

Although it might not be owed to them having been infected by Rona's irresponsible attitude, Klinge's soldiers succumbed so easily to Shion's persuasion that Renya actually felt disappointed. This didn't mean that Shion had to actually go as far as using physical force.

The soldiers, with Keith in the lead, were greatly surprised and slightly confused by Shion's words, but the majority of them accepted the news about Emil's true identity without any big chaos spreading.

"To be frank, it's not like we don't have our own feelings about this issue, but if Margrave-sama deems it acceptable, there won't be any objections from us as your subordinates." Keith said with a bitter smile after having been later called to Renya's office in secret to explain the situation.

Thanks to his reply, Renya felt somewhat doubtful whether their trust towards himself wasn't somehow way too high, but as that feeling apparently showed on Renya's face, Keith added in a hurry, "Beginning with me, all soldiers of Klinge have received help from Emil-sama to a greater or lesser extent. Even if you deduct the part about her actually being a demon, the benefits we received from her still outweigh it by leaps and bounds."

The soldiers stationed in Klinge as Renya's subordinates were mostly young folks who still had little experience as soldiers, probably because Renya himself was a still young noble with no history to him. Maybe owed to that, they hadn't personally fought against demons yet, and thus didn't accumulate that much hate towards them.

In addition, it was a plain fact that Emil had often helped them, and compounded highly effective medicines for wounded soldiers, who would always appear during training sessions, or the sick. In other words, the soldiers' impression of Emil ranged from her being a skilled doctor to a decent drugmaker. Being told that she was a demon now after all this time didn't really strike home for most of them.

"I think things might have been a little bit different if we had fought against the demon army that advanced on Klinge the other day, but we simply devoted ourselves to launching ranged attacks from the batteries with Frau-sama being the only one facing the demons directly."

"So you're saying, demons kinda don't feel real to you guys, huh?"

'Considering it from the angle of danger awareness, it might be an extremely bad,' Renya assessed, 'however, if the soldiers compare the threat of the demons, which they haven't experienced personally as of yet, and Emil's medical treatments, which they have received plentifully so far, it's no wonder that their internal scales inclines towards Emil.'

Once it came to talking about this matter with the heroes, Renya perceived slight differences in their disposition.

The one understanding the current situation the easiest was Grün. Even without being persuaded by Shion, Grün accepted the reality of Emil being a demon, and didn't bring up any protests towards that.

"I didn't need Shion-san to tell me about this since I had already known about it." Grün said, as if talking about today's weather, to the surprised Renya.

Renya wondered whether heroes might also possess something like a skill to identify demons, but when Grün told him the trick behind it, it was something far simpler.

"I interrogated Croire."

"...Oh, I see."

"Even though my situation is like this, Croire is still my blood relative, so I'm able to somewhat grasp in my own way if she hides something from me."

'I don't think you can say that it's also the same for the other side, though,' Renya believed. 'No matter how I think about it, between Croire and Grün, I'm sure Grün wins out at the mastery of sounding out each other's inner workings.'

Croire, who had guessed that Grün might tell Renya about the information he had gained from her, hid herself in the city of Klinge after repeatedly begging Frau to not look for her. Because she had apparently run away believing that she might be blamed for having told Grün something which Renya had asked her to keep secret, no matter how much Grün might be a hero, Renya asked Grün to search for Croire and pass on the message that she should come back since he wasn't angry at her.

The ones who followed Grün in having a good understanding of the circumstances were Kurz, and unexpectedly, Lepard.

Kurz accepted it for a reason that was very like him. In short, he had no interest in Emil's identity as long as Renya was fine with it. Just like Keith and the other soldiers, Lepard had apparently relied on hate towards demons, he came to the clean decision that there was no need to kick up a fuss as long as she didn't do anything evil.

The one showing the least sympathy, or rather, the most common reaction according to Renya's imagination, was Albert who advocated that they should simply ignore Emil. It wasn't as though Renya couldn't understand his reaction either.

The humans, elves, and beastmen had all suffered from the demons most recently, but their losses were limited to relatively small amounts. In contrast to them, the dragonoids had sustained such huge damages by the demons that one could as well call it a catastrophe.

Albert himself should have fought against demons many times over, and as an actual problem, he had been forced to experience things like his friends being killed or brought to grief by demons. It was impossible for him to simply accept it without a hitch after being told that Emil was a demon, even if she herself might not be directly related to Albert's suffering.

"Margrave-sama, just what are you thinking? The demons are the underlings of the demon king and beings hostile to all people living on this continent. Not only have you kept one of them close to you until now, but you're insane enough to go search for a missing demon. That's completely crazy!"

"Yeah, well, it's not like I can't understand your feelings on this."

"Margrave-sama, you've seen it with your own eyes as well, haven't you? All the agony those things brought upon our country!" Albert shouted with his face bright red.

Even Renya could fully understand Albert's opinion. However, at the same time he couldn't.

It was certainly a demon army that had attacked the dragonoids' continent. Since that demon army had committed atrocities to the cities and lands of the dragonoids that would make one avert their eyes, it was only natural for the dragonoids to loathe the demons.

However, Emil hadn't been a part of that army. It wasn't as if Emil had annihilated the dragonoid soldiers. Extending the feelings of hate even towards Emil after lumping all demons together into one pot felt to Renya like barking up the wrong tree. But then again, the sense of being victimized was something that could only be understood by the victims. Given that he believed that an outsider like him had no persuasive power by bringing up such logical reasoning, Renya didn't even try to.

"You know, I won't force you to understand or accept it. If you can't stomach it, it's fine. I have no right to force you guys to act, and at the same time, you guys have no right to limit my actions either."

"You're saying you will be going to search for that demon, no matter what...? I don't know about the other heroes, but...I'd like you to at least expect absolutely no help whatsoever from my side." Albert declared bluntly.

His expression overflowed with the determination of not giving way in the slightest, no matter what he'd be told, reaching even the point of him partially glaring at Renya.

"I hadn't expected this from the very start. In the first place, I don't have any intention to take even one of you heroes with me."

Renya's answer for Albert was extremely plain and light-hearted. Albert apparently hadn't anticipated such a reply at all, seeing how his grim expression transformed into one of surprise.

"You're telling me you're not taking the heroes along despite going to the demon's country, the demon king's territory?"

Barely managing to swallow down the comment that they'd be a hindrance, Renya pondered how he should answer here.

'It's not like I'm actually planning to have a battle with the demon king this time. It's going to be a very simple mission of swiftly searching the demon country for Emil, and as soon as we find her, we'll quickly pull out. Although we must get through the huge barrier that seems to cover the whole demon continent while at it, I can't believe that it'll be a setting requiring that much combat power, assuming that I can somehow deal with the barrier with my katana or some kind of powerful sorcery.

If it had been possible, Renya wanted to go searching for Emil by himself, but Rona, who could detect Emil's location, had become someone he definitely wanted to take along, considering it from a standpoint of speeding up the whole endeavor. When he pondered how things would develop from

there, there was no mistake that it would be much better to take along Shion's group, who didn't lose out in combat prowess to the heroes, and who would surely listen to Renya's instructions unlike the heroes, who might or might not do so depending on their moods.

"You guys are combat assets endowed with abilities to fight against the demon king, right? Thus, there's no way for me to force you to go along with my selfishness, is there?"

Once Renya voiced out his answer, which he had somehow managed to come up with as being the safest reply he could provide, Albert ended up speechless, seemingly believing that it was just as Renya had said.

"If you say that you feel bitter about staying in Klinge now that you found out about Emil being a demon, you're free to go back to your home country, you know? I'll give you permission to use the transfer gate, and I'll promise you that I'll also contact you if something happens."

"Please let me...think it over."

Albert bowed at Renya without saying anything else, turned on his heels, and left. While watching him leave, Renya ended up thinking, 'I'm sure he'd be happier if he could take various things a bit easier.'

With Albert having pulled back, albeit filled with discontent, Shion's persuasion duty in Klinge could be seen as done for the time being, resulting in Shion using the transfer gate to head over to the archduchess next. For better or worse, Renya decided to accompany her in this.

That didn't mean he was worried about the outbreak of the family fight mentioned by Rona, but still, he found it difficult to let Shion go by herself as it was an internal problem of Renya's territory.

The two, who immediately requested a meeting with the archduchess as soon as they arrived in the capital, ended up being surrounded by soldiers on the spot and dragged to the audience hall for some reason.

"Margrave Kunugi! Are you still sane!?"

What awaited Renya and Shion, who had entered the hall with the archduchess sitting on the throne, were insults and slander by the large number of nobles standing close to the archduchess. Moreover, they only targeted Renya.

Shion was the archduchess' daughter, but she had abdicated her succession rights. Since she currently held the position of being under Renya's care, the nobles' interrogations and insults were all turned at Renya, the one in charge.

"Even screwing around has its limits. The cat's out of the bag! You've been conspiring with a demon, we hear!?"

"Margrave Kunugi, haven't you possibly been planning to harm the human nations after siding with the demons?"

"Your Majesty, you should strip power and territory from Margrave Kunugi who sheltered a demon

while hiding it from you! If you keep him in power as a noble, it's not clear what harm he might bring to the Trident Principality!"

"Damn youngster! You're not even begging for forgiveness by prostrating yourself in front of Her Majesty!?"

Renya, who had been called a youngster, frantically resisted his urge to burst out into laughter. The noble in question was a skinny, fairly old man with a physique close to that of a dead tree. Going by his appearance, you could even describe him as very advanced in age in an age span from sixty to seventy years.

On the other hand, Renya definitely had an outward appearance justifying to be called youngster, but his inner self had now lived for close to one century. Even with his memories erased and him being unable to recall the time he had experienced, there was no reason for him to reply in any way, no matter how much people, who were only sixty or seventy years old, barked at him.

"Margrave Kunugi, you've stayed silent for some time now, but if there's anything you ought to tell us, go ahead."

The archduchess, who had let the nobles say whatever they wanted for some time, suddenly addressed Renya as her surroundings had run out of complaints. No blame could be felt from her words.

"With all due respect, there is something I would like to ask you, Your Majesty."

"Very well, I shall allow your question."

Voices crying, "Your Majesty!" tried to hold her back, but the archduchess ignored them, and looked at Renya with eyes full of anticipation as if she was waiting for something funny to entertain her.

Even while believing that he wouldn't be able to cater to her expectations, Renya voiced out the question he had prepared, "It doesn't matter whether it's this city, the far Kukrika, or even my Klinge, but criminals are bound in the prisons of any these cities, right?"

