

MIDDLE-AGED BUSINESSMAN,

Making a
Name for
Myself
Thanks to
Goddess
Power!

ARISE IN ANOTHER WORLD!

2

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**“Finally! We
are expanding
into the **royal**
capital!!”**

Elizabeth

President of Elunheine
Adventurer's Guild.



Shouzou Onigawara

A businessman who got transmigrated to
another world with his entire household.
Possesses incredible power thanks to a
divine blessing from his wife, Silvia.



"Warm-ups!"

Three Sisters of the Onigawara Family

Yuna

Hina

Kana

"Thank you for always helping my husband out so much."

"Elizabeth-san, h-how are you, um..."

...not embarrassed in that outfit?"

Sofie

Staff member at Elnheine Adventurer's Guild.

Silvia

Shouzou's wife. Former Grade 1 goddess.

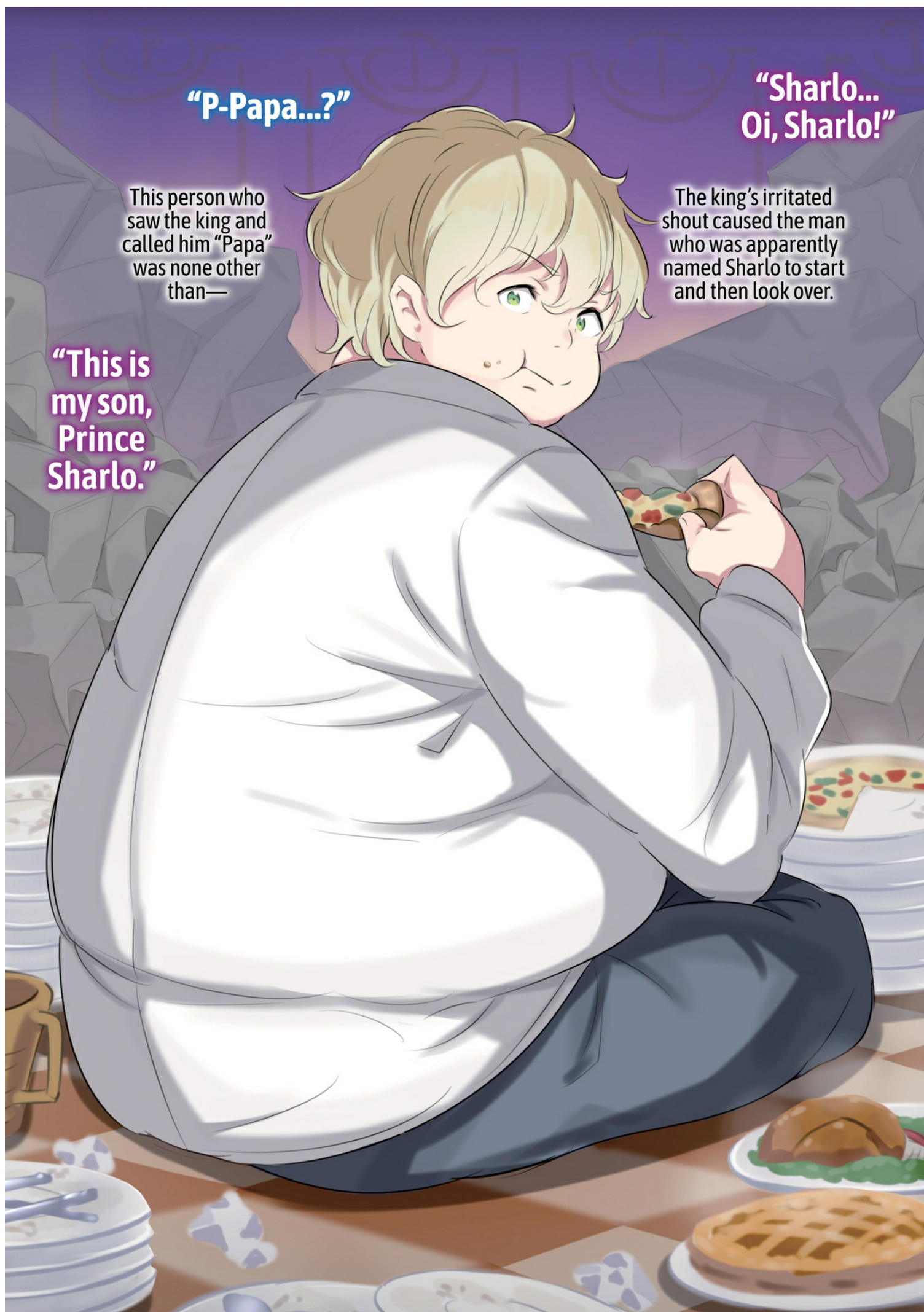
“P-Papa...?”

This person who saw the king and called him “Papa” was none other than—

**“Sharlo...
Oi, Sharlo!”**

The king’s irritated shout caused the man who was apparently named Sharlo to start and then look over.

**“This is
my son,
Prince
Sharlo.”**



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Chapter 1: A New Step Forward

The land that the Onigawara family, and their house, transmigrated to was called the Kingdom of Alsbeit. It was the third largest country in its entire world, and within its expansive borders lived a large variety of magic beasts.

For adventurers, this meant an endless source of income, and the struggle between adventurer's guilds was constantly fierce and heated.

—*“I will make Elunheine the very top guild of this entire city!”*

After realizing this goal, Shouzou made “be the top guild of the whole country” his next goal. Though, the case could be made that being the best in all of Treia—the city with the most prosperous adventuring industry in the country—technically also equated to being at the top of the entire country.

To that end, the very first step that he decided to take was— “Finally! We are expanding into the royal capital!!” shouted Elizabeth while standing in the middle of the road.

The principal street in the capital was more than twice as wide as that of the one in the fortress city of Treia. Open-air stalls were positioned so as to form a barrier between the roads for horses and pedestrians, but even so, the pedestrian sidewalks were more than wide enough.

The passersby stared confusedly at the diminutive young girl with blonde hair in ringlets.

Elizabeth paid them no mind while stepping through the large doorway before her.

This enormous four-story building was the royal capital branch of Elunheine Adventurer's Guild.

The ground floor lobby was even more spacious than the main store in Treia. Even so, it was already overflowing with adventurers, despite it being opening day. Just like in Treia, there were consultation booths in addition to the normal reception counters. Business was booming there too.

“Fufufu..... we've won!” Elizabeth was extremely satisfied.

“You sure are energetic for not having slept a wink last night due to worrying.”

“Oh, shush.” Elizabeth pouted in response to Shouzou’s comment.

“Well, to be honest, I had expected a fair amount of people to show up at the start, mainly those just curious about the new guild on the scene, but I confess this is more than what I had imagined.”

“We have put so much effort into gathering quests and advertising ourselves in preparation for this day. But, unfortunately, exactly as our preliminary research showed, these are mostly Bronze rank adventurers. We might have quantity, but it doesn’t seem like that’s going to translate into much profit, sorry to say.”

Those manning the reception counters also looked tense. Some of them were even flustered, which caused them to take much longer with tasks that could be done quickly. Even when considering how rushed their training period had been, this was hardly acceptable.

“You sure are full of complaints as always.”

“That’s just how I get when I’m in front of President.”

“Yeah, yeah. So, it’s the president’s job to hand out praise, right? Everyone’s working very hard, I’ll make sure to praise them lots afterward.”

Shouzou nodded deeply.

The two of them had a quick briefing with the head of the branch, then returned to the lobby.

After watching the receptionists’ performance for a while, Elizabeth murmured in disappointment. “Now that I’m taking a second look with a cool head, this really seems to be lacking something.”

“.....Number of customers, right?”

“In truth, it wouldn’t have been strange to see even bigger numbers today. Do you think this really is Goldas’s influence?”

After Jirahal replaced the previous guildmaster of their rival guild, Goldas Adventurer’s Guild, even while throwing out tactics to sabotage Shouzou and

the rest, he had been working on something else on the side.

Namely, they had been expanding into the industry in the royal capital with what could even be called forceful methods.

After Jirahal himself was overthrown, even while helping the main store in Treia get back on its feet, Kuntz, the new guildmaster, had succeeded in opening a branch here in the royal capital.

Although Elunheine had indeed surpassed Goldas in Treia, in the capital they were a latecomer.

Even when it came to cultivating curiosity, the guild that was being funded by a marquis had them beat.

A rough voice rang out from beside them. “The one and only achievement of that foolish son of mine, it could be said.”

“Marquis Goldas?!” shouted Elizabeth.

The fearsome face accentuated with a full beard grinned cheekily.

“You are in good health it seems, Lady Elizabeth. No wait, are the dark circles under your eyes due to not being able to sleep from nerves?”

“It has truly been a while. If you had sent word of your visit beforehand, then I would have made arrangements to offer you a proper reception.”

“Don’t mind me, I’m just here scouting out my enemy as a side detour for some other matter. I believe your hospitality would be misdirected if offered to me, would it not?”

Being treated as a mere “side detour” caused Elizabeth’s eyebrow to twitch. “Oh myyy I see that was indeed unnecessary after all. But worry not, we shall surpass you here in the capital just as we did in Treia very soon. I hope you will enjoy the show.”

The clash of sparks between the two of them caused nearby adventurers that were supposedly unrelated to tremble from fear.

But before Shouzou could step in, Marquis Goldas backed off first.

“Hmph. But joking aside, I believe that future might already be close. Right off

the bat, it seems we are already going to have a big one taken from us, hm?"

Shouzou interrupted, "Are you perhaps referring to *that* military accompaniment quest?"

"Indeed. When it comes to subjugating a water dragon, those actually capable of the job are limited in number. There's nothing much we can do to one up the guild that already has the Dragonslayer."

Quite recently, a water dragon had shown up within the kingdom's territorial waters.

Trade ships were attacked, and the damage was piling.

Thus the subjugation quest was circled around to all the guilds.

"You know that he's not actually exclusively bound to Elunheine, right?"

"But he is a young man with a strong sense of duty. You guys plan on asking him anyways, right?"

".....I will not deny that. Logically speaking, there is no reason to exclude him as an option."

"As I'd thought. Well, as a rival this stings, but as a man of the army there is no greater reassurance. For some reason, it is only ships from foreign countries that are being attacked, so if this continues, we could have an international problem on our hands."

"But marquis, do you not feel this strange feeling that I'm feeling?" murmured Elizabeth with creased brows.

"Water dragons normally live in the cold seas of the far north, do they not? To suddenly appear in the waters of our kingdom, which has a relatively much warmer climate, and to even do so in the middle of summer....."

"You have a point. Too much seems off for it to have just wandered down here on its own accord. Furthermore—no, let me stop there. There's no point in empty conjecture. All that matters is the successful subjugation of the water dragon." Marquis Goldas continued, all the while fixing Shouzou with a dead serious expression.

Elizabeth took a sharp breath.

Clearly, what was coming next was the true reason for this visit.

Shouzou received the piercingly sharp eyes straight on.

“Shouzou, I wish to ask your opinion on a matter. As a dad friend.”

“As a dad friend, you say. I’m all ears.”

“Actually, as of a few days ago, Jirahal has been abandoning his job duties, instead staying locked up inside his room and indulging in books for entertainment all day long.”

“Hmm. Even in consideration of the benefits of immersing oneself in a hobby, to neglect one’s responsibilities and refuse human contact is a clear problem.”

“I had considered kicking his door down and dragging him out by force, but I realize that what triggered this was most likely me reprimanding him for the mistakes he had committed. That was why I thought to consult your opinion first.”

“What need is there for such tact toward a full-fledged adult—is what I want to say, but there is a possibility that he has indeed been traumatized. I believe this situation calls for prudent discretion. Very well, I shall ask our illustrious forebears for the approach that needs to be taken.”

“Sorry for the trouble. I’ll be waiting.”

“Speak nothing of it. This is only normal between dad friends.”

The sight of the two extremely buff men patting each other’s shoulders and guffawing chummily— “What is with these two.....”

—Caused Elizabeth to look on with resigned exasperation.



That night, before dinner time, Shouzou was psyching himself up.

Moonlight glinted off the naked blade closing in on him with incredible speed.

The overhead strike was dodged with only the thickness of a piece of paper to spare.

Just as the tip of the blade was about to bury itself into the ground, it bounced back, darting toward his flank.

This, too, he dodged with but the barest of movements.

Painting crescents of light in the air, the blade assaulted Shouzou again and again.

The dogged flurry of blows knew no end, raising gusts of wind with every swing, causing all of the air in the vicinity to buffet around chaotically.

But Shouzou made them look like nothing more than the most refreshing of breezes as he seemingly entrusted his body to them, not allowing even a single blow to make contact with him as he fluttered about lightly.

His opponent finally ran out of patience, resorting to committing to a powerful thrust from an unsteady stance.

With a mischievous smile, Shouzou caught the blade with two fingers.

“Are you freaking kidding me?!” shouted the young man toward the sky.

Despite having been unleashed half in desperation, behind that thrust lay enough power to completely pierce through a dragon’s sturdy scales.

But for that thrust to have been stopped so easily—with only 2 fingers no less!—then what face would he, as the Dragonslayer, have left?

Although his face was cute like that of a girl’s, the eyes directed toward Shouzou were sharp.

And on his forehead protruded two horns, the characteristic that identified him as someone of the dragonewt race.

The young man’s name was Sidorias Geolta.

As a Platinum-ranked adventurer, he was also known by the title of Dragonslayer, famed far and wide for his strength.

Previously, he had lost his memory after being caught off guard in the middle of a dragon subjugation. When he had been consequently taken advantage of by small-time ruffians, it was Shouzou who had saved him. After that, every once in a while he would drop by the Onigawara residence to ask for a spar. Today was one of those days.

“So, what did you think? How is my swordsmanship now?”

“As I keep saying every single time, I am no expert. With that in mind, if I am to give my personal opinion.....”

Sidorias gulped audibly.

“The speed of your sword has gone up.”

“Is that so!” Sidorias’s face blossomed into a smile. He shot the quickest of looks to the side while clenching a fist in celebration.

The target of his look was a young girl who was making her way over.

“Dad, good work. You too, Sid.” It was none other than the eldest daughter of the Onigawara house, Yuna.

She handed a towel to Shouzou, her father, before also handing one over to Sidorias.



“Th-Thank you very much!” Sidorias accepted the towel with a bright red face, then promptly began using it to roughly wipe his sweat off. The floral scent made him dizzy. However, he made an effort to drag back his consciousness just as it was about to fall off into the world of dreams.

“Y-Yuna-san. What did you think? Did you see anything strange in my movements?”

“Eh, I mean, even if you ask me what I think..... It was so fast that I couldn’t catch anything at all.....”

“Is that so! I was fast, huh!”

Yuna was puzzled, unable to comprehend why he looked so happy even though she hadn’t complimented him.

“You’re staying for dinner, right? Today we’re having barbeque outside.”

““Bah-be-kiu’?”

“We will be roasting meat and vegetables and eating outside.”

“Roasting meat and vegetables... outside.....” This time it was Sidorias’s turn to be puzzled, unable to comprehend why she was looking so happy about something that occurred as a matter of course whenever he was out adventuring.

However, just the sight of Yuna being so lively was already enough to bring a smile to Sidorias’s face.

“Let me help out!”

“Sure, thanks!” In high spirits, Sidorias was about to follow behind Yuna when suddenly, he felt Shouzou’s hand landing on his shoulder.

“By the way, Sidorias-kun.”

“Y-Yes... sir. What is it, sir?” Sidorias’s head turned around creakily, only to see the fearsome face seemingly zooming up on him.

“I am very thankful to you for reaching out a hand of friendship toward my daughters, who unfortunately are new to this land and have no acquaintances.”

“O-Oh.....”

“As a parent, I have no intention whatsoever in interfering with my daughters’ friendships.”

“Uuuuu... aaa.....”

“However, but however... Be very, very, *very* careful that you do not dirty any of them with lecherous eyes.”

“Yezzir.....”

Shouzou grinned devilishly. “So then, let’s go get out the barbeque set, shall we? You said you’re helping out, yes? With me?”

“O-O-O-O-Of course.....”

Moonlight shone on the happy, happy scene of a happy family enjoying barbeque together.

The sole exception was Sidorias, who ate like he was sitting on top of a chair of thorns.

Although that wasn’t exactly the reason per se— Three days later, the water dragon subjugation ended in failure.

The Dragonslayer, who was in poor health, was unable to land even a single significant blow on the water dragon, which ended up successfully getting away.

The reason for Sidorias’s poor health—was because he got seasick.



“It’s the ocean!”

Clad in her navy blue school swimsuit, Kana, the second daughter, shouted with unbridled excitement.

“It’s the ocean~!” Next to her, Hina, the youngest daughter, was jumping up and down with an inflatable tube already around her waist. The swimsuit she was wearing was a pale pink one-piece.

But unfortunately, the location they were at was not actually the ocean.

“What on earth are you two doing in the living room?!” Yuna exclaimed in surprise at her two sisters who had suddenly barged in during dinnertime.

“My, oh my. What is the matter, you two?” Their mother, Silvia, smiled gently while turning toward the two younger ones.

“We want to go to the ocean, Mama. The reason? ‘Cus it’s summer!”

“Hina-sama wants to go too~ Because I want to play with Crab-sama~”

“I see. It is true that it is summer. But is there actually anywhere nearby that we can play in the ocean?” Silvia directed her eyes toward Shouzou.

“The coastline of the kingdom has a lot of sandy beaches, I hear. I believe there’s also one right next to the port city. Let me ask some of the staff when I go to work tomorrow. We’ll be aiming to go this weekend then, I suppose?”

Dazzling smiles blossomed on the faces of his two younger daughters.

“Let’s have a barbeque there too!”

“Can Puru-sama join too~?”

In contrast to the two who were frolicking about with no worries— “A swimsuit?Would online delivery make it in time.....?” The eldest daughter Yuna, who had recently started becoming conscious about fashion, suddenly found herself faced with a very pressing problem indeed— ★

The next day, during lunch break.

While having lunch in the guild office, Shouzou asked Sofie whether she knew anywhere that was famous for swimming.

“A place to swim.....? In the ocean.....? Umm, if you’re looking for a place with a sandy beach, then—” Sofie brought a map over, then pointed out several locations for Shouzou to see.

Elizabeth joined their conversation with a puzzled tone.

“Why do you want to swim in the ocean in the first place anyway?” This was a question that Shouzou had not expected.

“Do you girls not swim in the ocean?”

“There are large rivers near here. And when we feel like taking a dip, we usually go to a spring or a lake.”

“Me too. I mean, it might be one thing for people who live close to the ocean,

but.....”

“In the first place, when you swim in the ocean don’t you get all sticky and uncomfortable?”

“I’ve also heard that it’s so salty that it’s bitter. Not that I’ve tried licking any personally.”

Shouzou found himself fascinated by how a different understanding of a few points could change someone’s impression so completely.

But at the same time, the thought also occurred to him that, if the idea of swimming in the ocean was not widely accepted here, then it would in effect mean having the beach all to themselves no matter where they go.

(That sounds wonderful in its own way too.....) Not being bothered by anyone else, getting to enjoy a leisurely day with his family alone.

As a grin crept onto his face from him just entertaining the thought, Elizabeth shot him an exasperated look.

“But are you sure about being so laidback at a time like this? What are you going to do about that water dragon subjugation?”

“Work is work, but this is my private life. The distinction needs to be clearly drawn.” But because of Shouzou’s disposition, the matter wouldn’t leave his mind.

“But that said, it is indeed true that we are a bit stuck. Now that Sidorias-kun has failed, it will be extremely hard to find a replacement. Even Lalaine had a hard time thinking of potential candidates.”

It was extremely rare for an aquatic species of dragon to appear in the kingdom. Though Sidorias-kun had indeed been sick, the dragon had proved itself fast and tough enough just by merit of not having suffered a single wound from Sidorias.

There wasn’t a thing that any normal adventurer could do against it.

“Apparently Goldas and other guilds in the royal capital are trying to get into contact with adventurers in foreign countries.”

“Our information network is quite small... it barely extends beyond Treia. So

then, what *should* we do.....” Regardless of whatever countermeasure they came up with, Shouzou still very much wanted to see the water dragon in person first.

However, the dragon itself was a phantom, such that just going out to the ocean did not guarantee being able to meet it. Sidorias’s fight with it had supposedly also been preluded by two whole days of searching.

(Two whole days..... all that heaving and rolling probably worsened his seasickness, most likely.) A certain plan surfaced in Shouzou’s mind. Though it wasn’t exactly ingenious, but it still more than merited a try.

“By the way,” cut in Elizabeth while looking at Shouzou. “Is it fun? Swimming in the ocean?” Despite all her bashing of the idea just now, she seemed very curious about the concept.

“Do you want to come too?”

“Eh, can I?” Elizabeth leaned forward with great momentum.

Looking on with envy in her eyes, Sofie let an inadvertent “Aww.....” slip from her lips.

There was no way that Shouzou, with his sharp hearing, would miss that.

“Sofie-san, would you be interested as well?”

“I can come too?!” Sofie’s exclamation was as full of emotion as the time when she closed her very first sales job.

“Back at my previous workplace, every once in a while, us coworkers would socialize outside the workplace. I suppose it wouldn’t be a bad idea for you girls to also understand such a culture as well.”

At this, the beastkin Moko chimed in with “I’m going too!”

Lalaine of the Naga race softly spoke up with “.....Going outdoors is a bit—”

“Lalaine, you’re coming too right? Yes you are, that’s decided!”

“—Uuu.....”

So in the end, it was decided that all of them would be participating after all.



And so, that weekend...

The sky was a clear blue, and the sand glittered in the sunlight. Right at the edge of the gently lapping ocean waves stood a giant of a man wearing only a Speedo. At his feet lay a young man wearing normal clothes, but he was curled up in the fetal position.

“Come, Jirahal! How about a swim!”

“Youtrickedmeyoutrickedmeyoutrickedme.....”

“I did no such thing! What I said was ‘There will be beautiful girls playing around at the ocean,’ was it not?”

“I didn’t hear anything about *him* being present, Father!” Jirahal’s accusatory finger was pointed toward Shouzou, who happened to be in the middle of walking over.

“Ha~ha~ha, he’s much livelier than I had expected!” Shouzou said while smiling. The swimming trunks that he was wearing were his favorite pair, the pair that he had been using lovingly for the past ten years.

Despite being the one doing the finger pointing, as Shouzou gradually drew near, Jirahal became increasingly terrified.

“Eep?!”

“Ohhh, look at that shut-in diving into the ocean and swimming with such determination! It’s just like your dad friends said: bringing him outside even if it required resorting to trickery was indeed the right call.”

“.....So it seems.” (← somehow understood that Jirahal was terrified of him and thus was just running away, but he couldn’t bring himself to say that out loud) After seeing Marquis Goldas dive into the ocean in pursuit of his son, Shouzou turned around. Before his eyes was the sight of a certain blond who had a modest chest and yet the biggest attitude of all.

“I see..... this does indeed feel quite liberating.” Elizabeth was wearing a red bikini and standing with her hands on her hips. However, her face and skin was all red, and she also appeared to be slightly quivering.

“Elizabeth-san, h-how are you, um, not embarrassed in that outfit.....?” Sofie,

in contrast, was wrapped up in a towel from the chin down, and was hugging herself shyly.

“Can’t you tell that I’m super embarrassed right now?! What is this? I’m almost completely naked right now, aren’t I? But I can’t back down just because of that and admit defeat. Not with that around!” Her resentful eyes were directed toward Silvia, Shouzou’s wife. Her enormous breasts seemed in constant danger of spilling out from the white bikini that she was sporting.

“Thank you for always helping my husband out so much.” Silvia was going around offering her greetings to each of Shouzou’s coworkers.

From her resting spot underneath a large parasol, Lalaine, who was actually still in her usual clothes, was clutching her knees (well, in her case, the snake-like lower half of her body) and making herself as small as possible. Not knowing where to look, her eyes were simply darting around erratically.

Next to her, Moko’s tail was wagging furiously. The one-piece swimsuit that she was wearing actually also had a hole in the back for her tail to pass through.

“Onee-san, are you really married to Oni-occhan?”

“Yes I really am.”

“He didn’t blackmail you?”

“If I’m being honest, then technically it was me who compelled him.”

“Onee-san, you’re such a nice person……” But even while saying that, Moko’s eyes never left Silvia’s breasts.

Similarly, Elizabeth gazed at the two heavy-looking bountiful bosoms. “I’m not entertaining any fantasies of being able to win against those. However, my pride would not allow me to cringe and hide in a corner just because of that. You actually have rather splendid ones, Sofie! So get yourself together!”

“Eliza-san wait a—?! D-Don’t take my towel—” But Sofie’s plea fell on deaf ears. Her towel was snatched away, causing her body to be revealed.

Her swimsuit was also a bikini type, but the pareo served to lower the degree of exposure. However, as the pair next in size after Silvia’s own, Sofie’s twin mounds jiggled alluringly.

Shouzou quickly shifted his gaze toward his beloved daughters.

“Warm~ups!” At Yuna’s command, her other two sisters began doing calisthenics. Kana did them begrudgingly, and Hina cheerfully.

Kana’s current situation was preluded by a mad dash toward the ocean immediately upon arrival at the venue followed by a severe scolding from Yuna.

“The ocean is a scary place, understand? Even though Dad and Mom are here with us, you can die if you get careless!” Even Kana, who normally loved to push her luck, found herself overwhelmed by her older sister’s threatening attitude and was unable to say anything in rebuttal.

While watching the exchange between his daughters with a warm smile, Shouzou laid a heavy hand on the shoulder of the young man standing beside him. “Well then, Sidorias-kun, shall we also get started on warming up?” The ogling look on his face had apparently earned him the ire of someone he could not afford to.

“Um, that’s..... I am very glad and thankful that you’ve invited me here today, but.....” Unable to look at Shouzou directly, he voiced his question in a voice colored with apprehension.

“What exactly is it that we are going to be doing for this ‘special training’.....?”

Currently the kingdom was quite inconvenienced by a water dragon. The Dragonslayer set off to subjugate it, only to have the effort end in failure due to being seasick. But that was only natural, since he had no prior experience riding in a ship or swimming.

“Do you not want to defeat the water dragon?”

“If you put it that way, then yeah of course I want a rematch. It vexes me that I wasn’t able to give it my all.”

“Mm. It was because I had thought you would say those exact words that I called you here today.” Although Shouzou generally preferred to keep work from entering his private life, he wasn’t completely against resolving the worries of a promising youngster during this outing.

And thus...

“Let’s train together, Sid-onii-chan!”

“Training~!”

The entire Onigawara family was going to lend its full effort toward Sidorias’s training— Incidentally, Sofie’s aunt, Adora, also had every intention of coming, but she got too excited and drank too much the night before, so she couldn’t that day due to a terrible hangover.



“Ahahaha, it’s coming it’s coming it’s coming— Sofie, run away—!”

“Ah, wait for me Eliza-san! Uuu, it’s so cold—!”

Among the ebbing and flowing waves, two young girls were having the time of their lives.

“Oh, it’s receding. Wait for me—!”

“Wah! A big wave is coming! It’s dangerous!”

“No problem, no problem, ahahaha—*boof*—” Elizabeth lost her footing and fell forward, coincidentally planting her face right into an incoming wave.

“*Puha! Peh peh peh*, what is this? It really is bitter with saltiness.”

Sofie licked the tip of one of her fingers, then—“Oh, it really is!”—widened her eyes in astonishment.

Even during this exchange, the waves continued to gently roll in and out, repeatedly coming and going.

The two of them sat down where they were, enjoying the feel of the waves that reached up to their waist pushing and pulling, sharing a quiet moment gazing out toward the open ocean.

“Hm?”

“Eh?”

Immediately after they thought they spotted a black shadow in between the waves— Splash!

“Uwah!”

“Eep?!”

“Nyahaha, look at what I got!” It turned out to be Moko, equipped with goggles and snorkel, who had jumped up from the sea.

“This large pair of glasses is amazing! I can see everything underwater. This flappy thing on my feet also makes it so much easier to swim. I swam like a fish and caught these!” In both her hands were fish still flapping about energetically. Moko walked over with her feet going *splish, splash*.

“I’m going to get us lots and lots of food for dinner! So then, I’m off again!” After chucking the fish onto the sand, Moko turned her heels and dived back into the ocean.

“Should we swim too?”

“.....You know how to swim?”

“Ehh, I’ve swam lots in the river before. What about Eliza-san?”

“.....Teach me.”

“Sure thing ♪”

The two of them also strode into the ocean, holding onto each other’s hands.



A distance away from the two of them, finally Sidorias’s special training was about to begin.

“Umm..... what is this rope for?” There was a rope firmly bound around Sidorias’s waist. The other end of the very long stretch of rope was being held tightly in Shouzou’s fist.

“Seasickness is caused by the irregular swaying that you are not used to. Which means that we need to help you develop a resistance against that swaying.”

Though the Onigawara family did have seasickness medication in stock, it was unknown what side effects might arise if taken by someone of a different race. That was why Shouzou opted to train Sidorias’s body up directly.

“Ooook..... But still, what is with the rope?”

“This is what we’ll be doing.” After taking some distance away, Shouzou pulled on the rope, then— “NoooOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO—”

—began to whirl Sidorias around in midair.

“So well, by repeatedly experiencing acceleration and deceleration in this way..... what is the matter? It’s not been even five seconds.” Seeing how Sidorias had gone limp in the air, Shouzou summarily threw him back onto the beach.

The young man looked so green in the face that he seemed about to puke at any moment.

“Th-This..... is even tougher..... than seasickness.....”

“Could it be called ‘special training’ if it were not tough?”

“I might end up dying before I overcome my seasickness.....”

(Was this method perhaps a bit too drastic?) Shouzou found himself almost feeling a bit of remorse— ★

At the same time, the two younger sisters were looking on at the training scene between their father and the young man with positively sparkling eyes.

“Kana-onee-sama, Hina-sama wants to do that~!”

“What a coincidence. I was just thinking that I wanted to do it to you, Hinacchi.”

So without further delay, they “borrowed” some spare rope, which was then promptly tied to the inflatable tube that Hina had on.

Copying their father, they went a distance away, then Kana pulled the rope with all her strength and began swinging it around her head.

“AHAHAHAHAHAHAHA, THIS IS SO FUN~!”

“Nuuoooh~ This actually takes quite a lot of strength!” Even so, in order to make it even more fun for Hina, Kana continued swinging the rope faster and faster.

However, what the rope was bound to was but a fragile inflatable tube.

BANG, pshhhh~

The inflatable tube ruptured, and all the air inside escaped.

Hina slipped out from the ring that had gotten slack.

“AHAHAHAHAHA~!”

“HINACCHI~?!”

As the inflatable tube—which had been her only support—shrunk, Hina flew off into the air.

Below her was open water. However, Hina did not know how to swim.

“Hm?” Shouzou was about to dash off to save his daughter, but then stopped.

“*Kueeh~*” A blue shadow shot forward in the clear blue sky with flapping wings.

Their pet blue dragon, Puru, caught up with Hina, then matched her speed such that it caught Hina with its back without any impact whatsoever.

“Puru-sama, thank you~” While circling through the skies, Hina continued frolicking in high spirits.



Seeing that, Kana patted her chest in relief.

“All right, Kana, let’s have a chat right over here, shall we?” However, her older sister Yuna was almost immediately on top of her, sporting a smile that would instill absolute terror into anyone who beheld it. All that was left after that was a long, long round of being chewed out— ★

“Please keep such dangerous training beyond the sight of the children, all right honey?” Upon being chastised by his wife, a new idea occurred to Shouzou.

“Let’s change the way we think about this.”

“Change the way..... we think about this.....?”

“Indeed. You get seasick because you’re riding a ship. Then the answer is simple: just don’t ride a ship.”

“I see..... eh, you mean for me to continue swimming the entire time?”

“There’s no need to swim either.”

Sidorias tilted his head in puzzlement. Right then, Hina’s laughter from on high caused him to look up, which turned out to be the exact moment when the blue dragon and Hina passed by right above his head.

“I have no experience riding on a flying-type magic beast either, just saying.”

“What are you saying? There’s no need to ride anything either. You will challenge the dragon with but your body.”

“How, if I’m not swimming?”

“Just run.”

“What.....” On Sidorias’s face was sheer disbelief. That was just too tall an order.

“The method is simple. First you put one foot onto the water surface. Then before that foot sinks, take a step with the other foot. Then before *that* foot sinks, kick the water with the first foot and move forward. Then just rinse and repeat.”

“Oh sure, you make it *sound* easy!” But it was impossible to actually put that

into practice.

“Papa, you’re talking about the ninja walk, right?” Having escaped from Yuna’s scolding, Kana’s head popped up all of a sudden.

“Kana, can you do it?”

“Hehe, well just watch.” Kana got down into a crouching start on the sand, then shot forward like a rocket.

“*UryaaaAAAAA—*” Her feet moved with incredible speed as she cut through the approaching and receding waves..... until the water got to around her waist, at which point she gave up and simply began swimming.

“Pfft, you didn’t actually do it.”

“Ahaha, yeah it’s not possible.” Kana scratched her head sheepishly while bobbing in the water.

Just then, Hina and Puru alighted.

“Kana-onee-sama, let’s play together~”

“Good idea! And let’s call Yuna-nee too! It’s about high time the two of you learned how to swim. I’ll teach!”

“Ya~ay~!” Just as Hina was hopping up and down on Puru’s back from excitement— “*Kueh!*” Abruptly, Puru raised its voice and turned to glare toward the open sea.

“Oh?” It was Kana who first noticed that something was up. She felt the water pulling out toward the sea.

The next instant, a gigantic magic beast burst out from the far off ocean surface.

At first glance, the thing that had caused such an eruption of water seemed like a moray eel. Its long body was vertically thin, and sunlight reflected off of its crystal-like scales in rainbow-colored rays. The sharp horn protruding from its upper jaw gave its head the impression of a swordfish.

Despite the distance, it was all too easy to see that it was no normal size.

It was perhaps as long as two copies of the dark dragon that Shouzou had

previously faced off against lining up side by side with wings outstretched.

“The rumored water dragon.....” murmured Shouzou.

“I find it hard to believe that there are two of them in these waters, so most likely, yes it is,” replied Sidorias bitterly.

It was quite far away.

As water dragons usually didn’t have a habit of getting close to land, the possibility of them being attacked was low.

However, when considering how hard it normally would be to locate it, Shouzou wanted to settle this matter right then and there.

But that said, it was forbidden for a staff member of an adventurer’s guild to do anything that could constitute as contribution toward the completion of a quest.

“So then, what should I do..... hm?” With a shudder, all his hair stood on end.

The magic beast had the front half of its body exposed above the ocean and was swaying back and forth. With its horn pointed straight into the sky, it opened its mouth and roared.

The soundwave exploded like a thunderous clap.

After a slight delay, an enormous wave began rushing out from the magic beast’s location.

At five meters tall, the approaching wave almost seemed like an encroaching castle wall.

Kana managed to hop onto Puru’s back and escape into the air, but at this rate, the other children playing by the waterside would be swallowed up when the wave crashed.

Shouzou clenched his fists— “*URARARARARARARA!!*”

—and unleashed a barrage of straight punches. It was effectively a carpet bombing of missiles generated by the shockwaves of his punches. The tall wave was quickly broken down, at which point the water reversed direction and rushed back into the sea.

The waves approached and receded as a part of the natural process.

Therefore, Shouzou broke down each approaching wave, taking a brief break each time the ocean pulled back. He made sure to gradually adjust the power of his punches to match the decreasing strength of each successive wave. By the time he lowered his fists, the ocean had reverted to its usual calm self.

“*Fuu.....*” Seeing that everyone else had safely evacuated, Shouzou let out a sigh of relief. But then a diabolical smile came over his face.

“For the water dragon to hand me justification on a platter.....” They had just received what could clearly be construed as an attack, and his family had indeed been exposed to danger.

This was more than enough justification to offset the rules that forbade him from fighting. So Shouzou sped forward in a straight line, right toward the water dragon.

“HE’S ACTUALLY RUNNING ON TOP OF THE WATER?!”

Seawater is, of course, liquid. However, in the case of an impact with something at a high enough velocity, it behaves like a solid. But that said, this was not a feat that just anyone could pull off.

But true to his own words, Shouzou was simply taking the next step before his other foot sank, and in this way running steadily over the ocean surface.

“*DooryaaAAHH!*” He jumped.

From his position directly beside the water dragon’s maw, he tightened his body to unleash an incredible blow.

But at that exact moment, a wind rushed by from behind him.

Another dragon shot past Shouzou in the air. Then a tiny silhouette jumped off from its back.

“Otoo-sama, bullying is bad~!” As if in an effort to protect the water dragon, Hina spread out both her hands as she got in Shouzou’s way.

But with that said, she *did* just throw herself off into empty space, so that was immediately followed up by a “I’m~ fal~ling~” as she succumbed to the laws of gravity.

Shouzou used the momentum originally intended for the punch to grab his daughter just as their trajectories crossed, then jumped at the swordfish-like part protruding from the water dragon's upper jaw.

"Hina, why did you stop me?"

"This dragon is asking for help~"

"I see. So it is asking for help. Does that mean you can understand what this magic beast is saying?"

"I don't know~" Shouzou found it hard to keep a stern face before Hina's full-faced beam.

"Then how do you know that it is asking for help?"

"Puru-sama told me~ Hina-sama can sort of understand what Puru-sama is saying~"

This water dragon looked like a snake or a moray eel. But in spite of their wildly different appearances, the two were still of the same species. Perhaps as a blue dragon, Puru could feel something from it.

As for Puru, it circled around the water dragon's head several times, then came to position itself right next to Shouzou and Hina.

The whole time, the water dragon obediently kept its head directed toward the sky. Its googling pupil rotated over. Within its depths, there seemed to be sadness and pain that threatened to spill out as tears.

Shouzou carefully placed his beloved daughter back onto Puru's back.

"I want to have a conversation with this magic beast. Can you help me do that, Hina?"

"Puru-sama, can you help us do talking~?" Hina banged on Puru's neck with her soft hands.

"Kueh!"

"Puru-sama said 'Super duper easy for me, give me a reward later!'"

(Did that single utterance just now include so much cheekiness?) But it occurred to Shouzou that there might be a telepathic component to the

communication between Hina and Puru, so he chose not to dwell on it for now.

“First we need to verify, so please ask ‘Are you the water dragon that has been attacking ships around this area?’”

Hina banged on Puru’s neck again while asking, “Are you the bad boy breaking ships around here~?”

“*Kue—*” Puru cried out once, after which the water dragon answered with a roar that sounded like an earthquake.

“*Kueh*”

“It said ‘I couldn’t help it’~” The whole translating a translation thing gave Shouzou a slight sense of unease, but so far it appeared that some degree of communication was indeed possible.

“Why did you attack the ships?”

Once again the chain of exchanges from Hina to Puru, then all the way back from the water dragon took place. After which, Hina announced the water dragon’s answer. “‘I was commanded to, I couldn’t disobey’..... oh no, it’s terrible..... There’s a bully somewhere~!”

What a perfectly fitting way of putting things. So apparently there was someone who was controlling this water dragon from the shadows. It seemed like this would be the correct line of thought to pursue. However, what kind of person could it be that even a magic beast this size could not disobey them? But unfortunately, conversation didn’t really progress after that point, so it proved impossible to get any specific information about the controller.

In the eyes of dragons, all human faces apparently looked the same. This water dragon identified its controller by voice, but with the double and triple layers of translation, Shouzou was ultimately unable to comprehend the description the water dragon provided. In the first place, the water dragon did not even understand the concept of an individual as opposed to an organization, as its species generally never did anything in a “group.”

It seemed like the controller was indeed just one person, but it proved impossible to gain any more information beyond “yes, the controller did come into contact with several other individuals.”

It was at this point that the water dragon abruptly cried out mournfully.

Then it slowly began withdrawing into the ocean.

“What is happening?”

“Um, ‘I have to go back now,’ it said~”

Back to its controller, perhaps? If so, then it might be a good idea to give chase, as doing so might reveal the location and maybe even the identity of the controller in question.

Groan.

Apparently, that had been “Please don’t follow me.”

Shouzou tried to ask why, but no answer was forthcoming.

“There’s one last thing we want to know: why did you come here?”

Silence.

However, the instant right before its head fully submerged underwater, the water dragon answered.

—You guys looked like you were having so much fun, I wanted to join in too.

With that, the water dragon retreated deep underwater, far further than even Shouzou could follow.

“I see. Then let’s play all you want when we meet next.”

“Let’s play~!”

“KUEEHHH!”

(Did our thoughts reach the dragon?) While floating amidst the waves, Shouzou earnestly prayed that they did.

So then, the water dragon had left.

Shouzou switched his train of thought. *(Who could it be that’s pulling the strings in the shadows?)* Their motive was also unclear. The cargo of the ships that the water dragon had attacked were mainly on the ocean floor. The few that were floating on the surface did not seem to have been touched either. *(Was it a grudge? But the attacks seemed too indiscriminate for that. Wait no,*

didn't Jilk say.....) — *"It is only ships from foreign countries that are being attacked."*

— *"If this continues, we could have an international problem on our hands."*

It seemed like Jilk knew something else as well. Shouzou returned to the beach in a hurry. With perfect timing, Jilk also just happened to be surfacing from the water, dragging a half-drowned Jirahal along.

Leaving his kids under the care of Puru and Sofie and his other coworkers, Shouzou called Elizabeth and Silvia over. After he explained the situation, the wrinkles on Goldas's forehead deepened into a frown.

"So that's what it was. Though it's still blurry, I may be starting to see what's going on behind the scenes here. The ships attacked by the water dragon were all foreign merchant ships. To be more specific, only the ships belonging to the Empire of Bardimia." The Empire of Bardimia, sometimes also called the Bardimian Empire, was located north of the kingdom, on the other side of a sea.

In recent years, the empire had been boosting its military strength, citing random reasons to justify attacking and annexing small countries on its borders. Due to the sea that separated the two countries, people in the kingdom had yet to feel any sense of a crisis from this. However, the longer this went on, the more at risk they were.

"So you're saying it could be someone from the empire who has a grudge against us?" asked Elizabeth.

"That's not a strong enough reason to explain why they're doing this in our waters." Goldas expressed his disagreement.

Shouzou was of the same mind as the marquis. That alone was not enough to justify going to the trouble of bringing a water dragon so far from its usual habitat to conduct attacks in someone else's country.

"Then, marquis, what do you think are the chances of this being the handiwork of a third country?"

"Hmm. Pitting our two countries against each other, then swooping in when we are both exhausted from fighting? Hmmm....." Goldas groaned with his arms crossed.

At that moment, another possibility occurred to Shouzou. “This might be the empire itself.”

“Hah?” Although it was Elizabeth who raised her voice, everyone else also turned toward Shouzou with equally astonished expressions.

“I am not too clear on the exact details of the situation, but I can think of several reasons why they might want to do this.” With that preface, Shouzou began to explain his thoughts. “By attacking only their own ships, they could be trying to create a pretext for demanding a large amount of reparation. Or perhaps this could be a tactic for gauging our kingdom’s naval strength. It is a natural assumption that the navy would have to get involved when it comes to subjugating a water dragon. Then an estimate of the forces at our disposal could be extrapolated based on what we bring to bear against the dragon.”

Goldas’s face stiffened. “Either of them seem equally probable. No, it might be that.....”

“Indeed. If this is indeed the work of the empire, then it would be safer to assume that they were aiming for *both* of those in carrying out this plan. And of course, their final aim would be—”

Shouzou’s next words caused everyone to swallow their breath.

“—to use it as pretext for starting a war.”

Even for a country so actively pursuing the expansion of its borders, invading other countries without rhyme or reason would provoke criticism from both without and within. Having a reason for doing so, such as this, for example, could go a long way in lessening that criticism.

“If things truly are as Shouzou surmises, then the situation is very grave.” By this point in time, they had already deployed their navy to subjugate the water dragon. If the aim was truly to assess their naval strength, then that aim was already accomplished.

Furthermore, even if they somehow managed to capture the person controlling the water dragon and confirm that this truly was the empire’s doing, chances were high that the empire would simply just play innocent. The only thing left after that would be an express ticket to war. The empire would surely

harp on about how “the kingdom tried to pin a false accusation on us!” and invade in high spirits. Everything would have gone exactly as they wanted.

Discretion was needed. The best option was to defeat the water dragon quietly and without fanfare, and in so doing, regain peace.

Goldas strongly supported this idea.

“Silvia, are you able to track the water dragon just now with your tracking magic?”

“Mhm. I was a ways off when it showed up, but I managed to grasp its unique magic signature nevertheless.”

“Shouzou, you will do this for us?” Goldas patted his chest with relief.

Shouzou directed his eyes toward the lapping waves.

Hina was happily playing by splashing Puru with water. The smile on her face was even brighter than the sun hanging in the clear blue sky.

“Upon parting, apparently that water dragon said ‘I have to go back now.’ In other words, there is a possibility that at this very moment, it is heading toward the person who is controlling it, and that they are going to make contact.”

“Oi, Shouzou. You crazy bastard, what are you planning—”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Shouzou glared sharply toward the far horizon beyond the sea.

“I will apprehend this villainous fool who is taking advantage of a virtuous magic beast, and free the water dragon from its bonds.”

Goldas was struck dumbfounded.

In stark contrast, Silvia and Elizabeth both smiled with relief.

“I hear that water dragons normally live in colder waters. It is surely finding the warm waters around here quite uncomfortable indeed. Maybe we will only get to play with it just the one time.”

“Hold on. But then the relationship between our countries—”

“Come, come, there’s no cause for worry.” Shouzou laughed away Goldas’s worry. “I will do something about it.”

“Will you at least tell us what plan you’ve cooked up that gives you such confidence?!”

The plan was to play it by ear, of course. In the cutthroat business world, things almost never go according to plan. With that thought in his mind, Shouzou merely chuckled— ★

This was the family’s first sea bathing outing since coming to this other world.

They had even made preparations for having a barbeque in the afternoon.

Although the sun had yet to reach its zenith, because he couldn’t predict how things would turn out, Shouzou had no choice but to tell the others to start without him.

After entrusting everything to Emalia, who had come late, Shouzou sped off on the ocean surface, with the sole aim of saving the virtuous magic beast being toyed with due to human greed.

Keeping up with him in midair was his wife, Silvia. Silently keeping an eye on the window displayed before her eyes, she was constantly making sure he was heading in the right direction.

“The dragon has stopped.” Silvia announced as the red dot on her screen had stopped moving.

“Its location is still within the ocean. Maybe it is resting on the ocean floor.” If that was so, then chances of the person controlling the dragon being at its location was low.

Or so they thought, but that proved to be a needless worry. Dead ahead, a medium-sized sailing vessel gradually came into view. Naturally, they had no guarantee yet that the people on that ship were the people they were after, but that could be easily ascertained with but a little bit of investigating.

Shouzou increased his speed, kicked off of the ocean surface, then leaped into the air.

Out of the blue, BAM!, there stood a half-naked giant of a man on the deck. All of the sailors stumbled back in astonishment.

Then beside him, a half-naked lady landed softly. All of the sailors were

spellbound at what looked like the descent of a goddess.

Then they came to a start. “Wh-Who are you two?!”

Instead of answering, Shouzou swiveled his head to pan around. On the deck stood five men. It seemed like they had been in the middle of cleaning the deck, as some of them were now holding their mops as spears. All of them had really good physiques. Now, was that because they were sailors, or was that because they were soldiers? Then Shouzou noticed the man in the crow’s nest aiming a bowgun at him.

Eventually losing patience with Shouzou’s silence, one of the sailors shouted at him. “Oi, bastard, did you not hear us? Surely you know that this ship belongs to the esteemed Nemeelaso Giel-sama!” This stereotypical “spiel to say to an invader” was delivered absolutely flawlessly.

“Silvia?”

“Mhmm, on it.” Silvia manifested a window screen, then used communication magic to connect with Emalia back on the beach. Through Emalia, Shouzou asked Marquis Jilk Goldas to confirm what he knew about this “Nemeelaso Giel” character.

“Shouzou, come back right now. Viscount Giel is a special diplomatic envoy dispatched by the Empire of Bardimia. Do *not* cause any trouble with him!”

An envoy from the empire just happened to be in a ship directly above the position where the water dragon chose to rest?

Although the conclusion was already plain to see, Shouzou asked one more question, just in case. “What business would a special diplomatic envoy have in the middle of the ocean?”

“.....The merchant ships of his own country are being attacked. The special envoy has been very eager to help out with our efforts, to the point where he goes out on his own ship every once in a while to conduct his own investigating.”

“Is that something for a special diplomatic envoy to do?”

“We tried to stop him multiple times. However, he has express permission

from his home country. Furthermore, he said that even if anything happened to him, he won't make it into a diplomatic issue. Since he's already promised to shoulder full responsibility, we have no way of stopping him. In any case, now we know the other party's identity. Come back first so we can come up with—"

"Like I could go along with such a roundabout way of doing things. If more casualties occur while we do that, then it'd be putting the cart before the horse." With that, Shouzou nodded at Silvia to cut off the communication.

"Oi! Shouzou! Wai—"

"Well then," said Shouzou while cracking his neck. "Allow me to meet the person in charge on this ship. I already know that you guys are controlling the water dragon to attack your own country's merchant ships. You would be wise to give up immediately."

The men became astir. However, within the whirlpool of bewilderment and perturbation, as well as unease and resignation that could be felt from them, there also was resolve and spirit.

"Invaders! There are intruders onboard!" With that shout, a man brandished his deck mop and rushed toward Shouzou.

Shouzou met it without moving a muscle. The deck mop slammed onto Shouzou's shoulder... then the handle snapped in two. Shouzou did not move a single muscle through it all.

Men wielding swords and spears emerged from within the ship. However, they did not immediately leap in to attack. The reason being that from the crow's nest, three men were using their bowguns to unleash a rain of arrows.

With added momentum from the force of gravity, the arrows flew straight at Shouzou's body and... bounced off. Stopped by a body of steel, the repelled arrows fell to the deck like so many mere twigs.

"Wh-What is with this guy....."

"Is he using strengthening-type magic.....?"

"He's a monster....."

The morale of the sailors shrivelled up at the sight.

Shouzou slowly turned to glare at the man who came to attack him first. “You will guide me now, yes?”

“Y-Yes... sir..... This way please.....” With a shaky voice, the man walked ahead to show the way. Shouzou and Silvia followed behind.

Right before stepping into the hull of the ship, Silvia frowned. However, she merely gave Shouzou a look, and did not say anything. There was probably some sort of magic in effect, but the fact that she didn’t say anything meant that it was not much of a problem.

The moment they stepped in, they found a sweet smell hanging thick in the air. “It’s that room,” said their guide while pointing to a certain door. However, he did not walk in any further.

There was no point forcing someone who was unwilling. It might be a trap, but the two had no intention of turning back. They opened the door that was pointed out to them, and smoke billowed into their faces.

Within the dimly lit room, a man was rocking in a rocking chair while puffing away at a tobacco pipe. The man was thin and gaunt. His glassed over eyes added to the impression that he was addicted to some suspicious drug. Seeing them walk in, the man asked warily, “Huh? Who’re you two?”

“So you are Nemeelaso Giel. What is your aim in controlling the water dragon to attack your own country’s ships?”

The ice cold expression and narrowed eyes on Giel’s face eventually gave way, and then he smirked. “Hmph. Well done figuring it out. Or should I say, well done *finally* figuring that out.” Giel chuckled as if he found something funny. “So you got all the way here unscathed. You must be quite skilled, then. Or, going by your half-naked state, did you perhaps swim to my ship and sneak in by dodging the eyes of the sailors?”

“I am the one doing the asking. Answer my question.”

“Ha ha ha, that’s quite some confidence you have there. So that’s why you two just nonchalantly strolled into my room, without making any preparations whatsoever?” Giel placed the pipe back into his mouth, then breathed out a large cloud of purple smoke. “There are numerous spells cast upon this room.

Magic for corroding minds, strong enough to affect even dragons.”

Shouzou felt a sense of wrongness. It was as if his body was bound by thin, invisible spider’s silk from head to toe.

“You can’t move, hm? You two idiots have already stepped into my trap. Now then. Before I kill you nice and slow, let *me* ask you some questions. Who are you people, where are you from, and who ordered you to come? How did you deduce the location of my ship through the water dragon incident?” Giel took another puff from his pipe, after which a vulgar smile appeared upon his face. “But before that, I’m going to have me some fun with this woman here, hm?”

Snap. Snap. Snap.

“Eh?”

Paying no mind to whatever it was that continued trying to wrap around his body, Shouzou walked briskly forward.

“H-How can that be? How can you be moving?!”

Shouzou did not understand what he was being asked. Every time he moved, a soft snapping sound could be heard, but his eyes weren’t seeing anything. Perhaps it was something magical. It might even be what Giel himself mentioned just now.

However, none of it was of any consequence to Shouzou. “Once more, I ask you.” He brought his face right up to the man’s, then blew the pipe away with a sharp exhale. “What is your aim in controlling the water dragon to attack your own country’s ships?”

“Eep?!” Giel was so startled that he fell off his chair. “Th-This can’t be happening. I don’t feel even a scrap of magic from either of you. You have no resistance magic cast on you, and I personally checked the magicks cast on this room. Yet how... HOW!”

The couple were not beholden in any way to answer Giel’s question, but it seemed clear that the conversation would not proceed if he didn’t get his answer.

However, this was not a question that Shouzou could answer, so he passed

the baton to Silvia. “In the first place, the quality of a goddess’s magic is simply different from that of a human’s. Furthermore, for fear of affecting nearby unrelated people, I’m using a certain amount of concealment magic, powerful enough that a less wary magician would be unable to detect it. And lastly, there is no need for me to resort to resistance magicks. As a Grade 1 goddess, such crude and sloppy magic is far too lacking to affect me.”

“Hah? Eh.....” All that went over Shouzou’s head, but it seemed like Giel didn’t quite understand any of it either.

“As for Shouzou-san—” A blush abruptly blossomed on Silvia’s cheeks. “That... would be because of love.”

Now Giel was *really* confused.

Moving the conversation along, Shouzou grasped Giel’s shoulder as he shrunk back in fear.

“Eep, o-okay, I’ll talk. I’ll tell you whatever you want to know.” As if some internal dam had burst, Giel began to babble on without stopping. As it turned out, just as Shouzou and the others had suspected, everything was indeed a charade directed and carried out by the empire itself. They would control the water dragon, and make it attack their own merchant ships, carefully note the forces deployed by the kingdom in response, and use that information toward future naval battles. In addition, they also intended to demand a large amount of reparation. If the kingdom refused, then they would use that as the pretext to declare war. As for the cargo that fell out of the sunken ships, they actually were also using the water dragon to retrieve whatever could be salvaged from the ocean floor.

“And if I get caught, I was told to not resist and share all of the above. Even if you make me out to be a criminal and question the empire about all this, the emperor can just play innocent. Conversely, he would even use that as the pretext for war.” While talking, Giel got so hysterical that his face began to smile and twitch at the same time. “Ha, hahaha. That’s right. Everything is as the emperor predicted. The instant the empire decided to go after your country, you were already checkmated. So, what will you do now? Go ahead, apprehend me. Fuha, FUHAHAHA. I’m just saying, but even if you take me

prisoner, make sure that you treat me with courtes—eep?!”

Shouzou grinned deviously. “Giel-san, what are you saying?”

“Heh?”

“Apprehend? Take you prisoner? You’re making no sense. See, I’ve come here only to make a request and offer an invitation.”

“R-Request? Invitation..... to what.....?”

Shouzou drew his face so close that their noses almost touched. He had the back of Giel’s head in an iron vise, so that he couldn’t draw back. “Release the magic you have cast over the water dragon. This... is a request.”

“O-Okaiii.....”

Shouzou backed off a little bit to nod firmly. Then in the same motion, he moved his hand down to grab Giel by the back of his head, and dragged him out of the room. The man had said “yes,” and there was no time like the present. The point was to not give him time to think.

The instant they stepped out onto the deck, Shouzou had Giel call up the water dragon. By playing a special flute, the gigantic beast with an eel-like body and a swordfish-like horn appeared. Immediately, Giel went to work chanting the release spell. Shouzou could not tell what had been done, but the water dragon jumped out of the ocean once in delight before diving back into the depths. Thanks to that, the ship had to ride out an enormous wave.

With the added confirmation from Silvia, this meant that their biggest goal had been cleared. During that time, the sailors on the deck were staring in dumbfounded bewilderment at the scene of Giel being ordered around by Shouzou.

Giel turned to Shouzou anxiously. He still hadn’t asked what the remaining “invitation” would be.

Shouzou gently laid a hand on Giel’s shoulder, then gave him a smile that looked so carefree it could have come from a child. “So then, Giel-san. Let’s enjoy a barbeque together.”

“I’m sorry, what? Baabe... kyu?” Giel’s confusion only served to make him

even more flustered. Exactly what was it that this man was about to make him do?

“It means we are going to enjoy a meal together outdoors. The man who stands over all of the kingdom’s military, Marquis Goldas, is there already. How about sharing with him the story of how *you* helped resolve the problem with the water dragon?”

Giel got it in a split second. He understood the full extent of Shouzou’s terrifying plot.

“This time it’s only going to be a modest feast, but worry not! If Marquis Goldas expresses his support, then surely our king would invite you to an official celebration. Since you are not an adventurer, a monetary reward separate from the quest completion reward will be bestowed upon you. Without fail.”

“P-Please spare me..... If you do that, then I—” He would be branded as a traitor in the mind of his emperor.

“Ha ha ha! Come on, there’s no need to be so reserved. Well, let’s get going then. Oh right, as for your sailors, go dock the ship at the nearest port. I’ll ask the marquis to treat you all to some good alcohol when you land.”

“Aaa..... uuuu.....” Shouzou tightened his grip on the back of Giel’s neck, then jumped off of the ship. Witnessing this giant of a man running on water without the help of any magic once again struck fear deep into Giel’s heart. All he could do was curse his fate, a fate that he had no hopes of escaping from— In one corner of the beach laid Giel on his side, eyes staring off into nowhere. The barbeque turned out very boisterous and fun. The children, who knew nothing of the circumstances, had the time of their lives playing with the water dragon that had come to pay its parting respects, all the way until the sun set over the horizon— ★

Several days after the water dragon incident, the entire Onigawara family was invited over to Marquis Goldas’s house.

After the dinner, when his wife and children were napping in the parlor, Shouzou and Jilk Goldas were sitting across from each other on sofas, sharing a bottle of wine.

“Fuu.....” A sigh spilled from Shouzou’s lips.

“What’s wrong, Shouzou? You seemed uncharacteristically down today. Was my hospitality lacking?”

“Ahh, no, I apologize. Your hospitality was wonderful. Both my wife and children enjoyed it very much. No, I currently have something that I’m worrying over.”

“Hm, that’s rare coming from you. You also had a serious look on your face the entire time. Even now you still do.”

“You picked that up, did you. Mmm.....”

The two of them sighed in unison, then Marquis Goldas spoke up first. “Though this might be a bit inappropriate coming from me, as the host, but there’s a serious matter than I want to discuss with you.”

Shouzou temporarily pushed his own worry into a corner of his head, then sat up straight.

Goldas’s eyes took on a sharp gleam. “I’ve asked this before, but Shouzou, do you have any intention of serving our king?”

“.....I believe I have already answered “no” to that, have I not?”

“But I have not given up. Back then it was too early, but now the situation is different.” Goldas leaned back deeply into the sofa before continuing. “Right now, the Kingdom of Alsbeit is in a critical situation. We are under the clear threat of an external enemy.”

This world that the Onigawara family had transmigrated to was one in which magic beasts ran rampant. The “threat” that most countries were concerned with was the internal one of magic beasts. Most of the excursions that they deployed their military for were magic beast-related incidents. Due to this ever-prevalent threat, countries usually resolved problems through talking and negotiation, so except in rare instances, wars never started.

“However, in recent years, a violent country that has been gradually swallowing up its smaller neighbors in order to expand its own borders has amassed strength that cannot be ignored.” It was none other than the country

that had employed a water dragon to attack its own merchant ships within Alsbeit Kingdom's borders—the Bardimian Empire.

“Have they already started accusing us of something?”

“Not yet. However, I believe that it would be too late to do anything about it if we wait for them to do so.”

“What has been the empire's reaction to how the water dragon incident played out?”

“They've shown no reaction so far. It would probably take them a little more time to fully understand what had happened. In that matter, we have the advantage. As for the special diplomatic envoy who had been controlling the water dragon, Nemeelaso Giel, he's currently recuperating in the royal capital. After we confiscated all his highly suspicious tobacco, he got very sick. We've already dispatched an envoy to the empire bearing the message that he shall return soon after he recovers.”

“It was the empire's merchant ships that got damaged by the water dragon's attacks. What are they doing about that?”

Judging by Giel's confession, there was no room for doubt that this matter was a charade from start to finish, entirely orchestrated by the empire itself. The kingdom had also received indirect damage from being unable to conduct proper trades with the empire. The opinions of the nobles in the House of Lords were split all over the spectrum regarding this matter. Whereas some insisted on not offering reparations for the merchant ships, there were also more diehard nobles who wanted to demand an explanation and apology, as well as reparations from the empire.

“However, this matter blowing up would also be playing into the empire's plans. From our end, we have already sent word to the empire that we are also prepared to pay a certain amount of reparations for the ships that went down in our waters, although it won't be the full amount. Our king has already approved this.”

“Hmm. Though vexing, I suppose a little expenditure can't be helped if we want to prod our opponent to make a move. When thinking about it from a long-term perspective, offering reparations is a good strategy. It serves as

demonstration of our earnestness in the eyes of the other countries.”

Seeing Shouzou cross his arms and nod, Goldas could not help but to chuckle a little.

“What is it?”

“No, it’s nothing. I was just thinking that you really are someone who should become one of our country’s central pillars.”

“Spare me please. I am an absolute novice when it comes to politics. But international diplomacy, that’s basically just negotiation, which I *am* good at. All I’m doing is offering my personal opinion from generalizing the issues. In the world of business negotiations, ‘war’ is not included as a viable solution.”

“You don’t think I’ll let you off the hook for such a weak excuse, do you? So far, you have been thinking up outlandish schemes that would never occur to anyone else in a thousand years, in the process pushing a bottom feeder guild into becoming the top one in Treia within such record time. If it’s you, then I have no doubt you’ll come up with something so that we won’t have to resort to playing the final card of ‘war.’” Goldas leaned forward eagerly. “It irks me to admit this, but it is doubtful whether anyone in the House of Lords, myself included, is capable of avoiding this war or not. Naturally, we don’t think we’ll lose if war does break out, but it will undoubtedly be a huge drain on our resources. Will you please lend us your aid?” Goldas lowered his head deeply, causing Shouzou to become troubled for an answer.

On the one hand, if war did indeed break out, his work at the guild would be negatively affected for sure, and the majority of Platinum and Gold-ranked adventurers would surely be gathered to fight in the war.

“.....Give me some time to think about it. This is not something that I can decide at my own discretion. I will need to talk it over with both my family and coworkers.”

“Very well. But don’t forget the urgency of our circumstances.” Shouzou smiled wryly at Goldas’s very last show of insistence.

“So then, Shouzou, what is it that you were worried about? If you are fine with me, then I’ll lend you an ear.”

“Asking that at this timing makes it seem like you’re trying to make me owe you one.”

“That’s half my intention, actually.” Goldas’s villainous smirk evoked another wry smile from Shouzou.

“Actually, it’s about my family..... one of my daughters, to be exact.”

“Oh, a matter of child education huh.....” The composed smile on Goldas’s face disappeared. In regards to child education, Shouzou was Goldas’s own mentor. He found himself worried whether or not he would be able to provide any actually useful advice.

“This was something that happened last night—” Thus Shouzou began his retelling in a troubled voice— ★

Last night, after dinner was cleared away, his wife and daughters had already finished bathing, and the family was just sitting together, sharing a moment before heading off to bed.

“Dad, I have something I want to talk to you about.” His oldest daughter Yuna, clad in pajamas, came over to sit on the sofa across from Shouzou, and straightened her back. “I want to work at your workplace.”



“.....Mm?” For the briefest of moments, Shouzou could not comprehend what he had just heard. He shot a look toward his wife, Silvia, who was almost done helping Hina brush her teeth. She met his gaze, then smiled. Clearly this was a matter that had already been discussed with her.

Shouzou then rotated his head toward Emalia, who was sipping a cup of tea at the dining table. She had apparently been keeping an eye on him, as his gaze immediately caused her to shrink in on herself. It seemed that she was in the know as well.

“I want to work at Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild.”

“Ah, hmm. All right. Wait no, my ‘all right’ just now was not permission, it was just me expressing that I understand what you’re saying..... So what brought this on out of the blue?” Shouzou was feeling bewildered at this unexpected situation.

In contrast, Yuna’s eyes were clear and earnest.

“I’ve held an interest toward your work for a while. In the future, I think I want to work in sales or something similar.”

Shouzou trembled with emotion. As a parent, learning that your own child was looking up to you and wanting to follow the path you had walked is one of the greatest joys ever. “But Yuna, right now is your time to learn many things that you will need in the future, so working is a bit.....”

“That’s why I’m thinking I should learn those things firsthand. Jumping directly into sales might be impossible, but I think I can handle general admin work.”

“What I’m talking about is not practical learning, but schoolwork.....” In the middle of his sentence, Shouzou came to a start.

He had indeed previously been consulted by Emalia in regards to Yuna’s educational situation. Namely, Emalia had said, “I no longer have anything left to teach her.” Yuna absorbed everything that she was taught in the blink of an eye. At the moment, even university-level questions were a breeze for her. She had been a smart girl even before, but it was Emalia’s hypothesis that her goddess blood had awakened upon coming to this world.

“No, but..... you’re still in middle school. You’re a first year in middle school, to be exact. Aren’t there ethics and social norms to consider?”

“Sofie-san is 15-years-old, isn’t she? I heard from her that she had also been around my age when she started helping out at the guild.”

“Even if you bring out the standards of this world.....”

“In Japan too, there are child actors and idols who work from a young age, aren’t there?”

She had a point. In certain industries, such as in entertainment, let alone teenagers, there were even children under 10 who were already actively working. Shouzou remembered previously seeing some news about some elementary school kids who had started their own company based off of some idea they had.

“Also, it’s summer break right now. I’m fine with starting out with a probationary period. But of course, I will be trying my best to get accepted as an official employee.”

Shouzou was weak against his daughter’s persistent urging. He almost blurted out “All right,” but somehow managed to swallow it back down. “F-For what it’s worth, I’ll try asking our president then.....”

“Really? Thanks, Dad! ♪”

In the end, his resistance was completely worn down.

“It’s not fair that it’s only Yuna-nee! I want to do it too! It’s summer break for me as well!” This time, it was Kana’s turn to cling to Shouzou.

“Don’t you have to work hard on your studies, Kana?”

“Eh—? It’s summer break, it’ll be fine!”

However, Kana’s attempt to breakthrough by insisting on it being the summer break was flatly denied by a blunt declaration from across the room. “I have plenty of homework prepared for Kana-san. It is a collection of questions that I have very carefully selected, all for the sake of making up for how much we’ve fallen behind. It *is* summer break after all.”

“Nooo?!” Kana hugged her father tightly and let out a cry of distress.

“Here, here~! Hina-sama’s job is to play~! So Hina-sama will work hard too~!” The last comment was taken by Hina, who had just finished brushing her teeth and thus was brandishing her pearly whites with a dazzling smile—



Two days after being invited to the Goldas residence, Shouzou went to the guild to consult Elizabeth.

“Sure, why not? I don’t mind. Bring her along any time you want.” Sitting at her desk and fiddling with her blond ringlets, Elizabeth laughed loudly.

Shouzou, who was standing in front of her, dropped his shoulders. “President, please give it a little more thought.”

“Oh, I have already given it thought. I’ve only exchanged a few words with her before, but I remember her responses being clear and coherent, and she also seemed like she could think quickly on her feet. If you put her under Sofie, she’ll probably pick up how to do sales pretty quickly, don’t you think?”

“That’s exactly what Jilk said.....” That night when he had been invited to the Goldas residence and asked for counsel, the marquis had given him a very similar evaluation.

“Don’t get too caught up about her age. I myself got involved with guild work at 10 years old, and I think it was similar for Sofie as well. It’s not only in businesses, you know. I think a large majority of people who make it big in their respective industries all started young.”

This, too, was something Marquis Goldas had said.

“But, as I’d mentioned previously, our family won’t be able to stay in this town for an extended period of time.”

“I’d have no complaints if she gets into shape and contributes properly by then. I think she’d be worth the effort to train.” Elizabeth continued with a serious face. “What about yourself, Shouzou?” She was referring to Marquis Goldas’s invitation for him to enter the service of the king and serve as a central pillar of the country. “Honestly speaking, losing you would be a huge blow to the guild. As guildmaster, I am strongly against it. Like, don’t screw with me, seriously.” However, Elizabeth then continued with a sigh. “For what it’s worth,

I also am a noble of this kingdom. If you are to support our king, then there would be nothing more reassuring.”

“A pretty complicated standpoint, isn’t it?”

“Don’t talk like you’re not related to it. So then? What are you going to do? Go work for the country, or stay in our guild? I will support whichever you choose.”

Asking for her opinion was well and good, but in the end the question got thrown back into his court.

Shouzou crossed his arms, deep in thought. Being needed was, honestly speaking, an honor. Was there a choice that would allow him to do right by Marquis Goldas, by Elizabeth and those at the guild, and most of all, by himself and his family?

“Hm. I see. So this is the only viable option.” Shouzou looked like he had gotten over his indecision as he declared confidently, “I just have to do my best at both of them.”

Elizabeth’s jaw dropped for only a brief moment. “A-Ahh. So you’ll both be working at the guild and also supporting our king at the same time? Is that what you’re saying?”

“Though which one I focus on at any given time would depend on the circumstances. I do only have one body after all. I have my limits. But if it’s within my means, I will give it my all.”

“Well, I guess you’d be the very last person I’d ever need to worry about. I’ve already learned my lesson that our ideas of common sense do not apply to you.”

“.....Common sense, huh.” Up till now, he had put into practice numerous measures while paying no mind to so-called common sense, and his current success was clear for all to see.

Despite that—

“I had been too fixated on common sense when it came to myself, and in so doing was eliminating my own possibilities.” Shouzou bowed toward Elizabeth

with a cheerful look on his face. “President, can my daughter begin working here starting tomorrow?”

“I said ‘Bring her along any time you want’ just now, did I not?”

As a parent, there was no end to the worries in his mind. However, Yuna was trying to take the first step upon the path that she had chosen for herself. As her parent, he wanted to give her as much support as he could.

The next day, Yuna began working at Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild as an admin assistant.

At the same time, Shouzou went to meet Marquis Goldas and accepted his offer with conditions. Though Goldas raised both hands in joy at this, no one had ever served as an advisor to the king while holding another job concurrently.

Backlash came from the House of Lords as expected, but Shouzou seemed to enjoy this situation instead, heading toward the royal palace with lighthearted steps—

Chapter 2: The Me from Yesterday, the Me from Today Today, too, Elunheine Adventurer's Guild was bustling as usual. However, what was not usual was the heavy atmosphere in the air. The cause of this was clear in the eyes of everyone present. It was because of the presence of the giant man who was "hiding" himself at the far end of the reception counters. Shouzou had half of his face peeking behind the counters, maintaining a steady gaze toward the office area. Although everyone knew why he was doing that, nobody would call out to him. The "don't come near me" aura that he was clad in was too powerful for most people to bear.

The target of Shouzou's stare was a single girl. The girl who was talking to Lalaine of the Naga race, his eldest daughter, Yuna. At the moment, she was being briefed on adventurers and quests. However, she was having difficulty settling down. The reason was a certain unnatural atmosphere. Everybody present could feel it. Naturally, so could Yuna.

(If only he would actually come in and just talk to us.....) Lately, Shouzou had been busy making frequent trips to the royal capital. Consequently, he hadn't been able to show his face much at the guild. Today, too, he supposedly had an engagement in the morning, but he wanted to catch as many glimpses of his daughter as possible.

Yuna thought about going over to speak with him first, but Lalaine just happened to be getting into her stride, which made it hard for Yuna to stand up. Just when she was crying out in her heart for someone to do something about the situation, a hero of valor willing to brave talking to Shouzou appeared as if in answer to her prayer.

“Shouzou..... what are you doing?” It was Elizabeth, the guildmaster.

Shouzou replied with his head still half peeking out from the counter. “Is that you, President? Don’t mind me, I’m just checking in on the state of the guild.”

“Checking in on your daughter, you mean. Why are you just standing there? Just go in and talk to her directly.”

“I don’t want to get in the way of her work. And I have to go soon anyways.”

“Um, you do realize that you are already in the way, right.....?”

Shouzou finally realized all the stares directed at him. When he turned around, all the adventurers immediately turned their heads to look somewhere else.

“So, how is Yuna? Has she gotten used to the job yet?” asked Shouzou in slight discomfort.

“She is doing great. She remembers things quickly. More like, she’s *too* good. That girl, she remembers everything that she’s heard just once. Her lack of experience is what’s holding her back, but I’m sure that’s just a matter of time.”

“Is she fitting in with those around her? I mean..... she’s not being bullied or anything, right?”

“Of course not. Your teaching of ‘If you feel envious of someone else then just direct that energy into your work and earn more money, then you’ll be happy’ has thoroughly pervaded the guild. Well, at the start, there was some slight unease on the part of the other staff in regards to how to interact with ‘Shouzou’s daughter,’ but your daughter is actually quite socially capable, so there’s no problem at all.”

“Is that so, is that so.....” Shouzou exhaled a long sigh in relief.

“So that’s why we plan to let her experience being at the counter today.”

“I-Is that so..... Isn’t that taking things a bit too fast?”

“Moko will be with her, so it’ll be fine. Why don’t you put a little more trust in your daughter? I said this just now, but that girl is quite capable, all right?”

It wasn’t that he didn’t trust her. However, being unable to stop worrying comes part and parcel with being a parent.

“More importantly, what’s your schedule for today?”

Recently, Shouzou had been busy going around making his greetings to all the nobles in the House of Lords. Every part of his acceptance into the upper echelon of the country had been a special exception. Therefore, with the hope of smoothing over as many ruffled feathers as possible, he had enlisted the help of Marquis Goldas in order to properly open up channels of communication with as many of them as he could.

“Today, I’ll be meeting your father first, then—” As Shouzou started listing out the names of the nobles that he would be meeting today, Elizabeth’s face grew increasingly fatigued.

“You’re meeting *those* people back to back? I wouldn’t be able to bear it if I were you.” Every single one of them were famous bigshots in the House of Lords. Not only were they in high social positions, but their long years in those positions had made them cunning and crafty beyond measure. Every single word in even a simple greeting would be read into, every facial twitch would be considered, so in that regard, there would be no room for respite.

However, Shouzou had plenty of experience making contact with politicians back when he was living in Japan. Though there might be slight differences in values between the two worlds every now and then, but Shouzou did not expect to have too hard a time.

“Then at night, I’m also going to have an audience with the king.”

“WHAT?! You even made plans for an audience?!”

“Well, it’s not a proper audience. Apparently he wanted to meet in a personal capacity.”

Elizabeth’s cheek twitched unconsciously. The current king was famous for his

curiosity. No doubt Marquis Goldas putting in a word also had a part in this. However, a mere guild staff employee suddenly getting to meet with the king in a personal capacity was still almost too unbelievable.

“Mind yourself, all right? You never know, maybe there’s something going on in the shadows.”

“Well, I’ll just have to meet him and see for myself, won’t I?” With that, Shouzou stood up. “It’s time for me to go.” With brisk steps, Shouzou cut through the packed lobby, and soon disappeared from sight.



After paying his greetings to the nobles scheduled for the day, Shouzou headed toward the royal palace with plenty of willpower to spare. Even when facing those crafty old foxes from the House of Lords, Shouzou had been so forceful that it was his opponents who withered up in the end. The face-to-face before the previous one was also a dinner banquet, so his stomach was also comfortably filled.

Shouzou caught his own loosening expression and braced himself. The very last person that he would be meeting today was none other than the person who stood in the top position of the country, the king himself. In addition, it was not an official audience, but an unofficial, closed door meeting in a private chamber. He had received no prior notice regarding the topic that would be discussed. The probability that there was something going on, just as Elizabeth had said, was very high.



Deep within the depths of the royal palace was a wide, spacious room lined with bookshelves that were filled all the way to the ceiling in a grand, overwhelming display. This was originally an archival room, but apparently it had been converted into the king’s personal relaxation room, as evidenced by the lounge furniture that had been brought in.

Shouzou entered the room together with Marquis Goldas, and found the owner of the room already waiting. He was in one of the sofas, absorbed in a book.

“There you are.” So saying, the man closed his book and stood up. This man who directed sharp eyes toward Shouzou was none other than King Alan Alsbeit himself.

He had blond hair streaked with white. Having reigned for more than twenty years since his coronation at 18-years-old, the hardships over the years played no small part in causing the deep wrinkles carved into his face, which made him look much older than someone with fewer than 40 years under his belt.

His governance was extolled as being one of the very best in the kingdom’s entire history. His benevolence and wisdom had caused him to be reverently referred to as the “Sage King” by some. However, he was also well-known for being quite the odd character.

Goldas respectfully lowered his head. “We apologize for the wait.”

“I mind it not. Waiting here is no burden. And it seems you two have arrived earlier than the scheduled time as well.”

As the king turned his gaze toward Shouzou again, the latter also lowered his head. “Your lowly subject is filled with joyous delight at being granted the honor of this audience with Your Majesty.”

“There’s no need for such formalities here. This is an unofficial audience. Today, I want to hear candid and unreserved opinions from the both of you. As I’ve ordered that no one else enter the room, unfortunately I can’t even offer a cup of tea. But well, have a seat.” King Alsbeit gestured toward the sofa across while dropping himself into his.

Shouzou followed Goldas in sitting down.

“First, allow me to acknowledge your efforts, Shouzou. Despite the necessity of laying down groundwork as someone new to the scene, going around lowering your head to those troublesome geezers must have been tiring indeed.”

“No, it was not that much trouble, actually.”

“Is that so? And here I was, expecting the usual complaints. What a fearful man you must be to be able to say that of the gaggle that gives even me headaches at times.” The sight of the king laughing frankly and openly caused

Shouzou's nervousness to recede a little.

However, the king's face quickly turned severe. "Allow me to get straight to the point. We might have to go a few rounds with the Bardimian Empire after all."

"Your Majesty, what are you saying?! That's too sudden....." Goldas was so surprised he almost stood up.

"Of course, this is not confirmed yet. However, if things take a turn for the worse, we would be hurtling down a one-way path, is what I'm trying to say."

"I'm afraid I do not follow the situation. What change has there been after the water dragon incident?" asked Shouzou while keeping his cool.

"The water dragon incident..... Thanks to the initiative we held, that matter did not go awry. In regards to the reparation, the empire readily agreed to drop the issue for the lowest amount we offered, much to our surprise."

"In other words, is the empire trying to shake us up with a new approach?"

The king nodded gravely, then stood up with his book in hand. While walking over to the bookshelf behind him to put the thickly bound book back in its position, he said, "I assume both of you know that I have children. One son and one daughter....."

The elder brother was 16 years old. In this kingdom, that age was considered an adult already. However, the rumors about him were not good. Supposedly he had inherited none of his father's ability, and was permanently locked up in his room. It was said that no one had seen him at a formal function for the longest time.

On the other hand, despite being merely 8 years old, the younger sister was already known throughout the kingdom for her wisdom and cheerfulness. She was a bit of a tomboy, but voices supporting her as the next generation ruler had already reached the level of being general public opinion.

"The next move that the empire made..... was an offer of marriage. They asked for the princess's hand in marriage to a man of a branch family of their imperial line who was feudal lord over what is effectively one of their most backwater domains."

“Such insolence! Such arrogance!” Goldas leaped to his feet in incensed indignation.

“So well, that’s what’s going on behind closed doors at the moment. I haven’t shared the news of this offer with the more hot-blooded nobles yet. I can already imagine them screaming ‘Reject it immediately!’ at me.” The king shrugged his shoulders while turning back around. “Onigawara, what are your thoughts?”

“I am unable to make judgment. There is insufficient information.”

“In other words, you would consider accepting, depending on the circumstances?”

“That is not so. I am, in principle, against marriages formed against the will of the couple in question. However, encounters can happen in an almost endless variety of ways. I do not deny that even in political marriages, the couple can learn to love and cherish each other. However—” This time, denial was the only viable option. “Her Highness is still only 8 years of age. I believe that she needs to at least be old enough to be capable of objectively understanding her own emotions.”

“I see. I understand your point of view. However, this is a highly political dilemma. Those born into royalty have a duty to do what must be done, even if that requires one to suppress and kill one’s own emotions,” said King Alsbeit flatly.

His value system was at complete odds with that of the one in modern Japan that Shouzou was from. To ask him to change his mind would likely be an effort in futility. If it was on a usual matter, that was— “I see, ‘even if that requires one to suppress and kill one’s own emotions,’ is it. Is it not because you cannot do this that you have summoned us?”

“Shouzou, you are out of line!” Marquis Goldas raised his voice, but King Alsbeit waved his hand dismissively.

“Leave it. He speaks true. I thought I was the one probing you, but it seems I was the one being probed instead. As expected of the man that Jilk recommended so strongly.” The king dropped his gaze toward the low table, the wrinkles on his brow deepening into a grimace. With a heavy tone, he spat

out, “The princess is my ultimate pride and joy. The very thought of letting her go is enough to make me go mad.”

“Y-Your Majesty?!”

(I get it.....) Shouzou nodded deeply from his heart.

“However, if I simply rejected the empire’s offer in a fit of emotion, it could have led to war. And so—”

“And so.....?”

“I said to them, ‘The princess is still too young, we would not want to cause trouble for the family that she marries into.’ Though well, that was the pretext. Then I suggested, ‘Instead, the prince is already of age but unfortunately has yet to be blessed with a good match. Would the empire consider sending over one of your imperial princesses to be his partner?’”

“Ha~ha~ha! What a splendid idea it is, having the emperor experience the pain of losing one of his beloved daughters!” However, Shouzou had the presence of mind to not comment on the fact that that was still a very emotional response. Apparently this king would lose all traces of being the “Sage King” when it came to his family.

“Would that not be taken as provocation.....?” asked the marquis worriedly.

“Indeed, I myself also regretted it as soon as I calmed down. However, to my surprise—” The empire had immediately sent a response of agreement. “And that is the very reason why I am troubled. Lend me your wisdom, gentlemen.”

Shouzou tilted his head in puzzlement. “I am afraid I do not follow. If the empire is willing to send over a consort, then the relationship between the two countries would not only be bettered, it would in fact become unshakeable.”

“You are right. However, that is only if this marriage goes well.”

“Could it be.....”

Is the empire planning on finding fault with the marriage after the fact, forcing a breakup, and shoving the blame for that onto the kingdom?

“The emperor is a man feared as the Emperor of Ruin. He has no qualms about using his family members as mere tools. So we cannot fully rule out that

possibility. However, regardless of what their intentions are, this marriage is doomed to fail. The fact that the empire still holds the upper hand and that our kingdom is still in a predicament remains unchanged.” King Alsbeit stood up with a grave look on his face. “Follow me,” he said. Then he walked out of the room without turning around.

Shouzou looked at Goldas’s face, but the latter merely had his brows drawn in distress, and wordlessly followed after the king— ★

After leaving the room, the trio made their way out of the royal palace, eventually arriving at a certain tower. There was not even a single guard in sight. It was probably true that they didn’t need one, as Goldas was strong enough to go toe-to-toe with a Platinum class adventurer. But even so, the situation seemed very out of place to Shouzou’s eyes.

They climbed the spiral staircase that led them to the room at the top of the tower.

Champ, chomp, munch.....

From behind the thick, wooden door echoed very strange sounds. The atmosphere seemed very eerie.

Both the king and Goldas had remained quiet the entire way, which made the air very heavy. Though not scared, Shouzou did find it slightly suffocating.

The king flung the door open carelessly. Surprisingly, the room inside was much more spacious and well-lit than expected. Shouzou inadvertently narrowed his eyes against the light.

Chomp, chomp, munchmunchmunch.....

Upon realizing the source of the strange sounds, Shouzou became stunned.

Right beside a canopy bed were mounds of pies and stews, fried foods and potatoes and dried meats galore. There was way more food there than what a single person could eat.

—And in the middle of it all..... was a pig.

So round and so fat was the silhouette that he mistook it for a pig at first sight, but apparently it was a human. This giant that wasn’t particularly tall but

was horizontally greater than a normal person by twofold was wordlessly stuffing his face with food.

“Sharlo..... Oi, Sharlo!” The king’s irritated shout caused the person who was apparently named Sharlo to start and then look over.

“P-Papa.....?” This person who saw the king and called him “Papa” was none other than— “This is my son, Prince Sharlo.”

Although he had a sneaking suspicion prior to this, it was hard for Shouzou to believe that this overly well-rounded figure was a 16-year-old boy. His flabby skin was rougher than sandpaper. His blond hair was streaked with even more white than his father’s. There was not a single part of him that looked polished. So the reason why he had not been seen at a formal function for a long time was because this terrible appearance was simply not presentable to the citizens. In other words, he *couldn’t* show up to formal functions.

“I am ashamed. I am truly ashamed. As a result of overly doting on my child while bringing him up, *this* is what he has become. A marriage means there’s no getting around exposing him to the citizens. But the even bigger issue is—” The king abruptly opened his eyes wide and shouted, “WHO WOULD WANT A MAN SUCH AS THIS AS A SPOUSE?! I would not. Not in a million years.”

Without any hesitation, Marquis Goldas also nodded his agreement.

“The instant the princess from the empire lays eyes on him, she would surely explode in indignation and outrage. Then after that, the relationship between our countries can only spiral into outright war.”

“Th-That’s a bit much, Papa. Well, not that I want to get married anyway. Little Sis can have the throne, all I need to be happy is to stay locked up in here until I die. Or rather, it might be better to treat me like I’ve already died, how does that sound?” Sharlo smiled sheepishly while crunching on potato chips.

King Alsbeit looked up at the ceiling. “Such apathy..... Even if his appearance was bad, if he had an earnest and positive personality, then we might have been able to make something of it. And so, this is the situation we are in. Jilk and Onigawara, we need to dissolve this marriage offer in a peaceful way. I am open to ideas.”

Goldas crossed his arms and tilted his head.

Shouzou stared long and hard at Sharlo. Noticing Shouzou's stare, Sharlo flashed another sheepish smile while stuffing his cheeks with more food.

Without averting his eyes, Shouzou spoke up. "I am of the mind that it would be fine to proceed with the marriage talks. Whether it goes through or falls apart, it doesn't matter. There's only one thing that we need to do."

"Let's hear it then. What is that 'one thing'?"

"I said this earlier, but I believe that marriage is something for the people involved to decide. Based on that, I recommend telling the other side about the prince's appearance and personality without holding anything back, and even including the prince's preference for women while at it."

"You mean to make the requirements we put forth even stricter? You surely must be aware that that could too easily be taken as arrogance, right?"

"The point is to frame this in the light of us putting effort toward bringing about reconciliation between our countries and doing what we can so that neither party walks away disappointed. To complain about that would only paint the empire in a bad light."

"I see..... It pains me deeply to expose the embarrassment of my family, but there's no helping it. Once the empire knows of my son's state, then surely they will drop this matter by themselves."

Would they really? If the emperor was truly a man who would not hesitate to use his family members as mere tools, as King Alsbeit had just said, then chances were high that he would attempt to take advantage of even these new conditions.

"Well then, that aside." Shouzou slowly walked forward toward Sharlo, who was looking at his approach with suspicion.

"I speak in full knowledge of my disrespect, but I sense something that shines within this youngster. May I have custody of him for a period of time?"

The eyes of everyone else present widened in surprise.

The first person who responded was... none other than Sharlo himself.

“Wh-What are you saying? All out of the blu—”

Shouzou peered into those eyes colored with unease. There was no way to know how the marriage talks would end up. And not knowing meant that there was not much that could be done in preparation. That was why it would be a good idea to play the hand that seemed like it would make the biggest difference ahead of time.

Specifically, that meant— Shouzou smiled kindly, then said, “How would you like to try being an adventurer?”

—changing the prince himself as much as possible. Shouzou was convinced that that was the best option available to them to break through the situation they were in.

After several beats of silence— ““““SAY WHAAATT?!““““

—Shouzou’s smile remained unaffected by the chorus of manly exclamations
— ★

A certain man approached one of Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild’s many counters. The adventurer clothes he was wearing appeared newly bought, and gave off a strong impression of him just wearing them. As for the person himself, he had a very roly-poly build that made all onlookers wonder “wouldn’t he be faster rolling instead of walking?” inside their hearts.

The receptionist who greeted him at the counter gave him a slightly stiff smile. It was her second day at the counters, and her name was Yuna.

“Welcome to Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild. Are you here to register as a new adventurer?”

“Mm,” grunted the man curtly. Everything about him was giving off the impression that he did not want to be here.

“I-In that case, then please fill in all the relevant fields on this application.....” As Yuna proffered sheet and pen, the man accepted them with another annoyed expression. He looked very impatient as his pen flew over the paper.

While looking on, Yuna could not help but to murmur, “Such beautiful handwriting.....”

The man shot a glare at Yuna. Then he tsked once, after which he changed to writing as roughly as he could.

“Here. This good enough?”

“Eh, ah, yes sir..... Umm, so you are ‘Sharlo Aashu,’ is that correct?”

“Can’t you tell by reading?”

“I-I apologize. Let me see, your previous profession was ‘None’.....? Age..... you’re 16 years old?!” Yuna could not help but to take another look at the man.

His unkempt blond hair was streaked with white, and his skin was in terrible condition. No matter from which angle she looked, Yuna could only see him as a man in his 30s hoping to get back on his feet by trying to be an adventurer.....

“Well sorry for my old-looking face. Seriously, this was why I didn’t want to get involved with other people. Why do I have to be an adventurer.....” This man muttering complaints to himself nonstop was, needless to say, the first prince of the Kingdom of Alsbeit, Sharlo Alsbeit in the flesh. But of course, his identity was being kept a secret. His father had threatened him that there would be a terrible punishment in store if he ever revealed himself of his own accord.

A large shadow abruptly loomed up from behind him. It was Shouzou.

“Sharlo-kun, I remember teaching you that ‘smiling’ is one of the very basics of social interactions.”

“Y-You.....” Sharlo glared at Shouzou hatefully.

“Regardless of who you’re dealing with, maintaining a respectful and open attitude is important. Just by keeping that in mind and applying it, you can already avoid 90% of the troublesome situations that crop up in human interactions.”

“If I don’t talk to anyone, then the chance for trouble would be 0%, wouldn’t it?”

Shouzou handled even Sharlo’s sarcastic remark with a genial smile. “That might be true. However, then you’d also get 0% of the benefits from interacting with other people.”

“Benefits from interacting with other people? I don’t really—”

“Need them? Well, you’ll understand eventually. For now, just take my words as they are, since you won’t be able to go home for at least a whole month anyways.”

When Sharlo had been handed over to Shouzou’s care, he had been strictly told “You are not allowed to set foot in the royal palace for a month” by his father, King Alsbeit. Just recalling that scene caused Sharlo to grind and gnash his teeth.

(Maybe it would be better to back off a bit for now.) In recent years, Sharlo had absolutely no opportunity to interact with other people. Therefore, his wariness toward complete strangers was strong, so it might be a bit much to ask him to approach someone else on an emotional level.

(He doesn’t seem like he’s at the point where he can unconditionally be kind to other people yet. In that case—) When it comes to interpersonal relationships, a benefit-loss paradigm was a perfectly viable place to start from. “Sharlo-kun, think about it this way. For an adventurer, the adventurer’s guild is a business partner. There is no superiority or inferiority in that relationship. By building a mutually beneficial relationship, both sides get what they want. How about just keeping that in mind and suppressing your emotions for now?”

But that said, being too dry means becoming someone only capable of thinking in loss and benefit, which would cause other people to distance themselves. What Shouzou was hoping to help Sharlo realize was that mutually beneficial relationships, the so-called win-win scenario, was a viable thing to achieve.

“All right, all right, I get it already. I was ordered by Papa to do whatever you say. Geez, how happy I was back when I was left alone.....” Sharlo’s inability to hold back from grumbling even while expressing acquiescence caused Shouzou to smile wryly.

(He really isn’t going to make this easy for me, is he.) But that was what made this worth doing.

And as their exchange drew to an end, Sharlo’s adventurer application process also just happened to be done.

Yuna held out a sheet of paper. “Here is your adventurer registration paper. Your rank is Iron. You will need it when accepting and turning in quests, so please make sure to bring it whenever you visit any guild. Please also make sure to not lose it.”

“Hmph, Iron, huh.....”

“U-Um, if you were previously a mercenary, or if you have some special advantage, such as being really proficient with magic, then we could consider allowing you to start from Copper.....”

“.....” Sharlo looked like he was about to voice some complaint or another, but then swallowed it down just in time.

“Um, then, h-here is your Iron adventurer’s plate.” Looking decidedly uncomfortable, Yuna took out an iron plate the size of a business card. There was a fine chain attached to one of its corners.

Adventurers couldn’t very well hang something so valuable as their registration paper around their neck. Therefore, for the sake of telling adventurer ranks apart, they were also given this adventurer’s plate, which is supposed to be worn at a visible location on their body. However, reality did not quite work out that way.

“Huh? What’s this? Looks so shabby.” Sharlo roughly shoved his plate into a pocket.

Like Sharlo, there weren’t many adventurers who actually wore their adventurer’s plate in a visible location. Their reasons for not doing so were varied, but because this was not an enforced rule, they couldn’t be rebuked for not doing so.

“Would you like to accept a quest right off the bat?” asked Yuna.

However, the person who answered was not Sharlo, but Shouzou. “Before that, there’s something that Sharlo-kun needs to do.”

“Wh-What is it? Are you going to make me do something else again? I’m good on the quests today—”

“Most adventurers complete quests in groups. This is especially true for

beginners, who shouldn't be doing anything on their own. So it's important to first join a party," said Shouzou plainly, clearly not paying any attention to Sharlo's complaint.

"Party, you say..... wait, don't tell me!"

"Yes, people who are to be your comrades in arms. You will need to approach them of your own accord."

"Y-You've gotta be kidding me! Me? Approach complete strangers?!"

"That is correct."

"Goddammit....." Shouzou's slightly cold reply prompted Sharlo to direct yet another hateful glare in his direction. However, to disobey Shouzou could possibly lead to his banishment from the royal palace becoming extended. Reluctantly, Sharlo looked over all the adventurers in the lobby, then approached a certain three-person group.

After he was a sufficient distance away, Yuna whispered to Shouzou, "Dad, are you sure he'll be all right?"

"We'll just have to see, won't we. Incidentally, regarding the quest that Sharlo-kun will be accepting—" Shouzou told Yuna the details of the quest that he had previously planned on making Sharlo accept. "—is there a quest like that?"

"Wait, Dad, are you serious?"

"Of course I am. Well? Is there?"

"There should be, but....." With an uneasy look on her face, Yuna left her seat to look for the person in charge of handling the quests. During that time, Shouzou looked over to see how Sharlo was doing.

Sharlo called out to the person who seemed like the leader of the three-person group. "Ah, may I have a bit of your time? I would like to join your party." The smile on his face was twitching so badly that it was actually quite painful to watch.

The man responded in a slightly creeped out tone. "Hah? Who're you, old man?" The man looked to be in his mid 20s. That made him way older than

Sharlo, but he went and called Sharlo an ‘old man.’

“I am only 16 years old!”

“Eh, for real? Then the hell you talking down at me for if you’re younger than me.”

“Oh, pay that no mind. Anyways, I’ve just become an adventurer, and have no comrades. That’s why..... please.” Those words were the very limit of what Sharlo could manage in the way of earnesty. In addition, he even managed a smirk, which for him was the equivalent of a full-face beam.

“Uwah, so creepy.....” muttered the girl in the group, who made no effort to hide her revulsion.

The last person, a priest, calmly asked, “Are you an Iron then?”

Sharlo’s nod prompted the group leader to shrug his shoulders. “Sorry bud, our party is for Copper and above only. Go try somebody else.”

However, the leader’s shooing hand motion proved to be the last straw, prompting Sharlo to murmur, “Hah, acting so self-important when you’re also a mere Iron yourself.....”

“Wha-?! How did you—!”

“Oh, did I guess right? Looking around, the only people I see openly wearing their plates are Silver. I figured that Iron and Copper are too ashamed to be identified as such.”

On the other end of the spectrum, Gold and Platinum are all quite well-known in their own right, with most people knowing them by face. In other words, it’d be embarrassing in a different way to wear their plates, as it could be construed as them showing it off. Or at the very least, that’s what Sharlo figured. Based on that logic, Sharlo had guessed that this group that was not wearing plates and was standing in the corner whispering to themselves was most likely even lower ranked than Copper, which meant Iron.

Shouzou was following along with the conversation the entire time with his incredibly sharp ears.

(That is quite the observant eye he has. However—) “The hell is with this

guy.....”

“Let’s just go.”

“Getting involved is just going to be a waste of time.”

The group of three hastily walked away, leaving Sharlo by himself.

After that, Sharlo continued calling out to adventurers that he thought were Iron rank.

“We’re looking for someone in a higher rank than us.”

“How can you fight magic beasts with that inflated body of yours?”

“If only you could use healing magic.....”

“Your appearance is just... I can’t on a physiological level.....”

He was rejected by one and by all.

“Goddammit, what the hell is with all these people. I’m even lowering my head to them! Why the hell are mere Iron rankers talking about fighting magic beasts? You don’t need a healer. As for the physiological level asshole, *I’m* the one who physiologically can’t handle you.” His torrent of swearing was soft and under his breath, but Shouzou had heard it all loud and clear.

(It seems that his social skills really do need a lot of work.) In spite of the issue of his build and lack of ability, if he would strike up talks with the self-awareness of being a complete beginner, then probability suggests that he should already have gotten at least one “yes.” Though well, even if someone said yes, that party would have fallen apart before they even completed their first quest. Shouzou had foreseen this outcome. Or it might be more accurate to say— “It’s not going so well, is it.” Shouzou approached Sharlo from the back and placed one hand on his shoulder. Sharlo turned around with a despondent face. “But don’t feel so down. The reason why I suggested you do this was to let you comprehend the reality that in your current state, nobody would want to group with you.”

“So you’ve been just messing with me?!”

“No, that’s not it. Above all else, I wanted to gauge your strength and ability. Your eye for spotting adventurers of the same rank as yourself was spot on. The

fact that you still kept on going after experiencing rejection was very praiseworthy.”

“Eh? Ah, I mean, I... guess.....?” Despite his demeanor, Sharlo’s embarrassed face showed that he actually liked being praised.

At this point, Yuna came back with a piece of paper in hand. It was the quest that Shouzou had asked for.

“With all that in mind, here is the perfect job for a solo quester, since you failed to make even a single comrade.” Shouzou accepted the quest detail poster from Yuna, then passed it to Sharlo with a gentle smile on his face.

“Did you just insult me offhandedly? But never mind. Rather than that, let me see.....” Sharlo’s eyes had become reduced to being mere dots.

“Oi..... are you saying that I have to do this quest.....?” Sharlo was visibly quivering. Without even waiting for Shouzou’s answer, he shouted, “ARE YOU ASKING ME OF ALL PEOPLE TO CLEAN DITCHES?!”

Making the prince clean ditches. Normally, if news of this reached the king’s ear, heads would be flying.

“That’s correct. You can do it alone, and it is a very meaningful job,” said Shouzou with an entirely straight face— ★

It was almost lunchtime. As the home tutor, Emalia, was not present, Silvia took her two remaining daughters out for a hike.

They were at a hilly area covered with fresh, green grass roughly 30 minutes of flying away from their house. In fact, this location was closer to the royal capital than it was to Treia.

Silvia was wearing a hat with a wide brim, holding the basket that held what they would all be eating for lunch, and watching the children playing around.

“Let’s go, Purucchi! Today is the day we’ll surpass the speed of sound!”

“U—wa—h—so—fa—st— ♪~”

“*Kueh*——!”

Puru the blue dragon had its head thrust forward in an effort to streamline its body so as to reduce drag. Kana and Hina were both crouching on its back,

hanging on tightly.

When they approached the top of a hill, suddenly Puru switched to gliding, trying to hug the hill's slanted surface as close as possible.

"Kana, if you go too fast then—" *zzzoooOOHHHHmmm* "—you'll get thrown off, silly." Although she called out to them when they passed by her at extreme velocity, her admonition only served to prompt them to go even faster.

Silvia placed a hand on her cheek, with an "oh my, oh my" troubled look on her face.

Even for a blue dragon, exceeding the speed of sound was an impossible feat. And the faster they went, the harder it would be for the girls to hold on. Kana might be fine, as she was awakening to superhuman physical prowess, but Hina's physical abilities were no different from that of the average 5-year-old.

As Silvia mentally readied herself to fly to the girls' aid at any moment—"What could that be?"

Far off, near the foot of a hill, the figures of many people could be seen walking along the road. No, to be specific, they were marching.

With a huge flag in front, cavalry and foot soldiers that numbered more than a hundred in total were proceeding in orderly ranks. And in the middle of the procession was a luxurious and gorgeous box carriage.

Unfortunately, this carriage that clearly was carrying someone of extremely high status—"Kueeeh!"

—happened to be right in the path of one of Puru's charges.

"What is that?!"

"A dragon?!"

"Protect the carriage!"

"Men, take positions!"

"Mage squad, start chanting!"

The soldiers quickly got into formation, despite being quite shaken by the abrupt development.

For its part, Puru also noticed that there were a lot of humans in its path, and thus began pulling up to avoid them. However, the soldiers that had identified Puru as a hostile target would not let up.

Behind ranks of soldiers forming a spear wall, a group wearing robes thrust their hands toward Puru.

“Fire!” At the signal from their commander, several fireballs were released simultaneously.

It was a homing type of fire magic. This was a great demonstration of the capability of this magic squad. Based on both speed and power, even one of those fireballs would have been enough to shoot Puru down.

However, although they were released in misunderstanding, Silvia was not about to let even one of those destructive missiles anywhere near her precious daughters.

Several magic formations abruptly appeared in midair. Because they appeared only several tens of centimeters in front of each fireball, the fireballs had no time to change their trajectory and thus all crashed and burned to nothing.

Silvia did not stop there. Belt-shaped magic formations appeared en masse, raining onto the soldiers below. Those that hit the ground began wriggling like snakes, until each and every soldier was completely tied up.

However, at that moment— “U—wa—h~!”

“Hinacchi?!”

“*Kueh?!*”

High up in the sky, Puru had yet to notice that all the fireballs were already dealt with, and thus was still repeatedly making sharp turns in midair. And as a result, Hina had gotten thrown off.

“U—wa—h~!”

Silvia watched as her beloved daughter hurtled downward. However—
Bo~ing.

Hina bounced off of the gigantic balloon that Silvia had made in advance.

Boing, boing, boing she went as she bounced on the balloon repeatedly.

“What is that, it looks so fun!!!” Kana’s eyes sparkled like stars as she jumped off Puru’s back to join in.

“Ahahaha~! This~! Is~! So~! Fun~! ♪~!”

“Whee—♪!”

The two of them squealed with laughter while jumping up and down on the balloon.

As the soldiers that were restrained with magic formations watched on dumbfoundedly, the door of the carriage banged open.

“Where are the ruffians! I, Lynfil Alsbeit, shall neither run nor hide!” The high-pitched voice was accompanied by the appearance of a young girl in a pure white dress. She flicked her soft-looking blond hair back dashing.



“Your Royal Highness! It is dangerou—”

“Please get back inside the carri—”

Threading her way through the immobilized soldiers, the girl glared sharply toward the front.

“No, I will draw their attention. In that time, all of yo— hm?” Before her eyes was the sight of two sisters having fun bouncing up and down. “What is that, it looks so fun! I want to do that too!”

“Your Royal Highneessss—?!” As she dashed off at full speed, an old man also appeared from within the carriage and tearfully set off on her heels— ★

Boing, boing went the girls while going up and down. With the addition of one more person, now there were three little girls jumping on the giant balloon while chatting with each other.

“Oh~ so Lyn-chan is this country’s princess?”

“That I am. Though it was but a month ago that I turned 8, I am already a proper lady!”

“You are more of a big sister than Hina-sama~”

While the children continued playing, the adults talked it out with each other. Silvia undid the restraints on the soldiers and reassured them that she meant them no harm. And since that was coming from someone that they had no hope of winning against, the soldiers had no choice but to take her word for it.

Right beside the balloon, Lynfil’s personal royal tutor, the old magician named Gettel, was looking on restlessly. “Oh no, Your Royal Highness, jumping so high is extremely dangerous!”

However, standing next to him was Silvia, who smilingly reassured him with a “Don’t worry, it’s all right.”

“Uwa—! Wh—?!”

“YOUR HIGHNESS!”

Right after Silvia’s words, Lynfil’s small body bounced off particularly hard. However, Puru immediately caught her on its back. Then it circled back over the

balloon and dropped her right off. Thus Lynfil went *boing* once again.

“See? Don’t worry, it’s all right.”

“I thought I was going to have a heart attack!”

After a while, the girls finally had their fill of playing, and it was decided that Lynfil would stay for lunch. A vinyl sheet was spread out at the top of a hill, and out came lunch box after lunch box. The soldiers were told to rest at the foot of the hill.

“How delicious! What is this?! Lady Mother, were you the person who made this?”

“Yes I did. Here, eat more, there’s plenty left.”

“How exquisite, how truly exquisite! Very well, I have made up my mind. I shall appoint you as Head Chef of the royal palace. Worry not, I merely have to ask this of my father, the king, then he would not refuse. His Majesty loves me very much.”

“Though it is an enormous honor, I currently have no intention of working outside of my home. Sorry, all right, sweetie?”

“Hmm, so you don’t want to. I see, that’s a pity..... Then how about court mage? With your prowess, no one could say no to you assuming command over all our mage forces. I can guarantee you a salary several times that of Head Chef.”

“Oh sweetie, it’s not a matter of money. I am a housewife. That means I already have a job, a job which involves taking care of my family.”

“Hmm, so you don’t want this either. I see, that’s a pity..... A really, really big pity..... *sniff*.....”

“We would be quite troubled too if we don’t have our Mama around.” Kana patted Lynfil’s head in consolation, but then Lynfil grabbed that hand with all her strength.

“In spite of your young age, I see that the two of you are already capable of making a blue dragon do your bidding. How would you like to be—”

“You really are persistent, aren’t you?”

“I will pay you a lot of money.”

“Mama, may I?!”

“You may not.”

Both girls’ heads drooped in disappointment.

Then it was Hina’s turn to pat both their heads in consolation.

Lynfil took a big bite out of an onigiri—*om, nom, nom, gulp*—then pulled herself back together. “So what were you all doing out here anyway?”

“Time attack~!” responded Hina.

“Along with hiking, we were also trying to see how fast Puru could go,” elaborated Kana.

“I see, so you were determining this blue dragon’s flying capabilities. It is usually not their flying capabilities that large dragons are famous for..... no wait, if we could incorporate such a large creature as air support, it could make a big difference in the naval war that might be coming against the empire..... hm, hmm, I see..... hm, hm.....”

“Lyn-sama is saying difficult things~”

“I’m not sure what you’re getting at either, but Puru is our friend, all right?”

“Interesting. So even though this dragon cannot speak, you would yet call it a friend. How broad-minded you are..... In that case, then. That’s, um, building friendships with other people, uh, regardless of any difference in status..... Would you happen to, um, be that kind of..... person?” Lynfil shot quick, furtive glances toward Kana and Hina.

“Lyn-sama is saying difficult things again~”

“I’m not sure what you’re getting at, but Lyn-chan, aren’t we already friends?”

“Do you speak true?!”

“I mean, we’re talking together, and we’ve even eaten a meal together too!” Kana’s standard for being a friend was extremely low. Let alone being in the same class, just being in the same school was already enough for her to

consider someone a friend. Even an absolute stranger would turn into a friend after just one conversation. Back when they lived in Japan, even the courier “big brother” was a full-fledged friend.

“F-Finally, even I have someone that I can call a friend..... *uuu, sniff*.....” Lynfil quivered with emotion.

“Our Royal Highness, Our Royal Highness looks so happy.....” The old magician Gettel also got infected with the quivers. He began to tear up even.

“Gettel, make preparations for a banquet. Gather all the local nobles, for I will announce to them my new friends. We will make it a celebration that lasts three days and three nights!”

“Your wish is my command!”

“I don’t quite get it, but I think we don’t need that. Yep.”

“Why is that?!”

“Oh, but if you’re a princess, does that mean you live in a castle? I want to try going there.”

“Not a problem! Come whenever you want. If you want, then we can go right now—ah, I’m sorry, I have something to do after this.....” Lynfil visibly deflated.

“Which reminds me, where are you heading, Lyn-chan?” asked Kana.

“Hm? Ahh, I am in the middle of heading toward Treia.”

“Treia..... ohh, isn’t that the town close to our house? Our Papa works there! And Onee-chan also.”

“What fortuity! So you all are residents of Treia!”

“Oh, no, that’s not it. Our house is on top of a hill a little ways off from the town.”

“Your house is... outside... of the town? Though I suppose that with Lady Mother’s magical prowess, it is true that you have no need to be afraid of magic beasts.” The seemingly odd statement came to make sense the more Lynfil thought about it.

“So, why do you want to go to Treia anyway?”

“Good question. Now, this is actually a secret, but I shan’t hide anything from my friends. I am going to see how Ani-ue is doing.”

““Ani-ue?”” Both sisters tilted their heads in concert.

“Indeed. This is also a secret, but right now, Ani-ue is working as an adventurer.”

“Your ‘Ani-ue’ means your older brother, right? Doesn’t that mean he’s the prince? Why is he working as an adventurer?”

Lynfil’s eyes sparkled with an “I’m glad you asked!” light. “After training in solitude to better himself for the past few years, Ani-ue has finally reached the next stage of his training. Of his own free will, he is placing himself within the general populace, all so that he can see the citizens’ way of life with his own eyes. And the profession that he chose to do that through was ‘adventurer,’” explained Lynfil passionately and at length. “Adventurers are people who stand face to face with any number of problems, men and women of valor who at times even subjugate magic beasts. They are closer to the general populace than the army, and are the heroes of the common man. Ani-ue is an esteemed individual who will eventually take the reins of this country after our Father King. Toward that end, he is hiding his identity and doing his best to meet the people where they are.”

Kana held out a plastic bottle toward Lynfil, whose shoulders were heaving with heavy breathing.

She took a gulp. “So cold! So sweet!” She smacked her lips, then downed the rest of the bottle in one go. Afterward, she stared closely at the bottle. “Hmm, transparent like glass, yet so soft and light. What a curious container this is.” After a brief pause to marvel at the bottle, she came to a start and then resumed talking about her brother. “Unfortunately, I haven’t been able to meet Ani-ue these past few years. That is why I am heading for this far off land, all so that I can secretly steal a peek at his gallant figure and burn it into these eyes of mine.”

“Secretly.....?” Kana turned her eyes toward the hundred or so soldiers currently resting a ways off. They were super duper conspicuous.

“So, all right, Lyn-chan’s big brother sounds pretty cool!” managed Kana.

“Indeed he is. There are some deeply jealous people who say bad things about him, but I still remember how he always looked after me when I was young. He was kind and strong and just a wonderful person all in all!”

“Ohh, as expected of a real prince.”

“Does he ride a white horse~?”

In contrast to the increasingly excited sisters, their mother Silvia tilted her head at Lynfil’s words. (*That... sounds different from what Shouzou-san told me.....*) What she had heard from Shouzou was that he had taken it upon himself to straighten out the good-for-nothing prince.

Silvia did not suspect Lynfil of lying at all. However, she could not deny the possibility that this 8-year-old girl was merely glorifying faint memories from several years ago.

“Lyn-chan, I want to meet a real prince!”

“Hina-sama too~!”

“Of course you do, of course you do. I also want to introduce my friends to Ani-ue. But you must remember, Ani-ue is hiding his identity. So we must do it very secretly, while pretending to be strangers, all right?”

“We just have to make sure he isn’t revealed as a prince, right? No problem, no problem.”

“No problem~!”

The two of them had every intention of going.

“Mama, can we go?”

“Okaa-sama, can we go~?”

“Hmmm.....” Silvia had one hand on her cheek while thinking. What would happen the instant the princess with an overly glorified mental image met the prince in the state that she had heard described? None of the possibilities that came to mind boded well.

“What say you, Lady Mother?”

With a quick sideways glance, Silvia caught the old man Gettel—the person

who was in charge of the princess's education—looking at her pleadingly. He surely knew of the prince's current state, and was thinking of preventing the princess from meeting him. In fact, surely he must have already tried to stop her from making this journey in the first place. Yet in spite of that, here she was, on her way toward Treia. No matter what any random stranger said, surely Lynfil would still drag her soldiers along while going to see her brother.

No, actually, there are some things that only a random stranger—an unrelated third party—could do.

“Very well. If it is not too much trouble for you.” Silvia's smiling reply prompted Gettel to sigh in relief.

“We did it♪!”

“We did it♪~”

However, while watching her daughters hop around in excitement, Silvia did not forget to pound home one last nail. “And you two, you must not get in the way of His Royal Highness's work, all right?”

“We knew that already, Mama,” said Kana while practically skipping. “And let's also go tease Yuna-nee while we're at it!”

“Stop it.” Silvia found herself already feeling the first twinge of unease— ★
Guu, rang the sound of a stomach.

The sun had already passed its zenith, and yet was still beating down without mercy. The rivulets of sweat showed no sign of abating.

“Dammit, I... am... the... prince, aren't I.....” After having eaten only a small-portioned lunch, the torrent of cursing gradually decreased in intensity along with the passage of time.

Sharlo Alsbeit, also known as Sharlo Aashu, was wearing waterproof gloves, long boots, and a mask that covered his face from the nose down while applying himself to the task of “ditch cleaning.”

One of the large avenues running through Treia, specifically the one that stretched from the Central Plaza to the South Gate, was lined on both sides with narrow ditches. They measured roughly 50 cm in width and 70 cm in

depth.

The job consisted of removing the stone lids that covered the ditches five at a time, and then shoveling out the dirty sludge at the bottom. The scooped out sludge and trash was then packed into wooden barrels that were supposed to be lined up along the side of the road.

Every once in a while, a cart would come along to take away the barrels packed with sludge and leave behind empty barrels. Then rinse and repeat.

While slotting in frequent breaks, Sharlo was nevertheless clearing out the ditches in silence. His waist hurt. His arms and legs felt like lead. The mud that had turned to sludge stank terribly, so much so that it stung his nose even through his mask.

The stares of passersby hurt. It felt like everyone looking on was scornfully laughing at him.

[Damn that looks tough—]

[How can he even keep that up in this awful heat?]

[More like, isn't he, like, way too round? Lol.]

He was already imagining such voices.

“Dammit, dammit, dammit, dammit!” He brandished the specially shaped shovel, angrily transferring more sludge into the barrels. If someone showed up pointing and laughing at him, then he was going to throw a whole shovel of sludge into that person’s face without hesitation.

But the truth of it was that there were actually a lot of people who were looking at him with concern. Among those who noticed him, many were thinking “How tough is that in this awful heat?”, “Thank you for your hard work,” or other thoughts similarly colored with gratitude while passing by.

However, Sharlo did not have the presence of mind to notice those supportive gazes. “Dammit, dammit.....” His stamina had already run out ages ago, and his arm refused to rise any more. He looked forward, and saw the South Gate blurredly in the distance. “It’s... still that far.....?”

Of course, this was not a distance that could be completed by one person in

one day. He only had 200 meters more to go to meet his quota for the day, but even that he was not sure he could complete by nightfall. The thought caused his eagerness to shrivel up, and he stopped his hand.

No, to be correct, he never had any eagerness in the first place. What he had been using as fuel to keep himself going was the anger toward the unreasonableness that had befallen himself.

“I want to go home.....” He wanted desperately to be back in his room at the top of his tower, rolling around doing nothing aside from stuffing his face with an endless supply of food. Just how much longer would it be until he could go back to that dream-like life?

“If only *that guy* had never shown up.....!” Just remembering that large man with a bearded face caused the back of Sharlo’s head to grow hot.

“Dammit, dammitdammitdammit! Dammit!” The anger that welled up motivated his shovel to resume moving again.

But at that moment, a voice suddenly addressed him from behind. “You’re pretty fired up, aren’t you?”

“You.....” When Sharlo stopped swinging his shovel and waited, a bearded giant of a man walked over to stand next to him. In his hand was an attaché case.

“What do you want?”

“I was in the middle of my rounds and was near, so I thought to come over and see how you’re doing.”

“Hmph. No doubt you only came to laugh at me.....” He himself was aware that his pace was slow. The people carrying the barrels had told him so several times already. Sharlo decided to ignore Shouzou, and turned to get back to work.

Right next to him, Shouzou stared at him fixedly. Then after a while, he asked, “Have you learned swordsmanship or any other form of martial arts before?”

“Hah? What are you asking out of the blue?” Partly due to being tired, he inadvertently stopped his hand and responded.

“It was a simple question. Have you?”

“Well, I mean.....” Right now he was an abandoned case, but back when he was young he had received a well-rounded education for the sake of becoming the next king. Swordsmanship had been among them. He had received instruction from the famous martial master, Marquis Jilk Goldas.

“As I had thought. Though your stamina may have decreased, there are still glimpses of the movements here and there. Sometimes, it might benefit you to reflect on and remember the past,” said Shouzou. “Anyway, I’ll be off.”

“.....What was that all about, seriously.” After being told something completely incomprehensible, Sharlo felt irritation tickling his chest. Then he roughly thrust his shovel, scraped the bottom of the ditch with it, then flexed his arm muscles to bring it up. But unfortunately, his arm couldn’t quite pull it up.

“.....I see. Because I try to get so much in one go, it requires so much strength.” He withdrew his shovel, then tried to scrape off only a bit off the surface of the sludge. “Though even this little still requires quite some strength.....”

Abruptly, Shouzou’s parting words came up again in his mind.

—Sometimes, it might benefit you to reflect on and remember the past.

Then followed the voice of Goldas from his childhood. It was from one of their swordsmanship lessons.

—Your Royal Highness, the sword is not something that you swing with your arm alone. Lower your waist, steady your center of gravity, then use your entire body. Like so.

While ruminating on the words from back then, Sharlo lowered his waist, tucked in his elbows, then tried to shovel while moving his arms as little as possible. “Oh hey, this is much easier.”

Then he began experimenting with finding a better way to efficiently scoop sludge while using the least amount of strength. Again and again, in trial and error. As he did so, he gradually came to grasp the knack for it.

“.....That’s well and good, but still doesn’t change the fact that this is back-breaking work.” He glared ahead in annoyance. There was still a lot left in his quota for the day.

(Is there no other method to get this done more efficiently and easily? Is there anything from what I had learned in the past that could be a hint? In the past..... the past.....?!) He came to a start and abandoned his train of thought.

“Screw this! I’m tired. I deserve another break.” Sharlo threw his shovel away, then heavily lowered his butt onto the side of the road.

Shifting his mask away, he sucked in a whole lungful of air. Then the smell caused him to grimace.

“That bastard, saying unnecessary things.....” Shouzou’s words seemed plastered over his mind and just won’t leave.

—Sometimes, it might benefit you to reflect on and remember the past.

What good would it do him to remember the past? Just now it might have been slightly helpful, but ultimately what’s the meaning in becoming better at cleaning ditches? Also, recalling the past did not mean that only things useful to him would come to mind. No, to the contrary— Day in and day out, he had no time to play, and he was spending every waking moment on training and learning, with meals and sleep being the only brief moments of respite. Swordsmanship. Martial arts. Bow. Magic. After moving his body, then would come time to face a desk, where knowledge supposedly necessary for being a king was then pounded into his head. It was tough. He wanted to run away. He even thought that he didn’t want to be the king, not if it meant having to continue enduring this suffering. But if that was all there was to it, then perhaps he might have been able to barely hang on.

(The reason why I couldn’t endure it anymore was—) What showed up in his eyes was a faint, troubled smile. What flowed into his ears were voices colored with dejection and disappointment.

[You... can’t exactly be called talented, I’m afraid.....]

[I won’t say that you are a slow learner per se, but if this is all you can manage.....]

[How many days are you going to need for such basic level magic.....]

He himself thought that he was actually doing quite well. But apparently that was far from enough to satisfy the expectations of those around him. No matter how hard he worked, his efforts were never acknowledged. He did not have even a single memory of being praised.

—*Ani-ue is amazing.*

Abruptly, a childish voice brushed by his ear.

(*Which reminds me, it was only Lynfil alone who praised me to the sky for some unknown reason.....*) Even the most basic sword dance and the easiest magic must have looked like a marvel in the eyes of that significantly younger sister of his.

However, what was truly marvelous was that sister herself.

[Your Royal Highness is truly talented!]

[You have managed to not only recite this highly difficult poem verbatim, you have also grasped the intent of the writer himself!]

[You have mastered Fireball in only half a day?!]

The princess who had only been following her brother around attempted to copy whatever she saw, and the results shocked everyone. Surely she was what people actually call a “genius.”

Sharlo felt like everything that he had built up thus far was being denied and stripped of value. The biggest factor that clinched his decision to lock himself up in a room was, without any doubt, the existence of his younger sister.

(*She... can surely fly however high she wants. That's why someone like me should not succeed the throne.....*) Had it already been three years since they last met?

During that time, his weight had more than doubled, and his hair and skin had both lost their luster. If she saw him right now, surely even his younger sister would not be able to recognize him. Or so he thought, when— “Ani...ue.....?” He thought it another auditory hallucination. But that small voice stuck to the inside of his ear and refused to leave.

He slowly lifted his face in fear, and found a girl looking at him dumbfoundedly. She wore the clothing of an average village girl, and had her hood pulled forward as if to make her face less conspicuous. However, despite several years of growth, her face still bore great resemblance to what it had been three years ago.

There was no way he could mistake her. She was Lynfil, his younger sister.

Why? How? Why today, of all days? And why her, the person that he did not want seeing his current state the most? Why was she here? As his mind whirled in chaotic confusion— “Is this person ‘Ani-ue’-sama~?”

“He doesn’t really fit the image of a prince, does he.”

On either side of his younger sister stood girls that he did not know. One appeared older than Lynfil, and had short hair that gave off a boyish impression. The other seemed about the same age as the younger sister in his own memories.

Sharlo’s disordered thoughts fell into place quickly, and he covered the bottom half of his face with his mask. He grabbed his shovel, stood upright, then said, “You must have the wrong person. I’m just an ordinary adventurer.”

His slightly cold response prompted Lynfil to look into his eyes, then shift her gaze toward the shovel, then gaze at the unlidded side ditch, then back to his face and eyes once again.

“Oh, I’d forgotten! Your good self is a fresh, new adventurer who proactively took on this long-suffering, dirty job not worth the pay of ditch cleaning that no one else wanted to take, an esteemed person who is contributing to the beautification of this town by protecting its sanitary condition!”

“That’s laying it on a bit thick, don’t you think.....?”

Paying absolutely no mind to Sharlo’s retort, Lynfil widened her eyes all the way and shouted, “How admirable! To take the initiative to do the dirty work that no one else wants to do..... as expected of Ani-ue!”

“I said it just now, but I’m not your Ani-ue—”

“Ohhh, that’s right. But allow me to say it again. As expected of Ani-ue.”

Lynfil's eyes were sparkling like stars.

Unable to bear those eyes any longer, Sharlo turned his back.



“And to even change the shape of your body for this..... you really do make sure to go the extra mile for everything. As expected of An—”

“Stop it already!” Being bathed in the gazes of the passersby was too painful. If there was a hole in the ground, then he would jump into it. The side ditch was too narrow and wouldn’t suffice.

“A-Anyway, you’re in the way of my work. Children should go home already.” Sharlo brandished his shovel, and assumed the stance for shoveling.

“I-I apologize. I had no intention of getting in your way..... Then we will take our leave now.” But despite saying that, Lynfil fidgeted a brief while, until she finally managed to say out loud, “Lastly, just one more thing I want to say..... I am very happy that we were able to meet again.” Then she turned toward the direction of the Central Plaza and ran off down the road.

“Ah, Lyn-chan, wait for me!”

“You will become lost~”

The two other girls also ran off.

A beautiful lady that he had not noticed till that moment also bowed to him, then set off in pursuit of the three. Maybe she was the guardian or parent of those children.

(What was that just now? What... just happened.....?) The country’s princess was walking around on the streets with not a guard behind her, accompanied only by an unfamiliar woman and her children? Even for an undercover inspection, that was far too strange.

(Don’t tell me, did that guy arrange this too?) The large man’s disagreeable smile floated up in his mind, causing him to become incensed once again *(But still, is she going to be all right? This town’s public order is on the good side, but even so.....)* It bothered him, but he hesitated to follow his sister’s back with his eyes. So naturally, his eyes only fell on the remaining quota, which only served to drain away his motivation again. But even so, he wordlessly resumed working, all while remaining mindful of his movements and consciously trying to scoop the sludge with less strength.

“Quite a lot of unnecessary motion is gone, I see. Glad to see you’re getting accustomed to it.”

The voice from his back caused his hands to freeze again. Sarcasm flew out of his mouth unbidden, directed toward the large man standing beside him. “What point is there in getting better at something like this, huh?”

“The point in getting better at cleaning ditches is that you are better at cleaning ditches. But that’s not all, of course. What you found useful here, you will find useful in most other physical labor jobs. In the first place, your base is in swordsmanship and martial arts, so just by remembering the basics, you could become an asset in high-paying quests like bodyguarding and magic beast hunting.” Taking advantage of Sharlo’s dumbfoundedness, Shouzou continued with a smile. “So, how was it? Sometimes it really *is* beneficial to reflect on and remember the past, isn’t it?”

“You... did you already know.....”

“Right before I asked for custody of you, I dug up all the information I could on you.”

“Does that mean my sister also..... you even brought Lynfil over here?”

Shouzou raised a hand to his chin. “No, her appearance was as much a surprise for me as it was for you. That was a complete coincidence.”

Immediately after exiting the public office located on the side of the Central Plaza, he had bumped into someone completely unexpected. For some reason, together with his wife and daughters, there stood the princess.

“I talked with her for a bit. She talked about you very joyfully and boastfully.”

“She just overvalues me, despite being the true genius herself. What is there about me to boast of.....” His sinking emotions caused him to also lower his eyes.

“Indeed, I also agree that her valuation of you might be a bit too high.”

Hearing it said so clearly sounded like it was not him that was being belittled, but his sister. Anger spiked through his mind. He reflexively glared up at Shouzou, only to find an unexpectedly gentle face greeting him.

“You see, valuation from other people is always affected by personal opinion. Your younger sister’s feelings of reverence for her brother are too strong, which is what leads to her higher-than-reality valuation of you. In contrast—” Here, Shouzou’s eyes turned serious. “Be it the king or Jilk or any of your instructors, their overly high expectations of you had caused them to constantly undervalue you.”

“Eh.....?”

Shouzou slowly nodded for him to see. “You heard me. Undervalue. You may not have natural born talent like your younger sister has. However, every single person, no matter who they may be, possesses something that can allow them to transcend ordinary human limits. This holds true for you as well.”

Sharlo had gotten lost, and Shouzou did not hold back in poking at the exact reason for it.

“You are a very forward-facing man. And I mean that in a bad way. So badly you do not want to recall your painful past that you fixate your eyes only on your front, as a venue of escape. You are doing that even now. Is it not true that your mind is only occupied by the quota you have left, and that doing so is making you depressed?”

“That... that’s.....”

“What you need is to stop sometimes, and to look back with courage. Look.”

What Shouzou pointed at was the unlidded part of the side ditch that Sharlo was currently working on. Half of it was still packed with sludge, and half was already cleared. However, even the cleared part was already slightly invaded by more sludge. Add that onto the fact that he hadn’t exactly made it sparkling clean in the first place, so at a glance even that part looked dirty. But even so— “You felt with your bones how much effort it took to clear even that amount of sludge. But tell me, is what you have achieved only *this little bit*?” Shouzou’s finger shifted to point behind Sharlo.

As if guided by the finger, Sharlo turned around. Far off in the distance, he saw the Central Plaza. The sun was setting, and many people were walking to and fro. And stretching beside the road was the side ditch, covered with stone lids. Far beyond what had occupied his mind today, his quota for the day, the

ditch continued all the way off.

“The ditch from the Central Plaza to all the way here has been cleaned by you and you alone. With the lids placed back, most people probably don’t even notice it. But it is hard, undeniable evidence of what you have achieved today, yesterday, and all the days going back.”

Sharlo could not say anything. His vision blurred with tears.

“From this moment on, stop letting yourself be thrown around by other people’s valuation of you. You yourself set an objective standard, then you value yourself once each day. Just by doing that, you will change greatly. No, let me rephrase myself. By doing so, you will regain your true self.”

It was nothing difficult. In fact, it would be a very easy thing to do.

“At the end of each day, take only a few minutes before you go to bed. Do a quick comparison of the ‘you’ from yesterday, and the ‘you’ from today.”

“And... that’s it.....?”

“Indeed. Just by doing that—” Shouzou turned his eyes toward the far off Central Plaza. “—you can become a man that that girl can boast about in truth.”

Within Sharlo’s blurred vision, only a single girl’s figure was clear. There, standing beside the side ditch at the position where he had started today, stood the girl who had continued to look at the back of her beloved brother all the way through the years, without end.

(Ahh, so that’s how it is. What I truly could not bear was—) The pure feelings of expectation from this young girl. He had thought it far beyond him, and had given up trying to meet that expectation.

Sharlo tightened his grip on his shovel. The only thing left after that was to immerse himself in shoveling sludge.

—For the sake of surpassing who he had been yesterday.

Chapter 3: So Is the Love Story Going to Begin or Not?

In the far northeastern corner of the Bardimian Empire was a rural domain under the rule of the imperial princess 11th in the line of succession, Yuliana von Bardimial, a girl who had turned 16 only recently.

Although she was indeed in the line of succession, 11th was far from being high. To make matters worse, she was the daughter of a concubine. Due to certain circumstances, she was out of favor with her father, the emperor, and as a result was effectively being confined in the frontiers.

The kingdom where Shouzou lived was still in autumn, but winter was already encroaching on the northern territories.

Due to the dropping temperature, the fireplace in Yuliana's personal quarters was crackling with flames as she passed her eyes over some documents.

Her luscious black hair barely brushed the top of her shoulders. In addition, she was almost always wearing pants. As a result, she was often mistaken for a pretty boy at first glance.

As the firewood burned and crackled, Yuliana picked up a portrait in an extravagant frame and gazed at it. Depicted within was a very well-rounded young man. This was apparently the first prince of the Kingdom of Alsbeit. His body looked unhealthy and his face looked sullen. It was hard to believe that this portrait was sent for the purpose of setting up marriage talks.

Yuliana's short sigh happened to coincide with the sound of someone gently knocking on her door.

"Princess Yuliana, Hanna at your service. I am here in response to your summons."

"You may enter."

After several seconds of pause, a young, slightly plump maid excused herself, then silently came into the room.

Within this mansion that was riddled with those in her father's pocket, this maid was one of Yuliana's most trusted confidants, someone who she had known for many years. In terms of age, she was two years Yuliana's elder, but her short stature and baby face gave her the impression of being much younger.

"What can I do for Your Imperial Highness at this late hour?"

"This is a marriage proposal sent over by my father."

"From His Imperial Majesty?! Wait, marriage proposal?!" Hanna looked extremely surprised. In addition, her face had the expression of someone for whom the world had ended.

"The man is the prince of Alsbeit Kingdom across the sea." She held out the framed portrait, and Hanna accepted it with shaking hands after excusing herself. Hanna looked at it. Then she became dumbstruck.

"What is with this fa—very chubby man?! This is coming from me, a rather plump person, but this overly full-bodied person is not suitable as a match for Your Imperial Highness!"

"Well, judging someone by their loo—"

"That is not so, Your Imperial Highness. I might not be the best person to say this, but a person who lets their body go is a person who lets their personality go. And with this detestable face on top of it..... this man's terrible personality is oozing from every inch of this portrait!"

While wondering whether a single portrait could indeed convey so much, Yuliana cleared her throat in an attempt to clear the air. "In any case, I am thinking about proceeding with this offer."

"With this fatty?! I mean, with this pig?!"

She actually said it. What's more, her rewording was even more foul-mouthed.

"I only said 'proceed.' Well, it would depend on how things play out, but I might also consider actually going through with it."

"How can that be..... for Your Imperial Highness to be married off..... Allow

me to give everything I have in preventing this from happening!”

Uh-oh, those eyes means she's serious, thought Yuliana as she tried to convince Hanna otherwise. “Hold on, listen to me first. At the moment, I am in a very precarious position.”

The empire was not a single monolith. The emperor held overwhelming authority, but there were many who were discontent with his tyrannical rule. This included not only the countries annexed by the empire, but also men of influence hailing from families with long histories in the empire, and even some of the emperor's own blood relatives. And among those in opposition to the current emperor was a faction who was trying to hold Yuliana up as a figurehead.

“I do want to put a stop to my father's rampage. Letting that man continue doing what he wants is something that must not be.”

However, in order to do that, she needed power. Especially power from foreign countries.

“Alsbeit Kingdom is a major power that also has friendly relations with its neighbors. If our empire attacks them indiscriminately as we have been doing, we will end up having to face many countries all at the same time. I'm sure that's why even that man is being cautious right now.” If she successfully garnered the cooperation of the kingdom, that would cause the winds of fortune to blow strongly in favor of the anti-emperor side.

“But Your Imperial Highness, if His Imperial Majesty truly regards the kingdom to be as dangerous as you say, then wouldn't he send one of the other imperial princesses with higher status and influence?”

“I cannot say for certain. But at the very least, expelling me from the country would mean the faction opposing him would lose their figurehead and thus lose influence. And it just might be that on top of that—” Yuliana glared at the dancing flames while continuing. “Perhaps he intends to have me assassinated in the kingdom, and then lay the blame for my death on the kingdom and use it as the pretext to invade them.”

“That's too much..... But if that's the case, then that's all the more reason why you should turn this down!”

“I am aware of the dangers involved. Even so, I see enough value in this offer to bet on it. However, I am yet sorely lacking in information. Unfortunately, I do not know much about the internal state of Alsbeit Kingdom. To that end—” Yuliana looked straight into Hanna’s eyes, which caused a faint blush to creep into her cheeks. “I have a favor to ask of you.”

“Yes, I’ll do it!”

“Listen to what I have to say first!” Yuliana felt a slight sense of doubt regarding her personnel choice while elaborating on her request.

“Eh, really? More like, would His Imperial Majesty actually allow this.....”

“No, I believe this is within the limits of how far he would allow us to push things.” The flames dancing in the fireplace reflected in her eyes as if her resolute will was also burning within like a fire— ★

Shouzou was summoned to the royal palace on very short notice. He was let through to the king’s private chambers, into the room that used to be an archive.

The first thing that King Alsbeit said upon Shouzou’s entrance was, “The empire agreed to proceed with the marriage talks.”

“So then, the way to peace has been opened,” rejoiced Shouzou. He believed that marriage was something to be decided on by the people involved. However, Prince Sharlo did seem quite motivated as of late. If he had his own family, that just might make him into an even better man. If the girl took a liking to him, and if he also took a liking to the girl, then Shouzou intended to give them every ounce of his support.

However, the king shrugged his shoulders. “I’m not so sure it has. Who knows what they’re scheming now.”

“Well, well, that might be so. But for now, who is to be the prince’s partner?”

“Who do you think?” returned the king with a cheeky smile. A smile that, in the next instant, froze over.

“Could it be Princess Yuliana von Bardimial, the one who’s 11th in the line of succession?”

“You... how did you know.....” The king’s eyes dropped to the table, on which laid the portrait of a beautiful, black-haired girl. She wore a resplendent dress, and had a faint smile on her face.

Shouzou’s impression was that she looked quite different *from the video*. “Though it might have been forward of me, I took the initiative to conduct my own investigation of the empire. I just happen to have an acquaintance who can use teleportation magic and has a bit of free time, so I’ve asked them to do a little bit of reconnaissance for me.”

That acquaintance was the Grade 7 goddess, Emalia. At the start, her role was to tutor the Onigawara children. However, Yuna went off to work at the guild, and Silvia said she could handle it herself if it was just Kana. That left Emalia with absolutely nothing to do. Therefore, Shouzou gave her a camera and sent her off to check out various places.

“Among the possibilities that I considered, the most politically motivated choice would be her.”

“By which you mean...?”

“She is the symbol of the anti-emperor faction. By sending her out of the country with a valid pretext, the anti-emperor faction loses its support, and thus becomes weakened.” However, a tinge of unease whispered to Shouzou that that might not be all to it.

“So you are saying that we’ve been made use of. Wait. That doesn’t make sense then.”

“Is there something on your mind?”

“Indeed. Actually, the other side posed a rather strange condition while agreeing to proceed with the talks.”

Shouzou tilted his head. This was the perfect excuse to chase out the figurehead of the opposition faction. Why would the emperor pose uncalled-for conditions that might cause that to go awry?

“What they said was they ‘wanted to ascertain the state of the country that the princess was going to marry into.’ To that end, the diplomatic envoy was accompanied by the princess’s lady attendant, who will be staying for a while.”

“Ascertain not the prince himself, but the state of the country?” That was the kind of thing that’s normally done by sending in spies. Rather, declaring it out loud would take all the meaning out of it. It becomes a given that everything within the vicinity that could be observed would become strictly controlled. Even Shouzou could not puzzle out the intentions of the emperor.

However—



After being told “I leave the envoy in your hands” by the king, Shouzou was guided to the royal villa. He did not feel like a troublesome duty had merely being forced upon him. Rather, it was a responsibility of great import, and he pulled himself together while stepping into the designated room.

(I see. Wanting to observe the state of the country was not the will of the emperor, but that of the princess herself.) The moment he saw into the room, the dots in his head connected. Waiting for him inside the room— “P-Please take care of us. I am Princess Yuliana’s personal attendant. My name is Hanna.”

Shouzou was not surprised at the slightly chubby girl.

But next to the girl, there stood someone wearing the outfit of a butler. “I am her guard, Yuli.” Although this Yuli’s shoulder-length black hair was tied up in the back and was wearing a man’s butler outfit, this **girl** was undoubtedly— *(Princess Yuliana, in person.)* This world did not have the technology to record videos. Her intention behind wanting to check out this country with her own eyes surely meant— *(She wants to gauge whether the kingdom could be a reliable ally or not.)* Shouzou suddenly felt a heat coursing through his body. This marriage proposal was mired in a whirlpool of schemes from ally and enemy and even the forces in opposition to the enemy. He was going to make every single person involved understand one thing.

—Namely, that marriage is something for two people who love and treasure each other!



A well-rounded man jauntily made his way over to one of the counters at Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild.

“Ha~ha~ha! What wonderful weather we have today! The morning sun fills me with energy and vitality. Come now, let’s give our all in completing quests today too!”

This man who was swaggering brazenly while half talking to himself was none other than— “Oh, it’s the loner uncle.”

“Ditch Cleaning Master!”

“Sup, uncle!”

“I am no uncle!” While being teased by the surrounding adventurers (all of who were older than him), he—Sharlo—widened his eyes in intimidation.

“So you’re going to let the loner part slide?”

“You tell them, Master.”

“Loner-san, way wild.”

Although at first glance it might seem like he was being made a fool of, in actuality all the comments were filled with affection. Both adventurers and townsfolk had come to hold this man who proactively took on jobs that nobody else wanted to do in high regard.

“Hmph, a job is a job, even if it is ditch cleaning. There’s no discrimination when it comes to quests. If you’re jealous, then put in enough effort until you earn the title of ‘Master’ like I have!”

However, the arrogant front that Sharlo put up made it hard for everyone else to praise him honestly.

“Well then, leaving aside all those who are jealous of me, today too shall I display the techniques that I had polished and gallantly go forth to complete my duty. Come, bring me my ditch cleaning quest!” With that proclamation, he thrust out a hand in a dramatic fashion.

But without missing a beat, Moko, who happened to be in charge of reception, simply said, “There’s none.”

“What did you say?!”

“All the ditch cleaning quests have been taken already.”

“How can that be?!”

“Probably everybody saw how easy you made it look and thought ‘oh I can earn easy money too’? After all, ditch cleaning quests are priced higher based on their unpopularity.”

“*Grrr.....* Those copycat amateurs, doing as they please. My ambition of cleaning every inch of side ditch in Treia.....”

“You planned to do it all yourself? Isn’t that a bit unrealistic?”

“Hmph, then fine. I shall go try another adventurer’s guild.” Sharlo was about to turn his heels, but then froze at Moko’s nonchalant comment.

“I think every place is out of them now, though. It’s the same for us too, but we are receiving requests to take down the multiple posted quests due to them already being taken up somewhere else.”

Sharlo was at a loss for words.

Then Moko dealt him the final blow while giving him her very best smile. “So do you want to do another quest? If not, then you’re in the way of the other customers, so please stand aside to make way for them, nya~”

“Th-The nerve..... No, wait a moment. I can’t be taking the same quest every time. My goal is to become an older brother that *she* can be proud of. To that end, I must now challenge myself to a new quest, one that is more suitable for the me that has grown this far.”

“Oh yeah? You feeling up for it? Well, if it’s a quest that even a loner without friends can accept, let me see.....” Moko flipped through the list of available quests.

“Oi, you’re making me wait. Hurry it up,” said Sharlo in an irritated tone.

Right then, a voice called out to him from behind, “Heeey, Ditch Cleaning Bro. You sure are in a foul mood, eh?” It turned out to be a well-built guy in his twenties.

Sharlo recognized him. He was the leader of the three-person party that Sharlo approached about joining on his first day as an adventurer. “What do you want?”

“Pretty big attitude as always, eh. Well, no matter. So thing is, if you haven’t decided on today’s quest yet, then what do you think about doing one together with us?”

“With you guys?” Behind the man stood another man wearing priest-like clothing who had a smile on his face, and a girl who waved her hand slightly.

“Yep, it’s a quest to deliver some cargo to the royal capital. The amount turned out to be a bit more than expected. Among us three, I’m the only one who can do heavy lifting. Bro, you’ve gotten pretty buffed up from all the ditch cleaning, right?”

“Hah, of course. Underneath all this fat are muscles of steel.”

“Uh, you should probably lose the fat though.” After the light retort, the young man flashed a refreshing smile as if to prompt an answer from Sharlo.

“Mmmm..... I don’t exactly don’t want to do it, but.....” Rather, he was so happy about being invited that he wanted to accept on the spot.

However, the location was inconvenient. If he just nonchalantly strolled into the royal capital when his Father King had yet to grant him permission to come back home, would he get scolded for it? (*But when he said “don’t come home” he meant the royal palace, right? And in the first place, if it’s for a job, then he won’t say anything... I hope.....?*) As a last resort, he could just go crying to Shouzou. Sharlo had grown tough enough mentally to make such a judgment call. “Very well. I accept.”

“All right, so then you fine with splitting the reward three ways and you get one? Then two go to us three. How’s that sound?”

“Sure, I don’t mind.”

“Then we’re decided. We’ll be in your care then, Bro. Ah, sorry, your name is Sharlo, right? I’m the leader of the party, name’s Rosshi.”

“Sharlo Aashu. Same here.” The instant they exchanged a firm handshake, Sharlo’s breathing turned erratic from being excited about his first time partying up with someone else— ★

The carriage drawn by three horses was indeed packed with a large amount of

goods. Without any untoward encounters, they successfully arrived at the royal capital safe and sound. After unloading the goods at the recipient store, Sharlo's body ached here and there. Apparently he had used different muscles than the ones he normally used for ditch cleaning.

"So then, let's get back to collect the reward money?" asked Rosshi.

However, Sharlo called him back. "Hold on a moment. Are we going to go back with an empty carriage? Isn't that a waste?"

"So you say, but it's not like we have anything to carry back, though?"

"We can just look for something. There are adventurer guilds in the royal capital too, right? If I remember right, Elunheine has a branch here too. We can pick up the reward money there, then check whether they have any quests to carry something to Treia."

Ohhh, went the three person group in admiration.

"Hey, you have a pretty good head on your shoulders. Especially for someone who only ever cleans ditches."

"The second line was unnecessary. In the first place, if you properly understand how the whole adventurer system works, then this should have occurred to you naturally too." Though in Sharlo's case, it was because Shouzou told him "First pound into your head every detail about the surroundings you find yourself in" that he studied up on the system in the first place.

And that was how things ended up with Sharlo and Rosshi heading off together toward the center of the royal capital. The other two remained behind to look after the horses.

Along the way, Rosshi kept engaging Sharlo in conversation. "No matter how many times I look at you, I still can't believe that you're 16. You have this, like, dignity, or brazenness about you, I guess?"

"Oh get off it. There's no helping the truth, is there. My skin has actually improved a bit. So then, how old are you?"

"I'm 24."

Heeh, returned Sharlo indifferently. Age was not related to becoming an

adventurer. However, many had looked up to adventurers since they were young, and thus started adventuring in their teens.

Rosshi was yet a beginner Iron rank. Yet, he was already in his 20s. In other words— “I was a cook before.” Noticing how Sharlo had gotten quiet, Rosshi tried his best to adopt a light tone. “But, y’know, things happened. And now I’m an adventurer.”

“Things, huh..... Does that mean you’re being an adventurer reluctantly?”

“Not really, actually. It *was* something that I’d wanted to do. Although I can’t deny that me not having any other options did play a big part, but I’ve always been a bit confident of my physical strength since young. I thought I was quite suited for it. But things don’t always turn out so easy, do they.”

Once more Sharlo returned only an indifferent-sounding *heeh*, which prompted Rosshi to look at him jestfully.

“You also have various circumstances going on too, right? You have a family name, and yet you’re being an adventurer and even cleaning ditches. Aren’t you actually the son of some high up noble family? But then you were so haughty that they kicked you out—”

Sharlo started and averted his eyes. Let alone noble family, he was from the royal family. But there was no way he could actually say that.

“Ahaha, sorry, sorry. I shouldn’t probe. But well, y’know, that’s.....” After taking a while to find the right words, Rosshi said seriously, “Sharlo, would you like to join our party for real?”

That was obviously not a one-time-only offer, but an invitation to become a permanent part of Rosshi’s party. It made Sharlo very happy. He had experienced setback, locked himself up, and even given up on everything at one time. And yet there was still someone who acknowledged him. Someone who needed him. However— “Let me think about it for a while.....” After two more weeks, he would probably be going back to the royal palace. Without revealing his identity to anyone, without giving anybody notice, he was going to just disappear.

“.....I see. Well, take your time. More like, don’t think about it with that

grave-looking face, all right? You can even join as a trial, then if you find it doesn't suit you then you can just leave, no hard feelings."

"I am not making a grave-looking face. I just haven't perfected the art of ditch cleaning yet. I want to prioritize that first."

"Hah, you sure are obsessed with that." Rosshi returned Sharlo's joke-like reply in a similar manner.

Then, not long after, the two of them finally reached the royal capital branch of Elunheine Adventurer's Guild.

While Rosshi was talking with a receptionist, Sharlo gave some serious thought to his future course. What was it that he should be doing from now on? Even when he returned to the royal palace, he had no place there. More like—and this was something that he felt even more keenly after becoming an adventurer—his younger sister Lynfil was definitely more suitable to be the next ruler. *(This is me we're talking about. If I go back to the royal palace and find myself with nothing to do, then I'll definitely fall back into that self-indulgent lifestyle. My true nature is slothful.)* Admitting it was a bit painful, it was the truth, and there was no denying it.

(Rather, what if I just continue being an adventurer under this alias.....?) But if so, then he could no longer remain in this country. If he ever found himself in trouble, he knew he wouldn't be able to hold himself back from running to his father or sister for help.

(No wait, but would I be able to endure situations that would make me want to cling to them? Ugh..... What to do? What should I do..... More like, is this something that I have to decide here and now.....?) Just like his thoughts, he himself walked around the receptionist lobby round and round in circles.

Bump.

"Oh, sorry."

"Kyah!"

Until he bumped into someone. Looking down, he realized that a slightly plump girl had fallen on her butt. She was small-bodied and had a baby face. *(It would be better if she had a more adult-like aura, but this in itself is already*

quite.....) Sharlo could not help but to ogle a bit while observing her. It just so happened that girls who seemed enveloping were his type. Or to be more specific, well-rounded girls were his type.

“Apologies, I was in the middle of my thoughts.”

“Oh no, I was also a bit spaced out—eep!”

Sharlo had proffered a hand in a gentlemanly manner. However, the smile that he managed despite not being used to smiling apparently came out looking rather... disagreeable, so much so that it caused the girl to shrink back.

Right after she let out a small cry— “You ruffian, what have you done! Step away from Hanna... my lady immediately!” The shout caused Sharlo to jerk his hand back.

It was here that a person wearing the outfit of a butler smartly slid in between the two of them. The features framed by black hair tied up in the back cut quite the dashing image indeed.

“Yuli.....” The girl who was called “Hanna” looked up at the butler’s back with a spellbound expression.

“How lacking in common sense do you have to be to pace around and around in such a crowded place?!”

“Wh-What’s your problem. We were both not looking at where we were going. Hah, what’re you being so haughty about anyways. You and your woman-like face.”

“You knave, you dare mock me!” The butler—Yuli—glared at Sharlo, and reached for the thin-bladed sword on his waist.

“What are you do—?! H-Hah. So you are going to draw your sword on an unarmed person, are you? You talk high and mighty, but you act like a mere bandit.”

“You knave, I will endure your repeated insolent mockery no more! Very well. Let’s do this with our bare fists then. I’ll change the shape of your face for you!”

Sharlo could not help but to shiver at the sight of Yuli cracking his fingers. However, at that moment— “Oi, what’s the commotion?” asked Rosshi while

rushing over in a fluster.

“Y-Yo, did you find a good quest?”

“There were no quests for carrying cargo to Treia. Right now the receptionist is checking whether there’s anything similar. More like, this isn’t the time for that. What did you do?”

“I-I was not in the wrong.”

“You continue with your drivel?! How about you be a man and own up to your own mistakes!”

This was one thing that he did not want to hear from a guy with good looks. Sharlo grounded his teeth hatefully. *(Screw him and his trying to act cool in front of a girl. This is why I hate handsome guys. Both guys and girls, if they’ve got good looks, you can be sure they’ve got shit personalities. Lynfil being the only exception.) (What an egoistic man he is. If even someone like this can be an adventurer, then this country cannot amount to much.)* Sparks flew as the two of them glared at each other.



As tension ran through the lobby area of the adventurer's guild, *that man* suddenly showed up.

"What is this? What a coincidence it is to find you in the royal capital." Shouzou placed a hand on Sharlo's shoulder. "Are you perhaps here for a quest?"

"Oh, uh, yes I am. Actually—" Sharlo explained what had happened succinctly.

"I see. And so you are here looking for a quest that you can do on the way back. Then you're in luck."

As a question mark appeared above the head of everyone looking on, Shouzou paid them no mind and calmly approached Yuli and Hanna. Then he told them, "He's Sharlo-kun, the one I told you two about."

"Wha-?!"

"Geh!"

Both of them trembled in shock.

"Sharlo-kun, these two are customers of the guild who have come from a foreign country. This is Lady Hanna, and that's Yuli-san, her escort." Sharlo's mouth fell open.

Without paying any mind to the state that the three of them were in, Shouzou nonchalantly declared, "Sharlo-kun, how about you escort these two to Treia? After that, you can stay on as their local guide. Of course, this will be processed as an official quest issued by the two of them."

"What? Guide.....?" Sharlo looked at the two "customers" uncomprehendingly.

Whereas Hanna was looking up at the ceiling while murmuring an enigmatic "oy vey!" Yuli was still trembling all over. As for her state of mind— (*This..... This rude and egoistic man is the one who I might be wedded to, oh God?*) —She was in the middle of cursing God just a little bit.



Several hours before Sharlo and Yuliana's first meeting, Shouzou was in the

royal villa, sitting across from the two so-called “envoys” from the empire. He had already seen through the fact that the attendant wearing a butler outfit who identified as “Yuli” was none other than Sharlo’s arranged marriage partner.

Marriage was something to be decided by the couple themselves. So was this not the perfect opportunity then? Since she had traveled such a great distance to come all the way over, then why not introduce them to each other?

So for the moment, Shouzou talked with them about the arrangements for inspecting the country without letting on that he had realized Yuli’s real identity. “—And because of that, I think it would be a good idea for you two to make the fortress city of Treia your base. Allow me to arrange for your accommodations. Naturally, we will shoulder all the costs.”

Shouzou had been addressing Hanna when talking, but it was Yuliana who replied. “Very well, we understand. However, there is no need to pay in advance on our behalf. We have enough to cover our own travel expenses.” Even though Shouzou had said “shoulder all expenses,” Yuliana rephrasing that into “pay in advance” was most likely her way of expressing that she “would not accept charity.”

Shouzou nodded. “Then lastly, as for the person who will serve as your guide —”

“Hm? Hold on. Sir Onigawara, are you not going to do it yourself?”

“My sincere apologies. I am unable to accompany you all hours of the day.”

Yuliana’s face turned into a complicated mixture of relief and disappointment. By the looks of things, Shouzou was clearly someone in an important position of the country. She wanted to ask him a lot of things, but he had the appearance of a wild beast and yet seemed well versed in the art of communication. She thought instinctively that he would be quite difficult to handle.

“So as I was saying, the person who will serve as your guide—” The two of them gulped, waiting for Shouzou’s next words. “—I intend to ask Prince Sharlo to do it personally.”

“Wha-?!”

“Geh?!”

That name coming up here caught both of them off guard.

Hanna turned panicked “What shall we do?!” eyes toward Yuliana.

What is there to do, thought Yuliana in great perplexion. There was no one better suited than the prince if they were to understand the state of the country. However, by assigning the very person who was the subject of the marriage talks as a guide, surely the kingdom was also trying to gauge Yuliana through her attendant Hanna.

Gain a clear picture of the state of the kingdom, and proceed with the marriage talks if she determines they are worthy as an ally.

This was Yuliana’s intention in crossing the ocean. Another way of putting it was that if this kingdom could give her enough power to resist her father the emperor, then she would ensure that the marriage goes through by any means necessary. What she had seen and heard so far told her that the national power of the kingdom was much higher than she had initially expected. That was the conclusion that she had drawn along the journey from the port to the royal palace.

According to what she’d heard, in this kingdom was a warrior who could defeat a water dragon by himself. This country also had an adventurer system much more advanced than that of any other country, and many excellent adventurers were in the employ of those guilds. The current king was such a great leader that he was called the “Sage King,” and the country itself maintained great relationships with all of its neighbors.

Yuliana hated how wretched and miserable she seemed in comparison. (*For the sake of my goals, can I bring myself to fawn over the prince the first time I meet him, to resign myself to being a mere tool.....?*) However, she was already a tool for politics in the first place. She did not have the right to love freely. If the alternative was being used by the hated emperor, then she might as well— (*Don’t waver. This is something that I’d already set my mind on. If those around wish to use me as a figurehead for the opposition against the emperor, that is fine too. I will use them back, use the kingdom, all for the sake of bringing down the Emperor of Ruin.*) Yuliana surprised even herself with how calm she was.

And that was how a question rose up in her mind from what Shouzou had said.

“May I make a request?”

“What is it?” Shouzou’s kind-looking expression did not budge an inch.

In spite of the slight twinge of unease from now being able to read what he was thinking, surely he had the means to lower her guard even more. *Don’t let him pull the wool over your eyes. Stay vigilant*, said Yuliana to herself.

“If the prince is to walk about on the streets, that means being followed by a large retinue of guards. We actually don’t want such a conspicuous displa—”

“There will be no guards.”

“Hah?”

“Eh?”

“His Royal Highness Prince Sharlo will escort you by himself.”

“H-Hold on a moment. I understand that this country has good public order. However, there’s no telling whether there’s anyone aiming for the life of a member of the royal family. This would be effectively giving those people the perfect opportunity to target the prince.....”

“There’s no cause for concern on that front,” replied Shouzou nonchalantly. “At the moment, the prince is but a mere adventurer under an alias.”

“Hah?”

“Eh?”

The more they learned, the more confused they became.

“Why... on earth would.....?”

“The circumstances are complicated, but at the moment, His Royal Highness is filled with motivation in regards to fulfilling his duties in that capacity.”

(How could this be.....) Yuliana was so moved she trembled.

The people are the treasure of a country, for without the people, there would be no country.

To get up close to the people and see things from their perspective..... *(Surely*

that is why the prince is hiding his name and exposing himself to danger as an adventurer.) She had heard that he had almost never gone out due to being stricken with illness, but Yuliana was in deep admiration for what a wonderful person he turned out to be.

Incidentally, the fact that Sharlo had given up on the succession and become a hikikomori NEET was too embarrassing for the king to write down in the arranged marriage profile. He had thought that the other side would turn the offer down immediately upon seeing Sharlo's portrait anyway, so he had offhandedly wrote "because he's ill" instead. And that poorly thought out lie was now causing an enormous misunderstanding.

Seeing Yuliana's reddened cheeks from the side, Hanna felt an impending sense of danger. (*That is the face of a girl in love!*) It was very likely that within Yuliana's mind, the image of Prince Sharlo being "a wonderful person who puts the people first" was fast becoming set.

However, Hanna was very suspicious. Why did Shouzou gloss it over by calling the circumstances "complicated"? Did that not mean that there were reasons that he could not share? No, that was surely the case. In the first place, the whole "stricken with illness" thing was questionable. The mass of fat depicted in the portrait gave off a powerful stench of a decadent life. Even if he was indeed suffering from ill health, Hanna was sure beyond doubt that that was caused by a self-indulgent lifestyle. Even while she was thinking this, the mental image of the "perfect Prince Sharlo" was steadily being completed inside Yuliana's mind. That enraptured side profile was already— (*The face of a female in heat?!*) There was no longer any time. Hanna gathered every scrap of resolve inside of her, then replied, "Understood. We'll accept your offer."

(*If Her Imperial Highness can be happy, then there's nothing better. However —*) There was no way that she could be happy together with a prince of a possibly hostile nation, much less one who lives a decadent and self-indulgent life. Therefore, this marriage proposal must never succeed. (*.....I will definitely thwart it!*) Ufufufu♪

Fuhehehe♪

For some reason, both of them were laughing in a rather disturbing manner.

However, Shouzou paid it no mind. Marriage is something for the two people to decide for themselves. His role was to let the two of them meet and personally determine their affinity for each other. (*Leaving the schemes of the country and the attendant's intentions aside, the point is to leave the youngsters to themselves.*) Naturally, his role was to prepare the stage for that. That included making preparations beforehand in order to deal with any possible troubles that might arise.

“Allow me to step out for a while. Afterward, I shall guide the two of you through the city and to an adventurer’s guild. There we shall secure our method of travel and then make our way to Treia.”

Yuliana nodded in agreement, so Shouzou quickly went to King Alsbeit to gather everything needed.

This was how the three of them ended up being in the royal capital branch of Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild— But who would have thought that they’d be arguing the moment they met each other.

Even while considering the fact that a negative first impression could easily be flipped into a positive when it comes to relationships, there was still a point that worried Shouzou.

“.....Dammit. Why do I have to accompany this foul-mannered and handsome guy..... Why don’t all the people with good looks die already. Lynfil being the only exception.” Seeing him complaining under his breath nonstop, could it be that— (*It seems that Princess Yuliana’s face does not fit his preference.*) Though before talking about faces and whatnot, Sharlo was under the misunderstanding that Yuliana was a guy.

Shouzou was torn whether or not to help Yuliana keep up her pretense as a guy. If asked why, there were any number of possible excuses. However, rather than being weirdly self-conscious about her being a girl, maybe it would be better to first see if Sharlo could pick up on Yuliana’s nature as a person, gender aside. (*Yes, that sounds right. For some reason I feel like I’m forgetting something, but let’s put that aside for now.*) ★

Under the guise of it being a quest accepted by the party that Sharlo was temporarily a part of, the entire group headed off toward Treia together. Hanna

initially objected to riding in a carriage meant for cargo, but then backed down when Yuliana expressed ready agreement. As such, the journey itself went quite smoothly.

Along the way, Shouzou handed a certain something to Sharlo. It was a package bundled in cloth. Sharlo unwrapped it— “Wha-?!”

“——?!” Hearing Sharlo’s cry of astonishment, Yuliana looked over from her position a distance away, then swallowed down her own shock.

“Nice, is that a replica of Sylphid? Looks pretty well made too.” In contrast, the leader of the adventurer party, Rosshi, did not look too surprised. That was because, as he said, he was under the assumption that it was a “replica.” There was not even a scrap of doubt in his mind that it was a “fake.”

After all, the real Sylphid was one of the Four Holy Arms of the Alsbeit royal family. It was a one-of-a-kind masterwork sword that could not even be priced.

The Four Holy Arms would be put on display for the public to see every once in a while, so there were many replicas floating around. Ranging from shoddy pieces that couldn’t even serve as a kitchen knife to top-of-the-line pieces that even Gold rank adventurers would use, there was a huge variety among the replicas themselves. However, the one that Shouzou brought along was, without doubt, the real one.

Sharlo, who had previously touched it once before, as well as Yuliana, who knew that Shouzou had been bestowed something by the king before they departed, could both tell with the first glance.

“I thought that as an escort, you’d probably need a weapon of your own. So I borrowed it from your father, Sharlo-kun.”

“H-He actually let you get away with this.....?”

“Hm? Well, it happened to be hanging on the wall near where we were talking.” Shouzou remembered how when he just randomly pointed at it and said, “This should do,” the king had given him a very sour look. “Best case scenario is that you never have to use that sword. Though, well, you’ll just be guiding them around, so you probably won’t need it.”

Next, Shouzou took a handkerchief out of his pocket and handed that over to

Sharlo as well. “Keep this on your person at all times. If anything happens, this will save you.”

“What is this? Is there some magic cast on it or something?”

“Hm, yeah, something like that.” With this, all preparations were completed.

Even if Sharlo got wrapped up in trouble of some sort, this should help to buy some time.

“Well then, about the flow of things after you reach Treia—” Shouzou spoke matter-of-factly. The general gist was “there is no plan.” Everything would be up to Sharlo’s discretion. The only thing that Shouzou would help do was arrange for accommodation. Then after that he would only drop by every once in a while to see how things were going.

Sharlo seemed extremely discontent with it all, but in the end buckled under Shouzou’s forceful insistence.

However, Shouzou still felt like there was something tugging at the back of his mind. Just vaguely and ambiguously, something that he couldn’t quite put his finger on— ★

—When the group reached Treia, the sun had already fully set. After parting from Rosshi and his party, Shouzou informed Sharlo of the location of the inn that he had arranged, then he also went home.

“So what am I supposed to do anyway.....” Despite still feeling completely at a loss, for the time being, Sharlo led the two to their inn.

After finishing a simple dinner, he helped grab their luggage and guided them to the room booked for them.

Upon opening the door— “S-So large! We don’t actually need such a large room though.....” Hanna looked quite obliged while looking around the room restlessly. However, her eyes sparkled when she saw the canopied bed. In addition, there were also very comfortable-looking sofas as well as a very large table.

“Oi, uh, Yuli, yeah? We’re here.” Sharlo opened the door of a room tucked away in the back. It was quite sparsely furnished, with only a single bed, a table,

and two chairs. It was clearly the room for attendants. In terms of size, it was more than enough for a single person to sleep in.

However, while Yuliana was looking at the room with such impressions, the oddness of Sharlo's words slowly registered in her mind.

"Hmph, it's a bit tight for **two people**, but there's no helping it, I suppose." Yuliana could not help but to do a double take at Sharlo.

Hanna also sent him a "what is this guy even saying?" kind of look.

However, Sharlo paid them no mind, declaring assertively, "There's only one bed, so we'll have to take turns using it. But I'm going to insist on getting to use it today."

"Y-You ruffian..... what... are you saying.....?"

"Before meeting up with you two, I also did another quest that required a lot of heavy lifting, so I'm really tired. I think that's a pretty legit reason, isn't it?"

"That's not what I'm asking! Why are you talking like you sharing a room with me is a foregone conclusion!"

"What are you saying? Onigawara said 'stay close by 24/7,' right? Even without that, me sleeping over is much more efficient than commuting to and fro everyday."

"Do you not have your own room?"

"I'm basically being treated as another one of Lady Hanna's attendants, right? Instead of booking one more room, this one by itself is enough, isn't it?"

"N-No, but..... Th-Then I'll share the room with H—"

"Haah?! You plan to sleep in the **same room as a girl** even though you're a mere attendant? How shameless are you!"

It was then that the pieces finally clicked for Yuliana and Hanna.

Sharlo was still under the misunderstanding that "Yuli" was a guy.

"Come on, Lady Hanna is probably tired from the long journey, so let her have her rest already. Can you be any less thoughtful?" Sharlo quickly pulled Yuliana's arm.

“No... that’s... but... I.....” If she admitted to being a girl here, then she ran the risk of having her true identity being revealed. Her head was so thoroughly confused that she could not think of any good excuse on the spot.

“Save it, man. Just come already. I don’t like it either, sharing a room with a guy that I’ve just met today. But we’ll just be sleeping anyways, so don’t think too much about it. So then, Lady Hanna. We’ll see you in the morning.”

Hanna was so flustered that she could do nothing but simply see them off.

This day, for the first time in her life, Yuliana spent the night together with someone of the opposite gender— ★

That night, when Shouzou stepped into his bedroom, he suddenly came to a start of realization.

(Oh wait! Sharlo-kun thinks that Princess Yuliana is a guy! Right around now, the two of them.....) Might possibly be sharing the same room.

(I can’t imagine anything happening..... but.....) Shouzou was worried, but then again this was not something that he could check in on immediately.

“Ufufu♪ Ho~ney♪” Especially not when his wife Silvia was approaching him while cuddling a pillow that said “YES” on both sides—

Chapter 4: It's Always Best to Crush a Plot the Night It Happens

Shouzou sat back in the sofa in his living room. It was so late at night that all his children had already gone to bed.

He used the remote control to turn on the TV. Loud music blasted out, which prompted him to turn down the volume in a fluster. Eventually, words were boldly plastered over the screen.

[The Records of The Infiltration of the Bardimian Empire *What The Home Tutor Saw!*]

Shouzou tilted back a glass filled with whiskey, half amused and half taken aback at how much more unnecessarily elaborate the videos were getting. This video was the video report that Emalia had secretly filmed deep within the Bardimian Empire. It was not the first one that Shouzou had asked her to film.

The title screen faded, and finally the real content began.

“Ya~hoo, Papa, you watching this?”

“Looking at this~?”

There stood Kana and Hina deep within a dense forest, energetically waving their hands.

“Pfft, cough, cough.....” Shouzou choked at seeing his own children on the screen.

Then the video continued. Emalia’s face jumped into frame from the side while holding a mike (actually just a random object to fit the atmosphere) in one hand. “So then, this time we have special guests joining us..... though to be honest, they kinda just invited themselves.”

As Emalia managed a twitching smile, a new voice from off screen could be heard, saying, “Emalia-san, move on, move on.”

The urging voice was that of Silvia’s. Apparently she was taking on the role of

cameraman.

Realizing that she was also present allayed Shouzou's worries. In the first place, the video was a recording, and the two younger sisters were currently safe and fast asleep upstairs.

After that followed more of Kana's and Hina's comical back and forth, as well as Emalia's valiant struggle to move things forward. In that way, the video gradually moved locations. That continued until— "Okay everyone, from here on out we have to be quiet, all right?"

"All right!"

"All right~!"

"I said to be quiet, didn't I!"

"*Ufufu*, you're the most energetic person here, Emalia-san."

"Ugh."

Within the absolute absence of any sense of tension, with Emalia alone looking very nervous while taking the lead, the party cautiously proceeded down an animal trail.

Then the forest opened up. The ground abruptly fell away, turning into a sheer cliff high up.

Slo~wly, the three faces of Emalia and the two sisters peeked out from within the foliage to look down the cliff. The camera also followed suit.

Down at the bottom was a plot of bare dirt roughly the size of a baseball field. On the field were monsters lined up in ranks.

Shouzou recognized them. So did his family members.

"Isn't that the one that came to our house before?" asked Kana.

"It's Doggy-sama~" confirmed Hina.

"Those are called hellhounds," Emalia told the two.

It was a magic beast that looked like a dog covered in black fur. The one that they had seen before was as big as an elephant, but the ones lined up down below were about twice the size of a normal large dog. But with that said, even

that size was already more than a normal buff man could handle.

And yet, there were more than a hundred of them down there.

Five made up a group, and they displayed movements that made it clear that they each understood their specific roles and positionings in their respective groups. The teamwork between groups was also carried out flawlessly. They were being controlled very masterfully.

“It seems that the rumors were true after all. The empire is indeed training magic beasts for military use.” Emalia leaned into the camera with her “mike” still in one hand. “It is an incredible feat just to train a single magic beast. However, to pull it off in those numbers, and to do it so naturally as if moving one’s hands and feet, is nothing short of a miracle. They have yet to be employed in a real battle, but this is a dire situation indeed. Really, this is really ba—*wahyah?!?*”

Having leaned too far forward, Emalia almost fell off down the cliff. Kana and Hina hurriedly grabbed her clothing and pulled her back to safety.

“S-Sorry about that..... Where was I..... Oh right, so, the empire has under its employ not only hellhounds. I have also heard that they are also experimenting with controlling giant-type magic beasts like ogres and cyclopes. Just thinking of them all gathering together gives one the shivers. If these forces were to accompany the empire’s normal army in assault, then would the kingdom be able to fend them off?” With leaves still scattered throughout her hair, Emalia looked at the camera with a serious face. “Reporting live, this is Emalia.”

She held the face for a while, before eventually letting go of the tension with a sigh.

With this, the video..... still had yet to end.

“All right everyone, we’re going to head back now.”

“Ehh, we have to go back already?”

“Hina-sama wants to play more~”

The children expressed their displeasure.

“No, no, no, in the first place we didn’t come here to play. It’d be a big

problem if we were to be discovered.”

“How big a problem?”

“It would be a problem~?”

“Of course it would! Although they probably don’t know what a video camera is, if we are spotted here, it’s only natural that we would be suspected of being spies. Though well, it is true that we are spies from an enemy country,” explained Emalia in a somewhat proud tone.

At that moment, Kana poked Emalia’s shoulder a few times. “But they’ve already spotted us.”

“Wha—?” The camera panned to follow where Kana pointed.

Underneath the cliff, many soldiers were looking toward Emalia and the others’ location while shouting something. Apparently they had alerted the soldiers to their presence earlier when Emalia almost fell off.

One soldier blew a whistle, then 10 hellhounds began running toward the girls’ direction. There was a sheer cliff that blocked off the magic beasts’ path—
“They’re climbing up?!”

There were no footholds firm enough to support their giant forms. However, by plunging their sharp claws into the cliffside, the hellhounds were making their way up the cliff as if running on flat ground.

(From the looks of things, they would be able to easily climb up Treia’s walls then.) Shouzou calmly analyzed what he was seeing.

The Magic Repellent Powder that magic beasts hate was applied all over the wall. That was why wild magic beasts never approached the city. However, there was no telling whether it would still be effective against well-trained ones.

As Emalia continued to be flustered, Kana and Hina jumped onto the back of the blue dragon Puru that suddenly flew over and quickly took off. Emalia was hoisted up by Silvia the cameraman, and they also took to the skies.

It was here that the loud music played again, and the screen faded to black with “Fin” prominently displayed in white. Apparently this was the end of this

report.

Shouzou turned off the TV, then leaned back into the sofa. (*The Bardimian Empire is turning into quite the troublesome opponent indeed.*) In this world, the threat of magic beasts was much more prominent than that of other countries. Although all countries had standing armies, the main duties of those forces were usually magic beast subjugation and the maintaining of public order.

By perfecting the technique to control magic beasts, the empire had apparently alleviated this problem within their own borders. That was how they had the spare resources to proactively invade other countries.

And this time, the empire had finally reached the stage where they could use their magic beasts to bolster their own forces in war. Most likely, this was an idea that no one else had thought of, that no one else had attempted before.

In the Onigawara house was one magic beast that had gotten attached to the family: Puru the blue dragon. Aside from that, there was also an old man in the kingdom who bred a certain species of magic beast. However, such cases were extremely rare.

(*In which case, it probably means that they are using strange methods to control the minds of the magic beasts, like they did with the water dragon.*) Even so, they should require a large number of controllers, which couldn't be so easy to find. However, it was clear to see that the empire was indeed making steady progress. If they succeeded, then that would be akin to them getting spurs on their boots in their quest to expand their borders. The possibility of them attacking the kingdom, even without a pretext, would leap up dramatically.

But when thinking about it the opposite way, if a wrench could be thrown into their military plans of using magic beasts for war, then the empire would surely be pressed to review their objectives going forward.

(*While I have Emalia-san continue with her reconnaissance, I should also start thinking up several countermeasures as well.*) Shouzou drained the remainder of his glass of whiskey in one gulp. While enjoying the fiery sensation at the back of his throat, he continued spinning the gears inside his mind deep into the

night— ★

The third day of Yuliana and Hanna's inspection of the kingdom began with leaving Treia early in the morning to head toward the forest southwest of the city. Beside that, they also went around to several caves and such, striking up conversations with adventurers in the middle of their respective quests. By the time they returned back to their inn in Treia, night had already fallen.

Yuliana sat at the edge of her bed and loosened her neck. A long sigh escaped from her lips. (*Once again, night has come.....*) Her mood dropped like a ton of bricks.

At the moment, Sharlo was washing off his sweat in the shower, still completely oblivious. If he came out wearing only his underwear like he did yesterday, then she was going to punch him with her bare knuckles. Even if he thought that she was a "guy," there was still a certain degree of etiquette that needed to be maintained.

(*That man, isn't he acting more and more familiar with me day by day? Though it's a fact that he's been disrespectful from the very start, but still.....*) Yuliana was aware that she was also partly responsible for his softening attitude.

Though he was haughty and cheeky, he was very diligent when it came to work, such that she couldn't help but to praise him for it every once in a while. Before setting off, he would research their intended inspection location beforehand, so that he could provide detailed commentary when they arrived. He also was very thorough in arranging for things they needed, such as the carriage and horses. Yuliana aside, he made every effort to ensure that Hanna would never be inconvenienced in any way.

(*He really is working enough to merit the reward amount..... he is, but.....*) Although her first impression of him was the absolute worst, her running evaluation of him was gradually going up. The fact that he really was this country's prince and yet did not stand in a position of being served upon by anyone was worth big points in her book. His speech and attitude were both less than commendable, but could it be that he was actually a serious and kind young man?

“Ahhh, whatever!” Yuliana shook her head as if to rid herself of unnecessary thoughts. Why did she have to fret about Sharlo anyway?

Changing gears, she brought to mind the places she had inspected today. What had been most astonishing to her was the Keroriga breeding grounds located within the southwestern forest.

Magic beasts from a tropical habitat were being bred in this land.

Although the technical side of things was also quite impressive, what surprised her most was the ideology behind the enterprise.

(It was almost the complete opposite of Father’s.) Even if it fell short of actual domestication, the stance of using magic beasts for peaceful means left a deep impression on her.

In contrast, the empire was relying on mind control to exploit magic beasts for military means. What was more, it was being carried out with zero consideration for the danger it posed toward ordinary citizens. If those magic beasts ever got out of control, that would mean devastation to the degree of one or two entire cities being leveled to the ground.

(Just what is Father seeking that he would go to such means.....?) No matter how many times she asked him, no answer was forthcoming.

Her voice could not reach him. Nobody’s voice could reach him.

There was no other option left but to meet his force with another force. Ironically, that was the exact same thing that her father was pushing for.

Just when Yuliana was groaning and clenching her fists so hard they hurt—
“Phew~ I’m all refreshed!” Yuliana shot a glare toward the person who sounded like he hadn’t a care in the world. It was Sharlo, who was in his pajamas. He had just stepped out of the attached bathroom.

“Why are you sitting on the bed? Today is my turn to use it.” Sharlo jumped onto the bed as if to bounce her off of it. The simple bed frame raised a very loud creak of protest. “You also get showered and sleep already. Tomorrow is an early day again.”

“How many times do I have to tell you that I shower in the morning?”

“I’m just saying, it’s more annoying if you putter around before daybreak.”

“Wha—?! You knave, you were awake?!”

“Mm, I’m a light sleeper.”

“D-D-D-D-D-Did you see?!”

“See what?”

“M-M-M-Me being n-naked..... how shameless!”

“The hell you saying? Like I would get excited seeing another guy’s naked body.”

Yuliana came to a start and recovered her cool. “S-So that means you didn’t see anything, right?”

“It’s a pain to open my eyes in the morning. Just let me sleep up to the very last minute.”

“I’ll do my best. I promise to not make any noise at all.”

“No, what I’m saying is, showering in the morn—”

“Get off it and go to sleep already!” Her menacing look was so overwhelming that Sharlo decided to not say anything more. He just silently lay prostrate on the bed.

Yuliana sighed heavily once again— *BOOM!* A distance away, the sound of a collision could be heard. Right after that, a scream rang out.

“What’s that?” asked Sharlo as he quickly sat up.

“I’ll go check.” Yuliana buckled her sword onto her belt, then opened the door that led to Hanna’s room.

Splat. As soon as the door turned in, Hanna fell flat on her face.

“This is not what it looks like, I was not eavesdropping or anything like that.....” Her eyes were swimming around like crazy, but there was no time to question her.

“Hanna, you stay here.” While immediately regretting having unconsciously taken a commanding tone with Hanna, Yuliana proceeded toward the entrance

of the room. Slowly, she opened the door, then poked her head out to check the hallway. At that moment— Whoosh.

Something flew past with incredible speed. Despite having withdrawn her head just in time, Yuliana had seen what that “something” was, and she shivered for it.

“Grrrrrrr.....” A dog-like magic beast with black fur, sharp claws, and crooked fangs was crouching at the far end of the hallway.

“Hell... hound.....” As Yuliana stood there petrified, the large black silhouette leaped toward her— ★

At that time, in the Onigawara residence.

“Ho~ney~♪” Silvia was approaching Shouzou while clutching a pillow that said “YES” on both sides in her hands. However— “We have guests at this late hour, it seems.” Shouzou stood up and focused his senses. There were numerous presences surrounding the house.

“What bothersome guests,” pouted Silvia as her mood deflated.

Shouzou lovingly rubbed her head, saying, “I’ll go ‘greet’ them. You stay here.” Then he lumbered over to the front door, still in his pajamas.

The nighttime visitors were spread out so as to encircle the Onigawara household.

(One, two, three..... ten, eleven. Four pairs are creeping up, each from one side. The final group of three is remaining stationary behind the pair in the front. That’s most likely the commander.) Shouzou reached the front door, still in his pajamas.

Without waiting for any particular timing or anything, he just opened the door and stepped out.

Amidst the falling moonlight, far away, the lights of the city shone like quietly blinking stars.

After softly closing the door, Shouzou kicked off of the ground. Up, up, up he flew into the night sky, over the house, then *BAM!* he landed in the back.

““?!”” The two masked men wearing black stumbled back at the large man

who had suddenly descended from the sky. Shouzou closed in on them in a split second, then lightly brushed their chins with his finger.

For him it was light, but it was enough to cause the masked men's heads to snap to the side. The shake to the brain caused both of them to crumble to the ground. Though they remained conscious, it was but barely. Their legs were like those of a newborn fawn, such that they couldn't stand up even if they wanted to.

Shouzou immediately moved on. He closed in on one of the groups approaching from the side, and brushed their chins in the same way. Then jumped. Upon landing on the other side of the house, he robbed the last pair of their consciousness in once again the same way.

In no time at all, he had already downed 6 people.

The enemy commander did not know exactly what had gone wrong. However, he was aware that indeed something had gone wrong.

The battle plan was that the three groups from the back and the sides would attack simultaneously. Then the forces positioned in the front would get an easy kill catching the prey off guard rushing out of the front door. However, right before the plan was about to be put into motion, the large man who was their target came out from the front door. Right after he appeared, he disappeared. He had actually flown up, but the absolute lack of any preparatory movements made it impossible for the commander's eyes to actually catch it. Instead, he mistakenly thought that the target had used some form of movement magic.

After that, the time to launch the attack came, then passed. But no matter how long he waited, there was no scream from the house.

Something had happened.

The commander looking on from the back could not believe it. The 11 men here tonight were the best of the best. What's more, every single one of them were specialized in anti-personnel combat. They did not have the ability to deal with catastrophe-class magic beasts like dark dragons. However, they had every confidence of being able to kill a Platinum rank adventurer that could defeat said dragon.

If the opponent was a human, then they were invincible. Assassinations under the cover of darkness had an even smaller margin of failure. Or rather, it was their field of expertise. However— The two who were positioned in front of the front door of the house lay on the ground, immobile. It looked like some large black figure had moved, but it was way too fast for the commander's eyes to catch.

Thinking about it, it was a strange command that they had been given. Where this squad should have been deployed was not here, but **there**. Although they were overkill for a single girl, there was no surer way to ensure the job gets done than having them do it.

If the opponent was someone who had strength rivaling that of Platinum rank adventurers, such as Marquis Goldas, then it might make sense. They had been told that this target was on the same level as the marquis, but the thought “but it's just a no-name guild employee” was strong in their minds.

Ahh, so that's what it was. Surely they had misread everything. And so had *that person* as well.

This squad was specialized for killing humans. They were confident they could kill even Platinum-rank adventurers. However— “Are you the commander?” — they were no match against a superpowered magic beast in the guise of a human.

Before he knew it, standing right in front of him was a giant of a man, glaring down with eyes so sharp they seemed to be glowing.

His two comrades on either side were already prostrate on the ground. The pair positioned in front of the entrance were merely meant as a diversion. Then when the target ran off in a fluster, it was the duty of the three here, himself included, to ensure the target's demise. And yet, two had already been done in within a split second.

“Are you all from the empire?”

Oh yes we sure are. Though there's no way you would be able to determine our background. We've already erased every characteristic that would identify us as being from a northern country. We've also undergone training so that we can remain silent under any kind of torture, and loyalty to the empire has been

battered into our very bones.

“Why did you target this place?”

There’s no way we would know that. Attack. Kill. Those were our orders, and we’re simply here to carry them out.

“This isn’t the only location, is it?” *Of course not. The real target was the inn in Treia. The traitor in that inn.*

The commander had no intention of answering anything. But even if he did, everything was already too late. This very moment, the hellhounds should already be tearing *her* throat to shreds.

“Ha, ha ha.....” Pinched laughter leaked from his throat. Immediately afterward, his head jolted, then the commander lost consciousness— Shouzou looked down at the fallen masked man, his mind whirring. He had not gotten any verbal replies, but for simple questions, Shouzou could read the answers from the way the other party’s eyes moved. These men were assassins sent by the empire, and they apparently did not understand what was going on. But more importantly— Shouzou left the men where they were, and went back into his house. He called out to Silvia, who was still waiting for him in their bedroom.

“I’m worried about Sharlo-kun’s group. I want to head over there now. Can you help send me there?”

“Not a problem. Just in case, I’ll also tie up the scoundrels resting outside.”

“Yes, please.” Shouzou’s body became enveloped in light. It was teleportation magic. The destination was Sharlo’s location—to be exact, it was the location of the handkerchief that Shouzou had handed Sharlo before. That was the coordinate anchor that would allow Shouzou to reach him in an instant.

“Take care, all right?”

With a firm nod in response to his wife’s word of caution, Shouzou instantaneously arrived in Treia— ★

The fortress city of Treia was encircled by high castle walls that prevent the invasion of magic beasts. Or so it was supposed to. However, there was no doubt that what had appeared in one of the inns inside the city was a

hellhound. It was even as tall as an adult male. Its sharp fangs and claws could easily pierce through steel armor, and one swipe from its paw had enough strength to send someone's head flying.

Face to face with the magic beast, Yuliana could only stand stock still, petrified.

It was not because of fear.

It was because she understood.

She understood that that was no ordinary magic beast. It was a unique magic beast, one that was being controlled for military means by someone else.

(Father..... this is how much you..... I.....) She thought she had been mentally prepared. She was in the position of being hoisted up by the anti-emperor faction, so it should not be a surprise for her to be assassinated at any moment. However, even so, she had wanted to believe that he would not raise his hand against the child that had been born between him and a woman he loved so.

Upon perceiving why this timing, and why it was this unit that was deployed, Yuliana could not stop shivering.

The unit that controlled magic beasts was still considered to be in the experimental stage. This, too, was surely another one of those experiments. But if this assassination was to succeed, then her father the emperor would become even more confident that this unit was ready for actual deployment. Then he would immediately launch the invasion of this kingdom.

"Rrr!" roared the hellhound, before lunging at her.

"Ah....." Yuliana could not move.

Death rushed toward her—but.

"The hell you standing still for! You idiot!"

Bam! A force from the side sent her flying. Sharlo had tackled her.

(Who did you call an idiot? Idiot, you're the idiot.....) Sharlo had basically taken Yuliana's position. In other words, the hellhound's open jaw was making a beeline toward Sharlo's throat.

(Please, no. I don't want anyone to die for me—) “Please, no!”

“Eep!” Sharlo’s little scream of fear completely ruined his gallant image from just now. But even so, while averting his eyes from the magic beast, he turned to look at Yuliana, and mouthed, “Run away!”

“Sharlo!”

“Uwahh!”

As if in response to the shouts of both of them, a light sprang up from Sharlo’s body.

Clang! A sound similar to the clashing of swords rang out.

“Grrr!” The hellhound backed up as if it had been repelled. No, it actually had been repelled by the wall of light that had suddenly appeared between it and Sharlo.

“Wh-Wh-What is this.....?” Sharlo understood with his mind that it was defensive magic, but he could not use such magic. If it wasn’t him, then who had cast it? Both Yuliana and Hanna looked astonished, so it probably wasn’t them either.

“A-Anyways, this is our chance!” Sharlo chased the question from his mind, then readjusted his grip on Sylphid, the Sword of Wind. Then— “Let’s run!” He pulled Hanna over, and grabbed Yuliana’s hand. “Oh wind!” He slammed all the magic he had into the Sword of Wind.

A powerful gust of wind suddenly appeared inside the room. It wound around Sharlo’s body, and lifted his well-rounded body slightly off the ground.

“Wh-Whoa?! What’s this? There’s someone else’s magic in the sword?!” He had only expected the sword to make himself lighter and thus a bit faster. However, he could use this in his favor. Sharlo abandoned his original plan of charging down the hallway.

While piggybacking Hanna and firmly grabbing Yuliana’s hand, he glared toward the window in their room. Then his body automatically began rushing in that direction.

This room was on the third floor. If they fell normally, then it would hurt quite

a bit. However, things were different if they could fly.

Or so he thought when, right after shooting out from the window, he immediately found himself being pulled down by gravity. He was still far from being able to use Sylphid properly.

“Wha-?! U-UWAHHHH?!” Down he plunged, head first.

“O-O-O-OH WIND!” He shouted with sheer desperation. At which, his falling speed abruptly slackened. However, the ground was already right there.

Pfftttt.

“Gueh.”

“Pigyah!”

“Fuu…….”

Sharlo crashed into the ground stomach first. Hanna made a weird noise due to the impact. Yuliana had fixed her positioning in midair, and thus managed a perfect landing.

“Owww…… But we made it……” Because of the sudden decrease in speed right before slamming into the ground, nobody was much the worse for wear. However— “Grrr……” Outside the inn were apparently several more hellhounds laying in wait.

“Dammit! You stupid dogs!” Sharlo swung Sylphid around. Small blades of wind flew at the magic beasts. Although the blades did not have nearly enough power to hurt them, it did cause them to temporarily back off warily. Sharlo was not going to let that opportunity go to waste.

“Now’s the time! We run!” He intended to stick with that to the very end. In his eyes, no other option was viable. Staying alive was of the utmost priority. That’s why he chose to run. With no hesitation whatsoever.

Sharlo held Sylphid’s hilt in his mouth, and grabbed Yuliana’s and Hanna’s hand. “Oh-ind!” Then once again they were enveloped in wind, and off they went at top speed— ★

Slowly, a single handkerchief fluttered to the ground. It was the one that Shouzou had said “keep this on your person at all times” to Sharlo when giving

it to him. It was also what had protected Sharlo from the hellhound's pounce. However, when they were jumping out from the window, the wind had caught it from Sharlo's pajama pocket, and sent it flying high into the sky.

The handkerchief slowly settled onto the ground. It was exactly the same location where Sharlo had landed on his stomach earlier.

"Hmm? This is....." The person who picked it up was a young man with narrow eyes. He had a thin sword on either side of his waist, as well as two spears criss-crossed on his back. As he closely examined the handkerchief—"Pardon me. May I ask you a question?"

He turned around at the deep voice. There stood a huge man with a bearded face. The young man recognized him. This was most definitely "Shouzou Onigawara." Judging by how he had not felt the man approach, he must have appeared with some sort of movement magic.

(The fact that he appeared here must mean.....) Thinking that he had a good grasp on how things were developing, the young man asked in return. "Can I ask you a question first? Or so I ask but I'm already asking a question. But based on the fact of you being here, can I draw the conclusion that the assassination unit already failed in their mission?"

An aura of rage billowed out from Shouzou. "I'll make this simple. Are you my enemy or my ally?"

The young man gulped before the overwhelming sense of pressure. "Even if I offer my subjective answer, I don't think that would have much meaning. However, let me introduce myself first." His narrow eyes widened slightly. "My name is Cain Ketora. I am a Platinum class adventurer."



Around the time when Shouzou had arrived in Treia, Sharlo was in the middle of barreling down a street.

Hellhounds had very sharp noses. Although Sharlo and company kept turning into alleyways here and there in a bid to shake them, it was not working at all. That was why they decided to head toward Central Plaza, with the hope of asking for help from the city guards stationed there. However—"Something's

wrong. Why haven't we seen anyone so far.....?"

Hanna expressed agreement from her position on his back. "That really does seem strange. Although it is quite late at night, to not see even a single drunkard around....."

Yuliana frowned while keeping pace beside them. "This is the effect of a magic spell that wards off people. Clearly our intentions have already been seen through—" Abruptly, she braked and shouted, "Stop! There's someone... in front....."

Sharlo also came to an abrupt stop. He strained his eyes, and true enough, saw a woman standing in the middle of the avenue. She was wearing a dress that clearly displayed her outline, as well as a black mantle. On her head was a cone-shaped hat with a wide brim. With a metal-tipped tobacco pipe in hand, the figure of her elegantly puffing out purple smoke, when combined with her beauty, painted an almost bewitching picture.

Upon recognizing the features of the woman standing far away, Yuliana murmured with a shaking voice, "Lorelei... Ketora....." Who would have thought that her father would hire such a bigshot to come after her.

Sharlo reacted to the last name "Ketora." If he recalled correctly, that was the last name of a brother-sister pair of Platinum rank adventurers active in this country.....

"It's been a while, Princess. I suppose I should commend you for having run all the way here, hm?"

Upon hearing the beautiful woman's sugary sweet voice and seeing her coquettish gestures, Sharlo— "We're running!"

—pulled the hand of Yuliana, who had stopped in place.

"Eh? W-Wait, hold on, waaa~~!" This was Sharlo, this kingdom's first prince. A guy who would not deviate for anything after having set his mind on something. However, their opponent was not one who was going to let them go so easily.

"Well, I had half expected you to do that," said the elder Ketora sibling, Lorelei, after which she brought the tobacco pipe to her mouth and began blowing out purple smoke. The smoke expanded to a size that seemed clearly

beyond the capacity of her lungs, until it became a cloud-like mass.

(*What... is that.....?!*) Sharlo looked back while running, and was astonished at an even more bizarre change. The smoke had become long and thin like a snake, and was rushing toward them. Along the way, it split into two, with one going ahead as if to cut off Sharlo and company, while the other closed in on Yuliana, who Sharlo was still pulling along by hand.

Unlike that exchange with the hellhound, no protection magic activated for them.

“Dammit!” Sharlo twisted his body, and in doing so, pushed Yuliana to the ground. Then he slashed at the smoke that immediately passed by overhead with Sylphid.

He had not expected much from this swing of desperation, but the smoke dispersed like a gentle explosion.

“Tsk, making it difficult.....” said a soft voice.

Sharlo didn’t understand what was going on, but this was no time for that. Unable to maintain his posture any longer, he fell fully onto Yuliana.

“Oooph,” went Sharlo.

Upon being thrown off, Hanna also let slip a “*gueh*.”

“—?!” cried Yuliana silently with a red face, having become pressed into the ground.

“S-Sorry..... hm?” Sharlo was bewildered at a mysterious sensation. He had ended up completely falling onto Yuli, who was on his back. However, his face was enveloped in something strangely soft.

(*No way, were these.....*) “Boobs?!” When he nuzzled his face against them as final confirmation— “If you know it then get off already!”

“*Guboha!*”

A fist slammed into his temple, sending him rolling to the side. There was a throbbing pain in his head, but confirmation came first. “You... you’re a girl?!”

With her face completely red from mortification, Yuliana turned to look to the

side. Not denying it was the same as admitting it. Honestly speaking, he hadn't the faintest idea what to make of this. Why was she pretending to be a guy and investigating the internal state of a foreign country? He couldn't even imagine the reason for something like this.

"Why... you..... more like, did you know, Hanna?"

"Eh? Umm, that's, how do I put it....." She also did not deny anything. Clearly she, too, was in the know.

Amidst his confusion, a certain word floated up in his mind.

—It's been a while, Princess.

When Lorelei Ketora first appeared, that was what she had said. Princess. A "princess"... who had come from the Bardimian Empire.....

Sharlo came to a start, then stared closely at Yuli's face. Now that he was taking another look with the awareness that he was looking at a girl, he realized that he recognized this face. Yes, it was the portrait of his arranged marriage partner that had been sent to him from the empire. This face was the spitting image of the face of that beautiful girl wearing a dress.

"You... you're Princess Yuliana....."

Once again, Yuliana only lowered her eyes, and did not deny it.

"What is this..... Wait, could it be that you've already heard about me from Onigawara?"

".....I did indeed. He didn't tell us about your circumstances, but he did say that you are the prince, and that you're being an adventurer." This time, she voiced affirmation, reserved though it was.

She knew his true identity, and was choosing to come into contact with him while concealing her gender. In other words, she must have come to evaluate his worthiness as her future husband. That was the conclusion that Sharlo arrived at. "Ha... ha ha ha..... That geezer, he sure knows how to play a joke....." He could only manage a dry laugh. To his surprise, there was no anger in his heart. "Well, I suppose a princess couldn't publicly visit all those places. So, what did you think then? Do I make the cut?"

“The cut.....? Wh—?! Are you not misunderstanding something here? I did not come here to evaluate you kn—your personage.”

“Then what did you come to do?”

“I... I wanted to see with my own eyes what kind of country it was that I was going to be marrying into. That’s..... there are very complicated circumstances, it’d be hard to explain everything right now.....”

“Hmph. Well, doesn’t matter. I bet that geezer didn’t tell you the most important thing.”

“Important... thing.....?”

Seeing Yuliana tilt her head in puzzlement, Sharlo spoke in a self-derisive tone. “The reason why I’m being an adventurer is because I got chased out. For the sake of straightening out my self-indulgent lifestyle, they said. Even when I return to the royal palace, there’d be no place for me there. After all, the throne—” And here, he smiled as if a weight had fallen off his shoulders. “—will be going to my little sister, not me.”

“Wha—?!” Yuliana was struck dumbfounded. This time, it was her turn to be bewildered. She had heard nothing about this. Sharlo not inheriting the throne was far beyond her plans being derailed. This shattered the very assumptions that she had been working off of from the very beginning. Even if the kingdom truly had the strength to resist the empire, if she was not going to become the coming queen consort, marrying him would not grant her access to the influence necessary to mobilize that strength.

“Too bad for you, I guess. Nothing good will come out of marrying me. I may not know what it is that you want to do, or what it is that you’re planning, but staying in this country would only mean having your life continually being targeted. That’s why—” Sharlo stood up, turning his back toward Yuliana. “Go. Leave this to me.” He brought his sword up, glaring toward the beautiful woman puffing away on her tobacco pipe.

“Hmm? Have you two finished your little conversation, hm?”

“You waited courteously for us to finish? You sure seem at ease.”

“Hmm, since I found the princess, I have no need to rush anymore.” Lorelei

puffed her purple smoke contentedly.

Sharlo said softly toward his back, “What are you still here for! Go! Hurry!”

“But, wait. Why? You have no obligation toward me anymore. And yet, why.....”

“Obligation? That’s not it. I’m an adventurer. Although I was just your guide, I still have the duty to protect my client.” Despite it being a soft voice, the resolve contained inside caused Yuliana’s shoulders to jump.

“Go already! Run! Yuliana!” Yuliana leaped to her feet from hearing Sharlo call her name for the first time. After grabbing Hanna’s hand, she dashed off into an alleyway.

Lorelei squinted her eyes. “You rolly-polly old man... can you not make extra work for me? I really hate troublesome things, hm?”

“I am not an old man! I’m a 16-year-old teenager!”

“Eh, no way?! Seriously.....?”

“What about yourself? Aren’t you trying pretty hard to look younger than your age? If I remember correctly, the elder sister of the Ketora siblings is at a ripe old age, aren’t you, Grandma?”

Lorelei’s eyes shot wide open. “I’m still only in my 20s!” Magic began whirling around her with an almost malevolent density.

“From the point of view of a teenager such as myself, that’s already plenty... OLD!” The sound of something snapping seemed to ring out. Lorelei was looking at the ground. Just when Sharlo thought she was shivering for some reason— “Don’t you... DARE fucking underestimate me! You fucking brat with the face of a geezer!”

Although his knees were already shaking with fear, Sharlo decided to provoke her even farther. Poking someone where they hurt and making them fly into a rage was what he was best at. “The reason you lost against the dark dragon is because your age is catching up with you, isn’t it?”

A thin smile came over Lorelei’s face. Seeing as how the corners of her mouth were twitching furiously, she had apparently gotten so angry that she ended up

smiling. “It never occurred to me that I would be subjected to such insults in this country.....” She began laughing, “hi, hihhi,” like a broken record, immediately after which, “I’LL FUCKING KILL YOU!”

Sharlo chuckled from success. She had fallen for his provocation. That should have diverted her attention away from Yuliana and Hanna. Now all he had to do was buy enough time for the two of them to get somewhere safe, and then get away himself.

Or so he thought, up to the point when innumerable magic formations appeared all around Lorelei.

(Chantless?! As expected of a Platinum rank, I suppose.) Even though he was starting to get cold feet, Sharlo tightened his grip on his sword. From the magic circles rained a bombardment of magic. Balls of fire, shards of ice, spheres of light. He was honestly impressed at this feat of activating magic spells of so many different elements all at the same time.

“Whoa! Hah, hoh! Woachao?!” Sharlo disgracefully dropped to the floor, rolled about, and brought up his sword only barely in time to deflect the light sphere that was about to land where he was evading toward.

“Hmm, you’re managing pretty well. In terms of skill, I’d say you’ve got about one foot into Silver, hm?” Apparently having regained her composure, Lorelei directed her eyes toward the alleyway that Yuliana and Hanna had gone down. “It would be a problem if they get out of the city. It’s annoying, but work takes priority. Guess I’ll finish you off nice and quick first.” With a sadistic smile on her face, she brought her pipe to her mouth again. The purple smoke that she lightly puffed out almost instantaneously expanded into a gigantic wall.

Not good. Having caught his breath after the attacks let up, Sharlo now felt a shiver running down his back. The wall of smoke closed in. Then abruptly, a ball of fire flew through the wall, aimed straight at Sharlo.

“*Fugyah?!* ” Despite barely managing to parry with his blade, the momentum sent him falling onto his butt.

Then he realized. *(This is very bad. Now I can’t tell where the attacks are coming from.....)* Up till then, he had been able to manage somehow by keeping a close eye on the magic formations. Right before they shoot out an

attack, they would emit a faint, telltale glow. The reason why he had been able to handle everything so far was because he could tell where each attack was coming from. However, with a wall of smoke literally obstructing his view, now he wouldn't be able to cope in time. Not only that. Before he knew it, the wall of smoke had completely encircled him.

“Hmm, you're done~ Now there's nowhere to run to.” Accompanied by derisive laughter, magic flew at him from every single direction. With no hint whatsoever as to where each attack was coming from, Sharlo tried desperately to evade and parry, but— *“Guah!”* A clean hit on his back. Right when he was leaned over, a spear of ice had stabbed his back. But surprisingly, it was not as damaging as expected.

(Even though she said she'd finish me off “nice and quick,” it seems she actually intends on slowly tormenting me to death?!) Abruptly, his room in the tower came up in Sharlo's mind. He had wanted to live self-indulgently in there forever. Even if his sister took the throne, he wanted to just live his days indolently, and then to just quietly die when his time was up. *(But now—)* He still did not have any large goals. He still had no dreams nor hopes, nothing that he could put a name to. All he had was only— “I will surpass who I was yesterday!”

Incoming attacks: left shoulder, right flank, straight on. The first two, he evaded with a backstep. As for the light sphere from the front, that he slapped down with his sword. He was beginning to get a handle on his opponent's attack pattern. Almost certainly, Lorelei was aware of his position. That was why the attacks were not random. He could feel clear intention behind them. *(She's trying to prevent me from approaching the wall of smoke.....)* In that case—Sharlo lowered his waist, then dashed off toward his front. Even when attacks landed on him, he merely gritted his teeth and continued on, focusing solely on taking the next step.

“Oh wind!” As soon as he reached the wall of smoke, he swung his sword sharply in a mowing attack. The instant his sword sliced through the smoke, the walls all around immediately dissipated.

The figure of Lorelei with her eyes wide open became clearly revealed. “That can't be! My Purple Smoke Technique can withstand even a squall.....”

Sharlo started running again.

“That sword..... It can’t be the real Sylphid, right.....? Haha, no way that’s true. That’s not something that a low-ranked adventurer would be wielding!” Lorelei lined up numerous magic circles in front of herself. She clearly intended to shoot a volley of magic at the charging Sharlo to send him flying away. “No more time for games. You will now atone for the sin of having insulted me!” The magic circles glowed.

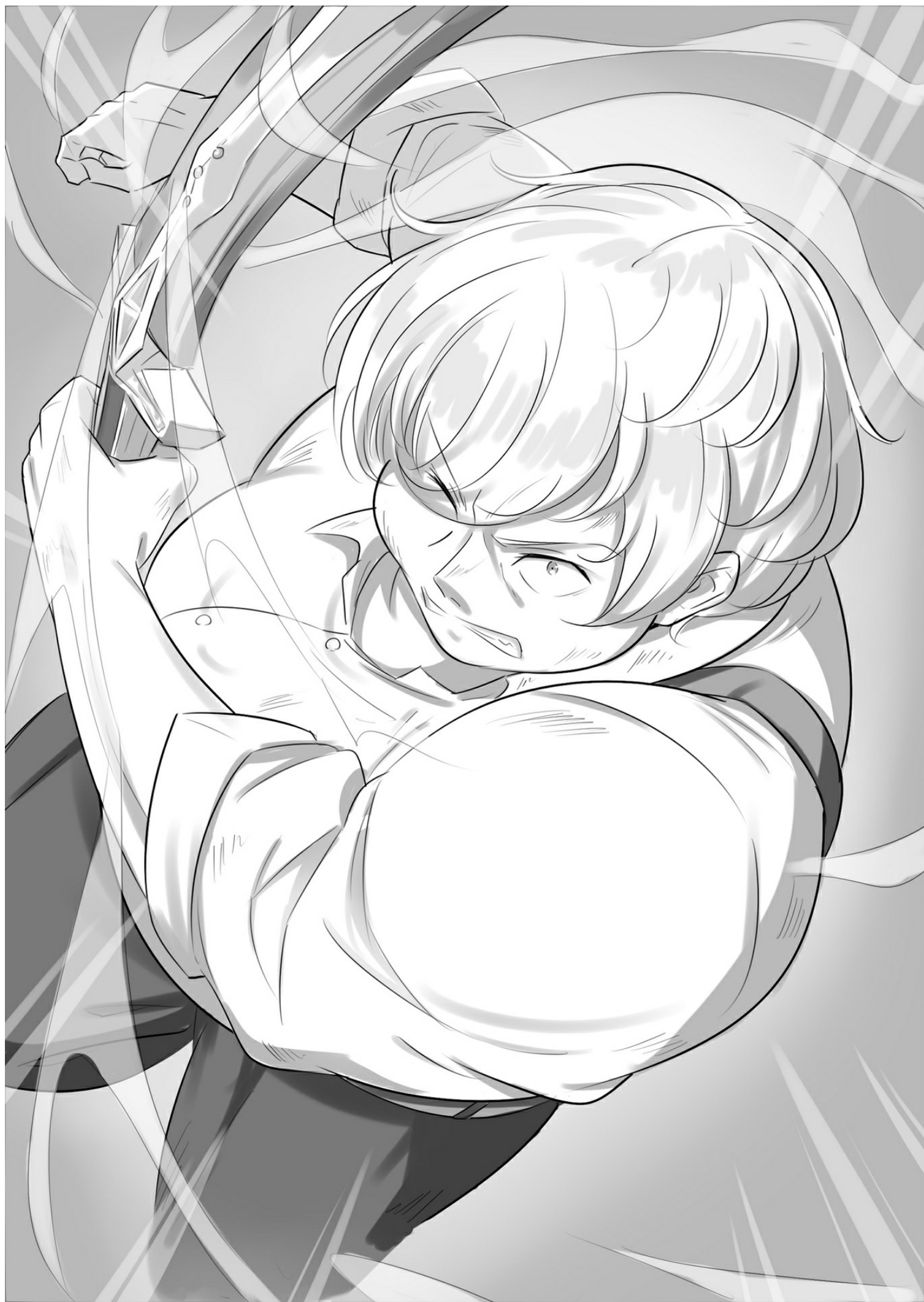
He wouldn’t be able to evade them anyway! So the only choice is to continue charging forward, even if to his death! ““UUUUOOOOHHHHH!!”” Two differently-colored shouts of fighting spirit tore through the air. One was from Sharlo from the front, while the other— Lorelei’s head snapped to look up. With the moon in the background, a lithe figure was dropping toward her. With blade in hand, Yuliana had jumped off of a nearby building.

“Shit!” Lorelei deployed a protective magic circle above her head in a fluster. Yuliana still thrust her sword regardless. A high-pitched *kiin!* rang out, and cracks ran throughout the magic circle. Instantaneously deciding that the magic circle was not going to hold, Lorelei made a big jump to the side.

“Pretty good. In swordsmanship, you’re already Gold class, hm?” But that said, there was no way that she, a Platinum, would lose. However, Lorelei was a pure mage. She would be greatly disadvantaged in close combat. She needed to take a bit of distance— At this moment, with her attention fully directed toward Yuliana, Lorelei had completely forgotten the existence that would prove to be her biggest threat— “.....!” When she caught the round figure in the corner of her eyes, it was already too late. With the fighting spirit from before nowhere to be seen, keeping his voice muffled and footsteps silent, the well-rounded man had gotten close. It was none other than Sharlo, who had expended everything into Sylphid so that he was almost floating above the ground while moving.

“Y-You! You pork steamed bun!” She only had time to shout out an insult. The next instant— BAM!

“Oof!” Sharlo’s shoulder tackle slammed into her straight on.



While enjoying the reward of the sensation of her very bouncy boobs, Sharlo mercilessly sent Lorelei flying off like a cannonball.

Thud. Lorelei crashed into a wall with her back. The strong impact to her head caused her eyes to roll back. Slowly, she slid to the ground, completely unconscious.

(We... beat her.....? Me, a mere Iron..... and her, a Platinum.....?) Sharlo blanked out for a second, but then quickly came to a start and roared, “Why did you come back?!”

“Wh-What is with that tone of yours! You would have been done in if I didn’t lend a hand!”

“Hah! Even if you stayed out of it, I would have been able to win somehow!”

“You sure about that? Aren’t you already injured all over? In my eyes, you look like a ragged dust cloth shot through as magic target practice!”

“Say that again!”

“Say what, huh!”

As the two glared at each other heatedly, an exasperated voice cut in. “All right, all right. This isn’t the time to be arguing together on good terms. Let’s run away already,” said Hanna.

Upon regaining their composure, the two averted their eyes awkwardly.

“W-Well, I’ll just say thanks, for what it’s worth. Th-Thanks.....” murmured Sharlo.

“S-Sure.....” Unsure how best to answer, Yuliana could only wriggle about bashfully.

Hanna ground her teeth, recognizing this to be a highly undesirable situation. This was clearly the cliché romantic scene of two people at each other’s throats who actually acknowledged the other but just couldn’t be honest about it. (*God, please do something about this!*) Perhaps this cry in her heart had indeed reached the heavens.

“Ane-ue!” A young man rushed over to Lorelei. At his waist were two swords,

and on his back were two spears. It took them no time at all to realize the identity of this man who called Lorelei “big sister.”

“““Cain Ketora!”””

In contrast to the older sister who had climbed up to Platinum rank by her magic prowess, this younger brother was a master in the martial arts. In addition, he could use magic too, which made him an even more troublesome opponent than his sister. There was absolutely no other choice but to run. Sharlo grabbed the hands of the two others, and was about to call on the wind and make a quick exit. However, he found a huge wall in his way.

“Unfortunately, it seems we were a step too late.”

Sharlo recognized this deep voice. What he had thought to be a wall turned out to be a man so large that he had to look up at him. It was Shouzou.

“Cain-kun, apologies. It seems some great misunderstanding has happened here.”

Upon being addressed by Shouzou, Cain instead responded in an even more apologetic tone. “I believe I’m the one who should apologize. I am almost certain that this was Ane-ue’s fault for not explaining the situation properly, thinking it too troublesome to do so. From what I can see, her life is in no danger. Please allow me to offer my deepest apologies instead.” Sharlo and the others could not wrap their minds around the sight of Cain deeply lowering his head.

Upon sensing this reaction of theirs, Cain informed everyone present, “Us siblings have accepted a quest to protect Your Imperial Highness, Princess Yuliana.”



The Ketora brother—Cain—was holding his sister, whose eyes were still whirling, in his arms. “I’ve already taken care of all the agents that the empire sent, including their commander. There’s a lot to discuss. Shall we move to a place where we can settle down?” As the spell that Lorelei had cast to keep people away was soon to lose effect, Cain was worried about the city guards arriving soon.

Shouzou and the others nodded at each other, then left the location behind. The group gradually made their way up onto the city walls.

After carefully laying his sister on the ground, Cain turned toward everyone else and deeply lowered his head once again. “Allow me to properly introduce myself once again. I am Cain Ketora, and I am here because my sister and I have accepted a quest from a certain person to protect Princess Yuliana. I sincerely apologize for all the acts of discourtesy performed by my sister.”

“Who is that certain person?” asked Yuliana.

“Unfortunately, I am not at liberty to say. I cannot betray my client’s confidentiality. I ask for your kind understanding.”

In Yuliana’s mind, several rather powerful individuals in the anti-emperor faction came to mind. However, now was not the time to be occupied with that.

“Is the attack this time really ordered by, um, the imperial emperor?”

“We have found no proof. However, we are also quite certain that is indeed the case.”

“What is he thinking..... if he just wants to finish me off, then why purposely target me when I’m in Alsbeit?”

“I cannot claim to be well-versed in politics, but according to my client, it is likely meant as a threat and also a pretext for war.”

By successfully killing the princess, the anti-emperor faction inside the empire would receive a huge blow. At the same time, this was an act of intimidation to alert the kingdom to the fact that the empire had successfully managed to control magic beasts. And lastly, to the rest of the world, a case could be made about how the princess was murdered in the kingdom, which would serve as a pretext to declare war.

“It’s an absurd idea to arrange the assassination themselves and yet lay the blame on the kingdom. No one would believe such a nonsensical claim! In the first place, making enemies of the entire world to prosper as a solitary country is impossible.....” Yuliana was beside herself with indignation, but Shouzou thought differently.

Without concrete evidence, the attention of the other countries would become focused solely on the fact that the princess had indeed been killed inside Alsbeit Kingdom. Although they would surely also suspect the empire, it would not be strange for them to also think that the kingdom was partly at fault for allowing this to happen within their borders. And, though this was not yet publicized, the proceeding marriage talks would also play against the kingdom. The princess went to visit the country she was about to marry into but then died there. Regardless of whether it was by accident or by assassination, the kingdom would surely be bombarded with censure. The choice to use a magic beast unit for this was also a display of confidence. True, there were no human casualties this time, but from this moment on, the kingdom would have to be on its guard against being ambushed by magic beasts.

On the other hand, surely the empire had gained more confidence in their magic beast unit from this incident. Although the attempt ultimately ended in failure, the fact that they had successfully sneaked magic beasts into the fortress city was huge.

(It seems that in order to avoid this war, we really do need to crush that confidence of theirs.) There were cards he could play. However, in the current powder keg situation, the options that could actually prove helpful were limited. In addition, due to still not having sufficient information, it was hard to be certain about anything.

There were two conditions that he needed to clear. Now that the empire had already made a move, it would be best to resolve everything within the very same night. “Princess Yuliana, how much do you know about the magic beast unit?”

“I tried looking into it, but I had yet to gain any information beyond the realm of mere rumor. They have everything under very close watch..... I’m sorry I can’t be of much help.”

“Does that mean you also have no idea how it is that they are controlling the magic beasts? Specifically, what techniques or tools they are using?”

“I’m afraid I have nothing better than mere conjecture. If I get to see the magic beast unit carrying out their training, then I might be able to make more

accurate deductions, but tonight was my first time seeing them actually in action.....”

Hmm, thought Shouzou. Although they still wouldn't have sound information, if they could at least gain relatively reliable deductions— “Princess Yuliana, there's something I wish to show you.” It seemed like there would be great meaning in showing her the footage of the unit's training. “Would you mind accompanying me to my house right now?”

As everyone present tilted their heads in confusion— “However, the hour is late. Please remain quiet, so that my daughters are not roused from their sleep.” Shouzou placed a large finger to his lips, then grinned— ★

After making their way through the roads at night, the group arrived at the Onigawara residence. Near the front door were several empire soldiers bound with belt-shaped magic formations lying limp on the ground. Everyone goggled at the sight, but Shouzou did not spare them even a glance as he invited Sharlo and the rest into his house.

Upon stepping through the front door, Yuliana and Sharlo and everyone else found themselves astonished again and again. The interior being as bright as day despite it being nighttime was indeed surprising, but what they found most shocking was the TV. The sight of people moving around inside a thin box gave all of them the shivers.

“Wh-What on earth is this.....” murmured Yuliana.

“Please just think of this as a kind of magic that records everything that you see so that you can look back at it as many times as you like afterwards.”

“I've never heard of magic like that.....” marveled Yuliana and the rest.

While Shouzou was setting things up, Silvia tended to Lorelei. When she came to, she was also astonished at the room, so much so that she forgot her animosity toward Sharlo.

When all the preparation was done, Shouzou then played the footage that Emalia had secretly taken of the magic beasts being trained. First was the one that showed the hellhounds. Yuliana leaned forward as if sucked in by the sight. The others were also silent, their attention fixated on the footage of magic

beasts moving in perfect synchronized unison. Though everyone did laugh a bit at his daughters' and Emalia's comical exchanges.

After that, Shouzou also played the other training videos that Emalia had supplemented afterward. These ones showed giant-type magic beasts such as ogres and cyclopes.

When he had finished playing all the footage he had, Shouzou turned to Yuliana for comment.

"Well, let me see..... it seemed like all of the magic beasts were young ones. In that case, then most likely they have adopted traditional anti-magic beast countermeasures as the basis of whatever technique they're using."

By capturing a newly born magic beast and sowing the fear of humans into it before releasing it again, that magic beast would learn to avoid human settlements, and the group that the magic beast joins, as well as its offspring, would also have a chance of doing the same.

However, the effect was quite limited, and there were some cases where doing so only further triggered the magic beast's hatred toward humans, making it even more brutal and ferocious.

"Most likely, they are breeding them somewhere. Then they put all the newborns under training so they learn to not resist, after which they cast hypnotic magic on them. Although magic beasts normally don't understand human language, a certain degree of understanding could be made possible through training. Though I can't imagine how difficult that would be."

"There was previously a water dragon that was attacking merchant ships within the kingdom's territorial waters who turned out to be under some form of hypnosis. It had enough self-consciousness to ask for help, but apparently could not break out of it on its own."

"You managed to communicate with a water dragon?"

"It wasn't us that did the talking, it was our blue dragon..... no, let's leave the details of that story for another time. In any case, it was in a state of being forced to obey commands, against its own will. The man who was controlling it was mentally ill, so he couldn't tell us anything specific."

It was clear that some form of hypnosis was being cast on the magic beasts through magic, but the specific details of the hypnosis were not clear. Shouzou had been too occupied with confirming whether the empire was truly the one pulling the strings in the back and thus had not done enough investigating on this front.

Yuliana brought a hand to her chin and contemplated deeply. “Perhaps they might be planting the idea inside the magic beasts that their controller is their parent.”

“Parent?”

“With only a small exception, most magic beasts form societies with very strict hierarchies. Even while growing up, the word of the ‘parent’ is absolute law. By nature, they would never oppose their ‘parent.’ At least, that’s a theory that I had heard before.”

Shouzou made no effort to hide his disgust. To think that these people were even taking advantage of the bonds between parent and child for their military aspirations.

“I cannot say for certain that that is what the empire is doing. However, logically, this is highly probable.”

In actual fact, there was a blue dragon living together with the Onigawara family. Puru was living off of magic from Hina, so maybe it had grown attached from recognizing Hina as its parent.

“Either way, it is very likely that some form of hypnosis is being utilized. By dispelling that hypnosis and making a clean sweep of all the controllers, then the magic beast unit should fall apart.” Seeing a glimpse of the light at the end of the tunnel, Yuliana’s breathing was erratic.

Shouzou too, despite the feelings of aversion inside his heart, was glad that one of the conditions had been cleared. That left only one other condition.

“Hmm. All right, let’s leave that aside for now.”

“I’m sorry? I don’t think we are in a position to put that off though.”

“Princess Yuliana, what is it that you plan on doing after this?”

“As we just discussed, the empire’s magic beast unit—”

Shouzou raised a hand to indicate that that was not what he was asking. “Have you properly explained everything to Sharlo-kun yet?”

Yuliana came to a start. Sharlo was nodding off, but upon hearing his own name, he also came to a start.

“We have a general idea of what it is that you wanted to do. From the looks of things, it seems that Sharlo-kun already knows your real identity. But have you properly explained to him everything beyond that?”

Yuliana shook her head feebly. She stood up, walked over to stand in front of Sharlo, then kneeled on the ground and bowed her head deeply. “Prince Sharlo. I have taken on a false identity, and deceived your personage without being honest about my own intentions. Here I offer my earnest apology. I am truly sorry.”

“Hold o—wh-what is with you, suddenly getting all formal..... it’s not like explaining anything at this time would change anything, right?”

“That cannot be so. I have an obligation to provide you with an explanation. I have been inspecting this country with the intention of using you, and by extension, this entire country. If you proved worthy as an ally, I planned on using you to stop the tyrannical rule of my Father Emperor.”

“.....In that case, then I still have only one thing to say: ‘too bad for you.’ Even if you get together with me, there’s no way you can use the kingdo—”

“That’s not it!” Yuliana lifted her head to look at Sharlo with sincerity. “My resolve still remains the same. Even if I have to fight alone, even if I have to give up my life while delivering the final thrust of the dagger, I *will* stop my Father Emperor. But, that’s..... the path is long and precipitous, so..... my heart was about to... snap.....” Her voice gradually dwindled into a mumble, but then she took a deep breath as if to gather up her resolve. “Even so! If you’re with me, I think I can continue to give my all!”

That shout accompanied by a reddened face was truly—



“A... confession.....?” Sharlo seemed to be incredulous at the words that came out of his own mouth.

Hanna, who had been standing by in a corner of the room, went “Oh, Princess.....” and then fainted.

Shouzou carried her over to the guest room, but even when he got back, it seemed like Sharlo had been merely making bizarre movements, still unable to manage a reply.

Unable to bear it any longer, Lorelei said in an exasperated tone, “I don’t quite get what’s going on either, but she’s gathered up all her courage to confess her love to you, right? How long are you going to make a woman wait?”

“Conf—love..... wait, that’s, but.....” He was so thoroughly confused that he ended up shouting, “What is there about me to like?!” He was indeed a rather lacking man in many ways.

However, Yuliana refuted him straight on. “It is true that your mouth and your attitude are both terrible. You torture yourself too much, and have a very lazy personality.”

“Oi.”

“However, you also hold unshakable conviction. The sight of you standing up even in the face of danger struck my heart. To put it simply, you... were cool.....”

As Shouzou looked at the princess with blushing cheeks, the thought: *Is this the suspension bridge effect?* rose up in his mind, but he kept his mouth shut.

“I myself am also lacking in many areas. I will work hard to improve on them, so please tell me anything that comes to your mind.”

“Anything, you say.....”

“I have already discarded my femininity once. Is my appearance not to your liking?”

“Eh, no, I kinda prefer more chubby girls, I guess—”

“Very well. Then I shall eat. My appetite is on the smaller side, but I’ll try my

best to eat a lot and gain weight!”

“Calm down a bit, would you!” Her abrupt change only added to Sharlo’s confusion.

“So then, Sharlo-kun. What is your answer going to be? Naturally, if the end goal is marriage, then eventually you’ll have to say ‘yes.’ However, it is true that you two only met each other recently. If you prefer, you could start by going out first, taking time to talk and get to know each other better.”

“Well..... that’s.....” Now that Sharlo was properly aware of Yuliana as a girl, he finally realized that she was incredibly cute. She did have a rather blunt personality, but apparently deep inside, she was the devoted type.

In the first place, the reason why he liked chubby girls was because they gave him a sense of security just by being on the other side of the spectrum from all the pretty girls that he could not trust. Honestly speaking, the reason why he was still hesitant to give his reply was because doubts like “Am I really good enough?” and “Will she get rid of me soon?” were still strong in his heart. But even so.

(Me receiving a confession is nothing short of a miracle. I can bet this is the one and only time this would ever happen to me in my entire life.....) It was clear to him that if he let this opportunity slip through his fingers, he was going to remain single the rest of his life. Up to now, he would have been fine even with such a life, but after having been confessed to once, the thought of it had become irreversibly colored with regret in his mind.

“Then, um, let’s start by going out.....”

“Really?! Oh thank you... thank you so much.....” The sight of Yuliana being so happy that she was shedding tears sent Sharlo’s heart aflutter.

“Well then, it seems things have been settled. This is a truly auspicious resolution indeed.”

“.....And what are *you* planning by trying to matchmake us together?”

“I have no intention of using you two youngsters’ honest feelings. However, you two being tied together, in light of your respective positions, is something that would greatly affect your surroundings. In both good and bad ways.

Naturally, that also includes the emperor of the Bardimian Empire.”

The second condition was now cleared as well. With this, now he had everything he needed to have an upper hand in the coming “negotiations.”

Shouzou himself truly had no intention of using the budding romance between these two. However, the same could not be said of the emperor, so as long as the emperor uses it *in the right way*, then Shouzou would have nothing to complain about. In fact, these conditions were necessary in order to guide the emperor toward that direction.

“My father also.....? However, he’s only just tried to assassinate me. Isn’t he only filled with hatred toward me?”

“Oh yes, I am quite angry about this incident as well. I won’t rest easy until I give him a piece of my mind about the consequences of trying to put a hand on my precious children.” However, there was a time and place to display and to swallow down emotions. Therefore, Shouzou declared nonchalantly, “Let’s go pay the emperor a visit right now.”

“..... Hah?”

Even the Ketora siblings dropped their jaws.

“Wh-What do you mean we’re going to meet my father now?!” Yuliana was thoroughly confused.

“Now that you two have decided to start going out, you have to properly report to him, right? Isn’t it common sense that you have to introduce your boyfriend to your father?”

“But even so, why now?” asked Sharlo, also in a great fluster.

“Since we might as well negotiate with him to stop the war while we’re at it.” Shouzou was pretty sure that the emperor did not have a way to instantaneously know about the failure of the assassination attempt. However, he explained that it was better to let him know earlier than later.

“The war is the ‘while we’re at it’.....?” In contrast to Sharlo sitting back drained of strength, Yuliana drew her eyebrows together in puzzlement.

“However, what do you mean by ‘negotiate’? Shouldn’t we first do something

about the magic beast unit?”

“I prefer to avoid getting rough if possible. If there’s really no other option, then naturally I won’t hold back. However, if there’s even the slightest probability of success, then I would like to settle things by talking. However,” Shouzou grinned ferociously. “I have no intention of letting him go with mere words. Since he is trying to intimidate us with might, I will teach him how frightening true might really is.”



In the heart of the well laid-out, orderly streets of Grancia—the brand new capital of the Bardimian Empire—towered an enormous castle that glared down at its surroundings in all 360 degrees. The castle grounds were so spacious that a mid-tier city could fit within. Surrounding it were walls and moats respectively thicker and deeper than the ones around the capital.

Due to its sheer size and heavy security, Yuliana found herself still waiting at the city gate a whole hour after she appeared and declared, “I want to meet with the emperor.”

“They’re not even going to bother telling us if there’s any progress?” complained Sharlo.

Shouzou replied, “Normally, we would have just been refused on the spot. We should probably take the fact that it’s taking so long as proof that the emperor is preparing something.”

Currently, Shouzou, Yuliana, and Sharlo were at the imperial capital. Silvia’s teleportation magic had dropped them off at a location close to the capital, and then they had made their way over on foot.

The Ketora siblings also wanted to come along, but Shouzou had turned them down. It would unnecessarily put the other side on their guard if they brought two Platinum class adventurers along. But these three weren’t alone; the rest of their group was standby in a hidden location.

After waiting for twenty more minutes, finally the permission for an audience was granted. When they passed through the gate, they were subjected to a body search. None of them had any weapons on them in the first place, so

there was nothing to confiscate. However, they were also made to put on some strange bracelets, which probably served to seal their magic.

They traveled to the vast castle by carriage, then, upon proceeding inside, they eventually arrived at a spacious hall roughly the size of a public gymnasium. The ceiling and walls were lit so brightly that the artificial light seemed to push back the moonlight shining through the gigantic skylight.

Shouzou and company made their way down the glossy, slick floor under the eyes of over a hundred soldiers armed to the teeth standing in ranks. Before long, they found themselves before a throne positioned on top of a 20-step dais.

“Why have you returned at such a late hour, my daughter, Yuliana?” A heavy and grave voice descended upon them from the man sitting on the throne at the top of the dais.

His masculine face looked so young that he could easily be mistaken for being in his 20s. However, according to the information that Shouzou had heard, this man was over 60. The sharpness of his eyes surpassed even those of Jilk Goldas, who was on the level of a Platinum adventurer.

The image of him sitting with an elbow resting on an armrest, a fist propping up his face, and legs crossed was extremely disrespectful. There was no smile on his face. He was simply looking down at Yuliana with such an air of intimidation that if looks could kill, she would already be dead. This was the emperor of the Bardimian Empire, Emperor Rudolf von Bardimial, in the flesh.

“I offer my deepest apologies for visiting at this late hour, Your Imperial Majesty, but this matter is urgent.” Yuliana got down on one knee and bowed her head.

Shouzou and Sharlo followed suit.

“Is that so? A matter of such import as to disturb my sleep, I see. Have you brought me news of something greatly interesting in the kingdom?”

“Before that, Father Emperor—” Yuliana lifted her face, and directed a glare toward Emperor Rudolf. “Are you not surprised to see me return safe and sound?”

Without moving even an eyebrow or changing the expression on his face, Rudolf replied, “I have no interest in your life or death. Enough of this trivial topic. Speak your piece.”

Yuliana gnashed her teeth. She was hoping she would shake her father up, but she only ended up getting herself insulted. However, she took a deep breath, reminding herself that there’d be no point if she allowed herself to be shaken. Right now, as agreed in the previous discussion with Shouzou, what she had to do was crack his expressionless face, even if that meant acting the part of a fool.

Yuliana stood up. So did Shouzou and Sharlo from their positions behind her.

Sharlo took one step forward. When he was lined up right next to her, Yuliana threw her eyes wide open, then shouted, “Allow me... to introduce my boyfriend!”

Discomposure ran through the soldiers that were lined up. Although they kept their mouths shut, the atmosphere filled with killing intent had become replaced with one tainted with perplexment. However, Rudolf’s expression remained unchanged. He glared at the soldiers with an ice-cold gaze in rebuke. The slightly loosened up atmosphere returned to being tense.

“This is the First Prince of the Kingdom of Alsbeit, His Royal Highness Sharlo Alsbeit. As we have decided that we will officially be in a romantic relationship, I have asked him to come give his greetings to Your Imperial Majesty.”

Sharlo bowed in greeting without saying anything.

During the briefing, Hanna, who was a part of the stay-behind group, had given him strict orders to “not say even a single word!” Depending on how the situation played out, conversation might become necessary. But at the moment, Sharlo did not think well of the emperor. Or rather, he had so much that he wanted to say to the man who had just tried to have Yuliana killed off. He was doing his best to keep all of that bottled up inside.

Rudolf took a long look at Sharlo, then shifted his eyes back to Yuliana. “Does this mean the kingdom has agreed to the marriage talks?”

“No, we have yet to inform King Alsbeit.”

“Then why have you come here first? I had entrusted the entire matter to you. Returning halfway through to present a progress report is but a waste.”

“I beg to differ. Prince Sharlo has promised me that he would convince King Alsbeit, even if he had to put his life on the line. In the first place, the king had been supportive of the talks throughout the entire process. As such, I believe his acceptance to already be all but confirmed. However,” continued Yuliana while adding emphasis to her tone, “The situation has changed a bit, such that we have determined that asking for Your Imperial Majesty’s approval of our association takes higher priority. And so we have made our way over in haste to present ourselves accordingly.”

Rudolf prompted her to continue with a jerk of his chin.

Yuliana swallowed once, then declared, “Prince Sharlo has no intention of succeeding the throne of the kingdom.”

The previously silent surroundings abruptly fell into an even more pronounced hush.

“As such, Prince Sharlo will be marrying into our family instead.”

While looking down at Yuliana, who had not shrunk away and managed to say everything she wanted to say, Rudolf pronounced in a chilly voice, “You have done well, Yuliana.” For the first time, a small smile appeared at the corner of his mouth. “With this, I now have a pretext to launch an invasion on the Kingdom of Alsbeit.”

Yuliana was dumbstruck. Sharlo also swallowed his breath.

After a quick glance at Shouzou, the only person who did not react at all, Rudolf continued, “Chop off the heads of the pig and large man, pickle them, and send them back to the kingdom. Accompany the package with a letter declaring war.”

“I-I beg a moment, Father Emperor! What are you saying?!”

“That pig is a coward who ran away from the throne, and he is also so incompetent that the kingdom did not bother to chase after him, is that not true? To try to push such a piece of trash into tainting our lineage is nothing but an insult toward me and our empire.”

Yuliana could not stop trembling from rage. However, she swallowed it down to attempt to speak reason. “As I said just now, King Alsbeit has yet to be informed of our association.”

“The fact that that pig is present here, right now, is all that matters.”

“Th-The surrounding countries might think that it was m-me who enticed Prince Sharlo and brought him to the imperial capital.”

“And what of it? This matter was arranged through unofficial channels. Both sides could insist on their version of events all they like, as there’s no evidence either way. We simply have to insist on our account and win the war. Then the surrounding countries would fall silent. If there is still any of them foolish enough to direct false accusations toward us, then we can just destroy that country too.”

“.....Do you really think victory is possible?”

“Without a doubt.”

“You must have a truly remarkable ace up your sleeve to be so confident. However,” Yuliana smiled provocatively, “That wouldn’t happen to be the magic beast unit that could not kill even a single teenage girl, right?”

Rudolf fell silent. However, his frosty expression remained unchanged.

Thinking this to be the time to press her case, Yuliana opened her mouth to—
“?!”

She found herself pinned down with a gaze so cold it made her freeze up.

“Yuliana, my daughter. It appears that you may have misunderstood your position. If you had simply stayed silent and obediently allowed me to use you as a tool, you might have prolonged your life just a bit.” The emperor glared directly at Shouzou. “And yet, not only have you allowed yourself to be won over by the kingdom, here you are trying to deceive me!”

Armor clanked noisily. The soldiers all pointed their spears and drew their swords. Emperor Rudolf merely had to raise his hand, and the soldiers would immediately assault Shouzou and company.

In this tightly wound up atmosphere, Shouzou— “Ha ha ha! Goodness me,

this is quite troubling indeed.”

—raised his voice in lighthearted laughter.

Rudolf’s hand froze halfway up. “You finally open your mouth, and this is what comes out of it, Onigawara?”

“To think you already know my name. I am truly honored.”

“The rumors about you have reached my ears. Supposedly you are so sharp and capable that, despite being a mere guild staff member, you have risen up the ranks to become an aide to King Alsbeit. Was Giel’s mental trauma not also your doing?”

“How strange. In regards to Giel-dono, all I did was offer him my idea of hospitality. But well, let’s put that aside for now.” Shouzou cleared his throat exaggeratedly. “How about we return to the matter at hand.”

“By which you mean.....”

“Indeed. As Princess Yuliana previously stated, we are here to ask Your Imperial Majesty to approve of the association between these two youngsters.”

“You..... have you not been listening just now?”

“I’m quite ashamed, but the conversation between Your Imperial Majesty and the princess suddenly got so complicated halfway through that I was not able to follow it anymore. Ohh, is this a kind of joke popular in the empire? Is that was it was? Ha ha ha!” Shouzou scratched his head sheepishly.

The expression on Shouzou’s face was meek, but his eyes were dead serious. “However, there seemed to be a misunderstanding which I believe requires correcting. Prince Sharlo is not a coward, and he is also not incompetent.” Treating the pressure emanating from Rudolf as a mere spring breeze, Shouzou continued, “As of a few hours ago, several magic beasts mysteriously managed to get into the city. It was a whole pack of very vicious hellhounds. However, His Royal Highness put his very life at risk to protect Her Imperial Highness from them. Without considering his own safety, he conducted himself very admirably. In addition, although it was due to a misunderstanding, he even managed to overturn incredible odds and defeat a Platinum class adventurer. There’s no way His Royal Highness is a coward or incompetent, not after having

proved himself capable of all that.”

Sharlo felt very itchy suddenly being praised so much.

“There was indeed a time when His Royal Highness despaired at the realization that he was not of the caliber to take up the throne and locked himself up in his room. However, he is a changed man, and he resolved to make a fresh start as an adventurer. At the moment, the reason why His Royal Highness has no intention of succeeding the throne is entirely different. Namely —” Shouzou clenched his fists and declared passionately, “It is because he wishes to protect the person that he loves!”

Is that true?! thought Sharlo, who was the most surprised at hearing this.

“The two of them have only just barely gotten to know each other. Although they are considering marriage down the line, time is needed when it comes to nurturing love. Would you not consider first approving of their relationship and warmly looking over them?”

Shouzou bowed his head respectfully, but Rudolf merely spat, “Out of the question.”

Having expected this answer, Shouzou quickly returned, “From the point of view of an ordinary person such as myself, romance is a matter solely between the two individuals involved. However, in light of the identities of these two personages, naturally, the intentions behind both countries must also be put into consideration.”

“Are you saying that that pig over there has value?”

Shouzou nodded in agreement, then rubbed his chin in a natural way. That was the signal for— *Craashhh!* A large figure burst through the skylight and rushed into the hall. Even Rudolf could not help but to widen his eyes, and the soldiers holding spears and swords rushed toward the throne to protect the emperor. The intruder paid them no mind, instead coming to land next to Shouzou while flapping its wings. It was Puru the blue dragon.

Puru rubbed its head against Shouzou, who responded by patting it lovingly.



“Oh my, didn’t I tell you to wait outside?”

Puru continued rubbing its head against Shouzou’s hand blissfully.

Although blue dragons were the most well-mannered species among dragons, seeing one acting so friendly with a human caused no small amount of shock in the room.

Emperor Rudolf, who had managed to maintain the same expression up till now, was no exception. He was so surprised that he leaped to his feet, saying in a trembling voice, “Impossible..... you managed to... a dragon.....?”

“Allow me to offer my apologies if I have unduly surprised anyone present. But please do not worry. This child is kind, and will not inflict harm on anyone here. However,” continued Shouzou in a flat voice, “Apparently the killing intent filling this place was bothering it quite a bit. Things might end catastrophically if Puru is unnecessarily provoked, so please keep that in mind.”

“Y-You.....” Rudolf clenched his teeth tightly, only barely managing to suppress his violent emotions. A blue dragon could indeed turn into huge military strength after growing up, but it was not that much of a threat when young. However, if it made a big commotion in the heart of the empire, right here in the emperor’s own audience hall, then it would become a massive humiliation. He would suffer a loss of authority, and the anti-emperor faction would gain even more momentum.

On top of that, if these three managed to get away during the commotion, then Yuliana could flee to a place where she had support and could very well raise a rebellion.

Rudolf sat heavily back into his throne, then gestured for the soldiers to return to their original positions. “I see where you are going with this. So you are making the case that that is the value of Prince Sharlo?”

Shouzou lifted the corner of his mouth in a grin. “I’ve *heard rumors* that the empire is working on developing traditional countermeasures against magic beasts, aiming to tame them in order to lessen the damage done by them. When I heard that, I thought, ‘Ahh, I see, makes sense that this is something that *any country* would attempt.’”

“Surely you jest. It may be true that the taming of magic beasts is something dreamt of in other countries, but all of them had already given up on that dream. We are the sole exception.”

“Taming... might not be the right word here, but we in the kingdom are also exploring ways to use magic beasts for peaceful means. As for this child here, we’ve done nothing aside from feeding and playing with it.”

“No hypnosis or perception-affecting magic?”

“Naturally not. There is no such need in the first place. Have you also heard of how in the kingdom, we are breeding magic beasts in order to safely and sustainably collect materials from them?”

Rudolf nodded slightly.

“The kingdom is expending resources in training up adventurers. They are specialists on magic beasts. We, on the management side, are collecting from them detailed data on magic beasts, which we use to further our continued research. Furthermore,” continued Shouzou with forceful eyes, “we have also turned our attention toward dragons. The dragon species reigns at the top of the magic beasts’ hierarchy. Being on good terms with them could serve as deterrent for the other magic beasts.”

Of course, the empire was also attempting to tame dragons. In fact, that was the area that they were pouring the majority of their efforts into. However, they have had only one success case to date. And it was not a flying dragon that could be used for a wide range of purposes, but a water dragon. If the empire could truly come to control *several* dragons of that size.....

As if he could see through Rudolf’s thoughts, here Shouzou threw in a bluff. “This child here is still young, so the only thing it can do is carry people on its back. But its older brothers have grown quite a bit. The other day, they played a huge role in a dark dragon subjugation.”

In this world, methods to convey information in real time was extremely limited. Shouzou meant to interweave different scraps of information to seal the matter before Rudolf got his hands on accurate accounts. “Unfortunately, we are still very much in the middle of our research. But that said—” Shouzou declared in a cheerful-sounding voice, “We already have enough numbers to

fully handle a large-scale magic beast attack on our royal capital.”

“*Kuh.....*” Rudolf made no attempt to hide his emotions, glaring at Shouzou hatefully. If what Shouzou was saying was the truth, then not only could they repel all the hellhounds thrown at them, the kingdom could even fly over the sea to level the imperial capital to the ground.

Naturally, even Rudolf could tell that there was a nine out of ten chance that Shouzou was merely bluffing. However, with a real life sample right in front of his eyes, that tiny bit of probability seemed so much bigger and realistic. At the very least, the soldiers in the room were already fully convinced, judging by their pale faces. Rudolf quietly closed his eyes, suppressing the frown between his brows with a finger.

However, as if to not give him time to think, Shouzou continued, “Ah, that reminds me. King Alsbeit intends to proactively share our findings with the surrounding countries—”

“HOLD ON! You’re *sharing* your findings with the other countries?!”

“We are indeed. Every country is equally a victim to the threat of the magic beasts. In addition, there may be different magic beasts living in different lands. Rather than the kingdom doing all the research on its lonesome, it would be so much more efficient to collaborate with various other countries, wouldn’t you think?”

Rudolf barely managed to swallow his expletive back down. However, this was undoubtedly a very alarming state of affairs. If the way to tame each kind of magic beast was established and known throughout all the lands, then the empire’s advantage would crumble to dust.

No, it would be far worse.

Just as Shouzou said, magic beasts did indeed vary by region. The further you went down south, the greater the variety there was, which naturally meant more powerful species with even more troublesome characteristics. Among the kinds of magic beasts currently employed by the empire, the ones that could be used in the south were extremely limited. It was in light of this that they chose more general purpose species like hellhounds and giant-types, but these probably wouldn’t stand a chance down there. The opposite could also be said,

which meant this wouldn't cause much trouble in terms of national defense, as southern magic beasts wouldn't do well up north. However, the plan to attack other countries to expand the empire's borders would be shaken to its very foundation. It would require a drastic revision from the ground up.

"Great danger accompanies any attempts to domesticate magic beasts. Disclosing information at the research stage could lead to problems."

"Hmm. It is indeed as Your Imperial Majesty says. We will make sure to remind each country to pay the greatest ca—"

"I'm saying to wait a while!" In order to determine the truth or falsehood of the matter, there was a need to secretly probe the kingdom's movements. After heaving a huge sigh, Rudolf said, "If you want to collaborate, should you not first do so with us, considering how we are at the very forefront in this field?" However, the emperor feared that he could not outplay this Shouzou, who could look and act so boldly even in the heart of enemy territory. Surely he would slip and dodge, using every means to suck all the information from the empire while holding back his own side's information. He recalled recently reading a report of a spy-like individual having been spotted near a hellhound training ground. Surely that, too, was someone from the kingdom's side. And in charge of it all was, without a doubt, the large man in front of him. If that was the case— "And in light of that—" After pausing briefly, Emperor Rudolf spat out bitterly, "I acknowledge the association between Prince Sharlo and Yuliana to be of value to the two countries they respectively represent."

If Sharlo married into the family, then he could be tapped as a source of information that had direct access into the kingdom.

Yuliana's face blossomed into a smile. "Father Emperor, you approve of our relationship?!"

Rudolf nodded wordlessly.

"This is truly auspicious indeed. However, the two of them have only met recently, and are still young. The environments they grew up in also differed greatly. During the courting stage, they might clash due to a difference of opinions on various matters."

The sudden backtrack at this stage caused Rudolf to almost burst a blood

vessel. He pushed it down with all he had, then managed a “Then we, as adults, should remonstrate and advise them when needed.”

“It is truly as you say. Let us warmly look over them accordingly.”

As if to add on to Shouzou’s words, Puru cried, “*Kueh!*”

“Well then, we will soon be sending an envoy to go over the details of our collaboration. For now—” Shouzou grabbed Sharlo and Yuliana under an arm each, then lightly jumped onto Puru’s back. “We shall hurry back to obtain King Alsbeit’s blessings for this relationship.”

In the time it took the soldiers to say, “Ah!” Puru ascended to the skylight.

“We shall meet again, someday.”

The group exited through the gaping window frame, and flew off into the night sky— ★

On the flight back, Yuliana was almost bubbling over with joy. But in sharp contrast, Sharlo asked in an uneasy tone, “Are you sure things are all right? All that about taming magic beasts and whatnot was just a bluff, right?”

“Our aim this time was to gain his approval of your relationship. In that respect, this was a resounding success. So now, all we have to do is use the time we have to make our bluff a reality.”

“So not only are we going to make sure we aren’t exposed, but we really will be looking for ways to domesticate magic beasts?”

Shouzou nodded in response. However, they were not going to do it in a forceful way like what the empire was doing.

The thing about hypnosis and perception-bending magic was that if the magic ever ran out, the reprisal would be enormous. Puru, as well as the water dragon previously controlled by the empire, had enough intelligence to hold proper conversation with. A more thorough survey of other magic beasts and other ecologies could perhaps reveal hope for the future. Most of what he had said to Rudolf was indeed a mere bluff, but it was true that they had a trove of information on magic beasts gathered from adventurers. This was archived among the various guilds in the form of quest records. Shouzou was sure that

by studying them in detail, they could be converted into ways to build real relationships with magic beasts.

The journey would be long, and Shouzou would not be able to see it through to the end. However, he could at least help lay the foundation for that research. In the first place, this was something that the people of this world needed to ponder and realize through their own efforts. Shouzou would only remain in a supporting role to the very end. The direction was set. The problems facing them were piled up as tall as a mountain, but surely things would go well.

While feeling the bitingly cold wind, Shouzou gazed toward the dark sea beyond the horizon, renewing the sense of purpose deep within his chest— The End

Omake Short Story: The Little Princess's Search for Her Spouse

On the afternoon of a certain day, a special guest was sitting at the Onigawaras' dining table.

“Wonderful! Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful! Lady Mother's cooking is truly fantastic as always.” It was none other than Princess Lynfil.

After having become friends with Kana and Hina, every once in a while, she would come over to play like she was doing today.

The house was overflowing with things that piqued Lynfil's curiosity. Devices such as the TV and tablets that provided access to entertainment were a given. However, even things widely available within Japan—like the dishwasher, washing machine, and refrigerator—also bewildered her.

But that aside...

After the meal was time set aside for relaxing and chatting in the living room. Silvia was hard at work on the household chores, and Emalia, although it had been a while, was planning on giving Kana a bit of tutoring. However, the conversation with Lynfil was so lively that she was in fear that her services would not be needed again.

As Emalia watched on from the dining table while sipping her cup of tea, Lynfil introduced a topic in a grave tone.

“Actually, the reason for my visit today is because there is a matter that I wish to seek counsel on.”

“Well all right, let's hear it. Even if we can't do anything about it, I'm sure Papa or Mama will be able to manage something.”

“That is truly reassuring to hear. Actually—” Lynfil paused dramatically, then pronounced with emphasis, “Ani-ue... has found himself a girlfriend!”

“Well, good for him.”

“His diet succeeded~?”

“Eh? Well, he has indeed grown a bit slimmer..... no wait, that’s not the point! Anyways, I hear that he has started going out with an incredibly beautiful princess.”

“Well hey, everybody has their preferences, I suppose.”

“Some people have funny taste~!”

“Hina my friend, aren’t you a bit too sharp with your tongue?!” At times, young children say the most hurtful things in their innocence.

“So then? Your beloved big brother is being stolen so you want to break them apart?”

“Hina-sama knows this~ It’s called ‘monster sister-in-law,’ right~?”

“That’s not it! Although it’s true I do feel a touch of loneliness and vexation, I intend to offer them my sincere blessings. Though of course, I will still need to determine whether this girl is worthy of my perfect Ani-ue or not.”

“So basically, a monster sister-in-law.”

“We say no to bullying~”

“As I said, that’s not it!” Despite having been driven to the edge of tears, Lynfil cleared her throat and tried to start again. “Ani-ue is steadily establishing himself with the future of the kingdom in mind. In contrast, I am only aimlessly studying martial arts and magic, politics and economics, agriculture and flood control, magic beast countermeasures, and how to lead people.”

Isn’t that already more than enough? thought Kana, but she chose to not say that out loud.

“When I look back on my own life, which has only been lived through habit and momentum, I feel the need to do something with my future in mind.”

“Lyn-sama talks about difficult things too often~”

“So in the end, what is it that you want to do?” Kana’s question prompted Lynfil to nod solemnly.

“I am thinking of looking for a spouse of my own.”

Emalia spat out a mouthful of tea.

“So then, what is a ‘spouse’? Emalia-sensei, do you know?”

“A bad insect~?”

“No, that’s a louse.....” retorted Emalia. After that, she reluctantly explained, “To be direct, it means ‘marriage partner.’” Paying no attention to the two younger sisters nodding in comprehension, Emalia continued, “But Your Royal Highness, you are only 8 years old. Isn’t it still a bit too early for you?”

“What are you saying! As a member of royalty, having at least one or two fiancés by the age of 10 is all too normal.”

“Wouldn’t it be a problem to have more than one fiancé.....?”

“In any case! I must also find a good man, and swear my future together with him! This is something that I have already set my mind on!”

Emalia held her mouth, finally understanding that nothing she said would be of any effect. *This tea really is delicious.*

“But is it really that easy to find one? What are your preferences, Lyn-chan?”

“Do you like princes~? Would you kompromize on the white horse~?”

Lynfil groaned with her arms crossed. “Normally, there would be heavy emphasis on bloodlines and lineages. However, I am not going to succeed the throne anyway, so I believe we can disregard all that.”

“What about the face then? Is handsomeness crucial?”

“Hmmm. There’s not much point being particular about the facial features that one is born with, right? In the first place, all faces other than Ani-ue’s look the same to me. I have no requirements there.”

“So the bar has suddenly dropped way down, I see. More like, doesn’t that mean just anyone would do?”

“What are you saying? Personality is important. I also wish to place emphasis on their amount of contribution to our kingdom.”

“Kindness is numbah one~”

“Well put. But that said, I won’t ask too much in terms of strength. All I ask is

for someone who is more able than myself and is strong enough to protect me.”

The way Kana saw it, these were only the words of an 8 year old, and therefore the bar may have been raised by only 3 cm or so. (*And there she's gone and made this an absolutely impossible task.*) In contrast, Emalia could only manage a dry laugh, having heard all the stories of Lynfil's genius talent.

Suddenly, a certain young man came to Kana's mind. “Wasn't the person who's raising those whatchamacallit magic beasts recruiting for a wife?”

“Could you perhaps be referring to the Kerorigas? But isn't that individual an old man of the goblin race?”

“Apparently that old man has an apprentice. I don't know too much about it though.”

Lynfil considered the idea. “So he's a man so able as to be involved with the breeding of highly difficult magic beasts. Then there is no doubt he is a cut above the average man. He is also greatly contributing to our kingdom even as we speak. Very well, he sounds worthy of a visit at least. Kana my friend, will you lead me to him?”

Kana's casual “Sure!” met fierce resistance from Emalia, but eventually Lynfil managed to push through and obtain Silvia's permission. And so off they went, riding on Puru's back.



“I'm sorry? Me? As Princess Lynfil's spouse.....?” Yunoh, the young man who was a candidate for eventually succeeding the Keroriga breedings grounds, was thoroughly taken back. “More like, who *are* you people?!”

“Don't sweat the small details. So then, what do you think?”

“You all..... wait, wait, wait, of course I'd say no to suddenly being asked to marry the princess. If I remember correctly, she's still only 8! Moreover, our status is also too far apart.”

“What if you don't have to worry about minor details like that?”

“Those are extremely important details though!”

“Then who would you recommend? Give us the opinion of a man that is a cut

above other men.”

“Eh? Then..... how about a prince from another country?”

“Can’t you come up with something better than such a cliché?”

“There are no requirements on face nor social status. If pressed to say, then a strong person with an upstanding personality would be strongly preferred,” cut in Lynfil with her face hidden deeply behind a hood.

“A strong person with an upstanding personality..... If I really had to name a specific person, then my benefactor fits the bill perfectly.”

Benefactor? The young girls tilted their heads.

Yunoh began to speak with veneration. “Although his appearance is a little scary, he is an extremely upstanding man who can accurately see through someone else’s circumstances and even the dreams that they don’t realize themselves, and then provide precise advice in a sympathetic way. From what I hear, he’s also so strong that he could defeat a dragon with an open palm.”

“D-Does such a saint-like person with such manliness truly exist?”

“Sure he does. Ah, but he’s already married. I only mentioned him as an example of someone suitable for Her Royal Highness.”

“Hmm, could there be another of equally remarkable character? Very well then, who’d be your next recommendation? You may speak.”

“You sound a bit self-important, you know.....? Umm, strong, upstanding character, still single..... then how about Sidorias Geolta, the Platinum class adventurer nicknamed ‘Dragonslayer’?”

Kana nodded with great interest. “If it’s Sid-onii-chan, then he’s probably going to be visiting Yuna-nee today too.”

“What heartening news. Knowing his location would save us much time. Let’s go visit him immediately.”

“Sure thing, let’s go. Oi~ Emalia-sensei!” Kana called out to Emalia, who was standing behind them looking dead tired. Until a short while ago, she had been thrown around while clinging to the tail of a living creature flying at high speed. Therefore, she was currently suffering from symptoms very similar to motion

sickness.

“Want to change places?”

“I-If possible.....”

After helping the tired Emalia onto Puru’s back, Kana also positioned Hina in front and Lynfil behind her, then went over to grab the tip of Puru’s tail as her eyes sparkled with expectation.

“So then, Yunoh, was it? Thank you for your time. We wish you the best with finding a spouse of your own.”

While seeing off the kid that had been self-important to the very end, Yunoh thought to himself, *Nahhh, no way.....* Regardless of how the characteristics seemed to match so well, there was no way that the princess who ruled over an entire country would show up in a place like this. So he quickly chased this impossible thought out of his mind— ★

Upon arriving at the fortress city of Treia, the party took their sweet time heading toward Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild, stopping by food stalls several times along the way. Although there was still a bit of time before dusk, the figures of several adventurers who had just finished a quest could be seen here and there in the reception lobby.

The instant Kana stepped into the building, she spotted a teenage boy happily chatting with a girl behind one of the reception counters. “Sid-onii-chan, you’re ogling too much.”

“Uwah! That surprised me..... Kana-chan? Why—”

“Hold on. Kana, what did you come here for?” The receptionist that Sidorias had been chatting with, Yuna, gave Kana a suspicious look.

Emalia stepped in to smooth things over, and the group quickly shifted to one of the lounges in the back of the first floor with Sidorias in custody.

After Sidorias sat down on one of the sofas, Lynfil plopped herself down on the one opposite his. Kana and Hina took up positions on each side.

Sidorias had realized almost immediately that this girl hiding her face with a hood was Princess Lynfil. However, why did she visit him out the blue? Why was

she asking him his hobbies and special talents and his beliefs and convictions? He hadn't the faintest idea what was going on. And right now, for some reason, the conversation had shifted to the topic of a certain Iron-rank adventurer.

"I see, I see. So does that mean you have a high opinion of this adventurer named Sharlo?"

"Well, you could say that, yes. He proactively takes on quests that nobody else wants to do, and then completes them without saying anything. Although his attitude isn't exactly the best, he's actually a very upstanding person deep down. That's what I think, at least."

"Well said. Very well said indeed!"

While looking at Lynfil beaming with satisfaction, a few things had become clear to Sidorias. He did not know previously that Sharlo was the kingdom's prince. However, the name and age matched perfectly, and he had been brought to the guild by Shouzou, who had gotten close to the king recently. It couldn't be clearer that he was the prince who had locked himself up before. So what exactly was he being tested on right now? Amidst his uneasiness and misgiving, an angel of salvation appeared unto him.

"So what is it exactly that you guys came here for anyways?" Yuna had taken a break and come in, even having gone to the trouble of preparing tea. The smell of the tea and Yuna's sweet smell sent Sidorias's head pounding from bliss. However, in the next instant, all the blood drained from his face.

"Lyn-chan is actually looking for a spouse. So we thought, 'how about Sid-onii-chan?'"

"Indeed, he is quite a promising man. His strength and achievements are beyond reproach. I have decided on you. Be my spouse."

His brain could not handle such abruptness.

"Will you girls stop teasing Sid? Can't you see how troubled he looks right now?"

Yuna's exasperated voice was met by Kana's candid "Lyn-chan is completely serious."

“Are you?”

“Indeed. I am completely serious.”

After groaning for a short while with her arms crossed, Yuna also put on a serious face. “All right then. In that case, Sid, give her a proper answer.”

“I’m sorry?!”

“You aren’t going out with anyone right now, right? Then maybe you can start by being friends?”

“I... I.....” Within his bewilderment, Sid suddenly felt the light of enlightenment fall upon him. This was indeed a strange situation, but it could also be a chance for him to honestly express his feelings.

Upon seeing the resolve on his face, Kana also found it hard to suppress her excitement at this unexpected development. This was definitely the build up for a confession. No matter how thickheaded her older sister was, if she was confessed to directly, then even she should get the message.

As a strange tension seized the room, Sidorias stood up abruptly, went to stand right in front of Yuna, looked into her eyes, then bared his heart, shouting, “I... have someone that I like!”

“Oh you do? Lyn-chan, what will you do then?” She did not get the message at all.

“That’s not it... that’s not the way to do it, Sid-onii-chan.....” When it came to this oblivious girl, something at least as specific as “I, Sidorias, feel love in the romantic sense toward you, Yuna-san, daughter of Onigawara Shouzou” was necessary to get the message across.

On the other hand, Lynfil, who seemed on the verge of being left out of what was happening, laughed dauntlessly. “Fu fu fu! To think that you already have someone in mind. What an exciting challenge this is! Very well, I shall do everything in my power to make you turn your head toward me!”

Bringing her hands together in applause— “Good luck, Lyn-chan. I’ll support you!”

—Yuna unsuspectingly dealt a death blow to Sidorias.

The man standing outside the door sensed the life seeping out of the young man, and thought it a suitable time to step in. Accordingly, he knocked on the door and entered the lounge.

“Papa!”

“Otoo-sama’s here~!”

After returning his two youngest daughters’ greetings with a gentle smile, the man, Shouzou, approached Lynfil. “I have just returned from the royal capital. Emalia-san has filled me in on the situation.”

The instant he got back, Emalia had come crying to him to “please do something about them.”

When Shouzou stopped, Lynfil looked up at his figure, then came to a start, shouting, “The fact that you are here and that you are aware of what we are doing must mean that you are presenting yourself as a candidate to be my spouse!”

“Hm?” The unexpected situation caused Shouzou to tilt his head.

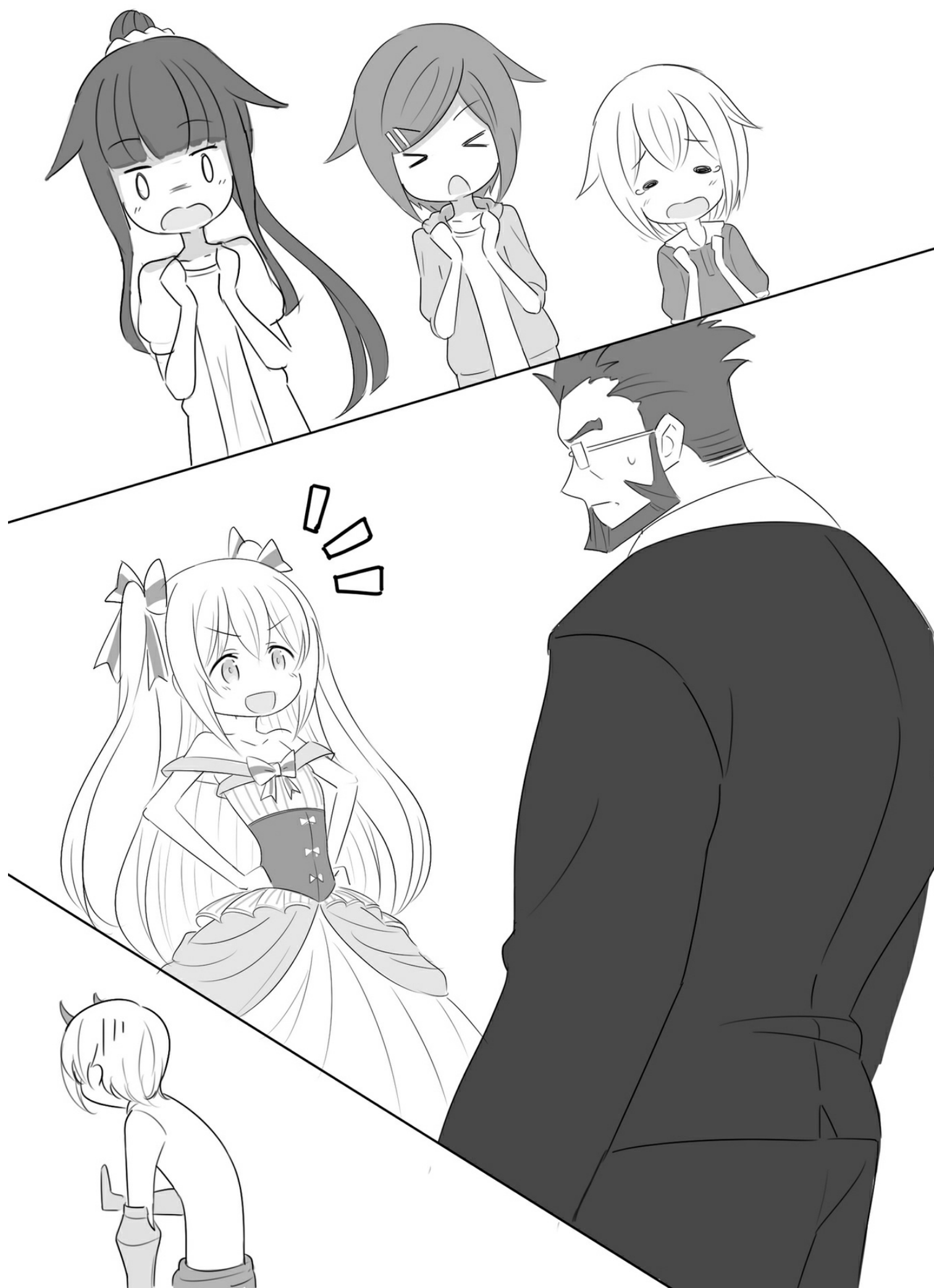
The three sisters hurriedly tried to stop her, but Lynfil started to talk up a storm. “My Father King has great trust in you, and you are also a great man who has saved our kingdom from ruin. Above all, I hear that you have given Ani-ue much advice. Oh? I see. The person that Yunoh spoke of was surely you. Let alone being beyond reproach, I should be the one to bow down in entreaty.” Her eyes widened, and she shouted, “I approve of you as my spouse!”

““Hold on RIGHT there!”” The two older sisters jumped in.

“Dad is already married!”

“Don’t take Papa away from us!”

The words of the two (more so Kana’s) gave Hina a general grasp of the situation and pushed her to the verge of tears.



“Oh, is that so? So he is already married. But no matter, I do not mind being a concubine. If I manage to tie not only Shouzou, but all of you even to our royal family, then Alsbeit is almost guaranteed an entire century of peace and prosperity. Yes, this would make for a truly splendid alliance.”

The two older siblings were almost taken in, thinking something along the lines of *Oh, is that how things are?* However, Shouzou drew Yuna and Kana to his side, then got onto his knees so that his eyes were at the same height as Lynfil’s.

“I’m sorry, but I have no intention of taking any wife other than Silvia.”

A puzzled look came over Lynfil’s face, in response to which Shouzou smiled gently and asked, “What is it that you are in such a hurry for?”

“Are you also saying that it’s too early for me and making fun of me!?”

“I am not making fun of you. However, there is an issue even before the question of this being too early or not.”

“What problem is there in me trying to find a spouse?”

Shouzou sighed softly, then began to share a certain story. “Let me tell you the story of a certain boy and girl. The parents of the two had arranged for the two of them to marry each other. However, they did not see eye to eye at their very first meeting, and clashed very terribly. However, as they continued working together, what they came to see was not the bad parts of the other person. Rather, they came to know also the good points, the parts worthy of respect that the other person possessed.”

“Is this perhaps.....”

“Eventually, they managed to overcome a great hardship by cooperating with each other. They came to acknowledge and fully accept everything about the other person. And as for now, the two of them are putting in effort nurturing their relationship of love.”

Lynfil went silent. She hung her head as if in mortification.

“With how smart and wise you are, I’m sure you already understand what I’m getting at. Marriage, and even love, is not a one-sided affair.”

“.....So I have only been trying to push my own selfishness onto other people.”

Shouzou grinned in response. “If I may add, timing is also an issue.”

“Timing, you say?”

“Meeting the right person is something that happens out of the blue one day. This was so for the two people I was talking about just now. This was true for me as well. So then, what is it that you should be doing now?”

Lynfil lifted her face and looked at Shouzou with clear eyes. “To polish and prepare myself for that moment. To obtain the skill to take other people into consideration.”

Satisfied with those eyes filled with purpose, Shouzou nodded firmly, then stood up. “Well then, since you’ve come all this way, you might as well relax a while. I believe Sharlo should be back soon.”

“Ohh, An—Sharlo will be back soon, you say.”

“Is it Ani-ue-sama~?”

“Shh! That’s a secret, remember?”

With the tension gone and the atmosphere reverted to one of harmony, there stood a young man whose soul seemed to have left his body.

Shouzou walked over to him. “Normally this probably shouldn’t come from me, but, well.....” He clapped a hand on Sidorias’s shoulder. “Try harder next time, young man.”

“Yes sir.....”

Yuna merely looked on blankly at the two guys who seemed to be up to something, still completely clueless—

Afterword

Sumimori Sai here. Some of you might otherwise know me as Sumimorisai. Greetings.

Thanks to you, my dear readers, we have released two volumes! This was made possible only because of everyone's support. Thank you so very much.

So then, the story this time starts in the summer. The sea. A water dragon. And then we take off from there.

How will this ultimate couple of Shouzou and Silvia handle everything with their incredible teamwork? Including being promoted to being the king's aide, Shouzou's otherworld OP story only continues to accelerate. Once again, I hope everyone enjoys the sense of exhilaration from seeing a main character get through crises not with brute strength, but the power of words.

This time we have a large number of themes all packed together, including how to raise children, sibling love, coming of age, independence, and so much more. The new main character is a very unconventional prince. I was worried about what you readers would think when you saw the illustration facing the title page. What will happen when he and Shouzou meet?

This time I also present to you a wonderful cast, including a princess from a great country tied in destiny with the kingdom, and a very big fish, who had only been mentioned by name in Volume 1, finally makes an appearance. I hope everyone will especially enjoy the occasional heartwarming scenes, the passionate scenes, and certain scenes that (I thought) were very well received in the web version. And this time, the omake is a short story about a little princess. It is an adventure (?) where the young princess looks for a marriage partner while accompanied by the two younger Onigawara sisters. She is a new character in this volume, so please look forward to meeting her as you read through the main story.

Next is a few words of thanks. Ichijirushi-san, who so kindly took care of all the illustrations, thank you for the swimsuits. I am also absolutely thankful and delighted that the prince came out exactly how I'd imagined him. Everyone over

at the editorial department at K-BOOKS, and especially my editor, Kurita-san. Thank you for taking such good care of me! And last but not least, allow me to express my heartfelt thanks to you, my dear readers. It doesn't matter if you started reading on the web or not, the very fact that you enjoy my work is what means the most to me.

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Middle-Aged Businessman, Arise in Another World! Volume 2

by Sai Sumimori

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MIDDLE-AGED BUSINESSMAN,

ARISE IN ANOTHER WORLD!

Making a
Name for
Myself
Thanks to
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Power!

2

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