



"Ah~ that was really terrible~"

Renya, who had been enjoying the view of Shion and the others preparing for the bath in the dressing room while coiling a cloth similar to towels around their bodies without having to peep, revealed a startled expression when he saw the archduchess abruptly standing up while speaking up as slowly as she did normally. He fully knew it himself because he had experienced it as well, but the pain from the hot water, which Renya had used just now, entering one's eyes and its effective period wasn't anything you could recover from in such a short time.

Renya believed that it might be recognized as simple stimulation leading to <High Recover> not working on it, but either way, the archduchess' recovery time was so short that it far surpassed Renya's estimation.

Without minding Renya's look, who was wondering just what was going on here, the archduchess slowly submerged her body in the bath while briskly rubbing her eyes. Just in case, Renya checked Croire's side as well, but that side had completely run out of strength due to rolling around in pain, showing no signs of getting up while breathing roughly as she laid upside-down.

"Margrave~ it's no good if you look at a woman as if watching a monster~"

Having submerged in the bath up to her shoulders, the archduchess grinned broadly, apparently having noticed Renya's stare. As far as Renya could see, her eyes were only slightly bloodshot, but it seemed as if the pain had completely faded away. Without knowing what he should answer, Renya said what came to his mind for starters while watching her huge boobs floating in the water.

"How about covering your private parts a bit, Your Majesty?"

"I don't possess~ anything so seedy-looking that I would get embarrassed about it being seen~"

Once the archduchess replied in such manner while making her flabby boobs sway in the water, Croire reacted with a twitch while still laying on the floor, but as she didn't appear to have recovered her strength to the extent of being able to get up, there was no response from her except the quiet sound of her grinding her teeth in vexation that reached Renya's ears.

"Besides~ the clothes provided here~ don't have enough fabric~ even if I tried to hide them, you know~?"

Being told that, Renya once again turned his eyes towards the dressing room that was in full view since the door had been left open. Over there, Rona was in the middle of barely managing to cover her body with one of the provided cloths.

Of course it had been Frau who had prepared those cloths, but Renya was sure that it was very likely Rona who registered as having the biggest proportions in Frau's mind. In such a case, he could only call it natural that it wouldn't be possible to hide the archduchess' body with those cloths, seeing how it boasted a volume exceeding that of Rona.

"Margrave~ you're also happy if you can see them, right~?"

"I prefer a slightly hidden state over a showcasing."

In response to Renya smoothly answering the archduchess, who was broadly grinning at him, with an unmoving expression, she started to splash bath water at Renya with a considerably disappointed expression, seemingly being extremely unhappy with his answer. Just as Renya blocked the water by holding up his hands, Shion and the other two, who had finished their preparations, modestly entered the bathroom.

"Renya, sorry for having made you wait."

"No...it's not like I've been waiting, you know..."

Shion had slid into the water next to Renya while combing her hair up with a smooth, natural motion. The parts that ought to not be seen were properly covered by the cloth wrapped around her body, but even just the parts that were actually visible were so stimulating that they caused Renya's heart to race. Moreover, because she sat down right next to him, the archduchess succeeded in splashing hot water into Renya's face through a gap in his hands as he had unintentionally lowered them.

Even though it was quite painful, Renya had prepared himself, seeing how it was the third time, and thus he washed out his eyes with water from a bucket, which he had prepared outside the bath in advance, while bearing the stinging pain.

In the short moment when Renya had his sight stolen, Kilie tried to wedge herself between Shion and Renya, but that ended with a short intermezzo as she was grabbed by her nape by Rona, and mercilessly slammed into the bath at a place distant from Renya. However, since Rona's actions took place speedily and quietly while Renya was washing his eyes, he didn't realize it.

When his sight returned, Renya could only see Rona sitting down next to Shion with a nonchalant expression, and Kilie splashing her own face with water she created through sorcery while clinging to the edge of the bath on the other side in panic.

"Just what are you people playing at..."

"Nothing in particular. By the way, Your Majesty, I wonder what should I think about you rushing out in the nude just because Renya is in the middle of taking a bath?"

'The precondition here is weird,' Renya thought, but didn't voice out that retort. That's because he felt he would get to hear an answer that would be wrong on several levels in the instant he spoke up.

"I wonder, was there~ anything more important~ than seeing~ the margrave's nude body~?"

Renya sighed deeply after hearing a reply he mustn't hear even without any retorts.

"Mother...that's no response that you should give in front of your own daughter."

Shion protested while quietly placing a hand on Renya's arm.

Just when Renya was about to warn her that it would be way too risqué in various meanings for her to place her hand on his arm while wearing such an attire in a bath, the archduchess very smoothly replied to Shion's objection, "Oh, as a matter~ of of fact there~ was something~, an important topic~."

"Pardon?" Renya asked back wondering whether he had heard her correctly due to the totally unexpected reply.

"As I said~ there is~ an important matter to talk about~" The archduchess asserted with her slow way of speaking without a shred of tension, but even after hearing it once more, Renya couldn't perceive it as anything but having misheard her.

Renya turned his face in Shion's direction who had her hand still resting on his arm. Since the slightly flushed face of Shion was closer than he had thought, Renya got startled, but while investing great effort into not showing it on his face, he asked Shion.

"Did you hear her saying something about an important matter?"

"Yeah, I did, what about it?"

Having confirmed that he apparently didn't mishear things, Renya turned back in the archduchess' direction again.

"An important matter?"

"How often~ are you going to ask, margrave~?"

Renya desisted from phrasing out that him asking back several times couldn't really be helped since he couldn't feel an atmosphere from her that she would be talking about something important from now on. Moreover, he wondered whether a bath was the right place to bring up an important talk, but he kept silent about that part, too. On top of inevitably feeling that it would be meaningless to repeat this routine several times over, the other party was tentatively the highest authority of the country and his boss.

"So, what kind of important matter would that be?"

When Renya urged her on, thinking that it might be better here to go along with the archduchess in order to get on with the story, even if it had some aspects that were somewhat difficult to swallow, the archduchess put on an expression similar to a child scheming a prank for some reason, and said, "Saying it seriously~ or unseriously~, which would be better?"

"Please go with the serious option."

Renya thought, 'It probably won't register as important matter at the moment it's treated unseriously,' but it was plain as day that the archduchess would dodge that with a "You sure~?" when he tried to point it out.

"Eh~? What a bummer. Even though~ it's about~ whether we should decide~ on a day for the

wedding~"

"Mother, I can't really close my eyes to you using that as material for an unserious talk."

"By the way~ the bride is me~"

"Can I have you step outside with me, mother...?"

Rona grabbed the shoulder of Shion, who was about to stand up from the bath with glazed eyes, restraining her. It's because she fully understood that the archduchess was joking around. Furthermore, if Shion were to go on a rampage here after her physical abilities shot up in Baron Gordonal's city, it was almost certain that the building wouldn't be able to evade fatal damage, no matter how sturdy it might be.

If she had completely lost it, Shion wouldn't be stoppable with such a level of detainment, but she apparently had enough reasoning left in her to understand that it was Rona's hand that had been placed on her shoulder. While submerging into the bath again albeit reluctantly, she didn't stop at placing her hand on Renya's arm this time, but instead embraced it closely.

In Shion's eyes, she was probably intending to make her own claim on Renya clear with this. However, as Shion's naked body was only covered by a cloth right now, and since there was no way for Renya, who had his arm wrapped up by her, to shake her off, he first off began to put strenuous efforts into continuously expelling the various signals, which were transmitted from his arm to his brain, out of his awareness.

"It's a joke~, just a joke. Speaking of important matters, there are actually several~ First, I will appoint Rona-chan as saint~ in the name of the Trident Principality~"

A grand sound of water splashing was audible behind Shion. At the end of Shion's and Renya's line of sights, who had turned around wondering what happened, Rona, who apparently was about to get up, spontaneously slipped and fell into the bath. Moreover, as it seemed like the hot spring water got directly into her eyes, she started to struggle due to the pain she experienced for the first time. Right now Kilie was in the middle of frantically trying to pull Rona to the bath's edge.

Kilie was almost dragged down into the depth of the water instead, probably because of the difference in body weight, but once she somehow managed to drag Rona to the edge, she carefully showered Rona's head from above with sorcery water, telling Rona to wash her eyes which were assailed by the stimulus of the hot spring water.

"Y-Your Majesty!? Just what the heck is me becoming a saint about!?" Rona yelled out while rubbing her eyes, using the water flowing down gushingly from the top of her head.

Renya had never heard the term 'saint' before, and thus looked at Shion to get an explanation about its meaning from her.

"Mmh? Oh, I see. Although the title is called 'saint,' it doesn't really connect with anything for you, does it Renya?"

"Is it something like a hero?"

Renya attempted to make an educated guess going by the word's nuance, but Shion shook her head at that, "So far as it goes, standing and authority is attached to the title 'hero.' However, a saint...how to describe it best? ...is someone respected, allowed to carry out their function with a lot of flexibility, but they have no authority...can you understand from that explanation?"

Renya managed to somewhat reach his own interpretation through Shion's explanation she somehow came up with. He thought that it might be something like an honorary title.

"The religion originating from the Holy Kingdom, which~ had propagated on a large scale until just recently, has become obsolete, right~? Because of that a new teaching originating from the Trident Principality spread on the human continent~ Did you know about that?"

Except for Renya, the three others nodded their heads at the archduchess' words, but Renya tilted his head to the side in confusion. Renya irresponsibly believed that the religious group located in the Holy Kingdom had probably lost its power because they were the leading authorities behind the criminal he had annihilated, but it was the first time for him to hear that a new faith had sprung forth from the Trident Principality, taking their place.

"You see~ It seems to stem from a beautiful girl with twin-tails and six pairs of shining wings standing at the bedside of several of our country's priests~ and proclaiming that she'll hand out plenty of divine protections~ if they were to~ start a new religion, or something like that~"

Renya was astonished how this whole process got started by an action similar to a bar's barker calling out to people. Apparently that thought showed on his face. Shion smiled, Rona somewhat pulled a face full of mixed feelings, and Kilie started to splash the hot spring water behind Renya for some reason.

After silencing Kilie by driving a cluster of hot spring water with <Manipulation> into her face as if to counterattack her while thinking, 'What would you have done if your splashing had hit my face?', Renya faced the archduchess.

"Well, all those priests~ next said that they received an oracle~ that Rona Chevalier, who's currently staying at Klinge, should be nominated as saint~"

"Also from that beautiful twin-tail girl or whatsoever?"

"Yeah, she seems to be the principal object of worship~"

"What's the merit of a saint acknowledgment?"

The archduchess revealed a faint smile at Renya's question. It's because she understood that titles were insignificant to Renya and that he apparently saw no worth in considering something like the religious implications stemming from it.

"It will lead to me taking her back to the capital for some time, but~ she'll be able to read as many of the treasured books of the church as she wants~"

"Where's the merit in that?"

"It'll widen her repertoire of divine arts~"

In the first place, Rona held the position of an apprentice, and thus she had only a limited number of divine arts at hand as people of her standing had only restricted access to information about divine arts. Unlike sorcery, divine arts couldn't be acquired by simply paying money. You wouldn't be shown and taught any divine arts unless you piled up a fair amount of achievements for a church and held a reasonably high position within the organization.

However, if it came to a saint, it was a position allowing to have insight into any divine art without any restrictions. Jumping to such a position in one leap from being an apprentice could certainly be called a merit.

"It's not that I won't be allowed to come back from the capital or something along those lines?"

Once Rona asked so while pondering that it might have some aspects worthy of consideration, the archduchess turned her face towards Rona, and asked in reverse, "Maybe if there's some reason~ for you to not wanting to return~?"

"Unthinkable. My place is to always be at Shion's side."

The archduchess smiled in satisfaction at Rona making such a clear-cut statement.

"Then you just have to return, right~? I'd also hate to incur the margrave's displeasure by restraining you against your will~"

"Wouldn't it be fine to simply have the headquarters of the church relocated to Klinge then?"

As Kilie cut in, Renya suddenly wondered whether it was really alright to allow Kilie, who ought to be an outsider, to listen in on an important talk by the archduchess. Even though that should be a natural question anyone should be able to come up with, no one except for Renya seemed to be bothered by this issue.

"If that's what you say~ it might also be fine to try considering that option~"

Moreover, the archduchess obediently agreed with the words of a simple peddler. Renya didn't even try to hide his feelings of suspicion as he wondered just who the hell this person might actually be.

Unclear whether she knew of Renya's thoughts, Kilie directly looked into his eyes, returning a broad smile that made him sense some kind of fishiness from it.

