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ヴァナディース

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Madan no Ou to Vanadis

vol.13

by Tsukasa Kawaguchi

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Chapter 1 – The Moonlight Knight Army’s Defeat

When she woke up, Eleonora Viltaria — Elen noticed that she was made to take an unnatural posture.

She sat down on the ground with her back against a long and narrow iron pole, and both her arms were restrained above her. When her consciousness cleared up, she felt a dull pain throughout her body.

—Where on earth is this place.....?

The surroundings were lit up by an extremely dim light, preventing her from seeing anything. It was impossible to tell whether it was day or night. She could hear the sounds of clattering coming from within the darkness, but was unable to discern any voices from it.

When she tried moving her hands, something coiled around both her arms made a jingling sound.

It was chains. The cold, unpleasant sensation made Elen regain her composure.

Narrowing down her eyes, Elen fixedly stared into the darkness. She first needed to accustom her eyes to the darkness. At the same time, she searched for her memory in order to remember what happened before she lost consciousness. Why was she put in such a situation?

“That’s right. I, by the enemy—”

Elen’s ruby-like pupils glinted, tinged with anger. However, she immediately calmed herself.

This was the enemy camp. Rather than getting angry, there were other things to do before.

She turned her attention to her own body. Various parts of her body were hurting due to the injuries she suffered in the battlefield. However, she could not feel that any of her bones were broken.

She moved to see whether she could pull out her hands from the chains coiling around both of her arms, but it ended with only the chains jingling. The chains seemed to be connected to the iron pole behind Elen, not even allowing her to stand up. The iron pole was stuck deeply into the ground, and it seemed impossible to move it by just pressing against it with her back.

While she was doing all that, her eyes finally got used to the darkness and, though faintly, she could see the surroundings.

—Seems to be a tent.

The sounds of clattering that she could hear from outside were probably the enemy soldiers'. There was nothing other than an old table inside the tent; it seemed to have been installed only to confine Elen.

“—Arifal”

She called the name of her beloved Dragonic Tool. A Dragonic Tool should instantly appear in the hand of its master when called.

But no matter how much time passed, the familiar sensation did not come back in Elen's hand.

“Don't tell me that it's because of these chains.....?”

A shocked voice leaked from her mouth. The Wind Princess of the Silverflash knew the existence of a metal on which the Dragonic Tool's power did not work at all. It was the same for the Brune Kingdom's sacred sword Durandal, and the chains that were on the Double-headed Dragon and the Fire Drake that had previously been deployed by Duke Thenardier.

—Even when I was held down by them, I couldn't use my Dragonic Skill, either.

She remembered the events that occurred just before she lost

consciousness.

She fought with the enemy troops and lost. Her allies' camp collapsed and the soldiers began to escape disorderly in every direction.

Elen stayed back and fought in the enemy camp to buy time for her allies to escape.

Before she knew it, she had been surrounded by a large number of enemy soldiers.

Elen, who was being suppressed due to the overwhelming fatigue of fighting for extended periods of time, had no choice but to use her Dragonic Skill. She was not using it to defeat the enemies around her, but instead to escape the encirclement by cladding herself in wind.

But, the Dragonic Skill did not activate. Thinking about it now, she had probably been led into a place where chains similar to these had been placed around beforehand.

As her surprise and confusion created a split second opening, Elen failed to completely avoid a blade that an enemy soldier unleashed.

Although the wound was on her arm, it was shallow and would not impede her fighting capabilities.

However, soon after she thought so, Elen lost her sense of balance and fell down. Her arms and legs became numb and her vision shook. She was unable to stand up or speak, and she could not maintain her grip on her weapon.

She realized that poison was used.

The enemy soldiers swarming at her all at once was the last scene that she saw.

“Not only did they throw poison in the river, they also smeared it on their blades, huh. They've really done it.”

Her having become held captive like this was due to her own carelessness.

Even when she thought so, she was not able to erase the anger flaring up in the depths of her heart. It was clear that the enemy resorted to cowardly means.

—However, even if I understand that they restrained me with chains as they were wary of the Dragonic Skill.....

Towards Vanadises who were existences only second to the King in the Zhcted Kingdom, this treatment could hardly be regarded as rude. She did not know the enemy's aim, but she could not expect a decent treatment.

—I wonder if Tigre is safe. Lim, too.....

The faces of the darkish red-haired youth and her adjutant, who was also her best friend, came to Elen's mind. Tigre was his nickname and when correctly calling it, it was Tigrevurmud Vorn. Same for Lim, which was a nickname; her name was Limalisha.

Tigre was the supreme commander of the Moonlight Knight Army, a combined army composed of Brune soldiers and Zhcted soldiers. Elen took a part of it as the commander of the LeitMeritz army, and Lim acted as her aid.

Elen considered Tigre as comrade in arms, but that was just a designation in order to deceive the surroundings and her own heart. She herself knew that for her, he was an irreplaceable person more important than anyone else.

—I just hope that he's safe.

Suddenly, light leaked from a corner of the darkness. Then, a man holding a lamp came into the tent. Thanks to the lamplight, the inside of the tent became bright at once.

“How are you feeling? Eleonora-dono”

The man stared at Elen, who was seated on the ground and revealed a favorable smile on his graceful face like that of a young noble. The man was around the late twenties. He carefully arranged his gray hair and wrapped his tall figure in luxurious silk clothes with golden embroidery.

When she took some time and remembered the man's name along with unpleasant memories, Elen threw a hateful gaze at him. She knew the man in front of her.

“Greast.....”

Charon Anquetil Greast. That was the man's name. He was a marquis of Brune and cooperated with Duke Ganelon in the civil war two years ago. When Duke Ganelon was defeated, he disappeared and never came out again to the front stage.



「ご機嫌いかがかな？ エレオノーラ殿」

During that civil war, Elen had met Greast only once. It was when Greast, as Ganelon's proxy, recommended Tigre to surrender.

Though he demanded a handshake to Elen as courtesy, the Wind Princess of the Silverflash felt goosebumps erupting all over her body at the touch of his palm.

"I am honored that you remembered my name."

Greast put the lamp on the table and approached Elen. As he crouched down a small distance from her feet, he looked into the silver-haired Vanadis' face.

"It's been two years since then. You were already beautiful enough that time, too, but it looks like you've become even more so now."

Elen did not answer. It was not that she did not feel the need to answer. She felt a chill at Greast's feverish and somewhat sticky gaze which crawled about her whole body.

What Elen wore was her blue military outfit, and several places were ripped and torn due to a series of fierce battles. As expected, she has been dispossessed of her protective gears such as breastplate, gauntlets and leg guards.

Unexpectedly, her medical care was properly done, clothes smeared with medicine were pushed against her injured parts and bandages were wound up, too.

Greast poured his gaze filled with lust without reserve on Elen's exposed skin.

"What business do you have with me?"

Elen questioned Greast as she fixed her breathing and retained the fighting spirit in her eyes. Though the other party was someone who she wanted to avoid exchanging words with, she had to know the purpose of his visit.

The smile floating on Greast's lips grew more lewd.

“It isn’t that much to call it business. If I were compelled to say it, then I’d say that I came to admire *what’s mine*.”

“What?”

To the unexpected reply, Elen stared at Greast with a dumbfounded face. When Greast put his knees on the ground and sidled up to Elen, he put his hand on her left thigh. He gently and carefully caressed it as if handling breakables.

“Stop.....!”

Elen raised her right leg with an angry voice. However, her leg did not move as she wanted as her body was restricted, and thus was easily dodged by Greast.

“It looks like the poison wore out. I made do with a weak one since I’d be troubled if there were after-effects. But, it looks like I can feel relieved if you’re so energetic.”

Greast happily laughed and stood up. He went around behind Elen with calm steps. Both his hands that he extended from behind her held both cheeks of Elen.

“Eleonora-dono. The reason why I captured you wasn’t for such things as to hold you as hostage of Zhcted or to boast of my military achievements.”

As he stabbed at Elen’s heart with every single word, Greast slowly spun his words.

“It was in order to make you mine. Anything and everything about you until even one strand of this silver hair.”

Greast’s hands parted from Elen’s cheeks and went to touch her hair. As to enjoy the touch, he combed it many times by letting his fingers running through.

Elen gritted her teeth and desperately moved both her arms, but the chains

showed no sign of loosening at all. Even when she twisted her body, it only stimulated Greast's sadistic heart and made him more delighted.

Greast's hand stroked her nape, traced the form of her ear and touched her forehead. As he declared, this man seemed to try to make Elen his by thoroughly leaving the traces of his hands on her body.

He touched Elen's shoulder, stroked her fingers and touched her tightly clenched hands. Greast lovelily stroke around her clenched fist.

The next moment, a strange sensation was transmitted on the back of Elen's hand. As it was repeated a second, then a third time, the silver-haired Vanadis understood what was being done to her.

Greast was licking Elen's hand. Not only the back of her hand. He also made his tongue crawl between her clenched fingers one by one.

"I've wanted to do this since the first time I met you."

Separating his mouth from Elen's hand for a moment, Greast said with an ecstatic expression.

"My wish has finally come true. It's as I expected, no, more than that."

Elen's face turned pale. This time, the disgust she previously felt at the sight of the gray-haired Marquis turned into fear as she shuddered.

But, Elen endured it while tightly clenching her fists so as not to speak. This was because she understood that if she spoke, no matter what words came from her mouth, it would please this disgusting man. There was no means of resistance other than going through it without any reaction.

When Greast's mouth was separated from her hand, Elen was worn out. But, she was not allowed to relax. Greast's infringement had just begun after all.

Greast's hand once again stroked Elen's arm. It went down little by little, went along her armpit and touched her chest.

The man's dry fingers crawled around Elen's chest over her military outfit like a poisonous insect. They relentlessly moved around as to feel the shape of her abundant chest.

"This heaviness, this size, this shape. Soft, and yet this elasticity which pushes back my fingers. My blood is boiling. Eleonora-dono, have you already let anybody other than me touch this wonderful thing?"

Elen did not answer. She endured not wanting to shout out loud. Her nails cut into her tightly clenched fists and blood oozed.

"You don't want to answer, huh. No, I don't mind it. It's really fun just seeing that face of yours."

As to enjoy the elasticity, Greast massaged the two hills. He suddenly stopped his hands and leaned forward and looked into Elen's face from the right side.

"A weak girl would have already burst into tears around now, but..... as expected of Eleonora-dono who made my heart her own."

Elen looked at Greast with a sidelong glance. Killing intent dwelled in her eyes of ruby.

The next moment, Elen inclined her head and spit on Greast's face. White saliva splashed on the man's cheek and left a strange trace. Dumbfounded, Greast removed his right hand from Elen's chest and took it to his cheek.

Elen opened her eyes wide to the next action that he took. Greast scooped up the saliva on his cheek with his finger and then moved it into his mouth.

Seeing Elen shocked, Greast revealed a faint smile.

"I said it, right? That I'll make everything of you mine."

Greast separated his hand from Elen's left breast and moved his body to her right side. He extended his hand and held Elen's chin.

"Eleonora-dono. Have you already kissed anyone?"

Elen refused to answer as she glared at Greast. The gray-haired Marquis removed his hand from her mouth and moved it to her abdomen. Elen tried to protect her abdomen by pulling up both her legs, but she was not able to block Greast's hand.

Greast's hand which caressed around her navel slowly slid to the bottom. Elen reflexively closed her eyes and firmly closed both her legs. Confirming her reaction, Greast removed his hand.

“—Virgin, huh”

Greast leaked out a joy-filled mutter as though he discovered a treasure. Elen pulled herself together and glared at the gray-haired Marquis. A rebuttal unintentionally spilled from her mouth.

“On what basis can you affirm—”

“I know of course.”

Interrupting Elen's words, Greast poured a gentle-looking gaze at the Vanadis.

“A secluded lady who has never spoken to any men other those of her family, a prostitute standing on a street corner, a country girl who has never gone out of her village..... I have embraced various women until now, but virgins generally showed such a reaction. I have heard that you have a close relationship with Tigrevurmud Vorn, but you haven't let him *touch* your body, huh. No, judging from your state, you two haven't even kissed yet, I guess.”

Greast laughed loudly. His well-featured face was greatly distorted due to his swelling lust.

“That's definitely a good fortune, Eleonora-dono. I shall take your lips and chastity after the battle with Tigrevurmud Vorn. I'll embrace you in front of that man. Though I don't know whether that man will be alive or his head will have been freshly severed at that time.”

“.....Is it all right for you sure to be this easygoing?”

Acting brave the best she could, Elen somehow revealed a smile on her lips. However, Greast warded off the Vanadis' gaze with a face full of composure.

“From the start, I didn't intend to get it all over with during this night. I plan to take my time and slowly make you only mine, you see?”

Greast leaned forward and thoroughly licked up Elen's shoulder and armpit. Elen barely suppressed the welling up nausea.

“If you were a woman who has already *known* a man, I would have deeply carved my existence into you here right now, in order to dim the past memory. But since that's not the case, then it's a different story.”

Then, Greast hold Elen's face from both sides. He brought his face near and had his tongue creep on her forehead, her left cheek and her right cheek respectively.

Meanwhile, Elen endured the unpleasant sensation without closing her eyes. She intended to bite him off if he was to try to steal her lips, but Greast did not touch her lips as he said.

Perhaps he was satisfied with that, Greast finally parted from Elen and stood up.

“I'll leave it at this for tonight. I'll come again tomorrow. Every night little by little, I'll make your body thoroughly remember the taste of my fingers and tongue. So that you can fully taste pleasure in front of that man. So that your eyes will reflect only me and so that your heart will yearn only for me.”

Greast picked up the lamp which he put on the table. The light flickered, making the silhouette of the man's profile eerily appear.

“I'll have a meal prepare for you later. I'd have like to make you eat with my own hands, but I don't have time today you see? I'll send a girl to personally take care of you. You should rest at ease. I'll not let any man other

than me, no matter who he is, approach this tent.”

As he said so, Greast left the tent while humming. Only Elen remained on the tent that returned to being dark.

For a while, Elen gritted her teeth and hung her head down without saying anything. This was because if she were to speak even a little, she felt like she would lose all restraint of her feelings. She shouted Tigre’s name many times in her heart to invigorate herself.

When she regained her calm with time, she felt the unpleasant sensation to the traces where Greast’s tongue crawled around. If her hands were free, she would have wanted to scrub her skin to the extent that her skin would peel off and blood would stream, in order to throw away this disgusting sensation.

—*Endure it. Don’t give up.*

She persuaded herself as such. The torturing like earlier would continue tomorrow as well. What would she do if she were exhausted and felt despair on only one day? Would it not just make that disgusting man happy?

Besides, Tigre and Lim would surely come to her rescue. Judging from what Greast said, Tigre wasn’t caught like her.

Of course, she would look for an opportunity to escape by herself, but apart from that, if she were not to count on Tigre and company, they would definitely get angry.

She closed her eyes. Since her thinking was settled, she should rest and recover her physical strength even if a little.

A long and painful fight was going to begin for Elen.



The spring approached its end, and the greenery wrapping the whole of Brune increased its vividness more and more. The wind blowing across the grassy plain was warm, and along with a quiet sunlight, gave the warmth to the earth.

In this season, the number of workers increased to nearly double in the vineyards. This was not because they were busy with work, but because they worked only half of their usual time. Rather than working and getting a wage, they chose to take a nap while drinking wine which passed winter.

“This year’s spring comes only this year. And today’s nap is possible only today.”

In Brune, there were a lot of poetry’s verses of such contents. In other words, this was already something which should even be said to be a custom since olden days. Naturally, the side allotting workers knew it; so it was made as such that every year they increased workers and in exchange suppressed the wages.

Although, this year in particular, that nap became very difficult, too. This was because as soon as the New Year began, the Sachstein Kingdom in the west invaded from the south and west.

Moreover, a revolt even occurred in the capital Nice against the Princess Regin Ester Loire Bastien de Charles, Brune’s ruler. Melisande, niece of the late King Faron and thus Regin’s cousin, secretly gathered comrades and tried to usurp the throne.

The one, who saved Princess Regin, suppressed the revolt and splendidly impeded Melisande’s scheme this time, was Tigrevurmud Vorn.

Until several years ago, he was only an earl who ruled Alsace, a small territory of the frontier.

But, he achieved victory in the many wars which stemmed from Brune’s civil war, was given the title of Star Shooter by the neighboring country Muozinel Kingdom, was given the title of Knight of the Moonlight in Brune, where he was born and raised, and was currently called young hero.

Regarding the Sachstein Army’s invasion this time, Tigre acted as the supreme commander of the combined army called Moonlight Knight Army. He defeated the enemy General Kreuger in the battlefield, and again made the

enemy General, who used battle and stratagems, retreat; it seemed like Brune regained its peace.

On their way back to the capital Nice, the Moonlight Knight Army was attacked by an enemy. They lost the battle and left. It was three days ago.

The dark clouds covering the Brune Kingdom showed no signs of clearing away even now.

Seeing the appearance of Mashas Rodant, who showed up in the audience room, the courtiers held their breath. This was because his gray hair and beard was disheveled and bundled in a strange form; color of fatigue was deep on his face, and blood and mud were stuck on the armor cladding his short and stout body.

Even Princess Regin sitting on the throne and the Prime Minister Pierre Badouin standing by her side were dumbfounded and were unable to speak immediately. The warm air of spring, which was filling the audience room, seemed to have been squashed by the cold and heavy silence.

This place was the capital Nice of the Brune Kingdom. It was the audience room in its royal palace. And it was one koku before noon that Mashas, who acted as the supreme commander's substitute of the Moonlight Knight Army, showed up there.

Mashas walked straight on the deep crimson carpet, stopped at a suitable position and went down on a knee. His armor made a clattering sound as if speaking of its wearer's bitterness.

"Mashas Rodant, here to report. I am extremely sorry to expose this defeated body in front of Her Highness."

Hearing Mashas' words, slight noise leaked out from among the courtiers.

"Has the Moonlight Knight Army really lost.....?"

"But, didn't they repel the Sachstein Army?"

At this time, two reports mixed in the royal palace and confusion occurred.

The one of the Moonlight Knight Army having won and another one of them having lost.

Both were right. This was because when they made the Sachstein Army retreat, and when they were attacked and defeated by an enemy a few days later, Mashas immediately sent a messenger to the royal palace. So, it could not be helped that the royal palace, which received two contradictory reports in succession, was unable to judge the situation.

“Earl Rodant. The Moonlight Knight Army — you people won against the Sachstein Army. Afterwards, you engaged in battle with an enemy that has no relation with the Sachstein Army and was defeated. There is no discrepancy about that, right?”

Regin asked. This was a question in order to let the courtiers grasp the situation. She herself knew it was true without needing to confirm it.

“It is exactly as your Highness said. I think that you are interested in the details of the battle with the Sachstein Army, but I would like to first report about the army that we suffered a defeat against..... Is that all right?”

Regin nodded at Mashas’s words. As for her, she was thankful to this old Earl and wanted to tell him to take a rest immediately, but when thinking about what happened, she had no choice but have Mashas overdo it a little more.

Even after having defeated the Sachstein Army, the Moonlight Knight Army’s military power should have been more than 30,000. But, they suffered a crushing defeat. Even if it was not Regin, there was no way that one would not be concerned about it. Moreover as Brune’s ruler, Regin must deal with that enemy.

As he greatly exhaled as if he were enduring the pain, Mashas fixed his breathing and then opened his mouth.

It was three days ago. The Moonlight Knight Army’s troops of about 34,000 that Tigre led were advancing on the highway leading to the city of Nice, the capital. They were heroes who repelled the Sachstein Army, the

invaders, thus they should have received reward when they arrived at the capital, become the leading actors at the place of the celebratory banquet and been flooded with praise.

It was when they took a break near a certain river that an ‘abnormal phenomenon’ occurred to them. The soldiers and horses that drank the river water suddenly began to suffer.

Poison was poured in the river.

Though Tigre immediately stopped himself from drinking the river water, 6000 soldiers, which was nearly 20% of the whole army, and about 3000 horses had already drunk the poisoned water.

Tigre and company were also careless. They had repelled the Sachstein Army, and before that, they had suppressed the rebellion that occurred in the royal palace. Everyone was thinking that the impending enemies had disappeared.

In addition, the river was within their sphere of influence, and they had previously used it on their way to fight the Sachstein Army, so their guard was lowered.

Although it was referred to as a poison, it wasn’t the type of poison that was lethal, but one of the kinds that caused headaches, fevers and long-term diarrhea. Even so, the soldiers who were poisoned were weakened and could not be considered to be fit for combat for the time being.

Furthermore, the remaining 28,000 soldiers, unable to appease their thirst, would suffer from dehydration. It was not like they used up the water on hand, but since they were unable to replenish their water supplies, they would have to be economic with it.

Tigre talked with his adjunct Mashas and they started to move while looking for other places with water. In preparation for when something happened, they inquired about places with river that a big army can use.

They reduced the March speed to about half the speed they used until then.

This was because not only did they have to switch the poisoned soldiers between horses, they also had to be cautious of the enemy. The people who targeted the Moonlight Knight Army should have been nearby.

When it began to get dark, in the place where they had arrived at as a new water source, a group of about 2000 people appeared before the Moonlight Knight Army. They did not approach more than required, sent a messenger to Tigre and he claimed that they were subordinates of Viscount Antiga.

The messenger said that Viscount Antiga was a local noble that had a territory located to the west from here, but he moved his soldiers and was chasing the criminals who put poison into the rivers of the country. He also said that Viscount Antiga himself did not come here because he had to protect his territory, thus had one of his retainers lead 2000 soldiers to chase them.

“Do you know the criminals?”

When Mashas asked as such, the Antiga army’s messenger clearly answered.

“They are Earl Cotillard’s subordinates. When we interrogated them after capturing them, they said that they poisoned the river in order to make you the Moonlight Knight Army, suffer.”

Tigre and Mashas looked at each other. Mashas knew Earl Cotillard just a little. He was a man who followed Duke Thenardier in the civil war two years ago, held dissatisfaction to Princess Regin’s rule after the civil war and supported Melisande.

The Antiga army’s messenger further demanded cooperation to Tigre and company.

“If the Moonlight Knight Army is an existence that shows Brune’s justice, then could you lend us your help?”

Tigre clearly refused this demand. He explained that the Moonlight Knight Army was a joint army organized by Princess Regin and that he was only

given its command temporarily, and moreover, told that from the point of food and materials, they could not afford to take unplanned actions.

It was a lie. The true reason why he refused was because he could not trust them. Though he could not see strange points in the messenger's explanation, the fact that they appeared in this situation was suspicious to begin with.

In addition, neither Tigre nor Mashas had ever met Viscount Antiga.

The viscount was a person, who was only interested in his territory; even in the civil war two years ago, he declared neutrality early and did not move until the end. Although, when Regin became Brune's ruler, as expected he visited the royal palace and pledged allegiance, it was said that he immediately went back to his territory afterwards.

Even regarding interactions between nobles, with the neighboring local feudal lords at the center, he did not have any interactions with Tigre governing Alsace in the northeast and Mashas governing Aude in the north.

The Antiga army's messenger, who was turned down by Tigre, did not obediently withdraw.

"Then, could you at least let our army tag along with you for a while? From the look of it, there seem to be many soldiers suffering from poison. We would like to help with their treatment."

Tigre also declined this. But, he did not prevent them from following behind them. This was because he thought that it would be better to keep them in view than to drive them away and be blind to their movements.

When about a half koku passed after they resumed their march, the targeted river could be seen.

The enemy also appeared near the river. It was a group of about 8000 where cavalry and infantry were mingled. The battle flag that they hoisted was Earl Cotillard House's.

A grassy plain with gentle ups and downs spread out near the river and

there were several small hills in a remote place. Under the gray sky, the Moonlight Knight Army and Cotillard army stood facing each other. The evening sun, which was setting, dyed the plain vermilion and made the river surface shine silver^[1].

Viscount Antiga's army, which followed behind, offered cooperation to the Moonlight Knight Army, but Tigre bluntly refused. He had no time to deal with them.

Tigre moved the 6000 soldiers who had been disabled by the poison and the 3000 soldiers who sustained serious injuries in the battle against the Sachstein Army to the rear and assigned 4000 soldiers to watch them. They also had the job of watching the movements of the Antiga army.

Even if he removed 13,000 soldiers from the battlefield like that, the Moonlight Knight Army still exceeded 20,000. It was more than double that of the 8000 men of the Cotillard army.

However, the Moonlight Knight Army's soldiers had not yet recovered from the fatigue of the battle with the Sachstein Army and the postwar processing that happened several days ago.

After the Sachstein Army was gone, they went around the trampled villages and towns and promised compensation; in addition, they subjugated bandits and brigands who aimed at these villages and towns and exerted themselves in the restoration of the public order.

The problem was not only the fatigue. Because they were not able to supply in water, there were a lot of soldiers who were dehydrated. Moreover, the Cotillard army spoke with one voice the following words.

“This river has also been poisoned! You may drink as much as you want!”

Tigre undauntedly encouraged his soldiers, too.

“Those guys should have safe water somewhere! Let defeat them and snatch it!”

It was a way of talking like the boss of bandits, but it had a certain effect and some soldiers recovered.

Like that, both armies clashed, but the Moonlight Knight Army was forced in an unexpected hard fight. The Cotillard army's commander's tactics were clever to an extent that surprised Tigre and company.

While the enemy had the river at their back and did not allow Tigre and company to take their back, he changed flexibly the form of his own army, stopped the Moonlight Knight Army's fierce attack and attacked their flank using a detached force.

The Cotillard army accurately found a place where their enemy's formation was disordered and a place where the soldiers' movement became dull, focused on the soldiers there and tried to break their formation. In addition, when they retreated luring the enemy to stick out, they attacked in pincer from left and right and defeated the Moonlight Knight Army's soldiers one after another.

They lured the Moonlight Knight Army to the temporary swamp that they built by drawing the river water and when their (Moonlight Knight Army) movements became dull there, they even went as far as to set up an attack where a barrage of stones rained down upon them. Mashas groaned at the fact that they seemed to have thoroughly prepared themselves when they were lying in wait.

Furthermore, the Cotillard army frequently used poison. When they thought that a unit of about dozens of people fiercely attacked them, their weapons were all smeared with poison. It was not a lethal poison, but the kind that caused dizziness and feeling of vomiting; but it was effective immediately.

Though Mashas was a bit late in discovering it, the Cotillard army's aim was probably not to make the Moonlight Knight Army suffer with poison, but to make them angry and inhibit their normal judgment power. There was no doubt that it (aim) had begun since the time when they threw poison in the first river. Melisande also used poison when she caused a revolt, but this was a way of using it totally different from her idea.

No matter how calm Tigre, Mashas and Elen issued instructions, if the squad captains under them that led the soldiers did not move decently, the army would not function. When they rampaged and pushed out more than required, units surrounded by the enemy and units, who panicked as their gaps were attacked, continued to appear one after another.

Even the units, which did not suffer the same fate as the above-mentioned ones, could not be said to move well. As the initiative continued being taken by the enemy, they were pushed back when it came to clashing. Fatigue and thirst withered away at their fighting spirit.

If the commander was an average person, he would have long failed to maintain the army. Even so, Tigre and company tenaciously gave directions. If they kept fighting like that, even if they were forced to a hard fight, the Moonlight Knight Army would definitely win by the difference of amount of material resources in the end.

A change came in a bad way for Tigre and company. The 2000 of the Viscount Antiga's army that assumed a bystanders' stance outside the battlefield until then suddenly advanced rapidly and attacked the Moonlight Knight Army. Moreover, they attacked the soldiers afflicted with poison or those who were on the rear as they were injured.

Before this, the Cotillard army had thrown multiple detached forces that showed signs of wanting to attack the soldiers to the rear. Therefore, the 4000 soldiers that Tigre left behind to protect the injured forces were on guard against the Cotillard army, and thus dropped their vigilance against the Antiga army. The latter attacked in this window of opportunity.

The Antiga army fired fire arrows one after another from windward, attacking the Moonlight Knight Army with fire.

Their archery's skill was not that good, to the extent as to wonder whether the fired arrows would fly 40 Alsins (about 40 meters); but the fire engulfed the bright green grass covering the ground and spread with a tremendous speed.

Although it was a dangerous strategy to use the fire attack since it could hit

allies depending on the wind's direction, the Antiga army kept firing the fire arrows fearlessly. The 4000 soldiers were confused due to flames and smoke. There were those, who threw away their weapons and ran away, and those who held their comrades, that could not move, and tried to escape with them.

The Antiga army mercilessly attacked those soldiers. They slashed at them around their shoulders with swords, smashed their heads with axes and pierced them from behind with spears. They mercilessly finished off even soldiers who fell down. The blazing flames and splashing blood excited the Antiga army.

“Were those guys in cahoots?”

The Moonlight Knight Army, who witnessed that disastrous scene from afar, flew into rage. Then, about 5000 soldiers began to move without Tigre's order. For the sake of their comrades afflicted with poison, they stopped thinking about maintaining their units and formed a group that gathered the above-mentioned number by combining with soldiers with same circumstances.

The Moonlight Knight Army's central forces were greatly disordered. The Cotillard naturally did not overlook this change. Without giving Tigre any room to reorganize, they deeply thrust their way through and *spread out the wound*.^[2]

The vigor of both armies created a flow on the battlefield. The more the Cotillard army advanced, the more the Moonlight Knight Army retreated. One by one, soldiers threw away their weapons and started fleeing; thus the Moonlight Knight Army rapidly collapsed.

When the Cotillard army succeeded in breaking through the Moonlight Knight Army's central forces, even Tigre could no longer reorganize the lines. The Moonlight Knight Army finally collapsed.

Tigre and Mashas admitted defeat. It was not that they gave up on fighting. They still led the forces by diffusing orders and devoted themselves in letting as many allies as possible get away.

Similarly, Elen left the LeitMeritz army's command to Lim and she herself wielded the Silver Flash at the most rear of the army. She occasionally turned her horse and resolutely cut down the enemies, who gave them a hot pursuit, thus dulling their pursuit.

At the time when the day set and the grass covering the ground could no longer be seen, the battle was finally over.

The Moonlight Knight Army lost more than 10,000 soldiers. And—.

At Mashas' report, a certain courtier spitted out cursing words and another one leaked a sigh of grief. They could not hide their resentment at the cowardly enemy that threw poison into the river.

Regin's anger increased along with strong feelings of disgust and she strongly clenched her hand. Her nails cut so deeply into her palm that she bled.

In the previous revolt of Melisande, poison was also used and it made a great number of soldiers, who were protecting the royal palace, suffer. The means that the enemy took made Regin recall that once again, and it was beyond enough to make her fly into rage. Moreover, in this time's case, it even brought harm to the territory people using the river.

Not wincing at all even after seeing their reactions, Mashas indifferently continued the report.

“—Within the confusion of the defeat, the supreme commander Tigrevurmud Vorn and the Zhcted Kingdom's Vanadis Eleonora Viltaria-dono went missing.....”

Before the old Earl finished his sentence, Regin unintentionally stood up from the throne. Emotions were lost from her face and she turned pale.

—*Tigre went missing.....?*

She had heard from the messenger that Tigre went missing. Even so, Regin thought that it was some kind of mistake. And if not, that they only lost sight

of him temporarily.

She believed that there was no way that Tigre, who repelled the Muozinel army, defeated Duke Thenardier, protected her from Melisande's evil hand and moreover defeated the Sachstein Army just now, would go missing with only one defeat. She believed that he would surely show her his safe figure.

“—Your Highness”

Badouin softly called out to her. Regin finally came to her senses. When looking, Mashas stopped his report and waited for her to recover. So did the courtiers, too.

Regin took a small breath and reseated herself to the throne with calm movements.

“Earl Rodant. Please continue.”

Mashas resumed his report. After Tigre and Elen went missing, Mashas sent soldiers in all directions to search for their whereabouts. On the other hand, he somehow managed to lead the Moonlight Knight Army whose number decreased up to 21,000 and returned to the capital Nice.

Waiting for Mashas to finish his report, Regin slowly opened her mouth.

“Yesterday morning, troops calling themselves the Moonlight Knight Army appeared near the capital. If you had not sent a messenger then, we would probably have let them enter the capital. I once again give you my gratitude.”

Mashas silently bowed at Regin's words.

When he sent a messenger to notify the Princess of their defeat, Mashas added this.

“The enemy, which defeated us, might disguise themselves as the Moonlight Knight Army. Please, set up countermeasures at once”. Regin, who heard it, called Prime Minister Badouin and ordered so that all the gates of the ramparts surrounding the capital were closed.

Thus, the troops that disguised themselves as the Moonlight Knight Army, unable to enter, appealed towards the ramparts many times; and when they understood that there was no result, they gave up and left.

It was the next day that the real Moonlight Knight Army appeared. In other words, it was early morning today. Mashas standing at the vanguard called and Viscount Augre and his son Gerard who were on the rampart hurriedly opened a gate.

And then Mashas head straight ahead to the royal palace and showed up in the audience room.

“You said that the ones who attacked you people were Earl Cotillard’s army and Viscount Antiga’s army, but is there no doubt?”

Regin asked in a cautious tone. The enemies were people who did not hesitate about pouring poison in the river. They also disguised themselves as the Moonlight Knight Army and tried to deceive Regin and the others. It was doubtful whether they were really Earl Cotillard and Viscount Antiga’s armies.

She wanted to avoid making a mistake in dealing with this and creating an unnecessary enemy.

Mashas raised his head and answered as he was impressed by his lord’s words.

“I was thinking to inform your Highness about that precisely. When we questioned several soldiers enemy after we caught them, it seems to be a lie that they were Viscount Antiga’s soldiers.”

Tightening his face in tension, Mashas continued further.

“However, there is no doubt about Earl Cotillard. The majority of the enemy is former knights, bandits and the like, but the ones forming the core of the army are the Earl’s soldiers. But, they said that the Earl himself already died due to illness and that, on the verge of death, he gave the command right

to Marquis Greast.”

“Greast.....?”

Regin opened her eyes wide at the unexpected name which came out. Surprise and confusion floated in the Princess’ blue pupils. It was also the same for Badouin and the courtiers and the audience room was wrapped in noise.

Greast was a man who sided with Duke Ganelon at the civil war in the Brune Kingdom two years ago. He was entrusted with soldiers by Ganelon and cornered Thenardier’s troops. But, he parted from the army as he was hurriedly called by Ganelon and then disappeared just like that.

The Ganelon army after Greast left received a devastating damage by the five dragons that Thenardier added in his battle formation and stampeded. Duke Ganelon, who received that report, set fire to Artishem, the city where his own mansion was located and it was said that he shared the same fate with his mansion which burnt and collapsed.

Having lost the person acting as the leader of their faction, the people who followed Ganelon scattered. Among them, there were those who joined in the Silver Meteor Army that Tigre led at the time and there were also those who took a neutral stance as they did not intend to adhere to another power.

However, among them, Greast was nowhere to be found and even when the civil war ended, his whereabouts were completely unknown. Anyone was thinking that Greast was dead. Regin confiscated the land of Evreux that Greast governed and dispatched a chief governor.

“—Silence”

Badouin, who was standing beside Regin, took a step forward. His eyes slanted slightly upwards were slowly looking around at the courtiers. The tips of his mustache that extended erectly to the sides in his round face harking back to a cat shook slightly.

“Everyone. I understand that you are surprised, but you are in the presence

of her Highness.”

Badouin served as Prime Minister since the period of the late King Faron. The glint in his eyes had enough power to make the lined up feudal lords and courtiers quiet.

Waiting until the audience room became quiet, Regin asked Mashas with a stiff expression.

“Earl Rodant. Let’s call the enemy, who defeated you people, the Greast army, using the name of their commander. If they did not pour poison into the river, would you have won against them?”

After a short pause, Mashas answered.

“I cannot assert it.”

“Even with the strength of you people who defeated the Sachstein Army?”

“Though the Greast army’s soldiers is a variety of people put together, their commander Greast is extraordinarily skilled in warfare. Even if we rack our brains, try all possible means and then face him with the belief of certain victory, he is not an opponent we will easily win against.”

Even while inwardly looking puzzled at Regin’s question, which was not like her, Mashas frankly expressed his thought. Anyway, she had to understand that Greast was not an ordinary opponent. But, it was also not good for him to be thought as getting cold feet.

“Nonetheless, this one’s old bones bear enough anger and fighting spirit in his heart. If your Highness permits it, I would by all means like to wipe out the disgrace of the defeat with my own hands.”

Regin, not returning words immediately, casually turned her gaze left and right, and then once again looked down at Mashas. The blond-haired Princess told with a stern expression and tone.

“Very well. I will then order you. Reorganize the Moonlight Knight Army as the acting supreme commander and defeat the Greast army that is Brune’s

enemy. In addition, you shall continuously carry out the search of Earl Vorn and Eleonora-dono. Until then, the responsibility of the defeat this time shall not matter.”

Mashas deeply bowed his head. He finally understood Regin’s intentions.

One was to clearly declare Greast as Brune’s enemy. They might be people among Greast’s relatives and acquaintances who would try to cover up for him. Regin sealed such an act beforehand with those words.

The other was the words about not questioning the responsibility of the defeat. Although cowardly means were used, it was a fact that the Moonlight Knight Army lost. There were probably people among the courtiers that would say that they should question the responsibility. She forestalled them so that such voices were not raised.

“Badouin. Send messengers respectively to Lutetia and Evreux. And investigate about Greast’s goal and people who may cooperate with him.”

Lutetia was the land once governed by Ganelon. Similarly to Evreux once governed by Greast, it has now become a territory under the royal family’s direct control. Taking into consideration the relationship between Greast and Ganelon, investigating Lutetia was a natural measure. Badouin respectfully bowed.

Afterwards, Mashas reported about the battle with Sachstein and after being praised for the victory with brief words, he left the audience room.

Perhaps she had wanted to exert more words to express her gratitude to Mashas. Just for an instant, Regin showed an apologetic face to the old Earl.



Mashas, who exited the audience room, took a rest in a guest room that Prime Minister Badouin prepared.

He took off his armor, carried water and wiped his body, fixed his beard and changed into new clothes. Then, he lay down on the bed and relaxed. He

refrained from alcohol.

Like that, when the sun ascended to the highest position in the sky, Mashas got up and left the guest room. He headed to a room used for conference. There were no windows in that room, the walls were thick and the door was two layers (thick); so it would not leak out even someone was to speak in a very loud voice.

When Mashas went inside the room, other people were already present and were surrounding an elliptical-shaped table. The fire of the candlestick put on the table illuminated them.

One of them was the old Prime Minister Badouin who wrapped his body with the gray official outfit.

The small-built old man next to him and revealing a kind-hearted smile was Hugues Augre. He was a close friend to Mashas and Tigre's late father, Urz and one of the Brune nobles supporting Regin.

The tall girl, who tied her dull blond hair to the left side of her head and set it adrift, was Limalisha. After Elen went missing, she was the one who managed the LeitMeritz army.

Though Lim had her usual unsociable expression, if those, who knew her well, looked at her, they would understand that her blue eyes were clouded with anxiety. She was worried about Elen.

Sitting next to Lim was a beautiful woman with bluish long black hair. She wrapped her body in a pure white dress decorated with varicolored roses and revealed an immaculate smile. On the wall behind her was leaned a long scythe tinged with an ominous ghastliness.

Her name was Valentina Glinka Estes. Like Elen, she was one of the Zhcted's Vanadises with the name of Illusory Princess of the Hollow Shadow. In the Moonlight Knight Army, she led the Osterode army. The scythe colored deep crimson and jet black behind her was her Dragonic Tool Ezendeis.

Waiting for Mashas to close the door, Badouin spread many maps on the table. In addition, Augre poured cold tea into silver cup prepared for the number of people.

“Did I keep you waiting?”

When Mashas sat down on the empty chair while saying so, Augre shook his head.

“I just came as well. —It’s been terrible, eh.”

Augre furrowed the outer canthus of his eyes and thanked his friend. Feelings of consolation, encouragement, sympathy and the like overflowed within these short words. Mashas revealed a bold smile.

“What, if it’s me, then it’s no big deal. There are many things I want to talk about though. And I’ll someday talk about that even while drinking alcohol with Tigre.”

“Regarding that Earl Vorn, but.....”

Badouin stared at Mashas with a stern expression.

“Is it really the truth that he did not go missing, but is acting alone in order to rescue Eleonora-dono who has been captured by the enemy?”

“If Tigre had really gone missing, I wouldn’t have been so calm in the presence of her Highness.”

Mashas answered with a face as though it was a matter of fact.

“Although you had a reason, you deceived your lord; so should you not take a slightly laudable attitude, Earl Rodant?”

Mashas ignored Badouin’s sarcasm and drank a mouthful of his tea. The Prime Minister with a countenance akin to a cunning cat continued his words further.

“Although there is no helping it even if I say it at this late hour, why did

you allow Earl Vorn to move alone? He is now a necessary existence to Brune. It is not as if you do not understand that, isn't it?"

Badouin's gaze and tone reached a level of blaming above criticism, and Mashas responded with a discouraged face.

"It's none other than Tigre himself who asked to move alone. Certainly, I didn't stop him, but this is because such a course of action would be futile. He was so determined that one wrong move and he might have left the army without saying anything. Rather than seeing that happen, it'd be much better to send him off while knowing his destination."

The old Earl's words were no lie. If Tigre could have been stopped by being persuaded, there was no way that Mashas would have spared his words towards him.

"Even if that was the case, should you not have at least assign people excellent in scouting out to him?"

To Badouin, who clung to it, Mashas laughed as though he did not mind it.

"You didn't know Tigre was a hunter after all. If it's running around hills and fields, it'd be better that it's alone. Unless it's people with quite the ability, they'll only become a drag. Don't you also share the same opinion as me, Limalisha-dono?"

"Eh? Yea..... T-That's right."

Perhaps because she was suddenly asked for agreement, Lim showed a perplexed face for an instant. Then after a short pause, she revealed a stiff smile as if having recalled something.

"Now that you mention it, even when he was in LeitMeritz, there were several times when he went in the mountains and did not come back for three days. At first, we were worried, but he each time would come back carrying his hunting's spoils without showing any signs of fatigue. Before we were aware, both I and Eleonora-sama had stopped worrying. No, I recall that Titta had a composed face from the beginning."

Titta was the maid serving Tigre. She was a girl who possessed lovely features, bright personality and fortitude and who, even in the war against Sachstein this time, followed Tigre in order to take care of him. She was one of the people who knew well Tigre since childhood.

“Rather a composed face, wasn’t it an amazed one? Saying that he’ll be back in two days, then coming back three days later with a face as if it was natural and being scolded by Titta was Tigre’s daily life after all.”

Mashas said in a joking tone. As she could easily imagine that scene, Lim smiled broadly. Augre, Badouin and even Valentina smiled.

“So, it’s like that. Just in case, I’ll send some search parties, but we should basically leave him alone. I don’t even know where he’s now. There’s no doubt that he’s chasing the Greast army though. —So, how was it? Were there some people who showed some kind of reactions?”

When Mashas asked as he changed the topic, Badouin squinted in displeasure, Augre shrugged his shoulders and both of the men nodded respectively.

In the audience room, while Mashas reported the circumstances of things and Regin was carefully listening to it, Badouin standing beside her was intently watching the courtiers. Augre mingled with the courtiers and was observing them as well.

In order to find out people who had connection with Greast.

Until two years ago, Greast was a respectable Brune noble. The possibility that people, who had interactions with him and inwardly harbored animosity towards Regin, secretly taking contact with him was by no means low.

Although there was a difference in the way of using it between those, who cooperated with Melisande’s revolt and those in the Cotillard army, that there was the strange common point of having used poison was also a matter of concern.

“There are three people I am concerned with. They are people I have been

cautious of since before, but..... When you were talking about the Moonlight Knight Army's defeat, these three people were not angry and had faces as if they have already heard about it."

"As for me, there are two people I found suspicious. When Her Highness Regin stood from the throne, as most of the courtiers were surprised, they were worried about her Highness. But, those two people were laughing. As if to say that she's done for."

Badouin and Augre respectively raised the names of the courtiers they were concerned about. While stroking his gray beard, Mashas revealed a villain-like smile.

"If it wasn't me, but Tigre who gave the report, or if her Highness calmly dealt with it as she knew of the circumstances, the enemies might not have given themselves away. Now then, Badouin. You'll let those lots swim for a while, right?"

"We must absolutely know how they contact the outside. Besides, we must have Greast think that Earl Vorn's whereabouts are unknown."

If he heard that Tigre went missing, Greast would try to ascertain whether it was the truth or not. Then, he should obtain the information that it seemed to be the true. There was no doubt that he would not possibly think that Tigre is chasing the Greast army by himself.

If Greast were to let his guard down even a little due to that, it would be a great help for Tigre who was acting alone.

—But, I'm amazed that Tigre came up with this in that situation.

Mashas inwardly leaked a mutter of admiration.

By reporting that Tigre went missing, they would find out people, who were in contact with Greast.

The one who thought about this plan was Tigre. And moreover it was when the Moonlight Knight Army lost, Elen has gone missing and everyone

was thrown in confusion that he came talking to Mashas.

There was no doubt that Tigre wanted to move alone because he wanted to rescue Elen with his own hands.

But, if he had insisted on only that, then no matter how much drive he had, Mashas would not have allowed him to be sent out. He would have done so because he would have judged that Tigre had lost his calm.

“Badouin. Deceiving her Highness is certainly not something that one must do as a retainer, but the enemy is formidable. I think that the matter this time is something unavoidable in order to win and for her Highness’s sake, too.”

“If you have that much resolve, then it is fine. The duty to tell the circumstances of things to her Highness and receive a scolding will be left to you.”

As he smoothly pushed a troublesome task to Mashas, Badouin asked in a careful way of speaking.

“By the way, it is about the fact that Vanadis-dono has been captured by the Greast army, but..... Has there been some sort of demand from Greast until today?”

“No.”

Lim weakly shook her head. Fatigue and irritation blurred in both her voice and her blue eyes. Badouin stroke his bears seeming to want to say that it was incomprehensible.

“Even towards us, Greast has not formulated any demand. Even despite having come immediately near this capital yesterday. I thought that if he held prisoner someone such as a Vanadis, there is no way he would not convey it.”

“Are you implying that we are lying?”

Lim glared at Badouin with a sharp gaze. It was an angry look to the extent that if she had a sword to her waist, she might have swiftly unsheathed it.

“Either he intended to take her prisoner but let her die by mistake, or she has been wounded more than he thought. And thus, he might be at loss about what he should do.”

Valentina said with cool face while tasting her tea. The male group made startled faces at this. This was because while they thought about that possibility, they avoided putting it into words.

Even when being turned eyes tinged with killing intent by Lim, the black-haired Vanadis did not change her expression in the slightest. She slightly moved her head and coolly received Lim’s gaze with her purple pupils.

“When I go out on the battlefield, I think about the worst case scenario and resolve myself. It should be the same for Eleonora. Moreover, unlike me, she stands at the vanguard of the soldiers and wields her sword. Despite this, why are you, Eleonora’s adjutant, acting in such a way?”

Valentina’s tone was too cold for a chiding one and it even sounded as provocation. Though Lim felt an intense anger welling up in the depths of her chest, she earnestly repressed it.

Though she did not like how the black-haired Vanadis put it, Lim could not help but recognize the correctness of what she said. If she rebutted here, it might be regarded as denying Elen’s resolution she spoke of.

“.....I am sorry, Valentina-sama. I did something rude.”

Then, Lim also expressed words of apology to Badouin. Toward the Prime Minister of a country, her attitude earlier was clearly impolite.

“I do not mind it. It’s quite difficult to stay calm when it comes to one’s lord’s danger.”

As he consoled Lim while saying so, Badouin went back to the topic without breaking his calm attitude.

“Concerning Greast, but..... Although he captured Vanadis-dono, because he is unable to decide how to use her, he has yet to say anything to us. I think

that we should assume as such for the time being, but is it all right with you?”

Lim silently nodded at the old Prime Minister’s suggestion and Valentina answered “I do not mind it” with a smile.

—No good. Limalisha-dono is more tired than I thought. It might be good to leave the LeitMeritz soldiers’ command to another person and have her rest at least while we’re in the capital.

Seeing Lim, who hung her head down completely depressed, Mashas thought about such a thing.

Though the five people who were here had abundant experience, even so there was not even one among them that thought that Greast captured Elen for his own desire.

More accurately, only Augre thought of that possibility. This was because when Greast met Elen for the first time two years ago, the old Viscount was there together with Tigre.

But, there was no way that he could voice it out with that alone as basis. All the more if he thought about the feelings of Lim who was concerned about Elen’s safety.

Besides, Elen’s utility value as a prisoner was extremely high. There was no way that Greast, who held resourcefulness enough to serve as Ganelon’s confidant, would not use Elen for such deals. He thought so.

“Regarding the method to rescue Eleonora-dono, do Limalisha-dono and Valentina-dono have any plan about it?”

Augre asked the two Zhcted people. Lim hung her head down with a stiff expression and as expected even Valentina shook her head with a serious face this time.

“It is deplorable, but for the moment we are in a situation where we can only rely on lord Tigrevurmud.”

Lim answered so with a depressed expression and Valentina also spoke in

a calm tone.

“If the enemy that captured Eleonora charged ahead, we will be unable to fight, right? On the other hand, even if we organized a unit in order to rescue her, we will only get in Earl Vorn’s way. We cannot afford to be careless.”

“No, I am sorry to have asked an unnecessary question.”

Augre lightly bowed his head. If Lim had any plan, there was no doubt that she would have long executed it. Badouin frowned anxiously and said to Mashas.

“Do you know how the Greast army will move? After having left the capital yesterday morning.....”

Mashas took one of the maps spread on the table and put it on topmost. It was the one depicting Brune northern part as the center. Both Evreux, which was Greast’s territory and Lutetia, which Ganelon once governed, were also drawn in the map.

“According to the scouting’s report, they seem to be moving not on the main highway, but a so to speak highway equivalent to a byroad to the north. It’s a report of around yesterday evening though.”

While looking at the characters “Lutetia” drawn on the map, Augre asked.

“Speaking of Greast..... Is it true that Ganelon was alive? I certainly thought that his death two years ago was too sudden.”

Mashas did not answer directly and turned his gaze at Valentina.

“Valentina-dono. Though briefly, I’ve heard the story of the other day from Tigre. Could you also tell us about it?”

It was about the night when Melisande caused a revolt. Without prior notice, Ganelon appeared in the royal palace. Although there were only four people who confirmed his figure. They were Tigre, Mashas’ son Gaspar, and the Zhcted people Rurick and Valentina.

Among them, both Gaspar and Rurick were immediately stunned by Ganelon, so they did not know the detailed circumstances.

Although Tigre more or less talked about it to several people including Mashas, and they had decided to think about a concrete way to deal with him after the battle with the Sachstein Army would be over. Before the formidable enemy, which was Sachstein, they had no room to think about other things.

“I will digress a little from the current topic, but.....”

Showing no signs of being agitated even after receiving Mashas’ gaze, Valentina bent her head slightly to the side. Mashas and company nodded unhesitantly.

Judging from the fact that Ganelon was alive and moreover appeared in the royal palace recently, it was safe to think that it was connected to Greast. It was necessary to know their purpose.

As Valentina put the silver cup she was holding in her hand on the table, she turned her gaze to Augre.

“Well then, first I shall answer Viscount Augre’s question. Duke Ganelon is alive. The night of the day when the revolt occurred, I met with him and we have exchanged words a little.”

“Tigre said that he was suddenly attacked and then was saved by you though.”

When Mashas said so, Valentina affirmed with a smile.

“Yes. I was concerned about the cause of the commotion and walked around in the corridor.”

The black-haired Vanadis turned her body and gazed at the scythe leaning against the wall behind her.

“Although I have a weak constitution, I am also one of the Vanadises. As long as I have this child, I will be able to at least protect myself. And then, I

have met them. I was also surprised at the fact that Duke Ganelon was there, the shock that I received when I knew that he is a demon, was even more than that.”

At the word “demon” that came out from Valentina’s mouth as if it was natural, Mashas and Lim were surprised, and Augre and Badouin stared at her without be able to conceal their confusion.

“Excuse me, Vanadis-dono. I would like to confirm one thing.”

Augre raised his hand and asked Valentina.

“Just now, you said “demon”, but..... When you met Duke Ganelon, what kind of appearance did he have?”

“It looks like my way of explain it was not good. The outward appearance was the very Duke Ganelon that you people and me know well. He neither has three or four eyes nor did he grow a horn.”

“Despite this, you are saying that you knew that Duke Ganelon was a demon?”

When Augre asked one question after another, Valentina once again looked back towards her Dragonic Tool.

“This child told me that. Though you have certainly heard about it from the other Vanadis, Dragonic Tools have the power to sense the existence of demons. Though it does not seem to be something you would know if it is nearby.”

“Huh?” Augre returned such an idiotic voice. Well, it was probably the natural reaction. Badouin turned a gaze demanding assistance to Mashas.

Mashas and Lim knew well what both of them were perplexed about. For Augre and Badouin, who had actually never seen a demon, they could not concretely imagine it even after being told about demons. Much more when they were told that they had a human appearance.

Mashas and Lim had encountered a demon called Baba Yaga in Lebus of

the Zhcted Kingdom. They have also heard about stories from Tigre and Elen. That's why they were not that much surprised at Valentina's story.

—That isn't something one can understand unless they actually witness it.

As Mashas temporarily interrupted her talk with a cough, he addressed Augre and Badouin.

“Hey, you two. Do you remember the folklores that wet nurses narrated when you were children and also poems of monsters that the minstrels recite? For example, the monster frog Vodyanoy. The broom witch Baba Yaga. The white demon Torbalan. Don't you remember at least one of them?”

“.....Are you telling us that those monsters actually exist?”

Badouin's middle forehead was carved with several deep wrinkles as he made a face seeming to want to say that it was absurd. Mashas shook his short and stout body and shrugged his shoulders.

“I don't know to that extant. But, it's true that there are people who take the names of such monsters and possess power beyond that of a human. —Valentina-dono.”

Mashas turned his face to the black-haired Vanadis.

“Judging from the fact that you called him a demon, even if his appearance is human as is, I think that Ganelon showed you some extraordinary power. For example, flying in the air, or spitting out fire from his mouth or bringing thunder from the sky.....”

While Valentina put the tea in her mouth, she looked at the old Earl with honestly impressed eyes.

Depending on the interaction of Augre and Badouin, she had thought to end the explanation using that^[3] as a reason, but as expected the attitude of Mashas, who has already seen a demon, was flexible. Pulling themselves together at his words, Augre and Badouin once again showed a stance of listening to the story.

“There are two points I saw that told me that Duke Ganelon is an existence detached from human.”

Holding her silver cup in her right hand as is, Valentina raised her left hand's index finger.

“One is his strength. He has easily crushed iron armor along with the human wearing it just by lightly catching it with his hand. In addition, he ran on the royal palace's roof with a speed like a beast. Since even my Dragonic Tool was not able to injure him, it will be useless to fight him with an ordinary sword and spear, right?”

“I see. And the other one?”

Although Mashas' face turned pale with fright, he briefly urged her to continue with a serious face.

“The other one is a power exactly like in fairy tales. He released a fireball of this size from his hand. And that fireball flew with the speed of an arrow.”

Valentina used both her hands to describe the fireball's size. It was roughly as big as an adult's head.

“That is all for what I saw” as Valentina said that, Mashas, Augre and Badouin stared at the black-haired Vanadis with serious expressions, but they looked at each other before long.

“So, that is how Duke Ganelon is now, huh..... What do we do?”

Badouin muttered his impression in a serene tone and asked the other two. While stroking his gray beard with a despondent face, Mashas answered.

“Well, even if you ask that, the fireball aside, we were told that swords don't work him..... Speaking of which, that Gaspar, he said that his sword was blown away in an instant and he didn't understand why.”

“In other words, things that face heroes recited in myths, huh. I wonder how his physical strength is. The outward appearance is the same as the Ganelon that we know, so I wonder if it's possible to attack him with number

and get him tire. I can't say that it's a good method though.”

To Augre's words, Mashas nodded seeming to want to say that it could not be helped.

“I guess there's only that. Bind him with chains..... No, if he can crush iron, then chains are useless. Though it's a little brutal, how about making him fall into a deep hole, pouring oil from above and then burning him to ash?”

“Or, there is also the method of attaching weight on him and sinking him in a deep lake or marsh.....”

Augre further proposed a plan, and Badouin summarized the talk.

“Aside from whether we can really do it or it will work, let's think about these two for now. After all, it is not like we currently know everything about him.”

While observing the old men, Valentina eagerly endured as she almost burst into laughter. This time seemed to be her turn to harbor thoughts that mixed amazement and admiration.

Both Augre and Badouin, hearing “demon”, were confused as they have imagined it to be a slippery monster. They revised their recognition thanks to Mashas saying that “it was a creature with supernatural power”.

It would have been better it was only that, but they seriously intended to fight against that creature. Without being at a loss how they should fight it, they did not give up before fighting and, for the time being, worked out countermeasures to face it.

This indomitable courage was without doubt what allowed them to get rid of the civil war and an enemy nation's invasion. Though it was Tigrevurmud Vorn, who was extolled as hero, it was not like Brune has obtained various victories with only his ability alone.

“Valentina-dono. There are several things that I would like to ask you, but

is it all right?”

Badouin turned eyes filled with great interest towards the black-haired Vanadis.

“You said that that day was the first time when you learnt that Duke Ganelon was..... not ‘a human’.”

He seemed to slightly hesitate to call him a “demon”. Figuratively expressing Ganelon as above, the cat-faced Prime Minister continued his words.

“Your interactions with Duke Ganelon should date back to a few years ago. Until then, have you never realized it? Or, in those days Duke Ganelon was still a human?”

It was an interaction with a great noble competing to be one of the best in Brune and a Vanadis with position second only to the King in Zhcted. There was no way that Badouin, who was the Prime Minister, would not know.

Valentina made a somewhat grim expression and answered.

“Just as you say, my interaction with Duke Ganelon extends for roughly three years from five years ago until two years ago.”

Five years ago, in order to make Osterode that she governed wealthier, Valentina, thinking about trading with Brune, got in contact with Ganelon.

At the time, Ganelon, with his territory Lutetia as the center, held an especially strong influence in Brune northern part. If Valentina, who had her dukedom in Zhcted northeast part, were to think about trading with Brune, it was the natural choice to get friendly with Ganelon.

“But, I do not think that he showed such a presence ever once. My Ezendeis did not show a reaction as well. Whether he had kept on hiding being a demon or he was still human at that time, I do not know.”

This was a lie. That day when she met Ganelon for the first time, Ezendeis reacted to him. While knowing that the other party was an inhuman demon,

Valentina continued the trade with him.

Although saying that the Dragonic Tool appealed as such, that was something only a Vanadis understood. If she were to brand a duke of another country as demon without conclusive evidence, it would invite a serious diplomatic issue.

In addition, although Ganelon vaguely guessed that his true identity was found out by Valentina, he did not breathe a word about such a thing. While showing a great noble-like attitude regarding the trade, he was throughout and upright.

As a lord, Ganelon was a cruel man who afflicted his territory people with violence and fear; but he did not show such an attitude to nobles of foreign countries and merchants, so as a trader partner, there was no problem in particular.

But, Valentina did not reveal a single word about those facts.

Before, at the place of the meeting^[4] on the night of the Sun Festival, Valentina adopted the attitude that she knew nothing about demons. By adding to that, she had to pretend that she knew about Ganelon's identity afterwards.

Though Tigre was not here and Valentina was also the only Vanadis present, it was very likely that Lim and Mashas would talk about it to Tigre and other Vanadises.

As Badouin listened to Valentina's words while nodding several times, he moved to the next question.

“You said that you exchanged words with Ganelon, who appeared in the royal palace, but could you tell us what he is thinking about or if he has revealed his goal?”

After finishing his question, Badouin made a face saying that they finally went back to the real issue at hand. It was not only him, so did Augre, Mashas and Lim as well.

This meeting was to speak about how to fight against the Greast army. Because there was no change in the fact that Ganelon was also an enemy to defeat for Brune, they thought about the means to fight him; but unless they made a connection between Ganelon himself and the Greast army, it could not become the subject of the topic at hand.

While bending her head slightly to one side as she explored her memory, Valentina answered to the Prime Minister.

“Duke Ganelon seems to be plotting something, but I do not know anything about it. But, when he showed up in this royal palace, he aimed at Earl Vorn.”

“At Tigre?”

Mashas and company’s expressions became steep. Even Lim, who has been listening to the talk silently until then, revealed a very small of strain on her unsociable face.

While gazing at her silver cup where a small quantity of tea remained at the bottom, Valentina answered.

“I only became aware of it recently, but the bow that Earl Vorn possesses seems to have the power to repel demons, like our Dragonic Tools. Perhaps, Duke Ganelon aimed at it.”

“So, he either tried to steal a weapon that can wound him, or to kill its wielder Earl Vorn.”

To Badouin, who narrowed his eyes and tilted his head to the side, Valentina nodded.

“It is to the bitter end a guess though. In the end, he escaped before revealing his aim after all.”

“However.....” said Mashas as he folded his arms and looked at the map on the table.

“As we don’t know Ganelon’s aim, we can only think about Greast’s goal

from his movement, huh.”

The fact that Ganelon was not human was certainly important information. They also understood regarding the relationship between Valentina and him. But if one had to say it, it was all they knew.

Since it was Mashas and company’s side that asked her, Valentina did not intend to express her dissatisfaction; but it was unfortunate that it did not seem to become a clue to find out Greast’s goal.

“There’s probably no doubt that he’ll aim at either Lutetia or Evreux, but..... No, judging from the fact that it’s clear that Ganelon is alive, will it be Lutetia after all?”

Augre’s gaze was busily coming and going to Lutetia and Evreux on the map, but then it was fixed on Lutetia. It was a distance of seven to eight days on foot from the capital Nice.

“Attacking Lutetia, making it their base and then building a force to revolt with assuming Ganelon as the leader. Wouldn’t the enemy’s intention something like that?”

At Lim’s words, Mashas and company assented. Two years passed since the previous civil war, so neither Ganelon nor Great would have their cohesive power like before. But, the remnants of Melisande faction and those, who still opposed Regin, would definitely assemble under him.

“Her Highness said that the Greast army is the Kingdom’s enemy.”

Badouin looked at Mashas with a stern expression.

“Earl Rodant. Is it possible to catch up with them and defeat them before they attacked Lutetia?”

“It’ll be impossible to defeat them, but if we make not letting them come near Lutetia as our number one objective and gain time by devoting ourselves to defense, then let’s see..... if we choose, among the soldiers, up to 7000 ones with minor injuries and with energy to spare in physical strength, have

them restore their energy by taking a rest until tomorrow and depart from here the morning of the day after tomorrow, then”

Without having room to recover from their fatigue of the battle against the Sachstein Army, the Moonlight Knight Army fought against the Greast army and lost. And then, they returned to the capital while dragging their injured bodies. As for Mashas, he really wanted to give them rest for at least five days.

But as expected, if they were to leave the Greast army alone for five days, Lutetia would be snatched away. Even now, they have moved ahead for approximately one day.

“What’s thankful for us is that the Greast army can’t head straight to Lutetia. Between the capital and Lutetia, there are a territory governed by a feudal lord who isn’t cooperative with Ganelon and a fort where a chivalric order is stationed.”

No matter how strong Greast was at battle, he would incur losses if he fought. It would also take time. In addition, if he were to attack Lutetia, suitable preparations would be necessary.

“On the other hand, we can go to Lutetia at the shortest distance through the highway. While requesting cooperation to the feudal lord and the chivalric order. This difference is big. If we leave the morning of the day after tomorrow, we’ll catch up with them.”

Mashas and Augre looked at each other. They somehow managed to be able to fight.

Of course, there was a possibility that Greast forced his way through the feudal lord’s territory and hurried to Lutetia, but they should have expectations from their ally there. Even if they were to forcibly have the exhausted soldiers walk and catch up with the enemy, they would only be kick about easily after all.

“I am sorry, but——”

At that time, Valentina slightly raised her hand. To Mashas and company, who made puzzled faces, the black-haired Vanadis plainly told in a calm attitude and tone.

“I and the soldiers of Osterode intend to leave the capital tomorrow morning at the latest.”

Silence descended in the conference room. Mashas, Lim, Augre and Badouin stared at Valentina with dumbfounded faces without moving an inch. It was as though too much surprise and confusion have turned the four people into sculptures.

“W-What..... What do you mean by that, Valentina-dono?”

After a little less than ten seconds passed, Mashas finally squeezed his voice. One could see the entanglement in his tongue to the point of trembling.

“Even if you ask me what I mean”

Even when being exposed to the four people’s gazes, Valentina did not break her composed attitude.

“The reason I am here is by the order of His Majesty King Victor of my country. His Majesty’s order was to cooperate with Brune and defeat Sachstein. Now that is over, I have no reason to remain in Brune.”

At this reply, not only Mashas, but also Augre and Badouin opened their eyes wide.

Though Valentina’s words seemed to be cruel, it was a sound argument and considering her position, it was a reasonable claim. This was because she first had responsibility regarding the soldiers, who were her subordinates, and should avoid doing something like exposing them to danger by shoving her neck in an unnecessary battle.

Lim, who recovered first, stood up from her chair and bowed her head to Valentina.

“Valentina-sama! I beg of you. In order to rescue Eleonora-sama, could

you remain here.....?”

“Limalisha. I should have already told you my evaluation regarding Eleonora.”

Mashas also vigorously left his seat with a pale face. As he walked until next to Valentina, he bowed his head very deeply like Lim.

“What you say is correct. Even after having understood it, I still beg of you. Could you cooperate with us at least until we defeat the Greast army?”

Furthermore, Augre and Badouin stood up and stared at Valentina.

“If you say that you must have permission of the Zhcted King, I will go to Zhcted. I will explain the circumstances and ask him to grant Vanadis-dono’s freedom of movement. Therefore, can’t you lend us your help here?”

When Augre said so, Badouin also appealed to Valentina with a serious expression.

“I beg you as well. If you want it, can you not give some conditions?”

The Osterode army’s soldiers numbered approximately 2600. They were 3000 when they set foot on the land of Brune, but they have lost 400 soldiers in the battles until today.

Though it was not a large army, they were well trained, loyally moved by Valentina’s command and bravely fought. It was 2600 that the Moonlight Knight Army could by no means let go of.

In addition, Valentina’s fame as a Vanadis could not be ignored.

Under the present circumstances in which Elen went missing, if the other Vanadis was to leave, the Moonlight Knight Army’s morale would greatly decline and conversely, the enemy’s fighting spirit would rise.

In addition, this was something that they could absolutely not voice out, but one concern was born in Badouin’s and Mashas’ minds.

They wondered whether Valentina, who would leave the capital, would not join the Greast army.

How much close the black-haired Vanadis was with Ganelon? Among the people present in this place, only Valentina herself knew. In this case, the point, that they did not know clearly Ganelon and Greast's goal, made fear well up inside the two men.

However, even when she was entreated by the four people, Valentina did not consent.

“Everyone, I am sorry for making you bow your heads, but I have already decided.”

Mashas and company stood stock still on the spot. She was a Vanadis of Zhcted, so even if it were Regin, she would not be able to force something on her.

—Since it comes to this, even if I'm to cling to her unsightly.....

Though Mashas thought so, he was unable to move. If he were to harm her mood by doing that, everything would be over.

Not caring at all about the four people's gazes, Valentina turned a smile to Badouin.

“Prime Minister. Could you prepare a (free) pass for me?”

“A pass.....?”

The man, who has served as the Prime Minister of a country for many years, artlessly repeated the Vanadis' words. Valentina joined her hands together and answered “yes”.

“I and my soldiers will go north from the capital, pass through Lutetia and then go back to Zhcted from the port city located in the northern coast. I would like to avoid causing needless misunderstanding after all.”

Badouin were unable to return words at once.

If Valentina, who held a pass, were to act together with Greast, Greast would be able to openly move around the land of Lutetia. This was the worst advent for Brune. However, if he were to voice it out, he would definitely anger Valentina.

He had to skillfully avoid her demand.

“Vanadis-dono. As we have talked earlier, Lutetia is a land which will become a battlefield from here on. You seem to be thinking about passing through there before the battle begins, but that we do not know what might happen is the way of the world. We find it difficult to thoughtlessly expose you to danger.”

“I assume that that is the Prime Minister’s thought, right?”

As if having waited for Badouin to finish speaking, Valentina asked. Although the old Prime Minister slightly frowned, he nodded with a composed attitude. He squared off in his mind at what she intended/meant to say.

“I am thankful at the Prime Minister’s concern. But, I too would like to have my soldiers return quickly. I will trouble you, but could you ask it to Her Highness Regin? If even Her Highness says that she cannot consent, at that time I will stay in the capital together with my soldiers.”

While stroking his moustache in a casual gesture, Badouin quickly scrutinized Valentina’s words. There was no problem about conveying her demand to Regin. What bothered him was that Valentina seemed to think that Regin would make a decision different from Badouin

“I understand. I shall get a reply from Her Highness by today and convey it to Vanadis-dono.”

And thus, with irritation, impatience and doubt remaining in some hearts, the meeting ended.

After the three people Augre, Lim and Valentina exited the conference room, Mashas and Badouin stayed behind. Badouin called out to and detained

Mashas, who was about to leave with Lim and company.

The two men were seated in the same way as at the time of the meeting while facing each other with the table between them. On the table, they were five empty silver cups and several maps were still spread as is.

“There is something on which I would like you to cooperate with me.”

Badouin directly cut to the chase.

“I would like to make Tigrevurmud Vorn the King of our country. As soon as possible.”

GATAN, the sound of the chair shaking resounded inside the room. Mashas has half-risen to his feet. The old Prime Minister’s reply was only brief, but it was plenty enough to surprise the old Earl.

“When I wondered how much troublesome thing you’ll bring out, this is more than what I expected. If it wasn’t you, I would have laughed it off as a poor joke though.....”

“I am serious. It is not an idea which just struck me, I have thought about it since before.”

When Badouin answered in a curt tone which was not like him, he heaved a sigh.

“But, I intended to take more time for that. I wanted to have him serve in the royal palace and steadily pile up achievements other than in the battlefield, have him act as the mediator of the young nobles, increase little by little the time he would spend together with Her Highness and thus gradually disseminate their relationship.”

“.....There are many things I want to say, but I’ll put them aside for the time being. In that case, why don’t you do as such? Why the hurry?”

Mashas asked with an expression still lingering with surprise. Badouin wrinkled his brows and further puffed out his round cheeks in displeasure. He took one of the maps spread out on the table. It was the one depicting the

neighboring countries.

“He was given a glorious title as a warrior by Muozinel, he was highly evaluated to the point of having the opportunity to talk one-on-one with the Zhcted King, he repelled the large army of Sachstein, negotiated on equal footing with Duke Tallard Graham, who is regarded as Asvarre’s next King, and gains him as an ally.....”

While tapping the various countries on the map with a finger, Badouin made an astonished face. The one that he deemed especially dangerous was the Asvarre Kingdom. Their conduct had no integrity, but as a result, only Asvarre stood almost unscathed in this war.

“It is no longer only achievements in the battlefield. Earl Vorn’s existence will become important even in the relationships with various countries in the future. Moreover, he is young and single. The possibility of Zhcted or Asvarre bringing up talk of engagement in the future is great.”

“Well, that may be so.....”

Mashas made a dejected face. He remembered about how previously various nobles of the country proposed marriage interviews to Tigre and were going to send their daughters or nieces as maid apprentices.

“I do not say that it will absolutely happen. But, it would be late to take countermeasures after such talks were to be brought up. What is especially scary is the case where a trouble will occur in the future diplomacy were we to decline. —Now then”

While stroking the tip of his erectly stretched moustache, Badouin made a solemn face.

“Her Highness Regin’s reign is also two years. It is already a good time for her to think about marriage, right? The marriage of royalty should give priority to political maneuvers, but there is nothing to criticize about the current Earl Vorn on that point. Above all, Her Highness likes him.”

“Even if Her Highness does.....”

After saying up to there, Mashas thought of something and knitted his brows. Why did Badouin suddenly start talking about something like this? That he had been thinking about it since before was probably not a lie, but would it not be fine talking about it after the battle against Greast ended?

—Has he noticed that Tigre yearns for Eleonora-dono?

Currently, Tigre was acting alone in order to rescue Elen. It was not out of responsibility as the Moonlight Knight Army's supreme commander. It was as one young man strongly yearning for one young woman.

Both Tigre and Elen had their respective positions and there was first no way that they could be wedded, but even so Badouin would like to take measures for the sake of Regin.

“Even if Her Highness likes Tigre, he's the lord of Alsace and doesn't come from a prestigious family. Even if he has brilliant war achievements and is highly evaluated by other countries, won't it be difficult? Above all, he can use neither sword nor spear even now and only excels at archery.”

“Aside from if it was until last year, our country in its present state cannot afford the luxury of choosing ‘an innocuous person with good pedigree and lineage’ as King. Be strong in war and be able to compete with various even in the field of diplomacy. That is what is demanded from a King. Those, who found it a problem that Earl Vorn can use neither sword nor spear and suspected that he is Zhcted's puppet, will behave themselves with the fact that he suppressed the revolt and protected Her Highness. If it is now, there will be few objections. And also, do you know about the title of Knight of the Moonlight that he was given by the late King Faron?”

Faron was Regin's father and Brune's previous King. To the unexpected question, Mashas made a puzzled face and shook his head.

“I've heard that, while it happened quite a long time, it isn't even sure that a person who was given that title has existed, but..... is there some special meaning to it?”

“Nearly 100 years ago, there was only one person who has been honored

with that title. The person married the King's daughter and became the next King."

Mashas had his mouth wide-open. The shock temporarily rendered the old Earl speechless.

"T-Then, won't it be better even if more were known about it.....?"

Though he somehow pulled himself together and threw a question, the old Prime Minister indifferently answered without being agitated.

"Do you think that a person, who is able to marry the King's daughter, has just been given that title alone? I heard that that person was also won many other titles and was called with various nicknames."

"Do you intend to choose a suitable time, spread that and shout that Tigre and Her Highness being wedded is the will of His Majesty Faron?"

Badouin did not returned words. His expression filled with determination was above all his reply.

Mashas made a sullen face and strongly stroked his gray beard as if tearing it off.

Tigre would undoubtedly make a good King.

He has an intention which would make him a good ruler and also the magnanimity of lending an ear to the voices of people. Regin, Badouin and Mashas just had to compensate for the abilities he lacked.

In addition, if Tigre became King, the position of Mashas, whom he deeply trusted, would become firm and the Rodant House would greatly prosper. Though Mashas was not that interested in power and influence, he naturally had the wish of wanting to make the Rodant House and the land of Aude that he governed prosper.

It was not only Mashas. Augre, the people of Alsace and all those, who had accompanied Tigre in the battles until now, would be given his favor.

But, Mashas shook his head with a wry smile.

“Badouin. I understand your thought. Sorry, but I can’t lend you my help.”

“Could I hear the reason?”

To the Prime Minister’s words, the old Earl nodded with a smile on his whole face.

“His father is a man who had the daughter of a gardener without relative as a wife. I think that it was a choice not like a noble, but the persons themselves seemed to be happy. As a person, who was a friend of such a fellow, I want Tigre to be wedded to someone he loves.”

“You are like a substitute for his father, huh.”

Badouin revealed a complex smile mixed with nostalgia, envy and somewhat disappointed feelings. He too knew Urz.

“I’m not that conceited. But, I only want Tigre to walk the path he believes in. If he himself desires the throne, I’ll gladly exert myself for that purpose. But if he doesn’t, I don’t want to let him carry a burden heavier than this on his back.”

“.....Understood.”

Returning such words in a calm tone, Badouin stood up from the chair.

“If I succeed in persuading Earl Vorn, I shall once again ask for your cooperation.”

“Do your best.”

Mashas also stood up and the two men exited the conference room.

Then, as they have not even taken several steps, the two men were called to halt by a loud voice. When they looked back, one civil official was running their way. To his unusual state, the old Prime Minister and the old Earl erased the calm mood of a little while ago and tightened their faces.

“Badouin-sama. And Earl Rodant, too.....”

The civil official fixed his breathing and earnestly reported while fixing the disorder of his gray official outfit.

“A report from the southeast border.....! It is said that a large army of Muozinel has invaded!”

Mashas and Badouin stood stock stiff on the spot horrified.

Translator and references notes

[1] wouldn't it be golden here? Possibly a typo from the author (kiniiro and giniiro have almost similar pronunciation with the only difference of k and g)?

[2] meaning they charged into the disordered ranks and further disordered those ranks

[3] here referring to the explanation that Dragonic Tools can sense demons

[4] meeting that all the Vanadis and Tigre had in order to talk about demons



Chapter 2 – What it means to believe

About a day's walk from the capital Nice to the northwest, a gently-sloping hill spread out and hung over the entire region. It was filled with sparsely populated forests and a thin river that flowed in between the hills. It was a place where different villages could be reached with 3 Verst (about 3 km) of walking.

Early in the afternoon as the sun passed its zenith, a little less than 10,000 men formed a long line and were walking on the long and narrow highway through that area.

Their outfits were uneven, and while there were those armed with spears and armor, there were also those wearing furs and twisting chains around their bodies. There were also people who wore leather armor and hung large hatchets at their waists as well.

If there was one thing that they all had in common, it'd be the dark and wild atmosphere they were giving off. They felt like people who would not hesitate to steal from or torment others.

Their supreme commander was on board of one of two carriages slowly advancing at the very rear of the group. He was a man with gray hair, well-ordered features and a body wrapped in luxurious silk clothes and he was lying down while being half buried among many cushions. It was Charon Anquetil Greast.

He commanded this group, which was composed of soldiers, who served Earl Cotillard, former knights, bandits and the like, to do two things.

One was the release of greed. Before fighting with the Moonlight Knight army, Greast mercilessly attacked and burnt some villages and towns located in Earl Cotillard's territory and abducted several people. He did not do so to

obtain food supplies and materials, but instead did it to raise the soldiers' fighting spirit and mentally corner Cotillard's soldiers so they could not remain uninvolved.

If they followed him, meals would be guaranteed and they could also plunder. Greast constantly reminded the soldiers of this.

The other method used to make the soldiers obey him was fear.

One time, six soldiers, who were standing guard, sneaked away from the army and attacked a nearby village. They set fire to houses, killed several villagers and stole food and alcohol.

What awaited them, when they returned, was Greast's severe execution.

He put an iron collar on the necks of those to be executed and made them wear a whole head iron mask. The iron mask only had a hole in one place. Water was poured into the hole then it was sealed up.

Those who received the sentence, unable to breathe, not being able to see anything and being unable to utter a sound, writhed in agony as if dancing and died by drowning. It was an execution method that Greast named "Dance of the Mask".

The soldiers who saw this execution all had pale faces and were unable to utter a single word. Men, who enjoyed plunder and killing and could even swing down their blades on women and children without hesitation, shrank.

When the iron mask was taken off to confirm that they were dead, there were people who threw up after seeing the deceased's *sublime* faces. At this moment, they submitted to Greast.

"I'm slightly dissatisfied, but well I can't help it....."

Greast listlessly rummaged through his gray hair as he looked up at the ceiling of the carriage while being buried amongst the cushions. These 10,000 soldiers led by him were going north.

He moved after being ordered by Ganelon to "bring chaos to Brune as

much as possible”. He had cooperated with Melisande and stolen the Kingdom’s sacred sword Durandal for that purpose. The only thing that he had done to satisfy his own greed would be the capture of Elen.

According to Greast’s schedule, he should have provoked Regin by attacking villages and towns around the capital Nice and plundering for a few days. Afterwards, he would occupy Lutetia and seize the northern part of Brune.

What made him change his schedule was the report of the Muozinel army’s invasion brought about by a scouting party. Greast had organized several scouting parties and diligently kept gathering information.

In order to check whether or not it was the truth, Greast had the Cotillard’s soldiers head to the nearby fort and the local feudal lord. Brune’s southern part was too far to have it confirm directly. It would require nearly ten days to just go and come back.

“Princess Regin should have given the land of Agnes in the southeast to Zhcted. If they invaded by breaking through Agnes, the Muozinel army would without doubt have a great number of soldiers.”

The Cotillard’s soldiers, who received Greast’s orders pretended to be Princess Regin’s subordinates and succeeded in getting a story from them.

The Muozinel army having invaded was a fact and it numbered from 100,000 to 150,000. It was said that they marched along the southern coast and captured port cities one after another.

“This is quite bad.”

Greast immediately saw through the fact that the Muozinel army secured the sea route by seizing the southern port cities group, and on top of that, intended to aim at the capital Nice.

He had no room to stick to the capital and plunder. It was necessary to seize Brune’s northern part as early as possible and strengthen the defense.

That was the reason why the Greast army immediately went away from the capital Nice and headed to the north.

The Greast army was not heading straight to Lutetia; they avoided the main highway and were aiming for the land of Montour located in the southwest of Lutetia.

Montour was a small territory which only had several villages and towns. Its current lord was Viscount Vernon Laspede, but this man was indebted to Greast.

Two years ago. It was the time when the Brune army lost to the Zhcted army in the land of Dinant and Princess Regin, who called herself Prince Regnas at the time, went missing. Being told “cooperate with this youngster” by Ganelon, Greast met with Vernon.

Vernon was the Laspede House’s eldest son and should have someday inherited the House, peerage and territory. But, the one that his father designated as the successor was the second son Denis.

Vernon had a rustic character and when something did not go his way, he would vent his anger on the fief’s population. He was generous, his ability as a warrior was also reliable and he greatly played an active part on the battlefield, but he was disliked and feared by the fief’s population.

“I watched over you hoping that you would someday correct this behavior, but it seems like I can only give up. I do not intend to let you inherit anything.”

Vernon’s father, Viscount Laspede said so. Vernon who was angry at his father’s attitude and was greatly perplexed implored Ganelon.

Greast, who heard the circumstances, arrested Viscount Laspede for the charge of plotting a rebellion against the royal family. After he went through torture and was killed by the execution method called “Armor of Flames”, then it was announced that the Viscount was innocent and that the second son Denis wanted to inherit the Viscount House so much that he tried to pin the crime on his father and his elder brother.

Greast ordered Vernon to arrest Denis, but Denis fled from the territory and was able to conceal himself. Thus, Vernon inherited the Viscount House.

The report, which was delivered to the royal palace, was something written by Greast's hand; it was only written that Viscount Laspede died, the eldest son Vernon succeeded him and the second son Denis absconded. It did not even have the description that Laspede plotted a rebellion.

When Regin became Brune's ruler, Vernon pledged allegiance to her, and confined himself in his territory so as to avoid standing out. In addition, he learnt some self-restraint and did not exert violence that much to the fief's population.

Even so if peace continued in Brune, either Regin or Badouin would probably realize a suspicious point regarding the Laspede House's peerage and territory's succession. But, their busy daily prolonged Vernon's life as feudal lord.

For Greast, the likes of Vernon were only mere *accessories*. But, Montour's land was an ideal position as base in order to seize Lutetia.

"I guess I'll borrow Vernon's mansion when I arrive at Montour. I shall deepen my relationship with Eleonora-dono one step further inside a bed."

Elen was put in the other carriage. The one, who might approach that carriage, was only a girl who was appointed by Greast to take care of her. It was a girl that he abducted from a certain village.

Three days have passed since Greast captured Elen. The gray-haired Marquis repeated the same act he did the first day on Elen every night. He felt her body over her clothes, licked her fingers and shoulders and pressed his tongue on her forehead and cheeks.

At times, no matter what, his blood boiled and he felt so excited that he almost stepped beyond that point, but Greast restrained himself. He did not want to welcome the moment of supreme bliss in a slightly dirty camp or a narrow carriage.

“However, to think that Tigrevurmud Vorn went missing..... Judging from the number of the Moonlight Knight army which returned to the capital, there’s no sign that he’s leading a detached force. I don’t think that he dies a dog’s death, but where is he and what is he doing.....?”

Greast had not noticed. That there was one youth on a hillside about 500 Arshins (approximately 500 meters) away from the army of 10,000 that he led. And that that youth slipped through the eyes of the scouting party that Greast frequently sent and, while hiding behind trees and rocks, continued pursuing the Greast army while keeping a constant distance.

That youth’s name was Tigrevurmud Vorn.



It was early afternoon two days ago that Tigre discovered the Greast army.

From that time until now, Tigre had been continually surveying them. The only times when he took his eyes off from them were when he stopped by a village or a town away from the highway to buy food, and when he slept.

If someone who knew Tigre well were to see his current state, they would not be able to conceal their surprise. The youth’s darkish red hair was disheveled like a shabby nest of birds, his face stained black with soil and dirt, there were dark circles under his eyes and a stubby beard stood out on his chin. Only his eyes shone fierily, glowing similarly to that of a starving beast.

The hempen clothes he wore turned black by soil and dirt and became loose here and there. The beast’s fur he coiled around his waist brought about an almost bandit-like atmosphere.

Since he parted from Mashas and company and acted alone, Tigre had hardly slept well. He even ignored the need to wipe his body clean, as he thought that rescuing Elen took precedent over it.

As a matter of fact, when he found the Greast army, Tigre was about to nock an arrow on his black bow. The figures of soldiers suffering from

poison and his allies escaping and collapsing within the confusion of the defeat flashed across the youth's mind.

If he were to use the black bow's power while being stimulated by a dark anger as is, he would probably be able to blow off many enemies and give them a severe blow and confusion. But at the same time, he would definitely invite the counterattack of the enemies who survived, made them cautious and thus be unable to achieve his original goal.

Tigre narrowly remembered his goal.

The reason why he was here all alone was in order to rescue Elen. As he remembered the smile of Elen that he met in the end on the battlefield and the depressed face of Lim, who has lowered her head saying "please" while trying to desperately maintain her calmness, Tigre barely removed his fingers from the bowstring.

Incidentally, Tigre was not currently on horse. He was riding one when he left the Moonlight Knight army, but after he discovered the Greast army, he thought that a horse might stand out, thus exchanged it with provisions in a settlement he stopped by.

Because the Greast army had many infantrymen, it was not difficult for Tigre to follow them.

"It's really a medley, a mixed organization, huh....."

As he scowled at the Greast army 500 Arshins ahead while hiding in a clump of bushes, Tigre took a small breath. Why did they lose to such guys? He was thinking very much about that recently.

As he was not chasing them directly, but instead sneaking around their flank while hiding in thickets under the cover of dusk, Tigre had observed the Greast army from various angles and distances. Due to this, he had not yet been found out by the frequent scouting parties.

He had been thinking about it since the time that they had fought, but their equipment was not uniform. If there were people who had outfitted

themselves with a full set of armor, there were also those who had outfits like what he had on currently. In addition, whenever they made camp or took time resting, there were frequent quarrels and scuffles, as well as people who were drunk.

The commander Greast seemed to let them do as they liked for some reason. He probably thought that it would be fine as long as they obeyed orders at crucial times.

Anyway, Tigre was thankful for that. This was because it meant that there was an opening he could take advantage of.

There was no soldier who would remember all the faces of 10,000 comrades. If he were to cover just his face, it looked like he could creep in under cover of the dark night and pretend to be one of theirs.

—And then first, I'll find out where Elen is.

As he decided so, Tigre decided to wait for the day to go down while making sure to not be too far from them.

A little before the day set, the Greast army stopped their march and set up camp.

Greast ordered soldiers and had them dig trenches in two-fold. Both trenches were shallow, but at the bottom of the trenches, there were swords and spears buried with their points facing upwards. Furthermore, Greast had them set several barracks between the two trenches, thus making it hard to see from outside of the camp.

“An enemy will not emerge from the capital at this point in time, but it’s better to take some measures after all.”

Even if there was an enemy, who set a night attack, if he could gain time by holding them back using the trenches, he would be able to deal with them in anyway by his command. Great had that much confidence.

Here and there in the camp, soldiers put stones together to make cooking

hearths and light fires.

The meal was only bread and soup. The soup's flavor was strong, containing meat, vegetables and cooked beans. The types of meat in the soup were varied, such as pig, rabbit and sheep, but it was enough to please the soldiers. The bread was flat and hard, but when it was dipped into the soup and eaten, it filled their stomachs.

By the time they started their meal, the day had passed and night had arrived.

While occasionally looking left and right as if he were looking for a vacant space, a youth walked between the soldiers who had surrounded the fires and were enjoying themselves with meals and conversation.

The youth's identity was Tigre. Under cover of the night darkness, he had sneaked into the Great army's camp with a nonchalant look.

Currently, Tigre had covered his head with the fur that he had wound around his waist, covering nearly half his face. His face was also rather dirty as he'd rubbed soil onto it. With his stubbly beard, the impression he gave off was completely different. Even those who knew his face would not be able to recognize him unless they could examine him in a well-lit place. Even his outfit of leather armor on dirty clothes fit in with the camp perfectly.

As Tigre occasionally stopped here and there, he eavesdropped on those around him. There were all kinds of people here, from bandits to knights and soldiers who previously served nobles. There were also mercenaries who had been hired.

—As I thought, these guys are just a gathering of various kinds of people.

And the majority of people seemed to have no hesitation towards carrying out inhuman acts.

Whenever he heard their stories, it was always about attacks they had carried out on the villages and towns in Earl Cotillard's territory, where they violated the residents, killed them and stole their food. They talked about

how it was unfortunate that they could not do the same in capital territory. Tigre constantly had to restrain himself from taking action.

As he thought that he could possibly learn something about Elen by listening to his surroundings, he heard a certain person speak.

“Speaking of which, what happened to that silver-haired woman? Because of her alone, more than half of my subordinates died.”

As if he were recalling an event, one of the soldiers that were having a meal asked his comrade. He was clad in leather armor reinforced with iron scraps and was exuding a mercenary-like atmosphere.

The one who answered his question was a man sitting on the side with the hearth in between them. This one wrapped his body in dark gray armor. He seemed to be a soldier who served a noble.

“Stop it. That woman is the supreme commander’s favorite. He tied her with chains, locked her inside one of the barracks and *played with her* every night.”

Tigre almost unintentionally called out to that man, but he promptly held his mouth and swallowed the words that were about to come out of his throat.

—*It’s Elen.*

With the terms of silver-haired girl and having killed many enemies all by herself, it could only be her.

—*I thought that it could’ve been misinformation that Elen had been caught, but.....*

The Greast army did not declare that they captured Elen. There was the possibility that in the end, Tigre and company did not find Elen, who was wounded and fell on the battlefield or also that she lost her life in some sort of way.

But, Tigre could not shake the thought that the enemy had captured Elen.

One reason was the testimony of some soldiers who said to have seen Elen being engulfed by the enemy army.

The other was because Tigre remembered Greast's attitude towards Elen two years ago.

As expected, Elen has been captured by the Greast army and was somewhere in this camp.

Another man, who surrounded the bonfire, cut into the two men's conversation.

“There was a guy that was executed by the supreme commander this morning, right? It seemed that he was executed because he tried to see that woman's mug and got near the barracks where she was. Even though he was subdued and wasn't even able to go inside in the end.”

“The last time, the one of pouring water inside the iron mask was quite extreme, but this time was also quite awful. He cut off their ears and toes, and put them together with soil in their mouths.....”

As they recalled that scene, a heavy atmosphere drifted among them.

“.....Was it Montour? I hope we'd arrive there quickly.”

The leather-armored man shrugged his shoulders and changed the topic. Tigre quietly left that place.

His heartbeat sped up due to relief, strain, anxiety and impatience. That he knew that Elen was there was something to be happy about. However, any other information aside from that strongly tightened Tigre's chest to the extent that his breathing became painful. Greast's crookedness has far exceeded Tigre's imagination.

—With a camp of such a configuration, the supreme commander's barrack should be at the center. In that case, the barrack where Elen is locked in would be next to it.....

What was Greast doing to Elen? Just imagining it, Tigre almost let himself

be overwhelmed with anger. He wanted to give himself to fury, run around while crying aloud, unleash his black bow's power to his heart's content and erase just about everything by shooting arrows around randomly.

Tigre barely held back those ferocious emotions with the feeble chain called 'reason'. His sole purpose here was to rescue Elen.

—In the worst case, Elen may not be able to walk by herself.

In other words, Tigre would have to carry her on his back and break through the encirclement of 10,000 soldiers. Moreover, according to the soldiers, it seemed that one would be executed by just going near the barrack Elen was locked in.

—What do I do.....?

Probably because he was walking while thinking like that, the black bow that Tigre held hit the head of a man, who was sitting on the ground and having his meal.

The fact that he was going to walk away without noticing it was a blunder.

“Oi, wait.”

An anger-filled throaty voice was struck on the youth's back.

Tigre stopped. He intended to ignore it and leave, but it would be bad if it became an uproar and attracted attention. Besides, people, who found this kind of quarrel amusing and fan it, could be found anywhere.

“.....What?”

As he reluctantly turned around, one man was walking his way. He had a stout body build and was one head taller than Tigre. The upper half of his body was naked and he wore a fur of an animal directly (on his bust). He wound a straw rope around his waist and inserted a dagger and a hatchet there.

The man revealed a ferocious smile and looked down at Tigre while

unnaturally shaking his shoulders.

“That dirty bow of yours hit my head.”

Tigre silently looked up at the man. He could see that the surrounding gazes gathered on the man and himself. However, Tigre had no intention at all to answer to their expectations.

“I’m sorry for that.”

Tigre slightly bowed his head. He turned on his heel and was about to leave this time for sure, but saying “oi”, the man once again called him to halt with an overbearing voice.

“Do you take me for a fool? Do you think it’ll just end with that?”

Tigre chewed his back teeth and restrained his irritation. He thought that it would be quick to knock him down, but because he saw multiple figures of persons appearing to be the man’s comrades behind him, he changed this thought.

“What do you want me to do then?”

“Apologize. While placing both your knees and hands on the ground, that is.”

At these words, the man’s comrades laughed all at once. The soldiers around them rustled. The man was asking him to go down on his hands and knees.

Tigre silently stood stock still on the spot. If he were to get on the other party’s provocation here, it would not end with a one-on-one fight and would become a brawl.

If Tigre’s bare face were exposed and someone were to notice him, even if he could escape from this place, everything would be over. Greast would become cautious of Tigre and increase the number of lookouts. Or, he might move Elen to a place that only he knew.

Tigre got down on his knees there. He put his bow aside, and stuck both his hands and head on the ground.

“I’m sorry.”

Sighs of disappointment and disdain leaked out from the surroundings. Abuses such as “don’t kid with us” and “show your guts” were showered on Tigre from all sides. He even had empty plates and bottles thrown at him.

The man also seemed to be disappointed at Tigre’s attitude. He spat saliva on Tigre’s back of head and stepped on the black bow placed to the side.

Tigre’s right hand clawed at the ground and tightly grasped a small handful of earth. Just a little more and the youth was about to take his bow from under the man’s step and beat him without arguing. He shouted Elen’s name many times in his heart, pictured her face in his mind and barely held onto his reason.

Could one call it fortunate? The man did not notice it.

“You dampen my mood. Cowards like you should just hurry up and disappear. Even if you go out in the battlefield, you won’t be of any use at all.”

The man’s foot separated from the bow. Tigre did not immediately extend his hand to the bow, and waited for the man to leave. Meanwhile, sneers and boos poured on the youth.

As the man and his comrades left, Tigre took his black bow and stood up unsteadily. He curved his back and looked downward so that his face was not seen and began to walk. He pretended to avoid the public eye and jumped behind a barrack.

He moved from shadow to shadow and exited the camp so that he was not found by the soldiers on lookout. He walked for a while and looked back towards the camp; as he confirmed that he was probably about 300 Arshins away from the bonfire’s size, he heaved a sigh of relief.

“.....Sorry”

While carefully cleaning off dirt on the black bow, the youth apologized. This time was entirely Tigre’s carelessness; if he was even a little careful, the bow would not have been stepped on. The fact, that the black bow was a special existence, so there would be no problem even if it was stepped on, was a different story.

Tigre slowly wiped the black bow covered with dirt with the fur that he put on his head. When he finished, he spread the fur on the ground and lay down on top of it.

He was thankful to the current season that was changing from spring to summer. This was because even if he slept like this, he would not catch a cold.

Anyway, it’d be better not to move today. He decided to rest and closed his eyes.

—The problem is what will I do from tomorrow on? As far as I see from their march, I can’t make a move in the daytime. In that case, it’ll be at night, but.....

Being unable to figure out a course of action, drowsiness encroached upon Tigre’s consciousness. It seemed that the infiltration and escape exhausted Tigre’s mind more than he thought.

Before he knew it, Tigre began to inhale and exhale slower and slower. The moon, which shone white with the darkness as background, silently overlooked the youth.

◎

At the time when Tigre was sleeping lying down on the ground, Limalisha was in her room located in Brune’s royal palace. It was a guest room that Augre has prepared for her.

Light was illuminating the room from the lit lamp hanging from the

ceiling. The interior design had a green color scheme to project a calm tone and it was tended scrupulously.

Just before she had entered the room, Lim had been inundated with tasks. She had to organize the soldiers from LeitMeritz and deal with other things. It had gotten to the point where even the time taken to have a meal had to be cut.

Mashas, who was considerate with her emotions and fatigue, told her to rest, but Lim declined it with a polite attitude and tidied up all the works she could do. It was as if she were seeking a minimal salvation in the exhausting work.

At present, the LeitMeritz soldiers' number was about 1600. The majority of them had rented out all the space in several inns to rest.

The arrangement of the inns and leading the troops to them had been undertaken by Augre and his son Gerard, so that was taken care of, but the management of the soldiers had to be done by Lim. She strictly ordered them not to cause any trouble in the capital and that they had to be ready to move out at any time.

As a result of losing the fight and Elen having gone missing, the soldiers were irritated. Still, only a portion of them knew that their lord, the silver-haired Vanadis, had been captured by the enemy. However, there were also a few soldiers who had guessed this was the case. If this situation were to drag on, she would have to inform them sooner or later.

In the time where they had yet to arrive at the capital, Rurick and Aram had visited Lim multiple times and requested permission to go and search for Elen.

“It’s not like we don’t believe in Lord Tigrevurmud, but as LeitMeritz’s soldiers following Vanadis-sama, I can’t just sit and not do anything to help. Please give us permission to leave the army temporarily and chase after her.

The bald-headed knight with excellent archery’s skills said so with a serious face.

“Thinking about Vanadis-sama’s position, the enemy will probably treat her politely. But, aren’t we worthless if we just stand and watch while biting our finger as our Vanadis-sama become a prisoner. Even if it doesn’t compare with Tigre-san, we should do what we can.”

The scout soldier with a round face that could be described as beaver’s also appealed as such.

Among the LeitMeritz soldiers, these two were the ones Tigre had a particularly close relation with. As for Rurick, he has never hidden his adoration towards Tigre.

Even these two were like that. So if it was other soldiers, they would think not to leave it to the foreigner Tigre and would definitely act at their own convenience.

While Lim inwardly sympathized with both of them, she soothed them, persuaded them and sent them back to the inn.

“Even I.....”

When she made time to be alone like this, she would unintentionally spill out grumbles.

Lim removed the sword to her waist along with its scabbard and leaned it against the wall, but because changing her clothes was annoying, she still wore her military clothes as is. As she was sitting on a chair, a deep sigh leaked out from her mouth.

—*Elen*.....

In her heart, she muttered Elen’s nickname. Although she feigned composure in front her soldiers, Lim could not stop thinking about Elen while she was working. No, it was the whole time since when she heard that Elen has been caught by the enemy.

She has been careless. With the wrong impression that if it was Elen, even if she cut through into the enemy camp, she would definitely come back. In

fact, the silver-haired Vanadis had always accomplished it until now. Therefore, Lim has unconsciously allowed it. Even though originally, she should have stopped Elen even by force.

She was envious of Tigre who was acting alone in order to rescue Elen, and thought: “If only I also had the strength that allowed me to run around in the hills and fields.

“Really, I’m hopeless.”

As she shook her head and drove away her miscellaneous thoughts, Lim stood up. There were many things that she had to think about, and her time was limited. For now, she had to hope that Elen was safe and believe that Tigre would be able to rescue her while she did what she had to.

She spread a copy of the map on the table. It was something she borrowed from Mashas.

At this point in time, Greast’s troops were probably going towards the north travelling along the capital Nice’s flank.

—Isn’t there anything I can do?

In order to rescue Elen as quickly as possible.

For example, could she lead the LeitMeritz soldiers that could move and launch a night attack on the enemy? This was Brune. The enemy would be well-versed in the topography.

Or maybe she could send a truce bearer and negotiate with the enemy on her own. But, if they stated that they knew nothing about Elen, she would not have any reason to continue. They had already touched on this subject in the meeting at midday.

No matter how enthusiastically she scowled at the map, she was unable to come up with any ideas as to how she could break the current deadlock. Because she was aware that she was agitated, she constantly told herself to calm down, but in the end it was a futile gesture.

After a long period of time had passed while she stared at the map, there was a knock on the door.

Lim raised her head and confusedly glanced at the door. Who could it be at this time where even the palace servants had already finished their dinner?

“Is it Rurick? Or maybe Lord Mashas.....?”

She could not think of any other person who would visit her room when Tigre and Elen were absent. She stood up and walked to open the door.

The one standing there was a young girl with chestnut-haired in ponytail. She wore a white apron on a black long-sleeved tunic and a skirt reaching to her feet. It was Titta.

“Titta. What’s the matter?”

Revealing slight surprise in her blue pupils, Lim looked down at Titta. Between the tall girl and the petite Titta, there was nearly a head’s difference in height.

Titta looked up at Lim with a pondering expression, but then she oozed determination in her hazel-colored pupils and held out the thing she had in her hands.

“Um, I wanted to give this to Limalisha-san.....”

Lim stared at the thing in Titta’s hands with a perplexed face.

It was stuffed bear. Stuffed with remaining fur and sewed in, its size was about a little bigger when putting it on one’s hand.

“You wanted to give me this?”

Titta nodded as Lim asked. Clenching her small hands and straightening her back, Titta eagerly spun her words. As if breathing out all the air in her lungs.

“Limalisha-san. Eleonora-sama is definitely safe. Tigre-sama will

definitely rescue her. So.....”

As she cut her words there, Titta silently looked up at Lim. She was one of the few persons who knew that Elen’s whereabouts were unknown and that Tigre was acting independently. The shine in her hazel-colored pupils made Lim remember the event a few months ago.

“.....You’re right.”

From the end of autumn last year to winter was the period when Tigre had gone missing. It took about two months until his whereabouts were known.

During those months, Titta commuted everyday to the temple and kept praying to the gods for Tigre’s safety. Of course, she did not fail to do her work as a maid, too. Even though she was tormented with anxiety, she had been squashed by despair. When she knew of Tigre’s whereabouts, she did not fear to go out on trip in spite of being winter.

Because it was Titta, she could probably imagine Lim’s mental state now. That’s why she came to visit her like this.

“Thank you, Titta. I will treasure it.”

Lim accepted the stuffed bear with careful hands. She looked at it with an affection-filled gaze and gently wrapped it in her hands. The soft sensation of the fur was transmitted in the palms of her hands.

“I can’t only do this much. But, if Limalisha-san is happy with it, then that’s good.”

“No, it’s the best present for me. And also..... I also believe that Eleonora-sama is safe. Of course, in Lord Tigrevurmud, too.”

Lim was able to speak these words not as a bluff, but as a firm thought inside her heart. Of course, she knew that the situation was more severe than she imagined. The possibility of Elen being safe was exceedingly small.

Even so, she did not want to give up hope.

It was not that she averted her eyes from the reality. She was just doing her best looking ahead while harboring resolution.

“Titta. I don’t have time now, but someday I’ll certainly repay your gratitude.”

“Yes. I’ll look forward to it.”



As she judged that Lim was already all right, Titta did not continue the talk any further. Even she knew that now, time was extremely precious.

Lim asked Titta about only one thing she was concerned with.

“How does Princess Regin feel?”

Today, Titta was requested by Regin and served as her maid. Regin dealt with everyone with a courteous attitude, but even so in Brune’s royal palace, Titta was probably the only maid personally requested by the princess.

“Today, Regin-sama was busier than usual, so we could hardly talk.....”

After answering as such, Titta’s expression clouded as she blamed herself.

“Besides, when I think that Regin-sama can’t afford to know about Tigre-sama, I reflexively put myself on guard..... I might have taken an attitude of not wanting her to talk to me too without knowing. Regin-sama looks like she’s considerate towards me.”

—*Well, it’s no wonder.*

Lim inwardly consented. Tigre was expected to have gone missing. It was natural for Titta to feel down, and Regin, whom she was intimate with, would naturally be considerate.

—*Maybe she might have been seen through.*

Titta was not good at hiding things. She was, of course, also worried about Elen and it was certain that her expression did not have its usual cheerfulness.

But, Titta harbored an absolute trust towards Tigre. Even the words, when she cheered up Lim earlier, were ones she said because she believed so.

—*If her Highness Regin notices that..... No, I shall leave this to Lord Mashas.*

“It’s all right, Titta. When the royal palace is this busy, there are also awkward things even though it’s nothing. Also, Lord Mashas is surely doing

well. So, you should approach her Highness Regin like usual.”

With a smile, Lim lightly stroked Titta’s head. She was four years older after all. She did not want to be cheered up, but relieve her anxiety even a little.

“Thank you, Limalisha-san.”

As she said so and bowed, Titta walked to the corridor. She turned her head towards Lim’s way only once and slightly waved her hand when she saw Lim still standing at the doorway. Lim also waved back to her while still holding the stuffed bear as is. While seeing off the young girl’s back figure, she closed the door.

—I feel like it’s been a long time since I touched a stuffed bear.

In fact, in the war against Sachstein, Lim secretly brought a stuffed bear. It was about the size of the one she just received from Titta, and she judged that it would not be a hindrance even if she carried it as a private property.

However, due to the pressure of work, she stored it inside her transport bag as is and stopped touching it before she knew. Ever since Elen had been captured by the Greast army, she had even forgotten about it.

“I shall slowly think about a name for you, too.”

While enjoying the stuffed toy’s sensation, Lim happily muttered. She stood before the table and dropped her gaze once again at the map.

Although one might say that she renewed her feelings, it was not like a good idea would immediately come to mind. But, Lim was able to look at the map with more composure than earlier.

—Eleonora-sama. Please, be safe.

When she said so in her heart, the anxiety she had lessened to some extent.

©

Regin Ester Loire Bastien do Charles was sitting on the chair at her office absentmindedly.

She too was, like other people in the royal palace, a busy person. After she finished hearing Mashas' report, she was processing the state affairs in her office as usual, but then the report of the Muozinel army invasion was brought there.

—Even though we just settled both Melisande's revolt and the Sachstein army's invasion.....

This time, the Greast army and the Muozinel army was trying to devour Brune's territory. It was a situation where even adults, who accumulated experiences, would want to throw away everything and run away.

But, Regin, who was the ruler, could not afford to do that.

She sent out an order to gather the main bureaucrats and immediately held a meeting. She issued instructions to investigate quickly and as accurate as possible the Muozinel army's scale, march speed and invasion situation, chose a messenger to send to the Muozinel army and also sent a notification to the cities and towns of Brune's southern part.

There were many frightening parts about the Muozinel army, but the most troublesome one was the point where they took away inhabitants of cities and towns as slaves. As for small towns, there were stories that, after having been thoroughly dispossessed and destroyed, only children and old people, who were deemed useless as slaves, would be left.

Therefore, there was the necessity for the cities and towns in the south to accept capitulation and escape to some extent.

From a strategic issue, there were also cities that she would have to order to resist to the bitter end, but she would have to send soldiers and materials to such places.

“Materials aside, what will we do about soldiers.....?”

What became the focus even in today's meeting was the 'soldiers'. Even though they have not yet fully recovered from the scars of the civil war two years ago, a revolt and an invasion happened in succession and many officers and men lost their lives. One or two years were not enough to nurture one person adequately.

It was said that the Muozinel army numbered from 100,000 to 150,000. Though they wanted to estimate it low, such a naïve thought would not work. Even though it was impossible for their side to gather even 10,000 soldiers.

The Moonlight Knight army lost to the Greast army and saw its number decrease to 21,000. At the time when the battle with the Sachstein army was over, there were 34,000 soldiers including the injured ones; so it was a loss large enough to make one feel nauseous.

Because there was the Zhcted army amongst the 21,000 soldiers, if you were to count again and only count the soldiers from Brune, it would further decrease that number. Moreover, they would have to fight against the Greast army again, and even if they assumed they would achieve a complete victory, it would be senseless to expect that there would be no casualties.

Other than the Moonlight Knight army, there were roughly 15,000 soldiers stationed in the capital. Nearly half of them were those who acted as the royal palace's security and also protected the public order by patrolling the capital. The time that they were mobilized would become the time when the capital would be attacked.

The idea of hiring mercenaries was also brought up, but knowing that they would fight with the Muozinel army, how many they would gather was the question. Besides, although the country's fate was at stake, Regin did not want to harbor the thought that "it's fine as long as we gather the number anyway".

This was because mercenaries with bad disposition could even plunder villages and towns of the Kingdom without hesitation. Looking back to the history of the continent, there were many countries, whose territories were thoroughly devastated by the mercenaries that should have been hired in order to drive away a foreign enemy.

Besides that, the preliminary estimation that they would assemble roughly 40,000 if they recruited the militia was also brought up. Just looking at the number, it seemed to be quite something; but they could not expect much from their skills at all. There was even the possibility that they would suddenly chicken out when standing before the enemy. This too could only be relied upon when the capital was attacked.

—*Even if we're able to gather soldiers, whom will we leave the command to.....?*

As a matter of fact, she was unable to process everything today and matters of low priority were postponed to tomorrow. This situation would probably continue for a while. When tomorrow came, it was likely that a new matter that had to be dealt with immediately would come up.

The time she spent absentmindedly sitting in her office was a brief respite.

“—Tigre”

Regin muttered the name of the youth she held dear.

“To leave me alone like this, aren't you awful?”

Her tone, rather than sounding like she was suffering from heartache, sounded like she was grumbling about something. When she had heard Mashas' report, she was not able to think about anything due to the surprise of it, but she still believed in Tigre's survival.

And, when she processed a huge amount of state affairs calmly and alone like this, there were parts where she held some doubt.

Regin knew well Tigre and Elen's way of fighting on the battlefield. This was because in the civil war two years ago, Regin, as a supreme commander, had seen them fighting. Although called supreme commander, she was of course just a *decoration* and the substantial command was left to Mashas.

It was not like she did not understand the part where Elen disappeared within the enemy army. She was a girl who wielded her long sword and

assertively cut through the enemy line. Mashas also talked in detail about it in the explanation of before and after.

On the other hand, how about Tigre? In the battle with the Greast army, Tigre was the supreme commander and should not be someone like, for example, Elen, who stood at the vanguard of soldiers and boldly charged. There was no such part even in Mashas' report.

In what kind of situation would a supreme commander, who was at the center or in the rear of the army, go missing? Were Tigre and Mashas read to the point of being assaulted to that degree?

Even if Greast's mercenaries were skilled and were really able to break through until where the supreme commander was, she felt like the explanation on that area was ambiguous. Just because it was a lost battle, Mashas should not be the kind of man that would make an excuse without admitting his blunder.

Moreover, what strengthened Regin's doubt was the attitude of Titta, the maid serving Tigre. Because she went until the battlefield following Tigre, Regin could think that she somewhat recovered from depression during the time until she returned to the capital, but

—But, something doesn't feel right.

It was then that the door was knocked from outside. The escort Selena, who served as guard outside the office, informed of Badouin's visit across the door.

When Regin consented, the cat-faced old Prime Minister entered the office.

Badouin's business was about the black-haired Vanadis Valentina. Hearing that she said she wanted to leave the capital and return to Zhcted with her soldiers, as expected even Regin was surprised, but she regained her calm before long.

—What she says isn't wrong, but....

Although Elen assertively jumped through the enemy camp, if Valentina were to return to Zhcted like this, would she not be blamed for having abandoned her comrade-in-arms, the Wind Princess of the Silverflash?

Except Mashas' report, something might have happened on the battlefield. Including the doubt about Tigre she felt earlier, she should probably try asking about the story once again.

Thinking so, Regin asked Badouin.

“Prime Minister. Putting aside Valentina-dono's matter for the time being, I would like to consult you about something. It is about Lord Tigrevurmud.”

At this time, Badouin asked back as followed.

“Have you already heard the story from Earl Rodant?”

Regin returned a question again with a puzzled face.

“What are you talking about?”

Badouin made a face showing that he made a blunder. For the old Prime Minister cautious in everything, it was a rare verbal slip.

Though, it might be a little cruel to blame him. Until just a while ago, he was also moving around regarding how to deal with the Muozinel army. During the interval between meetings, he was busy to the point that he also had to issue instructions one after another to the civil officials while walking through the corridor. In addition, there was also the sense of relief of having left this matter to Mashas.

Without concealing anything, Badouin explained that Tigre was safe and that he was acting alone in order to rescue Elen. After Regin listened until the end with an impressed face, she asked shortly.

“Who is the mastermind?”

“It is Earl Rodant.”

“I see. I shall hear about the circumstances in detail from the Earl tomorrow. I’m looking forward to it.”

To Regin, who revealed a bright smile, the cat-faced old Prime Minister deeply bowed his head. As for Mashas, if not for the Muozinel army’s invasion, he would have reported the circumstances of things to Regin before the day set. Though Badouin thought so, he did not plead for his friend.

“But thanks to that, I think that I understand. About what Valentina-dono is thinking about.”

Regin said with a relieved expression. Badouin revealed an honest surprise on his face.

“What do you mean by that?”

“It’s probably for insurance. Valentina-dono does not yet trust Lord Tigrevurmud, right?”

For example, the LeitMeritz army led by Lim showed a stance of cooperation even now because they believed that Tigre would rescue Elen. If they did not trust Tigre, they would have act independently in order to rescue Elen.

“Isn’t Valentina-dono’s thinking of wanting to go ahead to Lutetia in preparation of the case that Lord Tigrevurmud failed in rescuing Eleonora-dono?”

“It might be as your Highness says, but..... there is also the possibility that Valentina-dono would join hands with Greast in this opportunity.”

Badouin tightened his expression and advised Regin. Regin’s thinking felt like she trusted Valentina too much.

If Valentina showed that she wanted to cooperate with Greast and headed to him to Lutetia, Brune would have an extremely powerful enemy to the north. Moreover, depending on Valentina’s actions, Greast might also obtain the backing of the Zhcted Kingdom.

However, Regin shook her head and clearly denied it.

“Valentina-dono will definitely not ally herself with the Greast army. If she felt like it, she should have taken contact with Greast and acted earlier.”

For example, when the Moonlight Knight army was defeated. If Valentina and the Osterode army shouted that they would cooperate with Greast and attacked the Moonlight Knight army, the Moonlight Knight army would have suffered a devastating loss.

In addition, when the Greast army pretended to be the Moonlight Knight army and approached the capital. If they were accompanied by Valentina, Augre and company would have opened the castle gate.

“.....That’s certainly true.”

Badouin took a small breath. After she missed the two opportunities that Regin explained, it was inconceivable to say that Valentina she would go to Lutetia to ally with the Greast army.

Would Regin or Badouin not bring up the talk [in order to fight Muozinel, should we not temporarily join hands with the Greast army]? Valentina would have wondered about that.

In doing so, she could dignifiedly ask the Greast army as a messenger acting as mediator of both parties. After all, she probably noticed vaguely that Brune did not have enough soldiers.

The reason why Badouin did not think of these points until now was because his wariness, about the fact that Valentina and Ganelon had interactions and also about knowing that Ganelon was a demon, was too strong. Regin’s words and attitude made him regain his usual calm.

“Besides, Prime Minister. I believe in Lord Tigrevurmud.”

As Tigre’s name suddenly came up, Badouin’s eyes flickered. Regin revealed a gentle smile on her lips.

“That he will surely succeed in rescuing Eleonora-dono and defeat the

Greast army. Even if Valentina-dono were to plot something, as long as Lord Tigrevurmud is there, I do not think that it will affect his action.”

To Regin straightforward words, Badouin gazed at the princess while deeply moved. In her expression and tone, there was just a dazzling trust.

“You are right. If it is Earl Vorn, then.....”

Though not to the same degree as Regin, Badouin also agreed. It was not an empty expectation. Tigre did not only have achievements, but also something which made people believe in him. Otherwise, Badouin would not go as far as to consider Tigre for the throne.

And then, Valentina should not think of Tigre as just a young aristocrat.

“Well then, I shall issue a pass to Valentina-dono. We shall wait until tomorrow for that which is extending to the north’s highway to open the castle gate as well.”

“Please”

After Badouin answered so, one thought surfaced in Regin’s mind. Calling the Prime Minister, who was about to leave, to halt, the princess opened her mouth while drifting slight tension and resolution in her blue pupils.

“I thought of something regarding the battle with Muozinel.”

Badouin, who was told Regin’s thought, was first at a loss for words. Then, he felt his body shivering.

It was an extremely dangerous move. One mistake and Brune would be destroyed this time. There was no doubt that the territory would be trampled down to the enemy’s heart content and destroyed, and it would never again recover. Regin, who would be the cause of that would be criticized as an incompetent and foolish ruler.

He would really like to take time and carefully think about it, but if they were to execute, they must decide as soon as possible. And, thinking about Brune’s present condition, there was no other means.

When Badouin deeply inhaled and then exhaled, he gazed at the princess with a look of admiration.

It was a move he would not have come up with. If it was the late King Faron, then how would it have been? Even if he thought of it, he might have come to a decision to not use it.

“.....Your Highness. Could I inquire about only one thing?”

Regaining his nervousness, Badouin asked with a serious expression he had never shown.

“I think that it’s an extremely bold plan. And the fact that you spoke about it means that you have already made up your mind. Your Highness, what..... what pushed you to make such a decision?”

With a smile, Regin answered the only one feeling that made her decide.

“I believe in Tigre..... in Earl Vorn.”

Badouin held his breath and stood frozen in place. The old Prime Minister accurately understood the meaning and the weight of Regin’s words. And that it was a determination that he did not have after all.

After a short pause, as Badouin regained his calm, he respectfully bowed.

“Understood. I shall arrange it at once.”



When the day dawned, the sky, which Tigre looked up at, was covered with gray thick clouds. The clouds seeming like it would be no strange even it was to rain anytime hung low over, and the air was also chillier than yesterday.

—*Even though it was sunny until yesterday.....*

While lightly rubbing his eyelids with his fingers, he got up. Since he

began acting alone, Tigre had not slept satisfactorily even once; and today was also the same.

For one thing, this was because his sleep was light as he was cautious of stray dogs and wolves.

He was also in a similar situation at times when he entered the mountains and hunted for several days, but in that case, he could choose a place to rest his body. He could borrow the mountain hut that the hunters of his home town used, or he could use a natural cave in place of the hut.

He could not do so this time. He had to constantly watch for scouts while following the Greast army so he could stay concealed. Since he did not have the time to choose a place to rest, he also could not afford to light a fire.

While avoiding a large group of beasts, Tigre would aim for a prey moving alone. There was no leisure to rest.

And perhaps because his sleep was light, he had worthless dreams. There was a dream where he drunk poisoned water, there was one where he lost a battle and there was also one where Elen was kidnapped by someone. When he made noise during these dreams and suddenly jumped up, his whole body was covered with sweat and feeling of fatigue weighed on him.

Even so, Tigre stirred his body with willpower. Slipping once again into the Greast army's camp and rescuing Elen. That was the only thought left in his mind.

500 Arshins ahead, the Greast army stopped and started to cook their meals. Several lines of smoke rose because of the lit fires that were used to cook soup. Irritated, Tigre also took his meal. It was a simple meal comprised of dried meat, dried vegetables, bread and water.

The dried meat was something he made from thinly cut deer meat, smoked and salted with plenty of salt. It smelled slightly, but there was a feeling of satisfaction that came from eating something chewy with a salty taste.

Because the bread was insipid, he inserted dried vegetables within and ate

it. It slightly elevated the texture of the food, while he ended up drinking the water by itself at the end.

The Greast army was still taking their meal. The number of rising smoke spirals decreased, but they had yet to all disappear. Thanks to his survey these several days, Tigre knew that they would take more than a half koku until departing after finishing their meal, cleaning up and gathering their luggage.

As Tigre checked his luggage and confirmed that it was in a situation when he could move any time, he sprawled on the ground. A drop of water fell on his cheek and streamed down.

It was rain. Tigre hurriedly got up, put the fur on his head. He covered his quiver with a hood. He also wanted to wrap his bow with something, but there was nothing suitable.

“I hope it’ll stop immediately though.....”

Holding the bow in his hand, Tigre looked up at the sky. However, the rain ruthlessly increased in intensity. The ground became muddy, the air became cold and his field of vision also got worse.

“This isn’t good.”

Although cursing, Tigre quickly took out a leather bag for water from his luggage. While refilling water, he approached the Greast army little by little.

As he resolutely shortened the distance until 200 Arshins, the Greast army’s camp could be seen. Except the ones on lookout, the soldiers seemed to have gone in the barracks. They probably intended to observe the situation for a while.

—*I should also take shelter somewhere.*

Although he put on the fur and wore an overcoat, staying at the grasslands and being struck by the rain would exhaust his stamina because of the coldness. The rain, which penetrated from the gaps of the fur and the overcoat, would soak his clothes along with sweat and steal heat from his

body. So, it was necessary for him to take shelter under a shade of tree.

—Judging from that current situation of theirs, it'd be fine even if I distance myself one, no, two koku from them.

The rain would dull their march. Not only that, even if the Greast army were to change their course, Tigre would be able to chase them by following their footprints that would remain on the ground.

Tigre parted from the place and ran up to a nearby hill. Overlooking the surroundings from the summit, he found a group of trees that was too small to be called a forest.

“This place will do.”

Running down the slope while panting, Tigre jumped inside the trees. As the abundantly spread branches and leaves blocked the rain, he took the chance to catch his breath. He took out a cloth from his bag and wiped the bow.

—They're on the other side of the hill. There'll be no problem even if I light fire, I guess?

He could not let his eyes affected while holding down his stomach in this cold. Up to this point, due to the risk of being caught, Tigre had made sure to limit the amount of fires he had lit. However, he thought that it'd be fine to make one here.

Suddenly, a chill run down Tigre's spine. The youth let his bag slip from his shoulder, pulled out his black bow and gazed towards the inner part of the trees. He extended his right hand to the quiver and was on the verge of taking out an arrow.

There was something terrifying there. It was slowly approaching Tigre.

—This sensation..... it's not the kind of a beast.

He had the choice to either run or hide. While he wanted to pick, he decided not to move. One wrong move and he would be exposing an opening

to the other party. Besides, Tigre was tired after all he had done. Between thinking about it and deciding on a course of action, there was a slight delay between the two.

About dozens of steps away from the shade of a tree, a young man showed up. He was of medium build, sketchily twined a green cloth around his short black hair and wore thick clothes with fur to the collar and sleeves. One strange thing was that both his hair and clothes were not wet with rain.

“Vodyanoy.....”

A mutter tinged with a shudder leaked out from Tigre’s mouth. It was the name of monster frog coming out of folklore. The man revealed a joyful smile.

“So, you remembered my name. It’s been a while, boy. No, I should already call you young man, I guess. Humans really grow fast.”

Tigre did not return words and nocked an arrow to the black bow while fixing his eyes upon Vodyanoy. He looked like a cheerful youth, but this man was not human. He was a demon.

This was the third time that Tigre had confronted this demon.

The first time was two years ago. He appeared before Tigre immediately after the youth had repelled the Muozinel army, and had attacked him as he tried to take the youth away somewhere. That time, Tigre was able to repel him with the cooperation of the Zhcted’s Vanadis Ludmila Lourie, but he would have probably been beaten without knowing what to do were he alone.

The second time was a few months ago. He suddenly appeared in the middle of the fight against Baba Yaga. Though at that time, it was not Tigre who fought this demon, but Elen.

For Tigre and the Vanadises, Vodyanoy was an existence that should be called an enemy of fate.

“So, you don’t ask me what my business is. Is it perhaps because you

know?”

While talking happily, Vodyanoy slowly walked Tigre’s way. Tigre gritted his teeth enduring the tension and fixed his breathing.

There was enough distance between both parties, and there was nothing like a weapon in Vodyanoy’s hand.

Even so, Tigre could not relax his attention. Considering Vodyanoy’s physical ability, he could probably shorten this much distance in an instant. In addition, his body was so sturdy that it could clash with a Dragonic Tool and his tongue extended bizarrely long. He should also spit up something like acid from his mouth.

Unless Tigre relied on the black bow’s “power”, he would be unable to make even a scratch on Vodyanoy.

His skin grasped the slight change of flow of air. Tigre kicked the ground and jumped sideways. At the same time, a sound of something snapping echoed close to his ears.

The atmosphere was stirred up, rain scattering. Vodyanoy’s figure was in the air as he tore towards where Tigre had been, swinging at him with his right arm. If Tigre had remained where he was, there was no doubt that his left arm would’ve been torn from his shoulder.

Although he had fallen to the ground, Tigre immediately got back up. He then ran from left to right while taking cover behind trees. In any case, it was necessary to lengthen his distance from Vodyanoy.

Tigre’s left hand tightly gripped the black bow, his right hand on the bowstring with an arrow between his fingers. Something like black fog coiled around the arrowhead. This was the ‘power’ of the black bow, a power that allowed him to wound demons.

—No yet..... It’s still weak.

It was like that the time when he fought against Ganelon in the royal

palace the other day, but it took time to amass enough “power” in the arrowhead. There was also no meaning to inflict a little of amount of damage to the enemy with a half-charged blow. He would have to annihilate it with one arrow.

—*Still, why did he appear at such a time?*

Even though he had to rescue Elen from Greast.

Something approached from behind him. Tigre promptly leaned behind a tree towering nearby.

Immediately after, a loud crushing sound was heard, and the tree trunk suffered an impact as a hole was opened. Small wood chips fell on Tigre’s head as he looked above him. However, the monster’s figure was not there.

—*It’s the right side!*

Tigre turned to the right and immediately pulled the black bow to full draw. After half an instant of hesitation, Vodyanoy jumped out from the shadow of a tree. As expected, even the demon opened his eyes wide in surprise at the fact that the arrowhead tinged with the ‘power’ was pointed before his eyes. He kicked the ground and leapt up.

Tigre did not shoot the arrow, but instead turned around and began to run again. There was not yet enough power to instantly defeat Vodyanoy, but there was enough so that he would be hesitant to take the hit.

“Even I was surprised just now.”

A carefree, yet slightly irritated voice came from above. Tigre lowered his body and jumped inside a thicket nearby.

He lost his balance. It could not be seen from before he had entered the thicket, but the ground had become steeply slanted. Normally, Tigre would have noticed this, but he missed it due to the situation in front of him.

Tigre rolled on the steep slope as he slipped on the mud, collapsed on the ground and was smeared with mud. He crashed against a tree base and finally

stopped.

“Uah.....”

While enduring the pain on his body and emitting a wordless sound, he got up. Seeming to have cut the inside of his mouth, blood and mud were mixed with the saliva he spat out.

Vodyanoy sprung once again. There was no room to set up the black bow. Against the approaching hand blade strike [1] Tigre eagerly bent his body. The monster’s fingertip grazed his left shoulder. The leather armor’s shoulder pad was cut off and Tigre was blown off and rolled on the ground again. He fell down on his back.

—It’s no good..... Anyway, I must shoot.

As he was struck by the rain and was breathing roughly, Tigre reconsidered his options. It was naïve to think that he could defeat him in a single blow. He should not have hesitated out because it would have exhausted his stamina.

But, it looked like it was already too late. Even when he tried to get up, he could not fill his body with strength. Like this, he would not even be able to fully draw the bowstring. Vodyanoy was approaching.

—Elen.....

What am I doing lying down in such a place? Didn’t I say that I would rescue Elen? He told himself so. Even so, with his body covered with mud and rain, his fatigue felt strangely heavy.

Vodyanoy stood next to Tigre and looked down at the youth.

“How disappointing. That said, you surprised me. Just in case, I’ll break off an arm.”

Tigre’s face grew pale. The fear, not to have his arm broken, but to being taken away from here wrapped the youth. Tigre felt an illusion as if his body

was wrapped in a chill.

It was not an illusion though. Vodyanoy suddenly stopped his movement and turned his gaze. Tigre was not able to look over there, but a shadow like a traveler riding on a horse stood ahead of the demon's gaze.

Because the shadow wore an overcoat that covered them from the rain and had a hood over their eyes, their face couldn't be seen. Its owner had a small body and held a short spear adorned with a beautiful ornament in their hand. A gaze filled with hostility swept over Vodyanoy from within the hood.

“—I didn't think that I'd come you in such a place.”

A young girl's voice leaked from inside the hood.

At this, Vodyanoy's attention immediately shifted from Tigre. He had recognized this strange girl to be an enemy.

Kicking up mud, Vodyanoy stomped on the ground and dived at the girl on horseback. The girl blocked the hand blade strike with the short spear she was holding.

A clashing sound, as if slashing at a block of ice with a sword, echoed in the rain. The aftermath of the shock caused a faint wind, folding over the hood the girl wore.

Blue hair arranged around the shoulders and a white ribbon fluttering to the wind. Blue ice-colored pupils.

—*Mila*.....?

Because of too much surprise, Tigre raised a soundless mutter.

The girl on horseback was the Vanadis Ludmila Lourie with the nicknames of “Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave” and “Danseuse of the Spear”.

Ludmila Lourie was 18. She was the same age as Tigre and Elen and governed the Olmutz dukedom in the southwest of the Zhcted Kingdom. She was called by her nickname Mila by people close to her such as Tigre and

Sofya Obertas alias Sofy.

On the other hand, she had a relationship similar to oil and water with Elen and when the two girls met, they would definitely mix abuse and sarcasm in their greetings. And each time, Tigre or Sofy would then cut in as mediator with amazed faces.

Until a few weeks ago, Mila had been in Olmutz. Olmutz shared border with the Muozinel Kingdom to the south, but because Muozinel gathered soldiers near the border and showed signs of wanting to invade, she likewise gathered soldiers and was on alert.

If the Muozinel army were to step across the border, the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave would have been the first defensive wall blocking their march.

However, it did not happen. This was because after the Muozinel army pretended to invade Zhcted, they hurriedly changed the direction they were headed and invaded Brune by breaking through the land of Agnes that became a territory of Zhcted. Mila was used as a diversion in order to invade Brune.

Though Mila could not suppress her unpleasant feelings towards the Muozinel army, it was not why she came to Brune. The reason why she was here lay in the short spear grasped in her hand.

The Frozen Wave Lavias. This Dragonic Tool with the power of ice appealed for the existence of a demon and led Mila from the distant Olmutz until here.

Though for her, it was a trip longer than what she expected.

This was because she had to be careful so as not to be found by the Muozinel army, and seeing Mila travelling alone as a suitable prey, swarms of beasts and groups of bandits attacked her regardless of day and night. Of course, there was neither beast nor bandit able to wound her.

In doing so, as she went through many villages and towns and galloped

towards the plain while seeing the capital Nice far away, Mila had reached the place she aimed for.

“That’s a familiar face, eh.”

Glaring at Vodyanoy, who stopped his movement in the air, Mila changed her expression to a steep one. She naturally remembered that she fought this monster two years ago.

“It’s been a while, Master of the Frozen Wave.”

Vodyanoy called Mila as such. For demons, not the Vanadis, but the Dragonic Tool was the main constituent. Mila only narrowed her eyes slightly and sharply mowed down her spear to the side. So as to match it, Vodyanoy leaped back and landed on the ground.

Mila also went down from her horse while being cautious of the demon. She threw off her overcoat against rain. She wore a silver breastplate over a blue outfit and covered around her hips and her legs with simple armor.

She knitted her brows because the rain soaked her hair and face. Though her Dragonic Tool protected her from the coldness of the air, it was helpless against rain. However, Mila knew all too well that it was not an opponent that she could fight while wearing her overcoat as is.

“It’s just the right time. There’re a lot of things I want to ask you.”

“And do you think I’ll answer?”

“It’s fine if you don’t answer. —In that case, just die right now.”

Mila’s reply was clear and cold-headed towards Vodyanoy’s provocation. To protect the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave, a white cold wave poured out from the spear she held. At the same time, the spear handle nearly doubled in length. This Dragonic Tool was able to extend its handle as much as it liked depending on Mila’s will.

Vodyanoy showed no signs of flinching before neither the Dragonic Tool nor the cold wave surrounding Mila. Far from it, he challenged Mila as he ran

while intentionally kicking up mud.

The demon's fist and the Vanadis' spear once again clashed against each other. Neither of them backing off, white sparks were emitted and metallic sounds were heard as a series of offense and defensive strikes landed on each other.

Vodyanoy would thrust his fingers straight together, or strike with a fist, or sometimes swing out the back of his hand from the left to the right. When one thought that he deflected the spearhead with his feet and stepped on it, he swiped it upwards instead.

In contrast, Mila handled the Frozen Wave and endured altogether Vodyanoy's attacks. She repelled the thrust by scooping up the spear from the bottom and warded off the fists by sweeping aside with the long handle. She exchanged a stab toward his arm or shoulder as he launched a backhand, and warded off his kick with the spear handle.

The sharpness of each thrust and the speed of the spear pulling back after thrusting, as well as the speed of thrusting it again was not ordinary. Above all, inside this rain, her aim was unshakable even when the water got in her eyes, as well as the hand that never slipped spoke of her astounding level of skill.

The sludge of their steps greatly changed the form with every single blow, and mud was kicked around and dirtied the two people's feet. Vodyanoy's body aside, his clothes seemed to be of a decent structure, and the fibers that were torn off by the Frozen Wave sank in the mud.

Vodyanoy's hands and feet, let alone injuring Mila, could not even touch her body. But, the blue-haired Vanadis did not relax her attention in the slightest.

If fists that could evenly strike against a Dragonic Tool reached Mila's body, she would not escape from a fatal wound. A Vanadis' body was not any different than an ordinary human's.

After more than 30 clashes, Vodyanoy leaped back, taking distance from

Mila.

Mila threw an annoyed gaze at the demon. Sweat floated from her forehead and she began to breathe heavily. On the other hand, Vodyanoy, not sweating even one bit, revealed a frivolous smile. He then unnaturally waved both his hands.

“My, both my hands and feet are completely cold. You’ve become much stronger than the last time we fought. I thought that at least two or three blows would get through you though.”

Though Vodyanoy said with an impressed voice, his face was turned not towards Mila, but his feet. His shoes were now reduced to merely little fabric only coiled around his ankles like old rags.

“I can’t fall so much behind against an opponent I fought once, right?”

Mila replied in a cold tone while fixing her breathing. At that time, her eyes parted from the demon just for a moment and were turned towards Tigre lying down on the ground.

It was at that moment that Vodyanoy raised his face, opened his mouth widely and projected his tongue. The monster’s tongue went through the empty space with extraordinary length and speed and swooped down on Mila.

A dull sound resounded. Mila let her spear flashed and cut off the approaching long tongue. The tongue cut from the middle dance in the air as if being repelled and fell on the ground.

“I told you, right? That there’s no way I’d fall behind against an opponent I fought once.”

Mila’s blue ice-colored pupils, which harked back to a frozen lake surface, increased in sharpness, piercing Vodyanoy. She has read the fact that he probably intended to take her by surprise with something other than his hands and feet as he intentionally challenged her, who held a spear, in a close-range combat.

“Uh, oh yes..... That just now was splendid.”

While holding his mouth, Vodyanoy laughed. His muffled voice seemed to be in order for him to adjust his tongue’s length. He showed his tongue, seeming to be displaying that the part that she had cut had already regenerated.

—He’s getting more and more irritating.

Mila inwardly cursed. She felt irritated. Despite attacking this much, Vodyanoy did not yet suffer any serious wound. It was a situation hardly different from the time when she fought him two years ago.

In addition to governing Olmutz and accomplishing her duty as a Vanadis, Mila has eagerly polished her skill with the spear. She had the self-confidence that the current her became much stronger compared to two years ago. She felt like her pride has been hurt.

—As expected, won’t it be a decisive blow unless I use a Dragonic Skill or a blow equivalent to it?

“What’s the matter, Master of the Frozen Wave? Are you already exhausted?”

Extending his tongue languidly to the extent it reached the ground, Vodyanoy beckoned Mila. Quiet anger flickered in the blue-haired Vanadis’ eyes.

“—O’ the world that’s turning silent”

Mila held her spear in an underhand grip and stuck it on the ground at her feet. From the beautiful spearhead that look like polished block of ice or crystal, a vast cold wave quietly surged out.

The cold wave rapidly spread out around her as if crawling on the ground. Mud was frozen while keeping an irregular shape as is.

“Let’s go.”

Muttering to psych herself up, Mila stepped forward. Sliding on the frozen ground, she charged at Vodyanoy at a tremendous speed. The monster opened his eyes wide at that speed.

As she instantly shortened the distance to Vodyanoy in that way, Mila lunged with her spear along with war cry. She thrust towards his head, struck his arm very hard and swept at his legs.

The demon, unable to take distance, was driven into one-sided defensive fight. He would barely either block the spear that attacked incessantly, or repel it; but he did not seem to have any room to counterattack.

With the nth attack, the Frozen Wave's spearhead was caught in the sleeves of Vodyanoy's clothes. Mila pulled her spear without a moment's delay, beginning to break the demon's posture.

However, the Vanadis' movement stopped there. Something, which crept at Mila's feet, climbed on her while twining around her leg and coiled around her chest from over her waist and the breastplate. It furthermore extended to her right arm and completely sealed the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave's movements.

That was Vodyanoy's tongue — its remains that she cut some time ago. It crawled on the frozen ground and attacked Mila from behind. The monster's tongue has extended its length to more than double of when it was cut off and mercilessly tightened the blue-haired Vanadis' body.

“You were impatient at the time when you froze the ground. Did you think I wouldn't notice?”

Vodyanoy glared at Mila with a faint smile. Mila did not reply. Her neck was being strangled and her voice did not come out as she wanted. But, she glared at the demon with eyes retaining fighting spirit.

“Don't make such a scary face——”

As Vodyanoy was going to tease Mila further, he swallowed his words. He looked back with a quizzical face. Mila also looked ahead of the demon's

gaze while distorting her face painfully.

Tigre stood there. The mud, which dirtied his darkish red hair and his face, ran down little by little as he was struck by the rain. With an arrow nocked to the black bow, he stared at the demon's direction. The tip of the arrow was already tinged with strong "power" and looked as if only it was enveloped by black mist.

"Did you finally get up?"

Vodyanoy revealed a smile filled with composure and stood before Mila.

"I wonder if you can shoot even like this. It'll hit her if I dodge. Have you ever shot that arrow to a human until now?"

As Tigre did not reply to Vodyanoy and spat out the mud inside his mouth, he raised his voice.

"—Mila! Believe in me!"

As she tried to return the youth's words, Mila eagerly twisted her body. However, the pressure by the tongue strengthened all the more and she leaked out an anguished groan. The spearhead of the Frozen Wave that she tightly grasped in her right hand released a cold wave along with blue radiance, but it could not even attract Vodyanoy's interest.

Tigre strongly drew the bowstring to the limit and shot the arrow. The arrow clad in "power", far from having its momentum weakened by the down pouring rain, cut the wind and plunged forward while blowing off the rain.

Vodyanoy revealed disappointment and dejection respectively in both his eyes and moved only one step to the right. The arrow directly hit Mila, who was behind the demon.

The jet black flash danced boisterously, and the atmosphere which was torn off as it expanded screamed. The raging storm scooped out the ground and black smoke was scattered in all directions.

Slightly inclining his head, Vodyanoy looked at the black smoke with a

bored-looking expression. His expression changed to that of shock when he saw a spearhead approaching as it pierced the black smoke.

The demon tried to escape by leaping back, but he was slightly late. His forehead was sliced and black blood began to flow from there.

“—Hmm. So, you can be properly injured. I’m a little relieved.”

Mila showed up from within the black smoke still hanging over. She revealed a sneer on her lips

While holding his forehead, Vodyanoy glared at Mila while revealing hostility for the first time.

“.....So that’s it. So, he was aiming at you from the beginning.”

The arrow that Tigre shot was not aimed at Vodyanoy, but at the demon’s tongue that restrained Mila. Mila, who guessed so from Tigre’s appeal, released cold wave from the Frozen Wave, stretched an invisible defensive barrier of many layers and suppressed the impact to herself.

At this opening when Vodyanoy greatly separated from Mila, the two people gradually shortened distance and succeeded in joining. They stood back to back so as not to make any blind spot and stared at Vodyanoy together.



“Can you fight?”

“Thanks to you”

Tigre replied shortly to Mila’s short question. Feeling a clear fighting spirit and the gratitude to her in his voice, the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave secretly heaved a breath of relief.

She wondered what would have happened when she saw him lying down covered in mud, but in addition to having saved her just now, with this current attitude of his, it looked like she did not need to worry.

“From here, we might as well…… no, but with this little……”

Vodyanoy was looking down, seeming to be pondering about something, but then he suddenly raised his face and looked at Mila and Tigre with a refreshed expression.

“I decided. I’ll go at it just a little seriously.”

“Heeh..... are you saying that you weren’t serious so far?”

Though Mila scornfully laughed, it slightly lacked her usual coldness. Though vaguely, the blue-haired Vanadis understood what it meant for a demon fighting seriously.

She has heard about it in the meeting where Tigre and the Vanadises gathered at the night of the Sun Festival. That a demon had a human form and also a non-human form.

As Vodyanoy revealed a distorted smile, he lowered his waist and curled up his back. A poisonous-looking purple mist-like thing gushed out from his body. The purple mist ominously flickered while swallowing the rain and wrapped the demon’s body in a flash.

The spearhead of the Frozen Wave in Mila’s hand flashed bluish-white radiance as if issuing a warning. Tigre and she stared at the purple mist while holding their breaths. Both of them felt it with their skins. A dreadful maliciousness overflowing from inside the purple mist, that is.

As if to say that she could not keep being overwhelmed, Mila rotated the Frozen Wave and stuck its spearhead on the ground.

“—Pierce and freeze the sky!”

A white frost-like light was emitted around the Dragonic Tool’s tip and depicted a hexagonal crystallization on the earth. She intended to immediately killed Vodyanoy without letting him do anything.

So as to protect Mila and Tigre next to her, a huge cold wave blew up from the crystallization depicted on the ground. The ground surface was covered by thick ice and countless pillars of ice with sharp point were projected from there.

The group of pillars of ice attacked Vodyanoy from all directions. As he was unable to avoid them, the demon was thought to have been skewered

along with the purple mist.

However the next instant, the pillars of ice thrust inside the mist were smashed up altogether. Mila opened her eyes wide at that scene. Her Dragonic Skill did not work.

“How boorish. Wouldn’t one normally wait at such times?”

Inside the flickering mist, a black shadow taller than Tigre peeped out. The round eyes in the shadow emitted an ominous light and a laughter similar to a frog’s croak resounded. Both Mila and Tigre were dumbfounded and speechless.

Being pressed from the inside, the mist was scattered. The two people felt shivers at Vodyanoy’s figure that appeared before them.

His stature was about two heads higher than Tigre. His skin was made of the poisonous-looking purple plastered mist, his shoulders became wider and his body was muscular and burly.

His face was molded as half-human and half-frog and there was no hair remaining on both his hair and his body. His eyeballs were golden and his mouth was greatly split. There was webbing between his fingers and his feet.

He wore a piece of white cloth adorned with golden embroidery on his body and fastened it with a golden obi wound around his waist.

“Is that your true form.....?”

Tigre asked with a gasping voice. Vodyanoy, not replying, revealed a sneer.

The demon kicked the ground. A powerful sound as if swinging down a big hammer on the ground resounded. When Mila, startled, set up the Frozen Wave, Vodyanoy’s figure was already before her eyes.

Mila tried to ward off the fist with the Frozen Wave, but the shock of the impact that was transmitted through the Dragonic Tool far exceeded the blue-haired Vanadis’ expectation. Mila was thrown backwards from the strike.

“Mila!”

Tigre shouted and nocked an arrow to the black bow. As the demon squinted and smiled, he spat out a purple fluid from his mouth. Tigre reflexively shot the arrow. The purple fluid and the arrow collided in the air. Emitting a sound similar to that of meat being crushed, the arrow that bathed in the fluid melted and crumbled in the rain.

—Come to think of it, this guy had such a weapon, too.

Mila, who somehow rebuilt her posture thanks to Tigre, bitterly glared at the demon. The fluid just now was probably something like acid. She did not know what kind of other toxic it had. She did not intend to be touched by it even a little.

As she fixed her breathing, Mila closed in upon the demon with the momentum of colliding with him and thrust with her spear. She shouted to Tigre without looking back.

“Tigre! I’ll leave it to you!”

If it was him, he should guess with this much.

As the Dragonic Skill did not work, Mila’s thought became rather clear. She would exert herself in gaining time and make an opportunity for him. Afterwards, Tigre should just shoot an arrow. When she decided this, the feeling in her heart lightened up considerably.

The demon’s fist and the Frozen Wave’s spearhead clashed with each other. But, the fist was two times bigger.

Mila’s small body was blown away along with her spear as she was sent tumbling through the air. However, the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave extended the handle of the spear, stuck the spearhead into the ground, stabilized herself and landed on her feet. Her shoe soles slipped on the mud as it splashed around, dirtying her cheeks. As there was no time to wipe it away, it was washed off by the rain.

The tongue which extended from Vodyanoy's mouth attacked Mila. This time, it did not try to restrain her but instead looked like it was trying to knock her down. Mila rolled on the ground, dodging the tongue that approached while waving irregularly like a whip.

As Vodyanoy's tongue was flung against the ground, the grass was scooped along with the soil and were scattered. If she received it directly, her body along with her spine would have been smashed from over the armor.

“—Ice Petal!”

While getting up, Mila held her spear to the side and slashed downwards. A white cold wave was released from the spearhead as it radiated in all directions and attacked Vodyanoy that was coming her way while trampling the ground flat. Seeming to have a certain effect, the demon covered his face and stopped.

Mila shouted as she spitted out all the air that accumulated in her lungs and lunged her spear in rapid succession. The only response she received from her thrusts was as if she had been attacking an unwavering rock, but for Mila, but it was enough as she was able to stop his movements.

Vodyanoy's way of fighting was almost the same as when he had a human form. His way of fighting was centered on a hand-to-hand fighting making use of his hands and legs, and he occasionally uses his tongue and acid, too. However, the power was incomparable to that until a while ago.

Whenever a fist or a kick passed near Mila, it generated a terrifying wind pressure which almost carried her body away. If Mila's Dragonic Tool was not a spear, and moreover, if she could not freely adjusted the handle's length, some of the demon's attacks would have gone into her range and she might have received a fatal blow.

When she blocked it, she was forced to retreat by the powerful shock; and even when she warded it off, her stamina was shaved off. Mila waited for an opportunity to counterattack, but that moment did not readily come.

To change from defending or evading to launching a counterattack, one

would need to change their stance before doing so. However, before she had this chance, Vodyanoy's next attack was already on its way.

—I might have given up if Tigre wasn't there.....

Mila inwardly muttered as she repelled the fists and dodged the kicks. 'If it's Tigre's arrow — no, if it's Tigre, then he'll surely manage it', was what the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave thought.

Mila knew of the figure of the youth when he challenged a desperate fight with an unyielding will. She has also fought shoulder-to-shoulder together with him. She knew after hearing from other people that it was not only once that he had thrown himself in such a fight.

While blocking Mila's spear with both hands, Vodyanoy spat the purple acid. It passed through the Frozen Wave's side and hit Mila's shoulder. Seeing the Vanadis' shoulder blowing up gray smoke, the demon revealed a smile of victory; but that smile immediately froze.

From the place where the acid hit, a thin film-like thing was peeled off soundlessly and fell. At Vodyanoy's reaction, this time was Mila's turn to reveal a sarcastic smile.

She had stretched a defensive film of cold wave like a while ago with the Frozen Wave's power. What blew up gray smoke was the defensive film that turned into thin ice and protected Mila's shoulder.

“—Mila”

She had a feeling of having heard the youth's voice from long distance away. In fact, he might be far. While pulling through the demon's fierce attacks, she felt like she had considerably distanced herself from him.

But, Tigre knew that the fact that he could carefully accumulate the “power” was thanks to the white cold wave generated from the Frozen Wave's tip, though little by little, flowing to his rear.

Vodyanoy, who was attacking Mila as he swung his fists left and right,

made a face as he noticed something and leaped back. Ahead of the gaze of Mila, who squared off, wondering what he intended to do, the demon knocked both his fists together and muttered shortly.

“Projection”

Suddenly, the sky above Mila darkened. While maintaining her vigilance against Vodyanoy, she glanced upwards. Mila’s lips stiffened due to shock at the sight she saw.

A frighteningly giant frog, which could easily cover the whole area where they were, stretched its four limbs straight and floated with its white belly to the earth. Leaving its outrageous size aside, the frog’s figure which seemed to have a somewhat friendly feeling, was funny, yet also terrifying.

—*That’s the kind of cheat or magic tricks....*

Mila was flabbergasted, but the maliciousness emitted from the huge frog was something similar to Vodyanoy’s.

The frog was descending with its limbs stretched out. It was not clear if it was an illusion or if it was substantial, but at this rate, there was no doubt that they’d be defenseless against it. Vodyanoy’s aim was probably to force Tigre to shot towards the sky.

Mila calmly let her spear make a half-turn and stuck the ground.

“Pierce and freeze the sky.”

A hexagonal white crystallization was carved once again at the Vanadis’ feet. The frigid air turned into whirlwind and swirled in the atmosphere. The group of ice pillars generated however showed a movement different from that of a while ago.

Several ice pillars gathered together and extended straight as if piercing the sky with height and sharpness harking back to a tower. They pierced the frog coming down in the belly and limbs regardless.

Along with a roar similar to thunder, the huge frog quickly vanished.

Confirming it, Mila swiftly brandished the Frozen Wave. The group of ice pillars, which defeated the huge frog a moment ago, was smashed all at once, became hails and poured down to the ground.

“It’s your turn now!”

Mila called out to the rear. Reliable words were returned immediately.

“Thank you.”

That instant, an arrow was shot from behind Mila. The arrow, clad in both white frost and black darkness, pierced the demon giant’s chest the instant it was released from the bowstring. It traveled through the air at a speed not at all inferior to the speed of sound, and a trail was left in the rain in its wake.

Vodyanoy, expressionless, looked down at the arrow that pierced his chest. The arrowhead soundlessly exploded and the released cold wave covered the demon’s big frame. It tore the purple skin that even the Dragonic Tool had trouble injuring, and froze the wound even before the black blood flowed out.

While turning into an ice sculpture, Vodyanoy’s body crumbled away little by little. His fingers fell, his arm fell, were stuck onto the mud, smashed to pieces and scattered. The rain dissolved the wreckage of ice, which was then buried it in mud.

His head fell and with it, the rest of his large build crumpled and fell on its back and shattered into small fragments with a sound similar to that of shattering glass.

For a while, Mila and Tigre silently looked down at the thing that was Vodyanoy. The rain began to weaken and the sound of it striking the ground gradually lowered.

Before long, Mila looked back to Tigre with a serious expression.

“Do you think he died.....?”

“No.”

The youth's reply was short. The blue-haired Vanadis also agreed. The two of them knew about the last moments of the demon called Torbalan, who seemed to be a comrade of Vodyanoy, after hearing it from the Vanadis Elizavetta Fomina. According to her, Torbalan became a lump of earth after he died.

Of course, it was not necessary true that Vodyanoy was of the same nature as Torbalan. Though Tigre had fought Torbalan two times, it was demon completely different from Vodyanoy. Even so, both of them did not think that Vodyanoy perished.

“—Well, it's fine.”

Mila muttered in a light tone and took her eyes off the wreckage of ice. Even if Vodyanoy was a powerful demon, she did not think that he would come out unscathed after receiving that arrow. There were some things that she was not satisfied with, but it would be fine to think that they succeeded in repelling him for the time being.

Mila turned again towards Tigre. The Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave thought about what she should say first, but these thoughts vanished as she openly frowned.

“You've quite an awful appearance. Smell, too.”

After Tigre cocked his head in puzzlement with a wondering face, he looked down at his own body and said “yeah” with a convinced voice.

Because he had rolled in the mud multiple times over the duration of the fight, the youth was covered in mud from head to toe. Although the rain had washed the majority of it away, some of it had persisted and left an irregular pattern on his face and clothes.

“Isn't there a river nearby? Even a lake or a small pond is fine.”

When Mila asked, Tigre searched for his memory as he put a hand on his forehead. He answered that when he exchanged food in a settlement he stopped by, he was told the place of a river flowing in the vicinity.

“Let’s go there for the time being. We’ll wash our bodies and clothes.”

“Wait. There’s no time to do such a thing. I—”

“I’ll listen to you afterwards. So, just lead the way.”

As Mila pressed and cut him off in a tone that did not ask for consent or refusal, Tigre nodded with a reluctant expression.

The blue-haired Vanadis was concerned after seeing Tigre’s face. Although she had no time to check it earlier, after taking a closer look, there were dark circles under his eyes and he grew a stubbly beard. His complexion looking like this probably was not due to the fatigue that had come from the fight earlier.

“Do you know the direction?”

Tigre asked. Mila looked around and then rushed up as she found her horse standing still in a remote place. Though it was not her favorite one, it was an excellent warhorse, which was used to long trip and battle. Fortunately, it seems to be safe.

Noticing Mila approaching, the horse also walked to her. As the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave lightly stroked the horse’s face, she took out a suitable cloth from the bag that she tied to the saddle and lightly wiped it (horse’s face). Then, she prepared the map that was inside the back.

“I see, that’s right..... there’s no way that a decent traveler wouldn’t have a map, huh.”

Seeing the map in Mila’s hand, Tigre sighed emphatically. Though she found the youth’s reaction suspicious, Mila showed him the map. It was something in which only big cities, main highways, rivers and forests were drawn, but even so they should still be able to grasp the rough position.

“—I’ll guide you. This way.”

Waiting for Mila to gather her baggage and get on her horse, Tigre began to walk.



One man was lying down on his back on the grassy plain where the rain weakened.

He was the owner of a big frame and had a purple skin which looked even eerie when looking from far. The clothes he wore were torn and his face and body were covered with bruises.

It was Vodyanoy. As Tigre and Mila had anticipated, this demon did not perish. But, he did not seem to be able to stand up immediately.

With a dissatisfied expression, Vodyanoy was looking up at the gray sky while he was struck by the rain, but then he felt the presence of someone and looked towards a distant place.

A man, whom no one knew when he appeared, was standing there.

It was a very short man. He wore silk clothes adorned with small embroidery and put on a fine overcoat. One would understand that he was a wealthy noble with just his attire.

However, there was no doubt that the first thing that one would feel after meeting the man would be that of confusion, tension and fear as if peering at an unfathomable darkness. That was the type of atmosphere being exuded by the man.

Even when seeing the demon's figure, the man showed no signs of being shaken at all. Rather, he approached Vodyanoy with the expression of a cold-blooded hunter who found his prey.

“When I wondered who it was, so it's you”

Vodyanoy hatefully glared at the man and talked in a sarcastic tone.

“What do you want, Koschei? Or shall I call you Ganelon just as you wish?”

The man, who was called Koschei and then Ganelon, suddenly stopped.

The man's name was Maximilian Bennusa Ganelon. No matter how other people called him, the person himself thought that that was his name.

At this time, Ganelon stood in a place about seven steps to Vodyanoy. From what Ganelon saw, the large-build demon had wounds all over his body, and aside of his eyes and mouth, he did not seem to be able to move even one finger. Vodyanoy still called out to Ganelon in a scornful tone.

“What's the matter, Koschei? Didn't you come to devour me?”

Anger oozed in Ganelon's eyes which one did not know whether they were opened or closed. He casually took a step forward.

At that moment, something attacked right above Ganelon with frightening speed. It was the tongue that extended from Vodyanoy's mouth. Ganelon seized it, which approached while making the wind growl, with his hand without even looking. And he crushed it as is.

Vodyanoy, without any signs of pain, rewound his tongue, whose tip was crushed, inside his mouth. Ganelon looked at his own hand, then moved his gaze at his clothes and made a sullen face. He intended to wipe his hand, but seemed to have reconsidered. With an indignant face, he glared at the monster lying down as is.

“I have heard that there were beasts which pretended to be dead to lure their prey, but I didn't know that there was such a trait with the frogs.”

“Are you a poor loser? You having appeared before me is the fact that you've been lured out, right?”

While regenerating his tongue and then taking it in and out, Vodyanoy languidly stood up and smiled at Ganelon. It was a dangerous smile, the exact opposite of a friendly one.

Ganelon too let a cold smile appear on his lips.

“You should clap that foul mouth of yours while you still can. You won't

be able to do it ever again after being devoured by me after all.”

Ganelon had the ability of stealing a demon’s life force and ability. He expressed it with the word “devour”. This was because a demon devoured by him would turn to ashes and vanish.

The two of them faced each other as they were separated with a short distance. Their gazes tinged with killing intent intersected and a tense atmosphere filled the grassy plain.

“—Stop, Vodyanoy”

It was a third party’s voice that broke the short silence. Ganelon turned his gaze over there while being cautious of Vodyanoy.

A small-sized old man, who wrapped his body in a black robe, stood there. Although saying small-sized, he was taller than Ganelon and his face could not be seen as he put on a hood over his eyes.

“Drekavac, huh”

Ganelon muttered the old man’s name as if spitting out. Drekavac was also a demon, and Vodyanoy’s comrade. For Ganelon, it was a prey that he planned to devour someday.

Ganelon suddenly frowned. In contrast with Vodyanoy emitting killing intent from his whole body, he could not feel even hostility, let alone killing intent, from Drekavac. Thinking about it, why did he stop Vodyanoy?

“.....Do you have any business with me?”

Ganelon’s voice showed his wariness as Drekavac spoke in a serene tone similar to that of one advancing a business venture.

“I have a proposal. Don’t you want to join hands with us, Koschei?”

“With you bastards.....?”

Ganelon unintentionally asked back. It was an instant, but the anger at

being called Koschei vanished. The demon's words were that shocking for Ganelon.

Drekavac answered with a composed attitude as if speaking of a matter of fact.

“Making Tir Na Fal descend to the Earth. Until then, our goals match, right?”

Ganelon knitted his brows, but he silently urged for the rest of the story. As such a thing was obvious far back in the past, it could not be a reason to join hands at this late hour. Drekavac continued.

“I thought that the time when we should perform the Goddess advent ceremony was just slightly earlier. But, it seems to move ahead faster than expected.”

“.....By your guess, about when will it be?”

“This winter”

At Drekavac's reply, as expected, even Ganelon was surprised as he showed it on his face, and held his breath.

Currently, while spring was over in Brune, the wind of early summer was blowing slightly early in the south. If Drekavac's guess was right, the time that they were waiting eagerly for would come in half a year later.

“The current Bow^[2] shows a stance where five Vanadises cooperate with him. This is many in comparison with the Bows until now. It's not like we can't match him, but it's troublesome.”

“And so, you thought that the more help, the better and you called out to me, huh.”

A sneer appeared on Ganelon's lips. He finally understood. Drekavac thought of using Ganelon to at least restrain the Vanadises. In addition, there might also be the intention of monitoring him so that he did not hinder the

advent ceremony.

“I want to ask you one thing. Why did the time move ahead?”

Ganelon threw his question without being beating around the bush. If things did not turn like this, there was no way that Drekvac would have called out to him.

“Muozinel attacked.”

Drekvac’s reply was only that, but Ganelon immediately understood the meaning.

“Fine then. I shall lend you my help.”

Ganelon said with an eerily smiling face, and Vodyanoy, who was watching the two’s exchanges silently until then, was surprised. But, the frog demon, seeming to leave everything to Drekvac, did not interject even though he turned a suspicious look to Ganelon.

“Then, I’m looking to working with you.”

Even if he got consent from Ganelon, as expected Drekvac did not change his attitude. He returned words in a tone devoid of feelings. The hem of his robe slightly rolled up and one black lizard jumped out of it. Except its long tail, it was of a size as to fit into an adult’s palm.

The lizard crawled as if gliding on the ground and came over to Ganelon’s feet.

“It will convey you our words. Similarly, your words can be conveyed to us through it.”

As Ganelon stooped down there and pinched the lizard’s tail, he lifted it. The lizard, which hung upside down, struggled as it flappingly moved its four limbs.

“Are you telling me to take care of this?”

“It’s a part of me. It won’t die even you leave it alone.”

At Drekvac’s words, Ganelon openly revealed an unpleasant face and looked at the lizard.

But, he did not throw it away and instead put it on his shoulder. The lizard obediently clung to Ganelon’s shoulder.

“Are we done now?”

Ganelon asked. Drekvac said nothing, but it meant an affirmation.

“Demons. I’ll remember that you called me with that foolish name.”

Koschei was the name of the first demon that Ganelon devoured. He harbored a strong disgust in being called so. Even while knowing that, Drekvac still called him Koschei. Separately from the negotiations, there was no way that he could forget it.

Ganelon turned on his heel and turned his back on the demons. He quietly walked inside the rain which became light.

Though Vodyanoy glared at the retreating figure of Ganelon, who became small, he switched his mood and moved his gaze to Drekvac.

He attacked Tigre because he was requested by Drekvac to do so. Moreover, in order to indeed pretend of having been repelled at the end of the fight, he began to take action after waiting for the Vanadis— Mila to come near. All of this was to lure out Ganelon and negotiate with him.

It was Drekvac who showed off his existence towards Mila’s Frozen Wave and lured her from Olmutz until here. So as to avoid Valentina, who was in contact with Ganelon before, and Elen, who was acting together with her, the Vanadis at the nearest position was Mila.

Something appeared in Drekvac’s hand. It was a leather bag of the size of a clenched fist, and it was big so as to let one feel enough weight. The black-robed old man tossed that leather bag to the demon giant. Vodyanoy, who received the leather bag, peered into its interior without delay.

Gold coins, which emitted dazzling brilliance, were fully packed into the bag.

However, Vodyanoy raised his face and revealed a displeased expression.

“Only this much?”

“No. I’ve prepared 10 times that amount.!”

Vodyanoy raised a voice of delight at Drekvac’s words. He raised the leather bag overhead and turned it upside down after greatly opening his mouth. He swallowed the spilling gold coins at a stretch. To Vodyanoy, who revealed a satisfied smile, Drekvac talked with an emotionless voice.

“How were the Bow and the Spear?”^[3]

“Strong. They became much stronger than last time.”

Vodyanoy honestly admitted Tigre’s and Mila’s strength. Though, the conceit of him being still above them was included into the root of his words.

“Though it’s foolish to ask it after the talk was settled, aren’t only you and I enough?”

“There’s nothing better than having more pawns.”

“Koschei has probably guessed that. Will he really become a pawn just as we want? It looks to me like he’ll just let us and the Vanadises engage each other though.”

“He has a weakness.”

Drekvac shook his head towards Vodyanoy, who expressed his concern.

“If he has accepted that he was Koschei..... I would definitely have to destroy him. But, he kept thinking that he was only Maximilian Bennusa Ganelon. He isn’t worth fearing in the meantime.”

“Hmm. Well, it’s fine if you say so.”

As Vodyanoy gave an indifferent answer, Drekvac slightly stirred. Behind the hood covering his eyes, his eyes shone white. He seemed to be amazed. But, Drekvac did not offer a candid advice and asked the thing he has been bothered about.

“Did you smell Durandal from Koschei?”

“Just a little. He hides it quite well. He showed up probably because he also calculated that he’d be able to pull through even if it turned into a fight of two vs. one.”

Vodyanoy answered with a wry face. The two demons began to walk along the grassy plain, where the rain stopped, to somewhere unknown. This time, Vodyanoy asked.

“Muozinel, was it? Is it that big an army as you said?”

“150,000. I should have also observed other countries aside of Brune and Zhcted. When the war with Sachstein is over, I thought that there would not be any opportunity of a big war for a while though.”

After Drekvac admitted that he made a mistake in his judgment, he muttered in a low tone as if reciting an incantation.

“A battlefield, where an awakened Bow is, is namely a place of ritual to give an offering. The lying corpses and spilled bloods all become the food of the sleeping Goddess, and the sound of the bowstring of the black bow, which is the equipment for the ritual, is the call which shakes the Goddess awake.”

“But, will that young man challenge the Muozinel army? Five Vanadis will probably tag along. At least one of them will notice and stop it.”

Vodyanoy emitted a skeptical voice. The young man in this case was Tigre.

“They don’t appear to have noticed at the moment, but even if they have,

there's nothing they can do. The current Bow is a hero in the present age. The war needs a hero. Nobody can fit as a substitute.”

“And we're only you and I. In the end, we must even use Koschei. So, we're lacking manpower everywhere, huh.”

Vodyanoy shrugged his shoulders.

The figures of the demons walking on the grassy plain disappeared as they melted into the atmosphere.

Translator and references notes

[1] more precisely, a hand used like a sword in striking, though I don't know how to translate the term (手刀) accurately

[2] referring to Tigre, I guess

[3] referring to Tigre (Bow) and Mila (Spear)

Chapter 3 – North, South, North

By the time Mila and Tigre reached their destination, the river, the rain had stopped. About a quarter koku had passed after their life and death struggle against Vodyanoy.

Along the way, Mila, who heard the circumstances from Tigre, could not hide her surprise. She thought that Tigre and company were fighting against the Sachstein army.

But on the other hand, Mila was also convinced. While listening to the story, she has been concerned about Tigre's attitude and profile all this time. The Tigrevurmud Vorn that she knew, even when facing an overwhelmingly powerful enemy, would never give in to despair or lose his brightness. Or so it should have been like that.

But now, the youth's face had no composure and his eyes were gloomy and sluggish. There was no willpower in his voice, either.

—He focused on the fight until we got rid of that demon, so it isn't like he's become completely hopeless, but.....

“Still, acting independently in order to rescue Eleonora, huh.”

Mila put her hand on her forehead as if enduring a headache and muttered with an amazed voice. Tigre, seeming to feel awkwardness to some extent, slightly turned his face away.

The two people walked along the river for a while and then stopped at a place surrounded by trees on both banks. From what Tigre confirmed, the riverbed was not deep in this area and the current was also slow. The rain did not affect the rising of the water that much.

“Let's take a short break here. I think that I should also tell you about my circumstances.”

Because Tigre's story was longer than she thought, Mila has not yet talked about why she was here.

When Mila got down the horse, she took off the bag and the saddle and wiped the horse's body. She was thankful that the rain had stopped. As Tigre put his bag on the base of a tree nearby and leaned his bow and quiver against it, he gathered hand-sized stones, made a simple hearth and lighted a fire.

"Shall I go bathe first? Or do you want to go first, Tigre?"

Mila asked in a very bright tone. She also got quite dirty with mud and sweat, but it was nowhere near Tigre. Dried mud was stuck to the youth's darkish red hair and his green clothes became pitch black by dirt, sweat and soil. His leather armor and his overcoat were in a similar state, too.

But, Tigre shook his head. He didn't even try to brush off the mud sticking to his hair and face, as if he was not concerned about such a thing.

"I'm fine. By the way, is it fine if I go a half koku away from here?"

Tigre's question was natural in his consideration to Mila. However, the blue-haired Vanadis knitted her brows and looked up at Tigre with displeased eyes.

"You should just go about ten steps away from the river and turn around. Please, watch my baggage so that I can bathe in relief. I don't want to chase a weasel or a fox naked after all."

Though Tigre stared at Mila with a face mixed with slight surprise and bewilderment, he did not refuse. In the past, Tigre too, when he was hunting, had experienced the food inside his bag being eaten by a beast when he took his eyes off it for just a moment.

Mila stood at the riverside, removed her armor and leg guards, and took off her clothes, she became stark naked. Although the degree of fleshiness was somewhat thin compared with girls of the same age, her body, which has been forged thanks to fighting and training, let one feel flexible strength, well-balanced beauty, and breathtaking charm.

However, what further emphasized Mila's charm was without doubt her expression which revealed a tender smile. Because Tigre was next to her, she would take off the mask of Vanadis and naturally show her true self.

As she put the Frozen Wave on the ground at her feet and stooped down at the riverside, Mila scooped water with her right hand and sprinkled it on her shoulder and her chest. A long breath leaked out from her mouth due to the pleasant coldness.

“At such times, I really envy the people of Brune.”

Though spring was already over in Brune, in Olmutz that Mila governed, it was in the middle of spring. However, the river water was still cold and there was still snow remaining on the mountains.

Though there were people, who bathed or enjoyed themselves in a river on a sunny day, most of such people, after coming out from the river, warmed their bodies before a bonfire that they had prepared.

Mila also found this to be normal, but she was surprised when she heard from Tigre did it in Brune, too.

After she sprinkled water on her body several times, Mila softly stretched her leg and slowly got into the water. She was soaked in water until the area of her waist.

“It's been a while since I took a bath.”

She walked while being careful not to slip, and then soaked in water until her shoulders when she grew accustomed to the coldness. She dived into the water, counted until 10 before getting her face out to the surface. Her blue hair clung to her face.

As it became enjoyable, Mila slowly swam while making a round trip several times at a short distance.

From when she left Olmutz until today, she has not taken a bath like this even once. When she was concerned about dirt and sweat on her body, she

would go about it by wiping her body with a damp cloth. There was no helping it since she was traveling alone.

It was different now. When she raised her face, there was the figure of one youth with his back turned this way in a remote place. A slightly nasty smile appeared on Mila's lips.

“Tigre!”

Mila called out to him from within the river as she waved her hand.

“You should get in as well. It feels good, you know?”

Of course, she was not serious, she was just teasing him. She thought that with a joke of this extent, he would either shrug his shoulders and ward it off, or become tense and pretend not to have heard it. For Mila, apart from her good will towards Tigre, a person whom you could tell such a joke to was a valuable existence.

However, the blue-haired Vanadis' expectation came off. Tigre certainly did not turn around her way and did not even return words, but it was not because he was nervous. The feeling transmitted from his back was something totally different.

“.....Really”

Mila, who guessed the youth's innermost thoughts, sighed and resumed her bathing. Though she did not find Tigre's attitude amusing, she did not know when she would have an opportunity like this again. Now, she just wanted to savor the water to her heart's content.

When a time of about 1000 counts passed in that way, Mila, who was finally satisfied, looked once again towards Tigre. The youth's state has not changed at all.

As expected Mila got angry, grabbed the Frozen Wave and got out of the river. She walked to Tigre's side without wiping her body. When she stood behind the youth as such, she thrust the spear in her hand. The spearhead with

an elaborate structure as if having been shaved from a block of ice passed immediately near Tigre's face.

“Mila! What are you suddenly.....”

Tigre who turned around as he was surprised held his breath and stared at Mila with a dumbfounded face.

Her white naked body wet with water was before the youth's eyes. The drops of water spilling over from her body made many smudges on the ground. Mila glared at Tigre without even trying to cover her skin as she held her Dragonic Tool in her right hand and put her left hand to her waist, and said in a blunt tone.

“Tigre. I remembered asking you to keep look out, but I didn't say to go rot gloomily under the shade of a tree.”

Although Tigre was at a loss for words and stared at her face, he lowered his eyes as he could not take the stern glint in her eyes. As Mila's naked body entered his field of vision, he hurriedly turned his back. He said while gasping.

“If you want to talk, you should first wipe your body and put on some clothes.”

“I don't mind being like this. I've told you before, right? Would you think I'd get embarrassed about being seen naked by a dog or a cat?”

Mila coldly showered merciless words to Tigre's back; the youth's back shivered with a start. He was thought to be an existence similar to a dog or cat or even below.

“Your way of talking is as if worrying about Elen is a bad thing.”

“You failed at the point when you say such a thing. I can't even give you any sympathy points.”

While scolding him harshly, Mila felt irritation. It was a fact that the current Tigre's attitude was irritating, but if she were to be asked whether she

would be satisfied if she made the youth recover himself like that, she could easily imagine that she would not be.



The recovered Tigre would just immediately think about Elen again and try to concentrate all his effort towards rescuing her. It was a future picture that would not be funny no matter how she thought about it.

Thinking about it, she should snuggle up to Tigre here and draw the youth's heart towards herself even if a little. It should be the best way in order to get him.

—No, I can't.

Mila believed that her ideal was high. The Tigre, whom she wanted to be by her side, was not this sort of man. He was a man who possessed an unbending willpower and who flew to his objective like a shot arrow without succumbing to adversity. Precisely because he was such a man, she wanted to walk along with him.

—It makes me want to go back to Olmutz right now.

Mila was in Brune because she chased the presence of a demon, guided by Lavias. Although there were many suspicious points, since they somehow repelled Vodyanoy and the demon's presence could no longer be felt, she no longer had any reason to stay here.

Even when understanding that, Mila spun words for Tigre's sake.

“Tigre. You should understand it, too. We're Vanadis. Since we're on battlefields with a Dragonic Tool, not to mention becoming a prisoner, we're prepared even for death or humiliation. Besides, you didn't force her to fight, right?”

“Of course, I understand that.”

A voice repressing his anger spilled from Tigre's mouth.

“But, I can't forgive myself. For finding it natural to rely on, and fawn on Elen”

“Didn't Eleonora also rely on and fawn on you?”

When Mila asked, the youth fell silent as he was taken unawares. The Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave continued.

“Being relied upon by someone we rely on is a very happy thing, that’s what called an equal relationship. I feel the same way, too. Even the earlier fight with the demon, I saved you and relied on you. What about you, Tigre?”

“.....Me, too. I was able to feel at ease because you were there.”

Though it was a slightly unsteady tone, Tigre replied. These were his true feelings without any lies. If Mila was not there, the youth would definitely have not been able to stand here now like this.

“‘I should have done that. I should have done this’. I understand the feeling of regretting one’s actions like that. Even I’ve also made many mistakes and blamed myself. That’s why, I won’t tell you not to blame yourself. But, how many days do you intend to spend on doing that?”

When she finished speaking, a sign of the youth holding his breath was transmitted to Mila. It made her a little uneasy.

Has what she wanted to say really reached his heart? Would it not be over with him only being shaken a little? Mila still continued.

“I’m not going to drag it on forever. In such a state, it’s obvious that you won’t get anywhere no matter what you do. Or, are you saying that Eleonora is put in a situation where even the current you can easily rescue her?”

Mila, who finished saying what she should say, did not speak any further and watched the youth’s reaction. Tigre did not speak and just silently had his back to her, but the gloom that clung to his body seemed to have faded a little.

As a time of about 30 counts passed, Tigre finally expressed his gratitude.

“.....Thank you.”

It was a slightly embarrassed tone. Mila gazed at the youth’s back with a complicated smile similar to a wry one. While she thought it was all right like

this, still she was frustrated.

However, as expected she was hesitant in demanding something to Tigre in this situation where Elen was caught by the enemy. She might leave an unnecessary bad aftertaste in Tigre's heart.

—I shall think of something after we've rescued Eleonora.

“If you feel a little better, then how about you change your mood by taking a bath?”

“You're right.”

As he replied in a tone tinged with slight brightness, Tigre turned around her way. The youth once again witnessed Mila's naked body.

Mila promptly hugged herself, covering various places of her body. Probably because she was taken by surprise, she felt bashful rather than angry. Her cheeks bright red, she looked up at Tigre.

“.....Don't keep staring at me like that.”

Tigre's face turned bright red and he hurriedly turned around again.

As Mila sprinkled water on her body once more, she quickly wiped her body and put on her clothes. Then, she shifted with Tigre.

“Swim while counting to 1000. That smell won't come off unless you do that. Also, you should properly clean off the dirt, wash your clothes and also shave that beard. After you're all done, we'll continue the talk.”

Being told such fine orders, Tigre unintentionally rebutted her.

“Wait. I'm in a hurry now——”

“What are you in a hurry for?”

Interrupting Tigre's words, the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave pierced the youth with an icy gaze. Tigre swallowed his words at the anger released

from her petite body.

“We know the enemy’s position. There’s no fear of losing sight of them thanks to the rain. And yet, what are you in a hurry for? Do you think that by quickly finishing your bathing, Eleonora will be set free?”

Tigre, unable to retort anything, stood stock still on the spot. Even though Mila spent so many words to remonstrate him, there seemed to still be impatience in his heart.

“So, instead of just standing there blankly, why not quickly get it over with? You’re in a hurry, right?”

Mila further threw merciless sarcasm and turned her back.

“Properly count to 1000. Understood?”

She completely treated him like a child. Though Tigre dejectedly stared at the back of Mila walking to the hearth, he switched his mood as he sighed once and stood at the riverside.

He removed the dagger that he put to his waist, took off his leather armor and clothes and got into the river. The coldness of the water soaking onto his skin felt good.

Looking back, when he was in Alsace, he always swam in a river or a lake at this time of the season (end of spring). Incidentally, when he spent spring last year in LeitMeritz, as he was going to swim in a river nearby, he was surprised at the coldness of the water; he was laughed at by Elen, and Lim was amazed.

Tigre, who soaked into water until the waist, washed his face and rubbed his hands and arms. Together with the mud stuck to them, dirt and filth were mixed with water and spilled over and fell down.

—This might certainly have smelt quite awful.....

Remembering Mila’s words, he felt apologetic.

He dived into the water. “*She said 1000, didn’t she?*”, as he muttered in his heart, Tigre slowly stretched his body so as to get used to the water.

It’s been a while since he swam. He liked this sensation of his whole body being wrapped in water.

Though he calmly swam while counting in the beginning, impatience and irritation suddenly recurred and he vigorously swam while raising splashes. Coming to his senses, he noticed that he forgot to count midway, thus he couldn’t help but continue counting from where he remembered.

—I might have been conceited.

He stopped swimming as he felt fatigue; while looking up at the gray sky as he floated on the water surface, Tigre thought about such a thing. As he led a large army, won battles and was praised as hero, it seemed to have inadvertently misled him into believing that he could do anything alone by himself.

If my judgment and actions were right, Elen would not have been captured by the enemy. Wasn’t such a way of thinking just ignoring Elen’s will above all? After all, she was the commander of an army and also fought with her own thoughts and judgment.

When he finished swimming, he took the dagger he put at the riverside and shaved his beard. Then he washed his clothes; they were quite dirty, so the river surface became pitch black. His clothes were torn here and there, worn out and had holes.

Since he had no spare clothes, he wore the ones he’d just washed. Though it was not comfortable, he had no other choice. Lastly, he soaked his leather armor into water to wash away the mud.

It was not like his impatience and irritation had completely cooled down. Even so, when he left the river, Tigre regained his calm to some extent.

When he returned to where Mila was, she had spread out her overcoat on the ground as a substitute for a mat and was sitting down on top of it. A small

pot filled with hot water was put to the hearth and white steam rose from it.

The blue-haired Vanadis, who looked up at Tigre, revealed a satisfied smile on her lips.

“You became slightly decent.”

Tigre, not returning a smile, put on a serious face and deeply bowed his head to Mila. It was not like he felt completely refreshed yet, but he escaped from the state where he advanced into darkness. Although he still could not see ahead, a faint light illuminated at hand.

It was the blue-haired girl in front of him that brought the light.

“Thank you, Mila. I was really saved thanks to you.”

Mila shook her head and changed her smile to a confident, provocative one.

“Of course, I consider it with you owing me a favor. Look forward to it.”

“Yes. I’ll do my best to repay it.”

Tigre was going to sit opposite of her across the hearth, but the blue-haired Vanadis pointed to her side with a finger.

“Come here, Tigre. Considering our relation, there’s no need to be reserved, right?”

Although Tigre hesitated for a moment, he answered “got it” and sat down next to Mila. Even he did not know well why he hesitated.

Mila took out porcelain cups and a jar of tea from her bag, and served tea with practiced hands. After Tigre received the porcelain cup and dissolved the offered jam, he quietly took it to his mouth.

The tea’s fragrance and the faint sweetness he felt on his tongue quelled and eased the youth’s feelings. The hot liquid, which went through his throat, seemed as if it let heat spread throughout his body.

“It’s warm.....”

Such a mutter leaked out unconsciously. One could see Mila beside him smiling. Since when has it been since he drank her tea calmly like this?

While drinking tea little by little, Tigre felt drowsiness attacking him gradually. In a situation where he had already piled up fatigue, he used the black bow’s power many times in the fight with Vodyanoy. If he fell into relaxation, there was no way that he could fight against drowsiness.

When he finished drinking the tea and put the porcelain cup on the ground, Tigre was slowly drawn into the world of sleep.

When he awoke from his sleep, Tigre noticed that he was lying down before he was aware. There was something soft with mysterious warmth under his head. As he stretched his hand for no particular reason and touched it, the smooth sensation of human skin was transmitted to his palm.

As he was surprised and looked right above, there was Mila’s face right there. She had closed her eyes and raised a sleeper’s breathing. Tigre finally understood that he seemed to have been sleeping using her lap as a pillow. When he got up in panic, perhaps because the vibration was transmitted to her, faint breathing leaked from Mila’s mouth.

His eyes met the girl’s, who slightly opened her eyes. It was at this time that Tigre recalled what happened right before he fell asleep.

“S-Sorry.....!”

Tigre deeply bowed his head to the extent that his forehead touched the overcoat spread out on the ground. There was no reply.

Tigre could not see it, but Mila looked down at him with a blank face. She had just woken up as well and needed some time to remember the situation.

“What do you apologize for?”

Mila asked with a slightly angry voice. Tigre timidly raised his head and tried to explain.

“No, like I said, I slept with my head on your lap——”

As he said up until there, Tigre interrupted his own words. It was certainly him that slept first. He had leaned on Mila next to him, but couldn't she just have pushed him aside and make him lay down on the overcoat?

“I don't particularly mind it.”

Mila said while looking at Tigre with a displeased face. To the youth, who blinked several times in surprise and confusion, the blue-haired Vanadis continued her words full of sarcasm.

“I'm already used to your bad sleeping habits. My body won't hold if I get angry about this much. More importantly——”

When Mila was going to change the topic, a muffled, short sound reverberated between the two of them. It was the sound of Tigre's stomach. Maliciousness came off completely from the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave's expression, and she looked at Tigre with an amazed smile.

“It looks like we should eat first before having a talk. I think that it's probably already past noon.”

Tigre rummaged his darkish red hair, revealed a smile as to gloss things over and stood up. He picked up the black bow and the quiver that he'd leaned against the base of a tree.

“Mila. Could you wait for about half a koku? I'll go fetch something.”

“Will you be all right?”

Mila knitted her brows. She did not intend to doubt Tigre's ability as a hunter, but this area should be a place that he'd also visited for the first time. Wasn't it a little dangerous?

However, Tigre replied with a calm attitude so as to not let one feel an ounce of uneasiness.

“I won’t overdo it. But, I want to properly thank you after all.”

“Thank me.....? Didn’t I tell you that I consider you owing me a favor?”

“It’s thanks for the tea and the lap pillow. I was able to sleep well thanks to you.”

The latter half of his words were naturally intended as a joke. At this time, since Tigre wasn’t looking at Mila as he was pulling his bowstring to check its state, he didn’t notice that she’d blushed and hung her head down.

“.....I’ll be waiting without expecting much.”

As he lightly waved his hand to the blue-haired Vanadis who said that while turning away, Tigre began to run.



Exactly as Tigre had said, he returned to Mila when roughly half a koku had passed. Seeing the figure of the youth hanging two rabbits, which he’d finished draining the blood of, and one squirrel, Mila was dumbfounded. Furthermore, Tigre lined up dozens of grains and fruits before her and a bunch of edible wild grasses.

“Also, I seemed to have killed a deer though. Because it was quite big and I was quite far from here, I gave up on it.”

“This is really the first time that you came here, right.....?”

Mila looked at Tigre with very suspicious eyes. She also often hunted as a pastime, but she couldn’t hunt this way even in Olmutz where she was born and raised.

As the two skillfully handled the rabbits and squirrel, they finely cut the meat and threw it into the pot together with the wild grasses. As for the entrails, they removed the dangerous/toxic parts from them, buried them into the earth and threw away the remaining parts (parts not dangerous, that is) into the river. Although saying that they threw them away, it would eventually become food for the fishes and disappear.

They shaved off fat from the fur as much as possible and soaked it (fur) into the river water. Because it was troublesome to tan the fur by themselves, they intended to take it to a nearby village or settlement and exchange it for something.

After checking that the meat was cooked, they began their meal. Tigre did not have tableware, and of course Mila, except for porcelain cups to drink tea with, only had a plate for herself. So, the two people took turns in using the same plate.

The meat was fresh and although it was chewy, it was tender. It might have become monotonous if it was only meat, but the wild grasses with faint bitterness enhanced the flavor of the meat.

When drinking the soup in which salt was mixed well in, they leaked hot breaths. As it was Mila who provided salt as she had a great amount with her, Tigre was grateful to her from the bottom of his heart.

“I feel like it’s been a while since I ate something delicious. After all, I’ve been eating only dried meat and dried vegetables these past few days.”

“Well, such meals are natural when you’re on a trip. It was also the same for me.”

Mila who answered so looked satisfied. Actually, she was just as hungry as Tigre was, too.

When the pot became empty, after carefully washing it, Mila poured water in, boiled it and made tea. Tigre, who received a porcelain cup filled with tea, asked with a wondering face.

“Why do you have two porcelain cups?”

“When I travel, I always carry two with me. If it’s only the porcelain cups, they don’t take that much space and they can also be used on occasions of conversation after all. In a way where you treat someone you got to know to tea and in return have them tell you stories that may be useful.”

At Mila's explanation, Tigre stared at her with a surprised face.

"Even you also often go out to town?"

"How rude. I do at least that much."

Although Mila frowned as he had offended her, she immediately pulled herself together and continued her words.

"Speaking of which, I've never done something like that with you, right?"

"Yes. We've just taken a walk to the town of Rodnick the first time when we met, I guess."

During the time when Tigre stayed in LeitMeritz, Mila had asked Tigre several times, but they had not gone together to the town near the palace. In the Imperial Palace, they had just enjoyed various stories with Elen and Lim and had meals together.

In fact, it was just recently that Mila has begun walking in that way in a town she stopped by in the middle of a trip. That she took interest in it after being told about Tigre and Elen walking around the town incognito was the trigger; she had no intention to tell him that though.

"I'll try inviting you too next time."

"It'll be fine if you can properly brew tea, but if you can't, then forget it. It'll just increase the subjects for dispute."

Then, Mila told Tigre about why she came to Brune.

"The presence of a demon.....?"

Tigre cocked his head in puzzlement. In fact, Vodyanoy appeared before him and thanks to Mila's help, they repelled him; but when thinking calmly about it like this, there were several strange points. Mila, seeming to think the same thing, made a sullen face.

"Honestly, I didn't think that I would end up crossing nearly half of Brune.

On the way, you can imagine how many times I thought of returning.”

Saying with a sigh, Mila shrugged her shoulders. Considering the distance from Olmutz that she governed to here, it was without doubt quite a long trip.

“Thanks to that, you saved me, so I’m thankful though.”

After he said so to comfort her, Tigre pondered with a serious expression.

“Looking back, it felt like he deliberately showed up to be beaten up.”

Mila nodded as she agreed. They didn’t know where Vodyanoy had lay hidden, but wouldn’t he have defeated Tigre and Mila one by one before they joined up? After all, it was probably impossible for Tigre or Mila alone to defeat that monster.

“What about Lavias? Didn’t it tell you something?”

When Tigre asked, Mila shook her head. The spear of ice put next to her its spearhead, which was composed of an ice block and crystal, slightly shimmer with light.

“This child seemed to be perplexed, too. It said that after that guy disappeared, it could no longer feel any demon’s presence.”

“Perhaps, he might have come to test my power.”

Tigre’s gaze was turned towards the black bow. It was put on a bag so that he could immediately pick it up (when danger arises). So as to close the topic, Mila said.

“Let’s put the topic about demons aside for the time being. I don’t know whether or not he died, but since he’s gone, I guess he won’t show up for a while…… Besides, I have something more troublesome to tell you.”

“I don’t think there’s anything more troublesome than the talk about demons though.”

Though Tigre laughed in a joking tone, his complexion changed after

hearing that the Muozinel army invaded Brune. He opened his eyes wide and stared at Mila as he was speechless.

“It’s the truth.”

As she told so with a stern expression, Mila explained as far as she knew.

She told him that the Muozinel army appeared at the border of Olmutz, but that it was a diversion. While pretending to attack Zhcted, they marched to the northwest as they took advantage of a moment of carelessness from Mila, broke through Agnes which was a territory of Zhcted and crossed Brune’s border.

Though as a result, Mila chased the Muozinel army and entered Brune as she overtook them.

“What is the Muozinel army’s number.....?”

The voice of Tigre, who asked so, trembled.

“From what I saw, they were so many I was unable to grasp it. From what I heard in the towns and cities I stopped by since I entered Brune, it seems to be around 100,000 to 150,000 though.”

Tigre unintentionally staggered. He guessed that it would be around 50,000 to 60,000, but the actual number was far beyond his imagination. Even the Sachstein army, which invaded the other day, had 70,000 troops when combining the 50,000 led by Kreuger and the 20,000 led by Schmidt. It made him feel dizzy.

—*That Muozinel army.....*

Moreover, the youth was aware that he was not good at dealing with the Muozinel army. Two years ago, Tigre intercepted the Muozinel army, which invaded Brune, with a small army force. There were no chances of victory at all. He was just desperate to protect Brune’s people.

In the end, the Muozinel army withdrew; Tigre was given the title of “Star Shooter” by the Muozinel King’s younger brother Kreshu Shaheen Baramir,

and raised his fame in one fell swoop.

But, Tigre knew that if the Muozinel army had not withdrawn, they would have been forced to a defeat.

“What will you do?”

Tigre came to his senses at Mila’s voice. Before he was aware, sweat was oozing on his forehead. When he roughly wiped it with his arm, he drank up his tea. He pictured a map of all of Brune in his mind.

What Tigre first thought about was food. Even assuming the Muozinel army to be 100,000, an enormous quantity of food should be necessary. And there was also no doubt that there would be a huge amount of carts, horses and cattle required to transport it. Then, their supply line would be extremely unstable because it would pass through Zhcted’s territory.

—Won’t they head towards the southern port towns group rather than aiming straight for the Capital Nice?

If they aimed for the Capital, then it would be simple. While shutting all the castle gates and devoting themselves to defense, Brune would just move a detached unit to cut off their supply line. As a result, a large army’s strong point would turn into its weakness in no time. Their great numbers would become a great burden and they would starve in a few days.

In order to avoid such a situation, they should secure the sea route by gaining control of the southern port towns group.

After a short pause, Tigre replied.

“I’ll focus on my own goal. I’ll put off the Muozinel army aside for the time being.”

“Yes. That’s the right thing to do.”

Mila nodded contentedly and smiled with a slightly nasty tone so as to tease him.

“I intended to deduct you points and tell you to cool down your head if you hesitated too long, but I’m glad it didn’t turn out like that.”

“I just drank warm tea, so please spare me from that. By the way, about what to do from now on, but.....”

After saying up to there, Tigre changed his expression as he noticed a certain thing. He forgot something important. He turned towards Mila and bowed his head.

“Mila. Please, lend me your strength to rescue Elen.”

The reason she was here was because she chased after the presence of a demon, and not really because she came to save Tigre. He should ask her with his own words.

While looking at the back of the head of the youth, the blue-haired Vanadis curled her lips into a happy smile. With an expression as though to say “you pass so far”, she said.

“I’ll make Eleonora owe me a big favor, so I don’t mind helping you, but..... I’ve one condition. Show me how you can guarantee my position.”

Though Tigre cocked his head in puzzlement, he immediately understood what Mila wanted to say. There would certainly be a problem for a person with the position of a Vanadis of Zhcted saying that she was in Brune because she was chasing after a demon.

“How about saying that a friend of the neighboring country made a long journey to pay me a visit?”

Though Tigre suggested that with a serious face, the reply was a blow from the Frozen Wave. Though he was hit lightly, it hurt quite a lot as he was taken by surprise. And if it had also contained chill, then all the more.

“I’ll stab you the next time.”

Mila coldly pierced the youth with a gaze tinged with two kinds of anger. Not only the contents, but also the word “friend” made her quite displease,

but Tigre did not notice it.

“Then, how about this? In order to inquire about the lawless Muozinel army that broke through Agnes, a Zhcted territory, without permission, Mila came to Brune. And then you came to me, whom you’re acquainted with and trust, and who was entrusted with the army by Princess Regin.”

“I’ll barely give you a passing mark. It would have been better if you added that as the lord of Olmutz, I came to ask about Princess Regin’s intent on how she intends to deal with Muozinel who invaded Brune.”

On the occasion of the Sun Festival, the Zhcted King gave Mila and Sofy the order to be cautious of Muozinel. Moreover, before the Muozinel army invaded Brune, they attacked Fort Fordney located on the southern tip of Olmutz.

For Zhcted, Muozinel was a clear enemy and it was natural to suggest a common front to their ally Brune. Being explained as such by Mila, Tigre greatly nodded.

“I got it. I’ll also add that.”

The two people exchanged a handshake. Even if there was some distortion/stretch, because Mila moved as a Vanadis, such a formality was necessary.

As she poured new tea into the two porcelain cups respectively, Mila asked the youth.

“Without delay, could you talk about how we’ll move from now on?”

“For the time being, I intend to chase the Greast army just like before though.....”

When Tigre replied, the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave made a skeptical expression.

“Meaning that tonight too, you’re going to sneak into the enemy’s camp and look for an opportunity?”

When Tigre nodded while being puzzled at Mila's reaction, she shook her head. With an expression like a teacher scolding a bad student, she said.

“If you do something like that every night, before rescuing Eleonora, we'll be so tired we'll be unable to move. Also, just now, you said that without thinking about anything in particular, didn't you?”

“Wh.....What are you saying?! There's no way that I didn't think about anything!”

Tigre flared up and desperately rebutted. Even though she should know how much he was worried about Elen and wanted to rescue her as soon as possible, why did she say such a thing?

In contrast with Tigre, who flared up, Mila coldly responded.

“Looks like you lose your temper quite a lot. Fine, I'll give you an advice. Think about the Greast army's food supply?”

“Food supply.....?”

Mila silently stared at Tigre, who knitted his brows with a perplexed face. As the youth groaned while rummaging his darkish red hair, he pondered with his head hung down. The Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave quietly waited while drinking tea.

—*The Greast army's food, huh.....*

Tigre put in order in his head the information that he'd gathered from sneaking into their camp last night.

It was said that they attacked villages and towns in Earl Cotillard's territory and got food.

As far as Tigre knew, since they defeated the Moonlight Knight army, they did not do any looting. After learning of the Muozinel army's invasion, they probably tried to escape to the north as early as possible.

According to Tigre's observations these several days, they did not seem to be carrying a large quantity of food. With the remaining rations, they could only hold on at most 5 to 6 days.

—But, they did not look like they were worried about food. Does this mean that they found a way to supplement food during these few days?

When food was not enough, soldiers would be sensitive to it. Even if one could deceive them for a few days, the small sense of discomfort would turn into anxiety and before long they would become suspicious. The fall of the morale would bring about rebellion to the commander and it would gradually undermine the army. And it would finally end up with insubordination or desertion.

In order to prevent such a situation, one could only either prepare enough food, or show a plan about how to obtain food to let the soldiers feel relieve. There was also the method of deliberately making them starve to fan their fighting spirits, but it was a dangerous act that could easily bring about the rampage of the soldiers.

—The land they're heading to is Montour, right? They probably intend to resupply food there. I didn't hear them talking about assaulting it, which means.....

Tigre did not know about the person governing Montour, but he was definitely an ally of Greast.

Thinking up to there, Tigre unintentionally struck his hand. He understood what Mila wanted to say. Looking at the blue-haired Vanadis, the youth carefully opened his mouth.

“We'll sneak into the Greast army on the night just before they arrived at Montour. Is that it?”

“Exactly”

As she erased her sour look, Mila revealed a fearless smile.

“We’ll sneak among an enemy of 10,000, rescue a person and escape. You should think that there’ll only be one opportunity. In that case, we should aim for the moment when the enemy would relax their guard the most.”

Tigre strongly nodded back at Mila’s words. He felt ashamed of himself who could only think about naively chasing the enemy.

“We must first investigate where Montour is.”

Montour’s location wasn’t written down on the map that Mila had. It might be a territory so small that it wasn’t depicted on the map, so they just had to stop by a suitable village or settlement and ask about this.

And when they know the location of Montour by doing that, they would overtake the Great army so as to not be found by them and ambush them in the vicinity of Montour.

“Well then, shall we go?”

The two people stood up. They put out the fire and destroy the hearth. When they gathered their luggage, the youth began to go on foot and the Vanadis was on horse.

—Elen, wait just a little more.

Tigre muttered inwardly. A light of determination filled with vigor shone in his black pupils.



In the southern part of the Brune Kingdom, wind as to let one already feel early summer blew across the sea.

Originally, it shouldn’t have been unusual to see the figures of fleets with white sails filled with wind in the sea of the south at this period. Including the neighboring countries Sachstein and Muozinel, the ships of various countries would form a line towards the port towns group at the coast, transporting various articles.

Salted meat and fish, rare fruits and spices, tea and alcohol, works of art enveloped with many layers of silk clothes so as to not be flooded with the salty sea breeze, accessories adorned abundantly with jewels, sturdy wood, huge marble, carpets, ivory and the like would show up at the port one after another and each time, merchants and visitors would raise shouts of joy.

It was not just goods that entered. Even foreign merchants, itinerant minstrels, prostitutes, clowns, mercenaries, traveling knights and the like would appear at the port town. They would rarely remain in the port town and instead head for somewhere in Brune, thus beginning a trip by land routes this time.^[1]

The heat of the early summer and the fervor of people would mix, languages of various countries would fly about in disorder, and it should have shown great bustling like any port town.

However, there was none of that this year. The fleets coming to Brune were very few, and even these few did not stay for long. There were also few merchants and visitors and only the heat brought about by the sunlight of early summer hovered.

One of the causes was the existence of the Sachstein army that attacked in the beginning of this year. They concluded a secret agreement with Melisande and thus were able to put several port towns under control without fighting. But no matter if blood did not flow, there would not be so many merchants approaching a town that would eventually become a battlefield.

Though General Kreuger, who controlled the port towns group, was by no means an unjust man, the impression of an army being a group of annoying fellows that forcibly took away valuable trade articles was harbored by many merchants. So, they decided to adopt a watchful stance towards Sachstein and Muozinel.

And when they thought that the Sachstein army was defeated and had left, before the aftermath had cooled down, the Muozinel army showed up this time via land route. Moreover, it was a large army that was not comparable to the Sachstein army.

The soldiers, who saw them from the top of the castle walls surrounding the town or from high towers, were uniformly frightened.

The appearance of 150,000 Muozinel soldiers marching while literally filling up the horizon seemed as if an iron-colored flood had gradually engulfed the land.

Receiving the wind and fluttering while shinningly reflecting the sunlight was a battle flag that depicted a golden helmet with horns and a sword on a scarlet background. It was the War God Varhrān^[2].

They were composed of 25,000 cavalymen and 125,000 infantrymen. The infantrymen were furthermore split into 55,000 commoner soldiers and 70,000 war slaves.

The so-called war slaves were soldiers with the status of slaves.

The cavalry and infantry commoners were only Muozinel people, but the war slaves were various/mixed; of course, there were Muozinel people, but there were also Brune people and Zhcted people. Therefore, only the war slaves were mixed with white-skinned people and brown-skinned people.

They only got wages less than half the infantrymen's, were made to stand forefront on the battlefield, and were mercilessly shot dead by their allies when they tried to run away.

They were promised only three things: food, permission to plunder like other soldiers and to be freed from slavery by paying 1000 gold coins.

It was about several days ago, that the Muozinel army broke through the Zhcted territory Agnes and invaded Brune, but many port towns had already opened their gates and surrendered without fighting. Seeing about 150,000 soldiers from afar, they lost their fighting spirit. There were also people who abandoned the towns and escaped into the mountains or the forest.

There were also towns that shut the castle gates and showed a will of resistance, but their fate was, to sum it up in one word, miserable. The Muozinel army attacked like a storm, climbed over the castle walls with

ladders, destroyed the gate with a battering ram and surged into the town.

Those who resisted and old men were all killed and any other people, even children, were caught and made slaves. Money and goods, no matter how small it was, were taken, and even gold leaf^[3] applied on the gods' statues lined up in the temples was torn off.

In the end, fire was set on the buildings and the Muozinel army resumed their march leaving behind the town burning up and becoming ruins.

On the other hand, the Muozinel army was tolerant towards the towns that surrendered. They did not plunder neither did they make the residents slaves. They demanded food and materials, but it was not accompanied with direct violence, neither was it made on the principle of stealing everything.

But from their attitudes, the towns' heads could not help but realized.

That Muozinel did not come to plunder and go back, but to rule over them.

The one leading the 150,000 of the Muozinel army was Kreshu Shaheen Baramir. He held the nickname of "Red Beard (Barbaros)" and was the King's younger brother. He was 39 years old now. Liveliness and playfulness overflowed on his evil countenance comprised of greatly hollow eyes and a long nose and ears.

Kreshu was at the most rear of the 150,000 soldiers, sitting on a luxurious palanquin adorned with jewels. He wrapped his firm body in pure white silk clothes and put a similarly white feather in the silk cloth wrapped around his head. Only his red beard, which was the origin of his nickname and which extended to his chest, was tinged with a strong/eye-catching color.

This was a fairly unusual dress up for the extravagant him, but there was a somewhat nasty reason for this.

The Generals visited him to make some sort of reports.

Staring at their supreme commander's clothes, they revealed perplexed expressions. This was because the Kreshu they knew liked flashy clothes

such as rainbow-colored clothes, or clothing comprised of gaudy red, yellow and blue, or clothes studded with gold thread and the like.

While they reported, their expressions did not look very good. Finally, a certain person directly and another one indirectly asked gingerly “did something happen?”. Then, Kreshu deliberately made a disappointed expression and asked “try guessing. Can’t you see it?”

Kreshu was known for his tolerant personality, but he was also the King’s younger brother and the “Red Beard (Barbaros)” who boasted of distinguished war services like no other in Muozinel. If they were to give a reply that would hurt his feelings, even if it wouldn’t go as far as beheading them, they might be made to fall to the status of slaves.

There would by no means be anyone who would ask “Are you perhaps teasing us?” When they spoke their minds after being troubled for a while and were told “Enough already, leave” by Kreshu, they all left with deep blue faces.

As for why Kreshu did such a thing, there was no reason in particular. If one were compelled to say it, it was because he was bored to no end. The King’s younger brother was such a person.

“It’s something I already knew, but I’m really bored.”

When the sun was about to reach the zenith, as he received a report for the Nth time today, gave words of thanks to the soldier and had him leave, Kreshu talked to himself while stifling a yawn.

Since initiating the invasion into the Brune Kingdom, he has not experienced a decent battle even once.

There was no way that they would be that many enemies that would face 150,000 soldiers. A weak resistance to the degree of managing to gather 2000 to 3000 soldiers wouldn’t even compare to a quarrel between an adult and a child. If they poked them a little, the enemy would collapse and be annihilated.

Kreshu did not need to act in such battles. After one General assaulted a town with 10,000 soldiers and got the plundering over with, he would report the results to Kreshu and that was all.

In this campaign, the Generals that Kreshu chose were only capable and brave people with great loyalty. They should not have any trouble in assaulting a port town.

Besides, before entering Brune, Kreshu set a rough objective so that they would not come to seek his judgment for every single thing. Therefore, the General were able to quickly move in accordance with that.

In addition, when it came to the march of 150,000 soldiers, the movement would be disordered in the front and rear, the units would collide with each other and deserters would appear; but such things did not happen for the time being. The Generals, in response to Kreshu's trust, cooperated and splendidly led the army.

“My job now is only eating, sleeping, being shaken on the palanquin and listening to the reports.”

There might be no helping it for Kreshu, who was put in such a situation, to tease the Generals. That he didn't go as far as to tease even ordinary soldiers would be the minimal salvation.

Around the palanquin where he was sitting, close aides rode horses so as to protect the King's younger brother, but none of them stopped Kreshu from killing time. This was because they thought that it was just slightly troubling the Generals, but it was still okay.

But, seemingly feeling that it was necessary to soothe the King's younger brother, one of the close aides opened his mouth.

“Then, how about doing falconry^[4] as a victory celebration after having gain control of the port towns group and securing the sea route? Since Brune has many flat grassy plains, I think that there will be not too much trouble in choosing a place for that.”

“Hou. Falconry, huh.”

Kreshu’s hollow eyes shone as though to say that it was a splendid idea.

“Then, let’s do this. I’ll lead 10,000 soldiers and go around Brune while greatly enjoying falconry. You people will follow me with the remaining 140,000 soldiers. Meanwhile, if someone sees a town or a city to be assaulted, we’ll occupy it without a moment’s delay. Hahaha, won’t it look like quite an exciting falconry?”

The close aides were all at a loss for words. That was absolutely not falconry. What was frightening above all was that the King’s younger brother might happily do it.

Including the one who suggested falconry, the close aides prostrated themselves to Kreshu and begged him to retract that thought. The King’s red-bearded younger brother boringly frowned.

“What are you unhappy with?”

“Our bodies will not last.”

A close aide answered with a very serious face. If Kreshu were to seriously go wildly around freewheelingly, not only the close aides, but even the Generals and soldiers would end up being exhausted just by following him. As a result, the army would fall apart.

“Your Excellency. As expected, even Brune will have to fight when we draw near their capital. Could you please bear with it for a little while and wait for the fun to come?”

One of the close aides eagerly spun his words. Although Kreshu snorted revealing disappointment and dejection, he did not reject their request.

At that time, one of the soldiers showed up to report. Though the soldier felt an atmosphere similar to awkwardness hanging over and around the palanquin, he pretended not to notice it.

“Report. There are people who request an audience with your Highness the

Prince.....”

A light of curiosity, though little, was lit in Kreshu’s eyes. At this moment, anything would do as long as it staved off his boredom. Hearing the names of the people who wanted to meet him, the Red Beard (Barbaros) revealed a light smile.

“Lamer, Agde and Massilia, huh..... Fine. Bring them along.”

They were all port towns with some scale, but these three towns had one common point. It was the point where they had kept in touch with Melisande and changed sides to Sachstein.

Kreshu made the palanquin stop. 10,000 soldiers similarly stopped their march in order to protect him.

Then about a quarter koku passed and the heads of the towns finally showed up before Kreshu respectively. They were men in their thirties to fifties and they wore fine silk clothes.

Situated in between Muozinel soldiers with spears, they stood side-by-side about ten steps away from the palanquin. As the three men made courteous greetings in the Muozinel language, they exhausted words to praise Kreshu’s various distinguished military services, then went ahead and offered to cooperate.

Their intentions were clear. Now that Melisande was dead and Sachstein was defeated, they would only wait for Princess Regin’s punishment. The Muozinel army showing up then would look like a hand of salvation held out to them.

After Kreshu, who finished listening to their words, contentedly nodded, he turned his gaze to the close aide standing by his side.

“Send these guys to the front line as war slaves. Tell Ekrem to also treat them as such.”

Ekrem was one of the Generals that Kreshu selected for this campaign. He

commanded 20,000 war slaves and was in charge of the front row for today's march. Then, Kreshu ordered.

“And then, arrest all their families and relatives. The men shall be made wars slaves, and the women and children slaves. I don't mind if you leave the old men, but kill them should they resist.”

At the severe order, the head of Lamer screamed. Massilia's head took a step forward as his face turned blue, then red due to shock and fear. Kreshu's close aides changed their expressions and kneeled, the Muozinel soldiers quickly stuck out their spears.

“W-Why do we receive such a cruel treatment?! I heard that concerning the other towns that surrendered, both their lives and assets were protected.....!”

As his way was blocked by spears, the head of Massilia desperately appealed in the Muozinel language mixed with Brune language. Kreshu replied in a derisive tone.

“It looks like you got something wrong, but capitulation and betrayal are two different things, Head of Massilia. The other towns you speak of didn't betray Brune, right?”

It was not like Kreshu disliked the act of betrayal. He just judged that the so-called full scale cooperation they spoke of was not worth looking at.

If these three men had taken the initiative to express cooperation with Muozinel and moreover appealed to other towns for betrayal, Kreshu would have given them a suitable treatment.

But, there already existed many port towns that yielded to the pressure of their large army and surrendered. If he were to treat them and these three men in the same way, it was inevitable that the heads of other towns would hold animosity/antipathy.

On the other hand, if he were to put these three men under the others, this time, these three men would hold dissatisfaction. There was no guarantee that

people such as them that betrayed Brune twice would not betray Muozinel.

Dealing with them directly was the quickest way.

“O-Our experience and accomplishments in governing a town are.....”

The Head of Agde, who was speechless until then, came to his senses and desperately entreated. The Red Beard (Barbaros) clearly jeered at them this time.

“My country also has many towns with ports facing on the south sea. So, you don’t have to worry about that.”

These were words with the meaning that Muozinel people would directly rule over these three port towns.

Regarding the other towns which quietly obeyed, he thought that it was fine to leave their rules to the Brune people as before. Only, there should just be a Muozinel person with a rank higher than the ruler.^[5]

Alternatively, it might be good to continue the custom of having a Muozinel person ruling the towns in their place. In that case, not only could he bring to light problems at an early stage, he could also keep a spirit of rivalry between the Brune rulers.^[6]

When Kreshu lightly waved his hand, the Muozinel soldiers thrust their spears and took the three Brune men along. When their figures could no longer be seen, Kreshu’s palanquin was lifted. The King’s younger brother and the 10,000 soldiers resumed their march.

Then before long, Kreshu noticed a certain thing and said in a small voice.

“I should have asked them about Sachstein.”

About the time just when the New Year began, Kreshu, who had heard that Sachstein invaded Brune, had sent a messenger to Sachstein.

In the end, there was no reply and Kreshu himself decided to attack Brune

independently, but he was interested in the strategies and tactics that they'd pictured. Since the Brune men just now should have had a close relation with Sachstein, they might know about it in detail.

However, Kreshu shook his head and denied that thought. There was no way that people such as them that came before him and were unable to come up with proper means of negotiations would know that much. Even assuming that they knew, it might not be a useful thing.

Suddenly, Kreshu looked back towards one of his close aides and asked.

“Which reminds me, was there any report from Damad?”

The close aide shook his head as he answered “there was none”. Damad was one of Kreshu's close aides and also a youth with ability as a warrior and as a commander.

When they passed through Agnes and entered Brune's territory, Kreshu gave 2000 cavalymen to Damad and gave him one order.

It was to scout out the outskirts of the Capital Nice as well as Brune's western part and gathered information.

Not so many days have passed yet since the Moonlight Knight army lost to the Greast army.

Kreshu gathered information either by releasing several scouting parties or by listening to stories from the Heads and merchants of the port towns that surrendered, but he didn't know yet about the Sachstein army's withdrawal, the Moonlight Knight army's defeat and even the Greast army's existence. More exactly, even if he heard about it as a rumor, he has not yet verified whether it was true or false.

This was a problem of distance and means of communication; if Kreshu had not advanced through the southern coast, but instead went north towards the Capital, he would have obtained more accurate information. However, Red Beard (Barbaros) the King's younger brother, as a supreme commander, gave priority to the establishment of the supply line and instead sent Damad

far away.

“Since it’d take a lot of time when it comes to the capital, I didn’t set a time limit, but..... That Damad, I wonder until where he went. He didn’t possibly get lost, did he?”

At Kreshu’s mutter, the close aides remained silent and nobody answered.

While being protected by 10,000 soldiers, the King’s younger brother travelled aboard the palanquin through Brune’s highways.

At that time, Damad, who made Kreshu unusually worried, was at a place about half a day west of the Capital Nice. Being accompanied by 2000 cavalrymen, they took a short rest on a small hill surrounded by grassland.

Gray clouds thinly spread overhead of Damad. The weather was different from the south and the center even in the same country (Brune). Though he didn’t think that it would rain right now, it was weather that made one worry.

“I feel like I had gotten the short end of the stick.”

Looking up at the gray sky, Damad spitted out in irritation. He was currently 19. He was a tall figure youth with dark brown skin characteristic to Muozinel people, a slender nose and chin, and a sharp look.

Damad wore leather armor on thick clothes, hung a curved sword to his waist and fastened a bow on the saddle. The iron helmet he put on his head was the proof of being a commander. Frankly speaking, he wanted to take it off, but he endured it for his pride as a commander.

It might be said that his ability to lead 2000 soldiers on a land he’d visited for the first time was quite good. But, he was full of dissatisfaction.

He was not that dissatisfied about having been ordered to do reconnaissance in a distant place by Kreshu.

He thought that it was regrettable as a warrior he was not able to participate in the capture battle of the port towns group and that it was a shame when he thought about the plunder after the capture, but Kreshu was a

man who attached extreme importance to information gathering. If Damad were to bring accurate and valuable information, he would definitely be highly evaluated.

The time that he thought that his expectations were off was when he went to attack villages and towns from the south to the west of Brune.

Damad was ordered to procure food locally. In other words, it meant to steal it from the enemy. This was also the approval to acquire slaves.

However, the towns and villages of Brune's south had already been attacked by the Sachstein army and the Greast army. While prostrating himself before Damad, the chief of a certain village told in tears that there was almost no food remaining. And when he had his subordinates inquire, it was true.

Because it was only one or two villages and towns that were in this state, Damad was greatly perplexed.

Anyway, because they also needed food, although he coldly told them to "go ask to the Capital" and took some quantity of food by force, the feeling of wasted effort was bigger than the sense of accomplishment.

They did not obtain even one slave. As they must first secure enough food for themselves, there was no way that they could leisurely think of getting slaves. It was not as if Damad held merciful thoughts towards slaves, but it was not his hobby to watch them die by the roadside.

The reconnaissance and information gathering which were his original objectives went smoothly.

Damad got to know that the Sachstein army withdrew after having a battle with the Moonlight Knight army, and that a group of unknown identity defeated the Moonlight Knight army.

This group was the Greast army, but Damad naturally did not know that name. He just vaguely guessed that it was an anti-Princess armed group.

—I wonder if that was a blunder.....

Shifting his gaze, Damad thought while looking down at the grassland from the hill.

When Kreshu ordered reconnaissance around the Capital to Damad, he had not yet decided whether or not he would have him head to the west of Brune. After looking at the map of all of Brune, he asked

“East or west, which way do you want to go?”

Damad chose west because he thought that he would definitely get information about the Sachstein army, but it was not only for that.

On the northeast part of the map, he found the place named ‘Alsace’. Damad knew that it was Tigrevurmud Vorn’s territory.

The Sachstein army’s hand did not extend until the eastern part of Brune. If he had attacked the lands of Territoire and Alsace, he wouldn’t have gotten useful information like now; but he might have secured enough food, materials and slaves. And he would definitely be highly evaluated as such.

“What do we do, your Excellency?”

The soldier acting as his adjutant asked. It was a man two or three years older than Damad.

“I think that we got enough information about the Sachstein army and the so-called Moonlight Knight army. Since we don’t have that much food, I think that we shall go back from here.”

“Are you satisfied with the harvest of this time?”

Damad asked with a displeased face. The adjutant replied with a wry smile.

“As a scouting party, I think that they are results we should be satisfied with. Especially, if his Highness gets to know that Brune does not have a large amount of military power, he will be pleased.”

At these words, Damad stared at his adjutant with a sharper gaze.

“Do you really think so?”

“Do you think that the story of the combined army of Brune and Zhcted having suffered a crushing defeat and that “Star Shooter” having gone missing is a lie?”

The adjutant asked back with a dubious face. Damad took off his gaze from him, looked at the distance and muttered as if speaking to himself.

“That guy is more stubborn than a sand fox after all.”

A sand fox was a fox inhabiting Muozinel. It could leisurely endure the heat during the day and the cold during the night in the desert, and could move vigorously for two days without eating or drinking.

“Yea.....” throwing a sidelong glance at the adjutant who gave a vague reply, Damad pondered. He depicted a map in his head. He wondered about which direction they should ride their horses to.

If he judged that they had finished their mission and should join the main force, it would be south. If he thought about plundering, it would be east.

If he wanted to inquire about the movement of the Sachstein army after their withdrawal and Asvarre, then it would be west. However, if he were to go west, the supply of food and materials would without doubt become severer/harsher than now.

—*What’s left is the north.*

He tried thinking again about the Greast army. If they defeated the Moonlight Knight army, then it meant that they were fairly strong.

It was clear that they opposed Regin, but was there a possibility for them to betray Brune and cooperate with Muozinel? Conversely, was there a possibility that they regarded Muozinel as an enemy and temporarily join forces with Princess Regin?

—*I guess I shall inquire about them just a little more.*

He could not afford to ignore a group that might become an enemy of Muozinel. As he only had 2000 soldiers, he did not intend to fight them; he wanted to at least inquire about their aim, base and commander's identity. Anyway, it would not be futile since sooner or later they would either negotiate or cross blades.

“We’ll go to the north. I want to check out what kind of guys the group said to be the anti-Princess faction is; then after I get that over with, we’ll go back to the main force.”

“Isn’t it quite dangerous to head to the north from the Capital?”

At the adjutant, who cocked his head in puzzlement, Damad replied with a smile oozing ambition.

“His Highness is probably thinking that, too. In other words, it means that it might bear that much result.”

Finishing their rest before long, the Muozinel army of 2000 cavalymen led by Damad went down the hill. And they advanced their horses towards the north.

Translator and references notes

[1] This time refers to going on another trip but on land after their trip on the sea/ dualxblades

[2] Varhrān is apparently the name of Verethragna in middle Persian, meaning someone who breaks all obstacles. I’m not that well-informed on the subject, but it’s roughly something like this

[3] Gold leaf is gold that has been hammered into thin sheets by goldbeating and is often used for gilding-taken/ dualxblades

[4] the sport of hunting with falcons or other birds of prey; the keeping and training of such birds. For more details, please read here: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falconry>

[5] meaning that even with Brune people as the towns' heads, there would be a Muozinel person above them but the town heads would still make the rules

[6] rulers here meaning Heads of towns

Chapter 4 – The Battle of Montour

The early afternoon of that day, Charon Anquetil Greast, who received a report from the reconnaissance team, showed a confused look on his well-ordered face. After receiving a report that they sighted soldiers of the Muozinel army in such a place, it would be in fact difficult to have any other reactions.

They were currently located two days away from Montour.

“The Muozinel army, you say?”

Inside a carriage where cushions were spread all over, he spread several maps. How many forces were there currently between the Capital Nice and Lutetia?

He knew that the Osterode Army led by Valentina was going north through the high connecting the Capital Nice and Lutetia. He also knew that the Moonlight Knight Army of about 7000 left the Capital a day later than them.

Judging from the Greast Army’s position, the Osterode Army was to the northeast about a day and half on foot from them. And the Moonlight Knight Army was to the southeast about two days on foot from them.

They were probably heading to Lutetia, but even if they suddenly changed the direction and headed towards the Greast Army, there was no way he would not notice it and he should have plenty of time to respond.

But then, Muozinel showed up here. From the Greast Army’s perspective, it seemed that they were to the south a day and half on foot from them.

“The troops of Muozinel that invaded should exceed 100,000. But this one is composed of only 2000 cavalrymen. This means that they’re a reconnaissance team, huh.....”

Greast could guess up to there. But as to how much close that

reconnaissance team would be to them, even he could not predict it. Moreover, he could not guess whether they were the target of the reconnaissance team.

“I’ll leave them as is for the time being. They’re only 2000. They won’t possibly challenge us, who are nearly 10,000.”

As he reached such a conclusion, Greast decided to head to Montour as planned.

“I can easily grasp the Moonlight Knight Army’s intention. They probably intended to enter Lutetia before us and gain time by holding the fort in Artishem.”

Artishem was the Capital of Lutetia, so if they intended to take Lutetia, they must absolutely hold it. Greast also intended to aim there at first.

“But, that’s precisely why we’ll reach Montour without hindrance.”

It did not take one day to go from Montour to Lutetia. As long as he sent a reconnaissance team on a regular basis from Montour, he would be able to grasp the movement of the soldiers in Lutetia with great accuracy.

It was precisely for that reason why Greast thought of Montour as an ideal base. He certainly possessed adequate ability as a commander.

“After we arrive at Montour, I’ll send a messenger to the Osterode Army. Judging from their movement, it seems that they intend to assist the Moonlight Knight Army, but the latter should also know that Valentina-dono and Duke Ganelon had interactions. It will at least be able to shake them.”

At this point in time, he could do only this much. Then, Greast began to think about Elen. This night would probably be the last night he would play with her in the camp. *What shall I do after arriving at Montour?* He wondered.

“It’ll also be quite fun to ask her to demand to be rescued by the one she loved.”

When Greast tormented her by using his hands, fingers and tongue, he might request her to do it. In order to make her understand that no matter how much she shouted, nobody would come to her rescue. And if Elen insisted on firmly shutting her mouth, he might throw in a whisper.

“I’m looking forward to it, Eleonora-dono.”

He has sent a messenger yesterday at this time in Montour. As long as he could ensure food and safe bed/kip, he would still be able to maintain the morale of the soldiers.

For example, regarding the Moonlight Knight Army, Greast has thought about the possibility of them sending a military unit their way in order to rescue Elen. Though he has not yet publicly announced that he caught Elen, but even so clever people must have already realized it.

But, he was quite confident in the camp he set up. He was certain that even if they were able to successfully sneak in stealthily, there was no way that they would be able to rescue Elen and escape with her.

His judgment was not wrong. This was because a very close layout was performed in the Greast Army’s camp.

Besides, he strictly ordered his soldiers not to approach the tent where Elen was locked up. Though this showed his crooked desire of possessiveness, it was also a precautionary measure to immediately detect anyone who would approach the tent.

The very same day, the Greast Army stopped their march a half koku before the sun set, and set a camp on a flat hill. There were a river and a forest nearby, but the area of the forest was very small and the view was not bad. Thus, there should be no accident.

Tigrevurmud Vorn and Lyudmila Lourie were hidden inside the forest not far from the Greast Army’s camp. Their clothes got a lot of dirt during their travel, but their eyes were filled with a strong will and the expression on their faces was filled with vitality.

“The opportunity has finally come.”

Two kinds of feelings were mingled in Mila’s voice. One was slight tension. And the other was regret. Tigre briefly replied “yes” with a firm voice.

Looking up, the sky was welcoming the darkness of night. The two of them were thankful that the clouds covered the moon as they were about to sneak into the enemy camp.

“Thinking about it now, I finally understand why Earl Rodant allowed you freedom to act.”

Without taking her eyes off from the Greast Army’s camp, Mila earnestly said. Today was the fifth day since she reunited with Tigre. Since then, both of them secretly overtook the Greast Army by going around Montour, waiting for the only opportunity.

Doing this was not as easy as it sounded. The Greast Army was still sending reconnaissance teams on a regular basis, and there was also the fact that both of them had walked for more than half a day through the grasslands completely devoid of cover such as forests or hills.

However, while avoiding all these scout’s eyes and cleverly maintaining a reasonable distance from the Greast Army, Tigre pulled off the feat of catching up with them, lining up with them, overtaking them and finally pulling apart from them. And he probably did so by only using his ability as a hunter.

If it was only Mila tracking the Greast Army, she would have probably been found a reconnaissance team at an early stage. And if she were to give priority to hide herself so as not to be found, it would have without doubt been difficult for her to even keep tracking them.

“It’s thanks to Mila.”

Tigre looked at the blue-haired Vanadis and revealed a grateful smile.

“Because you’re with me, I’m able to do my best. Thank you.”

“I don’t want you to just say thanks. After we rescued Eleonora, well let’s see; I shall have you serve me tea, I guess. A delicious one, of course.”

“I’ll do my best, is what I would like to say, but tea is very expensive in Brune after all. If I mess with it^[1], I’ll be scolded by Titta. And by Lim, too.”

Even though they had to sneak into an enemy camp where there were 10,000 soldiers, the two of them had room to crack jokes.

Incidentally, Mila put on an overcoat made of fur on top of her blue clothes. She used the fur of preys that they killed during these several days of trip, and exchanged the unused parts against a horse in a village they stopped by. She deliberately made the hood larger so as to be able to cover her face.

She also held a handmade plain spear as she hid the Frozen Wave. This was because the Dragonic Tool, which was adorned with beautiful ornament, would definitely stand out in the camp. If Mila so wished, the Frozen Wave would immediately appear in her hand.

The darkness covering the earth gradually thickened and the many bonfires around the Greast Army’s camp increased in brightness. The clatter of soldiers could now be heard to up the place where they were hiding.

“Let’s go.”

Tigre said and began to walk quietly. Mila also put on the hood of fur and followed the youth. They approached under cover of darkness and sometimes deliberately stood up near a bonfire, pretending to be soldiers of the Greast Army.

Tigre led Mila by the hand and crossed the first trench. They advanced while hiding behind the tents and after they carefully slid in the second trench, they dodged the swords and spears buried in the bottom and crawled up.

“I’m amazed that you were able to sneak into such a place so easily

before.”

When they climbed out of the trench, Mila said as she was amazed. For a defense at a camp that they would use for only one day and moreover where there was no enemy around, she felt that it was too much labor.

Mila also thought that if it was when there was an enemy nearby, she would also put more effort into the defense; but she would not usually go so far. This was because it would tire the soldiers. She thought that the enemy commander had the ability of either earning much confidence from the soldiers, or exploiting them to the limit.

When they crossed the trench and came out of the shadow of the tents, the Greast soldiers were having a meal. From the look of it, it was only bread, soup and cured meat; but their expressions were bright. It was because before evening meal, Greast told them the distance until Montour, and their morale rose.

“It’s really a group of people scrapped together.”

While walking with careful steps between the soldiers, Mila muttered. As there were also many people other than them walking around the camp, no one paid special attention to Tigre and Mila.

“I heard that you guys lost quite badly, but I still can’t believe it.”

“I also thought like that a little while ago.....”

Tigre, holding the black bow on his left arm, walked with more cautious steps than Mila. He also held the quiver hanging around his waist from above with his right hand. He could not afford to make the same mistake again. After all, Mila was also here this time.

“After thinking about it for several days, I felt like I finally understood why we lost.”

They made surprisingly highly coordinated movements. Each soldier fully displayed his strength.

They came from everywhere, their armed forces were not unified and they did not even have enough training. What changed them into a powerful military group was probably Greast's outstanding command and formation ability.

However, before he had time to explain that, their destination could be seen.

At the center of the camp, two tents were installed a little apart from each other, there was nobody around this area, and thus a large space spread gaping wide there. The three bonfires set up near the tents quietly flickered.

Outside of that space, ten soldiers stood at regular intervals as they depicted an elliptical form. They stood watch so as not to let anyone close to the tents at the center.

Mila, who observed the situation while hiding behind a tent, spoke in an amazed voice.

"It doesn't seem like he commanded the soldiers with trust."

"He seemed to have used a rather cruel execution before. It's probably with that."

Mila, who heard Tigre's explanation, revealed a disgusted look. Though she had no intention of showing mercy, if the situation required it, it seemed like she would go in rampage to her heart's content.

"What do we do? We can't charge directly like this to the tents though."

They did not know which tent Elen was locked up in, but fortunately, the two tents were not that big. If they jumped in, they would be able to survey the inside with a glance.

"Let's watch the situation for a little."

Tigre's words, rather than being a reply to Mila, seemed to try to convince himself in order to suppress his feeling of impatience. As the blue-haired Vanadis slightly lifted her hood of fur and turned surveying eyes to the youth,

she shook her head.

“I think it’d be better to cause a commotion as soon as possible. Looking at you now, the more time passed, the more anxious you’d become and I feel like you might finally screw up the whole thing.”

Though he slightly groaned, he was self-aware of his nervousness and anxiety rapidly welling up as he stood in front of the tent where Elen was caught. But, he asked Mila just in case.

“Is there any other reason?”

“The defense is more rigorous than I expected. I think that the situation won’t change that much even if time passes. It’s possible to wait until half of the enemy forces fell asleep, but if we do it now.....”

How to cause a commotion in the enemy camp? Tigre and Mila have talked about that many times these days and worked out several plans. What was left to do was to only adjust it based on the situation.

After listening to Mila’s plan, Tigre slightly nodded.

“I got it. Let’s go with that.”

As Tigre carefully removed one of the leather bags hung to his waist, he spilled out its contents in the tent where they were hiding. What was inside was oil. The place where oil was spread was stained black.

Tigre and Mila left the place, passed between the tents used by the soldiers, circled the elliptical space for a half a lap and came out to the other side. Thanks to the bonfires at the center of the space, they grasped the place almost accurately.

Tigre removed another leather bag hung to his waist. It also contained oil, but they did not use it to spill it in the tents. Holding the leather bag in his left hand, Tigre took out one arrow from his quiver with his right hand.

Mila took it, quickly wounded an old rag to the arrowhead and dipped it into the leather bag. It was to make a fire arrow. Their aim was the tent where

they spilled oil a little while ago.

Although the place where Tigre stood now and the targeted tent were separated by two tents, both the youth and Mila did not think that the arrow would go off the mark. There were only 100 Arshins (about 100 meters) of distance at most and it would fine as long as he shot it so it depicted a great arc.

Tigre ignited the arrow and nocked it on the black bow. After he was ready, Mila walked out of the shadow of the tent and began to walk at a leisurely pace. Naturally, the soldiers on lookout saw her and called out to her. Mila stopped, waiting for one of the guards to approach.

The guards that were nearby focused their attention on Mila. After confirming it, Tigre shot the fire arrow. With the night sky as background, the fire arrow flew far above the two tents while depicting a magnificent parabola and accurately pierced in the tent where oil was spilled.

The tent burnt up. Because the amount of oil was not much, it did not cause that big a fire; but it was enough to surprise the guards and make them focus their awareness over there.

At this time, two guards already drew near Mila, but these two also reflexively shifted their attention to the burning tent. The Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave did not overlook that opportunity.

The spear in her hand flashed and one of them soundlessly collapsed. She quickly swung back and pierced the other one's throat.

“It's been a long time since I used an ordinary spear to kill enemies.”

When she muttered so, Tigre ran up to her side. He held the black bow in his left hand and grasped a new arrow in his right hand. Before the two could talk, Tigre suddenly stopped, nocked the arrow and shot it. After a short time, a guard who was in a distant place had his forehead pierced and he collapsed.

“I-Intruders!”

One of the guards shouted. Tigre and Mila ignored it and rushed towards the tents at the center. Even if soldiers came after hearing the voice just now, they would first take notice of the burning tent. It was fine as long as it could earn Mila and Tigre a little bit of time.

Among the two tents at the center, they rushed into the nearest one. The lamplight hanging from the ceiling illuminated the two people's faces. There was however nobody inside the tent where a carpet was spread on the ground and where cushions were spread all over the carpet.

“It's the wrong one, huh!”

The two of them immediately came out and rushed into the other tent.

This one was dim and they could not see inside immediately. But, they felt someone's presence.

“Elen!”

Tigre unintentionally shouted. And then, he heard a reply from within the dim light.

“.....Is it Tigre?”

A feeble, tired and weak voice. Mila's complexion changed, but she immediately ran out of the tent. She took off her overcoat made of fur, put it into the flames of the bonfire and returned to the tent again.

As the fire on the fur quickly spread until her hand, she thrust it with the spear, using it as a torch.

Inside the tent illuminated by the flames, an iron pillar stood at the center.

Elen was sitting on the ground, tied to that pillar.

“Elen.....!”

Tigre shouted her name and rushed over. Though Mila silently stood silently on the spot, her face showed surprise as well as a rising anger. What

kind of treatment was this towards a Vanadis of Zhcted, no, towards a warrior, who fought bravely and dignifiedly on a battlefield?

Elen raised her face. On her haggard face, she revealed a smile that looked like she would cry at any moment.

“Is it really you, Tigre.....? Isn’t it a dream?”

“Yes, that’s right..... It’s me, Elen. There’s no way it’s a dream, right?”

Tigre, still holding the bow in his left hand, strongly hugged her. The chains that restrained both of her hands made a clanging sound. Killing intent showed in Tigre’s eyes as he glared at these chains.

“Step aside, Tigre.”

Mila, who finally pulled herself together, came next to the youth. As she handed the impromptu torch to Tigre and had him step back, she stretched her right hand to the empty space.

“—Lavias!”

With her shout, a bluish white radiance was generated on her right hand. The surrounding atmosphere instantly turned into cold wave; the bluish white light stretched long and narrow, and took the form of a spear. When the light soundlessly dissipated, there was a beautiful spear in Mila’s hand made with the combination of block ice and crystal.

Mila casually swung the Frozen Wave, planning to cut the chains coiling around Elen’s arms like a poisonous snake. But, a metallic sound was emitted and the Frozen Wave was bounced off. Not only Mila, even Tigre opened his eyes wide in surprise. Elen looked up at Mila and uttered words painfully.

“This..... negates Dragonic Skills.....”

Though she heard only a few words, it was enough for Mila to understand.

She had found it strange. At first glance, Elen seemed to be exhausted, but she had no obvious injury. On the contrary, her wounds were properly

tended. Despite this, why did she not call her Dragonic Tool to escape?

“Now that you mention, such hateful things indeed exist.”

Mira’s eyes shone with anger. In the civil war two years ago, she fought together with Elen against dragons entwined with strange chains twine around their large builds. The chains were endowed with a mysterious power that negated Dragonic Skills.

Mila once again wielded the Frozen Wave. This time, she was not aiming at the chains, but at the iron pole on which Elen was tied. A metallic sound echoed again inside the tent. However, it was duller than the sound earlier.

The iron pole was beautifully divided into two; Tigre rushed up to Elen again and removed the chains from her arms. Indeed after ten days, Elen finally regained her freedom.

“You bastards, what are you doing there?”

An angry shout resounded from behind Tigre and Mila.

When they turned around, a gray-haired tall man stood there with a lamp in his right hand. He seemed to have walked into the tent after hearing the noise.

Tigre did not answer and just silently nocked an arrow on the black bow. The youth immediately recognized that this man was Greast. So, he did not hesitate to aim at his forehead.

Greast promptly reacted to the arrow shot from such a close range. He held up the lamp in his right hand in front of his face, trying to block it.

With a whistling sound, the lamp fell to the ground and broke with a small crashing sound. A groan leaked out from Greast’s mouth. The arrow shot by Tigre broke the lamp and pierced the man’s right hand. The acute pain caused Greast to kneel down while holding his right hand.

Tigre took out a new arrow from the quiver hung to his waist, intending to finish him off, but he failed to do so.

It was because at this moment, the Greast Army's soldiers armed with weapons rushed into the tent.

“Tigre! I leave Eleonora to you!”

At the same time as she shouted, Mila held up the Frozen Wave and jumped out. With every sharp thrust of her spear, a Greast soldier's forehead or throat would spur blood, which would then form a dark red rainbow in the air as they collapsed.

The tent's entrance was naturally made narrow and it was difficult for more than two people to enter together at the same time. For Mila who held a long-handled weapon, it was an ideal battleground.

Elen was sitting on the ground, still leaning on the iron pole. Tigre planned to carry her on his back, but then he was blown off, hit by something from the side.

“I won't hand her to you..... She..... she's mine.....!”

It was Greast. With the arrow still inserted into his right hand, the blood flowed out of his palm, sliding down his fingers and fell on the ground making countless blood stains. His pair of eyes that looked down at Tigre became bloodshot and his body was filled with an unusual madness. While breathing roughly, Greast kneeled down in front of Elen.

“Come on, Eleonora-dono. Heal the wound on my hand with your body's warmth.”

Though his face was full of sweat, Greast still revealed a smile and called the silver-haired Vanadis' name. The man's left hand clasped the chains thrown on the ground.

As he endured the pain on his right hand and held the chains with both hands, Greast tried to go around behind Elen. He intended to strangle Elen and held her hostage while sealing her Dragonic Tool.

“—Arifal”

However, a moment earlier than that, a silver radiance shone in Elen's right hand. It took the form of a long sword and was tightly grasped in her hand. As if having impatiently waited for that time, it scattered silver light particles.

Something flew above Elen and Greast. It left a trail of blood.

That something, which rolled on the ground with a *botori* sound was the right hand that was pierced by the arrow.

Although Greast groaned and rolled on the ground, he immediately stood up again. His gray hair was disheveled and became like a lion's mane. Although he was assailed by an intense pain, his willpower to endure it till the end was commendable.

“Never..... Never touch me again!”

Elen turned her eyes and glared at Greast. But, she seemed to have exhausted her strength with that; she staggered and was about to fall. A hand extended from the side and supported her body. It was Tigre.

While carrying Elen on his back, Tigre looked in the direction of Mila. The Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave was blocking the tent's entrance, swinging her Dragonic Tool. There was no opponent among the Greast soldiers who gave her a hard time, but they just kept coming one after another.

It was at that time when Tigre thought of taking Greast as hostage, but the gray-haired Marquis took action slightly earlier than him.

Before the youth put down Elen on the ground, Greast ran to the tent's entrance while stumbling. Throwing a sidelong glance at a soldier being knocked down immediately on the side by Mila's spear, he rushed out of the tent while rolling. Not only Tigre, but even Mila was dumbfounded by this.

“I was wondering who suddenly came out. It's just a bastard quick in fleeing.”

While spitting out such words, slight caution was however contained in Mila's voice. At the same time as Greast ran away, the enemy soldiers no longer rushed in. That man probably stopped them. The blue-haired Vanadis looked back towards Tigre.

“Was the one just now Greast you spoke about?”

Tigre nodded and carried Elen on his back again. Because the youth held the black bow in his left hand, he needed to be careful not to injure her leg with the bowstring. Although this will be the burden on his left hand, it could not be helped.

He turned his neck and looked back to Elen on his back. She seemed to regain her consciousness, but she was completely exhausted. She seemed to be struggling just to hold the long sword in her right hand.

Neither of them tried to run out of the tent immediately. If they went out of the tent head on, a rain of arrows would probably be poured on them. The Greast Army used fire arrows in the battle against the Moonlight Knight Army. There should be a group of people who could use bows. In addition, if they were surrounded by a large number of the enemy, even Mila would exhaust her strength sooner or later.

Mila threw a glance at Elen. She felt angry at her cruel treatment, but Greast did not hurt Elen and even tended to her wounds. *Doesn't this mean he'll refrain from exposing her to danger?* She wondered.

However, she immediately dismissed that thought. She had no conclusive evidence. Besides, she could not spend time thinking about such things. After all, as far as this situation was concerned, the more time passed, the more advantageous the enemy would become.

“Tigre. Let's act as planned.”

Staring at the tent's entrance, Mila said. Tigre replied briefly and picked up the impromptu torch that fell to the ground. Most of the fur has burnt up and the fire has become quite weak, but it has not yet been extinguished.

Tigre held it and pressed it against the bottom side of the tent. It smoldered at first, but then the fire quickly moved to the top and it started to burn. So as not to get smoked, Tigre moved away from there. Mila walked up to him.

The fire expanded rapidly and a part of the tent was ablaze. Before long, a hole big enough to allow one person to pass was formed. However, the threefold wall of flames, heat and smoke blocked the passage, not allowing an average person to pass.

The Frozen Wave in Mila's hand shone white and emitted cold wave. This cold wave coiled around its master Mira, Tigre and Elen and became a transparent cold armor.

“If Eleonora was in a better condition, she could have taken care of the smoke, but..... Anyway, please hold your breath.”

Mila stood at the front and bravely rushed out of the tent while forcing back the flames and heat. Tigre, carrying Elen on his back, also followed her.

The surprised ones would be the Greast soldiers who were waiting outside the tents. When they surrounded the tent according to the order of the supreme commander Greast, it suddenly burned up. Moreover, the intruders split the flames and appeared from the rear.

As he was wounded on the right arm, Greast's instructions also lacked in accuracy; so the Greast soldiers were concentrated at the entrance of the tent. At the rear, there were only a few people, who just came over to observe the situation, and the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave was never merciful when facing her enemies.

The spearhead that was pulled out of the wall of flames pierced with the night wind, sweeping the enemy soldiers. Short screams overlapped with the sound of the cold wave taking their lives, and the Greast soldiers fell down to the ground one by one. Tigre and company succeeded in breaking through the enemy line almost instantly.

Although they broke through successfully, on the whole, it was only one of the thin layers. Reinforcements would soon show up and blocked their way;

moreover, the Greast soldiers who noticed that Tigre and company running away chased after them.

Tigre and Mila already expected this situation. They silently exchanged glances and then rushed into a tent nearby. Mila was on guard at the entrance, while Tigre quickly lighted fire and set fire to the right side of the entrance.

The reason why they set a surprise attack at this time when the Greast Army had their evening meal was to create chaos by burning tents one after another like this and take the opportunity to escape.

If they did this in the middle of the night, they would have rushed into the tents where the enemies were waiting. Even if they were sleeping or awake, it would be fine as long as the enemy was confused; but it would be tricky if they were to encounter an enemy who would respond quickly.

“Have you used this method before?”

When Tigre asked, Mila shrugged her shoulders and shook her head.

“What a funny joke. Obviously, it’s my first time using such a crude and violent method.”

“I think it isn’t that bad though.”

“I didn’t say that it’s bad. I just think this method is too unconventional, and to begin with, the idea of sneaking into the enemy camp and create a chaos is too strange.”

The tent’s right side burned up and similarly created a hole. When they jumped out of it, the Greast Army was in the midst of confusion due to the flames and smoke. Half-eaten bread rolled to the ground and soup was thrown out. There was even cured meat which one did not know how many times it have been stepped on.

Sometimes, they ran while hiding in the shadow of tents, sometimes they broke through the enemy line or burned tents to cause confusion. If Tigre was

not carrying Elen on his back, he would have shot arrows one after another, but this this he left it to Mila to freely rampage.

The Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave, who created a storm of cold wave with a flash of the ice spear, left innumerable frosts on the ground and froze even the enemy's breath and blood, might look like a lovely snowy fairy from afar, but she was a frightening ice devil for those who confronted them.

After battling for more than ten minutes, the trio finally reached where the trench was. As expected, as the cold wave did not work here, so they had to proceed cautiously.

At that time, Tigre felt his wrist was pulled. At the same time, an unnatural whirlwind surrounded the youth and Mila. Tigre looked at the silver-haired girl on his back.

“.....Elen?”

This was definitely the power of Arifal she possessed. Mila also seemed to have understood that; though she flashed a displeased look, he did not reject the wrapping of this whirlwind.

“Is it all right for you to use the Dragonic Tool's power?”

“Believe in her, Tigre.”

It was Mila who replied. She lowered her posture as she was going to jump over the trench. Tigre also took his eyes off from Elen and turned around to the trench.

The reason why Elen did this was probably due to her pride as Vanadis. Besides, since both hands of Tigre were occupied, he was thankful for being able to jump over with the help of the wind.

They kicked the ground. The atmosphere did not hinder Tigre and company, but instead pushed them. Their bodies were wrapped with a sense of floating and they even had the illusion of being completely free from the bondage gravity. Tigre and Mila lightly landed to the other side of the trench.

After coming this far, it was as good as having succeeded in escaping. Then before long, Tigre and company completely left of the Greast Army's camp. They earnestly ran on the earth wrapped in darkness, and when they suddenly looked back, they saw flames bursting in the camp. It was probably the tents that they had set fire to.

“How do we act from now on?”

Mila adjusted her breathing and asked. She had a thin layer of sweat on her forehead. Tigre replied without hesitation.

“We'll go south for a while, and then go east.”

By going from here to the east, they should reach the main highway that linked the Capital Nice and Lutetia in two or three days. There was a high possibility that the Moonlight Knight Army travelled along that road.

But, Greast must have also expected this. So, he would definitely send pursuers to the east to intercept them. Taking that into consideration, he felt that it'd be better to go south. Besides if it was the south, Tigre roughly grasped the topography of that area.

“Then, we'll move towards a village or a settlement whose location you know. We must get horses.”

Tigre nodded and carried Elen on his back again. They walked cautiously on the grasslands covered by the night darkness. Though it was inconvenient to light a torch when considering pursuers, the warmth and weight that the youth felt on his back gave him joy and vitality.

—Finally, finally..... I was able to save you.

Ten days passed since the Moonlight Knight Army was defeated and Elen was captured.

It was long. Tigre felt that that he had finally been rewarded.



When the night wore on and darkness deepened even more, while receiving treatment of his right arm in the tent for the supreme commander located at the center of the camp, Greast received the report.

Although called treatment, it could only be done as a simple dressing here. They could only wash the wound with water, disinfect it with wine and then apply medicine on it.

At the time of disinfection, Greast almost lost consciousness due to the tremendous pain, but he endured it and continued the treatment. Ointment was applied, then a clean cloth was used as dressing and finally a bandage was wrapped around. Although blood immediately oozed out, he could only leave it as is.

After hearing the number of casualties and the number of tents burnt, Greast made a sullen face.

The number of casualties was a little less than 50 people. All of them were not killed by Mila; there were some of them who died by friendly fire in the midst of chaos. Anyway, it was not that great a loss. It was a hard blow that the tents were burnt, but in this season where early summer approached, it did not result in a serious problem after all.

—*Tigrevurmud Vorn*.....

He inwardly cursed the man he hated to the bones. Compared with killing soldiers and burning tents, he could not forgive the fact that Elen was taken away.

And moreover, she was taken by that youngster of all people.

—*I guess I can't rely on those guys that I left in the royal palace. When I eventually seized Lutetia, I would have to re-start all from scratch.*

Though Greast's heart was filled in anger and hatred, when he finished hearing the report, he regained a calm expression and began to give clear instructions, while letting the girl in charge of his treatment help him wipe the sweat on his forehead.

This girl was one of the people that he abducted at the time when they were burning and looting in Earl Cotillard's territory. During the period when Elian was imprisoned, this girl was responsible for taking care of her.

After finishing issuing instructions in that way, Greast decided to revise his plan.

—Before arriving at Montour, I want to meet the Moonlight Knight Army and crush them.

The Moonlight Knight Army should have go north through the highway in order to defeat them. So they would definitely come over as long as the Greast Army did not move.

Although he could also take the initiative to the highway where the enemy would probably be, Greast intended to spent time in the reorganization of his army. He also wanted to reinvigorate the soldiers' morale.

He had the girl and the soldiers leave, and then inside the tent where he was now alone, Greast gulped down the wine which became lukewarm. He then looked up in the empty space and shouted with a strong obsession.

“Eleonora-dono..... I haven't given up yet.”



It was daybreak. Tigre and Mila, who walked a grassy plain full of ups and downs stretching out to a flat hill, as expected showed a rather exhausted look. The two people have kept walking throughout the night. Mila suggested that they carried Ellen on their backs in turns, but Tigre refused while expressing his thanks.

Though the fact that he personally wanted to carry her himself was one of the reasons, another was that Tigre also considered the fact that it would be tough for the small-statured Mila to walk while carrying Elen. Perhaps she seemed to have noticed Tigre's intention, the blue-haired Vanadis revealed a playful smile and said “then, do as you like”.

When they went up the hill, they found a small forest and got inside it. They finally took a break.

“Do you think that pursuers will come?”

While drinking water contained in a leather bag, Mila asked. Tigre shook his head.

“They’ve probably given up, I think.”

Although Mila’s performance last night was quite brilliant, it did not cause much damage to the Greast Army. The gray-haired Marquis should have also estimated that the Moonlight Knight Army would soon appear again.

Tigre did not know that the Moonlight Knight Army received the order to subjugate the Greast Army, but there was no way that Regin and Mashas would ignore Greast and the private army following him. They would have to defeat them somewhere.

And, Greast was probably aware of it as well.

“I think that they would lie in wait around an area in front of Montour.”

“Then, we should soon go east and come out to the highway, right?”

At Mila’s words, Tigre nodded while biting dried meat. He did not have much appetite, but he would be unable to move at the critical moment if he did not eat.

At that time, as the sound of horses’ hooves came from afar, Tigre’s face turned pale. It was the same for Mila, and so the two of them hurriedly hid in the shadows of trees.

But then, they revealed dubious expressions almost the same time. They had the feeling that the sound came not from the north, but from the south. They did not think that the Greast Army’s pursuers overtook them unawares.

Tigre and Mila cautiously inquired the situation outside the forest from the trees’ shadows. The sound of horses’ hooves gradually approached and their

identity became clear.

Dark-skinned horses that were not from Brune and lightly equipped warriors riding them. They wound a black cloth on their head, put on leather armor over their clothes and hung a sword with a curved blade to their waists. They inserted a bow on the saddle and hung a quiver. The most striking feature was their dark brown skin.

“Muozinel.....”

His optimistic mood until a while ago completely blow away, Tigre gazed at the Muozinel cavalry unit in utter amazement. Mila, also speechless, she tightly clenched her hand grasping the Frozen Wave.

They were about 50 cavalymen and they ran straight through the forest. Waiting until the sound of horses’ hooves could no longer be heard, and after further counting to 20, Tigre and Mila, leaving Elen behind, came out of the forest.

“We’re lucky. We wouldn’t have gotten away easily if we were found.”

Mila sighed. Even for Tigre and Mila, it would be tough to fight against 50 cavalymen head on while protecting Elen. Moreover, both of them had kept walking all night long after having raided the Greast Army’s camp, so as expected they accumulated a lot of fatigue.

“But, why did the Muozinel army appear here.....?”

“Judging from their number, it’s probably a reconnaissance team.”

Tigre’s shoulders quivered at Mila’s words. He wondered whether the Muozinel army has pushed their way into Brune’s southern part, and whether the fact that a reconnaissance team having come until here would meant that they (the army) already drew near to the Capital Nice.

—*No*.....

Thinking up to there, Tigre shook his head. If a large army of 150,000

approached until the vicinity of the Capital, it would without doubt affect even the area around here. People abandoning towns and villages and escaping in sparsely populated areas, and soldiers of nobles governing territories nearby should have been noticeable frequently.

“I wonder if they’ve sent out a small-scale reconnaissance team to observe the situation.”

“It’s probably that.”

Mila agreed with Tigre’s words.

As both of them surmised, the unit of 50 cavalymen that were here was a small detachment of the reconnaissance team led by Damad. They were ordered by Damad to go deeper into Brune for reconnaissance.

“Let’s get out of here first. Those guys may come back, so we’d better look for a safer place to rest.”

It was about when Mila said so and Tigre was about to nod.

“—Tigre”

The youth’s name was suddenly called from behind. It was a familiar, gentle voice that he knew well.

As they turned around with surprise, a girl stood there, her silver hair fluttering in the wind. Bashfully scratching her cheek, she smiled at Tigre.

“Um, sorry. For having you carry me on your back for so long.”

Tigre’s reply was an embrace that gave vent to his feelings. While her cheeks dyed bright red, Elen softly hugged the youth in return. Afterwards, her gaze met with Mila’s and she gave an awkward greeting.

She softly patted the back of Tigre still hugging her.

“Tigre. We’re in a hurry now, right? I’ll let you hug me as much as you want later, okay?”

At these words, the youth immediately regained his composure and quickly pulled away from her as he realized what he had just done. As a result, Elen staggered, so he hurriedly supported her. That flustered state of his invited a wry smile not only to Elen, but to Mila as well.

And then finally, Tigre faced Elen.

With a voice flooded with emotions, the silver-haired Vanadis briefly said.

“Thank you, Tigre.”

The youth gave a small nod with a smile infused with all his feelings.

The three people who left the forest marched towards the east. As the sun rose just then, there was no need to worry about getting the wrong direction.

Despite Tigre’s worry, Elen was walking the grassland with steady steps.

“Last night, for some reason my body felt weak and I was carried by you the whole time, but it wasn’t like I was seriously injured or sick.”

“In that case, I’d have preferred you walk on your own since yesterday.”

Mila cursed. Elen knitted her brows in displeasure.

“If I could move my body properly, I would have instead cut off that guy’s head and not his hand. It’s been a long time since I felt that irritated.”

“I’d have been very troubled if you’ve done it. I want his head, too.”

While walking in between the two Vanadises, Tigre joined in the conversation in a casual tone. It was not like he was just going along with Elen’s words. Although similarly to Elen, it’s really been a long time since he had hated someone to this extent. Just remembering Elen’s state last night, he reflexively clasped the bow in his hand tightly.

“I’d like you leave him to me. Even if it’s me who take his head, the credit will still be yours, the supreme commander.”

“Can you still fight?”

Mila squinted and asked. Elen revealed a fearless smile.

“After having stuck on Tigre’s back, I’m now full of energy. Besides — since I was oppressed by the other party, I’ve to retaliate.”

Elen said so while releasing a sharp and unrelenting fighting spirit from her whole body. Her ruby-colored eyes were also with an uncommon drive. Mila shrugged her shoulders as she said “how reliable of you” with sarcasm.

Tigre stopped and looked at Elen with an earnest expression.

“Elen. If you want to take part in the battle against him, you must promise one thing.”

Feeling an unyielding will within the youth’s voice, Elen stopped. She urged him to continue speaking.

“You must absolutely follow my orders. When I tell you to retreat, you should retreat then.”

Those were words he spoke due to his excess worry about Elen. He asked such a request because he worried that the anger released from her body might break away from the rational shackles. As she guessed Tigre’s intention, Elen curved her lips.

“Of course, I’ll naturally follow the supreme commander’s orders.”

“If I was the supreme commander, I’d have ordered you to stay back as you’re convalescent though.”

Elen glared at Mila, who butted into the conversation, with a sour look.

“What’s with you? You’re complaining since some time now. Because I owe you a favor for having rescued me, I intended to ignore most of what you say, but if you’re picking a fight, you’ll have it.”

“Do you think I’ll pick a fight for such a thing? For the little time I didn’t

see you, I see that your short-tempered nature got worse. At this rate, wouldn't you fly into rage just for the simple reason that meal time was late?"

"You went and said it. Shall I beat you to the point that you'd be unable to eat for a while?"

Ruby-colored eyes and ice-blue eyes clashed while scattering hostile sparks. Tigre hurriedly broke in between the two girls.

"Stop quarreling in a place like this. Mila, you said that because you're worried about Elen, right? Though the way you say it might be slightly thorny....."

Tigre faced Elen and Mila respectively and somehow managed to soothe them. Though the two girls put an end to their sharp words for the time being, they snorted while turning their gazes away from each other.

Tigre did not realize that Mila was irritated partly because of him. Since Elen was awake, Tigre seemed to be always concerned about her, and this made Mira's heart feel very unpleasant. However, Mila did not even try to voice out that feeling.

Wrapped in an awkward atmosphere, the trio resumed their walk.

When the sun rose to a fairly high position, Tigre and company once again heard the roar of horses' hooves. This time, they were just going down a hill, and there was no place nearby where they could hide.

Preparing for the worst-case scenario, the three of them respectively set up their weapons. But when they saw the group approaching their way while letting the sound of horses' hooves resound, surprise and joy appeared on Tigre's face.

While raising his left hand holding the black blow in order to draw the attention to him, the youth shouted towards the man standing at the vanguard of the cavalymen. In his excitement, he unconsciously used his old way of calling him.

“Gaspar-niisan!”

Riding at the vanguard of the group of about 30 cavalrymen was Mashas’ second son and Tigre’s long acquaintance, Gaspar.



It was the evening of the same day that Tigre and company returned to the Moonlight Knight Army’s camp together with the reconnaissance team led by Gaspar.

“Tigre-sama!”

After Tigre entered the tent for the supreme commander, the first one to jump at him was Titta who was cleaning the inside of the tent just then. She threw away the dust cloth in her hand and threw herself at Tigre’s chest. Tigre also caught the chestnut-haired maid in his arms with a smile.

“I’m back, Titta. Sorry to have worried you.”

“No, no.....! It’s just good as long as you came back safely.....”

She did not say anything further. Although it was several days, she has been feeling anxious all the time. She worried herself about wondering whether, even though the enemy was strong to the extent to defeat their army, he would be fine by himself, and whether he would be able to rescue Elen. Tigre continued to gently stroke her head and her back until she calmed down.

Afterwards, Titta also greeted Elen who entered the tent after the youth. Though the maid’s hazel-colored eyes became moist with large drops of tears when she saw Elen, she did not embrace her and just deeply bowed. With a teasing smile, Elen said with opened arms.

“Titta. Don’t be so reserved, I don’t mind you embracing me like you did to Tigre, you know?”

The maid, who did her chestnut-colored hair in a ponytail raised her face and shook her head.

“Yes. I would gladly do that. But this time, I shall first let another one do it.....”

Titta’s gaze moved and was turned towards Elen’s rear.

The silver-haired Vanadis turned around and saw Lim standing there. Though she was gazing at Elen with her usual unsociable expression, upon closer inspection, her shoulders were slightly shaking.

Elen walked up to Lim; she seemed to want to smile, but she could not. So, she could only show a complex expression while looking up at her close friend three years older than her.

“Sorry to have let you worry.”

How many emotions were contained within her gaze and within her very short lines? Only Lim, who received Elen’s feelings, could understand that.

Lim did not answer and just silently looked down at Elen. The reason why she could not utter any words was because the unsociable expression, which she forced herself to maintain, was collapsing gradually.

Elen stretched both her arms and held Lim’s head, burying it into her chest. And Lim did not resist. Before long, slight sobbing leaked out from within Elen’s chest.

Then after a quarter koku, five men and women sat around the table inside the tent for the supreme commander.

They were Tigre, Elen, Mila, Lim and Mashas. Titta did not join in and was busy preparing wine and pastry for five people. However, she looked very happy when she poured wine in porcelain cups and served pastry on plates.

“First of all, it’s good that you came back safely.”

Mashas said so and bowed to Elen; then he deeply bowed to Mila.

“I heard about the circumstances, but..... I do not have enough words to thank you for joining our line of battle at this time before our battle.”

“It’s fine to skip such stiff greetings. I just went with the flow after all.”

Mila laughed and responded with ease. Before long, Titta put wine and pastry in front of the five people. The pastry was something made by mixing egg and sugar with wheat and were baked dry for long-term preservation; though it was hard, the sweetness one felt on the tongue seemed as if it removed the fatigue that accumulated in one’s body.

“Titta’s pastry is delicious after all.”

Elen contentedly tossed them one after another in her mouth. Within the peaceful atmosphere, Tigre, Mashas and Lim busily exchanged information. Elen and Mila silently listened to them.

“We have 7000 soldiers, and the enemy is a little less than 10,000. We’re quite in disadvantage. You’ve lost once, right?”

Mila stated her opinion unreservedly. Elen responded in indignation.

“This was because at that time, we were quite tired and were poisoned, too!”

“So you say, but what is the actual reason?”

Mila ignored Elen and asked Tigre and Mashas. Mashas replied with a serious expression.

“They are very strong. Especially, their ability to see through our intention and counterattack first is indeed frightening.”

Lim, seemingly of the same opinion, nodded with a stiff expression. As a result, Elen could not refute, and a heavy atmosphere filled inside the tent. So as to break that atmosphere, Tigre spoke.

“Well, about that topic, Lord Mashas”

“Have you thought of some countermeasures?”

The gazes of everyone present in the tent concentrated on Tigre. The youth rummaged his darkish red hair as if looking for words.

“When I sneaked into their camp and observed the soldiers there, there’s something that bothered me. They’re without doubt a bunch of guys scraped together. So I wondered why we lost against them.”

Then, Tigre told the four people what he thought about. And also a strategy plan based on it.

Mashas was the first to speak of his impression.

“That’s quite a rough method. Moreover, we are in numerical inferiority, yet you want us to do that?”

“But, it is also a fact that neither me nor Lord Mashas have come up with any useful strategy until today.”

Lim plainly said and turned her blue eyes to Tigre.

“I agree with Lord Tigrevurmud’s plan. If we were to use the same tactics as the last time, we will without doubt lose again. In that case, I choose to bet on the words of someone who has actually seen the enemy’s camp.”

“Though I’m treated as a guest General, I’m also fine with Tigre’s plan.”

When Mila said so, Elen greatly nodded as well.

“As long as you let me do the essential part, then I’m fine with it.”

“Then, it’s decided.”

Surveying the three Zhcted people, Mashas shook his gray beard. Tigre wonderingly blinked several times.

“Do you also agree, Lord Mashas?”

“I wasn’t against it from the beginning, you know? Besides, I’m also concerned about Muozinel’s reconnaissance team that you guys saw. If we can defeat Greast now, then we should do it. —By the way”

Mashas asked the opinion of Elen and Mila about whether they should contact Valentina and the Osterode Army that should be in Lutetia about this time. If she and her troops were to be added, then their number would be 9600 and they would be on par with the enemy.

“I think it’s fine. We shall send a messenger first.”

Tigre said so, but Elen and Mila shook their heads as though to say that that was unnecessary.

“I’ll put it bluntly. I don’t trust her.”

“I feel the same way. She only thinks about herself.”

“Even if you say that, whether it be the battle against the Sachstein army or the one against the Greast Army, she didn’t do us any harm, right?”

“She’s just given a bunch of wicked ideas, you know?”

Elen bluntly said without hiding her displeasure. Tigre fell silent.

Elen certainly did have a point. You could also say that Valentina’s suggestions, such as doing sneak attack or using poison and the like, were insidious contrary to her beautiful appearance. Moreover, it looked like she enjoyed what she suggested and also the reactions of others towards her suggestions.

“I am sorry, but this time, I cannot also agree with Lord Tigrevurmud.”

Even Lim said it bluntly.

“I do not say that Valentina-sama has done anything wrong. But, she deliberately kept a distance from us. You could say that the fact that she is not here now is the best evidence.”

“.....I got it.”

Tigre nodded.

“But, I think I shall at least let her know that Elen is safe.”

Even if, just as Mashas suspected, Valentina had the intention to cooperate with Greast, she might change her mind after receiving the news that Elen has been rescued. When Tigre explained so, the other four nodded reluctantly.

On the same day, a messenger left for Lutetia where the Osterode Army might be stationed.

The day dawned and the 7000 of the Moonlight Knight Army that vacated the camp started their march as they deviated from the highway. They headed straight to Montour.

These 7000 soldiers were composed of 4800 soldiers of noble feudal lords, 1000 of the Lutece Knight Squadron led by Scheie, and 1200 of the LeitMeritz Army.

Regarding the LeitMeritz soldiers, except the severely wounded ones, most of them were added to the battle line. The Lutece Knight Squadron accompanied all along since the battle with the Sachstein army. They lost a little less than 200 of their comrades by the Greast Army's poison, thus burnt for revenge.

It was something that Scheie, with his peculiar features of a large build and a stern face, said with a brazen smile to Tigre.

“As long as we can beat up those guys and win in the end, you can use us however you see fit. We shall become your shields, or even armors. Of course, we don't mind being used as your swords and spears, either.”

“I hope that you will continue fight together with us against the battle with Muozinel afterwards. So, don't overdo it.”

As Tigre said so, Scheie restrained his drive.

As they slowed down their marching speed slightly in order to cross the river, the Moonlight Knight Army arrived quite close to Montour in a day.

The night passed. On the next morning, the Moonlight Knight Army and the Greast Army confronted each other at the grassy plain spreading southeast of Montour.

This region where both armies would clash did not have any name in particular, so this battle would be called “Battle of Montour” and this grassy plain would later be named “Plain of Montour”, too.

At first glance, the Plain of Montour appeared to be a grassy plain with no ups and downs; but, in the north, there was a dense forest that appeared dim even during the day, there was a river flowing in the south, and hills stretched out in the east and west; and the grassy plain itself was also a rugged zone, so it was far from being called “flat”.

The Greast Army took up their position in the north of the grassy plain with the forest at their back. They divided approximately 9000 infantrymen into 3000 soldiers to the central main troops, the right wing and the left wing respectively, and stationed less than 400 cavalymen in the rear as reserves troops. This was a fairly orthodox battle formation, which seemed out of place when considering the very abnormal supreme commander who devised it.

The Moonlight Knight Army stationed their soldiers away as far as possible from the river in the south.

The central main troops were composed of the 4800 soldiers gathered by the noble feudal lords. The supreme commander was Tigre and Mashas acted as the adjutant. The Lutece Knight Squadron led by Scheie took over the right wing.

The left wing was the 1200 of the LeitMeritz Army, with Elen as the commander and Lim acting as her adjutant. Moreover, as a guest General, Mila stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Elen.

Anyway, Elen owed a great debt to Mila. Tigre also stated it, but without

her cooperation, Elen might not have been here like this now.

Therefore, they received Mila as a guest General, but after completing the battle formation, the two Vanadis did not even look at each other.

Incidentally, there was a cavalry group of about 200 that took up positions on one of the hills in the west, watching this battle. They were neither Brune people nor Zhcted people. They were Muozinel people.

It was the reconnaissance team led by Damad. The remaining 1800 cavalymen were in the south far away from Montour. Damad knew of the Moonlight Knight Army's movement from the report of several subordinates that he dispatched, and ran to here in order to confirm it with his own eyes.

He had not the least bit intention in siding with either party. Even being well aware that he has probably been found out already by both armies, he still intended to brazenly watch them.

The side that won this battle would probably become the Muozinel army's enemy later. He had the duty of ascertaining the outcome and report how they fought to the "Red Bear". And while at it, he wanted to make it clear whether or not Tigrevurmud Vorn really went missing.

"What's with those guys?"

After receiving the report that there was a cavalry unit of the Muozinel army at a hill in the west, Mashas muttered, annoyed. Tigre also responded with an amazed face.

"This is the first time I see an army just coming to stand as a spectator."

But thanks to that, one doubt was cleared. The reconnaissance team of the Muozinel army that Tigre and Mila saw has come all the way here in order to sound out either the Moonlight Knight Army or the Greast Army.

"In any case, if they are only 200, we shall just ignore them. But, if they came too close, we'll deal with them then."

After deciding so, Tigre sent messengers in order to convey his intention to

the right wing and the left wing.

“But, Tigre. The Greast Army is really in chaos.”

While watching from afar the Greast Army standing at the grassland basking in the early summer morning’s sunlight, Mashas said with an astonished face. As the old Earl said, the Greast Army was like a group of people who were made up of shrimps and crabs (haphazardly gathered).

Next to the unit of the Cotillard soldiers that attired themselves with iron helmet, armor and shield, there was a unit that was composed only of bandits and brigands. Further beside this unit, there was even a unit of soldiers wearing leather armor and holding only a sword; it was doubtful whether or not they could function properly.

But, the Moonlight Knight Army was defeated by them the other day. At that time, the Greast Army’s formation was exactly the same as it was now. That bitter event was still fresh in Mashas’ memory.

“In other words, it means that it’s as we planned.”

Tigre said so as to cheer up Mashas and then suddenly turned his gaze to the left wing. He wondered whether Elen would be all right. She and the LeitMeritz soldiers were the key of this battle.

—No, it’s Elen we’re talking about. She’ll surely do well.

At that time, in the LeitMeritz Army, Elen stared straight at the well-ordered soldiers.

“Once again — I’m sorry to have caused you guys to worry.”

Elen was not on horseback; she stuck her long sword on the ground and put both her hands on its pommel. Her voice rode upon the winds, to the extent that it was also clearly audible into the ears of the soldiers in the rearmost row.

“As you see, I’m safe, but it’s not because I received a proper treatment

from the enemy in front of us. Those guys have recognized my value as a hostage, but I wasn't treated as a guest General."

Though these words were half a lie, Elen did not feel any hesitation nor did she break her dignified attitude. She did not want to talk about Greast's abnormality, nor was there any meaning to talk about it.

"I'm on the battlefield only today in order to wash my humiliation. With this boiling rage, I'll wield my sword in order to crunch that guy into pieces and sink him very deep in the ground. How about you guys?"

Rurick standing at the vanguard of the army raised a war cry. What they should show to their commander was their fighting spirit, their firm intention to not forgive even one soldier of the enemy side, and their brute courage. For that reason, words were not necessary.

As though following Rurick, the LeitMeritz soldiers screamed, shouted and roared one after another, making the atmosphere rattlingly shake. They were like a group of wild beasts driven by rage.

Before long, when the echo of the roar of the last soldier disappeared, Elen revealed a fearless smile.

"Good. I'll look forward to your brave fight!"

The sun slowly rose, aiming at the zenith. The shadows reflected on the grassland also changed shapes. The wind blew, rustling the flowers and plants, and the sound of horns blown by both armies melted into the air.

The Moonlight Knight Army and the Greast Army began to advance in unison. Before long, as the distance between the two sides was shortened, the unit standing at the Greast Army's vanguard took out bow and arrow. The Moonlight Knight Army's soldiers took out their shields.

Cutting through the light blue sky, the arrows rain unilaterally poured down on the Moonlight Knight Army. But, most of the arrows were blocked by the shields and there were just a few casualties.

Oddly enough, on the side of the Moonlight Knight Army, the LeitMeritz Army, that should be able to use bow and arrow, also chose to lift shields and devoted themselves to defense.

In the Greast Army's central main troops, though Greast, who noticed that, furrowed his brows, he did not think too deeply about it. Bandage was still wound around his lost right hand.

Once a day, he poured wine on it to disinfect, put on a cloth smeared with medicine and changed the bandage.

The scary thing was that he firmly believed that he would one day be able to love this injury. The injury made by his beloved Elen has overwritten the unpleasant injury inflicted upon him by Tigrevurmud Vorn. Greast has begun to assume as such.

And such delusions did not damage the clarity of his thinking in the least.

After the arrows battle settled, he ordered his troops to advance. Although the strength of his central troops was inferior to the enemy's, those in the left and right wings had the upper hand. In that case, as long as the central troops withstood the enemy's attack, the left and right wings would respectively crush the enemy and in the end, they would eventually triumph once they encircled the enemy.

Even if Elen came to attack, he had a special squad prepare the chains that could seal a Dragonic Tool's power. Afterwards, he could only hope to lure Elen there. The problem was that there seemed to be another Vanadis, but he had many spares of these kinds of chains. So, his first target was Elen.

Before long, the central troops of both armies clashed along with war cries. Swords collided with armors, spears collided with shields, and hatchets and helmets gave off sparks. What came to mind were fear, killing intent and madness. Those whose swords were broken were mercilessly stabbed with spears, and those whose armor was smashed fell on the ground smeared with blood.

In terms of ferocity, the Moonlight Knight Army had the upper hand.

They remembered how they were poisoned, how their injured comrades were burnt, and also how they were forced to flee miserably.

They struck their swords to the point of being broken, and stabbed their spears with force as if they did not care about them (spears) breaking. By splitting skulls, tearing bellies and tearing off arms and legs, they continued dying their steps and the enemy's with blood.

The Great Army was not losing, either. They did not falter in the slightest against their enemies.

According to them, the ones who drank poison were at fault, the ones who were unable to escape fire were at fault; in short, the losers are in the wrong. They bashed with shields, struck from above with spears and slashed from below with axes. If they faltered, they would be pushed down, encircled and trampled to death.

The air was stained with the smell of blood, and the grass was sullied with entrails. The sun slowly shone on the many overlapping corpses. This battle had only just begun.

As they slightly fell behind in the center, the Moonlight Knight Army's right wing clashed with the Great army's left wing.

The Moonlight Knight Army's right wing, which was thought to have the momentum the moment they clashed, soon began to move back. The Lutece Knight Squadron that was in charge of the right wing numbered 1000, and the Great army's left wing counted 3000 soldiers. So it was no wonder that they were pushed back by the enemy's momentum.

Scheie wielded a sword at the vanguard; and when the sword lost its edge due to being covered with blood and grease, he switched to a spear. While swinging the spear, he ordered one of his subordinates to wipe his sword.

He killed an armed enemy, who seemed to be a Cotillard soldier, coming up front with a thrust and knocked down two new enemies, who came attacking him, by mowing down his spear. Rallied by their commander's hard fighting, the Moonlight Knight Army's right wing got back on their feet

(recovered). They raised their swords, hung their spears and moved to counterattack.

On the other hand, on the side of the Moonlight Knight Army's left wing — the LeitMeritz Army.

This side was passive to the point of making one wonder where the war cries of before the battle began had gone to. They were retreating repeatedly while withstanding the enemy's fierce attack with lined up shields. Although Elen and Mila also defeated many enemies attacking, they did not actively go to the front.

The Greast Army's right wing was advancing step by step.

A quarter koku passed since the battle began. The ground was already littered several hundreds of corpses. A change occurred in the clashing of both parties' central forces where the Moonlight Knight Army was supposed to have the advantage.

The Moonlight Knight Army began to be pushed back. The Greast Army has started to crush either squads with disordered ranks or squads with soldiers whose movement became dull.

The Greast Army's light equipped squads attacked with agile movement. Their purpose was not to deal fatal injuries to their enemy. On the contrary, their blow was rather light, but enough to disrupt the enemy's ranks.

Although the squads, which got attacked, counted almost no wounded, let alone casualties, the enemy squads, which seemed to be the ones in charge of dealing the sure kill-hit, swooped down on them in a flash afterwards. Their weapons were big hatchets, large swords and the likes which could crush armor mercilessly.

The smashing sound of metal was mixed with the sound of meat being cut apart, which occurred almost at the same time. Death followed bloodshed, and the Moonlight Knight Army soldiers fell one after the other.

And thus, an opening was created in one section of the army. At this time,

the well-ordered armed group of the Cotillard army broke in there. Their task was to prevent the hole created from being filled and to hold on until the squads, which would spread the hole, arrived.

But, new squads of the Moonlight Knight Army similarly appeared there at the same time. Those, who wore heavy armor, raised their shields and began to force back the enemy that invaded.

The head-on collision became a bout of fighting spirit. Moonlight Knight Army's soldiers, whose whole bodies overflowed with indignation, gradually pushed back the enemy and then finally started to beat them.

At this time, a similar change occurred in various places of the central troops, and in most cases, the Moonlight Knight Army triumphed. Even in the places where they were pushed back, a detached unit would immediately come to provide support.

“Since the time I saw the Greast Army's camp, I've always wondered about it.”

While giving direction to the central troops, Tigre said to Mashas.

“Why did we lose against a group of people scraped together? I think that it was because Greast accurately pinpointed their strong point and formed suitable squads based on it.”

For example, there are 100 soldiers who, though weak with sword and spear, are only skilled at archery.

Then, there are 100 soldiers who, though weak physically, are nimble and agile.

Then, there are soldiers who, though slow, can withstand enemy onslaughts while dressed in heavy armor.

How can one put these people together to perform an ideal battle? The first idea that comes to mind is to let agile soldiers first lure the enemy, block their offensive with the heavy-armored soldiers, and finally one-sidedly annihilate

them with soldiers skilled in archery.

After explaining this, Tigre continued with a bitter expression.

“Be it thieves or robbers, they’ll also have among them people who excelled at physical strength and also those who are agile. So I thought that Greast was able to accurately pinpoint their strong point, formed squads and then put up a fight that fully makes use of it.”

Mashas, who finished listening to him, became speechless for a while.

“.....Can he really do something like that?”

Even Mashas would not be able to pinpoint each person’s strong point and decide assignment based on it. After all, even excluding their origins and bonds, there were many cases that even the person himself was not aware of his strong point.

But, if such a thing was possible, then the enemy before them could not be considered as being scraped together. Wasn’t it the most powerful, fierce and worst possible enemy?

And judging from the enemy movement and the damage they suffered from, Mashas could not deny Tigre’s conjecture. When he thought about the fact that Greast’s dreadfulness was not just his superior ingenuity, but also his ability of being able to make the best use of that ingenuity, he could not help but shudder.

After Mashas recovered from his shock after a long while, he heavily sighed.

“So that’s why you leave it to Eleonora-dono, huh.”

Tigre nodded. In order to win, he had to think of some countermeasures. Not ones to surpass Greast’s ingenuity and compilation ability. He had to come up with a plan to deal with it.

A soldier came to report.

“The enemy’s right wing began to attack our left side!”

It was something that happened because the LeitMeritz Army, which was in charge of the Moonlight Knight Army’s left wing, retreated too much. And now, the central troops led by Tigre and Mashas were exposed to the fierce attack of the enemy’s central troops and right wing.

Tigre and Mashas give directions in rapid succession and supported the main troops about to collapse as much as possible.

And like that, at the moment when the enemy’s bold and diverse offensives temporarily stopped, Tigre gave an order to all the squads standing at the vanguard.

“CHARGE!”

Seeing as a part of the enemy’s right wing began to attack the central troops, Elen adjusted her breathing.

“You act rashly as always, huh.”

Mila, who was riding a horse next to hers, muttered. Although unwilling, she (Elen) could not help but acknowledge her (Mila) strength. No, it was precisely because this Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave was there that Tigre was able to think of such a plan.

“Let’s go!”

Elen raised Arifal and fiercely rode her horse. She was not rushing to the enemy’s right wing head on, but instead took a great detour so as to avoid it. Mila rode alongside her, followed by 1200 cavalymen who let horses’ hooves roar.

The Greast Army’s vanguard, which noticed the change in the LeitMeritz Army’s movement, charged towards them.

At that moment, thundering war cries arose in the center of the battlefield. Elen guessed that Tigre ordered the counterattack. So, her side just had to ride their horses without minding the enemy.

As she thought so, the enemy's right wing's movement became dull before long. Even so, about several hundreds of soldiers attacked the LeitMeritz Army's flank.

However, under such circumstances, the ones who attacked displayed an even more ferocious momentum. A group of the LeitMeritz cavalrymen fiercely withdrew, assertively shortened the distance to the enemy and raised their weapons. From horseback they swung down their swords, thrustured their spears and kicked about with horses' hooves.

Although it was only around 100 LeitMeritz cavalrymen who withdrew, they mercilessly crushed the enemy who was several times their number, though they were infantrymen. Their anger increased their momentum, and their bravery, which also increased their momentum, made the enemy falter even before they came in contact with them. The LeitMeritz soldiers quickly turned such faltering enemy one after another into corpses.

On the other hand, in the central troops, the hole, which could not be fixed until then, was finally beginning to disappear. Tigre's charge order displayed its effect.

This order's purpose was not to go deep into the enemy line, nor was it to inflict damage to the enemy camp.

Tigre's real purpose was to create a situation of melee between both armies.

By flexibly mobilizing various squads together with all kinds of abilities, the enemy could freely deploy any kind of powerful attacks and flexible defenses. If they were dealt with them one by one, Tigre's side would eventually be defeated. Thus, it was necessary to pull the enemy apart from Greast's ingenuity.

As a result, the order of the supreme commander Greast would be unable to reach his soldiers, and they would be forced in a situation where they could only fight using their own judgment.

If they were soldiers who received training, they would be able to attack or defend by acting in concert with their allies immediately close to them. But, the majority of Greast's soldiers were unable to do that. When it came to recovering from this situation of melee, they clearly fell behind.

The Moonlight Knight Army's soldiers began to thrust spears all at once. The Greast soldiers, who were unable to recover their pace or even obtain desirable results even by counterattacking, collapsed to the ground one after the other.

Still, in terms of number, the Greast Army, with the central troops and the right wing, counted 6000 soldiers whereas the Moonlight Knight Army only numbered 4800 of the central troops. Sooner or later, the Greast Army would restore their chain of command and get the upper hand.

But, before such a situation occurred, the LeitMeritz Army, which succeeded in making a detour, began to attack the right side of the Greast Army's central troops.

Although they struck the flank, the LeitMeritz Army numbered 1200, which was less than half of the central troops. Nonetheless, the soldiers' faces showed no fear whatsoever.

Not only did they not forget about the poison thrown into the river, but they were also angry at the fact that their lord Vanadis has been injured. Even if the enemy was 10 times or even 20 times their number, they would still face them. Right now, they were the most brave and ferocious group in the continent.

Standing at the vanguard of these 1200 soldiers, the two Vanadises rode side-by-side.

Whenever Elen swung Silver Flash, a silver shine drew an arc in the air, causing the Greast's soldiers to spit out fresh blood and fell to the ground, turning into corpses.

And whenever Mila mowed down Frozen Wave, cold air blew through the Greast's soldiers. By the time they felt the chill, most of them were dead with

either their heads severed, or their throats pierced. The fact that there was not as much bloodshed as when Elen killed the enemy was because the cut would freeze instantly.

Not a single one of Greast's soldiers were able to injure the two Vanadises.

When the enemy stepped in their range even just a little, they would be attacked by either the silver blade clad in wind or the spearhead clad in cold air. They had no time to swing their swords or spears. Even if they shot arrows from afar, the arrows would be bent by the wing and fly to the wrong direction.

The fighting of the LeitMeritz soldiers following them was also terrifying. They made the Greast soldiers wince by striking their swords on their (Greast soldiers) shields, and showered their helmet or armor with blows of battleaxes and spears. Even if the Greast soldiers were fully dressed in armor, they were helpless to these strikes.

The Greast Army changed their formation to a flexible one in order to face the LeitMeritz Army's attack on their flank; they assumed a formation, not to block their fierce attack, but to attack them in a pincer from both sides while gradually retreating and shaving at their power.

Not matter how Elen and Mila were warriors that could match thousand, the soldiers following them were not. They intended to force the LeitMeritz Army to a prolonged battle and then crush them gradually.

But, this plan did not display results that Greast expected. The LeitMeritz soldiers' fighting spirit was still boiling. Their aberrant bravery let them display strength far beyond their usual level, and crush the cool-headed ingenuity/tactics that should have normally brought about their death.

After breaking through the enemy's central troops and dividing it, the LeitMeritz Army changed their route, turning to the right, and attacked the Greast Army's left wing from the rear. At the same time, the Lutece Knight Squadron, which has withstood one third of the enemy number until then, began to counterattack.

The Greast Army's left wing, which was attacked from both front and rear, while its soldiers shrieked and screamed during bloodshed and death, saw its number decreased at an alarming rate.

Greast's instructions could no longer be passed on to them in such a situation.

The wind blew, the clouds drifted, covering the sun hanging high in the sky.

At a time when it was still early to say it was noon, Charon Anquetil Greast was giving directions to the central troops of his army. With the central troops divided and the left wing attacked in a pincer from both front and rear, the Greast Army has now fallen in a disadvantageous position.

However, he was still keeping his calm as if it was somebody else's problem.

“Was I seen through due to that last battle?”

He muttered to himself in a quizzical tone. How has Greast skillfully featured a group of people scrapped together? Unless one saw through it, they should not have used a plan which built up a situation of melee, thus cutting off Greast's instructions.

While the leading group panicked as they were drawn in a melee situation, they ended up permitting the LeitMeritz Army's detour, the attack on their flank and even a breakthrough.

Although, the breakthrough was the result of Greast misreading their fighting spirit.

Until the attack on the flank, even he assumed “I expected as much”. That's why he could immediately deal with it. If it was not the LeitMeritz Army, they would probably have stopped in the end when they were chipped from both sides, and they would have been annihilated.

Greast kept issuing precise instructions and succeeded in having the central

troops and the right wing restore their lineup.

But, the left wing was already so overwhelmed by the LeitMeritz Army and the Lutece Knight Squadron that he had no other choice but abandon it.

“As expected, the terrifying ones are the Vanadis, huh.”

The current LeitMeritz soldiers have changed into a mass of hatred and desire for revenge, but even so, without Elen and Mila, Greast would have been able to hold back the LeitMeritz Army’s fierce attack at an earlier stage.

“No, at the very least if it was only Eleonora-dono alone, there’d still a possibility to deal with the situation.”

If it was only Elen, he had confidence that he could use the chains to seal her Dragonic Tool’s power and then lay out a trap in twofold or threefold.

But now, the LeitMeritz Army had another Vanadis. Even if he trapped Elen, there was someone with the power to rescue her. Even if he outdid Mila, Tigrevurmud Vorn was also there. There was no doubt that he would also take action in Elen’s rescue.

“Let’s move.”

Greast ordered a subordinate and moved the location where he issue commands to the rear of his army’s central troops. There was the need to restore the places divided by the LeitMeritz Army’s fierce attack, and the vanguard, which collapsed due to the melee, has not yet fully recovered.

But, that was not the only reason why he moved his headquarters. Before long, a report which Greast expected was brought to him.

“An enemy attack from the rear! They number more than 2000……!”

“Do you know who the enemy is?”

At Greast’s question, the soldier gasping for breath replied. He said that the battle flag was light blue and a big circle with white and black colors were depicted at its center.

This soldier had worked as an official of coat of arms in a certain noble's house, so he was well-informed about various nobles' battle flags. That's precisely why Greast entrusted such a duty to him. The soldier continued his reply.

“It's a design I've never seen in Brune. Or it might be one belonging to Zhcted.”

“Got it. Go back and rest.”

Greast curtly replied and asked the soldier to withdraw. He knew very well the one who floated that battle flag.

—*Osterode, huh.*

Greast groaned inwardly. It was the army of Valentina Glinka Estes. She arrived at the battlefield after secretly going through the forest at the rear of the Greast Army.

—*What an elaborate trick. No, I guess she did it to make it easier for her to explain.*

Because I went along the forest, I was late in joining the battle. She would be able to justify herself by saying thus, thought Greast. In any case, Greast would have to face three Vanadis.

“I guess it'll be impossible to trap Valentina-dono, huh.”

Unlike Elen and Mila, Valentina was a Vanadis who devoted herself to command her army at the rear. Moreover, she used steady tactics without any opening. Having such an enemy take one's rear was as good as losing.

Greast issued orders to the forces at the rear; he had the soldiers spread out left and right so as to allow the Osterode Army, which came attacking, to move to the inner part of his army. By doing so, he would attack the Osterode Army, which has advanced, from both sides. It was similar to the strategy he set up against the LeitMeritz Army.

This had a certain effect, and the Osterode Army quickly retreated. Greast would have liked to pursue the enemy and inflicted them even more damage, but the Osterode Army was well-organized, showing no openings.

“I guess she’ll stop at that. There’s no way she’ll assertively attack.”

As Greast expected, Valentina refrained from further assertive action.

She was at the Osterode Army’s rear, issuing directions with a bewitching smile. She was without doubt the most leisurely commander in this battlefield.

Because the LeitMeritz Army and the Moonlight Knight Army were fiercely clashing with the Greast Army, the Osterode Army was allowed to partly take the stance of a bystander.

Of course this was temporary and if it came to a situation when the LeitMeritz Army and the Moonlight Knight Army fell into a disadvantageous position, the Osterode Army would be compelled to fight seriously.

Valentina sometimes gave orders to her soldiers to keep the Greast Army in check. She had a detached force move towards the Greast Army’s flank, and induced them in fear by feigning a fierce offensive.

Even when falling into this situation, Greast showed neither agitation nor panic.

While attacked in a pincer by the Moonlight Knight Army and the Osterode Army, he used a few squads to restrain the enemy, moved a detached force to stop the enemy’s advance, made an opening to break through and reduced their number. If it was a commander other than Greast, he would have long collapsed.

But, the left wing, which had long stopped receiving his instructions, was finally destroyed. The figures of soldiers running away in disorder and the figures of LeitMeritz Army and Lutece Knight Squadron reforming their ranks in order to join in the attack to the other direction could be seen.

“.....I guess I can only do this much.”

After further thinking, Greast muttered in a tone as if marking the end of a chess game. He could still put up a fight, but that would only delay the defeat.

With a feeling as if throwing away a broken toy, Greast abandoned his army. He thought from the bottom of his heart that he had no longer any reason or feeling to keep this group of people scrapped together.

—Vanadis. Vanadis. Vanadis, huh. The next time, I'll have to come up with a plan in order to defeat these Vanadises.

It was at the time when he inwardly muttered so. A new report was brought with a screaming voice.

“The enemy is coming!”

The Greast Army's central troops were already fated to receive fierce attacks from three directions. Greast once again asked to change the place where he gave directions.

And then before long, the Greast Army's central troops were struck in one go with a violent attack.

The Moonlight Knight Army's central troops commanded by Tigre and Mashas came crushing them from the front. In coordination with them, the LeitMeritz Army and the Lutece Knight Squadron set up their offensive to the left side.

Though the Osterode Army did not attack aggressively, they did not break their stance in intimidating the Greast Army's rear.



Being attacked from three directions, the Greast Army's central troops collapsed rapidly. Following it, the Greast Army's right wing has begun to show signs of collapse.

They were people who had been led by means of greed and fear to begin with. If they were given even more shock, they would no longer have any fighting spirit left.

One fled, two fled, ten fled. A person's escape led to another person's, and then they were infected by the fear of defeat. There were people, who surrendered, but many of them were not allowed to.

Before noon, the Battle of Montour came to an end.

And Greast also disappeared from the battlefield.

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Slightly before the Greast collapsed completely, Damad had already turned his horse, ready to depart.

“Let’s go back.”

He ordered his subordinates in a cold tone. He looked at his adjutant whose face became pale.

“How was it?”

“So that is, a Vanadis.....”

The adjutant replied in a trembling voice, turning only his head to gaze toward the battlefield.

Taking a detour by avoiding the enemy’s right wing, and a fierce breakthrough to the center that could only be described as reckless.

He would probably never forget the shock and the fear of having witnessed them.

It was not only the adjutant, it was the same for the other subordinates; one was excited by the existence of a formidable enemy, and another one was left speechless because of too much shudder. The next time, they would fight against the Vanadis.

However, Damad shook his head while laughing.

“The Vanadis isn’t the only terrifying thing. Well, I guess this report is more than enough to satisfy his Excellency.”

This black-haired Muozinel person noticed that Tigre was within the Moonlight Knight Army. *Though it’s slightly regrettable that he didn’t show his ability worthy of the name “Star Shooter” as he acts at the commander, Kureys already has knowledge of it, so well, it’s fine, he thought.*

“—Speaking of which”

As if recalling something, Damad looked at his adjutant.

“There seems to be so many people we can just capture as slaves and go back with them, but what do you think?”

He was referring to the Greast soldiers escaping towards their direction.



Though the sun has long crossed the zenith, it still brightly illuminated the earth. It was around early afternoon. More than one koku has passed since the end of the Battle of Montour.

Sitting at the root of a tree, Greast was breathing heavily.

His face covered with sweat was distorted in pain, and his silk clothes sewed with gold thread were disheveled and stained with sweat and mud. Blood was oozing on the bandage wrapped around his right arm.

The horse which he rode stood beside him. It stood as is as Greast had no room to remove the saddle.

He was alone at this place. Greast had escaped from the battlefield alone without bringing any followers along. To him, followers were just a hindrance.

—I guess I'll be safe for the time being after coming this far.

It was inside a small forest with no decent roads. There were also many thickets, so it seemed like Greast, as he was alone, would be able to hide here for some time.

He had no intention to die in such a battlefield. He intended to escape to a safe place, make a comeback, once again throw Brune into chaos and then made Elen's entire being his own for sure at the next opportunity.

This place was at the vicinity of Montour's northwest. Greast did not just blindly escape. If he could enter Montour and meet Vernon after waiting until the sun set, he should be able to take a rest and receive treatment on his right arm.

“Tigrevurmud Vorn ought to fight against Muozinel. I can’t be stuck here forever. I could also find an opening there. Though I don’t know yet how Zhcted will act.....”

“—That’s right. How do you think they’ll act?”

Surprised that there was a response in a clear voice containing hint of a smile to his soliloquy, Greast swallowed his next words. Although he promptly reached out to the sword at this waist, by the time he finally gripped the handle of the sword with his unaccustomed left hand, a curved huge blade was already thrust at his throat.

“It’s been a while, Marquis Greast.”

The one who appeared from the shadow of the tree, which Greast leaned against, was the Illusory Princess of the Hollow Shadow, Valentina Glinka Estes. The scythe emitting an ominous shine under Greast’s neck was the Dragonic Tool Ezendeis she held in her hand.

The hems of her white dress decorated with roses fluttered about in the wind.

“Valentina-dono, huh. Thanks for your care at that time.”

Greast removed his hand from his sword and returned Valentina’s greeting with a smile. He could be said to have an admirable courage to keep a composed attitude even in an apparent situation where his life was in the other party’s grasp.

While wiping the sweat on his face with his left arm’s sleeve, Greast asked in a tone as if gossiping.

“Did you come to take my head?”

“Even if I take it, I’ll be troubled about how to use it.”

The black-haired Vanadis again replied with a smile as if admiring flowers. Just by seeing her expression, it did not look like the expression of one that has thrust a scythe at someone.

“Marquis Greast, I chased after you because there is something I would like to ask you. If you answer me, I do not mind seeing you off with a smile.”

“.....Hou. That is, as long as I can answer though.”

Greast’s expression gradually recovered its calm. It was fortunate that the one chasing after him was Valentina. It was because he still had room to negotiate with her. Though, he could not relax yet.

“—His Highness Ruslan”

Greast frowned at the name which came out of Valentina’s mouth. After a short while, he asked just to be sure.

“Are you talking about King Victor’s eldest son, Prince Ruslan?”

“That’s right. I have thought that if it’s you, you might know the reason why His Highness Ruslan had ended up in that way.”

Ruslan was King Victor’s son and the man who should have been the next Zhcted King if nothing went amiss. But a few years ago, he suffered from heart disease and set fire to the palace.

After that, King Victor had locked up Ruslan in a certain temple in the Capital Silesia.

Confinement was the natural punishment, but the King had not decided of a successor until just recently. It was because he has been waiting for his beloved son to recover from his heart.

The smile disappeared from Greast’s lips. Just for an instant, he calmly observed Valentina’s expression. The black-haired Vanadis had an innocent smile without any shadow. Many people have probably been deceived by that smile.

But, Greast accurately saw through the light of ambition oozing in her pupils. The course of action might be different, but she and he were people belonging to the same world.

“All right. I’ll tell you everything I know.”

Then, after a quarter koku, Greast who parted from Valentina was advancing inside the forest on horseback. The negotiations with her ended smoothly.

—It looks like that woman intends to cause something in Zhcted.

That was probably why she would be troubled if Greast, who was trying to throw Brune into chaos, were to die now. The gray-haired Marquis guessed that was the reason why she did not kill him.

It was not like he was not displeased about being made to dance to her tune, but when he thought that it coincidentally matched with Ganelon’s instructions, he was not that much uncomfortable.

—However, I don’t know how she got wind of the fact that I’ve investigated about Ruslan.

The reason why Greast had investigated about Ruslan was because he thought that it could be of use for something, but it looked good that he told it to Valentina. If she were to cause chaos in Zhcted, it should be of help to Greast.

When the sun set, Greast entered Montour as planned and arrived at Vernon’s mansion. Fortunately, he was not found by the Moonlight Knight Army’s soldiers.

“L-Lord Marquis……!”

Viscount Vernon Laspede, who turned 23 this year, greeted Greast with an astonished expression. He seemed to have received a double shock of Greast’s sudden appearance and his disheveled outfit.

“It’s been a while, Viscount Laspede. As the messenger told you earlier, I’d like to trouble you for a short time.”

Without beating around the bush, Greast directly made his demand.

Vernon turned pale, but being overwhelmed by the gray-haired Marquis' drive, he nodded. He knew well how he obtained his current position. There was no way he could refuse.

Vernon ushered Greast in and summoned a servant and a maid. He arranged the best guest room for him (Greast) and had the maid treat his right arm. Meanwhile, the servant boiled hot water and prepared clothes.

After one koku, Greast visited Vernon's room feeling refreshed. Though his face has become haggard due to his wound and fatigue, the sharpness in his eyes has increased. The bandage wound up around his arm let one feel an indomitable will worthy of a noble of a prestigious house rather than pain.

Vernon had the servants bring food and wine, and the two of them talked across the table. Because it was a sudden visit, the dishes on the table were only bread, soup, a whole roasted chicken, pickled vegetables and a bunch of grapes; but Greast was not displeased.

“A messenger the so-called Moonlight Knight Army also came here. They asked me if I didn't see you. When I replied that I'd tell them if I saw you, he went back. The army itself hasn't come.”

Though Vernon was of medium build, his body was well trained. As a commander and feudal lord aside, he was certainly a skilled warrior. He also had a stern face. With just a glare from him, a timid person would probably flee.

But currently, he was speaking with his shoulders shrank timidly while examining Greast's mood from beginning to end. Though Greast felt irritated, if he were to ask him “what's the matter?” here, he knew the other would only dwindle even more. He placidly nodded and asked about some things.

—*I see.*

After getting answers from Vernon, Greast's eyes were tinged with vitality. The Moonlight Knight Army did not pay that much attention to Montour. They seemed to be thinking that he escaped either to Lutetia or Evreux,

which was once his territory.

There was probably no helping this. After all, both Tigre and Mashas did know about the relationship between Greast and Vernon. For Mashas, Vernon Laspede was only one of the nobles who pledged allegiance to Regin.

—Sooner or later, Prime Minister Badouin might sniff out something.....

But at that time, Greast would have already escaped.

“Viscount Laspede. From tomorrow, I’d have you move as my proxy. At the time when I would govern Lutetia, I’ll leave my former territory Evreux along with the rank of Earl to you.”

Greast said while curling his lips into a smile mixed with madness.

When Greast woke up, his surroundings were awfully dim.

At the end of his light of sight, flames were flickering in the fireplace. He thought that it was strange. Even it would be soon early summer, why would one put fire in the fireplace? The fireplace seemed to contain something like a lump of some metal, and a scarlet glow could be seen in the crimson flames.

Then, as his consciousness finally became clear, Greast noticed that he has been made to sit on a chair. Both his arms were bound behind his back and both his legs were attached to the legs of the chair.

“What is this?”

He finally voiced out his surprise. He should have gone to sleep in the bed of the guest room that Vernon prepared for him. Though he was slightly displeased with the quality of the bedding, he, who has been too tired, immediately fell asleep. How has it come to this? Did Vernon betray him?

“—Are you finally awake?”

In a low voice with suppressed feelings, light and footsteps were drawing near. A man, who held a lamp in his hand, stood before Greast. It was a skinny man about 20 years old with long dark brown hair. It seemed to be

holding something in his left hand, but it could not be seen clearly.

It was a familiar face, but Greast needed some time to remember the man's identity. And when he remembered it, the gray-haired Marquis could not believe his eyes.

“Denis.....? Vernon's little brother.”

“I am greatly honored that Lord Marquis still remembered me. No, you are no longer a Marquis. I guess I should call you Lord Charon.”

Both the gaze and the tone of the man called Denis were extremely cold. Greast noticed the smell of blood drifting from his body.

Denis was the second son of the Laspede House. But two years ago, he was pinned groundless crimes by Greast's scheme, and should have disappeared from this region.

“From your face, I guess you're wondering why I'm here, right? Is it really that strange for me to come back to the mansion where I used to live in for many years?”

While listening to Denis' words, Greast surveyed the surroundings with his eyes which finally got used to darkness. It was a small room. It was probably one guest room. Other than him and Denis in the room, there were several other men, and they were moving around near the fireplace.

“Where is this House's lord Vernon?”

Not losing his composure, Greast asked with an indifferent face. It was not that he did not understand the situation. Precisely because he understood it, he decided not to lose his composure.

Not in the least impressed by the attitude showed by Greast, Denis expressionlessly threw the thing he was holding in his hand.

It was Vernon's freshly severed head. On his stern face, both his eyes were greatly opened wide, and have stiffened with an expression as if complaining about the irrationality of the world. Dark red blood was still flowing from the

cut section. The origin of the smell of blood was this.

“It’s your turn next.”

When Denis said that, the men, who were near the fireplace, looked their way. A black glow was shining in their eyes, and some of them were holding large shears, that blacksmith master used, with both hands. They were Denis’ friends and people with whom he had led a life on the run over these past two years.

One of them thrust the shears inside the fireplace and pulled out something with a scarlet glow. It was a shaped iron shoe which could cover a leg from toes to the shin.

Understanding what would happen from here on, even Greast could not help but stiffen. It was one of the execution methods that he has devised before, the “armor of flames”.

“How you took my father’s life..... I remembered it clearly.”

The men held the iron shoes with the shears and carefully carried it to this place. They put them at Greast’s feet. At the sound of the floor burning, several lines of sweat dripped from Greast’s face.

One of the men moved behind Greast and gagged him. Then, he held Greast’s shoulders from behind. Another man untied Greast’s right leg from the leg of the chair and held it up.

“It’s the armor my father used. Then, let’s get started.”

Denis indifferently told. Greast’s right foot was pushed into the burning iron shoe.

A pain so intense as to faint assailed Greast’s right foot. Greast intended to endure, but he was unable to and churn up his right feet. The chair shook back and forth with a clattering sound. Soundless screams leaked out from the gap of the gag along with drools, and the smell of burnt flesh drifted to the surroundings.

But, all the people present, including Denis, did not change their expressions at all.

“Next”

Denis shortly said, and the men holding the shears carried the iron shoe for the left foot from the fireplace. Of course, it was also emitting a red hot glow.

Greast’s face was covered with sweat and it has become haggard. The skin below his right knee was burnt, the flesh was scorched and the nails have melted. Though he could not see it, Greast knew it. The heat filling the inside of the iron shoe tormented his foot. His breathing was getting rougher.

His left foot was pushed into the iron shoe. Greast struggled again at the new pain. Because he has moved his right left violently, it has burnt even further. His gray hair disheveled, he screamed to the point of spitting out blood from his throat.

When the pain faded after a long time, the pain of the burn assailed Greast to the point that he wanted to cut his feet. He has practically lost the sensation of his toes and soles of his feet.

“Next are the gauntlets. Let’s go with the order of left, then right.”

They untied his hands which were bound and put both his arms into the left and right gauntlets. When the gauntlet was pushed into his right arm, the wound where his arm was cut were burnt along with the bandage, and a more intense pain assailed Greast.

As he thrust away the man who has been holding his arms behind his arms, Greast toppled over from behind along with the chair. He struggled and rolled around the floor. But, neither the iron shoes nor the gauntlets came off.

The men set up the shears, indifferently looked down at Greast and waited for him to become quiet. Just in case, if he was to attack them, they intended to bash him with the shears.

Before long, Greast stopped struggling while leaking out a weak groan.

Although his consciousness was hazy, a faint will was still shining in his eyes.

One man held Greast by his armpit and lifted him up. Another one brought the chair without back, and they made Greast sit there. Greast did not resist. He no longer had any energy to do so. His disheveled gray hair looked whitish.

The men continued the lynching. They pushed the burning hot breastplate from the front and back. His flesh was unable to endure the repeated pain, and Greast threw up.

Vomit and excreta leaked out from the gaps of the gag, and then the men removed the gag while clicking their tongues. The vomit and excreta, which spilled over fell on the hot iron shoe, and an unpleasant smell rose up. At this time, the light in Greast's eyes was lost and his expression became hollow.

“Then, this is the last one.”

Along with Denis' voice, what the men brought while holding it with the shears was a scorching red helmet. It was one, without visor, which covered the head, except the face.

Charon Anquetil Greast died.



It was at the beginning of dawn that the man named Denis arrived at the Moonlight Knight Army's camp. Tigre, accompanied only by Mashas, met him in the tent for the supreme commander.

Seeing the two freshly severed heads that Denis brought, Tigre and Mashas gasped. Vernon's head aside, Greast's head was, except the face, severely burnt, his ears were sore, his scalp was peeled off and there was also no hair remaining; it was something that one could hardly bear to look straight at.

Mashas served as Denis' talking partner, asking about the circumstances in detail. It was at this time that the old Earl knew of the incident two years ago.

Moreover, as Mashas was talking more and more with Denis, he was caught by an unexpected surprise.

Denis said that it was last night that he came back with his friends to Montour, but he had no idea at all about Greast's visit.

“I was just targeting Vernon. Two years have passed since then, so I suspected he'd no longer be wary of me and thus came back to Montour. I've heard that some troops have come in the vicinity, but I didn't know that its commander was Greast.”

Denis told that after he attacked the mansion at midnight and captured Vernon, when he heard about Greast's presence from Vernon's mouth, he decided to take revenge on the spot. Greast has, so to say, 'accidentally' lost his life.

“After the civil war ended two years ago, why didn't you come to the Capital? If you were to appeal, her Highness Regin would have listened to you.”

At Mashas' question, Denis replied with a sarcastic smile.

“I don't know her Highness Princess's temperament. My father had taken me along to the royal palace several times, but her Highness— no, it was his Highness Prince before; I'd only saw His Highness' figure from afar. Moreover, even from Her Highness's reign, Vernon was living in that mansion.”

“.....You're right. I'm sorry for asking something unnecessary.”

Mashas apologized while bowing his head. He then continued with a serious expression.

“Denis-dono. Would you like to come to the Capital with us? I would like to clarify these circumstances and restore your and your late father's honor. About your friends, too.”

At this rate, Denis would become a criminal that murdered his big brother

who became Viscount Laspède. It was the same for Denis' friends, too. Mashas did not want to let something like that happen.

Denis appeared like he would not mind what might happen to him, but when Mashas mentioned his father and his friends, the darkness dwelling in both his pupils slightly weakened.

“.....You're right. Me aside, for the sake of my father and my friends, we should make the facts known.”

Thus, it was decided that Denis would go to the Capital under the care of Mashas. Until Denis came back, his friends would stay at the mansion of Montour.

Now that Greast's death was confirmed, there was now only one that Tigre and company had to do. It was how they would deal with the Greast Army's soldiers they had taken as prisoners.

No one had mentioned the opinion of incorporating them in the Moonlight Knight Army.

Although it was under Greast's command, it was fact that they poisoned the river and set fire to the injured. The soldiers would never accept them as comrades.

“It seems that those guys have devastated Earl Cotillard's territory to secure their rations. How about using them for labor in Lutetia for a while and then take them there (Earl Cotillard's territory) at some time in the future?”

Earl Cotillard's territory was located south of the Capital Nice, and it could become a battlefield depending on the Muozinel army's advance. Also, around here, only Lutetia could take over nearly 2000 people single-handedly.

However, Tigre's face showed that he could not consent with Mashas' proposal.

“In Alsace, those, who soiled the river more than necessary, are severely punished regardless of age. Even in Aude that Lord Mashas governed, it

should be the same, right?”

Tigre said that, despite being aware that he became somehow emotional. After assenting to the youth’s words, Mashas calmly warned him still.

“But, Tigre. We can’t massacre them. Besides, you wouldn’t like selling them as slaves, right?”

Tigre became speechless. He struggled to suppress the urge to say “let’s sell them”, and sighed.

“I got it. Let’s Lutetia take over them.”



In the early afternoon of that day, the Moonlight Knight Army vacated the camp and finished the preparations for departure. From here to the Capital Nice, it would take about 6 to 7 days by travelling along the highway.

Both Tigre and Mashas wanted to hurriedly return to the Capital, so after the two talked about it, they made plans to return to the Capital in six days.

News of the Muozinel army’s invasion has already spread around here, too. Among the nobles possessing a territory, there were surely some who were feeling uneasy. In order to not let them feel anxious, it was necessary to get on their way back while marching orderly.

It was decided that they would separate from Valentina Glinka Estes and the Osterode Army, which she led, here. They would continue going north and returned to Zhcted using the sea route.

“It’d be a big help if you were to fight together with us though.”

Tigre reservedly smiled, and exchanged handshake with Valentina. Because she carried the scythe, her Dragonic Tool, on her right shoulder, they shook hands with the left hand. The black-haired Vanadis, with her usual smile, replied to the youth while tilting her head to one side.

“I’m happy to hear you say that, but I’ve only come as an ally in order to

fight against the Sachstein army after all. Besides——”

Valentina moved her gaze to Tigre’s side and looked at Elen and Mila standing there with sullen faces.

“Someone has to report about those two to his Majesty, right? Including the various events that happened in Brune.”

“You’re right. Please, give a report without any mistakes.”

“You should just hand the report I wrote to his Majesty.”

Elen had her arms folded and Mila her hands put on her waist, both glaring at the black-haired Vanadis. Tigre slightly bowed to Valentina and once again expressed his thanks.

“I’m sorry to have asked something unreasonable. I really thank you for your help until today, Valentina. After the war against Muozinel is over, I will send you something as a present to express my gratitude. I would like you to give my greeting to the Zhcted King as well.”

“If you really want to express your gratitude, then how about you drop in for a visit to my Osterode? I will entertain to the best of my ability.”

While saying that, Valentina suddenly leaned forward and brought her face close to Tigre’s cheek. After blowing a ticklish breath on the youth’s ear, she immediately straightened herself.

As it was too sudden a ‘surprise attack’, Tigre was not even able to react promptly. His face turned red, and he could only stare fixedly at the black-haired Vanadis. When Valentina released the youth’s hand with a smile like a child that succeeded a prank, she bowed with her hair swaying.

“Well then, take care, Lord Tigrevurmud. Having fought together with you became a valuable asset for me.—May the fortunes of war be with you.”

After ending her speech, she turned her back on Tigre, with the skirt of her snow white dress following her movement. Then she sedately walked away.

While staring at her retreating figure, Tigre realized something. Wasn't this the first time that she called him 'Lord Tigrevurmud'?

—Until the end, she was an elusive person, huh.

He recalled her various merciless suggestions. He also did not feel irritated only once or twice. It was evident that she was not a good person, but he could hardly say that she was a bad person, either; she was that strange a woman.

“What are you two.....”

As he was about to ask Elen and Mila what they thought, Tigre, who looked at them, interrupted his words.

It was because the silver-haired Vanadis was looking downward with a serious expression. She was looking neither at Valentina walking away nor at Tigre.

“Elen?”

She did not react even after Tigre called out to her. At this, Mila also looked at her with a puzzled face.

“Eleonora, what's the matter?”

There, Elen finally raised her face as she came to her senses. Noticing Mila's and Tigre's gazes, she asked them with a perplexed expression.

“.....What's the matter?”

While thinking “that's our lines”, Tigre worriedly asked.

“Were you thinking about something?”

Hearing his question, Elen shook her head with an awkward smile.

“No, I wasn't..... Maybe, I'm a little tired.”

It was an unusual answer, coming from Elen. The usual her would have never said it this way even if she was tired. Tigre and Mila looked at each other, but this time, they did not question Elen any further.

The Moonlight Knight Army departed, going towards the Capital.



The fourth day after the start of their journey back to the Capital, Tigre was consulted by Lim. Shortly before the sun set, they set up a camp in a place away from the highway, and when the soldiers began to prepare dinner, she came to the tent for the supreme commander.

Lim seemed to hesitate as to whether or not she should tell him, thus did not speak immediately. Titta prepared wine diluted with water and honey for both of them and then withdrew; when nearly 30 more seconds passed, the LeitMeritz Army's adjutant still looked at Tigre with an expression filled with anxiety.

“Eleonora-sama is acting strange.”

“.....How so?”

While tasting the wine filled in his porcelain cup, Tigre asked in a calm tone. He was not surprised. This was because Tigre himself had thought the same thing many times these four days.

As if to urge Lim, who hesitated to speak, Tigre stared at her with a serious expression.

“I've also thought many times that Elen has been somewhat absentminded recently. Titta also said the same thing this morning.”

Titta noticed that because she knew Elen very well and also had many opportunities to be in contact with her. However, if she were left as is, many more people would definitely harbored suspicion to Elen's attitude. So before that, it was necessary to take some measures.

At Tigre's words, Lim seemed unable to hide her surprise, but she made up

her mind and spoke.

“Since the start of our journey, she has been drinking alcohol alone in her tent. She also didn’t seem to sleep well in the night, her complexion also isn’t good and she doesn’t eat well, too. Even when she’s talking with me, there are many times when she suddenly stopped talking halfway.”

Lim told one thing after another as she recalled them one by one. If it was the usual her, she would have sorted precisely what she should say before talking, but it did not look like it this time.

“Even during the march, she would make a scary face as if she remembered something unpleasant; she would make an expression as if brooding over something. No matter how I persisted in asking her, she would insist that it’s nothing.....”

“So, she didn’t tell anything even to Lim.”

Tigre revealed a complicated expression. The friendship between Lim and Elen traced back even before Elen became Vanadis. Elen considered her as her best friend, and they were always as close as sisters regardless of their status. There were also times that Elen was in total panic when Lim fell into danger of her life.

The fact that that Elen told nothing even to her despite their intimacy proved that it was not something so simple.

—As expected, something happened while she’s been held captive by Greast.....

He could only think of that. Her fury during the battle has probably stimulated, but after the battle ended and Greast was dead, she would relax her attention.

Lim, who finished speaking, hung her head down with a painful expression. Her clenched fists placed on her lap were trembling as she lamented her powerlessness.

“—I got it.”

Tigre answered her with a voice filled with determination.

“I’ll try talking to Elen.”

Since even Lim was no good, he himself might be useless, too. But, giving up without even discussing directly with her was not Tigre’s style.

When Tigre and Lim came out of the tent, it was already completely dark and the moon and stars were dazzlingly coloring the night sky. On the ground, the soldiers were having their dinner around the impromptu hearths.

According to Lim, Elen was alone in the LeitMeritz Army’s supreme commander’s tent.

“Is there anything I can do?”

To Lim, who asked with a sad expression, Tigre replied in a joking tone.

“Hmm, let’s see; keep people away from the vicinity of the tent until tomorrow morning. After all, it’d be troublesome if Elen were to make a racket and running amuck.”

He meant that even if she ran amuck, he would make her regain her calm. Lim smiled wryly as to go along with his “joke” and nodded. As Tigre turned around to the tent, he exhaled slightly, and then stepped in.

The lamp hanging from the ceiling illuminated the tent dimly. A carpet and a blanket were spread out to the ground, and Elen was sitting on the blanket. Her back faced Tigre’s way.

“.....Is it Lim?”

Reacting to the sounds of when Tigre came in, the silver-haired Vanadis turned around. However, when she saw that the other party was Tigre, she squinted as if bored.

“It’s you, huh. Do you need something?”

“Yes, I want to talk with you.”

Tigre expressly walked around until in front of Elen and sat down. When he looked, along with Silver Flash sheathed in his scabbard, an empty bottle of wine lay down on the ground at her feet.

“Did you empty it by yourself?”

Elen, who understood Tigre’s meaning after following Tigre’s gaze, flicked the bottle with her finger.

“No, this is the one I drank yesterday. Today, I haven’t yet drunk a single drop of alcohol. Somehow, I don’t feel like it.”

“You drank too much.”

Elen’s face, which was illuminated by the light of the lamp, was listless, devoid of brightness and vigor. The shine in her ruby-colored pupils was also dull and her whole body gave off an atmosphere as if even only opening her mouth was bothersome. She avoided Tigre’s gaze as if denying from being talked to.

Silence descended between the two. Tigre has first waited for Elen to open her mouth, but since she said nothing even after nearly 30 seconds passed, he decided to start talking.

“What happened?”

He went in head on. Elen did not look at Tigre, but she clearly frowned.

“What are you talking about?”

“Since the war is over, you’ve obviously been acting strange.”

“To think that you’ll be suspicious because I just drank alcohol more than usual; it isn’t that big a deal. While I was held prisoner, I didn’t drink alcohol for a long time. What’s wrong with getting a little drunk—?”

“I’ll ask again. What happened?”

Interrupting Elen's evasive words, Tigre stared at her. Rummaged her silver hair roughly, Elen finally raised her face. Her ruby-colored pupils looked at Tigre with a tinge as if looking at something irritating.

“Didn't you hear from Lim? There's nothing in particular. Even you have times when, even though nothing happened, you just find a lot of things bothersome or you want to drink alcohol and the like, right?”

Elen waved her left hand as if to say “I answered you, that's all”. It was the signal of asking him to leave.

Nervousness, anxiety and hesitation brushed Tigre's mind. He hesitated whether it was really okay like this.

Just now, he has cornered Elen. Like a small animal in a cage, she was cautious of him, baring her fangs. Wouldn't it be better to withdraw here and wait for her to come talking to him from her own free will? Would it not be not his words, but only the passage of time that would open her heart?

Tigre half-rose to his feet. But, he did not to stand up, but sat back again. The youth almost left the girl, and has barely held his ground.

She might loathe him. She might disdain him as a vulgar man, blame him for trying to forcibly pry open her heart with obscene delusions in mind and despise him.

But even so, Tigre thought that he did not care about it.

—I want to help you as much as I can.

It might be conceited or extreme, but those were his true feeling with any falsehood. And for that, even if he were to anger her, he had to ask.

“—Did Greast, do something to you?”

A crooked smile was revealed on Elen's lips. It was a cold, brittle and dry smile stirring disappointment and disdain mixed with some other thing.

“Ah. So you came to ask about that. Then, you should have said so since

the beginning.”

Did I ask the wrong question? Tigre’s heart leapt greatly. Because he was too flustered, his thinking stopped. Sweat gushed out from his chest and back and drenched his clothes.

Elen’s body shook as she laughed, then she leaned forward and peered into Tigre’s face.

“You know in what state I was when I was captured after all. Your mind was probably filled with wild delusions these few days, right? The fate of a young woman who became prisoner is imaginable. Moreover, the other party was that Greast after all.”

Being stared at from close range, Tigre has almost averted his eyes from her face. Due to the regret of having ended up hurting her carelessly and the fact of being unable to bear his foolish words, he was driven by the urge of wanting to flee right now.

However, Tigre took in Elen’s gaze and stared back straight at her. He should have resolved himself to end up hurting her. What was the point of flinching from such a thing? He has not even been slapped yet. Or, he might no longer be even worth getting slapped.

“I apologize if I made a mistake.”

While rebuking himself for being coward by saying this, Tigre desperately continued his words.

“What I want to know is what hurt you to the point of turning you like that.”

A short while ago, when he asked the wrong question. What was that something which showed on the face of Elen who was staring at him?

Disappointment. Disdain. And, wasn’t that other thing ‘bluff’? Taking advantage of Tigre’s blunder, wasn’t she trying to end the talk while hiding her true feelings as is?

It might be only a wrong impression. The weak light of the lamp forming a shadow on Elen's face might have made Tigre have an optical illusion.

Even so, until he obtained an answer to his question just now, Tigre had no intention of going out of the tent even if he had to cling to it. He was already hated. So, he did not mind being hate even more.

The smile disappeared from Elen's face. She drew back her body and reseated herself on the blanket.

She took her gaze off from Tigre, and looked around left and right as if looking for an escape. And then, she hung her head down, rummaged her silver hair and sighed. From her behavior, Tigre guessed that he pushed the right door open.

Silence once again fell inside the tent. Tigre, who regained his calm, waited silently.

And like that, one did not know how much time has passed. Suddenly, Elen began talking.

“—It's not like I'm hurt.”

The silver-haired girl adhered to these trivial words. But, that affirmed all the more that something happened. Tigre asked with a gentle voice.

“Then, why are you making such a face?”

“.....Is it that awful?”

Elen said with a perplexed voice. Tigre nodded.

“It's awful. A mirror— if you don't have one, you should try seeing it using Arifal's blade (as mirror).”

Reacting to Tigre's words, the long sword, which was at Elen's feet, created a gentle breeze from around the sword guard. It lightly fluttered Elen's much disheveled silver hair. Elen revealed a wry smile and looked down at Silver Flash which she relied upon. She gently stroked it with her

finger from the scabbard to the sword guard.

“Oh, I see..... I caused you to worry, too. Sorry.”

After she apologized to the Dragonic Tool, Elen raised her head and looked at Tigre.

“It’s a trifling story, you know? It’s a pathetic, boring, trivial and worthless story. I myself am thinking so more than anyone else, so there’s no doubt about it.”

Tigre did not know whether this was the truth or just threatening words.

That’s why the youth only replied how he felt like he should.

“If it’s something you tell me, I would like to hear it all. No matter what it is.”

That was the reason why he came to this tent. He has already resolved himself.

Elen stared at Tigre with eyes wide opened. A small smile formed from her lips. Tigre thought that it was a smile mixed with amazement and a sense of relief.

After a long silence of about 100 breaths, the silver-haired girl cast her gaze to the ground and began to talk little by little.

About what Greast has done to her when she was held captive by him.

Greast came to Elen’s tent every night. He licked her with his gaze, abused her with various words, persistently caressed her all over, thoroughly engraved the sensation of his hands and fingers on her body and whispered things to as to carve them in her heart, too.

Her lips and chastity were not stolen. After all, it seemed that Greast intended to take them in front of Tigre — or in front of Tigre’s corpse. He knew that it would deal the greatest blow to Elen’s mind.

Her foods were always ones which Greast has started eating. For example, he would hold out to Elen bread, which he has eaten about half of in front of her. Although she felt nauseated, Elen endured it and ate.

Since it was food that the supreme commander Greast was eating, there was no problem about it as food. She had to eat when she must, otherwise she would be unable when needed. Even though she persuaded herself as such, her meal was painful.

“Fortunately..... Yes, fortunately, you quickly came to rescue me, so it ended with just this much. He said that he wouldn’t violate me until he captured you, but it wouldn’t be strange if he were to change his mind afterwards.”

The face of Elen, who told so, was filled with bitterness and her eyes became cloudy. Not knowing what to say, Tigre just stared at Elen silently.

Elen raised her head. When their eyes met, the silver-haired Vanadis revealed a self-deprecating smile.

“I was safe. Even though there were many chances I would have experience a lot of more tragic things.”

Her eyes ruby-colored eyes were tinged with a dark shine. Various negative emotions turned into a muddy swirl and corroded Elen. Holding her arms with both her hands so as to hug herself, Elen continued with a shaking voice.

“There are girls, whose native villages were attacked by thieves, and they ended up being made as plaything, thus leaving scars that could not be erased for a lifetime. There are also girls who were caught by nasty mercenaries, thoroughly abused and then killed in the end. The pain I received is nothing worth mentioning compared to theirs.....”

Her nails dug into her arms, causing red blood to ooze on her white skin. Tears gathered at the corners of Elen’s eyes.

“And yet, with just that much, I become frightened.....! Whenever I

recalled it, I felt nauseated, my body stiffened and I'm plunged into darkness. Even the sensation of his filthy hands and his voice are brought back to my memory. I, as a warrior, as a Vanadis, who run around the battlefield, of all people, am frightened!"

"Elen!"

Tigre stood on his knees, leaned forward and grasped the girl's arms. Elen's body shook, and she looked up at Tigre. Her red eyes were blurred with tears.

"Don't forcibly hurt yourself, Elen."

As calmly as possible, Tigre appealed to her. He thought that perhaps, he was making an extremely grave face.

After confirming that strength on Elen's arms loosened, Tigre carefully pulled her hands off her arms. If possible, he would like to treat her arms, but there was neither medicine nor bandage here. And looking at Elen's state, it was also not suitable to call Titta, so they could only postpone it.

The silver-haired girl powerlessly hung her head down. She heaved a sigh filled with a sense of fatigue.

"It's a pathetic story, isn't it? I believed that I resolved myself for a tragic end. But, I could only believe. Just by being touched for a few days, I became like this. I've become completely disgusted with myself."

Tigre finally understood. There was no doubt that fear and the sense of disgust towards Greast left a deep scar in her heart. But, the disappointment towards the her, who was born due to that, robbed Elen of her vitality.

—What should I do? What can I do for Elen?

Tigre thought earnestly. He thought that just cheering her up and comforting her would not reach her heart. Besides, the scar carved into her heart was not something that could be erased in one day.

Even so, he could not absolutely do something like waiting that time would heal it.

“—Elen”

Changing the feelings welling up from the bottom of his heart into his voice, Tigre called out. Elen nervously raised her head. She looked at Tigre with wondering eyes.

—*Am I a coward?*

For just a half instant, he wondered to himself. He wondered if what he was about to do from here on was not an act to take advantage of her weakness. Wasn't it too irrational?

—*Even if it's the case.*

I don't care about it, he thought. Tigre could no longer suppress his feeling overflowing endlessly, and his hot urge no matter what.

“Elen. I want..... I want your everything.”

After an interval of a breath, “eh?!” such a surprised voice came out of Elen's mouth. She stared at Tigre with eyes wide opened and a mouth half-opened as if having grown senile. Staring straight at the girl with his unwavering eyes, the youth said once more.

“I want Elen's anything and everything. Now, in this place”

“I-I.....”

Finally understanding what Tigre meant, Elen was unusually flustered. Her eyes swam around left and right, she moved her mouth as if mumbling something and she began to entangle the fingers of both her hands without any meaning.

Tigre waited patiently, but because Elen did not speak even about ten breaths passed, he finally asked.

“Am I no good?”

“Of course not!”

The immediate reply came back with such vigor that Tigre who heard it was surprised. However, Elen immediately averted Tigre’s eyes. She anxiously continued her words.

“I mean, you’re asking me that after hearing such a story, so..... What do you mean? You aren’t the kind of person to comfort a woman by sleeping with her.”

Being scolded, Tigre slightly faltered. He felt like he was poured with cold water after trying to rush forward with the momentum. He reluctantly opened his mouth and asked.

“.....Do I have to say it?”

Elen finally stared at Tigre’s face and nodded. Though he was nervous after thinking that he might be rejected if he were to answer honestly, even so the youth decided to speak honestly.

“If I was slightly late, Elen might have been taken by that guy. When I think about it, I’m so horrified that I can’t bear it.”

Tigre and Elen originally walked different paths. Their paths intersected at present due to numerous coincidences, but they would eventually be going to walk different paths again someday. Tigre believed that he understood it. He has also thought that he could accept it.

But, he imagined things too simple.

“Like I said, I—”

“Can you do it?”

Interrupting the youth’s words, Elen asked in a mischievous tone.

“Can you make my everything yours? Can you get rid of all the disgusting

sensations that he left on my body and replaced them with yours?”

This was the utmost she could do now to provoke him. And it was also the utmost demand she could make. Her red pupils were shaking anxiously.

When Tigre nodded vigorously, “th-then.....” stuttered Elen with red cheeks, while looking up at the youth with upturned eyes.

“I want to hear your words first.”

—*Didn't I already say it?*

If one had to speak on his behalf, because the youth took it as a matter-of-fact knowledge, he seemed to believe having already said it. Tigre had a strong urge to beat himself (for being so stupid). To think that he immediately went with “I want you” without even saying what he should have first; this was over the top.

Tigre fixed his breathing, stared at Elen and slowly spun his words.

“Elen. I like you. I love you. Since before, since a long time ago.”

Whenever he pronounced each word, the heat welling up from the depths of his body rushed about within his body and greatly stirred up the youth's feelings. His feelings got much stronger, to the extent that he temporarily forgot everything except her.

Those were feelings that he has kept covered with several layers using all kinds of means and has suppressed for a long time.

Those were feelings, which, though he kept them suppressed, has been fostered and nurtured every time he saw her, every time they spoke about trivial matters, every time they walked, ate, laughed and rushed about the battlefield together.

But, the only absolute thing, which he could by no means go against, was not suppressing them. It was that if his feelings were stirred up and he was to remove the lid, which kept them covered, on his own will, they would

instantly poured out like a torrent.

The same was true for the girl.

“Tigre. I like you. Yes, I like you, too. I love you.”

Elen also returned such words feverishly, and the two people’s eyes get wet with tears while they were staring at each other.

Elen gently closed her eyes. Tigre gently embraced Elen’s shoulders.

And the lips of the two overlapped.



The first light of dawn shone inside the tent.

Tigre, who woke up, stared blankly at the ceiling wrapped with a very dim light. He seemed to have fallen asleep before he knew it. The light of the lamp on the ceiling was also extinguished.

He felt a weight with softness and warmth on the right upper half of his body. What leaned on his right shoulder was her head. When he raised his left hand beside him, he touched smooth and silky hair.

All those sensations told the youth that what happened last night was a not a dream. Joy gradually spread within his body.

Perhaps because he touched her hair, Elen slightly moved and opened her eyes.

As he was about to say “good morning”, Tigre was unable to say them right away. It was the same for Elen, and thus the two of them silently looked at each other for a while. They both blushed and revealed embarrassed smiles.

Elen put the blanket over her shoulders and got up. Her silver hair danced in front of her eyes which grew accustomed to the darkness.

Tigre stared fixedly at her naked body. Her well-proportioned outline, dainty shoulders, collarbone brimming over with feminine charm, ample breasts and red nipples, slender waist, small sunken navel, round curve, supple thighs—. Just about everything was beautiful.

“I’m already up, you know? Don’t stare too much like that.”

He has wanted to look more, but Elen pulled the blanket and covered her body. Finding even such a gesture lovely, Tigre continued staring at her.

Suddenly, Elen moved her gaze to the youth’s waist. Abruptly putting on a serious expression, she muttered with a shuddering voice while stroking her belly.

“Such a big..... This was inside me..... No, that time, it was more.....?”

“.....Um, did it hurt?”

As he recalled at this point having heard that it would hurt the first time, Tigre apologetically asked. When thinking back upon it, Tigre himself was no composed at all. Speaking more accurately, he was so frantic in his first time that he did not remembered well what he was doing.

Even if it could not be seen on Tigre’s face as the light was very dim, one could surmise it from his voice. Elen straightened up her back without minding the blanket exposing her naked body and replied with a proud expression.

“N-No, not at all, it was no problem at all. Well, it hurt a little, just a little, but it’s nothing to worry about.”

Though he understood from her tone alone that she was putting a false bravado, for Tigre, who could imagine what she felt, he could only respond “I see”. But, he very much wanted to embrace Elen who was saying that for his sake.

He reached out and grabbed her arms. As he gently pulled her, Elen, guessing his intention, fell over. Tigre embraced her together with the blanket and gently stroked her head. Elen also entrusted her body to Tigre and crawled her slender finger on the youth’s chest.

“Is it fine not to get up?”

“It’s still dark after all. I think it’s all right to stay a little like this.”

Tigre replied as such, but even if it was already bright, he had no intention to immediately leave this embrace. As Elen also thought the same, they both wanted to feel this warmth more.

“Sorry”

Elen suddenly said.

“Even though you were worried about me, I said such mean things to you.”

“—Elen”

With a serious face, Tigre asked.

“Was I of help to you even a little?”

It was not only for that that he slept with her. But, it would be a lie if he were to say that he was not concerned about it. Elen looked up at Tigre with upturned eyes and revealed a mischievous smile.

“A little, that is. But regarding what you said before, it is still far from being enough.”

After speaking up to there, Elen averted her gaze as she suddenly felt embarrassed.

“That’s why……. Um, I want, um, more of your sensation all over my body.”

The last words were spoken with a small voice, almost inaudible, but they barely reached into Tigre’s ears. Though, even from her countenance that turned bright red, it would not be difficult to guess.

“I’ll do my best.”

Tigre replied jokingly. And then, the youth changed the subject.

“Let’s count until 100. After that, we’ll both go to the river.”

“Yes. Then, let’s start counting.”

While saying so, before counting, Elen leaned her body forward and kissed Tigre. The youth was surprised at first, then he waited for her lips to separate, and this time, took the initiative kiss her.

After enjoying each other’s lips and warmth as such, they began to count.

It was unmistakably a happy moment.



They wore their clothes and quietly slipped out of the tent. Tigre and Elen then trotted under a still dim sky. Fortunately, they reached the river without being seen by anyone.

Tigre was going to wait from a distant place for Elen to finish bathing, but the silver-haired girl called the youth to halt while laughing.

“We’ve already seen each other naked. Aside from when there are other people, you don’t have to act reserved now, right? Besides, there’s also something I want to talk with you.”

Feeling her seriousness in the latter half of her speech, Tiger also stopped. Both of them respectively took off their clothes and entered the river. Though, they have turned their backs to each other.

“What I want to talk about is, of course, about last night.”

While combing her silver hair with her water-soaked hands, Elen immediately cut to the chase. Her voice was slightly shrill and nervous. Tigre listened carefully while also feeling embarrassed.

“Even though we did that kind of thing, it’s not like anything has changed. You’re Earl Vorn who governs Alsace Brune and will obviously serve in the royal palace in the near future. It’s the same for me, too. From now on, too, I’ll continue being the Vanadis who governs LeitMeritz.”

“That’s right”, Tigre shortly replied. Even though he wanted Elen’s emotional scars to fade, it was not like something changed by sleeping with her.

It was a night that happened because both their feelings, which have long been growing stronger, were stirred beyond the weir’s water level, and finally burst the levee itself after receiving an external stimulus.

And, once they woke up from the sweet dream, they would have to face reality.

“No one should have seen what happened last night. You spent all night to

give a pep talk to the depressed me. I somehow recovered. Other than that, nothing happened. We'll go with——”

“No”

Tigre interrupted Elen's words in a short, but sharp tone. Though Elen became silent for a moment, she spoke immediately after.

“I'll say this just in case, but it's not like I no longer want to sleep with you. Even I myself wonder whether it's good to say it like this, but..... I like you more and more.”

As Elen seemed embarrassed as might be expected, the latter half was spoken rapidly. After Tigre awkwardly rummaged his darkish red hair, he was about to say “me, too” after hesitating slightly; but Elen continued her words before he could say it. In an indifferent tone devoid of sweetness.

“But, we'll only act as usual ostensibly. Even if anyone becomes suspicious, we won't leak anything. Unless we're caught in the act, it'll be fine as long as we're both tight-lipped.”

“Are you fine with that?”

“Yes, I'm. I have no intention of quitting being Vanadis. As long as I'm not forsaken by Arifal, that is. And, you also don't intend to abandon Alsace.”

Elen said in a tone as if rebuking a child throwing a tantrum. Although he could not see her face since he had his back turned on her, it seemed like he could imagine her expression filled with perplexity and irritation.

While staring at the river surface, Tigre calmly voiced his thoughts.

“We can only do that for now. I also think that.”

“But then, I've a request”. When Tigre said so, Elen silently urged him.

“Give me time.”

“Time.....?”

To Elen, who muttered parroting his words, Tigre continued.

“I’ll find a way. I can’t think of anything now, but even so I’ll definitely find a way.”

“What do you mean by you’ll find a way.....?”

As expected, Elen seemed to be at a loss. But Tigre ignored her reaction and appealed desperately.

“Since the first time I met you, I hadn’t even imagined I’ll become like this now.”

The first time when Tigre met Elen in the battlefield of Dinant, It was a countryside noble who knew almost nothing of the world outside of Alsace. Who could have expected that that countryside noble would win through the civil war, repel neighboring countries’ troops, gain the Princess’ trust and make various acquaintances in foreign countries?

“I know that I’m not omnipotent. But, it doesn’t mean I can’t do anything. I also said it yesterday, but I want you.”

“.....I say, Tigre”

Elen spoke with a troubled, earnestly trying to persuade the youth.

“It’s a matter of fact that you’ll serve in the royal palace, you know? It isn’t like you’ll bow your head for that; you’ll be ordered by the royal palace. Taking into account the present situation of Brune, you’ll sooner or later aim for the throne. Don’t be fixated on me and miss what’s important.”

“I said that I want you.”

Tigre also did not give in, and returned such words with an attitude like an unwavering huge rock.

For a short while, only the sound of the river flowing tickled their ears.

“.....Fool”

A tearful voice reached the youth's ears.

“You're really a fool.”

Even though Tigre should have a bright path opened to him. Even though he should have been blessed with many people and dignifiedly walked that path as long as he was not so fixated on her.

“I had once told you about my father before, right?”

Tigre took his eyes off from the river surface and said while looking at the grasslands spreading in the distance.

“My father married a gardener's daughter. I think that one should marry someone he really loves.”

His father's action was probably not something praiseworthy as a noble with a territory. It was because a noble's marriage was for political maneuver and for the sake of enriching the household and the territory.

“I can't become like my father. But, I want to emulate him where I should.”

Elen did not reply immediately. It looked like she was somehow wondering whether to consider Tigre's words. The youth found such aspect of Elen strange, but he kept quiet and waited for her to speak.

“—Tigre”

After about ten breaths passed, Elen finally called the name of her loved. Tigre felt that her voice was filled with clear determination.

“I also think that your father and mother were amazing people. To be honest, I have no confidence to do the same thing.”

Though Tigre nodded, he did not know what Elen wanted to say. Elen hesitated for an instant, but then continued.

“That’s why, um..... I allow you to receive some concubines or mistresses. No, you must do it. Depending on the situation, I don’t mind be a concubine, too.”

“What are you saying suddenly?”

As expected, Tigre was dumbfounded. Elen replied in a somewhat urgent tone.

“Isn’t it obvious? I’m a Vanadis, not a noble; but I’ve observed how many nobles live. You said that you’ll find a way and I also believe you can do it, but there are also things about which nothing can be done, right? If I’ve to mention one, then it’d be children.”

Tigre was at a loss for words. Seeing how the youth could not say anything right away, Elen went on vehemently.

“You might be angry for what I’ll say, but your father and mother were lucky. After all, their son was born safely, raised healthily and has thus inherited everything that should be inherited.”

“No.....”

Tigre shook his head.

“My father also used to say it. That our household was quite blessed.”

There were cases where the mother was ill, and thus did not have enough physical strength to give birth, which led to stillbirth. Even if the child was born, he would likely be impaired. Moreover, even if the child was born with no physical defects, he would end up dying in childhood because of illness. Either of these cases was not unusual.

There were also often cases of nobles, who were only blessed with a daughter and could have their House be succeeded by welcoming a groom from outside. Even if they grew up safely, there was no way they would be immune from accidents or diseases. This was all the more true if there were wars.

When a House died out without getting anyone to inherit it, their territory would be seized by the royal family. After that, the royal family would either dispatch a governor with a term limit, or bestow it to another noble.

Therefore, in order to avoid these situations, the local lords would always take pains to cultivate their heirs. In order to pass the land, which they inherited from their ancestors and in turn made prospered, to the one who succeeded their will.

“You haven’t asked me to quit being a Vanadis even once.”

Elen said in a calm voice.

“I’m also the same. You can’t let the Vorn House’s bloodline die out. You can’t abandon the territory of Alsace. You’ve the duty to make a child, raise him and have him inherit many things that you’ve inherited, what you’ve accomplished and your own will. —But”

At this time, Elen’s words suddenly lost confidence.

“Of course, I want to give birth to your child, but..... I don’t know what will happen in the future. Suppose that I become your wife, after that, I don’t know whether or not I’ll properly gave birth to a child for you; and even assuming that I give birth, I don’t know if that child will grow up healthily. Anyway, I don’t have any experience after all.”

“That’s why you mentioned concubines and mistresses, huh.”

Tigre sighed. Elen was by no means joking. Rather, her claim was right. In the case that Tigre somehow found a way for his relationship with Elen as he declared earlier, this was a problem he would have to face.

Even Tigre did not want to abandon Alsace. Even if he could not go back depending on what might happen in his life, Alsace was his home town where he was born and raised, and the territory, which he inherited from his father. Unless something unexpected happened to Tigre, it would not be seized by others.

“But, I think there’s one problem.”

Tigre said also with a powerless voice. Though he was afraid of Elen’s reaction, since she has spoken frankly, he should also speak his mind right now.

“For example, suppose that I take you as my wife and also welcome a concubine. It’s just an example, you know? I naturally love you, but I’ll also, um, try my best to love that concubine.”

With Tigre’s personality, he could not accept having a physical relationship with her just to have her given birth to a healthy child for him. If he were to welcome a concubine, he would like to have conversations with her, understand her, love her and being affectionate to her. Otherwise, like his father, he might as well not take any concubine.

“I’ll be troubled if you don’t.”

Elen replied with a deadly serious attitude not seen so far without the slightest hesitation. Tigre, who was worried that this would made her sad, was shocked by her reaction.

“Will you be troubled.....?”

“I’m the one who told you to take concubines. Besides, depending on the situation, I could become a concubine, right? If that happens, you can’t say that you’ll disregard the legal wife and love me. Well, I think that she’ll burn with jealousy and won’t sit back and watch if you display it though.....”

Finally, Tigre could no longer hold it and turned around, splashing water. He vigorously embraced Elen, who had her back to him, with both his arms. He could not think of any other method to express his feelings for her. Neither “thank you” nor “sorry” would be fitting.

“—Tigre”

Elen inclined her head to look up at the youth, and whispered. She quietly closed her eyes, making an expression as if expecting something.

The two people's faces, vaguely reflected on the water's surface, silently overlapped.

It was found out.

It was immediately after they wiped their bodies, wore their clothes and went back to the camp.

“Where did you two go? Limalisha has been looking for you.”

As they were about to enter the LeitMeritz Army's supreme commander's tent, Tigre and Elen were halted by Mila. Both of them greeted her and thanked her and then went into the tent.

Then for some reason, Mila also followed them and entered the tent.

“Do you still have business with me? Lyudmila”

The Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave fixedly stared at Elen, who asked with a puzzled face, with her blue eyes reminiscent of ice. She was pouring a suspicious gaze at Elen silently for about 5 breaths, but perhaps because she found something, she asked while tilting her head to the side.

“Eleonora..... Don't tell me that you and Tigre have.....?”

“Eh?!” two voices of surprise resounded simultaneously inside the tent. Of course, they were Tigre and Elen's. Not expecting to be exposed so quickly, they stood stock still in astonishment.

On the other hand, Mila was staring dumbfounded at the two of them. Because she asked the question half in doubt instead of being completely convinced, the degree of her shock was much greater when she observed their reactions.

“W-What do you mean.....?”

As she finally recovered from the shock after nearly 20 breaths passed, Mila cross-examined Tigre and Elen. Incidentally, at the time until Mila recovered, the youth and the Wind Princess of the Silver Flash were looking

at each other with nervous expressions.

Without any choice, Tigre explained selecting some events that happened last night between him and Elen, and also talked about the promise they have just exchanged at the river earlier. Though Elen revealed a displeased expression, it would more much troublesome if they were to carelessly hide it, anger Mila and the incident was exposed. Thus, she folded her arms and kept quiet.

“.....Are you stupid?”

That was Lyudmila Lourie’s first sentence after hearing the entire story. When she was listening to the youth’s story, neither Tigre nor Elen noticed the look of “so, there was also this way” that she revealed just for an instant.

As a Vanadis as well as a ruler, Mila was excellent; but even she did not think that she would witness a “precedent”. One where the surge of tangled emotions would sometimes turn into a raging stream that washed away reason, status, anything and everything.

What she did not like above all was the fact that even she ended up thinking that if it was Tigre, he might really find a way to settle the matter.

“I thought that both of you properly knew your positions, yet how did it turn like this? Are you stupid? I really don’t understand. What will you do? Really, I’m struck speechless.”

“Struck speechless? Aren’t you busily ranting about?”

Mila sharply glared at Elen, who retorted diffidently. Elen trembled and ducked her head, which was unlike her usual self. Tigre gently patted Elen’s shoulders so as to reassure her. Such a sight irritated Mila even more.

Mila was about to scold them further, but he quickly stopped as it would be useless. This was also because she became aware of the fact that the blame coming out of her mouth sounded more like a way to express her jealousy towards Elen. It was not like blaming them continuously would change the facts.

If both of them did not understand the seriousness of the matter, she could still laugh at them.

But, both Tigre and Elen were clearly aware of their position and, were trying to overcome it. Blaming them despite all this would be too miserable.

Mila's inner entanglement almost caused her feelings to break out. After she finally suppressed it, she asked in a cold tone.

“And so, what will you actually do?”

“Can't you keep it secret for a while?”

Tigre lowered his head. He raised his face and stared straight at Mila.

“I know that I'm asking something selfish. But, I don't want to deceive myself anymore. I can't think of anything at the moment, but I'll try my best to find a way.”

Mila sighed. Though she naturally harbored a selfish feeling, more than that, she also felt helpless inwardly. Mila thought that such single-mindedness of Tigre was one of his good points and she also liked it. She could not reject him.

Mila turned her blue eyes towards Elen.

“And what about you?”

“I believe in Tigre.”

With her arms still folded, Elen immediately replied boldly. Mila sighed again. It was not out of amazement, but because she felt the same.

Mila once again looked at both of their faces in turn. Then, she calmly said.

“I can't do like I didn't notice anything.”

Tigre and Elen became nervous. After confirming it, the Snow Princess of

the Frozen Wave continued.

“However, I won’t reveal anything about this. And even when it’ll be exposed, I won’t help you.”

This was her position on this matter. Both Elen and Tigre heaved sighs of relief and thanked Mila once again. The blue-haired Vanadis annoyingly snorted and ignored it.

Incidentally, in the Moonlight Knight Army, there was another person who noticed about the relationship between Tigre and Elen. It was Rurick.

Of course, he did not thoroughly observe them like Mila. When he inadvertently saw Tigre and Elen walking side-by-side inside the tent, he understood then.

If one had to explain in detail, it would be that he deduced it after vaguely sorting out the atmosphere drifting between the two of them, their gazes, their casual gestures, their ways of walking and the like, in his mind. The discerning eye of this man, who had many lovers waiting for him in LeitMeritz, was not common.

“What to do about this?”

As expected, even he thought that this was a problem. Tigre and Elen were not ordinary man and woman; one was a noble of Brune and the other was a Vanadis of Zhcted. Rurick himself, because of his complicated state of mind, could not bring himself to give them his blessing.

However, this bald knight pledged allegiance to Elen on one hand, and respected Tigre on the other. After a little thinking, he decided to take a similar stance to Mila. He decided not to poke his nose into this matter.

“But well, the two of them are already at that age, huh.”

These were the thoughts he could not help but voice at the moment. It might sound somewhat disrespectful though.

Translator and references notes

[1] a way to tell that he doesn't have any confidence in brewing tea well,
thus he might squander it

Epilogue

Tigrevurmud Vorn's return was welcomed by voices of grand acclamation from the citizens of the Capital Nice. It was only because Regin and Badouin had announced it beforehand. The successive invasion of neighboring countries and the revolt of the royal family had indeed made them feel uneasy.

Tigre went straight ahead through the main street on horseback. Behind him were Mashas and Elen also riding horses, followed by people, such as Scheie of the Lutece Knight Squadron, with distinguished military services in this battle.

Mila was separated from Tigre and Elen and was in the rear with Lim. Though she also made great contributions in this battle, due to political considerations, they could not afford to put the people from Zhcted in conspicuous places.

To Tigre who apologized to her for that, Mila shook her head telling him that she did not mind it. This was because as a lord of a dukedom, she also understood such circumstances.

The cheers did not stop even after Tigre and company crossed the main street and entered the royal palace. The praises they showered on Tigre were also an expression of their expectations to him. They earnestly hoped that the youth would win against the Muozinel army, which infringed upon the south and regained peace for Brune.

“Well, if it's winning, even I want to win, too.”

After entering the royal palace, Tigre sighed as he muttered in a place where he was not worried about being heard. Praises and expectations certainly make him happy, but at the same time, they were also a strong pressure. Although Tigre himself wanted to win, the enemy this time was strong, so he could not help but complain a little.

The ones who entered the audience room were Tigre, Mashas, Elen and Mila. After seeing Tigre, Regin had a radiant look on her face.

“It’s great that you came back safely.”

“I am sorry to have caused anxiety to your Highness the Princess. I must also apologize for the defeat against the Greast army.”

Tigre apologized as he went on his knee and bowed his head. Regin stood up from the throne and walked to Tigre. The courtiers standing on both sides of the hall looked at the Princess with looks of surprise and confusion.

“Earl Vorn. Please stand up.”

Though he was slightly perplexed, Tigre stood up as he was told.

The blond-haired Princess stood before the youth’s eyes. Regin took Tigre’s hand and tightly grasped by wrapping it with her own hands. She smiled and was about to say something, but she swallowed those words, erased her smile and then said with a serious and keen expression.

“I know that you have not yet recovered from the fatigue you have accumulated in many battles. And I would like to tell you to slowly take a rest, but we do not have much time left. —I order you. Defeat the Muozinel Army and recapture the southern region.”

When Regin took the youth’s hand, a part of the courtiers was about make a commotion, but they quickly quieted down. Everyone in this place was very clear about how cruel and harsh this order of defeating the Muozinel Army was.

“I respectfully accept the royal command.”

Tigre also stared at her and calmly replied. At this time, Regin opened her mouth again.

“Regarding the soldiers, I have prepared up to 30,000. If we wait for another two days, nearly 20,000 more soldiers are scheduled to arrive at the Capital.”

Tigre opened his eyes wide in surprise and bewilderment. He wondered whether the current Brune still had so many troops. Seeing the youth's reaction, Regin smiled.

“I sent a call to the western borders to have them come.”

After understanding the meaning of those words, Tigre gasped. Not only him, but even Mashas could not help but raise his head, and the courtiers also could help but scream as they were unable to endure the shock and tension.

Tigre asked Regin in a trembling voice.

“Then, the western borders are currently.....”

“You can say that it's almost empty. Each fortress should have left only 50 to 100 people for the maintenance of the fortresses.”

The Princess lightly said something frightening. From the rhetoric of the “western borders”, there was no doubt that other than the fortresses, she has also summoned other soldiers. But, if she did not do so, it would have been impossible to prepare 50,000 soldiers.

If it was the kind of bandits, they might still be able to deal with them, but if Sachstein or Asvarre were to gather soldiers and attack, it would easily be broken through.

“It's because I believe in you.”

Tigre's doubt was cleared with Regin's words. After the Sachstein Army withdrew from Brune, the Asvarre Army immediately invaded Sachstein.

Tallard, who led the Asvarre Army, seemed to not intend to retreat until he got some military gains. There was also the fact that Asvarre and Sachstein were originally bitter enemies, so the two sides were still in the midst of war.

In other words, before the two sides ended their battle and made preparations for attacking Brune again, there would be no problem even if the western border was defenseless. Conversely speaking, Tigre must repel the

Muozinel army during this period.

Trust, resolution and tension were transmitted along with faint warmth from the Princess' hands. Tigre consciously loosened his expression and revealed an awkward smile.

“Well, I'll somehow manage it.”

This was Tigre's own way to express his determination, and encourage Regin. The Princess opened her mouth flabbergasted and looked up at the youth, but then she lowered her head and smiled softly.

Behind Tigre, Mashas smiled wryly, Elen and Mila stifled their laughter. Though some of the courtiers were indignant, some others also laughed. They could only react as such.

Tigre, who left the audience room, turned to look at Elen, Mila and Mashas.

When his gaze met with the silver-haired Vanadis', the youth was about to say something. But, before he put them into words, she shook her head with a smile, as if having already guessed what Tigre wanted to say. After seeing Elen's reaction, Tigre also swallowed his words and nodded lightly.

He could convey his feelings without the need for words, which made him quite satisfied. Once again, Tigre called out to the three people.

“Let's go.”

The Moonlight Knight Army became a large army of about 70,000. Even so, it was still less than half of the Muozinel Army; but there was not the slightest trace of tension or fear on the youth's expression. Even though he was anxious, his determination and hope far exceeded it.

With his usual attitude, Tigre began to walk the corridor of the royal palace. Elen and Mila walked on the left and right sides of the youth, and Mashas followed the trio a few steps behind while smiling wryly at the sight.

The battle against the Muozinel Army was about to begin.