

## **Chapter 253 - Invitation to the Mansion**

We arrived at the open front gate. The big tigers Alray and Hueremy were positioned on both sides of the door. They were decorations made out of porcelain, but they emitted a presence similar to that of guardian lions at shrines.

Suddenly the noses of the two tigers showed a reaction. Their porcelain noses became pink-colored, as if blood was flowing through their noses' capillaries. Living, pink tiger noses; it was amusing to watch, exactly because the rest remained a porcelain decoration.

Those noses twitched and made cute sniffing movements. Their noses began to blow out air as you'd see it tigers normally do. Alray and Hueremy had apparently identified my presence through the smell.

And then, starting from those living noses, their foreheads became red as if nutrients streamed into their faces, and fur as typical for tigers grew on their heads.

Alray and Hueremy, who had become head-only tigers, let the mana flow from their heads to their necks, torso and lastly down to their paws. Their fur moved in waves as it suddenly grew out. Eventually the two completely transformed into two, living big tigers.

"Nyaaa——"

"Nyangoo——"

After meowing cheerfully, they leaped upon me, once again.

You think I'll let myself be pushed down like the other day!? With an imposing stance, I caught and tightly hugged the two tigers with my arms, as if to experience their fluffiness.

"N, nyaon."

It looks like Rollo got influenced by Alray and Hueremy, too. She jumped at my calf while in her black cat form, and clung to it like a doll.

My partner's claws dug into the dark green fabric. However, to no surprise, seeing as it's made out of Hal'Konk's Mmhwee, even a divine beast's claws didn't penetrate the cloth.

"Enchanto!?"

"...Shuuya, those tigers are..."

"You say it! For decorations to suddenly turn into wild beasts...moreover, to hug you...are you okay?"

Bon, Zaga, and Rubia were naturally surprised by the two tigers. While feeling their looks on me, I gently stroked the excited tigers.

After enjoying the softness of their fur for a while, I had Alray and Hueremy separate from me.

"Alray, Hueremy, I'm happy about your feelings, but please take care of gate watching again."

"Nyaaa."

"Nyangon."

They meowed with cat voices, and swiftly separated from me. Once they returned to their positions left and right of the gate, they transformed into decorations again. Cute, majestic gatekeepers.

"Whoaaa~"

"They fully turned back into decorations."

"Encha, encanto!"

Bon and Rubia ran up to the tiger statues. Zaga also got close to them with a slight delay. Their majesty could be called into question here, but all three of them touched the statues and examined them by continuously stroking their surface.

After spitting into his hands, Bon briskly rubbed Alray's statues with those hands, but what's the deal with that? He had started to scrub it. He's definitely not doing encanto, is he? I was slightly worried, but nothing happened.

It looks like he thought that he'd get a divine blessing or some effect of good luck if he touched it.

"...I think the greeting with the gatekeepers is done with that? Please enter the courtyard for starters."

"Sure."

"Okay! I'm going first! It's sooo big."

"Enchanto!"

Yui and Kaldo were training in the left corner of the courtyard.

After Zaga threw a glance at their practice, he asked, "Is the smithing room over there?"

"You can tell? Yep, it is."

It appears that Zaga had been more interested in the workshop of Mysty located in the right corner than the training.

"I'm curious. Please allow me to take a look later."

"Sure, but it might be a bit messy in there."

"Nyaon, nya——"

After Rollo meowed something that sounded like 『Let's play nya, come Bon-kun nya』, she ran over to in front of the stables where Balmint and Popobumu were.

"——Encha! Enchanto!"

Bon reacted to Rollo's calling, and chased after her. Once Bon joined up with them...

"Nyano, nyaa~"

"Enchanto!"

"Gaooo, gaona."

"Pubopubo!"

Just what the hell's going on over there...

Rollo repeatedly jumped up while showing off her belly. Bon-kun danced. Balmint replied by spreading his wings, and Popobumu blew his trumpet as if giving the rhythm for the song.

At that point, Alray and Hueremy joined the fray as well. They were in their mode of acting like whimsical cats, having stopped working as gatekeepers.

This settles it. They're a total miscast at the gate.

The female cats repeatedly performed weird jumps and rolled around on the ground. Then they showed their bellies to Rollo, the cat corps leader.

After unleashing a series of Enchantos at Alray, Bon-kun caught her, and lifted her up in the air like a little child. He screamed, "Enchantoooo", as if saying, "Heave, heave, ho"

It was a scene out of a fantastic movie.

"Gahahaha, how funny. A huge mansion where your friends train just like you'd do at a martial arts dojo and a huge dragon lives...moreover, that dragon dances with the cats and Bon, on top of being close to Popobumu who would usually become its fodder. It's strange and amusing."

"...Y-You're right. Bon-kun seems to be in very high spirits, too."

Rubia totally looked as if she wanted to join that Märchen-like zoo activity over there.

"...Going by the situation there, it's unlikely that they'll calm down anytime soon, so let's go over to the main building."

"Gotcha."

"Okay."

We climbed the small, barrier-free slope located at the main building's entrance, and proceeded to the entrance hall further down the terrace.

After opening the door, I adopted a pose of lowering my head like a butler. I showed the two into the building.

"Welcome back, Master."

"Welcome back!"

The servants under the lead of Head Maid Isabell came to greet us. She didn't make any retorts at me acting like a butler, though. They ignored it. I wanted to hear Rebecca's retort of "This really isn't like you."

While thinking so, I pulled myself together.

"...I'm home. My friends are visiting, so please serve us black tea."

"Certainly, Master."

Isabell bowed, and then started to order the servants by exchanging eye signals with them. I looked back at Zaga and Rubia.

"Now, come on in and sit down over there."

"Sure."

"Okay."

Zaga and Rubia met my eyes and nodded. They demurely sat down at the edges of their chairs. With their heads restlessly moving left and right, they were fidgety and couldn't quite settle down. Rubia's behavior was especially strange. At the end of her line of sight...was the enshrinement of Helme, the meditation spot of Helme. Sculptures that used Helme as motif were inlaid over there as pillars.

I think Helme is kinda different from "namu namu" and Ω. It's also different from being like Fulfillment Meditation. Anyway, Helme was in the middle of her meditation over there. In other words, the usual.

Noticing me, Helme slowly opened her eyes like a Buddha. She moved her lips with her long eyelashes trembling.

"...Your Excellency, welcome back."

You a goddess, or what!?

I held back on making that retort.

"Aye, don't mind us and go on meditating."

"Okay."

I have to introduce Helme. Come to think of it...it's unexpectedly their first time seeing her?

"...She's the Water Spirit of Everlasting Darkness Helme. She seems to be in the middle of meditation."

"Eh? That lady is a spirit-sama...? I was convinced that she might be a scaled person or a half-beastwoman."

Helme current appearance was completely that of a humanoid. Her body also seemed to be covered by clothes, and no sheets of water spray were emitted from it. Given that she wasn't floating either, she probably looked like a normal demi-human.

"A spirit-sama, huh? The dark elf attendant is nice, too. Shuuya, you're an amazing guy. At this rate, you might even make a Sosari into your comrade one day, no?"

"Sosari, eh? Who knows."

I have one as an acquaintance with Priestess Peladas, though.

"However, this mansion...feels like a high-ranking noble was living here, but I can also sense a gentle, commoner-like atmosphere."

"Yeah, but you will feel nervous with this size."

Both stated their impressions. They appear to still be tense. They haven't touched the black tea and fruits served by the servants either.

"You guys, no need to be so nervous. Come on, there's black tea and fruits for the taking." I tried to encourage them while focusing on smiling cheerfully.

"I-I got it, I got it." Zaga laughed through his nose, and stuffed his cheeks with fruits while sipping his tea.

It was funny how his beard got dyed violet.

"Okay. Oh, Zaga-san, your beard has become violet! Fufu, ahaha~" Rubia burst into laughter, unable to endure any longer.

"This goddamn beard. No helpin' it."

He wiped his beard with his short, thick arm, ending up dirtying his arm next. At once Anna got a napkin ready, and handed it to Zaga.

"A-Ah, sorry, young lady."

"No, do not mind me. I shall wipe it for you... We still have more of the tea and fruits, so please eat as much as you like."

Anna wiped Zaga's hands with the clean cloth in her hand. Her smile was truly wonderful.

"Ooh, I see. Thanks, beautiful lady."

Did Anna catch Zaga's interest? For a change he had a lewd, slack look on his face.

Or rather...I see that for the first time...

He mentioned it when we talked about the black-haired woman earlier, but here I fully experienced that Zaga was a man before being a craftsman. Well, the frilly maid attire she's wearing is something emphasizing her chest because of its tightness. Besides, he's being gently wiped by a pretty woman...it's only natural to react to that.

I can painfully understand Zaga's feelings as a man.

"...I will drink some tea as well then." Rubia smiled as she watched Zaga's slackened, mellowed expression while drinking her tea.

Whatever she might say, she's happy about Zaga's delightful look, isn't she?

While smiling like that, Rubia yelled out, "...Whoa, what a tasty tea," while holding her teacup in both hands.

Then a relaxed time of drinking tea and eating fruits started. We continued to have fun by chatting about everything like the amazingness of Bon's enchanting techniques, the hammering state of magic steel during smithing, the timing of heating, the adventurer clients of Zaga, and the clients who tried to hit on Rubia.