, because of her recklessness in pursuit of her research and how much trouble that had caused around the world, she was known as a mad scientist.

“Why are you... Or rather, *this* again?” Caim asked with a frown, looking around what appeared to be a classroom. It wasn’t his first time here—this had happened once before, when the woman before him had given him a strange lesson.

To put it simply, this place was an imaginary space created inside Caim’s dreams via Faust’s magic.

“Do you actually live in my head or something? You showed up just the other day, and yet here you are again...” Caim said.

“Please, don’t look so annoyed. I’m appearing in your dreams out of kindness, you know? After all, you’re pretty ignorant about the world, so you need someone to teach you. Just think of it as me looking after my patient. I may not seem like it, but I’ve got a reputation as a caring doctor,” Faust replied.

“Oh, really? Well, thanks, I guess. But...what about your appearance?” Caim shot her a cold glare.

Faust, currently standing with a blackboard behind her and a teacher’s pointer in her hand, was wearing something ridiculous. Her outfit was composed of only two pieces of black cloth barely covering her chest and her crotch—basically, it was as though she was in her undergarments.

“Ah, this? It’s a swimsuit—something you wear to swim in the sea or rivers.”

“So...that’s not underwear?”

“Nope. The fabric is thicker so you can’t see through it, and it’s coated with magic to repel water. Swimsuits are mainly used in the southern part of the continent, but they’re starting to become popular inside the empire too. When it’s hot, you wear an outfit like this and cool yourself down in the water. Oh, by the way, the male version doesn’t have the chest part, so don’t get the wrong one,” Faust explained.

“They must have quite the open-minded culture. Sounds fun.”

“That’s the real pleasure of traveling—discovering new cultures. Even farther east than the empire, there are countries where they soak in hot water that wells up from underground; in the north they live in houses made out of snow and drink a kind of black soup. Every place is unique. You’ll see that for yourself as you travel around the world.”

“I look forward to that, but you didn’t appear in my dream just to say this, right? Because that’d be pretty annoying,” Caim complained.

“Of course not. It might be a little sudden, but today, I’m here to give you a lecture on the Garnet Empire.” Faust put her hands behind her head and struck a sexy pose that emphasized her ample chest. “First, as its name suggests, the Garnet Empire is an empire—a nation where the emperor holds all the power. In the past, several small countries in these lands maintained a delicate balance between war and unity. However, all of that changed when barbarians from the south came and threatened to conquer them. The small countries had no other choice but to join forces, and the leader of this union of nations became the emperor.”

Faust paused, changing her posture to lean forward with her arms on Caim's desk, offering him a perfect view of her cleavage, before continuing, "The small countries united with the emperor at their center and repelled the barbarians' invasion. In fact, they went further—they struck back at the barbarians, conquering their lands instead. In the process, they even annexed the neighboring states until they became the greatest nation on the continent. Incidentally, it was named the Garnet Empire after the wife of the first emperor. She lost her life in the war against the barbarians, so he named the country in her honor."

Caim listened silently.

"Thus, the Garnet Empire achieved hegemony as the greatest nation, exercising its authority on the surrounding countries. The current emperor is a moderate, so there hasn't been a war in years, but many influential people in the empire still advocate and dream of conquering the entire continent," Faust concluded.

"Wow, that was an actually useful and interesting lesson," Caim said, then sighed before pointing out something that had been bothering him since earlier. "By the way, why have you been striking poses for a while? You're deliberately showing off your chest and rear, aren't you?"

"Hm? You mean *this*?" Faust tilted her head curiously. Right now, she was sitting on the podium, spreading her legs to show her crotch. "Well, since you've got quite a few women around you right now, I thought I should probably give you some eye candy too."

"...That's totally none of your business. Honestly, it's mostly just making me angry," Caim retorted. While it was true she was his benefactor in helping him conquer the Poison Queen's curse, she was also the one who had given him the curse in the first place. He didn't blame her anymore, but her casual teasing irked him.

"You don't like my sexy poses? That's a shame. I'm quite confident in my body."

"I *do* think you're beautiful. However, I'm not exactly thirsty for women right now."

“Because you have three adorable lovers? Ha ha, you’re pretty impressive, you know? It hasn’t even been a month since your departure.”

Faust even knew how many lovers Caim had. She’d told him that the dream was created from a magic she had implanted into his brain beforehand, but given how much she knew about his current situation, Caim started to suspect that she was actually spying on him.

“Don’t worry—I’m pretty busy and have a lot of other people to observe, so it’s not like I can spend too much time on you,” Faust reassured him.

“Really? If you’re lying, the next time we meet I’ll give you a taste of my poison.”

“It’s true, I swear. Anyway, back on topic—the empire was born from military might and war, so for better or worse, it became a meritocracy. As long as you’re good enough, even a commoner can become a noble, and as long as they’re strong, even criminals can get rich and seize power. In a way, it’s the perfect place for you, but...well, be careful.” Faust put her index finger before her lips and shot him a roguish smile. “If they learn about your power, lots of people will make their move—be it to use you, to get you out of the way, or even to take your seed.”



“My seed, you say...”

“Don’t you have two imperial girls attracted to you already? In fact, it’s high time for you to wake up and head back to reality. One of your cute lovers is waiting for you,” Faust said, ripples passing through her before she disappeared entirely.

Caim’s consciousness started to fade, and just when he realized he was going to wake up, his vision was filled with dazzling light.

Chapter 1: Boat Trip to the Empire

Caim woke up beneath an unfamiliar ceiling, different from that of the inn where he'd slept the previous night.

"Ah, are you awake, Caim?" said a voice from below him. When he turned toward it, he found a pretty blonde girl with blue eyes shooting him an upward glance.

"Millicia...?" Caim muttered her name. Millicia was a noble lady from the Garnet Empire who had become his lover a few days ago.

"You were sleeping so soundly. You must have been very tired."

"Yeah...well, you know, I had quite the workout and didn't get to sleep much last night." Caim slowly looked at his surroundings to figure out where he was. "Ah, I remember now—we're on the ship."

Caim was currently in a cabin of the ferryboat traveling from the Jade Kingdom to the Garnet Empire. The kingdom and the empire were separated by the Flumen River, with both nations connected by boat via port cities—Otarria on the kingdom's side, and Faure on the empire's side.

I was tired, so I decided to sleep until we set sail, Caim recalled. While they had no problem boarding the ferry using their tickets, it hadn't departed immediately. There was only one trip per day, so it took time for all the passengers to board and load their luggage. Caim chose to use the time waiting to rest in the cabin that was reserved for them.

They just wouldn't let me sleep last night, so I was reaching my limit... Caim had three lovers, including Millicia. The three of them had set upon him aggressively, as though they were competing with one another, so he'd ended up severely sleep-deprived.

"Must have been why I had that weird dream..." Caim whispered to himself. "By the way, Millicia, what are you doing?" Caim asked Millicia, who had her face right in front of his crotch.

Millicia had stripped Caim of his pants and underwear and was currently pressing her face between his legs. Her expression was lascivious—her cheeks flushed pink and her eyes glistening—and it was obvious that she was brimming with lust and not just innocently changing Caim’s clothes.

“I’m sorry. The ferry is sailing, so I came to wake you up, but you just wouldn’t, so...” Millicia trailed off.

“So you just went straight for my crotch?”

“Well, I thought I might as well service you... *Slurp.*”

Caim gasped and his shoulders shook as his sensitive parts were stimulated by Millicia’s tongue.

She chuckled. “At first I thought this was grotesque and scary, but now that I’m used to it, I find it pretty cute. Is that an odd way to think? Maybe that’s what becoming a woman means.”

“C-Calling it *cute* isn’t really a compliment...”

“You think so? Even though it’s so adorable, all twitchy like this...” Millicia slowly caressed Caim’s manhood—his “sword”—making him moan. She was very gentle, delicately stroking from its base to its tip, and even lovingly rubbing her cheek against it.

“I-I’m getting up, so stop!” Caim shouted.

“I won’t. I earned the right to be here after winning against the other two, so I won’t let this opportunity go.”

“Speaking of, where are Tea and Lenka?” Caim asked, realizing he and Millicia were alone in the cabin.

“We played rock, paper, scissors to decide who would service—I mean, awaken you, and I won.” Millicia proudly flashed a victory sign, still rubbing her cheek against Caim’s manhood. “They went onto the deck. We’ll head out to join them once we’ve had a chance to enjoy ourselves,” she said before going on the offensive.

First, Millicia gave Caim’s “sword” a few licks, then she removed her blouse and her bra, exposing her well-shaped breasts. Using her soft mounds, she

sandwiched his manhood, and just like a cat, she extended her small tongue to lick his “sword” and smear saliva all over it.



Having just graduated from being a virgin, Millicia lacked experience in using her tongue, but Caim was just as inexperienced, so he didn't exactly know the difference. In fact, the way Millicia clumsily did her best to please him made her all the more endearing.

"Uh... Millicia!"

"Aaah... I can't believe I'm doing something like this to your *thing*... Does it feel good? Does my tongue give you pleasure?"

"Yeah...it's amazing, Millicia..." Caim stopped resisting, seeing that Millicia wasn't going to be deterred. As he watched her lick his "sword," he sat up and gently caressed her blonde hair.

"Aww, I love it when you pat my head..." Millicia smiled bewitchingly, and then as if wanting to thank Caim for stroking her head, she started moving her tongue faster. She carefully licked the head of his manhood as though tasting a delicious candy, tracing her tongue around it.

"Ngh?!" Caim moaned loudly in pleasure when Millicia suddenly put her soft lips around his "sword" and started sucking it. He watched his lover, whose usually graceful and composed expression had transformed into that of a woman enraptured, making vulgar sounds while she sucked his manhood. "Damn... At this rate I'm going to... Ah!"

"Mmmh!"

Caim reached his limit and pleasure overwhelmed him as he released his lust inside Millicia's mouth.

"The scent is amazing... That was wonderful, Caim."

"...You were awesome too. Like, really." Caim had never thought that a prim and proper noble lady would change this much in just a few days. Caim enjoyed the immorality of it all and the sense of accomplishment he felt for dyeing a highborn woman in his colors as pleasant exhaustion overtook him. "Now that we're done, let's rejoin Tea and Lenka."

"No, please wait." Millicia stopped Caim from putting his underwear and pants back on. "You might feel refreshed now, but I do not. In fact, I'm feeling

even *more* lustful now.” She knelt on the bed and lifted her skirt, revealing that she wasn’t wearing anything under it. Her exposed crotch was oozing with sticky nectar trickling along her pale thighs. “Now it’s *your* turn to pleasure me.”

“...Yeah, I get it.” Caim sighed in resignation as he remembered something important.

After fusing with the Poison Queen, Caim had become the Poison King. All of his bodily fluids contained toxins, and among them were pheromones that would arouse women who were compatible with him. Having swallowed the aphrodisiac-like liquid secreted by Caim’s “sword,” there was no way that Millicia would stop there. In fact, as she licked her lips, her expression was even more lascivious than before.

“I’m too tired, so you’ll have to do the work yourself,” he said.

“Understood. Well then, excuse me.” Still lifting her skirt, Millicia slowly lowered her hips onto Caim’s abdomen.



Caim exited the cabin and headed toward the deck, leaving behind an exhausted, ravenous female on the bed. He’d planned to rest but had ended up working out instead. He banished his fatigue with a shake of his head as he emerged into the sunlight.

“Grrraow! You’re finally here, Master Caim!”

“You’re pretty late. You really took your time.”

Two women approached Caim when they noticed him step onto the deck.

The first one was a silver-haired woman in a maid uniform. Atop her head were animal ears, and a white tail with black stripes stretched out from beneath her skirt. She was a beastfolk—specifically a white tiger, a rare kind of tigerfolk. Her name was Tea, and she was a maid who had taken care of Caim since he was a baby.

“Sorry for the wait,” Caim greeted them.

“We waited for a truly long time! It’s so unfair that Millicia got to monopolize you for so long! If only I had played rock...” Tea bit at her thumbnail and struck

the floor with her tail in frustration.

“A loss is a loss. More importantly, where is my lady, Sir Caim? I don’t see her,” asked the second woman as she peered behind Caim. Her name was Lenka. She had short red hair and wore a sword at her hip, and she was a female knight serving Millicia.

Tea and Lenka, two beauties of a different sort, were Caim’s traveling companions, as well as his lovers with whom he had shared physical relations.

“Millicia’s sleeping in the cabin. She was pretty tired,” Caim said, a little jealous. After pleasuring him with her mouth, Millicia had exhausted herself while doing the main deed and fallen asleep. To be honest, Caim would have loved to just lie down next to her and do the same—but if he did, Tea and Lenka would be the ones to come and wake him up next. If that devolved into a foursome, his stamina would never be able to hold out. He had no other choice but to force his weary body out of bed.

“I see... What a shame. We have such great weather, and the water is so beautiful.” Lenka looked at the river regretfully.

While Caim had been having his fun with Millicia, everything had been loaded onto the ship and the ferry had sailed. The big ferryboat made its way across the canal, and the splash of water it created looked like jewels thanks to the reflection of the sunlight.

“It’s amazing... Is this really just a river?” Caim wondered, looking at the large expanse of water. The Flumen River was the most prominent canal on the continent and served as a natural border between the kingdom and the empire. To Caim, who had been born and raised in the small Halsberg domain, the view was so impressive it felt like a dream. “Say, Lenka—you sure this isn’t what people call the sea? You’re not tricking me, are you?”

“No, this is definitely a river. The sea is far larger than this. In fact, it’s so big that you wouldn’t be able to see the opposite shore.”

“Seriously? Man, the world is so wide...” Caim leaned out from the deck of the boat, once again struck by the vastness of the world.

The ferry they were currently on board was large enough to easily

accommodate over two hundred people. The figurehead at the prow was in the form of a dragon's head, and the ship was adorned with tasteful decorations here and there. The deck had no masts or sails to catch the wind, as the ship used magic items energized by manacrystals stuck under its hull to propel it. All the boats Caim knew of were small ones used for fishing in rivers and lakes, so this was his first time seeing—and boarding—such a big one.

Lenka watched Caim, who was entranced by the sight before him, as though he was a child. “There are two liners going back and forth to the empire—this one, the *Polydeuces*, and its sister ship, the *Castor*. They each belong to the two lords of the port towns on either side of the Flumen River. There are smaller boats too, but since the river contains aquatic monsters, it's better to use large ships like this one for safety,” she explained.

“Yeah, it would be troublesome to fight on the water—and if the monsters pierce the boat's hull, that would be the end of it,” Caim commented.

“A spell to repel monsters was cast on the bottom of this ship, so there's no need to worry about that. There aren't any pirates either, so we just need to wait around for three hours and we should safely arrive at the opposite shore.”

“Well, I guess I'll enjoy my first voyage on a ship until then. I wonder if they sell drinks?” Caim looked around.

“Ah, they sell fruity water over there. I'll go buy some for us.” The hem of Tea's maid uniform fluttered as she ran to buy drinks. When she returned, she was holding glasses with yellow liquid inside them. “The seller said these are made by squeezing lemons and adding sugar. Here.”

“Thanks.” Caim received a glass from Tea and drank the contents. First he tasted a combination of sour and sweet, then just after a mellow, citrusy flavor spread inside his mouth. “Mmh, it's good!”

“Yes, it's delicious and refreshing,” Tea said.

Perhaps the fruity water had been chilled with magic, as it was ice-cold. Caim just had quite the workout and had been sweating a lot, so the drink was very invigorating. He felt like he was coming back to life.

“I shall bring my lady her share. See you later.” Lenka took a glass for Millicia

and descended the stairs toward their cabin.

Caim and Tea were left alone on the ship deck, so they took a leisurely moment to enjoy the view as they sipped their drinks. They didn't speak, but having spent more than a decade together, just silently spending time with each other felt nice.

The clear blue sky stretched overhead with the dazzling rays of the sun cascading over them. When they looked down, the river was just as blue as the sky, and a little ways away, they caught sight of a waterfowl capturing a fish. It was a truly beautiful sight, one the Caim of the past would never have even dreamed of seeing with Tea by his side.

"Master Caim..." Tea lovingly called his name, leaning against him.

Before fusing with the Poison Queen, Caim had been more than a head shorter than Tea, but now he was taller than her. Tea snuggled her head onto Caim's shoulder and purred sweetly, asking to be spoiled.

"Jeez, you're more like an affectionate cat than a tiger." While he was a little exasperated, Caim didn't reject his adorable beastfolk maid. However, just as he extended his arm to tickle her chin...

"Hey, look! Something's coming!"

"It's sky pirates!"

The voices of sailors pointing toward the sky put a damper on Caim and Tea's mood. Caim grimaced as he looked up and noticed black silhouettes in the air, heading their way.

"Are those...people?" Caim strengthened his vision with mana and realized that the silhouettes were humanoid—a body with two arms and legs each, and with weapons clutched in their hands. However, they had something no human possessed: wings.

"They're birdfolk, Master Caim!" Tea shouted, pulling at his arm.

Hearing the term, Caim looked once again at the figures and noticed that indeed, they had feathers on their heads and beaks instead of lips. The birdfolk gang encircled the boat rapidly, pointing their weapons toward it with hostile

intent. The ferry suddenly stopped, and many passengers poured onto the deck, panicking.

“Wait... Are we being attacked?” Caim asked, but it wasn’t really a question, as the answer was evident. The ship was being raided by a group of pirates using their wings to fly above the river—sky pirates. “Didn’t Lenka tell us that there were no pirates around here? This isn’t at all like she claimed.”

“Grrraow... Maybe she only meant pirates using boats, not flying ones,” Tea replied.

“I don’t think Lenka would make a joke like that,” Caim muttered dubiously, looking up at the armed birdfolk.

In the meantime, as the commotion on the deck grew worse, sailors hurried out. “Why are there sky pirates here?!”

“That shouldn’t be possible! The birdfolk’s territory should be around the southern sea!”

“These damn barbarians... Did they fly over the sea all the way to the river here?!”

The ship’s crew was agitated by the arrival of the sky pirates. It truly seemed that it was an unusual situation for them.

“So we just happened to be attacked by sky pirates even though it should be a really rare occurrence? Just our luck. Maybe there’s a troublemaker among us who just attracts disasters,” Caim commented.

“That would most likely be you, Master Caim.”

“That’s what I thought too!” Caim’s shoulders drooped, and Tea rubbed his back to comfort him.

“More importantly, what should we do, Master Caim? Should we fight them?”

“Well, I wouldn’t mind taking care of those pirates, but...for now, let’s wait and see how it goes. We might break the ship if we start a battle thoughtlessly,” Caim answered.

There were around twenty birdfolk. It was troublesome that they were flying, but their number wasn’t a problem for Caim. That didn’t mean he would be

able to keep the ferry and its passengers safe, however. If the sky pirates fired arrows or spells at the boat, it might get damaged and sink.

“Grrraow... I think you’re right, Master Caim. And the fact that they still haven’t used violence means it might be possible to negotiate. Perhaps they’ll leave us alone if they’re given money and goods.”

“For now, let’s just wait and see. However, if they try anything, things may not end peacefully.”

Caim and Tea stayed vigilant as they watched an elderly sailor—likely the captain—emerge from the ship’s wheelhouse waving a white handkerchief.

“We don’t plan to fight! We’ll pay you, so please don’t hurt the passengers and my crew!” the captain shouted. He had chosen to surrender without resisting, which was a prudent decision.

“We don’t just want money. We want your cargo too,” ordered one of the sky pirates—probably their negotiator—as he landed on the deck. He had the head of a hawk and carried a spear.

“Our cargo belongs to our passengers. I can’t make that decision on my own...” the captain replied.

“We can just kill everyone and take everything after that, you know? We’re fine either way!” the hawk birdfolk declared condescendingly, and his comrades in the sky laughed vulgarly.

Because pirates almost never appeared on the Flumen River, there were no guards among the crew to defend the boat. Therefore, from the sky pirates’ point of view, it wouldn’t be that difficult to simply kill everyone before stealing the freight.

After some time, the shore patrol might notice something is strange and show up, but...just how long will that take? the captain wondered. They were in the middle of the canal, so it would take some time for the patrol to reach them—and, naturally, the sky pirates weren’t just going to wait around without doing anything.

“Ugh... Fine, you can take everything.” In the end, the captain accepted, his expression warped with frustration. It seemed that the captain of this ship was

a good man who prioritized people's lives.

“Wait! I won't allow that!” However, someone interjected, even though the negotiations were going well. He was a middle-aged man wearing a high-class suit who was not only bald, but his head was downright shining with sweat, and his flab swayed each time he took a step toward the captain. “My assets are on this ship! As if I would allow them to be seized by some lowly birds! I order you to refuse their demands and to resist to the bitter end!”

“Whoa... Is he an idiot?” Caim said, astounded, as he watched from a little ways away.

How could that man make a proclamation like that in such a situation? Had he lost his reason along with all his hair? The man was likely a wealthy aristocrat, but he clearly had poor decision-making skills—there was no way that going against the sky pirates was a good choice. Worst of all, he had called the birdfolk—currently pointing weapons at everyone on the ship—“lowly birds.” This went well past stupidity and into the realm of madness.

“He's gonna get killed... Not that I care.” And just as Caim had predicted, the sky pirates were very displeased by the nobleman's words. Caim couldn't read the expressions on their bird faces, but he could distinctly feel their hostility—and he wasn't the only one.

“W-Wait, dear passenger!” The captain hastily spread his arms out to stop the middle-aged man. “Please, don't hinder the negotiations! We're on the brink of sorting this out peacefully, so I beg you, don't interfere!”

“You think a mere commoner can order *me* around?! As the captain in charge of this ship, you should be risking your life to protect my assets!”

“That's impossible... All we have are guards to watch over the passengers' belongings! There haven't been pirates on this river for decades—we're not prepared to resist them!”

“I don't care! As a sailor, aren't you supposed to face these kinds of things bravely?!”

The captain and the fat, middle-aged nobleman quarreled, dampening the mood on the deck. The passengers and even the birdfolk pirates in the sky were

exasperatedly watching them, dumbfounded by how misplaced their conversation was, considering the situation.

“Ah! We’ve got a problem, boss!” yelled one of the sky pirates, pointing into the distance. “The militia’s borrowed some fishing boats, and they’re coming this way!” Looking to the west, several boats coming from Otarraia could be seen with soldiers on board.

The leader of the sky pirates clicked his tongue. “They’re faster than we expected. I thought we’d have more time... Oh well, guess we’ll give up on that cargo! Grab anything that looks valuable, then get outta here! And just as we were told, don’t forget to set fire to the ship!”

“What?! That’s not what we negotiated! Why would you burn the ship?!” the captain asked in a panic, but the hawk birdfolk struck him with the shaft of his spear.

“Shut up! Damn it—I thought this would be an easy, profitable job! The soldiers weren’t supposed to be so fast! Where’s the idiot who said peace had made the port militia complacent, so this would be child’s play?!”

“Y-You! I’m a noble from the empire, and this ship is carrying *my* assets! Don’t think you’ll be—gah?!”

“I don’t care! You’ve cost us time, you damn pig! Just die already!” The hawk birdfolk swung his spear and struck the fat middle-aged nobleman, who collapsed onto the deck, blood spraying everywhere. Then the hawk birdfolk turned toward his underlings and shouted, “Don’t just steal valuables—go for the women too! Snatch anyone who’s young and looks like she’d sell for a lot!”

The hawk birdfolk’s gaze swept over the deck of the ship until it stopped on Caim—or rather, on Tea, who was next to him. “Oh? That silver-haired beastfolk looks like she could sell for quite the sum! Let’s start with her and...”

“You fool. Seems like you’ve got a death wish,” Caim said—and then used the Purple Poison Magic Poison Shot, the projectile flying straight from his fingertip toward the hawk birdfolk’s face. The sky pirate flapped his wings, crying out in pain, until they suddenly went still and he fell from the deck straight into the river.

“You want to kidnap Tea? Don’t get carried away,” Caim muttered annoyingly as he stepped forward. “I don’t care who you kill and what you steal...but I won’t allow you to lay even a single finger on my woman! I’ll slaughter every single one of you and turn you into fish fodder, so bring it on!” he shouted, taunting the birdfolk flying in the sky.

“What the hell?!”

“You’ll pay for what you did to our buddy!”

The sky pirates raged at Caim for killing their comrade and pointed their weapons at him. One of them fired an arrow that struck Caim’s shoulder, but it didn’t pierce his skin; instead, it fell to the ground. As long as Caim used Mana Compression to protect himself, ordinary, nonmagical arrows were like toys to him.

“My body isn’t so weak that I’d die to an attack like that,” Caim snorted, then turned toward the ship’s captain. “Fall back. I’ll deal with them.”

The captain gasped in shock, but immediately did as he was asked and went to hide in the ship’s wheelhouse.

“I shall support you, Master Caim!” Tea cheerfully raised her hand, approaching Caim as the passengers and sailors fled the deck to hide in their cabins.

“Don’t push yourself, okay?”

“Of course! Don’t worry, I won’t be a hindrance!” she declared vigorously, taking her three-section staff out from under her skirt.

Caim supposed that Tea would be able to take care of herself—after all, she was a tigerfolk, a race renowned for its prowess in battle. “Well then, I’ll leave the ones who land on the deck to you. Smash their skulls.”

“What about the flying ones? As long as they stay in the sky, all we can do is defend against their attacks.”

“I’ll deal with them.”

Just as Caim finished speaking, a spear was flung at him. Caim deflected it using his arm like a sword before leaping from the deck. Naturally, even if he

was using Mana Compression to strengthen his body far above human limits, it wasn't enough to allow him to reach the birdfolk up in the air just by jumping. However...

"Toukishin Style—Suzaku." Caim *jumped again* in midair, allowing him to reach the birdfolk who had thrown the spear at him and punch him in the face.

"What?! Did that human just fly?!"

"Impossible! The sky's the birdfolk—*our* territory!"

The sky pirates yelled in shock.

"I'm not flying. I'm just kicking in midair and moving through the sky!" Caim shot a savage, carnivorous grin as he once again leaped into midair.

The Toukishin Style's Mana Compression allowed its users to give mana physical substance by condensing it. When used on the fists or legs, it could serve as a weapon; used on the torso or arms, it formed a powerful defense. Suzaku—Vermilion Bird—was a technique of the Basic Stance that created footholds out of mana in the air, permitting the user to move freely through the sky.

"The Toukishin Style uses mana to elevate martial arts to its ultimate peak, and it has no weakness. Even if my opponent was a dragon—the very ruler of the sky—I could still knock it down with my fists!" Caim declared as he struck a birdfolk with black wings—likely a member of the crow race—and sent him plummeting into the water.

Several sky pirates attacked Caim together using spears, swords, or bows. However, Caim simply avoided everything by moving three-dimensionally through the air as he defeated the birdfolk.

"Grrraow! Go drown in the river!" On the deck, Tea used her three-section staff to repel one of the birdfolk who had landed on the ship to plunder it. Birdfolk were fast and hard to strike, but that was only when they were flying. Once on the ground—or the ship's deck, in this case—they were no different from humans, which meant they were no match for Tea, a tigerfolk. "Maybe you could best me in the sky, but I won't lose on the surface! Never underestimate a tiger!"

“All right...get out there, boys! Let’s help the lass protect our ship!” The captain, who had been hiding in the boat’s wheelhouse, came out and called his crew—or rather, considering that he was now wielding a thick piece of timber, it seemed he had not fled but left to find a weapon.

“Yeah!”

“They’re gonna pay for attacking our ship!”

“Let’s show them how strong men of the sea really are!”

“We’re on a river, though!”

The sailors shouted, prepared to fight against the pirates with knives, mop shafts, and other weapons they could find. They might have capitulated at first, but hearing that their boat was going to be burned and they were all going to die, coupled with how easily Caim and Tea were crushing the birdfolk, they finally resolved themselves to battle.

“With this, the tide has turned. The militia will be arriving soon as well, so our victory is guaranteed,” Caim said.

“Damn it! To think we would lose to land people! How humiliating!” groaned one of the birdfolk in frustration, clacking his beak.

The sky pirates had numbered more than twenty, and yet now there were fewer than a dozen of them left—either because of Caim knocking them out of the air, or Tea and the sailors pushing them into the river.

“We’re getting out of here—but before that, let’s do our job!” A birdfolk with particularly colorful plumage took out a rolled parchment. “Burn! Giga Flare!”

“What?!”

The parchment in the birdfolk’s hand was a magic item—specifically, a magic scroll. Runes and sigils were written on parchment to imbue it with a spell that allowed even people who weren’t mages to cast a spell one single time. In this case, a giant ball of fire appeared, shooting toward the ship and exploding into a blazing pillar on impact.

“Giga Flare!”

“Burn until nothing but ashes are left! We’ll avenge our comrades!”

The remaining birdfolk all took out magic scrolls of their own and fired spells at the ship.

Caim clicked his tongue. “Dammit, I can’t deal with them all! At this rate, the boat is gonna burn up and sink!” He managed to snatch a nearby birdfolk’s scroll and fling it, but he couldn’t stop the others. If there had only been one or two people, he could have defeated them before they could cast any spells, but the birdfolk were too numerous for him to be able to stop them all.

Then Caim noticed that one of the fireballs was heading in Tea’s direction. “As if I’d allow that!” he cried, deciding to postpone defeating the enemies to prioritize protecting his lover. “Toukishin Style—Houou!”

Houou—Phoenix—was another technique of the Toukishin Style that was used in combination with Suzaku during air battles. When Caim activated the technique, it looked as though he’d disappeared, but he suddenly reappeared on the path between the fireball and Tea.

“Master Caim?!”

“Hah!” He batted away the fireball with his right arm clad in Mana Compression, forcefully changing its trajectory. Thanks to that, the fireball missed the ship and landed in the canal instead, creating a massive pillar of water. “Phew, I made it in time. Glad you’re okay.”

In contrast to Suzaku, which made footholds to freely move in the sky, Houou was a momentary burst of mana that allowed the user to propel themselves at high speed. While it couldn’t be used consecutively and only allowed for linear motion, it was so fast it made it look as though the person using it had disappeared.

“Are you all right, Master Caim?! You just touched fire with your arm...” Tea asked worryingly.



“It’s no big deal. The burn is so light it’ll heal if I spit on it.” Caim’s right arm was slightly red from repelling the fireball, but it wasn’t a major injury. It would have been far worse if it hadn’t been covered with condensed mana, however. “Anyway, the situation looks pretty bad. Seems like the ship got hit a few times.”

“Quick, extinguish the fire! The flames are spreading!” the captain ordered his crew, but the blaze created by the multiple fireballs was too large.

“All right, we’re done! Let’s leave now!”

“Serves you right! Sink and die!”

The surviving birdfolk shouted before flying away down the river.

Caim glared at them, gritting his teeth. “You think I’m gonna let you run away after what you did? I won’t let a single one of you leave alive.” He kneaded his mana, but this time, it wasn’t to cover his body with it. “Purple Poison Magic—Poison Hornets!”

Violet mana gathered in Caim’s right hand, condensing into a round ball as big as a human head. Then he threw the ball toward the sky pirates, but...it just flew past them without hitting even a single birdfolk.

“Oh no! You missed!” Tea exclaimed, dejected.

Indeed, it looked like Caim had misjudged his aim—but in fact, his real attack was just beginning.

“Burst.” Caim snapped his fingers and the next instant, the mana ball exploded into hundreds of bullets scattering in all directions.

“Gaaah?!” The birdfolk screamed as the buckshot hit them.

The scene looked just like someone had poked a hornet’s nest, drawing all its poisonous residents out to attack. The sky pirates’ bodies and wings were pierced, and they plummeted into the river one after another. Even those who somehow managed to survive ultimately fell, unable to fly anymore. The reason was, of course, the toxins of Caim, the Poison King. As long as his mana made its way into his opponent’s body, they would be paralyzed and wracked with agony.

“Amazing! So that’s your magic, Master Caim... It’s so strong and awesome!” Tea hopped in joy as she saw the birdfolk being exterminated. She must have been very glad to see a fragment of her master’s new strength, because even though it wasn’t the right moment for that, she couldn’t help herself from making merry like a child, disheveling the skirt of her maid uniform.

Caim was rather gloomy, in stark contrast to the praise he was receiving. “If only I could control my magic better, we wouldn’t have to go through all this trouble...”

Caim wasn’t terribly good at controlling his magic. No—it was more honest to say that he was *bad* at it. He didn’t have much of a problem when it was just a small spell aimed at a person or two, but when it came to a dozen or more, he wasn’t dexterous enough to only hit his enemies and avoid involving his allies. If he had finer control over his magic, he would have been able to deal with the sky pirates before they could burn the ship.

“I defeated my enemies, but I still have some reflecting to do. I shouldn’t be so focused on martial arts—I need to train my magic too,” Caim muttered to himself as he canceled Suzaku and fell onto the boat’s deck.

“Master Caim!” Tea rushed over to him.

Caim looked at his surroundings. The ship was being consumed by the flames. The fire was so intense and stretched so wide that it would be impossible to extinguish.

“Wh-What’s happening?! Why is the ship burning?!”

“What happened while I was asleep?!”

Lenka and Millicia appeared from the stairs leading to the cabins, having finally noticed the commotion.

“Great timing, you two. We’re getting out of here!” Caim quickly took the girls under his arms, earning a squeal from the two, then headed toward the edge of the boat. “Don’t fall behind, Tea. Let’s go!” he said and jumped into the river.

“Yes!” Tea answered and followed after him, creating small columns of water as they landed.

When they looked around, they found the other passengers and the sailors. The ship's crew had tried to extinguish the fire but, unable to withstand its fierceness, they had given up and jumped into the river instead.

"Hey! Is everyone all right?! We're going to save you—just wait a bit!" shouted a soldier atop one of the boats that were coming from Otarraia.

The militia and sailors helped everyone in the Flumen River get aboard their ships when suddenly, an ominous crack rang out from the burning ferry.

"Ah..." someone let out.

And just like that, the massive liner that could easily accommodate over two hundred people crumbled and, soon enough, sunk into the river.

Chapter 2: The Town on the Opposite Shore

“That was quite the misadventure, but don’t worry—we’ll bring you all to the opposite shore. You can rest easy,” said a soldier.

The ferry carrying Caim and the other passengers toward the empire had been attacked by sky pirates and sunk, so the militia that had helped them took everyone to the port on the opposite shore in their boats instead.

After that, they finally reached the empire’s territory—the town of Faure. When they arrived, the port was filled with curious onlookers staring at the burning ship sinking in the distance.

A well-dressed man called out to the kingdom’s soldiers, “Well, well, that was quite the incident. To think sky pirates would raid the ferry! This is a first!”

“Milord...if you would allow me to be frank, I would like to ask you why you didn’t send any help from your side. If you had, perhaps we would have been able to rescue the ship before it sank,” asked one of the soldiers from the kingdom, dubious. While the attack had occurred around the center of the Flumen River, it had been more on the empire’s side than the kingdom’s. If the empire had sent help, they might have been able to drive off the sky pirates before the ship had been burned.

“I didn’t really have much of a choice,” replied the man, who was apparently Faure’s lord. “I was still trying to confirm the situation when everything ended. Moreover, it was a boat from the kingdom that was attacked. I couldn’t thoughtlessly send soldiers from the empire, could I? That might have escalated it into an international problem,” he said, shaking his head regretfully.

Caim wasn’t the only one to find the lord’s attitude to be suspicious, but his explanation did make sense. Unfortunately, a mere soldier from the kingdom couldn’t protest against a lord from the empire. “So you affirm that you did nothing wrong?” the soldier asked.

“What else can I say? It’s the truth. You didn’t predict a sky pirate raid, did

you? Well, we didn't either."

The soldier stayed silent for a few seconds, frustrated at his inability to press the empire's lord further, before he finally said, "Understood. In that case, can we leave the passengers in your care? They are all wet from falling into the river."

"Why, yes, of course. I shall arrange lodgings for all of them! Many must have lost their valuables and money, so I shall even pay for the night myself!" the lord declared, striking his chest.

However, while that was generous of him, the ferry passengers still wore gloomy expressions. That was only natural, as they had lost their belongings in the attack. For some it was their assets, for others the merchandise they had planned to sell on the empire's side. Having a single night's lodging paid for didn't do much to relieve their concerns about the future.

"We should go, Caim."

"Millicia?"

Millicia was pulling at Caim's sleeve, wearing a cloak over her plain dress with its hood pulled low over her head like a fugitive hiding their face.

"Our belongings are fine, so we don't need any help from the lord of the town. We need not stay here any longer."

"Yeah...you're right. It's still the middle of the day, but I guess we should start looking for an inn anyway." Caim was puzzled by Millicia's behavior, but he agreed that they were going to be all right, since their belongings were contained within their magic items endowed with Spatial Magic. And it *was* more constructive to search for an inn than to listen to that shameless lord.

Caim and the girls tried to leave the port, but they were stopped by an unexpected encounter.

"You! Wait!"

"Huh?" Caim turned toward the angry voice and saw a bald, middle-aged man using a cane to help him stand. He was the same nobleman who had quarreled with the ship's captain. "Ah, you're that guy..." Caim muttered. "I'm surprised

you're still alive after that cut you got." Perhaps all that fat had protected his vitals? While his upper body was bandaged and he needed a cane to walk, he still looked surprisingly lively.

The middle-aged nobleman's face was flushed with anger, and he squared his shoulders as he approached Caim. "It's all your fault!"

"...What are you talking about? I don't have any idea what you mean."

"The damn birds burned the ship because *you* fought them! It's your fault that everything I owned sunk to the bottom of the river! This is *your* responsibility!"

"What?" Caim frowned at the illogical argument. True, the man before him had been against giving the ship's cargo to the birdfolk, but that had nothing to do with the ultimate outcome. After all, the sky pirates themselves had said that they'd been ordered to burn the ferry. The cargo would have been lost whether Caim had fought them or not.

Thinking about it, I wonder who ordered them to burn the boat? Can't ask now that they're all dead, though...

"What worthless nonsense..." Caim said. "I don't want to waste my time on a fool like you. We're leaving, so feel free to bawl as much as you want." He then turned on his heels to leave with his companions.

However, the fat nobleman was far more stupid than Caim expected, and he made quite the unwise choice. "Wait! I told you to *wait*! Give me back my money—and if you can't pay, then sell those women!"

"Ah?!"

"Milady!"

Of all things, the man caught Millicia's arm and pulled her toward him. Lenka hastily tried to retrieve Millicia, but before she could...

"Die." Now that the man had laid a hand on Millicia, Caim was out of mercy to give. He kicked the nobleman in the stomach.

"Guhhh!" Letting out a strange cry, the middle-aged noble was sent flying. Once he hit the ground, he rolled like a ball all the way to the edge of the water,

where he fell into the river.

“Trash like you shouldn’t put his filthy hands on my woman,” Caim said spitefully.

As they were still in the harbor, the soldiers were watching them—and yet, none of them blamed Caim at all. Though they were astonished by Caim’s action, they knew from the conversation that the fat man had been in the wrong. One of the soldiers sighed in resignation and went to pull the man out of the water. Lying on the ground, the fat nobleman spewed water from his mouth like a sea lion. He still wasn’t dead.

“They do say that ill weeds grow apace, but still...his vitality sure is impressive, huh?” Caim commented. Between this and surviving the blow from the sky pirate’s spear, the man was pretty resilient...or maybe it was just dumb luck.

“Are you all right, milady?” Lenka asked.

“Yes...I’m fine,” Millicia replied, rubbing her arm where she had been grabbed. Thankfully, it had left no mark.

“Wait... You are...!” A voice rang out—it was the city’s lord. Being pulled by the arm had caused the hood of Millicia’s cloak to fall back from her face, and the lord was now staring at her, his eyes wide open. “But what are *you doing* in this town?!”

“Let’s go, Caim! We need to leave—now!” Millicia hastily pulled her hood back up and pressed Caim, pulling his sleeve.

“Yeah...let’s go.” Seeing how desperate Millicia seemed, Caim agreed, and they quickly left the port. All the while, Caim felt the gaze of the lord on their backs, but while it seemed that the lord knew Millicia, he didn’t pursue them to talk to her.

So he knows her, but they must not be on particularly good terms. I just hope that won’t cause trouble... Even though they’d finally arrived in the empire, their stay had begun with a bad omen.

Unfortunately for Caim, his wish for a peaceful journey would not come true—his terrible premonition would soon be proved right.

The port city of Faure was situated on the eastern shore of the Flumen River, which meant it stood on the western edge of the Garnet Empire. The city served as a gateway for commerce and was just as thriving as Otarrria on the kingdom's side. The main street was filled to the brim with people, and it was easy to become separated from one's companions if one was not careful. The main difference between Faure and Otarrria, though, was the ratio of humans walking down the street. In Faure, there were far more beastfolk and demi-humans.

A woman with animal ears and a tail was purchasing something at a stall.

A man with a reptile head was selling fish, calling out to customers with his wide mouth.

A cat walking on two legs played tag with a group of children.

An old man with an owl face sat on the side of the road, sleeping comfortably.

Such a sight was inconceivable in the Jade Kingdom where the Church, which professed human supremacy, had a lot of clout, causing immense discrimination against other races.

But here, in the empire, no one gave a second glance at the tigerfolk maid—Tea—as she walked down the main street.

"Yup...I like it here. Pretty pleasant city." Caim nodded in admiration as he observed the veritable salad bowl of races in front of him. In the Jade Kingdom, beastfolk and demi-humans were either slaves or homeless people adrift in the streets. So while the sight of so many races coexisting together was quite different from what Caim knew, he liked how the chaotic townscape accepted everyone, whomever they were.

"The empire is a meritocracy and accepts anyone, whatever their race, as long as they prove their abilities," Millicia explained, still wearing her hood. "People visiting from abroad are often surprised. Some don't like it, though..."

"Hah! The guys in my country are all stubborn and exclusionary. They can't help but fear anyone different from them. I don't know if I should call them small-minded or just plain cowards, but they're the sort who make you question

if humans are really all that amazing,” Caim spat, his words heavy with meaning.

Even though he was human, everyone had shunned Caim just because he had been born as a cursed child, so he was well aware how strong discrimination was in the Jade Kingdom.

Perhaps my life would have been a little different if I had been born in the empire... Well, it's kinda meaningless to think about that now. If Caim hadn't lived an unfortunate childhood, he wouldn't have been able to come to an understanding with the Poison Queen, and they wouldn't have fused with each other. Then, after some time, the curse would have consumed him and the Queen would have taken over his body as her new vessel. *You never know what might prove fortunate in life. On the one hand, the unpredictability is amusing, but on the other hand, because you have no control over it, you never get what exactly you want...*

“What should we do now, milady?” Lenka asked from behind him.

Millicia's face looked a little pensive under her hood, but after a few moments, she answered. “Well...I think we should look for an inn to rest tonight. It's still light outside, but it's better to find one quickly.”

As a trade city, Faure was filled with merchants and travelers. So while it seemed too early to reserve an inn, there was a chance that they would end up having a hard time finding lodging like they had in Otarra if they waited too long.

“You're right. We'd better find somewhere to sleep, fast—even more so considering there's four of us,” Caim agreed.

“Then Tea shall sleep with you, Master Caim!” she declared, hugging his arm. “The other two will sleep in a separate place.”

“Wait! Why would *that* be the arrangement?!” Millicia argued against Tea, who was fawning over Caim, rubbing her face against his arm. Lenka also frowned.

“It's going to be hard to find a four-person room, so I think it'll be easier to just find two double rooms in different inns,” Tea said.

“That’s...fair, but that doesn’t mean that *you* should be the one to sleep with Caim! / should!” Millicia exclaimed.

“Milady...I am not so sure about that...”

“Aren’t you frustrated, Lenka?! Caim belongs to all of us, and yet Tea is trying to monopolize him! It’s against our agreement!”

“What the hell is this so-called agreement? I’m my own person, so don’t treat me like shared property...” Caim interjected, exasperated. True, he had become Millicia and Lenka’s lover after sleeping with them, and the same went for Tea—but of course he would be bothered if they treated his body like an object they possessed.

I wonder why... I’m in a situation any man would be envious of, with three gorgeous women desperate to get at me. And yet, I’m not happy at all... Men thought of harems as the ultimate dream, but the reality was surprisingly different, and Caim was now personally experiencing how difficult it was to be surrounded by women. I would actually be thankful if we could get a single room and a triple room, but... Well, that’s not gonna happen, is it?

In the end, they had to take two double rooms in different inns, just as they expected. Even trying to find lodging early hadn’t helped much due to the number of people in the city. In fact, no single inn had enough open rooms for four people, let alone a vacant four-person room.

It was decided that Tea would stay with Caim, and Millicia would be with Lenka. Millicia had complained about this, but as she’d had the chance to make love with Caim on the ship and Lenka didn’t want to be separated from her lady, Tea earned the right to sleep with her master, just like she wanted.

Looking at Millicia gnawing her handkerchief in frustration, Caim—the one whose love the girls all fought over—couldn’t help but wonder if it truly was worth being so grieved about something like that.



“Well then, let’s go get something to eat while we tour the city.”

“Yes! Let’s!”

Caim and Tea left their inn after dropping their baggage off in their room. To be honest, Caim would have rather taken his time visiting the town tomorrow, but Millicia wanted to leave as soon as possible. She didn't tell him the reason, but he supposed that it involved the fact that the lord had seen her face.

It's a shame I won't be able to have a leisurely tour, but Millicia's also my employer, so I want to respect her decision as much as I can.

Instead of eating at the inn, Caim decided to go search for a restaurant and see the sights while he was at it.

Naturally, Caim had invited Millicia and Lenka, but they had refused.

"No, I'm exhausted, so I will rest in my room," Millicia had said.

"You sure? If you want, I can also stay with you," Caim had suggested.

"Thank you for the offer, but I do not want to force your hand. I won't leave the inn, so there shouldn't be any problems."

"Don't worry—I shall protect my lady. Just go enjoy your meal," Lenka had said.

And so, Caim and Tea were now strolling along the main street without a particular destination. Even though the sun was setting, there were still quite a lot of people in the street. The various stalls had closed, but in their stead, taverns and such had opened up. In front of them were women wearing revealing clothes, trying to attract customers and tempt healthy young men like Caim.

"Women's attire in the empire is quite...open. Feels a little indecent, though."

"How could you, Master Caim! Even though Tea is right next to you!"

"Ow!" Caim groaned as Tea pinched his flank. It might have been an adorable act of jealousy, but considering the strength of tigerfolk, it was actually pretty painful.

Tea reproachfully glared at the lascivious dress one of the women was wearing, then she looked down at her own outfit. "Grrraow... Would you be happy if Tea wore that kind of dress too? Have you lost interest in my maid uniform?"

“It’s not as if I’m tired of it or anything, just that, er...” Caim tried to explain himself, but he started to get flustered when he noticed how unusually depressed Tea seemed. She often got angry or peevish, but it was pretty rare for her to actually become dejected like this. Caim hurriedly took stock of his surroundings and, by chance, spotted a particular store. “Well...it’s not that I’m tired of your maid uniform, it’s just that I was thinking it might be nice for you to wear something else once in a while. And look, there’s a clothing shop right there, so how about taking a peek?”

Caim indicated a very clean store with his gaze. It wasn’t a high-class establishment aimed at nobility or royalty, but it would still likely be considered a luxury by commoners.

“Grrraow?! You’re going to buy Tea some new clothes, Master Caim?!” Tea exclaimed, her eyes widening and her striped tail straightening from under her skirt.

Caim wondered why she was so surprised—but thinking about it, he had never bought anything for Tea. *I suppose I was just a thirteen-year-old brat until recently, so it’s not like I had any money. My old man didn’t even give me a single copper coin.* He did recall wanting to offer her a beautiful flower he had found on the roadside once, but the instant he had taken it, his toxins had withered it away.

“You’re always caring for me, so the least I can do is buy you a new outfit.”

“Master Caim!” Deeply moved, Tea leaped at Caim and hugged him, taking his head in her arms and locking her legs behind his back.

“Wah?!”

“I’m so touched! And so thankful! This is the best day of my life!”

“Y-Your life must be pretty cheap... Also, let me go,” Caim asked uncomfortably, tapping Tea’s back, his face buried in her soft mounds.

After spending a whole five minutes soothing Tea, Caim finally entered the clothing store with her.

“Welcome, valued customers! What kind of attire are you looking for?” A

female clerk immediately greeted them with a businesslike smile.

“Something casual for her...and for me too, I guess.” Since he’d grown after his fusion with the Poison Queen, Caim couldn’t wear any of his old clothes, so he had almost none. The only garments and underwear he owned were the ones Faust had put inside the magic bag. *It’s kinda creepy only wearing stuff that woman gave me, so I want to at least buy my own clothes.* “But I’m fine with whatever, so that can wait. First, show us your women’s clothes.”

“Certainly. This way, please.” The clerk guided them to the ladies’ section of the store. It was filled with a myriad of vibrant colors that caught the eye.

“Whoa... It’s amazing...” Tea sighed in admiration—and while Caim didn’t voice it, he was also quite surprised.

This was Caim’s first time entering a clothing store in a big city, or at least his first time since he became mature enough to understand such things. He felt like he had once gone to a place like this with his mother—Sasha Halsberg—when she had still been relatively healthy, but he had been so young he barely remembered it.

It was the same for Tea. Beastfolk were scorned in the Jade Kingdom and forbidden from entering most shops and restaurants. Moreover, the Halsberg territory was in the countryside, so it didn’t have any fashionable stores in the first place. Her maid uniform and nightdress were the only clothing she’d ever owned.

“There’s so many clothes... It’s like a room full of jewels...” Tea commented.

“And all of that is for sale? That’s amazing...” Caim added.

“Yes, and you can try anything you want,” the clerk said.

“What?!” Caim and Tea both exclaimed in surprise, turning toward the clerk.

Seeing how the two were obviously country bumpkins, the clerk pointed at a dressing room, her smile overflowing with kindness, and explained, “You can try on clothes in the private room over there. We can adjust the size if necessary, so do not hesitate to ask us for help.”

Caim and Tea silently looked at each other, speechless. Clothing stores in the

city were truly incredible.

“W-Well then, how about doing as she said and trying something?” Caim said.

“Y-Yes...” Tea nervously answered, clearly showing her inexperience as she picked up various outfits to examine them. But after a while, her anxiety was replaced by the enjoyment of choosing new dresses and her expression brightened.

Tea happily took different attires, pressing them against her body and trying the ones she liked best. “Does it suit me, Master Caim?”

“Yeah, it does.”

“What about this one? I’ll also try it in a different color.”

“Yeah, yeah, it suits you.”

Eventually, almost two hours had passed since they entered the store, and Tea showed no sign of growing tired as she went from one outfit to another, but Caim was quite exhausted mentally.

She’s taking so much time... I wonder if that’s particular to Tea, or if all women are like this when shopping for clothes. Caim sighed internally—he had already randomly chosen a few outfits for himself, but Tea seemingly never tired of trying out all the clothes in the store. Caim couldn’t understand what was so fun about it.

After a while, Tea finally selected all the dresses she wanted. Then she headed to the underwear section and started carefully scrutinizing everything.

“Grrraow... There are so many kinds of panties... Is there any you like in particular?”

“...Whatever.”

“They have brassieres like the ones Millicia and Lenka wear too. Which do you prefer—red or black?”

“Whatever!” Caim shouted at Tea, who was asking for his opinion and presenting him with different undergarments. He couldn’t help feeling embarrassed by the situation—his lover was asking him about his underwear preferences right in front of the clerk’s heartwarming gaze.

Do all men in the world have to suffer through this when dating women...?
Unfortunately for Caim, aside from his parents, he didn't know any couples to use as a reference.

"Look, I did say I would buy you clothes, but I don't know a single thing about women's underwear."

"You don't need to think too hard about it. You'll be the one stripping them off, Master Caim, so you should just choose the ones that make you want to mate with me."

"That makes it even harder to pick!"

"Then what about this G-string? This is one of our newest products." The clerk made this suggestion with her usual businesslike smile, but what she presented was a lascivious pair of lace panties that mostly exposed the buttocks of its wearer.

"Grrraow... It's amazing. It's indecent. It's so lewd!" Tea exclaimed, but her eyes were sparkling with interest. "I'm going to try them on, Master Caim, so please wait a moment!"

"You're *seriously* going to try them on?!"

"Of course. The clerk said that you have to carefully choose underwear that fits well if you want to keep a perfect figure! My breasts and my butt are yours, Master Caim, so I have to take care of them!"

Caim winced at the unexpected comment. "Fine, just go already." He looked around the interior of the store and was reassured to find no other men, since they might have been able to catch a glimpse of Tea's naked body.

After a short while, the dressing room's curtain opened from the inside.

"How do I look, Master Caim? Do they suit me?"

Caim gasped at the sight. Tea, clad in bright red panties, brassiere, and garter belt, looked so bewitching that he couldn't look away. The red underwear and Tea's silver hair went exceptionally well together. As for her soft twin mounds and her wonderfully round butt, the lascivious undergarments made them even more arousing than if they were completely bare.

“I’m buying them. Right now,” Tea said, satisfied with her choice after seeing Caim gulp at the sight. “I’ll wear them out. Can I also put on one of the dresses we bought earlier?”

“Of course. Thank you for your purchase.” The clerk bowed politely.

Tea selected a few undergarments in different colors—and with that, her shopping was done. As for what she was currently wearing, it was so gorgeous it was difficult to imagine it was only a casual outfit—a white dress adorned here and there with intricate patterns, featuring a deep slit in the skirt that revealed her long legs and a wide open neckline that emphasized her cleavage.

Once she was done packing their purchases in bags, the clerk clapped her hands as she watched Tea, who looked like a lady going to a party. “You look amazing, miss! You think so too, right, mister?”

“...Yeah. It suits you. No objections from me,” Caim agreed, pressed by the clerk, the awkwardness in his words clearly showing his embarrassment.

“Grrraooooow... I’m so glad, Master Caim! Tea is really, *really* happy!” Tea beamed, delighted.

After that, Caim somehow ended up having to buy an expensive suit that made him look like a noble in order to match Tea’s dress. He’d wanted to refuse, but the clerk had convinced him that if a man was wearing something unfashionable, it would reflect poorly on the woman with him. Plus, she had also suggested a restaurant with a very specific dress code, so he had no choice but to accept.

Feeling a little like he had been tricked, Caim paid a great sum for everything—and with that, their shopping finally came to an end after a whole three hours.



The restaurant the clerk had recommended to them was one of the most prominent in town. It required a certain dress code, but it wasn’t a problem thanks to the clothes they had just bought—a violet suit for Caim and a white dress for Tea. While neither of them was used to wearing these kinds of clothes, they were a handsome man and a beautiful woman, so just sitting together was

enough to look the part.

The restaurant's food and drinks were extremely high-class. Naturally, that meant it was very expensive, and if Caim hadn't obtained a lot of money from exterminating the bandits, he would have hesitated to even enter the place.

"I want every kind of alcohol you have," Caim ordered, throwing caution to the wind as Tea was enjoying her food in front of him.

The waiter was slightly astonished by the demand, but he was a professional. Without showing even the least bit of surprise on his face, he brought a large quantity of alcohol as requested.

Caim and Tea smacked their lips at their first taste of a fancy restaurant's cooking, accompanied by drinks. The other customers raised their voices in admiration and shock as they watched Caim drink alcohol like a whale would drink water, but he paid them no mind and drained glasses of wine and cocktails one after another.

It was their first night in the Garnet Empire after quitting the Jade Kingdom. Surely, this would be an unforgettable night—one that would become a truly great memory.

That is, if everything had continued that way.

"Jeez, why did it have to end up like this...?"

"Grrraow... They'll pay for intruding on Master Caim and Tea's time!"

On their way back to their inn from the restaurant, Caim and Tea found themselves surrounded by a group of people covered in black clothes.

It all started when they exited the restaurant.

Caim, who was feeling wonderfully tipsy, was walking with Tea's arm linked through his. Judging by Tea's bewitching expression, they were likely going to enjoy some nightly activities together once they were back in their room—that much was obvious from how brimming with lust the tigerfolk's merry smile was.

Unfortunately, Caim noticed something trying to hinder the sweet moment with his lover. "...Are we being tailed?" Caim frowned as he sensed multiple

presences behind him. No matter how tipsy he was, there was no way Caim would miss the hostility he now felt directed at him. His opponents had concealed themselves skillfully, but as a practitioner of the Toukishin Style, Caim's superior senses exceeded even those of the beastfolk.

"Ah, you're right! Who are they? They're so boorish, interrupting us during such a wonderful night!" Tea complained, replacing her smile with a pout. It had been the best night ever—her beloved master had bought her clothing, they'd enjoyed a nice dinner together, and now all that was left was to reaffirm their love in bed. And yet, now some people were trying to hinder them? Of course she'd be displeased.

Incidentally, Caim was far more terrified by Tea's discontent than the people stalking them.

"Who are they? And why follow us like this?" Caim wondered. It wasn't as though he had never done anything worth holding a grudge over—in fact, at first he'd thought they might be assassins sent by House Halsberg, but that would've been out of character for his father, and at any rate it was too soon for that. Caim had poisoned Kevin, so taking into account the time it would take for him to wake up and send people to follow Caim all the way to the empire, this was way too fast.

Maybe they're robbers or thieves? Like, the type that'll target anyone as long as they have money? Caim thought. He'd just left a fancy restaurant, so it would be easy to assume he was rich. *Either way, it doesn't change what I have to do. Tea's displeased, so I should quickly deal with them and... Um?* Suddenly, he sensed the presence of people not only behind him, but from ahead too. They were all holding their breath and concealing themselves. This was not a coincidence—all of them had been lying in wait for an ambush.

"Hey, give me a break. That's quite the crowd," Caim said.

As though they had been waiting to be certain there was no one else in the street, the people hiding both behind them and up ahead finally showed themselves, silently surrounding Caim and Tea. They were dressed all in black with hoods over their heads to hide their identities.



Feeling fed up with the situation, Caim asked, “I don’t know who you are, but you’re sure you’re not mistaking me for someone else? I only just arrived in this country, so I don’t see why anyone would be targeting me.”

However, his question was only answered with silence as the black-garbed figures readied their weapons.

Caim shook his head in disappointment, seeing they weren’t going to respond to him. “Yeah, of course they’re not gonna reply. Jeez, it’s just one thing after another, huh? How annoying.”

“Grrraaaaooow! You will pay for intruding on Master Caim and Tea’s time!” she shouted, taking a three-section staff out from the slit of her dress. She’d concealed it while dressing up by fastening it to her thigh.

Tea taking out her weapon must have served as a cue for the black figures to all attack at once.

“You take care of the ones behind us, Tea!”

“Grrraow!” she agreed with a roar.

There were five people clad in black ahead of them and three behind. In terms of numbers, there were fewer of them than there had been of the bandits or sky pirates. However...

“Wha?!” Tea exclaimed, and Caim gasped.

Their opponents were unexpectedly fast. Even Caim’s eyes went wide at how fast they were swinging their daggers. Though somewhat surprised, Caim still avoided the incoming blade just by moving his head to the side. The black figures must have predicted that Caim would dodge, though, as another two slashed at him from both sides.

“What a surprise... Are they professional assassins?!” What astonished Caim the most wasn’t their nimbleness, but the way they didn’t make a sound when they moved. That meant he was unable to read their attacks until just before they struck. “Whoa, that was close!” Caim exclaimed as he blocked the blades coming from his sides with his arms, which were covered in condensed mana.

However, there was another person hidden in his allies’ shadow, and that

mysterious figure threw a knife at Caim. Their coordination was flawless, but Caim managed to catch the blade with his teeth.

“Bleh, gross! It’s covered in poison. They really are planning to kill us, huh?!” Caim’s tongue tingled as an indescribable taste reminiscent of rotten eggs spread through his mouth. It was a virulent poison, but it was useless against the Poison King.

I’m fine, but what about Tea? I should deal with them quickly and go help her.

“Grrraaw! Grrraaw! *Grrraaw!*” Tea’s voice rang out as she fought a little ways away.

Determined to end the battle as soon as possible, Caim decided to demonstrate his true power. “Toukishin Style—Seiryuu!” He formed his right hand into a sword and covered it with condensed mana. His countenance then completely changed, and he began to emanate an intense bloodlust.

Sensing his overwhelming power, the five black figures grew wary and fell still.

“You’re the ones who started the fight, so don’t be frightened now. If you don’t come at me, then *I’ll* come at *you!*” And with that, Caim dashed toward them.

The black figures readied their daggers to intercept Caim, but he ignored them, simply swinging his arm in a broad arc.

“Hah!”

“Gah?!” three of the black-clad men screamed in unison. Even when shrieking, they were perfectly in sync.

Caim had sliced through their bodies, bisecting them.

The remaining two black figures gasped, their shock obvious even through their hoods. They couldn’t understand how Caim, who was bare-handed, had been able to cut through their allies so cleanly.

The reason was Seiryuu, a technique from the Basic Stance of the Toukishin Style. It sharpened compressed mana like a sword and vibrated it like a high-frequency blade. Its sharpness was equal to the finest blades from master

blacksmiths and could easily cut through steel.

“And I can even change its shape!” Caim extended the mana-compressed blade and stabbed one of the two remaining black figures. It pierced his heart and he collapsed atop the corpses of his comrades.

Caim could freely change the form of his mana blade, as well as extend its range. The longer and the more complex the shape, the weaker it became, but as long as it stayed smaller than three meters, it didn’t lose much effectiveness.

The remaining black-clad man decided to retreat after watching his last ally fall. He scaled the nearby building with the acrobatic movements of a monkey, intending to flee as soon as he reached the roof, but...

“Kirin!” Caim launched a mana shock wave that pierced the man from behind. With a hole torn through his torso, the man fell like a bird shot by a hunter, then crashed on the ground, a puddle of blood spreading out beneath him.

“Seems like I was better at projectiles than you after all,” Caim said. “Anyway, I need to help Tea...”

“And with this, it’s over, grrraaow!”

“Gah?!”

When Caim turned back, he found Tea tearing apart one of the black figures with her nails. Of the three who had fought against her, she had apparently smashed the heads of two with her staff and ripped the last one to shreds with her nails. He had thought she would have a hard time with them, but she had won on all her own.

“I guess I underestimated Tea’s strength. She’s quite powerful.” Caim had seen her train with the soldiers of the mansion, so he knew she could defend herself, but he hadn’t expected her to win against three professional assassins simultaneously—*and* without being injured. “But you’re still not thorough enough.”

“Grrraw?!” Tea exclaimed in surprise as Caim suddenly appeared right next to her and caught a knife flying in her direction with his bare hand.

“Huh?” Then Caim felt something slippery on his palm. When he looked at his

hand, he saw a small cut with blood oozing from it. While he hadn't made a serious effort, he *had* used Mana Compression, so the blade must have been exceptionally sharp in order to cut him.

An evil laugh echoed around Caim. "Now, you will die."

"Who are you?" Caim asked the hunched man who had emerged from the darkness. He was dressed entirely in black like the other eight, but unlike the others, he wasn't wearing a hood—and he spoke.

"I'm surprised you killed my disciples, but it's over now. In the end, you were negligent," the bald, hunched-over old man said with a delighted laugh. "The blade of that knife is coated with venom from a cobra of the desert on the western part of the continent. It's a rare poison, so you'll never be able to find a cure in time. I bear no grudge against you, but my employer wishes for your death, so you shall die."

"Master Caim! I'm sorry! This is all because you protected Tea!"

"Don't worry, and stay back," Caim said, waving his hand at Tea, then glared at the old man. "So, once again—who are you?"

The bald, elderly man grinned eerily and stuck out his tongue. "What's the point of giving my name to someone who is going to die? I hope the poison will make you suffer in agony as you die. That should serve as retribution for killing my dear disciples."

Caim kept quiet.

"What, has the poison begun to take effect, and now you can't speak? Oh ho ho! This is all so delightfully amusing. I love watching youths with a bright future like you die! Soon the poison will reach your legs and you will collapse, unable to stand, then..."

"Poison Shot." Caim fired a poison bullet from his finger.

"...you won't be able to move your fingers and— Ugh?!" The black-clad old man was struck in the face and collapsed, his limbs spread out on the ground like a crushed frog and his body spasming. He tried to stand, but found he could not. "Wh... What is happening...?"

“Looks like *you’re* the one who’s collapsed and can’t stand up, old man. Don’t start yapping in the middle of a fight.”

“H... How?! How can you still move...?”

“Poison doesn’t work on me,” Caim replied. “Anyway, you’ll answer my questions now.”

Caim approached the collapsed old man and trampled on his thin arm, which was nothing but skin and bones.

“Gah?!”

“You said your employer wished for my death, right? Tell me who they are.”

“I-I...” The old man hesitated, his face twisting as he looked away. When he’d first appeared, he’d acted like some kind of big shot, being the leader of the figures in black—but in the end, he was easily defeated. “I can’t tell you! I’m a professional! As someone working in the underworld, I won’t sell my employer out, even if...”

“Oh, really? Then I’ll just stop my questioning here.”

“...you torture me... Huh?” Still sprawled on the ground like a lizard, the old man was bewildered. He couldn’t understand why Caim was so quick to stop torturing him.

However, Caim had never *said* he would stop. “I’ll just wait until you talk. You’ll even beg for it. It shouldn’t take long.”

“Wh-What are you...?”

“By the way, you seem to be pretty knowledgeable about poisons, but are you familiar with formic acid?” Caim asked nonchalantly, ignoring the old man’s agitation as he produced a colorless and transparent liquid from the tip of his finger. “It’s something ants create inside their bodies. Not only are the stronger forms lethal, but they also cause intense pain. In fact, there are examples of people bitten by ants who severed their own limbs to escape from the agony,” he explained, using the knowledge he had earned from the Poison Queen.

Caim’s straight-faced explanation frightened the old man, who writhed on the ground. “N-No...you’re not going to—?! Stop! Don’t!”

“Tell me when you’ll be willing to talk about your employer. Until then, I’ll just do as I please,” Caim said. “Let’s see... How about starting with your feet?”

“Gaaaaaah?!” The old man’s scream echoed through the dark street—and yet strangely, no one appeared. The black-clad men must have done something to clear out any bystanders before launching their assault. Because of that, no one came to save the old man as Caim poured formic acid on him, making him regret their deed from the bottom of his heart.

In the end, it took ten minutes for the old man to confess.

With this, now Caim knew the name of the black-clad figures’ employer, as well as their objective.

Chapter 3: Millicia's Crisis

Having finished interrogating the black-clad old man, Caim and Tea headed straight for the inn—not their own lodgings, but the inn where Millicia and Lenka were staying.

“Millicia! Lenka!” Caim shouted the instant he opened the door to their room, but...they weren't present. The furniture had been knocked over and the girls' luggage was scattered around, showing that some kind of struggle had occurred. However, there was no sign of the room's former occupants. “Damn it!” Caim yelled. “We've been had!”

“Master Caim... I wonder where they've been taken...” Tea said anxiously, following Caim into the room. She had only just met Millicia and Lenka, but they were her traveling companions, so she would naturally worry about their safety.

Of course, that went for Caim as well. “If what that old man said was true, then they must have been taken to the town's lord's mansion,” he spat.

Through his interrogation, Caim had learned that the black-clad men had been hired by the lord of Faure—and that their true objective was Millicia. Just as Caim had supposed, Millicia was of extremely high rank and surrounded by special circumstances. The old man hadn't known the details, so Caim hadn't been able to learn any more about it, but there was no doubt that the lord of Faure was the one who'd kidnapped Millicia and Lenka.

Because of what happened this afternoon, I knew that the lord was acquainted with Millicia. She didn't seem too worried, so I thought everything would be fine...but I was too optimistic. We should have left the town immediately, even if that meant sleeping outdoors, Caim thought. Millicia hadn't asked to leave the city immediately, and her objections to sleeping in different inns hadn't been about safety, so Caim had thought it wasn't urgent and assumed they would be fine acting separately for a night. He had been careless.

“This is all my fault... No matter what they said, I should have stayed with

them,” Caim said bitterly.

“Grrraow... What should we do now, Master Caim?”

“Well, that goes without saying. We’re gonna raid the lord’s mansion and save them!” he declared. He wasn’t particularly fond of conflict, but he wasn’t going to just give up and accept the situation. If worse came to worst, he was ready to turn the entire town into his enemy to rescue Millicia and Lenka. In Caim’s mind, saving them was already a done deal.

To begin with, the fact that he kidnapped them means that the lord doesn’t want this matter to become public—that’s why he used assassins from the underworld instead of the militia to deal with us. After all, Millicia isn’t a criminal.

“First thing’s first, though—let’s take care of this obstacle here.”

“Gah!”

Suddenly, Caim reached out and grabbed the head of a man who was discreetly spying on them from the corridor and smashed it against the wall, pulverizing his skull like an egg. The man was dressed like an ordinary person, but he was most likely another assassin or spy sent by the lord.

“You didn’t completely conceal the stench of blood coming off you. Should have been more cautious,” Caim said.

“Da...mn...” the man somehow managed to mutter before collapsing.

Caim quickly left the inn with Tea, not even bothering to check if the man was dead. However, on their way to save the girls, he realized something. “Wait... Where *is* the lord’s mansion anyway?”

That was a serious issue. After all, if they didn’t know where to go, they couldn’t rescue their companions.

“Grrraow... Tea can use her nose to track their scents. Please let me lead the way.”

“I’m counting on you.” Caim followed Tea down the dark street, feeling a bit pathetic and useless.

The lord's mansion turned out to be at the center of the city. The building was surrounded by tall fences and was far larger than the Halsberg residence—in fact, it was hard to believe that they both belonged to lords. Soldiers patrolled the premises, with a few standing on guard at the entrance. The security looked tight.

“Grrraow. Millicia and Lenka's scent trail leads into that mansion. There's no doubt about it.”

“Which means they're both imprisoned inside,” Caim concluded. “Our first problem is the guards at the front gate.”

While their intrusion was going to be discovered eventually, the later that happened, the better. Caim couldn't know the condition Millicia and Lenka were in, after all. If they were injured, he would need to flee while carrying them. *I want to escape before we cause a commotion... Well, at least breaking in should be easy.*

“Hold on to me, Tea.”

“Yes!” Just as instructed, Tea clung to her master's body.

Caim lowered his hips, focused his strength into his legs, and then leaped. “Toukishin Style—Suzaku.” Using footholds made of compressed mana, he moved in midair, ignoring gravity and jumping over the fence.

“Ah!” Tea exclaimed.

“Crap...” Caim muttered as they landed behind the fence, immediately encountering a soldier patrolling the garden. However, just before the soldier could raise his voice to alert the others, Caim fired a poisonous projectile from his finger. “Poison Shot.”

“Ugh...” the man groaned, then dropped to the ground fast asleep.

Caim had used a nonlethal attack on the guard because the militia wasn't made up entirely of villains, so the man was likely ignorant of the lord's crimes—and besides, Caim didn't want anyone to notice the smell of blood.

“Still...I'm pretty bad at holding back, so forgive me if you end up sleeping forever.” Caim offered a small apology to the sleeping soldier before he walked

through the garden toward the mansion with Tea. Because it was night, the windows were closed and locked; Caim considered breaking one, but Tea called to him from a little ways away.

“Master Caim, come here. This window is open.”

“Oh, good job.”

They both entered the building through the open window. Tea almost got stuck because of her large chest but... Well, the important thing was that they had successfully invaded the mansion. They now stood in a dark, vacant room. Judging from the furniture, it was likely a guest room, and the door seemed to lead into a hallway.

“Now the question is: where are they being imprisoned? The most obvious place would be the dungeon, I guess.”

“Grrraow. I just need to find their scents. I’ll try to sniff around.”

Caim and Tea opened the door and moved into the corridor. It was empty, illuminated by lamps at regular intervals.

“I found something, Master Caim!”

“Oh, already?”

“Grrraow! There’s no doubt about it! This dog-in-heat smell has gotta be Lenka!”

“Dog in heat, you say...” Caim sighed, exasperated. He knew that the two women weren’t on particularly great terms—but still, that wasn’t a nice comparison. He shot an accusatory gaze at his foulmouthed maid, but Tea looked very serious. It didn’t seem like she was joking around.

“Grrraooow... I’m telling the truth. She really *does* smell like a dog in heat right now. We should find her quickly and see if she’s all right!”

“Got it,” Caim replied. He didn’t have the superhuman intuition of the beastfolk, but what Tea said gave him a bad feeling.

With Tea in the lead, they proceeded along the hallway until they found stairs going down. It appeared that there actually was a dungeon. They descended the stairs, carefully hiding the sound of their footsteps, when they suddenly

heard vulgar laughter.

“Ha ha ha! She’s got quite the body!”

“Ain’t looking so uptight now, huh? Ha ha ha!”

“Just...kill me...”

This last voice, full of frustration, belonged to one of the people Caim had come to rescue. Caim pressed himself against the wall of the stairwell and peered inside the room. Just as expected, it was the dungeon. Torches illuminated a jail with an iron grill and two men noisily talking before it. By straining his eyes a little to look beyond the metal bars, Caim could see one of the two women who had been kidnapped by the town’s lord—Lenka. She was currently naked, sitting on the floor with a vexed expression.

“Aah... Humiliated again! Mmh... Just kill me already!” Lenka said, hugging herself and trembling like a small animal. She didn’t look injured, so it seemed that even though she had been stripped down, no harm had been done to her. At first glance, the way she was blushing and her frustrated expression made it look as though she was frightened by the situation, but...a more careful observation allowed Caim to see a very different emotion: lust. Indeed, Lenka had been stripped naked and imprisoned—and yet, she was aroused.

“Seriously...?” Still in hiding, Caim’s face began to cramp. He hadn’t expected this. No wonder Tea had said she smelled the scent of a dog in heat.

Did they drug her like the bandits did? No... I don’t sense anything like that from her. As the Poison King, Caim was sensitive to medicines and poisons, so he was able to tell whether or not she had been drugged. As a result, he was fairly certain that Lenka hadn’t been given an aphrodisiac or anything. Which meant... *Don’t tell me that she’s aroused just from being captured and stripped naked by the enemy? Come on—just how much of a pervert is she?*

Caim thought of Lenka as a straitlaced knight, but the way she looked right now was quickly changing his perception of her. The way she twitched under the gazes of the men surveilling her was far removed from his mental image of the upright and diligent lady knight. Right now, she was just a mere female—nothing more, nothing less.

“Say, can’t we just do her right now? I can’t bear it when she’s looking so turned on!” said one of the men. He couldn’t resist Lenka’s bewitching appearance, slouching forward as he clung to the jail’s grill. If not for the iron bars, he would have already assaulted her.

“No, we can’t. That bitch is a bargaining chip for the other woman. Until the lord permits it, we can’t touch her.”

“Ah, you mean the one she was with? I wonder who that other girl is, since the lord insisted on talking to her directly.”

“Who knows? But this woman’s safety is the condition he’s using to make the other one do as he asks. If we rape her, it’ll break off the negotiations.”

“But that means if the negotiations go well, we won’t be able to screw her either! Shit, talk about blue balls!” The man struck the iron grill, irritated.

Their discussion had been interesting, but Caim was reaching his limit. *I can’t let them shame Lenka any longer—even if she’s kinda liking it and doesn’t actually want my help!* Caim rushed inside the dungeon.

The men noticed him and turned his way, but Caim attacked before they could even raise their voices. He leaped past them, then kicked the bars of the jail to propel himself forward and smash his knee into the back of one of the men’s heads.

“Gah?!”

“Y-You little...!”

“Shut up.”

“Urgh!”

Caim used his hand like a spear and pierced the other man’s neck all the way to his brain stem, breaking his cervical vertebra. The man collapsed like a marionette whose strings had been cut.

It hadn’t even taken five seconds for Caim to deal with the men. He had been amazingly swift.

“I came to save you...though I’m not sure if you need it,” Caim said.

“Uh... You...” Lenka lifted her head and looked at Caim. Tears started to trail down her cheeks the instant she recognized him and her expression melted, painted with even more desire than before.

“Err... I guess you don’t...?” Caim scratched his head. Behind the iron grill, Lenka was naked and trembling, and her face was filled with lust like an animal in heat. She had clearly enjoyed being ogled by those men, so Caim thought that maybe shouldn’t have come to her rescue after all.

“This is your fault...” Lenka started.

“Huh?”

“It’s all your fault... Ever since I met you, I’ve been getting stranger and stranger!” she shouted, hugging herself. “I shouldn’t be such a licentious woman, and yet, ever since I’ve met you... Ever since you kissed me in that cave, I’ve gone mad. Now, I’m overjoyed when I’m stripped naked and sneered at by men. I kept thinking about how great it would be if *you* were the one treating me like this...and I even wished for it. This is all your fault! If not for you, I wouldn’t have ended up like this!” she complained, beginning to weep. Surely, for a proud and noble knight like her, this must have been an excruciatingly painful confession.

Lenka had once been an upright and diligent knight. However, after ingesting the love poison given to her by the bandits and the toxins Caim had produced to neutralize it, she had awakened to the sexual fetish hidden away inside her. Even though she was so serious... No, *because* she was so serious, always disciplining herself, Lenka must have been incredibly repressed.

“So you do remember what happened inside the cave... That I kissed you and made you drink that antidote.”

“What did you make me drink? If not for that, I would still be my ideal self! I would still be a strong and noble knight!”

“Don’t be so unreasonable... If you’ve got any complaints, bring them up with the dead bandits.” Caim shrugged, though he did feel sympathetic to her circumstances. True, he had used his toxins on her, but it had been to save her and Millicia from the love poison corrupting their bodies. If he hadn’t done anything, they would have gone crazy from the intense pleasure assaulting their

senses—the bandits’ drug had just been that strong.

“Umm... I think that’s the key, Master Caim.” Tea, who had followed Caim, awkwardly pointed at a key hanging on the wall. She was avoiding Lenka’s eyes, feeling guilty to have heard the female knight’s confession, even though she wasn’t at fault.

“Anyway, let’s get you out of here,” Caim said. “We still need to rescue Millicia, so we can’t afford to waste time.” Caim grabbed the key and opened the jail’s lock; however, when he extended his hand toward Lenka, who was still crying, she grabbed his arm and kissed him. “Ngh?!”

“Mmmh... Be a man and ravish me!” Lenka urged Caim, an uncontrollable, blazing love raging in her eyes.



Caim stayed silent, throwing a glance at Tea as though asking for her help, but the tigerfolk maid immediately looked away.

“Err... Tea didn’t see anything! Nothing at all!” she exclaimed.

“You traitor...”

“Quickly, throw me to the ground! Absolutely mess me up!” Lenka pleaded.

“Are you an idiot? Wait... Actually, yeah, I guess you are,” Caim said in exasperation, tearing away from Lenka.

“Ah...”

“Think about the situation, you stupid nymphomaniac. Rescuing your precious lady should come before anything else! So until we save Millicia and get to a safe place, you’ll have to wait! Stay!”

“I love how you’re treating me like a dog... Woof.”

Lenka looked up at him, sitting on the ground like a dog, and Caim couldn’t help but think that she might have already been beyond saving.

Caim gave Lenka a cloak he had in his magic bag, and they exited the dungeon. Thankfully, because he had swiftly dealt with the guards, their invasion hadn’t been discovered yet. However, it was only a matter of time.

“They’ll notice the dead guys before long, so we need to save Millicia before that,” Caim declared.

“M-My lady was taken by the lord, so she should be in a room somewhere...” Lenka said. She wore nothing but a cloak over her naked body, but just wearing anything at all had been enough to calm her down—at least compared to earlier, when she’d been acting like a dog in heat.

Caim felt like it was really bad for a female knight to get aroused just from being seen naked, but he decided to put the matter aside for now.

“I don’t know why the lord kidnapped Millicia, but it doesn’t change what we must do. We’re gonna save her—and if anyone gets in our way, we crush them.”

“I can smell Millicia’s scent from the floor above, Master Caim!” Tea said, pulling at her master’s sleeve.

“Good. Let’s go!” Caim nodded, and they went up the stairs as silently as they could.

When they arrived on the second floor, they found a long hallway with several rooms on each side. All the doors looked the same, but one of them had a large man standing guard outside of it. He was tall, muscular, and had a shaved and tattooed head—basically, he looked like an outlaw, not someone who would be working in the mansion of the city’s lord.

“Oh well—no matter who he is, it won’t change anything.” Caim leaped out into the corridor and pointed a finger at him. “Poison Shot.”

“Wha...?!” The tattooed man’s eyes widened at Caim’s sudden appearance, but he promptly cocked his head to the side and successfully dodged the purple projectile.

“Oh, nice reflexes. You’re a bit better than the other small fry...but that’s it.” Caim had already started to move after firing his magic, using his mana to strengthen himself and dashing down the hallway.

“Who are you?! An intruder?!”

“None of your business. Scram!” Clad in compressed mana, Caim used his leg like a whip and kicked the man sharply, sending him flying through the door.

Inside the room were two people facing each other at a table, both surprised by what had just happened.

“Wha...?! Who are you?!” the lord of the mansion exclaimed.

“Caim!” Millicia beamed, her voice full of delight.

“Sorry for the wait,” Caim said.

“No, it’s all right! I knew you would come for me!” Millicia ran to Caim as he entered through the broken door. She wasn’t injured—unlike Lenka, she hadn’t been stripped down and imprisoned, but instead treated politely.

As Millicia was moved to tears by her reunion with Caim, Lenka stepped out from behind him. “Milady! Thank goodness you are safe!”

“You seem to have been rescued too, Lenka,” Millicia said happily, but when she saw that her knight was wearing nothing but a cloak over her naked body, she grimaced. “How immodest! How did you end up in such a state?!”

The truth was that Lenka had actually been really excited by her imprisonment, and it hadn’t been such a terrible experience, but that was better left unsaid.

“Don’t tell me...you’re intruders?! Did those useless idiots fail to deal with you?!” The lord gritted his teeth with a groan, then hastily stood up. Just as he was about to cry for help...

“I won’t let you do that!” Caim fired a poisonous projectile before the man could utter a word. However...

“Damn you, trespasser! I won’t let you get away with this!” The man with the shaved head leaped into the path of the bullet and blocked it with his arm. Once the poison touched him, it should have begun to take effect—but as the acid burned away the sleeve of his jacket, it revealed a metallic arm.

“An artificial arm!” Caim exclaimed.

The man clicked his tongue. “If not for that, you’d have melted my arm! What the hell are you, shooting acid from your finger like that... Are you really human?!”

“Is there someone—*anyone*—out there?! Bandits have invaded my mansion!” the lord shouted, hidden behind the large man. The next instant, the building came to life and the sound of people running could be heard from the lower floor.

“Master Caim! Soldiers are coming from downstairs!”

“This is bad... We won’t be able to escape!”

As Tea and Lenka peered into the hallway, they grew flustered. Some soldiers had already reached the second floor.

“So we’re outnumbered, huh... Seems like you’ve just barely saved your neck,” Caim said. “If you’d mistreated Millicia, I wouldn’t have cared whether you were a noble or the lord of this town, you know.”

Strictly speaking, Lenka *had* been mistreated, but... Well, her case was special, so he put it out of his mind.

“You think you can escape?! There are more than a hundred soldiers in the mansion! And once they hear the commotion, the town’s militia will come too!” The one who had just spoken wasn’t the lord himself, but the large man guarding him.

“Only a hundred? If you want to kill me, you need to add another zero to that.” Caim sneered as he put his left hand against a wall of the room. “Still, we’ll withdraw, so you’d better be grateful.” Caim focused his strength into his hand, and the next instant, the wall was pulverized to bits.

“What?!” the man with the shaven head exclaimed, the nighttime view of the city now visible through the round hole in the wall.

Ouryuu was a Basic Stance technique of the Toukishin Style that launched an explosive strike of mana from point-blank distance. While its range was short, it was the Basic Stance’s most destructive technique.

“I’ve taken back what you stole from me, so I don’t have a reason to stay any longer,” Caim said.

The man clicked his tongue.

“What about you?” Caim asked. “Shouldn’t you try to stop us? Otherwise, we’re gonna escape.”

“Capturing you isn’t my job. Get lost,” the man spat, jerking his chin.

However, the lord hiding behind him wasn’t of the same mind—and he hurriedly made this known. “W-Wait! I can’t allow this! You need to get her back... You need to get *Her Highness* Millicia back!”

“You say that, but in that case, who’s going to protect you? If I leave, you’re gonna get killed, my lord,” the large man warned. Indeed, he was the only one defending the lord. If they were separated, Caim—or even Tea or Lenka—could easily deal with the nobleman.

“Ugh...” the lord groaned.

“Well then, let’s go! Hold on to me!” Caim said.

“Yes!”

“Ah! I was beaten to the punch!”

Tea immediately clung to Caim, followed by Millicia, then Lenka, who stayed silent.

As the sound of the soldiers’ footsteps approached the room, Caim jumped through the hole he had made into the night sky.

“Milord! Are you all right?!” One of the many soldiers who had entered the room asked.

However, the lord ignored the inquiry about his safety and stepped toward the hole in the wall. “Aaah... *She* escaped!” Caim and the girls had leaped through the hole and vanished into the night. Face flushed in anger, the lord yelled at his guard. “This is *your* fault! Because you’re so useless, she escaped! If I had her on my side, I could raise my status, but because of you... You incompetent moron!”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m sorry...” The man shrugged nonchalantly. Stroking his bald head with his artificial hand, he glanced at the soldiers who had just entered the room and said, “More importantly, shouldn’t you ask the soldiers to pursue them?”

“Right... Hey, you! After those intruders, quickly! You can kill the man, but don’t harm the women!” the lord ordered.

“Yes, sir!” The soldiers hastily left the room, only leaving the lord and the man with the shaved head.

“Why are you still here, you good-for-nothing?!”

“Well, I don’t mind leaving too, but who’ll protect you, then?”

“Hmph! Now that the ruffian has fled, what’s the point of having a useless guard like you by my side?!” the lord cursed, stamping his foot in rage.

And here I’d thought that luck had finally turned my way... I managed to take control of trade by destroying that ship, and I even had the opportunity to get my hands on her...! The lord gritted his teeth in frustration. Indeed, he was the

very man responsible for the sky pirates' raid—the one who had ordered them to sink the Jade Kingdom's ship. By doing this, Faure would gain a monopoly over maritime trade, and as the lord of Faure this would bring him immense profit. The fact that Millicia had been aboard the kingdom's liner had been a coincidence, and it was only by chance that he had caught sight of her at the port. He had then decided to increase his status even further by laying claim to her.

"If possible, I wanted to make *her* my wife...but instead, she escaped!"

"Nah, I'm pretty sure that would be impossible. The gap in age—and appearance—is way too big," the man chided.

"You're still here?!" the lord snapped. "Just go after them already... Hm?" the lord began to shout at his guard, but frowned when he realized that a black-haired maid had appeared suddenly and was now standing next to the man. "Hey, I don't recall summoning you. Why are you—" However, before the lord could finish, the guard used his artificial hand like a spear to stab him in the throat.

"Sorry, my dear employer."

"Ugh..." The lord fell to the floor, writhing in pain. He was having a hard time breathing, let alone speaking.

"Seems like your role is over. Time to die."

The lord groaned in pain, not understanding what was happening.

"You did a good job, you know? By sinking the kingdom's ship, you created a rift between the two nations and destabilized the frontier. And your death will make it even better. Relations between the empire and the kingdom will be strained, and chaos will spread...just as our master wishes."

"Yo...ur...ma...ster...?" the lord tried to ask with his crushed throat, still struggling on the floor as he stared up at the man.

The black-haired maid knitted her brows and poked at the large man's flank. "You talk too much. Just do your job already."

"Yeah, yeah..." the man shrugged and raised his artificial arm overhead.

“Thanks for making me work so hard for a pittance, by the way. And for the bad meals too!”

“St...” The lord tried to protest, but the man ignored him and swung down his arm. The metallic hand crushed the lord’s skull, splattering blood and gray matter all over the floor.

“And now our job is over... Well then, time to leave.”

“Yes, let’s go.”

The large man and the black-haired maid used the commotion to slip out of the mansion without being noticed.

As for their identities and their objective, that was something that neither the lord nor Caim and his companions, who were currently fleeing, could possibly have known.

○ ○ ○

“We should be safe here... I think? Maybe?” Caim said.

“Yes, we should be fine,” Millicia replied.

“Grrraow, I don’t sense any pursuers,” Tea added.

“Good. Then we can rest now.” Caim relaxed and set the girls down.

They were currently hiding in a forest near Faure after escaping from the lord’s mansion. Caim would have preferred to go farther away, but using Suzaku continually while carrying three women was difficult even for him. Thankfully, the dense trees were perfect for concealing them from their pursuers—finding someone in the forest was complicated enough during the day, let alone at night.

“For now, let’s wait here until the morning. I have my magic bag, so we don’t have to worry about food and water,” Caim said.

Now that they’d made an enemy of the city’s lord, they couldn’t return to Faure. That meant they would have to sleep outdoors, unless they wanted to stay awake the entire night. Caim removed a camping blanket from his magic bag and spread it on the ground before putting a lantern at the center. Then, he had the girls sit around it with him.

“So...are you going to explain why you were kidnapped?” Caim asked Millicia, but the blonde noblewoman stayed silent, biting her lower lip. Lenka sat next to her, watching her master with concern. “If you don’t want to talk about it, I won’t force you,” Caim said. “Even though I still haven’t been paid, I *am* your bodyguard. Even if you don’t tell me anything, I’ll protect you.”

Still, Millicia kept quiet.

“However,” Caim continued, “I’ll probably be able to do more if you do talk to me. After all, if I’d known about all this beforehand, we could’ve prevented you from getting kidnapped. It should be useful for the future too, so...”

“I will explain everything,” Millicia interrupted Caim. “In truth, I have been wanting to do so for a while, but I couldn’t find the right opportunity and kept delaying it. I trust you, and I want you to know more about me, Caim.”

Caim listened in silence.

“First, allow me to reintroduce myself. My name is Millicia Garnet,” she presented herself, one hand on her chest.

“I see... Now everything makes sense.”

“Grrraow... Master Caim, isn’t Garnet...” Tea pulled at her master’s sleeve.

“Yeah, it’s the name of the empire,” Caim answered with a frown.

I did somehow suspect it, but to think that was actually the case... From how Millicia behaved, it was obvious that she was of very high and noble birth. Moreover, not revealing her family name and possessing a ring endowed with Spatial Magic—a magic item worthy of being a national treasure—had been pretty big hints. *And to top it all off, there’s what the lord said.* When they had been on the point of escaping, the lord had shouted, “*Her Highness Millicia.*” Naturally, Caim wasn’t so ignorant that he did not know the meaning of such a title. In other words, Millicia was part of the imperial family—she was related to the head of the Garnet Empire by blood.

“I suspect you already guessed as much, but allow me to say it plainly: I am the daughter of the Garnet Empire’s emperor. To be more precise, I am the first imperial princess,” Millicia declared, her expression brightening at finally revealing her secret. However, while it had removed a weight from *her* mind, it

had added one to Caim's.

Wait... That means I've embraced an imperial princess. While the aphrodisiac effect of his poison might have counted as special circumstances, there was no getting around the fact that he had made love to her. *What kind of punishment do you get for stealing the chastity of an imperial princess? A life sentence? Or...simply the death penalty?* It wasn't as though Caim feared being pursued by the authorities, as he could easily take care of hundreds of soldiers at once—the problem was that he had come to the empire to find peace, and now he'd run straight into trouble.

Caim shook his head a few times to banish his gloomy thoughts, then fired a question at Millicia. "I understand why you had to hide your identity—you can't thoughtlessly reveal you're an imperial princess, after all—but what were you doing in the Jade Kingdom incognito, with only a few guards?"

"Before I answer that, I first need to explain the imperial family's current situation. You see, around a year ago, my father—the eighteenth emperor, Bartholomew Garnet—grew ill and fell into a coma."

"Isn't it a big problem for the emperor to be in such a state?" Caim asked.

"Yes, but we made sure to hide it so that other countries don't seize the opportunity. Besides the imperial family, only a few top-ranking nobles and some of our most trusted retainers know about it." Millicia's expression darkened. "The problem is that it started a fight over who will become the next emperor."

"A struggle for the throne, huh..."

"My father had one child with each of his three wives—my two older brothers and me. My brothers took my father's sickness in stride and are now fighting behind the scenes over who will become the next emperor."

"Grrraow... Then why did you go to the kingdom in the middle of such a troubling situation?" Tea inquired with a twitch of her triangular tiger ears. It was an honest question with no ulterior motive, but Millicia responded with a pained look, biting her lower lip.

"My brother Lance, the second imperial prince, helped me escape. He didn't

want me to be involved in the struggle for the throne, so he had me flee to the neighboring nation. I wanted to do my best for the empire as a princess, but... No, that's just a convenient excuse. It doesn't change the fact that I ran away," Millicia said, hanging her head in shame—but the next instant, she looked up with strong conviction shining in her eyes. "And yet, here I am, back in the empire. I was kidnapped by bandits on my way, and was saved by someone heading toward the empire—you, Caim. I thought it must be Providence, that God was telling me to return to my homeland and accomplish my duties as a member of the imperial family!"

"Providence, huh... I don't think you're interpreting that correctly, considering who I am," Caim muttered. He had earned his power by fusing with the Poison Queen, a Demon Lord-class monster. While it might depend on the sect, in most cases that would make him God's enemy. If the Church learned about his existence, they'd likely send a punitive force after him.

Calling me, the Poison King, Providence from God makes me want to roll on the ground laughing... It actually makes me worried about the future of our journey.

"Does that mean the lord of Faure abducted you because of the power struggle? Seems like a pretty aggressive move, though, and he looked rather obsessed with you too," Caim said.

"He's supposed to be neutral, so I thought everything would be fine, but it seems he switched horses while I was away in the Jade Kingdom. Now, he's on the first imperial prince's side. He must have wanted to hand me over to my brother Arthur—or maybe use me as a hostage against Lance, as I have always been on good terms with him," Millicia explained.

"Hmm... I see... In that case, from now on we should—"

"S-Sorry, can I have a moment?" Lenka interrupted him, raising her right hand.

"Hm?" Caim looked at Lenka—she had been silent until now, but she was currently trembling as she made her presence known.

"What is it, Lenka? And why are you shaking so much? Are you unwell?" Millicia asked.

“No, Princess, this is something else... I... Aaah, I can’t bear it anymore!” Lenka bit at her lip with teary eyes before suddenly throwing aside the cloak she was wearing.

“Wha?!” Caim was taken aback. Because Lenka had been stripped down while imprisoned, she was currently naked now that she had removed her cloak.

Lenka threw herself at Caim. “I...I just can’t wait anymore! Please, make a mess out of me already! Discipline me!” she pleaded through her tears, pushing her breasts against Caim’s chest.

“Huh?! What are you saying, Lenka?!” Millicia shouted, abruptly standing up at Lenka’s sudden outburst. Of course she would be shocked—after all, her reliable knight was now completely naked, clinging to a man and asking him to do something very indecent.

“P-Please excuse me, Princess... I have been restraining myself ever since I was held captive in the lord’s mansion, but I am reaching my limit!” Lenka apologized to her master, then turned toward Caim, her eyes glistening. “Please, Sir Caim, ravish me right away! I want you to treat me roughly, like I’m an object—like a slave! I want you to violate me so, so much!”

“H-Huh?!” Caim was extremely shaken. Since he had rescued her from the dungeon... No, ever since he had first made love to her, he’d known that Lenka had a peculiar fetish. And yet, he didn’t expect her to ask to be *disciplined* in the middle of a serious discussion.

Caim tried to tear Lenka away from him to calm her down, but...

“Grrraow! That’s unfair! Tea’s been restraining herself too! Don’t try to get the drop on me, Lenka!” Tea exclaimed, adding more fuel to the fire. Her sense of rivalry ignited, the silver-haired tigerfolk maid briskly undressed just like Lenka. Once she was down to the red underwear Caim had just bought for her, she drew close. “Tea wants you to mate with her too! Please do it from behind today!”

“You too?! Come on, think about our current situation!” This shocking series of revelations was seriously starting to make Caim panic. Millicia had revealed her identity as an imperial princess, and they were now hiding in the forest to escape their pursuers sent by the lord of Faure—and yet, he’d somehow ended

up having two women make passes at him.

Searching for help, Caim turned toward the only person left—Millicia. The beautiful imperial princess was standing, her fists clenched and shaking. “Cut it out, you two!”

“Y-Yeah! Listen to her!”

“I *also* want to have sex with Caim! I won’t allow you to do it without me!”

“Ah, of course! I knew it would end like this!” Caim let out a cry of despair, clutching his head. As the saying went: what happens twice will happen thrice. He had somehow expected that Millicia would get aroused just like Lenka and Tea.

“My heart has been all aflutter ever since you rescued me from the mansion. You’ve charmed me... I guess this is what people call falling in love all over again. Anyway, I am now even more confident that you are my destiny, Caim!” Millicia declared. Then, as if to show that she wouldn’t lose to the other women, she threw off her dress, exposing her pure white underwear that contrasted with the darkness of the forest at night. She then joined the others, pressing her soft body against Caim.

“Now, push me down! And if you would spank me, that would make me even happier!”

“Tea will service you! First, let’s remove your pants.”

“You transformed an imperial princess into such an indecent woman. I hope you will take responsibility.”

Lenka, Tea, and Millicia all urged Caim on in their exposed states. Now that it had come to this, he couldn’t resist anymore. Just as they wanted, he would surrender himself to lust.

Take responsibility, huh... Well, I guess they did end up like this because of my poison... He wasn’t defending them, but Caim was certain that the girls hadn’t originally been such nymphomaniacs, and the reason they’d turned out like this was that they had ingested his—the Poison King’s—bodily fluids. Based on what he had heard from Faust, his pheromones had a strong aphrodisiac effect—and likely caused a powerful dependence too. Essentially, the girls had now become

his captives. Coupled with the fact that tonight one of them had enjoyed a nice date and the other two had been rescued from danger, all of which must have stimulated his pheromones inside them, it made sense that they were so aroused. *They can't be apart from me anymore. I didn't ask for this, but it doesn't change the fact that it's my fault. So I must take responsibility for what I've done.*

Caim sighed and threw his hands in the sky to show his surrender. In the end, all excuses aside, the truth was that Caim loved them just like they loved him. So even if distancing himself caused his poison to lose its effect on them, he didn't really *want* to leave.

"I'm a man! I'm prepared to take you all at once, so bring it on!" Caim roared like a beast as he bared his upper body.

Inside the luxuriant forest, a man and three naked women were illuminated by the orange light of a lantern.

We've done it a few times, but this is the first time we're doing it all together, Caim thought, letting out an admiring sigh as he observed the bodies of the three gorgeous women before him. Tea, Millicia, and Lenka were all of different builds—having different chest sizes, leg lengths, and such—but they were peerless beauties, all unique in their own ways. They were like flowers in full bloom, so bewitching and alluring that any man would want to lay their hands on them.

"Well then... Lenka can go before us. You don't mind, right, Tea?" Millicia said as Caim wondered who he would embrace first.

"Eh? Are you really going to let me go first?!" Lenka exclaimed.

"Yes. After all, you *are* at your limit, no?" Millicia smiled sympathetically at her knight. While the three of them were all extremely aroused, without a doubt Lenka had it the worst. She had been holding herself back since being imprisoned, so her case was very grave.

"Grrraow... Fine. But I'll count it as a favor you owe me." Tea reluctantly agreed, glancing down at Lenka's wet crotch.

“Thank you! I will never forget what I owe you!” Lenka beamed like a child receiving a surprise present at the approval of her two “sisters.” “Well then, Sir Caim, you can do with me as you please!” Lenka gingerly approached him, her expression full of lust.

Lenka was already stark naked, her pale skin illuminated by the light of the lantern. Her big, perky breasts, her tight abdominal muscles, and her “sacred place” the same red color as her hair were all in full view to Caim. Nectar was already overflowing from the cleft that only Caim had ever touched.

“Well...you really did your best to endure until now. Well done.” Caim coughed to shake off his embarrassment; then, wanting to reward Lenka for resisting her lust for so long, he said, “You’ve really been struggling, so if you have any request, I’ll try to grant it. Is there anything you want me to do?”

“Y-You’ll hear my wish?”

“Well, as much as I can. Don’t ask for the impossible.”

“I’m so glad... In that case, please use *this*, Sir Caim!”

“Huh?”

Lenka went to fetch something in her luggage, then returned and presented it to Caim. It was a length of rope. Just what did she want him to do with it?

“I-I want you to tie me up with this. As tight as possible,” Lenka demanded, her cheeks blushing furiously.

“...What?” Caim was completely flustered by her request. “Err... You want me to tie you up with rope? What’s the point of that?” He had been a virgin until a few days ago, and while his body was mature, he had almost no knowledge about sex. The idea that people might get pleasure from being bound by ropes had never even occurred to him.

“D-Don’t worry, I know how to do it. I did some research. You just need to do as I say.”

“Okay...” Caim shot a glance at Tea and Millicia, who were waiting for their turn, and saw they were both as perplexed as he was. Still, they nodded to tell him he ought to continue. With no other choice, Caim took the rope and began

to awkwardly wrap Lenka's body with it, doing just as she instructed.

"Y-Yeah, just like that. Now wrap it around there, tighten it behind me, and finally, firmly pull at it... Aaa-woof!" Lenka suddenly moaned like a dog as he pulled on the rope. "Nnngh, aaahn!"

"Err... You all right? I did as you said and tied up you pretty tight, so are you sure it doesn't hurt?"

"I-It does...but that's what makes it good!" she exclaimed as the rope dug into her flesh, her expression slack in pleasure. The female knight's face, usually so intimidating, was now full of ecstasy.

"Um..." Her pale skin reddening as the rope binds her, and the feeling of treating her like she's my toy... Interesting. This isn't half bad actually, Caim thought as he observed the bound body of the woman before him. What attracted his eyes the most was naturally her well-endowed chest. The rope encircled her breasts, emphasizing them by squeezing her flesh. Caim couldn't help feeling a perverse attraction to the beautifully pale body disgraced by the rope roughly coiling around it.

While Lenka was enjoying herself, Caim too was starting to awaken to the pleasure of binding a woman. The perverted, masochistic lady knight had opened a new door inside Caim, and while he was confused by the change happening inside him, he pulled even harder at the rope.

"Aaah! Sir Caim... I..." Lenka looked at Caim with greedy eyes, unable to bear it any longer.

"Yeah, I know." Caim understood what she wanted and stretched out his hands, firmly grasping the two mounds emphasized by the rope. He boldly groped her breasts, etching the feeling of his fingers into them.

"Aaah!"



Lenka's back arched from the new stimulus, causing the rope to tighten and bring her even more pleasure.

"Mmmh, aaah... It feels so good... Just kill me already..."

"Look at your face—you're completely falling to pieces... Jeez, what a perverted knight."

"Aaah, I love it when you insult me... Please, mock me even more..."

"Pervert. Dirty she-dog. No-good knight who's always in heat. You're just a bitch in knight's clothing."

"Aaaaaah!" Lenka let out her biggest moan of the night. Between Caim's hands groping her breasts, the pain from the rope binding her body, and the verbal abuse completely humiliating her, she immediately reached a wet, noisy climax. Twitching furiously, she listlessly collapsed on the ground—but because she was bound, she fell face down with her rear end pointed toward the sky, offering a great view of her tied-up body to Caim as she panted.

"Your pose is basically an invitation, so you're not gonna tell me to stop, right?" Caim slid the rope out of the way, grasped her hips, then took her from behind.

"Aaaaah!" Lenka screamed at this new assault right after her orgasm, immediately climaxing once again.

Half an hour later, Lenka lay on the ground completely exhausted as Caim untied the rope around her body, releasing her soft skin from it.

"Phew... And with that, I'm done with Lenka. I'm actually pretty satisfied, but..."

"Master Caim..."

"Caim..."

Absorbed in learning the pleasures of rope bondage, Caim had forgotten his surroundings, but he now recalled that there were two other females in heat waiting for their turn. Tea and Millicia approached him, their eyes full of desire. Watching him go at it with Lenka had greatly aroused them, and they were

quickly reaching their limit too.

“All right, I’m ready.” Caim put aside the satisfaction he felt after making love to Lenka and steeled himself for the coming battle. “Bring it on, you two! I’ll take you on together!”

The next instant, Tea and Millicia rushed over to him.

Dawn was still far away, and their night in the forest was still young.

Caim’s battle was only beginning.

Chapter 4: Toward the Imperial Capital

After spending an intense night devouring one another like beasts, morning finally came.

“I think we should head to the imperial capital at the center of the empire. Any thoughts, Caim?” Millicia asked.

“...No, let’s just do whatever you want,” Caim answered apathetically. His body felt heavy, and the fatigue and dizziness he was feeling definitely weren’t due to sleeping outdoors.

I got almost no sleep... They just wouldn’t let up. As strong as a practitioner of the Toukishin Style was, Caim was ultimately just one man, so of course he would lose sleep if three women kept coming at him until dawn. *If possible, I’d love to sleep until noon, but we’re not in a situation where I can complain at leisure. We need to get away from here fast.*

Faure’s lord likely had already sent numerous pursuers after Caim and the girls, though it would take time before they reached their current location in the forest. Still, it was better to leave as soon as possible, so they had decided they would depart at dawn. They couldn’t know where their enemies lurked in the vast empire, but they had to keep moving forward.

While their masters were discussing, sitting on fallen trunks, Tea and Lenka prepared for their departure by putting away the camping equipment.

“My brothers, Arthur and Lance, are in the capital. I want to try persuading them to stop their struggle!” Millicia declared, linking her arm with Caim’s as she leaned against him. She was beaming, her skin so smooth it was basically glowing. She looked so beautiful that it was difficult to believe she had just spent a night in the woods.

“Going to the capital is one thing, but can we really stop the fighting over the throne?” Tea asked, clothed in her usual maid uniform. She was almost finished folding their tent, occasionally gnawing at a piece of jerky. Beastfolk loved

meat, and Tea was no different, so she chewed on some dried meat while going about her duties.

“I want to try talking to Lance first. Arthur is very belligerent, so I fear he might try conquering other nations if he becomes emperor. That’s not the case for Lance. Ideally, I want to prevent them from clashing head-on while helping Lance to become the emperor.”

“I don’t think it’ll be that easy. Aren’t they only fighting now because they couldn’t talk it out between themselves?” Tea asked.

“Yeah, Tea’s right. To be honest, I don’t think this can possibly end without bloodshed...” Caim added, recalling his father and sister. Family bonds and blood relationships were nothing but naive illusions, and Caim was in the perfect position to know that. “In the first place, you all have different mothers, so your relationships are rather complicated, no? On top of that, the throne is at stake, and I don’t think either brother would want the other to take their place. Best case, everything will be settled behind the scenes—but worst case, it might develop into a civil war.”

“I know that it’ll be difficult to stop them. Still, as an imperial princess, it’s something I must do.” Millicia replied to Caim’s harsh opinion with determination. “If a civil war occurs, the people will be the ones who suffer. They are innocent and should never be forced to kill their brethren over something like that. That is the one thing that must absolutely not come to pass.”

“Princess...” Lenka paused in her task, overcome with emotion at seeing her master’s resolve. “You have truly grown during this journey. If you have prepared yourself, then I, Lenka, shall accompany you to the end!”

“Thank you, Lenka.” The princess and her knight gazed at each other, reconfirming their bond.

Caim threw them a sidelong glance, hiding his mouth as he did his best not to grimace. *They’re having such a nice talk, but did they forget how they were acting last night? Especially Lenka.* Millicia had moaned pretty loudly too, but Lenka had been the worst during their bondage play. Something like *that* had happened only the previous night, and yet they were acting as if everything

were normal. Caim wondered if his heart was tainted with malice for thinking that they looked utterly ridiculous, so he did his best to suppress the impulse.

“Millicia should just become the next emperor. That would solve everything,” Tea said after she’d finished tidying up, sounding like she thought it was a great idea. “Both parties are to blame in a quarrel. If your brothers are fighting each other, then you should just use the opportunity to take the throne for yourself and tell them off. That way there won’t be a civil war, and it’ll teach them both a lesson.”

“Please be serious. I can’t become the emperor,” Millicia answered with a self-deprecating smile. “The empire is a meritocracy. It’s not like there is no precedent for an empress pushing her brothers aside to take the throne for herself, but my mother came from relatively humble origins and I have almost no backing. Thanks to my work at the temple, a fair number of people support me, but that’s all. There is no way I could win against my brothers.”

“That’s such a shame... If you did, Master Caim could then reign over the empire.”

“So that’s what you were getting at...” Caim sighed at hearing his maid’s words. They hadn’t cleared up the matter, but having slept with Millicia several times, Caim could be considered her husband. After all, he had stolen the chastity of an imperial princess, so he would be expected to take responsibility for that. Therefore, if Millicia became empress, as her spouse, Caim would become the ruler of the empire. “I’m not really interested in that kind of power...”

“Tea is always thinking that you need a status that suits you, Master Caim. You can’t stay a mere traveler. You have to at *least* get a more important title than Count Halsberg, or I’ll never be satisfied!”

“Um...” Caim frowned at hearing his father mentioned. While it was true that he didn’t particularly care about having authority and high status, nor did he really hate his father anymore after defeating him, he had to admit it would feel pretty gratifying if he ended up outranking Count Halsberg, a noble of the Jade Kingdom. “You’re right... It would be nice. Even if I just became a government official or something like that, as long as I was above him, I could shove it in his

face if I ever meet him again. I can really picture how frustrated he would look.”

“Exactly! In the first place, you were supposed to become the next Count Halsberg, so Tea won’t be satisfied unless you get a position equal to that—or even higher!”

“And why is this so important to you?” Caim paused for a second. “Well, I suppose it’s for my sake.”

Tea was particular about Caim’s status because of how House Halsberg had treated him. She wanted him to have the position he deserved. Also, as a maid, she naturally wished for her master to rise in rank.

“In the empire, you can become an aristocrat if you accomplish a meritorious deed. A few distinguished adventurers even managed to become marquises in the past,” Millicia said.

“Well... I guess I don’t really have any particular objectives or dreams, so I might as well aim high to kill some time,” Caim joked with a shrug as Lenka finished tidying up the camp.

“Phew... It’s over.” Lenka turned toward Millicia. “We can leave whenever you wish, Princess.”

“Well then, let’s go, Caim,” Millicia prompted her lover as she stood from the stump where she was sitting.

“Yeah, let’s. To the imperial capital!” Forcing his sleep-deprived body to get up, Caim announced their departure.



Caim and the girls left the forest and headed toward the imperial capital at the center of the Garnet Empire. At first, they had planned to take the eastern main road and proceed straight for the city, but Lenka, being familiar with the land, objected to the idea. She claimed the route was too visible and obvious, which would make it easier for their pursuers to find them. Ultimately, instead of using the eastern main road—which was the shortest route—they decided to make a detour and take the northern road.

Luckily for them, they quickly found a carriage to board when they arrived at

the northern main road. The wagon was large and covered by a canopy, and inside there were already several passengers: travelers, merchants, adventurers, and a hooded woman who seemed to have some unusual circumstances. Carriages like this one were a common means of transportation in the empire, traveling at fixed intervals between the different towns.

Caim and the girls sat down in the available space, and the wagon started moving north, shaking intermittently.

Seriously, what a life. To think the woman I just happened to save would be the princess of the neighboring nation, and that I would become involved in their struggle for the throne... With nothing much to do during the transit, Caim reminisced about his journey so far. Just a little while ago he had been living a pitiful existence on account of his curse—and now, here he was, his life completely different. He truly had come a long way. *It's as if I'm the protagonist of a story...like one of these picture books I read when I was a kid.*

Caim didn't regret rescuing Millicia and Lenka from the bandits, not even one bit. Still, when he thought about how the good deed he had done without thinking much of it had now led to him being involved in a nationwide struggle that would decide the fate of a country, he couldn't help thinking that Lady Luck was certainly a fickle mistress. Between that and being born cursed, Caim felt like railing against God for his misfortune.

And yet, I'm sure anyone looking at me wouldn't think I was unlucky, considering how I'm surrounded by women. Others must think I'm quite the fortunate man indeed.

"Is there a problem, Master Caim?" Tea peered at her master, her red eyes reflecting his pensive and exhausted face. "Are you tired from the long trip? If you want to sleep, you can use my lap if you want." She tapped her thighs, inviting him.

"Um..." It wasn't like he'd been so quiet because he was tired, but it was true that he hadn't had much sleep the previous night, so Tea's suggestion was quite attractive. "Yeah... Let me lay on your lap a little."

Thankfully, the carriage was spacious enough for people to lie down inside of it, so Caim didn't hesitate to do so, laying the back of his head on Tea's soft

thighs, which were covered by the skirt of her maid uniform. Her legs were well-toned and firm, and yet they felt surprisingly comfortable. The female body was truly mysterious.

“Tch... Flirting right in front of us...”

“He’s surrounded by women...and they’re all gorgeous...”

The other men in the wagon clicked their tongues and complained. It was understandable, considering that not only did Caim have three bewitching beauties with him, one of them was letting him lie in her lap.

Just like I thought, it doesn’t look like I was born under an unlucky star to other people. Well, considering how terrible the first half of my life was, I should at least be allowed to enjoy these benefits to even things out.

“This is unfair, Tea. I want Caim to use my lap as a pillow too!” It seemed like the men weren’t the only envious ones. Millicia pouted, looking at Caim and Tea enviously. “Don’t you think Tea is being unfair, Lenka?”

“Hmm... No, I do not. But if I had to pick something, I would prefer being used as a chair or footstool instead of a pillow.” Lenka had just said something rather disturbing, and coupled with her actions last night, Caim couldn’t help but notice that her perversion kept increasing by the day. If his poison truly was the cause for awakening such a fearsome fetish within her, then he would feel pretty bad about it.

I should sleep. Thinking about this is a waste of time. Caim ignored Lenka’s bombshell and closed his eyes, letting his sleepiness take over him.

After that, there were no conversations inside the wagon, only the intermittent sound of its shaking. Around the time when the sun started to set, the other passengers began to look tired. Some nodded off, their backs against the carriage’s canopy, and others lay down like Caim. If everything went well, they would reach the post town before dusk.

Unfortunately, things were never that easy. Just before they arrived at their destination, something unexpected occurred.

“Hey, the carriage over there! Stop!” a sharp voice shouted from the outside.

Caim immediately got up and glared at the wagon's entrance. "What's happening? Is this an emergency?" Even if he'd just woken up, Caim's brain was already completely alert. His senses as a martial artist had detected the presence of multiple people outside the cart.

"Uh, dear passengers—it's the militia," the coachman announced, the bewilderment evident in his voice.

The carriage had been stopped by soldiers, and Caim could hear the hoofbeats of several horses as he listened carefully. "This is bad... Are they here for us?" he muttered to his comrades, who stiffened anxiously. Perhaps Faure's lord has sent the militia after them. He had employed people from the underworld to kidnap Millicia, but because Caim had attacked his mansion, maybe the lord had branded Caim an outlaw, allowing him to send his soldiers after Caim publicly.

"We've received intel that a criminal is hiding inside this carriage. Let us inspect it!" one of the soldiers said, as if to confirm Caim's hypothesis. Immediately after, the wooden door of the wagon flew open, and two armored soldiers stormed inside.

This is bad... Now that it's come to this, should we fight right here and now? Caim hesitated—while starting a fight might involve the other passengers, he wasn't about to just obediently allow himself to be captured either. If the soldiers truly were after Caim and the girls, then he had to resist them.

His resolve set, Caim clenched his fists, preparing himself to move at a moment's notice while the soldiers checked each passenger. He could feel Tea, Millicia, and Lenka's anxiety as the soldiers slowly got closer to them.

"Not her... Not her either... Next, you," the soldier ordered the hooded woman sitting next to Caim and the girls.

Caim prepared to unleash his bloodlust, ready to move at any moment, but before he could...

"It seems this is as far as I'll go..." the woman said with a sigh.

"Gah?!"

"I've got terrible luck...though the same goes for you."

A wet splatter resounded inside the carriage as bright red blood sprayed everywhere. Its source was the soldier's throat—a thick knife was buried in it.

"What a shame. If you hadn't found me, you wouldn't have to die here," the hooded woman muttered calmly. She then pulled her knife from the soldier's throat, and even more blood spouted out from the wound, dyeing the wagon's floor and the canopy in red.

The other passengers screamed at the sight of this unexpected tragedy. As for the hooded woman, she stood up, lightly swinging the knife in her right hand to shake the blood from it.

"You! How could you?!" the second soldier shouted.

"How noisy. Be quiet." The woman swung her knife before the soldier could even draw his sword. The sharp blade flashed as it sliced through the man's carotid artery, ending his life in an instant.

The carriage, which had been peaceful until just a few minutes ago, was now as bloody as an abattoir. Some passengers had even fainted because of the terrible scene.

"Hmm, I suppose the two of them only amounted to fifteen points. They get some credit for finding me only three days after I entered the empire, but they were way too careless. They should have known they wouldn't be able to use their swords inside the carriage," the woman commented, her voice inappropriately calm, as she once again shook the blood from her knife. Then she turned toward the other passengers and bowed. "Sorry for the trouble. I don't intend to harm you, so just wait here patiently."

When she lifted her head, her hood fell back, revealing a petite woman with navy blue, braided hair. She looked to be around twenty, and her body was so slender she almost looked like a boy. Her face was androgynously beautiful, but her eyes were icy, showing that she absolutely could not care less about having just killed two people.

"Caim, she..." Millicia started.

"I don't know who she is, but we'd better not get involved with her," Caim said. Her identity was unknown and she had just murdered two soldiers, but he

didn't feel that she was hostile toward them specifically. "As long as she isn't our enemy, there's no need to fight her. Let's wait and see how it goes."

"Grrraow... Understood."

"Got it..." For once, Tea and Lenka were in agreement.

The woman walked over the bloody floor, heading toward the wagon's exit. Caim stared at her back when suddenly she turned toward him and their eyes met. They silently gazed at each other for a moment before the woman turned away and left the carriage.

"That woman is strong..." Caim sighed in admiration. Not only had her skill in effortlessly killing the two soldiers been impressive, but she had even sensed Caim's slight hostility as he watched her leave and looked back at him. Just as she had been heading for the exit, Caim had the passing thought that he could just fire his poison at her defenseless back. It had only been a thought—he hadn't actually planned to do anything—and yet, that small amount of enmity had been enough for her to notice and turn his way.

That would've been impossible if she wasn't really perceptive. She's on a totally different level than those black-clad men Faure's lord hired. Caim sighed once again and peered outside the carriage.

"She's out! She killed the others!"

"There's no doubt about it... She's the wanted criminal we're looking for!"

"Surround her! We need to capture her!"

The soldiers surrounded the navy blue-haired woman, pointing their swords and spears at her. They outnumbered her six to one.

"Assassin Rozbeth the Headhuntress! Throw down your weapon and surrender!"

"How annoying... There's no need to shout—I can hear you just fine. Don't make such a racket." The woman—Rozbeth the Headhuntress—shook her head in irritation and took a fighting stance, holding knives in both hands. Even surrounded by soldiers, she clearly had no intention of capitulating.

"Capture her!" The soldiers jumped at Rozbeth in unison. Their coordination

was good, showing that they were well trained.

“Idiots... The difference in strength should be obvious,” Caim let out, dumbfounded by the soldiers’ stupidity. “She’s too strong for them to capture her alive. If they don’t go for the kill, they’re all gonna die.”

Rozbeth swung both of her knives, their blades leaving silver trails as she beheaded two soldiers that had come close to her.

“Wha—?!”

“Impossible! How can she be so fast?!” The soldiers shouted as they watched their comrades transform into fountains of blood. In a mere instant, two people had lost their lives. It was an impressively quick feat.

“Don’t just stand and stare. I’m coming for you next.” Rozbeth dashed through the rain of blood, her posture low. It was as though she was gliding along the ground as she drew near another soldier. The man hastily tried to defend himself, but she was already too close. He couldn’t move his sword in time.

“Gah!” Rozbeth stabbed her knife into his chest, the blade weaving between his ribs as it pierced his heart.

“You little...! How could you?!”

“Give up on capturing her alive! We need to defeat her, even if that means killing her!”

With five of them already dead, the remaining three soldiers finally realized that Rozbeth was too strong for them to arrest. Pouring all of their bloodlust into their attack, they leaped at her.

“Too slow. Twenty points.”

However, the soldiers had made their decision too late. If there had been more than three, things might have been different—but no matter how frantic their efforts, it was impossible to win with their current number.

Rozbeth used her knives to parry the incoming attacks before she swiftly killed the remaining soldiers. Thirty seconds—that was how long it had taken for her to deal with all of her opponents and transform her surroundings into a

sea of blood.

“It ended just like I thought it would... What a miserable bunch,” Caim said as he watched from the carriage’s entrance. As he had predicted, the woman with navy blue hair—Rozbeth the Headhuntress—had won, drowning her opponents in a pool of blood.

“Rozbeth the Headhuntress... I’ve heard about her,” Lenka muttered from behind Caim.

“Oh, you know something about her?”

“A little. I heard that a female assassin was mainly active in the southern part of the continent under that name, but I didn’t expect her to be so young...”

“An assassin, huh... I wonder why she’s in the empire,” Caim wondered out loud. Naturally, he didn’t think she was here to sightsee—it was likely that she had been hired to kill someone.

“All in all, it comes to twenty-five points. What a letdown. Well then, what’s next?” Rozbeth turned toward the wagon and met Caim’s gaze. “Judging the bloodlust I sensed, you should be around ninety-five points. I didn’t think I was riding with such a big shot.”

Caim kept quiet.

“I generally don’t kill if it doesn’t earn me money,” Rozbeth continued, “but you’re too strong to ignore. Perhaps taking care of you now will save me some trouble in the future.”

“That’s quite the sudden invitation. A beauty like you, hitting on me? You’re gonna make me blush,” Caim joked as he settled into a battle stance and clad his fists in condensed mana, preparing to fight. It was their first meeting, and he had no reason to engage in battle with her, but if she planned to kill him, then he wouldn’t show her any mercy. As always, Caim would crush any obstacles standing in his way.

Sensing Caim’s killing intent, Rozbeth shook her bloodied knives and readied herself.

The two of them let out a long, slow breath, awaiting the beginning of their

duel. However...

“R-Run!”

“Whoa?!”

...the fight would never happen. The coachman had vigorously shaken the reins to make the horses break into a gallop. The wagon swayed violently from the sudden increase in speed, and Caim almost bit his tongue.

“Hey, don’t do that without warning! It’s dangerous!” Caim complained.

“That’s not important right now! We need to flee!” the middle-aged coachman yelled back as he repeatedly whipped the horses. “She killed all those soldiers! If we’d stayed, she would have killed us too!”

“Aaah!”

“Milady!” Lenka immediately reacted to her master’s shriek and supported her as she clung to the frame of the wildly shaking carriage.

The other passengers did the same, screaming as they crouched inside the cart.

“Seems like she isn’t following us...” Caim checked outside of the carriage, his hand on the door’s rim. Rozbeth was still standing at the exact same place where she had killed the soldiers, her figure becoming smaller and smaller as the wagon distanced itself.

“M-Master Caim!”

“Yeah, we’re fine now.” Caim closed the door and supported Tea, who was clinging to him.

Rozbeth the Headhuntress, huh... I don’t know what her objective is, but I’d better remember her. Caim engraved the woman with navy blue hair into his memory as he endured the violent shaking of the carriage.

○ ○ ○

“I suppose I’ll need to walk from here on out...and the imperial capital is still so far away. Just my luck,” Rozbeth sighed, troubled.

Because of the militia’s sudden intrusion, she had been forced to leave the

carriage she'd been riding. However, said carriage had dashed away, and it was already out of sight. No matter how incredible her physical abilities were, even Rozbeth couldn't catch up to a wagon going at full speed.

"I don't even know where I am—I'm just in the middle of the main road... What am I even supposed to do? How cruel of them to just abandon me here." Rozbeth sulked, pursing her lips as she continued to ignore the bloodbath she had created.

Rozbeth the Headhuntress made a living off killing people. As long as she was paid, she would murder anyone. In the underworld, she was known as an incredible assassin who would never refuse a request. Some compared her to a stray dog because she served no master, but she didn't care about that. Rather than being tied to a person or an organization, she would rather live and kill as she wanted—a carefree lifestyle like that suited her best.

What should I do now? I'd planned to go to the capital via the northern route, but that ended up setting me back.

Rozbeth was heading toward the imperial capital with a certain objective. She had thought it would be better to take a detour than head directly for the city—which, by strange coincidence, was the same reasoning that Caim and the girls had used—but she had unfortunately been discovered by the militia and forced to disembark the carriage she had been riding. Now, the wagon was gone, and the horses the soldiers had used had fled as well, scared off by the battle. In a worst-case scenario, she might get lost and die on the roadside.

I didn't expect to be found by soldiers so soon after entering the empire. Based on what they said, they knew I was coming, so could it be that someone leaked intel on me? The militia's response had been far too fast—it was as if they had known beforehand that she'd be entering the country, meaning that the information must have been leaked. *Did the intermediary who gave me the job betray me? No, that's not possible. Middlemen are professionals—they know what would happen if they went around betraying assassins.*

Rozbeth pondered the situation. The only ones who should know about her presence in the empire should be her employer and the intermediary. As the people who hired assassins, the middlemen were arguably in an even more

risky position, so they couldn't afford to make mistakes. After all, if they did, they wouldn't last long in the underworld—they would likely be killed and their corpses thrown into a ditch.

To begin with, I don't even know who my employer is. Perhaps the intermediary knew, but he hadn't told Rozbeth. It wasn't unusual for a client to hide their identity—in fact, most did. The problem, though, was that her job this time was extremely difficult.

Kill two of the emperor's children. When and how don't matter, but the faster you are, the better your reward. Rozbeth recalled the exact words that had been used when she was given the job. Her targets were two members of the imperial family that led the largest nation on the continent. It was indisputably the biggest job she had ever received.

The only things I know are that my client is from the empire, and that the reward is really high. Even the advance payment was enough to pay for a mansion. Once she was given the full amount, she would even be able to buy herself a peerage and territory in any country she wanted. *I usually try to not get curious about my clients, but this time I can't help it.* After all, if the request was motivated by resentment toward the Garnet Empire—or even just toward the imperial family itself—then why was it to kill *two* of them and not all of them? That meant the client's objective didn't stem from a simple grudge. Perhaps it was political, then? Unfortunately, Rozbeth was only an assassin, so she couldn't begin to guess the motive.

Incidentally, one of the reasons she had so readily accepted this job was that she had been extremely curious about her client's objective.

From my prior investigation, I know that of the three imperial children, Princess Millicia is missing. Meaning that the only ones whose whereabouts are known are Prince Arthur and Prince Lance. So if I kill them, that will fulfill the client's request. And once she would have accomplished her task, maybe she would be able to understand her client's motive.

However, in order to do that, she would first need to reach the imperial capital. And now that the militia had forced her to go on foot instead of by carriage, it was going to be quite the ordeal.

“Hey, look! I found a woman!”

Rozbeth heard a hoarse voice and turned toward it, finding a large man wearing worn-out clothes.

“Heh heh... Aren’t we lucky? If we sell her, we should be able to make it through the winter!”

“And with how great she looks, she’s gonna sell for a lot!”

“Let’s have some fun before that, though. We don’t know when our next chance is gonna be, after all!”

Several men emerged from the forest near the main road and surrounded Rozbeth. They were all dressed in tattered clothes and armed with weapons like clubs and hatchets.

“All under five points... Just a bunch of trash. I suppose you’re former farmers who fell to banditry? I heard the empire was pretty safe, but I guess people like you exist everywhere,” Rozbeth said with a smile. Former peasants turned bandits weren’t a threat to her—in fact, this situation was quite the stroke of luck. “Just when I needed a new means of transportation too. If you’re farmers, then you should have a horse, no?” She readied her knives as she thanked God for her good fortune. “I suppose I only need one of you alive, so I should deal with the rest first.”

“She’s got knives!” one of the men shouted, and he and the others hesitated.

Seeing them so shaken just from that, Rozbeth was certain they had to be former farmers—meaning they were mere amateurs. “Well then, time to hunt some heads.”

The bandits were soon going to learn that the woman they thought was their prey was instead someone they should have never tried to assault.

After that, Rozbeth the Headhuntress took a different route than Caim and the girls had taken to head toward the imperial capital—country roads only known by the locals that she’d learned from the last peasant turned bandit left alive.

Among Rozbeth's targets was Caim's lover—Millicia. During their last encounter, Rozbeth hadn't noticed the imperial princess, but that might not remain the case if she encountered them again.

Would Rozbeth become Caim's enemy? Or would she become a new ally?

Not even God knew the answer to that.

Chapter 5: Post Town and Hot Spring

While there had been an incident on the way, the carriage safely arrived at the northern post town—Jarro. It was smaller than the port city of Faure, and while it was surrounded by ramparts and had soldiers stationed at the entrance, they only took a quick glance at the newcomers' faces before letting them enter. Perhaps it was safe around here and they had become complacent because of it, or maybe it was to make trade easier by allowing things to go faster.

Once the carriage reached the town's main street, it stopped, and the passengers disembarked one after another.

"We've safely arrived at our destination," Millicia said with relief as she descended from the bloodied wagon. "Now that we're here, we should be fine. Faure's lord isn't going to send people this far."

"Well, I'm not sure about how safe we are. We *did* end up riding with that strange woman," Caim commented. If a single thing had gone wrong, then they could have been involved in the fight between Rozbeth the Headhuntress and the militia. It was a miracle that they'd reached their destination without any of them being harmed. "So...what do we do now?"

Millicia pondered the question for a few seconds before answering. "We should gather information."

"What for?"

"So that we know the situation in the imperial capital, of course. When I was still there, my brothers fought behind the scenes, so at least there wasn't any direct military conflict. However, it seems circumstances are changing."

Millicia's expression was serious as she placed her right hand on her chest.

"When I was in Faure's lord mansion, I heard that the struggle between my brothers had become more severe since I left the capital. The nobles in the castle are divided into two sides, and it seems something similar is happening to

the knight orders. If this information reached Faure, a city at the western tip of the empire, then the situation must be quite dire.”

Perhaps Faure’s lord had gone so far as to use assassins to capture Millicia because of the heating-up power struggle.

Millicia continued, “This town is closer to the capital than Faure, so we should be able to gather more detailed information. I hope to ask one of the most important people in this town, but...”

“You know someone here?”

“I do, though we have never met in person. I cannot guarantee we will receive the help we seek.”

“I see... Well, I’m leaving that to you, then” Caim said, stretching his legs, which had grown stiff from the long trip in the carriage, before looking up at the sky. “Anyway, I think we should look for an inn. It’s gonna get dark soon.”

The sun was setting, and it wouldn’t be long before night fell. Considering how unlucky they had been with inns during their journey so far—in particular what had happened because they hadn’t found enough rooms and had been forced to separate—Caim didn’t want to repeat the same mistake.

“Searching for an inn aside, what is that smell? It stinks...” Tea complained, covering her nose as she grimaced.

“Huh? It stinks?”

“I don’t smell anything unusual...” Caim and Millicia cocked their heads, puzzled. They weren’t picking up anything in particular—at most, they could only smell odors from the people in the street and the scent of food from the stalls.

“Ah, that might be the sulfur,” Lenka said, remembering something. “This town is near the northern mountain range and has hot springs. We can’t detect it from here, but a beastfolk’s nose can.”

“You mean that anomalous phenomenon where hot water spouts from the ground?” Caim recalled something that he’d read in a book when he was a child. “I think it was something about fire-breathing dragons who lived deep

underground in a sea of flames, and when one stirred, it would cause an earthquake and boiling water would spout out of the ground.”

“It’s nothing so grand, but you’re right about the hot water spouting from the ground,” Lenka said with a wry smile. “This is my first time here, but I did have the chance to visit a hot spring before during an expedition with the knight order. It felt pleasant in a different way than a normal bath, and the water also smooths the skin,” she added fondly.

“It really does all *that*? This is wonderful! Then we should find an inn with a hot spring for tonight!” Millicia exclaimed cheerfully, clapping her hands together. “To tell the truth, I have always wanted to see what they were like, so that would make one of my wishes come true!”

“Hey, we’re not here to relax,” Caim chided her, exasperated—but in truth, he wanted to bathe in one too. The book he had read in his childhood had piqued his curiosity, and he wanted to sate it. “Well, I guess it wouldn’t hurt to look for an inn with a hot spring, though.” He turned toward Tea. “Are you all right with that?”

“Grrraow...” Tea let out an anguished voice, but she nodded, covering her nose with her hands. “Tea wants to go into a hot spring with you, Master Caim. I’ll do my best to get used to the smell.”

“Well, as long as you’re fine with it...but don’t strain yourself,” Caim said, concerned, and they went to search for lodgings that offered a hot spring.

Thankfully, they quickly found one, and while the fee was fairly high, they managed to get a room with private access to an open-air bath.

The inn where Caim and his companions ended up was a well-established one that had existed since the foundation of Jarro. In the beginning, the town had been made into a hot spring resort by the emperor seven generations prior when he had decided to retire and live here with his favorite retainers and concubines. Incidentally, the current lord of the town was descended from the child the emperor had sired with his youngest mistress, making them a distant relative of Millicia. As it had once been used by an emperor, the establishment was considered a high-class location that catered to the rich, and as long as one

could pay the price, it was possible to reserve a room with private access to an open-air bath.

Caim and the girls were guided to their room, where they left their luggage before taking a change of clothes and heading toward the hot spring.

“As you said, it’s pretty great... It feels like my body is melting...” Caim said contentedly, water up to his shoulders, as he stretched out his body and enjoyed his leisurely soak in the hot spring.

The open-air bath was surrounded by wooden fences, so there was no need to fear being seen by other people, and Caim felt a refreshing sense of liberation at being naked outside.

“Aaah, what a nice bath. I feel so weightless—even my breasts are floating.”

“It truly permeates the skin. Still, now that I’m getting another good look at it, your bust is truly amazing, Tea.”

“My stiff muscles are relaxing... Also, yours are hardly small, Princess, so you do not need to worry.”

Tea, Millicia, and Lenka also enjoyed the hot spring, talking with satisfied sighs as they offered a superb view of their beautiful naked bodies to Caim.

“Grrraow... I’m melting...” Tea stretched her limbs inside the water, without trying to hide her voluptuous figure. Her silver hair spread out on the surface of the water, her abundant assets floating and swaying like living beings. This experience was teaching Caim all kinds of things about women’s bodies and buoyancy.

“At first I was embarrassed to be naked outdoors, but once you get used to it, this feels wonderful. And we have such nice weather too—what a delight.” Unlike usual, Millicia had her blonde hair in an updo, and it was amazing how just changing a hairstyle could change a woman’s impression. Moreover, the unusual setting made her well-proportioned body stand out even more.

“The hot water and the cool air make for a great combination. It was snowing during that expedition I was on, so bathing in the cold felt even better.” Lenka also stretched her body in the water, doing some calisthenics. Her toned body had no extraneous fat, and was beautiful to look at even without considering

her sex appeal. She had firm limbs and tight abs, and her well-developed breasts changed shape with the movements of her body.

“Is this heaven? Didn’t think it was so close...” Caim sighed in admiration as he stared at the three naked figures. It wasn’t his first time seeing their bare bodies, as they had already made love several times, but tonight was different. Their glossy wet hair coupled with the droplets of water trickling down their soft and faintly flushed skin really raised their attractiveness to another level. It was all so alluring that Caim couldn’t keep himself from swallowing.

And of course, the girls enjoyed Caim’s nakedness too.

“Your body is beautiful, Caim. Your muscles are so toned and firm... You should absolutely be made into a sculpture,” Millicia said as she admired Caim’s sturdy warrior’s body dreamily, a hand on her cheek.

“That’s the first time someone ever called my body beautiful. Strangely, it doesn’t feel half bad,” Caim replied, looking down at himself with a wry smile. Before fusing with the Poison Queen, his skin had been covered with purple marks. Moreover, the curse had made his body weak and thin with barely any muscles, so aside from his mother and Tea, everyone had looked at him with disgust.

“Grrraow! You’ve always been handsome, Master Caim! When you were a child you were cute, but now you’re cool!”

“You’re probably the only one who thinks that...” Caim said.

“Caim when he was a child... I would have loved to see him,” Millicia commented.

“Personally, I have a hard time imagining a time when Sir Caim was considered cute,” Lenka added.

What they didn’t know, though, was that it hadn’t even been a month since the period of life that could be called Caim’s childhood.

Thinking about it, I never told them about the Poison Queen. Only Tea, who had known Caim for years, was aware of his sudden growth. He never had any reason to explain everything to Millicia and Lenka, so he still hadn’t told them, but it felt like he was keeping a secret from them and that made him feel a little

uncomfortable. *Once we've solved Millicia's problem and everything's settled down, I should take the time to explain everything to them. I just hope we'll be able to sort it out quickly.*

"Mmm... I think it's time to get out. Wouldn't want to get dizzy from soaking for too long," Caim suggested as he stood up. While hot springs were said to be good for the body, the proverb "too much of a good thing" was well-known, so he thought that saying too long might be bad for them.

However, Millicia and Lenka grabbed his arms to stop him from leaving.

"Caim...the real fun has yet to begin."

"Indeed... We won't let you run away."

"What...?" He turned toward the excited voices and found two faces brimming with lust. Millicia and Lenka's skin was flushed as they breathed heavily, and it wasn't from the water's heat. "Don't tell me you're..."

"Isn't it fine, Master Caim? I want more memories of our first time together at a hot spring."

"You too, Tea..."

The tigerfolk maid also got up and hugged her master from the front, squishing her abundant breasts against his chest.

"Mmmh... *It's* so hard, just like hot iron..." Tea commented as a certain part of Caim's anatomy pushed against her abdomen. She couldn't help but narrow her eyes in pleasure at being able to feel proof of her beloved mate's libido on her skin.

"You're all turned on *again*?!" Caim yelled, completely restrained by the three women. Their eyes were glistening, their breathing rough, and their skin flushed—they were evidently in a complete state of arousal.

Perhaps this was because it was still new to him, but Caim still wasn't fully aware of the implications of being the Poison King. All of his bodily fluids contained toxins, and he unconsciously released pheromones as well. These weren't lethal—instead, they attracted people of the opposite sex who were compatible with him.

In the current situation, the pheromones contained in Caim's sweat had dissolved into the water, where the girls bathing alongside him had absorbed them, making them sexually excited. None of them—Caim included—realized that, though.

“Tea shall go first! We decided our order beforehand!”

However, considering that they had already decided who would be doing it with him before they were affected by his toxins, things would likely still have ended up this way.

Tea chuckled bewitchingly as she ground her hips into Caim, sandwiching the most important part of her beloved man between her legs to service him. Each time she moved, her breasts pressed up against his chest, squishing into obscene shapes. Amid all the softness, Caim could feel the hard, erect tips pressed against him.

“Mmmh, aaah... Your hot *thing* is stimulating Tea's *important place*, Master Caim...”

“Ugh... This feels so...!” Caim moaned.

“You can't come yet. I want us to do it together!”



Caim moaned even more as he endured the stimulation from Tea's soft flesh. He wouldn't mind climaxing of his own volition, but his pride wouldn't allow him to succumb to Tea's one-sided attack.

"Show us some love too, Caim."

"Yeah, don't neglect us."

Millicia and Lenka pleaded with him, and they both took one of his arms each—Millicia on the right, and Lenka on the left. Caim's arms were sandwiched between their breasts as they guided his hands toward their crotches.

"Please, Caim, touch us..." Millicia sweetly murmured into his ear.

Feeling the soft bodies pressing against his arms, Caim answered her demand and stroked both of their intimate parts with his fingers.

"Aaah!" they both moaned loudly, strengthening their hold on Caim's arms, which squeezed their breasts even harder against him.

Since they were already slippery from the water, Caim pushed his fingers inside, gently rubbing the place that was every woman's weak point.

"Aaah... Mmmh... Aaah!"

"Ah... Mmmh... Just kill me... Aaah!"

Each stroke of Caim's fingers produced a seductive moan from the girls—it was as though they were instruments and he was playing music with their gasps of pleasure.

Of course, all the while Tea didn't stop grinding her hips against Caim's manhood while squeezing her breasts against his chest.

"Grrraow, grrraow... Grrraooooow!"

"Ah, aaah... Aaaaaaaah!"

"Just...kill me... Aaa-woooooof!"

The three women cried as they came.

At the same time, Caim let out a moan as he reached his limit and released everything that he'd been holding back, his vision going white from the intense

pleasure.

“Aaah... Master Caim...”

“Caim...”

“Woof...”

The three bewitching beauties who had just climaxed stared feverishly at Caim. It seemed they still weren't satisfied.

“I don't want to end things while I'm still on the defensive. Now it's my turn. You were the ones who tempted me, so prepare yourselves!” Caim declared. He pulled the girls out of the water, earning a yelp of surprise from them, and had them put their hands on the edge of the bath, which created a wonderful tableau of three beautiful women pointing their naked backsides at him.

“Here I come!” Caim exclaimed and took them from behind, filling the hot springs with high-pitched moans and the sounds of flesh slapping against flesh.

That night, Caim and the girls did end up getting lightheaded from staying in the hot water too long. Also, a member of the inn's staff scolded them with a smile for making such a mess in the bath—and they were forced to pay an extra fee to cover the cleaning.



The hot, intense night passed, and morning arrived.

Because of the scolding they'd received from the inn's staff, Caim and the girls had gone to sleep early after having their fun in the open-air bath. It had been a while since any of them had lain in a proper bed, and they were able to sleep soundly.

“So, what's the plan for today? You said you wanted to gather intel, right?” Caim asked Millicia as he put his luggage in order, recalling how she'd mentioned someone who should be informed about the current situation in the imperial capital.

“Yes. I want to go to the Adventurers' Guild,” Millicia answered as she changed out of her nightdress. “Each branch has a guildmaster in charge of it,

and the guildmaster in this town is the younger sister of the Knights of the Blue Wolf's captain. She ought to know what is happening in the capital."

"The Knights of the Blue Wolf?" Caim inquired.

"It's one of the five knight orders based in the imperial capital." Millicia had finished changing, and she now wore a simple dress that gave her the look of a young woman from a rather affluent house, though not a princess. She stopped talking and twirled around before throwing an expectant upturned glance at Caim.

"Yeah, it suits you. You look cute," Caim said, praising her. She did this every morning, so he was starting to get used to it.

The compliment had been pretty half-hearted, but Millicia smiled happily nonetheless.

"Why are there five orders? What's the difference?" Tea interjected, also having finished changing into her usual maid uniform.

"All the knight orders have mostly the same duties: defend forts and strongholds, subdue rebels, and help eliminate powerful monsters when needed," Millicia explained.

"The main difference is who belongs to each knight order," Lenka added as she finished donning her light armor. Once dressed, she continued. "Which one a person joins depends on their status and origin. Nobles with the rank of count or higher go to the Knights of the Silver Hawk, and any below that to the Knights of the Red Tiger; commoners born in the empire to the Knights of the Blue Wolf; and finally, immigrants and emancipated slaves to the Knights of the Black Dragon."

"Hm? That's only four. Didn't you say there were five?" Tea asked.

"The last one, the Knights of the Golden Lion, is composed of the best of the best, without regard for status or background. They're an elite legion under the direct command of the emperor."

Incidentally, the militias in charge of security in each town were under the jurisdiction of that territory's lord, whereas the five knight orders were under the direct control of the imperial family. They formed two distinct chains of

command.

“I see,” Caim said, nodding in understanding. “By the way, what about you, Lenka? You’re a knight, so you must belong to one of those orders, right?”

“Lenka is a member of the Knights of the Golden Lion,” Millicia answered instead. “My father, the emperor, ordered her to be my personal guard.”

“I pledged my loyalty to *you*, Princess! I would have done so even without the emperor’s decree!” Lenka declared.

“Aren’t the Golden Lions the strongest? Lenka’s one of them?” Caim threw a doubtful glance at Lenka. “She’s pretty weak, though... How did she end up with them?”

“I-I’m not weak! You’re just way too strong, Sir Caim!” Lenka retorted frantically. “Perhaps you are unaware, but normally, veteran adventurers or knights need to work together to defeat Count-class monsters and above! Even in the empire, anyone who can crush one alone is considered a hero—or a monster themselves!”

“Really? Then how strong are you actually?”

“I can easily defeat a Baron-class monster, like an orc or high goblin, by myself. For Viscount-class ones, like high orcs or gargoyles, it would be a risky feat, but possible.”

“I see...” Caim muttered. That meant that if someone was on the same level as a Viscount-class monster, they could enter the empire’s elite knight order. Caim, however, could easily kill Count-class monsters, and while he’d never fought one before, he was certain he could at least match Marquis-class ones. “Wait, am I actually *absurdly* strong?”

“You are.”

“Indeed.”

Lenka and Millicia nodded in unison.

Caim was conscious that he was powerful, but he’d thought that there were many others like his father—the Master Pugilist—who equaled him in strength. *I mean, I know I’m powerful, but my old man was too... Though, thinking about*

it, of course he would be—he was called a hero, after all.

“I’m not even sure if there are five people in the empire who could fight you as an equal, Sir Caim. Among S-rank adventurers, I know of the Storm King and the Magic Sword Princess. Then there’s the Black Knight, who is considered the strongest knight, and the Eye of Heaven, the ultimate mage with the power to see the future... Who else?”

After Lenka finished praising Caim’s strength, Millicia chimed in. “If you were to become a knight, Caim, it’s likely you would immediately rise to the top and become a knight captain. And with enough meritorious deeds, you should receive a peerage.”

Caim didn’t feel half bad to have the pair singing his praises like that. “Succeeding in life thanks to your own strength, huh... As a man, I do find the prospect attractive.”

Millicia chuckled. “And you would be able to marry me, an imperial princess. That would be wonderful.”

“...So, we’re going to the Adventurers’ Guild, right?” Caim nonchalantly brought the conversation back on track.

“Yes. I have never met the guildmaster, however, so perhaps she won’t be willing to see us. Still, we should at least try.” Even though Millicia was unsatisfied with Caim ignoring her statement, she still answered his question.

“Well then, let’s go. I look forward to seeing what the Adventurers’ Guild is like.” Caim had admired adventurers ever since he was a child, and he’d once dreamed of becoming one and traveling around the world.

Besides, registering as an adventurer wouldn’t be a bad idea. It’d serve as identification, so it wouldn’t be useless, Caim mused as he finished putting his luggage in order and exited the inn with the girls, his heart brimming with excitement.

Chapter 6: The Adventurers' Guild

The Adventurers' Guild was an independent organization not bound to any country, and Caim's parents, who had been hailed as heroes for defeating a Demon Lord, had both been members.

It was something he had always admired, and he'd always dreamed of seeing it in person.

Caim, Tea, Millicia, and Lenka headed toward the Adventurers' Guild's building at the center of the town. At first glance, the guild establishment looked like a tavern: swinging doors at the entrance and a large hall filled with round tables and chairs. The tables were filled with people wearing armor and robes, all talking noisily as they drank alcohol.

"Wow!" Caim couldn't help but raise his voice in admiration when he entered the guild.

So this is the den where rowdy warriors who care only for strength gather—the Adventurers' Guild! I never thought I'd ever be able to visit one! Back when he'd been living a miserable existence as a cursed child, Caim had never imagined that he would someday be able to actually step inside an Adventurers' Guild.

"We should enter, Caim."

"Ah, yeah. Let's go to the reception counter." Caim had been so overcome with emotion that he had stopped at the entrance, so Millicia lightly pushed him inside, and they headed toward the counter in the back.

As they walked, the adventurers who were enjoying their drinks looked at them and began to chat among themselves.

"A new face, huh? An outsider?"

"He's got some great-looking women with him. Sure wish I could spend a fun night with them."

“Damn him, keeping those three beauties all to himself... Makes me want to steal them away.”

Being surrounded by pretty girls, Caim naturally attracted the attention of various men at different tables. While their gazes were mostly filled with curiosity or jealousy, some were staring at Caim with a serious expression, trying to appraise his strength.

At the counter was a woman wearing a suit, with light-brown hair in a bob. While she was curious about this unusual group of one man with three women that had suddenly shown up, she stayed professional and immediately greeted them. “Welcome to the Adventurers’ Guild. Do you have a request to make, or do you wish to register as adventurers?”

Millicia stood in front of the counter and said, “We wish to speak with the guildmaster. Would it be possible to meet her?”

“Do you have an appointment?”

“No...”

“Then could you please tell me your name and the nature of your business?”

“I...” Millicia looked away, troubled. There were many people in the hall, and all of them were paying close attention to their group because it consisted of three beautiful women. If she gave her real name, one of them might guess that she was the imperial princess. “I am sorry, but I have reason to remain anonymous. However, I can tell you that I come from the capital. Could you at least pass her this letter I wrote?”

“A letter?” the receptionist sighed, looking suspiciously at Millicia when she refused to give her name. “Fine, I shall take it. However, the guildmaster is very busy and likely won’t be able to reply for quite some time. If you tell me where you are staying, I shall contact you there.”

“Umm... If possible, I’d like for you to hasten the process...”

“Then tell me your name and your business. If it really is important, I shall report to the guildmaster immediately,” the receptionist said, casually adding the letter to a pile of documents.

“Ah...” Millicia sighed sadly. Apparently, her letter was not considered an urgent matter.

That’s pretty disorganized of her... She isn’t going to throw it away, is she? Caim wondered. Because Millicia couldn’t reveal her identity, the receptionist could very well decide they were suspicious and refuse to pass the letter to the guildmaster.

“Hey, Millicia,” Caim whispered into her ear.

“Yes, we might not be able to meet the guildmaster,” she answered quietly. “I hoped to learn more about the situation before heading to the capital, but it seems that won’t be possible.”

They wanted to meet the guildmaster in order to learn more about the current situation in the imperial capital, but it wasn’t worth risking danger by revealing Millicia’s identity in a place with so many onlookers.

We want to gather intel. It’s not a necessity. Maybe we should leave? It wasn’t as if they could just leisurely wait several days for the guildmaster to meet them. Now that Faure’s lord knew about Millicia’s return, others might be pursuing her as well.

Millicia was of the same mind as Caim and shook her head regretfully. “I suppose we have no choice but to give up on gathering information and head toward the cap—”

“Hey there, don’t bother our receptionist!” a hoarse voice interjected.

“You’re bad girls. You need to be punished!” another added, following with a vulgar laugh.

Caim turned their way and saw a group of three men.

“You just show up out of the blue and ask to meet the guildmaster? That’s not how you do things!”

“Wow, you’re even more beautiful up close! Heh heh, want me to give those knockers a little massage?”

“What do these lowlifes want?” Lenka said, moving in front of Millicia to protect her as she glared at the men. Judging by their equipment, they seemed

to be adventurers. Vulgar grins were plastered across their crude faces as they ogled the girls' curves.

"Grrraow... How revolting. I want to tear them into shreds."

"I agree... Even I don't think it would be nice to be *disciplined* by sleazebags like that."

Tea and Lenka nodded at each other.

"Um... Mr. Nick, you can't just bother guests like this..." the receptionist said.

"Say no more, my dear Lucy! We're just trying to help you! Instead of complaining, you should thank us!"

"Y-You say that, but..." The receptionist—Lucy—awkwardly looked away. "Adventurers can quarrel together at their own discretion as long as they take responsibility, but these people are just guests who want to meet the guildmaster. If you cause an uproar, well..."

"What? You're saying we're causing *trouble*?!"

"Eek!" Lucy shrieked in fear.

The adventurers drinking at a nearby table began to talk in hushed voices.

"These guys again..."

"The Black Lions... They've been getting really cocky recently."

"Of course they would. Thanks to their promotion, they're now the only A-rank adventurers in town."

"It'd be a problem if they left, so the guild will overlook their mischief as long as they don't misbehave *too* badly..."

"They might be scum, but their strength is the real deal. Better not get involved with them."

Caim managed to catch their words by strengthening his hearing with mana. *No wonder they're so bold—the receptionist can't tell them off.*

Adventurer ranks went from A to E, the former being the highest. Technically, the S-rank existed above the A-rank, but only a rare few who were considered heroes could achieve it, so it generally wasn't taken into account.

They do seem strong, but I don't feel the same pressure as I did from my old man. They're not small fry, but they're not that powerful either. At a glance, Caim appraised them as being around the level of Viscount-class monsters. Considering that it normally required several adventurers to kill one such monster, these men could definitely be considered quite powerful if they could do it single-handedly. Still, Caim didn't think for a second that he would lose to them.

"If you *really* want to meet the guildmaster, then we'll test to see if you're worth it!" declared the leader of the three men—Nick, based on what the receptionist had called him.

"What do you mean?" Millicia asked from behind Lenka.

Nick grinned. "Let's spar. If you win, we'll help you meet the guildmaster!"

"But if you lose... Well, you know what will happen, right? Heh heh!"

"We'll show you girls plenty of love until morning."

"Yeah, of course that's your aim. You're just as worthless as you look," Caim spat, disgusted.

The three ignored Caim, their eyes fixed on Millicia, Lenka, and Tea. They clearly just wanted an excuse to lay their hands on the girls.

"We've got no reason to comply—though I'd love nothing more than to beat you all up," Caim said.

"But isn't this a great opportunity?" Millicia whispered into Caim's ear.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't expect them to be true to their word and help us, but if we cause a commotion, the guildmaster will likely come to check things out. Moreover, considering they are adventurers causing trouble for us—in other words, ordinary people—she might feel obligated to tell us what we want to know about the situation in the capital as compensation."

"So we'd basically be making her take responsibility for not disciplining her dogs well enough, huh?" It seemed that they'd be able to meet the guildmaster after all, even if it wasn't in the way they'd hoped to. In that case, it was worth

answering the adventurers' cheap provocations.

"Also, it seems Lenka and Tea are eager to jump into the fray." Millicia looked toward them.

"Grrraooooow! I can't bear it anymore! I'm gonna kill them!"

"They *dared* to show such base desires not only toward me, but my lady as well... They'll pay for this!"

Unexpectedly, Tea and Lenka were even angrier than Caim. They were both burning with fighting spirit, fully prepared to join battle.

"Well... I guess it's fine if these two are so eager. I do want to see how strong A-rank adventurers really are too," Caim said.

Also, now that he thought about it, wasn't there a stereotype about veteran adventurers harassing newcomers the first time they stepped into a guild? *Yeah, I'm pretty sure I read stuff like that in books when I was a kid. I guess I should be happy I get to experience something right out of my favorite stories from childhood,* Caim thought—mostly trying to convince himself—as he accepted the duels with the three men.



"Well then, I shall explain the rules of the match," the receptionist nervously began her explanation when they arrived at the training ground behind the guild's meeting hall.

In the center of the training ground stood Caim, Tea, and Lenka on one side, and the three A-rank adventurers from the so-called Black Lions on the other. The noncombatants, like Millicia and the other adventurers who had come to watch—some even placing bets on the outcome with drinks in hand—were standing a little ways away.

"To make things clear, this is a sparring match—you will only be testing your skills. Killing is forbidden—especially since only one side is composed of actual adventurers. Also, using magic that is too powerful will be considered foul play. You will fight three against three until all of your adversaries either give up or cannot continue the fight." Lucy paused her explanation and turned toward Caim and the girls, her expression a mix of uneasiness and regret. "I shall stop

the fight if necessary, but please be careful. Even if you have consented, it will be the guild's responsibility if something happens to ordinary people due to the actions of adventurers."

"We'll be fine. By the way, what happens if *we're* the ones injuring them?" Caim asked jokingly.

"I can't say there *won't* be any problems, but they were the ones who picked a fight with you. As long as you respect the rules, they shouldn't be able to complain," the receptionist answered with a stiff smile.

"Good." Caim turned toward the Black Lions with a belligerent grin. "Well then, time to fight."

Caim took a moment to observe his opponents. As A-rank adventurers, they showed no obvious weaknesses. The man at their center—the leader, Nick—was a swordsman armed with a great sword. The man on his right—who shall be called Underling One—wielded a bow and sported daggers hanging from his belt, so he was likely a scout. The problem, though, was Underling Two on the left side. In his hands was a metal shaft with an oval-shaped ball at its end—a blunt weapon called a mace.

"He's dressed strangely... Is he a monk?" Caim said, since that was what Underling Two's attire brought to mind. There was also something that looked like a religious symbol—the mark of a star—on the mace, which gave more credence to his supposition. "Still, for a monk to demand a duel over his lust for women... He must be really corrupt, huh?"

"No, Sir Caim. That symbol is the crest of the Siegzelon Church," Lenka commented.

"The what?" Caim had never heard of it—he only knew of the Holy Spirit Church, whose religion was the most widespread and the most popular. He wondered how it was different.

"The Siegzelon Faith is a minor religion originating from the eastern part of the continent," Lenka explained "They revere its founder, the legendary hero Siegzelon, as their god, and their creed is that mastering martial arts to its utmost limit is the way to reach divinity."

“Mastering martial arts, huh? Sounds more like a dojo than a religion.”

“You’re not wrong. To them, strength is law, so the strong can steal everything from the weak—be it wealth or women. In other words, they’re heathens. The empire allows for religious freedom and doesn’t persecute them—but every few years, one of their believers causes some trouble, which is quite bothersome.”

In short, for this monk, trying to steal someone’s women in a duel was just following his religion—and so was ravishing them.

“That’s pretty wicked...though I’m not really in a position to talk.” After all, Caim, too, had some special circumstances concerning his relationship with women. He didn’t have the right to condemn the members of the Black Lions. “Regardless, I don’t intend to lose. If they want to pick a fight with us, then fine—we’ll take them on!”

“Yes! They tried to lay hands on us even though we belong to you, Master Caim, so they must pay!”

“It’s also a knight’s duty to put heretics to death. I shall punish these miscreants!”

Tea and Lenka followed after Caim, fully prepared for battle, as Lucy announced the start of the duel. “Well then, let the match begin. Ready... Fight!”

The three adventurers rushed toward Caim and the girls, who were ready to engage.

The first to make his move was Underling One, the scout of the Black Lions. He quickly drew the string of his shortbow and fired an arrow at Caim’s legs. In accordance with the rule against killing, he didn’t aim for anything vital.

Quite the quick draw. That’s surprising, Caim thought, impressed, as he stomped down on the incoming arrow to stop it.

“Ha ha! Here I come!”

“Oh?”

But the Black Lions' onslaught was only just beginning. Nick, the party leader, raised his great sword overhead and kicked the ground to close the distance between himself and Caim.

"So you can move that fast even while wielding a heavy weapon, huh? I see that A-rank title isn't just for show," Caim commented.

"Master Caim!"

"No problem—I can deal with it," Caim replied to Tea as he caught the blade with his hand. "Toukishin Style—Genbu." By focusing condensed mana into his hand to heighten its defensive ability, he easily stopped the massive blade without being injured.

"What?! How could you stop my blow with just your bare hand?!" Nick exclaimed.

"It's too early to be surprised, A-rank adventurer," Caim said, still holding Nick's blade. Then he released his mana through the weapon. "Hebi."

"Ugh!" Nick was knocked back, but he immediately broke his fall, rolled on the ground, and quickly got to his feet—all of which proved his combat experience. "What did you do?!" he said, clicking his tongue.

"Hah! If you didn't understand what I did, then you should have just stayed on the ground!" Caim provoked him with a sneer.

"What?!" Nick snarled, his face contorting in anger.

Among the basic techniques of the Toukishin Style, Genbu specialized in defense, focusing Mana Compression on one point to explosively enhance its defensive power. Hebi—Snake—was a counter technique paired with Genbu. Its principle was simple: immediately after parrying an attack with Genbu, all the mana used for defense was released to deal a blow to the opponent. A tortoise defending with its shell, then attacking with the serpent that formed its tail—such was the divine beast Genbu, the origin of the technique's name.

"Damn it! If you can stop my sword, that means you're not just a small fry!"

"You finally realized, huh? Now it's my turn!" Caim dashed forward, immediately closing the distance and kicking Nick in the gut, sending him flying

back even farther.

“Gah?!”

Caim had intended to follow after Nick to strike him once again, but before he could do so, the two underlings attacked him simultaneously.

“Aaah!” On the left, Underling Two—the monk—struck with his mace from overhead.

“Take this!” On the right, Underling One—the scout—concealed himself in Caim’s blind spot and fired an arrow.

However, just as Nick had two underlings, Caim wasn’t alone.

“I won’t let you do that!”

“Hah!”

Tea repelled the mace with her three-section staff, and Lenka sliced the arrow in half with her sword.

“Leave them to us, Master Caim!”

“We can’t let you do everything, Sir Caim! It’s time I redeem myself and live up to my title of knight!”

“Got it. I’m leaving them to you, then.”

Tea and Lenka faced off against their opponents, and Caim dashed over to where Nick had landed. The battle went from three-on-three to three different one-on-one duels.

“Whoa!”

“Who the hell *are* they?!”

“They’re as strong as the Black Lions!”

The adventurers watching exclaimed, shocked by what they were seeing. Most of them had firmly believed that the Black Lions would crush Caim and the girls—and yet their expectations had been easily overturned.

“Are they seriously *not* adventurers? You don’t think they’re lying to us, right?!”

“Maybe they’re renowned knights!”

“Damn it! I should have bet on them instead!”

“Yeah, get ‘em! Ha ha! I’ve always thought the Black Lions were rotten! Beat ‘em up!”

Both yelled at and cheered on by the crowd, Caim and the girls continued their fight.

“You damn brat...” Nick coughed in pain, clutching at his stomach. “You kicked me with all you had!”

“If it hurts, you can give up, you know,” Caim suggested, standing defenseless before Nick, who glared back hatefully.

“You little...! Don’t get cocky! I’m not giving in!”

“Oh, you’re quite tough. I suppose you must have gotten that rank *somehow*,” Caim said, impressed, as he stroked his chin. The rules forbade killing, but he still had put a fair amount of strength into his kick. While it might not have been enough to rupture the man’s internal organs, it should’ve rendered him unable to move for some time. And yet, even though he was holding his stomach with one hand, Nick had gotten up and readied his great sword. He had taken minimal damage and was ready to continue the fight.

Let’s be honest—I really underestimated them. Caim had thought they were just hoodlums who harassed new adventurers and clients, and that even though they boasted about their strength, they were still small fry. But the truth of the matter was very different. Their coordination had been remarkable, and each one lived up to the standards of an A-rank adventurer.

“I guess I’m sorry for basing my judgment solely on your scummy behavior. From now on, I’ll take you seriously.” Caim psyched himself up and faced Nick. “While my companions take care of the other two, I’ll crush you myself. Fight back with all you’ve got.”

“Damn it... Don’t get cocky! You’re just a brat with a bunch of girls following him around, so I’d only planned to ridicule you a little—but that’s it! I’ve had enough! From now on, *I’m* the one who’s getting serious. Just you wait, you ignorant whelp... I’m gonna teach you how to respect your elders!” Nick

brandished his great sword, his eyes burning with strong enmity toward Caim as mana gushed out from his body, covering him like an aura. His claim hadn't been a mere bluff—he really was going all out.

“Great... Bring it on!” Caim took a fighting stance, readying his fists, and clad himself in condensed mana.

And with that, the curtain rose on the match's second act. It was time for the real fight to begin.

○ ○ ○

As Caim and Nick began to fight in earnest, the other two pairs were also battling each other fiercely a little ways away.

“Yah!”

“Damn it! That woman is fast!”

Lenka cornered Underling One with an onslaught of slashes from her sword. That meant he wasn't able to use his shortbow anymore and had been forced to pull out his daggers to defend himself.

Lenka was only armed with a slender sword, while Underling One had two daggers. In terms of quantity, the latter had the advantage. However, thanks to her dexterity, Lenka didn't allow her opponent a chance to counterattack, forcing him on the defensive.

“You're strong for a woman...even though you should only be good at shaking your ass!” Underling One swore in annoyance, parrying a slash just in time.

While Lenka had lost to the bandits a while ago, which had put her master in danger, she was not, in fact, weak. She only looked weak when compared to a monster like Caim—in reality, she was actually on par with A-rank adventurers.

“Shit! Damn it! You're just a woman, so don't get cocky!”

“Don't look down on me just because I'm a woman... There! You're wide open!”

“Ugh?!” Lenka's strike cut into Underling One's shoulder. The wound wasn't

deep, but it was still an injury, and he pressed on the cut with his hand as his face contorted in pain. “Goddamn! You bitch!” he cried in rage. Indignation welled up inside him—not only had he been hurt by someone he had thought weaker than him, but she was the very woman he had wanted to use as a sexual outlet.

Ultimately, Underling One was an archer and a thief—surprise attacks from a distance and scouting were his specialties, not close-range combat. It only made sense that he would be at a disadvantage if his opponent fought him in close quarters. This caused him to grow impatient—and of course, Lenka didn’t miss the opportunity.

“Another opening!”

“Argh!”

This time, Lenka stabbed him in the thigh with the point of her sword. This wasn’t a fatal wound either, but it was enough to disable the nimble footwork that scouts were known for. However, just as Lenka was feeling certain of her victory...

“Don’t get carried away, you bitch!” Underling One launched an unexpected attack—he tossed his left dagger away, then took a small bottle out of his waist pouch and threw it at Lenka. She blocked it with her sword, but that only broke the bottle, scattering green powder all over her face.

“Is that...poison?!” Suddenly, Lenka was overcome by drowsiness and dropped to one knee—the green powder must have been a sleeping drug. Her body felt heavy and her consciousness grew hazy.

“Ha ha ha! How do you like *that*?!” Underling One sneered.

“That’s unfair!”

“And you call yourself an A-rank adventurer? Fight fair and square!” The gallery jeered.

“Shut up! There’s no rule against poison! You’re just spectators, so keep quiet!” Underling One yelled back.

Just as he said, no rule explicitly forbade the usage of poison. However, that

didn't mean using it was acceptable either. The receptionist simply hadn't thought such a thing would happen, so she hadn't included it in the rules.

To begin with, being A-rank adventurers, it had been expected that the Black Lions would overwhelm their opponents. Since Caim and the girls seemed to be ordinary people, it was only natural that Lucy and the other adventurers would assume they stood no chance. And yet, it was now the Black Lions who were losing—to the point that one of them had resorted to using poison, even though that was so far off-limits that they hadn't even thought to include it in the rules.

The receptionist stayed silent with a pensive frown. While Underling One hadn't technically broken any rules, what he had done was a step too far. Deciding she should stop the fight, Lucy took a step forward, but before she could say anything...

“Ha ha ha—”

“You're wide open!” Lenka dashed forward from her kneeling position like she had springs in her legs. Underling One was currently defenseless, as he was busy snickering at her for succumbing to his poison, and she slashed him across the chest.



“Gah! That huuuurts! How are you even moving?!” Underling One screamed, rolling on the ground in agony. He had avoided a fatal injury thanks to his leather armor, but if the cut had been any deeper, he would have died. Now, he was too seriously wounded to continue the fight.

“Phew... And with that, the battle is over. I win,” Lenka declared her victory, looking down at her fallen opponent. She was steady on her feet and didn’t seem to be the least bit drowsy—in fact, there were no signs of the sleeping drug affecting her at all.

“Y-You deceived me! You coward! You acted like the poison worked even though you managed to avoid inhaling it!” Underling One complained—ignoring his own underhanded actions.

“I *did* inhale it. And it *did* work. But...maybe the dose was too small, because I only felt sleepy for an instant before everything went back to normal,” Lenka explained.

“That’s impossible! Just a small whiff is enough to put an ogre to sleep!” Underling One retorted with a painful grunt.

In fact, Lenka *had* taken a good breath of the drug—the reason she hadn’t noticed was that her recently acquired resistance to poison had caused its effect to dissipate quickly. When someone repeatedly ingested a particular medicine, it would sometimes lessen the effectiveness of other medicines. In this case, the intoxication she’d received from ingesting the Poison King’s bodily fluids several times had granted her a powerful resistance to other toxins. While it might have been different with a truly deadly poison—one that could melt flesh and bones, for example—her body would immediately neutralize something like a sleeping drug.

“Uh... Damn it...” Underling One swore as he was carried out of the training ground by one of the adventurers the receptionist had called.

Lenka threw him a glance and nodded in satisfaction. “And with that, I have regained my honor as a knight. I dedicate this victory to my lady!”

“Lenka!” Millicia waved her hand from the edge of the training ground, and Lenka waved back at her beloved master with a smile.

Underling Two repeatedly swung his mace, unleashing an intense onslaught of strikes at Tea, who skillfully parried them all with her three-section staff. The monk had no difficulty wielding his metal weapon and hurling such heavy blows at the maid. His attacks were powerful and fast, and an ordinary warrior would break their weapon trying to ward them off.

“Despite your slender frame, you possess great strength and endurance—you are a remarkable fighter for a woman! Truly impressive!”

“Well, for my part, I’m quite disappointed! You keep swinging your weapon, but you can’t even beat me! Are those big muscles just for show?!”

“Such harsh words! But...that’s great!” Underling Two grinned at Tea’s provocation. “I love making cheeky women submit to me! I find no greater joy than pushing down a woman who’s gotten carried away because she knows how to fight, raping her, and knocking her up with my child!”

“That’s revolting! Are you truly a monk?!” Tea asked, disgusted, only for Underling Two to laugh at her.

“My god’s teachings allow strong men to impregnate as many women as they want! It is the duty and the wish of every woman to birth the child of a strong man so he may continue his bloodline! It transcends feeble feelings like love and is the only right way for people to live!” As Underling Two stated his disregard for the dignity of women, he struck Tea’s three-section staff with his mace.

An ominous crack rang out from one of the wooden rods. At this rate, her weapon wouldn’t last.

“Hmph... Quite the self-serving argument you’ve got there... Though Tea doesn’t *completely* disagree with you,” she replied. Many women would protest Underling Two’s words—but unexpectedly, Tea agreed with him.

Strong men should have children with many women and were permitted to trample on the weak—as one of the most belligerent races of beastfolk, Tea readily accepted that reasoning. In the natural world, where survival of the fittest ruled, the strong made the law. The same went for the underworld of

human society, far away from the eyes of justice.

However, there was one point that Tea *didn't* agree with: the man proudly swinging his mace at her was clearly too weak and worthless to impregnate her.

“Unfortunately for you, Tea’s belly is already reserved! I don’t need your weak seed!” Finding an opening between swings of Underling Two’s mace, Tea drove her three-section staff into his stomach.

“Gah?!” Intense pain and nausea assaulted Underling Two, and he coughed a few times. “You...little...!”

“The only one who has the right to push Tea down is Master Caim, the strongest and kindest male of all. A small fry like you can keep dreaming!” Tea brandished her three-section staff and began her counteroffensive. The tables had turned—this time she was the one hurling an onslaught of blows against Underling Two. “Grrraw! Grrraaaw! Grrraaaw!” Tea exclaimed as she struck at his head, shoulders, chest, stomach, and his legs.

“Ugh!” The monk used his mace to defend himself, but he couldn’t keep up with Tea’s dexterity. The damage to his body was starting to accumulate.

A three-section staff was a uniquely shaped weapon, making it difficult to use. However, once mastered, it could be far stronger and faster than a blade. Swirling its rods in a circular motion not only increased its striking power thanks to centrifugal force, but it also made it harder for the opponent to follow its movement. So while it wasn’t a strong defensive weapon, the way it allowed the wielder to easily chain strikes together without giving the opponent a chance to counterattack entirely made up for that.

“Uhh... You damn bitch!” Underling Two decided to risk everything and went on the offensive. He strengthened his body with mana, heightening his endurance, then swung his mace at full power. His desperate attack was so strong that even Tea, a tigerfolk with incredible physical strength, wouldn’t be able to withstand it. Her bones would have been crushed if the blow had hit her. And that was why...

“Grrraow!” Tea did something completely unexpected and fully abandoned her defense. But she didn’t do it in the same way as the monk had, throwing everything into a desperate attack. No, what she did was...toss her three-

section staff away.

“What?!” Underling Two couldn’t help himself, instinctively following the weapon with his eyes. When he looked back, Tea was already gone; his strike hit nothing but air. “Where did she go?!”

“Below you.”

Underling Two gasped and looked downward. Tea had slipped past the mace strike by skidding on the ground and closed the distance between her and the monk, ending up just below him.

“Grrraaaaaaw!” Tea roared, swinging her arms. Her means of attack was simple: she was using her nails to claw at her enemy. She repeatedly tore at Underling Two’s face with her nails until it was carved with countless red lines.

“Gaaaah!” the monk screamed in pain.

Since she was a tigerfolk, Tea’s nails were not to be taken lightly. They had the same property as tiger claws, making them as sharp as knives. Moreover, she had used mana to strengthen them even further. While her technique wasn’t on the level of the Toukishin Style that Caim used, nails empowered by mana were quite powerful and could even tear through bedrock.

“Aaagh?! My eyes!” Underling Two shrieked, rolling on the floor and clutching at his bloodied face. It wasn’t a fatal injury, but with how deeply wounded his eyes were, even Healing Magic wouldn’t be able to restore them.

“Hmph... Evil has been vanquished. You can go to hell and apologize to all the women you’ve hurt!” Tea declared her victory, throwing her chest out, before taking a handkerchief to wipe the blood off her hands.

As for the man who had just lost his sight, his life as a warrior ended—and he would never embrace a woman again.



Now that Lenka and Tea had finished their battles, there was only one opponent left: Nick, the leader of the Black Lions.

“Come on, A-rank adventurer! I hope you’ll put up a decent fight!” Caim said.

“You bet I will! Now, die!” Nick replied to the provocation by swinging his

great sword at Caim's head. He was clearly going for the kill, ignoring the rules of the engagement.

"Jeez, that's scary... But I guess I'm grateful you're finally getting serious." Caim grinned faintly as he dodged the slash with minimal movement. While he had accepted the duel on behalf of his lovers, he had also admired adventurers since he was a child, so he couldn't help being excited to fight someone who had attained A-rank. "Don't betray my expectations. I hope you'll at least entertain me a little!"

"Talk all you want—you'll still die!"

"Oh?" Caim noticed Nick's blade was covered in frost, and he felt a shiver even though he was several meters away.

"I'm gonna skewer you... Ice Bullet!"

"Whoa!"

"Take that!" Nick swung his great sword and a sharp icicle a meter long flew toward Caim, who smashed it by kicking it from below.

"Is that a magic sword...? No, he's covering his sword with magic!" Caim exclaimed.

Most likely, Nick was a magic swordsman—someone who combined swordsmanship with magic. While there were many adventurers using one or the other, those who could use both were rare indeed. So while his personality left much to be desired, there was no doubt that Nick's strength matched his rank as an adventurer.

"I'm not done! Ice Field!" Nick stabbed his sword in the ground—obviously not intending to hit Caim—and an intense cold surged from the blade, covering everything around it in ice.

"Huh?" The ground under Caim froze solid, encasing his shoes and the hem of his pants in ice and immobilizing him. "That's impressive... Seems like you *aren't* all talk," Caim said, praising Nick. The situation might have been dangerous, but Caim felt nothing but joy. He was genuinely glad that adventurers, the job he had admired since childhood, weren't all pretense with no real skills.

Nick clicked his tongue, unaware of what was going on in Caim's mind. "You're pretty calm. Don't you understand the situation you're in?!" He felt like Caim, who was currently immobilized and yet continued to smile, was mocking him. "Now you won't be able to dodge like you did earlier! I'm gonna tear you to shreds!" Nick raised his great sword overhead and dozens of icicles appeared around him. Then, pointing their sharp edges toward Caim, he yelled, "Get skewered! Secret Technique—Ice Shotgun!"

"S-Stop! You're going too far!" shouted the receptionist serving as the umpire, but it was too late—dozens of icicles were already flying toward Caim.

At this rate, all the icicles were going to stab Caim and leave him full of holes—that is, if he didn't do anything to stop them.

"Nice attack...but not enough against me!" Caim declared as he used Genbu to strengthen the defensive power of his body to its limit with Mana Compression. When the icicles hit him, they broke on impact, not even injuring him.

"What?! How is that possible?!" Nick yelled, shocked to see Caim unharmed.

"My turn. Kirin!" Caim thrust his fist forward, firing a spiral shock wave of mana straight into Nick's stomach.

"Gah!" Nick was blown away, rolling on the ground for dozens of meters until he hit a wall. He wasn't dead, as Caim had held back from piercing him with Kirin, but Nick's internal organs had ruptured on impact and he fell unconscious.

"I win," Caim declared, pointing at the fallen Nick. "You're lucky killing is forbidden. If I'd been serious, you'd be dead."

Combined with Tea and Lenka's victories, Caim's triumph meant the Black Lions had all been defeated.

"Um... Th-The guests are the winners!" Even though it was a bit late because she was dumbfounded by the unexpected development, Lucy finally announced the result.

The gallery was shocked at first, but soon enough, they all started to cheer and applaud.

“P-Please come this way!” Lucy urged Caim and the girls inside the guild’s reception room.

Just because they had defeated the Black Lions didn’t mean that everything was settled. Now they were waiting in the guild’s parlor, Caim and Millicia sitting on the sofa while Tea and Lenka stood behind them like proper servants.

“The guildmaster should return from her business soon, so please, wait here! I beg you!” the receptionist pleaded.

“Well, I don’t mind...” Caim said, puzzled by her behavior.

“I shall prepare tea for everyone! Ah, do you prefer sweet or salty snacks?! Or something sour, perhaps?!”

“...Something sweet.”

“Understood!” Lucy shouted as she hurried out of the reception room.

“So...why is she acting like that?” Caim cocked his head.

“I don’t know...” Tea said, doing the same.

“Most likely, it’s because we demonstrated our strength during those duels,” Lenka said, answering their question. “The Adventurers’ Guild is a place where rowdy folk who value their strength above all else congregate. If you’re strong enough, they’ll respect you—and even overlook a certain amount of mischief.”

“Ah, so that’s why those guys were acting so arrogantly,” Caim commented in realization.

“Also, don’t forget that we’re in the Garnet Empire, the nation of lions. If you can defeat an A-rank adventurer, you could receive a peerage. Of course she would change the way she treats us.”

“I see... So in short, she’s trying to butter us up.” Caim nodded to himself in understanding.

While the receptionist had chided the Black Lions, she hadn’t actually stopped them. It was natural for guild staff to do so, considering they were A-rank adventurers, but that didn’t mean Caim and his companions would see things

the same way. On top of that, if they became nobles and decided they wanted retribution for what had happened, there was a chance that the receptionist would have to take responsibility for her inaction. In order to protect herself, she had decided to do her best to make a better impression on Caim and the girls.

“Thank you for waiting! Here is your tea!” Lucy came back, still acting servile.

“Oh?” Caim looked at the large tray Lucy had brought with her. On it were a steaming teapot, teacups, and a plate piled high with some kind of black bead Caim had never seen before.

“Please take your time and enjoy yourselves! Now, if you will excuse me!” Once Lucy was done serving them, she bowed at a right angle and hastily left the room.

“Say...is that food?” Caim asked, pointing at the plate of beads. They were a glossy black and didn’t look particularly appetizing, but they gave off a faint sweet scent.

“Yes, this is chocolate,” Millicia answered.

“Choco...what?”

“Chocolate,” she repeated, taking one of the beads in her hand as she explained gently. “They are sweets made with a fruit found in the southern part of the continent. Even in the empire, it is a rare delicacy that few can procure.”

“From the south, huh?” Caim recalled reading in books that the southern part of the continent was crowded with countless countries, many of which were populated by varied races and unique flora and fauna which gave them a culture not found anywhere else.

“Well, I guess I should try one.” Caim took a bead of chocolate, inspected it curiously, then popped it into his mouth.

The next instant, his eyes went wide. The heat of his mouth melted the chocolate, spreading it over his tongue as it unleashed a flavor he had never tasted before.

“It’s so sweet! And tasty!” Caim couldn’t resist the urge to exclaim.

There was sweetness beneath the bitterness, and it tasted completely different from any confection Caim had ever tasted before. He was so shocked such a delicious thing existed in this world that he felt like he'd been struck by lightning.

"It's delicious."

"The tea is good too. You should also have some, Lenka."

"Thank you, Princess."

Tea, Millicia, and Lenka enjoyed the black tea and the sweets while Caim silently continued to toss the chocolate beads into his mouth. The room was filled with a relaxing atmosphere, the tea and the sweets soothing their bodies that were exhausted from their earlier battles.

Eventually, after around an hour, someone knocked at the door of the parlor.

"I'm coming in." The door opened and a young woman wearing a suit entered. "Sorry for the wait. I am Sharon Ildana, and I am in charge of this branch of the Adventurers' Guild."

"You're the guildmaster?" Caim looked at her, his cheeks stuffed with chocolate. "You really made us wait." He gulped. "Your adventurers caused us trouble and..."

"Swallow before we continue. It's not like we're in a hurry."

"Uh... Sorry." Caim chewed the chocolate in his mouth and washed it down with black tea. Even though he should have been making a serious expression, the chocolate and the tea were so good he couldn't help his face slackening into a smile.



“Well, I’m glad you enjoyed yourselves while you waited for me, at least. We imported these sweets from the south and they were quite expensive,” the guildmaster—Sharon—said with a gracious smile, a hand on her cheek.

Sharon looked to be in her late twenties, and she was a beautiful woman, with a straight, slender nose and soft-looking lips painted with lipstick. Her figure was impressive, and she gave off the vibe of a mature woman.

“I heard about that earlier, but you’re all so young. I thought you’d be older, with a lot of experience,” Sharon said as she sat on the sofa in front of Caim and crossed her legs. She was brimming with composure and maturity, giving her a different sort of glamour than Tea and Lenka, both of whom were also in their twenties. “And...well, I didn’t expect such an esteemed guest either. I never thought that our guild would ever welcome a member of the imperial family.”

“...So you know about me, Miss Ildana,” Millicia said.

“You can call me Sharon, Your Highness.” Sharon placed a hand on her chest and did an elegant bow. “I had the opportunity to see you while you were volunteering at the temple in the capital. However, ever since I heard you had disappeared, I thought you had fled to another country. So, what are you doing in such a remote region?”

“I did, in fact, escape to another nation temporarily. However, I decided to return to perform my duties as an imperial princess, and I have visited you today to ask about the situation in the capital. Could you please inform me of any changes that have happened since my departure?” Millicia asked earnestly. “I heard that the struggle between my brothers has intensified. Since the captain of the Knights of the Blue Wolf is your brother, you must know something.”

“I see... So that’s what you want. And you made such a long detour to this town in order to avoid the notice of those who would want to use you, correct?”

Millicia silently nodded.

Sharon traced her lips with her fingertip, looking thoughtful. “To tell you the truth, I don’t know much. Ever since my brother told me to distance myself

from the capital, we haven't been able to contact each other."

"What do you mean?" Millicia inquired.

"I sent a few adventurers to check on the situation, but unfortunately, it seems the road from here to the capital has been blocked, and nobody is allowed to pass anymore."

"A blockade?!" Millicia got up from the sofa, raising her voice in surprise. "Don't tell me... Has their struggle intensified so much that they would resort to such methods?! Has armed conflict broken out?!"

"No, the road is blocked for another reason. There was a large landslide on the mountain road, so they are forbidding anyone from passing until they can be sure everything is safe."

"But doesn't that mean we can't go to the capital?"

"Indeed, and it seems it will take a while for them to restore the road. Because of that, not only are we unable to get any information, but it has also affected trade."

"This is troubling... How are we supposed to go to the capital, then?" Millicia set her teacup on the table, her expression darkening.

Caim and the girls had chosen to make a detour and used the northern road instead of going straight to the imperial capital in order to avoid Millicia's pursuers—after all, they didn't want to get into another situation like Faure's lord kidnapping her. And yet, in the end, their cautious decision backfired on them.

"Jeez, just our luck. So we wasted our time coming here?"

"That's troubling to hear. Should we go back and take another route?"

Caim frowned, and Tea poured him another cup.

Millicia looked down, pensive, but after a while she shook her head. "No, we can't. Faure's lord might have sent people this way. If we go back, we will be playing right into their hands."

"I agree with Her Highness. The nobles who control territory on the capital's western side all support the first imperial prince. It would be dangerous for Her

Highness, as she is close to the second prince. The same goes for returning to Faure and heading east,” Sharon said. They could neither advance nor withdraw—they had been backed into a corner. “Personally, I would recommend staying in this town until the landslide has been cleared away. By then, the adventurers I have sent should be able to return and inform us of the situation in the capital.”

“I suppose we don’t have a choice... We shall follow your suggestion.” Millicia agreed to Sharon’s proposal with drooped shoulders. She wanted to head to the capital immediately and stop the conflict between her brothers, but she understood that haste didn’t always bring better results. For now, the best thing to do was stay where they were and wait for intel from the adventurers Sharon had sent out. “It seems I have made a poor decision. I’m sorry,” Millicia apologized to her companions.

“No, Princess! I was the one who suggested taking the northern road. The responsibility is mine!” Lenka protested.

“This isn’t your fault, Lenka. You gave me advice as my retainer, and I am the one who decided to follow it.”

“Princess...!”

Millicia and Lenka defended each other, each of them trying to take the blame.

“Neither of you is at fault. How were we supposed to predict a natural disaster?” Caim shrugged, then took another bead of chocolate. “I feel sorry for you, Millicia, but personally, I’m glad we can stay here and enjoy the hot springs rather than going straight to the capital. I didn’t get to relax yesterday, so next time I’m definitely going in by myself.” While he *had* greatly enjoyed what they did the previous night, he also wanted to experience a hot spring normally. “Though, I guess we can’t really stay in the bath all day long... I wonder what we should do the rest of the time?”

“Oh? How about becoming adventurers?” Sharon suggested, putting her hands together. “If you have the time, might as well register as adventurers and take on some jobs. You’ll kill time *and* earn some money—two birds with one stone.”

“Hmm... Not a bad idea.” Caim nodded.

Adventurers were brave warriors who answered to no authority and traveled uncharted lands, slew monsters, and discovered treasure using only their own strength. To Caim, who once had trouble even walking because of his curse, it had been one of his ideal lifestyles.

I guess it'd be fun to become something I always admired from the books I read when I was a child, Caim mused. He was already traveling and living as he wanted, so he didn't *need* to become an adventurer, but he also thought it would be nice to take up the same occupation as his beloved mother—Sasha Halsberg. *Well, that means I'd also have the same job as that damn old man, but who cares about a loser who was beaten by the son he had abandoned anyway.*

“By the way, a guild card can serve as identification, right? I don't have any papers, so it would be useful to at least register for that.”

“Tea agrees. I'm sure you'll quickly become S-rank, Master Caim, and it's a maid's greatest honor to have her master succeed in life!” Tea said cheerfully. No matter how he accomplished it, she would be happy as long as Caim could show his strength to the world and finally get recognition.

“What do you two think?” Caim asked Millicia and Lenka.

“I also agree.”

“If my lady says it's all right, then the same goes for me.”

With everyone's approval, Caim turned toward Sharon. “There you have it. You can register us.”

“Thank goodness. I'll have the formalities taken care of quickly.”

“What do you mean by ‘thank goodness?’”

“Oh my, did I say that?” Sharon put her hand before her mouth and looked away.

“Are you hiding something? If you don't talk, we won't register as adventurers after all.”

“You're pretty shrewd...” Sharon sighed. “I'm not really hiding anything—it's

just that I had a job planned for the Black Lions, but they aren't in any condition to move anymore, right? So I need other capable adventurers instead."

"And that's where we come in. Can new adventurers even take on a job meant for an A-rank party?"

"That won't be an issue. You've shown your strength, so I can use my authority as guildmaster to make you skip ranks. Considering you defeated the Black Lions, I should be able to at least make you B-ranks."

"Wait... Was that your plan from the start? Was the blockade a lie to keep us in town?" Caim shot a small glare at Sharon.

"Of course not!" she quickly denied, shaking her hands before her chest. "Regardless of my own problems, I'd never deceive Her Highness and her companions! Moreover, that's something you could easily check, so there's no point lying about it!"

"That's...fair. Guess I'll trust you for now." Caim sipped his tea, still a little suspicious. "Anyway, can we hear about the job you want to give us?"

"Naturally. I'll have someone fetch the documents, so please wait here for a moment." Sharon took the handbell from the table and rang it, calling for the receptionist.

Once they learned the details from Sharon, Caim and the girls left the Adventurers' Guild to head back to the inn they'd slept at the previous night. Though they hadn't gotten any new information about the situation in the imperial capital, they earned a new occupation as adventurers.

After that, Caim tried to finally enjoy the hot spring by himself—but unfortunately for him, three ravenous beasts assaulted him. This resulted in another cleaning fee, coupled with a scolding from the mistress of the inn, who threatened to banish them from the establishment if they did it again.



"Phew... It's finally over..." Sharon Ildana collapsed on the sofa once Caim and the girls left the guild's reception room. She sprawled out on it, which disordered her suit and exposed glimpses of her chest and thighs.

If the receptionist or the adventurers saw their ever so serious and poised guildmaster like this, they would surely doubt their own eyes.

“What was that monster...? It’s been a while since I’ve seen such an outstanding talent...” Sharon wiped her brow with the back of her hand. Just thinking about him filled her with fear, making her break out in a cold sweat.

Sharon had acted very composed in front of Caim and his companions, but the truth was that she had been panicking internally. She had done her best to not show it on her face and had thankfully managed to appear calm—though it had been a close call.

Sharon had the ability to appraise people. Just by watching someone, she could tell if they were trustworthy and whether or not they were lying, as well as ascertaining their strength, their potential, and how likely they were to succeed as an adventurer. That was how she’d managed to become a guildmaster—even though it was just a branch in a rural area—at the young age of twenty-six.

As for what Sharon’s eyes had told her about the young man she’d just met... Well, he was an outrageous monster. He was already far above an A-rank adventurer, and his potential was off the charts. Whether he became famous or infamous, she was certain that he would leave his name in history.

No wonder Her Highness Millicia fell for him. Just where did she find a boy who’s like a man-eating dragon?

Sharon had immediately noticed how close Millicia was to Caim—she had sat next to him, naturally touching her shoulder with his. Sharon assumed that they had already slept together. A part of her was slightly miffed that a mere rascal had stolen the chastity of the imperial princess, but if it was him—if it was Caim—Sharon could come to terms with it.

He’s not the kind of man who would be deterred because she’s royalty—the selfish type who lives by his own rules and won’t hesitate to ignore the law. Even if someone tried to blame Caim for tainting Millicia’s purity, he would just crush anyone who criticized him. Sharon was certain he had the will and the power to do so. I panicked when I heard the Black Lions were in no condition to move anymore, but I’m certain I can trust them with the job instead.

Still lying down on the sofa, Sharon extended her hand toward the table to take the documents on it. On them were the details of the job she had pushed onto...or rather, *entrusted* to Caim and his companions—a request to investigate a certain village.

This village was isolated deep in the mountains, a little ways away from Jarro. Its name was unknown, perhaps even to its occupants—that was just how rural and insular it was. And recently, news from it had stopped coming. Usually, someone from the village would visit at regular intervals to sell their special products, but this year none of them had shown up.

Sharon had sent adventurers to investigate the matter, but they had disappeared too. They'd been a C-rank party, nearly B-rank in terms of their abilities, and for them not to come back meant that the situation was extremely unusual. That was why Sharon had wanted to ask the Black Lions to investigate next, as they were Jarro's finest adventurers.

Was the village destroyed by monsters? Or did bandits take over it? Or...did something happen that would be impossible for me to predict?

"Either way, I think they should be able to deal with it," Sharon muttered listlessly as she tossed the documents away, scattering them over the floor. She would have to tidy everything up later, but at the moment, she was too tired for that.

More importantly, I need to find a way to get on good terms with that boy.

Once the road had been cleared, Caim and the girls would likely head for the capital immediately. So before that, Sharon wanted to form a connection with him—after all, knowing someone that strong was always useful. Maybe getting closer to him would be akin to stepping into a dragon's territory, but her ability to judge talent told her he was entirely worth the danger.

"It's been a while since I've done it, but...maybe I should try seducing him?"

Considering the bewitching beauties who surrounded him, Caim was likely quite a lustful man. Sharon had absolute confidence in her figure—in particular her well-defined curves. If she used that, she might be able to build a good relationship with Caim.

“I feel bad for Her Highness Millicia, but...perhaps I should actually give it a serious try?” Sharon whispered, her expression making it unclear whether she was joking or not, as she grabbed her breasts with her hands and rubbed them to check how they felt.

Extra Story: Sister Millicia's Misadventure

After the incidents in the empire, Millicia was revealed as the emperor's daughter—but just because she was an imperial princess didn't mean that she had always lived in the castle.

In fact, when she was twelve, she had been entrusted to the temple to become a sister serving under God.

"Your Highness Millicia, we shall now begin your baptism. Are you prepared?" a nun said gently to Millicia, who was kneeling on the floor of the temple inside the imperial capital. The nun was Mother Ariessa, the one in charge of this temple and the highest-ranked priestess in the empire.

"Yes, I am, Mother Ariessa," Millicia answered, without lifting her head. Normally, it would be inconceivable for her, the imperial princess, to kneel and bow to anyone else, but this place was special. It was a temple, after all—a house of God. Before God, Millicia was just an ordinary girl, and as such she had to show her utmost respect.

"Good." Ariessa paused. "Still, I never expected to welcome my friend's daughter into this temple. You truly do resemble her... When I look at you, I cannot help but recall her." She smiled—not as a priestess, but as a woman worried about Millicia's well-being.

The ruler of the Garnet Empire had several wives, and Millicia's mother had the lowest position among them, having been born into the household of a viscount. She had served as a sister in the temple with Ariessa until one day, during a ritual performed by the temple, the emperor fell in love with her at first sight and married her. Sadly, Millicia's mother was now dead, and Ariessa didn't think that she had lived a happy life as an empress. After all, Ariessa had heard many rumors that people had harassed her because they were jealous that a mere viscount's daughter had received the love of the emperor.

"As long as you stay in this temple, you shall be safe. I shall protect you in

place of your mother,” Ariessa said.

“Thank you for your consideration, Mother Ariessa,” Millicia replied, her shoulders shaking as she continued to bow. Because she had little support, her life as an imperial princess was filled with hardship. Except for a small portion of the servants in the castle, everyone looked down on Millicia and belittled her. While they never acted against her directly, the way they treated her compared to her brothers made the situation obvious enough. In the castle, she had fewer allies than the number of fingers on her hands.

Ariessa looked at Millicia with pity as she began the ceremony. “Well then, the baptism to make you a nun serving under God shall now commence.”

Millicia stayed silent.

“During the baptism, some people experience a strange vision. This can be either a lesson or a sign given by God—an oracle, if you will. Do not fear it and accept everything.”

“Yes. I am prepared,” Millicia answered. She had already heard about these strange visions that came to some priests and nuns during the baptism—some were omens of the future or glimpses of past sins. She even knew what her mother had seen: a dragon taking her while she prayed in the temple.

“Now, pray. In the name of the Holy Spirit who travels the world, may the divine protection of God be bestowed upon you.” Ariessa scooped up purified water with the leaf of a laurel tree and poured it over Millicia’s head as she prayed. This was the baptism of the Holy Spirit Church—a rite of passage in becoming a servant of God.

Millicia gasped when she felt the cold water trickle down from the back of her head to the nape of her neck, but the sensation quickly faded. Even though her eyes were closed, her vision was suddenly flooded with white.

○ ○ ○

“Where am I...?”

Before she knew it, Millicia was standing in the middle of a road. It was paved with white stones and went on indefinitely, with plains spreading out on both sides.

"I should be in the temple, so why am I here now...?"

Millicia looked down at herself and noticed she was still wearing the white gown used for the baptism. It was the kind of garb that easily showed the curves under it, but as she was still just a young girl and only just starting to become a woman, her figure was still slender with nothing to show off.

The fact that she was wearing the pure white gown meant that the baptism was still ongoing—and that she was still a nobody.

"Could this be the oracle I was told of?" Millicia looked at the paved road, bewildered. The road went on forever in front of—and behind—her, but strangely, she didn't feel like turning back. It was as if something terrible was waiting for her in that direction.

"I should move on. I have to keep going forward." An unknown impulse took over Millicia, telling her she had to proceed, so she did exactly that. She was hesitant at first, but gradually, step after step, her pace increased.

She didn't know how long she had been walking—it felt like it could have been both a minute and an hour—when something suddenly changed. Black shadows appeared around the empty road, surrounding Millicia, who shrieked at the sight. The black silhouettes were humanoid, but they did not talk and had no faces—and yet, she could tell that they were sneering at her. She could sense their feelings: mockery, desire, contempt, scorn...and malice. They were all looking down at Millicia like she was prey for them to feast on—something that Millicia clearly understood as she hugged herself in fear.

"No! Please, don't come any closer!" she yelled frantically, but her terrified appearance only pleased the silhouettes, who extended their arms toward her.

However, just as their fingers were going to touch her and she was falling into despair, another great change occurred.

"Eh?!"

A purple silhouette stood before Millicia to defend her. Tendrils extended from its body, cutting the black figures into pieces.

"Did you protect me? Who are you?"

The violet silhouette was unfamiliar to her, but for some reason she wasn't scared. Unlike the black shapes, she didn't feel any malice coming from this one.

Millicia felt drawn to the purple silhouette and stretched her hand toward it, but the instant her finger touched it, it changed form, causing her to shout in surprise. The silhouette transformed from a distinct humanoid figure into an amorphous shape like a slime, which coiled itself around Millicia's body.

"Ah! Wh-What are you doing?!" she cried, bewildered by the purple slime's action. It entangled itself around her arms, legs, torso—everywhere, as if trying to etch its existence on Millicia's pale skin as it tore the pure white gown from her small body. No, her body wasn't small anymore—it was rapidly growing.

"Eh?! Why? What's happening?!" Her limbs and hair grew longer and her chest swelled, as if her body had suddenly matured to around the age of twenty.

The slime became even more vigorous as it caressed Millicia's now-grown body. It rubbed her large breasts, stroked her backside, and coiled around her hips. It gently brushed behind her ears and at the nape of her neck, smearing her beautiful blonde hair with sticky fluid.

Millicia moaned from the stimulus and collapsed on the road, unable to stand anymore. The slime did not miss the opportunity and immediately spread her legs with its purple tendrils, exposing the sacred place she had never shown to anyone.

"Aaah... No, please, stop!" Millicia pleaded, but it only made the slime more forceful, squeezing her breasts with its tentacles while playing with their protuberances. It also rubbed between her legs—somewhere she never even touched herself—giving her a vivid and lascivious lesson in how this place could be a source of sensual pleasure.



“Aaah... S-Sto...!” Millicia was going to tell it to stop, but then she noticed—did she really want it to? Perhaps, in fact, she would prefer if it kept going.

No way... Why would I...? That’s impossible!

“Aaah!” Though her reason denied it, Millicia’s mouth naturally let out a sweet moan each time the violet slime licked her body—she was clearly taking pleasure from it.

Why...? What is happening to my body...? Millicia wriggled as the tendrils caressed her until, finally, one of them vigorously thrust into her sacred place.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” Millicia screamed from the penetrating pain that assaulted her—but it only lasted an instant before transforming into pleasure and changing her scream into a loud moan.

Millicia embraced the purple slime in her arms, entirely accepting it and the ecstasy she was feeling.

“Millicia... Sister Millicia! Come back to your senses!”

“Huh...?”

Suddenly, Millicia found herself back in the temple. Before her stood Ariessa, looking at her anxiously. Millicia’s body was back to its original age, and the slime’s tendrils had disappeared.

“Eh? This is... Huh?” Millicia let out, confused.

“Calm down, Sister Millicia,” Ariessa said, then chanted. *“Mind Essence.”* Green magic wrapped itself around Millicia, permeating her skin and soothing her.

“Thank you, Mother Ariessa. What happened to me?” Millicia asked.

“Your gaze suddenly became vacant during the baptism, and you would not answer no matter how much I called you. What did you see?”

“I...do not remember,” Millicia replied honestly. She wasn’t deceiving Ariessa—her memories were vague and she truly could not recall what her vision had contained. *“I feel like I remembered it just after waking up, but the more I try to*

recall it now, the more my memories of the vision fade...just like a dream.”

“I see...” Ariessa nodded. “The memory must have been locked away because you do not need it right now. It was a gift from the Holy Spirit brought on by the baptism, so no matter what the content of your vision was, it will help you.”

“Yes...”

“Do you at least remember if it was a pleasant dream? Or was it terrifying?” Ariessa asked.

Millicia didn’t answer immediately, instead taking time to think about it. While she couldn’t remember anything, she did have the impression it hadn’t been bad, at least. “I think it was a good dream. I feel like I experienced something wonderful,” she said honestly, laying a hand on her chest. Beneath her palm, she could feel the throbbing of her still-racing heart. Her body was warm, and a sweet *something* permeated the core of her being. It was as though she had eaten chocolate that contained alcohol—while she felt hot and restless, it wasn’t a bad feeling.

Millicia had just awakened to the pleasures of the flesh, but she was still far too young to understand the change happening inside of her yet.

“I see... I am confident that your future is bright.” Ariessa smiled, unaware of Millicia’s awakening as a woman. She was concerned about Millicia’s future because of her status as an imperial princess, so she was truly relieved that the ceremony had gone well. “The baptism is now concluded. From this moment forward, you are a nun in service to God. Be pious and diligent, Sister Millicia.”

“Yes, I shall do my best.” Millicia bowed as she received Ariessa’s blessing.

But while she had become a woman of the cloth, the seed of sensual pleasure had already been planted inside her—something that no one, not even Millicia herself, had yet realized.

As predicted in the vision, Millicia would have a life-changing encounter several years later. If Ariessa, who cared for her like a daughter, knew about the things Millicia would experience, she would undoubtedly faint from shock.

Extra Story: Sister Arnette's Misadventure

"Let's go! Don't fall behind!" The girl raised her fist and marched forward resolutely.

"Milady, please have mercyyyyy!" the boy cried, his eyes full of tears as he followed behind her.

The girl had her red hair in a ponytail and wore clothing that allowed for easy movement. Even at the young age of thirteen, her steady gait would show anyone with the right knowledge that she was a practitioner of martial arts.

The girl's name was Arnette Halsberg, daughter of House Halsberg, a county in the northern part of the Jade Kingdom, and she was the disciple and successor of Kevin Halsberg, the Master Pugilist. And yet, Arnette, who had received plenty of love from her father, had left the Halsberg domain and was currently striding along the main road with confidence.

"Milady... Let's stop here. The master must be worried, so we should return to the mansion..." argued the boy. He was two or three years older than Arnette, and his name was Luzton. Being a commoner, he did not have a family name. He was an apprentice butler serving House Halsberg, and circumstances had led to him following Arnette on her journey.

"No. I won't go back until I pay that guy back for what he did to Father! I'm definitely gonna beat him!"

"Buuuut..."

"If you want to go back, then do it alone! I never asked for you to tag along!"

"Uh... I shouldn't have followed you. I should have pretended I didn't see anything..." Luzton cursed his thoughtlessness as he watched Arnette, who had no intention of stopping.

Ten days earlier, someone had defeated Kevin Halsberg—Luzton's master and Arnette's father—and had left him severely injured. Thankfully, Kevin had survived, but the doctor had said that he would never practice martial arts

again, so in a way, the Jade Kingdom's strongest warrior, the Master Pugilist himself, was as good as dead. Arnette had decided to take revenge for her father and run away from her home, starting off on a journey to track down her enemy.

"Uh... Why did things have to end up like this...? I want to go home..." Luzton complained, half weeping. But why had he followed Arnette in her quest for vengeance, in that case? Well, he'd just happened to spot Arnette as she slipped out of the mansion, and as a servant of House Halsberg, he'd naturally tried to stop her. Unfortunately, even though she was younger than he was, Arnette was still the Master Pugilist's disciple. Since she was too strong for him to restrain, he decided to persuade her with words instead. A day passed, then another, and before he knew it, they had left the Halsberg domain.

I can't stop Lady Arnette alone—I need to call for help, Luzton finally realized. However, at the same time, he also realized another truth: he was too far from the Halsberg mansion for that now. And if he went back alone, leaving Arnette on her own, he would definitely be punished for it. In the worst-case scenario, he might be suspected of having incited Arnette to leave in order to kidnap her.

I can't go back alone. I need to convince milady to return to the mansion with me to prove my innocence. And so, yet again, Luzton tried to persuade Arnette in vain. Every day, they strayed farther from the Halsberg territory, and now it was far too late for him to try returning alone.

"Milady... I think it's impossible to find the man who injured the master..."

"And why would that be the case? We won't know unless we try!"

"Well, first of all...do you even know his name?"

The identity of the purple-haired man who had defeated Kevin was unknown. As long as they didn't know who he was or why he had targeted Kevin, there was no way they would be able to find him.

Arnette finally stopped. For an instant, Luzton thought he had managed to convince her and smiled in relief, but Arnette immediately started to walk again.

"Milady?!"

“I do know his name.”

“Huh?”

“Of *course* I know it! He’s my twin brother—Caim Halsberg!” Arnette said bitterly without turning back.

“Um... You mean Master Caim? It couldn’t possibly be him, right?” Luzton commented, then nodded to himself. “Yup, *definitely* impossible.” After all, Caim Halsberg—Arnette’s twin brother—was a cursed child born with purple marks on his body. His health was so bad that he could barely move, and the other servants had always said they wouldn’t be surprised if he dropped dead at any moment. “There’s no way Master Caim could defeat Count Halsberg. Also, wasn’t the man said to have been in his late teens, with purple hair? That’s not how Master Caim looks at all!”

“But I’m certain it’s him...”

“Milady...?” While she didn’t turn his way, Luzton could see her shoulders tremble. It was as if she was holding back tears.

“I just know it. Even if his appearance has changed, I just *know* that that man is my twin brother.” Perhaps it was something that only twins could understand. It was quite ironic, though, that the moment they’d completely severed ties was also the moment she’d felt the strongest blood connection to Caim that she’d ever experienced in her life. “I can’t forgive him! Not only did he make Mother sick and kill her, but he also laid his hand on Father! Moreover, he humiliated me!”

“Did he do something to you?!”

Arnette gasped, and for the first time she turned toward Luzton, glaring at him with her face beet red. “If you press further, I’ll punch you in the face.”

“I’m sorry!” Luzton readily apologized. If he hadn’t been carrying luggage in his arms, he might have prostrated himself on the ground. Considering he was older than Arnette, some might have thought this behavior pathetic—but not only was he a servant, he was far weaker than her. Even if she was still young and inexperienced, Arnette was a practitioner of the Toukishin Style. She was a murder weapon in human form. “Still, Lady Arnette, the outside world is a scary

place. We may be attacked by bandits or monsters.”

“As long as we’re on the main road, we shouldn’t meet any monsters! In fact, we haven’t seen any yet, have we? And even if a monster did show up, I’d just defeat it, so you don’t need to worry!”

“But...”

“Stop being so persistent about this! I’m the daughter of the Master Pugilist! If a monster ever attacks us, I’ll just destroy it with my fis—”

“Graaaaaaah!” Suddenly, a roar echoed from the forest next to the road.

“Eek?!” Arnette and Luzton reflexively hugged each other, their faces painted with fear.

A large horned bear emerged from among the trees.

“It’s a m-m-m-monster!” Luzton screamed.

“I-It’s not my fault! What’s a monster doing *here*?!” Arnette shouted.

Generally, monsters lived in forests or mountains and rarely came near human settlements and roads—but “rarely” didn’t mean “never.” If they lacked food, if other monsters took over their territory, or if weather or natural disasters forced them to move, then monsters would start appearing near where people lived. That was exactly why adventurers existed and could make a living from their elimination.

As for the monster that just appeared before Arnette and Luzton, it had once inhabited the Halsberg domain but had fled after Caim’s massacre. Far from its habitat and starving, the bear monster had caught the scent of prey and leaped out of the forest.

“L-L-Lady Arnette! Please do somethiiiiing!” Luzton pleaded, but Arnette was frozen in fear as the horned bear roared and rushed their way.

I’m scared... Arnette had learned the Toukishin Style from her father, but it was only training—she had never experienced true battle. Naturally, she had never faced anything like the intense bloodlust the horned bear was directing toward her either. *I’m scared, but...* However, Arnette remembered *that* man—the matured Caim Halsberg. He had been way more frightening and

strong...and yet, unlike the monster now dashing her way, he hadn't even shown a drop of bloodlust.

That wasn't mercy. He was just looking down on me—he didn't think I was worth killing! A different emotion than fear started to swell inside Arnette's chest—rage and shame at being belittled by the brother she had always despised. *I won't forgive him! I'm definitely gonna make him pay! And for that...I can't be defeated here!*

"W-Waaaaaaah!" Arnette yelled as she thrust her small fist forward and fired a lump of mana toward the horned bear's head.

"Graaah?!" the monster yelped as its horn exploded, and its large body collapsed. Without the horn, the beast was back to being a mere bear.

"Huh...? I-Is it over?" Luzton asked, falling on his butt.

As for Arnette, she stared at her trembling fist, breathing roughly. "I...I won?"

The bear wasn't moving. Looking more closely, it seemed that a part of the destroyed horn had penetrated its skull and stabbed its brain.

What Arnette had just used was Kirin, a technique from the Basic Stance of the Toukishin Style. Thanks to her diligent training, she had reflexively used it to kill the monster.

"You're amazing, Lady Arnette!" Luzton praised his mistress, finally realizing that they were safe now. "I always thought you were just a stubborn, selfish, and cocky brat, but you're actually really strong! I've totally changed my tune!"

"Y-Yeah, I'm strong! Wait... A cocky brat?"

"Ah..." Luzton looked away, realizing he had just revealed his true thoughts.

Arnette frowned, her face red with anger. "I-Is that what you thought of me?!"

"I'm so sorry! My real feelings just slipped out of my mouth!"

"What, do you think that excuses what you said... Ah?!" Arnette raised her fist in rage, but then suddenly stopped moving and grimaced.

"Lady Arnette? Is something wrong?"

She didn't reply.

"Wait... Don't tell me you were injured?! Quick, you need to show me!"

"S-Stay away!" Arnette hurriedly backed away from Luzton. "I-I'm just a little, well...you know! Go fetch some water from the nearby stream! And take your time!"

"You want me to fetch water? Please, think about this. We just met a monster, I shouldn't go off alone..."

"Just go! That's an order!" Arnette yelled.

"This is so unfair..." Luzton reluctantly left to search for water.

Once she was certain that the apprentice butler was gone, Arnette's knees turned inward and she put her hands over her shorts.

"Ugh... I did it again..." she said, wincing.

Luzton hadn't noticed, but Arnette was currently surrounded by the faint smell of ammonia. Apparently, her encounter with Caim after his awakening as the Poison King and the fear he had instilled in her had given her the bad habit of wetting herself when scared.

"I need to change my pants and underwear... Aaah, why must I go through this..." Arnette was on the verge of tears as she bared her lower half and changed in the middle of the road. "Everything is his fault! I'm absolutely gonna make him pay!" Arnette furiously shouted toward the sky, swearing once more to take revenge on her twin brother.

Afterword

Long time no see, everyone. This is LeonarD, the eternal chuuni author.

Thanks to you, dear readers, I managed to publish the second volume of this series—and for that, you have my heartfelt gratitude. I also want to thank Won-sensei for the illustrations, as well as everyone else who was involved in the publication of this book. All of you are the reason this series, which started as a web novel, was able to get another volume. I am overjoyed to show you the heroines—who are even more daring than they were in the web version—through Won-sensei’s wonderful art.

Now, let’s talk about the series.

The first volume was intended to be a prologue, with the protagonist going on a journey, meeting the heroines, and deepening his relationship with them (in various ways).

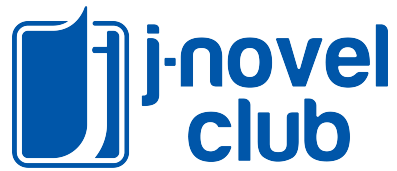
The second volume introduces a new twist, as they all go to the empire and start their next adventure. The relationship between the protagonist and the three heroines deepens further, and their flirting intensifies. New characters also appear, and some kind of conspiracy is brewing behind the scenes.

Just what lies ahead on this journey?

If I get the opportunity to release a third book, I burn with the ambition to write at least one lewd scene featuring a character other than the three heroines.

Until then, I shall pray to all the gods, Buddhas, and devils for us to meet again.

LeonarD



Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!

[Newsletter](#)

And you can read the latest chapters (like Vol. 3 of this series!) by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:

[J-Novel Club Membership](#)

Copyright

The Poison King: Now that I've Gained Ultimate Power, the Bewitching Beauties in My Harem Can't Get Enough of Me Volume 2

by LeonarD

Translated by Boris Lecourt Edited by Sarah Tilson

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © LeonarD

Illustrations by Won

Original Japanese edition published in 2023 by Hobby Japan This English edition is published by arrangement with Hobby Japan, Tokyo English translation © 2024 J-Novel Club LLC

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC

j-novel.club

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Ebook edition 1.0: October 2024