

## **Chapter 5 - Big Brother and Little Brother, Little Brother and Big Brother**

"Milord, today I'd like you to meet with a certain noble, if you could spare some time..."

The bellies of my wives have recently grown quite conspicuously. I spend every day being totally hyped hoping that my children might be born soon...and at the same time praying that the deliveries take place without any complications.

While I'm torn by such mood swings, Roderich shows up, informing me that a certain noble is requesting a meeting.

"The successor?"

"The family's head is sickly, resulting in the heir acting as his representative. In reality, you could essentially describe him as the current family head."

I suppose it'd be impolite if I don't personally meet with him, if he's basically the family head. Nobility is pretty much a pain when it comes to issues of status and honor.

"Is he one of our relatives?"

"He's the son and heir of the Viscount Madson House."

"I see..."

Well, even after asking, I've got absolutely no clue who's that supposed to be... My head still tends to heavily incline towards the thinking of a Japanese. Rather, noble names such as Konoe, Mushanokouji, or Imadegawa would probably be easier for me to remember.

Come to think of it, there are samurai in Mizuho, but none of them end their sentences on ~deojaru, or could be described as court nobles with white make-up and blackened teeth as they appear in TV dramas. Since I'd have likely become rude by bursting into laughter, if the samurai over there were like that, it's good that I've been spared from that embarrassment.

"He asked whether he could have around 30 minutes of your time for some light gossiping."

"I don't particularly mind if it's around that long, but why would he visit me for something like that?"

"It's because the territory of Viscount Madson is famous for its masonry..."

If one were to ask what makes masonry so important, it's the finely chiseled stone sculptures installed on top of bridge guardrails, or on roads to serve as distance markers.

A modern person might instinctively ask, 『Are those really necessary? Wouldn't it rather save on costs to do away with those things?』, but the common sense in this world dictates that architectural structures look bad without them.

The Viscount Madson territory has little agricultural land since it's full of rock mountains, but they're making good profit with the masonry that uses the stones they can easily procure locally. The stone quality over there is very good, and many exceptional artisans use those for their works.

The Baumeister Earldom also possesses an abundance of stones that can be used for stone pavings and buildings. However, we lack the craftsmen to process those stones. Even though we're trying to recruit such craftsmen left and right, there are still limits as to how many we can get. In the end, we've got not much choice but to nurture our own masons by having young, inexperienced crafters apprentice under retired, elderly masons.

In lieu, it means that we have to buy all the masonry works from the Madson territory until our craftsmen are far enough to stand on their own.

"Viscount Madson and his family have their own circumstances to worry about, too."

"Circumstances?"

"Yes, that place is in the middle of a dispute over the succession."

Tentatively, the oldest son, who's going to meet me today, has apparently been appointed as successor by the old Viscount Madson. However, it looks like he has an older brother who was born by a concubine.

"In that case, he'd ultimately be the only candidate for the inheritance, wouldn't he?"

In this world bloodline plays a very important role for the succession of noble houses. Unless there are some very extraordinary circumstances, it's set in stone for the eldest son of the first wife to inherit the peerage and land.

Still, if you look at the Browig Margraviate, it's obvious, when people disagree, it will develop into a dispute.

"For this reason, the heir wants to enjoy a good chat with you, milord, for the sake of thwarting the succession struggle at its root."

"Ah, as in getting some prestige to his name..."

Something like 『In fact, it's a meeting between two family heads, right?』. Or in other words, I'm supposed to give the heir his much needed legality.

"I've understood the circumstances now. Anyway, there must be some benefit in this for us, like getting a discount on masonry products or some such, right?"

"Yes, that goes without saying."

Nothing less of Roderich. It looks like he's negotiated with them in advance, procuring some nice benefits for the Earl Baumeister House. I mean, even I don't have the spare time to meet people for free.

In the first place, it's unthinkable that Roderich, who's stricter than me in such matters, would make a mistake in the negotiations.

"To be honest, that heir has a reputation for not being the brightest in scholarly abilities."

I've heard that houses with a reasonable standing have relatives and retainers run the territory's administration, treating the family head as a figurehead, if said family head isn't overly smart. This might be a similar case.

"I guess that means the sickly family head wants to give his stupid heir a chance to get some achievements, huh?"

Fully grasping the father's love for his son, Roderich skilfully used it to make some profit out of the situation.

Man, I gotta say, it's nice and easy to have Roderich take care of such things. Stupid figureheads rock.

"The audience is scheduled to last for two hours."

"Got it."

I swiftly proceeded with my preparation for the upcoming meeting, but at this point, I ran into a huge problem.



"Dear, it's impossible for Ina-san, Luise-san, Katharina-san and me to be present during the audience."

"Eh? Why?"

"Because our bellies are too big."

It's an audience for the sake of giving the other party some prestige, but it's somewhat of a custom to appeal that both sides share a close relationship by having the wives attend on such occasions. In reality, we don't know what kind of character the heir of the Viscount Madson House might have, though.

However, Elise refuses to attend the meeting. It's the same for Ina, Luise, and Katharina.

"Wend, it's normal for a husband to not have his wives appear publicly once their bellies become too big."

In this regard, the common sense of this world rather than the common sense among nobility comes into play. The assessment that it's bad for pregnant women to appear in public doesn't make much sense to me, though.

And although Ina informs me of it, she doesn't seem to understand the reason behind it either.

Maybe it originates from an old-fashioned folklore that pregnancy is impure, or the idea that it's very likely for a miscarriage to occur if a pregnant woman strains herself too much. Either way, Elise and the other three won't be able to sit in as their bellies stand out too much now since they've become pregnant first.

"What about you, Wilma?"

Wilma's belly is still small. She should be able to attend without any problem.

"Hm——m, difficult."

"Why?"

"I actually know the heir of the Viscount Madson House. It will definitely turn into a fight if we meet."

"A fight?"

Did something happen between them in the past?

"During my childhood, I had some arguments with him when he stayed at their mansion in the capital by chance."

Wilma was apparently ridiculed by him to be taciturn, unsociable, and gross during her childhood. After all, you can say that it's quite normal for stupid boys to tease girls, or he might simply be a guy with a bad character.

Hm——m, it's kinda difficult to judge which applies here.

"Since it's a story from my childhood, I won't say that I have any hard feelings left, but it might become an issue if I meet him again."

"Makes sense..."

Or rather, I'm going to have an audience with such a rude guy? While wondering whether that doesn't qualify as a bit of a problem, I gently stroke Wilma's head.

"I feel a touch of anxiety, but...maybe that guy has improved now that he's an adult..."

"He's evaluated to be an idiot because he hasn't."

"Figures..."

Wilma's way of talking is quite sharp, but she's not wrong about what she's saying. Now I've become slightly worried.

"In that case, the ones available would be..."

"It would be better for me to not meet with such an unpleasant fellow."

Of course it'd be impossible for Therese...

"Hubby, assuming that guy is really rude, it'll definitely be a bad idea for me to meet with him as I'd likely lash back at him right away."

Katia, no matter how much you don't want to meet with him, I think it's sneaky to use the reason that you'd immediately snap.

"That means, I'm left?"

"I think you'd be the safest choice here?"

Lisa is experienced as the oldest among us, and as long as she doesn't wear that outfit and make-up, the probability of her going on a rampage is close to zero. She might be able to deal with him skilfully as the wife of a noble.

"Rather, why do we have to worry so much over this anyway?"

"Ugh...I'm terribly sorry for causing you distress."

Even Roderich has probably agreed to the meeting with me only because he considered the possibility of the masonry trade being stopped if we dealt badly with the other party, but it looks like he's gradually becoming uneasy himself.

"If Lisa-san attends, it might alleviate some tension if I'm next to her as a maid?"

Amalie-san, I can fully understand the idea behind your words. It might be safer for many women to be present.

"You're probably right. I'll leave it to you then."

"But...somehow I have a bad feeling about all this."

I felt so as well, and in the end those worries turned into reality.



"It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Alban, the one designated to become the next Viscount Madson."

"(Designated? Ah, by his father, eh...?)"

As soon as the appointed time for the audience arrives, I receive the eldest son of the Madson House. He looks like he's around twenty. His appearance clearly gives me the impression of him

being a spoiled rich boy, but so far nothing out of the ordinary has happened.

Following social etiquette, he's only greeted me normally.

"Please, take a seat over there."

"Thank you very much."

After exchanging greetings, both of us sat down. Then I introduce my wife Lisa, and she sits down next to me. On the other hand, Alban hasn't brought a wife along.

As it looks like he'll be holding the official ceremony to succeed the family headship in a month with his father's sickness being rather bad, he's going to hold the marriage ceremony with his fiancée then. Doing the marriage and inheritance ceremonies at the same time seems to be for the sake of appealing to the fief's population and retainers.

"It might be humble, but please have some of our tea." Amalie-san says modestly, but since it's actually the new mate tea we procured from Helmut, it's a high-class tea.

I hear the guarding of the forest mate trees is becoming stricter as the manpower in the capital's Baumeister family grows, and with the number of trees increasing, the harvest of mate tea leaves has experienced a boost as well. We've procured some of it to offer it to important guests.

"It's a great mate tea. Is it a forest mate?"

Once Amalie-san pours tea in everyone's cup, wearing her maid uniform while at the same time acting as Lisa's helper, Alban notices that it's forest mate tea from just the aroma. He might own the ability to see through high-quality goods since he comes from a good family.

"By the way, who might be the person over there?"

"Ah, he's an attendant. Please don't pay any attention to him." Alban has brought a single youth as attendant.

At first I thought that he might simply be a butler or servant, but the face of this young man somewhat resembles that of Alban. Maybe he's the rumored elder half-brother.

"(What a nasty character!)"

Even though he probably could have had any servant accompany him, deliberately nominating his half-brother might aim at having him give up on the family head succession by clearly showing off the meeting with me.

But, wait a sec. If that's the case, is his half-brother actually someone overflowing with ambition?

I don't quite get the detailed circumstances, but in any case, the audience has started, just as scheduled.

"I'm deeply thankful to you for always providing your masonry products to my Baumeister

Earldom."

"My territory is also prospering from the sales to your earldom. It is us who should be thankful here."

Well, yeah, it makes sense. Since we're steadily building roads and bridges, a supply of masonry products is a constant necessity.

"I have also heard that your wives are soon going to give birth to children."

"Yes, it makes me somewhat worried whether the children will be born safely."

"I'm soon going to marry my fiancée as well. I might feel the same as you, Earl Baumeister-dono, once a child is on its way."

"(Huh?)"

Almost I unintentionally gasped audibly. Alban is supposed to be an idiot, but now that I'm talking with him, he's quite normal, isn't he? Why are those rumors about him going around?

"Seeing how the Earl Baumeister House is prospering and rising after being established by you in person, I think it would be great for you to have many children, Earl Baumeister-dono."

"Well, I'm doing my best."

"Having said that, when it comes to increasing the number of wives, I guess you also have to pay attention to the balance with Margrave Breithilde, your patron."

"Certainly..."

I've heard that he's stupid, but this young man seems to have properly investigated our background. I don't know whether he's done it himself, but it's a fact that he's properly informed about us.

"In such a case, the only option would be unofficial mistresses, huh? It'd be fine to simply have them give birth to children without increasing the count of official wives and lovers."

"Haah..."

Yeah, okay, that's something I hear often recently. Roderich blocks off all such talks, but such proposals seem to flow in without any end in sight.

Still, that's not a topic you'd actively broach while still being unmarried yourself, is it? Moreover, according to Roderich, it'd be a bad move for me to have such mistresses right now.

『Since it'd be noble daughters anyway, even if you had mistresses, they'd boldly demand under-the-table payoffs since they'd be related to you, if they gave birth to children. In such cases, it'd be better to have them officially acknowledged from the very start. Those saying that it's fine to keep it unofficial are usually scammers』

In other words, stories that sound too good to be true have their own snares. Or rather, for me that's not a good story at all.

My children might become magicians, no, according to Arnest, they'll definitely become magicians. If it's exposed that the children of my mistresses are magicians, things will become a major pain in the ass.

"No, I believe the current number of wives I have is plenty."

All of them are still young, and if each of them gives birth to around three children, we will have plenty. Besides, this isn't a 『TV documentary about big families of the Heisei era』. If I had this many children, I'd have trouble remembering their names and faces.