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Rifujin na Magonote

Illustration by
Asanagi

ORC EROTICA

CONJECTURE CHRONICLES

PARENTAL ADVISORY
WARNING
EXPLICIT CONTENT





ORCEROLICA

CONJECTURE CHRONICLES

5

Ludo & Luka

“Please, take
me on as your
apprentice!”

Ludo & Luka
Twins traveling to avenge their mother, the
ogress Rularula. The brother, Ludo, asks
Bash to take him on as his apprentice.

“Well, what
about ogres,
then?”



Characters

ORC EROICA

“Treating Lord
Bash the same as
any other orc... It is
something no
succubus should
ever do!”



Venus
A succubus whose life was saved by Bash
on the battlefield. She respects Bash for
saving her life and invites him to visit the
succubus country.

Venus



"If you can beat me,
you can have me.
Wouldn't that be
agreeable to you
as well?"



ORC EROICA

C O N T E N T S

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ORC ERQICA

CONJECTURE CHRONICLES



Rifujin na Magonote

Illustration by
Asanagi


New York

Copyright

Orc Eroica 5

Rifujin na Magonote

Translation by Evie Lund

Cover art by Asanagi

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忖度 (*sontaku*) “conjecture, surmise”; to make an assumption or guess about the feelings of another, and to then demonstrate care or consideration for the other party based on this.

(Source: Wikipedia Japan)

The Twins' Revenge Saga

EROICA

Book Five

ORC

Succubus Country

1

HEAVY RAIN

Heavy rain fell.

Lightning streaked across the sky, and large droplets pounded the earth as if summoned by the cacophony.

The wind was strong enough to topple even a mighty warrior.

For Bash, however, this was a mere post-workout shower.

“The rain just keeps comin’, eh, Boss?”

“Indeed.”

Several days had passed since Bash had left Lycant, the beastkin capital.

The rain began falling during the journey, and although both were sure it would stop soon, it just kept growing stronger and eventually swelled into a storm.

The torrential downpour showed no signs of letting up. It had been shaking the forest for days now.

“Hmm, still can’t see much, eh, Boss?”

Zell had flown up above the treetops several times to scout ahead, but visibility was poor due to the rain, and it was difficult to see even three hundred feet in any direction.

However, Zell was a seasoned fairy and was able to figure out the direction of their destination using the handy acronym PAS... In other words, by making use of the ideas of *probably*, *approximately*, and *somehow*.

It never failed.

“Yep, the demon country is this way! The weather sucks, but let’s put our best foot forward, eh, Boss?”

“Yeah!”

Heavy rain had caused rivers to overflow, causing parts of the forest to flood, and roads that should have been passable were now submerged in muddy water.

Bash, already up to his waist in water, headed in the direction Zell was indicating.

The demons.

The leaders of the Coalition of Seven and the strongest of them all, this race was the one the Alliance of Four feared the most.

Therefore, in order to make peace, the Alliance of Four had decided to push the Demon Kingdom to the edge of the continent.

In the northwest of the continent, a barren land surrounded by steep mountains and cliffs... The least valuable land of all. This land was given to the demons, essentially imprisoning them here.

Therefore, in order to enter the demon land, they had to cross a great valley.

Algardia Valley.

The valley, so named, was extremely deep and wide, with a river flowing at the bottom.

The current of the river was so strong that even a warrior of Bash's caliber would have difficulty crossing it without using a bridge.

There were a few bridges that spanned the valley, and each bridge had a checkpoint.

The checkpoints were fortified and operated under the control of the Alliance of Four.

That's how much the demon race was feared.

“Ah! Isn't that the border, Boss?”

At length, something became faintly visible ahead.

It was a stone building, the type that had become a familiar sight during the war.

A human stronghold.

“They’re strict,” said Bash.

“It gets rowdy in these parts. The borders are well guarded. Or at least, I assume so, Boss.”

This was the border to the demon country.

The checkpoint, which had been turned into a fortress, was incredibly imposing.

It was daubed all over with warding paint, and magical symbols were drawn here and there.

Human architecture, dwarf warding paint, and elf magic circles.

This was beastkin territory, but each country had chipped in, to keep close tabs on the demons. But of course Bash and Zell had no particular awareness of any of that.

The checkpoint entrance was always locked with a sturdy iron gate, one of the ones that the human race was so good at crafting.

The gate would only open when someone with a valid pass appeared.

Someone like our Hero, Bash.

“Careless of them. They’ve left the door open, Boss.”

“Hmm.”

But the door to the fort stood open. It didn’t even matter if they had a pass or not.

The thick double doors swayed and creaked in the wind.

“...Something’s happened here.”

Bash withdrew the sword from his scabbard.

Many years of battle had honed his sword senses.

“Well, I don’t smell any blood, Boss...?”

“No sign of anyone about.”

“Hmm. I know, Boss! I’ll do some scouting!”

“Would you?”

Zell zoomed into the stone fortress.

Bash followed, without any particular sense of caution.

“...What’s this?”

An eerie sight awaited them.

A fallen chair, a desk strewn with papers. Shattered shelves. Cards all over the floor.

A fight took place here, Bash determined.

They were caught off guard, ambushed. The scene had that look to it. Bash knew.

But something was amiss.

No dead bodies, no bloodstains. If there’d been a violent conflict here, there would be *some* sign of it.

Who would clean up corpses and bloodstains and leave the furniture and cards scattered about?

“...Hmm.”

There was no sign of anyone around who might have created this scene.

Now, you might think Bash is a rather oblivious individual, but those who know him know that he never lets his guard down, no matter the situation.

Bash stepped slowly through the odd scene, reaching the end of a passage. The entrance to the Demon Kingdom... In other words, the exit of the fort.

At the end of the passageway, which was wide enough for two carriages to pass by each other, stood a set of doors as large as the ones at the entrance, quaking in the storm. Bash looked behind the trembling doors and saw pounding rain soaking the stone bridge that spanned the valley.

The stone bridge, too, had been reduced to rubble.

There was no doubt that there had been a fierce battle here.

“Boss...”

Zell returned just then.

Zell swooped around Bash, explaining the situation with wild gestures.

“The inside of the fort is completely abandoned. It’s impossible to tell what actually happened. But there’s zero doubt that someone went on a rampage here, and then made the bodies disappear.”

“I see...”

Bash paused, then shrugged.

He’d be lying if he said he wasn’t at least a little curious about what had happened here.

But it probably had nothing to do with them.

“Still, it troubles me, Boss. If there’s no one at the checkpoint, you might be suspected of illegal entry.”

“...What should I do?”

“Hmm...”

Zell looked around and noticed the scattered documents.

“Aha! Humans often write orders and such down on paper, right? So why don’t we write down something that’ll make it look like you passed the border check?”

“I see... Sure, let’s give that a try.”

“Okay, I’ll write something, Boss. Let’s see... *The Orc...Hero...Bash...Is Hereby... Permitted...Entry.*”

Writing isn’t really something orcs or fairies do very often.

In fact, most orcs and fairies can’t write at all.

But Zell could both read *and* write.

Even among fairies who can read, few can write. And those who can often produce writing that’s barely legible to other races. So in their fairy homeland, Zell had been given the moniker “Zell of Letters.”

“This should do for us, Boss... Though I’m still a little worried about all this.”

“If we meet a human soldier, we can just explain.”

“You’re right, Boss!”

If this had been wartime, the two would have sensed the danger evident from the condition of the fort and returned to their home country to report the situation.

But it was not wartime. And the two of them had a mission.

Taking all that into consideration, they couldn’t put a priority on going to report the abandoned status of the fort.

“Shall we go, then?”

“You said it, Boss!”

Bash returned his sword to his back holster and stepped out into the storm.

The rain, hastened by the howling gale, pelted Bash all over. But it was still just rain, and compared to the water spells he’d been hit with during the war, this was a mere sprinkling.

But it was still strong enough to obscure visibility.

“Hmm!”

By the time Bash noticed it, it was already too late.

Was it caused by rain, or was it created when someone attacked the fort?

There was a large crack running right through the stone bridge.

The moment Bash put his foot on it, the crack made a loud crumbling sound and rapidly expanded...

Then the bridge collapsed.

“B-Boss!!!”

Bash heard Zell’s screams as he tumbled, helpless, down into the river.



Bash was a veteran warrior.

He had fought against many enemies and earned many victories But he was not invincible, nor was he immortal.

This is bad...

The river, swollen due to the storm, was a muddy maelstrom, sending Bash's body spinning and slamming him against the rocks over and over again.

Was he a poor swimmer, you ask?

No, not so.

Orcs are forest dwellers, but during the war there were many battles that were waged on water.

Rare indeed is the warrior who can't swim.

However, being buffeted by violent waters, with his feet unable to find purchase, and without the strength to swim against the raging current...

Can't...breathe...

Orcs can hold their breath several times longer than humans can.

Bash was an exemplary orc, and he could hold his breath for a very, very long time.

Whether in deep water or faced with thick smoke, being able to hold your breath is another important quality for any orc warrior.

Yet there are limits.

"Glurble!"

Eventually, Bash managed to surface.

His body was at the limits of its endurance, and his eyes were practically bugging out of their sockets as he gulped down fresh air.

Bash, who had been trying to kick against the riverbed whenever he got the chance and propel himself upward, now found himself sinking beneath the weight of his sword as the current swept him away.

It did not seem that he would manage to break the surface again.

Or so he thought, and yet...

“?”

Suddenly, Bash’s body stopped rotating.

In his fading consciousness, Bash saw something.

There was something moving in the water.

He strained his eyes but could not make out its shape. Had it become one with the water? Or was it water itself? Regardless, its very presence seemed to gently envelop Bash.

His ragged breathing grew easier. He stopped spinning. And he was no longer being slammed against riverbed or rock.

A spirit...?

But a spirit of river, cloud, or storm?

Bash didn’t know exactly what, but it seemed to be some type of water spirit.

He had never seen a real spirit before, but he’d heard tales of their existence.

They exist all over the world, are free and unrestrained, and sometimes they help people out. Other times, however, the spirits seek to bring people harm.

Either way, I have to show gratitude.

Still half-dazed, Bash thanked the spirit as the water whisked him away.

The spirit undulated... Perhaps Bash’s words had resonated.

For some reason, Bash felt like it was trying to tell him something.

Spirits were a manifestation of the capriciousness of nature. They did not seek to help people of their own goodwill.

They made an exception for those they were fond of, those who had formed bonds with them from childhood.

Bash had never encountered one before.

Even if a spirit does not feel warmly toward someone, they may make a request of them from time to time.

Great calamity will befall those who turn their nose up at the spirits or fail to honor those requests.

Such legends had permeated the land of the orcs as well.

So Bash tried to heed the desires of the water spirit.

What is it you require...?

But Bash had no way of comprehending its response.

The only people who can understand the language of spirits are those who have had repeated interactions with them since childhood.

If this was a wind spirit, Zell might have been able to communicate.

Fairies and wind spirits are kin, Zell might say.

Guh...

Bash began to lose consciousness.

The spirit's undulations seemed to indicate some sort of desire, but Bash could not decode it.

Was this reality? Or a death hallucination?

Before he could think on it any further, Bash's mind lapsed into a deep, deep darkness.

2

A PROPOSAL

“Groooooaar!”

Hearing a sudden roar, Bash jumped awake.

He grabbed hold of...“something” nearby, pulled himself upright, got on one knee, and withdrew the sword from his back scabbard.

“Gah... Geck... Guh!”

A cough seized him, and a large amount of water spilled from his lips.

Bash wiped his mouth and checked his surroundings.

Someone had awoken Bash. Someone roaring.

He appeared to be on the edge of some sort of cliff.

It was hard to tell with the overflowing river, but there had originally been a cliff here, and Bash had gotten caught in one of the trees growing on the edge of said cliff.

Before him was a vast forest, and he could see three individuals ahead.

Two were people, their backs to him.

And the third, the thing they were facing, was a monster.

A magical beast, about sixteen feet tall, with the head of a hawk, the body of a lion, and a huge pair of wings. A griffin.

No doubt it was the griffin’s roar that had awoken Bash.

The water spirit had been trying to communicate something to Bash.

Bash still did not know what.

Or maybe it was all just a dream Bash had while on the verge of death.

Maybe the spirit didn’t have anything to say. Maybe it just helped Bash out on

a whim.

But Bash thought he saw a deeper connection.

That what had happened in the water had some meaning to it.

You could call it intuition.

And that intuition had saved Bash from trouble time and time again.

Bash took a moment to observe the current scene more closely.

Two people with their backs turned to him. One on their knees, bleeding. The other person holding the shoulder of the first, supporting them.

Bash had seen this kind of scene several times.

The two had fought the griffin and lost.

Now they were about to receive their final blows.

Was the spirit saying that I should help these two...?

Bash came to that conclusion immediately.

Why else would the spirit go to the trouble of transporting him to this exact spot?

“Graaaagh!!!” came Bash’s war cry.

The sound immediately caught the griffin’s full attention.

It lifted its head, which had been pitched low and focused on the two other people, and fixed its eyes on Bash, the source of the war cry.

It observed Bash for but a second.

Perhaps it saw Bash as the biggest threat here, or maybe it saw him as tantalizing prey. Either way, it flapped its huge wings and rose into the air, charging straight toward Bash.

It was probably a young griffin.

If it were an older, more timid griffin, it would have probably run away the second it saw Bash.

Not that it mattered. With Bash in the mood for battle, its chances were no

different either way.

Bash held his sword high and brought it down hard.

“...Groar...”

The griffin was cut in two with one blow.

It fell into the murky waters flowing behind Bash, letting out a pathetic death cry hardly befitting a ferocious beast.

“...”

After Bash confirmed that the griffin was not going to rise again from the muddy swirl of water, he turned around.

“...Huh?”

“Wh-what...?”

There were three people there, looking dumbfounded.

A boy on his knees, wounded all over.

He had deep-red skin and a horn growing from his forehead.

These were telltale characteristics of an ogre, but he was too small and slender in form to be an ogre. Perhaps he had some human blood in him.

A girl crouched beside the boy.

She was an ogre, too, and a young one, at that.

A horn rose from her forehead, but it was still a small horn only, and her body was even smaller than the boy's.

If Bash was to guess her age, he'd say about ten years old.

And the third person...

A woman, who had been hidden from Bash's sight behind the griffin.

“What a surprise. An orc born from a muddy river.”

But the voice didn't sound surprised in the slightest.

The voice, however, was as beautiful and clear as a ringing bell, and it made Bash's heart flutter.

...What dulcet tones...

Upon closer inspection, the woman who was standing there looked to be a human woman, and she was clutching a sword.

...And that body!

To say she was easy on the eyes would be an understatement.

She cut a slender silhouette, but the curves of her chest and buttocks were the best Bash had ever seen.

Not too small, not too big. The lines of her body seemed to represent the fullest of nature's bounty, and her proportions made Bash want to fling himself into her arms on the spot.

She was attractive, yes, but that wasn't all.

To say nothing of her strength!

From her well-honed muscles, it was evident she was a talented warrior indeed.

Beautiful muscles. She wasn't *too* muscular, but it was clear her body had been trained to perfection. Her muscles glistened like gold.

You might compare her to the human prince Nazar or the Hero Leto.

Was it possible that her form was even better, even more toned than Bash's own?

Any child born to her would surely be a force to be reckoned with.

Orcs deeply desired female knights because they knew strong women birthed strong children. It was orcish instinct to be highly attracted to strong women.

The only thing left to check out was her face.

However, the woman before Bash kept her face hidden.

A white cloth was wrapped around her head, covering everything but her eyes. Though her body was a perfect ten, it was quite hard to make out her facial features.

Still, it didn't really matter all that much to Bash.

“You’re beautiful...”

The words left Bash’s mouth before he even realized what he was saying.

Or perhaps all Bash’s practice with wooing women led him to spill compliments like dripping honey.

The fruits of rigorous training, you might say.

“Beautiful...?”

The woman looked around, then pointed at herself as if to say, *You can’t mean...me?*

Bash nodded sheepishly.

What other woman was present? There *was* the ogre girl, but she was just a kid.

“Ha-ha-ha, you haven’t even seen my face, orc. How do you know I’m beautiful?”

The woman laughed, but without much mirth.

As if she’d made a joke she knew wasn’t that funny.

“I can tell, even without seeing your face.”

“Oh, what a smooth talker this orc is.”

The woman let out a chuckle this time, and then put her hand on the cloth around her face.

“...Even with *this* ugly face beneath my cloth?”

“Hmm...”

What emerged from beneath the mask was a face riddled with gruesome scars.

Half of her face had been burned, and she also seemed to have suffered a large knife wound.

The only part of the face that was undamaged was the area around the left eye.

In fact, when the ogre children saw that face, they cowered in fright.

That's how badly scarred and wounded she was.

"It matters not. Scars are the pride of a warrior."

Maybe Bash was only able to say that because of how long he'd been on his quest.

If he'd just been starting out, he might have balked at such a ghastly visage.

After all, a comely face is an important factor when looking for a wife.

But Bash had already seen plenty of beautiful women on his quest.

Starting with Judith the human, Thunder Sonia the elf, Primera the dwarf, Silviana the beastkin...

All of them had beautiful skin and no scars on their faces.

But were *all* the women like them? Not at all.

For example, many of the elves Bash noticed in the Shiwanashi Forest had large scars on their faces.

Scars did not detract from beauty, however. Bash would have had no problem proposing to this woman.

It was more than possible to be beautiful and scarred.

"I see... Even after seeing my face, you still think I'm beautiful... That warms me."

The woman spoke indifferently, but the set of her mouth was more relaxed now.

"In any case, what is it that orcs do when they come across a beautiful woman? You plan to beat and assault me, yes? Hmph, that's some gutsy behavior from someone who just emerged from a swirling mud puddle."

"...No. Nonconsensual sex is prohibited in the name of the Orc King."

"Huh. Then what's with the war cry?"

Bash glanced at the ogress.

Seeing this, the woman nodded as if satisfied.

"Ah, I see... Even orcs help people out sometimes. So what you just said was

only an attempt at flattery, meant to get me to lower my guard, huh...? Ha-ha, I never thought the day would come when I'd be sweet-talked by an orc... Man, this really pisses me off. I'm gonna have to kill you now."

"When I said you were beautiful, I meant it."

"...I don't get you. You show up out of nowhere and start spouting a bunch of nonsense. What is it that you want anyway?"



The woman tilted her head and studied Bash.

Well, Bash wasn't going to argue with her.

Instead, he answered honestly.

"I want to make you my wife."

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

The woman laughed out loud.

Not a calm laugh. It was slightly hysterical, like a dam bursting.

"Ah, my bad. Your sudden proposal made me laugh, but I didn't mean to mock you. When all this happened to my face, I gave up on the thought of ever being someone's wife. Actually, no one's even looked my way since I got scarred. So this is a first, I'd say. The first time a man's ever approached me with sincerity in his eyes since my face became like this."

"..."

"And yet I actually considered it for a second. That's what made me laugh. I was laughing at myself, you see."

That was the best initial response Bash had gotten yet.

Viewed from a certain light, you could even interpret that as an enthusiastic yes.

"So then..."

"But, orc, you can't save people and propose at the same time. Especially not when you're proposing to the adversary of the ones you're saving..."

The woman looked away as she spoke.

Looking toward the two ogres.

The ogres were watching Bash, anxious expressions on their faces.

"..."

"Still, you *are* an orc. I guess you could just as easily save them and then go ahead and have me for dessert, if you wished."

“As I said earlier, mating without consent is outlawed in the name of the Orc King.”

“Yeah, you do look like a well-bred orc who faithfully follows rules to the letter. I can’t really tell what would qualify as ‘handsome’ for an orc, but your face isn’t so bad, either. Or could it just be your sweet-talking swayed me a little? All that aside, orc, you may be earnest, but it’s never good to be a slave to rules. My philosophy has always been, ‘If you can beat me, you can have me.’ Wouldn’t that be agreeable to you as well?”

That was a difficult question.

If Zell were here, he would have consulted with the fairy right away.

Zell would have been able to tell Bash the right answer.

“So come on, then.”

The woman turned her palms upright and beckoned to Bash.

“...Why do you challenge me?”

“Because you killed my griffin. That was my mount, and now I have to walk back home. In all honesty, I *should* kill you where you stand. But I’m a complex woman. I can’t bring myself to slice up a man who just called me beautiful. I’d rather you attack me first. At least then, killing you would feel more like self-defense.”

“...So that’s how it is.”

“Yep, that’s how it is. Don’t worry too much about the griffin, though. I wasn’t too attached to it. We were only acquainted for a short time, so this won’t be a grudge match or anything.”

Bash was very confused.

He didn’t understand the meaning of the woman’s words or the turn the conversation was taking.

He could barely comprehend the conversation as is. How could he explain what it was he wanted?

“So what are you going to do, orc? If it’s all the same to you, I think I might

just head out. Those two are a pain, so I was going to kill them. But if you really plan to get in my way, I'd rather just not bother. You called me beautiful, so I don't wanna kill ya."

Finally, the woman gave Bash a choice.

"...Ngh."

Bash's mind was a whirl of confusion.

He had two options.

He could continue his proposal to the woman and take her as a wife...

...Or he could forget about proposing and save the boy and girl, fulfilling the desire of the water spirit... Erm, probably.

I don't know what to do!

If only someone else was here... Houston the Pig Slayer, perhaps... He would have warned Bash not to be swayed.

There had to be a middle ground. A way to accept the woman's nice proposal of "If you can beat me, you can have me" *and* save the kids, too. If only someone had been there to back Bash up and help him think straight.

But Bash was alone, and the woman's way with words had Bash at a complete loss.

Two choices.

Normally, Bash would have chosen the former.

The lady herself had said she wasn't particularly opposed to the idea.

He didn't have Zell's support, but if he could just say the right things here, then he might actually be able to snag a wife.

He'd had many opportunities so far, but surely this was one of the best of them all.

After all, the woman had reacted positively to his proposal.

And the entire point of Bash's quest was to secure a wife.

What did the lives of two ogre urchins matter, if Bash could achieve his

heart's greatest desire?

Still, a water spirit had saved Bash's life mere minutes ago.

The water spirit was trying to convey some kind of wish to Bash.

It wanted Bash to do something. It might have only been a hunch, but Bash thought that hunch was right.

Otherwise, there would have been no reason for the water spirit to help Bash.

Bash had certainly never been blessed by spirits in his life, to the extent that one might actually transport him here for the purpose of finding him a wife.

So then the spirit's desire must have been that Bash would save the two whelps.

If Bash ignored the wishes of the spirits, great misfortune would befall him...

In that case...

"I will help these two."

"In that case, I'll leave this place. I'm still busy, and I have things to do."

"Right."

"Then it's farewell. You two, return to your hometown and let this be a lesson to you."

With that said, the woman ran off through the downpour.

She disappeared into the deep forest in seconds, seemingly unhindered by the sucking mud.

She was fast. No doubt she was a worthy warrior, just as Bash had thought.

"Ah... Wait..."

The boy reached his hand out in the direction the woman had gone but then dropped it limply down.

The fist, resting in a mud puddle, was clenched with frustration.

The boy slowly lifted his head and looked at Bash.

"Um, thank you for your help..."

Bash nodded.

Perhaps the boy was annoyed at Bash for intervening.

Because even though the boy was hanging his head, he was trembling.

The girl crouching next to him was also looking at Bash with a slightly disgusted look on her face.

Like the orcs, most ogres were warriors.

Sometimes, like rogue orcs, they go afield, seeking battle... Or seeking a noble death.

Perhaps Bash had interfered with some sort of plan.

However, the boy soon rose to his feet.

“The swordsmanship you displayed earlier was most impressive! Please, take me on as your apprentice!”

Those sudden words were drowned out by the sound of the rain and were barely audible.

But Bash knew he had not misheard.

3

THE FIRST APPRENTICE

The torrential downpour raged on.

Bash and the ogre twins decided to go and sit in a nearby cave for the time being. After all, there was no point in standing around chatting in a deluge like this.

The three of them now sat around a bonfire.

“Please allow me to thank you again. You saved our lives earlier. I am Ludo, the son of Rularula, the great warrior of the ogre tribe. This is my younger sister, Luca.”

Ludo, the son of Rularula, the great warrior of the ogre tribe.

Luca, the daughter of Rularula, the great warrior of the ogre tribe.

That was how the twin brother and sister introduced themselves.

“I’m Bash.”

The moment he said his name, the younger sister, who’d been giving Bash the stink eye, suddenly jerked her head.

“Bash? The one who became known as the Orc Hero Bash, after the war?”

“Yeah.”

“News of your greatness has reached even the ogres! It is an honor to meet you!”

Surprised by her change in attitude, Ludo blinked.

“Wait, this man is famous?”

“Oh, Brother, you’re so oblivious to things. The Orc Hero Bash is a great Hero on par with our mother’s fellows! If it weren’t for Lord Bash, I don’t know how many battles we would have been on the losing end of!”

Luca's eyes sparkled as she gazed at Bash.

It was like a child looking at a hero from a fairy tale.

From Bash's point of view, it was a familiar gaze.

"Are you really the *real* Bash?"

"Yeah."

"Swear it on the Orc King's name?"

"I swear on the name of the Orc King Nemesis."

"He's the real deal!"

Swearing on the Orc King's name was no small thing.

Still, Bash *was* talking to a child.

Orcs didn't mind telling white lies to whelps.

But Bash was Bash, and he had no reason to lie. He was a mighty warrior, one who swore fealty to the Orc King Nemesis.

"And you are the son and daughter of Rularula...?"

"We are!"

"And how is she?"

The great fighter Rularula.

She was known by that name and many others, the most famous among them being "Frozen Eye."

"Frozen Eye Rularula."

A famous female warrior.

An ogress with three eyes.

Three-eyed ogres weren't all that rare, but her third eye had glowed with a striking blue light since birth.

She could summon an icy spear from that eye and skewer her enemies.

But being a great warrior, that wasn't her only strength.

Bash had seen her on the battlefield many times, running amok with a metal club clutched in each fist.

With amazing strength and agility typical of ogres, she had turned several human soldiers into bloody piles of flesh with a single swing. Bash remembered the sight well.

During the war, she was said to be one of the candidates for the next chieftain.

Even if she hadn't become a tribe chieftain, she was definitely the sort of person who would take a prominent position in the ogre tribe.

Incidentally, she was quite beautiful to behold—Bash's type, you might say.

If she hadn't been an old war buddy, or if she hadn't been married, Bash might have pursued her.

However, the ogres were ranked above the orcs in the Alliance.

For an ogre woman, mothering the child of someone of a lower rank was considered the greatest humiliation.

Bash might have been an Orc Hero, but he wasn't up to her standards.

Now, of course, Bash had no intention of laying a hand on the young sister.

Maybe in ten years... No doubt she'd grow up to be a beautiful ogress, maybe five years from now at the earliest. At the moment, however, she held no appeal for Bash.

Orcs did not consider any women too young or too old to bear children to be true women.

"No, she died."

Ludo was the one who answered.

"...I see. Was she sick?"

"No, she died in battle."

"A warrior of her caliber...?"

Bash groaned.

He remembered Rularula as an exceptionally strong warrior. The memories were vivid, even now.

“It is what it is. The war claimed many lives.”

But Bash knew some warriors who were even stronger.

For example, the great Elf Mage Thunder Sonia, or the Hero Leto. They would have been able to best Rularula on the battlefield.

Still, by the end of the war, the overwhelming disparity in numbers alone...

A thousand, or ten thousand mediocre warriors would still have been able to take out a warrior like Rularula.

“Our mother was killed after the war, actually.”

“...In a duel?”

Ogres are a warlike race similar to orcs.

Moreover, unlike orcs, who drink heavily and have a weakness for women, ogres are stoic and lust for power.

Bash had heard somewhere that when they had free time to drink and mate, they would spend it training instead, and to test the results of their training, they would fight duels, with at least one ogre dying almost every day.

“No. She was killed in a despicable sneak attack.”

“...What?! How could that be?”

“I don’t know the exact details of the fight... Although I doubt my mother, with all her strength, would have lost a fair fight. And they just left her corpse lying there. It was foul play, no doubt. That’s why we’re on our journey... We’re going to avenge our mother.”

The whole world was currently striving for peace.

In this new age, getting revenge wasn’t looked favorably upon.

War was a thing of the past. Whatever grudges remained, the leaders of each country had collectively decided to treat it all as water under the bridge.

But not everyone was satisfied with this. Like the rogue orcs, who refused to

follow the decrees of the Orc King, and had gone afield.

Some traveled across the continent to avenge their parents who died during the war.

Not that Bash knew anything about that.

“You mean...? That woman from before...?”

“...Yeah.”

Bash thought about the woman.

A female swordswoman with a perfect body and a scarred face.

Bash hadn’t even asked her name... But he had no doubt that she was famous.

Bash didn’t need to fight her to know that. One could tell just by looking at her.

“Are you going to try again?”

“Yeah.”

“...You can’t win.”

The boy before Bash was a weakling.

No doubt he had trained, but he didn’t have the kind of strength needed to defeat that swordswoman.

If she’d wanted to, she could have beheaded him in an instant.

“I... I know that!”

Ludo bit his lower lip agonizingly, then looked Bash in the eye and spoke in a resolute voice.

“But I’ll keep trying. And next time... I *will* win.”

“I see.”

Bash didn’t really feel like dissuading the boy.

Sometimes warriors have to challenge an opponent they can’t feasibly beat.

If you lose, you die. That’s all there is to it.

“ ... ”

Ludo then pulled out his sword and placed it in front of Bash.

Bash didn't twitch.

If the boy was signaling an attack, Bash would have fought back. But there was no sign of this.

“So let me ask you again! I know it's rude to ask such a thing of an Orc Hero such as yourself! But I ask again! Please, take me on as your apprentice!”

If this had been a bar in orc country, there would have been quite the commotion.

For starters, everyone present would have kicked their stools back and immediately closed in on the boy.

Who do you think you're talking to?!

Impudence!

Get in line! I'm first to be the almighty Bash's apprentice!

No, me, I'm first!

...And then things would likely devolve into a brawl.

After the dust settled, all that would remain would be a tavern in rubble, a heap of dead orcs, and only Bash left standing.

“Hmm...”

Up until yesterday, Bash would have turned the boy down without a second thought.

It is the duty of veterans to train young warriors, but Bash was on a quest, with a specific goal.

He didn't have time to help train this boy.

“Bro, don't be so rude. You can't ask Lord Bash to do that...”

“Luca, you were watching earlier! If I learn swordsmanship skills from him, I'll finally be able to defeat her!”

But there was something tugging on Bash's mind when it came to these twins.

...The water spirit's request...

The water spirit was trying to tell Bash something.

Bash's best guess was that it wanted him to aid these twins.

Well, he had aided them.

But why would the spirit ask Bash? An orc, one who had no connection to these whelps whatsoever?

Spirits don't appear before people with whom they have no affinity.

For the spirit to have gone to these lengths... Surely Bash was meant to do something more.

What did the spirit want Bash to do for these twins?

If Zell was here, the fairy would surely be able to explain the spirit's intentions...

"..."

Spirits are difficult and capricious beings.

Once angered, they become so ferocious that even fairies, their close friends, would tremble.

Bash had heard many tales.

It was said that a dwarf town that had angered a fire spirit was destroyed by a volcanic eruption.

It was said that a human town that had angered a water spirit was washed away by a terrible storm.

It was said that a lizardman town that had angered an earth spirit was once swallowed up by a fissure in the earth.

It was said that a fairy who had offended a wind spirit was whisked away by a sudden tornado and tossed about in the air all night until penance had been performed.

Spirits were not to be angered.

That was the common understanding held by everyone who lived on this

continent.

What if Bash left, thinking, *Well, I saved their lives. Surely that's enough?*

If that wasn't quite what the spirit wanted, then it might get angry.

But wait... No... Could that be the reason?

Suddenly, Bash thought of Frozen Eye Rularula.

Come to think of it, she was loved by the spirits.

She was an ogress with little magical power, but she could wield ice magic with ease. Proof of her affinity with spirits.

Perhaps the water spirit wanted to help the twins take revenge on their mother.

But Bash had never heard of spirits going in for vigilante justice. Then perhaps the water spirit was bonded somehow to one of these twins.

In such a case, perhaps that water spirit wanted to see the twins succeed in their goals.

Based on the scant information he had, Bash made his decision.

"Fine. But only until you have your rematch with that woman. I have my own quest to be getting on with."

Bash didn't know how much help he could give.

But, considering the future, he knew he ought to comply with the spirit's desire.

"Oh, thank you!"

Ludo bowed low.

If this was orc country, the other orcs would have broken into a chorus of cheers.

They'd be frustrated not to have been the ones chosen, but the great Bash taking an apprentice... That was something to celebrate.

Maybe they'd even have tossed the young whelp up into the air.

"Incidentally, Lord Bash...what *is* your quest?"

“I’m looking for something.”

“What?”

“I cannot say.”

“Oh, I see. All right.”

Ludo didn’t pursue it further. Perhaps because he wasn’t interested.

This was good, as far as Bash was concerned.

He was a little bit tired of having to explain his quest all the time.

“Anyway, I appreciate your help. Even if it’s only for a short time, I look forward to learning from you.”

“Right. I don’t know if you’ll ever be able to beat her, but I’ll do what I can to train you up a bit.”

“Yes! Thank you!”

Thus, Ludo became Bash’s apprentice.

His first one ever.

When the young orcs of Bash’s homeland talked of their hopes and dreams, this very situation was the kind of thing that would make them blush and squirm with desire and embarrassment.

That’s how valuable the position was.

Ludo was overjoyed. Luca gave him an unreadable look.

A look that no one else noticed.



The rain would not let up.

In the midst of a ferocious storm, Bash and Ludo faced off against one another at the entrance to the cave.

The rain was punishing. But this much rain often fell on the battlefield.

Bash didn’t care.

Ludo was struggling to keep his footing, though the gale threatened to blow

him away.

Ludo was armed with swords.

He wielded two in each hand. No doubt he had learned from Frozen Eye Rularula.

His stance was not bad at all.

“Come, then!”

Bash yelled over the rain, and Ludo nodded.

“Graaagh!”

Ludo roared and swung a powerful blow.

Bash caught it with his greatsword.

...Hmm!

Bash’s eyes widened. The weight of the swords. Their sharpness.

The child of Frozen Eye Rularula. The one who sought to get revenge for her death.

Even though it was a sneak attack, to have been able to kill Rularula, the assailant must have been quite something.

From Bash’s point of view, the swordswoman from earlier seemed quite skilled.

Ludo had sworn to defeat her “next time.” Or words to that effect anyway.

With that being what it was, and despite all appearances to the contrary, Bash had been prepared to receive quite a heavy blow. He’d even girded his loins and braced.

Yet...

“Oh, you are amazing indeed, Master! You parried my blow!”

But Bash had hardly *parried*.

“...”

The blow had been so light that Bash, taken by surprise, had almost fallen

forward and lost his balance.

Springing lightly on his feet, Ludo prepared for another go.

“I’ll just keep on coming, then!”

Hearing those words, Bash braced himself again.

Ludo seemed a little more limber now.

Perhaps he was about to unleash a barrage of real attacks.

Yes, Rularula’s arm strength was formidable, but it was her speed that set her apart.

The continuous attacks she launched from those two metal swords had overwhelmed even Dandelion, the great elven swordsman who went by the nickname of Instant Bloody Reflex.

Therefore, Bash guessed that Ludo would also be the type to compete with speed rather than with physical strength.

There are many warriors who excel when it comes to speed.

But Bash had never been far behind those warriors.

Bash was often considered a warrior of great strength, but he was no slouch in the speed department.

It takes more than just superior strength to be dubbed a Hero.

Those who fought against the Orc Hero would say, when asked of his swordplay skills: “His swordplay? Gah, I tremble just to think of it. At any rate, it sure is something. Oh yes, indeed. Now, you know I can fire three spells at you in the time it takes you to swing your sword once, right? I don’t mean to brag, but I *am* pretty fast. As far as I know, there’s only three folks out there who can shoot spells at this speed. Now, take Bash. He can swing his sword three times in the time it takes me to shoot three spells. That’s how fast he is. Of course, Nazar would have been faster. But Bash’s sword also has more heft. Even one blow of his could shatter any magical barrier, and you’ll get the full force of the blow, just like being clubbed on the head. And I’m including *my* magical barrier in this, too. Not to mention he could even shatter the magical barrier of the great Elf Mage Thunder Sonia...”

This could go on for a while, so let's stop there. But anyway, that's how people spoke about Bash's swordplay skills. Basically rhapsodizing about them.

I could have already killed him three times over...

The thought crossed Bash's mind as he easily dodged Ludo's clumsy swings.

Bash wasn't in the habit of criticizing others.

Since everyone was beneath him, what was the point of ranking them?

But sometimes he did size up an enemy, judging their strengths and weaknesses, gauging how easily he could defeat them.

Based on Bash's experience with evaluating foes, if he was to rate Ludo here...

His strength and speed are both below average. And he's weak, too...

Bash looked around, confused.

The cave was ahead. A girl stood at the entrance to the cave.

Ludo's younger sister, Luca, was it?

She'd been watching Ludo with a troubled look on her face, but when she caught Bash's eye, her expression changed to one of sadness, and she looked almost apologetic.

Surely, she knew.

Even if Ludo trained hard from now on, there was no way he would be able to defeat that woman in the future.

...

To train him, in this short period of time, to be able to defeat the one who had killed Frozen Eye Rularula... Even if it *had* been a sneak attack...

The sheer impossibility of it made Bash's head swim.

He'd never been this flummoxed, not even when he'd been bashed in the head by the human knight known as Ashes the Giant Killer.

What am I to do?

Thirty minutes later.

Bash looked down at Ludo with a conflicted expression as the boy, lying on his back, gasped for breath.

He'd asked Bash to take him on as an apprentice, but Bash had no idea how to teach someone this weak.

Orcs do not train, except when they are young.

They have an innate fighting instinct, and even without being taught anything, they naturally grow up to be warriors.

If they don't, they just die, and so any weaklings are naturally weeded out...

But all orcs have a desire for self-improvement.

Bash had never taught anyone how to use a sword.

Veterans had a duty to train the juniors, but they were never asked to take on apprentices.

Any young person would jump at the chance to be an apprentice of Bash's, but none could ever voice such a request. The very idea was ludicrous.

Still, back in orc country, Bash had been asked for fights many times.

Especially by the King's sons.

They approached Bash with stars in their eyes and said, "Lord Bash! Might we have the honor of a fight with you?" and when Bash agreed, they would yelp, "Yay!"

Then they would proceed to be pummeled by Bash. But then again, they'd been expecting this. After the fight, they'd ask Bash, "Lord Bash, what did you think of my skills?" all agog with anticipation.

As the winner, Bash wouldn't dole out false compliments, but he would offer pointers.

"Your footwork is too meek. If you're no coward, then show it, and come at me, even if you risk losing balance."

The king's sons would laugh with glee and respond with something like, "But Lord Bash, if your sword slices my legs from under me, I'll lose not only the legs but my entire lower body. I won't be able to go to the breeding grounds..." Still,

though, they would take his advice to heart.

This was the way of education in orc country.

If Ludo's skills were a little sharper, Bash could have offered pointers.

Too much advancing. Not enough advancing.

Take more care to observe your opponent's movements more closely before you swing.

Maybe the boy would have some quirks Bash could iron out. Or perhaps his style was too textbook, too easy to read.

Issues like that can be straightened out by fighting practice.

But in Ludo's case...

Well, the boy sucked at everything.

In battle, it was not uncommon for Bash to slay four or five enemies with one swing of his sword.

Some fools even found themselves killed by the effect of falling bodies crushing them.

Ludo had a lot in common with those types of fools.

Come to think of it...all the King's sons were high-class warriors.

Most were still young. But they had survived the fierce battles near the end of the war.

Hmm...

Bash racked his brains.

What could he possibly teach Ludo, now slumped before him?

He had never encountered such a weakling of an ogre. What could be done with him?

What happened to other young orcs, ogres, warriors on the battlefield?

Those who let their exhaustion show would die without exception.

On the battlefield, those who were unable to move died first.

Being unable to move or flee made you a sitting duck.

At the very least, Ludo's tendency to slump over had to be corrected.

"On your feet."

"Agh... Gah... I can't... Can't stand... Guh!"

Bash kicked Ludo up into the air.

Those claiming they could no longer stand on the battlefield often miraculously found themselves able to do so after Bash did this.



At least it was always so with orcs.

And apparently the same was true of ogres, since Ludo now stood, eyes bulging in surprise.

“Run.”

“Hahhh... Gah... Run? But where? It’s going to be getting dark soon, and... Guh!”

Bash kicked Ludo again.

Those claiming they could no longer run on the battlefield often miraculously found themselves able to do so after Bash did this.

Looking back, this was common to all races, not just to orcs.

You could kick them or slash them with your sword, it didn’t matter which, but when attacked, all would run for their lives.

Ludo landed, dropping his sword, on his hands and knees and dripping mud as he looked up at Bash.

His facial expression seemed to ask *Why?* So Bash spoke his mind.

“Are you going to look up at your mother’s killer with that same weak look on your face?”

When Bash said that, Ludo bit his lip as he slowly stood up and then started running.

Like he was fleeing from Bash through the downpour.

From the look on his face, the composure he’d had before starting the training had completely disappeared.

Bash pursued him with full murderous intent, as if he was hell-bent on killing the kid when he caught up to him.

But also slowly, so that he wouldn’t catch up to him too soon.

This was a technique used for hunting fleet-footed prey. It was better to tire them out first.

“ ... ”

Bash knew that people often performed their greatest feats of strength when they were on the verge of death.

It was the same for him. As it had been for all those he had defeated.

And Bash had been strengthened by those desperate battles.

Exerting one's power to the absolute limit always pushes a warrior to a higher level.

"Hah... Agh... Guh... Hah..."

Ludo ran with all his might.

So fast, in fact, that his earlier show of slumping in the rain seemed odd.

Through the rain, slipping and tumbling over and over, he kept getting up and running as fast as he could.

Was it fear of Bash? Or pure determination to get his revenge?

Perhaps Ludo himself did not know.

Ludo ran himself into exhaustion. Until even Bash's kicks could no longer motivate him.



The rain was relentless.

But Bash and the twins set off the next day.

It was Ludo who had suggested heading out.

If they remained, the enemy, who still ought to have been close by, might get away.

The younger sister, Luca, had a slightly dubious look on her face, but she said nothing.

Bash had wanted to stay in the cave and train Ludo until he'd managed to make something of the boy. However, he also had a strong desire to end his participation in this little revenge arc as soon as possible and get a move on to the demon country.

Time was always in limited supply.

So they continued to train, even as they traveled.

Ludo swung his sword at Bash and sometimes attempted to dodge Bash's attacks. But after a certain point, he gave up and chose to flee instead.

It was messy, uncoordinated. You could hardly call this training.

Ludo himself seemed displeased with how things were going, but he kept up with his practice anyway.

Bash took note of how Ludo's speed in regaining his feet was increasing and how he was able to create more distance between them when fleeing. The boy was making steady progress.

Luca always simply watched the two of them.

Not speaking. Just staring.

A hint of sadness in her eyes.

4

SUCCUBUS COUNTRY

About two days later.

The rain remained relentless.

Despite occasional signs of slowing, it continued to pour down heavily through most of the day.

Bash and the two whelps were making their way through the rain, step by step.

However, it was unclear whether they were actually moving in the desired direction.

Luca was in charge of navigating.

As a shamaness, she could use magic to pinpoint the direction of the target of their revenge.

But she wasn't able to pin down any particulars, it seemed. And so it felt very much like they were going in circles.

Ludo's training did not seem to be going very well, either.

Still, that made sense. If it was possible to become a strong warrior in just two days' training, no one would ever die in battle.

Ludo was giving it his all.

Every day, he would be set upon by Bash and forced to run like a scared rabbit. It wasn't really what you might call training.

For Ludo, every day of this was a reminder of how weak he was.

No doubt, it was humiliating.

But he never complained.

So Bash stuck to it as well and continued to train Ludo with patience.

He allowed the boy to attack him. Kicked him in the air. Forced him to his feet. Made him flee. Then kicked him again.

But perhaps you could call it training. Because now Ludo took longer to slump in the mud. He spent more time on his feet, fighting and fleeing.

Did it mean he was growing stronger as a warrior? Uh, no.

But it's still good.

No one can become a strong warrior that fast. Even someone of Bash's caliber takes a year at least to become a full-fledged warrior. For an average soldier to become a world-famous warrior, it would take several years of fierce battles.

Ogres and orcs might both start with the letter *O*, but ogres were actually more suited to combat than orcs were.

Orcs are unrivaled in their ability to adapt and propagate, but ogres have them beat in basically every other category.

In terms of simple strength, endurance, agility, battle sense, and general smarts, ogres far exceed orcs, on average.

So, even though there were many fewer ogres than orcs, they were ranked highly in the Coalition of Seven.

And so Bash expected that this training would pay off eventually.

Bash wasn't sure what to make of Ludo and Luca, but the siblings seemed very taken with Bash.

Even during meals, the two wanted to hear Bash's stories of the battlefield.

Sheltering from the rain, Bash would tell them tales of the fierce warriors he'd encountered on battlefields gone by, and they would beg to hear more, eyes sparkling.

But when he spoke of Frozen Eye Rularula, the two seemed a little despondent and upset.

Come to think of it, Bash hadn't had much experience with children of any race.

He'd seen whelps here and there on his travels, but he'd never directly interacted with any.

For Bash, children, being not of breeding age, were of no interest to him.

But now that he was actually interacting with youngsters for the first time... Bash discovered that he actually sort of liked them.

Perhaps it was a sort of protective instinct. A part of him was stirred, quite different from the usual reproductive desire he experienced.

Then the cyclical days of training and traveling came to an end.

The rain suddenly ceased.

"...?"

Bash looked dubiously up at the sky, palms held upright, as the rain fizzled out.

The sky was covered with thick clouds and was black as pitch.

Squinting, he saw that the rain was still falling nearby.

However, for some reason, no raindrops fell around Bash and his young friends.

Ludo and Luca were also looking around dubiously.

By squinting, it was clear to see driving sheets of rain against the ground on the path they had just come by.

Beyond that, floods of water. But where Bash and company stood, it was quite dry.

"...A barrier, of some sort?"

Luca muttered, and they all realized at the same moment that they'd stumbled through a barrier someone had cast.

A barrier guarding from rain and wind.

And quite a large-scale one, too.

Like something that might have been cast during the war, over an entire city...

"Eh-heh-heh..."

Suddenly, a voice.

When Bash turned around, a mist had gathered around him.

Its faint peach hue was something no one with experience of the battlefield could ever forget.

“This is bad...”

Bash quickly covered his nose and mouth and held his breath.

This fog. That sweet, sickly smell.

Whenever orcs caught a whiff of this scent on the battlefield, their hearts would leap, knowing that reinforcements had arrived.

But at the same time, all knew that they had to evacuate the area with all haste.

Because any man who inhaled that fog would be rendered completely incapacitated.

This is the seductive pink smoke of a succubus!

The secret weapon of the succubi, which laid waste to many a battlefield and even to the end of the war—no foolproof way of resisting its effects was ever discovered.

It was a devastating form of magic that dissolved a man’s sense of reason and forced his lower body to do the caster’s bidding.

“Tee-hee...”

Deep in the smoke stood a woman.

Light pink hair in bunches. She was short, with a youthful face and body.

But with a certain voluptuousness that proved she was a grown woman.

She wore a black leather ensemble that just barely concealed her delicate bits, and her skin was milky white, with a slight sheen of sweat, giving her a lustrous appeal that would make any man drool.

The owner of the body licked her fingers slowly, a devilish expression on her face.

She was a succubus, all right.

She had no tail and appeared to be missing a wing, but she was unmistakably a succubus.

“Naughty, naughty... What are you all doing out in this terrible weather...?”

The fingers she had been licking now drifted south along her abdomen.

Parting her thighs wide, she delicately traced the area between her legs, beckoning to Bash and the others with her free hand.

At the same time, the eyes of the succubus glowed red.

“Didn’t you know? Silly boys who stumble into the domain of the succubi will be slooowly devoured?”

Bash’s vision swam.

By the time he realized that the succubus’s charms were working on him, it was already too late.

His eyes were glued to the succubus’s supple features, his feet propelling him unsteadily toward her.

“Ooh, a big, strong orc! Come here, big boy. I’ll show you ecstasy unlike anything you’ve ever known. Yes, look deep into my eyes... Hee-hee... Such a manly man... And so handsome... Oh yeah, you’re just my type...”

Bash’s vision distorted, the succubus’s red eyes blurring.

Half of his brain was screaming that he was in mortal danger.

Don’t. Don’t touch her. If you reach out to her, it will be your end.



A virgin orc who has relations with a succubus will become a wizard without fail, even if he mates with others after her.

The Orc Hero would become...a wizard.

If that happened, all his pride as an orc would be dashed.

Bash could not allow that to happen. He could not!

He needed to fight... Fight with all his might.

But when the succubus's red eyes glowed, all the warning signals inside Bash went quiet.

So what if he became a wizard? Would it not be ecstasy to indulge himself with that body of hers?

Her skin was white as milk and translucent, her breasts small but perky, and with every movement of her hands, the soothing, sloshing sound of water rose.

That sound seeped deep into Bash's ears, eroding his will, making his body grow pliant and floppy.

Bash Jr. was anything but floppy, however. It was hard as stone, and it seemed to take the lead, drawing Bash forward.

His hands reached out of their own accord...

...toward the succubus.

"Huh?"

But the next moment, Bash's body was freed from its spell.

His vision unblurred. Before him stood a succubus, nothing more, looking up at Bash with wide eyes and a blank expression.

"Ah, could it be that...?"

The succubus slammed her thighs shut.

Standing up straight, she composed herself.

Then she looked at Bash somberly.

"Could it be that you are the Orc Hero Bash?"

“...Yeah, that’s me.”

The moment he said that, the succubus stumbled back in shock.

Then she went behind a tree and grabbed a bundle of cloth.

Carefully folded clothes.

She dressed quickly. With a practiced manner.

Before he even knew what had happened, the parts Bash had longed to gaze upon, touch, and possess were covered up with a baggy military uniform.

Her hair, no longer in bunches, was braided tightly, and she wore thick glasses on her face, making her look somewhat dorky.

Then the succubus placed her hand against her brow in salute.

“M-my name is Venus, and you once assisted me on the battlefield!”

Then she knelt down on the spot and bowed low.

“I apologize for all that! It is such an honor to properly meet you, Orc Hero Bash!”

“Ah... All right...”

Bash nodded.

It was hard to get a handle on the situation, but at least for now, it seemed the danger had passed.

“I would not blame you for being angry! How unseemly for a proud succubus such as myself to attempt to bewitch the mighty Bash, the benefactor, the Hero of all succubi! Please, forgive my transgression!”

“I’m not angry... Anyway, you stopped partway through, so thanks for that.”

“Such words of generosity! Thank you, sire!”

While Bash was disappointed to be deprived of the view of Venus’s curves, he was also quite relieved.

If things had escalated any further, Bash would have been unable to resist her charms and would have tossed inhibition to the wind in the worst possible way.

The inevitable result would have been wizardhood.

He might even have ended up a sex slave to a succubus.

A former Orc Hero turned succubus sex slave, with a wizard brand on his forehead. As a proud orc, Bash knew his very soul would have shriveled and died.

And the orc race would not have taken the debasement of one of their own heroes sitting down.

There would have been war between the orcs and the succubi.

Orcs ought never to wage war against the succubi.

That was a war they could never win.

“So, Lord Bash... What business do you have in succubus country? If you’re here for a visit, we would be honored to welcome you...”

“It’s a little too complex to explain...”

Bash turned and saw Ludo, who was being held back by his sister.

“Wh-what just happened?”

Apparently, he too had been ensnared.

But now that the charm had been lifted, he looked completely dumbfounded.

“I see! There are complicated circumstances, then!”

Venus stroked her chin.

“Then the fairy must have been telling the truth...”

“A fairy?”

“Yes, the other day, a fairy by the name of Zell appeared. It said that Lord Bash had been washed away by the river and ought to have washed up around here. For half a day it screeched about how, if we were holding you somewhere, we’d all live to regret it.”

“...”

“There’s no way we proud succubi would do something like that to our benefactor, Lord Bash. What an insult. That was our reaction. And so we captured the fairy.”

Bash could picture the scene in vivid detail.

“Indeed, I slipped off the bridge, fell into the river, and got separated from Zell.”

“Oh good. Then could you please come and collect it? It was screaming all night, and the guard on duty is on the verge of a nervous breakdown.”

“Hmm...”

Bash pondered it.

Succubus country.

A place occupied by, well, succubi.

Every succubus was a sight to behold. Sometimes acting devilish, sometimes acting deceptively pure, sometimes acting sweet. Even orcs fantasize about making it with succubi. So what if they can't reproduce? Still worth it.

But succubi, ranking highly in the Coalition of Seven, rarely consider orcs as romantic partners.

As food, though? Well, that was different.

Without exception, they hunted men for food.

Bash didn't have any particularly negative feelings for the succubi.

He couldn't condemn them for their very nature.

Sure, they couldn't have children. Nor could they be made into concubines. But for a one-night roll in the hay, it could be a win-win situation.

But all that would only apply *after* Bash had lost his virginity.

Right now, it was out of the question.

But, as we've just seen, Bash was not immune to the succubus charm.

Bash's worst possible fear had almost become a reality, and all because of the whim of one succubus.

A dangerous situation indeed.

Despite all the tantalizing possibilities, Bash absolutely could not go there.

“The whole nation will welcome you with open arms! Oh, everyone will be so happy...”

“No, if you could just bring my friend here...”

“What?! No, please! We proud succubi could never turn away our Hero, our savior, Lord Bash, at the border of our land! If we did so, the Queen would see that we lived to regret it!”

“But...”

Bash was an Orc Hero.

But he was afraid to enter the land of the succubi because of the risk of losing his virginity to a succubus.

Distressed, he turned his gaze to Ludo and Luca.

“I have other companions with me, and we are in something of a hurry.”

“Huh? Ah...”

Ludo looked confused.

Luca, meanwhile, shook her head hard.

Having no doubt witnessed the mesmerization that had just taken place, surely the danger was obvious to her.

“Ah, that delicious-looking young boy, he... Ahem! Forgive me! But who are these young ones?”

“The lad is my apprentice.”

“Ooh! An apprentice! How lucky you are to be receiving Lord Bash’s teachings! I, for one, would love a tussle in the sheets with... Ahem!”

Perhaps, in her scanty clothes, Venus had caught a cold, for she was coughing and clearing her throat a lot. Composing herself, she turned back to Bash.

“Hmm, either way, your little friends do look wary... But there is no cause for concern! Lord Bash is the benefactor of the succubus race! He is respected! No succubus would dare lay a hand on either Lord Bash or his apprentices. Even if one or two lose their heads over Lord Bash’s virility, I will personally... no, we will make sure no one lays a finger on you. The succubi whose lives were saved

by the almighty Lord Bash in the Rina Desert will do anything to be of service! Even if it means laying down our very lives!”

Venus’s words were convincing, and her determination was palpable.

“So please! I beg you! A short visit will do! But at least please greet the Queen! Oh, please! For our pride and our honor, please!”

She’d laid it on so thickly, Bash found it impossible to refuse.

“Very well... But we will not stay long. We’re on a quest of our own.”

“Of course! Come, come, this way!”

And so Bash and company entered succubus country.



The capital city of succubus country was deserted.

Usually, the whole city was coated with the dense pink fog that stole reason from men of all races, but now the city was empty.

Barely any signs of life. Hardly any people passing on the streets.

Alongside demons and ogres, succubi are considered high-ranking races among the Coalition.

In addition to the characteristics that give them a big advantage over the males of all the races in the Alliance of Four, they’re also an outstanding race in their own right, both physically and magically.

That was what the succubi were like.

The succubi Bash knew always wore bewitching smiles on their immaculately made-up faces and always acted with cool confidence...

But the few passersby he saw seemed to have none of that spark.

Instead, their cheeks looked sunken, and they lacked vibrancy.

“It seems rather gloomy here.”

“We lost... We’re cut off from our main source of sustenance... We’re starving. Just barely scraping by. Isn’t it the same in orc land?”

“We orcs have food, so we’re doing a little better.”

They're starving...

Immediately after hearing those words, Bash suddenly felt eyes on him and turned his head.

He saw several succubi loitering in an alley.

They stared at Bash with bloodshot eyes. They did not attack, but drool dripped from the corners of their mouths.

All were peerless beauties, typical succubi.

Their bodies were enough to make Bash gulp.

If a human woman wanted curves like those, it would take quite a lot of effort.

But upon closer inspection, he could see that there was a gauntness to their limbs, their ribs protruded, and their cheeks were hollow.

They clearly hadn't *eaten* in quite some time.

They wore no lipstick... Perhaps not needed except on the battlefield... And it was clear their lips were badly chapped.

"Oh, that's Kyuka over there. She's always..."

"Venus... Who's this succulent specimen with you?"

Just as Venus was talking, one of the succubi started approaching Bash and company, licking her lips.

Stopping in front of Bash, she thrust out her hips and put an index finger to her lips in an enticing pose, studying him.

And the part she was studying was Bash's crotch.

It was almost as if she was afraid it might disappear if she took her eyes off it. As if it was something she was determined not to lose sight of.

Bash began to wonder if he should obscure her sight of it.

It's not that Bash was feeling bashful, but it didn't seem prudent to leave one's vitals exposed while an enemy was sizing them up.

Her longing gaze was *intense*.

“Ah... How virile you seem...”

“The boy looks sweet, too, but no doubt the orc’s would be best... Yes, *his* would be thick, rich, and plentiful I’m sure...”

The other succubi surrounded Bash and company with vulgar, lascivious, devilish grins...

But despite approaching and staring, they did not attempt to reach out.

Bash wasn’t aware, but this was because of the succubus rule that stated “*Do not touch prey that has been charmed by others, except by permission.*”

“Tee-hee... Hey, look... The little girl is desperately trying to protect her brother...”

“How cute. As a special treat, I’ll let you watch as I make your brother feel better than he’s ever felt in his life...”

“Kyah-ha-ha! Now that’s in poor taste!”

“Oh, *pffft!* That’s *your* thing, isn’t it? Seeing women of other races gnash their teeth in despair while you... Hee-hee!”

The succubi circled around Bash and company, saying dreadful things all the while.

Ludo turned bright red and looked away, while Luca stood in front of him protectively, arms outstretched.

“From the looks of you all, you’re fools who stumbled across the border, right? Well, good. The guards toss us a feast every now and then. Let’s split them up evenly. Venus, we’re friends, aren’t we? I’m not sure about the shrimpy one, but the big one will produce enough for us all to share, surely! Hmm... Looks like he hasn’t gotten it up yet... Is your charm weak? Should I use mine as well?”

“Kyuka, our guest’s eyes are in his head, not his crotch. You’re being unspeakably rude right now.”

Venus’s response was curt.

The woman named Kyuka trembled, eyes going wide.

“Rude? Oh, come on... Let us have a little... Just a little...”

Kyuka lifted her eyes to Bash’s face, as if to make a show of concession.

The other succubi followed suit.

Then they paused for several seconds.

“...Um... You couldn’t possibly be the Orc Hero Bash, could you?”

“I am.”

The moment Bash nodded, Kyuka and the others shot to attention so quickly, there was almost an audible snapping sound.

Their hips, which had been arched like those of a cat, went as straight as tree trunks, and their faces, jaws pulled to one side in flirtatious mockery, went straight, with chins pulled in, and they all snapped a hand to the side of their foreheads.

The formal salute of the succubus army.

Though they were scantily clad and not in uniform.

“Please forgive us!”

“Uh, it’s fine...”

“Hey!”

At Kyuka’s shout, the other succubi dashed back down the alley.

They returned, bearing rags for three people.

They all dressed in a hurry, covering up their thin but bewitching bodies.

Bash was a little disappointed but also a little relieved.

“I am Kyuka! You saved my unit at the defensive battle of the Pyles River! Orc Hero Bash! I’m truly sorry for my terrible transgression!”

“Forgive us all!”

Then Kyuka produced a dagger from her rags.

“Instead of repaying Lord Bash, to whom I am so greatly indebted, I saw him as food! Even worse, I was about to divvy up his sustenance between myself

and my friends! As a proud succubus, I cannot live with such sin! As such, I will make amends with my life's blood!"

"Erm, no, don't..."

"However, these two are still inexperienced! Please spare them and let my blood be spilled in their stead! Now, please enjoy the splendor of a fool's life ending! The spray of my blood will serve to honor the remaining warriors! Farewell!"

But just as she was about to plunge the dagger into her heart, Bash grabbed her arm.

"I don't mind. Please, don't worry."

A succubus never charmed anyone she truly respected.

It was a little disappointing for Bash, but this state of affairs was convenient for his goals.

Bash had a firm resolve, but he was not immune to the appeals of a succubus.

But Bash's sentiment seemed to unsettle the other succubi.

"How magnanimous!"

"Even to the point of staying her hand! The hand of an uggo like Captain Kyuka!"

"Captain Kyuka's death would only be an eyesore to him. After all, she's a woman who lusted after the benefactor of all succubi..."

"You lusted after him, too!"

But the succubi had stopped looking at Bash like he was a prime cut of meat and had begun venerating him in earnest.

The hearts in their eyes had turned to stars.

"Lord Bash, we are honored by your visit... But please, take care!"

"What do you mean?"

"This nation has been forgetting its pride of late. When you walk through our land, please stick closely to Venus and make sure that you're never alone."

“Hmm?”

Bash tilted his head in confusion.

It was a simple gesture, but the succubi saw it as adorable, and it set their hearts clamoring again.

“...Well, whatever. At any rate, I don’t plan on staying long. I’ll pick up Zell, greet the Queen, and be on my way.”

“Understood! Lord Bash, thank you for honoring us with your conversation today! We will cherish this memory for the rest of our lives!”

“Thank you!”

Heads bowed low.

The beautiful hair, the luscious bodies, were hidden from sight.

These veteran warriors of bygone days, dressed in sack-like rags, looked like three brown caterpillars when viewed from above like this.

Their appearances seemed to sum up the modern-day succubus.

THE SUCCUBUS QUEEN

The succubus queen, Curly Kale, was a particularly bewitching woman, even for a succubus.

Being bewitching, for succubi, means having a long history of successful battles.

Even before she became queen, the name Princess Curly Kale was known the world over.

Previously, she was known as Boneless Curly.

This charming nickname came from her habit of sucking out a man's essence until he was only bones and skin, and for her habit of ripping out women's spines.

She had a formidable past, but her appearance now was different from how she'd been during the war.

She had bountiful breasts, a perfect, pear-shaped butt, and two beauty marks—one beneath her eye and one in her cleavage.

She appeared healthy, but she had burn marks on her body, from her collarbones down across her whole chest. And they were in the shape of tree branches.

Electric shock injury.

She'd been defeated by Thunder Sonia in the decisive battle between the elves and the succubi.

She'd survived, yes. But she'd suffered major injuries and a permanent disability in one of her legs.

After the war ended, she never wanted to be Queen. But all the other would-be successors to the throne had died, and there was no one left to serve as

monarch, so she continued to reign to this day.

And just the other day, in fact, she'd received a formal letter of protest from the beastkin land.

Carrot, a former general of the succubus army, had launched an attack and had caused the withering of a sacred tree.

Was she acting in the interests of the succubus nation? If so, then this could mean war...

That was the kind of thing the protest letter said. The succubus Queen, Curly Kale, was absolutely shocked.

Carrot had been AWOL for about a year.

Worried that Carrot was injured or sick somewhere, Curly Kale had been considering sending out a search party even though it might have sparked up negative talk from other countries. And now this had happened.

On the one hand, Curly Kale wondered why Carrot would have done something like this. But there was another part of her that was like, yeah. That tracks.

Curly Kale had heaped a lot on Carrot's plate.

She'd left all the negotiations with foreign countries to her.

Carrot didn't seem to want to talk much about what had occurred out there, but it was pretty obvious how she'd been treated.

But Carrot never showed any weakness in front of Curly Kale. She'd simply apologized and reported that negotiations had not been fruitful.

Carrot cared about the succubus race more than anyone else did.

She was reliable, but on the other hand, she also had a tendency to be overconfident.

Curly Kale had been worried that her anger could explode at any moment.

So it was more of an "Ah, that was inevitable" kind of reaction.

So Curly Kale stopped thinking too deeply about Carrot's actions any further.

If she, the proudest succubus of all, had lost the plot, well, any other succubus would have suffered the same fate.

Neither Curly Kale nor the other succubi had the right to blame Carrot.

Those left behind ought not to have been focusing on what to do with Carrot.

Because of her actions, the succubus nation was now under suspicion.

If what she reportedly did turned out to be true, war with the beastkin was very likely.

The succubi race didn't have enough energy left to go to war with other countries.

If they fought, they would be defeated for certain. All would be slaughtered, even the babies.

They would be wiped out.

That was how much everyone hated the succubi.

To keep their nation and the succubi alive, they could not afford to make any mistakes.

So an apology letter was sent back at once:

The individual known as Carrot has already fled from our country, and their actions do not represent the interests of the succubi nation. This recent incident is extremely regrettable.

If Carrot returns to our country, we will hand her over with a noose around her neck.

Although Curly Kale felt this was terribly ungrateful to Carrot, who had always worked tirelessly for the sake of the nation... It had to be done.

No reply to the apology had arrived yet.

What would they do if the response brought further recriminations from the beastkin? What if it came to war? Would Curly Kale be able to protect her people?

Her mind was filled, always, with these concerns.

Curly Kale was a queen who had seen war. She was a warrior, built for fighting and not for diplomacy.

But she had to do what she could. She was facing a national disaster of epic proportions.

On top of that and the chronic food shortages, it had been raining ceaselessly as of late.

Since the town was protected by a barrier, there was no need to worry about flooding, but the power maintaining the barrier had begun to waver.

Around that time, a letter came from Nazar, promising new deliveries of food, but Curly Kale wasn't sure how much stock she should place in such promises...

And, as those troubled days continued, something even worse happened.

A fairy attack.

"Heyyy! Boss! Where is Bash?! You dirty succubi, if you're holding him somewhere, you're not going to get away with it! I know the boss is a fine figure of a man, but some things are hitting below the belt! Kidnapping an Orc Hero, holding him prisoner, draining him of his life essence...it's deplorable! Have you no shame? Even if Lord Bash likes it, I, Zell, won't just let you have your wicked ways! Now, then! Produce the boss at once! Or I shall slay every last one of you! Boss, Boss! Answer me, Boss!"

Brought before Curly Kale, the raving fairy was bound and tied.

Two-faced Zell. A notorious fairy.

Famous not for being two-faced, of course.

This fairy was known to all succubi because it was the partner of Lord Bash, the Orc Hero to whom all succubi were indebted.

That said, it was still a mystery why this fairy was here now.

Moreover, it was ranting about confusing things, such as Lord Bash falling into a river, washing up nearby, and getting captured by a succubus.

Usually, the reaction would be "Shut up, fairy, how dare you insult us proud succubi?"

Succubi value those who show kindness to them, above all else. No one would dream of treating Lord Bash, to whom they owed so much, as mere food. Much less hold him prisoner. If someone *had* encountered Bash, they would immediately report such joyful news to the Queen, and they would welcome him as a state guest.

...At least, they would *like* to give him a grand welcome. But the land of the succubi was in shambles.

They were all starving, and as a species, they were rapidly losing what remained of their pride.

Shameful as it might be... It was no longer possible to completely rule out what the fairy was saying as a possibility.

Of course, such a thing should never be.

If Curly Kale got wind of any individuals who would actually commit an act as heinous as abducting, imprisoning, and consuming Lord Bash, she would make them rue the day.

A public execution must be carried out, in the name of the Queen.

“Nio. I doubt it could be true, but just in case, go investigate. And make sure the border guards are informed.”

“Yes, My Queen.”

So Curly Kale had her closest aide go and canvass the country in secret.

At this point in time, though, Curly Kale was quite optimistic. After all, why would Lord Bash have need of visiting the succubus country? No doubt the fairy was simply deranged.

Some might say that her attitude toward this was rather naive.

But you could hardly blame her. A fairy, suddenly appearing and raving about what sounded like utter nonsense? It had to be mere fantasy. Or some sort of trick.

History had proved that.

After several days, the aide reported back to say they had investigated all

suspicious persons spotted but that none were of note.

So it was a wild fairy tale after all. And even though this particular fairy was Lord Bash's former partner, this transgression could not be overlooked. Curly Kale was going to pluck off all its limbs and mount it as a specimen... But just as her rage was bubbling over...

"Your Highness. It appears that Venus, the border guard, has discovered Lord Bash, and he is heading toward us."

...a most interesting report came in.



Now came an orc before Curly Kale, Queen of the succubi.

An orc with green skin, carrying a greatsword on his back and exuding an aura of strength.

The Orc Hero Bash sat before her.

"Welcome, Orc Hero Bash."

The succubus throne is more of a chaise lounge.

When the Queen greets state guests, it is customary for her to lie there languorously and look down at the other person.

It's sort of like a sofa bed. She could take a nap there if the fancy took her.

Now, why would that be the case, you ask? Well, if the guest she is receiving is male, she will often end up dining right afterward.

Still, if the male guest is someone more worthy of respect, it won't come to that.

Curly Kale had leaped upright on the seat so abruptly, there was almost an audible crack.

"Venus and Kyuka almost charmed me, but they were kind enough to stop."

"What...?! My apologies! I will make sure they are both severely punished..."

"I do not mind. They might be succubi, but it was rather nice to feel wanted."

Charming a respected benefactor is succubus taboo.

Despite Lord Bash's magnanimity, Venus and Kyuka would need to be punished.

That was what Curly Kale thought. But as she looked on Bash, her feelings on that front weakened.

"Lord Bash..."

Strong arms you'd die to be held by. Sultry, come-to-bed hips. A robust lower body that would no doubt be able to produce much sustenance...

(He's sex on legs!)

She wanted to strip Bash naked and devour him on the spot.

(No! No! Have strength, Curly Kale! Bash is the Hero who saved the succubus nation! If he hadn't come to us at the Rina Desert, the entire succubus race would have perished! Do not think of him as food!) If she hadn't been Queen, she might not have been able to control herself.

Venus and Kyuka certainly did a grand job of checking themselves! They were both good soldiers who'd served the nation well. Truly, they understood the meaning of pride.

How could she punish those good women for a momentary lapse of reserve?

"In better times, we would be able to offer you a more comfortable welcome, but alas, our country is very poor, and, as you can see, we're struggling somewhat."

"I don't mind. Thank you for your consideration."

"Oh, but of course."

A number of dishes were placed in front of Bash, who sat cross-legged.

Spit-roasted beef, mountains of bread rolls, various hors d'oeuvres, several kinds of soup, and dessert.

In imitation of a human, Bash gulped down the provided wine, and when the succubus attending to him refilled his glass, he looked most satisfied.

Curly Kale had heard that other races liked this sort of thing as food, so she'd had a meal whipped up. She had no idea if it tasted good or not, but Lord Bash

certainly seemed to be enjoying it.



“But more importantly, I’ve heard that Zell has been causing some trouble.”

“Ah, yes, the fairy. It’s certainly a handful. You’ll collect it, won’t you?”

“Of course.”

“In that case... Nio!”

Curly Kale clapped her hands, and a wagon was brought in.

Riding on the wagon was, of course, Zell.

Bound in rope, with a slip of paper affixed, upon which was drawn a magic circle... And what’s more, the fairy was locked up in a birdcage.

Heavy restraints, making escape impossible.

“Ah, there you are, Boss. So I think this clears up any doubts, hmm? Or will you see my boss here duel for the freedom of this adorable fairy? Now, it won’t be a fair fight, you know? If you use your succubus charms, the boss won’t have a chance. And if you don’t use them, then *you* won’t have a chance. So I really wouldn’t recommend it! By the way, how’s about untying me? I’m already in a cage. What do I need to be bound for? Ouch! Hey! Easy on the goods! Fairies are as delicate as we look! You go tugging on our limbs or our heads, they’ll pop right off! And keep fire away from us, or we’ll expire, y’know?”

Nio, the Queen’s most trusted aide and the one who had produced the wagon, now opened the birdcage, tipped it upside down, and shook it. Zell plopped to the ground.

The succubus wordlessly extended a claw, cut the ropes that bound Zell, and... Zell was liberated.

Immediately, Zell began to fly around at super speed.

“Wowy! Freedom! Ah, yes, a fairy must be free! The rushing of air on my wings makes me feel so alive! Ah yes, that slipstream! Gasping for breath against the rushing air! The air is so delicious! Ah yes, right through the sound barrier, I am!”

Exhibiting an exaggerated delight over their freedom, the fairy flew around the echoing hall of the palace for a bit, then landed on Bash’s shoulder.

“Ah yes, Boss, you always save my bacon! This time I was thinking it was my time to save you, but here you are to rescue me just in the nick of time! You’ve saved my life! You are truly my hero! I pledge to follow you for the rest of my days and make sure I repay you all I can!”

“Not so. Your insight has been invaluable.”

“Oh! When you say sweet things like that... If I wasn’t a fairy, I’d wager you’d already have found your bride... Heh-heh...”

Zell wriggled bashfully.

Even Bash wished that Zell could have been a human or elf, but alas, it wasn’t the case.

Anyway, Zell and Bash got along so well precisely because Zell was a fairy.

But if Zell had belonged to another race, they would have become an outlet for the orcish sexual desire.

“Still, you’re amazing, Boss. You fell into that turbulent muddy stream and survived! I mean, of course I knew a mere swirling river would not be enough to kill you. But no doubt you were a bit exhausted. Then you got ensnared by a succubus, and no doubt things got a bit dicey there!”

“Silence, fairy! We proud succubi would never behave in *that* manner toward Lord Bash, the man to whom we owe so much! It would be shameful!”

Curly Kale declared this in a voice full of dignity.

There was a mysterious power in that voice, and Zell’s entire body stiffened.

Zell almost toppled off Bash’s shoulder, but Bash steadied the fairy with his hand.

“Ahem. Please excuse me, Lord Bash. I did not mean to raise my voice.”

“...No, it’s fine. Zell was being rude.”

“Y-you’re right, Boss... I got myself into a bit of a flap... Terribly sorry...”

Zell apologized. It’s a rare thing in this world, a fairy who can bring itself to apologize.

“Incidentally, Lord Bash...”

Now Curly Kale found herself in a bit of a conundrum.

Since Lord Bash was here, they would welcome him in as a state guest. It would only be proper.

After everything this orc had done for them.

But if they let this hot hunk of an orc go wandering about the land, with the people all starving, no doubt some would not be able to control their appetites. State guest he would be, but he must be kept cloistered.

Well, no issue there. All fine and good. But in that case...

“What business brings you to our land?”

Lord Bash wasn't the sort of person to come here.

He was meant to be living a life of leisure as a Hero back in the orc country.

Moreover, Lord Bash had a good deal of influence in the succubus nation. What had he come all the way here to achieve?

To be more specific, what demands had he come here to make?

Apparently, he fell into a river and washed up here. But anyone who had fought alongside him in battle knew the great Lord Bash was not one to be so clumsy.

There could be no doubt he had come to the succubus country for some specific purpose.

Since his intentions were shadowy, he had sent Zell ahead to infiltrate their land, meaning for the fairy to be captured, thus giving Lord Bash a convenient excuse for entering the country.

That conclusion was a natural one to draw. It made sense.

A somewhat sketchy and circuitous strategy. A little too smart for an orc to have thought up, but a fairy racking its brains could just about manage it.

“I only came to retrieve Zell. I have no specific business here. I plan to leave immediately.”

“...I see.”

If Curly Kale was still young, she might have swallowed such a story.

But she was a veteran Queen.

She was the leader of the succubi, trying to hold together a fraying nation.

“So then, where is your destination?”

“Demon country.”

Those words sent a chill down her spine.

Carrot, the former succubus general, seemed to have been desperate to revive Geddigs.

Geddigs, the Demon Lord.

Curly Kale remembered his magnificence.

If Geddigs were to be revived, the resumption of war would be the inevitable result. But the succubi didn't have any strength left to fight another war.

“But... Why?”

“Ah... I am looking for... Something.”

Lord Bash hesitated for a moment in his speech.

Curly Kale instantly knew that he was hiding something after all.

“Something we don't have in our land?”

“I won't know unless I look for it, but... I doubt it's here.”

Hmm, thought Curly Kale.

His verbiage was very wishy-washy.

He was seeking something. Was it really something he could not get in the succubus country?

Curly Kale was a highly sensible sort of succubus. But for one meal of Bash, she'd be willing to offer up any of their national treasures.

Generally speaking, one amazing night with a Hero would be far more valuable than any national treasure...

(No! No! Stay strong, Curly Kale! You are the succubus Queen! No time for

childish delusions! The succubus nation stands on the precipice!) Curly Kale shook her head to drive the delusions from her mind.

A virile man comes to her, gets up close, and offers her one night in paradise... What young girl these days would not dream of such a thing?

Still, a succubus always has sex on the brain. It comes with the territory.

“Does that thing you’re looking for exist in the land of the demons?”

“It does. Nazar said so.”

“Nazar... You mean the Cloudbreak Prince?”

“Yeah.”

Aha, Curly Kale thought.

Nazar was the one who had written that letter to the succubus nation just the other day.

The letter had said they’d heard the succubus country was suffering from a food shortage and that they would send new food.

To be frank, she’d thought it too good to be true.

Over the years, how many times had Carrot traveled to other countries to raise concerns about food shortages?

Curly Kale could not forget how Carrot’s clothes were covered in stains whenever she returned home.

Offerings from the humans, eh...?

Curly Kale narrowed her eyes.

Yes, she was starting to see the angle now.

Perhaps Lord Bash was here as an inspector.

To see if the succubi really had a food shortage, and if the food being brought in was being properly managed.

Right?

Humans send their own countrymen as food.

In fact, right after the war, the succubi had feasted so much on those people they sent that the majority of them expired.

Opinions were probably divided even among humans as to whether or not they ought to send people to such a place again.

No doubt the majority was against it.

So they'd sent in an inspector to make sure it was safe.

Why Lord Bash? Well, it was easy to see how he'd be the right candidate.

If it was true that food provisions were being devoured to death in the succubus country, they'd probably try to cover it up if an inspector appeared among them.

So the mission would have to be secret.

But if they sent a human, it would be too obvious that it was an inspector.

Hence, Lord Bash.

Apparently, the third-born beastkin princess had a wedding in the beastkin land recently, and no doubt Lord Bash had attended.

Orcs, like succubi, were hated by the Alliance of Four.

And with all the trouble that Carrot had caused... No doubt Lord Bash had been called upon to infiltrate the succubus nation.

Pretending he was not affiliated with humans at all, Lord Bash, having already obtained the respect of the succubi, would have no trouble touring the feeding grounds.

And if Bash himself got devoured, it wouldn't really bother the humans much.

Yes, a sly, wily human would cook up such a plan.

"Incidentally, Lord Bash... This may be a tad off topic, but are you interested in viewing our succubus, shall we say, cafeteria?"

"Cafeteria... Well, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't interested..."

(I knew it!)

Bash's awkwardly worded response had Curly Kale convinced that her

conjecture was close to the mark!

(If it's all true, it wouldn't be the best idea to send him away. And Lord Bash might be troubled by such a decision, too... I wasn't planning to do it, but...) Curly Kale shook her head and took a deep breath.

(Ah, but we have nothing to hide! Since the first supply of food perished, we've been making some adjustments. And as Bash is an orc, I don't need to worry about him spreading any false reports. All I have to do is show him the true state of things!) Curly Kale lifted her head, looking at Bash with a determined gaze.

Then, in a confident tone...

"If you don't mind, would you like to take a tour of our 'cafeteria' before you leave?"

"Ah, but I plan to leave right away."

"Oh, come now. It is pouring rain beyond the barrier... The path to the demon country will be treacherous. Please, shelter from the rain awhile and see our country. We might be on our last gasp, but there is still much to see here, you know?"

"Hmm..."

Lord Bash looked a little undecided, but then the fairy Zell whispered something in his ear, and he eventually nodded.

"All right. Let's do it."

Thus, Bash came to stay in the land of the succubi.

After their audience with Curly Kale, the two exited the grand chamber.

Asked to wait a little while a guard was arranged, the two sat down on the floor.

They were silent for a while, but then Zell spoke.

"That succubus Queen was terrifying. She was really eyeballing you, Boss."

"Orcs are a lower race in the minds of succubi. Normally, they wouldn't want to let one into their country."

“Right, Boss. During the war, when we first encountered that Queen, she looked right down her nose at us! ‘Stay away, filthy wretches,’ she said.”

“Ah yes, that takes me back. As an Orc Hero, I suppose I should be honored now that she is treating me with such decency.”

No one knew such a conversation was taking place.

If Curly Kale had been listening, then the current succubus Queen would have taken her life as immediate penance, and a new succubus Queen would have had to take her place.

6

THE CAFETERIA

A room was prepared for Bash in the royal palace of the succubi.

This was partly because succubi have little concept of the differences between the male and female gender, and partly for crime prevention purposes.

In this land, being alone in a room, for a man, was like a green flag saying, "Go ahead and eat me."

So the room was kept guarded, and three succubus soldiers were currently standing sentry in front of the room and outside the window.

"So that's about what happened."

In that room, Bash was telling Zell about the events leading up to that point.

"I see, a water spirit, eh...?"

Zell nodded with a knowing look on their fairy face and then looked at Ludo and Luca.

"Are you two friends with water spirits?"

Ludo and Luca looked confused.

"Water spirits...?"

"No, neither me nor Luca have ever heard a spirit speak, much less seen one."

"Well, maybe it's because your mother Rularula was loved by the spirits."

That was Bash's suggestion, but Luca looked dubious.

"It *could* be... Mom was an ogre, but she was very skilled with ice magic... Still, the spirits only attach to particular persons, I hear."

"Well, spirits are fickle, ya know? I often get tangled up with wind spirits,

too... They usually just ask for favors or give irrelevant lectures, but they sometimes come in handy in a pinch... Ah, you know, maybe they get a kick out of helping random people? Who knows, they might even help out a couple of kids they don't know, if the fancy took them!"

Zell's conjecture was convincing.

A mere whim, then. As unpredictable as a natural disaster.

In general, folks are pleased to receive something if it's given on a whim, but then you can't exactly complain if it's withdrawn.

"So, what are you all going to do now?"

"It's pouring outside the barrier that surrounds this land. I wouldn't mind if it was just you and I, but bringing these two with us will be rough going. We have no choice but to stay in this country until the rain stops."

"Right, even the almighty boss slipped and fell into a river out in all that..."

Ludo's lips tightened at those words.

"Darn it. I finally managed to catch up with her... Only to let her get away."

"She has not only lost her griffin, but she is now out there in that deluge. She can't go fast on human legs. Let us assume she is similarly stranded."

"Yes, yes, of course you're right, Master!"

Humans tend to move slowly during bad weather.

During the war, of all the twelve races, humans were the most susceptible to the terrain and the elements.

They don't have special characteristics that let them take advantage of certain conditions like the lizardmen do. And their weaknesses are multiple.

"Then please train me as much as you can in the meantime! I want to become stronger! I just... I get this feeling that I can't go letting the water spirits down!"

"Right."

Personally, Bash would rather have left immediately.

Wizardry was looming large on the horizon.

So he'd gotten a letter from the demon general. But this time, too, there were no guarantees.

Bash was always impatient.

Still, the things Curly Kale had said had sparked Bash's interest in this country a little.

"Hey, Boss, 'sup? Why so antsy?"

"Hmm, what the Queen said earlier, about showing me around the country... I'm a little curious."

"Oh yes! Well, the succubi are known for their stunning womenfolk! And you as an orc, Boss, you must be inspired by seeing such beauties! It's rather a shame. The succubi seem to esteem you so highly, Boss. If only they could have orc babies. You'd be able to find a wife here in a jiffy in that case."

"Hmm..."

Bash nodded in agreement, but even if succubi could give birth to orc pups, there was still no way Bash would ever propose to one.

Becoming a wizard was something to be avoided at all costs.

And there was another reason why Bash was feeling on edge.

The succubi's so-called cafeteria.

In other words, a place much akin to an orc breeding ground.

A place where men and women copulate day and night. The difference is that for a succubus, this is like eating a meal. Producing children is not a concern. In other words, it's not like regular intercourse.

Still, the act itself is basically identical.

Bash was an orc, but he had actually never seriously observed the mating act being conducted by others.

During the war, he was much too busy battling, and after the war, he steered clear of the breeding grounds. And of course he had never known the embrace of a woman himself.

In his novice warrior days, he'd seen warrior chiefs raping women from a

distance on several occasions.

If Bash had visited the orc breeding grounds, he'd have been able to see what kind of sex modern orcs were having.

But if he went there, no doubt he would be called upon to provide an example.

And that would have been Bash's final day on the planet.

But in succubus country, that wouldn't happen.

The succubi seemed opposed to the idea of charming Bash on principle, so basically watching the copulation would be perfectly safe for him.

It seemed very vital for Bash to observe this act.

By watching the succubus feasting, he'd be able to avoid making embarrassing blunders when it came to losing his own virginity.

That was why Bash was so on edge.

Succubus aren't like orcs, but he had heard the succubus mating act was very violent, with the male almost being sucked dry.

It would definitely be a learning experience.

"A wife?"

Luca piped up.

"Um, Lord Bash, are you, uh, seeking a wife? Like ogres and demons do? Because I heard that orcs, like, share one woman and..."

Those who don't know much about orcs often ask these questions.

Of course Zell jumped in with the answer.

"But of course, an Orc Hero is permitted to have a woman of his very own! Still, with the current situation in the orc country, finding a wife who would satisfy the boss's standards is almost impossible... Which is why the boss has set out on a quest to find a wife of his own!"

"Um... What standards are those?"

"Well, he is an orc, after all, so the right wife would need to be able to birth

young! Which is why succubi are a no-go. And lizardmen, now, they don't suit the boss's preferences, so they're out. The boss has high standards, so an elf or human would be best. Maybe a beastkin. The dwarves don't fit the boss's aesthetic preferences, but one mixed with human blood might do! The thing is, though, the boss is a man of very high standing, so his wife must be up to snuff. And personally, I'd rather not see the boss with some random lass from some Podunk village! Yes, she's got to be of high standing...like a female knight or a chieftain's daughter, something like that!"

"Mixed blood... Well, what about ogres, then?"

"Ogres! Boss, what say you?"

The first thing Bash thought of was Ludo's and Luca's mother, Rularula.

Male ogres have huge bodies that are much larger than those of orcs, with rocklike skin.

However, the women are closer to humans or demons, and although they are somewhat muscular, they are still quite beautiful to behold.

"Not bad, but... I doubt they'd go for someone like me."

"That's right. Basically, demons and ogres are like succubi. They tend to look down on orcs, so even if the boss took a fancy to one, I'm not sure he could get one..."

"Still, if I was able to choose one of those races as my wife, I'd be able to make a triumphant return."

Bash's statement made Luca mutter "triumphant...", and after that, she seemed lost in thought.

After that, Zell continued to wax lyrical about Bash and all his qualities, but Luca remained silent, and the conversation was one-sided.

Despite Zell's chattering serving as a kind of BGM, the general assembly was mute.

Knock, knock.

A knock at the door of the room.

“I apologize for disturbing your rest! Lieutenant Venus here!”

“Enter.”

“Entering now!”

Then a succubus entered the room.

A childlike woman with pink hair tied back in a braid.

Though it was hidden behind her thick glasses and baggy military uniform, all present could tell that she had a voluptuous body.

Ludo, seeming to realize this, pressed his knees together.

“I, Venus, have been entrusted with the role of showing you all around town!”

Her voice was sweet but high-pitched and tense.

Bash appreciated her respectful and compassionate attitude toward him.

If she weren't a succubus, it's a safe bet to guess he would have proposed to her that very same day.

“Shall we leave now, or would you like to rest a little longer?”

“We've been waiting. Let's go right away.”

“Yes, sir!”

She nodded crisply, as if she'd been expecting this answer.



Bash and his friends were brought to a huge building.

A rectangular building that seemed to be about the same size as the royal palace, or perhaps even larger.

There were several sentries standing around the building, giving the appearance of a robust security system.

“This is the succubus country's cafeteria.”

“It's pretty big.”

“During the war, we'd finish our meals entirely, but after the war, it became necessary to preserve food for as long as possible. We built this kind of building

so the fodder could live without any inconvenience.”

As Venus approached the building, explaining away, one of the sentries stepped forward with a look of wonder on their face.

“Lieutenant Venus, is that man you’ve got some extra food?! What a fine figure of an orc. He alone could feed fifty people a day.”

“No! The notice should have already been sent!”

“What? You mean he’s an inspect...? I mean, er, on a tour?! Is he, you know...?”

“Yes, it is Lord Bash. So don’t go looking at him like that.”

“B-but—”

The sentry looked at Bash and gulped.

Their eyes were bloodshot, their long tongue licked their lips, and their arms and wings moved rapidly.

“If you’d like to go up against me, then fine, but... Don’t you value your life?”

Venus’s tone was very different from the one she used when speaking to Bash.

Her tone showed a confidence in her fighting skills, and her determination to suppress this small insurrection was palpable.

The succubi who survived the evacuation battle of the Rina Desert were different from the common soldiers.

They were true elites who had overcome almost certain death.

This was someone you should not pick a fight with.

“Excuse me!”

The sentry seemed to shrink and removed their gaze from Bash with some difficulty, like peeling off rawhide.

Venus turned to Bash and bowed her head, looking somber.

“I apologize for such an unpleasant scene. Let’s go.”

“Right.”

After that exchange, they entered the building.

“...It looks very clean in here.”

The interior of the building was bright, and the walls and floors were polished to a shine.

It was comparable to the royal palace that Bash had just visited, and in fact, it looked like it was made with more luxurious building materials than were used in the royal palace. It also looked like it was kept meticulously clean.

“The fodder said they preferred to live like this.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes. At first it was more of a hovel, lots of drafts, but we listened to the requests of the fodder.”

“Hmm...”

Bash thought of the orc breeding grounds.

Humans and elves have weak bodies, so relatively soft beds were provided.

But with orcs flocking there day and night, you couldn't really describe it as clean.

Of course, Bash had never been inside, so what did he know...?

But come to think about it, before setting out on his quest, Bash had heard that some of the breeding slaves were starting to sicken and die.

“I think it would be a good idea for the orcs to prepare buildings like this for their breeding slaves as well.”

“Well, I don't know what it's like to be an orc breeding slave, but the fodder here has been able to live much longer since this building was built. It takes a lot of physical energy to be succubus fodder, so sometimes they do still get sick and die...”

Venus ascended the stairs as she spoke.

Up on the second floor, they came out on a balcony with a view of a big hall below.

Lots of succubi were in the hall.

It was like most of the succubi in the country were here.

All of them were wearing light clothing, typical of the succubi, and their body shapes were clearly visible.

The sight of bountiful breasts and butts was pleasing to Bash, but most of the succubi were a bit scrawny, with only their eyes shining brightly.

“They all look skinny.”

“Due to food shortages... Some have not had a meal in the past month.”

“Can’t you eat other races’ food?”

“We can supplement, but if we don’t have food from male bodies, we will eventually perish.”

Venus spoke with a rueful look on her face as she walked along the balcony and climbed the stairs to the third floor.

Several of the succubi looked up, noticed Bash, and started drooling. But Bash paid them no heed and headed off after Venus.



They were led to a room.

A succubus clad in a military uniform stood there.

There was a large glass panel in the floor, with magical patterns engraved around the edges, emitting light.

“Lieutenant Venus here. As you were informed earlier, the Orc Hero, Lord Bash, is here to view the facilities! Go about your business as usual.”

“Yes, ma’am!”

The succubus stared at Bash with wide eyes but quickly returned her gaze to the glass on the floor.

“From here, we can view the feeding act. It’s one-way glass, so no need to worry.”

“Why is this necessary?”

“Some people suck up too much sustenance from their meals and end up killing the fodder, so this is a countermeasure.”

“You people can’t control yourselves?”

“It’s instinctual to feed to completion. It could happen to anyone. So we need to have people standing by to intervene.”

“Right.”

For all species, predation is the act of taking the life of another.

However, a succubus can consume their prey without killing them.

Just like humans milk cows, they drain the essence out of men.

The difference from livestock, though, is that if they drain too much, the man will die easily.

This wasn’t wartime. It wasn’t the time to kill humans indiscriminately.

There *was* no more livestock. If they killed off their food source, the succubi would die, too.

No doubt the succubi managed their food with the utmost care.

However...

“Good. The ‘food’ looks healthy today as well.”

The person under the glass appeared to be a human male.

Completely naked, of course.

(But is it human...?)

In appearance, it was different from any human that Bash had seen before.

If its skin wasn’t milky white, it might have looked more like a fat orc than like a human.

No, not even orcs were that fat. Bash had to wonder if it was something like the magic beasts known as trolls you encountered in the North Forest.

Trolls are creatures that stand on two legs, but most of their bodies are made of fat, and because they eat everything, their mouths are always dirty and emit a foul odor that would make even an orc screw up its face in disgust.

The human in the room below looked like that.

“They get plenty of food and sleep. As you can see, they are fat and healthy.”

The “food” seemed to be sluggish as it lumbered over to the table set up in the room.

Then it set about eating all the food on the table.

After it was done eating, it lay down on the bed in the center of the room and dozed off.

The way he was lying on his back looked strange to Bash.

Although its body was white, its face was mottled red and black, with dark circles under its eyes.

Its breathing was labored, as if it was tired or out of breath.

(It *is* healthy, I suppose...?)

During the war, the weightier individuals were the ones who lived healthy, longer lives.

On the other hand, skinny folk tended to live less long.

Being thin meant getting sick more easily and having trouble healing injuries. Skinny folk had less physical strength than larger people, so they were more likely to die in battle.

So even Bash thought fatness was a sign of good health.

Even though the man below them didn’t look quite right.

In fact, there was a whiff of death about him.

“Ah, it’s almost time for the meal.”

Then Bash noticed someone entering the room.

“...!”

She was an extremely attractive woman.

She wore skimpy clothing that revealed a lot of skin, typical of a succubus, and had long, wavy hair.

Big breasts and a big butt. Any man would itch to throw her down and leave his offspring inside her.

Bash looked at the man.

This was the vital moment.

How would this man make love to this beautiful woman?

Being succubus food meant making love to women every day. And many of them in a day. No doubt the man would be very experienced.

Bash was here to observe, and hopefully, to learn.

"Thanks in advance for the meal."

"Yep."

The meal was over in the space of a few minutes.

The man lay there like a corpse while the succubus had her way with him.

The man's expression didn't even change.

Even though Bash's eyes bulged from their sockets when the succubus took off her clothes, the man didn't even glance at her. Just stared blankly at the ceiling.

Before Bash could even wonder why the man wasn't doing anything, the succubus had finished her business, and it was all over.

The succubus seemed to get very excited during the act, and Bash, observing, became very excited, too. But the man lying down didn't seem excited at all. He remained motionless until the end, his face completely blank.

"...The man did not move."

"Yes, some were more proactive at first, but after a month, they all end up like that. After all, being devoured is hard work, so we can hardly blame them, in my opinion."

"The succubus didn't use her charm, either."

"Well, why should she? It's hardly necessary."

"I see."

“Anyway, it is a disrespectful act to charm someone. It is out of the question for us to act disrespectfully toward the food who so kindly provide meals to us.”

Venus returned her gaze to the glass floor.

Inside the room, a second succubus had just entered and was walking toward the food.

Bash watched intently again, but again, the man did not move, and the succubus was quickly done sucking up his seed.

To be honest, Bash was disappointed.

Still, it made sense when you thought about it.

The men hadn't come here of their own volition.

Like at the orc breeding grounds, where the women certainly didn't *want* to give birth to orc children.

There was no way anyone would actively opt to engage in such rough, repeated mating with succubi.

“As you can see, the food workers are spending their days comfortably. What do you think?”

“Hmm...”

But Bash had not seen what he'd wanted to see.

“Is there something amiss?”

“No, nothing in particular.”

“Of course, we will continue to do everything we can! For example... Huh?”

Venus frowned.

There was something strange happening under the glass in the room.

The succubus who had come in to replace the second one, and who had been engaged in her meal, was looking flustered for some reason.

On closer inspection, the man could be seen lying on his back, the whites of his eyes showing, foaming at the mouth, and convulsing.

“What happened?! Did she suck too much?!”

Venus immediately asked the succubus who was standing nearby.

“No, she’s only on her first mouthful. He has not even met his daily quota yet... Perhaps he is sick...”

But the succubus didn’t seem too sure about what was happening.

“There’s no ‘perhaps’ about it! Come with me, quickly!”

“Y-yes, ma’am!”

Then Venus rushed from the room.

Looking through the floor, Bash watched as Venus burst into the room below and began to cast some sort of spell on the convulsing man.

No doubt it was recovery magic of some sort.

But Bash knew it was too late.

The man was definitely about to die.

As Bash looked back on it, the man had had a whiff of death about him from the start.

“What’s wrong, Boss?”

“Maybe someone poisoned him.”

“Ah yes, it looks like a death by poison.”

Orcs rarely die from poisoning.

Orcs have powerful stomachs that can digest most poisons.

But Bash had seen enemies killed by poison during the war. Their eyes rolled to the backs of the heads, they began seizing, and then they passed away in agony.

“Will your fairy dust cure it?”

“Not sure, Boss, but it’s worth a try! Let’s go!”

“Right.”

Then Zell zoomed downstairs in the direction Venus had gone.



In the end, the man was saved from the brink of death by Zell's fairy dust.

The slave had been taken to the facility's sick bay and was now being monitored.

Bash and his friends were taken to a separate room by the security succubus on duty.

There, they were invited to sit on a soft sofa that resembled a bed, and a succubus introducing herself as the director of the facility came to bow her head low before them.

"What you saw was regrettable. But please, be reassured. Our fodder is well-nourished, and I can assure you, nothing like this will ever happen again."

The succubus, who introduced herself as Nion, was pure eye candy for Bash.

Though she wore the same baggy military uniform as Venus and the others, it was surprisingly clear to see that she had a bodacious chest and prominent buttocks.

When she walked, sat, lowered her head... The slightest movement sent her assets jiggling.

But Bash had an inkling about this succubus, just from her name.

Nion the Suffocator.

The pink mist she emitted was so thick that it deprived her opponent of oxygen and slowed their movements.

Bash didn't know her personally, but he'd spotted her once on the battlefield.

Back then, Bash wasn't famous yet, and Nion had looked at him and snorted at him and said, "What gives you the right to stare at *me*, you dirty orc?"

No doubt Nion did not remember this...

It was very awkward for Bash to have such a person bowing her head to the ground in front of him now.

"There's no need to apologize to me..."

So Bash kept saying, but Nion kept her head bowed low.

She just kept repeating things like, “If you could find it in your heart to...” and “With your eminent grace...”

Zell kept interjecting with stuff like, “You oughtta be sorry!” and “If it weren’t for us, that could have been a total disaster!” but Bash had no idea what to say.

He crossed his arms over his chest and waited for Nion to straighten up, but she showed no signs of doing so, and eventually he let his gaze wander.

Then he made eye contact with Ludo and Luca, who were seated opposite.

“Um, Mr. Bash?”

“Yeah?”

“I know what this person’s saying and all, but good food provisions doesn’t guarantee this won’t happen again.”

At those words, Nion’s head snapped up.

Her face registered anger and resentment, with an aura of *Who gave you permission to weigh in?*

“Oh, indeed? I heard you were Lord Bash’s apprentice, young man, but it appears you haven’t learned not to speak out of turn?”

“No, I haven’t learned that.”

Nor had Bash taught that.

“So then, I would like you to explain to me why you think the same thing will happen again?”

One wrong word and I’ll kill you.

That was what her eyes were saying.

Anyone who knew her on the battlefield would have shut up at that moment.

But Ludo was unaware of the danger signs.

He rubbed his chin thoughtfully and began laying it out.

“Something similar happened in the ogre land. After the war, we realized fighting among ourselves wasn’t any fun, so the people cast aside their swords and began doing whatever they wanted all day. They started living free lives...

Just eating, sleeping, mating with women, drinking booze... We ogres weren't raked over the coals as much as the demons and succubi were, so we didn't have to worry about food."

"Hmm? Well, that's an enviable tale, isn't it? I'd certainly like to live that sort of lifestyle, too."

"But then, about two years ago, when everyone was getting drunk at a festival, I saw someone crash to the ground and die right on the spot. I was standing nearby, so I saw it... How creepy the corpse looked. All swollen up, like someone drowned. People started whispering that they'd been cursed. But if you looked closer, you'd see that some of the general population had a similar look about them. And to hear them talk, they were all getting tired more easily those days. Falling asleep everywhere, with knees creaking and aching... I thought it really must be a curse."

"...So did you find who cursed them?"

Now Nion was seated on the sofa, arms on the armrest, upper body contorted in a lugubriously sexy pose, gazing at Ludo with intense eyes.

Her murderous intent was even more palpable than before, and now even Ludo had to notice it. He averted his eyes from her.

Or maybe he was distracted by the mass of bosomy flesh that was resting on the table in front of her.

"N-no... In the end, it was chalked up to lack of physical training, and the clan chief cried out, 'You've all gotten soft!' and after that, things got a bit..."

"Hmph!"

Nion snorted, and a faintly sweet scent emanated from her.

Bash and Ludo snapped their knees together in unison.

"A little training wouldn't cure sickness like that! *Pfft*, you ogres. Even your brains are made of brawny muscle."

"B-but, up to the point I left the country, there were no more deaths like that."

"Then the person who died was simply sick, right?"

Nion released a sigh, crossing her legs, resting her elbows on her knees, and propping up her chin with her hands.

The sight of the verdant mound visible between her crossed legs had Bash's and Ludo's gazes transfixed.

Then Nion averted her eyes...

And looked again at Bash.

She paused for a few moments, then snapped upright in her seat with another of those almost audible cracks.

"My apologies! The young boy piped up, and I just..."

"It matters not. I can see that you are a proud warrior, not one to take the interjections of pups well."

"Oh, uh, I see... I'm honored that you think so."

"But judging by your attitude, that manner of dying isn't something new, is it?"

"...No, it's not."

Nion began talking with some resignation.

For the first year, the succubi didn't know how to properly handle food, and they ended up either sucking too much from the fodder, or else allowing them to die from lack of nutrition.

Over the next two years, they worked hard to ensure a stable supply of fodder and to create a comfortable environment to foster this.

But as a result, the fodder began to gain weight, stopped complaining, and began taking on more "hungry customers" in a day than ever before.

But this year, they had noticed that some of the fodder subjects were starting to grow pale.

The succubi thought that the daily meals might be sapping the fodder's physical strength a bit too much, so they tried to come up with ways for meals to be completed without the fodder having to do much or move around much, to conserve strength, but it didn't seem to help.

The fodder subjects started looking sicker and sicker, and deaths much like the one seen today were beginning to occur one after another.

It was like the outbreak of some sort of plague, but the succubi weren't affected. And though they tried to give the men a break from being meals as much as possible, starvation was imminent, and each still had to provide a certain number of succubi with meals per day.

They were all out of ideas, and in dire straits, to be sure.

"If only we could get more food, then the subjects could get more of a rest..."

Sneaking a quick peek at Bash, her intention was clearly to say: "We need more numbers, if we are to overcome the current situation."

But of course, Bash had no idea what she was driving at.

"If we can't expect reinforcements, we'll have no choice but to do something with the strength we currently have."

"...Yes, I see."

"Orcs know nothing of diseases. We don't suffer from them. But ogres have experience of overcoming stuff like this. Why don't you give it a try? It might help."

"Hmm, perhaps...? But if it really is a curse, then that would have no effect, would it?"

"Hmm..."

Then Zell, who'd been striking a menacing pose on the table and only nodding and tutting here and there, turned to Bash.

"But my fairy dust has no effect on curses, Boss. Since it worked, it must mean that the afflicted suffered from either some sickness or injury."

So then...?

But just as everyone in the room tilted their heads in thought, there came a knock at the door.

Venus entered, back from a patrol of the facility with the guards.

"Facility Director Nion, the others who were taken sick... Ahem, I mean those

few who've been under the weather lately were given a sprinkle of fairy dust, or an infusion of the same, and there has been a dramatic improvement in them all."

"Tell me more, in detail?"

"Right. Well, first, their complexions have improved. The overwhelming sense of fatigue has been said to have lifted. The achy knees and hips are better, and their vision has cleared. Some even said they feel right back to their usual selves. And they're raring to get back to food service right away, they said."

"Indeed! And then?"

"I and the other staff members had a taste, and indeed, the subjects seem as fresh as they did when they first came to the cafeteria."

On close inspection, Venus's face was glowing.

No doubt she'd just been enjoying a light session.

"...I see... But if a light sprinkle of fairy dust was enough to lift the symptoms, then there is every chance the disease may return..."

Nion looked conflicted, then nodded briskly as if she'd just made up her mind about something.

"I doubt it's going to work, but since we still don't know the root cause, I wonder if it's worth trying out the ogre boy's plan..."

A last resort, yes, but with no other options, it was worth a try.

That seemed to be Nion's decision as she turned now to Bash.

"Lord Bash, we would all appreciate it if you would stay a while longer so as to properly gauge the results..."



“No, I really must be leaving this land right away...”

For his part, Bash really was desperate to leave as soon as possible.

Since he hadn't even been able to see what he'd been hoping to see, there was no reason to stay any longer.

“Oh, please! I swear you'll see results! Please, just one more chance! I beg of you!”

“...Oh. All right, then.”

Well, what else was he supposed to say, with those gigantic bazongas pressed up against his crotch...?

7

SUCCUBUS BOOT CAMP

“Wily Lowein.”

He was a human soldier once.

He was from a farming village, a man who was unusually good with his hands.

During the war, he belonged to a construction unit and was involved in all kinds of operations behind the scenes, from blowing up escape routes and defusing traps to setting up camps and building roads and bridges. Although he had participated in battles, he had generally remained in the background and had never cut off the head of any enemy general, for example.

Perhaps because of that, the money he ought to have received for his acts in the military amounted to a paltry sum.

The village where he was born had long since been turned into a pile of rubble. Though he was good with his hands, he wasn't particularly friendly, and he often clashed with his superiors, which made it difficult for him to keep a job.

Not an unusual situation for an ex-soldier human after the war.

Some managed to find work and scrape by, but others left the country searching for work afield, and some others turned to a life of crime.

Well, if you can't find work, what else can you do but turn to crime?

Lowein had fallen as low as anyone could go.

He became a thief, robbing the houses of people who looked affluent, stealing their valuables and selling them.

Still, of all the many criminals who popped up after the war, he was actually a rather successful one.

But he was unlucky. Because one day he entered the house of the mistress of an eminent person.

And to make it worse, that aforementioned eminent person was in the middle of hanky-panky with said mistress at the time.

The eminent person's bodyguard was a decorated knight, who easily captured Lowein.

Normally, if a thief was caught, he would just be thrown in jail for a few months.

During that time, at least they wouldn't have to worry about food and shelter.

Prison was the last-ditch refuge of people like Lowein.

But Lowein had seen something he shouldn't have seen. So his situation was different.

After a lengthy trial, he was sentenced to death.

Lowein was lucky that the death penalty sentence in place involved being sent to succubus country.

Being sent to succubus country, to become food.

At that moment, Lowein despaired.

He'd heard about men who'd been captured by succubi on the battlefield. He'd seen the corpses left behind when he'd been tasked to rebuild a fortress reclaimed from the succubi. The bodies he found piled up in the underground dungeon didn't look like people.

They looked like dried-out pork jerky.

The dried-up, mummy-like corpses... The vitality of the succubi... The contrast there had Lowein convinced that there was no creature more terrifying than a succubus.

He would die, too, like dried-out meat.

The very thought made his head swim with terror.

In fact, for the first few months after being dispatched to the succubus country as food, he was convinced death was imminent.

Every day, multiple succubi would throw Lowein to the floor, whisper sweet nothings to him with their eyes glowing red, and drain him dry over and over again.

Sure, there was pleasure... Enough to drive a man crazy.

But it was still hell, all the same.

Lowein was certain he would die soon. And in fact, some of the other food subjects who'd arrived at the same time as Lowein were dead within six months.

However, at some point, it became heaven.

The facility where they were housed had become so luxurious, it'd be fit for the aristocracy, or even royalty. The bare cobblestone floors had been replaced by soft carpet. The rough linen sacks that had served as a place to lie and sleep had been replaced by plush beds, and the rooms had been equipped with furniture like tables and chairs. What's more, those tables were laden with enough food for a feast...more than anyone could finish.

The meals were sumptuous, and the helpings kept coming.

The flavors of the dishes were a bit strong, perhaps, but it was better than starving. Lowein had no complaints.

Also, during a meal, he would only have to serve one succubus at a time now, and the use of the succubus charm was now banned.

Now he was free to grab a succubus and throw *her* down on the bed, if he liked... If that helped him feel more normal. The succubi were pretty businesslike about the transactions, but sometimes this setup helped to make things much more exciting.

Three years had passed. Lowein ate, Lowein slept, and Lowein was devoured by succubi who visited him at regular intervals.

But even a cushy life can grow boring if there's no variety. Lowein gained a lot of weight, and his physical condition began to deteriorate.

He was fattened and milked each day in a clinical fashion.

He was like livestock. No, he *was* livestock.

Dragging his heavy, dull body around, suffering from some nameless ailment, Lowein remembered that he was technically suffering a death penalty.

He had lost all of his humanity.

When he felt that sudden pain in his chest during the succubus's meal, he knew the moment had come.

But he survived.

Before he knew what had happened, he was lying on a much less comfortable bed, surrounded by succubi and a fairy flying about.

Apparently, he'd been revived with fairy dust.

The explanations of the fairy and the succubi didn't make much sense. But what Lowein gleaned from the situation was that an Orc Hero had come to the country and ordered Lowein saved.

The Orc Hero Bash. He had seen him only once.

It was the decisive battle of the Remium Plateau. Lowein could never forget it.

Lowein was in the human battalion.

He saw an orc fighting a mighty dragon.

Everyone present was watching with jaws hanging, witnessing a battle that defied all logic.

When the orc slew the dragon, Lowein felt an indescribable sense of excitement fill his chest.

He said he had seen something unbelievable.

Even though the enemy had won, Lowein still felt that way.

Now the orc had come to the succubus land, and all the succubi seemed in awe of him.

The succubi did not attempt to attack or seduce the orc. In fact, they seemed almost nervous around him.

And on top of that, the orc had helped out mere succubi fodder with the use of fairy dust.

Stupid, smelly orcs... But apparently, an Orc Hero was cut from a different cloth.

The day after that incident...

Lowein and the other food subjects were taken outside for the first time in three years.

Lowein felt the sun for the first time in three years. He saw other food subjects for the first time in three years.

They looked as fat and unhealthy as he did, and they, too, gazed up at the bright sky, looking dazed.

Being taken outside alone would have been strange enough, but why so many others, too? No one seemed to know what was going on.

However, in the place where Lowein and the others were taken, a hellish scene unfolded.

“Gah... Ooh! Gack! Agh!”

An ogre youth was being chased around by an orc and occasionally kicked in the air by him.

It was unclear what the boy had done, but the orc seemed very angry with him.

The boy's face was a mask of deathly terror.

“Hey, that's the Orc Hero.”

Someone spoke up, identifying the orc who was chasing the boy around.

It had to be. What other orcs were known to be in the country?

At that moment, the memory of that old battle came back to Lowein, and a chill ran down his spine, as if a centipede had just marched down it.

In this world, there are some terrible monsters.

And this one was angry. Kicking the boy all over the place.

“Perhaps we are to be...”

Everyone had the same thought.

They were much weaker now than they used to be.

There were too many succubi for the food subjects to keep fed to a satisfactory standard.

Yesterday, fairy dust had given them something of a boost, but no doubt those results were only temporary.

What do farmers do with old cows that stop producing milk?

The answer is obvious.

Succubi do not eat meat. But according to rumors, orcs do eat human flesh.

It made sense.

Yes... This is why we were fattened.

“Now, everyone, we’re going to run a few laps of the courtyard. Please, all follow me.”

The succubus who had brought the food subjects to the courtyard addressed them then.

The succubus sounded almost apologetic.

Yes. This was a test. Those who couldn’t keep up would be disposed of like old livestock. Turned into jerky or something like that and given to the orc to eat.

Lowein did not want that.

He did not want to die.

“You don’t have to push yourself too hard. Now let’s go.”

Lowein ran as fast as he could.

His body felt heavy, his knees creaked in protest, and his lungs screamed for air.

Still, thanks to the fairy dust infusion he’d drunk yesterday, he was able to run.

Then, perhaps inspired by Lowein’s example, or perhaps having come to the same terrifying conclusion as Lowein, someone else started running in earnest as well.

When one person started running, two more followed suit. Then it was four.

If we don't run, this could be bad. Everyone seemed to have the same thought. They started running as fast as they could.

No one thought too deeply about why the ogre boy was being chased.

However, the ogre boy's look of desperation was enough to make those who had been idle for three years feel a sense of real crisis and fear.

All the food subjects chose to run.

They moved their feet as fast as they could.

When they fell, they dragged themselves to their feet, insisting, "I'm still good! I can still run!" and those who couldn't get back up kept moving, even if they had to crawl.

They had all spent their days eating, sleeping, and servicing succubus women.

They'd lived like aristocrats. They'd been happy. They were grateful, so grateful to have been born male. Because if they'd been women, they'd have ended up as orc breeding slaves instead.

But they were still livestock.

Livestock must be disposed of when no longer of use.

No one wanted to die. They'd survived the war. They wanted to live longer yet.

They wanted to live as long as possible...

Driven by this instinct, the men continued running.



"The food subjects were very happy! We planned to have them jog a little today to see how they did, but they loved it and asked to be allowed to run even more! After the training session was over, they all had a lot more color in their cheeks than before! They all looked very satisfied and seemed to find a sense of accomplishment in the exercise."

"Hmm, I was doubting how effective it would be in preventing the recurrence of the disease... But if they're happy, then I suppose we should make this a

regular thing and keep it going...”

“But the number of meals provided has decreased, simply because of the extra time spent training. There will be some dissent, I think.”

“And if we continue the training sessions, there will be even less time for meals. We will have to ask the people to have patience...”

After getting this report from Nion, Curly Kale nodded.

After all, the food subjects were a vital resource, a limited resource.

The last thing they wanted was for any of them to get injured. But if the exercise was making them happier, then it was well worth doing.

“Out in the courtyard, Lord Bash was training his apprentice at the same time. The food subjects seemed to be inspired by this. They all seemed to want to show off the fact that they ‘still got it.’”

“Lord Bash is a war hero. Soldier of the Alliance of Four or not, it’s only natural the food subjects would want to show off their prowess through training. Incidentally, what kind of training did Lord Bash have his apprentice doing?”

“You are interested in the orc’s doings, Your Majesty?”

“Well, yeah. I don’t mind telling you, I wouldn’t mind being ‘trained’ by Lord Bash himself!”

Curly Kale let out a bewitching laugh, and Nion shrugged.

“From what I saw, the training was more about physical strength and mental fortitude than technical battle training. Specifically, Lord Bash kicked the boy and made him run until he collapsed.”

“Quite practical, eh?”

“That’s right. On the battlefield, once you can’t run anymore, you’re dead...”

“It reminds me of the Rina Desert. It really was that sort of battlefield. Magic aside, physical battling aside... Only those with the most physical strength and greatest mental fortitude survived to the end...”

“I didn’t participate in the evacuation battle of the Rina Desert, but the

succubus who volunteered to be the food subjects' physical coach was a survivor of it. She remembered being kicked by him and made to run... And how it made her drool!"

"Looking at Lord Bash as foodstuff is bad. Bad girl. But I shall not punish her. I no doubt would have felt the same if that had been me."

"You are so magnanimous."

Nion did not propose a punishment, either. She, too, had been taken over by Bash's charms.

Though they'd only met once in the grand hall, Nion had stared at Bash's muscles, noting how they were so taut, they looked ready to snap. She'd wanted to throw herself against that firm chest. And the way he sat with his legs apart made her feel like he was personally seducing her.

If she hadn't kept her head bowed low, she might have lost total control of herself.

"At any rate, I don't think it's such a good idea for Lord Bash to stay in the succubus land much longer. Someone will end up losing their head."

"Yes. Personally, I'd like to keep him forever, but..."

"I hope Your Majesty will not be the one to sully the good name of the succubi..."

The two shared a wordless grin.

Suddenly, Nion looked out the window.

Not a single star could be seen in the dark sky.

"Ah."

Curly Kale had a sudden thought.

"The food subjects training, Lord Bash and his apprentice training... While we succubi just stand around watching? What if Lord Bash thinks we're lazy?"

"Hmm... Yes... So should we do some military exercises?"

"No, if we do that, it might look like we succubi are preparing for war. For now, I'll just run laps like they do."

“I cannot allow my Queen to run alone. I shall accompany you. And let’s rope in some volunteers, too.”

“Heh-heh, let’s.”

And so Curly Kale decided to take up jogging as well.

“I need volunteers.”

Nion returned to her office and summoned her subordinates.

“Tomorrow, the Queen will be jogging along with Bash’s training. Naturally, we should run as well. We are looking for other volunteers to join.”

“Yes, ma’am!”

After this short exchange, the subordinates nodded and left the room.

Seeing this, Nion sat down in her chair, relieved.

And that was the beginning of all the misfortune.



The next day, Bash saw a wonderful sight.

Women.

A group of women, running in the courtyard in front of him.

Succubi, yes. But still women.

And at the head of the group was the most succulent succubus of all, Curly Kale.

Nearly a hundred succubi running in her wake.

If they’d just been running, Bash would have been pleased enough.

But succubi wear skimpy clothes as part of the national costume.

The clothes are made of leather, fitting tightly to the body, and are easy to get physical in.

So as they ran, there was a lot of jiggling and swaying.

Swaying from their hair, and jiggling from... Well, you know.

The parts Bash was panting to get his hands on.

Now those parts were parading in front of him.

And not just a single set of parts. There were female jiggle bits of all shapes and sizes, bobbling around all over the place.

What a view! Bash was so taken, he even stopped kicking Ludo.

But as the final group of running succubi passed by, Bash's grin tightened.

The last group was the young succubi.

Skinny bodies leaned forward, faces pale, mouths opening and closing like fish out of water, glaring ahead with murderous stares as they struggled to follow the Queen.

Only when they passed in front of Bash did their eyes turn toward Bash and Ludo.

Their glares fixed on Bash's crotch, their mouths curved into smiles, their tongues darted out to lick dry lips.

Even Bash could pick up on the waves of dangerous desire emanating from the group.

Even after they passed by, they kept their heads turned toward Bash, necks twisting, and once this was no longer possible, their faces showed disappointment.

This odd jogging session of the Queen's came to an end after an easy fifty laps of the courtyard.

The Queen and her entourage returned to the palace, clutching gym towels and saying things like, "That was a heck of a workout!"

One by one, the others returned to their posts.

Only the final group of jogging succubi remained.

Sprawled on the floor half dead, gasping for breath.

Their dead eyes were fixed in different directions. Some looked at the sky. Some looked at the ground. Some looked in the direction of where the Queen had gone. Some looked at the buildings. But all had that same stare.

Eventually, the girls slowly got to their feet, and as if in silent agreement, they

turned their eyes to Bash and began advancing upon him.

But Venus quickly moved to stand in their way.

Venus stared them down until the young succubi clucked their tongues, turning from Bash and slinking out of the courtyard.

After making sure they had gone, Venus turned to Bash.

“So what did you think?”

Bash was a little surprised to be asked that question. But he couldn't deny that it had been a true feast for the eyes.

“Hmm. Not bad.”

His response assured Venus that the Queen's demonstration had hit its mark, and she nodded with a smile.



Curly Kale returned to the royal palace after her first workout in a long time and after successfully demonstrating her prowess to Bash.

A strategy of hers had paid off, and she felt reassured.

Some nice weather would have gone with this triumphant mood, but it was still cloudy outside. No doubt it must be raining heavily outside the barrier.

Nion came to stand at the window with the Queen.

Her eyes reflected the cloudy sky, just like the Queen's did.

“Your Highness.”

“Ye-es?”

“My subordinates are also worried that the rain won't stop.”

“Yeah... I know...”

“You won't discuss it, even with me?”

Nion and Curly Kale were from basically the same generation.

Before Curly Kale was called Queen, the two had shared the battlefield as comrades.

It would be no exaggeration to say she was one of the succubi Curly Kale trusted the most.

“No, I really don’t know the cause. It’s just...”

“Yes?”

“I don’t know if it’s related, but I can’t contact the Sacred Guardians.”

“...Did you send scouts?”

“Naturally, I sent a platoon just to make sure, but... they haven’t come back. They’ve probably all been wiped out.”

“A whole platoon wiped out?! Could it be Carrot’s doing?”

“No. Even if she were insane, there’s no way she would mess with the Sacred Place. She should know better than anyone how important the Sacred Place is to the succubi.”

“Then who?”

“I do not know the culprits, but there can be no doubt that this country is currently under attack.”

Curly Kale’s words contained a chilling, murderous intent.

Nion responded evenly, feeling a warm sense of nostalgia from the sound of that voice.

This she was familiar with.

“Your Majesty, if you’re worried, why don’t I go and check? If we’re facing an enemy who can scatter even the defenders of the Sacred Place, we’ll need to use a certain amount of skill, right?”

“What about the cafeteria?”

“I can leave that to my subordinates as well.”

“Oh, Nion... Yes, if you’re offering...can I entrust the ‘subjugation team’ to you?”

“You can count on me.”

There was almost no sound in the royal palace, protected by the barrier.

It was a silent night.

8

A WARRIORESS IN THE RAIN

Somewhere deep in the forest.

About a half day's march from the succubus capital.

The clever placement of multiple barriers caused people to lose their way in the forest, and many never reached their destination.

Not to say they'd be lost and stranded. Instead, they were funneled in the direction of the capital.

In this way, even after the war ended, the succubi were able to keep this place hidden from the other races.

Not that the other races would have done anything in particular, even if they'd known about it.

The succubi called it the Sacred Place.

Unlike the beastkin, they did not build their town around it or hold festivals there.

It was kept hidden and protected by multiple barriers.

Those of other races wouldn't even pick up on the fact that barriers were in place, let alone that there was a succubus sacred place there.

Even some succubi didn't know about the existence of the Sacred Place.

Still, there was definitely something there. Something the succubi had protected and believed in for many years.

A woman stood in that sacred place.

"Darn you..."

The Sacred Place was quiet today, as always.

But the ground was soaked with blood, and the last barrier had lost its glow.

Several succubi lay on the ground. Succubi corpses.

“Who *are* you...?”

All of the fallen succubi had been decorated warriors.

In a peaceful world, these were people who chose to serve their country over freedom.

Now those succubi were lying on the ground, destroyed.

The last standing succubus was glaring at the person who had committed this massacre inside the last barrier standing in the way of the Sacred Place. A barrier that was designed to prevent any intrusion.

She was a woman.

A human, probably, but she looked odd. About 80 percent of her face was covered, with only her eyes showing. She stood casually but was clearly on the alert.

She answered the succubus’s questions in a light tone.

“I’m under no obligation to answer, but I am humbled by your dedication, so usually, I would tell you. However, I have already lost my good name, and I have no intention of using my old name, so you’ll have to forgive me. As to my purpose... I want to take the power of your Sacred Place and use it to exact my revenge.”

“The... Power...?”

“Oh, you don’t know? Well, I suppose I didn’t know about it myself, either, until recently... There are certain places on this continent where power is accumulated, and if you gather that power, you can make miracles happen. Miracles, yes, it’s a vague term, but...for example...”

The woman’s easygoing tone darkened a little.

“Like bringing the dead back to life.”

The strongest of the succubus warriors trembled at those words.

“Are you planning on reviving Geddigs?”

“Good guess. Precisely.”

“You’re a human, right? Why would you do something like that? It’s a human world right now, isn’t it? Even the elves and dwarves kowtow to humans now. So why?”

“I mentioned revenge, right? Yes, I am human, but I am not on their side.”

“But a swordsperson of your caliber... You must have achieved great feats on the battlefield, right?”

“Yes. I know it sounds crazy. But humans are idiots.”

Shrugging, the warrioress shook her head.

“Now, let’s end this nonsense, shall we? ...Succubus warrior.”

“...”

“Normally, I would say that I’d spare your life if you can break this barrier, but contrary to appearances, I actually like the succubi. I won’t do anything that would hurt your national pride. I’d rather kill you honorably, like a real warrior, than do that.”

“What you’re doing is damaging enough to our pride... Doesn’t that occur to you?”

“I disagree. In fact, if I get my way, you people will get all of your lost pride back and more. Now, steel yourself.”

The succubus responded to the threat instantly.

She held up her fists in front of her, red eyes blazing, and a thick pink mist surrounded her.

Obviously, she knew the charm wouldn’t work on women, but releasing fog helped her get in the right mindset for battle.

“...I am Nion the Suffocator, the Vice-Commander-in-Chief of the Second Battalion under the succubus Queen!”

“I’m really sorry, but I don’t have a name to give you.”

The woman readied her sword.

The fighting stance set Nion's nerves jangling.

Considering the clear difference in their ability levels, it was only natural.

Nion knew winning was out of the question. This woman was clearly overwhelmingly strong. None of the elite soldiers Nion had brought with her had been able to inflict a single scratch.

"Well then, farewell."

Nion was a ray of light.

She couldn't even see the trajectory of the swipe. She just felt the heat of it against her neck.

"...Gah... Curly... I'm so sorry... Nio... Your Highness..."

Certain of her imminent death, Nion thought only of the Queen she adored and of her younger sister, who worked as the Queen's aide.

Then Nion's vision went black, and her long life as a succubus came to its end.

"...Hah."

Amid the piles of corpses, the woman took a deep breath and ran her hands through her hair.

The blood and gore on the sword she held was washed away quickly by the pouring rain.

"Now, then..."

The woman produced a key from her clothing.

One glance was enough to tell that this item was imbued with immense magical power, decorated as it was with intricate metalwork and jewels that emitted an ominous glow.

She inserted this key into the final barrier.

An ominous light spilled out from the insertion point...

But then an unpleasant, discordant sound rang out, as if to indicate some sort of conflict.

"...Oh. It's not going to open so easily, eh?"

The woman shrugged and peered through the barrier.

There were still a few succubi left inside the barrier.

Casters, maintaining the final barrier.

“I suppose this much should be expected from a succubus barrier... Even with the exact magic key needed to shatter the barrier, it’s still going to take some time to take effect...”

“...”

“But this magic key will not fail. After all, it’s a national treasure of the demons. It’s only a matter of time until the barrier breaks. But how about you do me a favor and release this barrier right away? You people will be trapped in there for several days, you know? You’ll go crazy from hunger, you know? Rather than suffer all that, why don’t you just come out now and fight? It will be better for both of us that way.”

The succubi holed up on the other side of the barrier knew all this.

The soldiers they’d seen slain in front of their eyes had all been decorated war veterans.

The slaying had been *brutal*. They’d barely had time to lift their swords before they’d been sliced and diced by the woman.

So they got it.

They understood what the woman was offering.

“I’ll kill you, but I’ll make it quick and painless. So come out now.”

The remaining succubi had a mission—to protect the Sacred Place.

Yes, they were hungry. But they weren’t going to abandon their posts over a few hunger pangs.

All they could do was hold tight and wait for reinforcements.

“...So you’re going to wait for reinforcements? Hmm, I thought the succubi would be braver, but you people are a disappointment.”

The succubi did not respond to the woman’s taunt.

“You’re wondering what will come first, the barrier breaking or your reinforcements showing up... But let me assure you. It won’t work out in your favor. You are simply wasting your own time.”

The woman grinned, perhaps sensing the unease unfolding within the hearts of the succubi.

Still, the succubi did not move.

They could not.

“Well, that’s fine. Like I keep saying, it’s all just a matter of time...”

The succubus heard those words, but the rain snatched them away quickly, the wind whipping the dregs away to the forest.

There was no one else to hear.

“Do you really think that you can revive Lord Geddigs?”

A succubus inside the barrier was the one who muttered this.

The woman laughed.

“Oh yes, I think so.”

“Bringing the dead back to life... It’s absurd, you know?”

“Yes, I agree. In fact, in order to resurrect the dead, you apparently need an enormous amount of power, far beyond the comprehension of current human knowledge.”

“Then...”

“But *this* land... Has *so* much power.”

The woman continued talking, almost as if she was trying to bring the succubi around to her way of thinking. Even though that really wasn’t her intention at all.

“A certain person found a document detailing this in an ancient ruin... This world was built on ancient battlegrounds, where battles were waged between great creatures, creatures modern humans couldn’t even begin to visualize.”

“Some of those old corpses still hold power... And they bestow certain

blessings on those who live in those areas...”

“People have worshipped the power that dwells in those old corpses as gods... Your Sacred Place is one such place of power.”

“So then why not use this power? Simply revering old bones will do nothing...”

“If I revive Lord Geddigs and spark another war, this time, the Coalition of Seven *will* win. Demons, succubi, ogres... They will be able to escape their current painful reality and grow drunk on the sweet wine of victory! Like the modern-day dirty humans are doing.”

One of the succubi confused by that final remark spoke up.

“Dirty humans...? Have you no pride in your own race?”

“Nope, none.”

“...”

“That self-serving, scummy race... They have zero pride.”

The woman’s voice was suddenly so cold, it chilled all listening to their very cores.

“So that’s how things are. I apologize for this, but would you mind opening the barrier for me? You’ll all die, yes, but it won’t be a bad thing for the succubus race in the end, you’ll see.”

Some among the succubi were slightly moved by what the woman had to say about resurrecting Geddigs.

But that final remark she’d made about her own race... That put any of them off going along with her.

Because what she was saying was twisted... Abhorrent... And it chilled them all to the bone.

MARKET RESEARCH

Several days had passed since Bash arrived in the land of the succubi.

The rain still showed no signs of stopping.

Ludo was steadily gaining strength, but his skills were still lacking.

During the days of pure stagnation, Bash had been doing a little training of his own for the first time in a while, but he still seemed to have a lot of time on his hands.

However, Bash was not the type of person who can endure stagnation.

After holding a strategy meeting with Zell, he took action.

“Lord Bash... What is it you’re saying here?”

Venus, escorting Bash and the others, as usual, seemed stunned by what Bash had just said.

“I want you to tell me what kind of men women like.”

As soon as Venus heard that, she gulped and let her gaze wander around her surroundings.

She was sure this must be some sort of test.

Otherwise, there would be no way that the mysterious and attractive man in front of her would say something so obviously tempting.

“So...what do you mean?”

Venus needed to tread carefully.

If she said something like, “You, completely naked!” then she’d end up on the execution stand.

“I’m looking for a wife.”

“Being an orc’s wife... I hear that means, uh, never missing a meal, so to speak.”

She responded evenly but with some hope.

Venus was a first-class soldier.

If she’d been any girl on the street, she’d have found herself on the chopping block already. Head, say good-bye to body.

But if he meant what she was hoping he meant... Then Venus wouldn’t need to be asked twice.

She would immediately take off her clothes and throw herself against Bash’s manly chest.

“Lord Bash, are you thinking of taking a succubus as your wife?”

That said, Venus had to be very careful here.

She hadn’t lost wings and tail due to being careless and running ahead of the pack during the war, after all.

“Hmm? Indeed, if I took a succubus as my wife, I would be able to brag to the others when I returned to my homeland. But you all hate orcs, don’t you?”

“Ah...well, erm, that’s true. We have a lot of respect for *you*, of course, Lord Bash, but we don’t think too much of the majority of the orcs...”

To be an orc’s wife is to become an orc’s sex slave.

Treated like objects and shown off as trophies.

Treated as a completely inferior being, in other words.

Most succubi considered all orcs other than Bash to be lower creatures.

Belonging to an orc was something a proud succubus would never do.

But in today’s scrappy world, a young succubi might actually accept such a position gladly...

It’s not all fun and games for the orcs, either.

If an orc married a succubus, that orc would be duty bound to feed his wife almost every night.

At first glance, this might sound like a win-win, but it's not a good thing for the orc race overall.

Because that orc would not be able to have new children.

It's no big deal if a few orcs do it, but if all the hungry succubi flocked to the orc country, it would spell the end of the orc race.

"Of course, Lord Bash, if you were after a trophy to prove you had subjugated a wife... I mean a succubus, I think there would be many volunteers. Myself included..."

Venus's gaze went to Bash's crotch.

Venus was living with a lack of food every day.

And being Bash's wife would not hurt any succubus's pride.

In other words, Bash could get it.

"...But that's not what you're after... Is it?"

Venus asked to confirm.

She was a very proud succubus, after all.

If she'd been a younger succubus, she'd be up in heaven right now, happily chasing men in the afterlife.

"Right. I would love to have a succubus wife, of course, but I need someone to birth my children."

"Ah yes, of course!!!"

Bash was an Orc Hero.

Venus, knowing the orcish sense of values, understood perfectly how a succubus would not be suitable as an orc's wife.

"Of course, if you weren't a succubus, I would have proposed to you when we first met, but with things being as they are..."

If Bash had the ability to see sound, he would have been able to see Venus's heart pounding in her chest.

But even Bash didn't have that kind of ability.

“Ahem, Lord Bash. I am a proud succubus soldier. I have endured harsh training, fought through fierce battles, and have a will of steel. However, you tempt me too much. In the succubus country, we’re taught that viewing a respectable man as food is an act that tarnishes one’s pride.”

“Hmm? Ah, yes. I understand.”

The confused look on Bash’s face as he nodded struck Venus as so cute, she wanted to yell, “It’s when you do stuff like that!” but of course, she could make no sound.

“So, I’m on a quest to find myself a human or elf woman who might be able to bear children as my wife, but nothing seems to be working out.”

“But, Lord Bash, you are an orc. Why not just fight a woman, defeat her, drag her to a secluded place, defile her, and then take her home as your own?”

“The Orc King’s orders prohibit sexual intercourse without consent, so that’s not an option.”

“Ah. Even the orcs face restrictions from the higher-ups...”

Venus muttered, then looked at Bash again.

Orcs were under constraints, just like succubi.

The succubi starved from limited food, and orcs were prevented from multiplying by restrictions placed on reproduction.

Despite this, Bash had decided to go along with human rules in his quest to find a wife.

No doubt he’d experienced tremendous discrimination and oppression throughout his journey thus far.

Much like Carrot, the succubus general who was currently away on a diplomatic mission.

Traveling, with great determination.

“Once I’m done helping out the kids, I’m going to go to the demon country. I received a letter of introduction to the demon race from the human prince Nazar. I’ve failed many times in the past, but this time, I want to get a wife for

sure.”

“I see!”

Now Venus understood what was going on.

He wanted advice on what women liked, to boost his chances for his next attempt.

“In that case, I’ll help however I can. Only... I must confess, I don’t know much about women from other countries, either.”

“Mmm...”

“But no doubt the demons are indebted to you as well, Lord Bash. Why don’t you just go and tell them you want a demon wife to strengthen friendly relationships between your two races? The demons won’t be able to say no then.”

“You think so?!”

“They may have requests of their own, but I think the demons are having a hard time right now, too, and strong connections could help them. The demons are a proud people, so I can’t really comment, but connections must be something they want. Like us succubi. We can’t have free diplomacy because we’re being watched so closely by other races, so we’d appreciate stronger bonds with the orcs.”

Bash’s chest swelled with anticipation.

Still, Bash was a veteran warrior. And on his journey so far, he had suffered many defeats.

Under the circumstances, he harbored no delusions.

“I doubt it would go all that smoothly.”

“...Maybe not. Just like us succubi, demons look down on the orc race. Actually, they look down on them even more than we do.”

As Venus spoke, she thought of the demon women she’d encountered.

They looked down on everyone.

It was especially bad when Geddigs was still alive. They even looked down on

the succubi and the ogres, too.

It wasn't a nice memory to think back on.

But now the demon race was suffering a decline.

Not as bad as the succubi had it, maybe... But no doubt the demons were suffering right now. That gave Venus a sense of satisfaction.

As she was mulling over this, Zell, who had been listening quietly for a while, suddenly piped up.

"That's right! Demon women and succubi have a lot of pride, and even besides that, they're a lot alike! How about we have Venus imitate a demon woman, and you two do some role-play as practice?"

Venus tilted her head.

"What do you mean 'imitate a demon woman'?"

"You know, you say something like, 'Get that arrogant orc out of my sight!' or something like that."

Venus could feel the blood draining from her face.

"I can't. I cannot. Please, spare me. Lord Bash, you are truly my hero. I don't want to look at you as food. I'd rather it be the other way around, with you thinking of *me* as food. But please don't make me do this! Also, if another succubus happened to see, my goose would be cooked! The moment Lord Bash leaves this country, I'll be taken to a back alley, tied in a sack, and beaten to death."

"Really?"

"If it were me, that's the punishment I'd come up with. Treating Lord Bash the same as any other orc... Looking down on him... It is something no succubus should ever do! I mean, if the Queen found out, she'd hand out a sentence of capital punishment!"

Venus bit her lip hard.

But a certain thought occurred to her.

She knew she could do it. Imitate a demon woman, that is. Imitate one of

those arrogant yet capable warriors. Wavering between pride and gratitude, she screwed up her face and spoke.

“But if you understand all that, Lord Bash, and would *still* like me to serve as a practice partner for you, then I... Then I...!”

She sprayed bloody spittle between her lips.

“No, I would not insist.”

“Oh, all right.”

Venus breathed a sigh of relief.

“...So then, how have you been going about it so far?”

“I have followed the human and elf custom of wooing in advance of an official verbal proposal.”

Venus opened her eyes and shifted her gaze from Bash’s crotch to his face.

She’d never dreamed that the strongest warrior of the orcish race, a race that indiscriminately impregnates any woman they see, would pursue such long-winded methods.

But at the same time, she was very impressed.

Lord Bash put a lot of consideration into his actions.

And this provided even more context behind why Lord Bash had come here as an inspector to appraise the succubi’s handling of the human’s food provisions.

“How wonderful... But yes... As I said earlier, I’m a succubus, so I don’t know much about women from other races... I’m sorry I can’t be of more assistance...”

“But succubi *are* women, are they not?”

“No, Lord Bash. You cannot lump us in with women. True, we succubi are no doubt female in appearance, and we are attracted to men, but unlike other races, we do not seek children. We seek only to feed.”

“But you have your own children, too, don’t you?”

“That’s a little different, though...”

Venus nodded and rubbed her chin thoughtfully.

“I don’t think our values would help you there. When we succubi create children, we place emphasis on strength. Stronger mothers give birth to stronger children.”

“Mmm...”

If women were wooed by mere strength alone, Bash ought to have a whole harem of wives including human, elf, dwarf, and beastkin by now.

In that case, he would have already handled his virginity and would by now have no doubt found himself a succubus as wife number five, and would be lounging with a blissful expression on his face.

By this point in time, Venus, for her part, would have already had her fill and would be lying back full and satisfied, casually picking her teeth with a toothpick, as it were.

“However, your attitude impresses me, Lord Bash. And, well... It’s true that in this day and age, we succubi also have to make an effort to be liked by men. We can’t just rely on our charms...”

“But aren’t your everyday words and gestures designed to make men like you?”

“Are they? Everyone’s just born like that, so I don’t really know... But I do hear that before the war started, our charms weren’t as strong as they are now, and we had to use our words and gestures to turn a man on...”

“Your words and gestures...?”

Come to think of it, Bash had never once thought about such things since he’d left the orc country.

Of course, Bash tried to use polite speech when he could, but the significance of gestures was beyond him.

“Venus. How ought a man act in order to entice you?”

“Well, you should be naked, with a hand on hips... Ah, no, ignore me. Just forget it.”

“Okay. Let’s forget it.”

“I mean... I don’t really know, but if you think succubus behavior leads to a positive reception from men, then there may be a hint there. We act like that toward all races... So, Bash, if there was a woman around who acted like us, what would you think?”

“Hmm. I’d find her sexy. I’d assume she’d be able to produce a child right away, without much resistance.”

“Even from an orc’s perspective... My guess is that signs of vitality probably stimulate the reproductive instinct.”

“And then women get stimulated, too?”

“No doubt it’s the same.”

The demon country was up next.

Even with a letter of introduction, Bash knew it would not be easy.

But he felt like he was finally starting to see a ray of hope.

“But what kind of gestures and words should I use to make women feel good? Especially demons.”

“...Well now, I don’t really know myself... We succubi tend to like it when a man fights back a bit or seems confident...”

“It’s similar to what orcs look for in a woman.”

“Succubi and orcs are both races that traditionally enjoyed subjugating other races, so I think our tastes and preferences are similar.”

“The same goes for demons. But in that case, isn’t it better to be obedient and lack confidence?”

“No, demons don’t view submissives as equals. You have to act in a way that makes you seem like their equal.”

“What is equality for a demon?”

“Well...”

But in the end, the answer to Bash’s initial question did not seem

forthcoming.

It seemed that the ray of light he'd thought he saw was completely in his imagination.

"...I'm sorry, I really don't think I can help you."

"Ah, it's no problem."

Bash knew from the beginning that there were differences between each race.

And until now, Bash had always tried to respond flexibly to the given situation.

"In the end, I have no choice but to continue on as usual."

Bash nodded, girding himself once more for the demon princesses he was on his way to meet.

He did not feel disappointment.

It was like this during the war, too.

A sudden strategy or secret weapon designed to reverse the tide of a difficult battle... Those things were in short supply.

In the end, you had no choice but to stick to your guns and just try to become stronger.

Then one day, as Bash continued his stay in the succubi country, an incident occurred.

10

A Riot

The incident occurred a few days after the exercise sessions held by the food subjects and succubi started.

“Some kind of commotion seems to be going on.”

Bash was just training Ludo in the cafeteria’s garden and had now decided to take a short break.

There was a sudden clamor from the other side of the wall.

A light, sweet scent began to waft through the garden, and the food subjects training near Bash also began to mumble among themselves.

“...There’s a huge number of succubi gathered on the other side of the wall.”

“A festival or something?”

“No, it’s not like that. They all look sort of... Murderous.”

“...So not a festival, then?”

Bash asked, a little on edge.

He was a veteran warrior. He knew there were many murderous succubi outside the wall.

Still, fights are inevitable at festivals.

The succubi looking bloodthirsty didn’t mean a festival wasn’t going on.

No doubt it would be a fine thing indeed to enjoy a drink of booze while watching the beautiful succubi fight among each other.

“Something’s up... Lord Bash, please stick close to me.”

As Venus spoke, she got out a metal knuckle duster and slipped it over her hand.

Succubi enjoy barehanded combat, but some use these kinds of weapons from time to time.

The next moment, a large number of succubi came running out of the cafeteria, and one dashed over to Venus as she stood beside Bash.

“Lieutenant Venus!”

“What’s all this fuss about?”

“A riot broke out! Everyone’s dissatisfied because of the drop in food rations...!”

Hearing that, Venus went pale.

“What about the evacuation of the food subjects?!”

“It’s already started. Only, the mob has already invaded the cafeteria. We’ve been ordered to keep the exercising food subjects out here.”

Bash looked over to see that the other succubi had begun to surround the exercising food subjects.

Protect the food subjects out in the open.

It struck Bash as a decent idea.

Without getting a visual on the enemy, it made sense to stay put and defend, pending updated information.

Even more so when there were people to protect.

Units are more defenseless when they are on the move.

But the food subjects, perhaps fired up from the exercising, were not falling in line. They seemed to be attracted by the sweet smell coming from beyond the wall, and even started attempting to caress the butts of the succubi guarding them.

“Lord Bash, you go over there, too. I know they’re succubi, but I can’t guarantee the young ones won’t molest you in a fray. If anything happened to you, my neck would be on the chopping block.”

Venus phrased it politely, but actually, even Bash knew he could not win against succubi.

But it was nothing to be ashamed of.

That was just the way things were.

Succubi specialize in sucking men to death.

If a succubus attacked in earnest, then no one, not Bash, not any Hero from any country, would be able to defeat them.

“Wait, Ludo isn’t back yet, Boss?!”

“The apprentice...? But where are you going?!”

“He went to take a leak!”

Yes, Ludo had just finished training and headed into the cafeteria to relieve himself.

Normally, he would have just pissed on the ground, but this was the land of the succubi, and for a man to expose his genitals in public meant certain death.

No doubt he’d gone to use the toilets inside the cafeteria building.

On the first floor, there were many succubi who’d come to eat, so no doubt he’d headed to the toilets on the second or third floor.

“I’ll go look for him, Boss!”

“Ah, fairy Zell, please wait! I’ll summon the security guards...”

But Zell zoomed off without heeding Venus.

Bash made no move to stop the fairy.

When a sudden situation like this occurs, it’s best to get information first, rather than acting blindly.

The fairy, specialized in reconnaissance, flew off quickly.

It would be best if Zell located Ludo.

If Zell could not find him, then it would not matter how much or how soon Bash went looking.

“...”

Bash sat down, gazed up at the cafeteria, and simply waited.

Meanwhile, the fence had been breached, and the rioters are rushing in.

However, the guards, including Venus, were dealing with this.

Most of the rioters appeared to be young people who'd had little participation in the war.

The guards all looked like seasoned warriors and were managing to suppress the rioters, one after another.

Although the mob had the overwhelming numbers, the guards showed no signs of losing.

Bash looked away, returning his gaze to the cafeteria.

There was a strong light beaming on the rooftop.

It was a familiar light.

The light emitted when a fairy transmits an emergency SOS.

Bash leaped to his feet.

He sped through the battle, shoving away succubi as he went, heading for the building.

He braced his feet on the window frame of the second floor and hauled his body up. Slamming his fists against the wall, he created craters as footholds and climbed higher and higher and higher.

In no time, he reached the roof.

"Boss!"

Immediately, the fairy appeared, hovering by Bash's face.

Before he could say anything to Zell, his attention was arrested by the scene unfolding on the rooftop.

The sight he saw there was almost enviable.

They were all young succubi.

Small breasts, small bodies, slim limbs.

Those girlish forms were surrounding a boy.

The boy was on his knees, eyes blank. The characteristic slack expression of someone under a spell, and on top of that, he was already stripped to the waist.

The succubi surrounding him, too...

“...Hey, old man. Who the heck are you?”

The eyes focused on Bash were predatory eyes.

A thick pink mist had already settled on the rooftop, and the eyes of the succubi glowed bright red.

Bash squeezed his eyes shut and held his breath.

Then he charged toward Ludo.

“Kyaaa!”

“What the heck?!”

“That old man’s rushing us!”

Hearing the succubi cries, Bash grabbed Ludo’s body and hugged him to his chest.

But as he tried to flee the scene, he felt dizzy and fell to his knees.

“Guh...”

An animalistic lust flared inside him, and it occurred to him that he should open his eyes and get an eyeful of the bare skin displayed by the succubi all around.

Apparently, by the time he’d made it to the roof, he’d already inhaled too much of the pink fog.

Of course. The succubi were fighting not just on the rooftop but throughout the cafeteria, spreading that pink fog all around.

“Hmm?”

“What’s wrong, pops?”

“Are you tired?”

“Just take a break, okay? We won’t hurt you.”

“Hey, don’t close your eyes. Look at us? Okay?”

The sweet voices of the succubi tickled Bash’s ears.

Bash curled up to protect Ludo, chancing a yell but trying not to take a breath.

“Zell!”

“Got it, Boss!”

The fairy responded instantly.

Bash could not see Zell at that moment.

However, he could tell by the sounds that a battle had ensued.

Zell was a veteran warrior, but a fairy’s main attack was magic, and succubi have high magic resistance. Bash could tell from the sound of attacks ricocheting that the young succubi weren’t used to battle, but it was still five against one. Zell was outmatched.

“Kya!”

“What’s that? A fairy? Get out of our way!”

“Quit your posturing and fluttering! What’s wrong if we have a little taste?”

“The Queen and her guards eat well enough! Why shouldn’t we have a little feast every now and then?!”

The succubi were dashing about, screaming in rage, the sweet, dulcet tones of earlier now absent.

“Your logic is flawed!”

Usually, Zell would be able to fly around freely, blasting magic, making child’s play of these green succubi.

But he wasn’t able to do that so well while keeping Bash and Ludo behind him.

Fairies are not suited to fighting while protecting others.

“Gah!”

“Caught it!”

“Kill it! Pull its head off its neck!”

The moment Bash heard that, his eyes widened.

A man who abandoned his comrade to die was not worthy of the title Orc Hero.

Bash jumped up and slammed his fist into the succubus who had hold of Zell.

But Bash pulled his punch, maybe because he was afraid Zell would be harmed, or maybe it was because he was under the influence of the pink fog.

The succubus’s upper body would have exploded if Bash had inflicted one of his usual hits. In reality, though, it merely went tumbling away, then began convulsing on the lip of the roof.

Zell slipped from its grasp and returned to the air.

But that was the best Bash could do.

“Get up! Look! Look into my eyes! Look! Look at me!”

Bash inhaled a thick pink mist, and his movements slowed down, as one of the succubi slunk in front of him.

He gazed right into red, glowing eyes.

“...Guh!”

“Heh-heh. Pops, you’re sweet. I really like ya. And there’s something I want you to give me... In *copious* amounts. Okay?”

The sweet voice of the succubi began to charm Bash.

No man could resist that voice. No man of any race...

“No!”

The next moment, a shadow leaped between Bash and the succubus, breaking their eye contact.

It was Luca.

She thrust her head in between Bash and the succubus like she was performing a headbutt, blocking any further contact.

Right. The succubus charm did not work on women.

“‘Curse of Thorns’!”

Luca pointed her staff at the succubus. Thorns sprang up and wrapped around the succubus’s body, preventing it from moving.

“What the heck?! You miserable brat! Get out of my way! I’ll kill you!”



“I won’t let you lay a hand on either Lord Bash *or* my brother!”

“Get rid of the woman! Kill her!”

“Right away!”

“‘Curse of Thorns’! ...Gah!”

However, just as Luca was about to bind the next succubus in line, someone grabbed her hair and pulled her to the ground.

Another succubus climbed on top of her and wrapped her arms around Luca’s neck.

And the red glowing eyes of a succubus met Bash’s once again.

Bash could no longer close his eyes.

His mesmerized brain would not allow him to.

“Flashlight!”

Zell returned at a swoop.

A blinding light shattered the succubus’s vision.

The succubus closed her eyes and turned her head away.

“Gah!!!”

Zell became a bullet of pure light and flew toward the other succubi.

“Don’t move, fairy! Unless you want this girl to die!”

When Zell saw Luca being held by the scruff of her neck, the fairy froze.

Zell hesitated. Try to save Luca? Or stand down?

They reluctantly chose the latter, but the fairy wasn’t about to come quietly.

Zell began to use their special skill... Ear-bending.

“What the heck do you think you’re all doing?!”

Zell raised their voice.

And in their usual jabbering tone...

“Succubi are forbidden to eat people of other races without permission,

right? Moreover, Lord Bash is the benefactor of the succubi! Do you understand?! The Queen will be furious! Ah, what will happen to you? Oh, I know! A mere scolding wouldn't be so bad, but considering the situation, it could be the death penalty! But it's okay. If you stand down now, I'll back you up! I'm good at groveling! The best in the biz! I can sweet-talk a queen or two..."

"Who cares? We're hungry! And yet they force us to exercise now?! Yurine! Get a move on and charm the orc into taking off his pants!"

One of the succubi got up, rubbing her eyes.

Though her vision still hadn't recovered from Zell's blinding beam, she tried to make eye contact with Bash even though she kept blinking rapidly.

Bash was immobilized, on the verge of being completely charmed... He inhaled even more of the pink fog, his consciousness grown hazy now.

By contrast, Bash's little general was decidedly perky, and it seemed to have a mind of its own, hell-bent on thrusting toward the succubus before it.

The succubus stood over Bash, eyes glowing red.

There was no one left to save Bash now.

"Stop it, you idiots!"

No, there was someone.

A succubus stood at the entrance to the rooftop.

Pink hair and small breasts.

She looked sort of childlike but had a much more mature and bewitching aura than that of the young succubi who had attacked Bash.

Her single wing and torn tail suggested a long history of fighting.

"Yeek! It's Venus!"

"Wh-what the heck...? Now see here, we were just..."

Venus stomped over to Bash with glaring eyes and knelt down before him.

"Lord Bash, I am so sorry about this."

But Bash, enchanted, just gazed at Venus with lust and made no response.

Venus looked away with a pained expression and slowly turned around.

Seeing the look on her face, the other succubi automatically took a step back.

“You scum! This man is a benefactor to all us succubi. If it wasn’t for him, you wouldn’t even have been *born*. Don’t you even realize that?”

The succubi did not answer, so Venus carried on.

“Of course I know you’re hungry. I know you’re forcing yourself to hold back. I understand. We’re adults... But please, don’t do this to this person. Please, let it remain true that the succubi he saved in battle are a noble race.”

Anyone who heard Venus’s words could tell she was completely earnest.

Her tone was sweet, typical of a succubus, but there was sincerity and urgency there, too.

It was like she understood their pain but wanted them to listen, to understand... That there was a certain line you did not cross.

“Oh, shut up! So what about nobility?!”

But her words did not move the young succubi.

“It’s fine for you to say that, when you’re not the ones going hungry!”

“You gorge yourselves, then lecture US?”

Venus took a deep breath, seeming like she was about to cry, then she looked at the ground before raising her eyes again.

With blank eyes, she spoke.

“So be it.”

Venus’s kick landed right in the middle of one of the succubus’s faces.

There was a dull sound, and the young succubus crumpled to her knees.

“Guh!”

One of any other race would lose their balance from that kick, but Venus steadied herself with a flap of her wing, and with a smooth, fluid movement, she slammed her fist into the scrawny chest of another of the succubi.

There was a thumping sound, and the succubus promptly vomited blood.

The succubus straddling Luca saw this and tried to stand up in a hurry but couldn't make it in time.

Venus performed a roundhouse kick, there was a loud crack, and the succubus's eyes rolled back, froth bubbling from its mouth.

The other two who had been bound by Luca's spell turned pale from the events unfolding.

"Ah, I wasn't part of it...! I was just following Yurine..."

"Me neither! I wasn't part of it, either! Actually, I tried to speak out against it..."

Venus's eyes were dark with anger and disappointment as she stared the two down.

"No decent succubus would ever use a dead comrade as a human shield."

Then Venus karate-chopped both in the neck, severing their spinal cords.

A PROPOSAL

Bash woke up in his room at the royal palace.

A windowless room prepared for him by the succubi.

The door was heavy and had a strong lock.

“...”

Bash sat up in bed and took a deep breath.

A sigh of relief.

Venus had come to save him just in the nick of time after he'd been charmed.

All the rioters had been slain, and the battle ended in victory.

But though he had been lucky, one insurrection would lead to more. War was ever ongoing.

More personally, though...

“I lost...”

It was Bash's first defeat in a long, long time.

The succubi were so incredibly powerful against male opponents.

After being held at the mercy of those young succubi, mere whelps too young to have ever tasted battle... Bash realized again how terrifyingly strong the succubi are in battle.

And he wondered a lot about what he should have done.

He should have killed them when he had the chance.

He'd always done that on the battlefield.

On the battlefield, there were only two types: comrades and enemies. And all enemies could be killed.

If he had climbed up to the roof, closed his eyes, held his breath, and swung his sword in a wide cross section, he would not have been defeated.

If he was fighting seasoned warriors, it would be a different story, but pups like those... He should have been able to win with his eyes closed.

But he had not been able to bring himself to slay them.

They were pups, children. Even orcs do not kill the young.

This was a time of peace, and succubi were not the enemy.

That was how Bash felt.

"It was hardly a defeat, Boss. I bet you coulda taken them if it was just you. I got captured and made things worse..."

"Zell..."

Zell was depressed.

It wasn't the fairy's first defeat, and protective fighting was not their forte.

Zell had flown low to get between the enemy and Bash, and had flitted about to distract their attention.

That plan should have been solid.

But the end result was that Zell had been outmaneuvered by those young succubi.

Unlike with orcs, succubus charms don't work on fairies. So they don't have that huge disadvantage that males do.

"..."

"..."

The two veterans were depressed by the defeat.

It wasn't a first defeat for either of them, but it was galling all the same.

"Um..."

When Bash looked up, a girl was standing next to his bed.

Luca.

“Are you all right?”

“Ah. Luca, you saved me. If it wasn’t for you, I would have been eaten by a succubus.”

“But, I mean, they overpowered me right away...”

“Those who are less powerful in battle just need to buy time until those with more power arrive. You fulfilled your role well.”

If Luca hadn’t come, Zell might have died.

Or maybe Bash would have lost his virginity.

Getting rid of his virginity was what Bash wanted, but if his first partner was a succubus, all the joy of it would be short-lived. He’d end up a wizard warrior with zero future.

And his honor as an orc would be dashed into the mud.

Venus had ultimately saved him, but she’d been doing it for the succubus reputation. Luca was different.

“You are my savior. In the name of the Orc King, I swear to you that I will repay you. If there is anything you would like me to do, just say it.”

“What...?!”

When Bash said that, Luca blushed and looked down.

“Um, in that case...!”

Luca’s head came up as if she’d just made up her mind about something, and she grabbed Bash’s hand.

Her hands were small, like a child’s, and warm.

“P-please, marry me!”

It was a proposal.

“...Why?”

Bash, unable to follow what was happening, grunted in surprise.

Luca’s face turned bright red as she squeezed Bash’s hand.

“Um, Lord Bash... you’re traveling in search of a wife, right? And your conditions for a wife are that she must be able to give birth to a child and that she needs to have a worthy title that an orc could be proud of back home. I’m still just a kid, so I can’t have children, but I am the daughter of the great warrior Rularula! I’m sure the other orcs would approve!”

“But I’m asking *you* why.”

Even Bash was thrilled to be proposed to.

On closer inspection, Luca had quite a beautiful face. And Bash was aware that ogre women were gorgeous.

No doubt she’d be a stunner when she grew up.

...When she grew up.

Orcs get a bad rap, and people say they attack any woman, but it’s not true.

The reason orcs attack women with their desire is because of their instinct to procreate and produce children.

Therefore, basically, the orcs do not desire bodies that are so young, they are clearly unable to bear children.

There were one or two orcs with those kinds of proclivities back in the orc country, but they were considered deviant.

In other words, Luca wasn’t on Bash’s radar like that.

In a few years, she might grow up to become Bash’s type. But for now, she was but a child.

And Bash didn’t have a few years. Wizardry loomed.

He could not wait.

Therefore, Bash was able to avoid giving an immediate answer.

If Silviana had approached him like this, Bash would have already leaped on her.

“You... Want to know why?”

“Right. Why propose to me out of the blue like this?”

Luca was silent for a while, thinking.

“My reason...”

She seemed at a loss as to how to begin explaining.

But eventually she whispered something.

“Um, the thing is, Rularula wasn’t actually our real mother.”

“Indeed?”

“No... She raised us and made everyone recognize us as her children, but actually another woman gave birth to us.”

Bash felt a sense of culture shock.

Ogres had fake mothers and birth mothers?

“Of course, I care about my mom, Rularula. But we also had a real father and mother. My memory of them is hazy now, though.”

“What happened to your real father and mother?”

“They were killed.”

“Then are you planning to take revenge for them, instead of for Rularula?”

“...No. That was our plan, when we set out on our journey of vengeance, but... After finding out more, it seems like our father and mother got what they deserved.”

“They...got what they deserved?”

“They were spies. My father was an ogre who sold information to the Alliance of Four, and my mother was in the Human Intelligence Department... They eloped, gave birth to us, and were then discovered...”

Luca lowered her head, her shoulders quaking.

Bash simply stared at her, confused.

Orcs have no concept of betrayal.

Orcs aren’t smart enough to double-cross. The worst thing they can think of to do is to disobey the Orc King’s orders.

“Among the pursuers was Rularula, who took in my brother and me, orphaned after our parents died, and raised us as her own.”

As Luca spoke of her memories, a seldom seen smile tugged at her lips.

“Mom... Rularula was a splendid person. She did her best to become the chief ogress and take care of others. She was a very, very splendid person. My brother and I respected her very much.”

But Luca continued.

“One day, her dead body was found... In a back alley... Killed like a dog...”

Luca’s eyes filled with tears, and as she spoke about that dark day, she began to shake and hugged herself with her slender arms.

“There was no way Mom... So strong! Could have lost so easily. She must have been taken by surprise, tricked by cowardly means... Then left in the dirt... She didn’t deserve to die like that. Neither my brother nor I can accept it. We can’t move on from something like that...”

As Luca spoke, her grip on Bash’s hand tightened.

And her trembling ceased.

“We swore an oath. Even if we die, even if Mom wouldn’t have wanted us to, it’s our duty as ogres to avenge our enemies...”

“An ogre revenge pact...”

Bash had heard of this ogrelike custom.

If someone killed an ogre’s parents or mentor, the ogre must avenge them, even if it meant risking their life. Otherwise, they would not be recognized as full-fledged members of society, and would not even be allowed to have children.

The same motivations behind why orcs defiled women on the battlefield.

That was why ogres were so strong.

In the age of the long war, almost every ogre had a parent or mentor killed.

The ogres were the race who continued to stand highest on a heap of corpses.

“But... Um, Lord Bash... What do you think about my brother? And me?”

“Eh?”

“Can we win? Against that woman? What if both of us take her on?”

“It’s pointless.”

Bash didn’t hesitate to give that response.

Ludo was so, so inferior to that woman in terms of skill. The best he could do would be to inflict one shallow cut in a hundred strikes.

“I... I figured.”

Luca’s shoulders slumped in defeat.

“I guess I knew that, too. Maybe my brother can’t win after all. He’ll just die in vain...”

Luca looked horribly depressed.

There were tears in her eyes again.

“What will happen if we die?”

“Nothing. You both, and Rularula, will simply be dead. Maybe that woman will brag about it at some tavern or other.”

Bash’s answer was brutally frank.

Bash, who had been out on the battlefield for a long time, was familiar with death.

Though he had no parents, most of his seniors, mentors, and comrades had died.

Bash had had people in his life who seemed sure to survive, who seemed sure to never die, who seemed sure to always be fighting alongside him, whose presence and survival reassured him. But when they’d died, Bash had still remained, and after that, nothing much had changed.

So Bash’s thinking was this.

If, for example, Zell died, Bash would be sad, of course, but nothing would change.

There was no such thing as a guaranteed comrade for life.

“I—I don’t want to die. I want my brother to live, too.”

“Hmm.”

“But I also want to take revenge. Even if I know I can’t win...”

“Hmm.”

Not wanting to die is a normal emotion.

All races use every means possible to inspire themselves to keep living.

“I want to take revenge, but my brother... He’s never going to give up. He must know that he can never win, but he still forces himself to fight... I can’t bear to watch him.”

“...”

“I don’t know what to do anymore... I don’t even know what it is I want...”

Suffering from this conundrum, Luca covered her face with both hands and wept, fat tears rolling down her face.

Bash listened in silence, but then he asked again.

“How did that bring you to the idea of marriage?”

“There’s a rule when it comes to ogrelike revenge... Family members can assist.

“So please! Marry me and destroy that woman!”

Bash thought it over.

She wanted a husband to help her take revenge.

Not something you hear very often, but it was understandable.

Most orcs would say you should take revenge on your own. Even for ogres.

But the person in front of him was a child.

“...I will give birth to as many children as you desire, Lord Bash! It may not be possible right now, but I’ll do my best! As a wife of an Orc Hero, I’ll make you proud! I’ll devote my life to it! So please, please help me...”

Luca was desperate.

This was no joke. No trick.

If Bash was to fling himself on her right now, she would accept him without a single scream.

But Bash said this:

“I cannot make you my wife.”

Luca sat down on the spot, looking shocked.

Before she could ask why, Bash continued.

“But I will help you take down that woman.”

“Huh? But that’s against the rules...”

“I will personally avenge Lady Rularula. There is nothing in the orc rules that says only relatives can take revenge, after all.”

It was a very Bash-like way of thinking.

“Besides, I was thinking of leaving this country soon.”

The succubi had been good to him.

Bash had thought he wouldn’t have minded staying a while.

However, the land of the succubi was still a dangerous place. Recent events had proved that. Honestly, he’d rather leave sooner than later.

Also, come to think of it, he’d spent far too much time doing things that were unrelated to his quest. Concerned about offending the spirits, he’d allowed himself to get distracted.

It was time to get back to business.

For Bash, there wasn’t much time left.

If all this had some purpose for his ultimate quest, it would have been worth it, but it was wholly unrelated.

So the issue he faced ought to be resolved as soon as possible, no matter what it took.

In other words, Bash would fight, and defeat, that woman.

It was the best plan Bash could think of.

The spirits might get annoyed and kill Bash, but it was better than wasting time here and turning into a wizard warrior.

It would be better for an Orc Hero to defy the spirits and die than to end up like *that*.

“I may not be able to give you and your brother your due pride, but if that’s still all right with you...”

And then Bash declared it.

In the name of the Orc King, he would repay his debt to Luca.

She had asked for his help, and he could not deny her.

“Lord Bash... You really are a kind man, aren’t you?”

Luca smiled, the tears still wet on her face.



After crying for a while, Luca left, upon learning that Ludo was up and out of his room.

It seemed that the effects of the charm had been stronger on Ludo than on Bash, so he’d been receiving treatment in a separate room.

Bash sat down on the bed, checking his body for any irregularities and eating the food that had been brought in.

If he was going to set out and fight Rularula’s enemy, he had to be in perfect physical condition.

If any aftereffects of the succubi charm lingered, he would be compromised even in simple battles.

And the opponent seemed quite formidable.

Zell piped up then.

“Ya sure about all this, Boss?”

“What?”

“That Luca girl, she’ll be a peach when she grows up. I can tell. I don’t know much about ogre aesthetics, but I know the boss’s type. She’ll be a home run of a woman one day.”

“Then she can propose to me again, once she is one.”

Yes, Luca was a beautiful girl.

No doubt she’d become a beautiful woman in the future.

But the future was not now.

It would take her five years... Three, at minimum... To become beautiful in the way Bash needed.

If he waited that long, Bash would become a wizard warrior.

Okay, if he made a move on her before that, he might be able to lose his virginity that way. But Bash just couldn’t see young Luca in a romantic fashion like that.

“If you marry her now, you can lock her down until she’s of age!”

“But that would block me from being able to get any other woman.”

Bash thought about the elves.

One female elf per one male elf.

Bash didn’t know what kind of social setup the demons he was about to visit had, but if they were the same as the elves, already having a wife would prevent Bash from wooing any other females.

In that case, he had to remain a free agent.

“...I apologize for interrupting your conversation.”

A woman with voluptuous breasts entered their room.

“Queen Curly Kale...”

“I am truly sorry for getting you caught up in the recent riot, Orc Hero Bash. As the Queen of the succubi, I would like to apologize.”

The succubus Queen, Curly Kale, spoke magnificently as she sat down on the bed where Bash was reclining.

Her big butt and breasts jiggled before Bash's eyes, and he had to look away.

The sight was searing.

The hand that touched Bash's upper arm felt incredibly hot, the flesh of her thigh incredibly soft where it pressed against him.

Of course, Curly Kale had no malicious intent.

Succubi have a habit of sitting close when making a sincere apology.

The sort of succubus gesture that's despised in other lands, especially in the human country.

"I won't go so far as to lie about the state of things to you, Orc Hero. It's embarrassing, but as you can see, we succubi are doing all we can right now to make ends meet. And yet we tell the young people to stand proud..."

"..."

"Still, as you can see, we manage our food subjects properly, treating our livestock, if you will, with the utmost care."

"..."

"I think if we could only have enough food, we would be able to teach the young people what it means to be proud of being a succubus."

Curly Kale was still speaking in a voice that could be described as a bit high-handed.

However, Bash could sense a tortured sort of desperation in her tone.

"I know that after the things that have happened, I have no right to ask this, but please... Lord Bash, please, save the succubus nation."

"...If you, the succubus Queen, ask me to do that, then I can't refuse. When the time comes, I will help you."

From Bash's point of view, he wasn't sure what she was asking him to save the succubus nation from.

But a succubus, from the succubus nation, long considered the pinnacle of the Coalition of Seven, and superior to the orcs, was asking him, as an Orc Hero, to lend them his strength.

There was no way Bash could say no.

In fact, he was honored.

Orcs have always been simple like that.

“I’m so glad.”

“However, Curly Kale...”

“Yes?”

“I said I would help you, but it’s not possible for me to do so right now. I’m thinking of leaving this country right away.”

Bash had a prior commitment.

Incidentally, Bash was a little scared of Curly Kale. She looked ready to devour him at any moment.

So he shifted in his seat a little awkwardly and tried to sit up.

“Yes, of course... I suppose it’s only natural after what happened...”

Curly Kale held her breath, taking Bash’s words as an inherent rejection.

“I apologize for pressing you. If it would please you, I am willing to offer my head to the chopping block...”

“No, let us say no more about it. You succubi have been kind to me. Even though it’s natural for you to look down on orcs, you have made my stay most comfortable. I appreciate it.”

“Your words are too generous...”

Bash stood, as if to signal that the conversation was over.

If he’d stayed sitting next to Curly Kale a second longer, he’d have ended up pushing her down on the bed.

At any rate, Bash had already decided on his next move.

All that was left was to travel to where he needed to go, and to fight.

“Well, then. Farewell.”

“...Right.”

Bash left the room, oblivious to the tortured tone in Curly Kale’s voice.

12

THE HERO VS. THE NAMELESS WOMAN

There was a huge shell.

It resembled a turtle shell, a snail's shell, or even an insect's cast-off exoskeleton, but it was huge in size. It was taller than an adult male ogre, and the edges of it disappeared into the trees of the forest, making it impossible to grasp the true size of the whole thing.

In the midst of the mossy forest, the shell was clear of moss or insects and emitted a mild glow.

Naturally, there was heavy rain all around, but the shell seemed to be able to repel the rain, so it was completely dry.

If a human priest saw it, would he have declared it an object of divinity?

Or a harbinger of doom?

The woman stood in front of the shell, looked up at it for a moment, then stepped inside.

The iridescent interior was an out-of-this-world sight, but the woman strolled through almost casually, easily reaching the innermost area.

At the very back, a stone sat enshrined, a translucent stone like a jewel.

The stone was mounted on a crystal plinth. The stem, so to speak, of this mysterious object.

The woman casually ripped it from its crystal pillar.

There was a sharp cracking sound, then the stone tumbled easily into the woman's hand.

At the same moment, the shine in the vicinity disappeared.

The sense of divinity, of otherworldliness, disappeared.

It was obvious what had happened.

The power had been lost.

Eventually, this shell would decay and disappear into the forest.

For those who had seen divinity in this shell, this sight might cause them to despair.

The woman murmured under her breath.

“I couldn’t just go ahead and let Carrot do it...”

The woman carefully wrapped the stone in a cloth and put it in her backpack.

She stepped out of the shell, looked up at the rainy sky, took a deep breath, and stretched.

“Hmm... Phew, I didn’t expect it to take this long... It was a real pain in the butt, like I’d thought it would be. That succubus barrier was a heap of trouble as well.”

Countless corpses lay nearby the woman.

After the demons’ magical key broke the barrier, the succubus team attacked, mounting a gallant last stand.

All of the mud-covered corpses had a sort of beauty to them.

Even in death, the succubi still had a mysterious charm.

The woman looked down at their beautiful faces, a bored expression on her own face. Then, sensing a presence, she looked up.

“...Huh.”

Beyond the mound of corpses, there were figures.

Two small shadows and one large shadow.

They looked familiar.

As soon as she realized who it was, anger flared in her.

“You darn orc! Why did you bring those children with you again?!”

From a woman’s point of view, this was incomprehensible behavior.

Hadn't they made a deal the other day?

The orc wanted her, but he'd held back and saved the two children instead. How laudable.

Naturally, he was an orc, with strong sexual desires. She'd been thinking that he would stash the whelps somewhere safe, then come after her again, to defile her.

Well, maybe he did do that, but the two whelps came trailing after him.

Either way, to see all three of them together... It was ludicrous.

"I have come to avenge Lady Rularula."

"...Indeed?"

Bash's words quickly took away the woman's anger.

Most likely, after listening to the sob story of the two whelps, he was filled with righteous indignation and offered to help.

She had no idea what the orc was doing on his journey, but if it was her, she'd have offered to help, too.

And no matter the purpose of his journey, leaving two children under his protection alone would not be a good idea.

"...What a surprise. Orcs are surprisingly kind."

Still, she'd never expected an orc to be so nice.

The orcs the woman was familiar with would rescue the twins, realize one of them was a girl, kill the male, defile the girl, and then cast her aside.

But she wasn't going to say that out loud. It would sound like prejudice.

At any rate, orclike principles and motivations were usually easy to understand.

"But you are still an orc. A foolish orc."

"Why foolish?"

"You don't expect to lose, do you? That's why you came here, so full of confidence."

The woman pulled out her sword, shrugging.

What difference did it make? They were both here. They might as well fight.

“Orcs don’t think of defeat when we fight.”

Bash drew his sword, too.

His greatsword had a dull shine to it.

For a moment, the woman felt that the sword looked familiar, but she declined to think about it any deeper just then.

She wasn’t really particular about swords, and she didn’t tend to recall the ones she’d seen anyway.

“I am from the former Orc Kingdom, and I...”

“Oh, no, there’s no need to name yourself. I can’t name myself, see, and someone of your caliber wouldn’t know me by name anyway. Besides, what’s about to happen isn’t some honorable duel, just a simple slaying.”

With that said, the woman stepped forward.

Her movements were silent, subtle, rapid.

If Bash was an average warrior, he probably wouldn’t have even noticed that the woman was moving at all, let alone the fact that she had come into range.

“It’s too bad. I didn’t want to have to kill you.”

It would happen in a flash.

The orc’s head, dashed from its body, which would collapse to the ground...

Yes, she was sure of it.

“...Huh?”

However, before the woman’s sword could reach Bash’s neck, its swing was blocked by a thick sword.

“Guh!”

As her sword was pushed back by an almighty force, the woman spun around.

She used her elbow to block Bash’s maelstrom-like slash, but the recoil

caused her to spin twice and hit the ground.

She danced, avoiding Bash's attacks.

After surviving five slashes, the woman managed to flee from Bash's reach.

The woman could hear her heart pounding in her ears.

She'd been caught off guard. Almost died.

"...Orc, you're strong, aren't you? I'm surprised."

Bash's series of attacks were intended to finish her off completely.

Each slash was incredibly heavy, and each one was accompanied by a strong blast or shock wave.

If those hits landed, her body would be pulverized, her skin would split and her flesh scatter, and if she even got a bit too close to the shock wave, she'd end up on the ground.

Even more so for a light woman.

If the woman hadn't learned how to dodge such slashes on the battlefield, she would already be dead.

Instead of resisting the impact from the passing sword, she rotated and spun her body to avoid them.

Requiring a great deal of physical strength and dexterity.

"Right back at you."

Bash realized the woman was strong, as he'd expected her to be.

"This is the first time since Lady Rularula that someone evaded my first hit. It took all I have even just to dodge you."

"You honor me."

A casual response to the woman's praise.

Any normal orc would be more... Ah, but the woman didn't really know all that much about orcs. Her orc prejudice was showing again.

In any case, the woman realized that the orc in front of her was much greater a man than she had imagined.

At the same time, a certain name came to her mind, from her limited knowledge.

“An orc of this caliber... You must be the Orc Hero Bash?”

“That’s me.”

Bash attacked with his sword while replying.

The woman kept her distance, avoided Bash’s swing, and made her counterattack.

Her slice did not reach Bash, but its slipstream whipped against his skin.

A shallow swipe, clearly intended to get the measure of Bash.

“I see. I would like to apologize for not giving my name to you, honorable dragon slayer...but I don’t have a name I’d like to offer.”

“...”

“However, if I’m really up against the strongest orc warrior, I’ll have to take this more seriously.”

As the woman spoke, she readied her sword again.

Something about her struck Bash as familiar.

Her stance was similar to that of a human knight, only a little different. A unique stance.

Seeing that, Bash felt his skin prickle. His instincts warned him that this woman was a very dangerous opponent indeed.

“Graaagh!!!”

To fire himself up, he released his war cry.

The battle had truly begun.



The battle continued for a long time.

The woman counterattacked Bash’s every violent slashing attack.

And the battle waged on, in the midst of the downpour.

Even amid the mud, neither party slipped nor faltered. They just kept at it.

Bash's blows did not hit the woman, and although the woman's counterattacks managed to hit Bash, they only took off surface skin, wounds that didn't even bleed.

This delicate, balanced dance was only possible because of their high matched levels of skill.

If the woman wasn't as skilled as she was, Bash's sword would cut right through her, and if Bash wasn't as skilled as he was, the woman's sword would cut through Bash's veins.

Had there been any discrepancy in skill, the end result would be death, even if it took a long time, even if it was not a single blow that did it.

No matter how many life-threatening slashes passed close to her body, the woman did not feel panicked.

She continued fighting calmly and methodically.

The woman observed Bash's swings, his fight pattern. If the sword swung straight out, she would dodge. If he was feinting, she would wait a beat, then dodge. If the trajectory of his sword changed midway, she would use her own sword to evade.

She kept a balanced distance, never too close, never too far, her slashes carefully considered.

Bash evaded her, too.

She knew that if she stepped too close, she wouldn't be able to evade Bash's next attack, and if he pulled back too much, Bash, with extra room, would unleash an attack too powerful to evade. If she dodged too hard, she'd lose her balance, and if he attacked again while she was off-balance, she'd eat dirt.

If that happened, the woman would have no chance.

But she knew something key.

The same thing applied to Bash.

Bash, for his part, was calm.

He kept on swinging his sword, so calmly, it was almost hard to believe that he was really an orc.

His thrusts and attacks were top-notch.

But, frustrated by the lack of battle resolution, he could lose his focus and be immediately speared by the woman's sword.

If she drew even a little blood, Bash would lose the advantage.

Then his goose would be well and truly cooked.

Still, at this rate, the advantage could arguably be said to belong to Bash.

The orc's body was far, far larger than the human woman's, and his physical strength was much greater. There was a 90 percent chance the woman would run out of stamina first.

So the woman went for the victory.

"So this is the Orc Hero... Well, who could overlook him?"

The woman muttered and took a half step back.

Bash was permitted more space for his swing, and this blow of his was even stronger than before.

The slash grazed the woman's neck but still did not bite her.

Losing her balance, the woman raised her sword.

Bash's backswing came down, attacking the woman in a way she could not evade.

"But he's still just an orc."

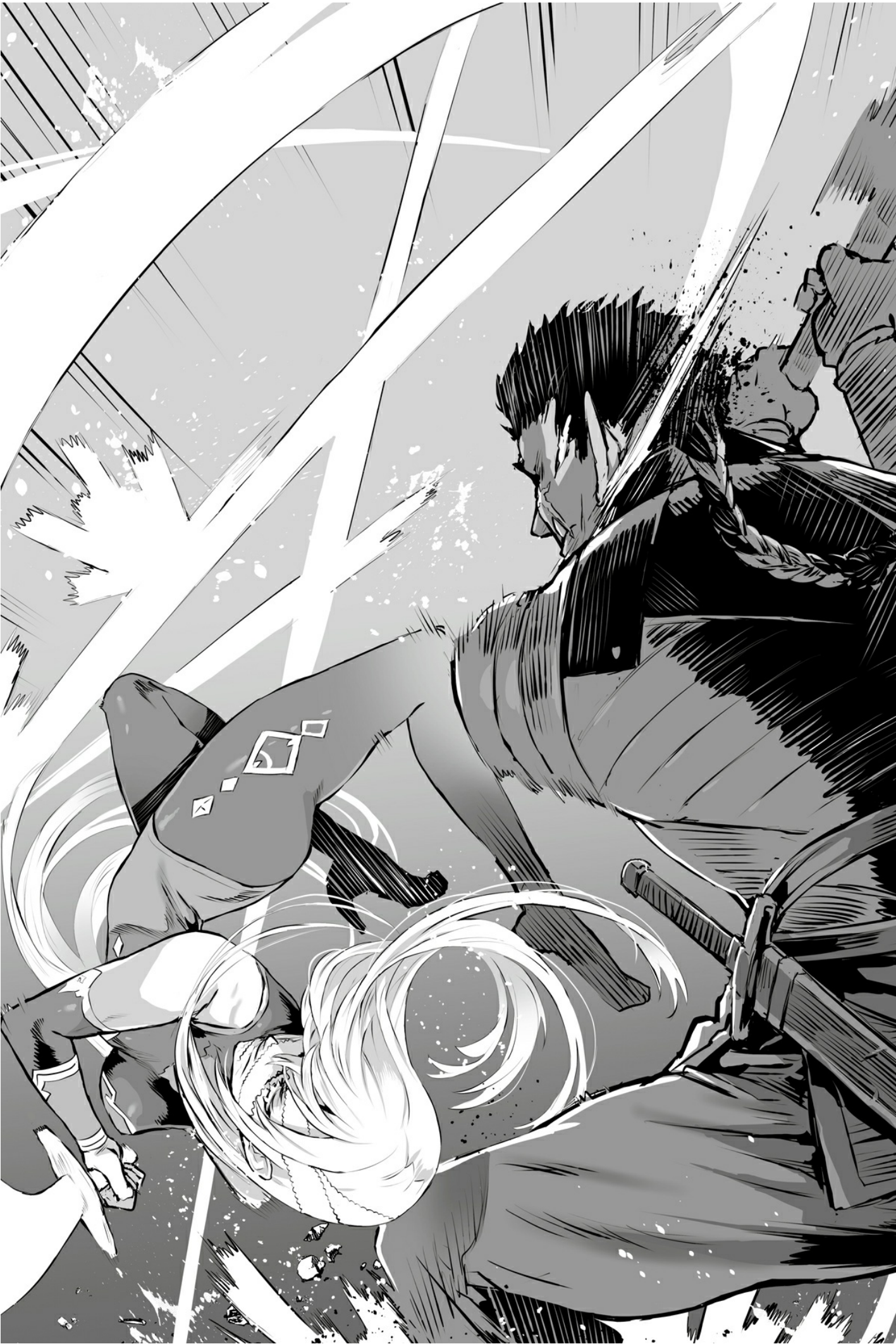
For just a moment, Bash's slashing wavered.

Bash's gaze fell to the woman's chest, his nose twitched, and his tight jaw slackened.

The tip of the blade passed through the woman's shoulder and down her left arm, the impact flaying the skin and shattering the bones.

The woman stepped forward, but instead of resisting the impact, she turned her body and slammed the sword in her right hand into Bash's neck.

Blood splattered.



“...!”

But Bash’s head didn’t fall off.

The carotid artery was torn open, and blood began gushing out like a fountain.

That sort of bleeding could be fatal to a human.

“Glad that worked, but... Can you react to that?”

The woman, on the other hand, had a broken left arm and was facing in the wrong direction, bleeding profusely.

Her chest piece was split open, and two large mounds were exposed.

“All right, this is where things start to get chaotic. It looks like my bones are going to break. Or maybe they’re already broken...”

The woman readied her sword.

She knew that, though the orc before her was bleeding profusely from its neck, it wouldn’t stop.

The light was still in the orc’s eyes, and his body was emanating heat that turned to steam against the cold rain. Orc warriors do not stop, even when they receive wounds that would cause a human to despair.

(He’s stronger than expected... So this is the Hero who killed the dragon...) In fact, the woman was more panicked than Bash looked.

Based on her plans, she should have been able to dodge Bash’s sword just in the nick of time.

Once, she had defeated an orc warrior using the same methods she was using now.

By baring her breasts, she could stay the orc’s hand and distract him with his own lust. Get him thinking about what he could do after the battle, turning his murderous intent into a state of confused horniness.

The orc she had once defeated had been a decorated warrior, but a Hero had to be of a higher caliber than that. This orc, after all, prioritized saving children over pursuing women. Her methods may have been too shortsighted for him.

Still, the orc and the human woman had far different builds.

The woman was physically inferior.

Though Bash was losing a lot of blood, it was the woman who was growing exhausted first.

So she stepped forward.

To slash at Bash's treelike neck with another blow.

In response, Bash unleashed a blow at the woman's head, as if to say, *You can't charm me.*

“‘Healing Wind’!”

Bash's sword slashed through thin air.

The woman spun around and was enveloped by a magical wind.

The wind, which had a color similar to that of fairy dust, healed the woman's wounds in an instant.

The woman's wounds healed, leaving only Bash wounded.

Now the situation was reversed somewhat.

“...!”

However, Bash's slashing attacks were swift.

His speed, which anyone would agree was monstrous, brought with it an immense destructive power, but it took too much buildup.

He could not waste the opportunity given by the woman taking a second to heal.

With one or two blows, he had her off-balance. The situation she'd feared if she took even a step back was exactly what happened. The third blow was aimed at the woman's torso.

“Guhhh!!!”

The woman looked desperate, bringing her sword up to block.

An incredible metallic clang echoed through the forest.

The demon sword, known as indestructible, collided with the woman's sword, creating an unusual impact.

Even Bash was stunned by the impact, and he was sent stumbling several feet back.

He looked up at the sky through a plume of dust rising, and he saw the woman spinning around in the air after being blown away.

The woman seemed to use magic to right herself in the air and landed on a tree branch.

“Hah! Hah! Hah!”

The woman was breathing heavily, her exposed breasts rising and falling.

But this was perhaps due to the fear of imminent death more than to exertion.

She was now on the brink of death.

Bash was faster than she expected, and she didn't even have a chance to recover.

His slashing attack was heavy, too. The woman's torso would have been cut in two if she hadn't imbued her sword with a huge amount of magical repelling power.

“Gah!”

There was no time for her to catch her breath.

The woman immediately jumped from the tree branch.

The next moment, the tree she was using as a foothold spun in the ground at an incredible speed, engulfing the surrounding trees and blowing them away.

The woman landed softly and crouched.

Bash's sword passed over her head.

She spun, carried away by the shock wave, and changed direction by sticking an elbow into the ground. Spinning her sword, she slammed it into Bash's ankle, right in front of her.

At the same time, Bash's vertical slash landed behind the woman.

As the earth and sand rained down, the woman felt a certain sensation as she crawled on her hands and knees to keep her distance.

She'd swung her sword to defend herself, based on instinct.

The woman herself didn't even know which direction the slash was coming from or which direction she was defending herself against. However, as she heard the metallic clang, she knew her instincts had been correct.

But she failed to understand that Bash's vertical slash had cut through the ground and now attacked her from below.

"Aaaargh!"

She could not rely on luck. She raised her sword and unleashed another slashing attack on Bash.



How long did the battle last?

The sky was blocked by thick clouds and rain, and there was no sense of time.

However, considering Bash's war history, we can't exactly call it a long battle, comparatively speaking.

Bash had fought the great elf mage Thunder Sonia for three days and three nights, but no more than a day had gone by this time.

Perhaps one day and one night, at most.

"Hah... hah..."

"..."

Over the course of that one night, the surroundings had changed drastically.

The shell of what was once called the Sacred Place was half destroyed, trees were torn down, and it looked as if a huge tornado had come through there.

Meanwhile, the two of them were still standing.

"Lord Bash, do you still intend to fight?"

"...Of course."

Bash was badly injured.

There were lacerations all over his body, some of which seemed to have gone to the arteries, and blood was spurting out. No matter how strong the orc was, it was clear he'd die if left like this.

But the woman wasn't much better off.

Her left arm was bent in an odd direction, and blood was dripping from her head.

The only reason it wasn't a fatal injury was because she was a user of recovery magic.

Even so, it seemed like she didn't have enough magical power to be able to home in on healing specific parts.

"If this continues, we're both gonna die."

"I'm... Fine with that."

Mutual destruction.

They both felt that premonition.

Their powers were equal. It was impossible for either of them to inflict a fatal wound on the other with a single blow.

The woman's arm strength could not pierce Bash's vitals, and Bash's blows could not directly land on the woman.

Little by little, they would get more and more injured, their strength would be diminished, but the battle would remain balanced.

For now, they could still be healed with fairy dust or healing magic, but if they carried on like this, both of them would be injured to the point where recovery was no longer possible.

And they were right at the point of no return.

"An Orc Hero should not have to die such a pointless death, fighting with a nameless woman in this godforsaken place."

"...And you, no doubt you were a famous warrior during the war."

“Ah, but it’s different now. Even if you defeat me now, it won’t bring you honor. It will only bring you dishonor.”

The woman regarded Bash.

She had to admit that he was a truly great warrior.

She’d never felt respect for someone like this before, just from crossing swords with them.

Then the woman cried out.

“Lady Rularula was a fine warrior! But why do you have to die to avenge her? Was she worth that much?!”

“Why do you care about that?”

“Because a fine warrior like you shouldn’t die in a place like this! You’re a warrior who can fight on equal terms with me! How many people are there on this continent who can say that? You should fight even greater enemies than me, and die in battle against them...not like this!”

The woman suddenly raised her head and craned her neck to look off to the side.

Two faces peeked out from the shadows of the forest that was untouched by destruction.

Ludo and Luca. The two, protected by spirits, watching all this with pale faces.

“Are you listening? Are you watching, children? A Hero is going to die because you can’t accept Rularula’s death! Is your revenge that important?! Is Rularula’s honor worth defending to the point of an Orc Hero’s death?”

The woman continued to yell.

“You whelps seem to be misunderstanding something, but I fought fair and square with Lady Rularula! I can swear it, on my past glory! It didn’t go down how you think it did. I didn’t engage in any cowardly sneak attacks! And I only left her corpse there out of urgency! Just like the Orc Hero did to the corpse of Leto, the beastkin Hero! Are you really going to blame me for that?”

The woman continued to yell even more.

“If you still want to avenge your enemy, that’s fine. But fight me yourselves! What’s the point of having someone else fight while you watch from the shadows, just because you know you can’t take me? Is that what you call defending Rularula’s honor? For shame!”

In a sense, she was begging for mercy.

She didn’t want to die in a place like this. Nor did she want Bash to die in a place like this.

She was incensed that the brother and sister, the so-called arbiters of revenge, were just watching the battle.

And Luca trembled at those words.

“I—I...”

Luca wanted to take vengeance herself.

But witnessing the actual battle... She knew it was hopeless.

She hadn’t asked Bash to help on a whim or anything.

However, the battle between Bash and the enemy was unimaginably harsh and frightening.

Bash ought to have been able to defeat any opponent easily.

That was sort of what Luca had been expecting.

Having seen the battle, Luca believed now that it had been a fair fight with Rularula. Her mother was strong, so if she’d died, it must have been because of underhanded means. That was what Luca had always thought, but now she could see it wasn’t true.

Still... Even so...

She could not let a blood relative fight against this monstrous opponent.

That feeling was stronger than before the battle had begun. So she could not call for the fight to stop.

She did not know what to do.

It was why she’d asked for Bash’s help in the first place.

“I... I think I’m good now.”

It was Ludo who said that.

“From the start, I was planning to take revenge by myself. But I’m not strong enough, and I’ll never be able to win. So I thought there was no choice but to ask my master to fight for me... Only... That won’t do anything for my master’s honor, my mother’s honor, or our honor as siblings.”

Luca suddenly seemed to lose strength.

She fell to her knees on the wet ground, tears dripping from her eyes.

“I was... Too hasty.”

Ludo murmured, remembering those long days of hopelessness.

“Master, I’m sorry for making you fight this long. I don’t know how many years it’s going to take, but I’ll train properly, from the basics, and one day fight this woman again. So for now...”

“...If Ludo insists... Then...”

Luca spoke in a strangled sort of voice.

The reason she asked Bash for help was to protect her brother.

If her brother gave up on the idea of defeating the woman as soon as possible, then she could stop worrying.

There was no way he could win in his current state, but you never know what’ll happen in the future.

One day, Ludo and Luca would gain confidence.

There would come a day when they had trained enough to believe it was the right time to risk it all, and fight, and maybe die.

When that day came, they would not hesitate.

Luca was sure of it.

“...Right.”

If the kids had come to that decision, then Bash had no choice but to sheathe his sword as well.

Seeing this, the woman let out a sigh of relief.

“...Children of Rularula. I’m sure you’ll become fine warriors. I was prepared to die at any time, but... For you, I think I’ll avoid death where I can, so as to be waiting for you someday.”

The woman sheathed her sword, turned on her heel, and started walking slowly away while casting a recovery spell on herself.

Bash watched her retreating form, hesitating.

Bash had no opposition to the twins’ decision.

Not being able to avenge Rularula... Well, that was fine.

Bash didn’t really want to take revenge. As the woman said, if Rularula’s death was the result of a fair fight, then it would be foolish to try to avenge her anyway.

But the question was whether or not the spirits would be satisfied with this.

Would they be all right with such a lackluster resolution?

“Hmm...”

Suddenly, Bash felt something strange.

The pounding of the rain had ceased.

Bash looked up to the sky, palms held aloft. There were gaps in the thick clouds, and light was beginning to shine through.

Blue skies were returning to the succubi nation.

“Hmm... It’s all right, then?”

The fact that the rain had ceased must mean that the anger of the water spirits had subsided.

Bash wasn’t too sure, but at any rate, it seemed the spirits were satisfied.

In that case, there was no reason for Bash to pay attention to that woman any longer.

And with his proposal being turned down just the other day...

“Hey, woman.”

Still, Bash called out to the woman.

“Lord Bash, when addressing a woman whose name you don’t know, I recommend that you say ‘miss,’ or ‘ma’am’ instead of ‘woman.’”

“Hmm, is that so? I’ll remember it. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. So what do you need? I think you should get some treatment, too...?”

The woman shrugged and spoke in an aloof manner, but her hand was resting on the sword at her waist. No doubt she was still on her guard.

But of course Bash had no desire to fight her anymore.

There was just one thing he wanted to say.

“You’re the first enemy to draw with me since Thunder Sonia.”

“It’s an honor to be ranked alongside the great elf mage. So?”

“I’m proud to have fought against you and survived.”

At those words, the woman stopped in her tracks.

She gripped the hilt of the sword at her waist and looked up at the sky. Her mouth tightened, loosened, tightened again, then she spoke.

“Then I’m honored to have survived, too.”

After saying that, the woman waved a hand in the air and disappeared into the half-destroyed forest.

Her steps seemed lighter than before...

Thus, Rularula’s children, Ludo and Luca, failed in their attempt to avenge her untimely death.

13

AN ENGAGEMENT

One night had passed since the woman left.

Bash was seriously injured, but thanks to fairy dust, he recovered without incident.

Everyone remained silent until the end of the night.

Zell and the twins were ruminating over the terrible battle from earlier.

Bash was thinking about how he could have won.

There was nothing to say. They barely moved.

But with the coming of the dawn, they stirred into action.

As they started walking, Ludo's excitement seemed to return to him, and he started to speak.

He rehashed the fight between Bash and the woman. The parts where he'd been sure Bash had the upper hand. The parts where he'd despaired. He seemed so excited that he couldn't stop talking.

Zell, good at talking, skillfully chimed in and brought up suggestions to liven things up, making Ludo even more excited.

But Bash and Luca were silent.

There was no particular reason why Bash didn't talk.

But no doubt he was recalling the way the woman's breasts had swayed every time she moved during the battle. His lips curved into a grin.

Luca, on the other hand, wore a much cloudier look on her face.

And like this, they eventually passed through the forest.

Beyond the clearing was a valley with a river flowing at the bottom of it.

There was quite a drop-off, but they could hear the river gurgling loudly.

No doubt because of the continuous rain.

“Ah, this is the river where you fell, Boss! If we go up this river, we can return to our original location!”

“Right.”

Bash and Zell headed upstream without hesitation.

However, the two ogres stopped in their tracks.

“Master, please excuse us here.”

“What are you going to do?”

“For now, we’ll go back to our hometown. Ogre country is downstream, so...”

“Right.”

“I’d like to follow you, my master, and train forever, but after seeing the battle yesterday, I realized that at my current level, there is...really nothing you could teach me...”

Ludo had been smiling up until this point.

However, his face suddenly became distorted, and he began to yell.

“I’m so frustrated! Not only can I not keep up when sparring with you, Master, I’m not even qualified to attempt it! I was so desperate to get revenge, but I couldn’t even fight against that woman! I understand it all so clearly now!”

Ludo looked up at Bash, his face streaked with tears.

“You knew it from the start, didn’t you? That I was still too much of a beginner to even start learning the basics! That’s why you trained me the way you did, right?”

“...That’s correct.”

Usually, Bash would have denied it, but he understood the situation too well.

As expected, Ludo was too weak.

He wasn’t even at the point of considering wins or losses.

“I’ll train from scratch until I can beat that woman...or at the very least, I’ll do my best until the adults in my country acknowledge me as a respectable man!”

“Your target might die at the hands of someone else in the meantime.”

“...I don’t think someone who could fight on equal terms with my master would die that easily... And...well, knowing how strong my mother was, I assumed her killer had used a sneak attack, but after seeing the fight between you and the woman earlier, I realized it wasn’t so... So I’m not in such a hurry anymore.”

“Then surely there’s no need for revenge at all anymore?”

“But it’s true that she killed my mother...and besides, if I don’t have a goal to work toward, I won’t be able to stay motivated.”

Then Ludo laughed, looking unburdened.

Luca took a step forward, as if to back Ludo up.

“Um, Mr. Bash?”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you very much for all of your help.”

And Luca bowed her head.

She looked up finally, fidgeting with her hands before her, gazing at Bash.

“Since... Since the revenge plot is over with, would you still consider making me your wife once I’ve grown up?”

“Mmm...”

Bash thought it over for a minute.

A few years... They wouldn’t have to get married right away.

It was an engagement, wasn’t it? Though Bash wasn’t familiar with the protocol there.

“Of course.”

Therefore, he simply nodded.

He’d be a free agent for a few years, at least. If he ended up meeting a

monogamous elf lady or something, he'd still be able to wed her instead.

"Yay! Thank you!"

Seeing Luca light up, Bash half smiled, too.

A half ogre, half human. No doubt she'd grow up beautiful, exactly Bash's type.

Thinking of having someone like that as his wife made his chest swell with anticipation.

Though Luca was currently such a tiny thing, he could hardly picture it.

Though adopted, she was technically the daughter of the great Rularula. More than good enough to be an Orc Hero's wife.

"Since it's only going to be a few years, should you return to the orc country now, Boss? She can't have kids right away, but why not kick back and wait leisurely at home?"

"No, not when I've recently received some vital intel. Let's press on to the demon country."

Bash spoke rather quickly.

Because Bash's big secret had nothing to do with wifely duties.

The vital thing was to rid himself of his virginity on this quest. In other words, to avoid becoming a wizard warrior.

Therefore, to give up the quest here and return home would be madness.

"Hmm, I guess that makes sense, Boss..."

Zell tilted their fairy head, not quite following.

But Zell was a fairy, and Bash was an orc, and neither of them tended to sweat the fine details.

"Well, anyway, Boss, it's fine if you have many wives! Besides, if you had to handle the boss all by yourself, Luca, then no matter how much ogre blood you have in you, you'd probably break from the strain right away!"

"Hmm."

Luca, still young, didn't quite understand what the fairy was getting at.

Still, ogres don't practice monogamy.

The suggestion of Bash having many wives didn't really faze her.

"...? I don't really understand, but I'll do my best to train as a bride in my hometown, so as to be of satisfactory service!"

"Right!"

Bash nodded with an expectant smile.

And so Bash managed to find himself a fiancée.

His first actual success since his journey had begun.

As a step, it wasn't really a big one, and it didn't help him with his ultimate goal any.

But it was a step in the right direction for the kind of future Bash envisioned.

And so Bash's quest continues.

In order to achieve his true purpose, he is off now to the land of the demons.

While still ruminating on the jiggling breasts of the swordswoman he'd fought along the way...



EPILOGUE

A few days had passed since Bash left, and the land of the succubi was wrapped in a somber atmosphere.

The long rains had finally ceased.

Now all that remained was the rubble from the riot, the mud-stained pride of the succubi, and their destroyed Sacred Place.

The Sacred Place had been of great importance to the succubi.

Since time immemorial, they had been taught to protect this place, and thus they had always done so.

Many succubi saw it as a holy monument, though its true purpose had not been passed down in history.

That part was lost.

The succubi are a shortsighted race.

Over a few decades, no doubt, they'd completely forgotten.

But most of the succubi now wore the same expressions they'd worn since the war had ended in failure and they'd had to accept peace at any cost.

In particular, the succubus Queen, Curly Kale, was suffering a deep state of depression.

I lost what the succubi had protected for years.

Because of her careless instructions, she'd lost subordinates who'd been by her side for many years.

She felt the weight of self-blame, and it was leading to wrinkles.

"Hah..."

Since the war was over, she'd let her guard down.

She'd been too careless. Perhaps a part of her had felt they couldn't possibly sink any lower.

But that was not true. She knew it, did she not?

Defeat brings defeat.

The pain and reality of their failure meant they had to pull themselves together now, once and for all.

The details of why the Sacred Place was destroyed were unknown.

According to reports from a scouting team she'd sent after the original team was late returning, there was evidence that the person who'd killed the succubus guards and destroyed the Sacred Place had fought against Bash.

The result of that battle was...unknown.

But the only bodies scattered around were the bodies of succubi. No corpse of Bash or of the criminal was found.

Therefore, it appeared likely that Bash had smashed his enemy, defiled them, then either cast them aside or dragged them away with him.

Normally, the succubi would have wanted the head of the defiler of the Sacred Place to be handed over to them, but the orcish habit was to drag away the women they defeated. So it couldn't be helped.

In fact, Curly Kale was filled with a sense of gratitude.

If the criminal had been allowed to run unchecked, things would have ended up much worse.

(Even despite what Lord Bash said before we parted, he still defeated the criminal who attacked the Sacred Place for us...) Just from the optics of it all, you could draw the conclusion that Bash and the criminal had been in cahoots.

But Curly Kale was not so weaselly a person as to jump to such false accusations.

Even if that were the case, it would be an appropriate response from Bash, who had been almost devoured by succubi after being welcomed into their

nation. They would have to forgive him.

That aside, the current situation in the succubus nation after Bash left was... dire.

Many young people had died.

Perhaps it was a blessing in disguise that there was no damage to the food subjects due to the riots, and there was now even a little leeway in the food supply due to there being fewer hungry mouths to feed.

But this was hardly a blessing. And there was no change to the fact that they desperately needed more food.

“Your Majesty, a messenger requests an audience.”

Nio, a close aide to the Queen, arrived then with a report.

“A messenger? At a time like this? If it’s some trivial matter, I shall devour them for this!”

Curly Kale was venting.

Defeat brings defeat.

In the current situation, what good news could there possibly be?

“Yikes. Should I just go home now?”

A young man entered, speaking.

Queen Curly Kale knew the man’s name.

“His Highness Nazar Gainius Grandolius...?! ”

“I believe this is our first real meeting, succubus Queen Curly Kale.”

Curly Kale had seen this man several times from a distance.

The most famous of all humans.

How many times during the war had she dreamed of capturing this man and sucking him to death, all the while listening to his cries?

If this was wartime, the sight of such a delectable sitting duck wandering into her midst would make her bewitching eyes glow, and she would suck up Nazar’s essence until she was full to bursting with it, then send the saliva-soaked bones

and skin of Nazar back to the human land.

But things were different now. Curly Kale knew what would happen if she laid a hand on the human prince Nazar.

So she settled for a show of indignation instead.

“It’s a bit rude of you to barge in here unanticipated, is it not?”

“My apologies. To tell the truth, I’m not even here in an official messenger capacity...”

Arriving at a succubus’s chambers unannounced is like asking to be eaten.

Still, this was Curly Kale.

She wasn’t the type of woman to take the bait so easily.

“Then what is it you want? If you want to talk, I’ll hear you out in the throne room, okay?”

“This is what I wanted to discuss.”

Nazar snapped his fingers.

Then twenty men came into the room, one by one.

Clearly, they’d been traveling for several days and hadn’t taken a bath, and the room was immediately filled with a strong male scent.

Nio, the aide, smelled it, and in a fluster, yelped at Nazar.

“Hey! What the heck are you thinking?! Barging into the succubus Queen’s chambers...”

“Yes, that was rude of me. Hardly the proper manners to display to a queen. However...”

“Rude?! It’s like throwing a fresh hog on the barbecue! We’re all doing our best to hold back here, can’t you see? Get out of here! Oh no, the drool is already...”

Nio was a proud succubus, too.

However, since the death of her beloved sister the other day, she’d lost her appetite, out of grief.

Presenting a feast to the starving... It would incite a frenzy.

“Ah, I see. Right, I apologize for this. However, that’s what I wanted to discuss.”

Nazar did not understand the suffering of the succubi.

But he began explaining things in his usual aloof way.

“The other day, I heard from a certain someone that the succubi were currently suffering from a severe food shortage, so I came prepared with relief supplies.”

“A certain person...?”

“Yes, I won’t give up the name, but I was told it’s urgent. That’s why I rushed to recruit volunteers and came here right away.”

Curly Kale thought instantly of one man.

A man who, just the other day, came suddenly to the land of the succubi, to inspect the food situation...

(Lord Bash, not only did you deal with that criminal attacker, but you even sent us food...?!) The timing obviously didn’t make sense; there hadn’t been enough time since Bash’s departure for him to inform Nazar and for Nazar to gather volunteers, but Curly Kale didn’t care about the fine details.

Because she believed Bash had come to help them. And, well, Bash was surely fast. He could make it in time. It was Carrot who was to be pitied.

“Thank you, human prince.”

“It’s no big deal. During the war, we humans hated you succubi. And look how things turned out. Now the war’s over, we should at least join hands...”

Nazar glanced out the window.

Beyond was the cafeteria, the pride of the succubi.

“However, I have heard rumors that the succubi are unable to accommodate their food in hospitality. I worried about bringing volunteers to such a place...”

“But that’s...”

A bead of cold sweat dripped down Curly Kale's forehead.

"So the other day, I had a spy acquaintance of mine come and secretly inspect it."

"..."

She thought instantly of one man.

The man who came to inspect the cafeteria but had ended up almost lunch for the succubi.

She had no excuses to make. No doubt Bash's report had been... Terrible.

Now Nazar was here to handle the aftermath...

Come to dangle food in front of them, then to declare, nope, you're not worthy... And take it all away?

Humans got a kick out of that sort of thing.

If that was the case, he might even be planning to take away the food they already had.

"..."

Even so, considering the treatment Bash had received... There wasn't a single excuse to be made.

So Curly Kale simply gazed at Nazar in despair.

She would have to bow her head low, like a human, and beg to at least be able to keep the food they already had.

It would hurt her succubus pride, but as the final act of a failed queen... It would have to suffice.

Curly Kale prepared herself to rise and...

"In a word, wonderful."

"What?"

Nazar's words made her plop back into her chair.

"The meals are lavish, the beds are warm, and the treatment is unbelievable for former death row criminals. I was worried there had been a little too much

weight gain, but apparently, there's plenty of opportunity for exercise. My spy even learned a clever method to help the sickness that's been cropping up in the human country."

"Er, yeah. Of course. We're the ones who would be in trouble if our precious food died, right?"

"The succubi here all seem well-trained. I thought I might be attacked when I entered the country, so I brought an entourage with me, but it wasn't necessary. I heard there'd been some kerfuffle in the past few days, but...in my eyes, succubi seem to be a very sensible race."

"Of course. We are proud succubi. We would never attack a guest."

Curly Kale grinned, wiping away the cold sweat that ran down her neck.

Things had calmed down again now, but if the inspection report had been submitted before the riot...

"Honestly, I was worried until I came here. As a man, I didn't participate in any battles with succubi. All I know of them is what I've heard. People say you're the female equivalent of orcs."

"...I see. Well, that's not exactly wrong."

"But the other day, I also learned that orcs are a much prouder race than I imagined, so I decided to visit the succubi myself, and it's turned out to be a very fulfilling experience."

"..."

Normally, Curly Kale would have been incensed at being compared to orcs.

But just the other day, they had all been saved by an Orc Hero, even after some of them had tried to eat him.

There was no way she could bad-mouth orcs now.

The current succubus race was clearly far below the orcs.

"Even though we elite succubi have our pride, it's not the same for the common people. You're lucky, young man. If you'd been waylaid on the way here, you might have been sucked to death."

“That’s why I brought an entourage. We can handle some of your common people.”

“I can’t see any bodyguards, though?”

“I don’t parade them around; it could cause trouble. They’re masked, safely hidden nearby. If anything happens to me, they’ll come running, of course.”

“Hmm.”

Curly Kale nodded casually.

In all the confusion, no reports had come in, but it seemed the man had come up with a way to keep himself protected.

With that being the case, Curly Kale thought, looking at the men lined up behind Nazar.

So based on the conversation, these men were...

“So these men are the so-called relief supplies?”

“Yes. These twenty men have volunteered to be succubus food.”

“So you mean... We can eat them? Without hesitation?”

“Yes, but they are volunteers, not death row criminals. Please promise to treat them accordingly.”

“What do you mean ‘treat them accordingly’? You want me to give them special treatment?”

Hearing those words, one of the twenty men stepped forward.

A bald man with a scar on his face. At a glance, it was clear he’d survived the war.

In addition, his facial features weren’t that good for a human’s.

If Curly Kale had to rate his looks on a scale from one to ten, he’d get a one. The ugliest you could get. There were a few twos among the men’s number, but generally they were all similar in looks.

Speaking from a succubus’s experience, this type of man tended to produce plenty of emissions.

“I’m looking to take a succubus for my wife!”

That sort of special treatment was not possible.

Curly Kale shook her head, looking contrite.

“Unfortunately, in our country, we do not do monogamous marriage like humans. What we’d like you to volunteer for is to...er, ‘serve’ around ten women a day... Also, please be aware...we succubi cannot have human babies.”

“Wait, I misspoke! All I want to do is get it on with cute succubus chicks!”

The mention of ten women a day had made the man start breathing heavily. His eyes even grew bloodshot.

Curly Kale wasn’t sure why, but he looked excited for some reason.

“So, they’re just here as basic food, right?”

“Is that how it works? I’ve never been eaten by a succubus myself, so I’m not sure.”

“Aren’t you being a bit rude there?”

“I’m not being rude.”

“Hmm.”

Maybe humans liked this sort of thing.

Curly Kale’s guess was that these men, these humans, who would volunteer to be food for other races... Well, maybe they weren’t normal.

“Excuse me!”

The next to step forward was a dismal-looking man.

To be brutally frank, he stank. Even among this group of men who hadn’t bathed in days. And his breath was a bit stinky, too.

Of course, to a succubus, a man’s stink only sparked the appetite.

“Um, if possible, if you could avoid making a, you know, disgusted face in the middle of the act, then... I mean, I don’t mind if it’s all fake! But if possible, if you could act as though you’re enjoying it...”

“Who would look disgusted in the middle of a meal? Everyone will be

delighted to welcome you. They will all be ecstatic, no doubt, while feasting on you and your friends.”

“Really...?”

“Of course. But wait... That means you’re keen to be eaten, too?”

Curly Kale couldn’t understand what the man was saying.

It was beyond her.

Among humans, many fail to marry, even after the war. They even lose their jobs and become common bandits, forced to roam the world. Human women don’t tend to give men like this the time of day.

These men had been turned down not only by human women but by women from all different races.

“Excuse me, I...”

Then, one by one, the men expressed their desires.

From a human POV, the sort of requests they were making would have anyone saying, “Ew, yuck,” but from a succubus’s POV, these were all perfectly normal dining customs.

“In other words, you guys really came here to become our food, right?”

“Y-yes...”

Once the men had finished their introductions, the succubus Queen’s voice grew husky.

Her gaze was sharp.

A succubus is the natural enemy of man.

Even the strongest man could be taken down by the charms of any succubi on the street.

And these men could only tremble at the prospect of being spurned by this jewel of the succubus race.

To be frank, these men had lost their heads completely to their base sexual desires.

They'd tried their luck at the wedding of the third-born beastkin princess, hoping to wed a female beastkin, but none had given them the time of day. So they scraped a living together through long wanderings, becoming bandits... But they were quickly captured and facing death...when Nazar made them an interesting proposition.

These men did not care about the plight of the succubi.

They wanted to get their rocks off before they died, even if it was with succubus women.

So they had come gladly to the land of the succubi.

Seeing them as nothing but ladies of pleasure, like any other prostitute.

Now, no doubt, the succubus Queen had seen through those nefarious intentions.

The thought made the men stiffen in fear.

“...”

They might be sucked to death, right here, right now.

But the Queen simply straightened in her seat.

Then she bowed gracefully, in the human style.

“We appreciate the assistance of the humans. I, succubus Queen Curly Kale, wish to thank you on behalf of all the succubi who are suffering from starvation.”

Curly Kale looked up, a soft smile on her face.

The men were stunned for a moment, then they broke into grins... Then they started chuckling shyly.

After the war, women would barely look at them, let alone give them a smile... Not even a fake smile.

Curly Kale's smile was too dazzling for them.

Her dazzling smile, her sexy, skimpy attire...

“Directly, we will show you to your new quarters. Please reach out to the

guards if you have any requests. Nio. Please guide these men to the cafeteria.”

“Yes, Your Highness!”

Following Curly Kale’s orders, Nio left the room with the men.

The men followed her, openly drooling as they watched her butt move, but these men would soon learn that daily meal provision was going to be much more grueling than they’d thought.

Still, there was no doubt they’d all live happily for the rest of their days.

“Your Highness, Nazar. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to you for bringing us twenty fresh food subjects on such short notice.”

“Not at all. In fact, I’m sorry it’s so few. When I return to my home country, I plan to bring up the subject of full-scale support. It looks like that will be quite difficult, though, so I don’t want to go giving you expectations that are too high or anything.”

“I can’t thank you enough for your kind consideration.”

“...Ha-ha, it feels kind of strange to have a succubus use such polite language with me.”

“Succubi only use honorific language toward those they truly respect.”

“Well, it’s truly an honor.”

Nazar laughed softly, then seemed to remember something.

“But there’s someone else you should be more grateful to than to myself.”

“Is there?”

“I can’t tell you his name...but let me tell you, he’s a noble man.”

“Right.”

Curly Kale knew what the man was trying to say.

“Of course. My succubi are forever at his service.”

Curly Kale thought of the green orc who’d been among them not too long ago.

There had never been an orc who had done so much for the succubi, and

there would probably never be another.

Orcs are a filthy, greedy race, in general.

However, just having one proud warrior in their midst greatly increased the value of their entire race.

“Even at risk to the lives of the succubi...”

The Sacred Place of the succubi had been destroyed.

However, the old tales of the succubi had not been lost. History remained.

They would never let go of their pride.

The name of the Queen who had been of service to such a proud Hero would go down in the history books. She would not merely be remembered as the Queen who had let the Sacred Place be destroyed.

“We succubi always return our favors.”

And Curly Kale smiled impishly.

AFTERWORD

Long time no see, everyone. Rifujin na Magonote here.

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to everyone who has picked up the fifth volume of *Orc Eroica*.

Everyone, thank you very much.

This time as well, I would like to write a sprightly update on my current situation.

What, you want me to write about my work?

I mean, I too would like to write about the fifth volume.

But even if I say so myself, *Orc Eroica* is super-engaging, right? I feel like if I write about the hardships I had with Volume 5, it would only dilute the impact of the story.

What, you don't agree? Oh well, then I suppose I could write a little bit about it.

This time, Bash and his friends went to the land of the succubi.

The idea for this country came about at a very early stage.

The succubus nation is a world of only women, where there are few men, and the women are highly predatory. Kind of a reverse world. Bash is highly respected by the succubi. When Bash visits the succubus nation, he experiences excitement on a level he never thought possible before. The succubi live in a strict military society under the rule of a queen, but their way of speaking is very succubus-like and quite mesmerizing...

These individual ideas struck me as very interesting when I dreamed them up, but the more those ideas accumulated, the more difficult it became to come up with a story.

Yes, these individual aspects, no matter how interesting, have no relation to the overall story at all.

If I focused only on those elements, then Bash would simply arrive at the land of the succubi, lose his virginity in a flash, and there the story would end.

So I had to come up with reasons why Bash couldn't bed a succubus lady, and I had to come up with a reason for Bash to go there in the first place, even with that being the case.

That's when I came up with the idea of the water spirits and the sibling pair of Ludo and Luca.

In addition, there are a few elements of the Geddigs revival strategy that started in the fourth volume.

This is the completion of the succubus country arc.

I regret that there were a few too many elements involved, and that Ludo and Luca were a bit underutilized, but I couldn't think of anything else, so it can't be helped.

In any case, if you reread these five volumes with the overall story in mind, it might be interesting to see a glimpse of my creative method.

Well, I have some extra space this time, so I thought I'd write a status report.

Last time, various things happened, and I turned into a zombie, and I spent an eternity attacking all living things, but the other day, I was able to recover from being a zombie!

Wow, that was a long time. Has it really been about one million years in real time? I don't feel like much time has passed, since my brain was rotten. It feels like it's only been about a year.

By the way, during that space of a million years, humanity seems to have gone extinct about three times. Humanity arose on one planet, then perished, then humankind arose on another planet and perished, then humankind arose on another planet and perished, and so on.

This means that in over a million years, there may be organisms that have evolved in exactly the same way on different planets.

If the given environment and conditions are the same, the results will be the same.

So, strictly speaking, I am a being from a super-ancient civilization, and I am therefore totally different from modern humans.

However, as you all know, I'm a novelist and not particularly intelligent, so even though I'm a person from an ancient civilization, I don't have any special powers.

However, the people who brought me back from being a zombie are pushing me to fight.

Apparently, they are a so-called evil organization that plans to revive people from ancient civilizations like me, use them as battle monsters, and take over the world.

How foolish. Just because someone is from a super-ancient civilization doesn't mean they're good at fighting.

Having said that, I also have a thing for world domination. After all, I'm a former zombie. I was one of the beings who destroyed humanity. And as a space zombie, I've already destroyed the human race once.

So I decided to give it a try. And it seems like there's going to be a tournament to rank all the monsters.

I'd rather not participate in that, but this is probably my inevitable fate after joining the organization.

So I'm going to give it all I've got.

Well, that got a bit long-winded, but anyway...

To Asanagi, who once again drew some wonderful illustrations, and to Editor K, whom I have inconvenienced by focusing too much on *Mushoku Tensei*...and to all the others who were involved in the creation of this book, not to mention all the readers who've been waiting for updates on the "Shousetsuka ni Narou" website...

Thank you very much, once again.

If I survive this hellish tournament, I'll see you again in Volume 6.

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