

Chapter 339 - Whereabouts of the Children



A mana light reminiscent of an emergency exit light blinked, causing a play of light and shadows to fill the space. Gross, bloodsucking monsters, who could be insects, fish or nothing of either, crawled across the floor, squirming and then vanishing.

A sour smell hung in the air. It reminded one of how a black, muddy waterfall basin would stink.

Countless people of all races were held prisoner inside this dim dungeon of the blood testing ground, made out of sturdy, special alloy. The only salvation for those prisoners was...them still being alive and treated carefully as fresh, living material to be used for the experiments, seeing how they were no more than food for the vampires.

But, this was nothing but a nightmare for the prisoners. In their midst, a single child, also stuck in here, spoke up.

"Arry, cheer up. What happened to the liveliness from the time when you did your best at the ant subjugation?"

"...I mean, look, this place is scary."

"...It's okay. I'll protect you."

"Thanks, Taack."

The children encouraged each other. They had been losing spirit in here, but after nodding at each other, they both smiled.

At that moment, the footsteps of the vampires could be heard, coming from the corridor.

"——Let go! What's this damn thread that doesn't want to get off!?"

"Nemus!"

"This one is way too heavy, isn't it?" "Is there any blood in this huge thing?" "It might become a precious ingredient, Toyz-sama instructed." "So they're going to be used in Bianco-sama's experiments?" "Ah, it can't be helped then." "The bird does look tasty, though." "You got a point there..."

The vampires carried their captives while evaluating them.

"Fuck, I ain't no bird. Even if you roast me, I won't become edible, you retards!"

A swordsman of a race resembling a bird screamed while its partner, a steel tree giant, was being held by the vampires.

"I am..."

"Nemus, you too, try to somehow free yourself!"

The giant and the bird-like man struggled, trying to get rid of the blood threads binding their bodies, but to no avail.

While laughing at that sight, the vampires scoffed, "Wait for your turn in here," and, "What a pesky bird, you are," bringing those two into the jail.

The giant and the moga race couldn't move because they were bound by <Blood Spinning Wheel>, an ability used by vampires. They were adventurers who had reached the level of veterans, but they had poor compatibility when it came to taking on vampires. The giant and the moga rolled around on the filthy, bare ground inside the prison. The giant kept screaming, "Nemus," whereas the moga loudly exclaimed, "I'm Günther Moga-sama!"

The completely inappropriate, cheerful laughter thundering across the prison in sight of this spectacle didn't originate from the vampires, but Arry and Taack.

"Ahaha, he's even smaller than I am!"

"The shape of his head looks like a bird! So funny!"

"The tree over there is huuuge."

"Look! It's not a tree over here as its eyes are gleaming!"

"——Gaaah! What's going on!? Don't touch me, brat, lass! I'm an adventurer and moga swordsman!"

"I am Nemus!"

"Hey, Taack, the big Mr. Nemus here has a mark on his shoulder, you know?"

"Oh, you're right. I wonder, won't we be able to escape this place through some special power if we press that mark?"

"...I'm Nemus."

The giant, who had the kanji for maple carved onto its left shoulder, kept repeating the same words, over and over again. But his crystalline eyes showed movements slightly different from up till now.

"Sparkling? But, it looks like a bad idea."

"No matter how much I pull on this, these blood threads won't come off. It's in vain with just our strength."

"What mysterious threads. They bind their bodies and yet there's no change to them even if we

touch them."

"Yep. If we at least had some kind of blade..."

Taack kept pondering with his big eyes trembling.

"Mr. Bird, can't you use your wings?"

"Impossible, they're too soft."

Seemingly very curious about the bird-like life-form, Taack had been massaging the bird body since a while ago, as if childishly playing around with its elastic flabbiness.

"Guuooo, I keep telling you to not touch and massage meeee! An exhaled person like me is no toy! I am a swordsman, goddamnit!"

"Ahahaha."

"I wanna massage him too."

With those words, Arry joined Taack in his enjoyment of trifling with the moga. But, once several hours had passed since that innocent, little playing, Taack and Arry were confronted reality once again...

"...Quiche-onee-chan and Sherry-onee-chan are going to rescue us..."

"...Uh-huh, we have to apologize for having acted on our own, if we get out of here alive."

"Taack, do you believe that even our strong Quiche-onee-chan won't be able to come here?"

"...Arry, look around yourself. It's not just us here. This bird and tree giant have been captured as well. Even a strong person like Quiche-onee-chan..."

"That's so not like you, Taack! Even though you cheered me up a while ago!" Having lost her emotional support, the little girl Arry was on the verge of crying.

Arry's heart hurt as she didn't want to hear such complaints from her childhood friend and dearly loved Taack.

"First you laugh and play around, and now you're crying? Well, as long as we can get Nemus to tear these threads apart..."

Günther Moga directed eyes full of hope in the reserve strength of Nemus as a steel tree race.

"I am...Nemus."

The giant closely shut, and then opened his eyes.

"I see. I'm looking forward to it."

They were a weird duo causing anyone to wonder whether they could really hold a conversation with just eye signals, but their behavior made those around them believe that they understood each other in one way or another.

And then, as the days passed on, one person in the jail after the other had their blood sucked. While the number of victims kept increasing, the people waiting for their death together with Arry and Taack were dominated by the depressing thoughts that an escape would be impossible with their fate being set to die after having their blood extracted, causing their expressions to become dark and forlorn from despair.

However, then, one day, an explosion occurred in the corridor close to their jail.



"I'm sorry to interrupt your fun time, but I'd like to collect the vampire's items as a hunter...is that okay?" Nora asks while looking at the items worn by Yuo.

Are these things she plans to bring back to the Egbayn family?

"I don't mind. In the first place, he's a target you've been chasing, Nora."

"...I have no interest in such things, so feel free to do as you please." Higlia says while glaring at the scattered items of Yuo.

"Thanks, I won't hold back then."

Nora starts picking up the items strewn across the ground.

To be honest, I'm slightly curious about the crimson copper ring, I believe to have been equipped at his feet, and the belt-shaped item box which disappeared into Nora's item box with the rest of the lot, but whatever...

Accordingly I turn my eyes in the direction of Higlia. While looking at her, I ponder about the words she blurted out: "Now come to the forest residence of the ancient wolfmen! And allow me to have a bout of fists and glory with you on the Idol Plaza."

"...Higlia, about the duel you mentioned earlier. I have no interest in a fist fight. I have to do something that's important to me." I honestly confess my feelings on the matter.

In response, she leaks a quiet, "Eh?", and scowls at me for an instant. But, her eyes keep trembling, exposing various emotions such as grief and fondness.

As she stays silent, I add, "...Even if you look at me like that, you know?"

"...It's no good? Even though I told you my name...?"

Next she casts her eyes down. But that disappointed look of hers is so adorable that it actually carries some destructive force... It's foul play, really.

Still, everything in life has a priority.

At that point, I look at Nora. Just now she's finished picking up all the items, storing away everything into the pouch connected to the worker's leather belt with the conspicuous silver buckle. That square, reddish-brown leather pouch seems to be an item box as I can sense mana from it.

Nora stares my way after brushing up her pretty, shoulder-long, wavy hair. Her white earrings are charming.

"...Shuuya, I hate to part with you, but I also have some °important business° to take care of. I'll go back any moment now since I've still got some requests left." Nora explains without hiding the sadness on her face.

Higlia, on the other hand, glowers at me in silence.

"...I'd love to help you with those requests, but sorry, I can't."

"No, don't worry about it."

Nora tightly hooks the waist belt to a string extending from a thumb-sized metal fixture of her breastplate with a finger, and fastens it by pulling tightly.

While charming me with her lovely belly button, "——Okay, see you. It'd be great if we could meet someday in Hekatrail or your mansion in Pelneet, Shuuya."

Honestly, Nora is a woman I'd love to screw once more. But, she has her own reasons for living her life as she does.

While aware of my feelings of respect for her, I answer, "...Sure, I might be present at the time when you meet Angie."

"Oki. Ah, but you don't have to force yourself if you're busy. It looks like my talks with her will take quite a bit of time, and I also need to go back to the Egbayn family to give my report. ...This is something I really don't feel like doing though..." She suddenly tightens up, apparently recalling her family with its longstanding history.

Her little sister who's become a vampire, and her work as hunter - I'm sure her life is going to become stormy and full of drama when it comes to the question how to balance those two.

The look she's sending my way every now and then makes me feel a painful reluctance.

"...Roger. I can only tell you to keep at it. I told you before, but if there's anything I can do for you, just contact the maids at my place or the folks of **【Remains of the Moon】**, and they'll immediately message me, okay? Feel free to depend on me without hesitation."

"...Fufu, as always, you're a kind, perverted gentleman..." Nora smiles after nodding at my words.

Apparently she's activated a skill at that moment. Is it the same one she used when peeking at the fight between Higlia and Yuo? At the least, it's some sort of hiding skill.

The area under her feet sways faintly. It might be the rare type of skill that causes mana flickering...

As I analyze it, she vanishes as if melting into the woods. The faint traces of her back's contours give her way of disappearance a sense of fleetingness.

At that moment, Higlia steps into my visual field. Her chests don't sway because of her armor, but she takes a posture of pressing both her hands against her hips which would otherwise cause her boobs to wobble.

"Hey! That part about a perverted gentleman bothers me! But, if it's something important to you, I'll come with you, Shuuya!"

"Huh?"

The cute Higlia with her single canine tooth protruding out at the edge of her mouth declares while pointing a finger at me. The silver claw on that finger has slightly extended.

"Nya~"

Rollodeen, who's transformed into her horse lion form, reacts to Higlia's statement by extending a tentacle towards her.

"——Kyaaa!"

Rollodeen coils her tentacle around Higlia's body and lifts her up on her back. Did she take a fancy to Higlia's scent?

"Divine Beast-sama...is it okay for me to ride you as well...?" Higlia's words and conduct don't mesh, seeing how she's hugging Rollodeen's furry back.

Did she get taken in by the fluffiness of the black fur? As I grin at her behavior, a tentacle heads my way as well.

But before that tentacle can coil itself around my body, I say "...It's fine, don't mind it," while actively grabbing the tentacle approaching from in front.

In an instant Rollodeen transforms her tentacle into something similar to a glove, as if doing a handshake with me, twines it around my hand, and vigorously reels it in with the tentacle vibrating. As my right hand is being pulled by her glove-like tentacle, I'm being guided next to her back. I amass mana in my feet to match her pulling, and energetically jump towards her back, place my left palm on her back, and do a handstand as if pretending to be a gymnastics athlete.

Rollodeen's tentacle, which has held onto my right hand, lets go and splits into smaller parts. That split tentacle looks just as if countless crow feathers are dancing in the air.

Higlia, who's already straddling Rollodeen, might look somewhat surprised at what I'm doing.

While doing a handstand, I bend my left elbow, and leap up, just relying on the strength in my left hand to push against Rollodeen's back. As I jump into the air, I focus on Higlia's location to not bump into her while twisting my body, and landing on Rollodeen.

"...Magnificent. You must be deeply connected with Divine Beast-sama."

Higlia appears to perceive the bonds between Rollodeen and me, who have changed into a unity of rider and holy mount, from the chain of actions just now. She might be muttering those words precisely because of the relation between ancient wolfmen and God Wolf Hurley.

"She's my partner, so that's why. Now then, we're about to head in the direction the blood chain indicates, and since Rollo has taken a liking to you, I don't mind you coming along, but...make sure to not get in the way of my objective, okay?"

"...I know. I've heard the story about the missing children. That means I'll assist you with that. Consider yourself lucky."

Contrary to her arrogant tone, Higlia hugs me closely enough to bury her face in my back.

"Then all's fine——"

Rollodeen, who understands my feelings as I turn my eyes to the front, raises her speed and starts to advance through the Sea of Trees. Higlia puts more force into her arms as she casually embraces me. Thanks to the Boobs Research Society and its techniques of divine providence, I can analyze the sensation of her wonderful boobies through her armor as she's closely glued to my back.



Immediately after Shuuya with his slightly lewd thoughts, Rollodeen, and Higlia disappeared into the woods, following the blood chain's trace, countless butterflies, which were supposed to be no more than mere butterflies fluttering through the air, suddenly started to squirm as if each of them possessed their own consciousness. And then, a cocoon of big white and purplish red wings was born from within the space where the butterflies were squirming around.

Two Death Butterfly people, one with a body of white moths and the other with a body of purplish red butterflies, appeared from within the cocoon while causing a gust of wind. They twisted the corners of their mouths, releasing a weird laughter.

"——Jody, the outside is super fun since you can find battles all over the place."

"Yep, it looks like the vortex is swirling."

"Hey, hey, do you think that the panther with the cute tentacles spotted us? I was surprised since she was looking our way despite us hiding."

"Hmm, it should be quite difficult to detect the <Demonic Suppression> of Fumkry's Divine Scales of Calamity, but it was sure odd her to look in our direction like that."

"Your prized item surpassed even that pesky god wolf, but it appears it couldn't win against the panther with its unique cuteness, huh?"

"...Humph."

Having her mood spoiled, Jody kept flying as if jumping through the air while setting her white moths loose.

"Fufu, wait for meee~"

"Bleah!"

Jody and Ciel joyfully leaped across the sky while clad in butterflies. Their actions produced a speed that rivaled that of Rollodeen. Going by appearance, it was a bizarre sight of gorgeous, pretty butterflies bustling about.

Suddenly the two stopped while scattering butterflies.

"——Hey, look! There's something like a village with the shape of a rock over there."

Ciel, possessing the face of a beautiful woman, made a scythe appear in her right hand, whirled it around, and thrust the tip of its blade downwards.

"That sure is a remote place for a village, isn't it? Oh, there are people capable of manipulating blood in it. Vampires, huh?"

"Yep. Underneath that claw-shaped rock is a cave that seems to be a dwelling of <Servant Leaders> or <Head Servants>."

"Speaking of vampires, I remember us having fought one in a very distant past..."

"That kin of Vampire God Lugnad whom we fought within deep darkness, on the other side of the Forest of Light Crosses...he was powerful, honestly."

"...He's just like the noble youth who's rampaging around the Sea of Trees right now. Ufufun."

"Ahaha, Ciel, the shapes your butterflies are forming are kinda indecent, you know? Ah, are you imagining it? But you see, even if they resemble each other, the noble youth is someone else."

"Ah, eh, for crying out loud... Anyway! I'm curious about the countless magic sources of the people below that village."

"There's many powerless among them, but I feel like there's some strong vampires mixed in as well♪"

"They might be hiding some fun items down there!"

"But, the opponent is a progenitor vampire. We've got a bad compatibility with those, but maybe I should suck up the blood with Cunnariel?"

"Great idea♪"

"Alrighty. Then we won't launch a flashy attack from the front. After exploring the interior——"

Jody nimbly dances around while changing around the hold of the scythe's end. After a skipper, a cross hand, and while performing a scuba dance, she bounces about in the air while whirling her scythe around.

And then Ciel matches her dance movements with those of Jody as if mirroring her, and moves her scythe Saju to make its blade clash against the curved blade of Jody's scythe.

A flash explodes from the spot where the two scythes overlap.

"——we'll destroy it all!"

"——Yep♪"

It's a unique scythe technique of those two. The whimsical death butterfly people, Jody and Ciel. They reveal expressions full of joy and deviousness even while bearing a shady gravity in their eyes, and extend their scythes diagonally. Making the blades cross as if creating an X-mark in the air, they begin to rotate with those overlapped scythe blades as focal point.

Moreover, they extend their empty hands in the opposite direction. Countless white moths and purplish red butterflies gush out of their napes and extended arms, rotating as well. The butterflies begin to shape a maelstrom while transforming into spotted patterns.

Jody and Ciel repeat the movements vertically to the side as if not feeling any gravity pulling at them. While spiraling, they plunge into the blood test site of the Valmask family.



Several hours before Shuuya bid farewell to Nora. Inside the blood test site, which used a cave in the center of the village, Hoffmann's <Servant Leaders>, except for Yuo, had gathered. Hoffmann himself was sitting deeply in a luxurious, wooden chair as he inclined a wine glass at his mouth.

His expression was one of delight as he drank the blood. Just like that, he observed the experiments performed by Bianco.

It was an experiment that used Technique God Abkhul's Dark Gold Pot and a special blood mana skill only Bianco had awakened to. It was used to create a new puppet monster by crossing a three-headed dragon, the egg of an orc queen, and carefully selected blood with vampire blood as the base.

This skill was also a part of the reason why Bianco could boast to be a <Servant Leader>. Bianco, a muscular, buffed guy, bowed at Hoffmann who was like a parent to him while conducting himself in a way you wouldn't expect from his physique.

Apparently content with Bianco's courteous demeanor, Hoffmann nodded generously.

The <Servant Leader> Toyz stood next to Hoffmann. She held a parchment in her hand, a document related to the blood and materials used. The names of the human children, which were still alive, were written down in a row. Toyz handed the document to Hoffmann while saying with a womanly, bell-like voice, "This is a study about the blood and materials for today's experiment."

He took the parchment, and while gazing at the letters... Just when he nodded with a smile, his expression suddenly froze.

"...Wh-!? It vanished!?"

"What might be wrong, Hoffmann-sama?"

"...Just now I felt how my connection with Yuo was severed."

"The disappearance of a <Servant Leader>..."

"Eh? No way, again?"

Biano, who poured blood on the new egg, recalled the events of the attack on their last facility.

Suddenly, the cave trembled.

"This vibration comes from the inside? What happened to the <Servants> outside?"

"At any rate, since it's coming from the direction of the jail, I shall go and take a look."

Cold sweat he hadn't felt for many, many years streamed down Hoffmann's nape. His whole body was assailed by a bad premonition. Just like Bianco and Toyz, he thought that it might be another attack by the black-haired alchemist.