

Chapter 2 - Story 24: Sea Devil

"Brother! —Ah no, Your Majesty!"

Arriving in front of the throne in the audience hall in a trot with his flabby flesh below his chin wobbling, Vulitas goes down on both knees and prostrates himself towards his elder brother, Warius.

"For me to be allowed to have another opportunity for an audience in front of Your Majesty like this is completely thanks to Your Majesty's lenient heart. The chest of this Vulitas is trembling in deep thankfulness and heartfelt emotions."

Vulitas gives words of thanks towards Warius while his cheeks are soaked with tears of gratitude. Originally it might have been a deeply moving scene, but the ugly and fat Vulitas crying and shouting only looks disgraceful, making the lined-up courtiers feel exceedingly disgusted. Given that the courtiers are in such a state, King Warius' sentiments are easily guessable. Each time Vulitas opens his mouth, Warius increases the strength of his hands gripping the throne's armrests and his cheeks keep twitching. However, without noticing that, Vulitas continues to talk with grand gestures how many hardships he had to endure in Bolnis and what hard time it was.

"Your Majesty! I beg you! Please avenge your younger brother! Please, make them realize their own position and beat them back into their slave pens where they belong! Otherwise the disgrace I suffered won't be cleared away!"

Vulitas cowers on the spot and starts to raise an exaggerated crying voice. King Warius calls out towards Vulitas as if whispering.

"...Step back."

Believing that he would be given the promise that Bolnis would be regained by defeating the slaves and showered with kind words, Vulitas only manages to return an idiotic "Huh?" That caused Warius' temper to finally explode.

"Don't you understand when you are told to step back!? You stupid pig!"

"P-Pig!?"

Vulitas is confused due to the overly abusive language that was hurled at him by his very own brother.

"Exposing yourself to such a shame, how dare you to brazenly show up in front of me! You suffered disgrace and difficulty going beyond death, you say? Then you should just have died then and there! If you had done that, I wouldn't have been forced to pay the large sum of 50,000 gold coins for a worthless pig like you! I don't even want to see your moronic face! Leave the capital at once!"

"But...I lost my territory. Just where should I go...?"

"As of now you dunce are appointed as governor of Raprel, the territory under my direct control."

Hearing that name for the first time, Vulitas asks like a parrot, "Raprel?"

"It's a remote area bordering with the Labian River. Strive at managing its governmental affairs to your utmost and lose that useless fat of yours!"

Due to Warius' scornful words, Vulitas screamed "Hiii" with his face turning pale.

Labian River is the name of the big river separating Holmea and Romania. In other words, it's a territory adjacent to Holmea's arch enemy Romania with nothing but a single river in-between. Leaving aside border cities that have ferries to Romania, there's no way for a territory along the border, where ferry services and bridges must not arbitrarily be established, to prosper. Moreover, one has to constantly fear an invasion by Romania.

Vulitas begged in tears with a blue face,

"Y-Your Majesty! Brother! P-Please show mercy...!"

"Shut up, pig! Someone! Pick up this chubby and take him away!"

Being secured on both sides by royal guards who abode King Warius' order, Vulitas was dragged out. Once his miserable crying couldn't be heard any longer, a single minister asked King Warius,

"Your Majesty, isn't it kind of risky to place His Highness close to the border with Romania?"

Without replying to the minister's concern, Warius calls the name of one of the generals present in the audience hall.

"Romania might show suspicious movements. Lead two thousand elites there and solidify the border's vicinity."

Warius ordered a chamberlain over and had him entrust his small sword to the general who had been appointed to his official duty while genuflecting with his head lowered. If it was a normal sword, it would mean that he had been entrusted with the military authority in place of the king, but due to the look of the general, who tries to surmise just what kind of meaning a small sword might have while receiving it, Warius faced him with a dark smile.

"Make sure to not take your eyes off him in Raprel. No matter how much of a hinterland it might, it's not said that Romania won't come attacking. If he becomes the prisoner of Romania in worst case, it will likely be a huge root of evil for Holmea. At that time..."

Darius didn't voice out who he was talking about and what to do to them, but the general wouldn't have reached his post if he couldn't infer something like that.

Without saying anything, the general simply withdrew while reverently holding the small sword in both hands with a pale expression.



Yoash, who had handed over Vulitas, quickly boarded a wagon, as if dreading being dragged into an outburst of Warius' temper, and left the royal capital Holmenia.

While gazing at the prisoner list which he had been given by Souma, he's pondering in what order he should proceed with the negotiations. Suddenly his wagon comes to a halt. In concord with that, the voices of his guards asking someone for their identity could be heard from the other side of the canopy.

"Bastard! Who the heck are you!?"

'An attack by bandits? However, all things considered, they must be big shots or at best utter fools who attack a wagon that flies the flag of Jeboa's merchant guild in the outskirts of the capital.'

Feeling curious what kind of people they are, Yoash peeked out from a gap in the canopy.

What he found was a single, red-haired woman standing in front of the wagon, trying to block its path. She's tall for a woman, and also wears trousers like a man. Because a single sword hangs at her waist, she looks like a young, chivalrous warrior. But, her abundant breasts, which are pushed up from below by her clothes, unmistakably emphasized her gender.

"Yoohoo! If I remember, you were Damia, right? You being here means that you master is nearby as well, I suppose?"

After signaling his escorts that it's an acquaintance, Yoash got off the wagon. Once he did, the red-haired woman——Damia bowed towards Yoash, and then pointed at a small hill besides the road with her hand.

"My master is waiting over there and hopes that he can invite you over, Sir Yoash, for a cup of alcohol."

"Yoohoo! That fits perfectly as my throat was just getting parched. I will gladly accept his invitation."

Yoash agreed without any hesitation. Yoash went back inside the wagon for a moment, grabbed a bundle of papers and came back out. Leaving his grim-faced guards behind, Yoash made his way up the hill while being guided by Damia.

A high-class sheet, which had been expressly ordered from a foreign country, was spread out at the root of the sole tree growing on top of the hill. A boy with a beautiful, white face, which was half-covered by his dark brown hair hanging down, greeted Yoash with a broad smile over there.

Yoash grandly spreads his arms at the sight of the boy, expressing his joy.

"Yoohoo! To meet each other like this, it's been a while, Tutu."

It was the armless boy Tutu who worked as Darius' spy.

Yoash flops down on the sheet with his legs crossed.

"Here's what you asked me to get you."

Saying so, Yoash holds out the bundle of papers he brought along from the wagon and Tutu skillfully grasps it with his feet. And in exchange he pushed a leather bag, which was laying next to him, towards Yoash.

Yoash picks up the leather bag which has the size of a baby's head, and fiddles with it to ascertain

its weight. As he does, the metals within hit each other, causing jangling sounds. Due to that Tutu spitefully shifts his eyes at Yoash who smiles complacently.

"Good grief, you sure take advantage of others and overcharge them too much."

Yoash shrugged his shoulders at that as if feeling really vexed.

"Now listen, I risked my life for these. In accordance with your request, I even acted rudely as if to make him deliberately angry in order to expose that guy's true nature. If I had been careless, this would have happened to my head long ago!"

Yoash showed his neck being cut with his thumb.
However, Tutu only laughs scornfully at that.

"To act like a fool and say that without shame, even though you are well aware that he would never have acted so violently."

While smiling wryly at Yoash, who feigns innocence by asking, "What do you mean?", due to that, Tutu grabs the bottle filled with alcohol, and pours its content into the cup placed in front of Yoash.

"So, just as I asked you, you actually encountered that guy—the 『Divine Son of Destruction』. What was your impression?"

"Hmm~. At first I thought that he was no more than a naive boy, but he's actually unexpectedly shrewd."

At that point Yoash covered his mouth with a lightly clenched fist and leaked a chuckle.

"It gave me the shivers when he even saw through my scheme."

Tutu urged Yoash, who reveals a fairly frivolous smile compared to him talking about getting the shivers, to continue with the story by saying "And?" Yoash tilted his head to the side due to that.

"Mmh? I believe I wrote everything I can in those papers?"

"What I really want to know are the things that weren't mentioned in here. ——They exist, don't they?"

Due to Tutu pressing for an answer with a glint in his narrow eyes, Yoash is baffled while scratching his head through the white kufiya.

"Even if you tell me that..."

Tutu pushed another bag full of silver coins towards Yoash who had a troubled expression. Yoash retrieves a single silver coin from within the bag and asks Tutu, obviously testing him,

"Are you really sure? It's nothing more than my intuition that lacks any proof, you know?"

"Rather, that's what I really want to hear."

Yoash sighs while dropping his shoulders in pretense, and then says "It can't be helped." After that the look in his eyes became similar as if he's gazing into the far distance, and after a short while he quietly said,

"...I'm sure that person is a sea devil (kraken)."

"A kraken?"

Tutu parroted the same word as it was a term unfamiliar to him.

"There's a legend among sailors. ——One day a sailor suddenly vanishes from a ship in the middle of its voyage. One would think that he likely fell into the sea due to an accident or similar, but at such times sailors say: 『They were kidnapped by a sea devil』."

Yoash depicts a big circle with both his arms.

"It seems to be a huuuge octopus or squid monster. Occasionally there are sailors saying that they saw a big shadow in the fog, or something large floating on the waves. They say that it's a sea devil, but there's no one who really saw its true shape in reality."

"...I don't quite get what you're trying to say here."

Upon Tutu asking in bewilderment, Yoash picked up his cup and said,

"At first I thought that there's a special, intelligent group standing behind the boy who has been given the name Divine Son of Destruction."

The more Yoash learned about the Divine Son of Destruction, the less he could believe there to be any other option.

'Even though it's already an astonishing feat to have had a strategy that defeated the highly acclaimed General Darius, the reforms in the government of Bolnis after that make feel shivers as they already went beyond surprise.

'A new system, new farming methods, new tools, and new equipment. You might not find anyone who did something similar to that, even if you look across the whole continent. However, since he's only a single human, it's impossible to accomplish that in almost no time.

Moreover, Yoash's intuition told him that this was knowledge and technology that skipped one——no, several generations instantly in some way.

"That's why I believed at first that there's an intelligent group that diligently studied and enhanced that knowledge and technology for many long years in hiding."

'A superior strategist. An agitator who charmed the masses. A daring reformer. An inventor of miracles. And, a naive dreamer.

The more Yoash investigated, the more different faces labeling the Divine Son of Destruction he found. That made him believe all the more that there are people who occasionally pull the strings in the back depending on the situation.

"However, the truth is that the 『Divine Son of Destruction』 is no more than a single boy."

Yoash revealed a bitter smile, seeming recalling his surprise back then.

"The strategies, knowledge and technologies that were pushed out of the sea due to me stirring him up, was no more than just one tentacle. A completely different, huge sea devil lurked below the sea's surface."

Tutu becomes somewhat disappointed by Yoash's words.

"That certainly merits to be surprised. However, to be different with only that——"

Yoash said as if drowning out Tutu's remark who had started to object.

"『Make the king carry the baggage』——"

Tutu's expression changes upon those words.

However, Yoash pretends to not have noticed that and continues to talk.

"I think it's been many years ago. This is what you told me when we met for the first time. Or to be precise, 『Make the one who was king carry the baggage while allowing the one who was slave to sit on a chair』, I guess? At the time when I heard that, I thought that this guy is someone thinking about outrageous stuff. Even Jeboa, where you buy peerage and even replace the king's head with money, pays a certain extent of respect to royalty."

Yoash drains the cup in his hand in one go. And then he placed the empty cup on the sheet as if slamming it down, and clearly stated,

"And that guy said something similar to you, namely, "Even royalty can carry baggage, can't they?""

Tutu allows a small and deep sigh of admiration to escape his lips. However, Yoash pours cold water on Tutu.

"But, you mustn't misunderstand. You appear to be similar, but your contents are completely different."

Yoash looks up into the sky and reminisces about the past.

"Back then you pretended to be calm, but unconcealable, strong emotions dwelt within your words and eyes. ——Well, I guess that's only natural though. A king manages his country on behalf of the gods. Slaves are put to use by people. This is the principle of this world. Saying that you will overthrow that principle is impossible with a half-hearted enthusiasm and will. Even if it's something based on dreams, hope, anger, or hatred."

At that point Yoash reveals an apathetic grin.

"Even if it goes to the extent that you'd abandon both arms that ought to be called one's life by yourself..."

Tutu's eyes, which slightly glimpse out from in-between his eyelids, had a dangerous glint.

"Oops, that was a slip of tongue. —Anyway, it's something requiring that much enthusiasm and will."

Tutu glared at Yoash, who apologizes verbally but doesn't look like he feels guilty at all, but that sullenness is blown away by Yoash's next words.

"But, you know. That doesn't apply for him."

At first Tutu blinked, apparently unable to understand what he was told.

"Well, I won't deny that he has some enthusiasm. But, it's not to the extent to overthrow the principles of this world. I can affirm that."

For a short while silence dominated the place.

"...I don't get it. Why is that guy trying to do something like that then?"

Yoash answered Tutu's question with the expression of a child talking about its cherished secret.

"It's because he considers it to be natural!"

As expected, even Tutu becomes dumbfounded due to that.

"See, you can't comprehend, can you? He looks like a simple boy. You can also add the attributes weak and timid to him. But, his contents are of a completely different nature. It's as if you're looking at a monster, whose true shape you don't know, even though you can see its figure."

"Even you, who encountered people all over the continent, regardless of their races, don't know?"

As far as Tutu knows, there's no other human who has gotten to know such a great variety of people as Yoash in Jeboa which is an Ocean Trade Nation. Yoash, who was extolled like that, shrugs his shoulders a bit and shows a strained smile.

"Even if there are difference in the knowledge and races, people are slaves of their own desires. Us Jeboan merchants see through those desires and use it for our business. —But, that guy doesn't have those cravings. At least I couldn't find any within him."

'Although it might be a provincial city, he still ruled over a whole city. If he desires, he can reasonably fulfill certain desires.

'Wielding his authority in the city as he pleases would be fine. Living a luxurious life while gathering riches would be fine as well. Making the elven beauties around him serve upon him while holding obscene orgies would be fine, too.

'However, there was no indication that the Divine Son of Destruction tries to satisfy his own desires.

"So you're saying that he's a person brimming with a self-sacrificing mind?"

"Whoa, don't be stupid. He picked a fight with Holmea and has obtained a single city. He's not a human on the giving side, but without a doubt a human on the stealing side! Such a guy is reigning with an expression telling one 'I'm a man of noble character or hero appearing in epic poems.'"

Subduing his frivolous laughter, Yoash becomes serious.

"That person is twisted in some ways."

Yoash declared.

"As if a character from within epic poems and legends would exist in reality otherwise. I'm pretty sure he carries a tremendous distortion within himself."

Yoash's way of talking was already more like speaking of a dreadful monster appearing in folklore than speaking about a person.

"Haven't his surroundings realized that? They seem to have a fairly strong unity, though."

"Well, I guess the debt of gratitude for having their relatives and themselves saved from their doom plays a big role, but——"

Answering Tutu's question, Yoash suddenly faltered. Once Tutu turns a quizzical look at his odd behavior, Yoash, who noticed that, coughs once to gloss over his hesitation and then continues to speak.

"I told you, didn't I? He's a monster of the sea. By nature people are charmed by what they can't become themselves. The further the difference in nature, the more attractive it seems to them. Just like the sailor, who peeked into the sea out of curiosity, just to be seized by a huge tentacle and get dragged to the bottom of the sea."

Yoash stood up while brushing off his knees.

"Well then, given that I have to negotiate the ransom with the Holmean lords, I shall excuse myself with this."

Yoash turned his back on Tutu in order to descend the hill, but on the way he stopped and looked over his shoulder at Tutu.

"Ah, yes. I will tell you one more additional information. ——The big simpleton of the Shapiro Company will be freely coming and going as friend to the place of the 『Divine Son of Destruction』."

"...Do you intend to get closer to a sea monster?"

Yoash spread his arms widely and shouted, "Yoohoo!"

"Of course! If you're a sailor, you want to ascertain the true shape of a sea monster with your own eyes at least once!"

While laughing loudly, Yoash descended the hill, but without stopping this time. Damia arrived at the place with only Tutu remaining while pushing a wooden wheelchair.

"Is what he said just now a diversion against us?"

Tutu shook his head lightly at his loyal swordswoman, who said that with a dangerous undertone.

"It would be endless if you paid attention to each and every of his superficial words and deeds. That's because he's the 『Big Simpleton of the Shapiro Company』. Even though it was exposed by the 『Divine Son of Destruction』 that he was trying to expand the company's influence into Holmea, I dare say that he deliberately allowed him to do so."

'He stirs animosity with a constantly aggressive behavior. He invites suspicion by pretending to be be menial from the beginning. However, he's a person who relaxes his guard towards people whom he defeated or outwitted.

Tutu jerked his chin while saying, "Don't think of him as ally," and pointed at the bundle of parchments he received from Yoash. "I'm sure he's going to sell out this guy with an innocent look even to the place of that 『Painting Maniac』.

"To the place of that Cesar Bulgeboa, you mean...?"

It's the name of the king of the small country Bulgeboa which was in-between the two countries, Holmea and Romania.

As the majority of its territory consists of mountain, the small country managed to somehow survive for a long time by keeping both sides, Holmea and Romania, in a good mood. Cesar Bulgeboa, the king of that country, has no ambitions to expand his territory, and even delegated the national politics to his retainers. He's a man rumored to be a foolish ruler who immerses himself in his own hobby of painting.

However, that's a story limited to outward appearance.

"But, if you compare trade partners, there's no one as reliable as Yoash. His true nature is doubtlessly that of a 『True Jeboan』. As long as we bring profit to him, he will never betray us."

『True Jeboan』 as it's often used when talking about Jeboa in the western regions means people who love to freely trade, if someone from Jeboa is asked, but for people from foreign countries it signifies someone whos fixated on nothing but making money.

"But, a sea devil, huh...?"

Tutu sinks into silence while looking up to the sky for a while.

At that moment various, complicated emotions were jumbled together in his heart.

Confusion, anxiety, disappointment, anger, grief, and hatred.

And due to the emotion remaining as last after pushing aside all those others, Tutu narrowed his already thread-like eyes even further.

"Well then, I was able to hear a very interesting story. I guess it's soon time for us to make our move as well."

Damia ordered the servants she brought along to clean up, raised Tutu in her arms, and made him sit in the wheelchair.

"Where are we headed?"

Tutu answered following at Damia's question:

"The place of the person who used to formerly be the best general of Holmea."

And then he reveals a sneering smile.

"Contrary to expectations, that old man seems to be bad at giving up."



Yoash thought back on the previous conversation with Tutu while being jolted around in the wagon. At the time when he was asked why the liberated slaves and not to mention the zoan are wholeheartedly obeying the Divine Son of Destruction, he replied that they are attracted by his difference in nature, and that's no lie.

However, that wasn't the whole truth either.

"For welding together the zoan and slaves the existence of that zoan girl plays a big part, I think," Yoash mutters to himself.

'The one zoan girl who always stayed close to the boy.

Her resolute attitude. Her nobility that knows no shame. Even if they are from different races, those are attributes of hers are very obvious. That girl devotes herself to the boy without the slightest silver of hesitation.

'Her appearance reassures the others.

'It tells them that it's fine to acknowledge that boy, and that it's alright to praise that boy's abilities. It tells them that it's okay to perceive his different nature as his characteristic that should be extolled.

'That zoan girl is so-to-speak the binding. She's a binding that fastens the different sheets of various shapes and qualities together so that they don't fall apart, making all of it form the shape of a single bucket.

'However, what would happen if that binding was gone?

'If one tries to make the group around the Divine Son of Destruction crumble, it's not really necessary to kill the Divine Son of Destruction himself.

'It would be enough to eliminate that zoan girl.

'If it comes to killing her, that's probably easier than killing that boy. After all that girl will expose her body to danger as shield against assassins that simply try to kill that boy. And, as long as the girl is out of the picture, they will likely disintegrate like a bucket that lost all its bindings.

'But,' Yoash thinks.

'It would be fine as long as it's limited to merely a bucket breaking a part.

'But, what if there's a terrifying sea devil inside that bucket?

'What if what I considered to be a bucket turns out to be a cage that has kept a sea devil locked up?

'Just how much destruction would the sea devil bring upon this world after having been released from the scattered bucket? How much chaos would it cause?

Yoash suddenly laughed scornfully at his own overly foolish imaginations. However, the chill that ran down his spine immediately afterwards made his body tremble slightly for some reason.