

Chapter 301 - Contact and Princess

"Are you the spearmaster?", asks the handsome man with a somewhat high-pitched and hoarse voice

His hair is swept back all the way, he has long eyelashes, and jet-black eyes. The black mantle draped over his body suits him well. It appears that he owns Demonic Eyes, but what draws my attention even more than his eyes is the circlet on his forehead. That thing's out of the ordinary, containing a huge amount of mana.

The decoration in the center of the circlet looks like some griffon, or a falcon.

He looks fairly strong to me.

"...I am, but why do you ask?"

『Your Excellency, the circlet on his forehead is similar to the necklace sealing Magit』

『Oh, so it's sealing something within, as expected, huh?』

『Yes』

Helme confirms my suspicions. And even the people behind and next to him...they're observing me.

There's a guy clad in a set of steel armor. His head is covered by an iron mask. I can't tell his expression, but the face's shape seems rather decent.

Mana dwells in the three eyes of the catwoman. No clue whether those are Demonic Eyes, but she's probably using some kind of ability. Because of the bulging chest armor, it's obvious that she's a woman. Still, is she measuring the combat distance? She's got the aura of a martial artist as she faintly shifts her feet.

The guy who's fully covered in armor...also has a slightly different way of walking than the others. It doesn't merely stem from the armor weighing down on him, but also from him being well versed in martial arts.

Thereupon, the guy in their middle speaks up again, "...My name is Garlo. I'd like to have a short chat with you. Could I have you come with me?"

Garlo-san, eh?

"Please wait a moment."

Looking back, I let my eyes wander across my bloodkin and the members of Remains of the Moon.

"Nn, against it."

Not only is Eva against it, she even releases a faint layer of her violet mana on the ground in front

of her, apparently thirsting for battle.

Garlo, the catwoman and the armored guy openly show their wariness of the mana creeping across the ground like a shadow, stepping back once, then twice.

"I don't really mind." Yui agrees, but places her left hand on the leather wrapping decorating the hilt of Fierce God - Spirit Wind, grasping the scabbard's cord.

She hasn't activated her Eyes of Baycala, but from her stance...she makes her intent of being able to draw her magic katana at any moment pretty clear.

"Guildmaster, please decide yourself."

"Master, is it okay for me to bring out the simple golem?"

"If we're going to fight, I'll skewer 'em with my blood swords."

Mel, Mysty, and Veronica seem to be eager for battle, too. Mysty and Veronica nod at each other.

"Master, they're a dark guild. Although they've been abiding to this being neutral ground since we're in the middle of the auction, it's still just a verbal promise. It might be a trap."

『It's as Viine says. I'm against it. They might attack you』

Helme agrees with Viine's grave words.

"The Blood Beast Corps will follow your instructions."

"I want to be of help to my elder sisters."

"...I'll prove my worth to you, Master."

"I am rather curious about the new combat slave."

Mamani and Fuu's eyes become bloodshot. Souther exchanges looks with Yui and Viine. In the middle of that, Bia scrutinizes Azure-kun, extending her long, narrow snake tongue.

"You are interested in me?"

"Guuh, that is my way of address you are using." [efn_note]Azure-kun uses "waga" to refer to himself. It's a rather formal, proudful way to address oneself, often used by nobles, knights. Bia has always been using it, but since English doesn't really have so many different words for "I", I've been trying to keep her speech pattern a bit more formal instead, knightly so to say. But well, my English skills...[efn_note]

Half of the eyeballs on Azure-kun's ring head turn in Bia's direction.

The responses of everyone are all different across the board.

Thereupon, "...Spearmaster, this is no trap." Garlo explains.

At the same time, the gem eyes embedded in the falcon's head on the circlet shine suspiciously.

"It's simply an invitation to see whether you wouldn't be willing to become a member of Shadow Wings."

He plans to recruit me? But, even if he asks me to become their friend all of a sudden...I'm already surrounded by my own friends.

Therefore, "...Impossible."

"I understand——" Garlo turns on his heels, making his black mantle flutter while being all smiles.

Taking his comrades along, he leaves us. I don't know what organization they belong to, but they withdrew quite easily.

"He invited you while being well aware of you being a guildmaster and leader?"

"Probably."

Rebecca looks puzzled. While coiling a brown cloth around her fists, she says, "Humph, what a weirdo," and starts shadow-boxing then and there. Or to be precise, thrusting her hands out.

On the other hand, Veronica's eyes become bloodshot as she declares, "I actually wanted you to tell them to submit to us instead," while thrusting out one arm, and pointing her index finger at me with a cute pose.

Her face is that of a vampire, but she's likewise a beauty. Since she's bewitching in her own way, she's attractive.

"Veronica, don't get ahead of yourself. Guildmaster has to take care of his new slave, and there's also tomorrow's second part, so he certainly doesn't want to increase his workload unnecessarily," Mel says in my stead.

"Well, Vero-cchi always gets carried away. However, it's also true that those guys felt like skilled fighters. Though it kinda pisses me off that they ignored us."

Mysty nods at Bennett's words, and adds, "It looks like they planned to only invite master from the start. I'm curious about that armored person. I want to touch and melt his armor as I couldn't determine what metal was used for the armor at a glance."

Though I'd consider it pretty amazing if she could actually melt the armor in the middle of battle. Mysty must be imagining what to do after having won, I guess.

"Nn, since I felt mana from it, it might be Refined Demonic Steel."

"I see. If that's what you sensed, I'll be able to absorb that metal if I manage to touch it."

"You two always immediately delve into talks about metals..."

"Oh my, Yui, you've also been paying attention to the longswords of the catwoman, haven't you? Especially the high-quality sword at her hips."

"You noticed, eh? Yep, it might be a katana similar to Spirit Wind. Besides, the other three swords don't seem to be normal swords either. I wonder what kind of battle is going to unfold if we cross blades...I want to test out how far my dual-wield style is going to take me."

"...Guildmaster, your family members are as belligerent as Vero-cchi, aren't they? The only composed ones are Mel n' me..."

"N, nyaa."

Rollo transforms into her horse lion form after Bennett's comment.

"Rollo-sama, you want to say, 『Me too nya』?"

"No, I'm sure it's simply something along the lines of 『I want to climb on Popobumu's head nya』 after getting back home."

"Nah, isn't it 『I want to play with the cats on the courtyard nya』?"

Afterwards, all of them start to quarrel over what Rollo might have meant with her meowing.

"Maybe——" After jumping on Rollodeen's back while laughing, "Azure-kun, whom I bought only moments ago, is with us as well, so let's head back home at a relaxed pace. I'd like to confirm whether the guys from just now are going to tail us," I say while staring at Azure-kun. Since I've already formed a contract with him, the collar around his neck has been removed, but now a slave mark is visible on the upper part of his chest.

However, except for his talk with Bia, Azure-kun doesn't seem willing to speak much...despite having a mouth.

"...Understood. For the time being, our tracking experts..." Mel turns her eyes towards Bennett and Veronica.

"Yeah, yeah, time for work, gotcha."

"Let's do our best at work♪"

Bennett and Veronica nod at each other, and then high five.

"Guildmaster, I'm going back to my office since I've got to work out some finer details, besides the alliance's coordinated conference, with the members of Bloody Stars Sea. See you again tomorrow when the second part starts here."

"Roger, see you tomorrow."

"Guildmaster, see you, we're going to shadow the other guild."

"Veronica, the other party is an unknown dark guild. Contact me at once through a blood message if something happens."

"Are you worried about me?"

"Of course I am."

"Awww~ Mel, did you hear? Is it alright for me to pass on work and have a date with guildmaster?" Veronica asks Mel after whirling around on the spot as if dancing.

"...Hee." Mel looks at her with a freezing gaze and attitude.

Seeing that, Veronica's body jumps with her face cramping up, "...Don't give me such a scary face. I'll do my job properly, oki?"

"Good girl, as long as you get it, all's fine." Mel smiles all over her face, having changed her expression in an instant.

"Yep♪ Anyway, guildmaster, everyone, see ya~♪"

"See you."

"Nn, lively Vero-senpai, bye."

"Bye bye, do your best, oki~?"

Eva and Rebecca wave lightly, cheering on Veronica. Veronica looks back to us, and leaves together with Mel while waving her hand.

"..." Viine observes the whole scene quietly.

"Since the number of allied guilds has increased for Remains of the Moon, their workload might have gone up as well." Mysty mumbles while staring at the entrance door of the mansion Mel and Veronica had entered.

"It sure looks like they've got to work out the fine details of the agreement. I'm going to have a meeting with Lezalaysa after the auction is over, too."

"The Dignified Heaven's Shrine, was it? I've heard that name before."

"Mirai mentioned that it's the exclusive inn of the Eight Lights."

"I've heard about that inn. The owner should be a S-Rank adventurer." Rebecca comments.

"Hee, if the landlord is an S-Rank adventurer, it should be very reassuring for the inn's customers."

"I happened to see that inn from afar. It stands out as there aren't that many long buildings in

Pelneet's east."

Eva's restaurant is in the east as well.

"Okay, let's go home. Azure Hundred Demon, you come as well."

"——Kakaka. Yo, Remains of the Moon." A characteristic voice addresses us

It's the leader of Noctal's Oath, Hogbar Shafeed.

"Do you have some business with us?"

Hogbar and his underlings approach us, acting overly familiar. He's also dragging the woman with the collar along.

"Ya the spearmaster, Shuuya Kagari, the leader of **【Remains of the Moon】**, right? The perpetrator who created the four-guild alliance Bloody Stars Sea Moon consisting of Bloody Long Ears, **【Assembly of the Stars】**, **【Sea King Hornet】**, and **【Remains of the Moon】**."

Four-guilds alliance? Bloody Stars Sea Moon? Did they give it such a name?

"It simply turned out like that. So, what's your business with us?"

I wonder why he's put a collar on that woman.

"Hmm? Ya interested in this woman?"

"——Kyaa, gueehh."

Pulling on the chain again, he makes the woman fall over, and kicks her belly. Treating a precious woman...he's getting on my nerves.

"...Shuuya, angry..."

"...His eyes...let's pull back a bit."

"Yep, master is scary..."

Feeling my rage, my bloodkin's faces become ghastly pale. They retreat from Rollodeen. It's only natural, but...it looks like my anger has shown on my face. Treating this guy politely is a waste.

"Can you not bother me with your hobbies?" I glare at Hogbar.

"What, ya quite the funny guy. Ain't that completely different from how ya acted during the meeting?"

I don't know what's so funny about it, but Hogbar laughs as he looks at my face. However, as he's apparently alert, he gathers mana in his left shoulder. Protuberances appear from the mantis-like, white compound eyes located on the spikes protruding out of his shoulder. Moreover, his upper left

hand clasps a staff with a bladed stake while he holds a clock-like magic tool in his lower left hand.

I guess both are magic items. Has he been hiding them under his sleeves? Or he might have retrieved them from a bracelet-shaped item box.

"...Take a guess. I told you that I don't want to watch your hobbies, didn't I? Are you deaf or something?"

"Kakaka, you pack quite some force. No wonder that you rose to being an Eight Lights."

"...You're an eyesore. Get lost." I jerk my chin, pointing my eyes to the side.

"Nah, I don't want to."

I should give him another warning, huh?

"Let me warn you, if you bug me any further, you gotta be prepared to pay the appropriate price."

"...Your reaction towards this woman is quite extreme. Is Remains of the Moon possibly connected to Leften?" Hogbar asks, seemingly misunderstanding something.

"..."

He looks at my face while pulling up the woman with his chain. Just as before, she's only wearing underwear. However, I wonder, why can I feel dignity from her? She gives me a strong impression of being trim and proper.

Is she related to Leften? Her name was Nereis'Kary, wasn't it? Ah! Isn't that the name of the kidnapped princess? Noctal's Oath is a major dark guild which uses Leften Kingdom's capital Fa'Dyke as its stronghold. Going by the circumstances, it must be the princess in question.

Hyatos mentioned that he passed her into the hands of the prime minister, but that'd mean she fell into the hands of a dark guild. Or maybe Noctal's Oath are underlings of the prime minister?

I've judged her to be a princess, but I won't mention it.

"...Leften? I've never seen that woman before."

"Then ya don't need to mind her, do ya? Nereis'Kary, do ya know that black-haired man?"

"..."

Nereis'Kary doesn't answer. Her blue eyes are fixed on me. I feel like her clear eyes are appealing to me in some way.

"——Hey, I'm talking to ya."

"——Kyaa."

Apparently unable to stomach that Nereis'Kary is ignoring him and looking into my eyes, Hogbar pulls on her chain again, causing her to fall down. This guy...doesn't he ever get tired from rebuking his slave over each and every little thing?

"...I do not know this gentleman."

"Hah? Speak up, bitch."

Nereis'Kary approaches Hogbar with a face full of shame. While leaning in close to him, she says into his ear, "I don't know him."

"That means, the usual reaction of a woman lover, eh? Do ya want this woman?" Hogbar calls out to me while flashing his teeth with a broad smile.

Pretty obviously...he's trying to provoke me. I'm sorry for the beauty, but I'm going to turn down his offer here.

Just as I'm about to answer, "——Kind sir, please accept me." Nereis'Kary runs up to me while stretching the chain tying her down, and pleads with a desperate look on her face.

"Hey, who told ya that ya should open your trap——"

Again, huh——?

Given that Hogbar is about to pull the chain once more, I draw Murasame's hilt with my left hand while swiftly getting off Rollodeen. As soon as I land on the ground, I quickly close in on Nereis'Kary in a forward-bent posture, using Magic Combat Step. I grasp the chain tied to her collar with my right hand, and pull Hogbar towards me.

"——Kuuooohh."

Hogbar loses his balance as his arm is pulled with a strength he apparently hasn't expected. At that moment, I pour mana into the hilt in my left hand, causing the light blade to appear with a buzzing. My target is, of course, the chain extending from Nereis'Kary's collar. I move Murasame diagonally upwards, cutting through the chain from below. The chain, which had been coiled around Hogbar's arm, snaps off midway from the heat, and falls to the ground. A faint stench of burned iron hangs in the air.

The instant the chain vanishes, Nereis'Kary uses her new freedom to run up to me, and hide behind my back. After I stop sending mana into Murasame's hilt, effectively erasing the light blade, I holster the hilt back at my hips.

"You alright?"

"Nn, leave the rest to Shuuya."

"The root of the collar has melted as well."

"Thanks."

My bloodkin are looking after her. The Blood Beast Corps takes up position to restrain Hogbar's underlings. Since Nereis'Kary can freely move around, she isn't an official slave, just as I expected.

"...What the fuck are ya doin'?" Hogbar blurts at me alongside a vexed glare after having fixed his posture.

Well, it's only natural for him to be pissed off, but...I warned him in advance. Besides, she told me to accept her. I've selfishly decided that to be a call for help.

"...You asked me whether I wanted that woman, didn't you? Let me give you an answer. Yes, I want her. That's why I'll take this woman."

"She's mine. Hand her back."

"I don't want to. Even Nereis'Kary said that she wants me to accept her."

Hearing my words, Hogbar's face distorts into a disgusting grimace, "Don't fuck with me. I've never heard anythin' 'bout Eight Lights meddlin' with the slaves of others. Moreover, I'm an Eight lights 's well."

"So what?"

I don't need any Eight Light titles. For all I care, Mel can immediately succeed it.

"...I really can't stand ya."

"Don't worry. I can't stand you either. I'll gladly teach you that your actions can displease others, if you want."

"Kuh, you haven't forgotten that this is neutral ground during the auction, haven't you?"

"It's exactly because I haven't forgotten it that your head is still connected to your torso, you know? You've barely escaped death because the other party is a gentlemanly cat lover." I repeatedly lightly chop my neck with my hand.

Hogbar stares at my hand and eyes with his three eyes.

"...That attitude and look, ya serious?"

At that point, the number of Hogbar's underlings increases. They've apparently been waiting on the street.

"Of course. Besides, I warned you in advance."

"I see, I see. That's the same as if turning all of Leften against you. I'm looking forward to the time after the auction."

Hogbar glares at us with a sharp glint in his eyes. However, he orders his underlings to pull back

with a wave of his hand, and puts away his own weapons, becoming unarmed. That's an Eight Lights for you. He doesn't come charging at me like a madman.

"Yeah, I can't wait."

Hogbar ignores my words, throws away the severed chain, kicks the ground, turns around, and leaves.

I guess this means Noctal's Oath is going to attack me in a group after the auction ends, huh? No, if they were such simple morons, they'd have attacked me right here. Besides, he knows about the four-guild alliance. He should be taking into account that he'll possibly turn all four guilds into his enemies if he meddles with Remains of the Moon. That should serve as a deterrent against him.

I suppose he'll first go back to Fa'Dyke and inform the prime minister, who probably pulls his strings, about the details of the dispute. Still, I'm arbitrarily assuming that Hogbar is connected to the prime minister, but...maybe they're unrelated, hostile with each other or some such. Well, I'll decide after hearing about the details of the political situation in Leften from Nereis'Kary later.