

Chapter 2 - Brinkill! The Margrave's Temptation

—Rapier of the Ivy's Flower.

That's the name of the holy sword in the possession of the royal family - and nowadays, the beloved sword of Second Prince John.

Its blade has a length of one meter. Its hilt has a shielding adorned with an elaborate design as if platinum had been braided, using blooming ivies as motif, just as the rapier's name suggests. A Blue Dragon Gem with a carving of the royal family's seal glitters at its pommel. —An elegant, luxurious and gorgeous sword.

Its blade is the most outstanding and characteristic part of the rapier. Imitating ivies, three blades are intertwined into a single sword blade made out of pure mithril. Prayers have been engraved on the blade's back, filling the whole surface with densely crammed runes, and reaching 30,000 runes in number.

Usually, the number of runes in a seal amounts to something between four and seven. Logically, 30,000 runes already fall into the category of sheer madness. Of course, the enchantments are also powerful beyond any comparison.

The three blades move like living beings, sometimes becoming one, other times splitting apart - all while freely unleashing attacks at will. The trajectories of the blades combine flexibility like those of a whip, and sharpness like those of a vacuum blade. It's said that it can even bisect an ethereal spirit body.

It's a masterpiece of a sword which has symbolized the royal family's holiness and power for over a century — a weapon truly befitting the title of holy sword.

Its creator was the Master Blacksmith Vincent Korpi, said to have forged this weapon over a period of five years. My ancestor from 18 years ago, the pride of the Korpi family, and the person I've set as my personal goal.

Someday I want to also forge a prestigious, high-quality sword with my own hands. Using all my techniques and abilities, I'm going to become a swordsmith whose name will go down in history—

The revival of the Korpi family — that's my dream...



"Fufufu, Tea was your name, right? It seems like you're quite skilled. Hey, how about it? Won't you try using that ability of yours to forge cursed weapons?" An old man with white hair peers into my face with a smile.

He's wearing a blaringly crimson coat, a vest decorated with beautiful embroidery, and breeches. The bracelets embedded with many gems are very likely something usually worn by women.

"Come on, Tea, forge some cursed weapons, will you?"

A nobleman and at the same time an oddball. The old man, who gives me that impression, pesters me about cursed weapons with a childish tenaciousness.

"No, umm, I'm...aiming to become the royal family's cortege blacksmith..."

"Who cares about the small stuff? Just give forging cursed weapons a chance."

"I'm sorry. Umm..."

"It's fine, isn't it? I'm personally asking you here. It's the request of a margrave. Do you know? I'm a relatively important noble."

"Yes...of course I know."

I'm troubled exactly because I'm aware of it.

The name of this old man is Margrave Alfonso. He's the lord governing over the Wildinne Region spreading in the western part of the Kingdom. His nickname is Count Capricious. He's ranking second in the noble hierarchy, right after King Robell.

For some reason I've been summoned by this big-shot, just to be continuously badgered about forging cursed weapons. If you ask how it came to this...

Of course, all of it stems back to that masked swordswoman. My encounter with Shea has drastically twisted the objective of my journey.



Meltart, the provincial capital and central city of the Margraviate, the Wildinne Region. Three days after the orc attack, I finally arrived at my destination, albeit now being completely tattered. Choosing a moderate inn, I got rid of the journey's dirt and the orcs' rotten stench with a hot bath, and immediately afterwards, slept like a log.

On the next day, I set out into the city once more. Stepping onto the main road for starters, I follow the street towards the city's center. As might be expected of the margraviate's center, this city doesn't lose out to the royal capital at all when it comes to the amount of pedestrian traffic. However, what's clearly different in comparison is the diversity of races here.

Hobbits, dwarves, elves, beastmen, and halves of all those races. Of course, humes make up the majority here as well, but still, the variety of different races is conspicuous. People draped in various garments you wouldn't see at the royal capital have spread out arrays of various folk craft at the roadside, selling these to the passersby.

I spot a knife with an inverted blade I see for the first time in my life. Very likely it's using the

margraviate's local specialty, a malachite alloy, as base material. I'm extremely curious about it, but my objective in coming here is mithril.

When we talked about the route of obtaining mithril, Mr. Favore told me that he'll get me through this with his reputation. But, as unfortunate it might be, his reputation has gone up in smoke with his face being smashed to pieces by an orc...

Now that it's come to this, I've got to handle it one way or another by myself.

Mithril steel, which is being mined in the Wildinne Region, has exceedingly high mana conductivity and storage capability. It's an indispensable steel for high-ranking enchanted weapons, and especially for weapons of the Light attribute.

Naturally, it's a super rare ore because of that. The amount of yield is minimal, and in particular, when it comes to mithril ore with a high purity, it almost never appears on the markets of cities. Its difficulty of acquisition is Special A.

That's precisely the reason why I had pinned my hopes on the connections of Mr. Favore, my coordinator...

"It's not like I can give up and go back home either..."

In the first place, this is not a journey I can wrap up by simply calling it off as impossible. The faces of my mother and father, who saw me off after entrusting me with their tiny, remaining amount of money, surface in my mind, making me shake my head. With the situation as is, I've got no alternatives but to go for broke.

I decide to first look for a Magic Material Store. Such stores are wholesalers, dealing with gems, ores, plants, raw materials of magic beasts, and all kinds of magic item materials. For starters, I'll search for the biggest Magic Material Store in this city.

"Umm, excuse me. I have a question, if you can spare me a moment." I call out to a middle-aged man who's about to pass in front of me.

A somewhat large hammer is affixed to his back, he wears tough gloves, and shoulders a big backpack. He has an appearance that screams blacksmith. I mean, if I'm going to call out to someone anyway, someone in the same trade would be the best choice, right?

"What's up? A traveller...or rather, you're somewhat tattered, aren't you? Ah, that knife with the inverted blade? It's better if you don't buy that. It's overpriced. Then again, it makes sense since that race usually doesn't use such a knife."

"T-Thanks."

"Sure thing. Bye."

"Ah! Wait a sec! I still haven't asked you what I want to know!"

"Oh really? So, what's up?"

"Is there any Magic Material Store around here? If possible, a big one with a large assortment..."

"A Magic Material Store? You're someone doing subjugations?"

"No...I'm a magic blacksmith."

"Hee. Still you look quite frail for someone doing magic blacksmithing. A Magic Material Store, eh? Well, there's plenty of those in this city. Moreover, their prices and qualities are all over the place. It frequently happens that they push magic materials of low quality on beginners. Anyway, you were right in calling out to me. Gaston's the name."

"Oh, thanks."

"So, a place with a decent assortment, right? In that case, you want to go with Mt. Gravel, I'd say. It's a store that's somewhat tough on beginners, but it enjoys a high reputation among pros like me. The store owner is a bit hard to deal with, but I think he'll give you a bit of a discount if you mention that I've referred you. Rane Magic Materials also has many amazing items, but that place might also be sliiightly too much for you since it's catered towards pros. They've got some nice stuff there, but likewise they sell junk items and illegal stuff. It's standard to start with Mt. Gravel first." The blacksmith rattles on without giving me a chance to interrupt.

While continuing to talk about the various Magic Material Stores in this city, he jots down the route to Mt. Gravel on a piece of paper, and presses it into my hand.

"Well, do your best, rookie. We might meet again somewhere if both of us survive."

Mr. Gaston ends up leaving without even listening to my thanks. Oh well. Relying on the map he's given me, I head over to his recommended magic material store.



Magic Material Store Mt. Gravel is full of shelves towering all the way to the ceiling. And all these shelves are tightly crammed with all kinds of magic materials. But, that's not all of it. Even the counter for serving customers has an array of materials lining up.

There's also Wind Stones, the basic item of any magic blacksmith.

"Hey, don't touch anything." The shopkeeper sits among all those magic materials as if buried within.

He's a small man with a peculiar beard, an old dwarf as it's common for Magic Material Stores.

While wincing from the sharp glint in his eyes, which I doubt anyone would use on a customer, I quickly broach the main topic, "Excuse me. Do you happen to deal with mithril steel?"

"Haah? You a magic blacksmith, or what?"

"Yes, a cortege blacksmith from the capital."

"Hee, a cortege blacksmith, eh? Then you should be aware that mithril steel isn't that easy to obtain. And even if I had some of it, I wouldn't sell it to someone visiting my store for the first time. But, assuming the unlikely scenario that I'd actually be willing to sell it to you, the price wouldn't be a sum of money someone like you could pay. I mean, you don't seem like a rich boy. What's your budget?"

"For the time being, I'll go with a down payment."

I pile up the silver coins I've taken out of my pouch on the counter. The fifty common silver coins are all I possess at present. For an ordinary commoner, that's quite a lot of money. It'll allow one to survive for three months if used sparingly.

"Hmm, considering your youth... But, anyway, what's impossible remains impossible."

"That's why this down payment, and I'll work off the rest."

"That's a no go. We don't do such deals."

I'm turned down by the dwarven shopkeeper.

"Can you somehow show some leeway in this? I need the steel at all costs."

"Listen, those looking for stuff like mithril steel are all folks needing it at all costs to begin with. And since they can't obtain it despite that, it's being called a Special A material. You understand?"

Mithril steel is mined at exceedingly low amounts, and because of that, it's ridiculously expensive. It's nothing anyone would be able to buy on a whim or just for show. Of course, I'm serious about this as well, but...

Now that it's come to this, I've got no choice but to persistently cling. This stubborn-seeming old dwarf is difficult to approach at first, but he'll become an old guy overflowing with helpfulness and chivalry, once we get along while being frank with each other. I've got to play up my enthusiasm here, tickling his sympathy as an old man.

"Can't you do anything about it...? I really need that steel. I'll come here every day until I get you to sell me some."

"Sorry, could you go back home? By the way, even if you stick to this routine for many times, my answer won't change. Moreover, it's going to be a pain if you get all enthusiastic about this. After all, I'm a dwarf with a dry personality. Also, I can't drink alcohol, and even if we were to drink the night away, I won't get along with you."

Ugh, how unexpected! So he was the type of dwarf shopkeeper who completely keeps others at a distance! Although he's got the typical dwarf-styled look going for him, he gives off a tough aura that doesn't allow anyone to get close to him, if you actually speak to him. Rather, he's the kind of guy who always maintains a distance. Even though I had resolved myself to open my heart to him

There's all kinds of characters among dwarves, really. However, the all-important reply is the same as before.

"Can't you do anything about it? I don't mind even if it's going to take many days."

"Now listen up, it's absurdly rare for mithril to appear in any normal store to begin with as most of it ends up in the hands of wealthy folks and nobles. And even those rare occurrences require one to wait for several years, okay? That's why, if you want it by all means..."

"Yes..."

"You'll need to use illegal channels." The shopkeeper lowers his voice, whispering.

"Illegal...you say?"

"Stuff like melting stolen goods to get the raw materials and so on. You should understand as a blacksmith, right?"

"Well, after you beat it into pieces, you turn it into an alloy by adding mercury and a lot of heat, and then..."

"This ain't nothing you can openly yap about. You never know who might be listening, okay? Tell me, do you actually have the resolve to do illegal jobs?"

"That's...a bit too much."

"Well, you don't look like it anyway. And even if you had told me that you're all for it, it'd only be trouble for me. At the very least, we'd need to be close enough buddies, comparable to drinking for three nights and days straight."

This dwarf actually feels like a normal one! He's nice and easy to understand, but still, I cannot afford to dabble with illegal stuff. I mean, the Korpi family's revival hinges on my search for mithril. If it gets exposed that I've been doing illegal stuff, it might result in an irreversible situation.

Having no choice, I decide to give up on Rane's store as well. Afterwards I visit every material store one by one. However, the replies I get are the same wherever I go. It makes me fully understand that I won't get my hands on mithril steel so easily.

"It's alright. I've still got plenty of time." I mutter in an attempt to encourage myself.

Yep, there's still a lot of time left until the ceremony for King Robell's birthday. I'll demonstrate the name of the Korpi family by preparing the best item to present to the king as a gift. Let's keep at this without rushing.

"I guess I'll stop for today..."

The sun has already gone down, and the streets are brightly illuminated by Meltart's rectangle crystal stones enclosing worm oil.

With me having walked for three days, and paced around the city on the fourth, my stamina has reached its limit. I decide to go back to my inn and rest up in preparation for tomorrow.

Today I've come out empty handed. I suppose, I won't have any choice but to do illegal work, if push comes to shove. As long as it's something I can do without getting exposed...no, that's a bad idea.

Immediately denying the shameful thoughts tainting my mind, I fall asleep in the inn.



"Hey, wake up!"

The next time my consciousness shows any response is when my body gets jolted around. It's a powerful, merciless shaking, accompanied by the rough voice of a man.

What? What's going on!?

The conversation at Rane's store naturally crosses my mind.

『You never know who might be listening, okay?』

The shopkeeper's words revive inside my head.

—Don't tell me! Some guy from the underworld has listened in on that talk, and believes that I'm a newbie trying to mess with his turf!?

No, that's stupid.

"He's still not waking up. What should we do?"

"Force him up, arrest him, and take him away."

—Arrest!? Taking away!?

That's vocabulary no underworld guy would use. Once I peek my face out from beneath the blanket, I spot three armored guards around me. Two of them hold onto my sides, before I can raise my body.

"Wait a sec, what's going on here!?"

"Don't make a fuss."

My right and left arms are both held by burly men. They're heavily pressing down on them. I try to struggle, but it's very unlikely for me to free myself.

"What's it all of a sudden? Where do you plan on taking me!?" I glare at the man restraining my

right shoulder.

His superior officer, whom the man is looking at, answers in a whisper after pondering for a moment, "The margrave is calling for you."

With this being the only explanation, the officer turns around, and starts to walk off. In response to that, strong force is applied on my shoulders, and I'm ordered to walk.

At this point, it'd be dangerous to resist. I leave the inn while flanked on both sides, and get pushed into a carriage.

Still, just what the hell is going on here!? The margrave is calling for me...?

Margrave Alfonso. Of course I know that name. He's the lord ruling over this Wildinne Region. His nickname is Count Capricious. He's ranking second in the noble hierarchy, right after King Robell. Yet another alias for him is Reclamation King.

He's actively inviting adventurers to Wildinne — the boundary line between the areas inhabited by people and demonic beasts. He's been repeatedly and constantly battling demonic beasts for more than 40 years, achieving a great expansion of the humes' sphere. Nowadays, his territory is the biggest within the Kingdom.

Why would such a person call for me?

While fervently brooding over the reason for getting arrested, I'm getting jolted around by the carriage for some time. Eventually, the carriage passes through a huge gate, entering the palace's grounds with me still having no clue why I'm here.

A neatly trimmed lawn, hedges with multicolored flowers in full bloom, a water fountain drawing complicated geometrical figures with its water streams, elaborate sculptures, and structures with novel designs - all of these should be things contradicting the alias of Count Capricious, but I'm not even granted to time to appreciate them while being forcibly moved.

Without a single stopover, I'm being taken deeper and deeper into the palace.



—Seven-headed Room

That's the name of the margrave's private room where I've been dragged to. Its ceiling is surprisingly far up, possibly around as high as the atrium of a three-storied building. Wide, tall walls serve as support for it.

The wall in front of me is decorated with a huge, horned lizard head - or to put it in common terms, a hunting trophy. It's not just one head either. Crowds of stuffed heads adorn all four walls. A huge wolf head with only its face - probably being as big as a hume, the head of something like a huge worm, and the head of an eerie demonic beast I've never seen before.

Below the wolf's head, an old man stretches out on a sofa with a broad grin plastered on his face — Margrave Alfonso.

If I remember correctly, he should be in his early 70s. His hair is completely white, just like his beard. Only his eyes are filled with a youthful, sparkling gleam.

The margrave points at the wolf head above him, suddenly starting a flood of words, "This? It's a fenrir. Yep, that fenrir. Well, it's a slightly smaller specimen. A knight squad led by me killed it 25 years ago. What do you think? It's amazing, isn't it? I went out to hunt it with a hundred of my most capable men, but when we finally succeeded in bringing it down, two thirds of my men had lost their lives. Hey, you, don't you think it's marvelous?"

Even though I haven't asked him anything, he bursts forth with a fervent speech like a child boasting of its toy.

"E-Excuse me, but..."

"No need to be so scared. Feel at home and come closer. Oh, I guess you won't be able to calm down while being watched by the guards, huh? You guys, step back. So, over here you can see an asp. Among worms, the poison of this one is especially potent." After having the guards withdraw, the margrave rattles on.

However, personally I don't feel composed enough to appreciate the stuffed heads of demonic beasts at all. If I don't get an idea what all of this is about soon...

"Pardon me, umm...what is your business with me?" I make up my mind, broaching the main topic from my side.

"Fufufu, Tea Korpi, there's only one reason why I've called you here." He peers into my face with a smile, and after gulping down the fruit wine in his glass, he boldly asks, "Would you be willing to create cursed weapons?"

"Cursed weapons!?"

Creating weapons that corrode the bodies of their owners is not a request you'd ask of someone else. Moreover, it's definitely nothing that should be requested by the lord ruling over this region.

"Well, I understand that it must sound odd to you. But, you see, I'm not weird or anything. I've been asked to request this by someone else, and that makes the original requester the odd one out. No, I guess I can't claim that I'm not weird myself either, but hmm okay, yeah, I guess I'm eccentric as well, or rather, in the eyes of the people living in the capital, the entirety of the borderlands is abnormal..." He quickly talks as if speaking to himself.

Maybe he's drunk? Or is he that kind of a person? Either way, I don't understand what he's going on about.

"Umm, sorry, but could I have you please tell me first why you had me kidnapped, Your Grace?"

"Kidnapped? Who? You? Did they handle you roughly? Ah, I see. I think I've worded it somewhat

badly. I've been asked to search for you. I had my men monitor your actions, but...anyway, when I told them today to bring you in anytime soon, you got abducted, huh? I see, I see. Sorry, really, sorry."

"No, not at all. It's nothing you need to apologize for."

Actually, it is something you've got to apologize for, old geezer! But, the other party is a margrave, so yeah...

"Either way, you see, I've been pestered about you. There's a girl who's said that she wants you."

Unsteadily standing up with the glass in one hand, the margrave looks at my face.

"Huh? Me?"

"Yep. Girls saying that they want you...exist, don't they? Fufufu, it must be that...although you look unreliable at a glance, when push comes to shove, you're unexpectedly...gufuu!"

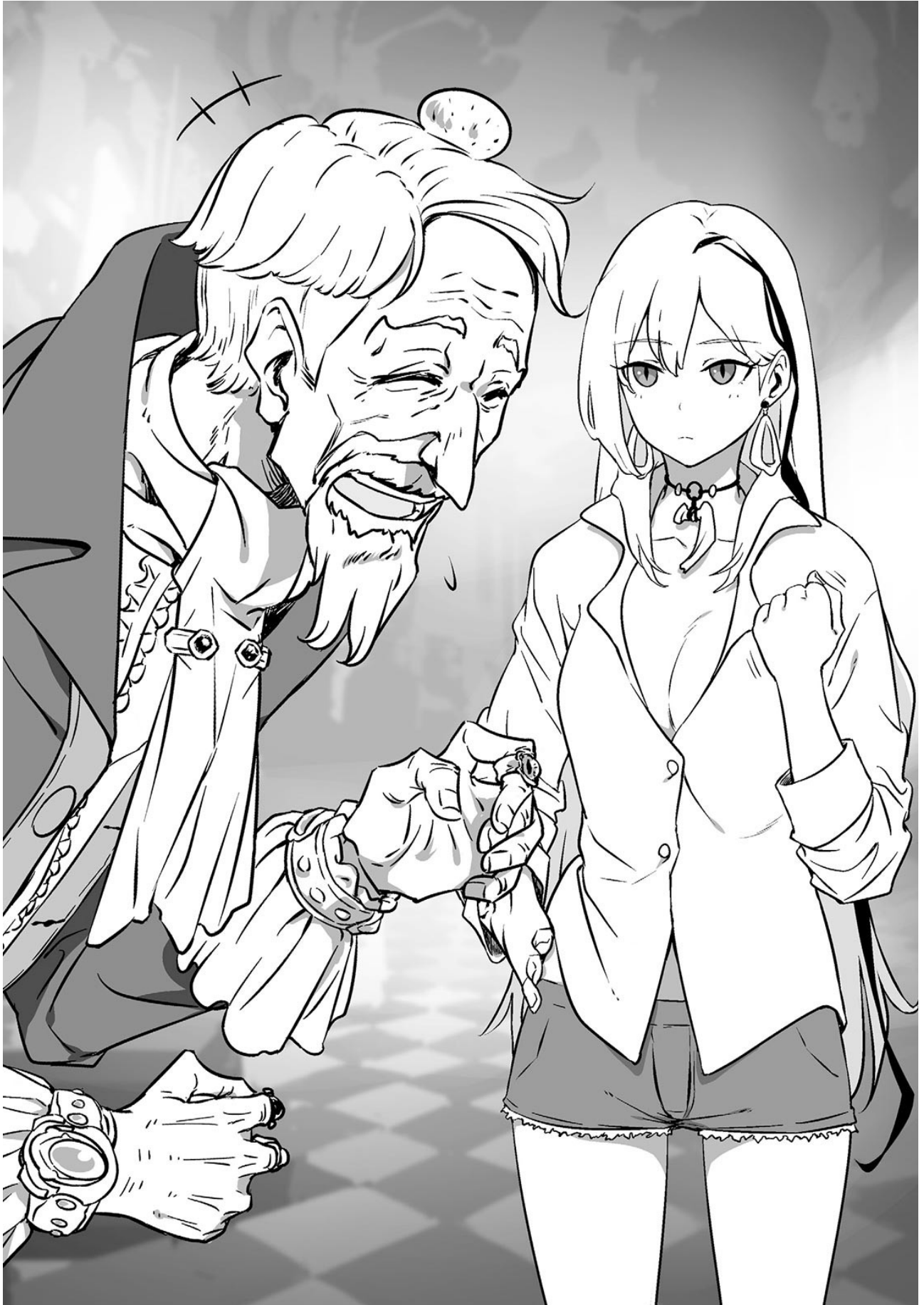
The margrave suddenly pitches forward alongside a dry slapping sound. This silly sound has obviously occurred at the moment when the back of his head got hit. And the one slapping a margrave who rules over one fourth of the Kingdom is...

"Stop teasing him."

A beautiful voice I'm familiar with. Without me having noticed at all, Shea stands right behind the margrave. Of course, she's not wearing her mask, allowing her pretty silver hair to casually spill down her shoulders. Just like last time, she's wearing a rather bold outfit. Her shirt is widely open at her chest, and her thighs are also daringly exposed underneath her shortly-cut pants. She might simply be wearing those for easier movement, but as I've never encountered an attire allowing to see so much skin in the capital, I'm kinda troubled as to where to look.

Then again, even though I think so, I bluntly stare at her in the end anyway — and taking another good look at her now, she's got a charming appearance that attracts others. Brown skin, silver hair, and purplish red eyes. Small lips and a somewhat emotionless face. All of it combines into giving her an exotic, unworldly, mysterious flair. But, looking at her like this, I gotta say that she's fairly young. Very likely her and my age aren't that far apart.

Speaking of the margrave who got hit by her...he looks oddly happy, for some reason.



"Ou-Ouch, I'm a margrave, for heaven's sake!"

"I see. With you having the leeway to whine about it, I'll wallop you one more for good measure, Margrave."

"Sheesh, you're terrible. My territory has grown to a fourth of the Kingdom's domain, you see."

"So? Are you telling me to blow away a third of your head, or what?" Shea coldly barks at the margrave.

"Bah, as always, you don't get a joke, do you?"

He turns in my direction while carefully caressing the back of his head, "Let me introduce her to you once more. She's Shea Kyle. The last Yughul and a cursed weapon user, also known as Black Dog Hunter Shea. She's also one of the ten certified champions approved of by me. To put it in simple terms, you could call her a super capable hunter."

The margrave seems to be even more braggy than he was when he proudly introduced his collection of stuffed heads.

But, Shea openly frowns at his words, immediately retorting, "I don't like exaggerated introductions."

"Fufufu, it's always the same with you. But, Tea, I need you to understand. She's an expert in combat against demonic beasts. She's a top-notch demonic beast hunter representing the Kingdom after she managed to successfully kill Bilrutong the Black Dog, an S-Rank demonic beast designated as one of the six calamities. Recently, she's also advanced to being my most favorite champion." He says, and winks in Shea's direction.

But, Shea completely gives him the cold shoulder. As if he's invisible, she's removed his existence from her field of view. And yet, the margrave continues without caring about it.

"Thus I was quite baffled when a hunter like her went out of her way to beg me to find you for her."

"Stop it with that misleading way of talking. I just told you that I want to use him as a field smith."

"Isn't that alone already plenty strange? If you plan to take down a reasonably strong demonic beast, it's common to form a party. And yet, Shea, you've always been hunting by yourself. It made me really worried."

"Considering efficiency, I decided to employ a field smith. That's all there is to it."

"Fufu, you're not an honest one, are you? I mean, how many years have passed since you partied with someone else? He must have...oops, let's leave it at this. I'm not all that keen to get slapped by you again."

"A smart decision, Margrave."

No matter how much the margrave has poked fun at her, Shea's expression hasn't changed once.

And because I can't read her expression, I've become all jittery as it looks like she might really slap him once more.

However, the margrave himself doesn't seem to care, or rather, he looks somewhat gleeful.

"Tea, let me ask you once more. Would you be willing to forge a cursed weapon for Shea? An especially dangerous one, of course. Fufufu." Saying so, the margrave even throws a wink in my direction.

He's revealing a shady smile, as he's apparently already imagining some dangerous, cursed weapon in his head... To be honest, he obviously got a screw loose.

But leaving that aside...it's an official request. I feel like it's truly too great an honor, but...

"Umm...actually there's something I must accomplish in this city."

Normally, it's not in my character to talk back. But, getting deceived by the margrave's childish and excessively friendly attitude, I explain my circumstances against my better judgment.

"Ah, you've been looking for mithril steel, right?"

I'm surprised by his instantaneous reply.

"Y-Yes...but why do you know that?"

"I told you just now, didn't I? You've been looking for it, correct?"

"A-Ah, I see."

If the local lord searches for someone, it's no wonder for him to investigate at least this much.

"That's why let's do it like this: I'll give you some of my own mithril as part of the reward."

"Oh? Really!?"

"Of course. I'll provide you with the best, high-purity mithril steel you can find in Wildinne. It'll be perfect as a present for the king's birthday festivities."

"Why do you even...?"

I ran around the city, looking for mithril steel. But, I'm sure I haven't told anyone about the reason why I need it.

"I mean, you're from the Korpi family, right? The former purveyors of the royal family. Currently it should be the Dickson family, I think?"

"Y-Yes."

Seeing me nod, the margrave continues to speak with his face increasingly beaming in pride, "Yep,

yep, it's just as I've said! And if a member of the Korpi family looks high and low for mithril, it's got to be for a birthday present. By displaying your skill through the creation of a great item, your family will be rehabilitated. Isn't that your aim?"

"You've read me well..."

"Yay, just as I had expected." The margrave is extremely happy over being correct.

It's completely as he deduced. The Korpi family had maintained its leading position as cortege blacksmiths for a long time. During my grandfather's time, the Korpi family was driven out of that position due to a political strife. At present, my family has no chance to create arms for the royal family.

However, the techniques have been passed on without allowing them to decline.

"You want to demonstrate the Korpi's skills with a gift to celebrate the king's birth, right? You want to make it clear that you guys are the best blacksmiths, and you'll forge the item as representative of the Korpi family."

"Yes, it's as you say."

"My investigative abilities are awesome, aren't they!? By the way, you didn't find any mithril, did you? Well, it's to be expected. It's nothing that's going to be sold at a normal store, and moreover, the mithril obtained through illegal channels is of inferior quality. You're in a bind, aren't you?" He says with a somewhat excited tone.

"Y-Yes. I didn't find any."

"Then you just need to become a field smith as Shea's partner. There's still some time left until the birthday festivities. Let's see...if you can work for us as field smith for a hundred days, I'll give you the mithril steel you require. All you'll need to do then is to forge the gift."

Those are nice terms that seem to be way too unexpected. They are so enticing and convenient that they make me worried instead.

"Why are you accommodating me to such an extent?"

"It's because I'm Earl Capricious. I have a weakness for works of art, furnishings, demonic beast stuffings, ores, gems, imported goods, paintings, blades, ancient scripts, antiques, inventions, furniture, gourmet food, high-grade alcohol, and above all, talented humes." He grins broadly as he lists all of these in one go.

His hair is already white, and his face has many wrinkles, but a power dwells in his eyes. That radiance allows me to feel a youthful heart from him instead.

"I'll speak with Rob."

"Rob?"

"It's the pet name of Robell, the king."

"Hiaah!?"

I doubt there's anyone who'd call the king by a pet name with the exception of this old man here.

"Wouldn't it be better if I told Rob that a blacksmith recommended by me is going to present him with a sword?"

"T-That's more than I can ask for..."

"I take it you're OK with the conditions then?"

"O-Of course."

"Then we've got a deal. Best regards. But I must admit, you're a big help here."

"It's me who should thank you for the help. I definitely hadn't anticipated to stumble upon such a path towards cortege blacksmithing."

"Fufu, I simply like talented people. I leave her in your hands. Ah right, I'll arrange for a letter to be sent to your family in my name. I'm sure they must be worried about you."

The margrave holds out his hand, requesting a handshake with me. He completely acts like a friend, without letting me feel any difference in standing. And, unintentionally I become deeply moved by him evaluating me as someone with talent.

"Thank you very much! I will definitely produce a present that won't put you to shame, Your Grace! Pouring all my techniques into it, I will create a sword comparable to the holy swords of the Era of Heroes!"

"Hahaha, you've gotten slightly too motivated, I see. That's a bit too exaggerated."

"Shea, thank you for recommending me."

I extend my hand for a handshake, but...Shea doesn't even try to respond to that.

"Yughul don't shake hands." Shea says with a dismissive tone.

"Tea, don't think badly of her. The Yughul race apparently has no custom of shaking hands. Instead of that...what was it again? The greeting of a wild eagle?...they'll violently clap your back while hugging you, was it? Fufu, quite odd, isn't it?" The margrave explains in Shea's stead.

"Okay, then I'll refrain from a handshake... Anyway, I'm sure father and mother will be delighted. It's been their dream for me to get employed as a cortege blacksmith."

"I see. That's great to hear."

Immediately following, Shea blurts out something extremely scary in exchange for a handshake,

"That's only if you're still alive after a hundred days, though."

"...? Umm, I kinda feel like I've just heard something extremely worrying..."

"Come to think of it, Shea, you once employed a field smith a very long time ago, didn't you?" The margrave looks in the far distance.

"Yeah, a fairly skilled one. It was such a waste." She recounts indifferently, lacking any nostalgia.

"Out of curiosity, how long did the previous person last...?"

"One month and three days."

"I-I see."

"That guy simply had no luck."

"So he got unlucky... By the way, where's that person right now?"

"In a tomb. He got his belly stabbed by a horned lizard."

"In a sense, you could say he got lucky. The harsh type of luck, that is." For some reason the margrave laughs cheerfully.

"Let's leave the talk about the previous smith at that. Tea, I'll rely on you from now on."

Her red eyes are fixated on me, bluntly telling me that she won't let me get away. I feel like I've tasted a tiny amount of the fear the orcs experienced back then.