

## Chapter 323 - Wandering Troupe

While we got all chummy with the princess and earl, the Burning Knights quickly returned to the spirit world, and I had Catiza turn back into being my finger again.

Just as I'm about to leave towards the corridor with my friends after making sure that Catiza has finished her transformation, Rollo jumps off my shoulder with a purr. I thought that she might be crying over the farewell with the princess, but it kinda looks different. She's started to frolic around with Alray.

Moreover, did the two cats think of Hankay as a perfect claw sharpening toy...? With a speed as if being on the run, the two cats run up to him, and mess with his short legs.

"W-What's wrong!? My legs are no food, okay?"

"Nn, nyaa."

"Nya, nya~n"

It looks like they're curious about Hankay's small but thick legs. Well, he's a short guy, so yeah... Though, he's on the taller side among dwarves.

Oh, it appears they don't plan to use him as a scratching post. They keep sniffing Hankay's shin guards. They seem curious about the smell from his ankles which are exposed between shin guards and boots. Their cute, small nostrils widen and contract repeatedly.

They keep sniffing at Hankay's legs for a while, rub their faces against them, and then, apparently start meowing to exchange their views about the smell. Mysty bends down, extending a hand towards the cats, but they ignore her, focusing on Hankay's legs.

Because she's bent both her knees, her black panties are in full view. Noticing my stare, she quickly tilts her knees in another direction. Mysty directs a soothing smile at me, slightly sticks out her tongue, looking my way with eyes that seem to complain about me being such a pervert. Staring back at her, it allows me to reaffirm how skilfully her bandana is hiding the crest on her forehead.

I answer her gaze with a smile, but in the middle of that, she, while emanating the aura of a pretty young lady, averts her eyes, bites her nails, and keeps mumbling a barrage of "Shit, shit, shit", obviously frustrated. Her reddish brown eyes are pinned on the cats who've got totally attached to Hankay. She seems jealous of him.

Turning my eyes away from Mysty, I check for Hueremy since I don't see her anywhere. I find her flopped down in a spot a bit away from us, licking her belly. Luckily her belly, which worried me during the fight earlier, has returned to normal. Now Hueremy seems to be alright again.

[efn\_note]The last few lines have been an abbreviated summary since the author went on a cat porn spree here. I don't mind writing a few lines about cat love, but certainly not paragraphs on end as it doesn't add anything to the story at this point. If you wish to read the full account of cat porn, you can do it here: <https://ncode.syosetu.com/n2335de/324/> . It also features some nice cat terms and all what's needed for cat lovers to swoon.[/efn\_note]

"Anyway, we're going." I call out to the cats.

"Nn, nyaa." "Nyaa." "Nyao."

I caress the heads of the cats who've run up to my feet. Afterwards, Alray and Hueremy transform back into palm-sized dolls. Putting those into my pocket, I try to leave together with my friends, but just then people wearing gorgeous outfits approach me, a bit hesitatingly but still noisily.

Are they merchants?

"Thank you very much for having saved our lives!" An old man standing at the front of the group states.

His movements feel refined and well-mannered. He's got a splendid goatee and wrinkles that match his age. But, lifesaver, eh...? To be honest, I didn't care about any other lives than those of the princess and earl.

That's why I answer, "...No, not at all. It was just by chance," in a way that ought to make clear that I haven't really intended to save them, as if apologizing to him.

"It doesn't matter how you did it. Even if you didn't plan on saving us, it doesn't change the fact that we'd have died if not for the presence of a mighty spear user like you..."

The old man is moved to tears. It looks like he interpreted my reaction as modesty.

Having seen that, another merchant adds passionately, "Heroic spearmaster! It's just as he's said! I've been employed by a caravan merely for the sake of not letting their fresh meat go bad. I am but a humble magician who makes his living on cooling food, but it's a fact that you've saved my life either way. You have my deepest gratitude."

Other merchants join in as well.

"I'm a translator for the ancient Dawn language. Thank you very much! Thanks to your rescue I'll be able to see my wife once more!"

"I'm Aquisat of the Antiques Union. As thanks for having saved me, I'll give you an unlimited free pass for the Antiques Company's inn! Besides, you're a great man, so I'd love to hire you as guard for our union!"

An unlimited free pass for the Antiques Company's inn might be cool and all, but I don't even know where to find that inn.

"I'm Pinoko, someone belonging to the Dualbell Enterprise ~nonno. I don't mind even giving you the monsters I've tamed only recently for the sake of bragging to my fellow management colleagues ~nonno! After all, you're my lifesaver ~nonno! I'll also give you my beloved curry ~nonno!"

Pinoko ~nonno? She's a woman with a weird way of speaking. While talking, she quickly flaps her small hands. She's goggle-eyed, has a feel of innocence to her, and seems lovely.

"Pinoko, you're way too excited~ But, I gotta admit, he's a dreamy guy who made my heart throb as he beat up all those evil people~ At the same, I feel deeply thankful~ You're my lifesaver! I won't let you get away, okaay?"

"Rinki-onee, her moustache is standing on end, so no ~nonno."

I ignore the "onee" guy, and decide to name the woman Nonno-chan.

"Men might be okay for him as well, you know!?"

Is Nonno-chan an acquaintance of Chianelas, seeing as how she also belongs to the Dualbell Enterprise? Animals similar to an albino lion cub and a child squirrel are at her feet. The cub has five tails, and as I look at it, the tip of one of its tails turns into three spears. It's a monster or animal I've never seen before.

Listening to the overenthusiastic thanking of the people we saved, I frankly explain while somewhat embarrassed, "...Please feel free to see this as a mere stroke of good luck."

"What a amiable gentleman you are...that can certainly be called fortunate." A light gleams deep in the eyes of the old man. I also feel as if he's grown in height. He adds, "It's all thanks to God of Fate Asura for making this fortuitous meeting possible. However, those guys were believers of Terrifying King Noctal who don't care about gods such as Asura-sama, and a genuine group of darkness who marched in here to assassinate the earl. Going by the fact that they mercilessly slayed merchants, they were strong fighters easily capable of massacres and assassinations."

Certainly, the catman brothers I fought had remarkable abilities. A spear user who mastered magic spears, a master of various weapons who used a Time Baku, and their little brother, a greatsword user...

"If not for you, it'd have been set in stone that all of us here would have died, become slaves, or suffered heavily despite surviving. That's why, just as everyone else mentioned, you have my deep, heartfelt gratitude. Truly, truly thank you." The old man repeatedly bows his head with his eyes blurred by tears.

In reflex, I grab his wrinkly hand, and courteously urge him to lift his head. However, this old guy got a ring with mana dwelling within...

『I didn't notice at first, but the mana movement within this man just now...』

『Well, it doesn't change him being a polite person, so don't mind it』

I let go of his hand while chatting telepathically with Helme.

"Thank you very much."

A nice smile has formed on the old man's face. And the various races standing behind him with smiles on their faces are likely wandering performers, and not merchants. Still, the items this old man is wearing are all filled with mana. Mana is also dwelling in his eyes. Is he possibly a strong

fighter?

At that moment, a smallish beastman also joins the conversation, saying, "It's just as Grandpa Ben says! Thanks, spearmaster!"

Her race is the same as Souther's. And just like Souther, she also has two dachshund-like ears on her forehead. The small torso is covered by a soft fluff of sheep fur. Rollo should feel an urge to touch it, but she holds back on it.

Moreover, up until now I've arbitrarily decided for noire runners to be small, but it might actually be correct to regard them as puppies.

"I won't ever forget that you've saved me~"

When I'm pondering about the small beastman, a female performer with long, smooth, model-like legs and a long, green whip also steps forward. For an instant, her pretty ankles remind me of Mel. I guess she's the beauty of this wandering troupe.

The frills added to her miniskirt look great as well, but those bare thighs of her... Buuut, a man's ogling would just earn me a look as sticky as natto from Viine-san. Having said that, it would be the usual. Still, I'll change my point of view, and regard her as a refreshing female performer.

The ends of her eyebrows, which have been prettied up with make-up, are profound. She might be an actress rather than a performer. There's a small scar on her right forehead, but it doesn't hurt her beauty. Her widened eyes carry power in them, but her delicate, light brown irises often move around. Her cheeks have a faint, red tinge. The nose bridge is slender, and she has slightly tapered lips. Her small chin is charming.

"...It's great that I could save a lovely beastgirl and an pretty woman with beautiful lips." I express my true feelings.

"Oh my, those words make me happy." The woman bows elegantly.

"Thanks!"

"Haha, please also include this old, senile lamp bearer, Benjamin Smoke, okay?"

So the old man's called Benjamin-san, huh? He introduces himself with his full name and nickname while flashing a good-natured smile at me, befitting an old grandpa.

After bowing to him, I answer, "My name is Shuuya Kagari."

"How polite... Well then, Shuuya-sama, please accept the highest show of gratitude we can give you. We shall perform 「The Love between the Knight of Secret Arts and a Traveling Girl」, a piece by the 【Wandering Troupe - Visitors from Afar】 who's proud to have made a name for itself at many Winter Solstice Festivals."

Benjamin-san introduces the show with the voice of a seasoned storyteller, and truly makes a "magic lamp" appear on his palm. Has he retrieved it from a ring-shaped item box? It's also possible

that one of his rings has turned into a lamp.

Then Benjamin-san turns around, and holds the lamp up above his head with his back turned towards us. This lamp turns into a special light source illuminating the actors, just like a stage lighting. It's a gentle, warm light.

Given that mana is contained in the lamp's light, there might be something special to it.

With the light shining upon the actors, their faces sparkle, and a brisk, short introduction begins. While they beat a tact with the feet, a scaled performer runs across the white floor, announcing, "—Now, now, what doesn't exist is going to start from now on~"

Oh, how interesting. It looks like an impromptu stage performance has already started. Performers of various races, including the puppy beastgirl from before, are part of 【Wandering Troupe - Visitors from Afar】.

I think the beauty I praised for her lips earlier plays the heroine. Looks like they've decided to do this on the spot, but it feels like all of them are quite experienced as accomplished performers. They also appear to be accustomed to ad-lib performances like this.

In addition, a minstrel-like woman who's playing a lute, and a composed, elven singer with a vivid, tenor voice enter the stage. The whole show keeps getting flashier and more gorgeous.

The elf-hater Hankay raises an eyebrow. But I don't pay any attention to him. Rollo, who's felt the evil thoughts of the ill-humored Hankay, returns on my shoulder, adopts a catloaf posture, and stares at the show from up there. Seemingly gradually losing interest in the show, she leans her head against my cheek, obviously being drowsy. I let her sleep while enjoying her dear body weight.  
\*censored cat love\*

I continue enjoying the performance where beauties keep interweaving in acts. As for the content of the show: there's a noble lady, who's been poisoned, and the name of the antidote Rinball gets introduced as an all-healing panacea. Love is mentioned in the title, but thanks to its mystery-based developments, it doesn't get boring.

Helme, Viine, and Mysty also enjoy the performance. Same applies to the princess and the earl. I've turned down their offer to continue with the banquet, but this kinda feels like the afterparty following after the banquet.

And then, at some point, the show comes to an end. The story finishes with the knight defeating all villains, but it was really fun.

"Nnn." Rollo wakes up due to the applause and cheers by the audience. Apparently grasping that the show has ended, she directs her red eyes at me, purring throatily.

I answer with an eye contact.

"Nn, nyao."

As if meowing, 『I'll head outside first ~nya』, Rollo jumps off my shoulder, and lands on the floor.

Then she starts racing across the saloon with a joyful gait, giving off the impression that she's saying, 『This time I'll be the main actor ~nya』. After launching a few cat punches at the troupe, Rollo heads outside as if running away.

I guess I'll follow her then. I thank Benjamin-san, the representative of the troupe, once more, and then cast another look at the princess, telling her, "Nereis'Kary, as I was saying earlier..."

"...Yes, Shuuya-sama." Nereis'Kary, who has enjoyed the play next to me, looks at me sadly.

Still, it's time to bid farewell.

"Princess, see you again somewhere."

At that moment, tears drop from her eyes...and she looks at me through her moist eyes. But, she doesn't say anything.

This time for sure I truly turn around, and leave towards the courtyard. The courtyard itself is filled with the stench of iron and ammoniak. Blood. Corpses stabbed by arrows are still visible here and there.

Divine Beast Rollodeen is gallantly standing atop one of the huge rocks in the corpse-littered courtyard, waiting for us. As soon as she notices us, she extends tentacles from all over her body. She coils them around my and everyone else's waists. On that occasion, I don't forget to massage the pad at the tentacle's end.

In the short time I indulge in its soft touch, I'm being carried atop Rollodeen's back. Once I alight on her black fur, she naturally removes the tentacle from my waist, points it upward, and sticks it to my neck. The usual feeling of shared senses flows into me through the tentacle's flat end.

After checking the state of my friends, who are now also on Rollodeen's back, I telepathically inform her that we're ready.

"Nn, nyaaa."

Rollodeen yells energetically, making her comprehension known. Immediately following that, she spreads her wings to the sides like a dragon. The wings look as if they're covering the earl's mansion. As soon as she powerfully flaps her wings, her body shoots up into the sky. In the blink of an eye we find ourselves high up in the air. Looking at her huge wings, they might be closer to those of a dragon - though they've got no scales - than those of a griffon.

Rollodeen changes the angle of her wings and tail. She keeps gliding through the air after inclining her head in the direction of the Whirlpool Forest of Demon Fog.

Meanwhile, I spot wild horses galloping atop a hill below us, a road with wheel tracks, and an area with continuous double ring patterns.

Rollodeen suddenly changes her flight angle, flying straight ahead. On the way, she eats jellyfish, which are floating in the way, by swallowing them whole, and chases after a yellow pigeon with a mysterious seal on its neck.

And then we encounter a fight between a divine warrior with an angel-like loop on his head and a disgusting monster which is a mass of crooked arms. The warrior is a kin of Buu-san.

It seems to be an even fight. Both crash down while entangled with each other... The impact point is close to the shore of the Heim River. Small houses thinly dot the area, but the houses where they crashed down are blown to pieces. It's a sudden incident, but...it's produced a tragic scene.

"...Master, there are many of those warriors or knights affiliated with Divine Domain Seuros in places other than Pelneet, right?"

"The Buus of the divine domain - they were mentioned in ancient books at the library, but...I've never seen that mass of arms he was fighting."

"I've seen that mass of arms before."

Its shape was different, but it was a similar monster.

"Where did you see it?"

"Ah, I remember. It was in the demonic labyrinth that trapped me, right?" Hankay comments, seemingly recalling his past.

"Yep."

"Demonic labyrinth. It's a famous labyrinth in the outskirts of Hekatrail. I guess that's why. It sounds likely that its forces are fighting against the forces of the divine domain."

I focus on the flight control while agreeing with Mysty. It's a maneuver going beyond what a griffon would be capable of. A travel on Rollodeen who flies as if being the ruler of the skies.

Since she's releasing something similar to mana particles from her whole body, just like last time, we don't feel much of a headwind. And then, as we glide, Rollodeen suddenly changes her flight angle again.

"——Kyaaa." Viine tightly embraces my arm while screaming.

Soon after, a place looking like the Whirlpool Forest of Demon Fog enters my field of view. Even from afar...and since we're up in the sky...the abnormality of that forest sticks out like a sore thumb.

Still grabbing my arm, Viine pulls herself together, and while looking at the fog's upper parts, mutters, "...It looks like there's a lid in the sky."

She's right. It's a mist abnormal enough to completely cover the forest. It's a cluster of white smoke in the shape of a swirling typhoon as you can find them on the surface of Jupiter. It's no wonder that people are calling it Whirlpool Forest.

Yui and I deeply trespassed into that forest in the past, didn't we?

"But...rather than a lid, it's more like a pot? A pot of bird wings."

Now I feel like eating a hot pot based on chicken meat.

"Yes. There's oddly many monsters flying in the air."

Just as Viine say, it's not just harpy-type monsters, but also gargoyle-type monster who are diving through the white mist.

"In that case, it's settled for today's lunch to be bird stew, right? I guess it's time for the Budant Clan's hidden stew recipe. The thigh meat of chicken-type monsters tastes superbly."

For sure I hadn't expected to hear the world lunch out of Hankay's mouth. I break out into a smile.

"——You can fly, Hankay?"

"...No. Shuuya, why are you trying to grab my back...?"

"Obviously I'm going to throw you into the sky so that you can catch the birds for your cooking, no?"

The sight of Hankay flying through the sky while hectically swinging his axes...might be funny. Of course it's just a joke, though.

"——Stop! Do you plan to turn me into an ingredient for the stew?! Besides, I'm not you! I was just talking about what I'd do after we landed."

"Hahaha, I'm just kidding." I explain while deliberately putting some strength into my look.

"It's scary because it doesn't sound like a joke. Be honest, you aren't looking for some entertainment by trying to find out whether I can also use that secret skill allowing you to create that special mana hand called <Mana Hand guided by Thought> which you've occasionally used during our training sessions, right?"

"Master is simply messing around. Since you're no Lucival, Hankay, he won't do anything like that."

"If you say so, it's fine. But good grief, is everyone so easygoing in your family of immortals?" Hankay shakes his onion head.

"I think it's probably just me."

"...Sorry, I've asked something inopportune."

Although it was just some joking around, Hankay puts on an awkward expression, apparently recalling a story of the past he had heard from my bloodkin.

"Don't worry about it. Nowadays, all of us are facing forward." I reassure him while sending looks at Viine and Mysty.

"Facing forward. It certainly seems so. As someone, who fought you some time ago, I'm well aware that the opponent I faced earl was strong, but apart from trying to learn all kinds of things, I want to grow by going through as much real combat as possible like the other <Head Servant Leader> without only focusing on reading books...this journey with Master should become a great opportunity for that. I want to use this Whirlpool Forest of Demon Fog for my own growth." Viine says after leaning in close to me.

I smell a nice fragrance each time her fluttering silver hair caresses my cheek.

"I'm sure a clever woman like you will be able to accomplish that, Viine."

"Yes!"

I naturally put my arm around her slender waist, and hug her tightly. And then I almost press my lips against her bluish-white nape. Looking at me with moist eyes, Viine pleads for a kiss.

"Man, you show-off."

"Well, she's my bloodkin after all. But, I think we should be there anytime soon. Or rather...I don't know where to find Sol's home in such a dense fog."

"If I remember correctly, it's surrounded by a barrier of stone monuments."

"...Yeah. But, it'll be difficult to spot their bluish-white light from up here. Or to be precise, I can't see anything."

『Same here. It's impossible. That veil is thin in this demonic forest, and its full of dense mana』

If Helme says so, it must be true.

"Anyway, just as we agreed on before, let's search on the ground."

I nod at Mysty's comment.

"As for plunging in thereM I've mentioned it many times before, but the forest is bustling with monsters."

"Okay, master. Next after <Rainbow-Colored Lotus Steel Blades> I think I'll try out <Throwing> with the metallic stakes. I can also use a few earth spells, but it requires me to chant."

"...You're right. Just like you, Mysty, I want to explore ways to fight as a Lucival."

Viine casts a look full of envious ambition at Mysty. Her expression shows Viine's trust in Mysty's strength as someone who had researched techniques based on blood before the others. And, probably for the sake of motivating herself, she ties her long hair into one plait, using Gold Titan's thread. A coquettish ponytail. It looks magnificent.

"Facing forward, huh...? Those are great words. I get cheered up being with you guys. I'll also do

my utmost."

Hankay's onion-shaped hair sways as his head is hit by a gentle wind. And although he's got an earnest attitude and a stern expression, his look is quite relaxed. He might actually be smiling. He's crossed both arms, as if resting them on the protuberance of his Adamantine wood armor.

Then Rollodeen plunges into the mist. Passing through dense layers of whiteness, we land in the forest. Rollodeen's huge limbs mow down some trees, and her long tail gouges the soil out. A fairly flashy way of landing. Bat-shaped monsters and bug monsters with carapaces as skin are squashed or blown away.

On the left is a gently sloping cliff, and the right is overgrown with trees.

"N, nyaa." Rollodeen notifies us of the arrival.

"This is the Whirlpool Forest of Demonic Fog, huh?"

Once she unwinds the tentacle from Hankay's waist, he gets off first while holding his axes in both hands. Next Rollodeen removes the tentacles from everyone else as well. After each of us strokes Rollodeen's back, we jump off in one stroke. And immediately after everyone has gotten off her back, Rollodeen transforms into her usual cat form, and lands on a protruding root. Sitting on the crooked, bent root in a posture of a doll, she looks our way.

Behind Rollo, many tree roots spread out as if weaving across the ground. There are also some roots that have taken the shapes of huge boomerangs, partially traveling underground. And as proof of this being the Whirlpool Forest of Demonic Fog...I can sense mana and magic source responses with Grasping Perception from all directions.

Now then...it's right away time to start hunting.

Just when I'm about to touch my ring, thinking about whom I should summon: Burning Knights, Catiza, Tsuan, or Purin, and whether I should leave the cats out of it for now, Viine says with bloodshot eyes, "Please leave the vanguard to me," while bowing.

Since she's said it herself a little while ago, she's now trying to proactively hunt.

"Sure, clear a path for us then."

"Okay!" Viine turns on her heels, full of motivation, and dashes ahead like the wind.

The ponytail on her back suits her extremely well... Her figure as she vanishes inside the forest truly befits a dark elf. It looks like it'll become busy around here soon.

I suppose the check of the box in my item box, which I can't quite identify as god or monster as of yet, has to wait a bit longer.

Let's advance at a pace that doesn't tire out Hankay, although he's no ordinary person either. ...Though, since we're talking about Hankay here, he'd likely get angry, complaining, "Don't worry about each and every little thing. I'm a member of the Budant Clan!"