



Renya had been sitting at the desk of his office and brooding with two things placed in front of him. One was a letter signed by Her Majesty the Archduchess, the highest authority in the Trident Principality.

That letter, which had accompanied a massive and excessively secured case, had sealing wax, which had the crest of the archduchess' family fully imprinted on it, applied to it, and was elegant at a glance, but in Renya's eyes, only the contents mattered, no matter how wonderfully decorated a letter might be. He ended up thinking that she might as well have told him while they took a bath together if the contents were so important.

The letter contained a notice that 2,000 soldiers of Trident's army had been dispatched to Klinge, and an order for him to allow their stationing in the city. Moreover, it stated that the soldiers' provisions were to be fully provided on-site, which was quite a troublesome matter.

The archduchess, who brought back the information that the demon continent had been isolated by an unidentifiable barrier, immediately decided to send reinforcements to every territory adjacent to the Miasma Forest in preparation for any unusual phenomena. The letter, which Renya was staring at with a displeased expression while shuffling it around atop the desk, notified him of that fact. In Renya's eyes, the army of the Trident Principality not only couldn't be counted on as combat asset, seeing how they got annihilated during the time when Frau was holding the fort before, but they even gave him the impression that just their presence would already become a nuisance, but unexpectedly they were highly rated by the nobles other than Renya.

For an instant Renya considered whether he should politely refuse the dispatch. However, he immediately revised his thinking.

If he only thought about Klinge, the military forces owned by Renya at present were endowed with abilities allowing them to sufficiently defend the city. Thus, if he only thought about Klinge, the story would be over with at this point.

The problem was the fact that Klinge wasn't the only place in Renya's domain where people lived in bigger groups. Renya's territory also contained the area outside of Klinge, and that area was dotted with smaller and bigger villages.

Renya didn't concern himself with this part much as it was exclusively handled by Mayria. If he believed the information brought up by Mayria, within Renya's territory...once he had thought up to this point, Renya stopped recalling all the detailed information.

Anyway, there existed settlements which were somewhat difficult to fully cover with the number of soldiers he had at hand. Considering that, the reinforcements by the archduchess were suitable assistance, and there existed no reason to turn them down.

'The food for the soldiers, which has to be delivered to them, and a place to station them might be necessary expenses,' Renya made a clear decision.

But then again, it was set in stone that Mayria would very likely file a mountain of objections since

the increase of paperwork accompanying the raising of funds would put an additional burden on Mayria.

"I guess I'll ignore it."

Renya made a cruel comment that would cause Mayria and her civil officials to become speechless while crying tears of blood if they heard it. He carelessly tossed the letter from the archduchess on the bundle of documents to be carried to Mayria's office. Losing all interest towards that letter as the rest would probably work out one way or the other, Renya shifted his attention to the other object laying on top of his desk.

It was something that had been discovered in the private room of the missing Emil Rajah.

Emil had owned two rooms inside Renya's castle. One was her private room she used to lodge at usually, and the other one was a laboratory used for her research.

The one who had noticed Emil's absence first was Frau who often cooperated with her. When Frau went to wake her up in the early morning, Emil wasn't in her room, and she hadn't come to take breakfast either.

Even the soldiers patrolling the city as a security measure hadn't seen Emil. At that point, Frau suddenly understood that Emil might have disappeared.

At first Renya had taken it easy, thinking that she might be working hard on some kind of shady experiment again while secluding herself in her laboratory, but once Frau began to suspect that she might have disappeared, things changed. It wasn't a simple feat to escape Frau's eyes inside Klinge. Of course, based on the precondition that Frau felt inclined to look.

Still, if this silky, who perceived the whole Klinge as Renya's home, felt like searching for a target for real, she had enough tracking ability that even Grün, who was regarded as master in covert actions, wouldn't be able to stay hidden from her for more than an hour. And that very Frau had declared that Emil wasn't in Klinge.

It was considered that she might have wandered outside Klinge to observe something that had caught her interest. However, that could be denied as the door to Emil's laboratory, which Renya had visited on a vague guess, wasn't locked. Moreover, he also noticed that not one of the traps was active with the laboratory having stayed as it was, although swarms of various traps should normally be planted behind the door to send back any uninvited guests.

By the way, after this came to light, it was decided by Frau, who had become as white as a sheet, to seal off Emil's laboratory right away. Given that Renya had only taken a glance at it, he didn't know much of what was left behind inside the room, but according to Frau, it was apparently full of extremely dangerous objects, laying around in there really casually.

Even if it was no issue as long as the room's owner Emil was present, it would become very dangerous or it could even develop into a situation that would put Frau in a bind, if Emil was absent. Renya was conflicted whether he wanted to really hear just what might have happened from Frau, who said that it would have almost ended in a disaster if they had been a little bit slower in realizing while wiping the sweat off her forehead.

What was delivered by Frau just when Renya returned to his office after pushing those complicated feelings away by using the proverb, 'Curiosity killed the cat,' was the object which he was brooding over right now while rolling and nudging it around with his index finger atop his desk. It was a very small, simple, violet metal pipe with engravings added to it.

While turning it over with a feeling that he had seen this somewhere else before, Renya searched his memories. After a short while, he remembered that it must be the pipe which had been tied to the root of Emil's side tail. Once he pondered about the individual called Emil Rajah, Renya believed it likely impossible for her to have been kidnapped against her own will without leaving any kind of traces behind.

'Even assuming that I would have been the one doing the kidnapping, I've got absolutely no confidence that I could disable Emil while preventing her from taking any action. Even if I tried to take her unaware, I'm positive that she's prepared some kinds of measures to resist. Exactly because she's a researcher, whose calling doesn't lie in combat, it's absolutely wrong to look down on her very careful preparations and her senses that are close to cowardice,' Renya felt.

But then again, Renya had fought against Emil only once. Moreover, because the opponent was a remote controlled terminal, her true abilities were unknown to him. Thus, her being unexpectedly weak also was a possibility.

'There won't be any end to it if I keep brooding about it. At present I don't have any basis and evidence either.

And yet Renya was convinced that Emil probably was a fairly formidable opponent. Considering it according to that belief, thinking that Emil had left Klinge out of her own will wasn't unreasonable.

'Now then, in such a case, it'll bring up another question.

It was the question why Emil had left behind her hair clip, which she always wore as far as Renya knew, in her private room. If you said that it dropped while she resisted after getting suddenly attacked, things would be easy. However, seeing how no traces of such a battle could be seen anywhere, it was only natural to consider that she had left the clip there on her own device.

'In case I assume that Emil left the hair clip there intentionally, just what's the meaning behind such an action? The clip itself isn't overly gaudy, and it's not like it uses some rare metal either. Since it doesn't look like a valuable object, I doubt that she intended to have it serve as settlement money,' Renya assessed.

'In that case, what about the line of thought that the act of leaving a hair clip behind might carry some special meaning for demons?' Renya asked himself, but immediately rejected that idea. 'There's no way to confirm something like customs characteristic to demons. In the first place, there's no way that a human would be able to understand it even if she tried to use that as a sign.

It was hard to imagine that a researcher, who would likely place logic above emotions, would adopt such a pointless action while knowing that the recipient wouldn't comprehend it to begin with. A completely meaningless behavior merely based on insinuation was somewhat bad to predict when considering that she had decided to disappear, even if one were to bear Emil's character of liking to

pull off such pranks in mind.

Renya, who tried to think about other possibilities in such a case, stared into the air for a while, but then stopped considering it any further.

'No matter how much I brood over it, predictions will never leave the range of predictions.

Rather than that, there was one thing Renya had to admit first.

'I'm hesitating.

Once he clearly voiced out that fact in his mind, he could quickly agree that this was the crux of the problem here. Renya had been hesitating.

If Emil were a human, Renya would have taken some kind of action right away, regardless of whether she had a little bit of a loose screw in her head, or a lacking understanding of the concept called morals. The reason why he hadn't done so yet was solely owed to the fact of her being a demon.

Considering the timing of her disappearance, Emil's whereabouts ought to be the demon country, which was locked up behind that barrier, with a fairly high probability. It wasn't as though he had completely discarded the possibility of her having wandered off to some place that was completely unrelated, but based on the information he had gained about her origin and the time of her disappearance, Renya believed that there was not much room for error here.

'In that case, if it comes to looking for Emil, I'll be forced to extend the search in that direction, and if I'm asked about the reason for doing that, I'll need to expose Emil's background. The part of me being blamed why I had stayed silent about it isn't a problem.

Even Renya had at least the resolve to accept everything, no matter in what way he might be blamed. However, Renya was afraid that honestly putting everything he was feeling right now into words would end up destroying the environment around him.

'I'm going to have to admit it', Renya twisted his lips. 'That it'll mean that I might lose someone among the people who are currently at my side, and that I'm very afraid of that happening.

'Emil might suddenly come back eventually, but if I don't take any measures right now, it's also possible that I'll lose her forever. However, if I make such a move, it might result in someone else leaving me.

On top of being quite aware that there was no method to settle everything amiably, he couldn't take the next step out of fear.

"Now then, what should I do about this?" Renya muttered, giving voice to a question that had no answer even if he asked it.

And just at that moment, the door of Renya's office was attacked by a considerably rough knocking. Even before Renya could answer to that knocking after stopping his contemplation, the door's hinge, which couldn't endure the impacts of the blows, split apart, and the beaten door transformed

into smashed splinters as if using the surrender of its hinge as a signal to give in.

The one showing up in Renya's line of sight, who thought that Frau would get angry if she saw this, and stepping across the splintered door was Shion.

"I'm entering, Renya."

Without waiting for Renya's reply, Shion rudely stepped inside the room, walked up right in front of the desk where Renya was sitting at, and slammed both hands on its surface. The desk didn't break apart into splinters like the door as it had apparently been built more sturdily, a fairly loud slamming sound reverberated across the whole room.

'It looks like she's kind of pissed off', Renya guessed from Shion's words and attitude. However, he had absolutely no clue as to what she was angry about.

"I have a question, and I'd like you to answer me, Renya."

She bent herself forward across the desk, using her hand as a support, and fixedly stared at Renya while bringing her face close to his. Renya didn't have any actions he could take except silently nodding at Shion's words.

