

Chapter 2 - My Haruka! The Interference

"Fufufu! This is a tremendously lucky break." (Takeomi)

"Oh dear. It would have been better if Kaede hadn't come along." (Kaede)

Us two started to tail Haruka and Erwin on their pilgrimage with the goal of obstructing it. However, I then confirmed how Earl Baumeister's party joined up with those two. It looks like they have noticed my plans...no doubt, it must have been former Duchess Philip. I guess it's only natural for that lady to realize it. And yet, as an effect of my disguise, they haven't been able to find me. There was another miscalculation by Earl Baumeister's group. They thought that I would interfere on my own, and thus used 『Detect』 to find a loner peeking at them from deserted places. But, right now Kaede is with me. Disguising as a pilgrimaging married couple, we can shadow them from a rather close place while not being spotted. At first I only lamented over Kaede accompanying me, but now I think it's a cue by the gods. As expected, the gods don't give their blessing to Haruka's and Erwin's marriage! Indeed, that must be it!

"There's no way for that to be true, is it?"

"Don't contradict me so calmly!"

"Of course Kaede will. Aren't those two enjoying themselves?"

Certainly, they are chatting happily with each other while walking along the Mizuho Mountain Ring.

They are a well-matched couple...not!

Haruka is going to walk the path of the sword with me!

"You are obstructing Haruka-sama' marriage, and at the same time you're going to marry since you're the heir. Kaede is appalled by your double standards, Takeomi-sama. You're a brute."

"Guhaa!"

That damn Kaede...as always she says whatever she wants...moreover, I can't refute her words.

"I will stay single, too." (Takeomi)

"That's impossible. In the first place, it's no good if Kaede doesn't become your concubine, Takeomi-sama."

Recently my father, mother, and relatives are noisy about me marrying as soon as possible. They've been even preparing formal marriage interviews behind my back as they please.

Since the Fujibayashi House has become higher-ranked retainers, they must usher in a legal wife from a suitable house as a new, high-ranked retainer house.

On the other hand, Kaede's father...and also my uncle, has no other children besides Kaede in his branch family.

Accordingly he's expecting the child between Kaede and me to become the next heir of the branch family. That's also the reason why my father, mother, and all my relatives pamper Kaede so much. Well, I guess it's also because Kaede seems to have a manner of always stating sound arguments...

"Anyway! I will definitely accomplish my will!" (Takeomi)

"Can you actually? Slipping through that strong guard protocol, that is."

"..."

Since it's not like I have to win through fighting, there would have been plenty of ways to go about it if it was only Erwin and Haruka, but with Earl Baumeister's group present as well...

"Let's give up already and join them normally, Takeomi-sama."

"Join them and then do what?"

"Say that Takeomi-sama and Kaede are doing the pilgrimage for the sake of informing the gods of our betrothal."

"We aren't engaged, though!"

Sure, there are some zealous believers who will go on the pilgrimage at the stage of betrothal. Afterwards those married couples would go on a pilgrimage every few years or decades in commemoration of their marriage, asking the gods to allow them to remain married until their deaths.

Among the couples on pilgrimage walking along the mountain road, there are actually quite a few elderly couples, it seems.

However, I'm no such passionate believer, and I haven't been engaged to Kaede yet either.

"It's just a matter of time anyway. Once Kaede grows and turns fifteen years old, Kaede will become Takeomi-sama's wife."

"Uuh..."

I have to take Kaede as my concubine and make a child with her to succeed the branch family. This is something I've been told quite a while ago by my father, mother, and relatives. There's also the matter with me receiving a legal wife from another high-ranking retainer house...no, all that matters now is to prevent Haruka's marriage!

"They have arrived at the first wayside shrine as we've been talking about all that."

Haruka and Erwin, who are ahead of us, stand in front of the shrine, bow twice, clap their hands twice, and bow once. Then they are about to put the first talisman into a wooden box set up inside the shrine.

I guess I will get going at once.

"You will be found out, Takeomi-sama."

"You're naive, Kaede. I'm Haruka's elder brother. I have acquired various, special techniques in correspondence to my age. 『Strategy One: A talisman about to be offered got carried away by a sudden gust of wind!』."

This is a technique which originally uses a magic katana.

You unleash a cluster of air as if causing a squall, discouraging an opponent.

However, since it would be noticed by Haruka and the others if I were to use a magic katana, I will use this technique with an ordinary katana. After all it'll be plenty as long as it has enough power to hurl the talisman into the sky.

"It succeeded."

It looked as if my feelings towards Haruka had been understood by the heavens.

The cluster of air pretending to be a small gust of wind let the talisman dance into the air without Haruka and the others suspecting anything.



This is a mountain road at an elevated altitude. There's always wind blowing in the upper air, and the talisman should be blown away into the far distance.

For me to have succeeded at the very first spot, that's certainly unexpected.

"The strategy worked out well."

"Umm...Takeomi-sama."

"What's up, Kaede? If it's preaching, I have no interest."

"Your strategy has failed. Look."

Oh damn, before the talisman flies off in the far distance, one of Earl Baumeister's wives, an impulsive and lively girl with her hair bound into twintails vigorously jumps up and grabs the talisman.

"Wha-!?"

"That person has great reflexes, hasn't she? It looks like this method won't work?"

"I will come up with the next strategy..."

There's still plenty of time left.

I will make sure to have them fail the pilgrimage, invalidating Haruka's and Erwin's marriage.

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"Erwin, be more careful, okay?"

"Sorry, this place is atop the mountains, so I guess the winds are strong around here."

"That's true. We have to be careful from now on."

At the first shrine there was an accident of the talisman, which they tried to offer, being almost blown away by the wind, but Katia swiftly jumped and caught the talisman, preventing its loss. Nothing less of Katia who ranks second to Luise in regards to reflexes.

"..."

"(What's wrong, Lisa?)"

Therese asks Lisa about the reason for her brooding.

"(I see...that means the interference has already started. Since we should have noticed it if a magical method were to be used, I suppose he used a technique not relying on magic to intervene...it's painful that we can't find him with 『Detect』, but...as long as it's physical interference, it's not

impossible to block it.)"

It seems that Lisa is convinced that the gust of wind that carried the talisman away was Takeomi-san's deed.

We don't know where he is, and if 『Detect』 doesn't work either, we have no choice but to thwart his sabotaging attempts each time they occur.

"(Seven more places to go.)"

"(We will manage somehow. I don't think that he can do anything too flashy either.)"

It's as Katia says. After all there's no way that he could attack us to steal the talismans.

"Wend, is something wrong?"

"No, nothing. Rather, make sure to not let the next talisman fly away."

"I know without you telling me."

We advanced along the mountain road, which became gradually steeper, aiming for the next shrine.

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"They have arrived at the second shrine, huh? This time for sure..." (Takeomi)

"Just admit already that you've run out of ideas. You really don't know when to give up. You're absolute trash as a man."

"Kaede, you really dish out whatever you want, don't you..."

Haruka and Erwin have arrived at the next shrine.

The second shrine is actually split into two separate ones.

The first is a normal shrine where even elderly couples with no stamina can offer their talismans.

The second is a shrine standing atop a huge rock.

Given that young couples have enough stamina, it seems more appropriate for them to offer their talismans to the second shrine.

It's also said that they will receive the gods' graces in proportion to having climbed the huge rock.

"You're quite well-informed about this, Takeomi-sama."

"Well, I looked it up after all."

Since I never got married, I didn't know much about the shrines, but there are many married people in the Battou Unit.

It was an easy task to extract the information out of them under the pretense of gossip.

"So, are you going to use a gust of wind again?"

"Now I will go with this."

I show Kaede a small pebble.

"It's the Battou Unit's Secret Stone Throwing Art."

Throwing stones is an extremely effective tactic in battle.

It's simple to provide the stones for throwing, and you can attack from a distance. Furthermore, if you hit an enemy with a stone of a reasonable size, you can easily rob them of their ability to continue fighting.

Even among the Battou Unit, it's regarded highly. I have also been continuing to practise stone throwing techniques.

And, stealing an opponent's ability to fight isn't the only thing you can do with stone throwing techniques.

You can move distant objects by throwing stones at them, and you can attract an enemy's attention to yourself.

There are also many other uses such as triggering a trap by throwing a stone from a distant place outside the trap's range.

For me, who has achieved a high accuracy in stone throwing, it will be an easy feat to hit the talisman out of Erwin's hand as he climbs the rock to get to the shrine while pretending for it to be a falling piece of the rock.

There's a rock wall towering behind the shrine. Because rocks fall down from there every once in a while, it's unlikely that I will be exposed if I do it skilfully enough.

"And that's how the all-important talisman will be carried away by the wind and go missing. Since Earl Baumeister and his group are outwardly offering talismans as well, they will likely climb the rock together with them. In short, they shouldn't be able to block my strategy as they did before."

"..."

"What's wrong, Kaede? Do you have a problem with my strategy?"

"Well, I just thought that it's a plan full of flaws, mostly based on nothing but wishful thinking."

"Guhaa!"

Kaede, you're as merciless as ever...

"My stone throwing techniques are..."

"Somehow it looks like there's an issue even before that. Look."

Kaede points at a signboard. I read what's written on it.

"Let's see...it says 『The other day the shrine atop the rock was destroyed by a rock slide. Please offer your talismans at the shrine below until the repairs have been finished』! Doesn't that mean that I can't obstruct them!?"

What a bad luck!

If Haruka and Erwin can't climb to the shrine atop the rock, my 『Strategy Two: Suddenly a stone falls down from above, causing Erwin to drop the talisman so that it's carried away by the wind』 won't be possible to implement.

"It's certainly a boring strategy name, lacking any kind of ingenuity. Or rather, you have no choice but to give up for today."

"The third shrine is too far, yep."

Normally there are many couples finishing their first day with the second shrine. There's quite a bit of way to go to the third shrine, and there are no inns along the way. Tonight they should stay at one of the many inns close to the second shrine in preparation for tomorrow.

"Oh well. I will definitely realize my ambition tomorrow!"

"By the way, won't you book an inn?"

"Of course I will book one."

This is no training, and besides, it's necessary for me to monitor Haruka and the others who're likely going to stay in an inn. We quickly headed to the same inn Haruka had entered, and immediately booked rooms there. However...

"Two rooms? Eh!? Why if you're a couple on pilgrimage?"

"You're totally right. My husband is a bit of a shy person. He's planning to stick to this until the end of our pilgrimage."

"Since there are many couples, I wonder whether I could have you refrain from booking one room per person. The other inns will likely decline it as well."

"..."

No way, for such an unexpected situation to crop up here because I'm pretending to be married to Kaede!

No matter how much Kaede might be a child, having an unmarried man and woman sleep in the same room...!

Such a shameless act is unforgivable!

"Isn't it just sleeping in the same room? To begin with, even married couples on a pilgrimage wouldn't do 'that' while staying at an inn."

Although they are newly wed, they will only be treated as a truly married couple after finishing their pilgrimage.

Haruka's body is still pure as well.

I can feel relieved until the pilgrimage ends...

"It's forbidde——n! That Erwin will surely kick that rule with his filthy feet!" (Takeomi)

"You're annoying! Shut it!"

"Ah, please excuse my husband. Takeomi-sama, you're bothering our neighbors. Let's go sleep early in preparation for tomorrow, okay?"

"..."

You think I'm a child!?

Even though I just worried a bit about my younger sister; that rude fellow from the room next to ours is much too narrow-minded!

Anyway.

I decided to go to sleep early in preparation for the next day so as to save Haruka out of Erwin's grasp as soon as possible.

"Isn't the quality of the futons in this inn way too cheap?"

"Who knows? Takeomi-sama, the last time you slept together with Kaede in a futon like this was when Kaede was three years old."

"Really?"

What a good memory she has.

At that time Kaede was as cute as Haruka in her childhood, but now she's like this...anyway, let's go sleep without thinking about anything unnecessary.

"Takeomi-sama, you're warm."

"Don't cling to me!"

"Isn't it fine? Also, Kaede will fall out of the futon if Kaede doesn't stick to you."

Gosh, because Kaede snuggled up to me right away, I couldn't get much sleep on the first day.

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"Lisa, you're lacking sleep?" (Wendelin)

"It looks like she isn't used to the bedding called futon." (Therese)

"Big Sis is sensitive, after all. I was completely fine with it." (Katia)

"There's no worry about Katia in this regard." (Wilma)

"It's the same for you as well, isn't it Wilma?" (Katia)

"I'm a hunter. Even if it might be camping out, it's only natural for me to be able to sleep anywhere. Leaving that aside, the side dishes are quite lacking." (Wilma)

"It's probably inevitable, seeing as we're in the mountains. Right, Haruka?" (Wendelin)

"Given that it's a mountain inn, there's a limit to how many ingredients can be brought up here. During the pilgrimage you won't get any meat or fish." (Haruka)

"Is it something like strictly forbidding fish and meat because it's a ritual?" (Wendelin)

"That's the idea here, milord." (Haruka)

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Third day of the pilgrimage. Earl Baumeister's group has been walking towards the third shrine while chatting cheerfully amongst each other. As expected, during their walk, they keep their talismans in their pockets, so there's no opening to be found here. According to the strategy I thought up yesterday, I will take a big gamble here at the third shrine.

"Do you have something like a trump card?"

"I do. I called it in early this morning."

Once I whistle lightly, a bird, which arrived from who knows where, perches down on my arm. It's a Mizuho Swallow, the third communication and messaging method next to human legs and MHCDs.

Of course every retainer house has been passionate about raising them...there are many who raise them as a hobby with races in mind, but...even before becoming a high-ranked retainer house, the Fujibayashi House has always kept excellent Mizuho Swallows for emergencies.

"For you to arbitrarily call a 『Thunderclap』 to such a place; you will be later scolded by the lord and his wife."

"I don't care. As long as it accomplishes its task."

Even if I'm going to be scolded by my father and mother afterwards, it'll be fine as long as I can use this Thunderclap to make my plan succeed.

"By the way, what kind of plan is it?"

"Fufufu, I dub it 『Strategy Three: Once they try to offer the talisman at the shrine, a bird will suddenly steal it away』."

They certainly won't expect a bird to steal the talisman. On top of that, it's forbidden to kill during the pilgrimage.

If they shoot down and kill a bird just because it stole the talisman, it will result in this pilgrimage failing.

"What a magnificent plan. This time it will succeed for sure." (Takeomi)

"I wonder about that."

She's as doubting as ever.

However, Thunderclap is a fairly famous, named swallow.

She should be able to find an opening and steal the talisman from Erwin and Haruka.

"Go, Thunderclap!"

Nothing less of an excellent swallow. Once I give the order, she flies high up in the sky for the time being, and then begins to swoop down at the talisman which Erwin took out of his pocket in order to offer it to the third shrine.

With that swiftness, the plan will definitely succeed...

"Wha-!? Why did you stop in the middle!? Thunderclap!"

For some reason Thunderclap interrupts her nose dive, and flies away.

"What the hell has..."

"It's that girl with the dango head. Just now, she released an amazing air of intimidation for an instant."

I guess it's Wilma, one of Earl Baumeister's wives, and an excellent hunter according to what I have heard...

I suppose Thunderclap couldn't put up with her coercion as a professional hunter, who killed a lot of prey, as an animal...

"It's a blessing that this happened during the pilgrimage. If a Thunderclap had been taken down, you would have gotten scolded harshly by the lord and his wife later on."

"Certainly...it's not so much a matter of money, but if a Thunderclap, who took a lot of time and effort to be raised up to this point, were to be taken down here..."

...It would be set in stone for me to get scolded for a long time by my father and mother. In the worst case, I might have been forced to raise and train a new Mizuho Swallow from scratch.

"Besides, even if Wilma-dono had killed Thunderclap by mistake, Earl Baumeister-sama's pilgrimage would have failed, but it wouldn't have any impact on Haruka-sama's and Erwin-sama's pilgrimage. It was a savage strategy forcing a meaningless burden on Thunderclap."

"Guhaa!"

Once again you run your mouth as you want, huh Kaede?

I guess it was a salvation that killing during the pilgrimage is forbidden.

"Shit! Next time for sure!"

"You're still going to continue with this?"

"Of course!"

"Kaede is shocked by Takeomi-sama's inability to accept reality."

"It's none of your business!"

As if I'm going to pull back after coming this far!

I will definitely interfere with their pilgrimage, and Haruka and I will return to our lives of mastering the sword.

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"Hmm? What's up all of a sudden, Wilma?" (Wendelin)

Because it felt as if Wilma was threatening something all of a sudden while Erw and Haruka were offering their third talisman, I asked her what was going on.

"Bird targeted talisman." (Wilma)

"The talisman, eh...? Did it mistake it for prey?"

"Big swallow." (Wilma)

"Takeomi-san, eh...?" (Wendelin)

It's been a series of assorted, petty interferences so far, but it's great that Wilma scared the swallow away by releasing her coercion.

Since I have heard that killing is prohibited during the pilgrimage, it would have become an issue if she had shot it down.

If the pilgrimage had failed, we would have been faulted.

"Wend-sama, I'd like to eat some meat once the pilgrimage is over." (Wilma)

"You're right there..."

"Me too. Putting aside the size of the meals, I don't replenish any strength unless I eat meat..." (Katia)

Even though it's a pilgrimage that has turned into a sightseeing tour at some point, I feel like there was no need to introduce a rule of not being allowed to kill animals.

At least I'd like them to serve some fish.

"There's that as well, but I'd like to also eat some sweets. Lisa is saying the same." (Therese)

Sweets aren't prohibited during the pilgrimage, but because it's problematic to transport food to the inns in the mountains, they seem to prioritize normal food.

"Milord, we will lodge after offering a talisman to the the second next shrine, but the special dish of the inns over there is pounded rice cake. You can eat it with sweet roasted soy flour. As it's beyond the half-point of the pilgrimage, the inns over there apparently offer it so that one can preserve to the very end." (Haruka)

"Let's go! I want to eat rice cakes with sweet, roasted soy flour!"

""""""Yeeeeeah!""""""

Tonight we will be able to eat sweets.

We began to walk through the mountains in high spirits.

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"Weird...for 『Strategy Four: Spoiling the talisman by getting it wet through the waterfall's sheet of spray』 and 『Strategy Five: Oh no! The talisman fell into the crater of a volcano because of the wind!』 to fail..."

"Basically you can't do anything too unreasonable. Kaede believes that it's only natural since the strategies had too many conditions. Earl Baumeister-sama's group is with them as well."

"..."

That damn Kaede, running her mouth again.

It's the fourth day of the pilgrimage. I have grown accustomed to staying in the same room as Kaede and sharing a futon with her...gah, that's not it!

Right now it's not a situation for me to get used to something like that!

The strategy to spoil the talisman by getting it wet through a change of the waterfall's stream through my sword's force at the nearby shrine failed because the new wife-addition of Earl Baumeister froze the waterfall with her ice magic.

And even the strategy to make the talisman fall into a volcano's crater by making it fly through my sword's force at the shrine close to the volcano was blocked by the former duchess using her own body to prevent it...

That lady has found out about my sabotage plan.

It looks like she hasn't grasped my location due to my disguise so far, but she noticed the plan to drop the talisman into the volcano, and blocked my sword's force after I had moved to the most ideal position.

Given that it was a wind pressure capable of making the talisman fly, I couldn't do anything about it once she stepped in front of the talisman, defending it with her body.

"I'm not done yet! There's still one more shrine, the last one!"

If they can't offer all their talismans to all eight shrines, the pilgrimage will fail.
In that case, I still have a chance.

"Takeomi-sama, do you have any other strategies?"

"Of course. Just when I wondered what you'd ask, the next strategy will be...huh?"

How should I break the talisman next...seeing as Earl Baumeister's group is around, a method that failed once shouldn't work any longer...I have no other plans.

"..."

"Takeomi-sama?"

"Yep! I have a strategy."

"Really?"

Truthfully, no, but there's no way that I will tell Kaede.

Even I have a dignity to uphold...now that it has come to this, this will be my last chance.

I guess I should face the fact that I have to resolve myself for a certain level of danger...however, if I'm spotted by Haruka...once I pondered about such things...

"Oh my, Kaede?" (Haruka)

"Ah, Haruka-sama. What a coincidence." (Kaede)

"Gah! Hey!" (Takeomi)

That damn Kaede has betrayed me at the very, very end.

Removing the hat which had completely covered her face, she deliberately allowed Haruka to find her! Shit!

"Huh? Is that nii-sama next to you? Why in disguise?" (Haruka)

Because Kaede deliberately exposed herself, my disguise as I stood next to her was exposed as well. Moreover, there's the stabbing looks of Earl Baumeister's group which are observing me closely. Seeing how my scheme has been found out, interfering with the pilgrimage has become impossible now.

On the contrary, I have even been spotted by Erwin and Haruka.

I don't give a damn about someone like Erwin, but at this rate I will be hated by Haruka.

I must prevent only that by all means!

"Nii-sama, why are you here together with Kaede while even going as far as disguising yourself?" (Haruka)

"Haruka, well, you see..." (Takeomi)

As I'm wavering how to best answer this, Haruka's face suddenly blooms into a smile.

"Nii-sama, your engagement with Kaede has been finally decided, right? That means you took a vacation and went on a premarital pilgrimage with her, correct?" (Haruka)

"That's it. I have just been slightly embarrassed about it..." (Takeomi)

"So that's why the disguise, huh?"

Since Haruka has a grave misunderstanding, I manage to prevent being hated by my beloved sister. However, at the same time it has developed into a mess of Kaede and me having been misunderstood to be actually engaged with each other.

"Umm...Haruka-san? This girl is...the one who greeted us after the ceremony, right?" (Erwin)

"Yes, this girl is my cousin, and the daughter of the Fujibayashi House's branch family." (Haruka)

"Kaede is glad to meet you...ah, no. Erwin-sama, allow me to introduce myself once more. I'm called Kaede."

"Hee, she's resembling you a bit, I think Haruka-san." (Erwin)

"It's probably because we're cousins. Kaede is a very smart girl."

Gah!

Why is that Kaede boldly introducing herself to Erwin!?

Have I possibly laid the groundwork for Kaede?

"Once again, congratulations to you as well, Kaede."

"Thank you very much, Haruka-sama. Of course the official betrothal will follow after I become an adult." (Kaede)

"Even so, I'm sure uncle-sama must be delighted." (Haruka)

"Yes, the child born by me will inherit the branch family after all."

"Before that, nii-sama has to welcome a wife from a suitable house, too."

"You're right, Haruka-sama. My lord and his wife seem busy with the selection of possible marriage candidates."

Kaede is happily chatting with Haruka, but at this moment, I suddenly realize why she has come with me.

If it had looked as if my plans might succeed, she would have obstructed them. And otherwise, she would deliberately show herself to Haruka at the very end, and give Haruka the impression that I'm engaged with her.

What a smart little schemer despite being only twelve years old!

Huh?

Does that mean that I've been nothing but a simple idiot then?

"Kaede, while we have been chatting, we got to the last shrine. Let's offer our talismans."

"Of course, Haruka-sama. For me this is the eighth one as well."

Saying so, Kaede happily offers her talisman to the last shrine together with Haruka. You...while I have been engrossed with tailing Haruka and the others, you properly offered talismans you prepared in advance to the shrines, didn't you? I just now realized for the first time...what a blunder.

"With this, Takeomi-sama is my official fiancé."

The ritual of pilgrimage is something sacred and inviolable, even if it's before the marriage. Seeing as the talismans had been offered with the two of us...and seeing how I went around the shrines with Kaede, despite not doing anything myself, it will be difficult to file a protest against this betrothal.

It would be something else if I abandoned everything and left Mizuho, but...

"Nii-sama, I have been told that you took an extended vacation, but I can fully understand if it was for the sake of setting out on a premarital pilgrimage with Kaede. The pilgrimage is a sacred ceremony after all."

"Yes, Haruka (Huh? It's definitely strange.)"

I made sure to apply for a week-long vacation in order to interfere with Haruka's and Erwin's pilgrimage.

I was told by the Battou Unit's officer that they will consider it for a while because of the vacation time being long. A few days later I managed to get my vacation, but...considering it now, being able to take a week of vacation in the name of training is...

Once I shift my eyes towards Kaede while believing that it's odd...

"Even before a marriage, a pilgrimage is a sacred ceremony. Isn't it, Takeomi-sama?" (Kaede)

"..."

Kaede, you!

You went as far as telling my superior that it would actually be a premarital pilgrimage, didn't you!? That's why my vacation was approved without a hitch!

"It will be bad if we go back without properly buying souvenirs for the members of the Battou Unit. I think it's fine to go with pilgrimage manjuu which are easy to share."

"Indeed. Aren't you happy that Kaede is such a reliable child, nii-sama? She will become a good wife."

"You're right..."

There's no way that I can deny it. If I awkwardly stir up trouble for myself by exposing that I tried to interfere with Haruka's and Erwin's pilgrimage, my dignity as an elder brother...

And above all, if I were to be hated by Haruka...I won't be able to live on!

"Haruka-sama, Kaede will become a good wife for Takeomi-sama."

"You're a lucky man, aren't you nii-sama?"

"Thanks...Haruka."

It finished without my schemes being exposed because Haruka is a pure girl, but at the same time it resulted in something terrible.

There's three years left until Kaede becomes an adult. Meanwhile I can expect my father, mother, and relatives to aggressively push marriage interviews on me.

Even though it's out of the question for me.

Haruka!

If it doesn't work out with Erwin, come back to me without caring about what society thinks about you!

Your brother will take care of you for the rest of your life!

* * *

"So that girl is Takeomi-san's fiancée..."

At the end of the pilgrimage, close to the eighth shrine, we finally managed to find Takeomi-san. Because of that, we finished the pilgrimage safely, but that's only because the girl called Kaede obviously allowed us to discover Takeomi-san by deliberately revealing herself... She's supposed to still be a minor, but she appears to be fairly smart.

"(Apparently she pretended to be Takeomi-san's fiancée while hindering his plans and betraying him at the very end. What a scary girl.)"

"(True. Brother-kun has been completely led around by the nose by that girl. Even if they become a married couple, she will have the pants on.)"

"(My condolences.)"

He will be dominated by a girl that seems to be ten years younger than him.

Takeomi-san is a master at swordsmanship, but he's quite stupid in regards to other matters.

"(What are thou acting for as if it's someone else's affair. Wendelin, thou aren't that much better either.)"

"(Just when I was wondering what you're going to say...oops, after offering this special talisman, the pilgrimage will be over. The souvenirs for Elise and the others...)"

"(That's the part I'm talking about. Well, it's not bad, though.)" (Therese)

"(Eh? What's not bad?)"

"(It's nothing, Wendelin.)"

Erw's and Haruka's pilgrimage has finished without any issues. The remaining days should turn into a honeymoon where they can sightsee the capital together.

As we also finished offering the expensive talismans, there won't be any doubts about our matrimonial happiness.

We expressly came to the Mizuho Mountain Ring. So I will try to buy somewhat novel souvenirs before returning home.

* * *

"Yo, Takeomi. A sword idiot like you has finally gotten engaged, huh?"

"Did you make sure to offer talismans to all eight shrines?"

"Kaede-dono, huh? It looks like she will become a beauty once she grows up. Isn't that great for you?"

"That means you're going to settle down. Work properly."

"Souvenirs, eh? Isn't Kaede-dono a thoughtful one? It's something you wouldn't be able to pull off, Takeomi."

The next day after we finished the pilgrimage. As I finished the vacation ahead of time and attended the training of the Battou Unit, the rumor that I got engaged had already spread among my colleagues.

As I distributed the manjuu, which Kaede chose as souvenirs, to everyone, my colleagues all chatted about my fiancée.

Those rumors have spread to the entire Battou Unit, making it exceedingly difficult to deny it at this point.

"How nice. A young wife."

"There's the saying, wives and tatami are best when they're new."

"Hey, if you say such things, you will get scolded by your wife."

"You can say that again."

My colleagues happily chat among each other while using me as pretext.

While watching that, I still didn't comprehend the reason how it could have turned out like this.