

Chapter 362 - Fresh Start towards Happiness

Immediately after we enter Cydale, Rollodeen comes into sight as she spreads her big, black wings. She's gliding through the sky as a divine beast as if to flaunt her overwhelming presence. Her adjusting the angle of her wings that vividly remind one of gigantified falcon looks striking.

She extends her lion-like front paws, grabs onto a round stone statue, and lands with her supple, huge frame in one breath. A loud boom and mana waves expand into the vicinity, clouds of dust whirling up. I wonder whether that was her idea of a gentle landing...

The village's children and Catiza frolic around, curious as to what's going on. Usually you'd expect screams of terror and panic, but none of that is audible here. Far from being frightened, the children here are overjoyed instead.

And as soon as the Burning Knights spot me, they both yell at the same time, "His Excellency has returned!" and "Your Excellency!", running up to me with steamy flames billowing up from their chests. A fiery gleam dwells in their eye sockets, telling me that they're delighted and excited over my return, but it's slightly scary, to be honest...

The agitated Burning Knights immediately go down on one knee in front of me. As they do it rather energetically, the ground beneath their kneecap caves in.

"...Yo, Zemetas, Adomos. It looks like you've done a good job on defending the village."

"Yes, Your Excellency! We have slaughtered many orc soldiers!"

"However, we had slight troubles dealing with an orcish cavalryman who withstood our charge..."

"His name was Tokk Ghul Kaibacz. He was a member of a platoon led by an Ogre Skull User. Seemingly having judged that they wouldn't be a match for us, the Ogre Skull User blew a bone flute, and the platoon retreated into the depths of the forest with the swordsman Tokk Ghul Kaibacz..."

While listening to their report, I got curious about the place where Rollodeen had landed. Carrying Rollo's weight, the stone statue shook, and had a part of its surface scratched out by her big claws.

Oh shit...what should we do if it's an important structure of the village?

It's round at a glance, but at a closer look, carvings as they seemed to have been popular among ancient elves have been engraved all over...so it might be a high-class item.

Worried about that, I check Quiche's expression who's entered the village a little while after me...

Without paying any attention to the statue, she drops the orc equipment on the ground, and simply mutters, "...As I thought, she's big and beautiful..." as if entranced by Rollodeen's gallant figure.

It appears I don't need to worry about the statue.

Thereupon, Rollo roars, "Nn, nyaooooooooo~", pulling off her usual "Lion King."

Then she gently lowers everyone, who's been sitting on her back, with her tentacles. Arry and Taack seem to be unhappy about the tentacles unraveling and separating from them. While squealing, "Waiiit!" and "Eehh? Don't remove it! I want moar!", they chase after the tentacles as they reel back towards Rollo's body. Of course, there's no way that they'll catch up with them.

However, Rollo is a kind kitty, and has properly listened to what they've said. After shrinking the tips of the tentacles down to sizes similar to dumplings, she extends them to Arry, Taack and the other children, letting them freely play around with the tentacles.

For some reason Catiza joins in with the children, and then Higlia also looks enviously at the whole scene, resulting in Rollo sending a tentacle her way as well.

In response Alray and Hueremy make their presence known by roaring loudly and exposing their fangs. This causes the fat elf to scream, "I'm no delicacy!", Gramps Ton to throw acorns, Mauric to step forward to cover the female karamnian, Granny Bang to hold up a charm, Gramps Paru and Riedel to be scared, and the dwarven lumberjack Ebe to yell, "Why are huge tiger monsters here!?" The one-armed, one-legged child remains expressionless.

"Those are monsters!"

"I'm Nemus!"

Moga and Nemus defend the bandaged child, but the one-armed, one-legged child glares at the item box peeking out from Moga's attire.

Alray and Hueremy, the origin of this panic, repeatedly extend and retract their front paws' sharp claws, prying open the ground. Maybe they're excited after seeing Rollo, who's something like a mother to them.

Then they notice me, and pounce on me playfully. I enjoy their soft fur while holding them in my arms.

"——Ouch, your claws hurt, but...I'm back."

"Nyao~"

"Nyao."

Both lick me passionately, occasionally hitting me with their fangs which hurts.

"...Alright, you two. It's enough now." I forcefully push both tigers away.

"Nyao."

"Nyao."

They meow sadly. But, after walking around me nimble movements as typical of tigers, they look

up to Rollodeen. I think their eyes are directed at Rollodeen's inner belly. Are they interested in her boobies? Though I don't think any milk will come out like it did with Balmint...

While I'm remembering Rollo in her role as a mother...I check the state of everyone who's arrived in Cydale. They're startled by the big tigers, but Mauric, Riedel, Gramps Paru, Gramps Ton, and Granny Bang are all here. I also check the situation of Higlia, Arry, and Taack who are playing with the tentacles.

Seeing all of them looking somewhat uneasy, I briefly inform them that I've obtained the permission for them to live in the village from Village Chief Quiche with the intent to give them some relief.

Hearing my words, everyone bursts into joy. Even Higlia walks up to me after separating from the tentacles with quick movements, and asks, almost shouting, "It's okay for me to live here as well!?"

I reply by silently nodding. The instant she sees my positive affirmation, she howls, "Uuooooonn!!!", as you'd expect of an ancient wolfwoman. She appears to be quite delighted over this piece of news.

The shape of her silver claw armor becomes somewhat thin and slender. Her velvet, pretty silver hair becomes visible on her back, and the tightness of her waist becomes even more prominent. Her current outfit is close to that I saw when I met her for the first time. Higlia's charm point, the canine peeking out at the edge of her lips, glitters.

"——Shuuya!" She calls out my name, and closes the distance in a forward-bent posture.

Kisara immediately alights from the sky in order to protect me, but I hold up my hand, muttering, "No need."

"Yes, Master," Kisara answers with a Palm Hold Fist salute while floating in the air.

At that moment, Higlia embraces me with the same force as the tigers earlier. I gently stroke her back just like that.

"That's great news, isn't it? Make sure to properly thank my friend Quiche, okay? Quiche said she'd take you in even while knowing that you're an ancient wolfwoman."

"I got it..."

Higlia nods, and immediately separates from me.

Having watched from nearby, Quiche says, "I mentioned that I'd take her in. I certainly did, but...for her to have been such a beauty..... Has the womanizing we spoke about earlier already come into effect?"

"Sorry."

"It's okay. I knew that you have other women besides Sherry. Still, my feelings remain unchanged——" Quiche answers with an expression showing how she's suppressing her jealousy, and while looking at Higlia, "Nice to meet you, Ms. Ancient Wolfwoman. Trusting Shuuya, I've

accepted you, but to be honest, I'm scared of you. As such I'd love to ask you various things if we can find some time to talk with each other in the near future."

"...Sure, elf. I'm glad that you're so open about your feelings. I think it's because you're an elf, but I've never heard about anyone trying to accept the ancient wolfman race in this Sea of Trees, especially about knowing about us. Are you an elf similar to Spirit Moon Dream Grass?"

"Spirit Moon? That's a type of grass I've never heard about."

Well, it looks like Quiche and Higlia are going to get along somehow, I suppose.

At that point, the giant Mauric yells, "I won't loooooose to Higlia! A pioneeeeeeeeer villaaaaaage! Hoooooray!"

The karamnian woman Suu-san, who's snuggling up to Mauric, also cheerfully shouts, "Yaaay, thanks Shuuya-sama, Divine Beast-sama!"

Next, Ebe, who's in high spirits because of his excessive joy, kisses the cheek of the fat elf next to him, resulting in her screaming, "What's up with you!?! Pervert!!", and slapping his cheek.

That fat elf is called Dokoko Mews-san. She has a bear tattoo on her cheek, though I'd get walloped if I said that she looks just like the picture.

Riedel and Gramps Paru are happily dancing after nursing Ebe who's propping himself up with both arms on the ground after getting slapped by Dokoko-san.

At that moment, Gramps Ton makes his entry. With a smile, he tosses the acorn in his hand into the air without eating it.

"——Rejoice! We're fortunate! We've obtained a sacred messiah who tears through the darkness! Let me demonstrate my Magic Finger Flip Technique in celebration!"

Gramps Ton is excited for a change. That technique of his is the one that completely drew the attention of the children a while ago, isn't it?

"Oh, it's Gramps Ton's special move."

"Again playing with acorns?"

Riedel points with a finger and Arry raises her voice. After flashing a smile at the children, Gramps Ton creates a clenched fist in front of his chest. He places an acorn with practiced moves on top of the fist. In the next instant, Gramps Ton's eyes become as sharp as a blade. Then he flicks up the acorn with his thumb.

Oohh, it's flying faster than usual.

The acorn, which is clad in mana, moves abnormally fast. Cutting its way through the air, the acorn loudly hits the other acorn which he had tossed up moments ago and is now in the process of falling down.

You can hear a hollow, deflection sound. It's different from fireworks, but it creates a festive mood in its own way. Each time he launches a new acorn from below, the first acorn is chipped away and becomes smaller. The damaged acorn is hurled up high into the sky in several stages like a rocket.

Gramps Ton shades his eyes, and comments with a somber tone, "I see, I see, I'm in good shape today," while looking up to the sky. And then, as if to dance a true "festival"...he starts to yell various things while moving as it's done during a Bon Festival dance. After adopting a peculiar pose, he bends his knees in succession, extends both hands, and exhibits his flipping technique.

He makes one bullet acorn after the other hit the damaged acorn that has been continuing to rise into the sky. For him to continuously hit such a small target... Previously I saw him throw an acorn at a spider from atop Rollo mid-flight, but...the mana acorn bullets are flicked up with his thumb while he makes use of a mana recoil.

The skill to engulf the acorns with a thin mana layer through his thumb is also amazing though... Gramps Ton's thumb looks like a dried twig, but mana is dwelling in the finger joints. It's a skill that requires training in Magic Combat Style...

Guidance sorcery or Magic Combat Style? It might be just a small fraction, but he might be a natural talent. I don't know, but I think <Finger Flick> is a kind of throwing skill. It should also work with pebbles.

At the end, the airborne acorn falls apart in small fragments, getting completely destroyed. Gramps Ton would probably be able to earn some good cash as a street performer, or rather, cook. The surroundings also honor his exquisite skill with a round of applause.

While their clapping fills the area...I recall a certain event. It's the incident at the Surgebald Earldom when I brought Nereis'Kary back to her country. We fought the dark guild **【Noctal's Oath】** and several skilled fighters such as Hogbar, Soleck, and Nuha. I also remember the band of wandering troupe **【Wandering Troupe – Strangers】** I met there.

Rotalz has also called me a Stranger. The lamp user Benjamin Smoke-san might be a Stranger, too.

Going even further, the troupe performed the piece 「The Love between the Knight of Secret Arts and a Traveling Girl」. Schmihazar also mentioned something about a western knight of secret arts...

I shiver as I imagine the complicated, intricate connections of this huge, vast world.

Quiche claps at Gramps Ton's performance together with everyone after having concluded her chat with Higlia. I join them, too.

But then Quiche stops clapping, and surveys the vicinity. She stops her eyes after finding a certain spot, and loudly shouts, "Arry! Taack!"

Yep, Quiche has been worriedly looking in the direction of the children who have been playing with the tentacles...

"Oh, it's Quiche."

"Quiche-onee-chan, we're back!"

Arry and Taack are holding onto tentacles. They notice Quiche after she loudly calls their names. I'm not sure whether it's Rollo's way of reading the atmosphere, but she pulls back her tentacles.

"You two——"

I can only see Quiche's face from the side, but I know that she's looking frantic. She dashes up to Arry and Taack, and falls on her knees in front of them.

"It's so wonderful that you've come back safe and sound!" Quiche croaks with a tear-choked, intermittent voice.

She puts her arms around Arry and Taack, and pulls them into her embrace. She's shedding tears while alternatively smothering Arry and Taack's heads with kisses.

"Quiche..."

"Quiche-onee-chan!"

Quiche's love is similar to that of a mother. Feeling her deep affection, the two children cry and hug Quiche while apologizing.

I'm really happy for you two... I'm thankful that I was able to rescue you in time...

Even I start to cry out of sympathy. Quiche and the two look like real mother and children.

Arry says with a smile, despite crying, "...Shuuya-an-chan said that it might be because of this here."

She grabs Azora's amulet that has been dangling at her waist, and shows it to Quiche. The amulet looks dirty. But I believe it's an irreplaceable treasure for those children.

At that moment, I feel like I see illusions of Azora and Pau as they laugh while enclosing Quiche, Arry, and Taack. I saw the same some time ago.

The letters written in my status cross my mind. They contained Super Advancement of Strange Phenomena Progress...

Well, I guess I should simply regard it as my eyesight becoming too good. Also, I'll cooperate a bit so that everyone can live here cheerfully. It'll be fine if they can have a fresh start towards happiness.

As I'm pondering about such things...Rollodeen shakes her big body like dogs do when shaking off water, and then transforms into her cat form in the next instant.

"Nya~" Rollo meows while looking at me.

"Rollo, good work. You did your best in transporting everyone, didn't you? Or should I also say welcome back?"

"Nnn——" Rollo runs up to me while replying with a throaty growl.

In the next moment she jumps up as if to secure her usual spot on my shoulder. But she doesn't sit down as a cat loaf on her usual spot, but bumps her head against my chin, and then starts to mess around by moving back and forth atop my shoulders.