



We track the trolls for two full days.

"Everyone, come here for a moment ~nya!" Nao calls us over with big gestures from slightly ahead, beckoning while hopping up and down.

It seems like she's discovered something she eagerly wants to show us...

"I don't want to take another look anymore..." Elemia is completely dejected before we've actually walked up to Nao.

"Hurry! Over here ~nya!"

"I've already told you to stop telling us how fresh the poop is and what kind of shape it has, god damn it..."

"No, that's not it! It's no poop ~nya! It's a troll! The guy who shat the poop!"

"Eehh!?"

"Hurry! Quick! There's a big one and a small one! Whoa, they look strong!"

There's certainly two trolls where Nao is pointing at. Two beasts walking on two legs. Even the smaller one has a size several that of a hume, I'd say. A thick layer of moss is growing on its back that's round and oddly protruding.

The trolls appear to have noticed our presence as well. They lower their bodies, taking a stance of wary readiness.

"Nao, fall back! I'll go." Shea advances, passing Nao without any hesitation.

This part belongs to the work of hunters. Drawing <Corpse Eater>, she begins to smoothly draw closer to the trolls at a fast pace. Elemia and I chase after her in a hurry.

And then, just at the moment I catch up to Shea,

"Guuaaaaaaa!"

The huge troll in front of Shea is already collapsing.

"Teo, it's awesomely sharp."

The troll's thick leg has been cleanly lopped off. Obviously, the troll wouldn't be able to keep its balance anymore. It trashes around after having its right foot sent flying at the ankle. It's completely lost any fighting spirit while groaning in pain and agony.

It's struggling, trying to somehow grab Shea, but she nimbly evades its hand.

"No, it's fine. Let it go." Shea holds her back with a hand.

The troll, which is a head smaller than the one she brought down just now, disappears into the forest while mowing down the trees in its way. Shea calmly sees it off.

"Are you telling me to not kill pointlessly?"

The swordswoman with her dark brown skin and animal bone mask stained by demonic beast blood looks as if she just crawled out of a nightmare. However, because that slaughtering was done for the sake of curse power, it's not like she likes butchering living beings more than necessary...maybe.

"If we had killed both of them here, we wouldn't have been able to look for their nest anymore ~nya."

That's an awfully pragmatic reason! Completely devoid of any emotions.

"So it's not that you're pitying it because it's still small..."

"No matter what I might think about it, it's still a fact that trolls regard humes as nothing but food. They're likely considering small humes to be especially tender and delicious." Shea answers indifferently.

Without even looking in our direction, she points a stabbing glare at the new animal trail created by the troll's flight.

"Nao, how is it?"

"Way too easy. A troll's scent won't disappear for ten days ~nya."

Nao picks up a twig that got broken off a tree by the troll, sniffs at it, and tosses it away with a bored look.

"That means we're going to chase after it at once, right? Let's find their den."

Elemia is about to walk ahead, but Nao quickly stops her from doing that with a hand.

"Not yet ~nya. The fleeing troll won't return straight to its nest ~nya. It'll wander around this area until it's certain that no one is following it, wary of not leading anyone to their nest. It's a prime example of their wild instincts ~nya."

"I see...they're surprisingly clever. The trolls, and you as well, Nao."

"Gnnya!?"

Nao seems to have been triggered by the term 'surprisingly'. She's likely pretty proud of her skill as a tracker.

"So, what are we going to do next?"

Nao immediately answers my question, "We're going to camp ~nya! We'll eat plenty of food and sleep lots ~nya!"

"Are we?"

"If Nao says so, then we do just that. Trust a professional tracker." Shea nods lightly.

As a result, we decide to interrupt our chase at this point, and pitch a camp until morning.

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"Nya munyamunya mu~"

The professional tracker was abnormally fast asleep. As soon as we set up the tents and finished dinner, she dozed off.

—Not that much time has passed since her energetic, "We're going to camp ~nya!"

"The period of time between her saying, "Good appetite!" and falling asleep is way too short, no matter how you look at it." Elemia has just started drinking her after-meal tea in front of the campfire.

"Beastmen generally like sleeping. Especially catmen spend a lot of time asleep. It'd be best for you guys to go to sleep early, too. We'll likely leave here before sunrise tomorrow."

With those words, Shea leaves the fire, and wraps herself up in her cloak underneath the tarp we erected by using a tree.

—Before sunrise, huh?

It's probably better for me to turn in early as well, but it's not like I can sleep on command.

"Sir Teo, want some tea? It'll calm you, making it easier to fall asleep." Elemia puts some tea leaves into my cup, and pours some hot water into it for me.

It's tea using dried Abra chrysanthemum leaves. You don't see them often in the capital, but they seem to have an effect of soothing one's nerves. The people in this area drink it everyday. I've finally gotten used to its peculiar aroma as well.

"...Elemia, why have you become a huntress?" I ask her to get a conversation going as it feels somewhat awkward to just drink tea in silence.

"Of course for the sake of money, status, and honor - in short, to rise in the world."

"Really?"

"Why do you doubt me? Is it wrong for me to not have some nobler reason?"

"That's not it. Just, I wondered whether your village got burned down, or if you got attacked by a demonic beast, or something like that."

"No, not at all. In the first place, it's no village, and it doesn't have anything of value to be burned down either! Rather, I think I'd feel refreshed if that place actually burned down for good."

"We're talking about your birthplace here, you know...?"

"Sir Teo, you see, it's not like us elves all live in clearly defined environments. Just like there exist rich and civilized elves, there also exist elves living in places similar to trash dumps."

Many of the elves in the capital belong to the social strata of nobility and relatively wealthy citizens. The woodland elves give one the impression of leading structured, traditional lives of protecting their land since ancient times.

"What's your birthplace like, Elemia?"

"It's a slum at the western edge of Meltart. The Trash Ear District."

"...What a terrible name."

"Lawless elves around here are called Trash Ears. And there I lived with Mama and five siblings in a shabby hut as the oldest daughter."

"...Just listening to it sounds hard."

"Mama was always drunk, and regularly brought new men over. A mother making out with a man right next to her small children is definitely weird, right?"

"Oof, that sounds quite harsh..."

I know that hackneyed pity isn't any kind of help whatsoever, but still...I'm so vexed that no other words leave my mouth.

"No kidding. That's why I'll absolutely rise in the world, absolutely! I'll become a certified hunter like Lady Shea, and build a huge house with my younger sisters and brothers."

Elemia slowly slurps her tea while fixedly staring into the empty twilight sky on the other side of the campfire.

"So that's the reason for your idolization of Shea, huh?"

"Yeah! Lady Shea is the best! Calling her a goddess would be an understatement!" Elemia's words are full of passion. "Lady Shea is also being looked down upon with eyes full of contempt and prejudice. But, she doesn't give a damn about something like that, right? It feels like she's rising in the world while fully relying on her own strength. That rocks! I also want to become like her. I'm going to become a bigshot with my archery skills, and then look back down on all those people who treated me like a fool!"

Elemia rattles on in one breath, looking quite excited. The soothing effect of the tea leaves doesn't seem to show any effect on her.

"Though I do believe that Shea has no interest looking back down on others or some such, heh."

"Yep. That part of hers is also cool and dreamy, isn't it? But, I'm different, I'll make a name for myself to show those people what I'm capable of. I'll show them how I obtain land, buy a huge house, and then flashily drive around in an awesome carriage!"

A dazzling flame burns within her emerald green eyes. I can feel her strong will and firm determination.

"Somehow it's actually fresh to be told something like this with such a decisive verve."

"That's why I'll stick to Lady Shea. Black Dog Huntress Shea and Morning Mist Shooter Elemia; I'll cling to her all the time until those names are mentioned in one breath!"

"I think Shea won't be overly happy about that, though."

"I believe that you might be unexpectedly wrong there. Lady Shea usually acts as a loner, so having someone like me persistently stick to her should make her happy as a fresh experience instead—!"

"Hey, if you're going to talk about me, get away from me a bit!"

We got scolded by Shea!

Elemia the Morning Mist Shooter was told to get away immediately after declaring that she'd always stick to Shea. She fell asleep soon while feeling somewhat downhearted over being hated by the person she admires.

