

## **Chapter 6 - Overwork! The Holiday**

In the evening we safely returned to the provincial capital Meltart after succeeding with the basilisk subjugation, Shea, Elemia, and I immediately visited the margrave. It's for the sake of offering him the beak, which we had gouged out of the basilisk, and the seething, dense blood.

Usually, the loot belongs to the hunters who obtained it during a subjugation, but the items picked up by Shea, a certified hunter, belong to the margrave, her sponsor.

A basilisk's beak and blood is extremely valuable, and fetches a good price when sold on the market. Both are also very potent when used as materials for magic enchantments. Even the gizzard is rich with magic elements, but—

"Hmm, these things are absolutely useless as pieces of art." The margrave declares with a sigh while casting a glance at the items arrayed up between the seven heads.

"Is that a complaint?"

As always, Shea's tone when dealing with the margrave is rather rude. For me it's a frightening bluntness.

"You know what I'm unhappy about, don't you? Why did you only retrieve the beak!? If we're talking about basilisks, it's common to go with its cockscomb and the pure, flame-colored eyes, no!? You should have brought its whole head."

"Heavy, and stinks." Shea flops down on the sofa as she pleases, and grabs a glass with fruit wine from an attendant.

"I'd have provided any amount of workers and wagons filled with preservative liquid. You're well aware that I fork over the money needed for things like this, aren't you?"

"I don't give a damn. Just use this as crafting material."

"Bah, that was 100% intentional. You've deliberately left the cockscomb and eyes behind because you've got no use for decorations. How sneaky."

"You a brat or what...?"

"I'm no brat, but margrave, okay?"

"Lady Shea...could you...umm...tone it down a bit?" Meeting the margrave for the first time, Elemia is frozen stiff out of nervousness.

She's curled up her body, spelling her usual spunkiness a lie... Well, it's understandable. It's a very natural reaction, after all.

"You were called Elemia, weren't you? Could you go pick up the basilisk's eyeballs? Those look pretty damn cool as decoration if you preserve them in a glass bottle filled with alcohol, you see?"

"Eh? Bringing it back now...o-okay!"

Elemia stands on attention, her spine upright like a stake.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Elemia. Even if you were to go back now, they've rotten away anyway. You don't have any duty to go along with a pervert's hobbies."

"...Lady Shea...I told you to stop." A voice as faint as the buzzing of a mosquito.

It clearly shows that she doesn't want to get dragged into this quarrel. But, I can totally relate. Denouncing a lord, who rules over a quarter of the Kingdom's territory, as a pervert...

If things go badly it's much more likely for us to lose our lives here than on the battlefield.

"You heard her? Shea, you're a really rude girl, you know? You see, I'm pretty important, and also accomplished, so there's always the option of imprisonment or dragging you around the city."

"I'm not worried. At the same time as old geezers like you become too distinguished, they stop being able to do things like these. Because they'd be regarded as intolerant."

"Hahaha, you sure stab where it hurts." The margrave looks somewhat happy.

Is it because he values people who take such an attitude with him now that he's become a powerful man? Or is it because he's the kind of pervert getting aroused from being maltreated by a beauty, unrelated to his social standing...?

"Oh well, whatever. Anyway, good work. Take your wage and get some rest."

"We'll also take the beak."

"Sure, go ahead."

The margrave gestures to have it taken away by waving a hand. Seeing this signal, attendants quickly run up to us, and carry away the beak and the jar filled with blood. They're very likely going to bring them to Shea's room.

This wraps up our business with the margrave...

"Ah yeah, Teo."

"Y-Yes?"

Suddenly the topic shifts to me! Even if it's not as bad as with Elemia, I'm still quite nervous when dealing with him.

"I received a letter from your mother."

"Huh!?"

"I previously told you that I'd tell your mother about hiring you through a letter, didn't I? It's the reply to that. An acknowledgment for me, and a private message for you, Teo."

"For you to personally contact her..."

"That's why I told you I'd make a special exception for you."

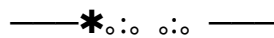
Once the margrave jerks his chin, an attendant runs up to me without a moment's delay, and hands me the letter.

I don't know the etiquette in such situations, but just to be on the safe side, I receive the letter respectfully. Shea watches all this play out with a bored look.

"So, anything else?"

"Nothing at the moment. You're free to go." The margrave signals that we may withdraw by loosely waving his hand while keeping his reply short.

Shea bows in a way making it plainly clear that she doesn't mean it, and turns on her heels. I copy her in a hurry, and walk out of the room with my back as straight as possible, as if being on a parade.



Returning to the lodging house, I break the letter's seal at once. A gentle, very familiar stroke of the brush - my mother's handwriting.

—To Teo

—I have heard that His Grace the Margrave has kindly allowed you to work for him as a blacksmith.

...That's not wrong. But mother, it's not the kind of work you imagine.

—I believe it will allow you to freely wield the prided skills of the Korpi family as a cortège blacksmith.

...I am wielding them. But mother, not in the way you think I do.

—His Grace has informed me that he will lend his help with the mithril. Everyone in the family is delighted over this great honor and fortune. Of course it means that he must have noticed your skill and sincerity, Teo. I think you should feel confident from that fact alone.

...I did catch eyes. But mother, those of someone else.

—The water and climate in the margraviate must be different from what you are used to, so please take care of yourself.

...I should genuinely take care of myself. But mother, at a level that's different from what you expect.

—Things might become painful, but do your best without complaining.

...I am doing my best at keeping at it. Just, it's not at the level of simple complaints, but rather me actually throwing up.

—I know that you will definitely come back with the mithril before the birthday festival. I am looking forward to the day of your return.

...I also want to do that. But, I don't have the leeway to spend my time looking forward to it.

The situation is quite different from what my mother perceives it to be. But that's reasonable. Back at home she perceived me as a craftsman liking to do plain, delicate work.

My mother is probably imagining that I'm currently creating elaborate, artistic works overflowing with holiness under the margrave. But, what I'm currently making is slightly, no, drastically different from that. However, I've got no intention to tell her any of that. It'd make her worry, and above all, mother might not believe me in the first place.

—That I'm currently enjoying doing this. The thrill and realistic approach of a field smith. And the existence of a person whom I help with my weapons, and who draws everything out of them.

I feel this is far more attractive and effective for wielding my skills than using them in some political strife between families. ...Of course that's nothing I can write about, though.

I decided to write up a letter that tells her that I'm doing fine in mind, body and spirit.



I'm swamped with work. On the work desk in the margrave's smithy lay a boorish, big machete.

After reporting the basilisk subjugation to the guild, meeting the margrave, and writing a reply to my mother, I'm now going to do maintenance on <Corpse Eater>.

"I told you before, but make sure to take some rest. This guy's curse is powerful for humes other than yughul. If you stay in contact with it for a long time, it'll contaminate your body and mind. It'd be a pain if you were to collapse on me."

"I know."

"Then, please take care of it." With those short, final words, Shea leaves her beloved blade behind,

and heads out of the smithy.

"Now then, time to go for it..." I mutter to myself.

It's a lot of work, but I'm brimming with eagerness. Shea has told me to take a break every now and then, but since I've accepted this task, I don't want to cut corners. Another aspect is me looking forward to handling <Corpse Eater>.

To be honest, it's no exaggeration to describe it as me being entranced with this weapon. It's crude and lacks any elegance, but the blade's surface possesses a unique texture. It's got a sticky feel. And then there's those bubbly goose pimples looking like pine tree bark, generated by all the tiny holes. A suspicious, purple-black aura oozes out from them.

And above all that, the machete has its mysterious seal created by multi-branch runes. As of now I'm unable to understand what's written there, but it looks very pretty as a design, and captivates me with its strange appeal.

Using a magnifying glass, I slowly and carefully examine the seal all over.

"Do you have a moment?"

As I look back towards the origin of the voice, I find the margrave standing at the smithy's door. He's holding a brass cup in his right hand, and carries a cloth bundle in his left.

"W-What might it be? I didn't expect you to come to a place like this, Your Grace."

"Sshhh! You're too loud! It's a secret that I am here." The margrave extends his index finger and places it vertically in front of his lips, smiling impishly.

"E-Excuse me. You startled me... Umm, please sit down. Watch out, it's dirty, though."

"I don't care. I'd rather hate it if a smithy was clean." After wiping off the dirt on the chair with the sleeve of his extravagant, silken shirt, he flops down on it.

"So, umm, what might be your business with me?"

"This here. This got delivered to me." With those words, the margrave holds out the cloth bundle to me.

It's a long and thin package. Even though it's just cloth, it somehow looks awfully expensive and glossy.

The margrave holds it out casually, but following manners, I go down on one knee, and reverently accept it with both hands.

It's quite heavy. Just what is this?

"Would it be alright for me to open this?"

"Of course. Or rather, hurry it up." The margrave's eyes dart around, him being very fidgety.

"As you command." I quickly unwrap the shiny cloth from the package. "T-T-This is...!"

Wrapped in the cloth is...a magnificent sword with three blades coiling around each other.

"Isn't that the Rapier of the Ivy's Flower!?"

"Sshhh! It's a secret!"

"It being a secret isn't the problem here! Why do you have this!?"

"Well, you see, I told Shea to inform me if there was something she's lacking. But when I did, she told me that this was lacking since you'd probably want it."

"No, no. No, no, no, no, wait! She got it all wrong!"

Of course it'd be impossible to decipher the seal as long as I don't have the Rapier of the Ivy's Flower. And it's correct that I've told her as much, but in the first place, I did so in the sense of it being impossible... Not in the meaning of an order to get it for me!

"How did you get your hands on this?"

The margrave drew close, beckoning me over. Once I bring my face close...

"I borrowed it...without permission." He whispers into my ear.

"You stole it...?"

"That's why I'm telling you to shush." The margrave's index finger tells me to not mention anything further.

The Rapier of the Ivy's Flower should be under strict surveillance, locked away in the treasure chamber, only to be taken out during the birthday festival and the Day of the Holy Mother. Having said that, someone in the position of a margrave might be an exception.

"Just three days. I'll return it after three days, okay?"

"U-Understood."

At this point, it's not a situation where my opinion would matter any longer. Seeing that things have turned out like this now, all I can do is to be grateful while looking after it...

Still, for me to be able to directly examine it... A beautiful, lustrous blade. 500 years have already passed since its creation, but even nowadays, no rust can be seen on it, and it emanates a clean, silver radiance similar to moonlight.

"Haaaaaa...haaaaaaa." Only deep sighs escape my lips. I harbor various feelings about the holy sword in front of my eyes, but the instant those feelings are about to leave my mouth, they're -

without missing a single one - translated into sighs.

"Enough with the sighs. Could I have you put it away for the time being. It'll be a problem if it's seen by someone else."

"I-I beg your pardon, Your Grace."

Recovering my senses just as my soul had almost slipped out of my body, I wrap up the rapier with its cloth.

"Make sure that it's not seen by anyone. When you take a look at it, limit it to late at night, and lock the door. On the night of the tenth day, I'll send a messenger to pick it up."

"A-As you command."

"Very well. I leave Shea in your hands from now on."

"Excuse me..." I stop the margrave who's trying to quickly leave the smithy.

"What is it?"

"Why are you going this far for Shea?"

"Because that girl is very precious."

"You're right, she's definitely an amazing warrior..."

I think she's quite awesome. But, this still makes Shea no more than a single warrior and huntress. For a margrave, who rules over a quarter of the Kingdom, to concern himself so much with her...

It looks like the margrave understands this doubt of mine. After deliberating for a moment, he continues speaking, "You're right. ...Say, Teo, do you know that mankind has entered a phase of decline?"

"What do you mean?"

"My margraviate is a frontier where humes have been exterminating demonic beasts for a long time. The heroes have fought the demonic beasts, expanding the areas under control by people, the hume domain, little by little."

"Yes, I know."

The magic blacksmiths have honed their techniques during those battles.

"But you see, in reality the hume domain has been shrinking in the last few years."

"Eh...? That can't be!"

"It's the truth. Step by step, it's gradually getting smaller."

I'm hearing about this for the first time. A piece of information completely unknown to me, and not just me either. At least the residents of the capital believe that the areas inhabited by people are continuing to expand.

"Well, this information is confidential. The demonic beasts are growing more active year by year. In the last few years, settlements in these borderlands have started to get destroyed, becoming completely uninhabitable. This year alone we had to give up on four settlements.

"No way..."

"It's saddening, isn't it? My territory ends up being stolen, and yet it becomes worse by the year. Among recent years, this year feels like the worst."

"I have heard stories about there being unusually many demonic beasts around, and stories about demonic beasts descending the mountains..."

I recall what the village chief of Mauser told me.

"Yep. On top of that, those reports keep increasing in numbers."

"I see..."

"Moreover, the locations mentioned in the reports are situated along a really bad route, you see? Yep, it's quite bad. I hope I'm wrong here, but..."

"What is the matter?"

"Probably...it's just my intuition, but...I wonder whether all of these might not be the harbinger for a coming Shadow Wave."

"Shadow Wave? If I remember correctly, this was a phenomenon caused by the Undead Dragon, wasn't it?"

"Ye, the Undead Dragon, one of the six calamities. Because it has started to move, the demonic beasts are kinda being driven into descending upon hume habitations."

"So, what's going to happen?"

"No clue. I can't tell. But that's the very reason why I need strong hunters. Among all of them, Shea stands out as special. To be frank, she's maybe the hope of mankind? No, I guess that's going too far. But, somehow I get such a feeling. Of course, you're also included in this, Teo." The margrave grins impishly while tapping my shoulder.

"Someone like me..."

"No, excellent magic blacksmiths are as valuable as certified hunters. That's why it's a waste for you to work on something like cortege blacksmithing. I believe you should freely exhibit your abilities on-site. But what's your take? Isn't this side more fun?"

"Fun or not, that's not the kind of problem it is..."

"Of course I'll keep my promise. I'll provide you with high-grade mithril when the agreed period of time ends. But you see, I think it'd really be too much of a waste. I'm certain that you're cut out for these borderlands here."

"No, not at all. I haven't gotten used to all of this, or rather, I'm still puking during battles..."

"Hmm, how regrettable. But, I'm a big shot, so it'd turn into me forcing you, if I pester you too much with this. No helping it. I'll extend our contract at any moment, if you change your mind."

"I am very honored, but since I am hailing from a family of cortege blacksmiths, I must go back home."

'I must go back home' — although that's my answer, I feel like this is worth doing. It's a dangerous world with death right next to you. But, it's also a world where you can exhibit your own skills to your heart's content. Though it comes with running from one place to another, and puking every now and then...

"Well, it's a shame, but please take care of Shea during the contracted period of time. Looking at it like that, she's a treasure of mankind. And, Teo, I feel you're the only one who can protect that daredevilish princess." He drains down the rest of the fruit wine in his cup.

"Protect? Me? What do you..."

"Oops, I got to head back now. For now, I leave that rapier in your capable hands." After playfully winking at me, he staggers out of the smithy.

Hume territory has shifted towards decline. And the treasure of mankind to stop that.

"Protect her...huh?"

She doesn't look like a person needing anyone's protection, though.

Shea's demonic way of fighting crosses my mind. And her appearance that makes me feel something akin to dignity once she removes her Breaking Bone Mask after the battle is over. She might not be conscious of it, but she's got a wild animal's beauty to her.

It'd be presumptuous of me to try protecting her, but I'll of course do everything in my capability.

—First I'll handle the maintenance of <Corpse Eater>.

Something like being able to compare it with the genuine Rapier of the Ivy's Flower is an exceedingly rare opportunity. For me to be allowed to touch and line up two old blades of the Heroic Age would be impossible even if I were to become the king's personal cortege blacksmith.

Moreover, in a place like this.

While feeling how my hands are faintly trembling from nervousness and excitement, I put on the leather gloves, and immediately get started on my work.



"Aren't you sick in body and mind?" Shea's voice resounds through the smithy three days later.

"What? Did something happen?"

Shea is holding a basket filled with bread. It looks like she's come here to bring me something to eat, but...as soon as she sees my face, she becomes so shocked that she almost drops the basket.

"What's with that ashen face of yours!? Are you dying?"

It appears that she's come to the conclusion that I've been possessed by curses... However, I simply forgot to eat and sleep because I was so focused on my work. In the last few days I've hardly eaten anything, let alone slept.

My mind and body are in a normal state, though.

"No, this facial color is rather proof of you having resurrected after dying earlier, isn't it?"

She's totally set on labeling me as undead!

"I'm not dead. I've simply continued pulling all-nighters."

Most of the last three days I've spent holed up in the smithy, a place full of soot and scraps, and since I've secluded myself in such a place for several days, moreover day and night, my personal appearance might be quite a sight to behold...

"It's pitiful, but I guess I'll return you to the land of the dead." Shea declares, picks up a big hammer from the floor, and brandishes it.

"Shea, listen to me! Okay, okay, I'm going to take a bath, so wait!"

I rush out of the smithy, heading to my lodging house's bathroom. I barely managed to avoid being killed during my maintenance work...



Shea puts down the hammer after seeing me completely bathed some time later. While eating her provisions for lunch as I sit on a stool in front of my work desk, I tell Shea the whole story.

"I see. So you've been decoding the seal of <Corpse Eater> with the Rapier of the Ivy's Flower as reference all this time...and, did you decipher it?"

"Well, somewhat."

"Somewhat as in how far?" Shea bends herself forward, full of curiosity.

"I succeeded in decoding the multi-branch rune." I report this precious result after spending three days and nights in a slightly proud manner.

"What!! ...In other words, you know what this seal here means?" Shea bends herself even further forward in response to my words.

"This isn't a seal to increase the curse's effect."

"Huh? Isn't a seal something to boost an enchantment's effect?"

Just as Shea says, the seals used in magic blacksmithing augment the power of an enchantment, and have the objective to affix and stabilize the enchantment. However, this seal here has another purpose.

"To be precise, this isn't an enchantment. But, rather the opposite. It's been carved into the sword with the goal of suppressing the power of the attributes. In other words..."

"What do you mean?" Shea asks seriously even while her mouth is filled with bread.

"It's a seal. That seal is suppressing the curse power of <Corpse Eater>."


"Seal... Okay, I see... so that's what it was..." Not surprise but mortification dyes Shea's expression by the unexpected piece of news. "Grandfather told me in my childhood that this thing wasn't anything that could be handled in the state of being human. <Corpse Eater> also eats the soul of its wielder. That's also why he added a "trick" to it so that I could use it."

—State of being human? That's a weird way to phrase it.

I'd love to ask her about more details, but Shea's face looks somewhat bitter, causing me to hesitate on digging any further into this.

"So, is there any way to remove this seal, Teo?"

"It'd be quite difficult, but..."

Curse removal is simple enough as a process. You just need to carve the negating rune 

at the appropriate location of a seal. However, reading a seal that's being jammed by a multi-branch rune and adding the negating rune precisely at the correct place requires quite a high level of technique.

"I see. I don't get it."

"You gave up quite easily on that, didn't you?"

"No, I've understood what's necessary. In short, you'd be able to do it, right Teo?"

"You sure are saying this as if it's no big deal..."

"It's possible, right? Please remove the seal for me."

"Shea, it's not smart to remove this."

"Why?"

It's a powerful seal created by seven, complicated runes which were carved into the tang. Very likely the curse power would become too strong, making it impossible for a humes to handle it, if this seal is gone. The seal tones it down to a level that allows yughul to use it...

No matter how strong the weapon might be, it's completely meaningless if humes can't even hold it in their hands. Originally it's an ultra-high-grade cursed tool which is too much for people to handle. This seal turns this weapon into a weapon that can be barely handled by humes.

"I don't mind. Undo the seal. I'll pay you."

"No. It's possible that it'll become truly unmanageable by humes."

"Grandfather used <Corpse Eater> while it didn't have that trick added to it. It pisses me off to always get treated like some inexperienced hume. I'm no kid anymore."

"Calm down. This isn't some kind of child safety measure. It's an adjustment of sorts. In the first place, <Corpse Eater> lacks stamina and not so much power, right? Even if you were to raise its power further, it'd just run out of curse power right away."

"Ugh, that makes sense... But..."

The bad energy management of <Corpse Eater> is Shea's biggest weak point. But, what can I do to alleviate that weakness?

"If I do proper maintenance on it even without tampering with the seal, I think its sharpness will increase. The curse power consumption won't change either."

"But, if you're saying that its power is being suppressed...it kinda doesn't sit well with me..."

"It's not a matter of it sitting well with you or not. You'd simply die from just holding it. ...Nothing can be done about this, okay? In exchange, I'll get slightly serious and genuinely sharpen <Corpse Eater> while putting some time and money into it. With the same technique as cortege blacksmiths do maintenance for the swords of the royal family. How about that?"

"You're my personal blacksmith. ...I'll follow your advice." Shea doesn't look like she's fully satisfied.

However, I'm confident I can power up her weapon quite a bit with my genuine sharpening.

"Please wait for another three days."

"Okay."

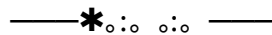
I make Shea agree with me, and have her leave the smithy, leaving me all alone in here once again.

...Now then, I suppose I'll get started on the promised special maintenance then.

First I'm going to create pure water. Pure water doesn't simply mean fresh water in magic blacksmithing. It's a perfectly attributeless water which had the minuscule amounts of magic elements in water removed. I filter the distilled water several times through a silver thread, and boil it once more. It's a process that takes time, but treading carefully here will bring about an overwhelming difference in the finished product later on. Magic elements being contained in the sharpening water often heavily lower the enchantment's effect. On the other hand, with the correct sharpening you can restore a weapon's original performance...

"I guess I'll have you allow me to perfect those techniques for the sake of holy swords." I mutter while watching the pure water drip down from the narrow openings of the silver distillation container.

Magic blacksmithing is a job where you're alone for long periods of time. Monologues are something similar to an occupational disease.



And then, another three days later, Shea visits the smithy while bringing Elemia with her.

"Sir Teo! Oh no, hasn't he passed away!?! This complexion...ten days must have passed since his death!" Elemia cries out in grief after seeing me.

"I'm not dead, damn it!"

"Eh!? You're not? What an undead look! What a ten-days-after-death face!"

"Who looks like an undead!?"

Well, apart from this ruckus, they've come at the perfect moment. I just finished the maintenance of <Corpse Eater> moments ago.

"...I've just finished the sharpening. It was honestly lots of trouble."

On top of the sharpening of an enchanted weapon taking time even under normal circumstances, <Corpse Eater> qualifies as a cursed weapon that's difficult to handle. Thus I think that it's actually fast for me to finish this part in just three days.

Shea immediately picks up her beloved sword, and scrutinizes it closely. Hit by the sunlight, the

blade shines with a glistening as if it's wet. It's very ominous, and feels even like some sort of charm.

"Hoh...this is..."

It looks like she's somehow grasped the quality of the workmanship. She seems slightly excited with her cheeks flushing faintly.

"What do you think? It should have become a lot better, err, much more evil."

"Yeah, to be frank, I want to test it out as soon as possible."

"To be honest, I want to see it in action as soon as possible, too."

My body feels exhausted, but I feel like wanting to immediately observe with my own eyes what kind of power the new <Corpse Eater> is going to exhibit.

"In that case, this comes at the perfect time. Sir Teo, our names have come up as recommended hunters for a certain quest." Elemia takes out a piece of paper, recording the quest details.

"The targets are Swamp Trolls. Several of them have attacked a small village in the neighborhood of Edilgen. Close to twenty people have died. There seems to also exist a fairly big number of people who are missing after having been kidnapped." While tracing the text describing the damages with a finger, Elemia continues puffed up with pride, "And the guild deemed us as suited for this job, and recommended us."

"The promise should have been to keep it limited to one time, though..."

"Does it really matter? Lady Shea, you bully! I've already told the guild that we're going to do it!"

"Feel free to go by yourself."

"Don't be such a miser. I won't bite or anything."

Elemia completely lacks any timidity. Her shamelessness might actually fit well with Shea who tries to keep others away from her.

"Now, now. Being recommended is something good, isn't it?"

"If that's what you think, Teo...well, I guess it's okay."

"By the way, what's this red border?"

"Ohh, this indicates that it's a quest which was failed by hunter parties. A yellow border for two failures, and a red one for more than three. It's very easy to understand."

"Yeah, it's easy to understand, but..."

...it's easy to understand just how dangerous it is. ...I guess it was a blunder to side with Elemia on

this.

According to the request form, swamp trolls are a big, blue-furred species. It's suspected for their numbers to go beyond twenty.

"The swamp trolls living in the wetland belt are big, but above all, they're ferocious. Be careful to not die."

Even if you tell me to be careful... I think the hunters who failed this before were careful as well. I'm full of worries, but Elemia, on the other hand, doesn't seem to have any worries at all...

"We're going to win! Sir Teo, exactly because the trolls killed all those trying to hunt them until now, it's a chance for us instead!"

"Like how?"

"This quest has come around to us because the previous parties failed. It means it's a great chance to make a name for ourselves in one swoop. This is truly the moment where victory and defeat is decided. The only way for nobodies to rise in this world is to put their lives on the line. That's the elven spirit there!"

"Were elves really like that...?"

"Anyway, this level of danger is normal for hunters. Let's tackle this offensively. We'll keep doing jobs, and keep earning good cash, allowing us to improve our equipment and quickly rise in rank." Elemia rattles down in one breath while accompanying her words with big gestures.

Her emerald green eyes are burning with ambition. I cannot help but stare at her dumbfoundedly.

"Sir Teo, what's with that face?"

"No, it's just you've become all motivated..."

"That's only natural. What's the point in being a hunter if you don't aim for the top!? I've finally managed to force a party with you and Lady Shea, so I'll keep going as far as I can, without break. And if I'm going to die, I'll pitch forward. That's a western elf for you."

"...So you're aware that you've been forceful. Well, I guess it's fine, but it's rather surprising for an elf..."

"I don't know what elves you're talking about, but western elves have a strong self-assertion. We like leopard prints for our clothes, and when shopping, we haggle so much that it causes the shop clerks to faint."

"I-Is that so...?"

As usual, there's a big gap between her character, and the delicate white skin and her beautiful blond hair.

"I don't give a damn about my rank in the guild, but swamp trolls, huh...? I feel like wanting to feed them to this guy." Shea holds up the new <Corpse Eater> into the sun once more, causing it to glitter anew.

"Now we're talking! Women and children are being kidnapped almost every day. We must save them! Right!?"

After Shea, Elemia seeks my approval.

"...If you put it like that, it's impossible to turn it down."

Hearing my agreement, Shea nods lightly too, "I got it. We'll take on that request. However, only after taking a break of two or three days. It'd be a pain if Teo died on us."

"Okay, it's decided then!"

"We'll depart in three days then. First we'll head over to the westernmost town of Edilgen, and then we'll enter the northern mountain district from there. Teo, make sure to get a good rest." With those words, Shea turns around and goes towards the smithy's exit.

Troll subjugation, several parties failing...I've become totally anxious about all this. I cannot afford to croak here with forty days left until the contract period ends. I must survive, get my hands on the mithril, and show King Robel the Korpi family's skills.

—Isn't there anything that I can prepare at the moment?

By now, as I pick up a hammer, I'm staggering, close to fainting.

"Hey, Teo! Get some real rest! Or do you plan to die before the departure?" Shea's voice suddenly pulls me back to my senses.

Somehow it was a sensation as if being possessed by a tenacity of purpose.

"Ah...y-yep. I-I guess you're right. I need to rest."

"You might not be aware of it yourself, but you've been touching <Corpse Eater> for too long. Your mind should be somewhat hazy right now. Sleep. Before you start pissing blood." Shea says, powerfully claps my back once as if telling me to regain myself, and leaves the smithy afterwards.

She's definitely right... Once again I notice just how tired I am.

On that day I slept like a log, and on the next day I confirmed that blood was mixed into my piss.