

Chapter 2 - Story 23: Gold Coins

That day Holmea's King Warius Sadoma Holmeanis granted ambassadors and influential people, who visited the royal palace, an audience.

That's linked to his official duty as king, and a scene inside the royal palace that never changes. As it's something King Warius got used to, he discussed with the ambassadors, carefully listened to the influential people, and consulted with his ministers, who were present as well, if there was some kind of issue. Basically, he performed his official duty indifferently.

And then the last person, who had been permitted an audience with the king, was allowed into the audience hall.

"Yooohoo! I'm deeply moved to have been allowed an audience like this with you, Your great Majesty, King Warius Sadoma Holmeanis!"

The one who gave his greeting with exaggerated gestures as he enters the audience halls is Yoash Shapiro.

King Warius, who raises his eyebrows at the clown-like, frivolous manner of speech, asks a chamberlain standing nearby, "Who's this guy?" In reply the chamberlain whispered into the king's ear,

"It's the Big Simpleton of the Shapiro Company."

Even King Warius had heard rumors of the "Big Simpleton of the Shapiro Company." Having to spend his valuable on such fool made him feel bitter, but likewise he can't flatly refuse with him being part of the company of Menahem Shapiro who is a member of the Committee of the Ten Jeboa's merchant guild.

Hiding his discontent, King Warius thanked Yoash for visiting the palace from afar, and inquired about his intention. In reply Yoash first starts with harmless and inoffensive seasonal greetings, then complains about Jeboa's merchant guild being unable to pass through the city of Bolnis, before petitioning for a swift restoration of the trade route.

Leaving Bolnis in the hands of the slaves who caused a revolt is even for the king upsetting. He doesn't clearly state when it will happen, but the king firmly promises that they will quickly recapture Bolnis.

After such diplomatic exchange between king and merchant, Yoash immediately broached the main topic.

"As a matter of fact, when I dropped by in Bolnis, did I not only receive the honor to be granted an audience with His Highness Vulitas, who is Your Majesty's younger brother, but also was entrusted with a letter from His Highness."

The audience hall became astir upon Yoash's mentioning of the royal prince's name.

Using his vocal strength, which he trained as sailor, Yoash reads out Vulitas' letter loudly through the noise.

Vulitas was a dim-witted imbecile, but it seems that he had the talent of a poet. Beginning by appealing to the brotherly bonds between them, he lamented over the ill fortune that befell him, and then fervently described his suffering in his current environment while putting plenty of emotions into it. It was written so well that it made even the courtiers, who bear prejudices against Vulitas, unintentionally feel their chests tighten.

"At this rate His Highness will succumb to excessive grief. Thus I petitioned the release of His Highness from a man called Soma Kisaki, the leader of the revolting slaves who are illegally occupying that place. In response I was told following: 『I won't hesitate to do so if you can get them to pay the expenses for taking care of His Highness so far』."

'In short, he's demanding a ransom in a roundabout way,' the king interpreted.

"I see. I understood the circumstances. —So, how much money are the slaves demanding?"

"If you wish to know, it's 50,000 gold coins."

The king became speechless upon hearing the amount of money voiced out by Yoash.

"Such a large amount of money for that damned pig...?"

However, if you consider the amount of money mentioned by Yoash as payment for the safety of a royal member, it's not much by all means. Rather, as ransom for royalty one can call it an amount of money that's barely enough for not making all sides involved lose face for it being too low. However, albeit they may be siblings, the bonds of brotherly love are weak among royalty, who fight each other over the throne and sometimes even resort to assassination. Much less to talk about King Warius who didn't consider his younger brother to be anything but a fat pig. And yet, it was an unexpected amount of ransom for the king. 'In this case paying for a real pig is better as I will be simply allowed to eat its meat.

"Those cursed slaves...! Not only did they defy me, they even demand money from me! There's a limit to audacity!"

Widening his glaring eyes so much that it seemed as if they would pop out at any moment, King Warius grabs the armrest with a strength as if he's trying to crush it with his body trembling all over.

Seeing that, Yoash thought that things are heading in the wrong direction.

He knew of Warius' temper, but he certainly didn't expect for it to go this far.

'Even though allowing Vulitas to be kept imprisoned in Bolnis will result in leaving a domestic and foreign issue for Holmea, he doesn't even realize that.

'King Warius and Vulitas are brothers sharing the same blood. Vulitas' imbecility is quite famous, but even King Warius, who loses sight of everything once blood rises into his head, is imbecilic for a ruler entrusted with a country. Moreover, it's a ever worse as those imbeciles brandish the blade called royalty.

'However, even if I repeatedly advocate the benefits of buying Vulitas' freedom here, it will likely fan King Warius' temper instead.

'From the fact that the king denounced Darius, who was hailed as strongest general of Holmea, in front of many generals and ordered his house arrest without allowing a single objection for nothing more but a single defeat, it's obvious that the king harbors strong feelings of jealousy towards those more excellent than himself.

'However, if such kind of human believes that they are more superior, they will listen to my side of the story to show off their own excellence.

Moving according to the expectations of others was an annoyance for Yoash, but he had decided to go along with Souma's plan.

Yoash feigns an attitude that doesn't allow any doubt in him really desiring the best for Holmea.

Misunderstanding the reason for the king's rage, he firmly believes that he had only been honored with words of praise for his own achievements. It's the behavior of the rumored Big Simpleton. Yoash acted it out with faint changes to his expression and tone.

"It's very natural for you to be enraged. It's not unreasonable to regard the ransom of a mere 50,000 gold coins as insult for Holmea's noble bloodline. But, please believe me! It's something I achieved through my skillful rhetoric."

Moreover, he doesn't forget to implicitly suggest that the king will disgrace himself if refuses it by labeling 50,000 gold coins with the term 'mere.'

With this even King Darius had no other option but to restrain his temper.

Furthermore, while performing his prided act of being a simpleton, he smoothly reveals an important piece of information.

"It has been decided that I will receive a mediation fee, but of course I plan to wangle it out of the slaves' leader. As proof of that, I have already cheated Lodonia gold coins out of them as deposit."

Not only King Warius, but even the present chief vassals were startled by that.

Lodonia gold coins are the currency of their arch enemy, Romania. Leaving aside silver and copper coins which are commonly circulating on the market, gold coins are only used when granting rewards or as payment for large business transactions. When it comes to being paid a deposit for ransom negotiations over an amount of 50,000 gold coins, it should be quite the hefty sum. If all of it was paid in Lodonia gold coins, it can't mean anything else but Romania having reached out to the revolting slaves.

In that case the value of Vulitas' safety changes drastically.

Holmea not having demanded Vulitas from Souma's group was not only because of King Warius' vanity of not being willing to negotiate with the likes of slaves. For Holmea itself Vulitas' safety didn't hold much value either.

That's not only because of his character and behavior. Even if there was a throne succession pending in Holmea, with there being a prince at adult age and King Warius being in good health, the likelihood of the crown passing on to Vulitas was almost negligible, making his value as the king's substitute low, too.

However, that still doesn't change the fact that he's royalty holding the right for succeeding the crown.

If Romania secures Vulitas, they will likely support him as Holmea's king and urge King Warius to abdicate. And, if King Warius refuses that, Romania invading Holmea under the banner of the just cause called responding to King Vulitas' appeal for help will be a foregone conclusion.

Even if they know that it's Romania's strategy, it will turn into a struggle over the throne between brothers, once it turns out like that. Even when they understand that they have to fend off Romania by banding together, Holmea's nobility might become greatly discomposd, not knowing whether to side with King Warius or Vulitas. And not only that. There's even the concern that some among the nobles, who have territories close to Romania, will use this opportunity to switch sides.

Because even the king comprehends as much, he's somehow suppressing his temper for now, but it's not clear for how long his power of endurance will last. Even now his face is dyed deep crimson and his entire body is trembling slightly.

"Your Majesty! Allow me to speak!"

Sensing danger due to the king's state, a minister raises his voice in panic.

"If it's about His Highness Vulitas' safety, it's a grave national issue. I feel that we can't give an answer right away. How about having Sir Yoash step back here for a moment to prepare a reply based on a discussion with all present chief vassals?"

King Warius confirmed that with a strained jerk of his head.



"Damn! That retarded pig! Even though it would have been best if he had quickly killed himself...!"

Once Yoash left, the king's angry bellow echoed through the audience hall.

"Your Majesty, please quell your anger. Fortunately, the pi...His Highness Vulitas hasn't yet fallen in the hands of Romania."

Moreover in an attempt to somehow appease King Warius, the minister adds the explanation that it will be difficult to transfer Vulitas, whose face as royal prince is known in Holmea, to Romania since it's necessary to cross Holmea to travel to Romania from Bolnis.

"Nonsense! If it's just assuming kingship by providing support, it's possible without him being in their hands!"

King Warius shouted in rage.

"That cursed senile old fool Doldea! That cunning Romania! To have fallen so low that they join hands with filthy slaves!"

The more he curses, the more enraged the king becomes. At last all reason vanishes from his mind.

"Very well, King Doldea! Leading the army myself, I will first force the slaves to yield, and then march on to invade Romania while I'm at it!"

Due to that the chief vassals lose all color in their faces and severally warn the king to not do so.

"Your Majesty! You must not do that!"

"The rebels staying in Bolnis are mere rats. If we make a serious effort, we will be able to crush them easily. But, we must not forget the old wolf laying in wait for the lion to turn its back as it goes to annihilate the rats!"

Lion signifies Holmea as a lion is drawn on the national flag. And the old wolf refers to King Doldea and Romania, which has a wolf depicted on its national flag. The vassals are claiming that Romania will attack from the east which would become short handed if they tried to attack Bolnis.

"Indeed! If you also consider the organized way of the slaves causing a rebellion, it's also possible that it has been Romania's strategy from the very start. We must not be fooled by their schemes!"

That was completely wrong, but if one considers that the slaves attacked a fortress and a city one after the other, and even managed to defeat General Darius, saying that the slaves received assistance from Romania is much more comprehensible than it being a simple slave and zoan revolt. The other vassals also stated their wish for King Warius to restrain himself.

And the ones who especially strongly urged King Warius to hold back among the vassals were the nobles, who heard Yoash's whispers about the possibility of their sons being alive in advance. The reason why they refrained from negotiating to get their sons back until now was owed to King Warius leaving Vulitas as is. By no means is there any way for them to recover their sons before the royal prince. They anxiously watched King Warius ignoring Vulitas. Even though the other side went out of their way to offer ransom negotiations, it will come all to nothing if that's refused by the king.

Due to that alone, they were desperate.

And, whatever the circumstances might be, it's not like King Warius doesn't know of that.

Grinding his teeth with a deep red face and bloodshot eyes, King Warius abruptly rises from the throne.

"Do as you see fit!"

Once he spits that out, King Warius leaves the audience hall. The vassals felt relieved that their thoughts somehow managed to reach him, but the next instant they ducked their heads due to the sound of something being violently crushed on the other side of the hallway where the king left.



A single man left the entrance hall of Holmea's royal palace with rough footsteps.

He's a man with short, curled, dark brown hair, and a thick chin on his grim, bearded face. On top of his fine garments, he's wearing so many ornaments that they are noisy due to all their jingling, but his body was clad in a crude aura making one believe that he's the chief of some brigands or mountain thieves.

The name of this man is Pilemon. He's a slave trader who was allowed to freely enter and leave Holmea's royal palace.

"Sir, what's wrong?"

A man, who works as sales clerk for Pilemon, asks him, who boarded the roofed palanquin, which awaited him on the capital's plaza, timidly. While four slaves shake their bodies as they lift up the palanquin, Pilemon spit out while looking annoyed,

"That damn 『Big Simpleton of the Shapiro Company』. Don't prattle about unnecessary things, you retard..."

As Pilemon sells unusual slaves in the western region from the continent's center, and then again sells unusual slave races in the continent's center in reverse, he has amassed vast riches so far. But, not only were the slaves, which he bought for a high price, stolen because of the slave revolt in Bolnis, he also received major losses when the trade route to Jeboa's merchant guild was closed down afterwards.

Thus he scattered a huge amount of money in the royal palace so far for the sake of restoring the trade route as fast as possible by instigating the recapture of Bolnis, but because Yoash hinted at Romania's involvement with Bolnis' slaves, all of his efforts went down the drain. According to what the ministers, who he had bribed, said, it will likely take several years to retake Bolnis. The clerk, who was informed about Bolnis recapture having apparently moved into the distant future by his employer, whispered into Pilemon's ear after acting as if paying attention to their vicinity,

"That would be troublesome. —Everyone in the Empire is saying that they want to indulge in 『Fish』."

Pilemon laughed that off.

"Hah! How selfish. Even though they drove them away by themselves, they now want what they don't have any longer!"

"We are racking in the dough thanks to that, though."

The clerk reveals a vulgar smile, and Pilemon responds while smiling in the same way,

"Sure can't decline that."

After that his expression turned serious and Pilemon quietly said,

"Inform Jeboa's 『Fisherman』 to send the 『Fish』 over to us, no matter what it takes."

"But, without being able to pass through Bolnis....how are we going to transport them...?"

Pilemon's face turns sour upon the clerk's words.

"Tell them to also come up with something in regards to that! How about creating a path in the south of Bolnis? In worst case it's fine for you to tell them that I will invest into it. The expenses will be painful, but the sales in the Empire won't go anywhere if we don't have any eye-catching goods."

Pilemon sinks his body into the cushion installed on top of the palanquin.

"It will be fine if we transport the goods from the Empire through Romania, but there ain't no other supplier for 『Fish』 than Jeboa. There ain't no friggin' way that we'll transport the 『Fish』 across the sea. —Those shitty slaves in Bolnis. Someday you will pay me back double for this debt."

Pilemon clicked his tongue grandly.



"50,000 gold coins. I have certainly received them."

Yoash, who brought a jar full with gold coins obtained from Holmea into Bolnis' feudal lord residence, said so to Souma with a smile all over his face. Michena, who stood on standby nearby, immediately starts to check the number of coins and the quality of the gold with her subordinates. While throwing a sidelong glance at that, Souma expresses his thanks to Yoash.

"You were a great help in the negotiations with Holmea."

"No, no, it was a good deal for my side as well. —I'm very sorry to say so all of a sudden, but I'd like to turn over His Highness."

Readily consenting to Yoash's request, orders Eladia, who waited at his side, to hand over Vulitas to Yoash.

"I'd like to leave the ransom negotiations for the captured nobles after that to you, but is that alright with you?"

Upon Souma's question, Yoash spread his arms widely, displaying his intent of welcoming it.

"Yoohoo! Of course! Can I have you pass me a list of the people that have become prisoners then?"

Souma offered him the prepared list. Choosing the instant when Yoash was about to take it, Souma starts a surprise attack.

"Mr. Yoash, what do you plan to draw out of Holmea's nobles?"

At the time when he requested this time's negotiation mediation, Souma has only talked about requesting a ransom negotiation for the royal prince Vulitas. But even so, Yoash not inquiring about the other prisoners at the end of their negotiation the other day bothered Souma.

'It's difficult to imagine that a man as smart as Yoash has made a mistake in listening to our talk. Rather, from the very start the younger nobles, and not Vulitas, were Yoash's objective,' Souma judged.

And what suddenly struck him when he pondered about the reason for it was Yoash's brief comment that the Shapiro Company's core business lies with maritime trade and that its influence doesn't extend as far as on land.

'If the Shapiro Company, which has been focused on maritime trade so far, tried to extend its hands toward business on land, they can't miss the patronage of influential people in that region.

'However, as other merchants have settled down there, there's no gap for newcomers to enter the market.

But, the story changes if the sons of those nobles have become prisoners of Bolnis. Demanding gratitude from the influential people as mediator in the negotiations will be fine. Demanding a monopolistic standing in that region as collateral for the ransom in advance will be fine as well. The Shapiro Company will likely gain a much bigger profit with this than the intermediation fee paid by Souma.

Still, to the bitter end it's Souma's deduction, which lacks positive proof.

'If I'm rejected by him asking what I'm talking about, that will be the end.

As Souma watched attentively wondering how Yoash was going to answer, Yoash grinned broadly.

"Aww, shucks. So I got found out, eh?"

Yoash readily confessed without any shyness.

Even Souma shows a wry smile due to Yoash showing an embarrassed smile like a child that had its small prank exposed.

"Seeing as the number of your company's trade partners has grown, it's kind of unfair to charge me with a mediation fee, isn't it?"

"Oh dear, I can't retaliate anything against that."

Yoash clapped his hands together.

"How about we act as if the talk about a mediation fee has never taken place then?"

"Only that?"

Yoash asked Souma, who told him that he can't agree with only the mediation fee being waived, "What do you want?" In response, Souma clearly states,

"Friendship."

Yoash's eyes widen slightly at that.

"Yoohoo! Friendship, he says! —That's a big one there. However, nothing is expensive as friendship. To say nothing if the other party is us merchants to whom you have to constantly show your worth."

"Are you capable of that?" Yoash implicitly provokes Souma. Souma responded to that with a smile.

"Of course. We will be come a lot bigger."

Yoash stared deeply into Souma's eyes. Souma stares back unperturbed into Yoash's eyes which peer into him as if seeing beyond his eyeballs directly into his brain. And then, after a short while, Yoash suddenly smiled.

"The merchant guild is impossible, but if it's me personally, I will gladly join my hands in friendship with you. How about that?"

Souma firmly grasps Yoash's right hand which was held out to him.

"Please lend us your strength from now on."

"Yoohoo! Doesn't everything depend on the worth you're going to show me?"

Souma couldn't help but feel astonished by Yoash who kept being brazen until the very end.



Once Yoash had left the feudal lord's residence, Shyemul, who had endured it the whole time, finally exploded.

"Geez, how irritating!"

Because she had been sternly warned by Eladia the other day, Shyemul held back without opening her mouth once, but she had reached a state where she couldn't hide her resentment towards Yoash for not having shown any timidity in his attitude, let alone having apologized for tricking Souma. Due to Shyemul flaring up in anger even more so than the person who was actually deceived, Souma unintentionally reveals a wry smile. Once it showed on his face, the brunt of Shyemul's anger shifted towards Souma as she felt aggravated by his smile.

"Soma! You are too lenient. You were made a fool by that guy! You have to tell such guys off in a strong manner! If you like, you can also tell me to do it for you, okay?"

Even while being overwhelmed by the menacing look of Shyemul, who seems to be about to draw her machete and not only keep it at the level of telling off, Souma soothes her with "Now, now."

"But, for those kind of people that's no good as they will slipperily evade everything, no matter what you say. This time it's fine to consider it a good bargain as it made him owe us a debt and caused him to stop trying to trick our side."

'As expected, it didn't go as far as a sudden improvement of the relationship, but even so it opened a window for negotiating with the merchant guild which was only hostile towards us until now. We have reached a point where we can promote our worth through Yoash next time. I think we can call that a big progress.

Once she was told as much, Shyemul couldn't rebut anything further. However, due to Shyemul wrinkling up her nose, obviously sulking, Souma clenched his right fist.

"For now we are looked down upon, but we will endure and amass power. We can become a lot stronger. We obtained these funds for that sake."

"What, you still plan to do something else?"

"We already have to deal with various things and invest into the plains' reclamation as well as the dwarves' workshop. And yet you want to start something on top of that?" Once Shyemul asked that, Souma smiled broadly.

"Yeah. I plan to build orphanages and schools in this city."