

Chapter 334 - Reunion with Quiche



The man blinked his pure golden eyes, and asked, "Toyz, are these the only living ones?", while staring at the addressee.

The blood stuck around his mouth got naturally absorbed into his skin. And then, after tossing away the dried-up dwarf corpse as if throwing away some piece of trash, he picked up one of the raim lined up as if prepared for a great feast, and ate it while sucking its blood.

The man pointed a look at Toyz that told her that he didn't really expect an answer until he was done eating. The name of the one devouring the cattle was Hoffmann Ravahl Valmask. He was a <Head Servant> of the Valmask family which explained the thick mana being emitted from his body.

Being on the receiving end of Hoffmann mana pressure, Toyz nodded, answering, "Yes...I played around a bit while using blood."

Hoffmann nodded while eating the raim, and focused on <Blood Mana>. He created a blood sword with the length of a spear in front of his eyes, and as soon as he manipulated that sword, the raim, which he had been eating, instantly split apart in small pieces, obviously cut apart by the sword, which caused blood to spray all over. Hoffmann absorbed that blood shower with his whole body.

Going by this instantaneous blood skill, allowing to weigh Hoffmann's ability, it was pretty clear that Hoffmann was something akin to an authority even among the twelve vampire families. He was a direct servant of Familia who was Vampire God Lugnad's <Head Servant Leader>, and an existence that could be described as being on the level of a progenitor.

He wore a mantle with a high, laced collar around his neck. The mantle's lining was scarlet, and at a glance, it made him look like an old-fashioned vampire. But, only the tailcoat-like clothing was somewhat old-fashioned. In reality he wore superior equipment and Legendary protective clothing, as if to prove his thick mana.

Hoffmann was a great vampire who attended the Grand Elder Council, and also the highest authority responsible for the blood test site he built in a village, located in the eastern part of these woodlands. The research facility in Mt. Lalarbuin had been destroyed by the black-haired alchemist Makoto, but the new blood test site here was proceeding according to schedule.

But, for the woodlands' village this couldn't be called anything but a disaster. The humans, dwarves, and beastmen, who originally lived in this village, were immediately wiped out after being hit by Hoffmann's <Bloodsucking>. Moreover, the fact that it was a remote place in an unexplored woodland was very convenient for Hoffmann's team.

The location of this blood test site was at the eastern edge of the woodlands, and south-east if you were to come here from the Benrack Village. If looking from Mt. Baldok, it seemed as though the branch of the Heim River wove its way in a complex pattern through the mountains as it connected

the adjoining land with the south-east while being adorned by steep cliffs. If you were to compare it to Earth's geography, which Shuuya knew, it'd likely fit with a place like the Ancient Plank Road at China's Mingyue Gorge.

Hoffmann finished sucking all the blood out of the living raim. Suddenly he said, "Again? You'll get pursued by the wolves after doing something like that."

"Fufu, thanks for your kind advice, but you having been able to use your <Bloodsucking> now is thanks to my playing, right?"

It was probably because Hoffmann's emotions were high-strung right after sucking all that blood.

"I didn't ask for your opinion, did I, my dear Toyz!?" With that statement, his eyes dyed bright red.

Then he held out both hands, and extended darkish nails from his fingers, pressing their tips against Toyz' long and slender neck. Blood trickled down from where his nails made contact with her neck. At the same time, ripples of mana were transmitted in waves from those black nails.

However, <Servant Leader> Toyz kept up her unconcerned look even as her neck got wounded.

"...This is an isolated place, after all."

"The wolves don't choose their place. They're full of spirit as long as the two moons come out, right?"

"But, even if they were to approach, they'd only get turned into food by you, right Hoffmann-sama? The other day...the wolves' blood was useful for our research too! You told me that I'd make for a great lure since I'm a woman."

Hearing that response, Hoffmann glared at Toyz, and declared, "That was an outcome of the strategy I had formed in advance..." with a laugh, adding, "...You must have gathered lots of blood since you played around, right?"

"Yes, like this."

The female <Servant Leader> Toyz bowed, and then extended her delicate arm to the side. A beautiful, translucent curtain drooped down from beneath her right forearm. No, not a curtain, but thin skin.

Once the pleats of the skin extended to the left and right, pretty blood veins, similar to the veins of a leaf, stretched out. This thin, vinyl-like skin was <Sleeping Blood Net> which capitalized on Toyz' own <Blood Mana>. It was a unique ability for storing blood.

Her skin spread out thinner than the wings of bats, and was capable of storing blood like an item box. Moreover, it was a skill based on <Blood Mana> that allowed her to use the stocked blood as an energy source while adopting it in her own way after making the blood fuse.

Seeing that ability, Hoffmann nodded with a laugh, "...It's a great ability. It's not really suited for combat, but it allows you to store blood in a state of being almost fresh. I believe it to be a truly

fitting ability for this blood test site. As my <Servant Leader>, I shall ask you to keep gathering blood from now on."

"That goes without saying, Hoffmann-sama."

"Biano seems to also have recovered from the wounds the black-hair dealt him. I hear the research results are superb."

Toyz knitted her eyebrows as soon as she heard the term 'black-hair.' But, it was only reasonable for her to react like that.

The Lalarbuin facility was suddenly attacked by the black-hair, Alchemist Makoto. The vampires, including Toyz, had to dispose of the results of their great blood research...

On that cursed day where the facility was destroyed after they decided to retreat...she had directly faced the black-haired alchemist. Makoto deployed special alchemy from both his hands, no, he shot black and white steel that had no resemblance with alchemy.

After Makoto immobilized Toyz' body by manipulating the white and black steel like snakes, he decapitated her as if playing around for fun.

"That was...my blunder. My visual field as the ceiling raced past...afterwards I repelled him by using my <Blood Mana>, but...it's still a humiliation. That damn guy called Makoto and his underlings who moved like some martial arts practitioners...I want to send their heads flying in the same way someday.

Toyz sent a look full of feelings going beyond loyalty towards Hoffmann while considering all that.

"...Even though he's a <Servant Leader>, wounds caused by Holy Water will leave scars behind. I think this fact will be quite tough on him who loves to be unblemished, but...now Biano will also be able to fully devote himself to research."

"The prey to be used for research purposes forced Yuo to use some quick-witted tactics for a change. For him to use the nest of an orc queen and weak-headed trolls, huh? It'll likely throw the local residents and adventurers in chaos."

"An orc queen and trolls are perfect for diversions and camouflage since they're slow because of their huge frames. However, they won't work against the ancient wolfmen..."

"The wolves got an abnormal sense of smell. They'll probably sniff out even a remote place like this here, sooner or later."

"Yes. Yuo is going to discover the next place, isn't he?"

"But, I'm worried about that guy since he's got a tendency to be more ferocious than you."



Divine Beast Rollodeen had comprehended my feeling of wanting to meet with Quiche. As if abusing Hekatrail's wall as a vaulting horse, she easily overcame the wall, and then flew onward with such a speed that it seemed as though she was stabbing through the windy layers high up in the sky.

As soon as she had gained quite a distance from Hekatrail's main road, Rollodeen proceeded by flying straight ahead, a hill approaching right in front of our eyes.

In response, Rollodeen extended two tentacles from her neck towards the hill, stabbing them into it. Using the power from reeling the tentacles back into the neck, she pulls her body towards the hill in one go. This whole maneuver grants us an explosive speed.

My partner arrives on the hill in like no time, and then, immediately stores the tentacles back away at the neck. Then she touches down, flattening the grass, which is as tall as her, with all four soles of her paws.

I check the tracks left behind by Rollodeen lumbering onwards. She has created a crop circle of paw marks. Those are footprints, but I don't think anyone will realize as much.

No, this world is full of nothing but encounters with the unknown. You never know what you might run into... Some weird dwarf researching cat footprints might exist somewhere.

Suddenly Rollodeen meows curtly as if saying, 『Hold on tight ~nya』. Though I knew from her having lowered her stance and having put strength in her front paws...

"Nn," my partner faintly purrs.

Then she extends two of her tentacles diagonally to the front. Those black tentacles, which look just like wires, are thrust towards a distant rock. The tips transform into shapes similar to anchors while coiling themselves around the rock.

So she's going to move there next, huh?

When I hear a sound similar to thick gum trembling as it contracts, the wire-like tentacles are reeled in towards Rollodeen's neck, and we move. The speed this time is even faster than before. Even I, as the one steering Rollodeen, feel an impact exceeding that of a roller coaster to my body. Especially my nether region feels somehow piercingly cold.

I wonder what that sensation is about? Be it human or Lucival, I suppose the pleasant feeling, err, the strange sensation you can feel from your balls remains the same.

Having arrived at the steep rock, my partner lands on its narrow top, skilfully using her limbs and tentacles to stand there. Rollodeen points her face, which looks close to the shape of a horse and leopard, towards the blue sky, and roars loudly. Though, with the voice of a cat. And yet she's adopted a pose like a howling wolf.

"Partner! Do you want to become a wolf?"

"Nnn——" My partner slaps my cheek with one of her tentacles.

Probably a retort close to 『As if! Don't blather such silly stuff ~nya』. After having put some force into her voice, my partner races down the rock with a terrifying speed. She's heading for the woodland area with Quiche's village and the Hino village at full speed.

She pushes forward with an explosive speed as befitting for a divine beast. She uses the tall trees as footholds, and leaps from tree to tree while forcefully stepping down each time. And then, at some point, she lands, and continues through the forest at a backbreaking pace.

Around the time when we've reached a place deep in the forest where canary-like twittering can be heard...Rollodeen slows down all of a sudden.

It looks like we're close now. Rollodeen has probably made out Quiche's scent. Her movements are extremely smooth. Even now she's shaking her big head sideways with her nostrils twitching. It looks like she's confirming the scent.

I also try my luck, but...I can't smell anything but the cold wind and the thick fragrances coming from the surrounding flowers. If I were to use <Inhalation of Odor Technique>, it'd be possible to perceive her scent to some extent...

Anyway, nothing less of a divine beast.

I gently stroke the back of her head while strongly thanking her in my mind.

In response, as we're sharing sensations right now, Rollodeen sends me following feelings: 『Friend』, 『Smell』, 『Play』, 『Smelly』, 『Like』, 『Poop』, 『Smelly』, 『Scent』, and 『Love』.

In the middle of it, she starts to send me weird emotions, but I ignore those without a hitch.

Checking the vicinity thereafter, I see that no road leading to the Hino Village has been built. There exists a narrow, mud path, seemingly weaving its way through the trees. The number of people using it is rather low, too.

While I peek at the forest's state every now and then, Rollodeen advances at a walking pace. My partner looks at bugs, butterflies, small insects, goblins with extremely clean rows of teeth, and octopus as well shrimp monsters, extends her tentacles, and sends me her feelings: 『Eat?』, 『Play?』, 『Eat』, 『Play?』, 『Tasty?』, 『Smell』, 『Smell』, and 『Fun』. At the same time she roughly snorts through her nose.

"Let's follow Quiche's scent for now." I tell Rollodeen while gently stroking her neck.

Once again she rushes in a straight line. Soon, something similar to an anthill becomes visible as it rises in the distance. It's the conspicuous Bewitching Baraydus Mansion that collapsed due to the battle against the dragon. Now, in its current state, it looks like a crooked dome that was designed by some famous artist.

When the huge, crooked anthill had become bigger, the Hino Village came into sight. It's a place close to an ant hive... This obviously means they're going to get attacked by ants.

Yet, it's a peaceful village. Even the paling is rather a fence than a wall, something small and crude that doesn't seem like it'll serve as much of a protective wall. The wooden gate I believe to be the village's entrance is asymmetrical. It's shaped as if inclining to one side, and reminds me of a soldier ant's head.

But, every important place has been reinforced with materials that use ant legs. This fence might be unexpectedly robust. But...despite it having its own charm, it still gives one a tattered impression.

There's a cattle barn on the village's right side. Domestic animals similar to cows are mooing over there. I think I've also seen those cows over at Master's place. They're called Lunga -cows with huge amounts of milk.

I recall the taste of the Cycole steak made out of lunga meat I ate at the butcher inside Hekatrail. It's a memory that makes me smack my lips...unintentionally, my mouth gets all watery.

But, even a divine beast's sense of smell can't tell the location of the new village or Quiche's precise location. Or rather, Rollodeen is already superb, seeing how she's never heard of the Hino Village in the first place. Maybe she's been following the scent of the children.

In the past, she played with the children at Quiche's side, so she's probably worried about them in her own way.

As I'm entertaining such impressions, two wagons appear on the mud road on the other side of the village while accompanied by loud hoof clapping. A wagon loaded with light-brown logs, and a covered wagon.

But, the sunshade curtain of the covered wagon is dyed blood red, and also possesses traces of the cloth having been cut. The wheels on one side are lurching, too. It looks like it's going to topple over any moment.

Those two wagons enter the Hino Village. Next, several minutes after the wagons, groups of humans and dwarves enter the village's gate. Going by the logs loaded on one of the wagons, the axes they held in an experienced way, and the apron attire of experts, they might belong to a company specializing in lumbering. It appears a woodcutter company has set up a base in the village.

The almost-broken, covered wagon which has apparently suffered an attack worries me, but...for starters I think I'll ask them where I can find Quiche.

I quickly raise a leg, and jump off Rollodeen, and then focus on smiling.

"——Umm, excuse me~"

"Hmm, what? Nuuooh!" A dwarf with hair that resembles the color of flames gets startled.

His eyes are directed to the area behind me. He's probably surprised to see Rollo change from her

divine beast form into a black cat. He keeps staring at her as she skilfully climbs on my left shoulder while making good use of her tentacles.

Rollo-san proudly holds out the pad of one of her paws towards the dwarf, greeting him with a "Nn, nya." Her red, round eyes are fixed on the dwarf's head, full of curiosity. Since the tousled red hair looks like a fruit or cotton candy, she might be thinking, 『Maybe that's ichigon. Sure looks delicious ~nya』.

"...Sorry, did we startle you?"

"Y-Yeah, somewhat. You a new adventurer? Right now she's a cute kitty, but her appearance moments ago was that of an imposing magic beast. Are you something like a demon tamer who employs such magnificent magic beasts?"

The dwarf calls me a new adventurer. Is quiche recruiting those right now? Sherry mentioned that they don't have lots of money, though.

"She's my partner, rather than being a familiar. By the way, do you know an elf with the name of Quiche?"

"I do. It's that elf who's been insisting on building a new village at the base of the mountain, right?"

"That's her, yes. If possible, could you tell me the location of that new village." I politely bow.

The dwarf points the tip of his ax diagonally to the front.

"——It's beyond the Legwyn Gate over there. Outside the gate, including close to the mountain, not only ants, but also other monsters have been repeatedly sighted. And the cattle disappearing is the same here as over there. I hear that adventurers have gone missing, too."

"The same troubles at the Hinno Village..."

As expected, it must be the adventurers whom Rollo and I rescued together with Quiche in the demonic labyrinth.

"Correct. On top of that, our bashes also get attacked in the area beyond the mountain."

He must be talking about that covered wagon.

"What kind of monster is responsible for the attacks?"

"Trolls and orcs."

Trolls are those big blokes, right? I've already encountered orcs in the past.

"That's why we've dispatched a request to Hekatrail's adventurer guild in order to hire some adventurers."

Though I think it should be alright since Quiches has an abundance of experience as an adventurer.

"Is the damage by monsters big in the new village which is being built by the elf?"

"I don't know the details since it's quite a bit away from here, but I think it's probably the same over there, too."

"I see..."

The opponents are trolls? Sherry did mention big footprints.

"But, the adventurers are late. So far you're the only one who came here."

"There are various problems in labyrinths and other areas, and there's plenty of monsters on the loose. I suspect that the adventurers are busy elsewhere."

Nora also told me about wanting to put things in order first. I wonder what kind of things she meant. Very likely something related to vampires, though...

It's very typical of her to not ask for my help. Well, when I told her about me being a Light Demon Lucival, her expression not only depicted shock, but it looked as if something special, as if her world, had fallen apart. But, when she heard about her sister being alive...she was happy from the bottom of her heart.

Even now, while recalling it...tears are instinctively welling up in my eyes. The feeling that it's truly great is something we mutually shared with each other. But, I believe that she also got her pride for the family business that's been going on for many generations now...

Oh, maybe she's doing that work right now. She might intend to wrap up all unfinished jobs as vampire hunter before reuniting with her little sister. After all, her sister is a vampire, so...it might change her future way of living.

In that case...how will the conversation with Paulsen work out...? Is he going to be alright? It might be smart for me to also be present when they meet again.

As I let my thoughts wander like that, the red-headed dwarf, who's been hesitating in the meanwhile, speaks up, "...I think it's the other monsters. Their numbers are definitely growing recently. They significantly went down after the subjugation of Baldok's dragon, but you see...that only lasted but an instant. There's still a lot of small dragons, and medium-sized dragons such as drakes and wyverns around. The ants of the Bewitching Baraydus Mansion are no different from before either. Except for those two, there's also a war between vampires and the ancient wolfmen going on, on top of the activity of goblins, trolls, and orcs having drastically increased. So it's getting unbearable."

"Sure sounds like it."

A monster subjugation befitting an adventurer for the first time in a while, huh?

"We'll also fight back with the axes we use for our crafting..."

They might be able to oppose the monsters, but if it's outside their field of expertise, completely stopping the monsters is...

"I can't recommend you doing that."

"I know. But, even the adventurers, who had been active in Hino Village, went missing, and the adventurers from Hekatrail are too damn slow!"

This dwarf gives me the impression that he'd be able to defeat a monster with his ax. But, it's a world where experience matters. It'd be better for him to not do anything dangerous.

"I know I'm repeating myself, but please leave the dangerous tasks to the experts. Since I haven't come here to take on that work, it's just lip service, but..."

"...You an acquaintance of that elf, eh?"

I don't think that he hates elves like Hankay does, but his response is still anything but good. ...It might be better to wait for other adventurers first, but I'll prioritize Quiche.

"...Okay, excuse me then. Just as you heard moments ago, I've got business with the new village, so..."

"Gahaha, what an honest guy you are. Don't mind me. No need to pull such an awkward face, man."

It looks like it was my imagination. I guess I got influenced by Hankay.

"Thanks. It's down the road there, right?"

"There's no proper road leading to the new village. It should be something similar to a village in a place where a cliff, a thorny forest, a lake, a depressed swampland, and a small mountain range line up."

'Something similar'...I guess it's still not being recognized as a proper village.

"A small mountain range? Are there any other landmarks besides a swampland?"

"Landmarks? Hmm, on top of following an animal trail, it's complicated...I think there was a rock towering vertically like a horse head..."

The dwarf puts on a troubled expression, but while forming a smile in the middle of his remark that shows off his dirty teeth, he gives me another hint. He's a nice old dwarf.

And the landmark is a horse-head rock, huh...? Even if we get lost, Rollo will likely be able to pick up the scent on the way. But, before heading there, I should thank the dwarf first.

"...Thank you very much for being so kind as to tell me all this."

"Sure. You look like a capable adventurer. I leave it in your hands!"

It's for the sake of Quiche and the children, but I'll do what I can.

"Okay, I'm off then."

"Aye."

"Nn, nya~"

Parting with the dwarf, we run towards the gate ahead of us. Reading the mood, Rollo transforms into her lion horse mode midway, and overtakes me who's running at a Lucival's speed.

As expected of a divine beast, but I won't lose!

While Rollodeen's tentacles are fluttering in the wind like vines, I jump upon her bushy back as usual, as if being attracted by the swarm of tentacles. As soon as I straddle her horse-like back, Rollodeen leaves through the village's gate while letting my body feel her speed.

We advance along the animal trail-like path in a straight line. Rollo's limbs firmly tread down on the uneven ground. Running with great vigor across the deserted, muddy path, Rollodeen plunges onward while blowing away all trees touching her body.

The freezing wind promotes the feeling of anxiety, but I don't mind. The sheens of ice covering many of the trees and their branches growing densely around thanks to that frosty wind seems to sparkle like crystals. The thorny plants are chopped down by Rollodeen's tentacles.

I think we've probably entered the place called the Sea of Trees here. I also believe it to be close to Mt. Baldok, though...

As we advance through the forest which is different from the usual forests, we arrive at a lake that continues from a depressed swampland. It's a lake with lots of trees possessing weird, red-coral-like leaves growing within.

『...Many water spirits are inhabiting this place』

『It's a beautiful spot』

I observe the vicinity while telepathically talking with Helme.

Their shapes don't look like anything existing on the surface world, but such leaves continue to fall on the swampland's surface. The sight of the sunken coral foliage spreading out at the bottom of the lake has a mystical flair. The corals lining up on that bottom seems like a grove of trees as they also exist above water. Even though the top and bottom looks to be inverted, it combines into a single, mysterious scenery.

It's an amazingly gorgeous place, but...

"Gyaagyaa."

"Gugyagya."

We encounter green-skinned goblins. Since I can also see beddings and crude living tools, this place must be the den of the goblins. The arms and legs of people are hung up between trees as if to dry laundry.

They wear leather armor and simple clothing while holding clubs in both hands. It might be equipment they stole from travelers after attacking them.

As soon as they spot us, the goblins raise both arms as if hurrying, and charge. I thought that they're carefree, cannibalistic goblins, but...as I don't see any intelligence dwelling in their eyes, I suppose they're regular goblins after all.

I feel like it's been a long time since I last saw goblins with abnormally thick eyebrows. I ponder about dealing with them using Baldok, but Rollodeen moves before I can do anything. She extends her tentacles to the front from her chest, and turns one approaching goblin after the other into a beehive.

The last remaining goblin tries to run away while screaming, but...naturally Rollodeen wouldn't allow an enemy to get away while being a horse lion similar to Kokuoh.

With powerful leg work she advances with me on top! Extending a thick, spiraling tentacle from her neck, she aims at the goblin's back, and squashes its torso from behind. Next, using a different, black tentacle, she extends it towards the goblin's corpse on the ground, and stabs it. After lifting the corpse up, she suddenly reels the tentacle back in, alongside the goblin corpse.

For an instant, the terrifying sound of something being squeezed reaches my ears from the returning tentacle. Like that, the goblin's corpse is being dragged at her feet in an instant...

After growling as you'd expect from a divine beast, she rotates her neck alongside the tentacles. It's a movement similar to a dog who sprays water in all directions by shaking its head.

I'm pretty sure that Rollodeen's face would look pretty damn weird now, if you could see it in slow motion.

Anyway, she eats the goblin in such a way. She chews only on the plump parts. It looks like Rollodeen feels like treating herself a bit today. After just eating the meaty parts, she shakes the corpse, and then tosses it away vigorously. Her appearance as she skilfully removes some remains between her fangs with tentacles after finishing her meal is indescribable.

We keep advancing for several hours while defeating many, many monsters in such a manner and taking a look at the unexplored area. Eventually...a horse-head-shaped rock comes into sight.

It's the landmark mentioned by the dwarf. A rock following a cliff, huh?

"Rollo, slow down a bit."

"Nya."

I gently tap the back of her head. As we advance at a comfortable pace, I spot a place with a brand-

new, small fence at the edge of the cliff.

I think it's a fence with the task to prevent the children from falling off the cliff. Rollo extends a tentacle to the tip of that fence, and plays around. She might feel the wish to revert into a cat and walk atop that fence.

But, right now meeting with Quiche takes precedence. We're in a sea of trees, but here it's a slope that looks like you're going to climb a mountain. That slope continues along the fence while curving left. A narrow path reminding me of the Goldiba Village.

I tilt the tentacle rein to the left, proceeding along a natural rock path which looks as if it's been formed by rain.

Soon, we suddenly exit onto a flattened, open place. On the left is, I think, a gate which was built by piling up logs between the rocks. It must be over there. It's a simple gate.

I hurry up. There's a sign with a conspicuous ebony wood grain style, resembling the fence of a ranch. There's also traces of several arrows getting stuck there left.

It looks like it's true that they've been under attack.

The sign has the name "Psydayle", probably the village's name, carved onto it. This name...I'm 100% sure that this here is Quiche's new village.

She had also mentioned Psydayle when we parted from each other last time. Even Rollodeen who's sharing sensations with me...tells me, 『Friend』, 『Friend』, 『Play』, 『Happy』, 『Friend』, 『Play』, and 『Scent』.

The scenery of her having played with Quiche and the others in the past surfaces in my mind. I pass through the gate after reading the sign, entering Quiche's village.

This place is still in development. It's surrounded by mountains and a cliff, but there's still a knoll inside the village, huh? It's way too close to the top to call it the base of a hill, but there are also gravestone-like boulders lined up over there. The village also has a watering hole drawn from a spring, and a huge field capitalizing on that watering hole.

In front of the woodshed on the left lay logs that still got plenty of branches growing out of them. Next to those is a work stand with various stuff placed on it such as a rough, old chain mail, a scrubbing sponge, deerskin clothes for children impregnated with oil, wood fibers, saws, wood hammers, planes and hoes. Right beside is a compost pile with a heap of small shiitake mushrooms, and fallen leaves.

Ropes are piled up as if forming a vertical wall at the side of a wooden hut which is still under construction. And there's one unfinished house, too.

"...Quiche! Are you here, Quiche!?" I naturally yell while being reminded of her jade green image.

I can perceive several magic source responses from the other side of the small house.

"Nn, nyaaaa~" Rollodeen cries, apparently also looking for Quiche.

I immediately dismount her, and once she reverts into a cat, she gets on my right shoulder.

Going by the magic source responses, Quiche is on the other side of that house...? Suddenly I can hear something similar to a children's song from over there.

"Blue-hair Arry and Taack are gone. What are we going to do? What should we do? Let's run away, let's run away, the orcs and trolls are here. The goblins and ants are here. The curse of the water spider living in the Plemos Basin is here. Silver wolves and vampires are here. What are we going to do? What should we do?"

"Hmm? Wait, stop singing for a moment. Just now a very nostalgic voice..."

The singing of the children that reverberated deeply odd in my ears stops. And the voice telling them to stop singing is a very nostalgic one. The vocal sound that reminds me of cut flowers somehow seeps deeply into me...

I can clearly tell that it's Quiche's voice. The Quiche with whom I exchanged a vow of friendship. The woman with the suitable alpine flower hair ornaments.

Naturally I walk forward.

"Are you outside, on the other side of the house, Quiche!?"

"Nn, nyaaa."

Enticed by me, Rollo also cries.

"Aaaaaaahhhhhh, it's Shuuya!"

"Eh!? Quiche-oneechan, why are you crying!? Oh, she started running!!"

"Let's go after her!"

Quiche apparently has started to run in a hurry, leaving the children behind. And then she shows up from in-between the sheds.

Her hair ornament is a string, different from before. And then her tied hair unfastens. Her light green hair is just like before... But, she looks frantic. No, it's a face as if she's been crying. Tears have welled up in her eyes.

I stand still like an idiot.

『What a pretty elf...no wonder that she's your friend, Your Excellency』

"...Shuuya, Shuuya. I want to me-, no....why are you here...? Ah, don't tell me, you came to save me?" Quiche stutters while covering her mouth with both hands.

The nails and fingers that are hiding the mouth of her expression that feels somewhat translucent...unlike before, her fingers have traces of getting cut and chaffed. An expression showing that she's been worrying too much, faint shadows under her eyes, a gloomy paleness...it's a face clearly showing that she's gone through many troubles in this village.

The marks on her fingers probably come from her experience of building a village.

And, the blood vessels in her eyes have become pronounced...to such an extent that it's painful for me to look at her.

Tears flowed down her face.

I recall the many times where we embraced each other as lovers and friends, and the details of my first meeting with her. While feeling something akin to being thirsty, a pricking pain assails my heart, excessively. As my heart gets filled with Quiche...my sight sways at the same time.

Yep, the scenery in front of me becomes blurry and watery. My sight sways and tears keep running down my cheeks.

"Nn, nyaaa."

"Rollo!"

"Nyaa~"

Damn it! While I was crying here, Rollo stole the first hug. Quiche and Rollo hug. Vehemently. Using her small tongue, Rollo licks Quiche from her chin to her cheeks, and throaty purring is audible even over here.

Haha, it looks like Rollo wanted to meet her, too. I wanted to meet her really badly, too.

"Shuuya..." Even while hugging Rollo, Quiche calls my name with a pained voice.

"Quiche!"

My voice naturally raises as I approach her. Then I hug her alongside Rollo, just like that.

"...Your scent is just like in the past...I haven't told anyone about it, but I really wanted to see you again." She tightly embraces me. To the extent of bending Hal'Konk's overcoat.

Rollo leaps down on the ground.

"Quiche..."

But, the reunion's first hug went to Rollo... Either way, it's fine like this for now. I'm happy just being able to feel her with my body. And although there are other things I also want to do besides hugging, I'll endure for now.

Separating my hands that held her, I take a little distance

"...Quiche, I came to help, is what I want to say, but please tell me about the situation in detail first."