

## **Chapter 4 - It Seems to Proceed towards a Search**

In reality, Renya didn't have much trust in Shion's words about persuading Rona. The part about her declaring that the friendship is unrelated to the other party being a demon or human was something that made him openly admire it as magnificent as it largely exceeded his own expectations.

However, saying that Shion might have suddenly become excellent because of that, wasn't anything Renya would believe. Even when he tried thinking that it would be fine to do so, there were still the blunders she had piled up so far.

The possibility of Shion simply not thinking too deeply over matters always followed her around. Of course, no matter the method, she had shown him the way to reaching the most ideal solution, which Renya couldn't embark on by himself, so he believed that he ought to acknowledge her for that.

'Even a fool stumbles upon a truth said to surpass a wise man every now and then. Considering it like that, Shion's speech and conduct lacks reason, and persuading others without reason should be called paramount to very difficult.

'Not to mention, the other party here is Rona. She has the role of watching Shion, and going by her position, she's capable of remonstrating Shion's speech and conduct. Since he has that calculative part about her on top of it, there's no way that she'll agree with a search for a demon, which would only offer many demerits. Moreover, since she's recently obtained the title of saint, it's not like she can permit something like a cooperation with demons either.

Since it'd be a quite difficult endeavor even if one's fairly skilled at talking, it probably won't work out with Shion's skills,' Renya judged.

"Shion won me over.

It was early afternoon of the next day when Rona visited Renya's office with a slightly gloomy expression and somewhat dropping shoulders.

With the situation being what it was, there was no way to seek Mayria's assistance for this case. While thinking that he had to search for Emil together with just Shion in the worst case, Renya sat at his desk while pondering about the arrangements of the necessary goods, and racking his brain just what kind of transportation he had to prepare, seeing how the area to look for Emil alone would be ridiculously huge on top of the distance to the demon country being too far with the need to cross the Miasma Forest and whatnot. When Rona suddenly rushed into his office, he at first didn't understand what he was being told. For a short while he stared at Rona's face, who returned his gaze with a somewhat glum and reproachful look.

What puzzled him first was just when Rona might have entered his room, and the fact that he didn't lock the door. When he was focusing on it, Renya was sensitive to the faintest hints of people's presences, but otherwise he was lacking vigilance so much that surprised those around him.

'Even when you approach ferocious carnivores, their reactions will be thin, especially when their bellies are full, but I wonder whether it's something similar to that?' Rona thought while looking at

Renya who was staring at her blankly as if unable to grasp the situation.

They stared at each other like that for several minutes. After taking that much time, surprise slowly dyed Renya's face as his thinking had apparently caught up with reality at last.

"Won over? Eh? Who did? Shion did? You? Why?"

"I'd like you to at least add that it was against my will, but going by your look, it appears that you hadn't expected this at all." Rona said while sighing.

Renya immediately shot back, "I mean, Rona is a Rona, right?"

"My name has completely registered as the definition of black-hearted in your head. Would it be fine for you to stop using me as a synonym for a malicious woman who doesn't listen to others?" Rona demanded without even trying to hide her displeasure while massaging her own eyebrows with her right hand.

Renya nodded at her while believing that he hadn't said anything that terrible, nor intended to do so.

"Leaving that aside, I thought that you definitely wouldn't consent, you know?"

"That sounds as if I've been deceived in a weird way, but normally people don't have anything they definitely wouldn't consent to."

"That basically means, you're scheming, Rona?"

"Could you please stop talking about me as if I'm incompatible with human society?"

Sensitively grasping how anger started to dye Rona's voice this time, Renya nodded. He didn't have the slightest intention to tease her. As he was just pursuing his own curiosity, he didn't want to rub Rona the wrong way.

"Even I told Shion that I'd like her to stop getting involved with Emil any longer when I heard of Emil's true identity."

Renya thought that this might have been a very natural response for a human. But with just this much, he couldn't spot a route leading to Rona being persuaded.

"Shion took my hands, and said that demons were being proper to be hated by us since they are a harm to humans, but that Emil was our comrade and friend, and that she hadn't harmed any humans at least after becoming our friend. She added that we should treat her as our friend and comrade then, and asked whether it wouldn't be only natural for a human to help a friend who might be in trouble."

"What cliched lines."

"Those are splendid words. But, they're too splendid and sounded like an empty slogan. At the very least, they don't sound like words that would touch Rona and make her do a 180° turn in her thinking."

"They were like a trite beauty, but once I considered how Shion had become capable of saying such words, it made me all teary, even if it was a blunder on my side."

"You're really easy..."

"No, even I wouldn't fold in with around this much, so I tightly endured, but..."

Seemingly recalling that time, Rona pressed both hands against her cheeks, and breathed out shortly.

"Once she fixedly stared at me from close-by with those pure eyes full of trust while saying 'Umm, I'm sure you'll understand me Rona' and 'You're going to agree with my view, right?'..."

"You're really very easy..."

"There's no way that I could do something so cold-blooded, atrocious, terrible, and cruel like rejecting Shion's words with those eyes in front of me, is there!?"

Even when she raised her voice to emphasize her words, Renya found it difficult to agree. If it had been a man who got cornered in Rona's place, Renya might have still understood, but this behavior was impossible for Renya to understand, if it came to a talk between two women.

"I will rather die than betray Shion's trust! I just got to feed my title of saint to the dogs!"

"The title of saint sure is cheap...wake up!?"

A sound similar to something loudly falling down in the far distance reached Renya's ears as he wondered what the human's goddess might think about this if she heard those words. Since Renya heard screams that seemed to originate from the maids working in his mansion at the same time, he grasped that a person or something must have toppled over within the building, but Renya only absentmindedly wondered, 'Now then, I wonder what might be going on?'

"Even so, she had an insurance method."

"Hmm?"

"I was told that she'd let her fists talk just like back then when she got to understand Emil, if she couldn't get me to understand."

It looked like the physical persuasion was Shion's final means to get her point across. It was unclear whether Shion really had the intention to resort to violence. Still, in Rona's eyes, talking through fists with the current Shion would very likely lead to a danger to her life.

"I think it was the right call of me to have chosen to give in mentally before being forced to do so physically."

"That makes sense."

"Besides..." Rona hesitated to say for an instant, but immediately continued, "...if not for the information about her true identity, I would have immediately supported the notion to go save Emil right away as well. If you and Shion say that you don't care about her true identity, I have no reason to keep opposing indefinitely either."



"Sorry, that's a big help."

Thinking that he had to be proper about what he should say and do, Renya apologized and bowed his head towards Rona. In response, Rona waved her hands in front of her chest in a fluster.

"Please don't mind it. Seeing how I was persuaded, you have my consent as well."

"Please allow me to express my gratitude despite that."

There was no way that danger wouldn't follow them around if they went to search the area from the Miasma Forest to the demon country. Since Rona had been forced to go along with that, it was only reasonable for Renya to feel indebted to her.

"I shall gratefully accept your feelings. Though, in fact it would be much better if I could get you to lend me one thing here."

"On top of black, you're really greedy, eh...?"

"It's a joke. Putting that aside..."

Rona approached Renya a bit, and held out her palm. Not understanding what she wanted, Renya wondered whether she might request money from him, but it was something totally different from what Rona demanded from Renya.

"Please lend me Emil's hair clip."

"I don't mind, but what are you going to use it for? A curse?"

The idea of casting a curse on someone with their belongings as catalyst was relatively popular in Renya's former world. Renya wondered whether Rona might curse Emil as insurance while considering the possibility that Emil had only feigned her friendliness so far seeing how she actually was a dangerous demon.

"I'm a saint for what it counts, okay?"

"There's no law that it won't work if you're cursed by a saint, is there?"

"In the first place, I don't know of any methods to curse others. Anyway, please hurry up and pass me the clip."

Rona, who snatched away Emil's hair clip just as Renya took it out, tucked it away in the pocket of her priestess' garb.

"Since I was appointed as saint, I was blessed with the opportunity to read through various books, and the number of divine arts I can use has grown rapidly, too."

If it had only been an increase of knowledge about divine arts, it shouldn't have resulted in what Rona described just now. The current Rona having attained the foremost ability on the continent as divine arts user was triggered by Shion's rampage a little while ago.

If Rona hadn't healed Shion to the extreme of fainting, the aggregate amount of Rona's divine power shouldn't have increased. Considering from there, it wasn't as though you couldn't say that Rona's current abilities were owed to Shion, albeit in a very indirect way, but Renya felt that most likely no one was grateful towards Shion for that.

"Among them exists a divine art skill allowing to search for someone by using their belongings as catalyst."

"You will know Emil's whereabouts by using that?"

"I will only know the rough direction if there's a big distance between us, but I think it will become more detailed if we continue getting closer to her."

On the one hand he considered it as rather convenient, on the other, Renya wondered whether that wasn't actually a kind of curse as well. Of course, since he felt like he'd get into an argument with Rona if he mentioned those thoughts, he decided to keep them to himself.

"Because it will take a bit of time, I will leave the preparations of the necessary goods to you in the meanwhile, Renya."

"The goods are one part, but the means of transportations is also a problem. It's certainly not like we can cross the Miasma Forest and head to the demon country by foot, right?"

Renya didn't want to think just how many days it'd take to reach their destination if they were stuck walking. Moreover, there was no doubt that the amount of goods to be carried would become ridiculous.

"Please leave that side to Shion."

"To Shion?"

'Now that's an unexpected person to entrust this duty,' Renya felt. 'Leaving aside Mayria, I only feel worries assail me when asking myself whether it'll be alright to leave this in Shion's hands.'

"Shion is currently explaining the situation to the heroes and Klinge's soldiers."

"You do act quickly, don't you...? Or rather, is she spreading rumors about Emil!?"

Explaining the circumstances would result in exposing Emil's true identity. But then again, there was no way that anyone would understand them going to the demon country while keeping Emil's identity hidden.

"She told me that she would definitely convince everyone."

"That'll become physical in the end."

"Who knows, I can't tell you anything about that."

Rona was evasive, but it was almost certain that Shion would use the troublesome way of persuasion called talking it out with her fists towards those trying to persist to the end.

'It'll be great if no one dies from this,' Renya held his forehead.

While Renya was in this state of mind, Rona further added further, "It looks like she's going to arrange for a means of transportation by asking Her Majesty, once she finished her persuasion."

"The archduchess...that'll cause an uproar, won't it?"

The other party was a person shouldering the fate of a nation. Renya couldn't believe at all that such a person would shrug off the information that one of her country's noble was close to a demon as trivial matter. The transportation that she would get the archduchess to prepare also drew Renya's interest, but it couldn't be helped that the archduchess' attitude currently worried him more than this interest.

"In that case, she's going to persuade her as well. Probably."

"Won't that easily turn into a coup d'etat!?"

If it led to something like Shion and the archduchess talking it out with their fists, it would almost definitely end with Shion having replaced the archduchess around the time they finished talking. In that case, it'd like lead to Mayria immediately succeeding her, but it would be extremely difficult to deny that Renya, the lord of Klinge where it all started, had pulled the strings in the back.

"Won't it work out somehow? It will be a simple quarrel between parent and child, right?" Rona laughed out loud after saying this in a very casual and irresponsible manner.



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 held 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?"



"...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.



Probably as an effect of her body's volume, Rona kept a firm posture even within the raging gale. As a trade-off, her slitted priestess's garb fluttered in the wind. Given that she pinned it down with both her arms so that the fabric wouldn't get turned up, she couldn't invest too much effort into resisting Kilie's insistent pushing from behind.

"How noisy," Renya curbed his eyebrows while sighing lightly.

Renya had tried to gather all personnel he could round up since it was the welcoming for the dragoon, the strongest official combat asset of the Trident Principality, but at this point he started to regret that he might have made a mistake in judgment.

By the way, Renya himself was regarded as the strongest unofficial combat asset. Even someone like the archduchess took into account that they wouldn't be able to hide that fact forever, but there was no way that she could publicly announce that their country had a noble who was capable of annihilating the four heroes all by himself. After all the existence of a man excelling the heroes in power by leaps and bounds would be something close to a nightmare for the ordinary citizens of all nations.

Even Renya himself hadn't the slightest intention to crush the dream of this world's inhabitants that the heroes were the strongest possessing the power to save their world.

While Renya was indulging in such thoughts, the dragon slowly alighted on the plaza. There was a reason why Renya had cocked his head in puzzlement at first, wondering whether the approaching dragon was really Dra-kun, and the other people also understood Renya's confusion when the dragon landed on the plaza while causing a low tremor.

That dragon had obviously grown in size to a remarkable extent. Even by the lowest estimates, the dragon in front of their eyes was almost twice as big as the Dra-kun in their memory. The wing-spread and thickness of the dragon's limbs had increased in proportion to that, and even his body color had taken on a far deeper crimson than before.

While everyone was wondering if this was truly Dra-kun, a figure nimbly jumped off the dragon's back. Befitting the dragon's increased body size, its back now towered quite high up in the air, but despite the deep crimson heavy armor apparently covering the whole body of that figure, they displayed fairly agile movements, landing safely with the soles of their boots clacking somewhat as they touched down on the stone paving.

Following the armored figure, a slender figure jumped off the dragon's back in the same way. This figure wore a gray robe and held a twisted wand in their hand. Seemingly using some kind of spell to ease their equipment's weight, they slowly descended, landed silently, and lined up behind the armored figure.

After having confirmed the robed figure's dismounting, the armored figure removed their helmet. Holding the helmet at their left flank while exposing their unpainted face to the open air, they turned their eyes in Renya's direction, and spoke to him.

"Dragoon Liaris Hound reporting in. By Her Majesty's decree, I have come here to enter under your command, Your Excellency Margrave Kunugi."



遠くトライデン公国の首都から飛来した赤色の竜は、  
待ち受けている蓮弥達の姿を認めたのか一直線にその広場に向けて降下し始める。  
「あれって……ドラ君だよな？」

蓮弥が考えている間に、ドラゴンはゆつくりと広場へと舞い降りた。

「竜騎兵、リアリスルハウンド。参上いたしました！」

「随伴魔術師、アズルハウンド。同じく閣下の指揮下に入る」

「おや、アズさんか。久しいな……」

「つて二人ともハウンド姓になったのか!？」

# 二度目の人生を 異世界で12

(T/N: The illustrator failed with Liaris' armor color.)

There was no mistake in what she had said. But Renya still frowned lightly, feeling like her words contained just one piece of information he somehow mustn't disregard.

The robed figure behind Liaris called out to Renya as if to emphasize that piece of information even further, "Accompanying sorcerer, Az Hound reporting in. Likewise entering beneath Your Excellency's command. Pleased to work together with you from now on."

"Oh my, Az-san, huh? Long time no see...but leaving that aside, both of you have the same surname!?" Shion interjected before Renya could gather his thoughts.

Her words clearly brought to light what bugged Renya for a moment there.

"Both are Hound...?"

"Ah, well, you see...for the time being...it's just an engagement..." Az quickly became flustered upon Renya's question.

Seeing his unsociable face take on a slightly red tinge and his eyes wandering around restlessly was a fairly amusing sight to behold, causing Renya to unconsciously break out into a broad smile. With her face bright red while still standing at attention, Liaris couldn't move as she was stuck between the grinning Shion and Rona on her sides in a slightly separated place.

"You're going to invite us to the wedding, aren't you? We will put the assets and resources of the Kunugi Margraviate to use as thanks."

"...That sounds like it'll become something dreadful, but...if I can have you go easy on us, you're invited by all means. Well, that's only after the battle has ended, though."

While smiling wryly as he felt that "only after the battle has ended" was a jinxed way to phrase it, Renya changed the direction of his look, just to notice Frau and Kilie waving small white flags in both hands with smiles plastered all over their faces for some reason as they stood quite far away.

As soon as Renya glared at them with a single tongue clicking, the four white flags fiercely went up in flames without any previous warning. Of course the hands of Frau and Kilie were directly affected by the heat of those flames. Letting go of the flags, which had turned into ashes, in a hurry, they began to wave their hands that got scorched by the fire.

After seeing that, Renya turned his eyes back to Az. Not understanding what had happened, Az was surprised by Kilie and Frau suddenly kicking up a fuss.

"Just what is going on over there? It looked like something burned."

"Who knows. They were probably punished for doing something silly. Rather than that, I think you should hold back on phrases such as 'after the battle has ended.' Most of those voicing out such things tend to run into trouble." Renya thought that he should warn him just in case.

"Oh? Okay...if that's what you say, Your Excellency."

"Somehow being called Excellency by you gives me goosebumps. Feel free to use Renya. Just like before."

"No, but..."

Even after being encouraged to do so, it was obviously difficult for Az to simply go along with it. Previously, when he had collaborated with Renya, both of them were mere adventurers, but now Renya was a fully-fledged noble, moreover a fairly high-ranking one.

"Aren't you going to be way above me when you become the husband of the dragoon, the strongest combat force of this country?"

"We're not married yet, and also, even then that won't be true. Besides, the big shot is the Dragoon Liaris, not me."

Az's attitude of not bulging from his claim that he was ultimately something similar to an extra of Liaris was very typical of him in Renya's eyes.

"I see. Then I shall order you: You may treat me just like before. In case you go against that order, you will be punished. To be more precise, I will fully enjoy groping Liaris' breasts. Regard this as the official order of Margrave Kunugi."

"That's quite unreasonable." For the time being, Az protested against Renya's order that he will be punished for defying orders if he didn't treat Renya disrespectfully. But immediately shrugging his shoulders, he continued, "I can't help it if it's your order. Not to mention that I can't really go against it with you taking Liaris hostage. Long time no see, Renya. You look the same just like before, although your position seems to have changed rather drastically."

"It's a full array of troublesome matters. I want to wrap up this incident quickly, and return to a carefree, prodigal life."

"I heard we're going to the demon country to search for a demon. Is that true?" Az's tone dropped faintly.

Renya answered his question smoothly in a tone as if talking about today's weather, "Indeed. Any problem with that?"

Considering it normally, Az and Liaris should think along common sense. It wouldn't be strange at all if they were hostile towards demons, or hated them. People, who received training as professional soldiers, should be able to swallow their dissatisfactions to some extent, and follow orders, but Liaris and Az were originally simple adventurers.

As Renya thought that it'd be troublesome though, if they refused to help because they disapproved of this whole endeavor, Az slowly shook his head after pondering about it for a short while.

"No, not in particular. I don't plan to hide my dislike of demons, though. Still...somehow that's very like you. I guess it's an action truly befitting a Lost."

Renya pondered whether he should actually take Az's assessment as praise or slander.

"This was meant as a praise, you know?" Az added as if having read Renya's thoughts.

"It doesn't really feel like praise though...well, whatever. The dragon you rode here is Dra-kun, right?"

When Renya asked this, believing that he should make sure of this as well, the dragon, who had waited motionlessly on the plaza, lifted his head faster than Az could answer, and moved his head up and down several times in Renya's direction.

'It seems he's nodding.

A saddle for two riders had been tied on his back, but because Renya had to secure a spot for all members when heading out to search, Frau removed the saddle and began to affix a new seat on Dra-kun's back. The members that would accompany him this time were Shion, Rona, Croire, and Frau, in addition to Az and Liaris - in total seven people with Renya.

You could have called this a number slightly unreasonable to be carried by just Dra-kun alone. However, now that Dra-kun's body, and thus his back as well, had grown, it appeared possible to somehow secure enough space for seven people, and Frau swiftly proceeded with the preparations.

"That's without a doubt Dra-kun. In the first place, it's not like Liaris can switch to another dragon, right?"

"He sure became big. Is he in his growth period?"

"I've got no clue whether dragons have something like a growth period..." Az answered without confidence while watching Dra-kun who was waiting obediently after having bedded his head on the ground again, apparently to make it easier for Frau to get her work done. "I don't know whether it's owed to better fodder or another cause, but either way, recently he's grown up quite remarkably..."

'Must be the fodder,' Renya judged. 'There's more than enough examples about reptiles growing big as long as they get enough good fodder. Dragons might be a type of reptile as well.'

It was unclear to him whether the categorization 'reptiles' existed in this world. Moreover, it was doubtful whether dragons could be labeled as such, but Renya didn't care since he wasn't a scholar to begin with.

"Oh well, it's a big help either way. I'm sorry to bring it up right after you got here, but I'd like to depart as soon as the preparations are done. Since we will hold back on hurrying with the preparations, take a rest at my mansion." Renya said after interrupting his thoughts about how great it was that he hadn't to call any other dragons due to lacking space on Dra-kun.

In response, Az asked with a curious look, "A rest is welcome. We'll fly as soon as you tell us to do so, but...is the provision of goods going to be okay? It's not going to be a day trip, is it?"

"Did you forget that I possess a void storage. I'll simply store all the goods in there. You don't need

to worry. We'll also prepare a tent for you two, including sleeping bags."

"We're not married yet, so sleeping in the same tent is a bit..."

When Liaris, whose face became redder than her armor, said so to Renya in Az's stead as he was at a loss for words, Renya was puzzled for a moment, then his throat began to tremble right away with him muffling a laughter. The surrounding female group and soldiers crowded the frozen Az and the bright red Liaris with broad smiles, fully intent on teasing them.