

Chapter 5 - It seems to be a Flight through the Miasma Forest

The preparations and rest took a bit of time, but in the end, Dra-kun had Renya's party get onto his back, and then took off from Klinge's plaza. Before their departure, Renya had offered Kilie to accompany them as well. However, Kilie readily refused, volunteering to stay back to watch Renya's home. Kilie said that she would immediately fly over if necessary, and Renya couldn't help but feel that she would literally do so if the need arose.

Dra-kun's take-off was quieter than his previous landing, but probably because of the big number of passengers on his back, he flew up with a speed that felt somewhat slow. He gained altitude while circling in Klinge's skies, and before long, he departed towards the demon country, located in the central area of this world, at a relaxed speed.

"As expected...I guess we're heavy."

Even Dra-kun, whose body had grown up considerably, had to labor away quite a bit to fly while carrying seven people. His flight speed was a lot lower when compared to Emedra and Rubydra, who Renya rode before. Renya believed that it might be owed to the weight of their luggage, but Liaris, sitting at the front with the reins in her hands, looked back, and denied his assumption.

"Dra-kun's speed is always around this fast, you know?"

"He's not slowed down? I feel that he's slow compared to the dragons that carried me before, though."

"Weren't they of a higher ranking dragon species than Dra-kun? Dra-kun's rank among the dragons isn't overly high to begin with. Above all, I think it's because he became slightly too big..." The rest of her words were mumbled, her obviously avoiding spelling it out clearly.

Renya wondered just what she might have meant with those ambiguous words, and immediately struck upon a possible answer.

"Is he slow because he's become fat?"

Dra-kun skilfully managed to make only his torso tremble with a start while continuing to flap his wings with loud whooshing sounds. Liaris only returned a weak smile at Renya without saying anything else.

Renya thought that her response already counted as a clear affirmation, but he decided to not deliberately probe any further as it was likely her kindness that kept her from voicing it out.

"In the first place, Dra-kun had been such an inferior specimen within his flock that he was chosen as a sacrifice for you, Renya, so it's set in stone that his food situation shouldn't have been all that great until he was caught."

While adding the unnecessary comment that Dra-kun might have been the only individual with inferior abilities as dragon when he was still with his flock, Az followed up on Liaris with something that didn't sound like a follow-up at all.

"His food worries disappeared thanks to becoming the dragon of Trident's dragoon, so it might not be all that strange for him to quickly grow up."

"Just be honest about it and call him fat ~no." Frau resolutely cut down Az's explanation, which he might have considered to be a backing of Dra-kun, with a short, decisive comment.

She had balled herself between Renya's legs who was sitting cross-legged on a seat affixed to Dra-kun's back. With her partway leaning her back against Renya's belly, Frau looked very comfortable, but the stabbing words leaving her mouth deeply penetrated Dra-kun's heart. While opening his muzzle as if crying out that he received a tremendous shock, Dra-kun's body stiffened up, stopping even the flapping of his wings, resulting in him starting to slowly lose altitude as he glided through the air.

"I-It's alright, Dra-kun! You might be big, but you're still cute!" Liaris frantically began to soothe him.

Since it wasn't as if a dragon was flying by flapping its wings, it wouldn't crash down right away just because its wings stopped moving. However, considering the fact that his altitude was visibly dropping, Frau calling him "fat" was apparently so devastating to him that it caused Dra-kun to forget about controlling his flight ability.

"Wouldn't it be fine to simply work out if it's so shocking to you?"

"For a dragon, you sure have a weak spirit ~nano."

"How about leaving it at that, you two? I mean, Dra-kun might truly be in his growth period..."

If this resulted in Dra-kun crashing after having become unable to keep flying, it could take a very bad turn for Renya and the others on his back. Thus Shion attempted to stop her lord and his silky as they started to gang up on Dra-kun, seemingly not minding that possibility at all.

No matter how rapidly her abilities might have developed most recently, she didn't have the confidence that she'd be able to remain unscathed when crashing from a dragon's flight altitude. Rona had been sitting in the seat next to Shion, but for some reason Rona maintained a vacant expression looking completely exhausted with her body wincing in response to something every now and then.

"Fat."

"Uuhh..."

"Corpulent."

"Uuhhh!!"

"Drooping, gaining weight, out of shape~"

"Uuggghh!!"

"Frau...can you stop messing with Rona? Somehow Rona's face is starting to look funny." Shion chided Frau with a sigh while patting Rona's back who had started to repeatedly quiver in waves, being at her wits' end.

In response, Frau stuck out her tongue without the tiniest sliver of guiltiness.

"Swinging between joy and sorrow over having little or much fat is only foolish." Sitting next to Renya, Croire said something oddly enlightening with understanding dyeing her voice as she enviously stared at Frau monopolizing Renya's lap. "A woman's worth isn't defined by the amount of fat on her." Croire put on a proud expression as if she said something great.

The looks of everyone except of Croire focused on a certain part of her body, and after averting their eyes all at once as if they had timed it, everyone besides her retorted in perfect unison, "*****Sure, sure, from your mouth to God's ears.*****"

"Wai-!? What's with that response!? Renya! Why are you averting your face with a faint smile? Frau, stop with that cheeky grin! Shion, can I have you stop patting my shoulder with a pitying look!? Rona, please stop nodding while grabbing my shoulder!"

"You guys sure are lively." That impression spilled out of Liaris' mouth after she had somehow managed to pacify Dra-kun while looking at Renya and his female companions who had started to loudly kick up a fuss over trivialities.

"We're going to trespass into the demon country soon. Is it going to be okay going at it with such a mood?"

"You see, Renya might unexpectedly be in a mood of going on a picnic."

Renya was obstinately gazing into the far distance as if to avoid looking into Croire's eyes, no matter what. Both Croire, who was grabbing his shoulder while trying to somehow make him turn towards her, and Frau, who was trying to somehow prevent Croire's from that, were keeping at it.

"Croire, Frau, stop acting so violently! We're high up in the sky on top of Dra-kun's back, do you understand that!?"

"Just ignore them, Shion. They'll probably get tired of this sooner or later." Rona started to hold back Shion, who had been trying to somehow separate the three squabblers, as she believed that it would just add one more squabblers to the mix instead.

While such things were going on, Renya's party continued their air trip. Although Renya had perceived Dra-kun as being slow, they still kept flying above the Miasma Forest at a reasonably high speed.

However, the Miasma Forest was extremely vast. Its scale wasn't so small that Dra-kun would be able to cross it one sitting, even if he flew while boosted by a dragon's stamina. The vastness of the forest, which had been isolating the demons from the other race's territories so as to make it impossible for both sides to easily invade each other, went far beyond Renya's imagination. Moreover, since flying after sunset would be accompanied by risks even for Dra-kun, Renya

decided to have Dra-kun land and pitch a camp when the sky started to grow dark.

It was only reasonable, but there was no way that a convenient landing spot for the huge frame of a dragon would exist in this deep forest.

"No choice but to clear a place by burning it down, right?"

"Let me at least give you warning..." Shion said with a lowered voice in response to Renya's attempt to get a confirmation. "...You're not allowed to have Dra-kun spit his fire after pouring your mana into like you did with Rubydra the other day, okay?"

"Huh?"

Having Renya stare back at her with a dumbfounded look, Shion furrowed her eyebrows, "We're inside a forest, you know!? Did you already forget the disaster last time? Renya, do you wish to turn this forest into a barren land of smoldering lava?"

"I thought we could neatly burn it down without the fire spreading, if we raise the heat?"

"Think about afterwards! There will be after-effects, right!? In the first place, how long do you think will it take for the temperature of a place that had been razed to the ground by a dragon's breath to drop low enough that we could use it for camping!?"

Rubydra's breath's heat had continued to smolder endlessly on the soil near the dragonoids' city, and it was only recently that the vicinity around there showed slow signs of recovery. Shion tried to make Renya recall those events, but Renya's reply widely deviated from what Shion had expected.

"If it's freezing sorcery..."

If Renya used the sorcery knowledge he had received from Emedra, and his own tremendous amount of mana, he would be capable of quickly cooling down an area that had been burned down by a dragon's breath. And if they were looking for an instantaneous solution, it would also be possible for Renya to splash freeze the ground after triggering the same downburst phenomenon he had used in the past right now and here.

"If you'd allow me to make a suggestion as a normal sorcerer," Az humbly interrupted their conversation, albeit likely not fully understanding what they were talking about, "I'd like to request that you choose a peaceful method, if possible."

"Do you have some kind of ingenious idea, Az-sensei?"

"Stop it with the sensei..." Az pulled a very gloomy face, and then started to ponder for a while. "I guess I'll handle it..." he said while originally wanting to save on wasting his mana.

However, he had apparently concluded that the most peaceful solution would be him using his own spell while taking into account to create a place that could be used to spend the night, seeing how the forest would be likely burned down to ashes by Dra-kun's breath if he were to leave this matter in Renya's hands.

"Liaris, please have Dra-kun drop his speed and altitude."

"Sure." Liaris responded curtly, and passed on the instructions to Dra-kun.

After confirming that the flight speed and altitude had started to slowly drop, Az picked up the wand laying at his side, closed his eyes, and focused his mind. Renya watched the whole process now that he had decided to leave it all to Az, seemingly because Az had suggested to do it himself.

"<Congregate mine power, oh hellfire, turn everything and anything into ash by devouring it in a maelstrom of raging flames>"

From the mana swelling up in Az, Renya knew that Az was apparently using a fairly powerful spell. The mana put into his chant immediately transformed into reality, rolling up a section of the huge forest in a tornado of big, crimson flames.

"A flame storm spell, eh? It sure looks pretty when seen from above."

The spell's scale covered a fairly huge pillar of flames, even when compared against Emedra's sorcery knowledge. Because it was for the sake of creating a landing site for Dra-kun, Az had invoked the spell after pouring a lot more mana than usual into it to enlarge its effective range.

The flame storm brewing brightly within the dark forest was a beautiful sight to behold in the eyes of Renya's party as they merely watched on from above, and that was the end of the story for them. However, probably because he had abruptly expended a huge amount of mana to enact the spell, Az leaned back against his seat while looking somewhat tired and worn-out as his breath heaved roughly.

"How much did you enlarge it?"

"I think around...64 times more than usual. I've turned a 4 meter circle into a 32 meter one. If we also consider that the fire should spread a bit, I think there will be enough space for Dra-kun to make his landing. I leave the fire fighting and cooling to you." Az answered Renya, sighing at the weak reaction to this feat of all present, including Renya.

Except for Liaris who didn't have much knowledge about sorcery, the other members likely didn't think anything of Az's words since they had been associating with Renya for a long time, allowing them to personally witness his crazy mana, but the number of sorcerers capable of pulling off what Az did should be fairly low, even across the wide human continent, and the true ability of Az, which allowed him to cast the spell without fainting on the spot, would make it actually proper for him to claim the title of strongest sorcerer on this continent. But, since he had someone, who could only be described as outlandish, right next to him, Az had completely ended up vanishing in their shadow.

"Okay, for the sake of cooling it down in one go, I'll use <Ice Storm> at full power..."

"Won't that make it impossible for us to land, even before needing to worry about cooling down the heat!?"

Shion grabbed Renya's neck from behind and frantically restrained him from starting to instantly

and chantlessly invoke a spell at the same level and scale as the one Az had somehow managed to cast after using a wand, which had the function to support the spell control, and using the proper spell chant.

Az couldn't help but clearly feel the abysmally deep difference in their abilities, but he also harbored a feeling that it was inevitable, seeing how the other party was Renya. Having a dire need to take a rest for now, Az averted his eyes from Renya, who was now being stopped by Rona from trying to cast yet another spell of aberrant scale, and breathed out very deeply, letting all power escape from his body.

