

## **Chapter 1 - It seems We Spotted Something Right Away**

"Renya, just what is that?"

The one noticing the abnormality was Croire, the only who didn't pay any heed to the uproar around her.

In the end, Renya won the contest of strength against Az. Although he put up a lot of resistance, Az quickly fainted after Renya firmly seized and put the screws on him. At present Liaris was desperately nursing him.

Almost all of the others wondered whether it was really alright for the dragoon to let go of her dragon's reins, and fully concentrate on the care of her lover, but since neither she nor Dra-kun seemed to mind, no one mentioned anything.

If you gave this a lovely and beautiful description, you could say both didn't need any reins or words as they were connected by deep bonds. However, if you were to be blunt about it, one could ask whether Liaris' presence was actually necessary at all.

'As expected, officially her presence is indispensable for situations where it becomes necessary to pass on Dra-kun's words to someone, huh?' Renya judged. Just as he was curiously looking at Liaris, who was bedding Az on her lap, while harboring such thoughts, Croire's voice pulled his attention back to reality.

"Even if you ask me, what do you mean with 'that'?"

The elves's racial trait was an exceptionally good hearing ability. It was considered to stem from their lives mostly taking place in forests. And in proportion to their good hearing, elves also possessed good eyesight. The most plausible theory about the elves' eyesight was that it had developed alongside their hearing, because it'd be pointless to be able to just hear something without being able to actually see it.

According to Croire, the elves connected to the royal family had especially good hearing and eyesight even among the elves, apparently because of their bloodline.

Renya had quite a bit of confidence in his own ears and eyes, but it was impossible for him to match Croire who appeared to have very fine senses even for an elf. The ones who might give Croire a run for her money were Frau, who boasted abilities outside any norm, and Dra-kun, whose race was in a different league altogether. However, seemingly not wanting to interrupt Croire unnecessarily, both of them didn't show much of a reaction to Croire's remark.

And given that Shion and Rona had decided to see where this was heading from the very start, only Renya was left as conversation partner.

"You can't see it, Renya? I mean 'that', look, it's just over there!" Croire appealed while raising her voice.

Renya strained his eyes, looking in the direction of her finger, but he couldn't find anything that

would justify Croire making such a big deal out of it. All he could perceive was Croire pointing in a slightly different direction from Dra-kun's flight path.

"It looks like something similar to a settlement, but smoke is rising over there." Croire explains to Renya who was starting to get irritated over his inability to see it for himself.

Carefully scrutinizing her words, he tilted his head in confusion as he couldn't find anything unusual in what she was saying. A settlement meant that people, demons, or something similar would live there. If someone were to live there, it'd be only natural for them to cook. He couldn't spot any abnormality in the fact of smoke rising from there.

The silly idea that elves might never have seen cooking smoke since they were living in forests crossed Renya's mind. However, there was no way for such an idiocy to be true. And even if it was, it'd have been impossible for Croire to not have seen cooking smoke since she had been living in Klinge for quite some time now.

"Smoke rising at a place where people live isn't anything unusual, is it?" Renya asked back in a bewildered manner while himself feeling that it was weird for him to become so worried about her insisting on something natural as being strange.

However, Croire shook her head, "It's not that kind of smoke. Umm...ah! Flames are blazing up!"

Croire, who had been fretting over the difference in eyesight between elves and humans, suddenly cried out in surprise. It seemed like the things she was talking about were currently occurring within her own visual field, but none of the human party members could confirm what she was saying.

"What are we going to do, Renya?"

As Shion asked him about his instructions, Renya started to ponder. Their goal on this trip was to find and secure Emil. Everything else was of no interest. He might get scolded if anyone heard his thoughts, but at present even the demon king didn't matter to Renya. Following that train of thought, it seemed to be the most reasonable choice to ignore the settlement and proceed onwards.

'However,' Renya thought, 'even if we plunge into it blindly, I feel like it'll work out one way or the other anyway. Besides, isn't it necessary to examine things now that we went out of our way to come to the demon country?'

"Dra-kun, Dra-kun," Renya called out to Dra-kun while slapping the back of Dra-kun with his hand.

Normally he should talk to him through Liaris, but she was currently absorbed in nursing Az, and didn't look like she had heard any of their words just now.

"I'd be sorry to interrupt your mistress in the middle of her business, so I'm asking you directly. Could I have you make a little side trip?"

Considering it normally, a mount with a master wouldn't ignore its master and listen to the orders of others. Much less so, if the mount were to be an intelligent dragon.

Renya had asked while expecting that his request would only have a chance of 20% to get accepted.

However, Dra-kun only looked back, glancing at Renya, roared powerlessly to show his reluctant compliance with the request, and slowly changed his flight direction according to where Croire's finger was pointing.

Renya couldn't really believe that any dragoon would be really fine with this, but since it was more convenient like this for him right now, Renya refrained from making any retorts.

"Eh? Huh? Dra-kun?" Seemingly having noticed that her dragon had begun to change its flight direction, as might be expected of a dragoon, Liaris was puzzled, but after sinking into silence for a short while, she agreed with a tone that sounded somewhat resigned, "Ah, if it's Renya-san's request, we've got no choice, I guess."

"No choice...?"

"You know, so far as it goes, you guys are the officially strongest combat force of the Trident Principality," were the words on the tip of Rona's tongue, almost slipping out.

That assessment had the attribute 'officially' attached to it. If you excluded that attribute, it was quite possible at the moment for Dra-kun's combat force to fall behind Rona's, depending on the situation and conditions. And yet it was very difficult to officially declare that the saint was stronger than a dragon if it came down to a showdown of single blows. It was also extremely difficult to talk about if one considered the mental image it'd produce. At the very least it was something that would never leave Rona's mouth.

Even while Rona was brooding over such matters, Dra-kun changed his flight path, heading towards the settlement indicated by Croire.

Thanks to the distance to their new target shrinking down after some time, Renya could also spot something like a settlement with his own eyes. That, which looked like a town when comparing its scale to what you'd find in human lands at the same scale, had definitely black smoke rising, just as Croire had mentioned.

"It doesn't really look like they are cooking something, does it?"

"Since the smoke is black...probably not."

"Since Croire mentioned flames blazing up, wouldn't it be some kind of conflagration?"

"Yeah, so?"

Renya was confused by Rona's guess. After all, the smoke, visible in the distance, gradually gained in thickness and force.

"They're demons right? I'd imagine that they can quickly put out such a fire with sorcery if needed?"

Quite a few spells usable for fire fighting existed. And even assuming that the fire wouldn't be controllable with sorcery, there were still plenty of ways to prevent a fire from spreading, Renya believed.

"Going by its appearance, it somehow looks like a fire that has been left to burn."

"...I can't see any people trying to extinguish it."

As expected of Croire who had better eyes than any of the humans present, she was apparently able to even see the situation on-site by now. It was just a tiny bit, but a faint trembling had crept into her voice, apparently because she understood just how abnormal the situation was.

"Even though it's burning so brightly, I can't see any people trying to escape or fight the fire."

"That sounds a bit too silly, doesn't it?" Az said, obviously unable to believe what he heard, while getting up from Liaris' lap.

When Az noticed how Renya looked at him with a gaze that implicitly indicated that Az sure understood the situation well despite having recovered consciousness just moments ago, Az nonchalantly but quickly stared in the far distance, trying to avoid Renya's eyes. That reaction in itself already served as confirmation of the doubt harbored by Renya, and it also resulted in the other members somewhat being able to grasp the situation, but because of his panic reaction, Az didn't realize that Renya had already noticed what was going on.

"Well, since it'd be troublesome if a living space were to burn down, even if it's that of demons, there's no way that they could ignore a fire."

"Still, according to Croire, no one is rushing over to extinguish it, nor is anyone running away from it."

"Wouldn't that simply mean that no one is there?" Shion mumbled under her breath.

It was an answer all of them had somewhat felt to be a possibility, and one they didn't really want to put in words as they didn't want to consider the implications.

"Huh? Did I say anything weird?"

"In case Shion-ane-sama's thinking proves to be correct, I can only think of two patterns ~nano."

While all of them sank into silence with frowns on their faces, Frau raised two fingers of her right hand.

"First, a fire broke out in a town that was uninhabited to begin with for some reason." Frau lowered one finger. "In that case, the question would be how the fire actually started ~no. The best outcome here would be a natural fire, but the chances for that are rather slim ~nano."

Reluctantly, Frau lowered the other finger, "Second, it was a normal town inhabited by people ~no."

"Eh?"

"That would be the truly nasty case ~no. In short, it'd indicate that all the residents disappeared for some reason within a time period where the town hasn't burned down completely while a fire was

still raging ~nano. Since that's definitely nothing that would happen naturally, it means that something, which erased all the residents, is in the vicinity of that town ~nano."

Shion envisioned the figure of something she somehow didn't quite understand herself. That figure suddenly appeared one day, somewhere in a town that had been peaceful until then. And then the demons, who should surpass humans by leaps and bounds if only speaking of their abilities, were attacked from below, behind and the front, being soundlessly annihilated by getting dragged into the ground, swallowed, and devoured. All that was left in the end was a lifeless, empty town.

"R-Renyaaa..."

"Come to think of it, Shion, you were really bad with ghost stories, weren't you...?"

Renya scratched his head with a troubled look as Shion clung to the hem of his clothes with teary eyes. The grip strength and physical power of Shion, which hadn't been so strong before, had recently reached a level you couldn't scoff at all. For Shion, who hated ghosts, the current situation of them heading to a town that might have something like that prowling within posed enough of a reason for her to completely lose her calm.

"Let's not go there, Renyaaa! It's a town full of ghosts! You can't cut ghosts down!"

"Let go of me, Shion!? Don't shake me! You're going to tear my clothes...hey, don't cling! It's not said that it's ghosts yet...it might be some kind of monster you can only find in the demon country, an outbreak of slimes, or some other reason... My neck! Don't pull on my neck! It's going to break! You're suffocating me!"

Because Shion tried to cling to Renya while making full use of her brute strength, he tried to somehow get away from her as he felt danger to his life.

Rona, who had been sitting next to Shion, had sensed the danger before the situation escalated, and had crawled on all fours along Dra-kun's back in order to distance herself from Shion.

On the other hand, Frau, who had been sitting on her usual spot between Renya's legs, was dragged and jostled around by their rampaging, but as she apparently intended to defend her place at any cost, she didn't show any intention to escape despite looking annoyed.

Shion put strength in her slender arms, which would make anyone wonder just where all that strength could be hidden, twining them around Renya's neck so as to not be shaken off while tightly pressing her eyes shut. Renya started to gradually look pale as he was strangled by Shion.

While sighing over a second uproar taking place on his back, wishing that they'd finally give it a rest with all the racket, Dra-kun kept flying towards the apparently deserted town just as he had been asked to, since no one stopped him from doing so.



"Just what the heck is this...?"

Renya had no clue how he should answer Rona's flabbergasted mumbling. Mostly because Shion was trying to suffocate him by clinging to his neck.

Once he told her that she should get behind him if she was going to cling anyway, since he wouldn't be able to move otherwise, Shion obediently did as told, put her arms around his neck from behind, and persistently remained there, closely glued to Renya's back.

For Renya she was no more than a simple, additional weight, but since she kicked up a fuss whenever he tried to tear her off, he reluctantly decided to leave her where she was, also somewhat owed to the sensation of her boobs being pressed against his back.

With Shion latched to his back, Renya got off Dra-kun, and surveyed the vicinity. They were in the central part of the settlement discovered by Croire, which very likely belonged to demons. Dra-kun had used a place similar to an open plaza as a landing point.

A part of his mind had worried how things would turn out if they landed right in the middle of the settlement all of a sudden. However, his thoughts about this had changed when he had Dra-kun circle above the settlement first.

As far as visible from above, this settlement, or rather, town lacked any and all presences of people - in short, it was deserted. If this had been a human town, just a dragon flying above them would have caused a huge panic, and yet, not a single soul came out to check what was going on.

As this was fairly weird, to say the least, he quickly scanned the town for a suitable landing spot for Dra-kun, which resulted in Dra-kun alighting on the central plaza.

'No matter what city it is, they all resemble each other for the greater parts,' Renya assessed. 'Even in Klinge, we've got a central plaza with around the same size, and just like back there, a water fountain has been installed in the middle of the plaza.'

They had set up such a fountain after Emil and Frau suggested that it'd serve as a place of relaxation for the residents, but Renya didn't really know how effective it was. What he knew were the plans to install something like a "Founding Lord Statue" in the fountain, which he personally and physically thwarted by heading over to the fountain and destroying the plan in its early stages.

While bitterly thinking, 'For heaven's sake, you never know what these girls are going to pull off if you leave them to their own devices,' Renya had jumped off Dra-kun's back. Looking down at Frau who had briskly walked over to him and was now tightly clinging to his waist on the right side, Renya pondered, 'Leaving that aside, you can only sum up the situation here as abnormal. The thick, black smoke rising at a place slightly away from the plaza must be the fire Croire had confirmed with her keen eyes. Even though it's been gaining in intensity all the while, there's absolutely no indication that anyone would try to extinguish it.'

No people screaming or yelling as you'd usually hear from places where fires were devastating the area. Only the flames' thunderous crackling and roaring could be heard within this otherwise deadly silent town. Renya couldn't find any term fitting this situation better than abnormal.

"The question is, what happened, right?" With a worried look and her long elven ears drooping

slightly, Croire placed a hand on Renya's left shoulder, opposite from where Frau was glued to him, and leaned in close.

Let alone being flanked by beauties on both sides, Renya had even a third beauty stuck to his back. However, as sad as it might sound, the lucky man himself only indulged in the thought just how difficult it was to move with all those weights dragging him down.

"I've got no idea. And since that's the case, let's try finding out. ...But, since it's somewhat difficult for me to move like that, I wonder whether you could let go of me anytime soon..."

"You haven't said anything like that to Shion-san, though..."

"That's clearly discrimination ~nano."

Renya only flashed a weak smile at Frau and Croire who separated from him while complaining in very bad moods. If he could, he'd love to say the same to Shion, however, in Shion's case it'd turn into a major pain if he did so and tried to get her off his back. After all, it'd be a bad joke if the town got completely wiped out just because Shion went berserk because of her fear towards ghosts. And the frightening part was how Shion was actually quite capable of it.

"How about I hug you from the front, if you have problems keeping your balance?" Rona teased with a grin.

Renya reacted by shooing her away with his hand. Just Shion's boobs were already quite something, but Rona's boobs would pack a completely different kind of punch. Having Rona's boobs pressed against him from the front would easily erase any reasoning in Renya, before he could even worry about an inhibition of his movements and all that. [efn\_note]The author uses "goods" instead of "boobs", but tbh, I can't be arsed to go along with the Japanese prude way of not naming things out of some kind of shame or modesty issues. It loses its comical part after the nth time.[/efn\_note]

"It sure is difficult to be a popular guy, isn't it?"

Liaris was closely snuggling up to Az who had called out to Renya with a smile full of sarcasm. Renya was definitely in the mood of retorting with a teasing of his own, but with him still allowing Shion to cling to his back, it'd lack persuasiveness.

Reluctantly Renya limited it to just sending a glare Az's way, and then called out to his friends after looking around him.

"Let's try to investigate things a bit since I feel like something weird is going on here. Az, Liaris, you stay here. Secure our path of retreat together with Dra-kun. If you notice anything odd, call us over by firing one shot of your breath."

Everyone except for Renya smiled wryly at the exceedingly flashy way of giving a signal. Dra-kun struck the plaza's stone paving with his tail as if to indicate his understanding.

"Be careful where you shoot that breath, okay? If you should fire it our way, roasted dragon tail will be on the menu for today's dinner, got it?"

Dra-kun's expression froze upon Renya's warning. Liaris laughed while consoling Dra-kun who repeatedly nodded his head to make clear that he comprehended.

"Don't worry. He's going to aim for the sky."

"Okay, I leave it to you. It'd be no joke if we were to pass on to the netherworld because of friendly fire."

It wasn't as though Az didn't wonder, 'Would you actually die from something at the level of a dragon's breath,' but being aware when to speak up and when to better stay silent, Az chose the latter.

By the way, since a dragon's tail would fully grow back after being cut off, Az also harbored the quite evil thought that it wouldn't really matter to lop it off in the worst case.

As there was no reason for him to know what Az was thinking, Renya took the other members with him after entrusting the plaza to the three, first heading towards the area where the fire appeared to burn.

"It's burning quite profusely ~no."

The area under fire was a district with what seemed to be residential houses lining up. It wouldn't be funny for them to get enveloped by the flames while they were checking the cause near the conflagration. Thus Renya decided that it'd be better to put out the fire first.

Even if it was easy to talk about putting out the fire, he had no other options but to either extinguish the flames by drowning them in lots of water or to wait for the fire to die out after all the burnable objects had fallen prey to it. Renya pondered which he should choose here.

"Are you going to handle it, Renya?" Since Croire had asked him, albeit with a somewhat worried look, Renya nodded. In response, Croire continued while remaining uneasy, "Could I have you give up on that..."

"Why? Is there some problem with me doing it?"

Croire's expression transformed into an apologetic one when Renya asked back.

"Yes, I mean, if you get involved with this...it seems like the town would be extinguished alongside the fire."

Being seriously told so with a grave expression, Renya was about to protest, but when he looked back at his actions so far, he realized that it might only be natural for her to tell him off. Renya himself was clearly aware that he'd caused quite a bit of damage all over the place thanks to him expanding huge amounts of mana without any restraint. Probably because he wasn't a professional sorcerer, he ended up causing devastating destructions on a large scale, no matter what he did, and when it came to finer spellwork, he tended to experience a significant drop in precision. He harbored the idea that it'd be fine now that he owned the dragons' sorcery knowledge, but once he assumed that the accumulation of all his previous transgressions was the main cause for Croire's current expression, Renya couldn't possibly file an objection.

"Ugh..."

"Okay, then it's Frau's turn!"

"You would knock down the whole region straight to hell if you tried to extinguish the fire, right?"

Being flatly shot down by Croire, Frau tried to argue, but immediately averted her eyes for some reason, and stepped back while mumbling something under her breath with her face cast down.

While believing that she must be thinking the same what he had thought moments ago, Renya gently stroked Frau's head to comfort her.

"Two peas in a pond consoling each other, how touching."

"That's really terrible of you, Croire! I'm going to send you back to that emperor of yours!"

Seemingly unable to ignore how Frau buried her face in his waist, Renya raised his voice at Croire who went for the finishing blow. Reacting to that, Croire asked Renya while keeping her serious look, "Would it really be fine for the current me to go back to the elven country?"

"...Mmh?"

"I have mastered such strong powers that finding an elf who could oppose me in all of the elven empire would prove to be rather difficult."

'Judging by her strength back when the wall surrounding the demon country was destroyed, that might not be bragging or anything, but a simple fact,' Renya thought.

"In that case, if you were to forcibly send me back to the elven country...I'd kill that retarded father of mine...err, His Majesty the Emperor, and take over the country for myself."

"Wait, wait, wait! What's with all that dangerous stuff you're bringing up here!?"

"It's because I would immediately start a war against the human nations once I usurped the empire's throne, you know? That war would be noted down as <Margrave Renya Kunugi Recapture Campaign> in the elven history books. On my special authority as empress."

"As if I'd allow you to use my name for such a fucked up military campaign!"

"Please let me stay at your side properly then." Completely switching away from her serious expression, a beautiful smile bloomed on Croire's face.

Just going by her appearance, she looked like a lovely fairy, but Renya couldn't help but spit out a deep sigh after realizing that the same abysmal darkness dwelt inside Croire as it did in Frau.

"...Okay, it's your win. But, you being unable to entrust the fire to Frau or me means that you can do something about it yourself, right?"

"Of course, please leave it to me, Renya."

While believing that she should have simply said so from the get-go if she wanted to take care of it herself, Renya decided to entrust the extinguishing of the fire to Croire.

"Okay, I'll start the ceremony of praying for rain, passed down among the elves since ancient times."

"And when is the rain going to start with you doing something like that!?"

"It's a joke. I'm just kidding."

"Man, just give me a break with all the jokes..."

"I believe jokes are necessary to enrich a conversation."

Once Renya glared at Croire while wondering whether her previous usurpation story really followed the intent to enliven the conversation, she ignored his glare, and simply stuck out her tongue at him. The gesture itself was adorable, but he couldn't quite laugh at it.

"Let's see... <Offering my power, I pray to the Queen of Blue Ice - peacefully take everything into your gentle embrace, erasing all sounds from existence>."



The chant was long, and the longer the chant, the stronger the power and range of a spell. In a hurry, Renya rummaged through his draconic sorcery knowledge, looking for the spell Croire had started to chant. The spell Croire had driven against the barrier wasn't known by the dragons, but this time he immediately found the corresponding spell.

It was the high-ranking ice spell <Ice Casket>. A spell used to enclose its target in ice that wouldn't melt. As long as no dispel spell was used, the target would remain locked up in ice for eternity. Still, at the very least it was no magic you'd use to extinguish a fire.

Since it was a powerful spell, no matter how you looked at it, Renya considered stopping Croire for an instant, but this was a demon town, and since the cause for the fire should have already burned down anyway, even if they were to look for it, it should only return the situation to them not knowing what might be best to investigate as they wouldn't learn anything new even if they did examine the site.

Believing that it'd be better to prioritize extinguishing, or rather, stopping the fire from spreading in this case, Renya opted to let Croire do what she wanted to do.

"<Lock it up, Ice Casket>"

At the same time as she finished the spell's chant, blue ice protruded from the ground, where the fire was ravaging furiously, and began to freeze fire and buildings, obviously lumping them together into one. In defiance of the fire's vigor, the area specified by Croire continued to be enveloped in thick layers of ice, and a little while later, completely covered the whole site where the flames had rampaged.

Seemingly unable to exist within the ice, the flames were completely extinguished, leaving only the frozen buildings visible across the transparent layers of ice. Seeing the result, Croire breathed out deeply.

"How about this? Perfect, wouldn't you say?"

"...I don't feel any sympathy since it's a demon town, but it'll likely be a chore to make this subside."

In front of the new mountain of ice, Croire pressed her hands against her hips, donning a triumphant look, whereas Rona very honestly stated her impression while looking up the mountain of ice.

Of course, if a mountain of ice suddenly rose high up into the sky in a section of a town, the temperature would naturally fall in its vicinity. Given that the fire's spread was wide, one could call it inevitable, but while feeling unpleasantly cold beneath the huge block of ice, Renya started to follow the silly question whether the cause for Shion's trembling might be her fear of ghosts or this mountain of ice in his mind.



Now that the fire was extinguished, even if it didn't take the aftermath into account, Renya's group split up while not separating too far from each other, and started to investigate the area, resulting in

them frowning at the situation. When Renya saw that all people had vanished from the town, he had wondered whether this was a mystery case like the Mary Celeste incident in his previous world. However, after getting close to a residential house, which had been spared by the flames, to investigate it, he realized how wrong he had been, after spotting the distinct traces remaining in the building.

If he were to describe those traces, only the term 'atrocious' would fit the bill.

No entrance door, no windows - almost everything that looked destroyable in a place similar to an entry hall had been trashed. And as if that wasn't enough, there were many places where even the walls had been smashed down. Once he went inside, he could see that everything definable as furniture had been pulverized, and plenty of bloodstains were left on what used to be furniture. It clearly told him that some kind of disaster had happened here.

If only for that, it would be possible to assume the viewpoint that some large bandit group - assuming something like that existed among demons - or something else had attacked and wrecked the town, but apparently believing that this viewpoint wouldn't work, Renya headed deeper inside, and then tilted his head in confusion after seeing the situation.

"Are demons actually quite greedy or something?"

It was only understandable for Renya to mutter such a question.

When speaking of things that would be commonly plundered by bandits and their ilk, it'd be valuables or maybe people to be used as labor slaves. However, the interior of the building Renya had entered was completely cleaned out. Other than fragments of the destroyed furniture on the floor, all daily life items such as clothes, food, cookware, and tableware, which should be necessary for people to lead a normal life in the house, were gone.

"For the time being..." Renya looked over his shoulder, at the reason for his back still being weighed down.

By the way, because Frau was still clinging to his right waist, which caused Renya's mobility to be extremely limited, he sensed the acute danger that they'd be in a dire pinch if they were to be attacked by something under these circumstances.

"Shion, it doesn't look like ghosts have anything to do with this."

"Really? Are you absolutely sure? It's not that you're only pretending for it to be so while the contrary is actually true?"

Renya rolled his eyes, believing that there had to be a limit to her doubting him, but while thinking that Shion's fear might look too excessive in his eyes, and yet might appear as very reasonable in Shion's eyes, since everyone had things they were bad with, Renya gently tapped Shion's head as she didn't even try to lift her face, keeping it buried between his shoulders.

"If this was caused by ghosts, they could have entered the building without needing to destroy the entrance, right? Since everything had been destroyed so thoroughly, and seeing how anything and everything had been removed from here, this is the deed by something capable of swinging a sword,

which is definitely not a ghost."

"Isn't it possible that it was destroyed when the residents were kidnapped?"

Even while harboring a weird admiration for her to be quick-witted enough to make such a retort, Renya denied that question, "Assuming that was the case, I don't know of any ghosts who would steal everything, including livingware, do you?"

"You might be right."

Due to Shion's reply, Renya held a faint hope that he might be able to resolve the issue of the weight on his back. However, that hope was immediately crushed.

Shion, who had pondered for a second whether she should get off Renya's back, pressed her face against Renya's shoulder, and said, "But, you might also be wrong."

Renya gave up on her as a lost cause. Now that the button had been pressed with Shion, it seemed ridiculously difficult to turn her fear off.

Probably believing that he just had to move with her latched onto him in the worst case, Renya decided to not think any further about this matter, and shifted his eyes to Frau at his hip next.

"Frau, why are you glued to that place again?"

"It's unfair for only Shion-ane-sama to stick to you ~no."

Renya didn't quite understand what she meant with unfair. He really didn't, but believing that there might be some unfairness involved if Frau said so, Renya decided to go along with her without probing any further.

"Oh, I see...so where did Croire and Rona go?"

"The two have teamed up to investigate another building ~nano. Besides the worry that the two might start to fight and cause even more damage to the surroundings, I think they will be fine ~no."

Renya had an urge to retort with "Just how's that going to be fine?", but the combination of a slim elf and a voluptuous human sounded strong as long as their proportions fitted perfectly. However, he also felt like the damage to the surroundings would become extensive, if they should fight each other.

Believing that they should wrap up the investigation quickly before anything like that happened, seeing how there wasn't much information to be gained anyway, Renya tried asking Frau about her opinion now that they had looked at the actual site.

"Frau, do you sense anything?"

Renya pointed at the emptied house, the fragments scattered all over, and the bloodstains left here and there. Those were about the only clues they had to work with. Renya guessed that the raging fire, which was extinguished by Croire, had spread from one of the houses that were wrecked like

this with a splinter or something else acting as a trigger.

"I think there's no doubt that they were attacked by something ~no." Frau cast her face down as if to gather her thoughts.

However, her expression was gloomy and depressed as she apparently didn't possess much confidence in her own words.

"But, if you were to ask me what it was that had attacked them, I couldn't tell. Either way, we lack too much evidence here ~no."

"Makes sense, I guess."

All that was left were the buildings, some fragments and bloodstains. It'd be asking too much to demand an educated guess from just those.

"But, I have a hypothesis I'd like to tell you, master ~no..."

Frau added to Renya, who had been wondering whether they should leave, with her face still showing her lack of confidence.

"If Kurz-kun were to attack some city without any restriction, I think it'd turn out just like here ~no."

The name of the human hero, who stayed back in Klinge, suddenly popped up. Outwardly he looked like a boy, but his insides were an aggregation of chaotic power created by Frau - something Renya couldn't grasp at all. Still, Renya could easily imagine that the thing, which currently looked like it had settled down in the personality called Kurz as focal point, might be able to randomly swallow about everything that it could get hold of, be it living beings or inanimate objects, in case he went berserk for some reason and attacked some city.

However, Renya would immediately deny it, if someone used that as a reason to claim Kurz to be the criminal in this case. Kurz should be right now in the middle of watching Renya's home, far away from Renya's current location. Even if he had sneaked around behind Renya's back, passed through the Miasma Forest, and arrived at the demon country, Renya couldn't imagine how Kurz should have been able to get ahead of them to attack the town here.

Renya started to ponder about other possibilities, and then, after some time, frowned at the possible explanation he had reached.

"Does that mean there's a being similar to Kurz on the demons' side?"

"It's just a possibility ~nano."

Considering that any further investigation would likely serve no purpose, Renya left the building, stepping out onto the garden.

Frau continued to speak while remaining stuck to Renya waist, "Even though I can hardly believe that there are several beings completely removed from the logic of this world like you, master."

"Hey, just a moment there, girly!"

"Frau is a being following the logic of this world, so it wouldn't be strange for another Frau to exist somewhere ~no."

Frau completely ignored the protest of Renya who had heard something he couldn't leave unchecked. While at it, Frau smoothly appealed that she adhered to common sense.

'I'm the wrong guy to claim this, but if two silkies like Frau were to exist in this world, the world would definitely get destroyed, even before any destruction triggered by lack of resources, the demon king, or the goddess' whim,' Renya assessed.

However, as Frau could say the same about Renya, he wondered whether he really was a being deviating from the world's common sense so much.

"Isn't this a classic case of both sides being wrong?" Shion whispered behind Renya.

Due to Shion's comment, which anyone would be able to immediately agree with, Renya glared at her over his shoulder, and Frau scowled up from his waist. In the next instant, Renya and Frau started to try tearing off Shion, who had wrapped her arms around Renya's neck, from his back, but Shion determinedly resisted this, freely using the full strength of her arms, legs, and the rest of her body.

"G-e-t o-f-f ~n-o!"

"I won't! And if I say so, it'll be so!"

"L-e-t g-o-o-o ~n-o!"

"I won't!"

"Stop it, Frau. Don't pull. If you pull it that way...my neck...my neck will!"

Once Frau pulled at the struggling Shion, somehow trying to tear her off, Renya's neck got naturally wrung in return. Moreover, because Shion put power in her legs, which were coiled around his waist, he started to scream due to the unreasonable pressure applied on his ribs and internal organs.

"Strangled...i-it hurts..."

Twisting his body to somehow get out of the situation of him being choked, Renya walked several steps as if being drawn into the direction of Frau's pulling, and then fell down after stumbling over some protrusion of the ground. Normally Renya would have immediately fixed his posture after tripping over something like that, but as he couldn't deal with this on top of being pulled by Frau and strangled by Shion, he tumbled down.

Two screams could be heard: Frau who had been pulling Shion, and Shion who was pulled by Frau. As for Renya, he was in a state not allowing him to make a voice at all.

"Ouuuccchhh...hmm?"

Having had her back knocked against the ground, Shion tried to stand up while groaning from the backache, just to notice Renya being frozen with his face thrust into her chest. Hence, the reason why Renya couldn't speak up was due to his face being buried in Shion's cleavage. Resulting in him starting to suffocate for a completely different reason than before.

Frau, who had fallen on her backside in a place slightly away from the other two, probably because of the force, yelled loudly as soon as she noticed the state over there, "He was a lucky pervert ~nano!?"

"Just where did you learn such words, Frau...?"

With her cheeks blushing faintly, despite being shocked, Shion gently pushed against Renya's shoulder so as to lift his face. Thanks to Shion's help, Renya managed to get his face out of her cleavage. Having a bright red face, Renya stood up while calming his rough gasping. Neither Shion nor Frau knew whether the flush of his face originated from embarrassment or being almost choked.

"I thought I'd die then and there..."

"Isn't it the dream of every man to die between the breasts of a woman?"

"I still have some things left to do in this world." Renya got up while bitterly answering Shion who joked around as she stood up while fixing her clothes that had become disheveled after Renya thrust his face into her cleavage.

Renya thought that he had to thank Shion for not teasing him about the situation when he fell into her. After all he'd be troubled how to answer, if she grilled him about how he liked the touch of her boobs or some such.

"However, what made me trip?"

Walking was a very important element in any martial art. Most people simply walked without being conscious of it, but to perfect a proper walking method was originally a very important technique. Renya was well aware of that. He should have paid plenty of attention where he was treading, but admonishing himself over possibly having not been careful enough as he didn't concentrate because he had been messing around too much with the other two, Renya stared at the place on the ground where his foot got stuck, and widened his eyes when he caught sight of what he found there.

'I've very likely scooped out the ground with my feet a bit at the moment I fell down.

That, which could fleetingly be seen within the grouted ground, was so clearly the finger of a person that there couldn't be the slightest doubt about it.