

Chapter 3 - I seems Simple Is Best

The news that the demon continent had been isolated by something like a barrier from the rest of the world appeared to have spread to all other continents far faster than Renya had expected, even if it wasn't at lightning speed. The reason why it only appeared to be so was the absolute lack of any attempts in publicizing this piece of information by the other races. Even Renya had only heard that the beastmen and elven higher-ups had apparently learned of this news to some extent through Kaede and Croire.

As for the dragonoids, Renya decided to not take them into consideration for the moment. The dragonoids, who were reconstructing their order after losing the Witenagemot, didn't have any leeway to pay attention to anything besides their own matters right now. They seemed to be in a state where they only barely managed to deal with the monsters streaming into their territory from the Miasma Forest.

With them being in such a dire situation, Renya had considered whether he should send back Albert to the dragonoids' continent as aid, but he received a declination about this from the dragonoids. They didn't tell Renya their reasoning.

Renya believed that it might be some silly reason that wouldn't fill anyone's bellies, like reputation or pride. While lowering his estimation of the dragonoids, Renya increased the amount of food aid in a partly forced manner, thinking that they should accept at least this much. Going by the fact that this was unexpectedly accepted without any problems, Renya got fed up with the dragonoids, labeling them as a pain.

"Not stopping the aid even while being sick of them, that's very like you, Renya."

"It's not like...I want to actually make them starve, and it's not that I can be bothered either."

Returning to the matter with the demon continent; the elves adopted an attitude of sticking to a wait-and-see approach, and the beastmen decided to completely disregard it. These two resembled each other in not acting assertively, but their actual actions were completely different.

The elves reinforced their monitoring of the demon continent, increased their establishment of bases inside the Miasma Forest, and began to augment their military strength. For the sake of providing equipment to the increased number of soldiers, they were carrying out large-scaled hunts over spans of many days to get their hands on monster materials without allowing the fires in their smithies to go out.

Seemingly having wondered what else could be done, there was a notion to go with a recommendation for all acts such as marriages, mating, and child rearing to be carried out under a huge Elven Breeding Plan by the elven emperor in person. Thanks to his attendants who had likely believed that this was going too far, whatever the circumstances might be, it was apparently successfully intercepted, barely stopping it on the verge of being proclaimed. There was no need to even mention that Croire was at her wits' end wondering, 'What's that idiot thinking?'

"A genuine rebellion..."

"I won't stop you, but wait for now. If even the elves fall into chaos, it will become impossible to settle the current issue."

The other one at her wits' end was Kaede, of course because of the beastmen's response. They concluded that it was unnecessary to deal with an opponent that seemed to have secluded themselves in a shell without coming out. Thus they began to focus on the internal struggles between the powers led by the four kings. This much wouldn't be enough to cause any headaches, but saying that this wasn't any time for civil wars as they were still more or less in a war with the demons, even if the opponent might not be attacking at the moment, the women, including Lobelia, took up arms.

The four kings turned pale in response to the uprising of all beastwomen as they believed they mustn't make the women into their enemies. Of all things, the kings, who expected that they might easily get crushed by the women if they were to be dealt with individually, stopped their quarreling temporarily, banded together, and for some incomprehensible reason in Renya's eyes the whole situation developed into an army of men vs. army of women. The army of men became desperate in their attempt to ward off the army of the enraged women as they feared the consequences if they were to lose here. This resulted in a situation where both sides vied for supremacy quite fervently, and it appeared that it would turn into a prolonged war.

Kaede grumbled, "Seriously, just what are those people doing?", but Renya felt like it was his side that actually wanted to know that.

"I will borrow Leopard for a bit, and annex all of it..."

"Stop it, as that will only lead to things getting even worse down the road."

If we were to speak of the human continent's reaction, the majority of the nations stuck to remaining spectators. There were many among them who believed that the threat of the demon continent was the demons and monsters attacking their continent while a demon king was present, and that there was no explicit need to deal with this if the demons and monsters didn't only not come attacking despite a demon king being present, but even remained locked up behind their barrier.

Another reason was that many of the countries were exhausted. Although they just reaped what they had sown, not few of the countries were in such a wretched state that they would fall apart like domino stones if they forcibly tried to replenish their soldiers, which they had lost in the hero battle, as it would negatively affect their industry and farming. They definitely couldn't be bothered taking even the demons into consideration.

The Trident Principality continuously received requests begging for assistance from many countries. The archduchess, who had gone to Klinge, was immediately dragged back to the capital.

Renya and others believed that it would be fine to just ignore those requests altogether, but if they were to actually leave the current situation alone with many countries collapsing, the people fleeing from those places would turn into refugees, and keep pouring into other countries. This would trigger a deterioration of the food situation and similar in the countries swamped by the refugees.

Furthermore, it wasn't unusual for that to invite a worsening of the public order with the people affiliated to the country's army turning into bandits after ruining themselves. Those bandits would

then attack the refugees streaming into the country, or visit the neighboring countries to lay waste there.

Being unable to get rid of the main cause behind all this, it wouldn't end with being the problem of just one country, but instead spread its effect to the surrounding countries, which in lieu would trigger a chain reaction with the influence continuing to spread even further.

The archduchess explained with an extremely tired smile to Renya before being brought back to the capital that it was necessary under any circumstances to provide barely enough aid so that the countries wouldn't collapse in order to avoid things developing like that. As Renya couldn't do anything about it even after being informed, he stopped his thinking at understanding that such circumstances might exist as well.

Somehow Renya felt the strong urge of wanting to ask, "And you guys really had planned to go to war?", but once he considered it well, it was only normal for the paces to differ depending on the conditions of the countries and the circumstances on-site. A situation, where the hero brings the world together to oppose the demon king as one unity like it happens in some heroic tales, was the height of weirdness. He could only think that it was fairly reasonable for the current situation to be as it was, if you considered all that.

"If things proceeded~ as they do in stories~ no one~ would need to suffer~"

"Though I kind of think it's the common people that suffer more than you, Your Highness."

Speaking of heroes, Renya ordered the four heroes, Kurz and Grün who came back, and Albert and Lepard who received treatment due to that, to earnestly hold mock battles against Shion, Rona, Croire, and Frau. As new equipment for Shion, Renya gave her an armor that used the same design as her previous one but was made out of evil dragon hide, and after he got persistently and intently pestered by Shion, a single katana which was tempered with an alloy of mithril and steel.

As katana were weapons from his former world and because he felt it would be somehow misplaced for him to add an inscription to the blade in the language of this world, Renya decided to keep the katana unsigned, but once he tried to appraise it with his appraisal skill, the result was rank 8.

This was the highest rank an artisan living in the transient world could achieve. It was such a rare item that people wanting to buy it any any price would rush Renya's place if the world were to learn of this, but without having a clue of that, Renya swiftly made a scabbard and a belt with the same mechanism as the one he was using himself, and handed all of it over to Shion as a set.

Thanks to the mithril added to the katana, it wasn't a blade that would chip easily, but since it wasn't maintenance-free like Renya's katana, it resulted in Renya first teaching Shion how to properly maintain her new katana.

At first the heroes were reluctant to hold mock battles with Shion and the others. The cocky words of Lepard that it wouldn't be much of a battle was the commonly shared opinion among all heroes, and the surroundings, who had heard about this idea, harbored the same view, too.

However, their way of thinking was easily betrayed after observing the first match.

Shion possessed an abnormal amount of strength on top of the ability to manipulate mana. Because she wore the equipment especially made for her by Renya, her defensive and offensive abilities got boosted, and on top of all, she could even use Lepard's <Roar>.

Thanks to being appointed as saint alongside the steep rise of her art powers, Rona had rapidly increased her repertoire of divine arts by reading all kinds of scriptures related to divine arts which she had ordered from the capital.

With the elves' characteristic abundance in mana as backing, Croire had developed her abilities even further by not shirking her training even after coming to Klinge as an accomplished, excellent sorceress.

And lastly Frau who was rumored that her existence itself might be gradually becoming too nonsensical.

If these four formed a party and fought by cooperating decently, there was no way for them to lose so easily, even with the heroes as opponents.

"Those eight people can't be handled by us anymore." Keith said feebly next to Renya as they observed those eight jumping and rushing around on the wide, flat place prepared outside the city for the mock battle from atop the city wall.

At the end of his line of sight were Frau, who was manipulating countless tentacles which she had created from the ground, and Kurz who intercepted those with countless tentacles created out of black mist. The battle, where their respective tentacles devoured, tore apart, bumped, and smashed each other with their numbers being replenished in proportion to the losses, didn't seem like a fight between a hero and a fairy at all, no matter how you looked at it.

"In case something were to happen, I will ask you to handle it please, Margrave-sama."

"...Somehow I feel like the troublesome matters have increased even further."

Once Rona's mace, which she had swung with her physical strength reinforced through self-strengthening, powerfully hit Lepard's guarded arm, his big frame was pushed back several meters while raising a cloud of dust. Shion's front kick awaiting him there blew Lepard several dozens of meters away in defiance of Lepard guarding against it.

'He's right, taking on something like that will be rather hard for normal soldiers', Renya sighed. 'In short, whenever Shion's group and the heroes were to cause some kind of trouble in Klinge, all of it would be sent my way to deal with.'

"Won't it somehow work out if you face them using around hundred people?"

"It won't. Please do your best, Margrave-sama."

Keith shot Renya down curtly.



It was decided for Kilie to stay in Klinge. On paper, she had the position of the archduchess' observer of Renya. Renya's protest that Shion and Mayria would be quite capable of that was rejected by the archduchess with the comment that there were no signs of them accomplishing that duty at present as both of them had ended up being tainted with thoughts close to those of Renya.

Renya didn't try asking her about Kilie's true identity. After all it was obvious that she would answer that she was a member of the Trident Principality's Intelligence Unit who had disguised herself as a peddler, even if he attempted to ask her.

From among the two pieces of information she had told him, Renya decided to share the information about the demon continent with all his friends, but he hid the other piece of information deep in his chest.

As far as Renya could see, it appeared that the residents of this world didn't know anything about the existence of a component called resources. Thus he thought that it might be better to have them perceive the collapse of mountains and the retreat of coastlines as nothing but unusual phenomena.

Renya didn't have any confidence that he could fully explain these things even if he tried to. Therefore he assessed that it might be better to not unnecessarily worry his friends with this information.

Instead, Renya somehow managed to grasp Kilie's true identity as she had directly informed him of these pieces of news while anticipating that it might cause quite a big shock if she let others know herself, but in the end he still had no will to check whether he was right.

"So it wasn't possible for things to improve to some extent with me coming here?"

"Hmm? What might you be talking about?"

"..."

"The decrease of resources went faster than anticipated. The reason...we just recently managed to identify the place that might be at fault...is difficult to deal with right away. Still, thanks to you Renya-san, it seems to be a situation where we still have some time until things become irrecoverable. This is what the electromagnetic waves, which I received, tell me."

"You know, that part about the waves is obviously weird if it's supposed to come out of the mouth of a resident of this world, okay?"

"Don't tell me, a leading question!?"

Kilie widened her eyes while pressing a hand on her mouth.

"Well, I don't particularly mind if you continue insisting that you're the peddler Kilie."

"It will be a big help if you could go along with that. It wouldn't be an overly cool story to tell the

people that the new supervisor of this world has willingly come down to the lower world as your guardian angel, Renya-san."

'I guess you don't have any intention to hide it,' Renya thought, but didn't retort audibly. He also pretended to not have heard the inappropriate term of 'guardian angel.' Although he ended up thinking, 'It's no more than a protection lacking any kind of divine favor.'

While at it, he also thought that it was her who had stood at the pillows of the priests all over the country, but he avoided pursuing this any further either.

Even if he were to disclose it to the public, there wouldn't be any gain to anyone, and Renya himself decided to flag it as trivial information. He felt like that little girl goddess would tell him everything, even the parts he didn't need to know, if he asked her directly.

"Though I had thought that it would be a place where I could spend my life more easily."

At the time when Renya grumbled this, there wasn't anyone near him capable of answering.

Spending several days in such a mood, one day that occurred all of a sudden.



Emil Rajah disappeared from Klinge.



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.



Even though it was a fairly fresh experience to be mentally overpowered by an angry Shion, Renya acted as if it was nothing special on the surface.

'The fact of me being overpowered isn't a big deal. After all it's been a common rule since ancient times that a woman's anger easily surpasses a man's. The problem here is that she would run her mouth, even if I don't listen to it, going as far as talking about unnecessary stuff until I cave in at the end, resulting in me being unable to do anything after getting cornered.'

Just when Renya leaned himself across the desk, about to ask just what had caused Shion to charge into his office while all mad so as to move on the talk in a calm and composed manner, Shion's right hand grabbed Renya's head in an eagle hold directly from the front.

"Oh!?"

Renya made his friends thoroughly experience his iron claw so far, but he perceived that he would apparently be on the receiving end this time. At the same time, probably in order to not allow Renya to get away, Shion put some strength into her hand.

Going by the strength of the pressure transmitted through the places where her fingers touched Renya's skin, Renya was convinced that Shion might be able to crush his skull with that pressure of hers while feeling a slight shiver traveling down his spine. If it was an injury to some extent, he

should manage to pull through one way or another due to the function of <High Recovery> which he had received from the little goddess. However, Renya thought even he might die if his skull were to be crushed.

As Renya brooded over thoughts in his mind that were close to escaping reality, such as, 'If it's possible to recover even from having my head crushed contrary to expectations, it might completely remove me from the range of being a human, no matter how much it might be a blessing of the skill's function,' Shion started to slowly talk with a low voice.

"Renya, right now I feel like I could even crush the head of an ogre."

"You won't hear any denial from me."

"No matter how strong you might be, the hardness of your head still loses out to that of an ogre, right Renya?"

"I share that opinion if we base it on the condition that it's gonna be a physical crushing."

'If it's based on mental crushing, I'm pretty stubborn', Renya assessed.

This nuance had apparently gotten through to Shion as well, even if only somewhat. At the edge of his sight, which was mostly blocked by Shion's palm, Renya faintly registered how Shion's mouth slackened a bit. Renya wondered whether he should grab that opportunity to try freeing his head from Shion's hold, but when he saw that Shion's mouth tightened again right away, he reconsidered.

'Things will likely become complicated, if I act imprudently here and offend Shion.

"Based on the fact that I don't want to get violent with you, I'd like you to answer me a question."

"Very well. I shall do my best to give you a truthful answer."

Hearing Renya answering with an obedient tone, Shion breathed in deeply, and asked Renya, "Why don't you give order to search for Emil?"

'Although it's said that there's no use to cry over spilled milk, I must admit that her question is very valid,' Renya realized his own blunder. 'Even if it's going to give Shion a bit of a bad impression, I should get Shion's hand out of my face for now. Completely hiding the intense ups and down of my emotions will be extremely difficult like this.

Even so, if it were to be limited to what he showed on his face, Renya was confident that he would be able to remain expressionless throughout this. However, that was ultimately limited to what was visible on his face. No matter how much he subdued them, he wouldn't be able to fully cut even the movements of his muscles, the stiffening of his skin as instantaneous reactions. Much more so in a state where he had only thought about the matter at hand moments ago, and had been forced to fully realize that he was still hesitating while not having yet reached a fixed conclusion.

"I guess you have your reasons. So I'd like to hear them."

Shion had apparently noticed the faint changes on his face through her palm.

"Considering the situation...of Emil having disappeared from in front of us, it's very likely that she has done it voluntarily. I don't believe that there's any need to chase after someone, who has left on her own accord, at present."

He couldn't afford to pile up blunder on blunder. That's why Renya gave the reply, which he had prepared in advance, while making an effort to keep his voice flat and calm.

He didn't lie. Considering only the parts that were currently clear, it was a very natural conclusion and the answer he could come up with while being confident of it.

Having misjudged that he probably wouldn't get exposed because of that, Renya ended up widening his eyes, albeit faintly, beneath Shion's palm as he listened to her.

"That's a lie, isn't it?"

"You're denying my words...with quite the confidence there, aren't you?"

Renya asked himself whether he had overlooked something. He reflected on whether he might have missed something crucial, seeing as Shion had been apparently able to immediately judge his words as a lie. Renya wasn't a poor talker, but he wasn't anyone you could describe as honeymouthed either.

It wouldn't be odd even if he had made a mistake somewhere just because of this, but no matter how much he pondered about it, he couldn't determine where he made a mistake that would be so obvious to Shion.

"There's no reason for Emil to leave your side, Renya."

"That's something you don't know, do you? Although it's me who's saying it, I'm quite aware that I hadn't treated her overly well. It would be no wonder if she had run out of patience with me, don't you think?"

Renya felt complicated as he kept saying things that seemed to abase himself, but there was no lie in those words either.

However, Shion easily denied this as well, "Such things don't matter. At the very least, Emil appeared to enjoy her time in Klinge. It also looked as though she felt something like a debt of gratitude towards you. Otherwise she wouldn't have helped you in this many ways for free, right?"

Renya admired Shion for having properly registered those things albeit seemingly not having paid any attention to them. Certainly, Renya had gotten Emil's help on various occasions. And although Emil complained about that every now and then, she never refused to give him a helping hand. Moreover, although Renya had taken advantage of Emil to quite an extent, he hadn't given her something like a reward, as an employer would give his subordinate, so far.

"It's not like I only exploited her work force, you know?"

"I'm aware of that."

Once Renya added, "I had to spell it out, just in case," Shion nodded with a wry smile.

"Since I'm not in charge of brain work like Mayria, I don't understand the complicated stuff, but there are still two things I do understand. First, I share a relation of having crossed fists with Emil."

Even when being told so, Renya couldn't make heads or tails out of it. After pondering about it for a while, he remembered that Shion and Emil had a scuffle in his office a while back.

Renya believed that it wasn't as though they had crossed fists in particular, but since it had apparently transformed into something like that in Shion's mind, he decided to remain quiet about that part.

"It's not like Emil had some kinds of complaints with the current situation, and even if she had dissatisfactions I didn't know of, she isn't the type of woman who would silently go away. She should have definitely told you something, Renya."

Even while thinking that they'd be likely able to sort it out with a short chat, in case Emil really had some kind of issue with Renya, he urged Shion to go on. Seemingly judging that Renya showed no signs of wanting to escape, Shion released her iron claw, removed her hands from the desk, and faced Renya directly.

"The other is something I heard from Frau. Emil's hair clip had been left behind in her private room."

"You mean this, I suppose."

Renya pointed with his eyes at the metallic pipe left laying on top of his desk. Following his line of sight, Shion nodded shortly after spotting the clip.

"I also use a hair clip. It's nothing expensive, but I cherish it."

Shion's hair clip wasn't metallic like Emil's. She gently placed her hand on that clip, and swiftly unfastened it. What remained on her palm was a cloth hair band similar to a plain ribbon.

"Mother often told me to wear something slightly cuter, but for me as someone aiming to become a swordswoman, this was the maximum. Even so, it's doubtlessly something invaluable for tying the hair, which is important for a woman."

That part was something Renya couldn't really understand quite well. 'And mostly likely there will never come a time where I'll be able to comprehend such things,' he assessed.

Shion tied together her hair again with the hair band she had removed, retrieving her ponytail. Then she placed her hands back down on the desk, albeit not slamming them down this time, and bent herself forward again while deeply staring into Renya's eyes.

"She deliberately left the hair clip behind. There's no way that it bears no meaning."



"It's incomprehensible to me."

Honestly, Renya couldn't provide any other answer. Although he wondered whether he would be ridiculed for that, Shion kept staring at Renya with a serious expression, showing no sign that she would laugh at him.

"You don't need to understand it. I will tell you. Emil has left her heart with Klinge, or rather, you, Renya. However, she had to leave this place against her will due to some kind of circumstance. I don't know the reason, but I think she couldn't ask for our help. Her leaving the hair clip behind is an expression of those feelings, I believe."

"That's absurdly difficult to understand, isn't it...? But, it's also possible that your line of thoughts is wrong, right?"

Renya was puzzled just why Shion, who had made her statement cockily, was overflowing with so much confidence. Still, having spelled it out so confidently to him, there was a part in him that could somewhat go along with her argumentation, even though it was a notion he couldn't understand himself.

"You can ridicule me if I made a mistake there. I won't mind at all if you laugh at me. However, if we never reunite with Emil after this as we didn't go out to look for her now, I'm going to regret that I couldn't have persuaded you, Renya. Even if you exclude the two things I said moments ago, she's still my friend."

"You're really enviable..."

Renya began to somehow feel stupid for having wavered after pondering about various things. The very simple argument that it was natural to go search for a friend since she vanished without a word was persuasive exactly because it was so simple. However, that was only the case if you omitted Emil's true identity which Shion didn't know of.

"Renya, what are you hiding?"

"Something I can't say, want to say, and might end various things if I do tell."

Harboring the faint hope that she might deduct the truth with this, Renya deliberately used a way of speaking full of implications. It was a comment that had the nuance that she wouldn't be able to double back once she heard about it. Renya thought that it would be a big help for him if he could get her to pull back with this.

In response, Shion looked mystified for just an instant, "I don't quite get it, but...if that's the case, let's do it like this. First, spit it out."

"Now listen..."

"In exchange I'll promise that I won't do anything that might worry you, no matter what I might hear."

She pulled back the hand she had placed on his desk, straightened up, and hit her own chest as if

saying that he should leave it all to her.

As Renya pulled a doubtful look, Shion became sullen and further added, "It's 'no matter what I might hear.' Even if Emil were to be pregnant with your child, if she were to be my mortal enemy, if she ran off with a good amount of cash after finding another man, or if you, Renya, actually had a fetish for little girls."

"It's not such an erratic story...no, wait, I guess I can't say that it's not..."

Even while considering where to start, Renya ended up wondering, 'Now then, if I had to choose between divulging Emil's real identity or pile up various offbeat stories like the ones Shion has mentioned, which would I prefer?'

Renya himself was aware that his understanding just how much the people of this world hated demons was rather shallow, probably because he didn't really have that much fear or emotional views about demons. Even an elf like Croire, whom he considered to have a relatively broad-minded personality, disapproved of demons. Thus he couldn't make any educated guesses what kind of reaction Shion, a human, would show.

"What is it that makes you hesitate so much? Just give me a try, Renya. I'll keep my promise."

"Emil Rajah is..." Faltering to continue for a moment, Renya fixed his eyes on Shion, who tried to not avert her eyes, and spit out the next words as if having partly given up that whatever will happen is going to happen anyway, "She's a demon. Considering the current situation, it's very likely that she's headed to the demon country. If we're going to perform a search, I think that we will need to go beyond the Miasma Forest into the demon country. I have ordered those, who know that, to remain silent about this piece of information on my own judgment."

"Those who know?"

"Croire and Frau. I had both remain silent on my order."

As Renya waited what kind of reaction she would show while filled with trepidation, Shion folded her arms and brooded for a while, and then declared without any hesitation, "Then it'll be okay if I make sure that it won't turn into an issue by talking it properly over with Rona."

"...Hmm?"

Renya was confused, wondering whether he had misheard. Seemingly having perceived what he was thinking from his reaction, Shion cracked a smile, "Don't worry, Renya. Rona might get slightly surprised, but it'll be alright. I will explain it to her."

"No... Eh? You understand what I'm saying? I told you that Emil is a demon, you know?"

"I heard and understood that, but what about it?"

Renya blankly stared back at Shion, who asked a question in return with a dumbfounded expression, as he didn't know how he should answer her.

"A demon, she's a demon. The ones that are underlings of the demon king, you see?"

"I'd like you to tell me if you know of any other beings called demons..."

Shion became bewildered instead, and Renya was confused as to just what the heck was going on here. Shion seemed to finally grasp from Renya's expression what had made him hold his tongue in fear, and clapped her hands together.

"Ohh...you were worried that I'd go ballistic or something because she's a demon?"

"It's as you say, but isn't your response to this way too casual?"

'Doesn't that make me look like a complete idiot for having worried about this?' Renya wondered.

"No, well, I hate demons, and it's unthinkable that I'll get along with them. I'll slaughter them if I spot any, and I also believe that it'd be better for them to get completely wiped out."

"Then..."

"Before being a demon and all that, Emil is Emil, right? Renya, you judged that it'd be no problem to not care about it either, didn't you? Isn't it a non-issue then? Rona might loathe them a bit more, but since Emil has gotten along with us without any problems so far, she should be able to understand if I explain it to her properly."

"Is that...how it works?"

"Isn't it? Even if someone might see it differently, isn't that how things work in Klinge?"

Shion broadly laughed at Renya, who felt as if his anxieties had been cleanly and easily cut apart and dumped away.

"That's the way it is with friends. Renya, you overthink too much."

Without any words to retort, Renya couldn't even groan. He could only keep staring at Shion's bright smile.