

Chapter 203 - It seems to be the Hunting Headquarters

The letter reached Kunugi Margraviate's Klinge from the Gordonal Barony while using a small transfer device utilized to send urgent correspondences. Immediately after the bundle of papers, which were bound in an extremely sloppy way considering through which channel they came, arrived, they were carried to Frau who was serving as acting Margrave, effectively making her the most powerful person in the Kunugi Margraviate at present.

Frau accepted it, and started to jog straight towards the audience hall of Renya's mansion while quickly scanning through the papers. The appearance of a little girl in an apron dress trotting with a bundle of papers in hand was somewhat pleasant to look at, but Frau's expression and the aura she emitted were full of seriousness. The people she passed followed her back with their eyes while wondering what might have happened.

Keith and several of the people below him, who were controlling the soldiers in Klinge and had been summoned by Frau in advance, were awaiting her in the audience hall. Once Frau entered the hall, they immediately went down on one knee. By genuflecting, they, who were trained soldiers and had many tall and buffed officers among them, had their line of sight lowered to some extent compared to Frau who had sitten down at the seat of honor, but their eyes as they looked at Frau didn't contain a shred disdain towards her.

Looking back at them who were filled with respect and a little amount of fear, Frau stood up, and casually stuffed the bundle of papers into a pocket of her apron dress.

"Gentlemen, stay at ease." Saying so, Frau urged the soldiers to stand up, which they followed on the spot.

Once they stood, they naturally looked down at Frau, but even in this situation, the soldiers were overwhelmed by Frau's presence. Mostly in the way of it sticking out like a sore thumb way too much, though.

The girl, who exceeded half the burly soldiers' height by just a bit, conducted herself majestically. There was no way for such a sight to not look strange, but it was an everyday's occurrence in Klinge.

"Now then, gentlemen, a letter from my respected and beloved master was delivered ~no."

Tension rose in the hall. There was only one person in this world who Frau would call her master. If it came to a letter from that master, it wouldn't be treated as anything less than a supreme order in Klinge.

It was a digression, but Renya, who was actually the person called master here, always regarded himself as one of many nobles affiliated to the Trident Principality, and thought that a supreme order would be something originating from the archduchess, even if it came to his territory, but he never tested if this idea of his was actually true. He wondered how it would actually turn out as an organization belonging to a country, but at the same time he understood that it was a result stemming from their idolization, and thus Renya couldn't rebuke them too strongly either.

"I'll pass on the order from master ~no."

"We shall listen respectfully, Frau-sama." Keith said as representative of the arrayed soldiers.

Frau nodded once and then loudly declared, "We will mobilize Klinge's military forces, and capture the heroes ~no!"

"As you command." Keith immediately replied, and bowed his head. The others followed his lead.

It looked as if their talks were proceeding at a very quick and easy pace, but this was actually an abnormal situation. In the first place, the heroes had been treated very casually around Renya and they didn't mind that either, but originally they were the final and biggest military force to battle the demon king and destroy him while representing the four races in this world.

Naturally they were beings who should be treated appropriately, and definitely not people who should be located and apprehended on sight.

If there were people giving such orders, there were also people accepting them silently, and not a single of those present in the audience hall would object or question those orders. If you were to call their attitude of absolutely carrying out orders no matter what they had to do as splendid, there would be no doubt for that to be true, but there was no mistake about Klinge's common sense being regarded as irrational by the world. The biggest problem was the absence of someone who would stop or retort at them.

"We will establish a Hero Hunting Headquarters ~no!"

"Start assembling the troops and also wake those off-duty. I will give permission to use the equipment used against large magic beasts. Don't be misled by their outward appearance! The targets are heroes!"

The door to the hall was opened, and many soldiers carried in tables and bulletin boards with a timing and speed as if they had only waited for their turn. Within the blink of an eye, countless documents and pieces of paper filled the place.

"Endorse the citizens to report if they discover a hero."

"Increase the number of patrols. Have them always act in groups of two, and give them the order to contact us at once in case they find a hero. Don't challenge them with few men in hope of meritorious deeds."

"Ah, it's fine to exclude Kurz-kun from the list of targets. We will be able to persuade him if we tell him that it was a request by master ~no."

"The problem is...that Leopard-dono, isn't it?"

A map of Klinge's entire area had been pinned up on a remarkably big bulletin board. The commanding officers continued to draw the routes of the patrolling soldiers on the map with red lines.

"Talking it over with Grün-dono should be possible...it will probably be alright if we get Croire-dono to put in a good word for us."

"As for Albert-dono...as long as we surround him, we will be able to cope one way or the other. As soon as you find him, gather the soldiers, and surround him with big numbers."

"So the issue remains Lepard-dono, after all. He's someone that can be compared with Kurz-dono if it only concerns combat prowess. Seizing Kaede-dono first might be the highest priority."

The ones they were chasing should be the heroes without a doubt. However, the atmosphere prevailing in the audience hall that had turned into a Hero Hunting Headquarters in no time was that of a police department pursuing criminals, no matter how you looked at it.

"We secured Croire-dono and Kaede-dono!"

"Treat them politely and carefully! Have Croire-dono start persuading Grün-dono after explaining the situation to her!"

"We will transfer Kaede-dono to headquarters for the time being ~no."

"How about having her persuade Lepard-dono?"

Frau quietly shook her head at the soldier offering his opinion with a somewhat sad expression. "It's impossible to persuade a muscle-brain with words ~no. It's saddening, but we can't change reality ~nano."

She treated him like some wild beast not understanding human language, but actually, if Kaede had gone to persuade him, it was very probable that even Lepard wouldn't be able to ignore her. But, in addition to the enthusiasm and energy that could be called characteristic of Klinge, the fact that Lepard's own, usual bad behavior erased the option of "Persuasion" from Frau's and the others' minds was a misfortune for Lepard.

However, the one who was even more unlucky than Lepard was Albert. In spite of him being a relatively decent person, nothing but the bad image of the dragonoids' Witenagemot prevailed in Klinge, leading to a rough treatment for Albert by the soldiers. To make matters worse, Albert also had a too strong self-awareness as a hero even among the four heroes. For him even common soldiers entered the range of having to be protected as citizens, and thus he was completely unable to cope with the situation of being suddenly attacked by those he was supposed to protect.

"Albert-dono, secured."

Frau bent her head slightly to one side in curiosity due to the matter-of-factly report by the soldier.

"Somehow that was strangely fast ~no."

"We mobilized 30 elite soldiers, but there was almost no resistance. There have been no injuries or losses."

"Did something happen? Well, whatever ~no. For the time being we will standby after restraining

him ~no."

"Grün-dono surrendered in accordance with Croire-dono's persuasion."

A somewhat relieved atmosphere drifted through the hunting headquarters due to the next report.

"So it was no mistake to ask Croire-dono for her assistance, huh?"

"In this case...only Leopard-dono is left."

The atmosphere, which had started to get slack, tensed again at the moment Leopard's name was mentioned. That's because all of them expected that there was no way for Leopard's capture to finish so smoothly and with so little damage as with the other three heroes.

After all, the opponent was a battle maniac and a muscle-brain. Moreover, among the four heroes he was notorious for still requesting a rematch against Renya. On top of that, the beastmen as a whole had many hot-blooded fellows.

To summarize it, he was no one who would let them capture him obediently even if they used Renya's name.

"Err...everyone? Umm...just why am I here?" Kaede asked after having been brought in just at this moment.

Kaede, who was transferred to the headquarters in her usual shrine maiden attire while being apprehended on both sides by two female soldiers, timidly tried to get an explanation as she couldn't understand what was going on in this hall that was filled with a tense atmosphere.

While the soldiers looked at each other's faces wondering who should answer that question, Frau spoke up gravely, "Right now we are in the middle of an important mission ~nano."

The surrounding soldiers nodded in compliance, but even if she could now comprehend the serious atmosphere, Kaede still didn't grasp the reason why she had been brought here.

"Haah...so how's that related to me?"

"It's no exaggeration to say that your existence holds the key to the final outcome ~no."

"That's not really an explanation for anything, is it...?"

Due to Frau's words which seemed to put on airs, Kaede was at the point where she would normally start to get slightly irritated, but being easily overwhelmed by the strained mood around her, she couldn't do much more than feebly give that reply.

While thinking, 'If Renya was here at such a time, he would likely give me some kind of explanation even while being reluctant to do so,' Kaede looked around her to find some help, but as if they had arranged it in advance, all present avoided meeting Kaede's eyes.

'It looks like I have no other option but to go with the flow and see through what's going on by

myself,' Kaede judged.

"...I can get you to at least provide a chair for me, right?"

'If I'm told to keep standing like this while apprehended on both sides, they probably won't be able to complain later even if I go on a rampage here no matter what the situation might be,' Kaede thought, but even Frau agreed with as much.

"Of course ~nano. We have also prepared tea and sweets on the table over there ~no. If you like, I can have them prepare a light meal at once ~no."

"You're rather well prepared..."

While being astonished by the overly good preparations, Kaede was dragged away by the two female soldiers to a table that had been set up along the wall, and provided tea and sweets as Kaede said.

"Kaede-sama, I have brought a seat. Please sit down."

One of the female soldiers left Kaede's side, quietly brought a chair over, and offered it to Kaede. While choosing the timing when the preparation of a seat had been finished, the woman on the opposite side separated from Kaede, and began to prepare tea and sweets.

Once Kaede sat down while being surprised by their decent performance, a tea cup was immediately placed down in front of her. The female soldier poured a piping hot, amber tea into the cup. The tea's aroma tickled Kaede's nose. Cookies and scones were put down next to the tea cup. Next, several small bottles containing honey and different kinds of jams were lined up in a row.

"This time we have prepared black tea. I don't know whether the tea agrees with your palate. Since we prepared in a hurry, we will immediately arrange for anything if there's something you desire."

"We have been told by the Head Maid to make sure that you don't experience any inconveniences. Please tell us at once if there's anything."

"You two...I had wondered whether you're soldiers, but it sure looks like you're Renya's maids..."

Kaede, who stared at the faces of the female soldiers who had brought her here once more, noticed at that point that their faces matched two maids working at Renya's mansion. Kaede didn't know whether them wearing soldier's uniforms was some kind of prank or an act, but from the fact that two properly trained maids had been assigned to her, she understood that they apparently intended to treat her properly.

Deciding to go with the optimistic view that it shouldn't be anything so bad in this case, Kaede immediately started to enjoy the tea and sweets that had been prepared for her. After all, when it came to food, the dishes prepared in Renya's mansion didn't know the concept of compromising. Since it was a safe bet that it would be delicious, Kaede decided that it would be a loss to not partake in them.

"Can I have a second serving of these, too?"

"Please enjoy the tea and sweets to your heart's content."

"What about takeout?"

"I will ask the Head Maid, but...I think it won't be a problem."

While listening to the words, "We will wrap it up when you go back home," of the maids in soldier uniforms, Kaede enjoyed the tea and sweets without any reservation. If she could even take back some souvenirs on top of enjoying an all-you-can-eat-and-drink, it was no real problem for Kaede to be restrained for a bit.

All in all, many beastmen were gluttons. In Kaede's case, she was still young, and thus was able to wolf down a considerable amount of food if she started to eat for real. The provided sweets vanished from the table in no time. Kaede immediately ordered another helping while gulping down the black tea.

"With this, we probably won't displease Kaede either.

While thinking so, Frau started to pray that she would quickly receive a report about Leopard's whereabouts or his capture among the incoming reports.

"Discovering Leopard or running out of sweets, the match will be decided by what comes first ~nano..."

"It sounds like it will become a very disadvantageous match for our side. Frau sighed softly while harboring such a premonition.