



"...They are imprisoned there, aren't they?"

Not grasping the aim behind Renya's question, the audience hall stirred. Shion, who stood behind Renya, didn't understand why Renya was asking something like that, and even the addressee of the question, the archduchess, had put on an expression as if questioning what the point would be in trying to answer that.

"Those people...the criminals...about all of them are humans, aren't they?"

An atmosphere of puzzlement about that obvious fact spread within the hall.

Renya's party had been visiting places all over the continents, using the transfer gates. However, ordinary citizens never used transfer gates. Not to mention that the idea of deliberately using a transfer gate to head to another continent to commit crimes over there wasn't anything overly feasible. In other words, it was only natural for the criminals arrested after perpetrating crimes to belong to the majority race ruling a continent. On the human continent it was extremely unlikely to find criminals of any other race.

"Margrave Kunugi, just what the hell are you..."

"Oh!"

It was Shion who lightly cried out. Widening her eyes somewhat as she had apparently grasped something, Shion glanced at Renya in front of her, and then looked at the archduchess on the throne. After spotting how the archduchess gestured something similar to a light nod, a vicious smile formed on Shion's lips.

The nobles started to fuss due to the sudden change in Shion's expression, wondering just what might happen from now on.

With a voice drowning out their noise, Renya stated, "If you're saying that my friend Emil Rajah is a bad person who harms humans because she's a demon, is it fine for me to consider the race of the criminals, who are bad people causing harm to people, in other words, humans, to be an evil that harms humans?"

"S-Stop playing word games"

"What word games? I shouldn't have said anything wrong if we're talking about the good and evil when it comes to races, or did I?"

After silencing the noble, who had shouted, by looking at him and indifferently giving such an answer, Renya turned his eyes towards the archduchess. Behind him, Shion suddenly invoked her body strengthening at full throttle through mana manipulation. The mana blowing out of Shion's whole body turned into a physical gale, raging throughout the entire hall. The nobles screamed while laying face-down, and the archduchess held up a hand as if to protect her face from the wind, but she continued to stare at Renya and Shion without moving an inch from the throne.

"I'd like to hear your answer on this, Your Majesty. It is not wrong for me to interpret it in such a way, is it?"

Since they were in the audience hall, neither Renya nor Shion were armed. The soldiers guarding the place, on the other hand, were completely armed. Even so, the soldiers intuitively grasped that they'd experience the misery of annihilation if they were to act imprudently, and take on Renya and Shion.

Whether they might have weapons or not, the soldiers had never witnessed such a powerful body strengthening that it'd create a wind in the surroundings like the one Shion was causing right now. The soldiers comprehended that the mana circulating through her body was in a different league altogether. That unbelievable mana reflected the magnitude of her body strengthening in proportion.

"Margrave Kunugi, you're mistaken." The archduchess calmly answered while the nobles, who perceived from the obviously pale faces of the soldiers that this was the one answer that would end the lives of everyone present in this place, watched with their faces going just as pale as the soldiers'. "Judging the act of a part to be the act of all is wrong. With that kind of thinking, this world wouldn't house a single being allowed to live."

"In that case, Your Majesty, my friend is..."

"It is a fact that demons like to act in a way considered evil by nature. Even so, if that person called Emil is just as Margrave Kunugi has diagnosed, she can be considered harmless. Judging an innocent person as evil is unjust. Thus, Emil Rajah will be placed under Margrave Kunugi's charge, and the principality won't regard her residence here as crime for as long as she doesn't commit any wrongdoings."

"Is that definitely going to be the case?"

After flashing a wry smile at Renya, who made sure, the archduchess answered on the spot with a serious look, "Don't make me repeat myself, or are you doubting my words?"

"I beg your pardon, Your Majesty. ...Shion, you're in the presence of Her Majesty." Renya said while bowing his head.

Shion canceled her body strengthening, and bowed, copying Renya.

As soon as the gale raging in the hall stopped, the soldiers understood that they apparently wouldn't die today in this place, and deeply breathed out in relief.

While still bowing, Renya was astonished in his mind. He had expected that the archduchess might dodge his forceful reasoning in some way. However, he hadn't thought that she would go as far as admitting that not all demons are evil on an official occasion.

If the Holy Kingdom still had boasted its original authority, they would have immediately branded the Trident Principality as heretics, and come to overthrow them. You could say the decline of the Holy Kingdom and the appearance of a new religion rooted in the Trident Principality was the reason why the archduchess could say something like this right here and now.

"Your Majesty, now that we clarified that my friend Emil isn't evil, I have something I'd like to request."

Suddenly, Shion lifted her face behind Renya, and made a direct appeal to the archduchess. Usually this would be an act which would be stopped by the surrounding nobles or soldiers. However, because they had been freed from a tense feeling similar to facing their own deaths, the soldiers' minds had completely relaxed, and none of the nobles tried to even move as they were too scared of the power behind Shion's body strengthening.

"Request? Speak."

"Because of my friend's disappearance, Margrave Kunugi has been planning to perform a search."

Despite believing that this wasn't anything that ought to be said to the archduchess at this official place as it was a personal matter, Renya decided to let Shion go on after somehow missing the timing to stop her, since the archduchess showed no signs that she would prevent Shion's appeal.

"In line with this, I'd like to request the permission to borrow the dragoon for the sake of the travel required for the search."

"I allow it. Take her with you."

'No, no, there's no way that you'll be given permission,' Renya believed, and so did everyone present in the audience hall. But, the archduchess' instantaneous reply betrayed the expectations of everyone.

"Eh? It's been allowed?"

"Margrave...your wording..."

Being told so by the archduchess while letting her eyes wander across the vicinity, Renya became flustered.

"Ah? Umm, with all due respect..."

"Gosh~it's a pain~ so let's keep it casual~"

Her atmosphere relaxed all at once. Once the archduchess instructed them with a wave of her hand as if saying that it'd be fine for the nobles to not hear the rest, the soldiers quickly carried the nobles, who had fainted, flopped down on the spot as their legs gave way, or had foam at their mouths, out of the audience hall.

"Umm~, since I'm going to lend you the dragoon~, you can just use her to look for Emil-chan~"

"Even though it's a normal occurrence, this difference in attitude is really intense."

'Since she can act properly during official duty, I'd like her to always act like that,' Renya thought. For some reason, he felt an extreme mental exhaustion from the difference between her acting

proper and all loose.

"Get used to it. So~, can you find out~ what's going on~ with the demon country~ and the barrier completely hiding the demon country~ while you're at it~?"

"That means, you're telling us to investigate?"

"You don't have to try the impossible~. Can I leave it to you~?"

Giving permission to lend the dragoon, who could be described as the strongest national combat asset, for the very personal matter of Renya, who was no more than a single noble, was unprecedented.

'At the same time, this in itself might be something like a reward for the requested information gathering,' Renya assessed. 'It's not a bad deal. The only additional workload will be to tell the archduchess about what we observed during the search for Emil in the form of a report.'

After making that decision, Renya informed the archduchess, "I accept, Your Majesty," in the audience hall that had become mostly deserted.



Renya and Shion's return from the capital took place at almost the same time as the dragoon's arrival in the city of Klinge. Due to that perfectly fitting timing, Renya suspected that they might have prepared in advance, anticipating that things would turn out like this from the very start.

'No matter how ditsy her outward appearance, how stupid her look, and how slow her way of speaking might be, as someone acting as archduchess, she does have the discernment and guessing ability befitting her station', Renya was forced to realize.

The arrival of a dragoon meant that her mount, the dragon, would come to Klinge. Renya was worried that a dragon would cause chaos and fear among the residents, and regretted for an instant that he should have prepared a landing point for dragons outside the city, but contrary to Renya expectations, the residents didn't fall into anything like a panic, although there was a bit of a confusion, when the dragon was about to land on a plaza in the middle of the city.

"They've grown accustomed to it, huh?" Keith murmured calmly among the soldiers, he had rounded up as guards just in case.

Renya cocked his head in puzzlement, wondering whether that's how it was, but observing the residents, who were surrounding the plaza at a distance while full of keen curiosity, he revised his thinking that this might really be the case here. Even though they were the residents of his own city, Renya got slightly scared by their high adaption capability.

Completely unrelated to those thoughts of Renya, the crimson dragon, who had flown all the way from the distant capital of the Trident Principality, drew one circle above the city, and then began to descend towards the plaza in a straight line, seemingly having recognized Renya who was waiting

for him.

Renya tilted his head once more due to the appearance of the dragon which was gradually getting bigger.

"That's...Dra-kun, right?"

"I've heard no rumors about the Trident Principality's dragon having been substituted."

On the plaza, where a cloud of dust started to blow up due to the wind pressure caused by the descending dragon, stood Croire in a light green shirt and a flared skirt next to Renya. Even the soldiers, who had been deployed in the vicinity just in case, grimaced due to the blowing wind or staggered after losing out to the wind pressure, but in the midst of all that, Croire, who was far more slender than the soldiers, stood still like a rock.

"As always, your skirt is an impregnable fortress." The one saying so while mystified from the bottom of her heart was Shion.

Going by her physique, Shion also entered the delicate category when compared to the soldiers, but she didn't budge at all either, even while being exposed to the wind which packed quite a pressure by now. Her eyes weren't directed at the dragon alighting from the sky, but the hem of Croire's skirt that didn't show the slightest hint of being rolled up even while fluttering in the violent wind.

"I wonder, isn't it a curse in a certain sense ~no?" Frau uttered her impression.

Probably because of the tininess of her body, Frau had been losing out to the wind pressure generated by the dragon's wings. She had been partly closing her eyes while enduring the wind by clinging to Renya's waist. The hem of her apron dress' skirt was violently fluttering. However, that fluttering never caused her skirt to fully roll up above her knees.

'This might also be a curse in a certain sense,' Renya thought.

"I think it'd be possible for it to be turned up if you removed the curse? This is the time for the saint to shine~"

"Eh? Wait a sec? I'm supposed to use my divine arts to do something about her skirt...?"

Although it wasn't clear whether she wanted to make Rona use her divine arts, or to use her as a shield against the wind, Kilie tried to make Rona move towards Croire by pushing her back which she was using to hide. On the other hand, Rona started to resist while confused by the sudden pushing.

