The Poison King: Now that I've Gained Ultimate Power, the Bewitching Beauties in My Harem Can't Get Enough of Me

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Author: LeonarD
Illustrator: Won

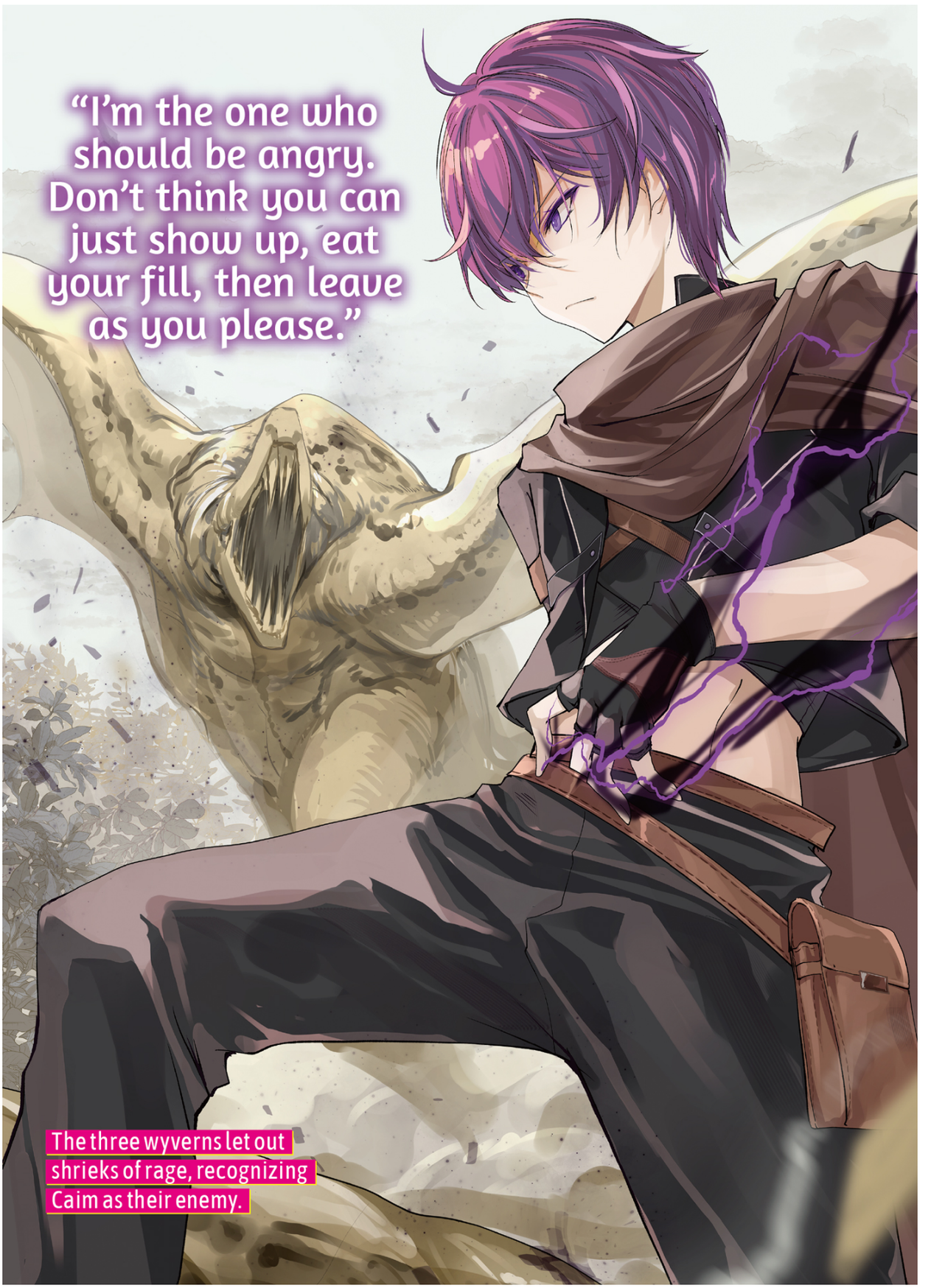


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“I’m the one who should be angry. Don’t think you can just show up, eat your fill, then leave as you please.”
The three wyverns let out shrieks of rage, recognizing Caim as their enemy.


Lenka
A swordswoman with a peculiar fetish working as Millicia's guard.
Millicia
The first imperial princess of the Garnet Empire who devotes her body and soul to Caim.
Rozbeth
A solitary skilled assassin feared as the Headhuntress.
Tea
A white tiger beastfolk who has served Caim since he was a child.


"How is it, Master Caim?"
"Great. Like, *really* great."
Ten long, delicate fingers combed through his hair and carefully massaged his scalp with just the right amount of strength. During their journey, they'd only been able to take cold baths, so this felt even better than usual.

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Prologue

“Phew… Seems like I managed to escape without a problem.” In a dim back alley, a woman let out a relieved sigh. She had a petite figure and navy blue hair weaved in a braid, and she was currently resting her back against a building’s wall, trying to catch her breath. She was Rozbeth the Headhuntress, a very skilled assassin who would kill anyone, no matter who they were, as long as she was paid.

“To think I would fail to kill a target *and* be forced to flee… That’s a terrible result. Twenty-five points.”

Rozbeth had come to the Garnet Empire’s capital to accomplish a job. Her client’s request was to kill two of the three children of the emperor—a strange request with an unknown motive. For that matter, her client’s identity was unknown too. And yet, the pay was *really* good. As such, even though Rozbeth usually didn’t care much about why she was hired for her jobs, she became somewhat interested in this one, which was one of the reasons she had accepted it.

To accomplish the assassination of Arthur, the first imperial prince, Rozbeth had infiltrated the imperial palace, but her attempt had ended in a failure. As she had been investigating her target’s movements, concealed inside the castle, Arthur had gotten involved in a fierce fight. Thinking this was the perfect opportunity, Rozbeth had tried to take Arthur’s head, but his Twin Wings—the prince’s close aids—had interfered. As a result, she had failed.

Thanks to the gas explosion caused by Caim—the young man who had fought against Arthur—Rozbeth had managed to flee from the imperial palace, but thinking back on it, she realized she’d been in a truly dangerous situation and couldn’t help but break out in a cold sweat.

“I escaped safely, but what about him? Not that I think the small fry around here could actually capture him…” Rozbeth recalled Caim’s face. They had fled together, but he was nowhere in the back alley she currently was in. They had separated the instant

they'd left the castle.

They weren't allies, only people who happened to be fighting the same enemy, so it was natural that they would each go their own way.

And yet, for some reason, Rozbeth couldn't help thinking about Caim.

"Mmmh!" A sudden shiver ran through Rozbeth's body. The moment she thought about Caim, a strange tingle assaulted her. She placed a hand on her lower abdomen, her body shaking like a newborn fawn.

Rozbeth started to moan sweetly, and her skin flushed. A trail of saliva trickled down from the corner of her mouth to her chin before falling to the ground.

"Aaah... Wh-What's happening to me...? Why am I shivering like this? I should be resistant to poison..." The sensation was similar to having fingers lovingly caress her most sensitive parts. Rozbeth supposed that this was caused by the poison gas Caim had used, but as a trained assassin, she should be resistant to most toxins.

Another shiver ran through Rozbeth, eliciting another moan, as she recalled the scent of Caim's poison. It had been so sweet—more so than sugar and honey. She had been careful not to breathe too much of it, but a little had entered her nose, and now she couldn't forget its fragrance.

"This is bad... What's happening to me?" Rozbeth calmed herself by taking deep breaths and attempting to forget about what had happened by locking the memories away. "More importantly, I need to think about what I'll do from now on!" She slapped her cheeks, trying to pull herself together.

I failed my assassination, so the imperial palace will be better guarded in the future. It's going to be impossible to target Arthur now. I guess I should go for the other two. Arthur wasn't her only mark. His brother Lance, the second imperial prince, and his sister Millicia, the only imperial princess, were targets too. The task was to kill two out of the three, so she could accomplish her job even without assassinating Arthur. *Prince Lance isn't in the imperial palace, which is great for me. The problem is Princess Millicia. Her whereabouts are currently unknown.*

From her investigation, Rozbeth knew that Lance had gone east after his conflict with Arthur and was raising an army. She also

knew his approximate location. Millicia presented more difficulty—she had left the imperial capital a few months ago and was still missing. Rozbeth hypothesized that Millicia had fled the capital to avoid her brothers' struggle for the throne—a clash that threatened to escalate into civil war—and was now hiding somewhere. Perhaps she had even absconded to another country. Lance, being close to his sister, had likely helped her, but if Millicia really had fled to some other nation, that would be pretty troublesome for Rozbeth.

First, I should take care of Lance, as I know where he is. I can try to make him tell me where Millicia is before I kill him. That's more effort, but better than just searching at random.

"Did you find them?"

"No, sir!"

"Search more, then! Comb every nook and cranny!"

The voices of soldiers echoed a little ways away from the back alley where Rozbeth was hiding. As they neared her position, she leaped up silently and clung to the high section of the adjacent wall, concealing herself.

Jeez, this job is really bothersome.

"Damn it! Where on earth are they?!"

"Still, to think someone like that would attack His Highness Arthur..."

"Maybe His Highness Lance is behind it..."

Rozbeth listened to the soldiers' conversation from above. *Who is this "someone"?* She frowned. From the way they were talking, they obviously didn't mean her. *Maybe they mean that man? Or...*

"You should know this already, but Her Highness Millicia must not be harmed. You can kill the guard and the maid, though. And the ones who attacked His Highness Arthur—the man with purple hair and the black-clad woman. Don't let them escape the capital!"

Rozbeth gasped. The soldier said the name "Millicia" and even preceded it with "Her Highness." It was now clear who he meant.

My my... Thank you, mister soldier. You get zero points for being so talkative in a place like this, though.

Luck had smiled upon Rozbeth. Maybe getting intel about her missing target was going to be easier than she expected. Rozbeth dropped down from the wall and landed silently behind the soldiers.

“Your heads are mine.”

“Wha—?!”

Just as the men noticed Rozbeth, she swung her knives and beheaded two of them, their heads rolling on the ground of the back alley.

“You— Gah!” The last soldier tried to talk but was interrupted.

“You were discussing something pretty interesting. Mind telling me more?” Rozbeth pinned the man down. He must have been a trained soldier, and yet she easily incapacitated him.

“H-How dare you do that to my— Argh!”

“I’m warning you—you’re not allowed to open your mouth unless it’s to answer my questions. If you don’t want to go through a very painful experience, you should tell me everything I want to know.”

The soldier instantly clammed up, determined to not talk. As expected of a soldier from the greatest nation on the continent, he had enough backbone to not immediately spill information.

“You were so talkative earlier. Did you lose your tongue along with your friends?”

The soldier stayed quiet.

“Torture isn’t my forte but… Oh well.” Still restraining the man with one hand, Rozbeth took out a knife with the other. “If I end up killing you, I can just try again with some other soldier. For now, I’ll just open you up and start taking out organs you can live without until you answer me. You might want to speak quickly so you don’t waste my time.”

Rozbeth stabbed the man in the back, avoiding arteries and organs, making the poor soldier scream in pain.

It took ten minutes for the man to talk. When another soldier arrived at the back alley, there was not a single person left alive. Instead, what he found was blood, organs, corpses, and severed heads.

Chapter 1: Escape from the Imperial Capital

"Jeez, it's revolting how bad my luck is…" Caim complained with a sigh as he jumped from roof to roof.

He had managed to survive against Arthur and his Twin Wings, and he'd escaped from the imperial palace. However, the price had been high. Caim had also been hurt in the explosion he'd produced with his poison gas, and even protecting his body with condensed mana hadn't been enough to come out of it uninjured.

I'd be a laughingstock if I died from an explosion I caused… Caim smiled wryly as he looked down at the city from the roof of a building. Many soldiers were walking through the streets, searching for him—and likely for Millicia, Lenka, and Tea too.

I hope they're all right. We need to join back up and escape from the capital quickly!

Persuading Arthur had failed. That meant they were now enemies, which meant that the imperial capital could be considered enemy territory. As such, they had to get out of it as fast as possible. The problem, though, was that Caim had no idea where the girls were. He regretted not having chosen a meeting place in case of an emergency beforehand.

If I had Tea with me, I could use her nose, but I can't do anything on my own… While the Toukishin Style heightened the five senses, it didn't allow the user to track someone's scent like a dog, so Caim had no way to find people whose whereabouts were unknown.

On the other hand, counting on Tea to guide the girls to Caim wasn't ideal either. After all, they were also busy fleeing.

In that case, maybe I should just knock out as many soldiers as I can? It'll serve as a diversion, and the girls should have an easier time finding me with fewer pursuers. But… The problem was that Caim was hardly in good condition after being damaged in the explosion. He didn't think he would have a problem fighting mere soldiers, but if he was surrounded by well-trained knights, things might get dangerous.

I guess it's better to avoid unnecessary battles. And it would be a pain if I encountered Gawain or Merlin… Caim recalled the two he

had fought earlier. Known as the Twin Wings, they were as strong as his father, the Master Pugilist. Even if Caim were at his best, he wasn't certain he could win against them both. Arthur might have had other powerful pawns at his disposal as well, so it was better for Caim to avoid fighting and focus on finding his comrades.

"So, what should I...? Huh?" As Caim pondered his next action on the roof of a house, a shadow fell over him. Had something passed between him and the sun?

Caim hastily looked up.

"Whoa!" A petite figure was jumping at him. Caim almost attacked on reflex, but thankfully, he realized who it was and stopped his fist in time.

"Lykos?!"

"Mmmh!"



The one who had suddenly jumped at Caim and hugged him was Lykos, the young girl they had entrusted to the monastery. Her presence here meant that she must have fled from the abbey to follow Caim. She currently was wearing a nun habit that was slightly too large for her. Perhaps she had found it difficult to move in, since the hem and sleeves were torn.

"What a pain... I don't have the time to take you back to the monastery, you know."

Lykos whined, clinging to Caim's waist as she struck him with her small fists. She must have been really angry at being left at the monastery.

"Yeah, yeah, I got it! Fine, I'll take you with me, so let me go!" Caim said, resigned. Lykos wasn't just any little girl. As shown by her leap earlier, she really was the daughter of the strongest wolf. Her arm strength was also very impressive for her small frame. It seemed that it wasn't possible to just lock her in a tiny monastery and hope she would live as a normal girl.

"How did you find me, by the way?" Caim asked.

"Mmmh!" Lykos pointed at her nose.

"Your nose, huh..." Had the wolf girl found Caim thanks to his scent? Even if she'd been raised by wolves, her body ought to have been that of a normal human.

Did living in the deepest part of a mana zone and being raised by wolves allow her to acquire a sense of smell like that of the beastfolk...?

"Either way, this is just what I needed. Perfect for the current situation."

Lykos cocked her head to the side.

"Can you search for Millicia, Tea, and Lenka using their scents? You know, the women who were with me."

"Mmm-hm!" Lykos gave a firm nod and jumped from the roof, landing on a back alley on all fours, then dashed off somewhere.

Caim quickly followed after her.

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As Caim and Lykos reunited, Millicia, Lenka, and Tea were fleeing from soldiers down a different back alley.

"Are you all right, Princess?" Lenka asked Millicia, who was

panting heavily.

“Y-Yes…” Millicia somehow managed to answer between rough breaths, her face flushed from the effort. But contrary to her words, it was obvious that she wasn’t fine.

It only made sense. After all, they were being pursued by soldiers and had escaped in a panic from the imperial palace. After Millicia had failed to persuade her brother, they’d ended up confronting each other. Arthur had ordered his soldiers to capture her, but Caim had taken care of them before Lenka and Tea had helped to break out of the castle.

However, even if they had managed to run to the castle town, the threat still wasn’t gone. They were completely outnumbered—there were too many soldiers searching for them, and slowly they were finding fewer and fewer places to hide.

“I am sorry…” Millicia said, her breathing now in order as they hid in the shadow of a building. “If not for me, you would be far away already…” She was aware that she was dragging Lenka and Tea down. If not for her, the female knight and the beastfolk maid could have easily slipped past the soldiers.

“Princess… I am your knight. I pledged my allegiance to you and will never abandon you. So please, do not worry about such things,” Lenka comforted her master.

“I’m not doing this for you, Millicia. Master Caim asked me to protect you, so I’m just doing as he says.” Tea shrugged. “Rather than apologize, we need to think of a way to get out of this situation. At this rate, we’re going to be captured before we can reunite with Master Caim.”

“True… We have to find a way to rejoin Caim…” Millicia peeked at the main street from the corner of the building. There were more and more soldiers walking around, and it wouldn’t take long before they were found. Moreover, they didn’t know how Caim, who had stayed in the castle to buy them time, was faring. They could only hope he would be able to escape safely. “There are more and more soldiers coming after us… Also, they have likely closed the capital’s gates. It will be difficult to escape the city.”

“Then I shall act as a decoy!” Lenka suddenly declared.

“What are you saying, Lenka?!”

“Please listen, Princess. There is no way all three of us will be able to break out of this situation. So you need to flee the capital

while I attract the attention of our pursuers!”

Millicia gasped at Lenka’s suggestion. After years together, Lenka was the person Millicia trusted the most. Losing her would be like losing a limb.

“Lenka, please do not do something so stupid! We should flee together!”

“Knights live for their masters. I am only doing my duty, so please do not worry about me. Just concentrate on keeping yourself safe.”

“No… I will not let you do that!” Millicia protested.

“Please, Princess, you have to understand!”

Master and knight began to quarrel in the back alley—and while this was a beautiful example of the strong bond between them, the timing was terrible.

“There!”

“We’ve found Her Highness Millicia!”

“Ah…” Millicia and Lenka blurted out simultaneously. While they were arguing, the soldiers had discovered their hiding place.

Tea gave a troubled frown, pulling her three-section staff from under the skirt of her maid uniform. “Now that they’ve found us, there’s only one option left!”

“We have no choice, then. I shall protect the princess even if it costs me my life!” Lenka declared.

More soldiers arrived, hearing the shouts from their allies, and they surrounded the three girls, forming a wall to block their escape route. Now that it had come to this, the girls’ only way out was to break through the line of soldiers by force and get out of the capital.

“Stay back, Princess!”

“Tea and Lenka will make an opening! When we give the signal, run as fast as you can!”

“You two… Please, stay safe!” Millicia prayed as Lenka and Tea readied their weapons, prepared to fight to the death against the soldiers surrounding them.

Thankfully, that future never came to pass.

“Lie down!” a familiar voice shouted.

The moment they heard it, the girls’ bodies acted before they could even think and, as ordered, they dropped to the ground.

“Purple Poison Magic—Poison Hornets!”

A lump of ultra-condensed mana was thrown above the soldiers before it exploded, scattering countless mana bullets everywhere.

“Gah!”

“Wh-What is this?!”

The soldiers screamed as the rain of mana bullets poured on them. First, they felt a sharp pain, which was then followed by a numbness that was impossible to resist. They collapsed one after another, losing control of their bodies.

“Phew, I arrived just in time,” said Caim, jumping down from the roof of the building. He was carrying Lykos, who was dressed in a tattered nun habit, on his back.

“Master Caim!”

“Caim!”

“Sir Caim!”

Tea and Millicia called their lover’s name with relief in their voices. Lenka also looked relieved by his arrival as she saw him approach the other two.

“I’m so glad to see you again, Master Caim!”

“Thank you for saving us!”

Tea and Millicia rejoiced.

“Sorry it took so long. If Lykos hadn’t helped, I’d never have found you.” Caim examined everyone’s bodies. They were all exhausted, but nobody was hurt. “I’m glad you’re okay. I was pretty worried.”

“On the other hand, *you* don’t look okay, Sir Caim. Did someone use a fire spell against you?” Lenka asked, seeing the burns all over Caim’s body.

Millicia quickly pointed her hands toward Caim and cast a healing spell. “Please do not move. I will heal you.”

“Thanks.”

Millicia had served in the temple as a teenager and learned how to use Sacred Arts there—a special kind of magic working on faith toward God that could cure injuries and illnesses, as well as purify the undead. So far, it hadn’t been used much in their journey. In fact, it was the first time Millicia ever had to heal Caim.

“Finally feeling useful?” Caim teased her.

“I played my part in the village full of undead. I am not useless!” Millicia pouted as she finished healing Caim. “It should be fine now. Incidentally, why is Lykos with you? Don’t tell me you took

her from the monastery?”

“Hey, what kind of guy do you think I am? She ran away on her own,” Caim retorted. “Anyway, it’s not the time for that. We need to get out of the capital.”

“With you here, Master Caim, we’ve gained the strength of a hundred people. It’ll be a cinch to escape!” Tea cheered.

Caim shrugged, looking at the ramparts in the distance. “I don’t think it’ll be that easy… But for now, let’s head for the city gate!”

“Yes!”

“I shall do my best!”

“Please do not overexert yourself, Princess…”

Tea, Millicia, and Lenka spoke as they followed Caim toward the city gate. Now that they had been reunited, it was finally time to escape the imperial capital.

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Sometimes they would hide, and other times they would fight the soldiers bravely, but eventually, Caim and the girls arrived at the city gate. However, as they had expected, the door leading outside the capital was closed and guarded by a multitude of soldiers. They were clearly determined to not even let so much as a single ant pass through.

“Well… That’s gonna be difficult. My magic should be enough to deal with them, but what do you think we should do?” Caim asked as he peered at the gate from his hiding place behind a building.

Next to him, Millicia nervously shook her head. “No, we had better not. There are ordinary people present, so I would rather not do something that could harm them.” Many peddlers and citizens of the capital were near the gate, with quite a few asking the soldiers why it was closed. If Caim used an area spell, they would be dragged into it. “If only there were a way to leave the capital without passing through the gate…”

“You’re being unreasonable, Millicia. Or maybe you’re confident you can climb the rampart?” Tea chided her.

Millicia looked apologetic. “I know I am asking for something unreasonable. However, I believe that Caim can protect us and find a way to escape without harming too many people.”

“So in the end you’re leaving everything to me… Jeez, you’re one

amazing woman," Caim said.

"You are the man I chose after all. You should be able to do that much."

"Ha ha, quite the bold statement. But if you expect so much from me, I guess I can't disappoint you." Caim smiled wryly, thinking that it was a little late to think about the damage caused after that explosion in the castle, but if Millicia wanted him to avoid harming people, then he would do his best to live up to her expectations.

His strongest spell could easily destroy the gate, but the soldiers would obviously try to defend it. That would mean he would first need to deal with them. However, while doing so, there was a high probability that ordinary people would be hurt.

"I guess our only option is to fly." Caim looked up. If destroying the gate wasn't possible, then jumping over it or making a tunnel underground were the only options. The latter was a pain, which left only the former. "I need something large enough..." He looked around until he found what he was searching for. "That will do." Caim's eyes fell on the tent used by one of the stalls in the main street, and he dashed toward it at blinding speed. "Sorry, gonna borrow this."

"Wha—?!"

"Here, some money for the trouble!" Caim swiftly snatched the stall's tent and threw a few gold coins at the owner's face before returning to his comrades. "All right. This should work!"

"What are you planning, Master Caim?"

"I'll explain later. For now, hold on to me! Everyone else too!"

"Y-Yes?"

"G-Got it!"

"Mmmh."

While they didn't know Caim's plan, Tea, Millicia, Lenka, and Lykos did as he ordered and clung to him.

Women of various sizes pressed themselves against Caim, and he did his best to ignore the feel of their softness and warmth. He would have liked to enjoy it, but it wasn't the time for that, so he shook off his worldly desires and prepared his magic.

"Don't bite your tongues!" Caim kicked the ground strongly and jumped, eliciting shrieks from the girls. Thanks to his amazing strength, they reached a height of several meters. However, it

didn’t stop there—Caim stepped on a foothold in midair and leaped even higher.

This was one of the techniques of the Toukishin Style’s Basic Stance—Suzaku. It created footholds made with condensed mana to allow the user to move freely through the sky.

Eventually, Caim reached the rampart’s peak. However, no matter how useful Suzaku was for moving through the air, Caim couldn’t use it repeatedly while holding four people. At this rate, they would be brought down by gravity—but before that could happen, Caim cast the spell he had been preparing.

“Purple Poison Magic—Lindworm!” Purple gas gushed out of Caim’s palm and filled the inside of the tent he had snatched earlier, expanding it.

“Are…? Are we flying?”

“We are! How?!”

Millicia and Lenka raised their voices in surprise. They were floating in the sky, their bodies not plummeting to the ground thanks to the improvised hot-air balloon Caim had just made. The poison gas Caim produced was lighter than air, so by using a large enough cloth as a makeshift hot-air balloon, they could float in the sky. Naturally, a tent would quickly deflate, but Caim continuously replenished the gas with his spell to maintain their altitude.



“Hey, look! What is that?!”

“They’re flying! Bring the bows!”

“Shoot them down!”

The soldiers noticed Caim and his companions rising over the rampart and hurriedly called for bows. However, they were too late. By the time they started firing arrows, Caim and the girls were already too high, the wind carrying them away from the imperial capital.

“They’re fleeing! Go after them!”

“Fetch the horses and open the gate!”

“Faster! Ah, damn it, they’re getting away!”

Seeing it was useless to shoot at Caim and his companions, the soldiers decided to pursue them on horseback. However, they had shut the gate so firmly that it ended up working against them. As the heavy door slowly opened, Caim and the girls were getting farther away. Lady Luck must have smiled upon them as the wind blew in their favor, rapidly increasing the distance between them and the capital.

“I thought I would need to throw poison at them from above if they went after us, but it seems things will end without anybody getting hurt.” Caim grinned cynically as he looked down at the flustered soldiers from the sky.

The reason he had avoided fighting with them was to avoid involving innocent people. If the soldiers had pursued them outside of the city, Caim wouldn’t have shown any mercy. It could be said that Caim and the girls weren’t the only ones who had been saved by luck.

“Aaah! We’re going to fall!”

“Ah! That’s unfair, Lenka!”

“I am scared as well, Caim!”

“Mmmh…”

The trip through the sky wasn’t without its problems, however. Lenka was apparently afraid of heights, since she clung to Caim with her face completely pale, and Tea and Millicia did the same, letting out high-pitched screams as they pressed their bodies against him.

Their carefree flight continued for around thirty minutes.

There had been many twists and turns—but with that, Caim

and his companions had shaken off their pursuers and successfully escaped from the imperial capital.

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As Caim and the girls escaped the crisis and fled the imperial capital, Lykos's disappearance had thrown the monastery entrusted with her into an uproar.

"W-We can't find her, Mother Ariessa..."

"Just where did Lykos go...?"

"I see. So you could not find her..." Ariessa said. She was currently in front of the monastery with the other nuns, who were all out of breath from running around the capital searching for Lykos after she had vanished.

They had noticed her disappearance about three hours ago. When she'd first arrived, Lykos had obediently eaten the sweets she had been given, but once finished with them, she had finally realized that Caim had left her behind.

Lykos had immediately tried to run away in order to follow Caim and the girls, so the nuns had hurriedly restrained her, again using food to calm her down as they called for Ariessa. In the end, they had no other choice but to lock her up in one of the monastery's rooms. Since they often took in badly behaved young ladies, they used this particular room when one of their charges needed to reflect on her attitude.

They had heard noise coming from the locked room, but after two hours, it had stopped. The sisters had thought Lykos had grown tired and fallen asleep—but when Ariessa had looked inside, the young girl had vanished.

"I never expected her to escape... Her strength is astounding for a child," commented one of the nuns, her voice filled with shock.

The room Lykos had been locked in was three stories up, and its only window had iron bars over it. And yet, Lykos had forcefully bent the bars and jumped from the third floor.

"Her Highness Millicia did say that Lykos was raised by wolf monsters. I suppose living in such a harsh environment has made her a very strong and robust child," Ariessa said, her tone calm.

She took her rosary, praying for Lykos's safety before continuing. "I do not think we need to search for her any longer. Lykos likely has already rejoined them."

"Do you mean Her Highness and her companions?"

"Yes. She is an unfortunate girl with the strange fate of being raised by the wolves of a mana zone. I had hoped to save her through the teachings of the Holy Spirit, but it seems that will not be possible. Let us pray for her, at least."

"Did you know that child, Mother Ariessa?" asked one of the sisters.

"I wonder," Ariessa replied with an ambiguous smile. "I admit that Lykos bears a strong resemblance to a woman I once knew. Unfortunately, that child left this place before I could confirm anything."

Ariessa's expression turned bitter as she recalled a painful memory.

"The violets have bloomed beautifully again this year, Mother Ariessa. We should make pressed flowers and give them to the children," a woman called Feena Lyzbeth had once said. She was a daughter of House Lyzbeth, a family that controlled a county in the southern part of the empire. She was a kind and pious woman who would sometimes come to help the monastery and take care of the children. Anyone who knew her considered her pure and chaste—and yet, she was exiled from her house because she conceived a child with a man who was not her fiancé. The name of the father was never discovered, however, as Feena never revealed it no matter how much she was questioned.

It was decided that Miss Feena would be sent to the monastery to be under my supervision. I should have protected her and her unborn child, and yet... Ariessa's expression darkened with regret.

Count Lyzbeth had exiled his daughter, but he didn't want her to live in the streets. So he chose to entrust her to Ariessa, who was an acquaintance of his, to protect her. Count Lyzbeth loved his daughter, but he had to punish her for her infidelity toward her fiancé, so he made it look as though he was sending her off to a monastery as a punishment. However, he was in fact leaving her to Ariessa's care.

And yet, Miss Feena never arrived. It was determined that she was attacked by a thief who broke in during the night, but I am certain

that in truth... Ariessa thought the culprit was Feena's fiancé, the poor man betrayed by the woman he loved—the son of Marquis Eberle. He was a jealous man who couldn't forgive his fiancée's treachery, and likely couldn't accept that Feena was allowed to live peacefully at the monastery even though she was pregnant with another man's child. Feena was attacked before she could be sent to the abbey and taken away. The only thing left behind was a dress drenched with blood.

Naturally, there was no proof that he'd done it. However, most people who knew the son of House Eberle suspected he was involved. After all, he was that kind of person.

Could this mean that Miss Feena lived after all? She lived and gave birth to Lykos?

"I hope Lykos is all right... And Her Highness Millicia too," said one of the nuns worriedly, bringing Ariessa's focus back to the present.

"I hope the same. After all, many trials await them." The paths of Lykos, who was raised by wolves, and Millicia, who was caught in the midst of political strife, would surely be filled with hardships. "Fate can be cruel, and I am certain the connections those two girls have will cause them hardship." Ariessa's expression darkened, thinking about the girls' future.

Millicia would need to confront her brother, Arthur. The same held true for Lykos—if she truly was Feena's child, then someday she would have to face the fate tied to her blood. After all, both Feena's father, Count Lyzbeth, and her former fiancé, the son of Marquis Eberle, were part of the first imperial prince's faction.

If Her Highness Millicia decides to support His Highness Lance, then they are bound to confront each other someday.

Different fates were now converging. Perhaps the fact that Lykos had met Millicia, fled from the monastery, and chosen a future with Caim and the rest was just part of a larger destiny arranged by some power beyond human understanding.

"Let us pray that they have a bright future ahead of them," Ariessa said, inviting the sister to enter the building.

"Yes."

Ariessa followed after her, when suddenly, she stopped and blurted out in realization. "Ah..." If Lykos truly was Feena's daughter, then that raised one particular question. "Miss Feena

disappeared almost twenty years ago. Then that would mean…”

Feena had already been pregnant when she went missing. If she’d survived, and Lykos had been born a few months later, that would mean that Lykos couldn’t be any younger than eighteen. How could a girl who looked barely ten be the same age as Millicia?

“W-Well, maybe I should not think that deeply about it.”

Perhaps Feena had given birth to more than one child. Still, Ariessa felt a chill run down her spine and decided to put it out of her mind.

Chapter 2: Wyvern Attack

Caim and the girls were traveling along the eastern main road, heading toward the town where the second imperial prince—Lance—had his base of operations. Having failed to persuade Arthur, it was now impossible to stop the impending civil war. That being the case, the least they could do was to help Lance, who was a pacifist, to become emperor instead of Arthur, who wished for war and conquest.

"By the way, who exactly were those two people with Arthur?" Caim asked Millicia.

Caim, Millicia, Lenka, Tea, and Lykos were currently traveling on foot, as they had left their carriage back in the imperial capital. They hadn't had a choice, as they had been fleeing from soldiers and had not had the time to retrieve it. They couldn't buy a new one either, as it was possible that Arthur had agents in nearby villages and towns, so they couldn't stop there.

As such, the five of them had no choice but to walk toward their destination.

"Who are you talking about?"

"You know, the black knight and mage woman who protected Arthur. They were called the...Twin Wings, I think?"

"Ah, you mean Ser Gawain and Dame Merlin," Millicia said their names.

"Yeah, them."

"They are my brother's close aides. Ser Gawain is the right wing and the empire's strongest warrior, renowned as the Black Knight. Dame Merlin is the left wing and a mage known as the Eye of Heaven. Nobody knows her true age, but she has been serving the empire for more than a hundred years, and she has the power of precognition," Millicia explained.

"Wait... She's more than a hundred and looks like *that*...?"

"The strongest knight and a mage who can predict the future... They're quite the dangerous pair."

Caim and Tea both voiced their bafflement with a frown.

Lenka, who was walking in front of them, agreed with a grave expression. “Indeed. Sir Gawain is an expert spearman who once slew a dragon and rivals any S-rank adventurer. He is also the captain of the Knights of the Silver Hawk under His Highness Arthur’s command.”

The Knights of the Silver Hawk was one of the five knight orders of the Garnet Empire and was composed solely of nobles with a rank of count or higher.

“Yeah… He was really strong.” Caim nodded. Having fought against Gawain, Caim considered him equal to his father—Kevin Halsberg, the Master Pugilist. Moreover, they had been indoors, so Gawain had only used a sword despite being a master of the spear. That meant he hadn’t even been fighting seriously. “That’s enough about Gawain. What about Merlin? You said she has the power of precognition, right?”

“Yes. Dame Merlin contracted a being called the Demon of Laplace who gave her the power to predict the future,” Millicia answered.

“Then does that mean they already knew we would visit the castle and a fight would break out?” Caim asked.

“I wonder…” Millicia replied vaguely. “Only Dame Merlin herself knows how far into the future she can see, and she is not always correct. So perhaps she did not predict our confrontation with Arthur after all.”

If Merlin was able to predict everything correctly, Caim and his companions wouldn’t have been able to escape, and Rozbeth wouldn’t have been able to infiltrate the imperial palace.

So they call it precognition, but it’s closer to divination and isn’t totally certain, huh? I guess I don’t need to worry too much about it, then.

“In short, if we want to defeat Arthur, we need to take care of his Twin Wings first. That’s gonna be a pain.” Caim had fought them, so he knew that even he would have a difficult time winning against all three of them together. “And Arthur has other subordinates like the Knights of the Silver Hawk, right? Man, we’re so far away from putting them in checkmate.”

“Yes, many members of the Knights of the Red Tiger also support him. That is why I must meet with Lance as soon as possible.”

Arthur had many knights and soldiers serving under him, so if they wanted to prevent him from becoming emperor, they needed even more allies. The only way to do that was by cooperating with Lance.

"So the plan still is to head east," Caim said. "I'm eager for a rematch with them." He was determined to make up for the beating they'd given him.

"Mmmhmm!"

"What's the problem, Lykos?" Caim asked the girl, who was pulling at his sleeve and pointing at the distance. "Is that...a carriage?"

"It's going very fast," Tea commented.

On the opposite end of the main road, just where it began to slope downward, a wagon was coming their way at great speed.

"There's something behind it... Is it being pursued by a monster?" Caim narrowed his eyes to discern what it was—and what appeared from behind the hill was a massive monster with large wings chasing after the carriage like a cat chasing after a mouse.

The monster roared, and the young man driving the carriage screamed as he whipped his horse to go faster. Then, a few seconds later, Caim finally was able to clearly see the creature.

"Is that a dragon?"

The flying monster was a giant lizard with yellow ocher scales and broad wings. Its appearance was close to one of the most powerful creatures of myth and legend—a dragon.

"No, Caim—this is a wyvern!" Millicia shouted in reply. "They are called lesser dragons for their resemblance to true dragons. They are not as strong, but they are still Count-class monsters. Usually, knights and adventurers must cooperate to kill one!"

"A wyvern... I think I read about those in a book. So that's what they really look like..." Watching carefully, Caim noticed that the creature was indeed different from a dragon. While both were flying reptiles, a dragon's wings were on their back while a wyvern's wings were part of their front limbs, like those of a bat. This monster was also smaller—around five meters tall—whereas dragons usually exceeded ten meters. "So, yeah, it's not a dragon, but it's still pretty terrifying to normal people, no? Should we help him?" Caim pointed at the carriage with his eyes.

The face of the young man driving the wagon was full of dread and looked like he might drop dead at any moment. The horse seemed pretty exhausted too, so it must have been running for a while.

“At this rate, the wyvern is gonna catch up to the carriage. And they’re coming our way, so I guess we can’t avoid fighting that thing.”

“Can you do this for me, Caim?” Millicia asked.

“Of course. I’ve admired dragon slayers since I was a child. A shame it’s just a wyvern, though, but I guess it’ll serve as a dry run.” Caim had read many tales of dragon-slaying heroes when he was younger. Slaying a dragon was as great a feat as slaying a Demon Lord for adventurers, and in the mind of a dreaming young boy, it was one of the conditions for becoming a hero.

“Please! Someone! Save meeeeeeee!” the young man screamed as the wagon approached, the wyvern right behind it.

Caim pointed his finger at the monster.

“Poison Shot.” A poisonous bullet fired from his index finger toward the wyvern. However, the creature noticed the incoming attack and twisted its body to avoid the projectile.

The wyvern roared ferociously, its cold reptilian eyes glaring at Caim.

“Oh? It’s quite agile. I guess that’s a Count-class monster for you.” Caim smiled, glad that his opponent wouldn’t go down easily, then leaped forward. “Don’t stop, or you’re gonna be dragged into the fight,” Caim told the young man, who shouted in surprise as Caim leaped over him. Caim then kicked the carriage’s roof to jump even higher in the wyvern’s direction.

The flying lizard opened its jaws wide to bite Caim. Its sharp fangs were as thick as stakes and could easily crush horses and cattle alike.

Caim quickly reacted and mimicked tiger claws with the fingers of both his hands, strengthening them with condensed mana. “Byakko!” He swung his arms, his fingers breaking through the wyvern’s fangs before gouging the flesh around its mouth.

The monster screamed in pain as bright red blood sprayed everywhere.

“Seems like my claws are sharper than a lesser dragon’s fangs, at least. I wonder how they’ll fare against a true dragon,” Caim

wondered.

The wyvern roared, bringing his mind back to the battle. It deftly spun in midair and struck with its trunk-like tail as though it were a whip.

“Seiryuu.” Caim formed a sword with his hand, creating a blade of condensed mana around it, and cut the wyvern’s tail, which earned another scream of pain from the creature. “You’re tougher than rock, but your scales aren’t as hard as I expected. You’re not a small fry, but still far from being a worthy opponent.”

The wyvern howled.

“Oh?”

Apparently, having its face gouged and its tail cut had finally made the monster aware that the man before it was stronger than it was, and it frantically flapped its winged arms, turning its back on Caim as it attempted to escape.

“Good decision, though you made it too late.” Caim shook his head in pity, staying in midair thanks to a foothold he’d made using Suzaku.

The fleeing wyvern suddenly began to wobble before plummeting and crashing to the ground. Its body convulsed, and it spouted bloody foam from its mouth.

“My mana is highly toxic. There’s no way you’d survive contact with so much of it,” Caim said coldly, looking down at the wyvern from the sky. “I guess the poison took time to spread because its body is so big. If a wyvern held out this long, then dragons, which are twice that size, would be even more resistant. I should keep that in mind.”

Unfortunately for the poor wyvern, its defeat was only a dry run for the day Caim would fight a dragon.

The monster whined feebly.

“I’ll put an end to your suffering.” Caim descended to the ground and smashed the wyvern’s skull, his fist loaded with his gratitude toward the creature for accompanying him in his trial run. “And…done.” He confirmed the death of the wyvern and returned to his comrades.

“I… I thought I was going to die…” the young man said, panting.

“Are you all right? Were you hurt anywhere?” Millicia asked, taking care of him.

“No… Thank you, you saved me…”

The young man was sitting listlessly next to his carriage. A little ways away, Tea offered water in a wooden bucket to the horse that was lying on the ground, completely exhausted.

“Great, seems like everyone is fine.”

“Ah, Caim. What about the wyvern?” Millicia asked.

“Killed it no problem.”

“Y-You killed that terrible monster...?” The man’s eyes widened in shock.

“You don’t need to be so surprised... Anyway, mind telling us what happened?”

“O-Of course... The wyvern attacked me and tried to eat me and my horse. I think it came from the Dragon’s Nest.”

“The what?”

The person who answered Caim’s question wasn’t the man but Lenka, who had been observing their surroundings until now. “The Dragon’s Nest is another name for the Dragoon Mountains in the northern part of the empire. A powerful dragon lives there, and it holds many wyverns in its thrall,” she explained, then turned toward the man. “However, the dragon and wyverns living there generally don’t descend from the mountains. Once in a while, a stray wyvern attacks a village, but we’re far away from their habitat here.”

“W-Well, a wyvern outbreak occurred in the region ahead, and they blocked the road.”

“An outbreak and blockade?” Lenka narrowed her eyes.

The man chugged the water he received from Millicia in one gulp, took a deep breath, then spoke. “I don’t know the cause—just that wyverns started appearing in the area around a week ago. The count had the road blocked and asked the people to evacuate. I decided to take my wares and escape with my carriage, but I was unlucky enough to have a wyvern find me.”

“How could such a thing happen...? Do you know how many people died?” Millicia asked, her face completely pale as she covered her mouth.

Wyverns were Count-class monsters. Strong warriors like Caim aside, they brought unavoidable death for most people. If a whole flock of them appeared, they could easily destroy a small country.

“Sorry, but I don’t know. To begin with, it’s meaningless to make a blockade when the wyverns can fly, so I guess a few villages

must have already been ruined…”

Millicia gasped, speechless.

“Another blockade, huh…? Before it was a landslide, and now this. We’ve got terrible luck.” Caim grimaced.

Their plan had been to go east and meet with Lance, but if the road was blocked due to the wyverns, they would need to take a big detour.

Should we force our way through? No—they say that haste makes waste, after all… I guess the only choice is to just go around, then, Caim thought, but there was one problem to solve if he really wanted to go with that plan.

“Caim…” Millicia looked at Caim resolutely. “We must save the people!”

Caim sighed. “Well, of course you would say that.” He shrugged at the completely expected outcome. He had known that Millicia would ask for his help—after all, she was a kind princess who couldn’t bear to abandon people in need. She would surely have refused his suggestion to just take a detour. “Fine. Not like mere wyverns will be a problem.”

“Thank you!” Millicia cheered. “Well then, let’s hurry!”

After that, Caim and the girls parted ways with the man they had saved and headed toward the area where the wyverns had been appearing frequently.

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When Caim and his companions arrived at the blockade, they found a sea of people sitting in front of the barrier.

“Are they refugees?” Caim muttered without thinking.

Most of the people weren’t travelers or peddlers but villagers and townsfolk. Their attire suggested they had fled their homes with little more than the clothes on their backs, and quite a few of them were injured.

Many soldiers stood guard in front of the improvised barrier, weapons in hand, while some of them helped carry the wounded into tents. They weren’t watching the road, though—they were looking up at the sky, afraid that something might come flying this way.

“I cannot believe there are so many refugees… The wyverns

must have caused more damage than I expected." Millicia paled. At a glance, it looked like more than two hundred people were sitting on the ground, and considering how many must have been inside the tents for the injured, the total number must have been even greater. "I will help heal the wounded!"

"Wait, Millicia!" Caim called, but she was already inside one of the tents. He decided to follow her, but Lenka stopped him.

"I shall accompany my lady! Please gather intel from the soldiers and refugees, Sir Caim!"

"Got it. I'll leave Millicia to you!"

Lenka went inside the same tent as Millicia, leaving Caim, Tea, and Lykos—who was eyeing a saucepan the refugees were using to cook, ready to run toward it.

"I'm gonna ask around."

"Understood. I shall take care of Lykos," Tea replied.

"Thanks. I'll start with the soldiers over there."

Caim approached the barrier and looked for a soldier who seemed a little less busy than the others. These soldiers were wearing different armor than the ones from the imperial capital and the castle, indicating they weren't assigned to the same chain of command.

"Hey, sorry, can I have a minute?" Caim asked one of the soldiers.

"What is it?"

"I have business in the region ahead. Could you let me pass?"

"What, you don't know? There was a wyvern outbreak. I'm not talking about just one or two, but an entire flock of them. Our lord, Count Atlaus, ordered us to not let anyone pass."

"Wyverns, huh? Are there *that* many of them?"

"At least a hundred. They've already destroyed five villages and a town. I'm sorry, but we can't let travelers and peddlers pass in a situation like this."

"A hundred? That's a lot..." Caim hadn't expected so many wyverns. If it had only been five or six, he could have easily dealt with them, but even Caim would have a hard time against that number. "Do you know why so many appeared at once?"

"No. We know that they came from the Dragoon Mountains to the north, but not why. We're too busy helping the people evacuate and protecting them from the wyverns. We don't have

the resources to investigate the matter."

Caim stayed silent.

"Listen, I'd advise you to turn back. We're not going to reopen the road anytime soon."

Caim let out a small sigh. "I see. Thanks for the warning." Then he left.

Seems like we won't be able to pass easily... Though I guess we could just use force if we wanted. The barrier was there to keep travelers and peddlers out of danger, so it wasn't as though they were putting all their strength into blocking the road. And there weren't that many soldiers, so if Caim wanted, he could force his way through.

Caim returned to Tea and Lykos, and sure enough, Lykos was eating some of what the refugees had cooked.

"She's so adorable. How old is she?" An elderly woman gently watched over Lykos, who was stuffing her cheeks with oatmeal.

"We don't know. She's an orphan," Tea answered.

"Poor thing..." The elderly woman patted Lykos's head with a pitying look, but the girl herself couldn't have cared less as she focused on her meal.

"What are you doing...?"

"Ah, Master Caim."

"Food is pretty valuable here. You shouldn't eat their share," Caim chided Lykos.

"It's fine. We should help each other in times of need," the elderly woman reassured him with a smile. "And children her age need to eat a lot to grow. There is no need to hold back."

"But we're not..." Caim and his companions had plenty of food. The only ones in need were the refugees, and it was wrong to steal their food. "Here, this is to thank you for taking care of our kid." Caim took out a sack of wheat, a chunk of dried meat, and a jar of pickled fish from his item bag and offered them to the elderly woman.

"I-I can't possibly accept! I only shared oatmeal with a child!"

"We have plenty of food, so don't worry about us. In fact, we might even have *too* much." Caim wasn't lying. They had stocked up before going through the Forest of the Lycaons just in case, and because they had traversed it faster than expected, they still had plenty left. "Even preserved food will go bad after a while, so

you’re actually helping us by taking some.”

“R-Really? Well, if that’s the case, I suppose I can accept and share this with everyone else. Thank you.” The elderly woman accepted the food and distributed it to the other refugees. Considering the number of people, it was only a drop in the bucket, but it would help a little, at least.

“Caim! Can I have a moment?!” Millicia shouted, coming back from helping the injured with Lenka.

“What’s up?”

“Well, I learned that the way ahead is blocked…”

“I know. I heard about it from a soldier.”

“But if we travel with those people, they will let us pass. Do you mind speaking with them?” Millicia pointed at a group of four men and women. Though they were armed, judging by their mismatched gear, they didn’t appear to be soldiers. They were likely adventurers instead.

“Who are they?”

“A group of adventurers from the capital. They are heading toward the land governed by Count Atlaus and have the permission to pass the blockade.”

“Are you Millicia’s companion? We have a request,” said the young man who appeared to be the party leader. “We are adventurers from the capital. We need to meet with Count Atlaus, and for that, we must travel to the town of Extobell. We happened to see Millicia healing the injured, and we would like to ask if you would be willing to accompany us.”

People who could use Healing Magic were rare, and healers were even more valuable when traveling through a region swarming with wyverns. By chance, the adventurers happened to see Millicia as she healed the wounded and decided to ask for her help.

“If we go with them, we can pass the blockade. What do you think?” Millicia asked.

“I’m fine with that. Shouldn’t be a problem.” They needed to keep going, after all. Having more people along wasn’t an issue. “Can I ask what’s your business with that count?”

“Of course. The guildmaster in the capital asked us to deliver a letter to him. It contains the reply to his call for reinforcements against the wyverns.”

“Ah, makes sense.” Caim nodded. Of course the count would ask for the help of the Adventurers’ Guild, and naturally they would be the ones delivering the response to his call. “Considering we would be stuck here otherwise, we’ll gladly go with you.”

“Thank you. You’ll be a great help.” The young party leader shot Caim a friendly smile and held out his hand. “I’m Lux, the leader of our party, the Azure Wind. Nice to meet you.”

Contrary to most adventurers, who tended to be rough and vulgar types, Lux was a very pleasant and polite young man.

He’s my complete opposite. I wonder what kind of childhood leads to becoming someone like him.

“...Yeah, same.” Caim firmly squeezed Lux’s hand with a slightly self-deprecating smile.

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The party of adventurers known as the Azure Wind was composed of four people, all childhood friends from the same village. They were around twenty and already C-rank, so they were often considered rising stars among young adventurers.

“Oh, so you’re adventurers too? And B-rank, even? That’s impressive.” Lux engaged in some friendly discussion as they traveled. “Considering you’re around our age—maybe even younger—you’re really amazing. I’m embarrassed for being so happy that people called us promising young adventurers.”

“You don’t need to feel like that. You’re great adventurers too,” Caim said.

They were all currently inside a big carriage drawn by two horses. The guild had lent it to the Azure Wind, and that had turned out to be a good thing for Caim and the girls too, as they didn’t have to walk any longer.

“We’re entering the area where the wyverns have been appearing. Please stay on your guard, everyone,” Lux warned. They were now in the danger zone, so they could expect to be attacked at any moment. “By the way, what’s everyone’s specialty here?”

“You mean how we fight?” Caim asked back.

“Yes. I’m a swordsman, and my comrades are a spearman, a mage, and an archer. We had a priestess for Healing Magic at one

point, but she retired when she married, leaving just the four of us." Lux examined Caim and his companions, aside from Lykos. "From their equipment, I can guess that Millicia is a priestess and Lenka a swordswoman. But I don't know what you and Tea can do."

Lux wasn't trying to pry—he just genuinely wanted to know what the people who would fight alongside him were capable of. Caim and Tea didn't seem to have any weapons, and the latter was even wearing a maid uniform. Of course he would ask if she could actually fight. He ignored Lykos, though, as the girl looked to be around ten, so he didn't expect her to join them in battle.

"Don't worry. Tea and I can fight. Tea's a beastfolk, as you can see, and she hides her weapon inside her clothing. She's a warrior," Caim answered.

"And you...?"

"I fight bare-handed. I don't need weapons."

"Ah, you're a martial artist..." Lux's expression darkened slightly. Wyverns were lesser dragons with very tough scales. He didn't show it, but Lux was likely disappointed to hear that Caim was a martial artist, as that meant he had no weapon that could actually damage these monsters.

Can't blame him. Using condensed mana to fight is hardly common.

"I guarantee I'm not going to be a burden. More importantly, where are we heading?"

"To the town of Extobell. It's where Count Atlaus lives, and it's the frontline base against the wyverns."

"Extobell... Count Atlaus..." Millicia murmured. Obviously, the members of the Azure Wind hadn't been told her true identity. "Count Atlaus is a good man who always does what is best for his domain. He hates strife, and he is a prominent individual in the neutral party," she explained to Caim quietly. The neutral party was a faction that supported neither Arthur nor Lance. While they weren't Millicia's enemies, they weren't her allies either.

"If everything goes well, we should arrive in a day," Lux said.

"Are you *trying* to jinx us?" Caim smiled bitterly. He couldn't help but think Lux was tempting fate, and now an accident was practically guaranteed.

And Caim's hunch was quickly proved right.

“Rrraaarrrgh!” Growls resounded on all sides, and several figures emerged from the forest next to the road.

“Huh…?” Lux blurted out.

The creatures encircling them weren’t wyverns but large wolves with a single knifelike horn on each of their heads. These were not mere beasts—they were monsters.

“Horned wolves…? How can there be so many?!” Lux’s companion—the woman mage—shouted in surprise.

Around twenty horned wolves had emerged from the forest, surrounding the carriage and waiting for an opportune moment to attack.

“Not the wyverns, but hey—what did I say?” Caim shot a glance at his companions and got off the wagon.

“Tea shall accompany you, Master Caim!”

“Me too. I ask that you stay in the carriage, my lady.”

“Yes. Please be careful.” Millicia saw Tea and Lenka off as they followed Caim.

“Wait! We’ll fight too!” Lux shouted as he and his comrades also exited the coach. They encircled the vehicle and readied their weapons to protect it. “Don’t push yourselves too hard! Our main objective is to protect the carriage and Millicia!”

“Gotcha. You take care too,” Caim replied lightly as he covered his body in condensed mana and prepared himself for battle. He didn’t want to use Purple Poison Magic in front of Lux and his party, so he wouldn’t be able to go all out—not that he’d need to against such weak monsters.

However, the question is: Is their C-rank party strong enough to deal with the horned wolves? Not that I really care that *much about them.* If Lux and his companions died against such weak monsters, then they wouldn’t have lived much longer anyway.

Caim turned away from Lux and his friends, focusing back on the enemies before him just in time for a horned wolf to lunge at him with a bite. Caim quickly swung his right fist and smashed the monster’s skull, ending its life. As he’d expected, they were pretty weak. Caim could likely defeat them effortlessly just by strengthening his hand with mana and chopping at them.

“Yup. No problem,” Caim said as several wolves assaulted him, only to be killed by his punches and kicks. He dodged every attack with only the slightest movement, not even allowing them to graze

his clothes.

Naturally, Caim wasn't the only one fighting.

Tea struck the horned wolves with her three-section staff. Though she was a maid, Tea had also trained with the soldiers of the Halsberg county. Not only was she strong and fast, she was very skilled at using her three-section staff, which was a complicated weapon to wield. Moreover, she had only gotten better during their journey thanks to all the battles they had gone through. The way she twirled her staff around her at high speed practically formed an impenetrable barrier between her and the wolves.

"Here I come!" Lenka fought with her adept swordsmanship. She protected the carriage—where Millicia was—by slicing apart any monster that drew near it. Lenka had suffered several embarrassing defeats during their journey and had gotten almost no opportunity to show her worth, but she was still stronger than mere horned wolves. She easily killed any that dared to approach her master.



“We need to decrease their numbers! Don’t fall out of sync, everyone!”

“Yeah!”

“Got it!”

The four members of the Azure Wind also fought without issue. The two men of their group stood in the front, one wielding a sword and the other a spear, while the two women fired arrows and spells from the rear. This was the ideal standard battle formation used by adventurers—the vanguard protected the rear, and the rearguard supported the front. And when an opening was created, the vanguard boldly went on the offensive to defeat their opponents.

“I see. They’re not C-rank just for show. They should be useful enough,” Caim noted, slightly impressed, as he kicked a horned wolf.

The Azure Wind’s fighting style was steady and cautious. In a way, it could be said that *this* was the best way for adventurers to fight. Everyone relied upon their strengths while covering for each other’s weaknesses—in other words, they were fighting correctly.

On the other hand, Caim and the girls didn’t coordinate at all. Caim was so strong he didn’t need any help, so most of the time Tea and Lenka only dealt with the leftover foes. So while Tea and Lenka were stronger than high-ranked adventurers, and Millicia could use Sacred Arts, their coordination was far inferior to that of Lux and his friends.

“Coordination, huh…? I won’t say it’s our weakness, exactly, but we should probably work on it.” If Caim could cooperate more with his companions, it would improve their chances against Arthur and his Twin Wings. “I guess I still have a lot to learn.” Having acknowledged his own inexperience, Caim kicked yet another horned wolf.

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Eventually, the battle against the horned wolves ended without the Azure Wind or Caim and the girls suffering any injuries.

One question remained, however. Why had monsters suddenly appeared in the middle of the road? After some talking, they all concluded that it was because of the wyverns. The horned wolves

must have fled when the wyverns invaded their territory, which forced them onto the main road.

In any case, it was starting to get dark, so they decided to stop where they were for the day and set up camp in the middle of the road. The men pitched the tents and built a fire, after which the women cooked.

“You were super strong, Caim! That was amazing!” Lux suddenly said excitedly as they were eating around the fire. “I was worried about the fact you didn’t use a weapon, but you just crushed those horned wolves’ skulls with your bare hands! I bet your fists are stronger than my sword!”

“I use mana to strengthen my fists. They won’t lose to the average blade,” Caim replied.

“Every warrior strengthens themselves with mana, but you’re on a completely different level! Did you study under a renowned master?!”

“No… I’m self-taught. It’s all natural talent,” Caim casually answered as he stirred his soup. Being praised was all right, but it did get irritating after a little while, and Caim wasn’t really sociable to begin with. He kept his loved ones close, but generally tried to keep his distance from other people. And Lux, who was very cheerful and outgoing, was the kind of person he had a hard time dealing with.

“Hey, Lux! Don’t bother him!” One of the girls of the Azure Wind smacked her leader on the head.

“Ow!” Lux cried, rubbing at the place he’d been hit. “Y-You didn’t have to hit me so hard…”

“Then mind how you act!” She turned toward Caim. “Sorry for our leader’s rudeness…”

“It wasn’t a big deal. Don’t worry. Still, you guys seem pretty close. You said you were childhood friends, right?”

“Yes, we’re all from the same village and around the same age,” the archer girl said, eyeing her friends.

“Our village is poor, so we were forced to become adventurers to put food on the table. Being childhood friends, we decided to form a party and have been together ever since,” explained the mage.

“Even if we’d become farmers and plowed the fields, basically everything would be taken by the lord anyway. We earn way more

as adventurers," the spearman added with a stern expression before chugging a cup of water in one go. "The empire is a meritocracy, after all. Even adventurers can become nobles with their own territory if they become famous enough. Our objective is to buy back our village and save it from that corrupt lord."

"Is he really such a bad person?" Millicia asked with a gloomy expression.

"He's the worst," the four members of the Azure Wind immediately replied in unison.

"Because the empire is so big, the emperor can't keep an eye on everything. The lords who live far from the imperial capital can do as they please and raise taxes for any reason they want. Our village isn't the only one in that situation," Lux added, still patting his head.

"I see..." Millicia's beautiful face darkened even further. As a member of the imperial family, she couldn't ignore the talk of corrupt lords. Even though she wasn't in any position to do anything about it, she couldn't help but feel responsible.

Lux continued. "I don't fault the emperor, but... Well, when we were living in the village, I must admit I hated him for not saving us. Now that I've been to big cities and heard how people praise him, though, I know that things aren't like this *because* of the emperor. It's just that even he can't do anything about it."

Millicia stayed silent.

"Thinking about it, you have the same name as the princess, Millicia. I heard she's serving at the temple in the capital." Lux smiled wryly. "There were also a few people in my village who named their children and grandchildren after the princes and the princess. Did your parents do the same thing?"

"...Yes," Millicia answered with a stiff smile.

While they hadn't yet realized the truth, Lenka thought it was better to change the subject before they could figure anything out. "By the way, I had a question. Are you two couples? You are a group of two men and two women who often sleep together. It seems only natural that your relationships would become amorous."

"Ah... Well..." Lux started, the four of them smiling sheepishly. "We like each other, but we're more like siblings."

"It's hard to see them as men after all this time."

“I do think they’re great women, though.”

“I agree, I doubt I could think of them romantically.”

The other members added, confirming that love wasn’t in the air among their group.

“Ah, but what about you?” Lux asked. “You’re a man with three women…plus Lykos. It’s pretty rare for a party to have such a one-sided sex ratio.”

“All of us are Master Caim’s lovers.” Tea, who had been silent up until now as she cleaned up after their meal, dropped a conversational bomb. “Master Caim showers us with affection every night. We’re totally lovey-dovey.”

“Wh-What?!”

“A man with three women?!”

The members of the Azure Wind widened their eyes in shock.

“I-I know that polygamy is accepted in the empire, but for someone who isn’t a noble to actually practice it…”

“Wait… Maybe he’s actually an aristocrat’s illegitimate child, and he’s hiding his status?”

“Now that I think about it, Millicia is very elegant…”

“Tea,” Caim quietly chided his maid. “Be careful of what you say. It’ll be a pain if they guess Millicia’s identity.”

“I only told the truth.” Tea proudly threw her large chest out. “Tea isn’t ashamed to tell everyone that Master Caim is her lover! In fact, we should show off to everyone!”

“I-I would not go so far…” Millicia looked down, her face beet red.

“Hmm… Well, I won’t deny that it would turn me on…” Lenka folded her arms and nodded.

Tea’s bombshell had completely changed the mood.

One person wasn’t affected, however—Lykos. She hadn’t participated in the conversation and was focused on her meal.

In the end, the awkward mood never went away, so they all decided to go to sleep.

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Caim asked the Azure Wind when it was his group’s turn to be on lookout, but the four replied they would handle it.

“You killed more horned wolves than us, so let us be the ones to

keep watch!" Lux suggested.

"Thanks, but are you sure about that?"

"Yes! Leave it to us!"

Caim accepted the offer and went into the tent he would share with the girls. He was grateful that he wouldn't have to be on watch—the conversation during dinner had gotten pretty uncomfortable, so he really wanted to shut himself inside their tent and forget about it.

Jeez... Interacting with new people is more tiring than fighting monsters. I should go to sleep. It was a little early, but Caim decided to go to bed anyway. He lay down, pulled a blanket over himself, and closed his eyes. As he took slow, deep breaths, he gradually began to feel drowsy. If nothing happened, he would fall asleep in less than five minutes.

"Master Caim..."

"Caim..."

"Sir Caim..."

However, something *did* happen. Such was Caim's life.

Inside the tent, where even the moonlight couldn't reach, three people drew near Caim.

"I didn't expect the three of you to coordinate..." Caim slowly opened his eyes. He had thought one of them would ask for some nightly fun, but he was surprised to see all three of them.

They were inside a tent, but that didn't change the fact that they were technically sleeping outdoors. And yet, the three women were already half naked. Thanks to his night vision, Caim could see their flushed skin and the lust in their eyes as they panted.

In other words, it was the same as usual—they were aroused.

"Hey... Don't forget that Lux and the rest are outside. If we do it, they'll hear us," Caim warned them.

"Then we just need to be quiet," Tea immediately replied, licking her lips as she slid her hands under Caim's clothes.

"I-Indeed... If we keep our voices down, they should not be able to hear us outside of the tent..." Millicia agreed, though embarrassed.

"I don't mind if they hear us. In fact, I'd like it," added the pervert—Lenka.

If they were all so determined, then there was nothing Caim could do to stop them. His only salvation was that Lykos was

sleeping soundly in a corner of the tent. If a child like Lykos ended up in the same state as the others, Caim would fall into despair.

“Fine…” Caim sighed. “Be sure to keep your voices down,” he warned them one last time and extended his right hand toward one of Millicia’s ample mounds, eliciting a moan. He groped her well-sized breast, sinking his fingers into her soft flesh.

“Aaah… Caim, no… Mmmh!”

“Quiet. You promised you would keep your voice down.” Now that he had made up his mind, Caim wouldn’t show any mercy. He increased the pace at which he stroked her breast, purposefully trying to make Millicia moan.

“Mmmmh…” Millicia bit her index finger, doing her best to muffle her voice.

Toying with a woman as she tried to hold herself back from moaning was oddly exciting, and Caim quickly forgot his apprehension. In fact, it only stoked his sadistic desires. Even though it would be bad if the members of the Azure Wind heard Millicia, he really wanted to make her moan even louder.

Next, Caim grabbed Lenka’s rear with his left hand.

“Aaah!”

“Shut up.”

Lenka had already removed her pants and was now in her underwear. Caim vigorously groped and spanked her lightly.



“Aaah… Y-You’re so rough, Sir Caim!”

“That’s how you like it, no? So don’t complain.” Caim was well aware that Lenka was a major masochist who loved being hurt, so he didn’t hold back and even deliberately dug his nails into her flesh.

Millicia and Lenka did their best to keep their voices down as they enjoyed Caim’s caresses.

“This is unfair, Master Caim. Don’t forget about me.” A third woman suddenly jumped on Caim. “Boob attack!” The assailant—Tea—pressed her chest against Caim’s face. “Please shower Tea with love too.”

Caim somehow managed to free his mouth. “Unfortunately, my hands are already occupied.”

“Then use your mouth. Just look at my delicious boobies—I grew these fruits just for you, Master Caim.” Tea pushed the tip of one of her breasts against Caim’s lips.

Caim couldn’t escape, as his hands were busy with the other two, so he did as demanded and put the erect nipple inside his mouth.

“Aaah!” Tea moaned sweetly like a musical instrument as Caim sucked her nipple like an infant, sometimes biting it or licking the areola, thirsty for the bountiful meal laid out before him. The taste of sweat spread through his mouth. It was a flavor his tongue had savored countless times—Tea’s taste.

On Caim’s right was Millicia, and on his left, Lenka. In front of him was Tea. He was surrounded by gorgeous, lewd flowers, and nobody but Caim could savor their nectar.

The three did their best to muffle their moans as Caim’s fingers and tongue assaulted them. The night was only beginning. The girls were the ones who had initiated, so Caim wasn’t going to hold back.

“Here I come,” Caim announced, pulling his massive “sword” out and aiming directly for his lovers.

“Hey…”

“I know…”

“Th-Their voices are so lewd…”

“I’m getting wet just listening to them…”

As Caim and his lovers enjoyed some nightly fun, the four

members of the Azure Wind were all red-faced as they stood guard outside. All of them were keeping watch seriously—which meant that they were all sharpening their senses to notice any incoming monsters. As such, they were able to hear the muffled moans and the wet sounds coming from inside the tent. As much as they would have liked to ignore them, they were forced to listen to the obscene quartet playing behind them. And while they were all upstanding enough to not peek inside the tent, it made the mood between the group of four friends very awkward.

"...Say, Elize."

"...What is it, Lux?"

"Despite what I said earlier, I've actually been in love with you since we were both kids." Overcome by the strange mood, Lux confessed his hidden feelings to the archer.

"I-I love you too... I just wanted to wait for us to become veteran adventurers before telling you..." Elize shyly replied to her childhood friend's confession, looking down in embarrassment.

"Elize..."

"Lux..."

Their faces drew closer until they finally kissed. At first, it was only light pecks, but before long they were passionately intertwining their tongues.

And they weren't the only ones. A little ways away, the spearman and the mage were also sharing a deep kiss.

The two couples continued to devour each other's lips until they eventually completely forgot about keeping watch and threw their clothes away.

The next morning, the four members of the Azure Wind expressed their gratitude to Caim with refreshed expressions on their faces. As for why they did so, Caim never figured it out.

And then, finally, they reached Extobell.

Chapter 3: The Town Attacked by Wyverns

Caim and the rest continued their travel the following day. They encountered several monsters on the way, but no wyverns. They handled the threats without difficulty and pressed forward until they finally arrived at their destination—Extobell, the center of Count Atlaus's territory.

"So, we safely made it here, but is the lord even around?" Caim asked.

"He should be," Lux answered. "Once we've given him the letter from the Adventurers' Guild, our job will be done."

The Azure Wind's objective was to deliver the answer to the local lord's call for help against the wyverns. Now that they had reached the city where Count Atlaus resided, their job was practically over.

"Of course, I'll report your assistance to the guild," Lux added. "We were told we could ask for help, so you should get a part of the reward."

"Thanks. Are we going straight to the count?"

"Yes. He should be in his mansion."

The entire group had entered the city, as the guards at the entrance had readily let them in once Lux had explained the reason for their coming. Despite the town's size, the streets were basically deserted and almost nobody was walking around. And yet, some people with a strong mercantile spirit still had their stalls open for business, and the delicious odor of meat skewers being grilled on iron plates reached their noses.

"It smells nice," Tea commented. "Now that I think about it, we still haven't had lunch."

Lykos drooled, looking in the direction of a nearby stall.

"You're right." Caim turned toward Lux. "Mind if we take a detour?"

"No, of course. It should be fine as long as we don't take too long."

Caim nodded and approached the stand selling grilled meat.

“Nine skewers, please,” he ordered one for everyone.

The owner, a middle-aged woman, lifted her head from the iron plate and shot him a businesslike smile. “Right away! It’s one silver coin per skewer, though, so are you sure you want all of them?”

“That’s fairly expensive. You’re really taking advantage of the situation,” Caim noted. She was clearly overcharging—that was about ten times the normal price.

“Well, what can I say? We can’t get new stock because of the wyverns, so the prices skyrocket.”

“Ah… Yeah, that makes sense. Not much anyone can do, then. I’ll pay.”

“Thanks for your purchase!”

Caim couldn’t really argue if the problem was the lack of supplies, so he paid the requested price, received the meat skewers dripping with sauce, and distributed them to everyone.

“Thank you, but you didn’t have to buy our share,” Lux said apologetically.

“Don’t mention it. You’re the reason we were able to come here in the first place,” Caim casually replied. It was true that without the Azure Wind’s help, Caim and his companions would either have had to force their way through the blockade or take a big detour. Considering the trouble Lux and his party had saved them, a few meat skewers was a small price to pay.

“Still…there really are very few people here. Thankfully, it seems the city has yet to be attacked by wyverns, at least,” Millicia commented, a skewer in her hand.

At first glance, it didn’t look like the town had been damaged—and yet, it was practically deserted. Most of the citizens had likely fled the region in fear of the wyverns.

“Exactly, young lady. Almost everyone is gone,” the stall owner replied to Millicia’s muttering. “Well, it’s no surprise. We don’t know when the wyverns will attack, after all. The only people left are either stubborn eccentrics, those with nowhere else to go, or the elderly. Ah, and I suppose adventurers and mercenaries trying to earn their keep.”

“What about you, madame?” Millicia inquired.

“Madame? Come on, you’re gonna make me blush if you call me something like that! I was born here and have nowhere else to go. My husband and son died in the last war, so even if I’m eaten by a

wyvern, nobody would miss me.” The stall owner laughed despite her miserable situation.

Millicia was left speechless for a few moments. “The war…” she eventually said.

“It’s not that rare in the empire—even though it’s best to be at peace. I wonder why people keep killing each other.”

“…Indeed.” Millicia hung her head sadly.

Seeing his lover so gloomy, Caim wanted to do something, but he didn’t know what to say. Instead, he placed his hand on her shoulder. “Millicia.”

“…I am fine. Thank you for your concern,” she replied. Her face was still slightly pale, but her eyes held firm resolve. “We should do things one step at a time. First, we must go to Count Atlaus’s mansion.”

“Yeah, let’s.” Caim was relieved to see Millicia had regained her composure.

I guess I was worried for nothing. She isn’t the frail type of woman who would break over something so small. Millicia wasn’t weak. While confronting harsh reality did hurt her, she always pressed forward with an unyielding spirit that never wavered no matter what. *She may look delicate, but she has a will of iron. And that’s why she deserves to be my woman.* Caim grinned faintly as he bit off the last piece of meat on his skewer.

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They quickly reached Count Atlaus’s residence. Once there, they were greeted by a butler, who allowed them to enter the premises after they informed him of the reason for their visit.

Caim and the others stepped into the manor’s vast garden, which was filled with soldiers discussing how to deal with the wyverns. Among the soldiers was the man who seemed to be the lord of the city.

“That’s him—the lord of this land, Count Atlaus,” Millicia informed the group. Being a member of the imperial family, she had met him previously.

“The people sent by the Adventurers’ Guild have arrived, my lord,” the butler told his master.

“Oh, that’s them? I figured they would be here soon,” the count

said, rejoicing, and approached Caim and the rest. Count Atlaus was around fifty years old and sported a mustache; his calm, composed demeanor and firmly built body meant he could easily pass for a soldier or knight. “I am Count Atlaus, the lord governing this land. Thank you for coming, dear adventurers,” he said, his tone friendly. Despite being a noble, he didn’t put on airs and seemed like a fairly affable person.

He also had yet to notice Millicia, who was hiding in the back—not that he would ever have expected the missing princess would be among the group standing before him.

“I’m sorry you had to travel such a great distance. You didn’t encounter any wyverns on the way, did you?” Count Atlaus asked.

“No, we did not. Thank you for your concern, though!” Lux replied, on behalf of the whole group. “Here is the letter from the imperial capital’s guild.”

“Thank you. I shall read it immediately.” Count Atlaus took the letter and opened it. As he perused the message, though, his face gradually grew sterner. “The guild can’t help us because a civil war is brewing in the capital, huh…?”

“I am truly sorry,” Lux apologized. He didn’t seem surprised, so he must have known the contents of the letter beforehand.

“It’s not your fault. Still, this is quite troublesome…” Count Atlaus thought for a moment with a serious expression. “If we can’t secure the guild’s help, that means we must deal with the wyverns using only the soldiers available in my domain. Unfortunately, there aren’t very many, and they aren’t terribly skilled either.”

Count Atlaus had asked the imperial capital’s Adventurers’ Guild for help against the wyverns, but because of the war brewing between Arthur and Lance, the guild couldn’t afford to send out its members carelessly. While adventurers mostly fought monsters, they could also serve as mercenaries during wartime. If the guild decided to send a large number of adventurers to help against the wyverns, there was the possibility that either Arthur or Lance would view it as the guild making a move.

“We need to rethink our plans…” Count Atlaus pondered for a moment longer but ultimately shook his head. “You’ve done well. You may go now.” He could have lashed out at Lux over the guild’s refusal, but it wasn’t the young man’s fault, so the count let him go

without venting his anger.

“Yes… We shall leave, then.” Lux bowed, his expression apologetic, and stepped back.

With that, the Azure Wind’s mission was over.

That wasn’t the case for Caim and his companions, however. In fact, the real conversation was about to begin.

“Long time no see, Count Atlaus.” Millicia stepped out from behind Lux.

The soldiers were surprised to see the woman suddenly approached their lord, and one of them quickly interposed himself between the two.

“Such insolence! Stay back!”

“Wait! Leave her!” Count Atlaus hastily stopped his soldier before he could touch Millicia. “You are… What could such an important person possibly be doing here?”

“I am pleased to see you remember me, despite not having seen each other in years.”

“Of course I remember—you look just like your mother, the late empress… What a surprise this is.” Count Atlaus knelt.

“My lord?!” The soldiers and the Azure Wind were bewildered by what they were seeing.

“It has, indeed, been a long time, Your Imperial Highness Millicia. It is my greatest honor and joy to be in your presence once more.”

“I am glad to see you again too, Count Atlaus.” Millicia smiled.

The members of the Azure Wind looked at the two nobles.

“Wait… ‘Your Imperial Highness’?! You mean that Millicia is…?!” Lux cried in shock.

Naturally, the other members of his group and the rest of the soldiers were all equally surprised.

“Um… Sorry?” Seeing everyone so shocked, Millicia apologized with a tilt of her head.

After her identity was revealed, Count Atlaus couldn’t just let the imperial princess stand outside as they talked, so he invited Millicia and her companions to his parlor.

“Well then, might I hear the reason for your visit to my territory, Your Highness?” Count Atlaus asked, looking quite serious.

Millicia and Caim sat together on a sofa across the table from

the count, while Lenka and Tea stood behind their masters as usual. The members of Azure Wind were still outside, frozen by the shocking revelation that Millicia was the imperial princess.

As for Lykos, she had vanished before anyone could notice. Caim knew she would come back once she was hungry, so he didn't worry too much about it.

"I was told that you were missing, so I thought you had absconded to another nation so as not to become involved in politics."

"You were right at one point. My brother, Lance, helped me flee to the Jade Kingdom. However, I have returned to the empire to accomplish my duties," Millicia explained, staring straight at Count Atlaus. "This man is Caim. He is my guard, and the one who saved my life. He is also the person I trust more than anyone else."

"Oh?" One of Count Atlaus's eyebrows twitched, understanding the implication in Millicia's words. He appraised Caim for a moment, then turned back toward Millicia. "You did not answer my question, Your Highness. While it is wonderful to hear that you have returned to the empire, why did you come to my domain and not the capital?"

"On my way to meet with Lance, who is currently east of here, I heard that your territory was under attack by wyverns. While it might not amount to much, I thought that I should help you to the best of my ability."

"So you came here specifically to help me..." Count Atlaus looked troubled, like he was listening to an unreasonable child. He likely felt that Millicia's kindness was unwelcome. "I am truly thankful for your sympathy, but I do not think you can help me, Your Highness. Wyverns are powerful creatures, and there are a great many of them. You and a few guards will not make much difference." Even though he was polite and smiling, Count Atlaus was implying they would actually be a hindrance, and he didn't want their help. "Moreover, I cannot expose you to danger, Your Highness Millicia. I shall have my guards escort you outside of my domain. Please go somewhere safe."

"Are you not troubled by the fact that the Adventurers' Guild will not send reinforcements, Count Atlaus? I can use Healing Magic, and my companions are strong. I can assure you that our help will save lives."

Count Atlaus stayed silent.

“You should prioritize the safety of your people over everything else,” Millicia continued. “This is not a situation where you can afford to be obstinate. Am I wrong?”

“...Indeed,” the count replied, narrowing his eyes as he observed Millicia. She stared back at the man, who was more than twice her age, without flinching, her resolve firm. “It appears that you have matured quite a bit, Your Highness Millicia.” Count Atlaus sighed, finally understanding that her help wasn’t being offered lightly. “What do you want in return? Support during the war? My backing?”

“Nothing.”

“...What?”

“I do not require anything. As a member of the imperial family, it is my duty to protect my people.”

Count Atlaus’s eyes went wide, and he was struck speechless. After a few moments, he sighed, then said, “I am impressed. I deeply apologize for underestimating you, Your Highness.”

“It is only natural. I am merely a powerless girl, after all. I forgive you.”

“Thank you for your magnanimity.” Count Atlaus bowed, and Millicia nodded with a motherly smile. “Well then, let us resume our conversation. As you already know, my domain is being attacked by a swarm of wyverns,” he explained, having formally accepted her help. “We suspect they originate from a mountain range to the north called the Dragon’s Nest, and we estimate their number to be around a hundred. While they never move all at once, they do generally assault villages in small groups.”

Caim had heard the same number from the soldier at the blockade. Considering they wouldn’t be receiving reinforcements from the Adventurers’ Guild, the situation was dire.

“Wyverns are Count-class monsters,” Count Atlaus continued. “Several trained soldiers and adventurers must cooperate to slay a single one. So while I am glad to receive help from Your Highness’s companions, the truth of the matter is that three more people will not change anything.”

“I see... I understand the situation now.” Millicia nodded and took Caim’s hand. “Be at ease—Caim has the strength of a thousand men. He will take care of the wyverns effortlessly.”

“So in the end, you’re actually just relying on me…” Caim smiled wryly. He had expected it would come to this, but that confirmed he was going to be the one who would have to deal with the wyverns. “Oh well, not that I mind. Just tell me where they are, and I’ll hunt them down.”

“You do not seem to be taking this seriously. Do you really think you can defeat a wyvern by yourself?” Count Atlaus frowned. He didn’t want to doubt Millicia’s words, but he couldn’t help thinking that love must be clouding her judgment.

“If you doubt Caim’s strength, then your worries are unfounded. Not only has he already killed a wyvern by himself, but he also survived a fight against Arthur’s close aides—Ser Gawain and Dame Merlin.”

“What?! You mean he battled the Twin Wings?!” Count Atlaus exclaimed, his eyes wide. If Caim could fight against Gawain and Merlin—the strongest knight and mage in the empire—and come out alive, then his strength must be the real deal. “I had presumed you would be strong, being the man chosen by Her Highness Millicia, but to think you would be *that* powerful…”

“Master Caim is the strongest of all. He won’t lose to mere flying lizards.”

“Sir Caim is very powerful. I am certain he rivals—or even surpasses—the captain of the Knights of the Golden Lion.”

Tea and Lenka both backed Millicia’s claim.

Count Atlaus hummed at the three women’s evaluation. “If you are willing to go that far, then I must believe you. As soon as I receive new information on the wyverns’ whereabouts, I shall inform you. So please, lend us your stre—”

“My lord! Please excuse my rudeness!” Just as the discussion was concluding, a young, panicked-looking soldier burst into the parlor without knocking.

“What is the meaning of this?! Remember your place!” Count Atlaus chided him.

“We have just received a message by post-horse that wyverns are attacking the town of Ozd to the south! They have requested our help!” the young soldier reported.

“The timing is so perfect it almost feels like divine intervention.” Caim shrugged. Things were quite hectic—they had only just arrived at Extobell, and they already needed to leave. “Oh well, I

read in a book that skilled warriors should demonstrate their worth with their swords, not their words. I don't use a sword, though, so I guess I'll have to prove myself with my fists."

"Then, Caim—" Millicia began, but he stopped her with a hand on her shoulder.

"Just tell me where to go, and I'll kill them," Caim declared with a savage grin, baring his teeth. The perfect opportunity to show off his strength had just come to him on its own, as if everything had been orchestrated in advance. While he knew it was improper, he couldn't help being glad the wyverns had decided to attack.

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The place that was under assault by the wyverns was the town of Ozd, south of Extobell. Count Atlaus tried to send reinforcement to save his people, but Caim stopped him, offering to go himself instead.

"Well then, I'm heading out!"

"Please be careful, Caim." Millicia saw him off with Tea and Lenka. It had been decided that the three of them would stay in Extobell. Time was of the essence in saving Ozd, so Caim couldn't afford to have the girls slowing him down.

"I don't need a horse. I'll just run," he said.

"Are you sure...? Even by horse, Ozd is half a day away," Count Atlaus warned him.

"No worries," Caim replied and leaped. "Toukishin Style Basic Stance—Suzaku." He created footholds of compressed mana in midair and dashed through the sky at blinding speed.

"Whoa!"

"How?!"

"He's flying!"

Count Atlaus and his soldiers looked up in shock, but Caim didn't pay them any mind and simply continued to accelerate. By going through the sky, he could ignore terrain and obstacles, drastically shortening the travel time. Caim was moving even faster than a flying wyvern, so it only took a few seconds before he lost sight of the knights rushing toward Ozd.

They said Ozd was directly south of Extobell. But since there's marshland on the way, people and horses have to take a detour, which

makes the trip longer. Not that any of that mattered to Caim, who could just travel through the sky in a straight line.

Eventually, the marshland entered his view. However, he didn't slow down and continued to head south.

"Huh?" Just then, Caim noticed an approaching silhouette. He thought it might be a wyvern, but it ended up being a monster that looked like a mix between a rhinoceros beetle and a stag beetle—having both a horn *and* massive mandibles—but the size of a cow.

The giant insect buzzed, rubbing its appendages together to threaten Caim.

Caim ignored it and continued to dash through the sky, but the insect had already determined that this human was its prey and attacked.

"And here I was going to let you go if you didn't try to get in my way... Oh well, so be it."

The giant insect didn't understand Caim's clemency and charged at him, brandishing its horn and mandibles.

"Houou." Caim dodged the attack using the Toukishin Style's other midair technique, which allowed him to propel himself at great speed through the sky with a burst of mana under his feet.

"You're in my way."

Caim twisted his body in midair and threw a mana-clad punch at the giant insect's head. Its black shell wasn't for show, however—it was hard enough to resist the blow, though it did crack. But Caim wasn't finished.

"Ouryuu." A mana shock wave burst from his fist and into the monster's shell before exploding.

Its head blown to bits, the insect's wings twitched for one last buzz before it fell to the marshland, its corpse slowly sinking into the mud.

"I guess you didn't have any luck...or rather, any brains." Caim snorted at his own joke and resumed his travel.

While the battle had only lasted a few seconds, it had wasted precious time, so Caim increased his speed in order to arrive at his destination faster.

Usually, it took half a day to go from Extobell to Ozd by horse. But for Caim, who traveled through the sky, it only took around an

hour.

Caim gasped at the sight spreading out beneath him. Crumbling outer walls, smashed houses, smoke rising here and there—it looked like a major earthquake had occurred. While the town of Ozd wasn't big enough to be called a city, it was still quite developed—or rather, it *had* been, as it was now completely destroyed.

And among the ruins, wyverns roared. Three enormous lizards with dragon-like wings attached to their shoulders had stuck their heads inside collapsed buildings, as though searching for something.

"Noooooo!" A woman screamed as one of the wyverns pulled her from the remains of a house. But just before it could crunch her in its giant jaws...

"Houou!" Caim made his move to stop the crisis. He reached his top speed in an instant and strongly kicked the wyvern in the back, making the monster drop the woman as it cried in pain.

The woman fell to the ground—thankfully, she wasn't injured—then quickly fled inside a building to hide again.

The three wyverns let out shrieks of rage, recognizing Caim as their enemy.

"I'm the one who should be angry. Don't think you can just show up, eat your fill, then leave as you please."

When Caim had dropped from the sky, he had noticed the countless corpses. Men, women, children, elderly—no matter who they were, they had all either been devoured by the wyverns or crushed by the remains of buildings.

If Millicia had been here to see this, I'm sure she'd be really upset... Caim wasn't a saint and didn't really care about the deaths of strangers—the thing that really fueled his rage was the fact that this would hurt his lover.

Caim glared at the wyverns, fury blazing in his heart. "I think you've done enough hunting—now it's my turn to hunt you!"

The monsters roared.

"Shut up! Stop yapping!"

First, Caim decided he would finish off the wyvern he had kicked. He created a blade of condensed mana with Seiryuu and sliced through the monster's thick neck. Blood gushed out, raining on the ruins of the nearby buildings, and the wyvern collapsed,

never to move again.

Seeing their comrade killed, the other two wyverns flew into a frenzy and charged at Caim. He didn't dodge, however. Instead, he simply let the two creatures bite his arms.

"That hurts. What are you gonna do if I get injured?" Despite his words, Caim's expression was composed.

The wyverns were trying their hardest to crush his arms with their jaws, but not only did they fail to draw a single drop of blood, they couldn't even manage to scratch his skin. Thanks to Mana Compression, which protected his body like armor, Caim had nothing to fear from the wyverns' fangs. It felt more like dogs were playfully trying to bite him.

The wyverns, though, were in pain. They let go of Caim's arms, drooling uncontrollably, and collapsed in agony. A moment later, their flowing saliva ran red with blood. Caim had released strong toxins directly into their mouths and poisoned them.

"Hey, stop throwing up. I don't want to see the chewed up remains of the people you ate." Caim averted his eyes and quickly finished the monsters off, beheading them with Seiryuu. "And…mission complete. I'm done with the wyverns, but…"

Caim looked around him. Almost everything had been destroyed, and very few buildings had managed to stay intact. Most likely, there had been more than three wyverns, but only these three had remained behind while the others had flown away.

"What a pain…" Caim sighed.

Defeating the wyverns wasn't an issue—to him, they were nothing more than flying lizards. The problem was that he would need to search for them. Count Atlaus had said there were around a hundred, so finding them all was going to be quite troublesome.

"The worst thing is that Millicia won't want to leave this place until we deal with the situation…"

Considering that they didn't know when Arthur would make his move, they were wasting time. And yet, Caim would do as Millicia wished, because in the end, he loved her. He'd already been ensnared by her body and couldn't bring himself to refuse her requests.

"I guess complaining won't help… For now, I should just search for survivors." Caim chose a collapsed building at random and

began effortlessly digging away the rubble.

Eventually, people noticed that the wyverns had been defeated and emerged from their hiding spots on their own. Once out of hiding, they helped Caim rescue anyone who had been buried under debris.

A few hours later, Count Atlaus's army finally arrived at Ozd. Compared to Caim, they'd arrived pretty late, but considering how tired their horses looked, they must have been traveling as fast as they could.

"Hey there. Took your time, huh?" Caim greeted them.

"What's happened? Where are the wyverns?!"

"Over there. I killed them." Caim pointed at the corpses lying a little ways away. Then he looked around the ruined town and snorted. "Unfortunately, the wyverns rampaged through the whole town. It was already like this when I arrived."

"Those damn monsters!" The soldier bit his lower lip and clenched his fist in indignation.

Caim shrugged and pointed at a mountain of debris. "You can be angry all you want, but you should start helping out. There's still a lot of people buried under the rubble."

"Yeah, you're right... Let's help, everyone!"

"Yes!" the other soldiers replied in unison, and they went to join the rescue work.

Thanks to their aid, most of the buried people were saved before night fell. From what they could gather, more than half of the inhabitants had already evacuated to another town, but the buildings were so damaged that rebuilding would take a long time, even once they'd have exterminated all the wyverns.

"Damn it... He's dead..."

"Damn you, wyverns...!"

Unfortunately, not everyone who was buried had survived. Many townsfolk had been crushed under the debris, and their corpses were now laid on the road. Coupled with those who had been eaten by the monsters, the death toll was quite high.

"I killed three wyverns. How many are left?" Caim asked one of the townspeople assisting the rescue effort.

"I don't know the total number, but there were seven or eight that attacked us."

“I see…” As Caim had expected, despite numbering around a hundred overall, the wyverns mainly moved in smaller groups—sometimes even alone, like the one that had chased after the merchant carriage. It was going to be a pain to go around the entire county searching for them all.

From my battles, I know I could easily fight ten or twenty at once, no problem. But if they’re all scattered around, there’s a limit to what I can do by myself.

“Say, how many people do you need to defeat a single wyvern?” Caim decided that thinking about it to himself wasn’t useful and just asked the soldiers directly.

An older man who appeared to be the captain pondered for a moment, then answered, “I think we would need ten soldiers to kill one.”

“Ten? That’s the best you can do?”

“Please, don’t ask for the impossible. A single wyvern is still a Count-class monster—even veteran adventurers need to form a party to defeat one. Few people can do it alone.”

“I can. Just killed three of them, actually,” Caim retorted.

“…Point taken. Anyway, we could likely do better if we had better weapons.” The knights’ leader grimaced, then shook his head regretfully. “If we had weapons that were effective against wyverns—or dragons—we could defeat them with only a few soldiers. Unfortunately, dragon-killing magic items are few and rarely appear on the market…”

“Well, of course it’s not easy to obtain something that useful.” Caim furrowed his brow in thought.

Caim could effortlessly defeat the wyverns. The issue, however, was that there was only one of him, and there was no way he could cover the entire county alone. While the size of Count Atlaus’s army was significant, dispersing them through the different towns meant they’d be unable to match the wyverns, and they would likely be annihilated. In other words, they were at an impasse. The only option left was for Caim to slowly decrease the number of wyverns as they attacked.

“…Well, I guess I’m not gonna figure this out on my own,” Caim concluded. His job had been to kill the wyverns attacking Ozd, and he had accomplished his mission. Count Atlaus and Millicia could think of how to deal with the other wyverns. “I’ve done all I can

here, so I'm going back to Extobell. You don't mind?"

"No, of course not," the captain replied. "We will escort the survivors to safety, so please report what happened to our lord."

"Gotcha. Good luck." Caim left the rest of the work to the soldiers and left the town. Just as he had on the journey to Ozd, he used Suzaku to run through the sky, heading toward Extobell, where Millicia and the others were waiting for him.

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Since the sun was setting, monsters were becoming more active, and Caim met several on his way back, making the return trip longer. When he arrived in Extobell, it was already night.

Caim leaped over the ramparts and landed directly in the count's garden.

"Let me pass. I have a report for Count Atlaus," Caim said to the servant at the entrance. A few moments later, he was allowed to enter the mansion.

Even though it was already night, the count was still hard at work, so Caim was guided to his office.

"Ah, Sir Caim. That was fast. Did something happen?" Count Atlaus inquired, pausing in his paperwork. The way he asked it made it obvious that he thought Caim had never actually reached Ozd—considering it usually took half a day, he assumed Caim couldn't have possibly made the round trip so fast.

"I'd say I'm actually late getting back. It's already night, after all." Caim shrugged, sitting in a chair. "Anyway, I'm here to report that Ozd was destroyed by the wyverns. Thankfully, more than half of the inhabitants evacuated beforehand, but there were many casualties among the ones who stayed."

"What?!" Count Atlaus stood up and leaned over his desk. "Please explain what happened!"

Caim told him what had occurred in Ozd without leaving anything out.

At first, Count Atlaus listened silently, but gradually, his wrinkled face warped in fury. "Those damn wyverns! How dare they do this to my people?!" he cried, striking his desk with his trembling fist. His face was red from rage, but after a few moments, he heaved a deep sigh and calmed down. "Excuse me. I

lost control of myself.”

“I don’t mind, but… Are you all right?”

“I am…is what I would love to say, if I didn’t have so many problems.” Count Atlaus sat back in his chair, clasped his hands atop the desk, and hung his head. “Since wyverns can fly, we cannot take the initiative—and spreading my army out to protect every town would only make the soldiers fodder for those damn monsters.”

“Because you don’t have enough guys who’re strong enough to fight the wyverns, right?”

“Exactly. That’s why I asked for help from the Adventurers’ Guild, but you have seen the result of that.” Count Atlaus sighed. “What should I do now?” He was at his wits’ end.

Extobell had become the front line against the wyverns and was amply armed. However, if they received a report of any other town being attacked, the wyverns would have already moved on by the time the soldiers and knights arrived there.

On this occasion, Caim had been able to make it in time by running quickly through the sky, and he’d defeated three wyverns and saved the remaining survivors. If not for him, the wyverns would have finished their meal and left before the army could even reach Ozd.

“Can’t we find their nest and take care of all of them at once?” Caim suggested.

“No… While wyverns sometimes form groups while hunting their prey, they usually move alone or in pairs. Also, now that they have descended from the Dragoon Mountains, their former habitat, I am not certain that they have a fixed nest anywhere.”

“So the only option is slowly decreasing their number?”

“That will take far too long, though. Imagine how many people will die during that time…”

In any case, some damage was inevitable, and the longer the battle dragged on, the more troubled Caim—or more accurately, Millicia—would become. Not only that, but the longer it took for them to deal with the wyverns, the more they delayed their meeting with Lance.

And while we’re losing time here, Arthur is continuing to make preparations. How long do we actually have before the decisive battle…?

“I suppose I’ll take my leave now. Ah, are Millicia and the rest in this mansion?”

“Of course—I gave Her Highness the best room. She must already be asleep… Do you plan to visit her?”

“No… it’s fine.”

There were likely soldiers guarding Millicia’s bedroom, and he knew if he met her during the night, *something* would happen.

“Oh, right… Miss Lenka and the child called Lykos are resting in the same room as Her Highness, but the maid named Tea is staying at an inn not far from here. I offered her a guest room, but she refused, saying it would be more convenient this way. She also said to tell you once you returned, Sir Caim.”

“I see… So Tea isn’t here.” Caim immediately understood exactly why Tea had decided to not stay in the lord’s mansion. “I guess I’ll go to sleep at that same inn, then.”

“I shall have someone guide you there.” Count Atlaus straightened his posture. “Once again, you have my gratitude for saving Ozd’s inhabitants. I hope you have a restful evening.”

“Yeah, good night.” Caim bowed slightly and left the mansion. Then, without meeting Millicia or Lenka, he had a soldier guide him to the inn where Tea was staying. Once they’d arrived, Caim thanked the soldier.

“Don’t mention it,” the soldier replied, then bowed and left.

Caim opened the door and went inside.

“Ah, welcome back, Master Caim.”

“Don’t tell me… You’ve been waiting for me here the whole time?”

Tea had indeed been waiting for Caim at the inn’s entrance. She grasped the hem of her skirt, curtsied, and greeted her master with a smile. “Naturally. I was sure you’d return before the day was out.”

“Well, thanks for your dedication. You didn’t bother anybody, did you?”

“We’re the only people here, so it wasn’t a problem.”

“What do you mean?”

“The innkeeper and the staff have evacuated already, and there aren’t any customers, so we have the building all to ourselves. The lord even gave us permission to do as we please,” Tea explained.

There was nobody but them here—no innkeeper, no staff, no

customers, just the two of them. Upon hearing this, Caim naturally imagined all the improper things that would happen tonight.

"Well then, let's go to the bath. I shall *reward* you for all your hard work today, Master Caim."

"Yeah... I thought you'd say that." Caim had been right on the money. Tea had purposefully demanded to not stay at Count Atlaus's mansion with Millicia and Lenka for this exact purpose.

Caim didn't resist and allowed himself to be led into the inn's bathroom.

Unfortunately, the inn didn't have a hot spring or a large public bath—just a bathroom of ordinary size. The bathtub was barely big enough for two people.

"Please, sit here. I shall wash your hair and body."

"Got it." Caim sat naked on the bath stool.

Tea, who had also removed her maid uniform and underwear, stood behind him, covered only by a towel.

"You're wearing a towel today?" Caim asked.

"Yes. I heard that really turns men on."

Caim wanted to retort and ask where exactly she'd heard that, but decided to stay silent instead. "You can start."

"Please close your eyes, then," Tea warned Caim before pouring a bucket of hot water on his head.

She rubbed the soap bar until her hands were covered in suds and started washing Caim's hair, eliciting a contented sigh from him. Ten long, delicate fingers combed through his hair and carefully massaged his scalp with just the right amount of strength. During their journey they'd only been able to take cold baths, so this felt even better than usual.

"How is it, Master Caim?"

"Great. Like, *really* great."

"That's good to hear," Tea replied. "It kind of reminds me of our time in the Halsberg mansion."

"Huh?"

"Back then, I would often wash your hair."

"Ah, yeah, now that you mention it..."

When Caim's mother had still been alive and his father hadn't yet driven him out, Caim would often bathe with Tea, as she had been his caretaker. Back then, the curse had made him very weak

and bathing alone had been risky, as he could have fainted in the bathtub.

“Your hair’s changed color, but I’m glad I get to wash it again,” Tea commented.

“Don’t treat me like a child. How old do you think I am?”

“That’s a good question, actually. How old are you?”

Caim didn’t reply, as he didn’t know the answer himself. Fusing with the Poison Queen had matured his mind, but his actual age was now unknown.

Tea chuckled. “You’ve grown so much, and your back has become so strong and sturdy. Tea is so proud of you!”

“Whoa!” Caim exclaimed as Tea hugged him from behind. He could feel her soft mounds pressing against his back through the towel. Even though he had touched and even groped them countless times, he never grew tired of her amazing breasts.

Having the towel in between actually does kinda make it more arousing… Like, the tantalizing feeling makes me want it even more…

If not for the towel, he would be able to feel her bare chest directly on his skin. But now, the lack of contact actually heightened his sensitivity, and he felt as though a finger was tracing the edge of his erogenous zones.

“You’re more sensitive than usual, Master Caim,” Tea noted with a giggle, seeing through Caim’s internal conflict. She slowly caressed his chest, and when she flicked his erect nipples he couldn’t stop his shoulders from twitching.

“Tea can feel how much you want her. It fills me with pride.”

“Ugh… I’ll remember how you teased me later!” Caim complained, but for some reason, he couldn’t bring himself to resist. Tea’s fingers traced his abs as they gradually approached his most sensitive area.

“Hee hee… I think that’s enough for the warm-up.”

“Huh?” Caim blurted as Tea suddenly stopped hugging him, making the sensation of her breasts pressing on his back vanish, and looked at his maid dubiously.

“That should be enough washing. Next, please come here.” Tea removed her towel, making her abundant chest jiggle, then sat on her heels on the bathroom floor.

“Tea…?”

“Come, Master Caim. Please rest your head here,” Tea said,

patting her lap.

“Don’t tell me…” Caim immediately understood that she wanted to give him a lap pillow.

“I used to do this for you all the time. It’s been a while, but please indulge yourself.”

“You really are treating me like a child tonight,” Caim grumbled, but he did as demanded, unable to resist the temptation. He placed the back of his head on Tea’s lap. “It’s cramped…”

The bathroom wasn’t big enough, so Caim’s feet touched the wall when he was lying on the floor.

Tea chuckled. “Here’s a treat for you.”

“Mmmph?!” Caim quickly forgot the discomfort when Tea pressed her bountiful breasts on his face.

“Please, pretend you’re a baby and suckle as much as you want.”

She wasn’t just treating Caim like a child—Tea was treating him like a *baby*. It dumbfounded him for a moment, but he quickly stopped caring as he let himself indulge in the wonderful feeling of her chest and the comfort of her overwhelming maternal warmth.

Damn it… I can’t just let her do whatever she wants! Determined to get back at her, Caim sucked at the tip of the breast pushed against his mouth, eliciting a sweet moan from Tea. Encouraged, he sucked even more strongly.

“Aaah… You’re being so forceful, Master Caim…!”

“You’re the one who asked for it.” Caim didn’t limit himself to just using his lips, instead starting to lick and playfully bite Tea’s erect nipple, not wanting to give her the initiative again.

“Ahhh… Mmm… I would expect no less from you, Master Caim. But Tea won’t lose!” Tea grabbed Caim’s “sword,” earning a muffled groan out of him. Still pressing her chest on his face, she polished his valiantly standing “sword” up and down.

“Ngh… You little…!” Caim, not wanting to lose, counterattacked by sucking even harder.

“Aaah!” Tea moaned loudly, but didn’t stop moving her hand.



Eventually, both of them reached their climax at the same time. Their bodies shuddered violently in tandem, their breathing rough.

“Ahhh… Master Caim…”

Caim took a deep, relaxing breath and said, “Jeez… I’m feeling cold now.” He picked Tea up, making her yelp in surprise. “Let’s continue in the bathtub. We’re the only ones here, so it should be fine if we make a little bit of a mess.”

They entered the slightly tepid water and copulated fervently, mingling their bodies as though they were a single being.

It had been a while since Caim and Tea had been able to spend a night with just the two of them. So naturally, far from stopping after they finished in the bath, their passion burned even more fiercely, and they continued in the bedroom.

Chapter 4: Rozbeth the Headhuntress

“It is *so* unfair that only the two of you got to make out…”

“Indeed, Princess! If we were all members of the knight order, they would be punished!”

The next morning, Millicia and Lenka came to the inn where Caim and Tea were resting and began to complain the instant they saw the pair together in bed.

“Hey, it’s not my fault if you two slept in the count’s residence,” Caim retorted.

“Exactly. If you didn’t want me to press the advantage, then you should have just stayed with us,” Tea added.

“That may be true, but still…” Millicia grimaced in vexation. “We had no other choice. Count Atlaus really wanted us to sleep in his mansion, and I could not refuse.”

Millicia was the princess of the empire. As the lord governing this land, Count Atlaus had to show her hospitality. On the other hand, Millicia also had to accept Count Atlaus’s offer so that he didn’t lose face.

Tea chuckled. “Well, thanks to that, we spent a wonderful night together, just the two of us,” she boasted, her expression contented and her face practically glowing.

Naturally, Millicia and Lenka didn’t appreciate her gloating and glared at her in annoyance.

“Uhh… Mark my words! I shall definitely join next time!” Millicia declared boldly.

“Yeah, yeah, sure… Anyway, we have something more important to talk about. Did you hear the report on what happened yesterday?” Caim asked as he got up from the bed and began to get dressed. “I killed three wyverns, but the rest of them are spread around the territory. It’s gonna be difficult to deal with all of them.”

“I heard the same from Count Atlaus. It appears the situation is very grave.” Millicia’s expression became solemn as the discussion turned serious. “The Adventurers’ Guild won’t help, and there are not enough soldiers to cover the entire domain. If we sent them to

every town and village, there would not be enough people to repel the wyverns."

"However, that doesn't mean we can just keep doing like we did yesterday and only send the army after we've received news of an attack—they would never make it in time. And you can't exactly cover the entire county by yourself, Sir Caim," Lenka added, her expression also changing. "If only there were ten of you, we could just send them all around the county to protect it…"

"But there's only one of me," Caim said. It would be great if the Toukishin Style had a cloning technique, but unfortunately, that wasn't the case. "Maybe I could train the count's soldiers until they're strong enough to defeat wyverns?"

"I cannot even imagine how long that would take…"

"Tea and I could probably deal with a single wyvern by ourselves…as long as it doesn't fly away."

Caim, Millicia, and Lenka sighed. The more they thought about it, the more they realized they were at an impasse. And while they were stuck here, Arthur and Lance's confrontation was rapidly drawing closer.

"Umm… What about your poison, Master Caim?" Tea raised her hand, bringing everyone's attention to her. "You could distribute your poison to the soldiers, and they could coat their weapons with it. That way, even weak soldiers should be able to easily kill the wyverns."

"Of course! Why didn't I think of that?!" Caim exclaimed. That was a blind spot of his—while Caim was the Poison King and could control every existing toxin, he had never considered the possibility of letting someone else use the poisons he created.

"But if it's strong enough to kill wyverns, won't it be too dangerous? A single mistake could take the life of the one using it," Lenka remarked.

"No, I bet I can just create a poison that will only work on dragons," Caim answered as he sorted through everything he knew in his head. By fusing with the Poison Queen, Caim had inherited her memories, and among those memories he discovered a toxin that only worked on dragons. "My poison is virulent and can affect people even if they only inhale a little of its fumes. But if I made one that only worked on dragons, there shouldn't be an issue." In that case, it would also be useless for

anything else, so Caim wouldn't have to fear that it would be employed for assassinations. "All right, now we've got a plan. Gonna suggest it to Count Atlaus today?"

"Yes. However, that means revealing your power to him..."

"Too late to worry about that now, considering the people we least want to know about it are already aware," Caim said, assuaging Millicia's concern.

Caim had already used Purple Poison Magic in front of Arthur. Moreover, Arthur's close aide—Merlin—had recognized it as the same power the Poison Queen had wielded. There wasn't a point in hiding it anymore. If Caim needed to use his power, then he would.

"I'm gonna start making the poison, so I'm leaving talking to Count Atlaus to you, Millicia."

"Understood. Do you know how much you will be able to produce?"

"I won't know until I try... Ah, but I'm probably gonna get *very* hungry, so I'll need a lot of food."

"Tea will take care of it. I'll prepare tons of nutritious meals."

"As for me...I suppose I have no role in this. I will focus on guarding the princess, then."

By coating their weapons such as arrows and spears with poison, even regular soldiers ought to be able to kill the wyverns. Their plan to exterminate the rampant wyverns now established, Caim and his companions immediately prepared to enact it.

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"All right, time to start."

Caim had headed to the town's plaza to produce the dragon-slaying poison. Millicia and Lenka went to talk about the plan with Count Atlaus, and Tea was preparing food in the inn's kitchen.

"But before that... What are *you* doing here?" Caim asked Lykos. For some reason, the wolf girl was sitting in a corner of the plaza and staring vacantly at Caim. "Oh well, as long as you don't bother me." She didn't react, so he ignored her and began his work.

How to make a poison that only worked on dragons and wyverns? To begin with, what differentiated humans from wyverns? They were both living beings, so what was the difference

between them? Was it their size? Having scales or claws? Whether they were oviparous or viviparous? Their internal structure?

There were many differences, but the biggest and most important one was that wyverns possessed dragon blood. As its name indicated, it was a special kind of blood that flowed only in the veins of dragons and lesser dragons. Based on the Poison Queen's knowledge, dragon blood was extremely special and reinforced all the cells in a dragon's body so they were harder than steel. Also, while the effect was very limited in lesser dragons, the blood of a true dragon could be turned into an elixir of perpetual youth, and bathing in it could grant immortality.

So if I want to make a poison that only works on wyverns, I need to make something that specifically affects dragon blood. That meant either something that would break down the components of dragon blood and destroy its host, or something that would bind them together and create blood clots until it killed the wyvern. *The latter should be the fastest and most efficient. It should only take a little bit of poison to ensure their blood coagulates.*

To disassemble dragon blood, a large quantity of poison would need to enter the wyverns' bodies before it could kill them. On the other hand, just a little would be enough to make their blood start coagulating. It was the same for humans—just a single little blood clot could easily inflict great damage if it occurred inside the brain or a lung.

"Wyverns have brains and lungs too, so it should work."

Now that he knew what to do, Caim concentrated and activated his Purple Poison Magic. He manipulated his mana, gave form to what he imagined, then produced poison inside the empty cask in front of him.

"Phew…" Caim exhaled as a reddish-purple liquid that looked like wine flowed from his fingertips into the barrel drop by drop. Large beads of sweat had formed on his brow, and he was focusing so intensely he felt like his brain was going to fry. "This is way harder than I thought it would be…"

The sweat dripped from his brow to the ground, forming a small puddle. While Caim was talented when it came to fighting directly using punches and kicks, he had difficulty controlling his mana precisely. Creating a toxin that only worked on wyverns demanded extremely meticulous manipulation of mana.

I didn't think specifying the targets the poison could harm would make it so hard to produce, considering how easy it is when I just need it to kill everything, Caim complained internally, his face serious as he continued his task.

After three intense hours, Caim had finally filled half of the barrel with the wine-like liquid.

"Ahh... That's it. I'm at my limit. Time to rest!" Before Caim knew it, his body had become drenched in sweat, his throat was parched, and his stomach was growling from hunger.

Caim would usually never get so exhausted. It seemed that doing something new was a truly difficult task.

"Sorry for the wait, Master Caim. Here is your meal."

"Oh, perfect timing, Tea. I'm so hungry I could eat anything."

Caim sat cross-legged on the ground and Tea knelt next to him, placing a tray of food before him.

"These sandwiches look delicious."

"I used the ingredients that were left in the inn's kitchen."

On the tray were several varieties of sandwiches—some standard ones using lettuce, ham, and eggs, as well as less orthodox ones with fruits or fried meat.

"What's this one? Never seen anything like that before," Caim asked, picking up a sandwich.

"This is tuna. I heard from the people here that it's made from grinding up fish meat and preserving it in oil."

"Oh? I guess that's the empire for you. They have tons of unusual stuff."

Caim had only ever eaten fish that was boiled or grilled. Curious, he bit into the tuna sandwich, and the delicious taste of the tender fish meat immediately filled his mouth.

"This is great! It's got the texture of chicken!"

"I'm glad you like it. There's more, so eat as much as you want."

"Will do!" Caim finished the tuna sandwich before trying one with fried meat. He had liked the tuna, but this one was juicy and pretty tasty too. "This yellow sauce is called mustard, right? It's spicy but addicting."

"Yes. There was a lot in the kitchen."

"I had some before, but this really has an intense taste... I wonder if it can be used in other dishes too."

As Caim pondered, Lykos had appeared next to him and began

to eat the sandwiches as well. When she tried one with mustard, she grimaced, removed everything that had touched the sauce—the bread and the fried coating—and only ate the meat.



“Hey, you’re wasting most of the sandwich,” Caim chided her.

“Lykos really does love meat. Is that because she was raised by wolves?” Tea wondered.

“Probably… Ah, but she likes sweets too.”

Lykos’s eating habits were very unbalanced. She mainly ate meat and ignored vegetables, and the only exceptions were sweets. While her diet was unhealthy, Lykos herself was actually far healthier than other children, and her body was so strong she could easily jump between roofs.

“…Oh well. I’m not her dad, so it’s not my job to scold her.” Caim decided to let her eat what she wanted. He took the ham from one of the sandwiches and threw it at Lykos, who leaped to catch it with her mouth. “Anyway. Now that I’m full, I guess it’s time to get back to work.”

“How is it going? Will it take a long time to make enough poison?”

“Yeah. I’ve never done this before, so it’s kinda hard, but I’m getting used to it.” The speed at which Caim produced poison had been gradually increasing, so he estimated he should be able to fill the cask entirely after another hour or two. “Looks like I’ll have some good news to report to Millicia.” Caim held out his hand above the barrel. “All right, time to start.”

“If you need something, do not hesitate to call me, Master Caim,” Tea said as Caim resumed his work.

As for Lykos, filling her stomach had made her drowsy, and she was now sleeping soundly a little ways away, curled up in a sunny spot.

By sunset, Caim accomplished his first day’s quota of filling an entire cask and delivered it to Count Atlaus.

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The anti-wyvern poison was distributed to the count’s soldiers. Two days later, they encountered the perfect opportunity to test it.

They received a notice telling them that a settlement near Extobell was under attack from a wyvern, so the county’s army hurried there to fight against it. While it was only a single wyvern, it was still a threat to ordinary people, and several inhabitants of

the settlement had already been killed.

“Shoooooot!”

The soldiers did as their commander ordered and all fired arrows at the wyvern simultaneously, hitting the creature as it flew through the sky. The monster didn’t even try to dodge the arrows, as it didn’t think they were a threat.

“Damn, it didn’t work!” the soldiers shouted in frustration. Only the very tips of a few arrows had actually managed to slip through a slight gap between the wyvern’s scales, so it couldn’t really be said that they’d actually wounded it.

The wyvern roared and dove toward the soldiers.

“Whoa!”

“It’s coming!”

Their bows now useless, the soldiers threw them aside and hurriedly readied their spears. However, something surprising happened—the wyvern suddenly howled in pain, twisting its neck, before it fell to the ground, unable to keep flying. After landing, it struggled on the ground and flapped its wings, but after a while it stopped moving with one last feeble cry. The wyvern was dead.

“O-Oooh…!”

“Amazing…”

“No way… Why were we going to all that trouble until now…?”

Some soldiers rejoiced, while others were too taken aback by how easy it had been to celebrate.

The soldiers had used arrows coated with the anti-wyvern poison Caim had produced, and the result was more than satisfactory. It had proven that even weak soldiers could effortlessly kill a wyvern with arrows.

“Looks like it works as expected.” Caim crossed his arms and nodded to himself in satisfaction. He had followed the army to check the efficacy of his poison, and it had passed the test with flying colors.

Caim walked toward the wyvern that had fallen in the middle of the village square. Examining its corpse, he noticed foam flowing out of its mouth.

“I didn’t think it would be *this* effective… While its use is limited, maybe this dragon-slaying poison could be sold for a lot of money,” Caim wondered. With this, not just wyverns but all dragons and lesser dragons would no longer be a threat. Perhaps

it could even wipe out every dragon in the entire empire. “Not that I intend to sell it, though.”

“That was amazing, Sir Caim!” As Caim continued his examination of the wyvern’s corpse, the leader of the soldiers came to him, brimming with excitement. “I never thought we’d be able to defeat a wyvern so easily. With this poison, we will be able to purge the wyverns attacking the county and avenge all the civilians and soldiers they killed!” He took Caim’s hand and shook it fervently.

“Th-That’s great…” Caim replied, slightly annoyed to have his hand shaken like this.

“To be honest, I hadn’t thought that highly of you compared to Her Highness Millicia—but to think you were such an amazing alchemist! You saved this land!” The soldiers knew that Caim had made the poison, but not that he was the Poison King, so they assumed he had used alchemy. “The only problem is that there isn’t much of it. We need more if we want to distribute it to all the soldiers.”

“Don’t worry. I’m making more. I’ll give you enough for everyone.” Caim had gotten used to producing the anti-wyvern poison after two days of making it, increasing his speed. He could probably make three barrels in a day now.

“I see… Thank you!” The soldiers’ commander took Caim’s other hand, moved to tears. “I am sure the count will also express his gratitude, but on behalf of all the soldiers—truly, from the bottom of my heart, thank you very much!”

“Ah… Uh… You’re welcome?” Caim said hesitantly, somewhat embarrassed. It was rare for him to be thanked so honestly.

I still can’t get used to it… I grew too accustomed to being insulted and scorned while I was a child. Caim reflected on how sad his life had been with a self-deprecating smile.

Now that Caim had confirmed the effect of his poison, he left the army to take care of the settlement and returned to Extobell.

Back in Extobell, Caim reported to Count Atlaus and Millicia that the poison had worked and the wyvern that attacked the village was dead. He was then asked to make more, so he spent the rest of the day producing poison. Since he’d gotten accustomed to doing it and increased his speed, Caim managed to make four

more casks. There should now be enough to distribute the anti-wyvern poison to the entire army.

"Caim!" Millicia beamed as she barged into Caim's inn room to find Tea massaging his back on the bed.

"What's up? Why are you so excited?"

"Count Atlaus told me he would support Lance with us!"

"He did? Why so suddenly?" Caim asked, sitting up on the bed with Tea next to him.

"It's all thanks to you, Sir Caim," Lenka explained, entering after Millicia. "Count Atlaus is part of the neutral faction that supports neither of the princes. However, your poison allowed him to deal with the wyverns, so to show his gratitude he's decided to side with the princess—which means siding with His Highness Lance."

"He will only make a move after he has completely dealt with the wyverns and the damage they caused, so he will not be able to send many soldiers. However, he said he would try convincing other nobles from the neutral party to join. He is one of the faction's leaders, so he should be able to persuade a large number of them!" Millicia said.

Caim now understood why she was so excited. While Millicia's kindness was the reason they'd decided to take a detour and lose time to help with the wyverns, in the end, it had ended up being a real boon for them. With Count Atlaus and other neutral nobles joining his side, Lance had increased his chances of winning the looming civil war.

"Everything is thanks to you, Caim... I don't even know how to express all my gratitude!"

"Don't worry about it. I've already been thanked way too much today."

Millicia chuckled. "No need to be so shy. Then I will show my gratitude by servicing you tonight!" She fidgeted, her face flushing. Just where had the pure and chaste princess gone? Her blue eyes were filled with lust.

"That's not thanking me. You wanted to do that anyway..."

"Aren't you supposed to sleep at the count's mansion tonight too, Millicia?" Tea interjected with a pout. Millicia and Lenka had been resting at Count Atlaus's residence ever since they had arrived at Extobell, which had allowed Tea to monopolize Caim for the past few days.

“Now that they have a chance to exterminate the wyverns, Count Atlaus is very busy and his mansion is full of people moving around, so I told him we would sleep at the inn with you.” Millicia puffed out her chest with an elated laugh.

In other words, it had been a while, but tonight would be *that* kind of night again.

“Oh well… Don’t go too hard on me.”

“I suppose we should eat dinner earlier, considering how…turbulent tonight is going to be.”

Caim and Tea sighed in unison.

After that, everything went as expected. Caim and his three lovers ate, bathed, then went to bed as if they were all competing with each other.

It had been days since the four of them had spent a night together. Making up for lost time, they enjoyed a passionate, intense, and lewd night that continued until it was very late.

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“So this is where you’re hiding, Millicia Garnet.”

In the middle of the night, a petite, black-clad woman around twenty years old was hiding in the shadow of a store on the main street of Extobell. Her braided, navy blue hair was concealed by a hood, and her icy eyes were fixed on a particular building.

She was Rozbeth the Headhuntress, an assassin who had targeted Arthur at the imperial palace, which had forced her to ally temporarily with Caim. After her failed attempt on Arthur’s life, Rozbeth had also escaped from the imperial capital and arrived at this town.

“I didn’t think that girl was actually one of my targets. If I had known, I would have just killed her when we first met,” she whispered with a wry smile.

The reason Rozbeth had come to Extobell was, of course, to hunt one of her targets: Millicia Garnet. Her job wasn’t to kill Arthur in particular but to assassinate two of the current emperor’s three children—Arthur, Lance, and Millicia.

Having failed to kill Arthur, Rozbeth had decided to go after Lance instead, and she’d been heading east toward his location

when she'd happened to hear on the way that Millicia was in Extobell. When Rozbeth had realized that the missing princess was one of the women she had traveled with on her way to the imperial capital, she had been disheartened by her terrible luck.

Millicia had been staying at Count Atlaus's mansion for the past few days, and because of the wyverns, there had been tons of soldiers guarding it. Due to the mass evacuation of the inhabitants, any outsiders would stand out, and that combined with her injury from the battle against Arthur had prevented Rozbeth from infiltrating the residence.

However, tonight Millicia was sleeping at an inn instead of the count's mansion. It was the perfect opportunity to assassinate her.

Princess Millicia is staying there to have a tryst with her lover, which means that man *is with her...* Rozbeth's lips curved into a grin as she looked up at the inn. She didn't understand why, but she was getting really worked up. Nervousness, excitement, and another indescribable emotion swirled in her chest. Even while infiltrating the imperial palace to murder Arthur, she hadn't felt like this.

Aiming for Princess Millicia's life means that he *will stand in my way and try to stop me—no, he'll actually try to kill me to defend his lover.* There was no way *that man* would let Rozbeth kill Millicia right before his eyes. Even though she didn't know Caim, she just *knew* that fact for certain.

I could have killed her while they were separated. In fact, I've had the opportunity more than once since coming to this town. And yet... I don't know why, but I just couldn't bring myself to do something so boring.

In the criminal underworld, Rozbeth was known as the strongest assassin. Her personal feelings never influenced her work, and while she didn't find any pleasure in the act of murder, she did feel a sense of accomplishment after each kill. And yet, even though Millicia was her target, she was really hoping to fight the young man at the princess's side. Rationally, if she wanted to finish her job, attacking Millicia while Caim was away was the most logical thing to do. Having seen him fight against Arthur and his Twin Wings, she knew he was an exceptionally strong warrior.

Just what is happening to me...? I can't help but think I'd regret it if I assassinated Princess Millicia without confronting him. This was the first time Rozbeth had ever been so fixated on someone. Whether

they were enemies or allies, she had never held any interest in anyone. *For me, of all people, to act like a maiden in love… I don't know why I'm so obsessed with him, but that just means I'll have to kill him first.*

First she would murder him, and then she would take care of Millicia. As for the other two women, she didn't care about them. As long as they didn't hinder her, she would let them live.

"Well then… Time to hunt some heads!" she purposefully declared this aloud to put herself into a more serious mindset.

Rozbeth silently leaped from her hiding place and dashed toward the inn where Caim and the girls were staying. A soldier sent by Count Atlaus to guard Millicia stood in front of the entrance; Rozbeth approached him from his blind spot and struck the back of his neck with the pommel of her knife.

"Ugh…" The man collapsed like a marionette with cut strings.

"Five points. You were basically just standing there like a scarecrow."

Rozbeth hadn't let him live out of compassion, nor because she refused to kill anyone but her targets. No, it was simply that the scent of blood and the presence of death might alert the people inside of her approach.

There's a beastfolk among them. If there's blood, she'll smell it. And that man might even be able to sense that a fight is happening nearby.

After swiftly dealing with the soldier, Rozbeth quietly infiltrated the inn. The entrance hall was dark and silent. From her preliminary investigation, she knew that the owner and the staff had already evacuated and the only customers present were Caim and his companions.

If I recall, that room was the one with light in the window. Rozbeth glared at the top of the stairs and pinpointed her destination. She strained her ears, using the sharpened senses she had cultivated for her work, and heard the sounds of a bed creaking and women moaning. *It seems they're in the middle of their nightly fun. Now I'm certain they haven't noticed me.*

They must be truly carefree to make love with an assassin stalking them. Well, that made things easier for Rozbeth, at least.

What should I do? They're getting really into it, so maybe I should go for it now? Caim and the girls were in the middle of sex, which

wasn't a bad opportunity. Through her work, Rozbeth knew that men were at their most vulnerable during climax. When that happened, no matter how strong or skilled they were, their senses dulled and they wouldn't notice their impending death. Rozbeth had employed this method several times to assassinate tough targets.

No—this is just a hunch, but I don't think that'll be enough for him to show an opening.

Rozbeth's instinct as an assassin told her that even if she barged into the room and attacked Caim with a knife right when he orgasmed, she wouldn't be able to kill him. He would simply stop having sex—or perhaps he wouldn't even bother to stop, just counterattacking her while his "sword" was still piercing one of his lovers. Rozbeth didn't want to have any weird fluids fly at her and dirty her clothes, so she decided to not go for that strategy right now.

Then I suppose I'll need to wait a little… No matter how exceptional that man is, even he would be completely spent after being wrung out by three women. I should aim to strike after his very last climax.

Waiting it out meant that there was a chance that the collapsed soldier she had left at the entrance would be discovered, which would reveal her infiltration, but she was willing to take the risk in order to strike at Caim when he was weakened by sex. That was just how cautious she was about him.

I must not be impatient. Being hasty will only make my muscles stiff… The key to killing people is to not think of it like that, but instead stay indifferent and detached as you do it.

When people focused on killing, they couldn't help but become tense, which could make them more likely to be spotted. Rozbeth took deep, quiet breaths to calm down, waiting for the right time.

To distract herself, she looked around the entrance hall.

"Hm?" Rozbeth found a few barrels stacked against the wall. For some reason, she felt really interested in them, even though she would usually never pay attention to such things. Here, though, a part of her was screaming at her to check them.

In Rozbeth's work, listening to one's instinct was important, and it had saved her numerous times. So even if she found the impulse strange, she walked to the casks and opened one of them.

Is this…wine? Inside was a reddish-purple liquid, and it must

have been very well aged—just slightly shifting its lid had been enough to release a rich and fragrant aroma. *That's bad. They might notice the smell!*

Rozbeth hurriedly closed the lid. One of her target's companions was a beastfolk, and she might pick up the scent of the wine. Rozbeth quietly stepped away from the barrel, but something inside her was very reluctant to do so, and she stopped midway. Then she turned back, walked to the cask, and opened it again.

Rozbeth fell into a trance as the deep aroma enveloped her, and she swallowed reflexively. Her eyes were fixed on the barrel, and she couldn't look away from it.

It... It should be fine if I just take a sip, right? Rozbeth was assaulted by the urge to drink, and now that the thought had entered her mind, it wouldn't leave. Instead, it kept growing.

Rozbeth was a first-class assassin, and she would never drink alcohol just before attacking her target. This was yet another thing that was completely out of character for her.

Rozbeth gulped once again as she smelled the wine's sweet scent—that was it. She couldn't escape from its appeal anymore. Just smelling it was enough to warm her body, her skin flushing as arousal swelled inside her. Internally, she couldn't help wondering where this fondness for alcohol was coming from.

"J-Just a little... I'll just take a lick..." She would just dip her finger in the wine and lick it. If she didn't do that, she wouldn't be able to focus on her work. Indeed, if she wanted to be at her best, she *had* to do it—or so she told herself as she dipped her fingertip in the wine.

"Ah..." Rozbeth licked her fingertip and a shudder ran along her spine. "It's delicious!"

The moment the liquid entered her mouth, it was like fireworks went off inside her head. The wine's fragrance and flavor instantly spread around her entire body and uncontrollable pleasure took hold of her. Her whole body became so sensitive that every part of her might as well be an erogenous zone. Sweet moans escaped her lips, like a woman being caressed tenderly by her lover, her face melting in pleasure and rapture.

"T-To think such a delicious alcohol existed...!"

Rozbeth was deeply moved by her discovery. She had drunk

several kinds of liquor, but never had she tasted something so sweet.

“I-I need to take another sip… Just one more…” Unable to restrain the urge, Rozbeth scooped the wine with her palm and drank it, which gave her even more pleasure than earlier.

The taste was rich, yet refreshing and fruity at the same time. Then the aftertaste was pleasant, like a gentle breeze sweeping across a plain. The sweet liquid flowed down her throat into her stomach, and from there it coursed through her veins and made every cell in her body dance with joy.

“Aaah… Mmmh…” Rozbeth squatted down, doing her best to resist—but no matter how much she tried to fight it, the pleasure only increased. For the first time in her life, Rozbeth was experiencing pleasure as a woman.

“Haaah… Just another sip… Really, I just want a little more…” Rozbeth persuaded herself, completely forgetting the dangerous situation she was in.

She scooped up more wine and drank it. Then she did it again and again, taking several more drinks using one hand while she groped her chest with the other. She slid her hand inside her clothes, directly stroking her breast and pinching its tip.

“Aaah… I feel sho hot… What’sh happening…?”

Then finally, unable to resist any longer, Rozbeth thrust her head into the barrel and drank the wine directly. As she became more intoxicated by the sweet wine, Rozbeth used both of her hands to caress her chest and crotch, trying to appease her burning body. She couldn’t think straight anymore, and her brain felt like mush.

“Ah…aaauhhh…” She tried to talk, but couldn’t even form words.

Rozbeth’s breathing became labored, and she moaned in pleasure as she drank more wine, feeling as though she was doing something lewd with a man who was perfectly compatible with her.

For better or worse, Caim and the girls didn’t notice Rozbeth’s intrusion until the morning. And because of that, she never stopped drinking the wine as she toyed with her body and shed more and more of her modesty.



Rozbeth didn’t know that what she was drinking wasn’t wine but the dragon-slaying poison Caim had produced to exterminate the wyverns. It only affected dragons and did nothing to humans, but there was one exception—to women compatible with Caim, it would function as an aphrodisiac. And so, when morning came, Rozbeth was dead-drunk and had become a slave to the potent poison.

“What the hell…?” Caim said as he stared at the moaning woman collapsed on the entrance hall next to an empty cask.

Chapter 5: The Fallen Headhuntress

Somewhere in the Garnet Empire—or perhaps nowhere in particular—several individuals were in a dark, secret room not even lit by a single candle.

The first thing to disturb the silence was a voice that sounded like that of a good-natured old man. He cackled, learning of the Headhuntress's—that is to say, Rozbeth's—defeat. "So the Headhuntress failed... That's unusual, but I suppose no matter how skilled she is, in the end she's just a young lass who hasn't even lived a tenth of my life. It seems that assassinating the imperial family members was too much for her."

"This is no laughing matter, Elder."

"Indeed. Her failure means that our enemy is strong. We will need to put our lives on the line as well."

A young woman and a stern man replied.

The individuals in the dark room were all people who could not walk openly in the light of day. Hit men, killers, assassins, headhunters—they went by many different names, but they were all in the business of murder.

Most would think that such people were lawless and had no respect for order, but the truth was that even they had rules of their own. Any of them who broke those rules would make enemies of the others, and that would put even the most skilled assassin's life at risk.

"I agree, and that is why I gathered everyone today," said a young man in an incongruously cheerful tone, clapping his hands. "I'm sure you're all aware that stealing someone else's target is forbidden. Once someone has taken the job, nobody else must touch their mark."

Everyone in the room agreed in silence. They knew that rule...and they also knew the exception to it.

"However, if the one who was entrusted with the job fails, that restriction is removed. At that point, anyone can try to kill the target and claim the reward for their own—in short, it is first come, first served."

“First come, first served” was a familiar rule among assassins. When one of them failed a job, the middleman would then inform everyone else who was free, invoking the rule. At that point, whoever killed the target would receive the reward instead.

“Earlier, the overseer contacted me to say that Rozbeth the Headhuntress not only failed to kill Prince Arthur in the imperial capital, she also infiltrated the inn where Princess Millicia was staying and did not emerge even after the sun rose. We suspect that she was captured.” The mediator shook his head sadly, then spread his arms. “On account of this, I have decided that she has failed her mission to kill the members of the imperial family, and thus I invoke the ‘first come, first served’ rule. I shall give everyone all the relevant information, so feel free to steal her targets.”

Everyone listened silently.

“There are three marks: Arthur Garnet, Lance Garnet, and Millicia Garnet. They are all children of the emperor who have a claim to the throne. This is a very important job.”

A faint orange light appeared and lit up the portraits of the three people who bore the name of Garnet. The images were so lifelike it was as though they had been cut from a mirror.

“However, only two among them must die. I know this is a bit unusual, but a reward will only be given for the first two kills,” the mediator explained.

“What happens if all three are assassinated?”

“As I said, only the first two will be compensated, so you will receive nothing for the third. There will not be any penalties for killing them, but you will not be paid for your labor. As such, I shall do my best to notify everyone once two of them are dead. If you kill the third one regardless, that would be unfortunate, but that’s your own responsibility,” the mediator answered. “Also, if anyone kills the previous assassin—Rozbeth the Headhuntress—they shall receive a special reward. Failing her job is one thing, but being captured means that there is a risk she might leak information about our community, so we must deal with her before that happens.”

The hit men kept quiet.

“You are free to accept or refuse this job. If you accept, please take the information we have compiled about the targets before you leave. Well then, everyone—have a good hunt,” the mediator

said in a jesting tone and clapped his hands once again.

The next moment, the presences hidden in the dark vanished one by one.

Because Rozbeth had succumbed to the sweet poison, different assassins began to make their moves. The threat looming over Caim and his companions had yet to disappear, and the abyss surrounding them only grew darker.

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"Aaah... Mmmh..."

"...What the hell is she doing?"

The next morning, after spending a fierce night with his three lovers, Caim found a woman collapsed in the entrance hall of the inn. Her clothes were open and it looked as though she'd just finished a bout of intense sex—sweet moans escaped from her lips, and she seemed barely conscious, not even noticing Caim approaching her.

"I think her name was...Rozbeth? What the hell is she doing here?" Caim recalled the name of the woman with navy blue hair tied in a braid who now brazenly exposed her skin before him—a skilled assassin renowned as Rozbeth the Headhuntress.

"Um... Why is she here?" asked Millicia, perplexed, after she'd descended the stairs behind Caim. "She is an assassin, isn't she? You said she was targeting Arthur."

"Yeah, she tried to kill Arthur in the imperial palace."

This was Caim's third time meeting her. The first had been in the carriage on the way to the capital, the second in the imperial castle during the fight with Arthur and his Twin Wings, and the third was now. The first two times she had been an awe-inspiring sight while fighting, and yet this time her appearance was completely shameful. It was so unsightly that it made one want to look away, but Caim was a man and couldn't help staring at her alluring figure.

"Ah, Master Caim! Look, she drank your poison!" Tea reported, showing an empty cask. "I think she's in heat because of it!"

"She completely drained the cask...? I shudder at the idea of that happening to me..." Lenka embraced herself in dread, peering

at the empty barrel. The toxins in Caim's bodily fluids were like an aphrodisiac for certain women. Just how great would the arousal from drinking an entire cask be, and how badly would it break her?

"Ay cyan't dring anymoore…" Rozbeth slurred. She had lost all dignity. Various bodily fluids—saliva, sweat, and something else—leaked out of her, forming a puddle beneath her.

"If someone ever saw me like this, I would never be able to live with myself. I would definitely commit suicide."

"Uh, Lenka, you actually look like that pretty often," Caim immediately retorted before lifting Rozbeth's body, eliciting a moan. "Anyway, we need to interrogate her. I'm gonna carry her to our room."

"Then I shall go fetch water. I hope that will be enough to make her more decent…" Tea rushed to the kitchen.

Caim brought Rozbeth to their room and tied her to a chair, making her drink water and providing the bare minimum of care. It still took an hour before she was finally conscious enough to talk.

"Ugh… For me of all people to end up like this…" Rozbeth groaned.

"So, in short, you infiltrated the inn to kill Millicia," Caim said.

The interrogation was going surprisingly well. Rozbeth was tied to a chair, her skin still flushed, and her body twitched from time to time. That meant that the effect of the poison still hadn't completely cleared, which might have been why she answered Caim's questions so easily.

"T-To be more precise, the job I accepted was to kill two of the emperor's three children…"

"That's kinda weird. Just who is your client?"

"I don't know."

Caim stared at her.

"I don't know, I swear! I'm not just feigning ignorance!" Rozbeth shouted, her face beet red. "I got the job from a mediator, so I don't know who the client is! They'd never want their identity to be so easily found!"

"Makes sense." Caim agreed with a sigh. Now that he thought about it, of course an assassin wouldn't be able to reveal the identity of their client so easily, especially for a job requesting the

murder of members of the imperial family. They must even have used a proxy to contact the middleman. “Considering how vague ‘two of the three’ is, the client can’t be from the imperial family, and probably isn’t one of their retainers either.”

If Millicia and Lance had been the targets, then that would make Arthur the most likely suspect. However, Arthur was included in the request, as proved by Rozbeth’s attempt on his life. That meant neither Arthur nor his retainers had been the client.

“In that case, I guess it was probably an enemy of the empire,” Caim suggested.

“Wouldn’t they have wanted the whole imperial family killed, then?” Rozbeth countered.

“Right…”

Requesting the murder of only two of the emperor’s three children was definitely odd, and it only deepened the mystery.

“I usually don’t care about my clients, but this job was so strange that it got me curious, which is why I accepted it.”

“And yet, you ended up captured because you couldn’t resist drinking. Talk about a big failure.”

“…That’s zero points for me. I’ve got nothing to say in my defense.” Rozbeth hung her head, dejected. If she hadn’t been tied to a chair, she might even have fallen prostrate on the floor.

Almost anyone would say that drinking alcohol while infiltrating enemy territory and then being captured in a state of complete arousal was a perfect zero. Rozbeth was utterly ashamed of herself.

“Let’s forget about me,” Rozbeth said. “Instead, let’s talk about you. You don’t think this is the end, do you?” She suddenly lifted her head and gazed at Caim and the girls suggestively. “The assassin community isn’t lawless. We have our own rules. For example, once someone’s taken a job, nobody can steal their target.”

“So…that means you’re the only one who can try to kill Millicia?” Caim asked.

“Yes… Or at least, I was—until I failed.” Rozbeth’s lips curved into a grin. “When an assassin fails a job, that rule is negated and the ‘first come, first served’ rule comes into play. Now that I’ve failed, all the other killers are going to try assassinating Princess Millicia and the other targets.”

“What?!” The one who exclaimed in anger wasn’t Caim but Lenka, who had been listening quietly in a corner of the room with her arms crossed so as to not hinder the interrogation. “You mean that the princess is still going to be targeted by assassins?!”

“Exactly. From now on, a lot of other hit men are going to be aiming for her life. In a way, you could say that my failure made things worse for you.” Rozbeth shrugged at Lenka. “This might sound ridiculous considering my shameful display, but I’m known as the strongest assassin in the underworld. The ‘strongest’ failed, so of course quite a few will hesitate to take on the job, but it’ll fuel the bloodlust of many more.”

“So your failure is actually gonna make some people *want* to accept the job?” Caim asked.

Rozbeth nodded. “I’m certain they are going to try to increase their fame by accomplishing something that I, the strongest of all, failed to do. And there is no doubt that the ones who will come are going to be skilled assassins…and maybe some idiots who *think* they are competent, I suppose…”

“Incidentally, do you have some names to give us?” Millicia interjected, her expression serious at hearing that her own life and the lives of her brothers were all in peril.

“Hmm… MacGuffin of the Thousand Blades, Deed the Gravedigger, the Bone-Eating General, the Immortal Butterfly, the Company, and Ariette the Bitch are some of the most famous.”

“…Wait, what’s the deal with the last one? Is she seriously a powerful assassin?” Caim couldn’t help but ask. After all, there was a she-dog in their group too. Was Ariette a killer who liked to be tied up with ropes or collared to go on naked walkies like Lenka?

Rozbeth ignored his question and continued. “Well, Prince Arthur and Prince Lance are also among the marks, so I don’t think everyone is going to target Princess Millicia.”

“I see…” Millicia replied.

“But you better prepare yourself. After all, on paper, you’re the one who seems to be the easiest to kill,” Rozbeth pointed out, which made Millicia cast her eyes down in discomfort.

Arthur and Lance had many guards—in fact, they had entire armies—so naturally, the hit men would find it hard to breach their defenses. Millicia did have Caim, but the assassins didn’t know that, so she looked like an easier target than her brothers.

“And…that’s it. I’m done talking. You can do whatever you want with me.” Rozbeth stared up at the ceiling, still tied to the chair. “Now that I’ve been captured, there’s nothing I can do. Just kill me already. I’ve steeled myself.”

“Rozbeth…” Millicia muttered.

“Why are you so hesitant, Princess Millicia? I’m your family’s enemy, no?” Rozbeth didn’t even try to beg for her life, instead offering it up readily. Perhaps that was her way of protecting her remaining pride after her utterly shameful display.

“Well then, I’ll do it.” If she had steeled herself, then Caim wouldn’t hesitate. He killed his enemies without mercy—and Rozbeth would be no different.

“Please wait, Caim.” Millicia stopped Caim as he began to clad his right hand in mana. Then she approached the bound Rozbeth and stooped to meet her gaze. “Would you let me employ you, Rozbeth?”

“Millicia?” Caim asked, surprised.

“You do not plan to assassinate me or my brothers anymore, do you? In that case, I want to hire you as a bodyguard.” Millicia’s expression was the definition of seriousness. She clearly wasn’t joking.

“Hey, remember that she infiltrated the inn and tried to kill you,” Caim interjected, exasperated.

“I know. However, now that she has failed, she is no longer our enemy,” Millicia answered with a smile. “If other assassins are going to target me, then having Rozbeth, who knows their capabilities, on our side would be very heartening. We will need all the strength we can get, so it cannot be a bad idea to make her our ally.”

“Well… You’re not wrong, but…” Caim trailed off.

“Also… I have another reason for my offer.” Millicia raised her index finger, looking as though she was going to reveal an amazing trick, which made Caim strangely anxious.

“…Say it.”

“For some reason, I cannot think of Rozbeth as a mere stranger. I feel we have a deep connection.”

“…What?” Caim was dumbfounded by Millicia’s words.

Millicia whispered into his ear. “She is like us—she was intoxicated by your poison, Caim. That means she is our sister, and

I do not want her to die."

"'Sister,' you say..."

"You do not want to kill her either, do you? The fact that she was aroused by your poison means she is compatible with you, after all."

Caim grimaced—Millicia had seen right through him. If he had to be honest, while he wouldn't go as far as to say he felt a connection with her like Millicia did, he *was* attracted to Rozbeth. If possible, he would rather not kill her.

"If we are going to fight against Arthur, we cannot afford to be caught up in trivial matters. We should take any manpower we can get, good or evil."

"...That's pretty broad-minded of you. Well, if you're fine with it, I don't mind," Caim concluded. Millicia was the one Rozbeth had been trying to kill, so if Millicia forgave Rozbeth and decided to hire her, then he had no reason to complain.

"Wait a second... Could you not discuss things on your own?" Rozbeth cut in, her brow furrowed in displeasure. "I never agreed to be employed by Princess Millicia. Just because I failed my job and won't target her anymore doesn't mean I want the mercy of someone I was trying to murder only yesterday. I refuse to fall so low," she declared, indignant.

As someone who killed people for money, Rozbeth knew that she was in no position to complain if she was killed herself. And now that her turn had come, her pride wouldn't allow her to refuse death.

"Also, it seems you've misunderstood. I lost to that delicious wine, not you! I didn't yield to *you*!" Rozbeth said with bravado, unaware the wine that had bested her was actually a poison created by Caim—so in fact, he had already made her yield. How would she react if they told her the truth?

"I see... So if we make you submit, would you accept my offer of employment?" Millicia made another strange suggestion. "You are refusing because you claim that you lost to the wine, not to us, right? In other words, if you *do* lose to us, then you will accept. Am I wrong?"

"...Is that a threat? You think a sheltered princess can win against me?" Rozbeth glared at Millicia. She knew she was being provoked, but went along with it anyway. "Fine. If you think you

can make me submit to you, then you're welcome to try." Still tied to the chair, Rozbeth shot Millicia a challenging grin. "But fair warning: I'm trained to resist torture. You can tear out my nails, break my bones, or whatever—I will never yield. I guarantee it."

"Oh, are you certain?" Millicia asked.

"Absolutely." Rozbeth nodded confidently. "If I submit, I'm fine pledging my allegiance to you. I'll stop being an assassin and become your retainer, servant, or whatever you want."

"You said it." Millicia looked at Caim, Tea, and Lenka in turns.

"Ah… So that's your plan."

"I see."

"I would expect no less from you, Princess."

The three immediately understood what Millicia wanted to do and what was going to happen to Rozbeth.

"Well then, we accept your challenge, Rozbeth." Millicia clapped her hands. Even though her smile was angelic and pure, it seemed strangely wicked at the same time. "If you would, Caim."



Caim sighed and took Millicia's place. He knew what to do: completely drown Rozbeth in pleasure.

"Oh, you'll be my opponent? Are you planning to hit me? Or...I doubt it, but are you going to do something lewd to me?" Rozbeth sneered at Caim. "You can try if you want. Go on, have your way with me. I'll take you on."

Caim stared at her silently.

"But know that won't be enough to make me—"

"Shut up or I'll bite your tongue."

"Ngh?!"

Caim suddenly sealed Rozbeth's lips with his own. She tried to resist, shaking her head—apparently, while she had been prepared for torture, she hadn't expected to be kissed out of the blue.

However, Caim didn't let her go and continued his assault, pushing his tongue inside her mouth and pouring his saliva into it. The next instant, Rozbeth's entire body violently convulsed as though she'd been shocked by an electric current.

Rozbeth had accepted Millicia's challenge, sure of herself...but right now, she was completely confused.

What is...this...?!

Caim's tongue parted her lips and invaded her mouth. For a brief moment, she considered biting it off, but when his saliva flowed into her mouth, she was assaulted by intense pleasure.

This taste... This sweetness... This is...! It was sweeter than sugar and richer than honey. The flavor was mellow, and it melted in her mouth. Rozbeth immediately remembered where she had tasted this before. *It's the same as that wine! Why does his saliva taste the same?!*

Caim's saliva had the same taste as the devilish wine that had stolen Rozbeth's killing intent and completely intoxicated her. His saliva poured down her throat into her stomach, where it was absorbed by her intestines and spread through her entire body, permeating all her cells with joy and reviving the pleasure she'd been experiencing the entire night.

"Aaah! Shtop!" Rozbeth fled from Caim's kiss, her voice pleading as a sweet moan escaped her lips.

"What's the matter? Didn't you say you were trained against

torture?” Caim asked.

“N-No… That was…”

“Stop resisting,” Caim ordered, and Rozbeth stiffened. Even if her heart hadn’t yielded yet, her body had already submitted to Caim after drinking an entire cask of his poison, and she couldn’t disobey his command. In fact, if she hadn’t been tied to a chair, she might even have groveled on the floor and begged to receive his affection.

He pressed his lips against Rozbeth’s once again, but this time she didn’t resist. Then when Caim pushed his tongue inside her mouth, she also extended hers to intertwine with his. Their tongues intermingled, and pleasure even greater than before burst like a firework inside Rozbeth’s brain.

Their kiss deepened, with wet sounds and sweet moans escaping Rozbeth’s lips every time they took a breather. Her eyes glistened as she melted in ecstasy, her entire body drenched in sweat. Each time Caim moved his tongue, her slender shoulders twitched, and she rubbed her thighs together as she grew more and more wet between her legs.

Millicia chuckled at the sight. “You have become quite adorable, Rozbeth.”

“Where’s all your bravado?” Tea added as she and Millicia moved behind Rozbeth with impish expressions and reached toward the assassin, earning a yelp out of her.

“You have beautiful breasts that look very sensitive.” Millicia slid Rozbeth’s brassiere aside before stroking and groping her soft chest, sometimes pinching her nipples.

“You’re completely wet. No matter how tough you act, your body is honest.” Tea decided to hit below the belt—she put her hand inside Rozbeth’s pants, forcefully spreading the legs that the assassin’s maidenly instincts had closed. Tea’s fingers furiously rubbed Rozbeth’s crotch up and down, making obscene wet sounds.

Rozbeth couldn’t help but moan as Millicia and Tea played with her body, while Caim continued to pour his aphrodisiac poison into her mouth. Rozbeth discovered erogenous zones she didn’t even know existed as waves of pleasure more intense than the previous night assaulted her.

“Aaah… Mmmh… Aaaaah!”

No! That's so wrong! This can't be me! Rozbeth refused to acknowledge that *she* was the one moaning like that. Her identity as Rozbeth the Headhuntress was being stripped away by the second as the joy of being born a woman was etched in her body.

"No! Don't push your finger inside!"

This feeble, coquettish voice can't be coming from me! Rozbeth kept denying reality.

"I apologize for the wait, Princess." A new assailant appeared—Lenka, who had vanished from the room until now, had suddenly returned.

"Where have you been, Lenka?" Millicia asked.

"The neighboring room. I brought something we do not have here."

Rozbeth, wondering what it could be, gingerly looked toward the entrance and spied a large mirror.

"Ah, I see what you're planning. Jeez, you really are a perverted bitch." Caim broke their kiss and stepped aside.

"Ah..." Rozbeth had now a full view of the mirror and what it reflected—herself, tied to a chair with her clothes open, drooling from her slovenly parted lips and making bedroom eyes. "Aaah..."

The reflection in the mirror wasn't Rozbeth the Headhuntress, the assassin renowned as the strongest in the underworld. No, it was just a mere female drowning in pleasure.

"N-No... That can't be me..."

"You're making quite the face, Rozbeth. Can you still spout nonsense and claim you haven't lost?" Caim said.

"I-I..."

"Shut up."

"Ngh!"

Caim once again sealed her lips.

"I'll hear your answer after we're done. I'm gonna make you submit so thoroughly that you won't be able to deny it anymore, so prepare yourself."

Rozbeth's eyes widened in shock. *No way! Are you telling me there's more?!* Intense fear—and a tinge of anticipation—swelled in her chest. *This is bad... At this rate, I'm really going to...!*

"Do it," Caim ordered his lovers, mercilessly extinguishing the resistance that Rozbeth had managed to muster.

"Yes."

“Understood.”

“I suppose being the one doing the teasing can be nice occasionally.”

Tea, Millicia, and Lenka attacked together, six hands assaulting Rozbeth’s body.

“Aaaaaaaaah!” Rozbeth shrieked from the unprecedented pleasure. As the girls groped her, the ropes tying Rozbeth to the chair came loose, but she couldn’t escape or fight back. She was played with like a toy, and the only thing she could do was moan.

Eventually, after what seemed like an instant and an eternity at the same time, Rozbeth fell from the chair with labored breaths.

“Oops.” Caim quickly caught her and embraced her slender body before tossing her on the bed.

“Ah…” Rozbeth feebly blurted out.

“Guess it’s about time.” Caim leaned over Rozbeth and she absentmindedly stared at him. “I think you’ve already submitted to me by this point, but… Well, better make doubly sure. You’re free to resist if you can.”

Caim teased Rozbeth, but she was already too far gone to care anymore. She just spread her legs on her own and accepted the ferocious male who was going to conquer her.

“Ah!”

Finally…Caim swung his “sword.” The strike felt like it might split the earth, and it drove Rozbeth into the deepest mire of pleasure.

Thus, Caim made the strongest assassin in the underworld his ally.

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“…That’s enough. I give up. Do whatever you want with me,” Rozbeth finally said shortly after their bout of intense sex, her shoulders drooping. While still exhausted, she was now conscious enough to talk. “It’s my loss. If you want me to serve you, then I will. So please, let me rest already.”

After climaxing nearly a hundred times from the four assaulting her body, Rozbeth had been forced to yield. And now that she had drunk so much of Caim’s poison, she had become just as addicted to it as Millicia and the others. There was no way she would ever

betray them now.

“Finally. You’re quite the stubborn woman.” Caim took a pitcher, poured a cup of water, then handed it to Rozbeth.

She accepted it and glared hatefully at Caim. “I’d already lost from the outset. How could I have known that *you’d* made the wine I drank yesterday? I’m astonished that someone who can produce poison from their body even exists.”

“I’ve never met anyone who could do that besides me either… Well, one exception aside.”

“Who?”

“Hmph.” Caim only shrugged and put on his jacket.

Tea, Millicia, and Lenka had also gotten dressed again. The only one still naked was Rozbeth, who had been unconscious until just now.

“With that, you have become our ally, Rozbeth. I am glad to have a new sister.” Millicia beamed.

“I find it unpardonable that you tried to kill the princess, but… Well, I suppose I can’t keep condemning you after seeing such a pitiful display.” Lenka accepted Rozbeth joining them, though a little reluctantly.

“I’m a little saddened by Master Caim’s growing number of lovers, but a strong man is bound to have many women by his side. That’s just how things are.” Tea didn’t object to Rozbeth becoming their comrade either.

The three girls—and now Rozbeth—had all drunk Caim’s poison, which had aroused and charmed them. They were sisters bound by a poison thicker than blood—a bond so strong it transcended reason.

“Anyway… Now that Rozbeth is with us, let’s talk about our next move.” Caim drank straight from the pitcher and resumed. “Thanks to my dragon-slaying poison, the wyverns are basically dealt with. We should now be able to leave this town and head to Lance’s location, right?”

“Yes.” Millicia nodded. While Rozbeth had drunk an entire cask, there was still plenty of dragon-slaying poison left. Even if Caim and his companions departed, the county’s army should be able to eliminate the wyverns on their own. “If we stay here too long, Arthur might make his move before we can join Lance.”

“I don’t know your circumstances, but if you want to leave this

town, we should hurry," Rozbeth interjected, placing her now empty cup on the table. Then, as she picked up her underwear lying on the floor and put it back on, she continued. "The mediator should already be aware that you've captured me. Other assassins will likely start targeting us tomorrow—or even today."

"Seriously...? We caught you this morning and it's only just past noon," Caim said.

"Don't underestimate assassins. Time is money, and this job comes with a really big reward, so I wouldn't be surprised if there already were some who—"

Someone barged into the room, interrupting Rozbeth. It was their final companion—Lykos the wolf girl.

"L-Lykos? You shouldn't enter without knocking!" Tea chided her.

"Mmm! Mmhm!" Lykos hurriedly pointed at the window.

"Is there something outside?" Millicia approached the window.

"Watch out! Duck!" Still in her underwear, Rozbeth leaped and pinned Millicia to the floor.

The next instant, the window was shattered from the outside.

"Eeek!" Millicia screamed as glass and fragments of the wall blew her way.

Caim clicked his tongue and immediately flew into action. He strengthened the front of his body with compressed mana using Genbu and defended against the debris without even suffering a single scratch.

"Was that a magical attack...? No, that's not it." Caim gritted his teeth against the dull pain and looked down. "Is that...lead?" A large quantity of lead lumps the size of a phalanx were lying on the floor. They had an aerodynamic shape, and when he picked one up, it was extremely hot.

"Are you all right, Master Caim?!"

"Princess! Are you injured?!"

Tea and Lenka shouted at their respective masters.

Millicia and Rozbeth stood up. "I-I am fine. Rozbeth saved me." If Rozbeth hadn't pinned her down on the floor, Millicia might have gotten more than just injured. "Thank you."

"It's nothing... Anyway, we need to get out fast!" Rozbeth said, quickly getting dressed. "That was an attack from an assassin. The most impatient ones are already here!"

As though reacting to her words, the sound of people running

came from the hallway and two men emerged from the door Lykos had opened.

"Found them!"

"Let's kill th—"

"Poison Shot!"

The attackers pointed some sort of black weapons at Caim and the girls, but Caim hastily fired poison projectiles at their faces.

"Ugh!" The men began to foam at the mouth and collapsed on the floor.

The pair were clutching strange weapons in their hands, but Caim didn't have the time to inspect them. "We're getting out of the inn! Follow me!" he ordered. He didn't know the identity of his enemies, but it was obvious who they were targeting. Considering Caim could sense bloodlust from every direction, they were likely surrounded by several opponents. "Come on! It's the middle of the day! What's the count's army doing?!"

With Caim in the lead, the six of them exited the room. As there were no enemies in the hallway, they headed for the stairs, but Lykos began to bark once again.

"Master Caim! From the side!"

A man clad in black jumped out from one of the rooms and pointed his weapon at Caim and his companions—the same strange weapon the other men had been carrying. "Die!"

"No, *you* die!" Tea used her three-section staff to knock the weapon out of her opponent's grip before clawing at his face with her nails. "Grrraw!"

"Argh!" The man collapsed in agony, burying his bloodied face in his hands.

Caim kicked his body all the way to the end of the corridor and clicked his tongue. "Just how many of them are there?!"

"They're from the Company—the biggest group of assassins in the underworld, with almost a thousand members!" Rozbeth explained, confirming the identity of the assailants. Even though she had been captured just this morning and not much time had passed, their adversaries were already here. "Be careful of their black weapons! They're called guns and have a long range! They use gunpowder instead of magic to launch lead bullets!"

"Ah, so that's why I didn't sense any magic!" Caim realized, looking down at the black weapon Tea had knocked away earlier. It

was apparently called a gun, and it was slightly larger than the palm of his hand. “It’s not a problem for me, since I have Mana Compression, but…”

Caim could defend himself by strengthening his body with mana, but a weapon that could fire projectiles faster than arrows without using magic was a threat to Millicia and the rest. They could easily suffer a fatal wound.

“They’ve descended!”

“Fire!”

The instant Caim and the girls made it down the stairs, several black-clad men fired at them with their guns from the entrance to the inn. Loud bangs resonated as the gunpowder exploded.

“This is so annoying! It’s making me itchy all over!” Caim complained as he was showered in bullets.

“What?!”

“Die!” Caim leaped toward the entrance and punched the black-clad men with his fists wrapped in condensed mana, taking them out in a few seconds. “Jeez—they just keep coming!”

“I don’t think all thousand of them have come to this town, but we should be prepared to face at least a hundred. The inn must already be surrounded,” Rozbeth replied. “If we go out there without a plan, we’re going to be met with a hail of bullets. You might be fine, but we won’t be.”

“Should we wait for the help of Count Atlaus, then? He should notice the commotion before long!” Millicia suggested, but Rozbeth shook her head.

“The Company must have already done something to stop the soldiers from coming here.”

“Then what should we do?!” Millicia cried, starting to panic.

They were outnumbered, and no reinforcements were coming. It was a desperate situation—or it would have been, if Caim hadn’t been present.

“I’ll go outside alone and scatter them. Find an opening and escape!” Caim said. He was the only one who could ignore the bullets, after all.

Without waiting for his companions’ answer, Caim kicked the door open and rushed outside.

“Got him!”

“Whoa!”

The instant Caim emerged from the inn, nets were flung over him, and he was captured.

A few minutes earlier...

A great number of people had surrounded the inn where Caim and the girls were staying. All of them belonged to a famous group of assassins in the underworld—the Company—and they had killed the soldiers guarding the inn. Now, their attempt to assassinate Millicia was well underway.

“I wonder if our dear Millicia is still alive,” said a woman who stood out among all the black-clad men, clad in a red dress and elegantly smoking a cigar. Her name was Mistress—though of course, that wasn’t her real name. It was only her moniker as an assassin. She was around thirty, and the neckline of her dress revealed deep cleavage, making her look more like a voluptuous prostitute or a barmaid than a killer.

“We haven’t received a report from the ones inside. Maybe they’ve been killed...” answered one of the men.

“My my, how troublesome,” Mistress said, not looking troubled in the least.

Mistress was the leader of the Company, a group of assassins made up almost entirely of people who could not use magic and were not very strong, and she controlled them through her wealth and by providing them with firearms.

“Should we break into the inn, Mistress?” asked one of the men.

“Yes, if nothing happens in the next two minutes. Make the preparations,” she replied, breathing smoke from her crimson lips.

In front of the inn were currently around thirty of her underlings, all armed with guns. Firearms had been developed in a particular corner of the empire, but they were not widely used, since they weren’t *that* powerful despite their immense cost. Thanks to gunpowder, anyone could use a firearm, but a bullet couldn’t fatally wound someone using mana to strengthen their body. In other words, training with a sword or spear and learning magic was an easier path to strength than using a gun, so firearms had never been popularized.

“If someone leaves the inn, use you-know-what. Got it?” Mistress said.

“Understood.”

The black-clad men positioned themselves as their boss had directed.

Guns were weak—and yet, the members of the Company used them. The reason was that they took *far* less time to learn than the sword, so even a little bit of training could make anyone into a killer. In short, the Company's strength was its overwhelming number of expendable assassins.

"Someone is coming, Mistress!"

"I know."

They heard the sound of someone running inside the inn, and the next instant, a man with purple hair and eyes burst through the door and rushed out of the building. The Company didn't know his name, but the man was Caim, who had come outside to allow his companions to escape.

"Do it!" Mistress ordered.

"Yes!" the black-clad men answered in unison and fired something—not bullets but nets.

"Whoa! What the hell are these?!" Caim panicked. He had expected to be attacked when he exited the inn, but he was instead greeted with multiple metal nets that completely entangled him.



“As expected, one of you fled the inn as a last-ditch effort.” Mistress smiled alluringly.

She knew that guns couldn’t fatally wound anyone strong enough to protect themselves with mana. As such, once she surrounded the inn with her firearm-wielding minions, she had anticipated that their strongest fighter—someone who could endure a shower of bullets—would come out as a diversion to protect the princess. Once that happened, they would capture that strong fighter with metal nets and use the opportunity to assassinate Millicia—such was Mistress’s plan.

“You can ignore him! Go kill Millicia, quickly!” Mistress ordered.

The black-clad men obeyed and rushed toward the inn.

However, the Company had made a grave mistake.

“Jeez… I didn’t expect you to actually use a clever plan like that…”

The young man they had captured—Caim—was far stronger than anything they had imagined.

“Unfortunately for you, I’m not weak enough to just let myself be captured and do nothing!”

“What?!”

The metal nets around Caim were now corroded and crumbling away. He had produced an acid strong enough to erode the metal—something that Mistress and her men couldn’t have expected, not knowing Caim’s power.

“Toukishin Style Basic Stance—Byakko!” Caim created claws of compressed mana around his fingers, then swung both his arms to mow down the black-clad men who had been rushing toward the inn, spraying blood everywhere.

“Damn him!”

“Fire! Fire!”

“You’re too slow.” Caim’s poison bullets were faster than their guns, and the men collapsed to the ground with a cry of agony.

Caim’s opponents were now scattered, creating an opening.

“Now, Millicia!”

“Right!” Millicia left the inn and sprinted down the main street, holding Lykos’s hand as Tea, Lenka, and Rozbeth protected the two of them.

“It’s Princess Millicia!”

“Damn it! We won’t let you escape!”

“Purple Poison Magic—Nidhogg.”

The black-clad men tried to chase after Millicia, but Caim launched a poison dragon that swallowed all of them at once.

“Let’s steal a carriage and flee! This way!”

“Out of the way!”

Rozbeth and Tea cut down the men standing in their path—the former using a knife, and the latter her three-section staff.

“Get lost.” Caim followed his companions as he knocked aside the black-clad men who chased after them. Some of the assassins used their guns, but that didn’t work against Caim, who was covering his body with condensed mana—and of course, he stood in the path of the bullets to protect the girls.

“Princess!”

A gunshot rang out amid the chaos. It came from the roof of a building—someone had hidden there and attempted to snipe Millicia.

Lenka quickly protected her master, becoming her shield.

“Lenka!”

“I am fine! Please keep running!” Lenka pressed against Millicia, slightly grimacing. While not on Caim’s level, she could strengthen her body with mana, so she was able to endure a shot or two.

“Poison Shot.” Caim fired a poison bullet at the sniper, who fell from the roof still clutching a gun bigger and longer than the ones carried by the other members of the Company. “Go! We need to find a carriage and get out of town!”

“Y-Yes!” Millicia started running again, urged on by Caim.

“...This attempt is a failure. We’ll need to try again,” Mistress muttered, watching Caim and his companions get away. Having spent a rather long time in the underworld, Mistress understood they had failed and would not be able to kill Millicia here and now. “We’re withdrawing. If we stay too long, the count’s soldiers will arrest us. Once you’ve retrieved the guns from anyone who died, we’re heading out of town,” she ordered coldly.

“Understood!”

To stop the county’s army, they had blocked the roads around the count’s mansion with overturned wagons, but that would likely not last much longer. It was important to know when to withdraw during assassinations, and Mistress wasn’t one to hesitate.

“Well now, that was a big waste of money. That’s all right,

though—we'll just call it reconnaissance in force."

Today's assault had failed, but Mistress didn't mind. For the Company, a group that treated its assassins as expendable goods, it was a trivial loss. Moreover, once they finally assassinated Millicia, they would receive such a huge reward that it would more than compensate for their failure.

Mistress decided to retreat and plan for their next attack.

"There are quite a few unusual assassins besides us targeting you, so I hope you won't let them kill you before we can, my dear Millicia," Mistress whispered, chuckling and smiling as she watched her mark and her companions escape.

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Caim and the girls stole a random carriage and fled Extobell. They weren't able to say goodbye to Count Atlaus, but they did explain the situation to the soldiers guarding the entrance of the town, informing them of the attack and explaining that they were leaving the city for their own safety and heading east to join Lance.

One of the soldiers hurriedly ran toward the count's residence to report, but Caim and his companions didn't know when the enemy's reinforcements would arrive, so they didn't wait for the soldier's return before taking the road.

"Phew... We somehow made it through." Caim shrugged inside the canopied carriage. "I didn't think we would be attacked right after capturing you, Rozbeth... Did they do any preparation at all before they managed to make their move?"

"How should I know?" Rozbeth sighed. "The Company is the most organized of all the assassin groups, so they're generally faster to act than anyone."

"But I killed around twenty of them, so they should stop coming after us, right?"

"Supposedly the Company boasts more than a thousand members. Twenty is basically nothing," Rozbeth explained while cleaning the blood off her knife with a handkerchief. "Their assassins are consumable goods, so it won't take long to replace such a paltry number. That's why we must take care of their leader."

“And who is that?”

“Didn’t you see her while you were escaping? She was the woman wearing a red dress—Mistress, the boss of the Company.”

“Ah, yeah, now that you mention it.” Caim did remember the woman. She had been hiding behind the black-clad men, using them as shields, so he had ignored her. If he had known she was their boss, he would have prioritized defeating her instead.

“Are you all right, Lenka? Is it painful?” Meanwhile, Millicia was treating Lenka’s injury. The knight had removed her light armor, exposing the shoulder wound she’d suffered while protecting her master from the sniper.

“This is nothing,” Lenka answered.

“I am sorry… You were hurt because you protected me…”

“This is my duty as your knight. Above all, I am glad that you are safe, Princess,” Lenka replied, her expression full of relief as Millicia healed her using Sacred Arts. Caim hadn’t noticed the sniper and Millicia couldn’t strengthen herself with mana, so if Lenka hadn’t been right there to defend her, Millicia might have died from the shot.

“Guns, huh…? Seems like they’re quite the annoying weapon.” Caim’s face twisted in anger as he watched Lenka’s injury being healed. As he could use Mana Compression, bullets did nothing to him. Lenka, Tea, and Rozbeth could strengthen themselves with mana to a certain extent, so they could avoid fatal wounds. Millicia, however, couldn’t do any of that. If she was shot in the head or another vital spot, she would die. “And because those guns don’t use mana, they’re hard to spot… What a pain.”

“That stuff… Gunpowder, was it? It had a peculiar scent, so I should be able to smell it if there’s any nearby. I can make no guarantee if we’re downwind, though…” Tea commented from the coachman’s seat. Lenka usually drove, but as she was being treated for her injury, Tea had taken her place.

“I see. Tell me immediately if you smell gunpowder, then,” Caim said.

“Understood.”

“All right… What do we do now?” Caim wondered aloud. He knew they should head directly for Lance’s location—but that was also what all the assassins were likely expecting them to do now. It was well-known that Millicia and Lance were close siblings after all.

“Honestly, if we don’t want to deal with all those killers, I think we should hide instead of joining up with Lance.”

“I agree it is dangerous to be targeted by so many assassins, but that is all the more reason to be worried about Lance,” Millicia countered. Without pausing in her treatment of Lenka, she stared at Caim with determined eyes. “Lance is likely to be targeted by assassins too. I know that he has his own guards, but I still want to reunite with him as soon as possible.”

“I knew you would say that.” Millicia was kind and docile, but she wasn’t a coward. Even if her life was at risk, she would still act on behalf of her nation and her brother. “Well, I suppose if more assassins show up, we can just take care of them. Now that Rozbeth has joined us, we should be able to manage.”

“You expect much from someone who was defeated by your lewd torture… But, well… It feels strangely good to know that you are relying on me.” Rozbeth sighed, then threw her cleaned knife in the air before catching it with the scabbard. “I’ll keep my promise. Now that I’m her guard, I’ll do my best to defend Princess Millicia.”

“Thank you, Rozbeth.”

Rozbeth simply shrugged at Millicia’s gratitude and lay down in the carriage. Her face was turned toward the canopy, and it almost looked like she was hiding her embarrassment.

“Out of the frying pan and into the fire, huh? Things really never go the way you want them to…” Caim muttered.

Their first objective had been to escort Millicia to the empire, only to discover that a civil war between her brothers was brewing. They had gone to the imperial palace instead to meet Arthur, the first imperial prince, but that had ended with them becoming his enemies instead. Then, on their way to meet with the second prince, Lance, they had encountered a wyvern outbreak—but just when they had finally taken care of the wyvern problem, they’d been targeted by assassins and were forced to flee town.

Just what kind of star was I born under? It hasn’t even been a year since I left my homeland, and yet it feels like I’ve already gone through a lifetime’s worth of trouble. Caim smiled wryly as he opened the door at the back of the carriage slightly to peer outside. The wagon rattled intermittently as it proceeded at great speed, the

scenery quickly passing by as the town of Extobell vanished behind them. There didn't seem to be anyone from the Company following them, so they should be able to flee without issue.

"...Huh?" Suddenly, Caim noticed something small running on the ground. It was the size of his palm and appeared to be a mouse—not an unusual animal to see, but Caim was immediately struck by how bizarre the situation was. The mouse wasn't alone—another, then another, then countless more appeared, running alongside it. Also, taking a closer look, the mice didn't have skin or flesh—they were all bones. "Wait... Are they undead?!"

"What?!" Millicia and Lenka looked outside the carriage too and were shocked by the sight.

The situation then got even worse. Along with the mice, other animals such as cats and dogs also began to chase after the wagon. They were also made entirely of bones, running easily despite not possessing any muscles.

"We have a problem, Master Caim!" the maid cried from the coachman's seat.

"What's up, Tea?!"

"Birds are flying our way! But they're weird skeleton birds!"

"Seriously?!" Caim moved to the front of the carriage and looked up at the sky. Up above the wagon were countless birds—both small ones and large ones the size of eagles or hawks, entirely made of bones and flying parallel to the carriage without any feathers.

"It seems another assassin has already arrived."

"Rozbeth..."

Before Caim knew it, Rozbeth had gotten up and was glaring at the animal bones chasing after the wagon. "They serve the Bone-Eating General, a necromancer who controls countless skeletons. He's quite the troublesome foe."

"The Bone-Eating General...!" Caim repeated the ominous moniker, clenching his fists.

Once one problem was solved, another occurred. Then when that one was resolved, yet another cropped up.

A new enemy stood in Caim's path, and his troubles were far from over.

Would Caim, who had become the Poison King, ever be able to

live a peaceful life?

Extra Story: The Day the Headhuntress Was Born

The dimly lit room was a sea of blood.

Every surface was covered in bright red blood, and the scent of rusted iron permeated the air. Headless corpses lay all on the floor, their heads methodically placed on a table in the middle of the room. Their expressions, never to be changed again, showed fury, despair, grief, surprise—some were even smiling or neutral, proving that they hadn't even had time to realize what had happened to them. The table piled high with severed heads looked like an art piece straight out of a nightmare full of black humor, as the sight was as ridiculous as it was eerie.

Not a single living person was present in the room, and the only moving thing was the pendulum of the grandfather clock fruitlessly indicating the time where nobody would read it.

"My my... This is pretty impressive," the husky voice of a woman resonated as the door of the room opened.

She was completely dressed in black. Her shirt, her pants, her coat, her hat—from top to bottom, everything was black. It was as though darkness had taken human form.

"And here I was ready for a big job after so long... What exactly happened here? Everyone is already dead."

The woman was an assassin known in the underworld as the Headhuntress—a skilled killer feared for severing the heads of her victims. Today, she had come to this mansion to murder her target only to find the sight described earlier. Before she could accomplish her job, someone else had apparently killed all the people in the residence—including the Headhuntress's target, whose head was also on the table.

"It seems I've been beaten to the punch. Still, this method of killing..." Everyone's heads had been severed. It was as though the Headhuntress had murdered them herself. She chuckled. "Do I have a copycat?"

Now that her mark was dead, the Headhuntress had no reason to stay anymore. Normally, she would already have left, but this

time she waded into the sea of blood with interest. She was curious—she wanted to know who was responsible for the corpses on the floor. Usually, people killed their opponents by stabbing them in the chest, stomach, or throat. Sometimes, they cut an artery or struck them in the head. Sawing through the bone just to sever the head was irrational—nobody would bother to do such a thing.

"To think someone would use the same nonsensical method as I do… It makes me feel some kind of kinship with them." The Headhuntress giggled, somehow delighted, as she approached the headless corpses lying on the carpet to examine them.

The next instant, the grandfather clock's door opened and a small figure emerged from it, leaping at the stooping Headhuntress with a hatchet aimed at her neck.

"Oh my… You should be careful. You might hurt yourself." However, the Headhuntress quickly drew a knife and blocked the blow. If it had been anyone else, they wouldn't have been able to react fast enough and would have lost their head. "You've already severed the heads of six people, and yet you still want mine? You have an unnatural attachment to headhunting. I like you, young lady."

The person who had come out of the grandfather clock was a young girl who seemed to be around ten years old. Her hair was disheveled, and her skin was slightly dirty. Moreover, her immature body wasn't covered by anything—she was completely naked.

"Ah, I remember now. My target was prostituting orphans. You must be one of them."

The girl didn't answer, instead swinging her hatchet once again.

"So you're giving me the silent treatment? Oh well…" However, the Headhuntress struck the girl's hand with the butt of her knife, making her drop her weapon. Then, as payback, she swung her blade at the girl's neck. "Sixty points. That was decent."

"Ah…" the girl blurted out, flopping listlessly in the puddle of blood. Her head hadn't been severed, though. Just before the knife reached the girl, the Headhuntress reversed her grip, striking her neck with the back of the blade. As such, though the girl was lying in a puddle of blood, it wasn't hers. She had only lost consciousness and was still breathing.

“The way you go for the kill isn’t bad, but you lack finesse. Also, you’re a girl, so you should take more care of your appearance. You’ve got talent *and* looks after all,” said the Headhuntress, exasperated, as she removed her coat and covered the girl with it before shouldering her like luggage. “I don’t know if this is a godsend or if it’s just that birds of a feather flock together, but either way, I was searching for someone to inherit my techniques. I may have had my mark stolen, but I hit upon a great find instead.”

Carrying the girl, the Headhuntress started heading toward the exit, but the moment she stepped forward, she fell into a coughing fit and put her hand over her mouth. When it ended, she looked down at her bloodstained palm. The Headhuntress was ill, and her doctor had already told her she hadn’t long to live.

“I really did find you at the perfect moment. For the first time in my life, I actually feel like thanking God.”

The Headhuntress’s instincts were telling her that she’d be able to pass on all her techniques to the girl she was carrying. If the Headhuntress had found her before falling ill, she would have killed her without even considering the idea of making the girl her disciple. On the other hand, if her illness had been more advanced, the Headhuntress would have likely died before she could impart everything.

The timing of her meeting with the girl was so perfect that it could only be called a miracle. It was as though their bloodlust had attracted them to each other, and their meeting had thus been predestined. The Headhuntress, who had always been an atheist, actually felt like believing in God for the first time.

“This room looks like a scene out of hell itself, but that’s not a bad thing. In fact, it’s the perfect place for a new Headhuntress to be born.”

Certainly, the girl would assassinate many people in the future. She had great talent for killing and had been born under a star that predisposed her to it. Just like the current Headhuntress, the girl would walk through a hell that suited her moniker.

With a slight spring in her step, the Headhuntress left her target’s mansion and returned home.

Later, the Headhuntress confirmed that the girl had indeed

been an orphan kidnapped to become a prostitute, and the men she had killed were all scum who abducted children without relatives and forced them to sell their bodies. The Headhuntress didn't know who'd hired her, but those men had all deserved to die.

The girl was an orphan they'd taken from the slums, and they'd decided to have a little taste before selling her. However, just before they could do anything to her, the girl had retaliated and killed them all.

The Headhuntress called the nameless girl Rozbeth and drilled an assassin's way of life into her. Having only half a year left to live, the Headhuntress's training was truly grueling, and yet the girl—Rozbeth—never hated her mentor. To a girl who had never known her parents, the Headhuntress, no matter how severe, was like a mother. She was the one who had given Rozbeth a name and taught her everything she knew.

And that was why, even now, Rozbeth could still clearly remember her last words, which sounded more like a curse.

"I am certain you'll have a bloody life without a moment of peace, and you will never be blessed with happiness."

"You will never be loved, nor will you love anyone. You will die without knowing the joy of being a woman."

"Someday, you'll surely come to hate me for forcing you to become the next Headhuntress."

"So… I'm sorry. Truly… I am so sorry I didn't kill you that day. Please forgive me for being a terrible mother."

Such were the last words of the previous Headhuntress.

After that, Rozbeth succeeded her mentor and became known as Rozbeth the Headhuntress in the underworld. She grew to be a beautiful woman and skilled young assassin, killing one target after another. However, beneath her cool facade, never once did she forget her mother's last words.

Rozbeth would never be happy. No matter how many people she assassinated, she would never be satisfied—she would never know the joy of being a woman, and someday, she would die alone in a sea of blood. Rozbeth had always been certain that was her future. After all, those had been the last words and teachings of her mother, the woman who had taught her everything.

Thus, Rozbeth was confident she would never ever find true happiness.

○○○

“Aaaaaaaaah!”

Wh-What’s happening?! Rozbeth thought as she was awakened by her own scream.

A wave of pleasure shot through her like lightning, starting from her lower abdomen and spreading through her entire body. She must have momentarily lost consciousness because the first jolt of pleasure she’d ever felt in her life had been so strong.

“Shtooop! Pleashe don’t be sho rough!” Rozbeth cried, moans escaping her lips of their own accord. As her body was tormented by intense pleasure, Rozbeth didn’t scorn the man but pleaded with him instead. “P-Pleashe… Ay can’t… Ay’m gonna bweak… Ay beg you!”

“And you call yourself the strongest assassin?” the man said to Rozbeth, who was pinned face down on the bed. His voice wasn’t particularly beautiful, but for some reason, Rozbeth found it so seductive it practically melted her eardrums. He was the first man to have ever forcefully pushed Rozbeth down. His name was Caim, if she recalled correctly. “Even Millicia, who’s far weaker than you, can handle that much with no problem. You said you trained against torture, but I guess you’ve got no resistance to lewd stuff,” he teased her.

“Th-That’s not— Aaaaah!” Rozbeth tried to protest but was cut off by a new wave of pleasure.

I-I remember now… I drank that sweet wine, and then this man…! Rozbeth’s memories finally became clearer. The shock had been so great that she’d flashed back to her past. *How humiliating! For me, who inherited the name of Headhuntress, to be pinned down and forcefully taken from behind… It feels so… So…!*

“Shooo goooooood!” Rozbeth shouted, unable to endure it anymore. Or rather, she didn’t even feel like resisting any longer. Caim had awakened Rozbeth’s true nature.

I was told that I would never become happy… That I would never know the joy of being a woman… And yet…! And yet, Rozbeth couldn’t stop moaning at Caim’s every action, as though her body

was a musical instrument he was playing. She had completely become a woman and was made to feel the joy of being one.

M-My teacher... My mother was wrong! Rozbeth, too, was a woman. Even if she was an assassin—even if she was the Headhuntress, she was utterly powerless in front of this overwhelming male. No matter how much she rejected it, she couldn't feel unhappy—because he just *forced* her to be happy. He carved a message into Rozbeth's body saying that her happiness was right here.

"All right... Now come!" Caim ordered.

"Aaaaaaaah!" Rozbeth immediately orgasmed for the umpteenth time.



That day, Rozbeth the Headhuntress ceased her activities as an assassin. Instead, she started her new life as a woman, proving the previous Headhuntress's last words had been wrong.

Extra Story: Sister Arnette’s Adventure

“Whoa, so this is the royal capital!”

“It’s so huge…and there are so many people…”

As the pair passed through the entrance gate of the Jade Kingdom’s capital, they each let out an admiring sigh.

The girl, who looked like a country bumpkin visiting the city for the first time as she glanced around excitedly, was Arnette Halsberg, the daughter of the Master Pugilist who governed a county in the northern part of the kingdom.

Next to her, dressed in traveling clothes, was Luzton, a commoner boy with no last name. He worked as an apprentice butler for House Halsberg, and circumstances had somehow forced him to accompany Arnette on her journey.

The two had made the long trip from the northern remote region to the royal capital, and they had finally arrived after a few months of traveling. Coming from the countryside, the pair was really surprised by how many people there were in the city. Between all the street stalls and voices trying to attract customers, it was as though there was a festival going on all the time. Among the stands were ones that sold food, and the smells of fruit juice and grilled meat tickled their noses.

“Looks delicious…” Arnette was attracted by the food but remembered her objective and shook her head to get her mind back on track. “Now that we’ve finally arrived at the capital, we need to look for Caim!”

The pair had come all the way from the Halsberg county to the royal capital to take revenge against Caim for having injured Kevin Halsberg beyond recovery. Arnette was certain that her twin brother was in the capital—though it was just a hunch.

“Not that I think we will find him…” Luzton muttered, quietly enough that Arnette wouldn’t hear him.

Caim being in the royal capital was only Arnette’s baseless assumption—and it was wrong. After all, Caim had already departed the Jade Kingdom and was currently in the neighboring country—the Garnet Empire.

“Anyway, let’s search for him! Time to ask around!” Arnette declared.

“Um… Do we really need to do that now? I think we should eat and find an inn first…” Luzton suggested.

“How can you be so casual about this?! Once he knows I’m after him, that man might get away! We need to move with haste. Celerity is the soul of warfare!”

“Ugh… I want to go home…” Luzton’s shoulders drooped. It was the young apprentice butler’s first time visiting the royal capital. Instead of searching for a foe who might not even be there, he would prefer to enjoy seeing the sights.

Unfortunately, if there was one thing this journey had taught him, it was that Arnette Halsberg was a headstrong, reckless girl. Once she had decided something, she would do it no matter what.

“I really shouldn’t have followed her…” Luzton grumbled, grieving his misfortune. If only he hadn’t found Arnette when she had snuck out, or had just turned a blind eye to it, he wouldn’t be here. However, it was already far too late for regrets. Even if he went back now, he would be accused of leaving Arnette alone. The only way he could possibly return to the Halsberg mansion was by bringing that impetuous girl back with him.

“Anyway, we need to gather intel, so take this!” Arnette shoved a sheet of paper at Luzton.

“D-Do you really want to use this portrait?”

“Of course! Is there a problem?”

“There are tons of them…” Luzton quietly replied. “Whoa…” he couldn’t help blurting out, grimacing as he looked at the portrait of Caim that Arnette had drawn during their journey.

If someone were to describe the drawing, they might say something like “a snake and a worm fire dancing while holding each other’s nonexistent hands.” Arnette’s artistic sense was so divorced from reality that it was hard to tell if the drawing depicted a man or a monkey. While she had inherited her father’s talent for hand-to-hand combat, the heavens hadn’t blessed Arnette with a gift for the arts.

“I feel dizzy just looking at this drawing. Like, my footing is getting unsteady, and it feels like the world’s about to flip upside down…”

“Don’t spout nonsense—just show it around to find where Caim

is! I'm going this way, so you go that way!" Arnette ordered.

Luzton whined but did as demanded and went on his way. However, even if Caim *actually* was in the royal capital, he didn't think they would be able to find him with such a bizarre-looking portrait. Luzton couldn't help but wonder why he was being forced to do something that was doomed to fail anyway.

"Well... It *is* better to not find him, so that's actually a good thing, I suppose..." Luzton slumped over, looking down at the ground.

Arnette was looking for Caim to take revenge for her father. However, the Master Pugilist was said to be the strongest man in the kingdom, and yet Caim had hurt him so badly that he would never be able to recover his former strength. Even though Arnette wasn't exactly weak, the only conclusion Luzton could see was her losing to Caim.

"...Yeah, it's better not to find him. I just hope she'll give up quickly so we can return home," Luzton grumbled as he did his best to ask around, just as he had been ordered. People laughed at him when they saw the badly drawn portrait, and he even encountered a strangely dressed priest who got angry and said the drawing was cursed, throwing holy water at Luzton.

Eventually, after two hours, the pair reunited.

"Ah, Luzton."

"I suppose you did not find him ei—"

"Perfect timing! I've found someone who knows about Caim!"

"What?! You actually found someone?!" Luzton exclaimed. That shouldn't have been possible, and he almost said that aloud. After all, even if someone really did know who Caim was, they definitely wouldn't be able to recognize him from that portrait.

"Look—there he is."

"Oh, are you with the lass, boy?"

Arnette introduced a rough-looking, clearly dubious man. While he was tall, his body was thin, and his skin was dirty. He was dressed like a beggar, but his gaze was strangely threatening as his eyes darted around restlessly.

Luzton stared at him silently. The man was suspicious. Like...really, *really* suspicious.

"Um... Are you certain it is a good idea to trust him, Lady Arnette?" Luzton whispered.

“You shouldn’t judge people by their appearance!” Arnette raised one finger, throwing her chest out. “He’s really kind—he offered to help when he saw me asking around! He said he knew a lot of people in the capital so he should be able to lend a hand!”

“But… Uh…” Luzton hesitated, not knowing how to explain to his oblivious lady that this was exactly how swindlers and kidnappers acted.

“You’re searching for the man in that portrait, right? I think I saw someone who matches his description,” the suspicious man interrupted Luzton with a grin. “However, I don’t know where he is right now, so I’ll introduce you to an acquaintance who should know more.”

“See, Luzton? He’s going to introduce us to someone who might know where Caim is!” Arnette beamed.

“He’s in the slums, deep in the backstreets, but there’s no need to be afraid. You’ll be fine as long as I’m with you, so don’t worry. There’ll be thugs, and you’ll sometimes hear people scream, but just ignore them and stick with me.”

“So suspicious…” Luzton muttered. This was all so shady he didn’t even know where to start. Even a country bumpkin like him knew that the slums were a hotbed for criminals.

“Isn’t it great, Luzton? We’ve already found a lead!” Arnette rejoiced.

“L-Lady Arnette… I think this is a trap! He must intend to kidnap and sell us!”

“Come on, you’re still judging him by how he looks?”

“It’s not just that! It’s what he said too! Everything about him is suspicious!”

“Don’t get so excited, boy. Here, have some candy,” the man suggested.

“This is suspicious too!” Luzton shouted, but unfortunately, Arnette ignored him. Perhaps it was because she was lured by the possibility of learning Caim’s whereabouts, or because she was naive and ignorant of the world…or simply because she was dumb. Either way, Arnette decided to accept the man’s invitation.

“Heh heh… Well then, let’s go.”

“Yes, please lead the way.”

“Ugh, jeez!”

Arnette obediently followed him, and Luzton, having no other

choice, trotted after them with tears in his eyes.

Guided by the man, the pair exited the main street and entered a back alley. Gradually, the tumult of the crowd grew distant, and there were fewer and fewer people present.

“Uhh…” Luzton whined at the foul smell permeating the air. When he looked around, he found a tattered man lying on the side of the road with flies swarming around his body. Was he just sleeping, or…?

“Hmm, the place feels quite desolate,” Arnette commented.

“Well, it is the slums,” the suspicious man answered. “This is where kids who’ve lost their parents, failures who’ve lost their job or family, and people with some dirty laundry they wanna keep quiet gather.”

“What’s the problem with their dirty laundry?” Arnette asked, not understanding the implication—that they were people who had done bad things in the past and were hiding them.

“Uhh… Everyone is staring at us…” Luzton noted, feeling uncomfortable as he tried to make himself inconspicuous. The people in the slums were all focused on him and Arnette. And it wasn’t just the ones directly watching them from the road—people were peeping at them from behind walls and buildings too.

“Don’t mind them, boy. They’re just curious because we don’t often see outsiders,” the suspicious man explained with a flippant smile before pointing at a house in the back. “There. That’s where the guy who’s well-informed about what happens in the capital lives.”

The house the man was pointing at was larger and in better shape than the buildings around it. Despite that, it was still pretty shady. Even if Luzton couldn’t see anyone, he felt someone watching them from a window.

“Thanks for guiding us,” Arnette said, heedless of the strange atmosphere, and walked toward the house.

“W-Wait, milady!” Luzton followed her.

“Heh heh… Two guests incoming…” the suspicious man muttered behind them, blocking the pair’s escape route.

Arnette opened the door, revealing a spacious room inside where several men stood in front of a table and chairs in the back.

“Ha ha! They actually came!”

“To think there’s anybody out there dumb enough to believe

someone as shady as Bordes!”

“Quite a nice-looking pair too! We’re gonna drink well tonight!”

The men cheered and clapped their hands the instant Arnette and Luzton entered the house. All of them were just like the man behind them—a bad countenance and dirty clothes. Some of them had tattoos or scars on their arms or faces, clearly proving they weren’t respectable people.

“Ummm… So, who’s the one who knows where Caim is?” Arnette asked, cocking her head in confusion.

“Wait, you seriously still don’t understand the situation you’re in?”

“You’ve been tricked, brat!”

The men sneered at Arnette, laughing vulgarly like monkeys in heat.

“The guy behind you was lying—you were brought here to be sold!”

“Tricking country bumpkin kids and selling them as slaves is our bread and butter!”

“It’s hard to believe there are brats who’d follow that guy, considering his shifty-looking face, but I guess kids really *are* stupid!”

“I-I was right, milady! It was a trap!” Luzton cried, eyes filling with tears.

This place was indeed a den of kidnappers. That one of them knew where Caim was had been a lie, and Arnette and Luzton had been guided here to be sold as slaves.

“Huh…? I’ve been deceived…?” Arnette finally realized the truth, widening her eyes in astonishment.

“It’s too late now!”

“Hey, do you think the lass is a noble? She looks healthy, and she’s cute. I’m sure some rich old pervert will pay a lot for her!”

“And the boy should be popular among the madames.”

The men cackled.

“I…see… I was tricked. It was all a lie…” Arnette looked down, biting her lip. She must have been very shocked, because she clenched her fists so hard that her nails stabbed into her palms.

“Sorry about that. But don’t worry, we’ll sell you to a nice pla—”

“Byakko.”

“—ce… Huh?” the man blurted out dumbly. Five red lines ran

from his throat to his torso, blood spouting from them. “Argh…” he babbled feebly, unable to even cry out because his throat had been torn, and collapsed, blood splattering all around him.

“How dare you… How *dare* you take advantage of my innocent heart!” Arnette shouted.

“What the hell is this ki— Aaaaaargh!”

“You’re gonna pay for this!” Arnette screamed, swinging her clawed right hand at the kidnappers. She was using Byakko, a technique from the Basic Stance of the Toukishin Style that covered one’s fingers with compressed mana, making them as sharp as tiger claws. “You’re! Gonna! Pay! For this!!!”

“Wh-What the hell *is* she?!”

“P-Pin her down… No, kill her!”

“Th-That’s impossible! We should flee— Aaaargh!”

Arnette let her rage take her as she mowed down the men one after another. She always had been impulsive, and this time her fury led her on a serious rampage.

The reason for that was, of course, that Arnette was a naive and sheltered young lady. She had been raised with great care inside the Halsberg mansion, rarely talking with people other than her family and the servants. As such, she never had anyone trick her and was easily deceived by simple lies. But because she wasn’t used to deception, the moment she learned she’d been tricked she couldn’t handle the emotional turmoil inside her. The experience of being deceived for the first time in her life made Arnette feel intense rage, frustration, disappointment, sorrow—as well as another feeling she couldn’t recognize—and unable to process them, she lost her temper and threw a tantrum like a young child.

“Th-This is going to end *very* badly…” Luzton muttered, curling himself into a corner of the room, shaking like a leaf.

Arnette may have been throwing a tantrum like a little girl, but it didn’t change the fact that she was a practitioner of the Toukishin Style. Her rampage was roughly equivalent to having a small storm inside the house. People, furniture—everything in the room was destroyed.

Eventually, Arnette’s destructive impulses settled down, and she stopped, panting loudly.

The room was in an atrocious state. All the kidnappers had been torn to shreds, the furniture was in pieces, and the walls and

ceiling were marked with beastly scratches.

“I-I want to go home…” Fortunately, Arnette had been sane enough to not attack her ally, and Luzton was still unharmed in his corner of the room.

“Phew… I feel a lot better now…” Arnette slowly calmed her breathing, feeling refreshed from her rampage, and her expression brightened as she wiped the sweat on her brow. “To think they would manage to trick me… I guess the royal capital has really good liars. I need to be more careful from now on.” She looked around until she found her traveling partner curled up in a corner of the room. “Luzton.”

“YES?!” Luzton shrieked as Arnette approached him, stepping on the corpses.

“That was a false lead. We’ll need to start our search over—”

“Nobody move!” a voice shouted as someone barged in through the door of the house. “Everyone in this room is suspected of being a kidnapper and of selling illegal slaves! I shall mercilessly cut down anyone who re…sists… Huh?” The young man in knight’s armor froze when he saw the horrible state of the room. “Wh-What’s happened here…?”

“What is the meaning of this?”

“It’s as though a monster rampaged through the room…”

All the knights who entered were just as shocked as the first one when they saw the disastrous scene.

“Were they selling monsters as well as slaves…?” muttered the young knight who had entered first, looking around the room until his gaze stopped on a particular spot.

“Ah…” Luzton blurted out. Arnette, who had been going to extend her hand to help Luzton up, turned toward the knight and their eyes met. “This is bad!” Luzton grimaced.

Arnette’s entire body was covered in blood. Some even dripped from her fingers, making it completely obvious that she was the assailant. It had been legitimate self-defense and Arnette was a noble lady, but they didn’t have anything to prove her identity to make the knights believe them.

“Beautiful…” the young knight said unexpectedly. “An innocent face that still retains a touch of childishness, and a body covered in bright crimson blood. It’s as though you are a red rosebud waiting for the arrival of spring…”

“...Huh?” Luzton blurted out, bewildered by the man’s muttering.

“Um... Yes?” Arnette replied, puzzled.

The young knight walked to Arnette, then knelt on the bloodied floor in front of her. “Are you all right, oh beautiful lady?”

“Huh? Y-Yeah, I’m fine...”

“Now that I am here, everything will be fine. You can rest assured that I shall not let anyone hurt you.” He took Arnette’s hand, not minding her confusion. “My name is Roussel Jade, the fifth prince of this country.”

“What...? A prince?”

“Please, would you deign to tell me your name, oh fair and delicate maiden? Oh lady of the red rose!”

Arnette and Luzton were struck speechless at the prince’s words, frozen in place as if they were two statues inside the room painted with fresh, red blood.

Afterword

Long time no see, everyone. This is LeonarD, the eternal chuuni author.

We're now on the fourth volume, and on the cover is...Rozbeth the Headhuntress! Who would have thought she would end up there—and practically half naked at that! If you still haven't read this book, I hope you will enjoy her appearance in the story.

As usual, I am grateful to Won-sensei for his sexily cute illustrations, as well as everyone who was involved in the publication of this book.

Now that all the heroines have had their own covers, I wonder who will be on the next one? I hope that everyone will have fun trying to guess, just like I am!

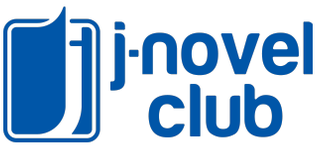
Now, if you would allow me to get a little personal.

If you have been reading my series on the web or following me on X, you should already know that I've had a lot of work and been very busy as an author recently. You, the readers, are the reason I've been able to do my best. So even though you can't see it, allow me to prostrate myself on the floor in my room to express my gratitude.

Back to this series, I plan to keep up with my current writing pace, so you shouldn't have to wait long for the fifth volume to come out. Naturally, it will be full of battles and lewd events. A new(?) heroine will also make her entrance, and Caim's harem will heat up even more, so please look forward to it!

Until then, I shall pray to all the gods, Buddhas, and devils for us to meet again.

LeonarD



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The Poison King: Now that I've Gained Ultimate Power, the Bewitching Beauties in My Harem Can't Get Enough of Me Volume 4
by LeonarD

Translated by Boris Lecourt
Edited by Sarah Tilson

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