

## **Chapter 1 - It seems I came back**

The place regarded as the most important location of the Kunugi Margraviate was Klinge, the city where Margrave Renya Kunugi's castle stood.

Even though there existed many big and small cities on the human continent, it received an evaluation of being abnormal by those of an established reputation. It went even as far as Klinge being titled as the strangest city on the human continent within almost not time. Moreover, that status was in the process of being set in stone at an astounding pace.

This city, which was surrounded by a wall covered in ivies as it was also the city closest to the Miasma Forest, had become the center of attention, be it inside or outside the principality.

Of course a considerable number of spies had been dispatched to this city, and originally all these spies should have provided a huge amount of information, disregarding whether that information would be true or not. However, after a short time those, who had dispatched those spies, started to doubt their eyes, ears, and sanity. That's because not a single of the spies, who had been sent out in droves, returned to their employer. Not one, without even a single exception.

A man-eating city.

Klinge had reached the point that it was called like that by those living in the dark areas of society, but on the other hand, it was also a city that received high praise by those living in places the sun reached.

Just going by its living environment, Klinge possessed very decent, full water and sewer services, and any building in the city could benefit from their blessings. Even if you looked at the public order, soldiers with somehow strangely good movements continuously patrolled the city, and slums, which you'd find in any city, didn't exist here at all. The existence of poor people simply wasn't permitted since there was work to be found at each corner, as long as one wasn't too picky.

Above all things, the taxes were low.

If you were to ask how low they were, it could be described with the comparison that three families could cover the taxes in Klinge with the tax amount of one family in any other city. The answer as to why the taxes were so low was simple: The treasury of Margrave Kunugi was bursting with all kinds of jewels and money.

The magic stones produced in heaps within the Kunugi Margraviate, the produce imported from the elven country, the processed goods based on that produce, the monster resources yielded by the forest with its fortress which Keith and the others built during their previous training session by Renya, and the lumber produced by the forest itself brought about a mountain of riches for Klinge.

However, Renya, who should normally be the one to invest and manage those riches, had absolutely no talent in that field. On top of that, because Renya had the disposition of being interested in the things he could buy with money but having absolutely no interest in money itself, Mayria and the civil officials under her were currently managing all those funds, allowing them to pay those funds as taxes to the Trident Principality.

Renya had no clue about the detailed account of this amount of money, but it was an amount any other noble would never be able to surpass. Moreover, as territory closest to the Miasma Forest, its taxes had been set to be cheap with the argument of its location, which in lieu allowed Renya to pay most of the taxes out of his pocket, which was another reason for the low taxes in Klinge. Of course it's not like he could cover all costs, so it went without saying that the rest became the people's taxes, but still, with the taxes being less than half that of other territories, it was a natural outcome for people trying to somehow settle down and merchants trying to get into the wallets of the residents, which they concluded to be full, endlessly streaming into the Kunugi Margraviate.

"Is it really all that bad if I just run all of this over by coincidence?" Emil muttered with her fingers tapping the steering wheel in the driver's seat of the car, which she had built, while looking somewhat irritated.

In response, Shion and Rona, who had been sitting in the backseats, got startled and were about to lean forward, but as the backseat - originally intended for two people - had become slightly cramped with Kilie having joined them, both of them ended up wriggling around without being able to move as they wanted.

Emil let the car fly across the well-maintained street in sections with few people on the way back from the Gordonal Barony, but as they got closer to Klinge, the number of travelers, merchants, and adventurer-like people started to increase, giving Emil no choice but to slow down their speed. Driving in a situation where she couldn't bring out the car's speed seemed to be quite stressful to her. Those words just now escaped her mouth unconsciously, but if they were to change the road into a splatter scene from hell for such a reason, it would start nasty rumors about the margraviate being very dangerous.

"Should we put away the car and walk?"

While believing that he still didn't get too stressed, Emil frowned at Renya's suggestion while shaking her head, "This way is still better than walking."

"Please endure then."

Even if the pace was slow, it was faster and more comfortable than walking. Given that they sent all their luggage ahead of them through the katurul-based transfer facility that was apparently put into operation, the group's load was light, but as they felt that not having to walk would be quite relaxing stamina-wise and on a mental level, the three in the backseat also agreed with Emil's bitter words.



"Rather, how about forcing them to make way by telling them that Margrave Kunugis is coming through?"

"I don't really care much about incurring the enmity of others, but that still doesn't mean that I want to provoke it deliberately, you know?" Renya cast a glare at Kilie who said this as if having just come up with a good idea.

It'd be another matter if they were to have some kind of urgent business to attend to, but Renya didn't have the slightest intention to wield his authority as lord for fun. In Renya's eyes, this way of thinking was only natural, but it couldn't be called common for the nobles of this world. Knowing that, Shion and Rona smiled being somewhat proud of him, and the sullen face of Emil turned into a wry smile.

"...What is it?" Renya was bewildered by the suddenly changed atmosphere within the car.

As if acting as the representative for the women in the car, Shion answered with a laugh, "Nah, we just thought that it's very like you, Renya."

Revealing a faltering look for an instant in response to Shion's reply, Renya turned his eyes at the landscape outside the car, and remained silent without answering.

'It's pretty obvious that he's pondering whether Shion's words just now count as simple praise or if they contain some kind of hidden meaning', Shion and the others somehow grasped and didn't comment on Renya's behavior in any way. With a visibly, slightly improved mood, Emil adjusted her hold on the wheel once again.

"By the way..."

As long as there was nothing in particular to talk about, silence naturally dominated the car's interior during the drive. After Emil's dangerous muttering, their car slowly advanced along the road for a while again while dodging people, carriages, and wagons, but the one who broke that silence was Renya.

"Somehow I think that we will reach Klinge very soon, but how about you?"

"Let's see...it should be anytime soon, I'd say?"

No matter how highly efficient and far beyond the standards in this work the car built by Emil might be, Emil's skill didn't go so far that she could reproduce a navigation system as it was added to cars in Renya's former world. In the first place, that was only reasonable since it wasn't as though they had launched any satellites into space for that to be feasible. While calculating the direction and distance on the map as driver, Emil somehow inferred their current location by intuition.

"Are you sure about the city being in that direction?"

Although you might summarize the terrain as plains in a word, there were quite a few ups and downs. Hence the city of Klinge wasn't yet visible from the location of their car. And yet Emil was sure about Klinge laying in the direction pointed out by Renya according to her own intuition.

"I don't think I'm wrong, but why are you asking?"

"I see...somehow...I feel like something similar to smoke is rising over there." Renya said while narrowing his eyes.

In response, the atmosphere in the car immediately became tense.

Since Klinge was a city inhabited by quite a few people, it was normal for smoke to rise up there to some extent. However, something that would cause smoke to be visible at a distance, where the city itself wasn't in sight yet, couldn't be quite considered as a frequent occurrence. Going by that thinking, they couldn't think of whatever was causing the smoke in Klinge right now as being an overly good omen.

"Ah, you don't need to worry. The smoke's color is white, so it's probably water vapor."

'It's not 100% clear yet, though.

Although it was a result from the distance still being fairly high, Renya judged that the true identity of the smoke, which he caught sight of, didn't seem to be one what would occur when something was being burned, but rather something similar to steam rising from a bath.

"Water vapor?"

Although it felt like no real surprise here, it was Shion who asked back. Going by the fact that Rona was also pulling a somewhat questioning face, Renya perceived that this word apparently wasn't common in this world. Because it didn't look at all like that, if going by Emil's reaction, Renya thought that there might be some who know about this word, and on top used some time to brood over how he should explain it. In the end he came up with a somewhat passable reply.

"Would you understand if I told you that it's the smoke occurring during baths?"

"Ah, you're talking about steam. If it's that, I know about it, but...was there any facility in Klinge that would release so much steam that it'd be visible this far away?" Shion asked curiously, but even Renya couldn't think of any such place.

'At the very least it shouldn't have existed at the time when we left Klinge. In that case it'd follow logic that it'd be something built during our stay in the Gordonal Barony, but there's too little information to conclude what might have been built there.

"Frau, huh...?"

"Frau, for sure."

"It's gotta be Frau~"

Three people voiced out the same name in three different ways. Shion turned her eyes towards the outside with a gloomy face, Rona sighed while placing a hand on her cheek as if troubled, and Emil fell prostrate towards the front while draping her body over the wheel. Any of them basically commented, "That girl again, huh?" As expected of Renya, he had to at least come to her defense here, and thus he was on the verge of saying that it'd be unfair towards Frau, who was working so earnestly for their cause. After flapping his mouth open and shut for a while, and then remaining silent for a further while, he closed his mouth in the end for some reason.

"Renya?"

Seemingly worried about Renya who had a somewhat dispirited air hanging around him, Shion bent herself forward from the backseat and tried to peer at Renya's face from behind.

"I didn't find any counterargument." Renya muttered with a disappointed tone while covering his hand with both hands.

As a result, Shion tapped his shoulder, obviously telling him to not mind it.

Whenever some kind of big incident took place in Klinge, the ones behind it were most of the time either Renya or Frau. Renya himself had fully grasped that fact. Since one of the two possible ringleaders wasn't in Klinge right now, the possibility of it being the other one was extremely high. Going by his experience so far, Renya couldn't identify any words capable of denying Frau's involvement.

By the way, another candidate would be Leopard, and the dark horse would be Shion. Emil was someone who had the potential to jump up high in that ranking if things were to go west for her, but because of her position as researcher, she would usually take measures so that things wouldn't totally go out of control even if she were to fail in some kind of experiment, and otherwise conceal everything in secrecy, so it didn't happen often for her name to come up whenever these kind of stories came up.

"For starters...it's wrong to make decisions based on nothing but possibilities. Even if we know that the probability is extremely high going by past examples."

"You're right. It's wrong to jump to conclusions. It's not like the possibility of it being something completely different is zero."

Shion immediately agreed with Renya's words, which he had somehow managed to come up with after some time had passed. No matter how low her ability to read the mood was, Shion apparently had scruples to deliver the finishing blow at the remark, which Renya had squeezed out after being unable to bring up even one counterargument in the defense of Frau who idolized him so dearly.

Shion tried to soften the mood at least a bit by immediately agreeing with Renya on this as she didn't have the heart to kick him while he was laying on the ground already anyway, but just then Kilie dropped a bomb.

"But, if that's the most likely case here, acting under that assumption might also have the highest probability to avoid the situation worsening any further, I thi...moguuhh!?"

Apparently having a bad premonition the instant Kilie opened her mouth, Shion blocked Renya's ears with her hands from behind, and Rona, who had judged that it would be better to shut up Kilie after letting her talk for a bit, forcibly silenced Kilie by grabbing her head and pushing it into her chest.

Renya, who had his ears blocked by Shion, didn't even try to look at the state inside the car, and kept staring at the landscape outside as if not having heard anything. Kilie, who was embraced by Rona, struggled for a while, but eventually became obedient after her limbs lost all power, limply dropping down.

"Jeez, this before we reached our destination. This is gonna be a pain, I can tell." Contrary to what she said, Emil smiled happily.

While stepping a bit stronger on the car's accelerator as she believed that it might be better for them to get back to Klinge as fast as possible, Emil drove the car off the road, continuing to plow across the grassland with its intense undulations.

