

Chapter 206 - It seems to be an Order from Renya

"What are your plans with us?"

Those were the first words of Lepard after he was brought to Renya's mansion's audience hall with his hands bound behind his back by a rope. It went without saying, but if Lepard were to be willed and used his superhuman strength, he could instantly tear off the binding, even if they were to change it from a rope to a chain.

Lepard not doing so was supposedly owed to his worry about Kaede who was loosely stretched out on a sofa alongside the wall, laying there limp after having drunk too much alcohol, on top of his official position he couldn't escape from, but reality was actually different.

"Fufun, oh hero, are you so worried about thine future ~nano?"

Even now Frau clad in a black robe laughed scornfully while making sure to look down on Lepard from her seat of honor. Her appearance as she crossed her legs while sitting deeply on her chair and entrusting her back to the chair's back was the very definition of a villain, but since the chair had been unfortunately built with Renya's stature in mind, its size didn't fit Frau. Frau luffed her crossed legs without them reaching the ground.

"As long as Kaede is safe...I don't care what happens to me."

Once Lepard said so meekly, the corners of Frau's mouth twisted, "Fuhahahaha! What an admirable resolve, hero ~nano!"

"Frau-sama...Kurz-sama is going to wake up if you're so loud." The one calmly retorting Frau was Keith, who was standing behind her.

Once Frau looked towards a section along the wall, Kurz, who had been peacefully sleeping on the sofa there while holding the two beasman priestesses on both his sides, revealing a slightly peevish expression was reflected in her eyes. Frau's figure on top of the seat of honor collapsed alongside a sound similar to space being faintly torn apart.

Lepard and Keith were about to become dumbfounded, but immediately noticed that only the peeled-off black robe was laying atop the chair. When they wondered just where the robe's contents had vanished to, they saw Frau in her apron dress trying to lull Kurz into sleep again while gently caressing his head next to him.

"How fast..."

"Nothing less of Frau-sama."

Frau properly confirmed the changes on Kurz' expression to make sure that he was calmly sleeping at last while being watched by Lepard, who raised his voice in astonishment, and Keith who expressed his adoration of Frau. She then returned to her chair with the same speed that she used when leaving it, and quickly changed into the black robe again.

"Fuhahahaha~... What an admirable resolve...hero ~nano!" Frau restated with a voice that barely reached Lepard's ears.

"You're resuming from there?" Muttering that with a sigh while dropping his shoulders in disappointment, Lepard noticed Albert, who was still laying on the ground while not moving at all, and Grün who was watching the situation with great interest, sitting on another sofa.

"I recall you said something about gathering all four heroes as there's an order from Renya. What does he intend to make us do?"

"You see, master has apparently negotiated with the katurul ~nano."

"...Haaah!?"

As Lepard reflexively yelled out loudly, Frau raised her index finger in front of her lips, instructing him to stay quiet. It was an instruction out of fear that Kurz, whom she had put to sleep at great pains, would wake up again, but probably because she had just lulled him into sleep, Kurz slept with a carefree, happy expression when Frau and Lepard turned their eyes towards him.

"What are you going to do if he wakes up ~nano...?"

"Ugh, sorry...but, isn't it kind of normal for me to raise my voice if I get surprised?"

Even while feeling apologetic, Lepard at least tried to defend himself against Frau's remark that sounded as though she was blaming him.

Lepard, a beastman, also knew of the existence of the katurul. There existed port towns on the beastmen continent as well. Limiting the fishing to a small area once it was deemed as safe from any harm by the katurul could be called something similar to commonly shared rule across all continents. Even the beastman warriors, who had many battle maniacs among them, possessed enough common sense to stress avoiding a battle over looking for one when it came to an opponent with a size reaching a global scale.

"If you're going to be surprised about each and every of master's actions, it will be bad for your heart ~no."

Lepard smiled bitterly at himself for running counter to his surprise, and agreeing with Frau's comment, which seemed to shred common sense to pieces. Keith seemed to think something similar. Him forming a smile on his lips was visible from Lepard's location.

"Well, I suppose you're right. Leaving that aside, was the katurul a being one could negotiate with?"

"Even Frau doesn't understand that part well, and the letter didn't explain any details either ~no."

"Letter, eh...? Wait, can I ask something I want to know?"

Frau tilted her head in puzzlement just what might be so interesting about a letter upon Lepard reacting to that word. Lepard confronted Frau with a question he had suddenly come up with.

"Was there any mention of capturing the heroes in that letter?"

"It said to give the four heroes the following orders ~no."

Once Frau honestly answered Lepard's question, his eyes became slightly glassy. Frau, who didn't grasp the meaning behind that change, waited for Lepard's further words while puzzled.

"It doesn't mention anything about a capture, right?"

"No, it doesn't ~no. That's why we talked it properly over with Grün and Kurz ~no."

"How about an explanation about the treatment towards Albert and me then!?"

"It's a free interpretation of the letter's content and a result of your usual behavior ~nano. Any objections?"

Being asked back, Lepard was about to reply with a loud voice, but remembering Kurz, he held his words back, mumbling something under his breath, and didn't object in the end. It's because he fully understood before even protesting that it would be pointless, on top of no arguments coming to his mind at all. Lepard had comprehended that he would waste his breath and time by just doing something futile, even if he did it.

"Now that I got you to understand, I will formally inform you about the order from master ~no."

"Yeah...I got it already, so please remove the rope...it ain't like I'm a criminal in the first place, right? I won't run away anymore either."

Once Lepard requested this while putting a full dose of resignation into his voice, the rope binding Lepard's hands slid to the ground with just a glance from Frau. It's not like it had been tied so tightly, but Lepard breathed out in relief, seemingly relaxing a bit now that he regained the freedom of his arms, but seeing the cut end of the rope on the ground, a shiver traveled down his spine. It's not because the rope had been untied, but because he could see such a sharp, clear slit on the rope that he felt a chill.

"You...aren't you just continuing to deviate from the domain of a fairy more and more?"

"How rude. Frau is a cute silky-san ~nano!"

Frau protested while clenching her fists with a cute gesture of puffing up her cheeks, obviously showing her deep-rooted unwillingness to consent here, but no one showed an inkling of intention to support her case.

"...Do you object ~no?"

Once she released the clenched fists, crossed her arms in front of her chest and lifted her head in haughtiness, everyone present in the audience hall averted their eyes very quickly due to the oppressive coercion suddenly ruling the place. It was everyone except Kurz and the two beastman priestesses who were sleeping. Even the bound Albert rolled his body over while in a state similar to a caterpillar, trying to escape Frau's gaze.

"Since I feel like the talks aren't getting anywhere, wouldn't it be better to shelve this issue for the moment and have us hear Margrave-dono's order?"

It was Grün who threw a lifeline at this point since Lepard couldn't speak up as he received the full brunt of Frau's coercion in his position of being right in front of her even after averting his eyes.

Grün, who tried to not stand out at all on top of being calm and mild-mannered to begin with, having joined the talks from his side for a change was apparently owed to him regarding Lepard's current situation as that dangerous.

Frau showed a somewhat displeased expression due to Grün's mediation, but since there was definitely no sign of the conversation going anywhere at this rate, she stopped folding her arms and released her coercion, seemingly having judged she wouldn't be able to convey Renya's order to the heroes otherwise.

"Master's order is for you to dig a shaft at a designated location ~nano."

"Shaft? How long?"

Holding back Lepard, who was about to say something, with a hand, Grün asked while walking up next to Lepard from the wall.

'Lepard was very likely going to complain about being ordered to do public works again, but seeing that it's Renya's order, Frau won't pull back, no matter how much he tries to complain about it,' Grün judged. 'In that case, it's pointless to speak up here. Based on what I have heard of the orders' details for the time being, I think it's more constructive to make an effort in alleviating the objective and the work conditions.'

"It looks like it should have a diameter of 100 meters and a little depth of 30 meters ~no. It's not all that difficult ~no."

"I still think that's a fairly difficult task, though..."

"Going by the initial plans, there were talks about digging a tunnel until the port town master is currently visiting ~no. Compared to such a task, this much is a breeze, I believe ~no."

Lepard became dumbstruck after being told about the initial plan. Even for Grün there was no way to simply agree here, but he limited it to showing a troubled smile. And both of them were almost simultaneously relieved that it hadn't come to this.

Assuming they would have fallen into a situation where they had to dig such a tunnel, both fully understood that it wasn't difficult to predict that they mightn't have a choice besides doing the job of continuously digging an endlessly long tunnel until that port town.

"It's a job where you will precisely set up a facility after flattening the bottom of the dug shaft, and piling up stones ~nano."

"For what are you going to use something like that? Is it for a ritual to extol the katurul or such?"

Lepard grumbled while assuming that even the task of piling up stones would be allotted to them.

In response, Frau continued with a detailed explanation which she apparently didn't intend to hide, "We will use it for a transfer device that will be connected with the port town. Frau will handle the connection to the katurul and the set up on the transfer, so that part will be fine ~no. I'd like you heroes to also build the architectural structure on the surface once you finished digging the shaft. ~no."

"Is it fine to consider it as a temporary storage facility for the goods that will be moved through the transfer while adding something that won't allow the transfer device to be exposed to wind and weather?"

"As expected of you, Grün. You get it quickly ~no. Lepard, you should follow his example as well ~nano." Frau bobbed her head in approval upon Grün's question.

For the time being it seemed as though he had been praised, but Grün wasn't sure whether it would be fine to normally accept that praise.

Lepard, who had been used as a comparison target, clicked his tongue while looking sullen, but then straightened himself in panic after being glared at by Frau.

"Keith, use the soldiers and start building a paved road connecting Klinge and the facility ~no. You don't have to worry since we will request the arrangement of the materials from Mayria ~no."

"As you order. However, it's very likely that Mayria-sama will file a complaint." Keith said while bowing respectfully.

In response, Frau took off the black robe, and casually tossed it on the floor while returning to her usual apron dress appearance.

"The management of Klinge and the rest of the margraviate should be more or less on track ~nano. She shouldn't be so busy right now ~nano. However, since I would feel bad about placing a burden on just Mayria-ane-sama, I will give my agreement if she were to request an increase of personnel for her office ~nano."

"Increase the number of our helpers as well!"

'If we leave her to her own devices, we'll be definitely forced to do everything from the shaft digging to the stonework with just the four of us. No, since it's not like Frau will make Kurz do anything too strenuous, we'll have to actually do it with three people', thought Lepard, and desperately yelled out.

"Even if I were to assign ordinary people to the heroes, they would simply become hindrances as they wouldn't be able to keep up with the work speed ~nano." Frau declared, audibly snorting through her nose in amusement.

While once again holding back Lepard who was about to complain, Grün said to Frau after thinking it over for a bit, "It's certainly as you say in regards to the shaft digging, but I think it doesn't really matter whether we or specialized laborers do the work of piling up stones. Can't we have you

increase the manpower, even if it's just for that side of the work?"

"Oh my, Grün, you're quite skilled at negotiating...but, sure, that kind of work doesn't seem to be particularly related to the heroes ~nano. Rather, craftsmen might be more suited for it ~no. ...Okay, I will assign several helpers for that part ~no." Frau said very, very slowly, as if putting her thoughts in order while speaking.

Grün's fist silenced Lepard, who was about to snap at her, by stabbing into Lepard's flank.

'He was very likely on the verge of saying something along the lines of excluding it from our workload if she can send helpers anyway', Grün assessed, 'but it wouldn't be very funny if Frau would cancel the dispatch of helpers after getting displeased by him saying something imprudent.'

Watching Lepard, who had received a fairly strong blow to his unguarded, soft flank, collapse while having difficulty breathing with a disinterested look, Frau clapped her hands after seeing that Lepard had gone completely silent.

"Okay, now, that finishes the talks. I won't tell you anything unreasonable as starting to work right away. Everyone's work will start tomorrow ~no. Got it ~no?"

"As you command."

Kurz' group was still sleeping, and Lepard had dropped out moments ago after being knocked out. And except for Albert, who was still rolled up, everyone in the hall bowed while confirming her order. This was the end of the meeting to pass on Renya's orders.