

Sieghardt
Saladin
Greyrat



MUSHOKU TENSEI

– JOBLESS OBLIGE –

– Jobless Reincarnation –

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- STORY -

Sieghardt Saladin Greyrat. He is unemployed. From an early age, he wanted only to be an Ally-of-Justice. For that sake, he learned the way of the sword and became strong. However, when he left his hometown, he got a taste of reality, and abandoned his dream. He spent his days lethargically wasting away, until the day he met this one boy... This is the tale of how the unemployed boy found his way to becoming an Ally-of-Justice!

— A Spin-off Work of Mushoku Tensei.

CHAPTER 1

MEETING IN THE PAST

I wanted to become Cheddar-man.

Cheddar-man was the hero of the bedtime stories father would tell me at night.

Cheddar-man was an ally of justice!

He loved peace and helping others.

Wearing a cloak and flying in the air, if he heard a voice calling for help, he would immediately head to that place to help.

He was willing to sacrifice himself if it was to protect the ones he cared for.

If there was a person who was hungry, he would tear off a piece of his cheese-face and offer it for free in order to help them.

Of course, since he was an ally of justice, he did not forgive evildoers.

If a villain arrived and caused suffering to the masses, he would immediately rush to combat them.

Even if the villain was very powerful, Cheddar-man would never run away.

By mustering his strength to fight for love and courage,

his Cheddar-punch would always defeat the villain, reforming their evil ways.

Evil was punished, and peace would return.

Back then, when I was only five years old, they were very compelling stories.

I really wanted to meet Cheddar-man, but where could he be?

I asked father once before, but with a bitter smile on his face, he merely said, “He is in a faraway place right now, so seeing him isn’t that easy... but if you are a good boy, maybe one day you’ll meet him.”

At the time however, I thought that Cheddar-man was somehow still relatively close by.

It puzzled me why I always thought that...

It was possible that the very reason was my father.

I remembered a time when father would take the time to look after poor people and give them food.

Are you hungry? Has it been more than a day since you have had anything to eat?

I remembered father asking the woman of the beast tribe who was clinging to his foot this as he distributed food to her.

What was given was some meat and cheese.

My father is Cheddar-man!

I held the conviction that my father was actually the hero in the stories I was told for a long time.

I heard from a friend of my father who was once a former enemy.

The heroic tale of when he and my father had once battled.

The very existence of a country hung in the balance on the outcome of that one battle.

Famous warriors of that era had gathered, battled, and died.

And in the final battle, he fought against my father.

In the end, he was defeated and his forces capitulated to my father’s.

While he was in the middle of recounting the heroic tale, he mentioned something.

“The me in those days had been wrong. I was evil, and your father was just. But I was far mightier, and your father had no chance of winning.”

However, he fought.

He did not run away.

For the sake of protecting his loved ones, he mustered his courage to fight and decidedly won with a single punch.

Hearing that, the me who was still a child considered it.

There was no mistake.

Father was Cheddar-man.

He was an ally of justice.

With that, father became the person I admired most.

And I thought that maybe I should also become an ally of justice.

Then, like Cheddar-man, I too could safeguard peace!

But, how can I become one?

When I asked my father’s friend, he answered it in this way:

“You can achieve it with effort. Strengthen your body, and learn the ways of the sword and magic.”

Listening to those words, I decided to learn how to use the sword from father’s friend.

It doesn’t mean that I couldn’t be taught swordsmanship or magic from mother and father, but I wanted to conceal myself and improve and then gallantly arrive at a critical moment, amazing them.

So, learning from father’s friend was the most suitable course of action.

Anyway, it was also because he was the head of one of the three major schools [North

God Style] , “The North God Kalman.”

At first, my father’s friend was unwilling.

He felt that he was still too inexperienced as the head.

However, father’s boss would also advise him, so he arranged to have me instructed in the sword.

The friend of my father became my master.

While learning the sword from my master, I also was taught knowledge required to be an ally of justice.

It seems that there was a time where master also aimed to be an ally of justice as well, so he taught me various things.

Even if the villain was much stronger, you must fight on and obtain victory.

Even if you must fight, make sure it isn’t for the sake of fame or rewards.

Even if it might appear a certain way at first, do not judge good or evil solely based on appearances.

Though it seems that there were various other teachings, these three were the most important ones to remember.

In accordance with what I was taught, I enrolled into Ranoa Magic Academy at the age of 7 while always trying my best to become an ally of justice.

I belonged to the student council at school and went around suppressing all the bad guys around campus.

At school, there was the occasional upstart adventurer or influential noble’s child, but they were no match for me.

Every time they committed an injustice, I appeared and dealt out punishment.

There was never a time when all evil in the school had been eradicated, but as an ally of justice, I had managed to find a place in the school where I belonged.

I was able to make many friends, and I was popular among the girls too.

The teachers acknowledged my efforts as well.

However, only my youngest older sister who saw me laughed at me scornfully.

“Zeke, you are such an idiot~”

In those days, I did not understand the meaning behind those words.

But then, my youngest older sister was slightly strange herself.

She was always walking along with her pet dog and didn't speak with people very often.

Loving mischief and naps, always doing some tiny misdeed, and either slacking off in her studies or just lying around.

A whimsical person who knew not what they wanted to do.

And so I thought those words were also just another whimsical thing spoken by my sister.

It wasn't until after I had graduated from the magical academy that I began to understand the true meaning behind those words.



I learned the basics at the magic academy in our hometown, and celebrating my adulthood at the age of 15, I left my hometown in Ranoa Kingdom and went to a school at Asura Kingdom.

I left my hometown without telling anyone.

Though parting with my family and master was a sad thing, it was also the first step in becoming an ally of justice. Making use of what I have learned up till now, I would do my best on the next stage.

I was overflowing with such hope.

Asura Royal Academy.

It was a beautiful place, partly because many years had passed since I had last come.

The school buildings were as large as those of the Magic Academy, and the interiors were abundantly decorated in glass and lace.

The uniforms mimicking the Magic Academy were gorgeous as well, and they suited the beautiful nobles of the Asura Kingdom splendidly.

If my younger sister were to see it, her eyes would be full of pleasant sparkles.

However, the only sparkling thing as far as I was concerned was a dull gray school building.

My gray school life.

Is the current state of things because of someone's oppression?

No.

Because I underwent such strict training by my former master, having a hundred fencer's worth of skill coming out of mock battles, of course there's no way any of these guys would be able to do anything.

So I was ignored.

Thoroughly.

There was only one reason for this.

Because of my hair color.

My hair color was green.

It seems to have been inherited.

This green hair color is the color of the Spelled Tribe.

The Spelled tribe is supposed to be a race of devils, and 400 years ago, many of them

supposedly did terrible things.

Therefore, in the world of humankind, they still associated green as an ominous color and discriminated against those who have the devil's color.

Up till this point, I had never really been caught up too much in regards to my hair color.

The reason was because my father and mother repeatedly told me that none of it was true.

While certainly, the Spelled had probably done some bad things during the war 400 years ago, that had nothing to do with anything devil-like.

When actually conversing with someone, that would immediately be understood.

Actually, my uncle is a member of the Spelled tribe and even a cousin of mine is as well.

When I meet with them to talk, I know I am normal.

Well, Uncle is a bit stubborn-minded though.

Actually taking a moment to mention it now, in my hometown, the matter regarding my hair color was never really discussed.

Around the time I was born, mother seemed to have been seriously disturbed about something. The first person I met surely seemed startled when he saw my hair that time, and the adventurers would walk along the road and whisper rumors as they went by on occasion.

However, it was only to that degree.

Actually, I have not heard of anyone speaking ill of the Spelled tribe in Ranoa Kingdom for that matter either.

However, in Asura Kingdom, it was very different.

When I showed up to the entrance ceremony, someone screamed out "It's a devil!" and the place was in an uproar.

Teachers and Guards appeared and surrounded me.

If it's always going to be such a situation, I would, as an ally of justice, make an immediate decision to fight for them.

However, at that time I had no idea what was going on.

I did not understand why I was being surrounded.

When I asked what was going on and gave my name, they somehow came to a conclusion and dissolved the encirclement.

But because the students were still clamoring, I was escorted to another room.

Then, a teacher gave me a series of various explanations.

Because the Asura Kingdom is a society primarily of the Human Tribe, the tradition of believing that the Spelled tribe were devils still remains.

In the first place, I am not from the Spelled tribe.

My uncle is so, but he's not connected by blood, and the matter of my hair being this color is simply the result of a mutation.

Though I said so, whether or not I was actually from the Spelled tribe was actually irrelevant.

The problem was that I appeared to be -like- the Spelled tribe.

The entrance ceremony ended safely, but afterwards, I was isolated.

No one tried to speak with me, and so, I, in turn, ignored everyone else.

Nevertheless, I still intended to be active in meting out judgment as an ally of justice.

If I did that, then surely everyone would understand.

They would understand that I was a good person and would disregard the matter of my hair.

It was like that in my previous school, so it should be the same this time too.

With such feelings in my chest, I helped rescue a timid, lone boy on the other side of the school building who was being accosted by many other boys.

However, even though I helped him, he would not speak to me.

Though when I think about it now, if he were to have conversed with me, he would definitely have been bullied even more...

At that time though, I couldn't understand the reason for it.

Still, I intended to be an ally of justice.

If I pressed on, then surely it would become reality.

The reason why was because this is what I was taught by my master.

However the next day, some senpai had come.

He explained the influence of the "Top Class" at this school, that the guys I beat up belonged to it, and how they were the next in line to become the heads of their families. He arrogantly told this to me as well after stressing how much influence those nobles carried inside the Asura Kingdom.

"Your father has our gratitude. If it was not for the friendship Her Majesty has with your father, you, with your green hair, would have certainly been kicked out before the day ended."

Gratitude to my father.

Those words became like a sharp thorn which deeply pierced my chest.

Father was a great person.

He established a base in Magic City Sharia, he's one of the [7 World Powers] , and he's a trusted friend of the Dragon God Orsted.

It's no exaggeration to say he's Top Brass.

He even had a private army at his beck and call.

[Ru-do Mercenary Corps] they're called, and besides that of Ranoa Kingdom, there were branch offices all over the world that can even be organized into a great mercenary organization.

Besides, the King of the world's largest country, the famous Asura Kingdom was also a close friend of his.

And at one time, she had even gone to this same school.

Not only that.

Father is old friends with the headmaster of the Magic Academy. Plus, he's also the public face and manager of the town's Ru-do Mercenary Corps. He also associates with presidents of other large companies. In fact, in every country across the world, he has connections with powerful people.

And it's not just about connections.

He himself is a remarkable magician. He acquired the knowledge to develop the powerful armament [Magic Armor]. He can peer ahead several seconds into the future with the [Demon Eye]. He can move around at super-high speeds, possess powerful magic which can even kill a dragon with a single blow all while manipulating two things at once.

And on the subject of power, even my Master, who is the head of the North God School, acknowledges the superiority of my father.

Just on the above-mentioned things, my father is considered to be one of the people with the greatest authority in Magic City Sharia and the Ranoa Kingdom.

And I... am the son of such a father.

The words of the Senpai cause me once again to realize that.

And at once, all the days I lived in Ranoa Kingdom were remembered at the same time.

Even if I walloped someone, in my self-assumed role of an Ally of Justice, no one ever said anything.

Everyone put up with me.

Ah, that's right.

In the Magic City Sharia of Ranoa Kingdom, with me being the son of my father, who could bring themselves to complain?

Ah, that's right.

Though I self-importantly proclaimed that I was an ally of justice, saying "Stop doing these kinds of things!" as I went to clobber them until they quit, there was never anyone there to oppose me.

And it wasn't because I was right.

The reason they didn't defy me was because they had no idea what my father might do if they did so.

Even if father had no intention of intervening in any way, it made no matter.

The only important thing was that I was his son.

And thanks to the thorn stuck deep in my chest, I completely understood it for what it was.

Under the umbrella of my father's influence, I had just been lording it over everyone.

And here, in the Royal Academy of the Asura Kingdom, was somewhere my father's heavy influence did not extend to.

It was only as far as the Magic City Sharia's reach...

Still, I am afraid of no one.

However, senpai seems to know to the bitter end the level of his house's influence and in fact recognizes that his house is greater here; that's why he spoke his complaint.

Even with just the trivial reason — the color of hair, he could cause me to be completely disregarded.

It may be because there are so many nobles of high status attending the Asura Royal Academy.

However, it might be the case that even the students of the Ranoa Magic Academy might have done the same to me if my father was only a mere merchant or something.

I wasn't an ally of justice.

Backed by the influence of my parents, I was just a brat foolishly imitating one.

This is the reality of my life.

But even if the reality was so, I did not ever fail to believe in the heart of justice.

Even if I misunderstood and was under a false pretense, I cannot believe the very effort I put in to dispense justice would have made things any worse.

However, the meaning of the words of my older sister, "Zeke, you are such an idiot~," once I understood them, I felt as if I had been finished off.

And now that I completely comprehended it all... it became near impossible to continue on as before.

On that day, I stopped being an ally of justice, and my gray-colored school life began.



That gray school life continued for several months.

There is no one I talk to, and there is no one who talks to me.

Of course, I don't even play at being an ally of justice.

I wonder, even if Cheddar-man was ignored by the people he helped, would he find it difficult to remain an ally of justice?

With the state of my affairs like that, my older brother who had entered school a year before me came to visit me once or twice. But that still did nothing to change the situation.

I, in my isolation, gradually stopped going out for classes anymore.

Of course, it's not that the classes were boring.

The lectures about the cultural differences between Asura and Ranoa were interesting, and the lessons on mathematics and economics because of the noble's study requirements were far above the Magic Academy's.

However, as far as I was concerned, I was relatively indifferent to those kinds of classes, and the will to learn soon faded.

Skiping classes, lying down in the yard behind the school, and watching the clouds instead became the way to go.

It was the rule in my family that I must attend this school for three years.

But to be honest, I thought I would quit halfway through.

I don't have any friends nor any desire to learn.

Going to school in that kind of situation, what kind of meaning is there in a life like that?

If there was possibly someone I could consult, then somehow I might get a reasonable answer.

For example, my older brother.

But, having come so far, the shock of being so completely denied is too big for me to handle, and I didn't even have the mental capacity to even talk to someone about it.

However, such a gray school life that I had abruptly ended on a certain day.

I met HIM.

No... should I say that I encountered him? Perhaps it's better to say I found him.

When I was sitting down in the shade of a tree in the yard behind the school and watching the students, there was one boy who noticeably stood out.

It seemed like he was in a similar situation.

Isolated, ignored by everyone, given the cold shoulder.

All this time I thought I was the only one.

However, unlike myself, he didn't screw around and properly attended classes.

Though he had to endure his peers and even the cold attitude of his teachers sometimes, he still studied hard.

And just when it seemed I had finally found him, it seems he also had found me.

He, on that certain day, came before me.

He raised a hand and began talking to me in a relaxing way.

"Say, are you not going to class?"

Looking closely at him, he was very peculiar.

Is he a dwarf? Or perhaps just some blood of the dwarf tribe flows in him? He was low in height and wide of breadth.

Yet somehow he looked decidedly solid; it was only at first glance that he seemed fat.

However, it was not his figure that stood out.

"Will you not go together with me? I am looking for a school friend who I can learn together with... Is it because of your hair color? Is that why you aren't able to make any friends?"

His hair was a brilliant blue.

It was a different color than to mine.

However, it was a color which would very much stand out in this school.

He was ignored in the same way as me and treated coldly.

“ .. ”

“Please treat me well!”

I was silent as I stood up, did he regard it as me giving approval? He stuck out his hand before me.

Someway, somehow, I reached out and grasped that hand.

“My name is Pax. And yours?”

“Zeke.”

Thus, that is how I became friends with him — **Pax**.

CHAPTER 2

PRESENTLY, UNEMPLOYED

“Zeke!”

I heard a voice.

A voice I’ve been hearing every day.

“How long are you going to sleep! Get up!”

I woke up.

Raising myself upright and looking out the window, the sun had already risen high into the sky.

And when I look away from the mirror, my white-haired mother was standing there, glaring at me with a hand on her hip.

“Don’t let your lunch go to waste, hurry up and get eating.”

“...Ah.”

Having obeyed mother’s words, I left my room without even changing my clothes.

“And don’t just clean your room whenever you feel up to it!”

“O~kay.”

While giving the appropriate replies to all of mother’s sermons, I walked across the hallway and down the staircase.

“Good morning.”

“...Morning.”

In the dining room was my red-haired mother.

And when she noticed my appearance, I felt her glare come at me.

“Hurry up and eat!”

“...Yeah.”

From above my seat at the table, there was a basket with a cloth draped over it.

When I went to remove the cloth, I found the usual breakfast of bread, soup, and salad waiting for me.

Of course, it had cooled down long ago.

While being glared down by Red Mama, I ate.

I don't particularly dislike meals that have cooled, but her glare made it a bit hard to eat.

“So, what are you planning on doing today?”

“...Nothing much.”

“Why don't you go look for a job!”

“Red Mama, though you keep telling me to, I am quite proud of where I'm at right now.”

But having said that, I saw that my red-haired mother's mood turned sour in the blink of an eye.

And my red-haired mother is very scary.

When I was young, if any of us did something wrong, she would immediately catch us and blister our bums until they turned bright red.

Though having grown up, such methods have abated, but even until now, the fact that she could still do so remains as one of our weak points.

“What have you got to be proud about?”

“I’m proud of what I am proud of. At the present, I am very proud of the life I lead!”

“I can’t see the first thing you would be proud of about that.”

“Red Mama, that’s because you only know the one facet of me.”

“.....”

My red-haired mother does not have the tongue for sweet-talking.

When it comes to arguing, there are few people she can defeat.

However, if we were to include fencing in that, even if you looked around the world, the number of people that she couldn’t defeat would be quite few.

So, when she became unable to find the words to retort with, she would instead turn silent and just outright deliver a walloping blow.

This is why her nickname was [Mad Dog].

But she doesn’t hit family.

I mean, as long as I didn’t do anything *that* bad, I wouldn’t get hit by her.

Thus, her mouth took the shape of the character へ, and she just continued to silently glare at me.

“.....”

For me to escape from her gaze, I hurriedly finished eating breakfast.

It’s not my intention to agitate mother.

“Thanks for the delicious meal.”

“Since you seem to be free, why don’t you at least deliver a bentou to Roxy. She forgot to take it with her again.”

Saying this to me, at the corner of the table, a square shaped lunch box was placed there.

“Blue Mama, to still be forgetting to take the bentou...”

“Since you don’t seem to be doing any work today, then at least do that much. Okay?”

“Sure. I’ll take care of it.”

When I finished washing the dishes after eating, with the bentou in hand, I exited the dining room as if I was trying to flee.”

“Ah, Zeke... That bentou, are you going to deliver it? Thank you.”

As I reached the exit of the dining room, my white-haired mother had just come in.

“If you are going to go out, aren’t you going to at least change your clothes?”

“O~kay.”

“Don’t forget to brush your teeth too...”

“I get it, I get it!!”

Just to escape from the nagging of my white-haired mother, I returned to my own room.

“Ugh!”

All while taking no notice of the exasperated sigh of my mother behind me.



My name is Zeke.

Zieghardt Saladin Greyrat.

But everybody calls me Zeke.

I am the second son of the Greyrat family who resides in the Magic City Sharia of the Ranoa Kingdom. I am the fourth eldest of six brothers and sisters.

I have two elder sisters, one elder brother, and two younger sisters.

I am currently unemployed.

Unlike my older brother, I don't help father with his work; similar to my oldest sister, I haven't gotten married; I haven't started any studies like my younger older sister; I haven't even found work at a good company like my older younger sister; and lastly, I don't go to school like my youngest sister.

So, after graduating from school, I chose to idle instead of working.

However, with how things are now, I'm neither dissatisfied nor in any hurry to change anything.

Rather, I am particularly proud of being unemployed.

Everyone else is bound by their obligations.

Money, reputation, glory.

For the sake of acquiring these things, they will bend over backward, laugh when they don't want to, ignore corruption, and even abandon the weak.

However, for the jobless, there is no need to deal with any of those things.

Because the unemployed are neither compensated nor rewarded.

When to bend over backward, laughing when you want to laugh, passing judgment on the wicked, and helping the weak.

The only one who could possibly do such a thing is someone without an occupation.

Being jobless is a noble existence.

And because of that, I will never get a job.

Well, by job, of course, I am speaking of one where you receive compensation.

Adventurers, artisans, and merchants are the ones that never change.

It's said that when one receives compensation, one also can also be obligated.

Though I can't say that it's bad to live a life bound by obligations, it also can't be said to be noble, either.

After I decided to shoulder the task of being unemployed, I never once asked for any kind of compensation.

However, I don't want a misunderstanding.

Even though I haven't asked for any compensation, I have also not refused anything requested of me.

I help people out for free.

That is why I advocate that being Jobless is a noble thing.

"Ah, Zeke. Thank you very much. I was about to spend my lunchtime here without anything to eat."

"You're welcome."

From the time I left the house, about an hour has passed.

I went towards the Magic Academy, in service to deliver my blue-haired mother her bentou.

For me who isn't currently working, it's an easy task to go to that place.

"As a reward, should I give you some pocket money?"

"For such a little thing like this, I don't need any reward."

"Is that so..."

Like that, I do not accept any rewards.

The unemployed should not receive any rewards.

There is nothing cheaper than free.

"But, won't you need some money so you can go job hunting?"

“Ahahahahaha. Ah, It’s already that time, let’s talk later.”

“Ah, hey, Zeke...”

Under a cover of deceptive laughter, I escaped from that place.

My blue-haired mother probably had something extra she wanted to say, but in the end, I only said “Thanks” and bid her farewell.

I think you may have noticed by now, but I do have three mothers.

A mother with white hair, a mother with red hair, and a mother with blue hair.

Father was very affluent, and because he was not a follower of the Milis faith, he took three wives.

I am the son of the mother with white hair; however, when it comes to each of the mother’s children, there isn’t any particular favoritism.

Likewise, we children also treated each of them equally as if they were all our mothers.

When I try and explain this to any acquaintances who are of the Milis faith, they can’t seem to fathom a relationship to a mother who isn’t connected by blood, but for me, it’s an ordinary thing.

All of us children were looked after by mothers who didn’t show favoritism.

And presently, without any of them showing partiality to me who is jobless, every day I am greeted with the words “Go find some work.”

Though the individual words are different, the meaning is the same.

No matter how much I try and explain how noble it is to be jobless, they show no signs of understanding it.

Well, as expected, I realize that I can’t make them understand me.

Even though I help the family by doing things, when it comes to the mothers, I am a good-for-nothing.

If it wasn't for the affluence of my house, I would have long ago been thrown out.

Yep.

I know.

Now, the reason I can even talk all high and mighty like this is thanks to the backing of my parents.

Though I am told to go find some work, I am grateful to my mothers for not throwing me out of the house.

However, when it came to the matter of father, I avoided him.

Honestly, when it came to what my father might say, I was terrified.

I wonder what my father might say if he saw my present situation...

From the time I was a child I have had deep respect for my father, and it was so tremendous that it's hard to bear.

Because it's like that, I wait until it's daytime and then take a stroll out of the house.

This town, Magic City Sharia, is both small and spacious.

So as long as I don't go to where my father will be, then it is likely that I will probably not encounter him.

The odds of meeting him at the Magic Academy were high, but today father happens to be in Asura Kingdom on a business trip.

Even if he were to suddenly return home, there is probably still no chance he would show his face here at the Magic Academy.

In other words, I can't go back home.

I would be scolded by the mothers, and I don't want to be subjected to more pain.

Therefore, I am hanging around a part of the Magic Academy.

Visiting a certain room in the research building.

“Lala-nee, are you here?”

I opened the door while giving it a cursory knock, and inside the room, many things were packed away.

So much junk that I had no idea what it was used for and large amounts of paper scattered about.

What was written on the papers were primarily Magical Formations.

I enter into the room, careful not to step on any of the papers.

Then, from the back of the room, a huge dog leisurely showed itself.

Close to 3 meters in size, it was a big dog.

This is my immediate older sister.

Lala Greyrat.

She was a regular human being until she became an adult. Then, when she finished the adulthood ceremony of the beast tribe and came back home, she had become majorly hairy.

“Wan!”

“...”

Ah, that was a lie.

This dog is our family pet, Leo.

According to my older sister who he is always with, he is there to protect her.

He is her protector and bodyguard.

Incidentally, may I say, he was the first victim of the wild and whimsical older sister.

“Is Lala-nee back there?”

Leo nodded his head, so accompanying him, I go look into the adjacent room.

There is a bed installed there, and there was a strange lived-in smell. On the bed, there was a lone girl sleeping.

It is a girl with blue hair who looks to be about 14 years old.

Because she was the daughter of blue-haired mother who was of the demon tribe, though she appeared to be around 14 years old, she has in fact already passed the age of 20.

Incidentally, she is single.

“gogah~... gugh~...”

She is currently sporting an unladylike figure while just wearing one shirt and a pair of panties, and although she was scratching around a sweaty area, she remained fast asleep.

Her sleeping posture is bad, and her snore is dreadful.

Her sex appeal is nonexistent.

Even if I say that though, there is probably someone...

Naturally, they'd be single?

After I quietly closed the door to the bedroom, I returned to the laboratory.

There is only one chair to sit down on.

Like those for private use by royals, it was a soft and fluffy chair and clearly a special order product.

I look at one of the pieces of paper scattered about that has come into my hand.

It's definitely a magic formula that's written on it.

I wonder if it is perhaps magic from the summoning system for use with a magic square formation.

After my older sister graduated from Asura Royal Academy, she became a researcher at Ranoa Magic Academy.

As for her research subjects, they are summoning magic and divination magic.

With summoning magic, whether from far away or another world, Magic Beasts can be summoned. It's magic used to create quasi-living entities.

With divination magic, it's magic that can reveal the pros and cons of choices that may cause certain events to occur in the future.

Though I don't specifically know the underlying aspects of the research behind those fields of study...

At any rate, my older sister spends almost every day sleeping away.

With the research funds being provided by the school, every day is spent being a hopeless idler.

And that is not noble.

But I imagine it resembles me to some extent.

Of my theory on Noble Unemployment, she is one of the few people who understand.

"But y'know, even though I have free time, I still do plenty of research..."

Since the last time I came here, the number of papers increased.

Here and there are theories written down as memos.

Though she sleeps in the daytime, perhaps the only time she is active is at night?

"Woof."

While I look at the paper, Leo approached and placed his head on my knee.

Leo the dog, for as long as I can remember, had lived in our house.

Somehow, father, for all of our sakes, summoned this guardian beast to protect us.

Though it should have been summoned in order to protect all of us siblings, nowadays, it has become my sister's exclusive charm.

For some reason or another, my sister is somehow special to Leo.

“.....”

When I gently pat Leo's head, in return, he only licked my hand.

Leo favors my older sister.

But it's not like we were ever disliked by him.

Perhaps for him, he too was concerned about me being unemployed.

“Are you also worried about me?”

“Not really.”

Out of nowhere, I suddenly heard a voice.

Naturally, the one speaking wasn't Leo.

When I looked up, I noticed that my older sister had come out of the bedroom.

As always, she is in just a shirt and panties and in a completely unladylike state.

“Don't you know it's rude to enter the room of a young maiden without permission?”

“Eh? But I did properly knock though.”

“Then it's fine... Leo.”

When sister called for Leo, he left from my lap and headed over towards her and curled up.

And in the middle of Leo, who had become a round shape, she sat down.

He had become like a sofa.

“For what reason did you come?”

“Just killing time.”

“I see, then it’s fine to take it easy.”

Following her advice, I sank my body into a chair.

Probably because this is the place where she had just woken up, some sleepiness still remains.

Because the chair is of such quality, I might just fall asleep in it.

“Zeke. ‘That’, are you still doing it?”

” “That’? ”

“Cheddarman.”

“Um-... yeah.”

That’s my older sister though. Even if I was hiding someone, she would immediately discover them.

Secrets too, would also be immediately known.

Discovering things is her strong point.

“For how long are you planning on continuing?”

“Now that, I don’t know yet.”

“Hmm...”

Even if I was keeping something secret, it’s not like my sister would tell anyone in particular about it.

Even when she knows, there's never a time when she would threaten me with it.

So because of that, I find it comforting to be able to spend time with her.

“...”

When I think about how silent my older sister is, she began to casually roll a nearby crystal ball that she had picked up with her hand.

Though to the eyes, it looks just like a crystal ball, for the sake of furthering her divination magic, there was a complex magic formula incorporated into it.

Father never said anything about it. Though he had bought it for her as a gift, it had to be a specially ordered product, and likely it was quite expensive.

I feel a little shiver knowing that items like this have just been strewn about in some corner of the room.

She sits there cross-legged holding the crystal ball.

Looking at it objectively, it seems like a dubious ritual.

But when magical power is poured into that crystal ball, I can see it is operating something within.

However, I have no clue what I am looking at.

“Zeke.”

“What?”

“Papa is returning home today.”

“Eh? Wasn't he supposed to be on a business trip for another 3 days...?”

Divination magic is divination.

Though it's said to be shady nowadays, it's long since continued being practiced from back in the days when the human and demon tribes were at war, and it's a historically noble magic.

Formerly, at least every big country always had at least one person on hand who could use divination magic, but nowadays that practice has completely died out.

Because, excluding the more charismatic divination magicians, even the most practiced users can't see anything but the trivial parts of the future.

Still, even after looking at the future matters, the rate of accurate interpretation is said to only be about 20%.

Long story short, most of the divination magicians who send in questionable magic power into a crystal ball use suggestive expressions and insinuations to make others believe that those events are actually probable. They are a real shady bunch.

In the past, a magician of each country often times affected their country's future path with their divinations. Since a while back though, the number of those who practiced it have decreased, and these days, the number of people learning how to do it are practically nonexistent.

According to the history teacher and if I remember correctly, with the advancement of magic and magical tools, there was no longer a need to depend on the slim probability of an accurate divination.

While it can be learned at the Magic Academy, until my older sister enrolled in a divination magic class at the Magic Academy, I hear that for a long time the number of students who enrolled in it was zero.

To be honest, I think it's quite shady as well.

But, as it is with my sister's whimsical nature, she chose it as a major course of study.

While there might be a purpose behind it, because it was something my whimsical sister did, there probably is no actual meaning behind it.

"I just saw white mama cheerfully picking out a pair of white panties. So probably, papa will come home. Perhaps his work ended early."

It's not that my sister isn't a charismatic divination magician, but by just using that expensive magical tool, it seems there's never a time she can't see something there.

However, the probability of using divination to pinpoint the thing I want to see is very

low.

In that case, the things the practitioner saw, combined with other information, allows them to derive the correct interpretation of what was inferred.

Of course my sister is dead on with this skill.

I think it's fine that she has no pride.

Because mother is cheerfully selecting her underwear, father will return today.

What? Even under pain of death, I won't ever call her an ordinary divination magician.

To them, who teaches things like "You should always phrase everything you say in a roundabout way and assume it is an important matter in the future as much as possible."

And should you be divining for other magicians, "Deep in the mountain range is a lone giant."

If a giant were to throw snow at a midget, the midget would panic and run back to his home" is the style in which one should speak.

Though it seems there is a reason for expressing things that way... if they were instead like my sister who doesn't need to put on airs to appear to be effective, then wouldn't there be no need to label it as something shady?

"Then, I just won't go home today."

"Are you still avoiding papa?"

"Mm... well..."

"Always like that. Zeke, you are such an idiot~"

This is my older sister's favorite phrase.

Sister always ends the conversation with "...you are such an idiot."

In the old days, I often wondered if they held any meaning in them, though she says it

to pretty much anyone, so it might just be a bad habit after all.

“It’s good to be an idiot.”

“I see.”

My older sister casually tosses the expensive crystal ball which lands somewhere with a thump, buries herself into Leo, and yawns.

It seems she still intends to sleep.

Behaving like usual despite even having company around.

I didn’t mind that my sister went back to sleep and decided to pass the time leisurely until the early afternoon.



Early Afternoon.

I said goodbye to my older sister and wandered around the town aimlessly.

I still had a bit of time before a certain store I was waiting for would be open.

So in the meantime, I took a look at things around the city.

Quite by accident, I discovered a carriage at a standstill before me.

A carriage wheel connected to the axle had broken and had scattered various packages onto the ground.

The owner of the carriage and an attendant were gathering all the scattered packages strewn about the ground while appearing distraught.

Nonetheless, the two soon had all the packages loaded back onto the carriage.

I didn’t plan to go over there and impose on them to help repair what broke off the axle, but I wasn’t going to just leave either when I considered the likelihood of the goods being stolen, so I also asked if they needed a hand with repairs.

Though it seems like they really are in trouble.

“Shall I lend a hand?”

“Oh, it’s you Zeke... I’m saved! I was really troubled. I had almost arrived at my destination too, but...”

“Then, shall we fix that axle?”

I lift the carriage up and fix the back up at the proper working height.

Slipping in under it, I hardened the axle by using some soil magic.

“It’s nothing more than first aid, but it should hold fine for about an hour.”

“As expected from ya...”

The merchant was watching with admiration as I went about repairing the axle.

I took lessons in carriage repair at the Asura Royal Academy.

Why at the Royal Academy? You must consider that when it comes to knights and nobles, traveling in carriages is a commonplace thing.

And it’s for that very reason that they taught the methods of repairing them at school.

Though, a noble would never repair a carriage by themselves.

Afterwards, I casually lowered the carriage down, reloaded the packages, and helped the merchant up onto the coachman’s seat.

“Yeah, you really saved me there. Please let me pay you something. Though I don’t have too much coin on hand...”

“No thanks, it’s free of charge. Just because I helped you doesn’t mean I did it for a reward.”

“Is that how it is?... You are indeed a child of the Greyrat family. And a truly splendid person too.”

From those words, giving me an immense feeling of satisfaction, I left that place.

“Yo~ Zeke-kun, good job today!”

“Oh, Ossan*, thanks!”

Suddenly, from the fruit shop’s boss, he threw a red fruit he was holding over to me.

Apparently, it seems the boss had seen some of the series of events with the carriage.

I took the fruit, brought it to my mouth, and bit right into it.

It had a bittersweet and refreshing taste which spread in my mouth.

“Should we be troubled, we’ll be counting on you.”

“Sure, as long as I happen to be free at that time.”

“Ha ha ha.”

This fruit is not considered compensation.

The reason is because there was no connection at all with the merchant from before and myself.

Besides, if the fruit shop’s boss is troubled, I would help him regardless of being given this fruit, and at that time, I wouldn’t ask for a reward then either.

In other words, this fruit is a freebie.

“Ou~, Zeke-kun! Because of your help the other day, I managed to get some good quality meat in stock, so thanks a lot!”

“You’re welcome.”

“Yo, Zeke-kun. Thanks for your help recently! Thanks to you, a healthy child was born!”

“No, no, I’m just glad I passed by accidentally.”

“Zeke! We’re about to play hide-and-seek after this, do you wanna come too!?”

"I have to quit for now. I have to get home before it gets dark!"

When I walk through town, various people call out to me.

The butcher shop's boss was troubled by his stock, the wife of one of the garrison's soldiers suddenly went into labor on the road, and even the neighborhood brats.

To everyone, I am just a good samaritan.

I kill some time while wandering around while thinking on things, and while I do, the sun sets. It seems that I have come to the place that was my destination all along.



-The Drunken Goblin-

In this town, this bar is the most inconspicuous place to be.

There isn't particularly good liquor, and the cooking here is only so-so.

Despite that, thanks to the dark and quiet atmosphere, a customer enters.

Preferring the dark and quiet atmosphere, there are only people possessing scars from head to toe.

Entering the bar, I immediately found a face I recognized right away.

A small man with a bald patch at the top of his head called George.

I took a seat in front of him.

"Yo, George, how's business?"

"Zeke... today is looking good. A lot of money came in!"

As he works in the market as a day-laborer, he earns his cash on a daily basis.

Although he could be called a little scoundrel, it's not to the point I would interfere. Though, little misdeeds might be accumulated, and I haven't had any reason to judge him to have done enough bad things to be a villain.

If I were to judge him as a villain, then as for all those brats who live downtown, I would have no choice but to annihilate them all.

Business is always good for him; he always earns plenty of money everyday, is always in a good mood, and always happily gulps down his beer.

Strangely though, there was no visible sign of him becoming richer.

Maybe he's the type who's not attached to money?

"George, have you heard any interesting rumors?"

"Interesting ones? In the usual sense?"

"Yeah, in the usual sense."

George is a contact man.

He sells off all the information he obtains in the market here in this bar.

So, here at times, I can learn a stock of other information.

"Let's see... it might be a little bit dangerous."

"If it's just a 'little,' then there's no problem."

"Recently, there appears to be some strange medicine circulating in this area."

"...Medicine?"

"When inhaled, it makes people feel as if they were floating up to heaven."

It's drugs.

It's a devil's drug, which drives a person to become an invalid.

Father pays meticulous attention to make sure that this is not distributed here in the city.

"Where?"

“As for where the pushers are, I don’t have a clue. But recently, the head clerk of the Reiji store, or so I have heard, night after night goes to visit a certain warehouse with no sign of other people. Incidentally, I’ve also heard that he’s become awfully influential these days as well.”

That doesn’t necessarily mean that he’s guilty.

However, the chance that Reiji Shop’s head clerk is related to this matter is probably high.

“And the location of this warehouse?”

“I don’t know precisely where it is. However, there are only so many warehouses that Reiji Shop owns. So if we were to talk of a warehouse that was devoid of people...”

From George, I managed to elicit the expected location of the warehouse.

As for me, I have passed through the neighborhood several times throughout the day.

And I hit upon a warehouse that, even at midday, has few signs of life around.

It’s not even an exaggeration to say it’s unmanned even at night.

“Thanks, yo.”

“Hey, it’s all good. Oh, that reminds me, I want to hear anything you have on your sister, okay?”

“About?”

“Your older sister, you have one called Lala, right?”

“Ah, I do.”

George is a generous guy after all, so he’s not going to take money from me.

However, he will ask me this and that instead.

And I tell him what I can.

It's not compensation.

Even if I don't have any new information for him, George will still tell me what I need, and I am also like that.

So mutually, we never try and talk about painful matters.

In other words, this is just small talk.

"I've heard a story that she never comes out of her laboratory, is she doing something dangerous in there?"

"Well, it's just the usual research in regards to Divination and Summoning magic."

"Divination Magic? Is that something like fortune-telling?"

"I dunno. Because Lala is so whimsical by nature, there might not be any meaning behind her doing it."

"Ah~"

George does not desire money from me.

But then, George is an information broker, so the information that he gets from me, someday somehow, is turned into money.

But in all likelihood, there isn't a way.

Because he is not nobly unemployed.

It's not my fault if he went barking up the wrong tree.



The time is now midnight.

Stores are closing, and customers, in pairs and trios, are returning home to their beds.

The time when people fall asleep.

The end of the day.

But my time is not yet over.

Notes:

Ossan: an informal way of addressing a person older than the speaker.

Lala: There is probably an established name for her as well. But it's not on the BT* names & terminology page, and I didn't feel like looking through 300 chapters for whatever chapter she is born in for the name, so it's Lala for now at least, may edit later.

White/Blue/Red Mama: A reference to Sylphiette, Roxy, and Eris respectively.

CHAPTER 3

PRESENTLY, AN ALLY OF JUSTICE

On the night of the crescent moon.

Somewhere in a corner of Magic City Sharia, there was an old warehouse which went unnoticed.

It was there, at a certain company's dead stock warehouse which had fallen into disuse.

Despite it being such a place, there was a something there which shone faintly.

It was a light from a candle.

Rather, two candles.

In the warehouse, there were two people of whom were wearing hoods to cover their faces.

The two approached each other silently...

"The door of the house..."

"...must be tightly shut."

In a low voice, they each confirmed the password with the other.

"The usual stuff, were you able to arrange it?"

"Yeah, it's top of the line stuff."

One party asked the question, and the other party answered. The sack which one of them was holding was placed onto a table.

And then, its contents were revealed.

Inside it, a large number of brown bags were packed tightly together.

The man who had brought the bag reached in, pulled one out, and then handed it to his companion as if telling him to check it.

When the other man opened the bag, he put a finger inside, and after he took it out, there was white powder stuck to it which he then licked.

With that, he then nodded.

“It’s high quality. When this is all sold, it should amount to a small fortune.”

“Then, I’ll gladly buy this from you.”

Saying that, the man who licked the white powder pulled out a small pouch from his pocket, and from within, he removed three gold coins.

“Whoa, no matter the reason 3 gold coins is... These are really Asura gold coins? Is it alright?”

“It might be a bit high to hand over to the guy who arranged for such quality goods, but I’d like to think of it as an investment.”

Asura gold coins.

Of all the gold coins, it was the one with the highest value.

It’s said that in other countries they are valued from several times to even tens of times their own gold coins.

And there were three such pieces.

It was a lot of money.

One could live and play around for quite a while in this town with that sum.

“Or perhaps, it is cheaper?”

“N-not at all, don’t be ridiculous. It’s more than enough.”

Before the man in front of him has time to say otherwise, the money was pocketed.

Seeing it before his own eyes and after the money was paid, the sack was pushed in the direction of the other man.

The transaction was complete.

The man who paid the money took hold of the sack in hand and closed it up. The man who received the money took care to put the coins in his purse and then stashed it away on his body.

After that, those two men, much in the same way they arrived, also left in silence. The man who transported the powder here proceeded to make arrangements for next time, and the man who bought the powder will sell it somewhere else.

This is, of course, the unspoken agreement in this kind of shady business.

“But y’know, isn’t it a bit risky to be dealing this in the town?”

However, it shouldn’t become an issue.

The man who transported the powder raised his voice a little as he was concerned.

“What do you mean by ‘Isn’t it risky?’”

“This town is practically under the thumb of the Dragon God Orsted. Also in addition to him are the Magic King Rudeus and North God Kalman. If you try to sell that stuff with those dangerous guys who control this town, I’m telling you it could become a pretty bad situation. Or possibly, you are telling me you have a plan for dealing with that matter?”

“Whadda’ya know ‘bout that?”

“...As for Magic King Rudeus, the rumors say he is persistent. From out of nowhere, you’ll suddenly be buried up to your legs in trouble.”

“Ah.”

The man nodded his head as if he had been convinced.

Dragon God Orsted.

He was called one of the «Seven Great World Powers», and in this world he alone is considered to be the strongest in the world.

The two subordinates following him are leading figures here in the Magic City Sharia.

The two subordinates.

The right hand of the Dragon God, «Magic King» Rudeus.

The left hand of the Dragon God, «North God Kalman III» Alexander.

The former is a magician, the latter a swordsman.

Originally, wielding his sword as the vanguard, the swordsman was very hot-blooded and was said to be as strong as an army.

But when it comes to these two people, rather than an army... no, the one known for being more extreme, is Rudeus.

At a party in Asura Kingdom, a certain noble insulted God and he got angry, and there was a rumor that a certain neighborhood was burned down completely. All the residents who lived there were completely annihilated.

That Rudeus, so pleased with this town, called his Rudo Mercenary Corps to this town as his private army, as if it belonged to him.

If one goes about starting up that kind of “business” as they please in this town, what would become of it...?

“But those’re probably stories that’ve just followed him. I’ve been in this town for a while, and Rudeus hasn’t paid me any mind, so I don’t really know what’s there to be worried about, as long as it seems as if I’m not touching onto this guy’s turf, then I should be able to do it as much as I’d like.”

The man shrugged his shoulders as he said it.

Yes, even Rudeus is human.

Since he is nothing less than human, then he also has things he's fond of, things he concerns himself with, and things he is biased against.

So, if he is human, then he is harmless to the operation, and as long as the view doesn't become an eyesore, then he should remain indifferent.

The man, finding such a loophole, planned to sell as much of his powder as he can.

His drugs.

The Devil's Medicine...

And so, the man who obtained great wealth laughs.

Being a man who relaxed in a luxurious house built upon all the people he had stepped on, vulgar laughing resounded.

However, right at that moment!

"I won't let you do it!"

In the warehouse, a voice echoed.

"Who's there!?"

The two men hold their candles out, searching the area.

And then they found it.

Overhead from the skylight, a lone man sat, looking down at them.

"Wha..."

The two men were speechless.

Was their secret meeting exposed?

No, the man had a moon on his back and a weird helmet attached.

His whole face was covered, it was a Full-face helmet.

His body was dressed in a lightweight outfit, and it was just the helmet that gave off a sense of incongruity.

“Who’s there!?”

“Fufu, me? I am the knight of the silver moon which shines in the darkness...”

The man in the helmet declared jovially.

“The Ally of Justice, Moon Knight, has arrived!”

At the mention of the name, the two men’s faces paled.

And once again, he said the same thing.

This time, it was in a calmer voice.

“Who are you?”

“Villain! To be selling these things in my beloved town! Here I come!”

The man in the helmet disregarded the second question.

Suddenly jumping down from the skylight, he dropped down and stood in between the two men.

The two men cannot hide their confusion.

“Tch, a nuisance huh! I won’t hand it over to you!”

However, he had no intention of allowing that stuff to become distributed.

The man holding the sack of powder unsheathed a sword from his waist.

Seeing the dull silver light, the man who received the money came to his senses.

“I-It’s none of your business!”

He lost his head and ran towards the exit while uttering such nonsense such as that it had nothing to do with the newcomer.

However, the man in the helmet did not let him escape.

“M o o n l i g h t • K n u c k l e !”

When the man in the helmet cries out, he turned around and, at a terrific speed, plunged into the man before him who had transported the powder with a fist that hammered into his stomach.

“GUFUU...”

The man who transported the powder shed blood from his mouth while he crumpled down from his knees.

“Wha...!”

The man who drew the sword trembled in fear at the display of speed and ability.

Even though that man suddenly appeared and shouted something incomprehensible, he still understood that the man’s existence was one far stronger than him which caused him to tense up.

While having drawn his sword, the man was going to jump outside through a nearby window.

“M o o n l i g h t • S t r i k e !”

However, the man in the helmet was faster.

Much in the same way as before, he moved towards the man before him, and this time, he drove in a precise blow with his fist right into the man’s face.

“GUHEE...”

The man’s nose caved in, and a fountain of blood sprayed out.

The man fell to one knee while holding his nose.

And then, with a face mixed with despair and perplexity, he looked up at the man in the helmet.

When he looked, he saw the man in the helmet still had his fist grasped tightly.

“Alright, I get it, I’m in the wrong, because I’m wrong...”

“Finishing blow! “M o o n l i g h t • S e r e n a a a a a a d e ! ””

A tremendous uppercut blasted through the man’s chin.

While the man was bent backward, he was blown away, and after making a thunderous sound, he became concerned about the pile of product on the floor.

“Judgment!”

While the man in the helmet took a moment to pose, several seconds passed.

After confirming that there were no other sounds coming from nearby, he quickly began to move.

Heading towards the bag in front of him which held the white powder.

The contents were removed and thrown onto the ground.

“Such things exist... only to corrupt the people...!”

When the man muttered those words, a flame shot out of his hand.

The flames burned the powder completely, and in just a moment it all turned to ash.

Right now, there was no one moving.

The wicked were destroyed, and the ringleader who would’ve spread the evil was eliminated.

Satisfied with his judgment, the man cries “Touu!” and leapt out of the skylight towards the outside of the warehouse.



The man who wears a mask ran.

Running at nighttime through the unattended town.

From roof to roof, with the moon at his back.

He ran at an amazing speed.

The man was in a certain nook of the town.

Having been involved with the development of the town, when he reached a small vacant lot, he headed towards the ground.

It was a vacant lot with nothing on it.

Even if it was just a bit wider, it would still probably be difficult to build a house on it.

However, in such a small vacant lot, it is considerably hard to see within, and only a single rope rose up out of it.

When the man approached the rope, he pulled on it with a simple jerk.

Then, an amazing thing happened!

From a small corner of the lot, there was a sound of something opening with a *bokori*, and what appeared was a staircase that continued to the underground.

It was not a vacant lot here.

It was a secret base!

The man looked around, and while confirming that no one was watching, he took light steps down the stairway as the entrance closed behind him.

And the vacant lot changed back to the vacant lot it was before.

The man descended the stairs quietly.

There wasn't any light on the dark staircase, but having come and gone many times, he arrived at the deepest part without stumbling even once.

Then the man raised his index finger.

A small flame danced on the fingertip of the man, and the inside of the room was faintly illuminated.

On the table, there was a closet.

A sword, armor, magic tool, and scroll were in it.

Preserved foods and drinking water were as well.

While it was simple in design, it could certainly be called adequate for being the interior of a secret base.

The man moved towards the entrance and transferred the flame from his finger to the candle nearby and walked towards the closet.

With that, he removed his helmet.

What came out from inside was green-colored hair.

While there were still childish features remaining, the man is endowed with more than enough to qualify as an adult. He is at such an age after all.

“Fuu~”

As the man exhaled a sigh of relief, he opened the closet and began to change.

After taking off the clothes which are black in color from top to bottom, from the closet he takes out his original clothes and changes into them. With that, there was no longer the appearance of the previous individual remaining. There was just the appearance of a townspeople which could be found anywhere.

After he confirmed his appearance in the mirror, he left the secret base.

After coming out of the vacant lot, he walked slowly as if it was a lie that he was just running hurriedly only moments ago.

He wandered and loitered here and there like an old man, but after a few minutes, he arrived at a certain place.

A section in the residential area.

The general residents who live in the Magic City Sharia are not particularly afraid, but without having business, there is rarely a time when they will approach a certain house.

Closely bound ivy wreathed itself around the fence of that house.

If seen during daytime, there are flowers that bloom on the ivy, and it gives off the impression of being fashionably chic.

However, when you look at night, in a single word, it is 'eerie.'

A man approaches the gate opening it and enters silently.

There is no one on the other side.

Does the man even question it? After gently stroking the ivy which was coiled around the gate, he entered the location.

A key is taken out from a pocket, and with as little a sound as possible being made, the key opens up the entryway to the house.

Qui~et~ly, the door was opened, and qui~et~ly, the door was closed.

No footfalls were made as he qui~et~ly he entered inside, and nearby the entrance was a staircase where he qui~et~ly decided to head upwards to the second floor.

"Welcome home."

Then, a voice called out, sending a shiver up the man's body.

"I-I'm home."

When the man looked back, there was a woman with white hair there.

A woman who still seemed young looking, and to be truthful, it was his mother.

“Zeke, what have you been doing until such a late hour?”

Zeke.

What a thing to say!

The man of green hair. It happened to be Zeke!

What an unbelievable thing, the knight of the silver moon which shines in the darkness
“Moon Knight”’s real identity, was none other than Zieghardt Saladin Greyrat!

“Ah, yeah. White Mama as well, why are you also up this late?”

“It’s a coincidence. I woke up just a little while ago.”

She had a scowl on when she approached where Zeke was frozen stiff at.

“...Fighting?”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“Here on your neck, there seems to be some blood there.”

Zeke, in a panic, presses down on that part of his neck.

When he can see what is visible on his fingertips, certainly there is some dark red filth there.

It was probably a spurt of blood from before when he beat the drug trafficker.

“Well, I think this is something else. I’m pretty sure it was from a slight nosebleed I had on the way...”

“Haa... Because your papa doesn’t make a fuss about it, I also won’t nag you either, however, please don’t make me worry about you so much, okay?”

“Yeah, I’m sorry.”

After Zeke apologized, he ascended the stairs as if he were escaping.

“Really... He keeps changing from working to not doing anything...”

That mother, while watching Zeke’s back, sighed deeply.



Zeke Saladin Greyrat

The second son of the Greyrat family, and an unemployed man.

However, for his occupation: being jobless was just an alias.

His true form was the Ally of Justice!

The knight of the silver moon which shines in the darkness, the Moon Knight!

While he puts on a display as an idler in the daytime, he gathers information in the bars and adventurer’s guild.

Then, on the basis of getting a sense of evil from the information acquired, he will act.

In the middle of the night, he secretly defeats evil.

After having graduated from Asura Royal Academy, he had spent his daily life in such a way since then.

Without a job.

CHAPTER 4

BYGONE BUDDIES

Pax was a clever man, full of determination.

Whether it was Mathematics, the Magical Arts, or even entirely theoretical concepts, he was quick to grasp them all.

It was quite apparent he held a strong interest in the fields of Territory Management and Economics. Some of his remarks in class were, in fact, very creative and made a great deal of sense.

While we were both looked down upon and ignored by the aristocratic brats, it was still enough to open the eyes of the teachers.

Moreover, he was also able to utilize three languages.

They were Central Continent's Human Language, Begaritt Continent's Fighting God Language, and the Great Forest's Beast God Language.

Furthermore, it has been said that he was learning the Sea God language now as well.

Incidentally, the only languages I could get a handle on were just the Human Language and Demon God Language. (Magic God Language? Need to check BT wiki)

Mother tried to teach me some other languages, but I was simply unable to learn them.

The only reason I was able to get the hang of the Demon God Language was because there were many people of the Demon Tribe living close by.

My Shishou had the blood of the Demon Tribe running through his veins, and the person my Aunt married was also of the Demon Tribe.

But even though I say that, there is almost next to no opportunity for me to use the Demon God Language.

“How are you able to learn so damn much?”

When I asked, this was the reply I was given.

“When the time comes for me to manage my territory in the future, I imagine that I will meet with those of the Demon Tribe or Beast Tribe who happen to not understand Human Language quite often.”

“If it’s just management, then wouldn’t it be good enough to just hire an interpreter?”

“Then, when it comes time to hire an interpreter, will it not be necessary to verify whether or not they will be able to carefully pass on the words I need them to?”

“Would it be particularly necessary for you to be the one to do it?”

“Rather than necessary, it is something I absolutely must do. At any rate, my allies still number quite a few, after all.”

He was not the kind of person to talk about his situation very much.

What I understood was he is originally from the Ouryuu Kingdom, so other than his mother being an Aristocrat, I can’t say that I know anything else worth mentioning.

Also, he himself has said that he doesn’t have very good memories in regards to that.

As a result of being continually ostracized, he has few people that he can call allies, and he was separated from the man charged with educating him and his mother. Not only that, but he was then sent to Asura Royal Academy under the pretense of “Studying Abroad.”

I was able to understand this much from the conversations we had patched together with some of my own guesswork.

“Still, do you find it really necessary to learn the Sea God Language? Aren’t they the kind of people that actively try and avoid contact with those living on the surface?”

“While it’s not viewed as much of a problematic matter, from the olden days, those of the coastal area and “them” have engaged in disputes many times. They eventually turn into full-scale disputes and then devolve into fighting. In many cases, it leads to a lot of blood being spilled over pointless matters.”

“Then, is there nothing that can be done about it?”

“I do not think so. After researching some documents, though I say fighting, it’s really just a great number of trivial matters. Before they were even aware of it, the Human tribe had already gone and defiled the things which were important to the Seafish Tribe.”

“Wow...”

“If some dialogue can begin, then some of the problems can be solved in short order. However, there is the matter of one village already being annihilated. Of course, there are going to be many cases which won’t be solved with just dialogue. However, if there can be an understanding of words, for both parties to take it as far as fighting, I expect there can be a place to negotiate and end the hostilities.”

He said this with a smile.

For myself, there weren’t any particular feelings that sprung up within me from this, but there was a very persuasive power behind it.

So together with him, I studied the language.

And, when it came to studying together with him, I even found it surprisingly easy to learn it.

It was surely because of his, ‘If it were me, in what way would I use it?’ attitude, all while diligently studying and doing our very best while taking it into consideration.

Leaving aside whether or not I would actually end up using what I learned in practice, having such thoughts while studying in that manner, I find that I have come to be somewhat excited.

By the way, even though it was him, his talent in fencing was just ordinary.

For me, who had started to study the North God Style at a young age, no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t best me even once.

I am in no way saying he is weak.

He had studied the same North God Style as me and even had the foundations firmly

built.

But, even after saying all that, he is still unskilled.

“Zeke, you are really strong!”

“What’s strong was all this innate power I was born with.”

“Like a Miko?”

“I don’t believe it’s quite to that level, though perhaps it might feel somewhat similar.”

Miko (God-Child) is the name given to children who are born with an extraordinary and terrifying ability.

I pictured in my mind many of my father’s acquaintances, and before long, there was a single person who possessed superhuman strength.

However, the difference between my superhuman strength and their superhuman strength was vastly different!

To have obtained the strength I have now, I’ve had to train my body a considerable amount. However, it’s said that person never even once had to train theirs.

Furthermore, even as strong as I am now, I am still no match for his physical strength.

“Also, I’m proud to say that my Shishou is the Northern God. Northern God Kalman III. It’s likely the difference between the masters!”

“Ah, I see. The person who came to teach me the sword, despite how considerably strong he is with it, he might not be as good as the head of the faction after all.”

When it came to the matter of losing to me in fencing, he really did not seem to pay it much mind.

To begin with, he probably doesn’t have the disposition suited for fighting.

In any case, school life with him was enjoyable.

If I think about it, it’s very possible that he is the first person I could consider to be a

close friend.

Though while there were some very close friends at Magic City Sharia, when I think about it from the bottom of my heart who my closest one was, it was just him.



Having been reeled in by Pax, I had reached the point of becoming diligent in my studies.

Pax's method of teaching was quite skillful, and in no time at all, I had recovered from how far behind I had fallen in my class work.

Even though I had just caught up, my best grades placed me dead center in the upper ranks.

However, that was only limited to the academic portion.

When it came to my ranking pertaining to martial arts, I was the top of my class.

Or perhaps, it was the top of the entire academy?

I didn't feel the need to look too deeply into that.

Pax taught me how to study, and in return, I taught Pax how to fence.

Much as how I was not a great pupil in academic learning, Pax likewise wasn't a great student of the martial arts.

His body was strengthened, and he seemed to have a good understanding of the basics, but it seems he was just unable to improve.

And so, because of this, his results were similarly a dead center of the upper ranks.

Though, for him, that was only in martial arts.

His ranks in the academic portion were top of the class.

Even after we started hanging out, we were still being ignored as usual.

Steadily, our results improved over time, except where we ranked at the top. That never changed.

At this point in my so-called school life, it's as gray as ever.

But compared to the times when I was alone, I have definitely seen some color.

Thankfully, I was able to pass the time in an enjoyable way.

Mostly due to Pax, definitely.

"You are not going over there today as well?"

A close friend as him, of course, had a certain hobby.

No, I don't know if it's alright to call it a hobby.

Rather, a habit or... no, it's probably better to call it a bad habit.

At Asura Royal Academy, every 10th day is a school holiday.

Students are free to spend time however they would like on campus, but leaving school grounds is prohibited.

Mainly because problems tend to arise from it.

The Royal Academy is situated right in the middle of the district that insulates the middle-class nobility from the upper-class nobility.

Leaving the boundaries of where the middle-class nobles live, one arrives at where the lower class nobles live, and past that is where the common folk live.

As for the Royal Academy, it accepts not only exchange students from other countries but also commoners with particularly high abilities.

However, it goes without needing to be said that the majority are the children of the Asura Nobility.

Those aristocratic brats who were raised in that boxed off environment, under the pretense of adventure, descend upon the place where the commoners are.

And thus, as would be expected as a matter of course, problems arise.

At times there is a real likelihood of a student dying, and when that becomes a point of concern, it is only natural for it to be prohibited.

Nevertheless, though not much time has passed since the founding of the Academy, there are students who are unable to put up with it.

After several years, a loophole was created, and it became a holiday for the students to start being able to move about freely outside.

Now, while the Academy, to preserve its integrity, prohibits it on the surface, there is definitely the feeling that it has completely given up on trying to obstruct that loophole.

So without pretense, we also use the loophole and use the holiday to head out into the town.

After exiting from the small hole which was opened up from behind the school building, we are already there in the Asura Kingdom's capital city.

The place we were going was a particularly dark place, even in the Asura Kingdom.

Should I call it a "dubious place"?

Well, if you looked at it from a certain viewpoint, it probably is.

It's the place to go to for the very purpose of being dubious.

This is the place where the drainage from the areas of the Royal Castle and the Aristocratic Wards spills out to.

It is the area where the commoners live, an area that is especially filthy and smells terrible.

What is otherwise known as the Slums.

The slums are surrounded by the castle walls, and there are always guards posted on the ramparts.

The reason for that is to prevent the vagrants from the slums from getting inside.

Of course, the other part of their duties is to protect those of us with high enough status and let us inside.

Pax, however, was well versed in the art of infiltrating places such as this.

I was told once that it was the person in charge of his education that taught him how to do such things.

For those of the slums of the capital city in Asura Kingdom, such sparkling places like the Royal Academy or the Aristocratic District sound like outright lies.

Small and shabby houses are lined up in a row, and there is a man lying down on the road in his own vomit whilst holding fast to a bottle of liquor.

Bare-naked children run around with sticks and disappear off into the back alleys.

Having said that, not everyone is burdened with the needs of food, clothing, and shelter—the necessities of life.

Peeking into one of the small houses, while sipping on tasty soup, a mother, and her children could be seen laughing together.

Then, from time to time, a young woman with a collar of iron attached to her being led by a well-dressed man could be seen.

Probably a slave on her way to being sold off. The man is clearly a slave trader.

The young girl has a pained expression on her face, too tired from resisting, with an expression of defeat... to say of her appearance, well, it's a just an ordinary face.

In other words, the normal face of those who clearly understood that they were being sold off as an object.

In order for us to chase after them, we move within the slums.

As for the residents of the slums, when they look at us who are well dressed, sometimes they would come out and put out their hands as if hoping we would fulfill some kind of demand.

Pax didn't even give them a single glance and instead said "You must not give them anything at all. Otherwise, they will never stop swarming you, okay?"

After coming out of the dark alley, there was a plaza-like area.

It's the interior of the slums, a place you would never know from the looks of the area around it.

A place overflowing with a zealousness all its own.

On a platform located in the center, there are a group of naked people being displayed there.

The slave market.

Compared to the one in my hometown, it's a bit smaller, but there is no mistaking it.

In the Kingdom of Asura, the official stance on slavery is that it is prohibited by law, but that is just outward appearances.

For it is in fact secretly done here.

And now, for some reason unknown to me, Pax has the hobby of coming to take a look at the slave market.

I can say, however, that the reason Pax has come here is not to buy a slave.

"That slave over there looks like they have considerable skill in fencing, huh? The blisters on their palms, how do they look to you?"

"No, those are not the kinds of blisters you get from holding onto a sword. Perhaps, they're from something like farmwork? Here, take a look at my hands. If you only do fencing, then you cannot get blisters in these places."

"Then if it's the case of a different school of fencing, might it be possible for such types of blisters to grow there then?"

"Maybe..."

However, he made observational comments.

What kind of person is that slave? What's their forte? What kind of experiences has that person had?

Before you became a slave, what did you do? What kind of social status did you come from?

Sometimes we compare answers, but mostly it's just him saying whatever he wants.

"Ah, that man who is being watched by everyone, although he is wearing worn-out-looking clothes, his hair and fingernails are clean."

Incidentally, the commentary was not limited to just slaves.

"It's an employee who serves a noble. By some chance, maybe even someone from the Royal Family."

"Whoa!"

"That slave trader is a member of the Beast Tribe, isn't he? He's also selling those from the Beast Tribe. However, the atmosphere around here feels different from the usual human areas. Maybe, perchance, someone from a thief company has betrayed his companions and was selling them here instead. Slaves of the Beast Tribe fetch a very high price here in the Asura Kingdom don't they?"

The slave trader and the slave buyer who came to shop again once more became the targets of Pax's observations.

Though there were a lot of hit and misses on his observations of the slaves, he was good at inspecting the customers. He was able to distinguish those who held a high status and those who held a lower position in an instant.

"Pax, you are really detail-oriented, you know?"

"I received instruction in this from my mother. How to see through disguises and how to see through those who lie about their social status."

"In Ouryuu Kingdom, such things can be taught?"

"No... Mother it seems had been taught this by my father, or so I understand."

When Pax said that, he had an indescribable look on his face.

It was one of longing, and different from nostalgia, his facial expression seemed complicated.

Because of that, it might be something that I probably should have known already.

For him, what kind of place is this place?

For him, what kind of existence is his father?

“Be that as it may, the fact that you like coming to a place such as this is really quite surprising.”

Though I wanted to know about it, I didn’t inquire about it directly.

I might not have had enough courage inside of me too.

“Such a place as this? You’re here, so exactly what kind of place did you expect it to be?”

Listening to his reversal of a question, for just a moment I was unable to reply.

As for the slave market in my own hometown, Magic City Sharia, I haven’t set a single foot into it.

In the past, when goofing around with my older brothers and sisters, we tried to sneak in and take a peek, but we were discovered by mama and subjected to a very angry lecture, so never again did we try.

It would be a lie to say that I wasn’t curious about it, but I would never have thought a smart and noble man like Pax would ever intentionally come to this kind of place.

“This place... is a wicked place. And the bad guys are in control of it.”

I said as much while looking at the surrounding area.

First of all, the slave seller is quite vulgar.

The upper half of that person’s body is bare and covered in tattoos. They also seem to have a number of scars, and they are glaring at everything around them with

displeasure.

Secondly, the slaves they have for sale, they are all in poor condition healthwise.

The slaves you can look at openly don't look visibly ill, but I can tell they aren't getting a satisfactory amount of food to eat at all.

The location itself is bad as well.

The sewage ditch with the runoff from the slums gives off the smell as if something is rotting away. Surely, if any of that water is drunk as is, very likely they will be sick to the very pit of their stomach. Also, the sanitary conditions are reprehensible.

Furthermore, any of the Royals or Aristocrats who would come to this place to buy a slave, I can say with certainty aren't ever the kind of person that could be considered virtuous.

"Evil huh?... Well, at the very least it's not a great place, right?"

As Pax said this, he began walking.

While looking at the slaves, while looking at the merchant, and while looking at the customer who is looking at a slave, appraising it seriously for the sake of making a purchase.

"But my father seemed to have a fondness for such a place as this."

"Seemed to have?"

"By the time I was born, my father was already dead. I have never heard the voice of my father and have only ever seen his face on a portrait."

"... is that so?"

He's usually not one to talk much about his personal history.

Thereby, today is the first time I had heard that his father was already dead.

Well, I had a vague impression it was something like that.

“Though I don’t know what there is to like about a place such as the slave market, for your father to slip out of the castle often and visit such a place, it seems like there may have been something causing a problem.”

“Huh?”

“However, he seemed to have gathered a group of people who were there for the purpose of controlling them. After hearing that, I wanted to make it something I did too.”

While talking about his father, he had a far-away look in his eyes.

The father he had never seen outside of portraits.

That, compared to how I look at my own father, might have been given an image much larger than life to look at.

“At one point in time, the man in charge of my education asked me why I was so obstinate about wanting to hear about why my father was fixated on such a place. Though his words were a bit evasive, he also spoke about it to its end. “Your father was definitely disliked in the country. So where else do you think he’d find a place he could be himself but in the slums?””

His father was said to be originally a prince from the country formerly called the Shiron* Kingdom.

His small stature was probably due to the curse he was born with, and because of that, his behavior had worsened too, even being neglected or mistreated among other things by the royal family.

It can be said to be an inevitable thing for him to find the place he could feel he belonged to.

“It’s not just my father. I had heard that my grandmother was originally a slave. My grandfather, who was the King of Ouryuu Kingdom, though I don’t understand the intention behind why my grandmother was bought, eventually became a plaything for my grandfather, and my mother was born. And mother, of course, being the child of a slave, was shunned.”

His grandmother it seems was said to have had blue hair.

When you think of a race with blue hair, it's got to be the Migurd Tribe, is that the blood flowing through those veins, or is it the blood of another tribe of the Demon Race? Or it is unrelated to it entirely, and the hair color was just merely inherent? I can't be sure of it just from his story alone.

However, a certain daughter and son had inherited the hair color.

And that stigma then marked them as being descendants of a slave.

"And then, it was my turn to be ostracized. However, I do not bear a grudge against my grandfather. My grandfather acknowledged my mother as his daughter, so she was brought up properly because of that."

After he said that, he came to a stop.

Exactly in the middle of the slave market.

"My father found his place in the slave market, and my mother was the child of a slave."

All around us, the slave merchants were showing off their slaves as they saw fit to do so as they spat out their selling points.

Breathing in the smells that wafted in from the surrounding environment, there were signs everywhere that were plastered with vulgarities.

"So, I wonder... the slave market here is filthy, stinking, and, as I understand, not a good place at all. But, I cannot think of it as an evil place."

Pax said as much with a strained smile.

"Well, whether good or evil, it's necessary. Though I can't say slavery is a good institution, even if it has been kept to this street only, on the other hand, it shouldn't be left as it is. If it's not managed and maintained properly, the number of misfortunate people will only increase. When I receive my territory in the future, you will be able to make a clear decision if you will come to a place such as this again. With correct management and since I intend such a place to not become a place where the bad guys are in control, I feel it's necessary that I should know very well what kind of place it is inside and out. Therefore, the reason for coming here is to study it."

Pax, while giving a bitter smile, shrugged his shoulders.

For him, the slave market is not a place of evil.

Of course, slaves aren't evil either.

If it turns out it is evil, then his existence, surely at that time, will become evil as well.

"Studying, you say..."

Did he want to affirm his own existence?

Or, did you want to affirm the existences of your own neglected mother and father?

I just don't know.

There was one thing I did understand, though.

Whatever it might be, he has been aiming for something very grand.

Otherwise, why else would he come to study something in a country so far away from Ouryuu Kingdom and not just observe and study his own nation's slave market?

"Is it that detestable to you? Coming to a place such as this..."

"... Though I'm not enthusiastic, we are study buddies."

Pax looked dazzling to me.

For the me who had given up on the dream to become an Ally of Justice and for me who lived a school life without any purpose at all, he was a very enviable existence.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTLY, WITH MY YOUNGER SISTER

“Zeke!”

I heard a voice in the middle of my nap.

As I’d heard this voice everyday, I was experiencing a sense of déjà vu.

“How long do you plan on sleeping!? Get up!”

I opened my eyes.

When I rose from the bed, I looked out the window and saw that it was already midday.

When I looked in the opposite direction, it was the same as usual. My white-haired mama had her hands on her hips, scowling at me.

Today, too, I had to be woken up.

Though I didn’t complain, it was also troublesome for my mama to do this every morning.

“I’m airing out the futons today, so get up already.”

“..... okay.”

Following her exact words, without even changing clothes, I left my room.

“I’ve already prepared breakfast for you, so hurry downstairs and eat up!!”

“Al~right.”

While giving an unmotivated reply to my mother’s words, I walked down the hallway and descended the stairs.

Then, halfway down the staircase, I saw a blue-haired girl sitting down.

It was my younger sister, Lily.

When I glanced at her hands, I wondered what she was doing as it seemed she was fiddling with something like a shell that had many kinds of bumps.

Perhaps it was some kind of magic tool?

I don't really understand what it would be used for.

But it was not a rare scene.

Her hobby was the assembly and disassembly of magical tools.

So, finding herself with free time, she was playing with them.

While it's a good thing, it's also an issue not knowing the time and place when inspiration would strike.

When you love what you do, you could really get absorbed in your work just about anywhere.

Whether it be in the middle of a meal or a bath, inside a store, or by the sidewalk, even at times taking a seat in a back alley, she would begin to tinker with magical tools.

Today, well... seemed to be one of her better days.

"Lily, is today your day off?"

When I poked her back with my foot, she seemed startled and turned her head, looking right at me.

Then, after exchanging looks with me, and what I had in my hand, she shook her head.

"Then it's not your day off?"

"It's not too late for you to report to your job yet, right?"

"Right."

“..... Go change your clothes. I’ll escort you there.”

“Ah, sure. Please do.”

Apparently, she had been in the process of playing hooky from work.

I escorted her up the stairs, and having made sure she went into her room, I went downstairs.

I wondered was it because of Lily’s personality being like that or was it the fact that I was ignored at the Royal Academy, but amongst our brothers and sisters, she was the only one who didn’t attend the academy.

Since it was my younger sister herself who wished not to attend the Royal Academy, she instead got a job through dad’s connection at Zanoba Company, which manufactured and sold works of art and magical tools.

As for Lily’s position, it was mainly in the Development and Repair of Magical Tools Division.

She seemed to be quite reliable, and was even given a private workshop by the company.

For my younger sister who loved anything magical tool-related, that kind of workplace must’ve been akin to paradise.

Despite that, she was chronically tardy or absent from work.

Usually, like how it was today, she became almost completely absorbed in fiddling with strange magical tools.

She was not sufficiently aware of her role as a member of the working class society.

Well, I of all people have no business saying that.

Incidentally, my younger sister, Chris, had entered into the Asura Royal Academy.

Her hair color is neither blue or green and, from the beginning, she was eager to go to the Asura Kingdom, so our father and mothers didn’t have anything, in particular, to say about it.

My younger sister, despite being a grown up, had a shining admiration for the princess, so a place such as the Royal Academy must be like paradise to her. I wonder what she is doing there now? Has she made a boyfriend yet?

“Red mama! Lily is going to the shop right now, and I’m going to escort her. So is it alright if I borrow a horse?”

“So today wasn’t a day off after all... that’s fine. Just be careful.”

After informing my red-haired mother in the dining room about our departure, I quickly wolfed down my breakfast and left the house to prepare a horse.



Helping Lily onto the saddle behind me, we headed along the road to the Zanoba Company.

By the way, the horse belonged to our red-haired mother.

Not only fencing but equestrianism was also one of the red-haired mother’s strong suits, so back when we were kids, we were often taken on long rides.

I also happened to be good at training horses.

Any horse mother would ‘get a hold of’* became obedient.

[T/N: lit. embrace. See Linnea and Pursena for details.]

All of us siblings, under the tutelage of the red-haired mother, were taught equestrianism and how to break in horses.

Incidentally, the name of this horse was Caravaggio.

Father named it.

It seemed to be the same name as the horse my grandfather once kept.*

[T/N: see Roxy’s final exam, childhood chapter.]

Though I didn’t understand the reason behind it, whenever father kept an animal, he

never failed to give it a name.

Perhaps it was a part of his character.

Since a short while ago, Lily had been leaning against me, fiddling with a magical tool.

Even while in the middle of traveling, or just during anything, she paid no heed to anything but them.

So, to not let her fall off, I deftly handled the horse.

I was quite used to it.

“So, what kind of magical tool is that?”

“..... It’s a magical tool that waters the fields. When you hold onto the rod and pour mana into it, it rotates while going ‘clack clack clack’ and sprays water everywhere.”

“Whoa... it sounds like it would also spray water on the person using it.”

“That’s why I need to see if there’s any way to improve it.”

While Lily was saying that, it began to go ‘clack clack clack’.

Though all of us siblings learned equestrianism, Lily was not particularly good at it.

When it came to getting on, she could, but once she did, Lily was at a complete loss at what to do next.

Incidentally, while on this matter, when Lily finds something interesting on the roadside, she might jump off.

She’s very whimsical.

And because she was short, she would have a hard time getting back on again.

In addition, Lily also had no sense of direction.

From home to school and from home to work, it was expected that she would get lost on the road...

However, she didn't use to lose her way at all when she was a child.

That said, for this person to lose her way so often now was simply because she had no awareness.

I often went to look for the lost Lily, and the many times I would find her, she always seemed to have a puzzled look on her face.

To not send her to the Royal Academy, father and mother probably took into account her horrendous sense of direction.

Anyway, due to those sorts of things, I can't help but accompany her, when she is late.

"Hiiii~!"

Then suddenly, a cold feeling streamed down my back.

"Kyaa!?"

"Uwah~"

"It's cold!"

Coincidentally, similar shrieks also erupted from the various people who were walking around the neighborhood near us.

"Lily. I'm freezing."

"..... uh, I'm really sorry."

"I have told you many times not to activate magic tools back there."

Lily, of course, had activated a magical tool while sitting behind me.

This was a common event.

At least today, I can consider myself fortunate as I wasn't covered in flames.

"Ah."

This time with a small voice, the feeling of Lily against my back disappeared.

Did she fall off the horse?

Thinking that that's what happened, I looked behind me and saw Lily running towards a place.

She crossed the main street, with a pitter-patter.

Her destination was a roadside stall.

"Caravaggio."

Circling back with the horse, I moved to the front of the street vendor.

Looking at it from above, it appeared to be a shop that had some magic items put out.

People made magical tools, and nature made magic items.

Though they seemed similar, they were different, and regardless, Lily liked both types.

So, as per her usual behavior when she found such a place, she jumped right after it.

"... and it's effect?"

"When you whack someone with this staff, they will have a brain-freeze. It will feel like they have drunk a large amount of ice water."

"How much is it?"

"You would like to buy it? Young miss, you don't look like an adventurer or mercenary..."

"It's for research, so that I can make similar magical tools."

"Oh! As expected of the Magic City Sharia, there are people who buy with that kind of purpose! So, you got money?"

Lily pulled out a heavy sack from her pocket and placed five coins she took out from it in front of the merchant.

A suitable price.

Even though Lily was weak at equestrianism, she was fast at calculation and magical formations.

“Hm, here you go.”

“Hoh, to be carrying such a large sum of money, you must be a wealthy young miss.”

“It’s only for such opportunities like this.”

“Is that so? If I were you, I’d be worried about pickpockets swiping them... well, is that why you have a bodyguard?”

The merchant looked at me, smiling with a laugh.

Was I supposed to be a bodyguard?

“He’s not a bodyguard. This guy is my older brother.”

“Is that how it is? I guess the features, minus the hair, do look a bit similar...”

“There’s no such thing... Ah!”

I extended my hand out from where I’m sitting on the horse and pulled her up before she gets stuck telling her life’s story.

“You are late to work, so we need to hurry on.”

“Right. Then, Shopkeeper-san, that’s goodbye.”

“Sure, thanks for your patronage, and watch out for pickpockets and kidnappers~”

Lily is completely treated as a child.

Lily is the child of our blue-haired mother and that seems to be the reason why her appearance seems so young.

Her speech and behavior are also childlike.

However, amongst our siblings, she is probably the hardest worker.

It's unmistakeable, since I am the best at not working at all.

"Nii-san, would it be alright if I whacked you on the head with this to see how it looks?"

"Get fucked."

"Eh... nn, aaaah-!"

When I looked back, Lily seemed to be holding her head in agony.

It seemed that she had just tested out the effects of the magical item she bought on herself.

In situations like this, if it were my older sister Lala, I wouldn't have refused and been hit on the head.

Lily can't feel satisfied until she tries it out herself.

"The brain freeze is real... Nii-san, want to try it too?"

"Stop it. It'll be bad if we fall off the horse."

"... okay."

Lily, seemingly a bit disappointed, slid the staff into her bag around her waist and began to fumble around with a magical tool.

Moving along on the horse in silence for a while, the destination came into sight.

The atelier owned by the Zanoba Company.

When I stopped the horse in front of the building, Lily got down.

"We've arrived."

"Thanks, Nii-san."

"All good. And when you return?"

“I can go home by myself.”

“I see, take care then, sis.”

“Yup.”

Pitter-pattering, Lily headed into the atelier, but stopped and suddenly looked back at me.

“Ah, Nii-san.”

“Hm? What’s up? Forget something?”

“If perhaps Nii-san wants to work, I could hire you in at my place, you know?”

“As your chauffeur?”

“More like running errands. Nii-san, it’d be convenient, since you already know a bit about magical tools.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“kay.”

With a small nod from Lily, she entered the atelier, this time for sure.

Nevertheless, my younger sister seemed to want to help me get a job by going as far as this.

She also understands the situation in regards to my unemployment, but I guess she must not think I am in a good state.

“.....”

Moreover, the words of the merchant from before made me anxious about pickpockets and kidnappers.

Suddenly disappearing one day, and then being put on display in the slave market, it’s good that there’s never been such a thing.....

Well, despite her appearance, she is a lady of the Greyrat family.

Even if her equestrianism was poor, her fencing and magic skill were well above the ordinary.

Besides, in this town, the Greyrat family had influence.

I can't imagine there would be many people who'd dare to mess with the Greyrat family.

"No point in being careless though, right?"

While muttering such things, I left.



Wandering around town as usual, eventually, I arrived at a certain business I frequented.

『The Drunken Goblin』 .

This bar was the most inconspicuous location in town.

The so-called 'dive bar' on the outskirts of town.

It wasn't the kind of place for the really notorious, but rather, where the small time villains could gather.

There maybe some people wondering why an upstanding person, like myself, would be at such a place.

However, it was something I had realized.

Just like what Cheddarman were battling, there was no evil that is easy to understand.

Yes, real evil doesn't show itself on the surface.

Evil was always sly and crafty.

It was always hiding in the shadows and moving behind the scenes.

If someone wanted to punish such evil, they themselves must go to where there is evil.

By putting myself into the den of evil, I can gain information on the evil.

“Oh.”

Thinking this as I entered the bar, I located the usual face.

It’s a small man with a balding head. It’s George, the information broker.

“Yo, George, how’s business doin’?”

“Oh, it’s Zeke... Well, it ain’t too bad. Alcohol sales are in the black today, at least. I can treat you to something if you want.”

“Is it alright? Thank you~ Ah, alcohol is no good though.”

“I gotcha.”

George asked the serving staff to add on a drink.

I don’t receive compensation, though I’m not paying, but I will accept something given in goodwill.

That is because goodwill is the partner of the Ally of Justice!

“And how about yourself, Zeke? How’s business?”

“You mean how’s my unemployment going? Eh, sometimes good, sometimes bad y’know?”

“Ha ha, I get that impression from you. Then, is there anything interesting going on?”

『Small talk』 was something I engage in, from time to time.

At any rate, it was basically just a bit of gossip.

It’s a good place to start from anyway.

“There’s nothing particularly interesting going on. I escorted my sister who was late

to her job, and at around noon there was a kid who fell down near an alley. He was crying, so I used some healing magic on him. Umm, there was a pickpocket in the market, so I tripped him with my leg and made him fall down.”

“Your younger sister? Is she the one called Lala? Or is it Lily?”

“It’s Lily. Right now, Lily is the only one of my younger sisters in town.”

“Ah, that’s how it iss. My bad, my bad, the names are a bit similar so sometimes I jumble them up a bit.”

It seemed that today, what George wanted to know about is Lily.

He was a good listener when it came to hearing me talk about my family.

Information on the Greyrat family probably had a high price.

And since I was the source, the credibility of the information was very high.

“There is a rumor that she acts like a spendthrift and buys all the magical items and magical tools around, but what kind of lady is she really?”

“That is... well, there’s no mistaking the buying all the magical tools and magical items part, but it’s just her hobby. Rather, it’s more like she has a personal interest in them, since she’s a workaholic to the end. After all, she’s developing new merchandise for the Zanoba Company.”

“New merchandise, eh? Anything that might be popular?”

“Well, exactly what she is developing, I don’t actually know.”

I have no idea where George was selling my older and younger sisters’ information.

Because of that, I didn’t disclose any important information.

Well, exactly what was being developed, I really didn’t have a clue.

“How about you? Is there anything interesting going on?”

“Anything interesting, huh..... you mean, in the usual sense?”

“That’s right, in the usual sense.”

Incidentally, it seemed George may have a vague suspicion that I was an Ally of Justice.

That may have stemmed from the result of some villains being suppressed because of the information distributed to me.

I didn’t think a guy who couldn’t piece that much together had any business being an information broker though.

“Nothing really interesting, but I did hear a strange rumor just then.”

“A strange rumor?”

“Something about, a band of thieves that had been frequently appearing on the main road to the west.”

“... it’s not something too strange, is it?”

Magic City Sharia was a city with an excellent public order, however, it’s a lawless area outside of its walls.

Things like bandits appearing on the highways was a daily occurrence.

Sooner or later, the country would dispatch a knight or soldier to suppress them.

The fact of the matter is, even if I were to make the trip out west as an Ally of Justice... it would take a whole day.

I left in the evening, I preferred to return home during the same night.

If possible, only in town.

Outside of the town was outside of the jurisdiction for the Ally of Justice.

“Well, that’s unfortunate. They say that the band of thieves are selling women and girls in the slave market every night.”

The slave market?

Then, that was nearby.

“Any particular features?”

“I don’t know all the details, but... the leader seems to be the one wearing a red bandana. Aside from that——”

As always, from George, I drew out information about the villains.

Afterwards, the small talk began again as usual.

From this point, it’s really just a normal chat.

I listened to George bitch about things, and then we talked about how fine the asses were on the neighborhood girls.

Of course, George wasn’t the only one I talked to.

I also spent time talking to my other acquaintances in the bar.



Late at night.

After I left the bar, I headed over to the vacant lot downtown.

Then, in the middle of that vacant lot, I pulled on a certain rope.

There was a clink, and the entrance to the secret base was opened.

When I was younger, my older brother and sister had made this place together with me.

We carried tables, closets, carpets and cushions over and made this our hideout.

Back then, we had a lot of fun playing together here.

This base was not going to be succeeded by our younger sisters, so it had been decided that the last resident to inherit it would be me.

The small bed and closet have still remained as they were.

Or perhaps, the one who hadn't changed since back then was me.

"Just kidding~"

After making that joke, I took a certain item out from the closet.

It was a black helmet.

The helmet was the kind that covered the entire head, and it was something I found in the castle of the Dragon God, Orsted-sama, when I once accompanied my father on a visit.

Incidentally, though I said castle, it wasn't a large place at all.

If I were to compare it to the size of other buildings on the ground, it is a bit smaller than our house, and father called it an office.

But, all those who lived in the town called it a castle. The reason was probably that they think it would be disrespectful to call the place where Orsted-sama lived anything other than a castle.

Was I also lured into that as well? Before I realized it, I had reached the point of calling it a castle.

Well, that's enough on that subject.

There were large quantities of this helmet placed in the castle's massive underground warehouse.

There were twenty, no, was it more like thirty?

The helmets which were exhibited in rows on a shelf were similar to this one, however, the design of each of the black helmets differed little by little.

Just like a certain section of a Magical Tool shop.

Among those, there was one that I was attracted to.

It was a very cool helmet.

But of course, even if was the coolest looking thing, I would never steal it.

No matter how foolish of a child I may have been, I would never steal something that was the property of someone my father worked for.

Still, I picked it up.

Letting out a sigh of admiration as I held it in my hands, I was unaware of Orsted-sama who had appeared behind me saying, “You can keep that.”

From that day onwards, this helmet became mine.

Orsted-sama was always wearing something of a similar design and though there were many like it, this one was mine.

In order to show my ownership, I carved a crescent emblem on the brow of the helmet and made it the symbol of the Moon Knight.

“.....”

From top to bottom, I changed into some black clothes and put the helmet on.

Finishing it off with a dark-colored mantle, the figure reflected in the mirror is none other than the Ally of Justice, 『Moon Knight』 .

Today as well, I would rid the city of its evil.

CHAPTER 6

PRESENTLY, AT THE SLAVE MARKET

Dead of night.

Leaping from roof to roof, I was heading for my destination.

Decked completely in black, silver mask on my head, the tune I hummed was the Song of Justice.

A dark curtain of night, a shining moon in the sky.

A moonlit shadow. A silver-masked shadow.

An ally of justice, they say. A man who defeats evil, they say.

I am a knight of the moon of justice. I am called the Moon Knight.

Justice, Love and Courage, surges from my heart,

Just, Love and Courage, defeats all evil.

A silver, shining moon in the night sky, it's the Ally of Justice, Moon Knight~.

Cheddarman's song that my father sang for me a long time ago... a parody of it, that is.

As I sing this, my mood lifts a bit.

Determination rising!

At the same time, I also feel like I forget all the unpleasant things.

"Over there, huh."

The destination I finally arrived at is a place where public safety is particularly poor, despite being in the heart of the town.

There's nothing like a slum in this town.

Even so, there's still many impoverished folk, and bad lots.

Such people have a tendency to gather in one place.

And in most cases, the public order of that place diminishes.

And, in the middle of that kind of neighborhood, is that slave market.

In Magic City Sharia, it's regarded as the slave market with the poorest of conditions.

The slaves sold here are gravely ill or close to death.

Where other slave markets would hesitate to sell such slaves, here they are sold without batting an eye.

Therefore, they have an awful reputation.

However, the prices are extraordinarily cheap and occasionally you'll unearth a lucky find.

They also sell slaves that aren't able to be sold in the usual slave markets, like ones from high social standing, or slaves from rare tribes who were left behind.

This gathered a crowd of those who desire a slave but don't possess the funds, slave traders looking to resell, those who want a dispensable laborer, or inexperienced merchants or young aristocrats who were duped into being brought along.

"....."

As I drew nearer while concealed, the pungent smell characteristic to this sort of area drifted in.

It's the smell of when people have become soiled.

This is the smell that's more or less present at slave markets.

However, markets that deal in particularly high class slaves are also careful about this smell.

There are a couple slave markets in Magic City Sharia as well, but none of them smell as bad as this.

The merchandise, the dealers and the patrons; I wonder if all of them are becoming soiled.

“.....eugh.”

When I tried to take a step further, I suddenly stepped in something mushy.

A glance revealed brown and black lumps piling up at the edge of the market.

It emitted a putrid stench and a swarm of flies buzzed around it.

It would appear that the waste expelled by the slaves seems to have amassed here.

While cursing that I couldn't cover my nose while wearing the mask, I tried to wipe off the excrement clinging to my shoe.

Determination fizzling.

“No, no, I just stepped in some shit, that's all.”

Pulling myself together, I continued moving through the shadows, searching for the previously mentioned person.

Sanitation was a catastrophe here.

You're likely to contract a disease just by being here for a period of time.

Let's just locate the target as soon as possible.

I was looking for a man wearing a red bandana.

There weren't many lights around even though it was the middle of the night, making it easy to remain hidden at this outdoor slave market.

Maybe it's to hide the condition of the slaves, but it also made it difficult to make out who the dealers are.

Though upon closer examination, there are also a lot of people covering their faces just like I am.

I kind of can't decide if that's a good or bad thing.....

In any case, since I can't really see the dealers like this, I decided to leave my hiding spot and get closer.

"Hey, bro, we got a super rare deal, yo!"

Abruptly, a slaver came up to me.

There really isn't anything to make a good sales pitch about when compared to a normal slave market, but it seems they're strongly determined to make a sale anyway.

Of course, I ignored such a—

"It's the second youngest daughter of that Magic King, y'know."

"Wha-!?"

I look at the stage in astonishment.

Standing there was a scrawny and emaciated young lady with her blue hair in a braid.

The second youngest daughter would be..... Lily.

"....."

It's not her.

I almost believed it for a moment there, but it obviously wasn't my little sister.

The braided hair is kind of like her at first glance, but looking more closely, the blue of this girl's hair was just dyed.

Moreover, the age difference is too wide.

First of all, my little sister inherited the appearance characteristics of the Magic Race and looks like a child.

But I can clearly tell this girl is already an adult. She looks about the same age as me.

And the face is just too different.

Maybe someone who's only glimpsed her once or twice can be fooled, but there's no way I'd mistake someone else for the little sister who I see every day.

My little sister is cuter, and soft.

"Don't worry. She isn't being tracked, so of course the Magic King also won't be coming to take 'er back."

Well, maybe because on top of it being a fake...

Forget being tracked, she doesn't even have feet to leave tracks with.

".....Wow, amazing, how'd you obtain something so rare?"

"Hehe, well, y'see... One of the Magic King's sons is a prodigal, and unemployed, and has been on a buying spree for magic items and magic tools, and so, struggling for funds, the parent sees the daughter, and... yeeaahhh."

"....."

That prodigal son is most likely referring to me.

But I'm not that extravagant, hey.

The one buying up all the magic items and magic tools is Lily herself.

I usually don't have any money, not that I really do much spending in the first place.

I am Nobly Unemployed.

"So how 'bout it? I'll give you a special bargain for 'er."

"Ha, if you're going to sell a dupe, you should come up with a more believable reason."

I said it with a shrug, and promptly skedaddled.

If I'd found my actual sister abducted I'd save her immediately, but I'm not going to go along with this kind of sham.

But he didn't pick the wrong person.

My little sister is absent-minded and it feels like she really will get kidnapped.

Walking through this place full of fraud and deception, I search for my target.

Still, the slaves are in quite poor condition.

Because I scrutinized slaves together with Pax in our student days, I get how bad it is here.

No one seems to be whole.

They look healthy at a glance but it's just cheating using makeup and oils.

That they can still be disguised to look healthy is already pretty good, with things like broken arms or being full of fresh wounds;

Even the slave market in Asura Kingdom's slums wasn't as bad as this.

"Slavery can't exactly be called a good institution, but even banned, it's the way things are. Having said that, you also can't just leave it as is. If you don't properly regulate it, tragedies will just continue to increase."

I recall the words Pax had once said to me.

Slavery itself is not evil.

But I can't see the present situation as anything but evil.

Including Ranoa Kingdom, most countries have been turning a blind eye to the slave trade.

There are countries that outlaw it but there aren't any countries that properly regulate it. It's not banned in Ranoa Kingdom, but it also looks like there aren't any intentions to regulate it.

You'd think that a person like me, who deals with things quickly and carelessly, would be good for shutting down business.....

.....but whether it's at the place where a market was originally brought down, or some other place, at any rate another market would just pop up.

"Oh."

In the middle of my thoughts, I found the man wearing a red bandana.

The man has the bandana coiled around the lower half of his face, concealing his face.

His hair is cropped short and close to his head, and there's a scar on his forehead.

It's him, there's no doubt about it.

I don't know if slavery is evil or not, but kidnappers are definitely evil.

"Okay,"

I hid myself in the shadows.

I checked my disguise with the mirror I'd prepared beforehand, washed off my shoes that were still stained with poop and then shined them with a cloth.

If an ally of justice stank, the name would be ruined.

"Let's go."

I once again confirmed that I looked flawless, and straightened up.



"That's as far as you go!"

A voice reverberated throughout the slave market.

While everyone was astir trying to figure out whose voice that was, I scanned them from my elevated location and shouted once more.

“That red bandana over there! You kidnapping villain! Your evil deeds may not be able to be exposed during the day and maybe cannot be seen under the light of the sun, but you can’t escape from the eyes of the moon!”

Red bandana, kidnapper.

With those words, everyone’s gazes landed on that man.

And also discovered me at the same time.

They looked up at me,

“Who the hell are ya, ya bastard!”

I heard someone ask that.

There’s only one way that can answer that question.

“Fufu, me? I am the knight of the silver moon which shines in the darkness...”

I pose and declare,

“The Ally of Justice, Moon Knight, has arrived!”

Red Bandana and his cronies muddledly exchanged glances with each other.

And so, once more, I said the same thing, in the same way, for them to hear.

“Who are you?”

Why do these guys always keep needing me to repeat myself.

I really don’t get it, but it’s uncool to keep having to give me name out, so I promptly transition to the next part of my speech.

“Villains! People like you kidnappers aren’t allowed in my beloved town! Here I come!”

I leap off my high place.

Simultaneously, Red Bandana and his cronies unsheathed their swords.

I've gotten pretty used to this kind of reaction.

Five people in total.

However, Justice cannot lose.

I've learned how to fight multiple opponents from my shishou.

"Haaaa! M o o n l i g h t • P u n c h !"

I first drove my fist at the first guy who drew his sword.

Aiming for the jaw, this technique that knocks an opponent out in one blow was learned from Red-haired Mama.

The first person tried to defend himself, but was too slow.

I felt my fist make a good landing.

"Ta! M o o n l i g h t • K n u c k l e !"

The next person tried to slash at me from behind.

While avoiding his attack and also throwing a backhand chop at him, the move name came out wrong. Knuckle is a body blow.

"Tou! M o o n l i g h t • S a u l t !"¹

Because two people have come forth with their swords, I avoid with a backward somersault.

A backward somersault isn't necessary, but it looks cool.

Perhaps trembling because of my backflip, one of the two who came at me from behind flinched.

Yes, that was also what I was going for!

"Hoa! M o o n l i g h t • S t r i k e !"

I drove my fist in a counter at the one who attacked without flinching.

With that, that's three people.

Two people left, Red Bandana and the young guy who flinched from my backflip.

"Boss, this guy, he's kinda...!"

"Calm down. I'll distract him while you secure the merchandise."

Red Bandana came out to meet me.

His stance is tight and there aren't any gaps.

Even though three of his men got taken out, he's still calm. I can't see any sign of tension.

His sword is quite worn down.

Judging from these three points, he's pretty capable.

"Those moves are from the North God Style, aren't they."

"...Wrong! This is the fist of the knight from shadows formed from moonlight! Its name is Moonlight Fist!"

Fourth point.

He immediately recognized my moves as the North God Style after seeing it.

His observation skills are also sharp.

"Recently, I heard rumors of a dumb rascal fighting with combat techniques. It's you, isn't it."

"That's right! Evil must perish! Here I gooo!"

"Come at me!"

I yelled and took a step forward.

Then Red Bandana also took a step.

But the signals are different.

There's no indication of an attack.

While looking like he'll absolutely attack, he's taking a stance for countering.

This guy, he's from the Water God Style.

The school centered around counters.

Speaking of reversal techniques, it's said that of the three major styles, not one is superior to the others.....

"Hey, hey, what's wrong, Justice-man..... thought you said you were gonna attack now? If this is all you got, my bud's going to run off with the merchandise, ya' know?"

".....You bastard! How cowardly!"

I really dislike the Water God Style.

They themselves always never make a move first.

While stopping their feet there and adjusting the remaining distance bit by bit, not giving the impression of attacking at all, they lead on their opponent into attacking, or lure them through spouting provocations.

Because my opponent isn't going to make any strikes of his own, this really won't be a cool-looking fight.

"What's wrong? Come fight me with your cool fist. Can't attack me or somethin'?"

"Not at all! Here I come!"

If possible, I don't want to take the initiative against a Water God Style opponent.

But at this rate, his crony will make a getaway with those kidnapped victims.

.....there's nothing else for it.

“M o o n l i g h t ! ”

Both hands ready at my waist, I take one step back.

At that moment, he also came at me.

“Are you stupid!”

“F e i n t ! ”

I clapped both my hands together with a slap.

Simultaneously, I generate mana and magnificent sparks scatter from my hands.

“Na!”

At nearly the same moment, Red Bandana swung his sword.

It’s a counter slash aimed for my right hand.

But Nekodamashi² isn’t an attacking technique.

There was quite some distance between us, so his sword slashed at thin air and completely missed me.

Of course I’m not going to let that opening slip by.

“Take this! M o o n l i g h t • S e r e n a a a a a a d e ! ”

I launched a fist with all my might behind it at Red Bandana’s face.

Red Bandana is finished, with a tooth flying out.

Red Bandana spun while flying several meters and landed in the muck piled up at the edge of the slave market.

An acceptable outcome.

That certainly made the right kind of impression of a villain being brought down.

With this, it's done.

"Judgement!"

"Ee- eek! Help!"

It's not done, there was one more.

I caught up to the last guy and knocked him out with a body blow.

"Judgement!"

When I posed again, the people in the slave market, who'd just been watching until now, fled in all directions.

It probably goes to show that they all have some sort of guilt weighing on their hearts.

"Are you all right?"

However, I have no intention of pursuing anything but my target.

Because they haven't settled into the path of evil yet.

Rather, let's prioritize protecting the poor victims.

I took off the handcuffs and mouth gags of people it seemed were nearly sold as slaves.

"Ah, aah..... you saved me. I was suddenly attacked on the highway, for such a thing to happen..."

"Thank you, thank you!"

"Thank you so much for saving me!"

The people who had been lined up as merchandise faced me and each thanked me.

To the gratitude offered to me, I only had one response.

"No need to be so formal! As an Ally of Justice, it was only a matter of course! Though you may have lost all your possessions, you are all now free! You should go home!"

“Thank you so much!”

“Look, you all, it’s time to go home!”

They all quickly dispersed while wearing relieved expressions.

While watching them, I busied myself tying up that fainted Red Bandana with a rope.

I’ll notify the guards on my way back.

Abduction is clearly a criminal act, but it’s difficult to make an arrest without sufficient evidence.

But there were a lot of witnesses today. This guy is definitely getting tossed in jail.

Justice, complete.

Looks like I’ll be returning home in a good mood.

“.....Ah.”

Just as I was heading back while thinking such thoughts, I noticed a young girl watching me.

She was still all chained up and watching me with reproachful eyes from between her blue bangs.

Why does he help them, but he won’t help me... was the kind of face she was making.

But she’d never requested help from me.

When our eyes met, she quickly averted her gaze and was pulled by a slave trader into the crowd.

“.....”

I don’t know the details of how she became a slave, even had her hair dyed and got sold.

Perhaps it’s the result of being tricked by some scoundrel.

It's impossible for me to discern at this moment.

All I know is that probably... she's a really unfortunate person.

It's not good or evil, it's just sad.

"If Pax were in control, I wonder what he'd do..."

I left the slave market behind with the words of my prior best friend on my mind.

Footnotes:

1. Somerssault, though a *sault* is also a throwing move in wrestling apparently... ↵
2. *Nekodamashi* – An unconventional sumo wrestling technique which involves a wrestler clapping his hands together in front of his opponent's face. The aim of this technique is to cause the opponent to close his eyes briefly, allowing the instigator to gain the advantage. – taken from jisho. ↵

CHAPTER 7

PRINCESS OF THE PAST

We are now second years.

We got good grades on our finals. I landed the top spot in combat while Pax scored top in academics.

While we may each have our weak points, if you put us together, we did exceedingly well nonetheless.

Although our grades may have been good, our isolated school life continued.

However, I think the reactions from our surroundings have changed a bit.

I no longer sense most of the hostility directed at us from when we first enrolled.

To deal with that atmosphere between them and us, we tend to mutually ignore each other.

The first years didn't pay us any attention in particular.

Maybe we're just used to it by now.

Perhaps, in order to work on improving themselves, they've no liberty to pay attention to strangers.

I don't know why, but this feels a little better.

However, another problem arose.

It happened shortly after our second year began.

A lone girl approached.

Graced with long, fluffy blond hair, she was beautiful.

She came before me and gave an elegant bow.

“I’ve always been looked at you from afar.”

Followed up by a respectful self-introduction.

She was the daughter of the ruler of Asura, in other words, a genuine princess, and a second year student, same as us.

From when we first enrolled, it would seem like her mother had instructed her to get along with me.

Yet, due to the color of my hair, my large physique, and the fact that I got into a fight soon after enrolling, I appeared to be too intimidating, so she avoided contact until now.

Since I’ve recently been more studious and have been carrying a gentle expression more often, she’s changed her mind.

She was sorry for being taken by first impressions.

She wishes to get along from now on.

By some chance, we may get married in the future...

After having one-sidedly apologized, without waiting for a response, she bowed and left.

Marriage.

Though that keyword rang out, I could understand.

My father is a fairly influential person.

Naturally, he would have close relations with the Asura Kingdom, the largest country in the world.

It seems that the ruler of Asura wishes to forge even closer ties with my dad.

Or possibly, it’s the other way around.

Which ever way, with such connections, talks of having their children marry would naturally surface.

At first, the candidate was to be my older brother.

My brother Ars has red hair, common to the Asura Kingdom, as well as knightly facial features like red-mama.

It seems like there were already talks for having my brother marry the Asura princess.

However, in the end, he had found another partner and ended up marrying and living with her instead.

Hence, those plans were canceled.

Though dad had given permission, I remember my eldest sister Lucy denouncing “You’ve betrayed father’s expectations” in rage.

I wouldn’t go so far as to call it betrayal, but having seen my sister’s fit, I can’t quite consider my brother’s actions correct either.

Well, putting that aside.

Since my brother’s no good, expectations now fall to me, the second son.

From a perspective of relative political power, it would be proper for my house to marry a male heir to an Asura princess.

Father hasn’t said anything.

About who to marry or who to not.

However, that girl’s mother had given her detailed instructions for various things.

That’s why she called out to me.

That said, I can’t help but be startled by these sudden talks of marriage.

“She did seem like a nice girl.”

While I was in that state, what Pax said was.

“She needed to overlook my hair color?”

“That’s not the essence of it. She didn’t hate you because of your emerald hair. She was just scared.”

“Was I so frightening?”

“Yeah, when school first started, you were scary as hell. Even in my eyes.”

Pax shrugged to show that it was just banter.

Certainly, I guess I was quite scary at the start of school.

Though I wasn’t conscious of it, protected by father’s authority, I’d been using violence all while saying that I wanted to be an ally of justice.

Being such an enigma, I suppose others would see me as a frightening being.

“Normally, I’d expect her to just keep ignoring you, but nonetheless, she came to get acquainted. If she wanted to, she could have put off contacting you till after your engagement was established, nor did she even need to bring up the possibility that you’d get married in the first place. What an honest girl.”

Now that you’ve mentioned it, that sounds about right.

“Same as us, with parents in politics, she’ll eventually have to marry for that sake. In that case, wouldn’t it be preferable to marry someone nice?”

When what Pax said sunk in a bit.

“Pax, could it be that you have a fiancée?”

“Ah, actually I do. We’ve never met, but that might be because I’ve been avoiding it.”

With those words, I’m reminded of his homeland filled with nothing but enemies.

Surely, even after marriage, his wife wouldn’t become his ally.

“Oh yeah. That princess’s name. What was it again?”

“Umm, it was... Sarii.”

Sarii Anemoi Asura.

That was her name.



After that day, Sarii dropped by to chat on a daily basis.

That said, her conversation topics were too far out of my areas of expertise.

Things like flowers and tea, pastries and animals.

Since we did have a dog at home, I was able to chat about that a bit, but that’s as far as I could go.

The conversations quickly came to a halt.

Whenever our exchange would hit a stop, Sarii would make a troubled face and depart after saying “Well then, please excuse me”.

With no means of stopping her, I’d end up seeing her off.

Those kind of exchanges repeated many times.

“You need to bring up some topics yourself.”

Though Pax might have said that, it wasn’t exactly a simple matter.

“I had intended to do so.”

My preferred topics were the same as always.

Heroic epics, tales of adventures.

The stories I’ve heard since I was a child of various struggles that my parents and master experienced.

All tales of battles.

Yet, when we go with that, it ends up being me doing all the talking.

Sariel would hear such stories with enthusiasm, making indications that she was properly listening.

She would even pose questions when something was unclear.

However, that was just on the surface, and I could tell that she wasn't actually interested.

While we're at it, in particular, she wasn't good with stories in which people die.

For example, once upon a time, my dad and granddad challenged a labyrinth of the highest difficulty.

To rescue mom and grandmother, dad and granddad had secured the cooperation of various allies and delved to the depths of the labyrinth.

Along the way, the group was able to rescue my mom as well as my grandmother.

However, grandfather had perished in battle versus the labyrinth's boss.

Because of that, father had fallen into a deep depression, but recovered with mom's assistance, and returned home.

It's a sad story, but at the end, without fail, dad would state "No matter what trials and tribulations one may experience, this had taught me that we must always continue to push forward."

It's a nice story.

Still, upon hearing of my grandfather's death, Sariel would make a sad face, saying "I'm sorry, but I don't want to hear the rest." and leaving.

Without hearing the conclusion, it ends as a sorrowful story.

Even though, if you stop the story there, it would certainly have a sad ending...

I'd say, for sure, our compatibility is bad.

Even if our compatibility isn't great, I know she's not a bad girl.

I can't say that I want to marry her though.

If we could find some common ground, it could be possible for her to become pleasant company, but being unable to do so, this continues to bother me.

Anyhow, she's a troubling partner.

It would be nice if I could talk with my brother who's good with the ladies, but he's long since graduated, and has been helping father with his work.

Though he graduated the royal academy at the top of his class, he's now buried under a mountain of work.

It's not so important of a problem for me to trouble such a busy brother.

Therefore my mediocre relationship with Sariel remained as is.

Still, the advent of Sariel didn't improve the state of segregation for myself and Pax.

To the contrary, it feels like we're even more isolated than before.

There were some students that didn't like how I was getting close to Sariel.

They were guys from distinguished households, hoping to get married to Sariel.

Having seen me get close to Sariel, their attitude took an about face and the harassment began.

That didn't last long though.

That's because Sariel's entourage took action.

Since Sariel was a princess, it was a given that she'd have quite a few followers.

They were girls from families of Asura's upper nobles.

Always nearby, they would shower Sariel with affirmation.

Like a field of flowers with Sariel's smile in full bloom at its center.

From afar, in the midst of flattery and honest praise, you could always see Sariel's unwavering smile.

That entourage came before us.

They made up some "Only Sariel-sama is allowed to call out to them." kind of rule.

Regardless of who would approach us, they would drive them off off.

Be they ones with any prospects of marrying Sariel or not.

The girls of Sariel's entourage were from families of high standing, as well as abundant in number.

Surely, this wasn't for our sake, nor was it out of some sense of justice.

Witnessing their idol, Sariel, willingly associate with some boy instead of themselves, perhaps they felt their own value decreasing.

Or maybe, she told them "My mother instructed me to do so.", and they wanted follow in line with the royal family.

Anyways, because her followers wanted to be special to Sariel, they wanted to drive off the insignificant pests crowding around her.

That said, their rule became absolute.

All those hostile classmates were driven away and, from then on, don't really bother us anymore.

However, we were no longer treated like we didn't exist.

We began to stand out.

While we were unaware, we started to draw some attention from those uninterested to start with.

Those overbearing senpai from back when we were first years now turn a blind eye.

The teachers seem to be treating us like some kind of tumor.

As expected of the royal family's authority.

I couldn't tell if that was a good or bad thing, nor was I interested.

Anyways, it didn't change our situation very much.

Still, what was I to do about my relationship with Sariel?

How was I supposed to treat her?

That still bothered me.

"Your marriage is still only in the realm of possibility, right? In that case, just treat her like a friend."

Pax might've said that, but Sariel was too different from any girl I knew.

I've never met such a frail, dainty girl.

The closest might be my youngest sister, Chris.

She likes flowers and sparkly things and gets mad when I tell tales of battle and adventure, calling them boring.

Sariel doesn't get mad though.

The furthest would be my elder sister, Lara.

She lives a crude and slovenly lifestyle, always playing hooky and only thinking of her next prank.

Strangely, we got along just fine.

If Sariel was a little more like Lara, I wouldn't be so troubled.

"When you look at it like that."

Though I may say that, my relationship with Sariel seem to make any progress.

Her entourage didn't want someone who's "just friends" talking with her, nor did she herself wish for more "friends".

In which case, regardless of our poor compatibility, those dull exchanges continued.

Nonetheless, for Pax and I.

Without doubt, this character named Sariel had entered the story of our school life.

The appearance of a cute girl had blossomed upon our gray school life.

I may be a loner, but there's no way I'd reject some female company.

Regardless of how we might become engaged or the fact that she's a genuine princess, I still held the desire to get close to a pretty girl.

Although, our feelings for each other didn't seem to change.

My strange relationship with Pax and Sariel went on.

Visiting the slums with Pax. The three of us having a chat.

Many things happened.

But our relationships didn't really change.

Pax and I remained close friends.

Sariel and I remained awkward with each other, same as always.

CHAPTER 8

PRESENTLY, MARRIAGE

It was a holiday.

White mama had left in the morning, making it a rare occasion that allowed me to sleep in.

Though breakfast wasn't prepared for me, there were some leftovers in the kitchen, so I ate.

It might be a little lonely, but that seems just right.

Since I don't have a job, this is to be expected.

Typically on holidays, white-mama and red-mama go out, while blue-mama stays at home.

Recently, that's been our home's norm.

Dad may or may not be home, but today, he's not.

That means I can relax at home.

"Ah, Sieg. Good Morning."

Just as I thought, blue-mama had come to the dining room.

I'm a little on guard.

Blue-mama hasn't directly told me to go find a job or keeps an eye on me in that regard.

She's only hinted that I should seriously look for a job.

!!!In short, she has many weak points.

“Actually, Sieg. There’s something I want you to take a look at.”

“What?”

“Wait just a moment.”

Blue-mama scampered off to her room.

Now then, what hand will she play today?

Shortly, blue-mama brought back a stack of square boards.

Perhaps her goal today isn’t to get me to find a job, but to get me to help with something.

That would be most welcome.

#I may be unemployed, but I wouldn’t turn down a request.

“Please look at this.”

Saying that, mom starts lining up the boards in front of me.

There were pieces of cloth attached to each board, with paintings on the cloth.

Portraits of women.

All portraits of women.

The girls look young, around 20 years old.

“What’s this?”

“That’s the second daughter of the Tyle House of the Ranoa Kingdom, Marida. That one’s the third daughter of House Yunipin, Monory”

“... And this one?”

“That’s the fifth daughter of the ruler of the Basherant Dukedom, Egrid. Since we’ve started to put effort into sales of magic tools with help from the Zanoba firm, Basherant has been wanting to establish some connection. As a matter of fact, Lily’s

also received a marriage proposal from their prince.”

Marriage.

Even without hearing that keyword, I figured it was something like that from the lineup of portraits.

#From today’s predicament, I can feel my hair color changing.

“How about it? Aren’t they all quite beautiful?”

“Well, I guess they are...”

“Could it be that you’d prefer more cute-type girls over the beauties? In that case, how about these.”

“Umm, Blue-mama...”

“Look at this girl. Lotte House’s Krisna. She’s got a cute face and great tits. Ah, speaking of chest size, this girl’s great too. Taashin House’s Roko. She’s about as tall as I am, and with tits like that, from your height, you’ll have a nice view down her cleav-”

“MAMA!”

Hearing me shout, she stopped.

“I have no intention of getting married.”

“Why? Since they’re all high class, you’d be able to get away with taking on a not-very-job-like job.”

“I won’t be fooled so easily. Nobles still have to do quite a bit of work. They’re required to attend various events and ceremonies, and when the time comes, they have a duty to fight for the sake of the king. Knowingly marrying a child of the Greyrat House means that they intend to use me as a negotiation channel with all of the other Greyrat connections.”

Mainly, I hate that I would be made to deviate from my sense of justice for something like that.

If I was to get married, I'd be made to work for the house for whoever I get married to.

For a house that I don't even like.

Working for the Greyrat House is still better...

"Well, I guess you're right. You are an adult now. I might have been treating you too much like a kid just now."

"..."

"But Sieg. In order to become a proper adult, it's about time for you to find a partner. If you think about it as working for the girl you love, I feel like you might stop thinking about if something is a "job" or not."

"That's... you might be right."

"Right? Well, I won't say to do it immediately, but if any of these girls made you think "Oh, She's cute.", why don't you try just meeting her for now?"

"... I'll think about it."

Right then, Lily came into the dining room while yawning.

Looks like she also spent her holiday sleeping in.

She made a little gulp, seeing me and blue-mama sitting with a lineup of portraits.

"Lily. Good morning."

Watching her come in, blue-mama broke into a grin that would indicate the end of the opening act.

"Of course, there's some for you too."

"D- don't need it."

"Ah, come, at least see what they look like. They're all very understanding, saying that it would be fine for you to continue with your current job."

To chase after Lily who fled, blue-mama ran out of the dining room.

It's been a while since marriage proposals first came in for Lily.

She's a talented lady working at the Zanoba Firm.

Various places have placed recognition upon her works.

Although, she does seem to bring about many worries for our parents.

She gives off the impression that if we were take our eyes off of her, she'll end up getting captured by some slave traders.

Regardless of her work, I bet our parents wishes for some reliable husband to take care of her.

I totally sympathize.

"Before I do, shouldn't Lara-oneesan be getting married first?"

"That girl will find someone on her own soon enough. I can tell."

"That's definitely a lie~!"

I could hear that coming from upstairs.

By the way, no marriage proposals had come in for Lara.

While I was away at the Asura Royal Academy, I thought that a good number of marriage proposals would come in for Lara.

However, no one wanted to marry her.

There weren't any heroes brave enough to take my pranks-and-naps-loving sister.

Perhaps word had gotten out, leading blue-mama to give up.

"At any rate, we sure collected an impressive amount..."

Amongst the painted visages, there were only magnificently beautiful girls.

Since these were painted for the purpose of a marriage introduction, they might've drawn the girls a bit prettier than they are in reality, but they seem to have gathered those who would be most likely to suit my tastes.

Without someone telling me, I wouldn't even know their names or pedigree.

However, I'm sure they're all well-breed ladies.

If I was to marry any of them, I'd expect to be able to enjoy a laid back lifestyle to some extent.

Even if I had to do some work as a noble's adopted son, I could veto it to some extent.

Of course, I'm not unemployed because I want to slack off. It's because I'm a temporary ally of justice.

Though I feel bad for blue-mama who went out of her way to gather these, I must decline.

While I was just thinking that, in the midst of tidying up the portraits.

"Ah"

Among the sheets of pictures, there was a face that I recognized.

A face adorned with fluffy blond hair, she was a doll-like girl.

Sariel Anemoi Asura.

A classmate from when I was at the Asura Royal Academy.

Though her face would normally be considered beautiful, thanks to the shy smile she was making, that cute representation suited her well.

I can picture very well what kind of expression she was making as she sat before the painter to have this portrait made.

As expected of one who works on portraits for Asuran royalty, this painter looked to be very skilled...

Amongst all of these candidates, of course she would be the one to stand out the most.

“ .. ”

Putting hers along with the other portrait, I piled and left them.



Midday.

As usual, I spend the day wondering around town.

The weather's nice. A blue cloud-free sky spread to horizon, a rare occasion for this region.

It's a little warm too. A perfect day for airing out laundry.

The river was glimmering from reflected sunlight.

Since it flowed through the town, it wasn't the prettiest river, but you could see a few shadows of fish in it.

It wouldn't be bad to do a bit of fishing on a day like this.

Blue-mama likes to fish.

When we were young, on a day like this, she would take me and my siblings upstream.

I would often play around the river with my older brother, but at other I would go fishing with blue-mama.

She would sit me down in her lap, and while holding the rod, she would tell me stories of her days as an adventurer.

In particular, I enjoyed her stories of when she would go solo into a labyrinth.

How nostalgic.

That reminds me, though my eldest sister is usually quite refined, she too enjoyed fishing.

After we all got older, those family fishing trips stopped happening, and mom would

end up fishing alone.

On those days, we could always expect the dining table to be lined with fish dishes.

Maybe I should also try fishing by myself once in a while.

When my eldest sister got married, she didn't take any fishing gear with her.

Most likely, the gear is still gathering dust in the storehouse.

"Uuh... Uug..."

While I was lost in thought, it sounded like someone was moaning.

No, not "sounded like". Someone was definitely moaning.

Someone was in pain.

There was no way an aspiring ally of justice such as myself would mishear that.

I restlessly survey the area.

Moon knight's insight evolved to clairvoyance with the power of sunlight.

Found it.

Under the shade at the side of a bridge, there was a man crouching.

"What happened?"

I immediately rush over to talk to him.

A beardless middle-aged man.

He was leaning himself over a cask.

"Oh, It's Sieg-kun..."

Where have I met him before... Ah, It's the old man from the fruit stall.

I didn't immediately recognize him, since he shaved his beard.

"I was supposed carry this barrel of wine to the church up ahead, but midway, my back gave out... Oooww... I hate to ask, but could you help out?"

"A simple task."

First off, I massage his back.

Adding in a little magical power, I clear up the pain.

I'm not particularly good at healing magic, but I can at least do this much.

"I used some healing magic. How does it feel?"

"Oh... The pain's gone. That's a big help. With this..."

"Hold up. The healing magic might have relieved your stained back, but you should still rest for a while. I'll carry the cask."

"Is that so? Then, If you would please."

I pick up the cask of wine, putting it under my arms.

It's quite an amount.

Too much for a single person to drink.

"What are they going to do with so much wine?"

"I'm glad you asked. Today's my daughter's wedding."

"Hee. Congratulations."

"Thank you. Well, it's hard to stomach how her husband's going to be the son from the liquor store!"

While chatting, the church came into view.

Lots of people were gathered.

From a carriage parked in front of the church, luggage was being carried in.

“Oh, Horis!”

Out of the crowd, a single man came before us.

A man with a beard.

It was the owner of the liquor store.

Wearing a bright smile, he approached us.

“Didn’t you get all excited, saying that you’d bring in the wine for the banquet yourself?
And yet you got Sieg-kun to carry it for you.”

“There’s no helping it. My back went out on my halfway here.”

“Your back? Haha, your back gave in!? Weren’t you too excited!? Dumbass!”

“Shut it!”

The fruit store owner wasn’t amused seeing the liquor store owner laugh.

These two are childhood friends, born and raised together in this town.

Partners in crime, so to speak.

“Sieg-kun, were you also come by to give your regards?”

“No, I was just passing by.”

“I see. Thanks for cleaning up after this idiot. Since you’re here already, how about joining in on the celebration?”

The liquor store’s old man let out a hearty laugh, patting me on the back.

Then, the fruit store’s old man turned around with a grin on his face.

“Well, however. Next time, just have my boy carry it. He might be the second son, but he’s a professional at moving around wine barrels.”

“I’ll do just that. After all, from this day forward, he’s my son too.”

A daughter from the fruit stall and a son from the liquor store.

When I last saw them, both were still fairly young...

That’s before I attended the royal academy though.

I wonder how many years it’s been. Before I knew it, they had grown up and are now getting married.

Time flies.

“Well, it’s best to get a day’s rest if you got a strained back. Just sit back and watch.”

The liquor store owner showed off his biceps.

And then, he went to grab one of the crates filled with fruit out of the carriage.

“For now, I’ll carry in what’s here. You should head inside and take care of less strenuous...”

Saying that, when going to lift the crate, as he put pressure on his back, he put the box back down and fell forward.

“Oi, Godol. Could it be that you...”

“...”

“Ha! Did your back give in!? After laughing at me, you went and threw out your back too?! Hahaa!”

“Fucking asshole... shit... I’m... just not used to carrying fruit is all...”

I went up to the liquor store owner who was breaking out in a cold sweat and applied some healing magic.

“Thanks Sieg-kun... being able to use healing magic at a time like this is really convenient, isn’t it?”

The liquor store owner said that while on all fours, putting pressure on his back.

Having cast healing magic, he should be fine after some rest.

“Pfft-... Hahahaha...”

“Asshole... Laugh while you can, but what are we going to do with all this luggage? If you we can’t do anything, how are we be ready in time for the ceremony?”

“Ah”

The fruit store owner stopped laughing and turned green.

The two of them made an unpleasant face at each other and turned to me after a while.

“Hey, Sieg-kun. Can you help a little?”

“No problem.”

Immediately after replying, I got to work.

This kind of honest work also falls under the jurisdiction of an ally of justice.



After that, the wedding went on without a hitch.

Both the bride and groom were younger than me.

During the ceremony, both looked to be a little flustered with an innocent blush on their faces.

Looking at scene, you can tell that the two truly loved each other, even making me break out in a natural smile.

After the ceremony finished, it was time for the reception.

It’s not the Milis faith, but the local custom.

Everyone makes merry and feasts in celebration of the couple’s new life.

Leaving nothing in want, happiness spread across the wedding and banquet.

All thanks to me taking up the fathers' job of bringing over the wine.

Though I probably shouldn't say that myself.

The two old men with strained backs were very gracious, but I turned down their offer of partaking in the banquet in return for helping.

That's because an ally of justice doesn't act for reward.

Do what I must and take my leave.

That is the way of an ally-of-justice.

"Now then, what should I do next?"

It is now evening.

No destination nor direction.

"How about Lara-nee's place... Yeah, that sounds good. I'll get her to feed me."

Having decided that, I head towards the Magic Academy.

Acting like this school belongs to my family, I head up the stairs towards Lara's lab.

However it was locked.

It's rare for her door to be locked. She only does that when she's away.

Guess she's out.

Unusual.

"Ah, Sensei. Do you know where Lara-nee is?"

I tried asking a teacher who was nearby.

"She wasn't in her lab? Then, I don't know. There's no way I'd know. No one in this

school except maybe Roxy-sensei can guess where that girl's gone."

"I guess so."

Roxy is blue-mama's name.

And today, she's on break.

That means no one has any idea where she went.

Not a single person alive is capable of finding the elusive Lara.

Where am I to go to fill this empty stomach?

The bar I usually go to for gathering intelligence isn't open yet.

Since father won't be home today, there is the possibility of heading home to plunder the kitchen.

Alternatively, I could head back to the church and pick at their leftover fruits.

However, if I was going to do that, I might as well have stayed there for the whole ceremony.

Since I am acquainted with both the bride and groom, if I was there to congratulate the newlyweds, I could have considered the food to be part of the ceremony, and not a reward for helping.

No... as an ally of justice, I don't think that's appropriate...

"gsu... *hick*..."

Suddenly, I could hear crying.

I'm particularly sensitive to the sound of someone crying.

That's because I'm an ally of justice.

My Justice Ear is tingling as I search for the source.

There, at the bottom of the stairway.

I found a girl hidden in the shadows.

I say “girl”, but she’s more like on the brink of adulthood.

She looks to be around 15 years old.

Probably of the human tribe.

“What’s the matter?”

“Eh?”

Having called out to her, she turned to me with a surprised face.

She was a pretty girl with flaxen hair.

“It’s nothing.”

“Ah, I’m sorry. I’m not a suspicious person. I’m Sieg. Sieghardt Saladin Greyrat”

“The Greyrat House...!”

In times like these, the name Greyrat is quite useful.

That’s because it’s a trustworthy name.

My own name might more or less lower the credibility, but not enough to shake the solid foundation of the name “Greyrat”.

“Why were you crying?”

“Uhh, that’s...”

“It’s alright. I won’t tell anyone. I may be able to help, and even if I can’t, just talking to someone will be a weight of your shoulders.”

I have no intention of lying.

If it's within my ability, I intend to lend her my strength.

In fact, I've been on the strong side ever since I was a child. I have plenty of extra strength to lend out.

She looked quite reluctant, but little by little, words began to come out.

"I'm... supposed to get married tomorrow."

"Oh. Well, congrats."

Marriage.

Looks like today's theme is definitely about marriage.

Perhaps some greater power is pushing me to accept one of those marriage interviews.

"There's nothing to congratulate. The groom is over thirty years older than me."

"... That's no good. It's quite the age gap."

"I don't want to get married... but, that guy, he said he wanted me no matter what. and my parents. said... that I have to... since we... don't have money..... Tonight... I was... supposed to go meet... his family... but I don't want to... so I came here... to cry... *hick* ... gsu..... WwwwaaaA....."

She burst into tears, but not before managing to explain her situation.

Her parents forced her into this marriage.

Like a political marriage of convenience, parents frequently decide their child's spouse for them.

This thing called "marriage" is used as a means to connect families.

Therefore, there are many cases where the head of a household would send off their child in order to establish a connection with another house.

That could have been the case even for the marriage between the liquor store and fruit store's children earlier today.

However, unlike the wedding earlier today, there's clearly isn't mutual love in this situation.

This is simply for the sake of money or status.

Even though the girl herself is against it, the parents are forcing this along for their own convenience.

Looks like she's being offered up to a perverted old man more than 30 years older than her.

#Moreover, even though the other party one-sidedly wants this, the parents

#

My father is against forcing a marriage on us kids.

He might initiate the conversation, but won't force us into anything.

That's why Lily and I are able to dodge the issue though...

Many families aren't like ours.

"I see."

If there are happy marriages, there are also unhappy marriages.

That can't be helped.

However, if the power of money is being used to create an unhappy marriage...

It would be impossible for me to overlook.

My righteous deed for the day has been decided.

CHAPTER 9

CURRENTLY, DEFEAT

Late night.

I'm tailing a girl in a carriage.

While the North God Style is a swordsmanship school, some factions of it also taught tailing techniques.

Not only tailing visible targets, but also tracking the target from the leftover clues.

There are also techniques for hiding and sneak attacks, and to run straight up the wall.

Even though Sensei's from a different faction, he's versed in all the techniques since he's at

the pinnacle of North God Style.

Sensei used to hate techniques outside of his faction, but he seemed to change his mind after fighting Father and was happy to teach me.

In any case, the carriage circled the Magic University for a while and eventually arrived before the mansion of a high noble.

A giant house.

Someone with a house this big might be a friend of Father.

With that in mind, I decided to separate from the carriage and infiltrate the mansion.

The mansion is heavily guarded.

There are probably many things worth stealing in a large mansion like this.

However, I'm versed in North God Style infiltration technique.

I don't know why such a technique exists in a swordsman school, but I was trained in it along with the tailing technique, which came in handy.

How nostalgic. Back then, Sensei took me along and sneaked into various places.

Noble mansions, trading houses, the mercenary armory...

With some help from the Ranoa Knights, we even slipped past noble escorts.

By the way, the most secure location in town is the girls' dormitory at Magic University.

It's guarded by Father's Rude Mercenary Corps. The beast race and demon race girls that lived there also form their own patrol within.

While the girls are not professionals, the beast race have sensitive noses, and the demon race have other ways to identify people.

With students from all over the world, there're even some with demon eyes.

Quite literally eyes all over the place.

However, there are ways to deceive the nose and demon eyes, and demons are easy to deal with if you know their racial characteristics.

That's why I managed to sneak into the mansion with the ease of water through a colander.

Looking around the inside of the mansion from the ceiling, I found people rushing to and fro making preparations to welcome the bride.

Whether from the maid's clothes or the ingredients and seasoning, you can see that this is a wealthy household.

Yes, extremely wealthy.

I collected some intel before coming today, and knew that this is a noble family that has been a money lender for many generations.

They earned a huge fortune by lending to the Magic Guild and magic tool workshops, even before the City's founding.

Among the Ranoa Kingdom's wealthiest.

The head of the house is greedy and lustful.

He lends money to poor nobles and merchants in need of money, then marries their daughters for collateral.

Quite cunning.

Never the eldest daughter.

But the second or third daughter, even if initially reluctant, the parents would eventually "If that's so..." and hand over their daughter.

For poor nobles, it is difficult to find a marriage partner for their second or third daughters regardless.

The daughter will be happier to marry someone with money.

Excuses like that.

On the surface, there's nothing wrong with this.

It does not violate the law.

It can be said that he is only helping an impoverished acquaintance.

There are many such marriages in the world.

But the head of the house here has already married seven wives.

Like collecting women...

That is a villain.



I found him in a bedroom.

I knew it was him right away.

He is in his 40s and 50s.

A fat body, about as long as it is wide.

A villian right out of the storybook.

There is no mistake.

A hero of justice does not judge people by their appearance.

However, it is indisputable that with food so costly in the north, only the wealthy could afford to put on weight.

And according to my sources, the household has no sons.

There are other men in the house, but the only person lazy and rich enough to get fat would be him.

If I'm wrong here, I would not believe in money anymore.

"Huff~, today is wedding day, expensive clothes. Bring the most expensive clothes."

Sweating despite not doing much in particular, he ordered a steward-looking man.

The room was scattered with enough clothes to dress a large tree, while the butler folded them one by one.

"Master, rather than expensive clothes, why don't you do something about your waistline instead?"

"Don't think I won't fire you!"

"Anyhow, I don't think expensive clothes would make much of a difference..."

"Listen, huff, let me say it again, today's wedding day.

She might be a collateral, but a bride is a bride.

It's a day worth celebrating, and we need to welcome her properly into our house.

The food needs to use expensive ingredients, and I must dress up as well.

Making that effort is the duty of our household.

But shrinking my waistline isn't. "

"Sure."

His words are boastful but sincere.

The aesthetic of a villain, I suppose?

Even if that aesthetics excludes doing something about his waistline.

"Huff~, anyways, I'm looking forward to it. The bride this time is especially young and beautiful.

Such an innocent looking thing.

She probably doesn't know the way of an adult yet, so put plenty of aphrodisiacs in her meal. "

"Aphrodisiacs again...?"

"It's going to happen anyways, why not make it more enjoyable for everyone involved?"

I can't listen anymore.

This man seems to have his own aesthetics.

But that girl is just an outlet for his libido to him.

Rather than welcoming as a new family member.

Just as if you were buying a new horse and treating it as a tool.

"..."

I thought randomly.

If I had married Sarii, would I be treated the same?

Even if not Sarii herself, those around her might.

Maybe that's why I'm against that marriage.

...Well, that has nothing to do with this.

Let's go.

"Stop right there!!"

My voice echoed through the room.

Surprised by the noise, the fat noble and his butler scanned the room in confusion.

"Yo, pig face! You sex-crazed villain! Doing evil deeds in the shadows, even if you can hide from the sun, the eyes of the moon will find you!"

Pig face.

Hearing that, the butler looked at his master suspiciously.

The fat noble pursed his mouth and returned his butler's gaze confused.

"What did you do, Master?"

"I wouldn't know even if I thought about it... maybe, it is you?"

"If the two of us are together and someone would call me the fat pig, I'd like to meet him and check his special eyes."

Ah.

This reaction is different. How relaxed.

Anyhow.

"Pow!"

I kicked open the ceiling board, spun, and landed onto a high shelf in the room.

And, pose.

The fat nobleman stood there dumbfounded, but the butler lowered his stance.

This butler looks pretty tough.

"Who are you? Who hired you?"

The fat nobleman regained his composure and asked as if he's used to this.

If you can say a line like this, you are probably targeted by assassins constantly.

Even so, good question.

I thought no one would ask this time.

"Haha, me!? I am the knight of the silver moon which shines in the darkness..."

I responded to the question and posed.

"The Ally of Justice, Moon Knight, has arrived!"

The butler looked at the fat nobleman with a puzzled reaction.

Why did everyone have the same reaction when I said that?

Yet the fat nobleman signed. Unusual.

"I guess Ally of Justice Moon Knight is his employer..."

"Hmm. I figured you won't tell your actual name or employer."

But I did...

Oh well.

"Villain! In this town I love, I can't forgive marriage just for money and lust!"

"Against marriage... are you an enemy of that house or the daughter's suitor?"

"Or maybe Master's enemy?"

"Why am I a villain with so few enemies..."

"But still a villain."

"I see, so he's a so-called ally of justice... Hey, you, let me give you some advice. I'll let you go this time, so leave. If you touch me, you'll just regret it."

Why the sudden advice, I have no idea.

But I am a friend of justice.

I won't be persuaded by clever words from evil!

"Be quiet! I'm coming!"

I jumped off the shelf.

At the same time, the butler pulled out two thin-and-long daggers from his waist.

He positioned himself before the fat nobleman to shield him.

Apparently, he wasn't just a butler.

But also serve as his escort.

I sensed some considerable ability.

But justice will never be defeated!

"Haa! Moonlight Punch!"

"Mysteriou [Flow]"

"Oww."

Hearing his murmur, I quickly pulled back my hand and backstepped.

At the same time, the butler rushed in.

Even as I fell back, pain pulsed through my thigh.

The butler's right-hand dagger drew a little bit of blood.

Looked like a shallow cut to my thighs.

"So you managed to dodge that... Too bad it's coated in poison."

A cold sweat dripped down when I heard his words.

He got me.

Flow is a technique of the Water Sword Style.

A base counter that leads to all the techniques of the Water God.

The Water God Style treats it as one of the most important techniques, that's why it's named Mysterious.

In fact, it is even said that even if it is a basic technique, at extreme it can even counter any attack.

But today's different.

I see.

He made me vigilant with words alone and sneaked in a counter when I hesitated.

"Don't kill him, Laurus. It's a festive day, so don't dirty it with blood. Capture him and squeeze his employer out of him. Once you know who hired him, money can take care of the rest."

"But this man is quite skillful... Gonna be difficult to capture him alive?"

"...It's unusual for you to call someone skillful."

"If you can avoid that blow, it has to be skill."

Full of confidence.

That stab was proof enough.

However, I sparred with various teachers before.

Sword God Style, North God Style, Water God Style, Even spear wielding demon race warriors.

A dual dagger-wielding opponent is difficult to handle.

Daggers differ in speed from long swords.

The timing and slashing trajectory is different.

The overall range is small and there are few gaps.

In general swordsmen prefer longswords, using daggers only as sidearms.

Although there are dagger techniques in the North God Style, they do not use thin daggers like these.

Dagger users... Assassin's Guild?

"Curses... are you from the Assassin Guild!"

"Obviously, but that was before."

Rough words, unlike his master.

His knives gave away his origin.

"Only villains attack from the shadow... Moonlight Kick!"

Before I noticed, the butler had already drawn close.

To attack in the middle of a line, how devious!!

I dodged the butler's sneak attack and returned a strike.

"Moonlight Punch!"

The butler swiftly avoided it, and drew his dagger in a single motion.

The legs do not seem to move at all.

An Assassin's Guild move.

Drawing close before I realized, I'm already within his range.

The rotation of the butler's attack does not stop.

It is a terrible onslaught.

"Moonlight Kick! Moonlight Punch! Moonlight Flip!"

But I've sparred with people from the Assassin's Guild before.

Taking advantage of that experience, I handled the onslaught brilliantly.

"Moon... uh!"

But I had little to spare.

I couldn't land a hit between his dagger blows.

He had good range management.

Keeping at a distance where my fists can't reach, but his daggers could.

My fists won't land, but his dagger sometimes scratched my body, bit-by-bit landing cuts.

If the dagger is poisoned, I might not be able to move soon.

Even though I'm barehanded, this butler might be reaching King Rank.

Sometimes I want to use healing magic instead of attack, but there's no opportunity...

However, I don't feel my life's endangered.

"Well, with power like yours... why help the villain!"

I asked while keeping a distance.

Men who belonged to Assassin's Guild rarely appear in public.

Not to mention this level of skill.

Certainly not as personal escort.

"Mmm?"

The butler stopped with a stern face and glanced at the fat nobleman.

"Well, this guy isn't much of a villain."

"What!?"

"I don't know if you're moving under someone's direction."

"I'm not following anyone else's instructions! I'm on the side of justice! I move on my own!"

"Not the way I see it...!"

The Butler sped up.

His feet blurred and moved in a disgusting matter, a dagger flew over...

In an instant, my skin tore and pain shocked through my body.

So strong!

Did the fat nobleman not escape because of trust in his ability?

"Moon... ugh, moonlight...?!"

I can't even shout my killer move anymore.

Wearing down bit-by-bit, little by little I'm getting cornered.

My hand is shrinking, I understand I'm getting forced into a checkmate.

It would have been easier if I had a sword...

"Die"

A dagger approaches.

it can not be helped. This isn't an opponent I can win cleanly.

I immediately decided so and prepared to throw away my left hand.

"North God Style Mystery "Swallow"!"

The dagger cut off a few fingers off my left hand.

But at the same time my left hand passed by the dagger.

"!?"

The butler's fist shattered and the dagger fell to the floor.

An counter technique that crushes the opponent's fist at the expense one's fingers.
That is Swallow.

For those who don't expect the counter, the moment you think you've cut off their finger, you'll suddenly feel your fist shattered. Only those familiar with North God Style could hope to counter it.

In fact, the butler's posture had collapsed, exposing his body unprotected.

"What...?"

"This is it!"

I striked true.

Stepping deep toward the butler with all my strength in my right hand.

"Moonlight! Sere~nade!"

The butler tried to evade, but Serenade is an unavoidable special move. It's impossible.

I punched through the butler's torso.

The butler was blown away, bounced off to the ceiling and dropped to the ground.

I did not kill him.

The ally of justice defeats evil, but never kills.

Hate evil but not evildoers.

"Now..."

I looked toward the shivering, fat nobleman.

Looking toward me and his fallen butler, the fat nobleman looked stunned.

"You idiot..."

"Get ready."

Hearing me, the fat nobleman gazed back.

"...If you kill me, those families I lent my money to will go bankrupt! Then that girl's house will be in ruin! No one can be happy! Please, reconsider!"

I point a fist at the fat nobleman.

Certainly, even if I beat down this nobleman, the girl's tears will not stop.

Yet that is also justice.

"I won't kill you, but do reflect on what happened. Stop trampling on the lives of innocent girls!"

I held my fists against my waist and readied the Serenade pose.

Let me explain. Moonlight Serenade is a deadly straight punch with my entire weight, when released it's unavoidable.

One punch that destroys all evil.

Just then.

"Wait!"

Suddenly, a voice resounded in the room.

I stopped moving and turned to the one who immediately spoke.

A window.

An open window.

There was a weird guy sitting there.

Muscular body. Black clothes.

He had a helmet on his head.

A rugged, black helmet.

The forehead of the helmet was marked with a yellow lightning-like mark.

"W-who...!?"

He immediately laughed.

"Who am I? I'm a ray of light falling in the darkness, they call me... Lightning!"

A familiar voice.

Hearing that simple intro, I knew who it was in an instant...

But I couldn't understand why he was here, dressing like that, and identified himself as such.

"What was that?"

"A ray of light falling in the darkness, they call me... Lightning!"

He introduced himself a second time.

He did easily what I felt too embarrassed to do.

"No, no, I mean why here of all place--"

"Lightning!"

A third time.

Full of confidence.

Apparently, he had no intention of answering seriously.

"Are you an ally of his!"

It was the fat noble who shouted.

He stood up in a hurry and tried to escape from this place.

But Lightning stopped him with his hand.

Just don't move, sit down, and watch.

Power in his gestures.

You don't know what might happen to you if you fail to listen, that strength says.

"Huh, oh..."

The fat nobleman sat back on the chair unhappily.

After seeing it, Lightning turned to me.

"Kukukuku, you're the 'Justice' that has been rampaging around here recently... Moon Knight?"

"..."

"I've been letting it go until now, but if you disturb us, I'm not so merciful."

"Who are 'us'?"

"We are the secret society of Evil, Shadow Corps."

"Shadow? Huh? No, wait, hold on."

I'm confused.

There wasn't such a thing until now.

There doesn't seem like a connecting story. What is he talking about? I don't get it at all.

What is Shadow Corps?

When was I in their way?

"Be quiet!"

Lightning shouted, and at the same time kicked off the window sill.

I responded immediately.

At a reaction speed impressive even for me, I punched at approaching Lightning.

"Moonlight Punch!"

"Lightning Kick!"

But Lightning was faster.

My fist and Lightning's fist hit each other.

He said kick but punched instead!

"...!"

My fists shattered and broke.

The fist, already missing fingers, broke even further at the wrist and protrude in a

strange direction.

Pain coursed through my body.

This level of pain I could endure, but my whole fist was crushed and my upper body was midair...

I could see Lightning making a pose.

"Haaaaaa! Lightning Kick! Lightning Kick! Lightning, Lightning, Lightning Punch!"

Five straight shots from Lightning landed on my body.

Four punches and one kick.

All of those shots landed on my vulnerable points.

I was blown away and smashed into a thick brick wall. The impact punched through the brick wall with ease, and I landed outside.

A momentary floating feeling.

I smashed the ground from the second floor.

"Guh..."

I stood up quickly after spitting blood clots from my lips.

I applied healing magic to my whole body and prepared for the pursuit.

But there was no pursuit.

Confused, I looked up the mansion.

He was looking down from above.

"Ha ha ha ha! Was that it, Moon Knight?"

"..."

"You can't defeat me! I'll let you go for today, so go back and practice some more, ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!"

Surely, I couldn't beat him today.

I knew it better than anyone.

I had no way of breaking through him to that fat nobleman...

Additionally, the surroundings had become rowdy.

After hearing the commotion, his other escorts began surrounding to seize me.

If I stay here, I would be surrounded.

Numbers weren't the problem.

The problem was these people were mere recent hires.

In other words, they are innocent civilians. I can't fight them.

"..."

I ran away from the spot.

It was the first defeat for Justice.



After that, I continued to flee.

Racing through the noble district, through the markets, circled the warehouse streets, shaking any tail I might have had, and returned to the secret base.

"Well..."

I took off my helmet and took a breath.

I looked at my cut-off fingers.

I walked up to a wooden box in one corner of the secret base and took a piece of paper out of it.

A scroll of healing magic.

The healing magic that I could use is only up to the advanced level, but the advanced level can not cure lost body parts, so I need scrolls instead.

When the scroll was applied to the affected area and magic poured in, the fingers grew back in a flash.

It has been a long time since I had to cure a wound this way.

When I was training with Sensei, injuries like this were more common...

"..."

And the one who comes to mind was the masked man who appeared in the end.

Lightning.

Who are you... those words I won't say.

Because I knew his identity.

North God Style martial arts, even better trained than me.

Stronger, faster.

There's no more than a dozen in the world that fit that description.

In addition, a simple naming sense, Lightning...

No doubt.

His real identity is vassal of the Dragon God Orsted, a colleague of my father Rudeus Greyrat.

Head of North God School.

"North God Kalman III" Alexander Ryback.

My Sensei.

CHAPTER 10

PAST, GRADUATION

The curriculum at Asura Royal Academy is sophisticated and intense.

Because it is so dense, the enrollment period is rather short.

Only three years.

The school term only lasted three years.

Me, Pax and Sariel.

Our relationship continued without changes, then that relationship came to an end.

Graduation day.



The graduation ceremony was held at the silver Royal Palace of Asura Kingdom.

All the graduates gathered in the large auditorium in the Royal Castle first before heading together to the party venue.

To show all graduates are equal for this occasion, there are no chairs set in the venue, only tables piled high with food.

All the graduates were dressed up in formal wear.

They are dresses and tuxedos, not uniforms.

Of course, commoners won't have money to prepare such luxuries, so theirs were provided for as a graduation gift.

A huge 5-meter wide chandelier hung from the ceiling, luminating brightly the beautifully dressed newly grads.

At the opening ceremony, the Asura Queen stood directly on the stage to congratulate the new graduates.

This was a great honor.

After all, even in the academy, many could not easily see the queen.

In addition, the country's other heavyweights made their appearance as well.

The Prime Minister of the Asura Kingdom, high nobles, and other celebrities.

King's Gatekeeper Doga and King's Great Shield North God Isolte, of the renowned Seven Knights of Asura.

Those two were heroes that fought against North God Kalman, Ogre God, and Fighting God with Father.

Even for me, they're people of legends. Of course we're all honored to see them even from a distance.

In addition, Father and Mothers came as well.

My father wore a crisp tuxedo that he would never wear at home, standing proud, chatting happily with his neighbors.

Because he's even more renown than even the Asuran high nobles, many graduates had gathered around Father.

Venue, food, and guests.

I had heard of such luxury beforehand, but I was still surprised.

This was a world apart.

As I thought when I first entered school, was this the same world? Maybe the Asura Kingdom was another world altogether?

Yes... It was actually another world.

Especially for me and Pax.

After all, even now we were isolated here.

"Sariel is also popular today."

"Unlike us two."

We watched Sariel, surrounded by many students at a corner of the venue.

So popular compared to us, left to eat by our lonesome.

Many students flocked to her.

Not just the students, many nobles who were attending as guests also greeted her.

She probably had higher status than most noble adults here.

Without having time to eat, Sariel wore a flowery smile to greet them all.

She probably wasn't used to this either.

She seemed more lively when talking with us.

"Oh, it's her Majesty!"

Among Sariel's wellwishers was her mother.

Ariel Anemoi Asura, Queen of the Asura Kingdom.

She ascended to the throne at a young age and quickly brought peace to the Kingdom.
A true queen without equals.

Her appearance was beautiful even from a distance, her voice must be equally bewitching as well.

The Queen spoke to Sariel a bit before heading toward us.

Bringing Doga and Isolte with her, our sights crossed.

Seeing this, I hurriedly laid down my plate and attempted to kneel.

"Oh, as you were, you graduates are the protagonists of the day."

Troubled, I looked toward Pax. With his hand folded against his chest, he bowed gracefully.

An informal greeting.

"Pax Shirone Jr. I'm honored to meet you, Your Majesty."

Following his example, I put my hand on my chest and lowered my head.

"Sieghard Saladin Greyrat. I'm honored to see you. Your Majesty."

Ariel is a friend of Father's, so she probably knew my name already.

In fact, I have met her several times when I was little.

However, it was my first time making self-introduction in such a formal setting.

I raised my head thinking so, when Her Majesty smiled softly.

"Congratulations to both of you for your graduation. I've heard that coming from afar, cultural differences and hair color have caused you some difficulties. Now that you have successfully graduated, did you learn anything in these three years? "

"Indeed, the economy of the kingdom of Asura, territory management, populus management, subordinates management... those were all valuable classes."

"Yes, I think so too."

I concurred with Pax's words when Ariel suddenly approached close to me.

Even approaching her 40s, her beauty had yet to diminish.

A pleasant voice seemingly filled with magical powers.

My heart quickened.

But the content of the following words was so terrifying that they chilled the beating heart.

"Looks like you're on good terms with Sariel. If you wish, maybe it's time to formalize your marriage arrangement."

Sariel was ordered by Ariel to approach me.

Sariel said so herself.

But I didn't truly appreciate the weight of those words back then.

"That girl seems to like you too, so I'm sure she would be pleased if you would agree. Even your father had consent to let you do as you please."

"...Oh, ah, I will seriously consider it then."

"I don't mind. Anytime is fine. I look forward to the next few years."

For the time being, Ariel nodded with a smile.

Then she turned to Pax.

"Pax Shirone Jr. I've heard a lot about you."

"...Huh?"

"If you don't wish to return to the Kingdom of the Dragon King, I will welcome you into Asura. You're very impressive."

"..."

"Of course, it's not only your own excellence. Your uncle, Zanoba Shirone, was a friend and classmate... I have no reason not to lend his family a hand."

"No, I'm sorry, I still have a duty to my royal bloodline."

"Is that so?"

Ariel smiled with a slight bitterness, having been refused twice.

She turned and returned to the center of the venue.

"Then, please enjoy your graduation ceremony."

Just a few minutes.

Or maybe less than a minute.

But I was exhausted, as if we had been talking for hours.

Is that the power of a queen?

I wanted to talk to Doga and Isolte, but we didn't have a chance.

"Her Majesty is incredible."

"Yeah, very."

Pax and I agreed.

Feelin so intimated from mere conversation with her.

"Ah."

As if switching with Ariel, a figure came towards us.

Father.

The students who surrounded him scattered when he approached us.

"Hey, Sieg. Congratulations on graduating!"

"Thank you, Father."

"Don't be so modest..."

Placing my hand on my chest and bowed, and my father smiled wryly and reciprocated.

"Why are you hanging out all the way out here?"

"This is the most comfortable place."

"That... well, not that I don't get it."

I said in half-jist, but father seemed to understood

Father probably came to the conclusion that I'm the "hate crowd" type and nodded.

"Anyhow, congratulations on ranking first in martial arts on your graduation exams. I'm very proud."

"No, that's to be expected. I can't afford to taint the good name of Father or Sensei. Rather, I'm ashamed that I didn't take first place overall."

"I think you have nothing to be ashamed of..."

Father was smiling wryly again.

He probably thought it's only natural that I can't take first place overall.

After all, compared to our great father, us children had no results worth mentioning.

So he had no expectations for us.

While I entertained such thoughts, Father said instead.

"Good. After your graduation you'll be standing on your own two legs now. I expect much from you."

Expect much from you.

That phrase rang like a bell through my heart.

Ding, dong.

Even more intense and unstoppable than when I was spoken to by Her Majesty.

Expectation.

Father said, but... what do you expect from me?

My marriage... was that it?

"..."

When I was silent, my father turned to Pax.

"Congratulations on your graduation as well!"

"Pax Shirone. Jr. I'm honored to see you, Rudeus-sama."

"Please, no -sama. Even though some started calling me 'Mage King' these days, I'm really no big deal."

Father shrugged and said.

A man of great humility.

Even though he spoke so casually with Her Majesty of the Asura Kingdom just now.

"Pax. I heard about that matter."

He suddenly said that.

That matter?

What the hell is that?

I had no idea.

"I wish I could do something..."

"No, I already heard the permission to study abroad at Royal Academy for me was due to your recommendations. What comes next is something I alone should overcome."

"I see... I won't pursue further if you say so. Do your best!"

I didn't understand the meaning of the exchange between Pax with my father.

My father simply bowed to us and returned to the venue.

I didn't look at Father's face then.

From the moment I was told, "I expect much from you", I stopped looking at Father's face.

And my heartbeat never settled until the graduation ceremony was over.



After the graduation ceremony, I was on my way home with Pax.

We didn't talk much.

After the graduation ceremony, you will return to your hometown.

You have to prepare for your trip and leave the dormitory before next season.

Otherwise, there won't be room for freshmen.

With Pax, the time for parting approaches.

"...Pax, you knew Father?"

On the way, I spit out the question.

"Yeah, your father was involved in my father's death. That always bothered him, so he gave me a lot of support over the years."

That was a story I only heard once before from Father.

Shirone Kingdom.

A small western region country.

It was a time of internal turmoil at Shirone Kingdom.

The Seventh Prince, who had been casted away by the king, returned with the backing of the Kingdom of the Dragon King for the throne.

My father and his friend, Zanoba Shirone, took part in the conflict.

Supporting the Seventh Prince, they fought off an invading northern nation taking

advantage of the turmoil.

Although my father won the battle, the consequences of the conflict were dire.

The Seventh Prince died, and someone else gained the throne.

As a result, the Shirone Kingdom broke away from the Kingdom of the Dragon King and declared independence.

However, the new regime did not last and was destroyed by a pincer of the Kingdom of the Dragon King and the northern kingdoms.

After the civil war, the Seventh Prince left behind a wife and son.

Although they returned to the Kingdom of the Dragon King, they lived in dire straits.

After all, the Kingdom of the Dragon King lost a tributary state as result of the Seventh Prince.

Feeling responsible for what happened, Father supported them until the child of the Seventh Prince could become independent.

And the name of the Seventh Prince.

I remembered it now.

Pax.

Pax Shirone...

Pax Shirone Jr. is the son of Pax, the Seventh Prince who died in battle.

"Well, that was the first time we spoke face-to-face. I heard that I was receiving support, but we never met."

"Is that so..."

"Honestly speaking, back when we first met, I thought you were told to help me out, so I wouldn't be alone."

"..."

I didn't know...

Well, I didn't remember.

In any case, the story of the Shirone Kingdom War ultimately ended in defeat.

My father didn't like to talk about it, nor did I like to hear it either, so I didn't ask about it again.

It's a story I've only heard once or twice.

"Don't let it bother you. I didn't tell you until now, but I didn't intend to deceive you. I just thought you always knew."

Pax said and apologized.

I shook my head. I don't mind.

"...No, it's fine. I'm actually grateful that you approached me. Even if you were told to, I would still be grateful."

"I would have helped you regardless."

Unlike Sariel.

I wasn't so calculating.

Maybe I should have noticed when he introduced himself as Pax.

Maybe my lack of reaction was disappointing to Pax?

"So, what was that about?"

"You mean from earlier?"

"What Father and Her Majesty said, about helping you out."

"Well..."

Pax turned gloomy, smiling wryly.

"I will be given a territory when I return to the Kingdom of the Dragon King."

"...You'll become a lord?"

"Ostensibly. But nothing so impressive. The territory grant is on the southern border of the Kingdom of the Dragon King, near the northern forest of the Red Dragon's Lower Jaw. A barren land I need to develop from scratch."

The Red Dragon Mountains, a large mountain range that separates the Aura Kingdom from other countries.

Humans cannot pass through the mountains where countless Red Dragons reside.

With the exception of several valleys, which are called Red Dragon's Jaws.

No Red Dragons inhabiting those areas.

Therefore, they have served as strategic positions since ancient times.

Although their value has diminished since the Asura Kingdom recently began to popularize Teleportation Circles, their importance as a chokepoint remains.

It is not surprising that the Kingdom of the Dragon King would try to claim a nearby territory.

Rather, with Asura Kingdom so preoccupied with the Teleportation Circles, they are less likely to interfere. Now is the perfect time.

"The forest hosts many monsters, so neighboring kingdoms will not stay quiet when the Kingdom of the Dragon King makes its claim. Even without the Kingdom of the Dragon King's backing, with my education I should be able to manage if the land develops quickly enough. But the notoriety of my name would rile up the neighbors. They would probably try to sabotage me."

"...So it's an impossible task?"

Even in my classes, I learned about the trials and tribulation of developing a wilderness.

The forests of the Asura Kingdom are relatively peaceful, but it still took thousands of people and decades to tame.

And doing so without any support.

"Yeah, I'm sure I'll die there, so Her Majesty and your father both offered their help."

Pax seemed unfazed, speaking of death.

"But why?"

"As I said before, I'm a nuisance."

I heard that before.

His father caused great damage to the Kingdom of the Dragon King.

In addition, his mother is a descendant of the Demon Race.

However, since the royal family is a royal family, he has a claim to succession.

The possibility exist, however low.

"...You understand, right?"

"Then why did you refuse Her Majesty's offer? If you claim asylum in the Asura Kingdom..."

"Noblesse Oblige. While the Kingdom of the Dragon King considered me a nuisance, it also allowed me to study in the kingdom of Asura and its top-notch education. My county granted me freedom, and in turn I owe it responsibility. If I flee at the first sight of trouble, even I won't forgive myself. Moreover, if I flee, mother would certainly be held liable too."

No escape.

He certainly thought so.

Not knowing what to say, I bit my tongue.

But his words did not stop.

"That's just the face of it... the truth is different."

"Is that so?"

"Indeed, I'll tell only you this."

When he said that, he stopped on the spot.

He looked back at me and said with determination.

"I have an ambition."

I stopped as well, watching him.

He seemed unusually nervous.

He was always so easygoing, but today he's choosing his words carefully.

"Ambition? What ambition?"

"My ambition for my own nation."

Those words left me agasp.

Pax's ambition, founding of a nation.

"I will fulfill the dream that my father left behind."

I thought it would be something trivial, but his want was far greater than I imagined.

Founding an entire nation, going far beyond even his father.

Indeed, he looked dazzling.

"That's why, this will become my opportunity. Developing a new land, untainted by anyone. Even though an enclave of the Kingdom of the Dragon King, at some point it should be able to become independent."

Pax declared.

But it's a sucker's bet.

There is little hope.

Becoming independent means betraying the Kingdom of the Dragon King.

After that war with the Kingdom of the Dragon King would be inevitable.

"That... seems unlikely."

"It will be tough. But even without independence, if I developed it, it'll be my territory, both in name and in fact. I can welcome mother over then. I'm confident that with my three years of education here, I can identify talent and develop the territory into a comfortable place. Then it's distance can take care of the rest."

It's easier said than done.

However, reclaiming barren land is no easy task. There'll be little reason for talented people to gather, and thin, barren lands can support only so much population as well.

Maybe I should try to stop him.

It is impossible. Look at reality.

You should choose exile in the Asura Kingdom, and Father will do something about your mother.

But I know.

Pax has always been working toward that dream.

For that purpose, he has been studying in the distant Asura Kingdom.

If he had remained in the Kingdom of the Dragon King, he would have surely lost his life already.

He left but did not give up, daring to walk the difficult path in sole pursuit of his goals.

So I can't stop him.

Because even I started to envy his pursuit in life.

"That's why, even though it's difficult to ask, there is one thing I want to ask you."

"...What is it?"

Pax exhaled.

He took a deep breath and clenched his fist.

He said with determination.

"Would you come with me?"

He did not wait for my reply, he continued.

"I know your circumstances.

You will be married to Sariel.

Your father and Her Majesty Ariel both desire it.

I know what I'm asking cannot compare."

His words had me thinking of Father.

"But I've thought of the last three years I have been with you.

You are strong and thoughtful.

Talking to you has given me courage and conviction many times.

With you with me, I feel like I can overcome any difficulty."

"That is..."

"So fight with me."

Oh, that request...

I was troubled.

I was troubled.

Father's words returned to me...

My father's words, "I expect much of you."

Surely, my father "expects" me and Sarriel to get married.

Complete the task that my older brother had failed.

Moreover, my father has a particularly friendly relationship with Asura Kingdom.

While he has interaction with the Kingdom of the Dragon King as well, only with the Asuran royal family is he interested in an marriage alliance.

By doing so, my family would forge a reliable link.

Father's expectation.

Surely isn't to help Pax.

Not strengthen relations with the Kingdom of the Dragon King.

Marry Sariel and strengthen our relationship with the Asura Kingdom.

Following Pax deviates from Father's expectations.

But that doesn't mean that we can strengthen our connection with the Kingdom of the Dragon King instead.

Within the Kingdom of the Dragon King, Pax is isolated.

No benefit to my father.

On the contrary, it might cause troubles.

Indeed, the disadvantage would be greater.

If Pax aims for independence, we'll become hostile to the Kingdom of the Dragon King.

Following Pax will surely betray Father's expectations.

The father that protected us all the time.

My respected father.

"..."

I thought for a long time without a response.

I needed time to think.

But Pax did not wait for a reply.

"...I'm sorry, pretend that I never asked."

A few seconds after asking a question, Pax said, ending the conversation.

And that was my last conversation with Pax in the Asura Kingdom.



Pax returned to his homeland, and I felt something vacant in my chest.

I became empty and lethargic.

I didn't know what to do.

Pax's invitation I rejected, probably in line with Father's wishes.

But getting married to Sariel seemed like a betrayal of Pax.

I could not do it either.

Troubling over this, I returned home.

I refused Pax's invitation and betrayed Father's expectations as well.

Abandoning everything, presently unemployed.

CHAPTER 11

PRESENTLY, SENSEI

I headed out of town that day.

It was a place I visited almost everyday before going to the Asura Royal Academy.

However, since returning, I never showed my face.

The town outskirts.

A rough, nondescript two-story building that looked like a place monsters would roam.

At a glance, it looked like a typical stand-alone house.

In fact, it was reinforced everywhere with a metal called “Rudeus Steel”, which is incredibly sturdy.

A oversized basement, with Teleportation Circles connections to all over the world, an armory, an library, and training facility.

This is the residence of Dragon God Orsted.

I became a pupil here when I was a child. By the time I was 15, I was granted the title of North King left for Asura Kingdom

Elementary, Intermediate, Advanced, Saint, King, Emperor, and God Ranks.

Third Rank from the top, each school has no more than 5 members totally in the God and Emperor ranks.

King Rank is generally the highest rank around.

With around 50 King Ranks, North God Style probably has the most in the world.

Back then, I was still filled with hope and anticipation. I said my sincere farewell,

thinking I wouldn't be back for at least a decade.

Sensei said, "I may never see you again, so don't forget my teachings: may your sword swing true."

A heartfelt parting.

To come back in mere years, I was too embarrassed to show up.

Then yesterday happened.

Lightning, the masked man who suddenly appeared... I wanted to hear the truth from Sensei.

"..."

The first room you see after entering the building looks like a clinic waiting room.

A few chairs for waiting, a large table counter, and a woman with one long ear standing behind the counter.

She looked at me and smiled.

"Oh, Sieg-kun, welcome. It's been a long time."

"Yes, it's been a while..."

She is Philiastea.

A receptionist who deals with visitors who visit the office.

A beautiful appearance, probably because she's from the long-eared tribe.

"Oh, it's not Sieg-kun anymore. I should call you Sieg-san now right?"

"Please, don't fuss over it."

Except for her, there are three main residents in this office.

Dragon God Orsted, the boss.

My father, the Right Arm of Orsted, "Mage King" Rudeus Greyrat.

And my teacher, the Left Arm of Orsted, "North God Kalman III" Alexander Ryback.

Three people renown throughout the world.

Orsted rarely makes his appearance, but I fear like no one in the world can win against those three when together.

These three, including Father, have been making preparations to defeat the Demon God who will resurrect after 60 years or so.

Basically, working toward future world peace?

I used to think how cool that sounds, but the reality of the job involves mostly building relationships with important people around the world. The slow and steady work of building an alliance for a war 70 years later.

Father eagerly travels the world for his work, but Sensei mostly acts as Orsted's escort. Orsted... I have no idea what he actually does.

Well, I guess it's a matter of information security from outsiders.

Anyways, visiting this office is anxiety-inducing.

There are three people here who can erase me with the flick of a finger.

...Father shouldn't be in today, so two.

"Did you come by to visit Orsted-sama today?"

"No, just Sensei today."

"If you want Alexander-sama, he's at the underground training facility."

"Got it."

It would be better to greet Orsted-sama.

He's Father's boss, after all, thus benefactor of the Greyrat family.

However, Orsted isn't a sociable person.

He doesn't come out too much.

Well, toward Father' children he won't treat us so coldly.

But I am no longer a child. I should know better.

With that thought, I went down from the reception room to the basement.

Walking down the dark corridor toward the training facility.

The training facility is a room with a high ceiling. It is set up with magic circles to mitigate physical and magic attacks, and magic circles to heal injuries.

At the beginning of my apprenticeship, I was taught swordsmanship in the field behind the office.

However, by the time I was ten years old, my father used earth magic and made this expansion.

Since then, I learned the sword here from Sensei.

North God Style.

The greatest sword school in the world.

Some said Sword God Style's 1-hit-KO is the strongest, others said it's Water God Style that's undefeatable.

But I can say with conviction.

The North God Style is the greatest.

I'd say it's the strongest, but it's hard to be sure since I'm far from the pinnacle myself.

Moreover, Sensei North God Kalman III is the pinnacle of the North God Style. Despite his strength, he still lost to Father, a magician, and to Orsted as well.

So it may not be the strongest after all.

But only North God Style.

A school that embodies justice.

"Hey, Sensei..."

Sensei was sitting in the center of the training area.

By himself, without a sword, sitting quietly with his back to the entrance.

Unmoving.

Still, like a stone statue.

Seeing this, I stopped talking and sat down at the entrance of the training area.

One instance later.

Sensei suddenly stood up.

Still standing with his back facing me, he appeared by my side.

There was no sword in his hand, then I knew the sword was there.

Another instance later.

Vertical cut, horizontal cut, diagonal cut.

In the blink of an eye, Sensei swung three times.

Faster than even the Sword God Style.

The current Sword God could probably swing four or five times.

Another instance later.

The teacher was in front of me.

I'm not surprised.

Some techniques of the North God Style are performed in response to the blink of an eye or a person's heartbeat.

Against such technique, even the Water God Style has trouble countering unless the instructor is familiar with it.

I am someone who is familiar.

"Hey Sieg, it's been a long time."

The teacher sat in front of me and said.

Smiling as if nothing had happened yesterday.

"My apologies for not visiting."

"Since coming back you had yet to show your face. I thought I was hated."

On Sensei a smile unchanged from our farewell years ago.

"Well, I had my own circumstances."

"What will it be today? Here for the North God title?"

"No, no way."

If I said yes, Sensei would probably gladly oblige the challenge.

Then, laugh after winning overwhelmingly, "Well, well, you have a long way to go." when I fell.

In the unlikely event that I win, I would become the head of the North God Style, as North God.

Without any disciples to lead though.

"I just want to ask about some things."

"Well, what... waited. Let's guess. Hmm, yes, that's it, You look troubled. I see. What is troubling you?"

"I can't say that's not the case."

"I'm told I'm not good for consultations, but let's hear what's bothering you."

Over the years, I have learned many things from Sensei.

However, consultation with Sensei over my worries is not one of them.

Sensei is simple-minded.

Sensei never over-think things no matter how complicated.

Also, loose-lips.

Whatever we talk about will certainly be shared with Father by the end of the day.

"No, I didn't come here today to talk about my worries."

"Okay? Then what?"

"What happened yesterday."

"Yesterday? What yesterday? I've been here all day yesterday. After escorting Orsted-sama, I was busy meditating and had no time to go outside. Orsted-sama could attest. Yeah."

I haven't even asked yet and he's already anxiously offering alibi.

Too easy to understand.

Sensei is not a good liar.

"Alek-thunder, so you picked 'Lightning', right?"

I offered him a bait.

The teacher, surprised, quickly shook his head.

Bingo.

"Did you say Lightning just now? The guy that wore a black helmet?"

Huh? that's unexpected.

"Sensei, please cut the crap."

"Lightning, the number two in Shadow Corps, the most powerful evil organization in the area."

"Shadow Corps..."

"The Shadow Corps is a terrible organization that does the utmost evil every day. Nobody knows their true nature. It's a big organization that even we can't get a handle of."

"...No, Sensei is Lightning, right?"

"Lightning was a disciple who once trained under me, Emperor Rank. I excommunicated him when he joined the Shadow Corps."

How descriptive.

Sensei is simple and bad at lying, but he's rather descriptive.

But no matter the excuse, one should fess up when caught, yet he insisted on his innocence.

"Sieg-kun, Lightning and the Shadow Corps are terrifying. You should never get involved."

What should I do?

I don't know why my teacher is lying like this.

Why did you protect that nobleman?

"...Do you know what the man was doing yesterday?"

"That man yesterday? Who is it?"

"Viscount Basteel, the fat man."

"Ah," Sensei nodded.

"The second wealthiest noble in the city."

"Yes, he is."

"He offers noble families that couldn't stand on their own with marriage alliances."

"You mean an innocent girl to fulfill his own desires."

Sensei frowned.

Did you not know?

Surely, the Sensei who aims to be a hero would surely not tolerate such a man.

Sensei took out a small piece of paper from his pocket.

Reciting,

"A good man, although lustful. Although he had done some distasteful things, so let this be a lesson for him."

Come on!

The lies, blatantly read off a script, Sensei was obviously following someone else's instructions.

Yesterday was obviously no accident either.

There aren't many people who can enact such a farce with Sensei, except...

"...but I heard rumors that he's also funding Shadow Corps. That's probably why you ended up fighting Lightning yesterday."

I didn't even mention that I fought him yet.

Honestly, it's embarrassing how bad Sensei is at lying.

"Unfortunately, I don't know where Shadow Corps' base is. Perhaps there's someone

who's familiar with the underworld around town... Too bad I can't be of more help."

The teacher closed his mouth like a clam.

This means that if you gather intel in town, you will naturally get information about the Shadow Corps.

"Huh..."

I stood up, sighing.

To be honest, I thought this would happen eventually.

Surely, that nobleman had a relationship with Orsted and others.

Being the second richest person in the town, he may have also funded Orsted.

If it seems that if such an opponent is attacked, Orsted's subordinates could not stay silent.

Then Orsted have to send those two to take care of business.

My sensei, Alexander, and my father, Rudeus.

"..."

The person behind this farce... is probably Father.

But I can't believe Father would prepare such a farce.

I've been avoiding Father ever since I came back to this town.

I had surely let Father down.

I didn't marry Sarel, nor helped Father with work. Presently unemployed, moonlighting as an Ally of Justice.

I am confident that I failed my father's expectations.

I'm scared of what would be say.

Will I be scolded or angry?

Maybe he'll kick me out altogether.

It's just as well if he's disappointed.

It's fine if he's just angry and scolded me.

The scariest thing is saying nothing at all.

Not being disappointed at all.

Perhaps expectations were mere lip service, maybe I'm like air to him.

Like I don't exist at all.

Just like my grey-colored school life...

I won't be able to handle it.

I still respect my father.

I can't be like Father, but I still respect him.

I can't stand being treated like that by him.

Should I meet him? I have to, right...?

Yes, he prepared such a farce.

He must have something to say.

Until now, even though I was unemployed, he hasn't said anything.

Even though I had nothing lined up after coming back from Royal Academy, he just said "I see" and nodded.

Father probably has something to say.

Maybe a rebuke for beating that noble.

Yeah, something.

"Sieg-kun... are you going?"

"Yes."

"Well... I won't stop you, but at least bring this with you."

Sensei nodded and said, like reciting from a play, presenting a sword.

The lies and the lines are bad, but that was a good line...

"No, I won't need a sword."

I'm not going to fight or use a sword.

Allies of justice always use bare hands.

I stood up.

I was planning to have Sensei lead me to the next stage.

But Sensei surely needed a costume change before the next scene.

I don't want to ruin the farce prepared for me.

"Sieg-kun"

He stopped me suddenly, and I looked back.

"Before you go, answer my question."

"Question?"

"Oh, it's no big deal."

It wasn't the play-acting tone as before.

The nostalgic voice of a teacher.

Surely, he wanted to ask this of his own will.

Nevertheless, the question is predictable.

Why aren't you working but doing that instead?

Surely.

I used to be able to talk about the noblesse of unemployment.

But Sensei seemed to know I was working as an ally of justice.

Should we talk about justice?

Would Sensei scold me like my mothers?

If it's Sensei...

As the one that taught me about Allies of Justice, he surely won't.

I want to know, but I'm also afraid.

"Sure, what do you want to know?"

Sensei scanned my face, as if searching for my true feelings, and asked.

"Why won't you use a sword?"

I was struck by the question.

"Oh, that's..."

Because it was different from the question than I had assumed.

That is not all.

I didn't know myself.

I haven't touched my sword since returning to Magic City Sharia.

The activities of the ally of justice have always been done with bare hands.

So the real answer is "I don't know."

"...I don't need weapons for my justice."

But that was the answer I came up with.

I heard Father say that once.

Cheddarman does not use weapons.

Always fight evil with bare hands.

For his power is not to fight the bad guys, but to help the weak.

His justice is to help the weak, and helping the weak does not require excessive weaponry.

"Justice..."

Sensei sighed.

I had a sneaky idea that those words would make sense for my teacher.

Master once ran rampant due an incredibly powerful weapon.

He mistook the strength of his weapon as his own strength.

But after losing to Father and Orsted, he reflected and gave it up.

He said he was still immature and had much to learn.

Since then, he no longer uses magic swords and demon swords.

Instead a simple sword, sturdy and sharp sword, without a name.

With that experience, Sensei could surely appreciate my reason for not using a sword.

"I think justice needs a sword."

But failing my expectations, Sensei said instead.

"Why?"

"Well, you're trying to fight evil. You can help the innocent without fighting. But if you choose to fight evil, you will have to go where evil resides."

"I'm not going to fight evil..."

"So you'll just show up?"

"..."

As if he no longer planned to hide everything, he sat back down.

Standing on his knees and leaning forward.

"You're going to fight evil? Then you need a sword."

"...Why?"

"Because justice can't lose."

If you fight, don't lose.

If you can't lose, you need a sword.

A very simple theory, just like Sensei.

I cannot argue against its simplicity.

"I taught you the sword because you want to become someone that would fight even an impossible enemy, like a hero."

When I was young, I swung the sword that goal.

That looming presence.

What Sensei called a "hero".

To me, an "Ally of Justice".

They have slightly different meanings, but both are for defeating evil and helping the weak.

"Of course, but that was a long time ago. Now that you're an adult, you don't have to be a hero. But if you're going to fight a mighty opponent. A sword is a must, no?"

I'm meeting Father, so I don't need a sword with me.

In the first place, it won't be a fight.

How could I attack my father?

But Sensei wasn't talking about that.

He is scolding me.

Of my current situation.

"Or have you truly fallen? Fallen so much that you're merely venting your anger against the weak?"

"You think I'm bullying the weak in anger?"

"With justice as your excuse, just as I was."

Using justice as an excuse to bully the weak.

It might be so.

Certainly, since becoming an Ally of Justice, I never fought against a stronger opponent.

I struggled a little yesterday, but I have strength left.

No, I knew.

Saying I don't would be a lie.

Ally of Justice, the Jobless Oblige...

That's just an excuse or justification for the status quo.

Not using a sword is just another excuse.

The Ally of Justice is, after all, mere playing pretend.

"If I have fallen, would you excommunicate me too?"

"No way, I just wanted to hear your troubles."

Sensei shrugged and stood up.

"But the one to hear your troubles won't be me."

He pointed to the exit of the training area.

"Go. Tell your worries to the person in question. You'll find the answer you're looking for."

Sensai said with a rare, lonely expression.



I walked back to town.

It might be the first time that Senei looked that lonesome.

My worries, should I have told him?

No, even if I tell Sensei, I won't get the answer I'm looking for.

"Somehow, my chest hurts."

I'm troubled.

Unmarried, unemployed, unoccupied.

My worries.

But Sensei doesn't have answers for me.

Because Sensei is simple-minded, he won't understand my troubles.

He'll just say, "Then just do it." If it's so easy, I would have done it already.

"..."

I head towards the tavern with those thoughts.

The Drunken Goblin

It's a bar that I visit almost every day.

I guess coming by has turned into a habit.

Why 'goblin' when there's no goblins nearby?

I've heard about that before.

The guy I heard from said:

Because small-time villains gather at this bar like a nest of goblins.

Left alone too long and it'll fester, so once a while they get exterminated by castle knights or killed by nobles for sport.

Just the same, right? He said.

When I entered the store, I recalled that exchange.

Those I beat up before, have I been treating them like goblins too?

To be honest, I felt like drinking this time.

When was the last time I drank?

Probably during graduation at Asura Royal Academy.

At least since coming back, I haven't drunk any alcohol.

I only come to the bar for information gathering.

When the bar owner offered gratuities, I always accepted, perhaps today I should...

Oh well.

Alcohol is a symbol of evil.

If I get drunk and lose it, I don't know what to do with me.

"Hey, Georges!"

"Hmm?? Sieg! How are you doing?"

He reeked of alcohol when I sat in front of him.

Apparently Georges was drinking more than usual.

"I'm alright. You?"

"Hmm. Not great. I didn't make any money yesterday."

Georges said with a smirk.

"Hey, that's unusual for you."

Georges had always done well for himself.

Yet he's always short of cash. I always wondered where he spent all his money.

So there are days when even he couldn't make money either, huh.

"But you look pretty good though."

"Yesterday was yesterday, today is today. Today I got a big job."

"Ah, so business is good then?"

So are you in a good mood?

"Well, I don't know. I might not be able to make easy money after today."

"Is that so?"

"That's right."

Day jobs, huh.

But I heard that you're doing steady work lately?

Seems unrelated to your job as an informant.

No, unless, maybe...

"Hey Georges."

"Hmm ~"

"Do you know about the 'Shadow Corps'?"

Hearing that, with a surprised face Georges stiffened up.

After looking around him, he leaned close to me.

"Idiot, not so loud! What if someone hears you?"

"Oh, ah, sorry."

"The Shadow Corps? Where did you hear that? There're dangerous rumors about those guys...!"

Apparently Georges knows about the Shadow Corps.

So that means...

Georges is probably the man that Father and Sensei used to pass messages.

Unless I'm completely misunderstood and this isn't part of a farce...

But in retrospect, most of my villain's information so far came from Georges.

That's why business was so good.

Pass information about villians to me, getting paid from Father.

Well, can't blame Georges. He probably just did his job.

"They're the worst villains in town. Even that Orsted can't deal with them. Don't talk openly about them. You never know where those guys are hiding!"

Georges kept scanning our surroundings, looking really pale in the face.

Then, after confirming that no one was looking, he whispered.

"So, what did you want to know about the 'Shadow Corps'?"

Georges is a good actor.

I want Sensei to learn a little from him.

"Location... their bases."

"Sieg... Are you...!"

Georges leaned back, and opened his eyes as if horrified.

However, he shook his head immediately.

"No, if you knew of 'Shadow Corps', I thought you'd do something."

AKA "That's why I didn't say anything until now".

"Their base is here."

He took a piece of paper out of his pocket and handed it to me.

When I opened it, a detailed map appeared.

So detailed it makes one wonder why you happened to carry it around.

A cross drawn near the center of the map.

That is probably the secret base.

"Georges. Thank you."

"No problem."

Georges said, rubbing under his nose.

He probably thought he pulled one over me again.

Too bad...

I feel a bit bad for him.

"I'll entrust the peace of this town to you... Moon Knight"

Feeling apologetic, I decided to play along.

Looking at Georges's face in surprise, I steeled myself and nodded.

"Yes, I shall return."

And stood up.

Say, Georges was probably receiving money from Father.

If so, there are some things I don't understand.

"Well, Sieg."

"What?"

"...I'm sorry."

I didn't know at that moment what the apology meant.

But apart from "information gathering", he also made "small talk".

That time was never uncomfortable.

It must have been the same for him.

The proof was the conversation just now, it wasn't an act, but said coldly.

That's probably his true self.

"No worries."

Drunk Goblin guests are killed as easily as goblins.

Small-time villain with little power, earning daily coin, making petty havoks...

But even small-time villains have a friend or two.

With that in mind, I got out of the bar.

Towards Father.

CHAPTER 12

PRESENTLY, FATHER

My father is someone I looked up to and greatly respected.

I thought of him as an ally of justice who wielded great power.

As I grew older and became more aware, I realized that Father wasn't an ally of justice.

But my respect did not diminish.

Rather, it had only grown.

For family, for those he must protect, he cast aside even his pride and kowtowed to a hated enemy.

The same humility and generosity that let Father build strong relationships all over the world.

By no means a trivial task.

Not a fantastical ally of justice, but a realistic, hard worker.

And the results speak for themselves.

Although I haven't seen it recently, nowadays in public, Father looks rather dignified and cool.

"Ha ha ha ha ha!"

That father was laughing.

Standing up high atop a staircase above me, loudly laughing.

He was imposing.

"I'm the leader of Shadow Corps, knight of the moon's shadow, Shadow Knight! The greatest villain of the land!"

He was laughing loudly and saying stupid things.

It wasn't cool at all.



After coming out of the bar, I followed the map around town.

"Shadow Corps' Secret Base".

Seeing it written so plainly on the map made me lose the little motivation I had.

The location was a warehouse in a corner of the warehouse district.

A nondescript warehouse.

After searching for a bit, I found a stairway to the basement.

I found a Teleportation Circle after descending down the basement stairs.

Taking the Teleportation Circle, I arrived in a separate stone building.

A dark, gloomy prison-like atmosphere with candlelights flickering.

Was the atmosphere for the final battle a suggestion from Sensei?

I walked down the hallway wondering.

While walking down the hallway, my mood was complicated.

What does Father want to say to me?

Will he scold me or not?

Some harsh words for certain.

What would he say first?

How harsh could it be?

I couldn't imagine.

I wanted to escape from here right now.

Why am I here? Why did I come?

With that thought, I walked, arriving at an audience hall-like place.

A high ceiling supported by six tall pillars, lit by bonfires, making the room as bright as day.

In the back of the room, a long set of stairs led to a large stone relief.

A giant skull with protruding horns, a campy bad guy.

In front of the relief was a stylish throne, on which a man sat.

Father.

He's wearing a black mask and a black cloak, but no way I'd miss him.

The gray robe, which can be seen through the cloak, was picked out for him by white mama last year.

And that armor underneath the robe.

Impervious to physical attack below Saint Rank, it also multiplies the users' physical and magical strength many fold.

It's called "Magical Armor".

Because of its high magic consumption, only one person in the world wore it.

That is why its bearer came to be known as

"Mage King" Rudeus Greyrat.

"Ha ha ha ha ha!"

When he found me, he stood up and laughed loudly.

"I'm the leader of Shadow Corps, knight of the moon's shadow, Shadow Knight! The greatest villain of the land!"

The first words I was so nervous about...

They're harsh words alright.

Too harsh.

Too embarrassing.

It sounds cool to say for yourself.

Honestly, when I'm doing it myself, I think it's cool.

But when I saw the father I respected so much doing it... Well, it's hard to watch.

My father is over 40 already...

Yet... He's...

I can feel my mental statue of a respected father shattering and falling.

The father who stands by Orsted and offers wise counsel.

The father who travels the world on Orsted's behalf to parlay with world powers.

The father that scatters all enemies stood against with a blast of magic.

Such a statue of my father is crushed and turned into powder.

And Sensei?

He's okay. That's the kind of person he always was.

"Dad... please stop."

"I'm not your father."

He said, flipping his cloak.

"Call me Mr. Shadow."

"NOOOOO~!"

Embarrassing.

Shameful.

Why do I have to be treated like this?

Why does the father that I respect so want me to witness this?

Ah, this must be my punishment.

Because I'm unemployed.

I didn't get married or work, living a rotten life.

Because I bullied the weak in the name of justice.

That's why Father appeared like this?

"Dad!"

"Haha, you must be the one rampaging in our territory lately, Moon Knight? I'm impressed that you managed to come this far..."

"Dad, enough!."

"Why are you hesitating? Hahah, are you scared?"

"Please, that's enough. Dad, I can't look anymore, it's painful to look at. Honestly, it's too embarrassing to watch. I know I was wrong, so please stop..."

My father stopped to listen to my words.

"Embarrassing?"

"Yes. really, I can't handle it anymore."

"...I see"

Father drooped his shoulders lightly.

Then he removed his helmet.

Revealing my father underneath, Rudeus Greyrat.

Perhaps there was a different face under that helmet... Even that ephemeral hope was gone.

"Why are you dressed like that?"

"Because you were avoiding me, I thought I better hide my identity."

Avoiding him.

That was true.

I have been hiding from Father in the past year.

Even now I want to run away, but for a different reason.

"If so, please disguise yourself better."

"But if you didn't notice, I'd be so sad I could throw up."

So is that halfway?

Atypical for father.

"...Sure, if dad disguised yourself seriously, I might not have figured it out."

"Dad does have a talent for disguise."

Father often had to wear disguises for work.

I've never seen it personally, but I haven't heard of a failed disguise yet.

"So what happened to Sensei?"

I might as well ask first.

To be honest, I expected Father here.

But I expected to have a confrontation with Sensei - Lightning - first before.

There is no reason to fight, but Sensei is the type that does that.

"Ha ha ha, Lightning? He's not here!"

"Why? Also, please stop talking like that."

"He said he didn't want to disturb a heart-to-heart between father and son and refrained himself."

"Ah, is that so?"

So Sensei intended to confront me initially.

But after the daytime conversation we had, he felt it was enough.

He probably thought I needed another point of view.

After our talk, he knew he said all he needed to say.

"...So, there is something to talk about after all this set up, right?"

Hearing that, Father swallowed nervously and glanced around.

"Ah, well, Sieg. I know you don't like talking with me. The Mothers told me too, that it's about time we... Well, no, I'm not blaming you. If you don't feel like it today, we can take a raincheck?"

"Dad!"

"Yes?"

"Please settle down a bit, I have always respected you."

"...Really?"

"Yes! Since my childhood till now."

He looked dumbfound.

That's not the look I expected.

But the children of Greyrat House have always respected Father.

Bigger sis, big brother, little sis, and small sis as well.

Lara might have a slightly different feeling from respect, but she never looked down on Father either.

We all are a little different in our feelings, but we all respected Father.

"Well, I was respected... hehe?"

"Don't you have something to say?"

"...Oh, yeah. I do."

"How about we take it somewhere else?"

Father nodded in agreement.

"Sure, I know a good place."

He flipped his cloak.

Please stop.



We ended up coming back to my original bar.

The Drunk Goblin.

I was fine with anything, but Father settled on this place.

He figured it's somewhere I'm familiar and comfortable with.

The store was full, but when we entered the store, some of the goblins got frightened and skedaddled.

They're probably afraid of Father.

If it wasn't for today, I would have been one of them.

Father took the innermost seat.

He ordered the nervous waiter to bring some food and alcohol.

"Sieg... do you drink?"

"I do, but I haven't drank since the graduation ceremony"

"Well, let's drink a little. If it gets hard to talk, maybe a little alcohol would help. Yeah?"

Father is sitting before me.

Just two of us.

It makes me nervous.

I don't think I ever talked to my father alone.

Well, maybe a couple times.

But if I get cold feet now, then...

Yet, Father seems to be nervous as well.

Can't stay calm.

Must have something difficult to say?

" ... "

" ... "

As we sat silently across each other, the food and ale arrived.

"Well... a toast?"

My father raised the cup and said.

"What should we toast to ?"

"...Anything is fine."

"Then a toast to... anything."

We drank our ale and shotgunned the full cup.

It tasted pretty awful since this bar only served cheap ale.

"Ah, food and ale are pretty great here!"

"I think Dad eats better food on a daily basis."

"Mama does make a delicious meal, but I rarely get to enjoy it because of my business trips."

"What about during the trip?"

"...I don't really enjoy cooking on a business trip. It's pretty awful."

To Father, there's little difference between a royal banquet and bar grub for thugs?

"The best food is the meal you eat with your family, so this food is good too, although it doesn't taste as good as Mama's..."

Father says as he ate.

I toyed with the roasted beans with a fork, observing him.

No choice, I cut to the chase.

"So... why the farce?"

"I want to talk to you."

"So, what about? I hope you'll get into the subject soon."

When I said that, my father paused for a moment.

After an "Mmm" he settled on something, and twisted it around.

"Before that, I have something I want to hear from you."

Not a talk, but listen.

"So Dad has nothing to tell me?"

"Well, I don't know yet until I hear your story."

Does that mean Father thought nothing of my current situation?

Didn't marry Sarel, didn't work.

Loitered around town by day, fighting evil by night.

That current situation.

"Because Dad expects nothing from me anymore?"

I asked after making up my mind.

And Father looked at me flabbergasted.

As if he couldn't comprehend.

Or maybe he wasn't listening seriously, busy shoving mouthfuls of roast beans instead.

"Why would you think that?"

"Why..."

Do you want to hear it in my own words?

"Because Dad wanted me to marry Sariel, right? That was the expectation."

"I thought it was a good idea."

My father chugged his ale.

"Do you not want to hear why I refused to get married?"

"Why not? Sariel seemed like a good girl. Big breasts, and being Her Majesty Ariel's daughter, she's probably pretty wild in the bed--"

"Dad!"

"Oh, sorry, why? Why didn't you like that girl?"

Reason for not getting married.

I thought often about it in the past year.

I wondered about it over and over.

"I don't hate her. She's a good friend. But with Sariel... What should I say, we just don't hit off. Our conversation tends to die when we're alone together, and staying silent gets painful too."

"Ah."

"Maybe if we get married, that pain would only continue, so it's hard to imagine getting married like that... Anyways, it's impossible, marrying her."

"Sounds like you're just looking for an excuse..."

My father said, still chewing on beans.

Probably.

I'm just finding excuses in retrospect.

"But, isn't that also fine?"

As I was lost in my thoughts, Father said.

"No need to force yourself to get married."

Simply.

With a casual tone.

"But didn't Dad want to strengthen his relationship with Asura Kingdom?"

"Well, saying I don't would be a lie. Ariel-sama thought so too. Truth be told, if our families form a marriage alliance, it'll increase our influence with the Asuran Royal Family. That'd make work easier in the future."

"In that case!"

"But..."

Blocking my words, Father continued.

"If you don't want to, you don't have to."

As if it's a matter of course.

"Rather, you should prioritize what you want to do instead. Ally of Justice. The Moon Knight. Isn't that fine too? Your Mothers might get on your case about it, but Papa is on your side!"

Father spread his hands in exaggeration.

"To be honest, when I first heard I thought it was kind of childish, but everyone was like that at first.

No one can do amazing things right from the start.

Right now, it's just a small villain in town,

With your abilities, it could be bigger and bigger, and eventually fight the greater evil.'

I wasn't thinking that far.

There's no need to fight evil if I was just trying to be a good samaritan.

Like helping people on the side of the road.

Fighting evil, it's as Sensei said.

It's just venting.

"No."

"No? Oh, do you want to keep peace nearby?"

"Dad, no."

I forced this out of my throat...

"I gave up on being an ally of justice."

Yes, I have already given up.

The day at Asural Royal Academy, when I realized that I was borrowing from Dad.

I'm not justice, I can't be justice.

"Yes, I wanted to become an ally of justice.

I wanted to be Cheddarman.

But it's impossible. I already gave up.

What I did was a mockery. just playing pretend."

The trigger was simple.

After graduating and coming home, while wandering around bored I fought off some thugs that were pestering a Magic University student.

She said "Thank you" for helping her.

She didn't know me.

A freshman at Magic University. Having just arrived, she probably didn't even know Father.

Sooner or later, she would have heard about Father and me, but not yet.

Even not knowing, she still said "thank you" to me.

Despite being frightened by my creepy green hair, she still offered her thanks.

"Even its play-pretend, there are still people who have been saved, so I think it's good... Well, Basteel got angry..."

Dad looked around nervously, then leaning closer he asked, peering into me.

"But, what do you really want to do?"

"..."

I can't answer.

What I really want to do is contrary to what Dad wishes.

"..."

I was silent for a while.

I was not searching for words.

I was just silent.

Then he drank his ale and ordered refills.

I drank too, copying him.

No matter how much I drank, no words spilled out.

I had not been drunk for a long time.

"...When you came back from the Royal Academy, you seemed to be having a hard time back then."

Dad, breaking the silence.

My gaze was on his plate. Only a single bean leftover.

He rolled that bean between his fingertips, making a sound, neither crunchy nor mushy.

With that sound as a backdrop, Dad continued.

“Being alive, you get hurt sometimes.

Making you want to withdraw into yourself.

Even Papa has been there. Many times.

Especially that one time...

Blaming the world for all the befalls you, regretting your own lack of ability.

But now I’m where I am today, I think, because of experiencing those episodes of regret.

So when I saw you hurt, I told your Mothers that we should leave you alone for a while, and let you be.”

The ale came.

Dad picked up the bean and put it in his mouth.

Chewing loudly, he washed it down with ale.

Dad seemed drunk already.

Unlike me, Dad is not a strong drinker.

But his mouth is looser than usual.

"And then somehow you started the ally of justice thing.

I remembered how you idolize allies of justice as a child, so I figured you found what

you're looking for.

But somehow recently... well, I didn't see it personally, but when I listened to the people around you. Well, you were having fun, but no longer putting effort into it, like you were going through the motions."

"People around me?"

"The Mothers, Lara, Lily... and Georges. Aside from Lara and Georges, the rest didn't know about the justice stuff, but they knew something was off."

Dad said, finishing his ale.

He took a big burp, sighed.

"So I came today to hear about your troubles."

Not answers, but my worries.

That was the real purpose for today.

"Well, can't you call me out like normal..."

"I thought you wouldn't be honest with me.

You have always avoided me, and now you have reached an age where you too have worries that you can't share with your parents, right?

So I set up a small play.

As a show of understanding that I appreciate what you're doing."

I see, so that's why you did all that?

Dad was lost and unsure of how to approach me about my worries.

His solution after much consideration, an evil mastermind and three large glasses of ale...

"I was surprised to hear that you respected me. That made me happy."

"I was surprised that Dad would act like that."

"Ah, haha, sorry, sorry. I should have taken it more seriously."

You might not see it, but Papa is pretty confident with my acting ability.

I've once played the villain and hooked up a country knight and his princess."

"I remember. Knight Lynhard and the evil Great Magician Rudo? That story at Ronumer?"

A Nostalgic story.

One of Dad's heroic tales.

In order to hook up a knight and his princess, he acted as an evil magician, kidnapped the princess, and the knight came to her rescue.

If Dad had acted on that level, I certainly wouldn't have recognized him. He would certainly have fooled me as well.

"And so..."

My father rolled the beans around.

A force of habit?

"Your worries... is that you want to do something else, right?"

Saying with some difficulty, once a while he'll sneak a peek at me.

Despite seeing him in such a state, I still respect my father.

Great, hardworking, strong, gentle.

That's why, please be a bit more resolute, Dad!

But why?

The way Dad's acting now, it felt so familiar.

Perhaps how I liked him the best.

"...Yes."

"Can you tell me?"

Breath in.

Breath out.

I can hear my heart racing, with a hand to my chest.

Until now, something I could never say out loud.

Dad.

Something I would never have told Dad, that I will now.

"I wanted to follow Pax."

I said.

"Follow Pax... to the Kingdom of the Dragon King?"

"On Graduation Day, Pax asked if I would follow him. I wanted to, too. Maybe if I had a few days to think it over, I probably would have."

When I finished, Dad opened his eyes wide.

His mouth opened as if saying something, but after a brief pause, he asked calmly.

"So why didn't you?"

"It would betray Dad. Dad wished to strengthen his relationship with the Asuran Royal Family, but Pax is from the Kingdom of the Dragon King. He is also isolated there. If I went, we would have no more eligible bachelors left, and we would not be able to strengthen our connection with the Asuras. On the contrary, our relationship with the Kingdom of the Dragon King will likely deteriorate instead."

I said in one breath.

Dad, his mouth ajar, a face of sadness.

But it quickly returned neutral.

"What? For that poor excuse?"

"What poor excuse..."

What has been troubling me all this time, cast as a poor excuse... pisses me off a little.

"Well, Sieg. Sure, Papa and Her Majesty of Asura Kingdom are friends. In particular, it won't be a stretch to call White Mama and Her Majesty best friends. Certainly I hope we can get along like family. But that's it. "

"That's it?"

"Strengthening our bond with the Asuran Royal Family, increasing our voice within Asura Kingdom, those don't really matter."

"Don't matter...? But just now..."

"I did say, it would be nice. But haven't I said before? Put on the balance against your futures, things like strengthening bonds with Asura don't truly matter as much?"

Shocking.

What truly matters.

Then, why have I been...

"But the thing about helping Pax is true. It'll be a bit difficult in my position."

Dad gave a rough assessment of his concerns.

He was deeply involved in Pax's father's death. Pax's guardian also requested for Dad to provide help if anything arose.

However, interfering with the internal politics of the royal family is a challenge.

Furthermore, the royal family of the Kingdom of the Dragon King doesn't treat him

that poorly on a surface level.

As proof, even granting him a title and a territory.

But a title and territory implies obligations and responsibilities.

Thus, with their superficial obligations fulfilled, there's little Dad could protest publicly for.

In Father's position, even offering financial support would have to formally go through the royal household.

Through the royal household, after various interferences nothing would come of it.

Of course, we could provide money and resources on the down low, and in truth we had in the past year. But compared to what it takes to develop a new territory, it's a drop in the bucket.

Trying to provide support at a level to run a territory will surely be uncovered by the royal family.

If found, there will be a major crack in the relationship with the Kingdom of Dragon King built thus far.

"I wish I made better preparations before it happened, but it was all settled by then... I thought they'd content themselves with the destruction of the Shirone Kingdom, but even now they'd rid themselves if someone's too 'troublesome'."

After his explanations, Dad looked at me.

"But it's difficult only because of my position. As a dear friend, if you rush over alone... On your own initiative, nobody can refuse. Actually, Sieg, if you go and help Pax, it'd be a big help as well."

Oh, I see.

It's the same.

For Dad, marrying Sarel, helping Pax, they're the same.

Dad could have said, "Help Pax."

But Dad didn't.

Just as he never said, "Marry Sarel."

As Pater familias he kept from burdening me.

"But is it OK? Really?"

I wished to confirm.

Dad nodded, of course.

"Oh, but I can't give much public support. It's the same even for my son."

"Rather, if I went, won't the Kingdom of Dragon King make trouble with Dad? Even if I went on my own, I'm still a North King."

"Well, a little... no. Sieg. You don't have to mind that."

He took another big swig of ale.

He wiped his lip... no, faked-wiping to hide his lips in embarrassment.

"What Papa wants to protect wasn't peace or relationships, but you."

I couldn't appreciate the weight of those words.

But the nuance was transmitted.

"Don't worry about Papa. It's okay, even if you become Papa's enemy,"

"I don't want to be Dad's enemy."

"Well, becoming enemies would be too unfortunate. Let's avoid that at all costs... Still."

Dad ate the last of his beans and emptied the ale.

His face was already red.

"If you avoid doing what you wanted to do everyday, and you heard about Pax's death one day, you'll regret it for the rest of your life. You'll never be able to recover. That's more tragic than becoming enemies, because it means Papa failed to protect you."

In short, Dad wants me to be free.

And I am free.

So what is it?

Do I go to Pax?

It was okay from the beginning?

"...I see. Dad, thank you."

I said my thanks.

Dad moved his chair with a rattle to sit besides me.

He patted my back loudly.

"Before you go, make sure to say proper goodbyes to everyone."

"Yes"

"But for today, you drink with Papa. Because you keep avoiding me, Papa was feeling lonely."

"...Yes"

The conversation ended.

It was exactly as Sensei said.

Talking to that person would solve my worries.

It was simple.

"Hick... Mis, please more ale!"

In exchange, my father got completely wasted.



On that day, Dad continued to drink ale merriedly.

Getting drunk, praising how wonderfully cute the Mothers are, singing strange songs, shouting loudly, touching a waitress' buttocks and getting admonished for it. By the bar's closing time, he was hurling in front of the store.

I offered detoxifying magic for him, but was refused.

Dad was merry all the way home.

With his arm around my shoulder he sang red-faced.

Moon Knight's theme song.

Told to sing along, so I sang as well, out loud without regard for the neighbors.

Dad that let loose is rather tacky and embarrassing.

I never thought my father had this side to him.

I probably wouldn't have respected him so if he had always been like this.

But why?

Somehow it's the most I ever liked him.

Totally uncool, so I don't know why either.

"Oh, yes Sieg."

When we came home and stood in front of the gate, Dad called out to me.

"I will answer your first question."

He leaned over, with alcohol in his breath, Dad quietly said.

"Good luck, I expect much from you."

"...Yes."

I nodded, feeling refreshed.

CHAPTER 13

PRESENTLY, TAKING LEAVE

The day after drinking with Father, I woke up in my room.

Looking out from the window, the eastern sky was shining.

The city was silent, with a slight chill in the air.

I'd usually sleep in this early in the morning.

There's still time before breakfast.

I got up and changed.

Feeling refreshed.

My mind and body, both completely fresh.

"I want to follow Pax."

I told Father and received his blessings, clearing the cloud casted over my head the past year.

I don't know how much I can help Pax.

Maybe I'll be a drag for him instead.

But I want to at least see him in action.

"Ah!"

Well, I hold expectations for Pax as well.

I want to see where his future holds.

What kind of nation will he create, what kind of talent will he collect, who will he marry, and what kind of person will he become...

I want to see.

No matter the kingdom, talents, marriage, or the person he becomes.

I just want to witness his future.

Surely, that was the same as Father's "expectations" as well.

That's why Father held his silence for so long.

To me, big sis, big brother, to small sis.

"Dad is really amazing."

It suddenly dawned on me.

Father never did interrupt me.

He only asked for one thing.

"Make sure to say proper goodbyes to everyone."

Today, I'll make sure to do that.



I got down to the first floor.

First to fill my stomach.

Perhaps now with a clear mind, I felt particularly hungry this morning.

When I was attending Magic University, I used to have a large appetite, but I haven't had much of one lately.

Don't eat in the morning, eat a little before noon, and eat a little before the evening. Such was life.

But today I wanted to eat my fill, first thing in the morning.

I feel good today.

It won't hurt to help White Mama and grandma with breakfast once a while.

"...Oh."

When I entered the dining room, I was met with three pairs of eyes.

White Mama, Blue Mama, and Red Mama too.

All three were in the dining room and turned toward me, all at once.

"Morning."

"Good morning. You're early today."

"Good morning."

Each greeting their own way.

Looking back, it's been a long time since I saw the three mothers together.

Do they always eat breakfast together? I don't know either, since I haven't had breakfast for so long.

I took my seat.

Usually, if they were all together, I would run away, but today there was no reason to escape.

"Sieg. You came back with Rudy yesterday, went drinking together?"

"Yup."

"Rudy was especially merry yesterday, something good happened?"

White Mama asked, taking the initiative.

Maybe she already heard from Father last night.

"I told my dad about my worries this past year."

"No wonder Rudy's so happy."

Said Blue Mama.

"Rudy was always so worried about Sieg."

"Really?"

"Yeah, occasionally during breakfast, he would look up the ceiling and say, 'Sieg's not coming down today either?'"

"Oh..."

"I think he'll sleep for a while longer today. It's been a while since he drank that much."

Because I always avoided Father...

Maybe I did something terrible to Father.

"So, what were you talking about?"

Red Mama asked.

Too impatient, she wanted to know what I talked to my father about and what conclusion we came to.

"Um... starting with the conclusion?"

"I prefer that."

"I would like to help a friend in the Kingdom of the Dragon King. It might take a decade or two, maybe even more. I might never return here again."

I'm going to help Pax and witness his future.

But Pax's ambitions are enormous.

He wants a territory of his own, to become independent, to create a new nation.

Not a job for a couple years.

A decade, two decades...

Or maybe when he and I are both dead, a legacy for the next generation to fulfill.

"Is that so..."

The Mothers looked saddened.

Particularly White Mama, her lips bitten red, her eyes a dam near bursting.

In comparison, Red Mama remains her usual-self.

"Is that friend the one you must protect?"

"Yes."

"Now that you made up your mind. Do you best!"

Red Mama said with a smile.

The first time I saw her smile in a long time.

These days, I only saw her frowns.

Of course. Because I fell stagnant.

Red Mama always taught us siblings to "protect someone important."

My conclusion was exactly as she taught me.

"So you decided you won't marry Sarii?"

Blue Mama asked.

I responded.

"Yeah. I'd like to remain friends with Sariel. Sorry for wasting all the marriage prospects that Blue Mama sought for me."

"No, it's fine. As I always said, you live as you like. If you found your own path, follow it."

Blue Mama said with a smile.

Her lessons were, "Live as your heart desires. If you have a problem, just ask for help."

That teaching I haven't followed lately, until my talk with Father.

Indeed, living our own path is the way to a happy life.

"The house will get quiet with Sieg leaving."

White Mama was near tears.

My birth mother.

Big sis that married off to the Holy Land of Millis, we're both her children.

If I leave, both of us will be gone.

Even as an unemployed mouth to feed, White Mama always made breakfast for me.

When not on holiday, she always cooked and prepared breakfast.

Even when I came home late from playing ally of justice, she would sometimes get out of bed to welcome me home.

"Mama, he was my first real friend at Asura Kingdom. That's why I want to go give him a hand."

"Yeah, I know. If friends are in a pinch, you must go."

White Mama wiped away her tears and smiled.

Ever since when we're young, she had always earnestly exhorted us to "make friends and don't bully the weak."

I admired the ally of justice because of my father, Cheddarman.

But it may be because of her that I thought Cheddarman was so cool.

"So I'll be going now."

Looking over them three, I said again.

"Thank you for supporting me thus far."

Hearing those words, White Mama could hold back no longer, a flood of tears.

Originally Red Mama and White Mama both looked self-satisfied. But when they saw White Mama in that state, they tried to console her haphazardly.

"Don't cry?"

"Sieg's leaving, so see him off with a smile."

Still in tears, White Mama said to them.

"I'm just glad that Sieg is finally moving forward."

Feeling ashamed, I waited for my mother to stop crying.



Afterwards, the Mothers went to make breakfast, hand in hands.

Even Red Mam, who seldom cooks, went in the kitchen.

During breakfast, I told my grandmas that I'd be going abroad.

Both grandmas stroked my head gently, after hearing my decision.

Father, still with his head full of bed hair, smirked when he saw that.

There were two missing from the breakfast table.

Lara, my older sister, and Lily, my younger sister.

They seem to sleep at work rather often.

I'll have to talk to them as well.

So, after finishing breakfast, I decided to go to Magic University.

My last time visiting the Magic University.

The campus where I studied for many years, one I visited regularly even after graduating.

A place where there are bitter memories, but fond memories as well.

"Ah!"

While walking down a hallway on campus, I met a girl I recognized.

The girl that married the fat nobleman.

"Hey!"

"Oh, hey, Sieg-kun."

She was not crying underneath the stairs like before.

On the contrary, she was smiling, surrounded by friends.

She seemed to be fine.

"How are you doing?"

"Ah? Yes, I'm doing well."

"But you were crying so terribly not too long ago?"

"Oh... about that... When I actually got married, it was a little different than I thought."

"Oh?"

"Sure, he's a bit older and not much to look at, but surprisingly a pleasant guy after we talked a bit."

"Is that so?"

"He's a bit of a pervert, but I appreciate that he's always working to keep me entertained. He is also giving me a lot of leeway, like allowing me to continue attending school. The situation at home turned out better than I expected as well. There are many other wives in a similar situation to me. With everyone so gracious and considerate, I'll have to do my best as well..."

Ah, so it's like that.

A noble's sensibility, throwing money around to help acquaintances without self-regard.

Father and Sensei both rated him highly.

Only deducting points for his lower half.

Not someone I should be beating up.

"Shouldn't judge a book by its cover."

"Yeah..."

Before I go with Pax, I owe him an apology.

I thought.



I arrived at Lara's research lab.

One knock.

"Come in~"

A familiar voice from inside.

However, not Lara's voice.

"Oh, big brother!"

Lily was in the room too.

Playing with a magic tool as usual.

Before her, lounging in her favorite chair, Lara was studying magic circles on a piece of paper.

"Rare for Lily to be here. What the occasion?"

"I have been here since yesterday! Hey, check this out!"

What Lily showed off was something I didn't recognize.

It had a rough round shape, but with a few corners here or there.

Not quite a ball, if it hit you, it'd be painful.

Based on the magic circle drawn on various places, it's probably a magic tool.

"I don't know what it is."

"That's right! I don't know what it's used for either! Isn't it cool?"

"Oh... huh?"

"Big Sis Lara found it in the market and didn't know either, so I've been studying it all this time!"

Lily sure is eager.

I don't get it.

Anyways, does that mean she's been staring at this ridiculous thing since yesterday?

"Lily, did you skip out on work again?"

"No, this is part of the job!"

She insisted.

Why wasn't she fired yet? Nepotism? Because she's a Greyrat? Or does she actually produce results?

Whatever.

"Sieg."

Lara, who looked a bit haggard, looked up at me.

"Why are you here?"

Her usual tone.

I would always say to kill time.

"Saying my goodbyes."

Lily looked surprised, but Lara kept her usual sleepy expression.

"Ah, how simple."

"Huh? Oh, yeah."

Somehow big sis was rather cold.

No, that's just her usual self.

As usual, she's ambivalent with whatever happens with me.

I felt a little hurt.

"Well, I decided to go to my friend at the Kingdom of the Dragon King, so I might never return."

I put it succulently.

Then, Lily switched from shock to anger.

Not quite what I expect.

Well, I just made up my mind yesterday, and already am telling my goodbyes today, so it's understandable.

"What happened to become my assistant?"

"Huh? I never agreed to that."

"But Big brother Sieg is strong, can ride a horse, and knows how to pamper me. You're the best person to be my assistant!"

"Thank you the high evaluation."

"I told the Chief that I would hire a newcomer next year. What should I do?"

I do not know either.

"No luck this time."

"Well, what should I say to the Chief?"

"I guess tell him that the person ran away?"

At least I never consented to this.

"I thought for sure you'd be short on money eventually and come begging to be my assistant... tsk~"

Lily started playing with her magic tool again, pouting.

Even though I said we might not meet again, that's her reaction!

Well, that's Lily for you, I suppose.

I turned toward Lara.

Her usual self.

With her chin atop Leo's back, looking drowsy. With a "Huff へへ" she looked back.

"Big Sis Lara doesn't look too surprised."

"I thought it would happen sooner or later."

Did you see it with your fortune-telling?

I wish you could have told me if you did...

But if she did, would I have followed her instruction?

Probably not.

After all, before my talk with Father, I never made up my mind.

"So why the sudden change of heart?"

"Let me explain..."

I explained the sequence of events, how one thing led to another.

What happened, Pax's background.

Why I was under a cloud.

And how after talking to Father, it all cleared up for me.

What my heart desires.

Lara and Lily listened quietly without interrupting me.

"I feel glad that I talked with Dad."

"Until Lucy got married, she always misunderstood Dad as well, because dad was always so lenient on us."

"Ah... yes."

Father was always lenient with us.

Too lenient.

I didn't realize it until now.

Indeed, bigger sis finally had a heart-to-heart with Father only after getting married.

Maybe because it was only then, like I am now, she realized Father's feelings.

"So you're not doing that anymore?"

"That?"

Big Sis asked abruptly, causing me to raise my head.

"Cheddarman!"

"Oh..."

Oh right, Lara knew what I was doing.

"I won't do it anymore"

"Not anymore?"

"It was like... just a way to vent and pass time."

Cheddarman. Moon Knight. An Ally of Justice.

It's not like I don't know what I was doing. Reflecting on it now, in a way, I was searching for my true self.

I couldn't do what I really wanted to do, so I did what I didn't want to instead.

Then tricking myself into thinking that it was what I wanted all along.

"What's the story?"

Lily tilted her head and asked.

"Sieg, behind the scenes, was playing ally of justice! Beating up bad guys and feeling all proud about himself."

"Oh, so that's why you always came back late at night."

"Ally of Justice. He called himself Moon Knight... Pretty lame, right?"

"Oh yeah! The Chief once said to avoid resisting if Moon Knight shows up. Nothing more valuable than your life, he said."

I'm not a robber.

I have never asked for money, obviously.

I just started punching without asking questions instead.

Still, Uncle Zanoba doesn't look like a bad person, but maybe he has a dark secret somewhere?

"So that's it. Brother was doing that behind my back."

"Yeah..."

"Brother always said you wanted to be an ally of justice since when we were kids, and I did get a lot of help over the years. I get it."

She understood.

Indeed, I helped Lily out often.

As a natural airhead, she's an easy target for the bad guys.

"Sieg."

Lara was looking at me while holding her chin.

"No more helping others, so you're choosing to be a bad guy instead?"

"No, I don't think I'll stop helping people, but I won't hide anymore. I'll proudly help those who want help."

"I see."

Lara studied my face.

And said.

"Sieg is surprisingly clever today."

A rare smile appeared.

Somehow, it's been ages since I saw Lara's smile.

"So that's why, I will be leaving soon."

Lara didn't call me stupid today.

That alone makes coming by today worthwhile.

At last, Big Sis finally acknowledged me for myself?

"Big Si Lara. Thank you for letting me use this room until now, and thanks Lily for always worrying about me."

"I wasn't that worried... But I'll miss my big brother. I don't get to leave late anymore."

"No, you shouldn't be late even if I'm here."

I'm not your horse.

Certainly, I did give you rides often.

I smiled wryly at Lily's words, then it was Lara's turn.

"Sieg. Even after going far away, and after many years, we'll always be brothers and sisters. Remember that."

Even if we say our goodbyes, it's only distance that separates us.

Our relationship would never change.

Maybe after half a century, big brother Ars and little sis Chris may no longer be with us.

But Lara, Lily, bigger sister Lucy, and I all shared mothers with longer-lives.

Or perhaps Pax will achieve his goals in mere decades, while everyone's still alive.

If not, with the twists of fate who knows what might happen.

Because I became like this. Something might happen among us siblings as well.

As long as we help each other when one gets in trouble.

Like when Lara helped me... no, she didn't help much, but she did understand me.

"Yeah, I know."

"Okay."

When I answered, Lara nodded with satisfaction.



Then I visited people in the market district.

The old man at the fruit stand, the old man at the liquor store.

And many other acquaintances as well.

When I told them I'm leaving town, they all said their regret.

However, no one asked me to stay.

If I'm in a pessimistic mood, maybe I'm surprisingly not well liked...

"We also, when we saw how Sieg just hung out all day, felt it wasn't ideal. But you finally found your calling, so we feel at ease as well."

But hearing that, the opposite seems to be the case.

"Thank you for taking care of us."

I was thanked by even those I didn't recognize.

Father said, even if I was playing-pretend I still saved people. They must be among

them.

If so, I might feel a little lonely to leave this town.

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

A man stood out among the crowd.

A man who works the market by day and drinks and sells information at the bar by night.

Yes, it was Georges.

"Hey, Georges"

"Ah, son of Greyrat House, thanks for your patronage, but please don't call me Georges."

"Please don't say that. Weren't we friends? Haven't we hung out everyday?"

"No no, for you to consider someone like me a friend, I'm really grateful, but..."

Georges looked away.

He probably thought he would never see me again.

I put my arm around his shoulder.

"It's because of you, I could move forward. Thank you."

Then, after taking a serious look at me, George laughed.

"...I see. That's good. But now that my work's done, my prospects look terrible. How are you gonna pay me back?"

"My sister is looking for an assistant. She might hire you if I recommended you."

"Really?"

"And if you sell information gained as her assistant to my dad, you might do rather well for yourself?"

"Hey, not a bad idea!"

Georges laughed, wrapping his arm around my shoulder as well.

"I've had a lot of fun this past year."

He said and laughed.



Finally, I visited Sensei.

Sensei sat with his back towards the entrance, just as he did the other day.

However, he doesn't seem to be training.

"That face... looks like you still can't go up against Dark Shadow?"

Sensei said, his back facing me.

Of course, without turning his head either.

If you're going to recite that line, at least turn around first!

And Father is Moon Shadow, not Dark Shadow.

"So... you still find the sword necessary, didn't you?"

Teacher lifted something.

My sword.

Sensei held my beloved sword in his hand.

It should have been left in my room...

Did you bring it yesterday too?

"Yes, now is time for you to wield this sword! For justice, for defeating the greater evil!"

The teacher turned around with great vigor.

Shouting cheerfully while making various poses.

"I shall pass down to you, the final mystery of North God Style! And the title of the Emperor! So get ready...!"

"..."

Silence followed.

Apparently, the narrative created by Sensei and Father diverged slightly.

Father wanted to talk to me, but Sensei thought differently.

He really wanted to drag me onto the path of a hero.

Father who wished for me to find my own way; Sensei who wished to direct me towards the righteous path.

I can't say which is better.

A difference in teachings.

"Ah, that look, you finally figured out something..."

Anyhow, looking at me, who remained silent, Sensei realized.

"Wait, you won...? Against Rude... I mean, great villain Dark Shadow?"

"Huh? No, it's not like I won but..."

"Wow, beating him with bare hands... That guy really goes easy on his son... throwing the match like that... mumble mumble..."

After mumbling to himself for some time, he suddenly clapped his hands.

Perhaps some bad idea came to mind.

"Sieg-kun, you have successfully defeated Dark Shadow, but he's merely the tip of that evil iceberg. Now, go and seek Lightning. That's right, if you don't defeat Lightning, evil cannot be defeated!"

it was useless after all.

"He's at--"

"Sensei, I won't be going."

In a stronger tone than usual, I interrupted Sensei.

That confused Sensei.

"...Why?"

"Because there is another place I must go."

"Where is it?"

The tone of the teacher was surprisingly gentle, unlike earlier.

"To my friend."

"...Is your friend in a pinch?"

"I don't know. But once upon a time, he asked for my help. I remembered, and now I must go."

I only said that much.

It's getting a bit tedious, giving the same explanation over and over again, and all the details would probably go over Sensei's head anyways.

"I see... will you need the sword there?"

But Sensei seemed to get that much.

As expected of Sensei.

"I'll need it. If you can return it to me, I'd appreciate it."

"Alright."

Senei said, sheathing the sword and passing it to me.

A heavy blade.

My beloved sword, custom-made by world-famous blacksmith Ore God for Father, perfect for my superb strength,

The blade is jet black, like obsidian, and blends into the darkness at night.

Only a reflection of moonlight as proof of its existence, for which Dragon God Orsted granted the title "Moon Glitter."

Moon Blade.

"Sieg."

"Yes."

"I'm not very good with words, and I'm not very smart."

"I agree."

"So let's practice till the end."

"Can you teach me a special move?"

"No, there's no such thing. Just our usual training."

"Yes."

I wore the sheath on my belt, then unsheathed the blade.

At that moment, the lesson began.

North God style training, no starting sound required.

Sparring after a long absence.

I tried my best to hit Sensei.

And, as a matter of course, I lost.

At the end of the day, I was taken by Sensei to a place.

Owned by a friend of Sensei.

The person was very rich, fat, and a noble.

When I apologized for the other day, he forgave me with a smile.

Even though he looked like a villain and rather crude, he welcomed me with warmth and politeness.

Just like Father, Sensei, and his newly wed wife said, aside from being a slave to his desires he's not a bad guy.

I didn't heed Sensei's third lesson, "Do not judge justice or evil by their appearance."

"You will surely become a hero."

On the way home, Sensei said.

Abruptly.

Sensei and I had various discussions about heroes and allies of justice over the years.

There was always a gap in the conversation.

Sensei who aimed to be a hero, and I who aimed to be an ally of justice.

They seem similar, yet they're apart.

It is natural that there would be a gap.

"I don't think so."

"What do you think a hero needs?"

When I heard this phrase before, I replied, "The ally of justice never regrets his choices."

In response, the teacher said, "Heroes are the ones who chooses after suffering their choices."

"From the distress of making that choice?"

"Yes, I wanted to be a hero, but it wasn't possible. No matter how much I stressed over it."

I was the opposite.

An ally of justice, yet still suffered.

Suffering, distressed, unable to make a choice.

Yet in the end I did choose.

Indeed, from an objective point of view, it is certainly a hero-like behavior.

"You can be a hero. Not an ally of justice, but a hero."

Sensei cannot be a hero, and I cannot be an ally of justice.

Instead, Sensei is more like a friend of justice.

"My disciple."

"Sir!"

"Can you inherit your master's will?"

"..."

I shook my head quietly.

"Senei will still live for a long time, so I will not inherit it now. Sensei, please continue to strive as well."

"...That's true. I'll do it!"

Sensei stated, without showing any signs of distress.



The next day, I made preparations for leave.

Goodbyes were made yesterday, so I had no lingering regrets.

Finally, after waving off my Mothers, I left.

Each mother left me with their own advice.

Father, having left early that morning, was no longer here.

I was hoping for a few last words, but it can't be helped.

So I walked through town.

My mother said I could ride a horse halfway, but I wanted the walk.

The market where adventurers and day-merchants hang out.

The shopping district where mid-scale merchants do their business, flowers in full bloom.

The smoke-filled manufacturing district, with an unceasing sound of blacksmithing clanging.

And the Magic University with its enormous campus.

These were the scenery of my everyday life. Witnessing them one last time, I was deeply moved.

Then I arrived at the gate.

The walls of the Magic City Sharia, my home.

The gate was wide open.

Beyond the gate, by the side of the road, a man sat.

A middle-aged magician wearing a gray robe.

Father.

When he found me, he stood up, dusted off the hem of his robe, and came over.

"Hey, Sieg"

"Dad, what are you doing here?"

"I'm seeing you off."

"Couldn't you see me off at home like mama?"

"I thought it's better here."

I think it would be good anywhere...

But is that so?

He probably figured I would leave from the front gate.

So he waited for me here.

"Thank you. I wanted Dad to see me off."

"Why, of course! because my son is going on a long journey."

He said, lifted a bag by his side and turned to me.

I received it. It was about the size of a human head and rather heavy.

I had a bad feeling.

But first, let's check the contents.

"Dad, this..."

It was a black helmet.

A full-face helmet with a crescent emblem on the forehead.

Ally of Justice, Moon Knight Helmet.

"Take it with you."

"Why...?"

"You have been doing something different from what you wanted in the past year, but not everything was wasted."

What was wasted?

Certainly, there was a sense that this year had been a waste.

If I had talked to my father earlier, it would not have happened.

"If you have any trouble in the future, look at the helmet and remember. You might find an answer hidden in that 'wasted' time."

He said and looked behind me.

I looked back as well.

Beyond the gates of Magic City Sharia.

Beyond that gate, the streets where I spent my decades.

When I came back from Royal Aura Academy, the cityscape had changed a lot.

But many things that remained the same.

Small sis and big sis unchanged, and my mothers unchanged.

Sensei as well.

How I viewed my father had changed a lot.

But that was my own misunderstanding.

If time so wasted helped resolve that misunderstanding, then it probably wasn't a waste.

"I see. I'll bring it with me."

"Oh, also, you could use it there too. It's pretty sturdy, after all."

"Ahahah, then I might. Maybe if I find a person on the side of justice, I'll lend it to him."

"In that case, I'll send you four more."

Father laughed.

Humored by the idea of a Moonlight Squadron.

I didn't think it was very funny, but it must have tickled him in some way.

I laughed as well.

After sharing a laugh, I said.

"I'll go now."

"Yes, do your best."

My father pat me on the back, as if pushing me forward, to my leave.

Leaving my hometown, toward my friend--

CHAPTER 14

PRESENTLY, FRIEND

It was a land without name.

An minuscule piece of land slightly southeast of Red Dragon's Lower Jaw.

An enclave of the Kingdom of the Dragon King.

A scattered few impoverished villages, a crumbling fort with no lord in residence.

There were several reasons why it was so desolated.

One is its proximity with the deep jungle.

An ancient dragon's curse, or perhaps due to the dust storms from the Begaritto Continent, the nearby jungle hosts many terrifying monsters in its depth.

Even the most experienced adventurers have lost their lives venturing into its depth.

Yet the other nations in the Red Dragon's Lower Jaw still coveted this land.

If any other power sent a force sufficient to tame the land, they'd surely interfere.

Of course, none could openly confront the Kingdom of the Dragon King.

But nor would they allow the Kingdom of the Dragon King to so easily occupy such a strategic location.

Moreover, dispatching sufficient forces to tame the land would certainly create a diplomatic incident with the Asura Kingdom.

It's also so distant from the Kingdom of the Dragon King heartland.

If not cutting straight through the dense jungle, the only path to this territory from the Kingdom of the Dragon King is a long detour around the Red Dragon mountain ranges.

No matter how powerful the Kingdom of the Dragon King is, transiting a large military force through neutral territories takes a great deal of political capital.

In some cases, it'll require monetary payoff as well.

While cutting through the jungles avoided the political cost, the tradeoff was the lives of many soldiers instead.

Various other reasons as well...

In any case, the Kingdom of the Dragon King has tried to develop this land time-and-time again and ended in failure.

To such a land, a man had been dispatched as its new lord.

His name, Pax Shione Jr.

With him, a dozen or so subordinates.

The numbers were too few.

Previous lords would arrive with hundreds of retainers, servants, and soldiers.

But his retinue was few in numbers.

Yet he was received warmly by the steward of the fort.

Doesn't matter if the new lord will eventually run away, get himself killed, or lose interest altogether, at least he wouldn't be so pointless as a steward without a master anymore. More importantly, the new lord of this desolate place is a member of the royal family. His head would surely go flying if he failed to treat the new lord with the utmost courtesy.

But Pax turned out more grounded and brilliant than the steward expected.

First, he united his people.

He had the few retainers he brought along recruit from the impoverished villagers. Selecting those with talent and motivation for education and training, bringing them under his patronage.

Despite offering little in compensation, there were many young people in the villages who didn't want to be stuck there all their lives, and Pax managed to attract more youths than anticipated.

Pax then contacted the lumberjack guild in a neighboring country and sold the lumber in his territory at a discount.

Normally, lumber from other countries would be very costly due to border tariffs.

But this lumber could be priced cheaply, because its sale was kept secret from his mother country.

No one could complain, with Pax the highest local authority around.

Then Pax assigned his new workforce to guard the lumberjacks.

Cheaply.

Cheap lumber, cheap escorts.

Using the profit to hire additional cheap labor from neighboring countries to develop the land cleared by the lumberjacks.

It's initially tough going.

The young people from the impoverished villages were basically useless, and the ones hired cheaply were just as incapable.

Several times, Pax appeared in person to instruct them. Sometimes even fighting off monsters, protecting them with his own two hands.

The tough times continued.

Slowly and surely, Pax succeeded in gradually expanding and developing his territory, launching one initiative after another.

At times there were troubles, but Pax resolved each of them one by one.

As a result, the scale of the business gradually increased, and the funds and human resources have grown to a surplus.

It was smooth sailing.

Until one day, a lumberjack squad died mysteriously.

An eerie death.

Everyone laid prone at the base of a tree, with a large hole in their chest.

Their escorts with a similar fate.

When discovered, everyone thought it was a monster.

A monster attacked and destroyed the party.

There was evidence of scavenging. While rare for monsters to eat human remains, it's not unheard of.

It happens.

Even for the powerful lumberjack guild, even when well escorted, stuff like this was commonplace.

That's why the local people fear the jungle.

Then the incident repeated.

Another group of lumberjacks was annihilated.

Even adding additional escorts was to no avail.

Everyone died.

Everyone with a large hole pierced through their chests, lying face down at the base of a tree.

Not a monster.

Someone was the culprit.

Someone killed the strong lumberjacks and their escorts, and dragged them to the

base of the tree.

A murder who kills for fun?

Or someone who wished to cripple the expanding territory?

The lumberjack guild stated that they'll no longer send squads into the jungle until the mysterious deaths were resolved.

Therefore, Pax needed to investigate.

Fortunately, as a result of his previous policies, there was some room in his budget.

Pax used it to hire veterans from the neighboring mercenary guild, and had them escort him to investigate in person.

His original retainers were all sent by Rudeus.

They were all talented and followed Pax's instructions.

Still, he didn't make use of them here, because he was worried that there would be a saboteur in their mix.

If he didn't weed them out now, it could stall out his plans.

Pax investigated numerous times.

He made a detailed map of the jungle and marked where each lumberjack squad had died.

Among the mercenaries were those skilled in information gathering, so Pax had them conduct background checks of his retainers and for any suspicious movements.

Fortunately, there was no traitor working under Pax.

Finally, a clue to the cause of death.

He noticed the trees where the lumberjacks died and laid down had something in common.

They were all Bashikara trees over a century old

These rare trees only grew in numbers in the dense jungles in this area, so their lumber could be sold for top dollars.

Some of the trees were even older, among them there were giants over four centuries old. That was why it wasn't immediately obvious that they were the same species.

However, one of his men was familiar with forestry and determined that they were the same type of tree.

Pax, thinking that the tree might be a clue, decided to take a branch home.

By the time he realized, they were already surrounded.

Surrounding them were people with dark skin, wearing primitive clothing.

They accused Pax, "How dare you to break branches of the sacred tree!"

They said in Fight God Language.

Pax recognized the language and tried to apologize.

But his escorts did not.

Surrounded by hostile enemies that they didn't understand, they drew their swords without waiting for Pax's instructions, fought, and were annihilated.

Even after losing his entire escort, Pax still tried to open dialogue with his opponents.

He tried to explain that he's from the Kingdom of the Dragon King and apologized for violating their territory and damaging their trees.

If possible, let's establish a peaceful relationship.

He offered.

But when they heard that Pax was the leader, they bound him up eagerly.

Pax was taken deep into the jungle.

It was their settlement.

Only those with dark skin and dark hair lived there.

Pax recalled from school lessons of a tribe from the Begaritto Continent that matched their description. They must be the indigenous population of the jungle, but that knowledge didn't improve his predicament in any way.

Pax was dragged before the tribal chief.

The chief did not offer Pax an opportunity to explain himself either.

Informed that he's the leader of the people that defiled the sacred groves, their chief declared that he would be sacrificed upon the next full moon to appease their gods.

They threw Pax into a wooden cell in the center square of the settlement.

Water was provided, but no food, as a form of cleansing before a divine offering.

At night, the village witch doctor would light bonfires and worship in a frenzy before him.

And thus, many days passed.

Pax attempted to escape several times, but the wooden cell was surprisingly well-built.

Even if he managed to escape, the settlement's warriors were all stronger than Pax, and they have the home field advantage.

He would never make it.

Then the day of the full moon arrived.

Pax was dragged out of his cell by a mighty warrior and presented to the village assembly before a bonfire on his knee, then pushed face down to the ground.

Pax struggled when he saw the dagger in the hands of the worshiping witch doctor.

He cried out.

Shouting I can't die here, help me.

Listing reasons why he must live, reasons why he wants to live.

And finally, desperately he begged for life.

But they were ruthless.

After finishing his prayer, the witch doctor pressed his dagger against Pax's back, right above the heart.

Readying his muscles to pierce his---



"Wait!"

A voice echoed.

A booming voice.

The witch doctor stopped involuntarily, distracted by the noise, and the villagers gathered in the square were stunned as well.

Their warriors scanned the surroundings, searching for the source.

However, it was in the depth of the night, even under a full moon.

From the open ground lit by the bonfire, you cannot see into the forest.

Then the tribal chief stepped forward and shouted:

"Who is it?"

"Eh? Fight God Language...? Um, eh..."

He murmured something.

Tracing that noise, several warriors discovered its origin.

It was from above.

Standing upon a treetop, outlined by the full moon.

The warriors readied their spears, pointing torches toward him.

A traveler.

Hemp cloak, ragged pants.

And a worn sword.

The looks of a traveler you can meet anywhere.

Except for the head.

Wearing a jet-black helmet on his head.

A full-face helmet with a crescent emblem engraved on the forehead.

Seeing the strange getup, the villagers stopped their movements and sighed.

"Who am I? hailing from the distant Magic City Sharia, for thousands of miles I traveled to rescue my dear friend..."

The man in the helmet paused briefly.

Briefly lost for what to say for a moment.

But soon, he continued.

Looking a little chippy.

"His confidant, Sieghart!"

Hearing this name, this voice.

Pax opened his eyes wide.

"Bam!"

With a shout, Sieg leaped and spin-jumped onto the center square.

"I have kept you waiting, Pax!"

"Sieg...! Why? Here..."

"Long story short, an informant gave me your rough location for a little cash. Then after arriving in the general area, using Sensei's tracking techniques... It wasn't hard to find this place."

Sieg explained casually, but in reality he impatiently rushed here.

In truth, when he heard from the steward that Pax went missing, his sights started to darken. When he found rotting corpses under the Bashkara tree, his world went completely dark.

He continued tracking, with a pounding heart, only to barely arrive in time.

Had he been late for a few moments, he would have missed it.

"I don't know who you are, but to interrupt our sacred ritual--"

"I am a disciple of the North God Kalman III, "North Emperor" Sieghart! I came as a guardian of my friend Pax! If you want to kill my friend, you must defeat me first!"

Sieg's booming voice drowned out the village chief, echoing through the surroundings.

His voice full of confidence, which the surrounding warriors interpret as "performing a sacred ritual without defeating the guardian warrior would be an affront to God."

And hearing his title, North Emperor, ignited their fighting spirit.

The two warriors holding down Pax released their hands and began to drum the ground with the end of their spears.

Following their lead, other warriors began drumming the ground with spears in unison.

Seeing this, the village chief was forced to bite his lips and shout:

"My name is Polpel, chief of the Ubaba Tribe! North Emperor Sieghart! I swear to the

gods that our warriors will defeat you and slay the evil one who defiled our sacred grove!"

"Then allow me to introduce myself once more! Chief Polpel of the Ubaba Tribe, I am North Emperor Sieghart! I swear upon the name of my great father Rudeus! After defeating your warriors with my own sword, please become a friend of Pax!"

"Huh?"

"?"

Above both Pax and the village chief's heads, question marks floated.

They did not understand the intent of Sieghart's vow.

However, the chief nodded, as to quickly tide over the ridiculous demand.

Drumming the ground with his spear, he shouted once more.

"Good! Then let the loser keep the winner's vow! We swear to all the spirits of the world that we shall uphold our sacred vows!"

"...I swear!"

"I, Chief Polpel of the Ubaba Tribe, also swear!"

While Pax was still flabbergasted, the village chief had already made his vows.

"Then, Great Warrior Herpel, step forth."

Don, Don, the warriors drummed the ground.

Not only the warriors, but all the people in the settlement pounded their feet in anticipation.

The warrior sitting beside the village chief.

Even on Sieg's arrival he had remained unmoved.

But after heralded and beckoned by the assembly, with a spear clutched he finally stood.

A tall man, full of muscle.

Perhaps 2 meters or more in height.

When he arrived before Sieg, there was almost the difference between an adult and a child.

But Sieg was not afraid.

He folded his arms in defiance and looked up at him.

"I announce myself a third time. I am North Emperor Sieghart! Guardian of Pax, with whom we swore to live and die together!"

"My name is Herpel, proud warrior of Ubaba! I'm the one who will defeat you!"

Herpel's voice ranged as loudly as Sieg.

The voice, combined with the surrounding drumming, made Herpel look even more intimidating and looming.

Pax became anxious.

The circumstances, and his fatigue after days of drinking only water, made him nervous.

"Sieg..."

"Pax, be reassured. I'm invincible. I'll be victorious even against the strongest foe."

"I've never seen you so confident even during our time as students, that's why I'm so worried."

"Then let's blow away your worries."

Sieg said, placing a hand on the shaft of his sword.

The dark blade of a great sword glowed faintly from the bonfire.

This child... no, this average-sized swordsman, wielded the heavy weight of his sword with unusual ease.

The sword "Moon Glitter".

Sieg unsheathed the sword with ease with one hand, then held it with both hands.

Holding the sword straight, he stood posed.

"I'm coming!"

Although their language was different, Herpel understood his intent.

No words needed between warriors.

Herpel held his spear by his hips, roared, rushing fore.

"Goaaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

"Kaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

Sieg's voice overcame Herpel's roar.

Then they collided.

It wasn't their weapons that struck.

It was their shoulder.

Their pose, even their tactics, the same.

Not totally understandable.

Herpel could read him.

Reading Sieg's intent, to blow away his opponent with blunt force shoulder tackle, then quickly deliver the killing blow.

Yet he stood his ground.

As if to say, "for a puny warrior like you, I'd blow you away instead."

"! ?"

At the moment of contact, he saw a steep cliff.

The moment of impact, he had thought of plunging down the bottom of a deep chasm.

But it quickly turned out to be an illusion.

Because cliffs don't return with momentum.

"Ahh!?"

Herpel found himself spinning in midair before smashing into the ground.

Having been large bodied from an young age, he had only been felled three times in his life.

The first when he first trained with his father, when he was young and knocked down.

The second time when he was young and eager, when he challenged a giant monster sized three times his own and flung away.

This was the third time.

Ever since he was fully grown and recognized as an Ubaba warrior, never once was he beaten.

Even more so by an opponent smaller than himself.

Fell on his bottom he saw before him a desperate sight.

The figure of Sieg, his muscles bulging and tense, readied to release his power.

With his sword held by his waist, drooping toward the ground, he inched forward.

"North God Style Mystery!"

Herpel did not understand the meaning of his words.

But he could sense something terrible coming.

"Moonlight Split!"

Sieg's sword swung.

From the bottom up, as if to split him in two.

The slash, as if using the ground as a sheath, was faster, more powerful, and more overwhelmingly destructive than any Herpel has ever witnessed.

The shockwave came.

The slash, as if splitting the air in two, gave Herpel his first life experience of being blown away from a shockwave.

The surrounding warriors and villagers were similarly swept away.

The momentum of the shock wave did not cease, shattering the bonfire, blowing it far away.

The momentum turned into twin tornadoes, reached the village chief house beyond the bonfire, crumbling it into piles of wood.

They landed on a big tree way back and made a loud, creaking noise.

Finally, an open space remained.

The bonfire extinguished, only the light of the full moon illuminated the darkened space.

It was quiet.

In that quiet space, only Sieg stood.

Sieg's sword pointing towards the heavens, shining in the moonlight.

"Do you see? This is my power! The power of Pax's friend!"

He thrust his sword on the ground and shouted.

But there was no one around.

Just Sieg.

Because both Pax and the village chief were also blown away.

Finally, a shadow approached him.

A giant man with dark skin.

Herpel of the Ubaba Tribe.

With some difficulty he walked up to Sieg, holding his upper arm still that was broken by the impact.

"Why didn't you kill me..."

"Because I swore in my father's name, to defeat you and befriend you with Pax. I do not kill my friends."

"...I admit defeat."

Herpel said, kneeling down, hanging his head. Their surroundings began abuzz.

Those who had been blown away returning.

Warriors, villagers, the village chief, and Pax.

To witness.

The moment of kneeling, the moment of defeat of a Ubaba warrior.

Pax and the village chief walked toward them.

"...The duel has concluded. It is our defeat. I shall respect our vows and forgive your Lord. You may go."

The village chief said with a grim face.

The battle of Sieg and Herpel.

A result every warrior on the ground can recognize.

Sieg beat Herpel by force, without signs of treachery.

A clear win or loss without a doubt.

"The next time we meet, let's fight again with the full spirit of our warriors."

But this is not the end.

Today, they lost this duel.

But if we return and try to cut down the sacred tree once more, the battle will start anew.

Even though the village chief and his warriors both bore witness to Sieg's strength, they're a proud people.

"Village chief. That was not my vow. '

"...? "

It was Sieg that complained of the result.

"I ask you to become Pax's friend."

"...Friend?"

"Friends and allies. Polpel, chief of the Ubaba Tribe. Please cooperate with us as friends, and we shall avoid things our friends hate as well."

An unilateral demand.

A surprise to Pax as well.

Makes him want to ask, "why are you deciding this on your own?"

But this wasn't a bad deal for Pax.

They are a strong people, with intimate knowledge of the jungle.

With their cooperation, they will surely become a powerful ally for the future of the territory.

The jungle is a place to reclaim, but there are ways to utilize the jungle without clear cutting the land.

Some clearing might be unavoidable, but based on the conversation thus far, there seemed to be room for negotiation. Aide from those trees deemed sacred, lumbering the land should still be possible since they can converse in Fight God Language.

For the tribal chief, there's little benefit.

Until now, this tribe has lived on the land without inconvenience.

Pax was the so-called invader that they have tried to fight off.

There was no reason to join hands.

But the chief swore an oath.

Swore to all the spirits that govern this world.

The winner's vow.

It was of the utmost importance to Ubaba.

"Then we shall. From this day forth the Ubaba Tribe are friends with Pax. We shall be allies! "

The chief loudly proclaimed.

Thus, the Ubabas became Pax's friends.

"Now, a banquet to witness those who became friends! "

" ... "

"And when we're done, rebuild my broken house!"

And that evening, a feast between strong-armed friends was held.



After the rather abrupt feast, Pax and the Ubabas quickly negotiated a simple treaty between their two peoples.

Afterwards, led by the warriors back to his fort, Pax asked Sieg.

"Well, Sieg... I wonder if I'm dreaming."

"Dreaming?"

"That my chest was already pierced and you coming was but a fever dream? Everything ended so quickly and smoothly, it's rather confusing."

When Sieg heard the words, he pinched Pax's cheeks nonchalantly.

Pax's soft cheek pulled, causing severe pain.

"It hurts! It hurts! Stop it!"

"If it's a dream, would it hurt?"

"No, the Sieg I know won't pinch my cheeks, so maybe it's a dream after all."

"Time to face reality."

Sieg shrugged.

He then put his hand on Pax's shoulder.

"I'm going to reply to that day."

"...Reply to that day?"

"I'm coming with you to fulfill your ambitions."

Pax was a face of surprise.

As if biting down on something he closed his lips.

Nodding, slightly teary.

"Thank you... I knew... you would say that..."

Pax said as he cried.

CHAPTER 15

FUTURE HERO

Decades passed.

Knight's Order Territory of the Kingdom of the Dragon King.

Also an enclave of the Kingdom of the Dragon King.

It used to be a palm-sized piece of land by the northern jungle, a no-man's land without a country.

The land with the worst monster infestation among the southern Central Continent, too difficult to develop even for a great power... It was considered.

Of course, there wasn't a Knight's Order back then.

However, under Lord Pax Shirone, Jr.'s guidance, the territory transformed itself.

Slowly developing the dense jungle that has been said to be impossible for many years.

He made good use of his people, built dams to divert the river flow, fought back monster invasions, and slowly cleared the jungle to expand his territory.

After the initial confrontation with the indigenous people of the jungle, he wine and dined the village chief, and eventually wedded the chief's daughter to cement their alliance.

In addition, to attract talent, he favored those who were more capable than those of high status.

A man came, boasting he could turn any wasteland into fertile farmland, so Pax took him up on the challenge and granted him wasteland to cultivate.

A penniless man claimed he could pioneer new trade routes through the dense jungle, so Pax sponsored him. The man has since become the top merchant within the

Knight's Order.

He found a boy slave with talent for the sword and became his patron.

This territory became known as a generous land even to people of low status.

Such rumors flowed and people flocked from all over.

In fact, the Knight's Order diligently assigned them all work according to their abilities.

Even slavery was more organized than anywhere else.

Merchandise at its slavery markets rarely died from sickness or injury.

On the contrary, the slaves were given the opportunity to showcase their abilities. If they were capable, the Knight's Order would acquire them for a hefty sum and be treated generously.

By the time neighboring countries of the Red Dragon's Lower Jaw took notice, it was already too late.

The Kingdom of the Dragon King's Knight's Order's territory, population, and military had already grown well beyond a mere enclave.

When the Knight's Order finally invaded, the neighboring countries' were ill prepared on their southern borders.

As a result, the Kingdom of the Dragon King came to rule the eastern regions of the Red Dragon's Lower Jaw.

It became an enormously profitable territory for the kingdom.

While the king despised Pax, he still had to honor Pax for his contributions.

However, Pax was of royal blood with a territory of his own.

With a power base of his own, Pax became a thorn in the side for the princes and ministers already vying for the throne.

Therefore, the state ordered Pax to take the Knight's Oath and assume command of the newly formed Knight's Order

A Knight's Oath to his king.

As long as Pax maintained his oath, he could not claim the throne of the Kingdom of the Dragon King.

Breaking the sacred vow makes one a rebel.

Few would support him.

Of course, Pax could refuse the vow.

But if he did, they could petition the King to withdraw Pax's honors, and use that to compel him to give up this land. Of course, that would make the land unmanageable and damage relationships with neighbors in the deep jungle.

Without Pax as the stabilizing force, everything would fall apart.

Such was the calculus of the ministers and princes.

To everyone's surprise, Pax took the Knight's Oath willingly.

Dedicating his life to the king and vowing to protect the homeland.

Pax became the commander of the newly established Knight's Order.

The birth of the Black Dragon Knights.

He immediately appointed five of his most reputable men as archknights, had them recruit 20 men each, and appointed them as knights as well.

As a result, a fighting force of 100 knights was formed.

What the ministers and princes failed to realize was that Pax's was not aiming for the throne of the Kingdom of the Dragon King



Black Dragon Castle, Kingdom of the Dragon King Knight's Order headquarters.

The conference room had a huge black iron conference desk.

There are a total of seven people sitting there.

Everyone was dressed in jet-black armor.

Starting from the entrance.

A man with dull blonde hair, thin eyes, sharp ears, with scales and a large x-shaped wound on his face.

He is a former slave who was found to have talent for the sword and bought.

North Saint Rank, half demon race.

"Loyal Hound Knight" Jeda.

A man with dark skin, black hair braided into several braids, bundled behind his head.

Wearing outfits common to the Kingdom of the Dragon King, but with a body better honed than anyone.

"Tribal Knight" Herpel.

A huge man with a gentle smile. Even wider than Herpel.

But most of the width is due to his arms, two great mounds of black metal.

"Iron Knight" Atmos Roland.

A dwarf woman with a childlike body, who wore a toy-like armor.

However, her face was not that of a child, shining with more intelligence than anyone else present.

"Dwarf Knight" Pyi Ku.

And finally, the innermost three.

Sitting to the right of the entrance, another woman.

Dark skinned with blue hair, around 20 in age.

Too young for a knight, yet she's also an archknight.

Moreover, she's the second highest ranked person present.

"Screaming Princess" Lauri Shirone

In the center.

On the high seat, owner of the castle.

Blue haired, a face full of wrinkles.

Although he was quite old, his eyes and body remained full of vigor.

"Black Dragon Knight Commander" Pax Shirone Jr.

And to his left.

A middle-aged man with green hair sits beside Pax.

A large sword on his back, and another sword on his waist.

His face had countless scars.

No, not just the face, but his armor and sword shafts bore numerous wounds.

The physical representation of "witness to a thousand battles."

The strongest Knight of the Knight's Order... No, the strongest knight of the Kingdom of the Dragon King.

A man who inherited the name of the 5th place of the Seventh Powers, "Death God".

Deputy Commander of the Black Dragon Knights.

“Death God Knight” Sieghart Saladin.

The seven observed a map on the conference table in silence.

Pieces were placed on the map. Cavalry pieces, infantry pieces, knight pieces...

The pieces were painted in distinct colors, clearly representing the forces of the Asura Kingdom, the Kingdom of the Dragon King, and the Ogre God Empire.

If the scenario unfolds as expected, the Knight's Order who held such a strategic position would certainly be dragged into the conflict.

It is not hard to imagine that even the powerful Black Dragon Knights would be swept away like dust in the wind, if they were involved in a war between the great powers.

As far as the board was concerned, the Knights were in a dangerous predicament.

"..."

Everyone besides Pax awaited for Pax's words.

Say what you must say. Everyone thought as they waited.

Finally, as if fulfilling their expectation Pax finally spoke.

"Finally, our opportunity has come!"

Pax's words directly contradicted the information presented on the map.

But no one objected.

Because, everyone knew in their hearts.

Indeed, now is the time!

"The time we long waited for is here!"

Those words shook everyone in the room.

Herpel and Pyi smiled slightly.

"I realize that our wait for this day has been long and painful. Through crises and missed opportunities, I'm grateful for everyone's patience and persistence until now."

Pax said bitterly, looking at each present.

Recalling painful memories.

Jeda's facial scars to protect Pax's honour.

Ever since Pax and the Ubaba tribal chief signed their alliance of friendship, Great Warriors of Ubaba had fought alongside Pax. Many died by his side, and Herpel was already the fourth in this role.

The magical prosthesis that replaced Atmos' arms were a result of protecting Pax, entrapped by another member of the royal family.

Everyone here was aware that Pyi was raped by the enemy as a prisoner of war.

And of course it goes without saying all the uncountable scars and scratches on Sieghart's face, scabbard, and armor.

"I will not let this opportunity pass and waste all your efforts thus far."

Pax said as he looked at the map.

The Ogre God Empire, an emerging nation that had captured the entire northern region.

The august Asura Kingdom that ruled the whole of the western region since ancient times.

And the Kingdom of the Dragon King that occupied half of the south, watching the movements of its rival nations cautiously.

Finally, the Knight's Order wedged in the very center of these three powers.

But in this precarious situation, they saw an opportunity.

"We shall take advantage of this standoff and declare our independence!"

"Oh!"

"Ooh!"

A grand response from the knights to Pax's declaration.

From the seven pieces within the Knight's Order, Pax moved three pieces toward the Red Dragon's Lower Jaw.

"Atmos, Pyi, and I will fortify our defenses. With the Red Dragon's Lower Jaw as a choke point, just as the original King Dragon King."

"Yes sir!"

"Got it."

The two nodded.

Pax moved three more pieces to the middle of the Red Dragon mountain range.

This is the point where the mountain ranges split into two, known as the Red Dragon's Cheek.

"Jeda, Herpel, and Sieg, take an elite force with you and attack this position. Find the hidden fortress of the Ogre God Empire and destroy it."

"Yes."

"Understood."

Two nodded.

But the last one, Sieghart, remained silent.

He was staring at the map with his arms folded, unmoved.

"Sieg? What's wrong? Something you don't understand?"

Sieghart laughed at the question.

"No, I was reminiscing at how far we came. I could still remember the moment when you were nearly killed by the Ubabas."

"Indeed, if you hadn't come, I suppose I would be fertilizing the Bashkara trees now."

"Yeah, a lot happened."

"Too many things."

Reminiscing of the past.

At first, they were just two.

Then before they realized it, they became three, then four.

At times, their number fell as well, but eventually it settled down to six.

Six was said to be an ominous number, but for the Black Dragon Knights it was the luckiest.

"Grandfather, Sieg. Sorry to disturb your reminiscing, but what will I be doing?"

It was Lauri who spoke.

"Screaming Princess" Lauri.

One of Pax's granddaughters, and a talented knight and commander of her own right.

Thus, Pax educated her himself and raised her as one of his commanders.

After shedding blood in her first battles, she too had earned the right to attend this conference.

However, she was still young, too young to place on the front lines of such importance.

"Guard the castle, can you do it?"

"Of course, grandfather. I'm unsatisfied to be left away from the front line, but I'm a smart girl who understands the importance of securing our rear and won't excuse myself."

"Good... You shall be rightfully rewarded if you succeed."

"Fufufu, you promised!"

Lauri sat back down happily.

"..."

After a short silence, everyone stood up naturally, holding a cup before them.

"To the Knights and People of the Land."

"To the People and Knights of the Land."

Everyone chugged down the contents of their cups, and slammed it on the desk with a bang.

The black iron cups, hitting the black iron desk, rang like a clash of swords.

The sound of battle.

"Depart!"

With Pax's command, everyone was in motion.

Jeda and Herpel.

Atmos and Pyi.

Then Lauri.

And finally, Pax and Sieghart left, side-by-side.

In the meeting room, only the black iron desk and empty cups remained.

Left as they are.

Until their return.

Until the day when they return, side-by-side, to toast with the same cups once more...

[Jobless Oblige END]



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