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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"Hey, Immortal Butterfly. It's been a while."
"What are you doing here? Another one of your worthless endeavors?"
The girl—the Immortal Butterfly—was a skilled assassin, considered to be one of the strongest in the underworld, who had sent countless important people to their deaths.


“That’s magic silver—mithril. No wonder your Sacred Arts aren’t working!”
Caim observed the giant skeleton as he moved through the sky, carrying Millicia. The skeleton had to weigh dozens of tons—and looking at it more carefully, Caim noticed its surface was coated in a silvery-blue metal.


"I have been waiting to engage in intercourse with you for so long, Master!"
The woman lowered her hips toward Caim's "sword."

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Prologue

In the northern part of the Garnet Empire, the country that ruled the center of the continent, stood a dangerous mountain range—the Dragoon Mountains. Also called the Dragon's Nest, the lesser dragons known as wyverns lived there, along with one of the rare true dragons.

"Ah, so *this* is the reason. What a cruel thing to do."

In the middle of the mountain range, encircled by tall peaks, was a lake that served as a very important water source for the monsters residing there. However, it was currently dyed a poisonous-looking red.

"This is a toxic substance that cannot be decomposed by microbes and shouldn't exist in the natural world. It must have taken quite a lot of effort to make with alchemy, and yet its creator did something as wasteful as throwing it into a lake. I wonder who that could be," a black-haired woman said cheerfully. She was wearing a white coat as she gazed down at the red lake, her eyes narrowed and her lips curved upward in a crescent-shaped smile.

The woman's name was Faust—an extraordinary mage, doctor, and scientist often likened to a demon for how far she was willing to go for her research. She was also deeply connected to Caim, the Poison King, but that had nothing to do with the reason for her coming to this place.

"This is quite interesting and delightful. However, now I'm *so* curious about the objective of whoever did this that I feel like I won't be able to sleep tonight."

"Then you just need to sleep during the day. That should easily solve your issue," answered a voice from behind Faust. The owner of the voice was a girl clad in a Gothic Lolita dress. She appeared to be around ten, but the vibe she gave off and her tone proved that she was far older than she looked. Her hair was pulled into two curled

red and black colored pigtails, creating strange double helixes.

"Hey, Immortal Butterfly. It's been a while," Faust greeted the girl with a friendly smile, not even surprised by her sudden appearance. "What a coincidence for us to meet here. I see that you're still making yourself look young."

"You talk as though I am the only one tinkering with her appearance. Anyway, what are you doing here? Another one of your worthless endeavors?"

"That's not a nice thing to say—and I don't want to hear that from an assassin of all people."

The girl—the Immortal Butterfly—was a skilled assassin, considered to be one of the strongest in the underworld, who had sent countless important people to their deaths.

"Are you the one who threw poison in this lake?" the Immortal Butterfly asked.

"Don't joke like that. You know I would never do something so pointless," Faust replied with a shrug. "The lake being poisoned is why wyverns have been rampaging through the area. Unlike *you*, I'm an ally of humanity, so I would never do something so cruel."

"Is that sarcasm I hear? You, an ally of humanity? As if a heretic like you had the right to say that."

"I'm not going to take that from a monster in human form. Anyway, why are you here? I don't think you came to see me."

"Of course I did not. I am on my way to meet my new kin. I simply happened to notice an old acquaintance and decided to say hi."

"A new kin... Do you mean that a new lycanthrope has been born? That's very interesting."

"Keep your interest to yourself. If you intend to butt in..." The skilled assassin practically exuded bloodlust.

"I know, I know. Don't worry—I won't do anything," Faust said, throwing her hands up in surrender. "It's just that... Well, I think I know who that kin is, and if I'm right, I thought that would be truly amusing."

The Immortal Butterfly stared at Faust suspiciously for a moment, but eventually, she turned back, the hem of her dress fluttering as

she did. “Fine. I shall be on my way, then. I hope we will not meet for another hundred years.”

“How cold. Even though I quite—”

“GYAOOOOOOOOO!” A roar echoed through the air and the sun was suddenly obscured, casting a shadow on the ground.

“—like you... Oh?”

“We have an uninvited guest—and a rare one, at that.”

Both of them looked up—above them was a flying lizard, vigorously flapping its wings. It looked like a wyvern but was twice as large, and its wings weren’t attached to its arms but to its back. It was one of the world’s strongest creatures, a Duke-class monster second only to Demon Lords—a dragon.

“GYAOOOOOO!” the dragon howled in rage.

“It seems awfully angry... Do you happen to know why?” the Immortal Butterfly asked.

“I think it’s mistaken us for whoever poisoned the lake,” Faust replied.

Dragons might have been more resistant to toxins than wyverns, but it still didn’t like having its precious water source polluted. And two suspicious humans now stood in front of the lake, so it had decided they must be the culprits.

“It might be a little risky on our own, so... Are you willing to team up?” Faust suggested.

“...Not like we have much of a choice,” replied the Immortal Butterfly.

The two of them exchanged glances, sighed, then prepared to fight together. Faust conjured complex magic circles with her hands, and the Immortal Butterfly invoked countless black butterflies around her.

“GRYAAAAAAAA!”

“Summon Demon.”

“Dance, my butterflies from hell—Jigokuchou no Mai.”

A dragon.

A mad mage.

A lycanthrope.

The three monstrous beings possessing power far beyond

humanity waged an intense battle next to the lake dyed in red. It lasted three days and three nights, altering the surrounding landscape and leaving deep scars on the mountain range.

Chapter 1: Fleeing from the Assassins

After being attacked by the Company, a criminal organization, Caim and the girls escaped from Extobell and headed east. However, not long after leaving town, they found themselves embroiled in a new crisis—the bones of innumerable beasts were chasing after their carriage.

"They serve the Bone-Eating General, a necromancer who controls countless skeletons. He's quite the troublesome foe," Rozbeth said with a know-it-all air.

"The Bone-Eating General...!" Caim repeated. It was an ominous moniker, and his subordinates, which were now pursuing Caim and his companions, matched the eeriness of the name. The distance separating the carriage from the skeletons was shortening by the second, and before long it would become nil. "Aren't assassins supposed to be more stealthy? He stands out way too much!"

The main road was currently deserted because of the wyverns, but normally it would be full of travelers and peddlers. Tons of animal bones running along the whole width of the road was *very* conspicuous.

"That's just the kind of killer he is. Being an assassin doesn't necessarily mean being stealthy. Some do murder their target without being noticed, but others prefer to destroy everything and cause a massacre while they're at it," Rozbeth explained coldly. She had been an assassin herself until just a few hours ago, so if she said so, Caim could only assume it was correct.

"Tea! Do you think we will be able to escape?!" asked Millicia, clinging to the luggage carrier.

Tea, on the coachman's seat, gritted her teeth and answered as she gripped the reins. "The horse is getting tired! It won't last more

than a few minutes at this rate!”

“Guess we better deal with them before that happens... Let’s do it.” Caim stood up in the swaying carriage and thrust his fist toward the chasing skeletons. “Kirin!”

The Basic Stance Technique of the Toukishin Style fired compressed mana like a cannonball, destroying several skeletons. Unfortunately, they were quickly replaced by others.

“What a pain... Just how many are there?”

The Toukishin Style was mainly intended for one-on-one combat and had few options for attacking multiple enemies at once. As for Caim’s Purple Poison Magic, it wasn’t very effective against skeletons.

“I could produce a really strong acid to melt their bones, but that would take too much mana...” Caim mused as the number of animal bones chasing them continued to increase. No matter how much mana Caim had, he would likely run out before he could deal with all of them. “We don’t know how many of them there still are, so I better not exhaust myself carelessly.”

While Caim was monologizing, two skeletal birds charged at him. He moved to counterattack with his fist, but someone acted before him—Rozbeth. She destroyed the skeleton birds with her knives.

“Stay on guard,” she warned him.

“Thanks. Still, there’s just too many of them...” Next, a wolflike skeleton attacked, so Caim dealt with it using a kick that pulverized its bones. “Taking care of their source would do the trick, but... Well, he’d never be stupid enough to reveal where he is.”

They only needed to take care of the necromancer—the Bone-Eating General. But unfortunately, they didn’t know where he was.

A new skeleton joined the fray—that of a wyvern this time.

“To think he even has wyvern bones...” Caim looked at the enormous skeleton, spreading its bony wings as it charged toward them. “Toukishin Style—”

He prepared to take the creature down, but just before he could, a light enveloped the carriage.

“Holy Circlet!” Millicia cried.

The skeleton wyvern turned to dust the moment it was touched

by the purifying glow. Caim turned toward the source of the light and found Millicia standing with her staff in the back of the wagon.

"I created a barrier with my Sacred Arts! It took some time for me to recite the incantation, but the undead controlled by the necromancer can no longer approach us!"

The carriage was covered by a white veil made from Millicia's Sacred Arts—and the way it had turned the wyvern skeleton to dust more than proved her words were true.

Seeing this, the other skeletons whined in agitation and slowed down. They had given up, and the distance between them and the carriage gradually widened until they vanished into the distance.

"Phew... We should be in the clear now," Caim muttered.

"Indeed," Rozbeth agreed, spinning her knives before sheathing them. "But the Bone-Eating General is a tenacious man. He'll surely attack us again, and the same goes for the Company. The other assassins should be making their move too... We're going to have quite the hellish journey."

"So it's gonna be a battle royale with all those killers? Not really what I would call a fun event." If many assassins of this caliber were going to aim for their lives, their journey was bound to be quite a severe one.

Thus began a long battle against an unknown number of assassins with equally unknown capabilities.

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"Hmm, they managed to escape. It's been twenty years since I've made a mistake like this," said an old man from atop a small hill overlooking the main road.

He looked withered, not unlike a monk who had practiced austerity to the point of mummification. His stature was short, his entire body was wrinkled and devoid of fat, his deep eye sockets lacked eyeballs, and his skin and even lips were completely dry. If he hadn't been talking, he would have been mistaken for a corpse.

"So Princess Millicia is a priestess... This is quite troublesome."

The old man leaned on his cane, his back bent, as he gazed down

at the main road from atop the hill. A small bird perched itself on his shoulder. However, the bird didn't have any feathers or flesh—it was nothing but bones. Indeed, this old man was the Bone-Eating General himself, a very old assassin widely known in the underworld.

"A priestess princess, a beastfolk girl, a woman knight, the traitor Headhuntress, and a young man with purple hair... All of them are inexperienced youngsters. How irritating—I want to strip their meat away and gnaw their bones!" The Bone-Eating General laughed eerily, knocking his cane against the ground.

The old man was one of the most senior assassins in existence and had been part of the underworld for more than a hundred years. He had killed thousands of targets, and more than ten times that number of people had ended up as collateral damage. The Bone-Eating General's modus operandi was to overwhelm his targets with countless undead, and as such his natural enemy was the clergy, who could use the Sacred Arts. Millicia being a priestess made it more difficult for him to accomplish his job.

"Oh, Elder. You are already here?" asked a young woman in a crimson dress who had appeared behind the old man.

"You are...the one from the Company...?"

"Yes."

The woman was of the same profession as the old man—a renowned assassin. Her moniker was Mistress, and she was the boss of the Company, the largest criminal organization on the continent, composed of more than a thousand professional killers. She had tried to assassinate Millicia just before the Bone-Eating General had made his attempt.

"Oh! You're as beautiful as ever. Do you have some business with me?" His wrinkled face twisted into a smile as he moved next to Mistress and rudely slapped then groped her rear with a hand so frail it looked like it might break.

"This is inappropriate, Elder."

"Oops... I meant to pat your shoulder but ended up stroking your behind instead. Aging is a sad thing."

"My, my... You are quite vigorous despite your old age." Mistress lightly struck the Bone-Eating General's hand and stepped away. She

didn’t mind the old man’s sexual harassment, but her black-clad subordinates standing a little ways away were clearly displeased, blue veins throbbing on their foreheads as they pointed black weapons—guns—toward the old assassin.

The Bone-Eating General cackled. “How violent. Youngsters are so quick-tempered.”

“Lower your guns,” Mistress ordered.

“But, boss...!”

“Do what I say if you don’t want to die. Look behind you.”

Her subordinates hurriedly turned around and found that several skeletons of wild animals had gathered unnoticed behind them. If they’d tried to fire on the Bone-Eating General, they would have been mercilessly slaughtered.

“He’s more than two hundred years our senior. Pay him respect,” Mistress said.

“You’re the only one who says that, my dear Mistress! Most of the youngsters just treat me like an old sack of bones and look down on me!” The Bone-Eating General laughed cheerfully for a moment before his face turned serious. “So, back to my question. Do you have some business with me? Surely you didn’t just come to see my lovely face.”

“I wondered if you would be willing to team up for this mission to kill the members of the imperial family,” Mistress suggested with a bewitching expression, tracing her plump red lips with her finger.

“Oh, you want to join forces?”

“To tell you the truth, we have already tried to attack them. Unfortunately, the princess has a very strong guard, and we failed. Would you mind helping us so that I do not waste more of my subordinates’ lives?”

The Company was made up of more than a thousand assassins, making it the largest criminal organization in the underworld, but its members weren’t that strong individually. They used guns and other special weapons to make up for their lack of might, but they were no match for other famous assassins like the Headhuntress or the Bone-Eating General.

“I heard that Princess Millicia once served as a nun in the temple.

That should make her a troublesome target for you, no?" It would be difficult to complete the job with his undead subordinates, so her proposal ought to be very attractive. "As for the distribution of the reward, how about sixty-forty? Naturally, the sixty is for you, Elder."

"Ninety-ten," declared the Bone-Eating General in a hoarse voice. "I appreciate your invitation, young lady, but I get ninety percent and you ten. I won't accept less."

"Elder... Do you not think you are asking for too much?"

"I plan to live another hundred years, so I need to save money for my retirement!" the greedy old man cackled. He was already more than two hundred, and yet... His avarice truly knew no bounds.

"I see... What a shame." Mistress shook her head with a sigh. "I suppose we can forget about my proposal, then. I will not be able to make a profit if we go with your suggestion."

"Indeed, truly a shame. And here I thought I would be able to work while admiring your behind!"

"I sincerely apologize. I was the one to make the proposal, and yet... Please forgive me."

"I don't mind. Well then, stay in good health." The Bone-Eating General walked to the edge of the cliff, then threw himself off without hesitation. Naturally, he didn't fall headfirst into the ground, but was instead caught by the skeleton of a giant vulture and carried away. The other bone animals vanished along with the withered necromancer.

"Tch... Shitty old man."

"How dare he act so cocky when he's half senile..."

The black-clad men complained, but Mistress clapped her hands and calmed her subordinates.

"Stop it. We don't know where he has ears... He's a really lecherous old man." Mistress slightly raised her left leg and stomped on the ground. Her heel struck something—the skeleton of a mouse that had been trying to peek inside her skirt. "He was already an assassin before our grandparents were even born. Don't let your guards down."

"S-Sorry, Boss..."

"Also, I expected our negotiations to end exactly like this."

Mistress held out her right hand. One of her subordinates immediately handed her a cigar and lit it. “After all, we could never work well with him. No—all I wanted was to stir him up.”

Her subordinates tilted their heads, not understanding.

The Company’s boss hadn’t intended to cooperate with the Bone-Eating General at all. All she’d wanted was to show him that someone else was targeting Millicia, in order to provoke a sense of urgency.

“The Elder is going to redouble his efforts so we don’t get the drop on him. We should let him tire our target out for us.” The job was to kill two of the emperor’s three children, and Millicia was believed to be the easiest mark. However, Mistress didn’t think it would be so simple. “It’ll make things easier for us if the Elder has already exhausted them.”

Basically, she was using the Bone-Eating General—an assassin more than two hundred years old—as a vanguard before swooping in and snatching the spoils. Perhaps the most fearsome thing about Mistress wasn’t the fact that she commanded an organization with more than a thousand members or her use of guns...but her cunning.

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“Well... What do we do now? Any ideas?” Caim asked his companions.

With him inside the swaying canopied carriage were Millicia, Lenka, Lykos, and Rozbeth. Tea was on the coachman’s seat, gripping the reins. After escaping from the Bone-Eating General, they’d continued to head east away from Count Atlaus’s domain. They had gone through a checkpoint when exiting the county, but fortunately, nobody had stopped them and they’d passed through without issue. The checkpoints mainly served to prevent people from entering the area, which was currently under attack by wyverns, so they didn’t really bother with people who wanted to get out of it.

“While I would like to immediately join Lance, we need to restock our supplies before that,” Millicia said. “We do not have much food

left—certainly not enough to reach the town where my brother currently resides."

Lance was preparing for his fight against Arthur in a town called Berwick. It was essentially Lance's turf, and he was currently recruiting supporters and soldiers there. As it was two weeks away from their current location, they wouldn't have enough food for the whole journey.

"From what we heard at the checkpoint," Millicia continued, "the area around here has been spared the wyvern attacks. If we go to a nearby town, they should have enough food available to sell us some."

"But it is possible there will be assassins waiting for us there..." Lenka opined. "They should know we will need to stop somewhere to restock and sleep, so it is likely that they are preparing an ambush."

"I agree with Lenka." Rozbeth nodded. "Some assassins do not care about collateral damage. Of course, there *are* a few who have conviction and refuse to kill anyone other than their targets, but we shouldn't count on them restraining themselves while we're in a town," she explained while tending to her knives.

"What about the Bone-Eating General who attacked us earlier?" Millicia asked.

"He's the former type, obviously. He wouldn't mind slaughtering an entire town to bring down his target," Rozbeth answered matter-of-factly. "He used animal bones earlier, but naturally, the old man can also control human bones. Who knows how much damage he would do if he attacked us in an inhabited place?"

"Then I suppose we really *cannot* stop in a town. We should follow the main road and go directly to my brother." Millicia didn't hesitate to choose the hard way. "We cannot get innocent people involved in our struggles. As for the food, I suppose we will have to procure some as we travel."

"Well, I don't care either way," Caim said. They could hunt or forage—there were many ways to get food in the wild. As for water, they could just find a river or a pond. "But are you all right with it? It's gonna be pretty harsh for a while."

That suited Caim just fine. He had lived on rotten bread and vegetables before, after all. He could even endure a few days with only water, or eat insects and weeds to stave off the starvation.

"It's going to be harder than anything we've done so far, Millicia. We'll only sleep outdoors from now on, and the food is gonna get worse too," Caim added.

"...I shall endure it. I swear." It would be a difficult journey for the imperial princess, but her resolve was firm. "This is nothing if it means not putting my people's lives at risk. I feel guilty for involving you all, however..."

"Princess... You have grown so much," Lenka said, overcome with emotion.

"I don't mind. I'm used to sleeping outdoors," Rozbeth replied, sheathing her knives.

"If Master Caim is fine with it, then so is Tea," Tea responded from the coachman's seat.

The decision was unanimous. For the next two weeks until they reached Berwick, they would go full survivalist, hunting and camping outdoors.

"As for Lykos... Huh?" Caim looked at Lykos only to find her with something in her mouth. "What are you eating?"

"Mmmh?" Lykos opened her mouth, and something that seemed to be a lizard's tail fell from it. She had apparently captured a lizard that had wandered inside the carriage and ate it.

"Guess it won't be a problem for her."

Lykos was a feral child who had been raised by lycaons in a mana zone, so she was more accustomed to the survivalist lifestyle than any of them.

Thus, Caim and his companions continued to head east toward Berwick, where Lance was located. To avoid assassins, they stayed away from towns and moved inconspicuously along the main road.

Currently, Caim was foraging in the forest for something to eat. They had hidden the carriage among the trees, scattered monster repellent around it, and even gotten Millicia to put up a barrier with her Sacred Arts as a countermeasure against the Bone-Eating General's undead.

They had split into two groups: one foraging in the forest, the other guarding the carriage while preparing the camp. The former group was made up of Caim, Lenka, and Lykos, and the latter of Millicia, Tea, and Rozbeth. It was dangerous to divide their forces, but Tea had a good nose and Rozbeth was familiar with how assassins operated, so the two of them were capable of protecting Millicia. There was also the barrier, so unless something unexpected happened, they should be fine.

"Well then, time to hunt," Caim said, but despite his enthusiasm, he didn't have that much experience with hunting. While he was used to repelling monsters that attacked him, he had never actually searched for prey himself.

"Oh, really? I guess it's my turn to shine, then!" Lenka declared proudly after hearing Caim's declaration.

"You seem pretty confident," Caim commented. Was she *that* good at hunting?

"I'm a knight. I often slept outside during military exercises and expeditions, and I've had to hunt and forage to conserve provisions!"

"Huh... Well, I'm counting on you to teach me how to hunt, then."

"Leave it to me. First, we'll need to set traps." Lenka took out a rope from her bag and fetched fallen tree branches on the ground. "It would be better if we had bows and arrows, but we don't. So instead, we're going to set traps and wait for game to get caught in them."

"Uh-huh."

"You plant the branches in the ground like this, and then you make a loop with the rope and... Done." Lenka skillfully created a snare on the ground. It was a pretty simple one—if an animal stepped on it, the rope would restrain it. "It should be able to catch any prey that steps on it. Now we need to make as many traps as we can all over the place and wait for something to be caught. During that time, we should look for edible wild plants and fruits. If we're lucky, we should be able to at least get one catch before the day ends."

"I see... And if we're not lucky?" Caim asked.

"In that case, we can only give up."

"Give up on what? Living?"

"There's nothing we can do about it! Hunting isn't easy, you know!" Lenka raised her index finger and started to explain glumly. "To begin with, it's very difficult to catch prey. They're far more clever than people think. Even professional hunters have days when they don't catch anything!"

"Hm... Really?"

"Really! However, if we manage to catch a deer or a wild boar, we should have enough meat for days!" Lenka declared as she set another trap.

Carefully observing what she was doing, Caim imitated Lenka, and they spent the next hour making traps around the forest.

"Phew... That should be enough," Lenka said, wiping her brow with her arm. Working in the hot and humid forest had made them rather sweaty. "While we wait for a prey to get caught, we should go gather some—"

She was interrupted by a whine as Lykos emerged from a bush. She had disappeared a while ago, so they had been wondering where she had gone.

"Mmmh?"

"Ah..."

Lenka and Caim noticed that Lykos was dragging something behind her—the corpse of a big wild boar. Despite her small size, she was hauling the nearly two-hundred-kilogram lump of meat in the direction of the camp.

"Didn't you say it was difficult to catch something...?"

"...Please say no more, Sir Caim." Lenka's shoulders drooped. However, she knew she couldn't stay depressed and slapped her cheeks slightly to snap herself out of it. "W-We can't just eat meat! We need vegetables too! And we must also search for water!"

"I'm rather knowledgeable about edible wild plants, you know. I once had to forage for them often."

"Huh. Didn't expect that from you."

"Just leave it to me." Caim glanced around the forest and his gaze stopped on a certain spot. On the ground there was a bright green plant with jagged leaves. "That one."

"Oh? I'm not familiar with it. Are you sure it's edible?"

"Yeah. It tastes really bad and gives you a stomachache, but it's edible."

"What?" Lenka was taken aback, but Caim ignored her, plucked the plant, then went to another one.

"This one releases a bitter juice when you chew on it, but it's surprisingly filling. That mushroom over there is absurdly spicy, but you can eat that too. The moss on that tree makes your tongue tingle and your skin turn green for a day, but it's super tasty."

"I see... Hah!" Lenka snatched the plants and shrooms Caim had collected and threw them far away into the forest.

"H-Hey!"

"If this were for me I could bear with it, but don't make my lady eat such dangerous things! *I'll* take care of foraging. Understood?!" Lenka was so insistent that Caim didn't even argue back.

You called them "dangerous," but I survived thanks to eating those, you know... Caim thought to himself.

"See the grass over there? That's what you should gather."

"What kind of plant is it?"

"It's an herb that can be used in cooking or to make medicine. There should be a lot around here, so please gather as much as you can."

"Got it." Caim obeyed Lenka and went to collect the plants.

The forest was a treasure trove of ingredients. There were plenty of things to eat other than animals, and Caim learned about each of them from Lenka.

"Oh? These are..."

"Mountain grapes. We're lucky," Lenka said.

"It'll make a great dessert. The girls will be happy."

They'd had the good fortune to find some fruits and had gathered several plants, so even if the traps didn't work, they wouldn't go back empty-handed.

"Huh? Wait, this is..." However, as they walked through the forest, Caim suddenly noticed an odd trail in the dirt. But it wasn't an animal trail—it was as though something big had crawled along the ground. "It's not from an animal. Is there a monster around...?"

"Is there a problem, Sir Caim?"

"Yeah, look at this. I think there's a big monster near—" Caim didn't have the time to finish his sentence before the sound of a bush rustling a little ways away stopped him. For a moment they both thought it might be Lykos again, but they felt something like bloodlust radiating from it and making their hair stand on end. And while it was faint, they also sensed mana, proving it wasn't just an animal.

"It must be a monster." Lenka drew her sword, and Caim took a fighting stance. "We're near the main road, so it shouldn't be that powerful. I hope it's edible." She stepped toward the bush that had rustled.

"Hey, be careful," Caim warned her.

"Don't worry. I'll be fine." The thicket didn't move, even now that Lenka was standing before it. She raised her sword overhead...and swung it down. "Hah!" The small sound of meat being sliced and the resistance she felt from her sword made Lenka grin victoriously.

"Hissssss!"

"Huh...?"

However, disaster came from the opposite direction. With a shrill hissing cry, something flew at Lenka from a nearby tree.

"Lenka! Behind you!"

"What?!"

But before Caim could help her, the something—a huge, long snake that was as thick as a log—fell over Lenka and...

"Ah..."

It swallowed her whole.

"Lenka!" Caim shouted. He looked at where Lenka had swung her sword and found it stuck into the monster's tail. "That was a decoy!"

The giant snake was very cunning—it had used its long tail to shake the bush and attract Lenka's attention, then used the opening to swallow her.

The monster made a gurgling sound as it tried to slide its prey down its throat.

"I won't let you do that!" Naturally, Caim wasn't going to stand idly by. He quickly closed on the giant snake and thrust his fist

toward it. “Spit her out!” He punched it repeatedly in the stomach like a sandbag until it finally spewed Lenka out of its mouth.

“Ugh...” Lenka groaned, showing she was still alive. She lay on the ground, her body covered with saliva and digestive fluids.

Caim had once heard that snakes were entirely made of muscle and that they constricted their insides to kill their swallowed prey before digesting them, but thankfully he had been fast enough to save Lenka.

The giant snake hissed and glared at Caim, its red eyes brimming with intense bloodlust.

“I’m the one who wants to kill you. Don’t go around eating other people’s women,” Caim said coldly, wrapping his body in condensed mana. He was enraged and ready to kill the monster that had almost devoured his companion—his lover—alive. “I’m the only one allowed to *eat* her. I’m gonna thoroughly slaughter you, so bring it on!”

Sensing Caim’s bloodlust, the giant snake heated up and shifted its body, flaring its hood around its face. It was obviously ready to fight, and yet it didn’t charge at Caim. Instead, it spit a strange liquid from its mouth like a water gun.

“Whoa?!” Caim reflexively exclaimed in surprise. He had expected the snake to bite him or try swallowing him, not to spout some weird stuff. “Wait... Is that poison?!”

Some snakes had holes in their fangs from which they could shoot venom. They sprayed it into the eyes of animals that preyed upon them, like lions or hyenas, causing them pain—or worse, making them lose their sight.

“Damn it... Feels like getting puked on by a drunkard...” However, while Caim was displeased, he wasn’t harmed at all. After all, he was the Poison King, ruler of all toxins. To him, the giant snake’s venom was nothing more than a stinky fluid.

The monster hissed in shock, seeing Caim was unaffected.

“Shut it! If you’re not coming at me, then I’ll come at you!” Caim kicked the ground and charged at the giant snake. “Seiryuu!”

Caim activated the Toukishin Style’s Basic Stance’s technique to cover both of his arms with condensed mana blades, then swung them at the giant snake, slicing it into bits.

The monster hissed feebly in pain, its head rolling on the ground.

"Didn't expect you to still be alive with your head severed," Caim commented, impressed by the snake's vitality. Then, raising his right foot above its head, he said, "Die."

Caim's heel crushed the monster's skull, and a dark-red stain spread through the fallen leaves on the ground. No matter how tenacious a snake might be, no living being could survive such a blow.

"You okay, Lenka?!" Caim hurriedly rushed over to his lover, who was sitting on the ground, covered in the giant snake's fluids.

"Uhh... That was a failure unbecoming of a knight... How humiliating!"

"...You seem all right. Also, I'll have you know that you humiliate yourself rather frequently." Being bound naked or putting on a collar and being treated like a dog were far more embarrassing. "You don't seem to have been poisoned, but those digestive fluids could be dangerous. You better wash quickly."

"Yeah... I want to clean myself up..."



“We need to find a river or a pond. If only we had a mage who could create water with magic...” Caim mused.

Usually, a party of adventurers had a mage who could produce fire and water, something very useful when camping out. In fact, that had been the case when they had traveled together with the Azure Wind. It would have made things easier if they had a mage like that, but unfortunately, Caim’s group could only use special spells—Caim’s Purple Poison Magic and Millicia’s Sacred Arts—and none of them could control the fundamental elements of earth, water, fire, and wind.

“Wait a minute. I’m gonna search from above.” Caim leaped into the sky, using footholds made of compressed mana to reach a high enough altitude to be able to overlook the forest. “I hope there’s a water source nearby... Oh, there is!” Fortunately, he spotted a river not far from their current location. “How lucky. And we’ll be able to secure drinking water too.” Caim nodded to himself, satisfied, and descended to the ground. “There’s a river close by to wash yourself.”

“Thank goodness... That’s a godsend.” Lenka sighed in relief. “Well then, let’s— Ah!” However, when she tried to stand, she slipped because of the giant snake’s fluids.

“Hey!” Caim hurriedly caught her—but as he did, he found himself covered in viscous fluids too. “Bleh... Lenka...”

“...Sorry.” She looked down, apologetic.

Now Caim wanted a bath too. He sighed and said, “Let’s just go to the river already. Hold on tight so you don’t fall!”

“Eep!”

Caim carried Lenka and, being careful not to slip, took a shortcut to the river by using mana footholds to leap in midair above the trees. At their destination was a gentle stream flowing through the greenery. Now that he was closer to it, Caim realized that the river was only knee-deep and the water was clear.

“Not only can we drink the water, but we should even be able to catch some fish. I guess finding this was worth getting messy for,” Caim commented.

“I was swallowed whole. It was a disaster. I never want to go through something like that again,” Lenka complained.

“And you’re clinging to me, so now we’re in the same boat... Anyway, let’s clean ourselves.” Caim stripped down without hesitation—even though there was a woman right next to him, he had nothing to be self-conscious about given their relationship. Lenka briskly undressed too. “We should bring the others here tomorrow. I’m sure they also want a bath.”

The main trouble women had with camping was that they couldn’t take a bath or a shower in the wild. The best they could do was wipe themselves with a wet cloth, but even that wasn’t always possible when there wasn’t enough clean water.

“If we store water in the magic bag, we should have enough for a while. I wish I had prepared more empty containers beforehand, though...” Caim said.

“There is nothing we can do about that. How could we have expected to be pursued by assassins?” Lenka replied as she washed away the snake’s saliva and digestive fluids.

Despite having been suddenly obliged to start living like survivalists, they had been able to find food and water rather easily.

“It’s hard to say if we’ve been lucky or unlucky...”

“By the way, Sir Caim... Can I ask for a favor?” Lenka pulled at his arm.

“What?” He turned her way to see that Lenka’s skin was flushed and her breath had turned slightly labored. “Wait... Don’t tell me...”

“I-I’m sorry...” Lenka rubbed her thighs together. “I’ve been aching ever since I got covered in the snake’s fluids... I can’t bear it anymore. Could you at least spank me?”

“I don’t think it’ll stop at spanking...” Caim muttered with a faraway look. Still, it was his fault that Lenka was like this. If he hadn’t used his poison on her, her body wouldn’t have changed to become so easily aroused. He had to take responsibility and discipline the she-dog who now stood before him. “The others are waiting for us, so let’s wrap this up in ten minutes.”

“Thank you!” Lenka placed her hands on a boulder in the middle of the river, leaning slightly on it, and stuck out her butt. “Please, Sir Caim...” she begged, flirtatiously turning her head toward him.

Caim mercilessly spanked the naked female knight, eliciting a

sweet moan and leaving a red handprint on her pale behind. He rhythmically slapped her butt, and each time Lenka barked in pleasure. Her rear was turning redder and redder, which looked painful, but only rapture could be found in her expression.

"Aaah... My butt feels like it's on fire, but the water is so cold... I'm going to go crazy!" Lenka exclaimed in delight.

"Don't worry, you already are," Caim coldly retorted.

Lenka usually was a dignified knight, so the way she acted when aroused felt all the more obscene and depraved.

Caim struck harder, which earned an especially loud moan from Lenka. Still leaning on the boulder, she arched her back, and her large breasts swayed up and down.

"Just...kill me..." she said, panting.

"You're still saying that?"

"How could I continue to live as a knight after being reduced to such a pitiful state...?" Despite her virtuous words, Lenka shook her butt temptingly. A very different kind of liquid from the snake's fluids was now running down her thighs before being washed away by the river. "I'm going to be completely ruined..." she panted. "Aaah, I can't wait for more..." Her eyes were full of expectation as she looked at Caim, and drool dripped from the corner of her lips.

Caim, of course, knew what she wanted, but he snorted and played dumb. "What? Is there something you want me to do?"

"W-Well..."

"I can't know if you don't tell me. So just say it already, you nympho."

Lenka's shoulders shook in humiliation from the scorn in Caim's voice. "M-My... Is..."

"What?"

"My crotch is..."

"I don't hear you." Caim feigned ignorance. "Well, if it's nothing, I guess we're done here. The girls are waiting for us, after all..."

"W-Wait! Please!" Lenka hastily stopped him. "My crotch is aching! So please, give it some attention too!" she begged, throwing away her shame and embracing the lewdness inside her. All the while, nectar kept flowing from between her legs. "I can't wait

anymore... I beg you, Sir Caim!”

“Jeez... You really are a slutty bitch. Oh well—you asked for it,” Caim said as he inserted two fingers inside her, eliciting a surprised yelp. “That’s where you wanted it, right? Still, whoa... You were already completely drenched before I even touched you.”

Lenka moaned loudly as Caim’s fingers stirred up her nectar. He knew all of her weak points since they’d slept together so many times, and naturally, the female knight couldn’t resist the pleasure, transforming into little more than a toy that could only moan as it climaxed.

“Aaaah! Sir Caim... Sir Caiiiiiiiiim!”

“I know, I know. You don’t need to yell.”

Lenka had come several times from Caim’s fingers, and her legs were trembling. If not for the boulder she was leaning on, she would have collapsed into the water. She’d reached her limit, so Caim decided to end the foreplay.

“Well then, it’s my turn now. Don’t come before me,” he declared, aiming his manly “sword” at Lenka’s rear.

The heat of his “weapon” was impervious to the river’s cold, and when it touched Lenka, she couldn’t stop herself from sticking her tongue out in a slovenly manner, breathing heavily. She expectantly shook her butt, rubbing herself against the tip.

Finally, Caim grabbed her hips and thrust his “sword” deep into the sheath before him.

“Aaaaaaaaaah!”

The she-dog’s loud moans resonated throughout the forest, making the birds who had been resting on nearby tree branches fly away at once.

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“Ah, welcome back, Caim, Lenka,” Millicia greeted them.

“Thanks.”

“We have returned, Princess.”

Caim and Lenka replied, having returned from the forest after finishing their session of outdoor se—or rather, gathering food.

At the camp, Millicia had made a fire and was currently preparing dinner. A wonderful aroma was wafting from the pot.

"What took you so long?" she asked.

"We went pretty far," Caim answered.

"But thanks to that, we found plenty of plants and fruits. Also, we not only located drinking water but even caught some fish as well," Lenka cheerfully followed up with a refreshed expression. Just from looking at her, nobody would ever think she had been barking like a she-dog just a few minutes ago.

"Ah, so this is why your hair is wet," Millicia realized.

"I shall guide you there tomorrow so that we can all bathe together," Lenka suggested.

"That would be wonderful," Millicia beamed, putting her hands together. "I do not wish to smell, so I have been wanting to clean myself for a while."

Caim took everything they'd foraged out of his magic bag and set it down next to Millicia. "Here's the stuff we've gathered. I also got ourselves some big game."

"Eeek!" Millicia screamed as she caught sight of the giant snake's corpse. "Is...is this a snake...?"

"Yeah. It attacked us, so I killed it," Caim answered.

"I-I see... Well, there are giant wolves, so it makes sense that there would be giant snakes too..." Millicia had turned completely pale—apparently, she didn't like snakes.

"You don't have to cook it if you don't want to, you know. I can just grill and eat it myself," Caim suggested.

"N-No, I am fine... We are not in a situation where I can afford to be picky." Millicia fearfully accepted the thick slices of snake meat. "For tonight, we have the wild boar Lykos has hunted, so we shall eat the snake another day. It should be fine... Yes, I will make sure to cook it deliciously!"

"You've really matured..." Caim muttered. Millicia, the sheltered imperial princess, was getting used to the survivalist lifestyle. He was truly impressed by her growth during their journey.

"Ah, you have found some herbs. I shall use them in the soup. The mountain grapes will be for dessert."

“By the way, where are Tea and Rozbeth? And hasn’t Lykos returned to camp yet?” Caim asked.

“Tea and Rozbeth are keeping watch. As for Lykos, she went back into the forest to hunt again,” Millicia explained, looking diagonally upward.

Caim followed her gaze and spotted Tea on top of a nearby tree. She was surveilling the surroundings from above, but when she noticed Caim’s presence, she jumped down to the ground.

“Welcome back, Master Caim.”

“Yeah, we’ve just returned. Thanks for keeping watch.”

“I want to be shown some appreciation too,” a voice suddenly said.

“Huh?” Before Caim knew it, Rozbeth had appeared behind him—as expected of a former assassin, he hadn’t noticed her presence until she spoke.

“We made the right choice to stray from the main road. No pursuers, travelers, or even peddlers came near us,” Rozbeth said.

“Good. And thanks to Millicia’s barrier, we’re safe from skeletons too, so we should be fine.” They couldn’t lower their guard just yet, but they didn’t need to stay overly alert either.

When Caim sat down next to the fire, Millicia took out enough wooden bowls for everyone and started to serve the soup before realizing something. “Ah, but Lykos still has not returned...”

And speaking of the devil—as though she had timed her return with dinner, Lykos came back from the forest right at that instant. She held two birds in her hands and another one in her mouth. “Mmmmh!”

“You caught a lot of meat. Thank you for your hard work.”

“I’ll pluck the feathers and prepare them later. I’ll turn them into jerky so they last longer.”

Millicia and Tea received the birds from Lykos, delighted.

Lenka, on the other hand, was depressed. “Ugh... How can she catch game so easily...? Why did I even bother making traps...?” She had been pretty confident in her hunting skills, but Lykos had completely outshone her.

Caim patted her shoulder in comfort. There was no way Lenka

could match Lykos, a feral child raised by wolves. Hunting in the forest was like second nature to her.

"Mmmh!" Lykos held out her hands expectantly.

"Yes, you are right. We should eat." Millicia smiled and handed Lykos a wooden bowl with soup inside.

"Well then, let's dig in. Seems pretty good... Is this the wild boar Lykos caught?" Caim asked about the pieces of meat inside the soup.

"We still had plenty of condiments, so I can guarantee the taste. And yes, it is. Thanks to that, the soup turned out more luxurious than I had expected," Millicia answered.

"I wondered what we'd be eating while living in the woods, but we're getting a surprisingly great dinner." Caim ate a spoonful. "Whoa, this really *is* good," he muttered. Its taste lived up to its appearance. The gaminess of the boar meat really punched up the flavor, and Caim couldn't help but be impressed that Millicia had managed to make something so good with the limited ingredients they had.

"Oh... You're a great cook. I didn't expect that," Rozbeth praised Millicia's soup while Lykos silently chewed on the meat.

"This is delicious..." Lenka commented with a conflicted expression. She was still dejected from Lykos stealing her thunder—she'd gone out to hunt so confidently, only to return without having achieved much.

"We still have the mountain grapes you gathered for dessert, Lenka."

"And we caught the snake and fish. Cheer up."

Millicia and Caim comforted her.

Despite being targeted by assassins and forced to survive in the wilderness, Caim and his companions ended up enjoying a surprisingly sumptuous dinner.

Chapter 2: The Bone-Eating General

"Just where *is* she?!"

A little ways away from the main road stood a strange building made of white marble. It was on the small side, with only two floors, but it was gorgeous enough to pass for the residence of a noble. However, if the travelers and peddlers who usually walked down the nearby main road ever saw the building, they would grow very suspicious—after all, there shouldn't be any sort of residence there at all. It appeared overnight.

"How irritating... Surely something born from my magnificent skills cannot be so useless! Bring Princess Millicia to me already!" shouted an old man, angrily stomping on the floor as he sat on a white chair inside the building. Each time he raised his voice, saliva splattered onto the floor.

The old man wasn't talking to a person, but a skeleton without skin and flesh. It was currently fanning the Bone-Eating General with a big fan, and it presented him with a plate full of fruit, like a servant might behave with a king.

The skeleton made clattering noises with its mouth.

"What? Princess Millicia created a barrier with her Sacred Arts so you can't get near her? I didn't ask for excuses! You should be ashamed, you incompetents!" The Bone-Eating General understood what the skeleton was saying and threw a fruit at it. It bounced off the creature's skull and smashed into the floor, staining it. "I ordered you to bring me Princess Millicia. You good-for-nothing puppets have no right to disobey me! Just do as I commanded you!"

The skeleton drooped its shoulders in distress at its master's unreasonable words. Even though it didn't have a face to show an expression, anyone looking at it would immediately be able to tell

that it was depressed. The Bone-Eating General, however, completely ignored the skeleton, grabbing another fruit and biting into it.

"Princess Millicia is exceptionally beautiful. I am so eager to devour the flesh of a girl with a bright future and lick her bones clean..." The Bone-Eating General's wrinkled face twisted disgustingly, brimming with lust. Apparently, even a withered old man over two hundred years old could get aroused. "I decided that I had to be the one to kill her the instant the mediator showed us her portrait! I'm going to make her my skeleton servant and dote on her forever!" He stuck out his tongue and licked the fruit juice from his lips.

The old man had some very wicked proclivities. When he saw a beautiful woman, he wanted to turn her into a skeleton. He would skin her alive, devour her flesh, lick her bones, then finally use his magic to enslave her for eternity—such was the extremely repulsive fetish of the Bone-Eating General. All the skeletons that were currently waiting upon him were female victims of his little hobby. They had once been pretty young girls and women enjoying their lives until the old assassin had captured them and turned them into skeletons.

The skeleton that had been struck by a fruit trembled with grief. Even though they had been reduced to such a pitiful state, they all remembered their lives as people, and this one had once been a fair maiden of eighteen. She'd had a wonderful family and a fiancé she'd loved, but on the day of their wedding, the Bone-Eating General had kidnapped her and turned her into this.

"What? Do you have any complaints?" the old man threatened.

The skeleton stayed quiet. No matter how much it hated him, it couldn't disobey because of the necromantic spell binding it. Without even being able to cry from its empty eye sockets, it was nothing but a puppet for its master to control as he wished.

"Oh, wait—I know! If we can't catch her, then we just need to make her come to us!" Ignoring the skeleton filled with grief, the Bone-Eating General was struck with an idea. The skeleton looked at him, certain that whatever his master was planning, it wasn't going

to be good. “What a wonderful idea!” he cackled evilly. “Oh, my lovely Princess Millicia! Even the wait until I make you mine is delightful! It reminds me of my younger days!”

The skeleton couldn’t help but pity Millicia for being targeted by its master, and it prayed that the princess would be able to escape safely.

“G-Get off! Stop!”

“Hmm?” A young man in traveling clothes was dragged into the Bone-Eating General’s room by a skeleton knight. “Is that an intruder?”

“Wh-Who the hell are you?! What are you planning to do to me?!” the man cried, frightened. He was a traveler who had been walking on the main road when he’d noticed the white building and managed to get close to it before being captured.

“You came at the right time for a precelebratory dinner!” The Bone-Eating General giggled cheerfully, his wrinkled face twisting into a smile. “Devour the little rat that has wandered in!”

The skeleton knight forcefully pinned the traveler against the white floor, making him groan in pain. Then the man let out a shriek when he realized that what he had thought was marble was, in fact, bone. Indeed, the Bone-Eating General’s residence was entirely made of white bones.

“Devour him!” the old man ordered once again, cackling madly.

The skeletons did as commanded and greedily ate the flesh of the traveler as he cried in agony. Naturally, skeletons did not possess an esophagus or stomach, so the meat and entrails they tore off simply fell to the floor, forming a puddle of blood.

It took less than ten minutes for them to strip the poor man to the bone and add him to the Bone-Eating General’s army.

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Caim and his companions continued to head east, maintaining their survivalist lifestyle without approaching any towns. Their journey was going well. They still hadn’t met a single assassin, and while they had been attacked by monsters when foraging for food,

Caim had easily dealt with them. The only thing that could be called an issue was that Lenka was depressed by how much better Lykos was at hunting.

"This is going a little *too* well," Caim commented.

They had stopped the carriage and were currently taking a short rest, drinking tea made from herbs they'd gathered out of wooden cups. A short distance away, the horse was drinking water and eating grass.

"Maybe nothing will happen and we'll safely reach Lance?" Caim said, sipping at his herbal tea.

"My, how unusual for you to let your guard down like that. Are you underestimating assassins?" Rozbeth teased him. "They strike when you least expect them to. In fact, perhaps one is currently targeting even as we speak."

"Don't say something like that. What if you jinx us?" Caim complained, but just in case, he surveyed their surroundings. There was nowhere for anyone to hide and no sign of imminent threats.

"Isn't it good that everything is going so smoothly?" Tea returned from giving water to the horse and sat next to Caim. "We're already halfway there and should arrive at our destination in a week. The town was called Berwick, right?"

"Yes," Millicia replied, sitting on Caim's other side. "I visited there once in the past. Berwick is an eastern port city and one of the empire's most prominent trade harbors."

"So that means it's connected to the sea..." Caim commented. While he had seen the Flumen River en route to the empire, he had never seen the ocean and wondered if it truly was that much bigger.

"The sea is vast, Sir Caim—far more than you imagine."

"You sound like a country bumpkin. Seems like there's a lot of things you don't know."

Lenka and Rozbeth spoke, half smiling.

"I'm certain you'll be deeply moved when you see it."

"Yeah, I was really surprised the first time I saw it. Hey, did you know that seawater is salty?"

"I know that! Don't take me for a complete fool!" Caim retorted, annoyed, then downed the rest of his cup of herbal tea in one go.

“All right, let’s get moving. I’m gonna see how great the sea truly is.”

“Yes.” Millicia stood up and stepped toward the carriage, but Caim immediately grabbed her wrist and pulled her toward him, making her yelp in surprise.

“Stay behind me!” Caim ordered, protecting her, then glared in the direction of the main road as he sensed something ominous. Before long, a man emerged from behind the hill in that direction. “Who is that?”

The man was wearing everyday clothing and wasn’t carrying anything. He didn’t seem like a traveler or a peddler—more like a villager or townsman on a stroll.

“I’m not sure if he’s an enemy... I don’t feel any hostility from him,” Rozbeth said, perplexed, as she placed her hands on the hilts of her knives.

There was nothing strange about the man—he looked perfectly ordinary. If they had seen him in a town, they wouldn’t have paid him any mind. But this wasn’t a town—this was the outside world, where monsters and bandits lurked. Wandering around unarmed was downright suicidal.

“The blonde woman...”

“What?”

“We need to bring the blonde woman!”

As the man got nearer, Caim’s sharp ears managed to catch the words “blonde woman.”

“I found her! The blonde woman is there!” the man shouted, waving his hand behind him. The next instant, a group of about ten men dressed like ordinary townspeople appeared. “She’s right there! Let’s capture her!”

“Yeeeeeaaaaah!” the other men yelled in unison.

“What?!” Caim exclaimed as the men rushed toward him and his companions. They were unarmed, and Caim didn’t understand what was happening, but he still prepared himself to fight.

“Capture her!”

“Yeeeeeaaaaah!”

“Who the hell are they?” Caim blurted out, baffled. “If they’re searching for a blonde woman, I guess their target must be Millicia.”

Caim punched a man in the face, knocking him away. A few broken teeth flew out of his mouth. They were regular people, so Caim didn't even need to use Mana Compression.

"I have no idea what is happening, but these people are ordinary citizens! So please, harm them as little as possible!" Millicia cried. She truly was a kind princess who even cared about people who were attacking her.

"You're pretty generous even though they're our enemies... Oh well, they're small fry, so this should be pretty simple."

"These people are way too weak."

"Five points. They're trash—not even worth killing."

Caim punched, Tea clawed with her nails, and Rozbeth struck with the pommel of her knives.

"Why are you attacking my lady?!" Lenka asked, striking a man with her sword still inside its scabbard.

"We don't have a choice! Just let us capture her already!"

"My daughter's life is on the line!"

The men yelled in response.

"What?!"

Despite the clear difference in strength, they still continued to attack without flinching. Their eyes weren't filled with hostility or malice—they were filled with despair at being cornered.

"Could it be...? Were your families taken hostage?!" Millicia shouted from behind her companions, who were protecting her. That was what she'd deduced from their words.

"Aaaaaaah!" However, nobody answered her question. Instead, a young boy suddenly leaped out from behind a large man and charged at Millicia with a sharpened tree branch.

Caim clicked his tongue and prepared to repel the boy's attack, but before he could do so Lykos kicked the boy in the face, blowing him away.

"Well done, Lykos!"

"Mmmh!" The wolf girl followed by stepping on the boy to prevent him from moving.

"We're not making any progress... Step back, everyone." No matter how much they were hurt, the men resolutely stood back up

and their number was becoming a hassle, so Caim decided to use one of his spells. “Purple Poison Magic—Poison Hornets!” He threw a lump of mana which exploded midair, scattering projectiles of poisonous mana that struck the men and caused them to drop to the ground, groaning.

“Don’t worry. It’s only a paralyzing toxin,” Caim said. The poison he’d used only immobilized its victim, nothing more—it was kind to people and nature. “The old me might have killed you by accident, though, so I guess you’re lucky.”

Caim had greatly improved his mana control thanks to producing so much dragon-slaying toxin for the wyverns.

“E-Everyone...” muttered the boy trampled by Lykos, dumbfounded.

Caim stood over him and stomped his foot right next to the boy’s face, threatening him. “So... Care to explain what’s going on now?”

“Uh...” the boy whined, trembling in fear.

It goes without saying that it didn’t take long for the scared, crying boy to tell Caim everything.

“A weird old man took over the town,” explained the boy a few minutes later, now bound in ropes. “I live in a small town called Orwell. A few days ago, a weird old man with bone monsters came and captured all the women, my mother and sister included. He’s keeping them hostage and told us to bring him some blonde woman if we wanted them back.”

“Bone monsters... So, skeletons,” Caim whispered.

Millicia gasped and looked at Caim and Rozbeth, who both nodded at her.

“There’s no doubt about it. That must be the Bone-Eating General,” Rozbeth declared.

The Bone-Eating General was the assassin who had attacked them when they’d left Extobell. And now, he had taken over an entire town using his skeletons.

“The militia and some adventurers tried to fight back, but they were all killed and turned into bone monsters themselves... The old man said he would do the same to my mother and everyone else if we didn’t bring him the blonde woman.” The boy’s face twisted in

frustration. “The local governor was killed too, and we were told the hostages would die if anyone reported to the lord... So with no other choice, we all searched around the main road hoping to find a blonde woman...”

“And then you found and assaulted us,” Caim concluded.

“...Yeah.” The boy hung his head, his tears falling to the ground. “I know it’s wrong to listen to that old man, but I didn’t know what else to do to get my mom and sister back!”

“That is all right. I do not blame you.” Millicia knelt and placed a hand on the boy’s shoulder. “If anything, I should be the one apologizing. This is all my fault. I never expected him to do something like that...” Her face twisted with sorrow.

They understood from the boy’s explanation that after failing to capture Millicia, the Bone-Eating General had instead decided to force an unrelated town’s men to do the work for him by taking all the women hostage.

“What a vile and foul assassin!”

“This is despicable...”

Lenka clenched her fist in rage, and Tea grimaced in disgust. Rozbeth stayed silent, but the way she slightly frowned showed she was displeased too.

“So... What do we do now?” Caim asked Millicia, who was still comforting the boy. “We could just ignore them and continue on our way.”

While Orwell had been taken over because of Millicia, she really shouldn’t feel responsible for it. The fault was with the Bone-Eating General for using such underhanded means to capture her. She had no obligation to accept his invitation.

“...No, we must go.” However, Millicia’s answer was exactly what Caim had expected. “Even if I am not directly responsible, it *is* my fault that a criminal has assaulted their town. I cannot simply ignore them!”

“I knew you’d say that,” Caim said. She had refused to abandon the domain under attack by wyverns, so of course she wouldn’t be able to ignore a town taken over by an assassin when she was the underlying cause. “It does feel like we’re just doing what he wants,

though.” Caim didn’t know how far the Bone-Eating General had planned things when he had taken Orwell hostage, but if he had anticipated that Millicia wouldn’t be able to abandon them, then he was quite a schemer. “It’s annoying that we have to go there even though we know full well it’s a trap...” Caim sighed and shook his head.

“It’s hard being a princess’s bodyguard. I feel you.” Rozbeth gave him a sympathetic pat on the back.

Caim wasn’t the only one thinking it was a bad idea to go along with the Bone-Eating General’s plan, but neither he nor his companions blamed Millicia. After all, they all shared her disgust for the assassin’s barbaric actions.

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Orwell was a small town, barely more than a village, with less than two hundred inhabitants. They cultivated silkworms and produced textiles from the silk before exporting it to other towns. It also had a small Adventurers’ Guild managed by a governor who served the local lord.

Caim and his companions arrived at the outskirts of Orwell and concealed themselves in the woods nearby while they observed the town’s entrance.

“For a single assassin to take over a whole town, even a small one, so easily...” Caim muttered, staying alert. From what the boy had said, the town’s combatants—the adventurers and the militia—had numbered around fifty, but they had been defeated quickly by the skeletons. “Doing that by himself is impressive... Though I guess I could too if I wanted.”

“The Bone-Eating General has an army of skeletons, so it’s a simple matter for him,” Rozbeth replied. She, Millicia, and Lenka were also hiding in the woods. Lykos, however, had been left behind with the men.

“Just how many of them are there?” Lenka asked with a nervous scowl. Humanoid and animal skeletons were guarding the town’s entrance.

Tea sniffed the air and grimaced. “I can’t determine how many there are, but considering how much it smells of death and we can already see more than twenty, there must be a lot of them.”

“Their number doesn’t matter—they’re just small fry,” Caim scoffed as he manipulated the mana inside his body. He wasn’t being arrogant—the skeletons they could see were weak, and even if there were hundreds of them, Caim was certain he could easily deal with them all.

“Don’t lower your guard. There will likely be modified skeletons too,” Rozbeth warned. “The Bone-Eating General combines various bones to make special skeletons. I might be better at assassinations, but even I would have a difficult time fighting him head-on.”

“Huh... Well, at least this won’t be boring,” Caim commented.

“We must not forget about the hostages. He could use the women as shields,” Millicia whispered, frowning nervously. “We know the enemy is a villain without morals. He would not hesitate to use the hostages against us.” For Millicia, the most important thing wasn’t to defeat the assassin targeting her, but to rescue the captured women. If they tried to fight without figuring out a way to avoid putting the hostages at risk, that would be putting the cart before the horse.

“What do we do then? Should we charge in from the front?” Rozbeth asked, caressing the knives attached to her belt. Like Caim, Rozbeth wouldn’t have any problem dealing with the skeletons, but she didn’t have the means to rescue the hostages. “You’re a priestess, so can’t you purify the whole town?”

“...No, I cannot. My mana is insufficient.” Millicia bit her lip in vexation. While she was particularly effective against the undead, there was a limit to how much she could do. “I would need a special ritual item or a sacred relic to cover the entire town. Perhaps an archpriest could do it, but it is above my abilities.”

“I see... Guess there’s nothing we can do about it, then. In that case, I suppose we really will have to head straight in?” Rozbeth unsheathed her knives and twirled them in her hands, quiet hostility showing through her cold expression. “If we do, I’ll go first. As the newcomer, I need to show my capabilities.”

"I appreciate the idea, but I have a plan." Millicia stayed silent for a moment before finally saying her suggestion. "I shall act as a decoy while you all sneak into the town and rescue the hostages."

"Hold on, that's..." Caim started to protest, but he stopped when confronted with Millicia's gaze. She didn't speak, but looking into her eyes was enough to understand the weight of her resolve. She was truly willing to use herself as bait to save the captured women. "Fine... But I won't let you go alone. I'm coming with you." Faced with her firm determination, Caim had no choice but to give in.

Their strategy meeting over and a decision made, all that was left was to enact the plan.

"Let's go!"

"Yes!"

Caim and Millicia ran toward the entrance to Orwell. Noticing them, the skeletons turned their animosity toward them and attacked.

"Get lost!" Caim punched the skeleton in front of him with his fist wrapped in condensed mana, smashing its skull into pieces.

Another one drew closer.

"I shall purify it!" Millicia shouted as she activated her Sacred Arts. She threw a ball of light at it, and the skeleton reverted to ordinary bones, falling to the ground.

"Don't use too much mana! It's gonna be a long fight!" Caim warned her.

"Understood!"

"And stay close to me!"

"No matter what happens, I will never leave your side!"

Caim kicked another skeleton as they passed through the town's gate. Millicia closely followed behind him, true to her word.

While the two of them were breaking in through the front gate, Tea, Lenka, and Rozbeth were sneaking in on the opposite side of the town. They were hoping that since Millicia was the Bone-Eating General's target, he would focus on her. While Caim and Millicia held his attention, the other three would stealthily infiltrate the town and rescue the women.

It helps that Millicia's a priestess too. She's a necromancer's

natural enemy, after all, so of course he's gonna focus on his most direct threat, Caim thought as skeletons closed in on them, proving his prediction correct. They kept coming by the dozens, and there were already more than thirty skeletons surrounding them. It was quite the hellish sight—bones as far as the eye could see.

"Kirin!" Caim launched a spiraling mana shock wave, destroying several skeletons in front of him. However, the gap was quickly filled by new ones. "Jeez, we're not gonna make any progress like this. We're wasting our time."

"Then I should—"

"No, wait," Caim interrupted Millicia before she could use a wide-scale Sacred Art spell. Despite not being able to cover the entire town, she could purify all the skeletons in view—but Caim didn't let her do that. "I think the objective is to exhaust you here, so don't use your mana carelessly!" The Bone-Eating General was likely planning to flood them with small fry in order to force Millicia to use her Sacred Arts and deplete her mana, so using a large spell would just be playing right into his hands. "We're gonna jump. Hold on tight!"

Caim grabbed Millicia, earning a yelp from her, and leaped forward, stepping on a skeleton's skull in the process. Then he landed on the roof of a nearby building. The instant he did, however, they were attacked by skeleton birds. Because Caim was carrying Millicia in his arms, he couldn't use his hands—but it wasn't a problem.

"Hebi." Caim produced a whip made of compressed mana from his back and struck the birds. While Hebi was a counter technique usually paired with Genbu, it could also be used on its own like he just had. "From what Rozbeth told us, the Bone-Eating General is very haughty and loves to show off, so I think he must be at the center of the town. I'm gonna rush directly there, so hold on tight!"

"Yes!" Millicia tightly clung to his neck.

Despite carrying someone, Caim effortlessly leaped from rooftop to rooftop—sometimes using mana footholds in midair—as though unburdened by gravity, until finally arriving at their destination.

The plaza at the center of the town was filled with hundreds of

skeletons crowded together. It was like a glimpse into the depths of hell.

"How repulsive... And this was all done by a single man?!" Millicia cried in outrage, still in Caim's arms. "Just how many people did he sacrifice to create so many skeletons?!" It was very rare for Millicia, who was usually gentle and refined, to become so angry. "You shall pay for this, Bone-Eating General!"

"Don't worry, I'll be sure to kill him. But first... Where is he?" There were so many skeletons in the plaza that Caim couldn't find the assassin. At first glance, it seemed that neither the old man nor the hostages were present. "I'd love nothing more than to defeat him and be done with this already, but going down there would be suicide..." It wouldn't be a problem for Caim, but with so many skeletons, he wouldn't be able to protect Millicia. "Well, there's no living people around, so I guess I can go all out!"

"What are you planning to do?"

"Just watch." Caim leaped and stood on a mana foothold in midair. He switched to carrying Millicia with a single arm, then manipulated his poisonous mana and sprayed a gas down toward the plaza. "Having no hostages present makes things easier. Purple Poison Magic—Poison Flare!"

Using toxic gas on already dead skeletons was useless, but that wasn't the point of his attack—Caim snapped his fingers to produce a spark that ignited the combustible gas. The next instant, a large explosion occurred, engulfing the entire plaza in bright red flames.

Millicia screamed and clung tightly to Caim's neck.

"Whoa... I didn't expect the explosion to be so big. I didn't think I made it that powerful, though..."

"Um... Caim? Do you not think you went too far?" Millicia asked.

"Ah, well... Should be fine, no? Sure, it was stronger than planned, but it only blew up the plaza...I think."

Unfortunately for Caim, he was wrong. Several buildings around the plaza had been caught in the explosion and had collapsed. Still, he convinced himself that it was a small price to pay to save the town.

"Anyway, where is the old geezer?" Caim surveyed the plaza, now

free of skeletons. There were scattered bone fragments and remnants of flames flickering here and there, but no signs of life. Just where could the Bone-Eating General be?

"Curse you!" a deep, angry voice shouted suddenly.

"Huh?"

"How dare you, brat?!" The eerie voice was filled with inhuman spite and malice.

"It feels as though it's coming from the bowels of the earth..." Caim commented—and he was right. A large crevice had opened in the plaza's ground and something crawled out of it along with a cloud of dust.

"No way...!"

"Whoa, it's huge."

Millicia's expression was full of dread, while Caim's had a hint of tension.

"How dare you destroy my servants, you damned youngsters!" screamed the voice.

A skeleton far bigger than a wyvern—at least twenty meters tall—had emerged from the ground.

"It looks like one of those giants from legends... Is that one of the modified skeletons Rozbeth mentioned?"

"Don't think I'll let you live after angering me like this! I'm going to suck the marrow straight from your bones!" The wrathful voice of an old man—the Bone-Eating General—rang out from within the giant skeleton. He was controlling it from the inside, wearing it like armor.

Just how had he created the giant skeleton? Had he combined countless human bones together, or had he found the bones of a titan—a race from the age of myth—and used his necromancy on them?

"Diiiieeeee!" The Bone-Eating General shouted, making the gigantic, heavy skeleton swing its fist at Caim and Millicia.

With a frown, Caim kicked the mana foothold and leaped into the sky, still carrying Millicia, to avoid the incoming strike.

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While Caim and Millicia were facing the Bone-Eating General, Tea, Lenka, and Rozbeth were infiltrating the town by climbing its defensive wall.

"Grrraow. This place seems fine." Tea had gone in first and now called her comrades to rejoin her.

"No enemy in sight. The plan is working."

"I'm worried about my lady, however..."

Rozbeth and Lenka both spoke as they climbed over the wall. The former was as cool as a cucumber, but the latter was very anxious about being absent from her master's side while she was in danger.

"It's going to be all right. Master Caim is protecting her." Tea patted Lenka's shoulder to comfort her. "She's safer with Master Caim than she would be with us—and he said he would carry her and run away if needed."

"...Yeah, I should trust Sir Caim." Lenka nodded and slapped her cheeks to motivate herself before turning toward the town. "Let's go save the hostages!"

They knew where to go. The men had explained with pained expressions where the women—their wives, lovers, daughters, or sisters—were confined.

"My lady is far too kind..." Lenka said. "If the hostages are used against her, she won't be able to do anything..."

That was why they needed to rescue the hostages first, no matter what. Their opponent, the Bone-Eating General, was a veteran assassin who had been doing his job for more than a century. He would likely stop at nothing to kill his target—or failing that, to survive.

"Grrraow. I can smell several people that way." Tea took the lead as they ran through the deserted town toward their destination—the guardhouse.

"The perfect place to imprison people."

"And of course, there are lookouts..."

Rozbeth and Lenka scowled at the guardhouse from behind a building. Several skeletons stood guard, and they weren't normal ones. One had six arms, another had a lizard's skull and a humanoid body, and the last one had long legs that made it more than three

meters tall. No living beings had skeletal structures like that.

"They're modified skeletons," Rozbeth said. "They're far stronger than the normal ones."

"There are three of them, so one for each of us." Tea took a three-section staff out from under the skirt of her maid uniform. "Master Caim will be free to act as he wishes once we have rescued the hostages. Let's finish this quickly."

"Yeah!" Lenka placed her hand on the hilt of her sword, determination clear in her eyes. "I won't fail like I did the other day. This time I'll put up a fight befitting of a kni—"

"Found. You."

A chill ran down the trio's spines as they heard an inhuman voice from above them. They hurriedly looked up only to find a fourth skeleton—one with three skulls that clung to the wall like a lizard.

"Found. You! Found. You!"

"Right. There!"

"Living. People... Women!"

"This is bad...!" Lenka said.

"I'm taking care of it!" Rozbeth quickly threw a knife at the skeleton, causing it to drop to the ground with a triple cry, and then Tea immediately smashed its skulls with her three-section staff.

"Enemy. Detected!"

"Must. Capture!"

The other modified skeletons had heard the three-headed one scream and were now aware of the girls' presence.

"They're coming our way!" Tea warned.

"Let's do this! Be careful, everyone!" Lenka said.

They all readied their weapons—Tea her three-section staff, Lenka her sword, and Rozbeth her knives—before leaping out from their hiding spot.

Thus began their fight against these twisted skeletons born from dark magic.



"Grrraw!"

"Cut! Slash!" The modified skeleton with six arms charged at Tea, a saber in each hand. "Slice you. Into pieces! I love. Woman flesh!"

"So skeletons *can* talk..." Tea said, baffled, as she dodged the incoming swords. Magic wasn't her thing, so there was no way she could have known this, but a skilled enough necromancer could indeed create undead with personalities. There were multiple possibilities—giving it the soul of a dead person, copying the personality of the spellcaster, or even creating a whole new one from scratch—and the fact that these skeletons could speak proved how impressive their creator's skills were.

"Let me! Cut you!" It swung its six blades in all directions, forming a barrier of sharp edges. If Tea carelessly drew too close, she would be torn to shreds.

"Sorry, but I'm going to smash you!" Tea dropped down on all fours, then swung her three-section staff parallel to the ground with her right hand. The crescent strike hit the skeleton's shin, spreading large cracks along its tibia.

"Hurts!"

"So you can even feel pain, huh? That's pretty creepy! You look and sound revolting too!"

"Kill! You! Cut! You! Revenge. For leg!" it yelled madly, charging at Tea with its six sabers.

However, Tea backstepped before the blades could reach her. While the modified skeleton was faster than the normal ones, she was still far more nimble. Once again, she lowered herself to the ground and struck the skeleton's shin. Its left tibia shattered with a resounding *crack*.

"Grrraaaw! I got your left leg!"

"Hurts!"

"You're wide open. Despite your eerie appearance, you're still just small fry."

"It hurts! Cheater! Let me. Get close. To cut you!"

"Says the one with six arms and swords. If you had six legs too, you could have easily kept fighting, but now it's all over for you."

With no left leg, the skeleton could barely move. It would be

unable to hurt Tea, and that meant she'd already won.

"Take. This!" The modified skeleton fell to its knees and walked forward while swinging its six blades, slowly approaching Tea. "Now. Can't smash. Other shin! Ha ha ha! I win!"

"You think *that's* the key to victory? You truly are brainless," Tea said in exasperation as she looked down at the skeleton slowly making its way toward her on its knees. However, it was true that she couldn't hit its shin anymore—and because of its swords, she couldn't get near to strike it with her three-section staff. "In that case, I'll use this!"

Tea glanced to the side, where an old stone statue stood. It was clearly a statue of a person, but due to wear from the rain and all the moss growing on it, it was impossible to figure out who it was. Not that Tea cared, of course. She struck the pedestal with her weapon, making large cracks in it.

"What. Are you. Doing?! Don't. Ignore me!"

"Don't worry, I didn't forget about you. I'll definitely kill you this time." Tea jumped and delivered a flying kick to the pedestal. It broke with a loud *crack*, and the three-meter-tall stone statue collapsed. "Take that!"

"Gaaaah?!"

The stone statue fell directly onto the six-armed skeleton. It tried to defend itself by swinging its swords around frantically, but it was a pointless effort. The statue crushed it. A crunching sound echoed and bones scattered everywhere, one of them even rolling to Tea's feet.

While Tea was defeating the six-armed skeleton, Lenka was fighting the one with long legs and arms.

"Hiiiyaaaa!" The skeleton used its arms like whips to attack Lenka. Its main body and skull were normal human bones, but its arms and legs were around two meters long and looked like distorted wireworks. "I'm going to. Kill youuu! Obliterate youuu!"

"Ugh... What an annoying way to fight." Lenka frowned in irritation as she lowered herself to avoid the long arms. Because of the length of the skeleton's limbs, she couldn't get close to it without being struck.

“Ha ha ha ha! Just let me. Kill you alreadyyy!”

“Your voice is very grating... Also, who’d just let themselves get killed because somebody asked?!” Lenka dodged a downward swing and used the opportunity to slash at the monster with her sword, hoping to sever an arm. However, her blade was repelled. “It’s hard...!”

“Useleeess!” The skeleton mocked her with a sneer and swung its other arm at Lenka, who quickly backstepped to avoid the blow. “My arms. And legs. Are coated with mithriiil! You won’t be able. To cut them. With a dull blade like thaaat!” With a jarring cackle, it continued to swing its arms at Lenka, throwing in the occasional kick.

“Mithril, you say...? No wonder it’s so tough!”

Observing more carefully, Lenka noticed that, indeed, the skeleton’s limbs had a silvery-blue sheen, proving they were plated with mithril. It looked thin, but mithril was very resistant to both physical and magical attacks, so she wouldn’t be able to break it with her ordinary sword.

“There’s no coating on the rest of its body, so that’s where I should aim, but...” But it was too far away. Because of its long arms, Lenka couldn’t get closer than two meters. Even if she did manage to get close to it, the skeleton’s trunk and skull were too high to reach because of its long legs. “I could reach them if I jumped, but I would be defenseless in the air... I guess there’s only one thing to do.”

Lenka readied her sword and took a deep breath. She sharpened her mind, focusing on her sword from its hilt to the tip of the blade.

“Have you given uuup? Fine. Then I’ll kill youuu!” The skeleton laughed cheerfully as it raised its right arm and swung it down like a guillotine.

“Dragonfly Cutter!”

But before it could reach her, Lenka swung her sword. There were more than two meters between her and the skeleton, so it should have been a meaningless attack. And yet...

“Huh...?” The skeleton’s body slanted and its arm missed its aim, striking the roof of a nearby house instead. “How...?”

The modified skeleton's body had been bisected diagonally from its left shoulder to its right hip. Its spine had been cleanly severed, and its upper body slid to the ground, its lower half following an instant later with a *thump*.

"It seems my imitation of Sir Caim was quite successful." Lenka nodded to herself, satisfied. Her brow was sweating profusely from the massive loss of mana.

Lenka had copied Caim's Kirin—a technique launching condensed mana at the enemy.

During their journey, Lenka had been troubled by her weakness on several occasions. Beginning with the time when she and Millicia had been captured by bandits, she'd failed as a knight far too many times. Determined not to let it stay that way, she had asked Caim to train together during their free time. Caim had told her that it wouldn't help her much to train with someone like him who fought bare-handed, but in the end, he granted her wish and practiced with her.

Finally, after a long training period filled with trial and error, Lenka had created the technique she had just used—the Dragonfly Cutter. She had come up with it while trying to imitate Caim's Mana Compression. However, while she had managed to launch a flying slash of condensed mana, it was far weaker and had less range than Caim's Kirin. It was an incomplete technique that used a lot of mana, but it had been sufficient to defeat the skeleton before her.

Incidentally, the origin of the name Dragonfly Cutter was pretty straightforward—the first time Lenka had used the technique, she had cut down a flying dragonfly.

"That's...impossiiible..." Even bisected, the skeleton still moved, flapping its long arms like a dying insect.

"It was a close match, but I won. Just accept it," Lenka said coldly.

"N-Nooo! Stooop! Don't kill meee!" The skeleton repeatedly struck the ground in fear. "Waiiit! Let's talk fiiir—"

"No." Lenka stomped on the skeleton's skull.

Now, nobody would hear its jarring manner of speaking ever again.

As Tea and Lenka faced their own enemies, Rozbeth was fleeing from the modified skeleton she was fighting.

"STOP RUNNING AWAY, HUMAN!" roared the skeleton with a humanoid body and the cranium of a crocodile, destroying the building that stood before it. Despite being human-sized, its strength was impressive.

"How stubborn... I don't like being chased like this," Rozbeth complained with a fed up sigh.

"JUST LET ME SMASH YOU ALREADY!"

"You're very...annoying!" Rozbeth dodged the powerful arm of the skeleton, then aimed at its neck with her knife. However, instead of severing it as usual, her weapon only managed to leave a scratch on the spine. "Oh?"

"IT'S USELESS! DIE!" The crocodile-headed skeleton counterattacked with a punch.

Rozbeth hurriedly avoided it by ducking, then tried to stab its trunk this time. However, once again it was too hard and her knife was repelled. "You're tough... I suppose there's more to you than meets the eye."

Rozbeth killed her targets by severing their heads, but it wasn't an easy thing to do. Cutting all the way through the neck was very difficult without using a tool like a guillotine. Some countries in the east and west used katanas or axes for executions, but even those often required multiple blows. It spoke to Rozbeth's incredible skill that she was able to do it with only a knife.

"If *I* can't cut them, your bones must be pretty special."

"AAAH!" The skeleton stomped powerfully on the ground and swung its left arm. Naturally, Rozbeth dodged the attack, so the wall behind her was smashed to pieces instead.

"And your strength... Could it be that your bone density is very high?" Rozbeth casually muttered to herself.

She was right. Thanks to the necromantic spell used on it, the crocodile-headed skeleton's bones were more than ten times as dense as normal. By compressing countless human bones, the skeleton had gained incredible strength and toughness.

"OOOOH!"

“Hmm... I don’t think I can sever your head the way I usually do...” Rozbeth shrugged, ignoring the shouting skeleton. *Looks like I can’t tackle this problem* head-on, *huh?* Rozbeth stifled a laugh at her own joke.

“JUST LET ME SMASH YOU ALREADY!”

“This is a pain, but I really can’t waste too much time here. Let’s get this done.” Rozbeth avoided the incoming blow with minimal movement, then swung the knife in her right hand, slashing through the skeleton’s right elbow.

“WHAT?! HOW?!”

“As I thought, your joints aren’t as tough as the rest. Dismantling you should be simple,” Rozbeth said in a detached tone. Generally, joints were connected by muscles, ligaments, or tendons. Naturally, a skeleton didn’t have any of those, so the bones were instead bound by the caster’s mana. “If you’re using mana to connect your bones, then I can just cover my knives with mana to sever that connection.”

No matter how tough the bones were, if the joints were only made of mana, they were easy to cut even without using Mana Compression like Caim.

“MYYY AAARM!”

“Not just your arm, actually.”

“AAAAH!”

Rozbeth circled behind the skeleton and stabbed her knife into its left knee. When she rotated the tip of her blade, a metallic popping sound rang out as its leg came off.

“DAMN YOUUU!”

“Having a high bone density means that you’re pretty heavy, right? Can you support yourself with only one leg?”

“GAH!” The answer was instantaneous as the crocodile-headed skeleton collapsed face down onto the ground. “DON’T MOCK ME, HUMAN!”

“Why not? I mean, you’re so pathetic and unsightly.”

“YOU BIIIITCH!”

“Yes, yes, whatever. Let’s get on with it,” Rozbeth scoffed and took care of the skeleton’s remaining limbs.

"NOOOO!"

"And now, it should be easy to sever your head. You weren't too bad—sixty-five points." The skeleton was down to only its trunk and crocodile cranium now. Rozbeth held its head down and laid her knife against the back of its neck. "I'll go nice and slow. It's good to take your time once in a while, don't you think?"

"STOOOOP!"

Rozbeth did in fact take her sweet time slowly sawing through the crocodile-headed skeleton's neck as it cried in agony. Eventually, the screaming ceased.

Once the girls ended their respective fights against the modified skeletons, they all reunited in front of the guardhouse.

"Is everyone all right?" Tea asked.

"Somehow..."

"No problems."

Lenka and Rozbeth both answered. While the three were a little exhausted, they hadn't been harmed. The modified skeletons made by the Bone-Eating General had been elite soldiers, as strong as Count-class monsters—or to put another way, they were *only* Count class.

"Before meeting Sir Caim, I would have lost..."

"Well, Master Caim is just that amazing. He's the greatest man ever."

Lenka and Tea nodded at each other.

Rozbeth frowned at them. "Say... I have a question."

"Yes?" Tea asked back.

"I feel like my mana pool has increased ever since I've slept with him. Am I imagining things?" she inquired, caressing the hilt of her knife with her palm. Normally, Rozbeth didn't have much mana, so she'd always had to compensate for that by improving her skills. However, during her fight earlier, she had been forced to use her mana, and that had made her notice that her mana pool had almost doubled. "Maybe I only noticed because I have so little mana, but... Could it be that his bodily fluids increase the mana of the people who ingest them?"

Caim's bodily fluids were like an aphrodisiac for women

compatible with him. However, perhaps it also had other effects. For example, because his bodily fluids were dense with mana, they might enlarge the mana pool of the women who received them.

"Tea doesn't know. Never really cared about that."

"Me neither. I'm too busy enjoying the pain every time..."

"Okay, I get it. You two are completely clueless. End of discussion." Rozbeth lightly clapped her hands and closed the topic. "Anyway, we need to rescue the hostages."

"Yeah, let's hurry!"

"We must save them, quickly!"

Lenka and Tea agreed, and the latter used her three-section staff to break the lock of the guardhouse door. Nobody could be seen inside, but by straining their ears, they could hear sobs from the back.

"That way!" Lenka took the lead and arrived in the prison area of the building, where criminals were usually detained. The sight that greeted her left her speechless—more than twenty naked women were crammed together inside the small prison cell, sobbing. Their ages varied, but they were all bruised from being beaten or bitten. Lenka's expression twisted in rage as she observed their pitiful state. "That scum... How could he do such a thing...?!"

"This is horrible..." Tea commented with a grimace, while Rozbeth frowned slightly in displeasure.

"That damn Bone-Eating General... How could he do something so cruel?! Even to children!"

"Save your anger for later, Lenka!" Tea warned her.

"Yeah, we need to rescue them first. The key is... Here, found it." Rozbeth fetched the key to the prison and unlocked the door. They gave the women blankets and curtains they'd found so they could cover themselves.

"Everyone, we're getting out of here! Follow us!" Lenka shouted.

"You... You're saving us?"

"Yes. Please hurry—we need to act fast."

"...Got it."

Still weeping, the women nodded and followed after Lenka, Tea, and Rozbeth.

“Where is my son?”

“The bones...”

“Ugh... It hurts...”

With the women slowly dragging their battered bodies along, they exited the guardhouse. Tea and Lenka checked that the streets were clear of enemies.

“All clear. Let’s leave the town!”

“Yeah, we need to hurry!”

Fortunately, there wasn’t a single skeleton in sight. Caim and Millicia’s diversion must have been working.

“Huh?” Rozbeth, who was in the rear of the group, stopped suddenly and glanced behind her with suspicion.

“Is there a problem, Rozbeth?” Tea asked.

“No... I just saw a few silhouettes, but they’re not skeletons.” She had seen people dressed in black. She had only gotten a glimpse before they’d vanished, but she was certain she had seen them somewhere. “Were they...?”

“I don’t know what you saw, but if there’s no danger, we should get out of here quickly!” Tea urged her.

“Yes... You’re right.” The black-clad figures still bothered her, but they weren’t in any position to dawdle. Rozbeth turned back, and along with Tea and Lenka, they rushed outside of the town while protecting the hostages.

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In the plaza at the center of the town, Caim and Millicia faced the Bone-Eating General, who was inside a giant skeleton.

The giant skeleton swung its arm as an eerie cackle could be heard from inside it. The creature aimed at Caim and Millicia, who were moving midair thanks to Suzaku.

Caim clicked his tongue and leaped from his mana foothold to avoid the blow. Millicia yelped in his arms, still clinging to his neck.

“Just let yourselves be crushed! I’ll suck your bones and keep you as my playthings once everything is over!” the Bone-Eating General shouted.

“The hell are you saying? Don’t get cocky, old man!” Caim yelled back, then vanished. The next instant, he was right in front of the giant skeleton, thrusting his fist at it. He had just used Houou, the other Basic Stance technique from the Toukishin Style that allowed one to move in midair with Suzaku. This skill propelled its user with a burst of compressed mana under their feet.

“Whoa?!” the Bone-Eating General exclaimed as the giant skeleton tilted back, but it didn’t fall. Its chest bones hadn’t been destroyed—they hadn’t even been damaged.

“It’s tough... Even tougher than steel!” Caim lightly shook his hand. Even though he had used Mana Compression, he’d still felt a sharp pain. The giant skeleton’s bones were far more durable than normal ones. “Have they been enhanced by magic? Or did he increase their density by compressing a lot of bones together? Either way, that’s a freaking pain.”

“It’s useless! No matter what you do, it won’t work!” the old man cried. The giant skeleton swung its arm at Caim, who once again quickly dodged with Houou. “This is the secret weapon that took me a century to make—my Giant Marionette! It’s undefeated, indomitable, and invincible! You’ll never be able to beat it, brat!” he declared, cackling madly.

“Leave this to me, Caim. O great light that travels the stars... Strong, noble, white emperor of the heavens... May you encircle these lost lambs with your mighty hands—Holy Circlet!” Millicia quickly chanted, using her Sacred Arts. A circle of light spread out with them at its center, reaching the giant skeleton. “An undead controlled by necromancy should be purified by this light. O cursed soul, may you return to the side of the angels!”

“Your faint light won’t be enough!” the Bone-Eating General sneered.

“Huh?”

“Take this!”

However, the giant skeleton wasn’t affected by the purifying light. It simply threw another punch at them. Caim avoided it in time, but it smashed the building behind him into pieces.

“How could the Sacred Arts possibly fail?!” Millicia exclaimed,

shocked.

"Maybe it just wasn't strong enough... No, wait, maybe...?" Caim observed the giant skeleton as he moved through the sky, carrying Millicia. The skeleton had to weigh dozens of tons—and looking at it more carefully, Caim noticed its surface was coated in a silvery-blue metal. He immediately understood what it was thanks to the Poison Queen's knowledge inside his brain. "That's magic silver—mithril. No wonder your Sacred Arts aren't working!"

Mithril, also known as magic silver, was a special alloy created by master alchemists. While the blue-tinted metal was difficult to process, it was very tough and resistant to magic. It was considered the natural enemy of mages—some even called it a magic killer. The metal repelled not just offensive spells, but also special magic like the Sacred Arts.

"He's using a metal specifically to counter mages... It's only a thin coating, but it must have been pretty difficult to get enough to cover everything," Caim noted.

"Mithril... Then my Sacred Arts will not work..." Millicia's expression contorted in vexation.

Naturally, that meant Caim's Purple Poison Magic wouldn't work either. Of course, that was only the case for the giant skeleton, not the Bone-Eating General inside of it. Caim just needed to strike him directly.

But he's protected by those bulky bones... Maybe I could use a poison gas that would pass through the gaps, but I'm not sure that would work. Poison Flare hadn't harmed the Bone-Eating General. While the giant skeleton could have protected him from the explosion, it shouldn't have been able to guard him from the toxic gas and the lack of oxygen.

"Wait... Rozbeth said the old man was more than two hundred, so maybe he's an undead too?" Caim wondered if perhaps the geezer had used necromancy on himself to become immortal, making him a lich... No, he had a body, so a living dead. In that case, Caim's poison couldn't kill him.

The Bone-Eating General laughed madly as the giant skeleton threw one punch after another.

“He’s a far more bothersome enemy than I’d expected... Now, how can I defeat him?” Caim muttered to himself, annoyed, as he avoided the blows.

“What’s up, brat? Can’t you do anything but dodge?!”

The giant skeleton’s attacks were powerful and fast, but it still wasn’t a match for Caim’s combination of Suzaku and Houou.

“He’s right, though. I can’t beat him just by evading...” Caim noticed that Millicia was out of breath. “You okay?”

“Y-Yesh...” she answered, her face pale. She wasn’t fine at all, though. Partially this was due to her fear of the giant skeleton, but the main reason was the damage to her inner ear from moving at high speed in the sky.

“You’re going to faint at this rate. I should put you down somewhere... No, that’s a bad idea.” Caim shook his head.

It would make things easier if Caim could fight without having to carry Millicia. True, she wasn’t heavy, but carrying her still restrained his movement. Moreover, he couldn’t get serious and use a powerful technique, as the impact might harm Millicia.

I can’t leave her alone, though. There could be skeletons hiding nearby. They could be inside buildings, underground, or even in the garbage dumps. Who knew where there could be a skeleton in hiding? No, Caim couldn’t risk Millicia’s life by leaving her alone.

“I guess quantity is really a quality of its own... You can’t take an army of small fry lightly.”

“C-Caim...” Millicia panted. “I should be fine on my own if I cast a purifying barrier around myself...”

“No. We don’t know what the enemy could do,” Caim refused. True, Millicia’s Sacred Arts were effective against the skeletons—but the opponent was sly enough to take an entire town hostage. They couldn’t let their guard down. “He could have a skeleton shoot an arrow at you from outside your barrier, or even force one of the hostages to attack you. It’s better you stay with me.”

“Yesh...”

“Hold on tight. If you drop, you’ll die.”

Millicia tightly embraced Caim’s neck. While this was necessary to do, somehow it almost looked like she was cuddling up to her lover.

“You damn brats! Don’t flirt right in front of me!” the Bone-Eating General shouted indignantly. The giant skeleton grabbed a nearby building and threw it at them.

“Oops...”

“Caim!”

The attack had been unexpected, and Caim had been a little late dodging it. Millicia wasn’t harmed, but a pointed piece of lumber had deeply gouged his cheek.

“Don’t worry. It’s not a big injury.”

“No! Let me heal you!” Millicia used her Sacred Arts on Caim. White light entered his body, spreading a comfortable warmth through him as the wound on his cheek was healed. “...And done. Thank goodness there is no scar...” She heaved a relieved sigh.

“Come on, it’s fine for a man to have a scar or...” Caim started to answer with a wry smile but suddenly stopped, struck by an epiphany. “Wait...”

“What is it?”

“I just had an idea. We may be able to beat the old man,” Caim said, still moving in the sky as the giant skeleton continued to attack. He thoroughly considered his idea. With this, he might be able to win even while carrying Millicia. “Yeah, it’s worth a try. It’s a fitting way to teach that cocky old geezer a lesson.”

“Um, Caim?”

“Listen, Millicia...” Caim whispered his plan into her ear.

“I see... I never would have thought of this.” Millicia was a little surprised by the idea, but she immediately approved it.

“Would you just stop running away already, you damn brats!” The giant skeleton had caught up to them as they talked. “Just get crushed already and join my army of servants!”

“Hard pass, you shitty geezer,” Caim spit, suddenly stopping on a mana foothold in midair just in front of the giant skeleton. “As if I’d want to serve a necrophiliac old man like you. If you want to play with dolls, then do it in your grave once I’ve killed you,” he provoked the Bone-Eating General, giving him the finger.

“What a cheeky brat... Don’t get carried away just because I’m being modest!”

You call that modest? Caim couldn't help wondering as the giant skeleton moved its arms to crush him and Millicia between its palms, just like it would a fly.

"Houou." Naturally, Caim didn't stay still, and instead immediately propelled himself with a burst of condensed mana, quickly drawing closer to the giant skeleton's chest.

The old assassin groaned at Caim's sudden approach, but there was no panic in his voice. He was certain that his masterpiece made of compressed bones and coated with mithril would never break.

Unfortunately for him, Caim and Millicia had a plan to bypass its defense.

"Now, Millicia!"

"Yes... Holy Circlet!" Millicia used her Sacred Arts, still clinging to Caim, even though they already knew it wouldn't work on the enemy. "I shall put everything I have into the purifying power!" Moreover, instead of creating a circle of light around her, she focused the power of her spell on one point and injected it into Caim. The white light soaked into Caim's body, and it made him feel uncomfortable, as though he had swallowed a lot of something he couldn't digest.

"It's different from Healing Magic... It's kinda sickening."

"Wh-What?! You were the one who wanted to do this!" Millicia retorted, nonplussed.

"Well, yeah, but I didn't think it would feel so weird... Anyway, it should work! Toukishin Style Basic Stance—Ouryuu!" Caim shouted, launching a palm strike at the giant skeleton's sternum while pouring out a large quantity of mana.



"Gaaaaaaah?!" The Bone-Eating General screamed as the giant skeleton's sternum exploded. The rib cage shattered too, and the impact toppled it on its back. "H-How?! How could my Giant Marionette be defeated?!" He crawled out of the broken rib cage like a tiny insect fleeing its nest. "That's impossible! My Giant Marionette is invincible! There is no way it would lose!"

"If those are your last words, then you must have had a really boring life," Caim said coldly, sending a shiver down the old assassin's spine. Caim was currently standing midair just above him. "I absorbed Millicia's Sacred Arts and used Ouryuu. It was an unpracticed, improvised move, but it worked."

Caim had accomplished what magic researchers called synchronicity—the act of multiple people combining their mana to use a single spell. Millicia had injected the purifying power of her Sacred Arts into Caim, and then he had released it together with his own mana. Ouryuu was a technique that sent a shock wave inside the opponent's body, so it bypassed the mithril coating and exploded directly inside the bones, destroying the giant skeleton's rib cage.

"That might not have worked if the mithril plating had been a little thicker, though... But anyway, how does it feel to be defeated by the woman you wanted to make into your plaything?" Caim sneered at the Bone-Eating General, glaring down at him. "You must be thrilled, no? I heard from Rozbeth that you're a dirty old man who loves to torment women. It was Millicia's mana that defeated you, so how does it feel to lose to the girl you were so eager to play with?"

"Y-You damn brat... I still haven't lost yet!" The Bone-Eating General ordered the half-destroyed giant skeleton to attack Caim.

"Kirin."

"Gah!" But it was too slow. Caim fired a spiraling mana shock wave that pierced his left side of his chest and shoulder. And yet, the old assassin still lived. "Ugh... Yo...u..."

"So I was right. You aren't human anymore."

"In that case, I shall deal with him," Millicia said, seeing that the old man was still moving even with a hole in his chest. She had depleted almost all of her mana earlier, but she still had enough left

to purify one more undead.

"Sto...p..."

"Holy Circlet."

"Aaaaaaaaaaah!"

The withered old man—the Bone-Eating General, a feared, cunning veteran assassin—was disintegrated by the purifying light of Millicia's Sacred Arts.

Chapter 3: Decisive Battle at Mount Garank

"My, I didn't expect the elder to lose."

A short distance away from Orwell stood a woman in a bright red dress, smoking a cigar next to a carriage. She was Mistress, the boss of a criminal organization called the Company. Around her were black-clad men standing alert to answer her orders.

"Our dear Millicia and her boyfriend are pretty good. I suppose it's time for the Bone-Eating General to pay the piper." Mistress chuckled, and the tip of her tongue peeked out of her crimson lips like a snake.

While there was nothing to respect about the vile and foul old man as a person, his skills as an assassin were the real deal. He stopped at nothing to catch his targets, pursuing them like a pack of hyenas without regard for casualties. Nobody wanted him as their enemy.

"To think that cunning assassin died—no, was killed..."

"I'm not dead yet."

"Oh...?" Mistress heard a tiny, hoarse voice coming from below her. When she looked down, she spotted a small skeleton mouse peeking inside the skirt of her dress. She blinked a few times in surprise but quickly followed with a bewitching smile. "Is that you, Elder? You look quite adorable like this. What happened?"

"I used Soul Copy before the battle, just in case."

"Could you explain...?"

"It's a secret necromantic spell that copies a part of the caster's soul into an animal or other vessel to avoid death." The skeleton mouse let out an eerie cackle. "They must think they've killed me, but they're wrong! Pretty cheeky for brats who haven't even lived two decades!"

Mistress listened silently.

"I shall definitely make them pay one day! I'll turn their family, their friends—everyone with any connection to them—into bones and suck them all dry!"

"Incidentally, Elder... How are you planning to do that in your current form?" Mistress asked.

The skeleton mouse tilted its head and pondered the question. "Well, I lost almost all of my mana, so I will need a lot of time to restore my strength. In my current form, even a cat could kill me, so... Say, young lady, would you mind taking care of—"

"Do it."

"Yes, Mistress!"

An explosive sound rang out, and the skeleton mouse was destroyed, leaving nothing but a hole in the ground. Without being noticed, one of Mistress's subordinates had approached and was now pointing a black weapon at the ground. It was a gun, a weapon that launched bullets by detonating a substance called gunpowder. Firearms were useless against people and monsters who could strengthen themselves with mana, so they weren't widely used. However, anyone could use a gun, so all the members of the Company wielded them.

"Sorry, Elder. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to bring down a troublesome business rival." Mistress laid a finger on her lips and giggled, purring like a contented cat.

She found it strange that the cunning old man had appeared to her in such a weak state, though. Had he been that backed into a corner? Or, perhaps, he had thought Mistress would help him?

Either way, now the Bone-Eating General was well and truly dead.

"Well then, now that the lead actor is gone, it's time to bring the curtain down. Send the signal," Mistress ordered.

"Yes, Mistress!" one of the black-clad men answered, then raised a white flag in the direction of the town.

"Goodbye, Millicia. I hope you die for good this time."

The next instant, there was a deafening explosion, and the town was engulfed in blazing red flames.

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Back to the town plaza, after the defeat of the Bone-Eating General...

"It's finally over..."

"Yes, it is..."

Caim and Millicia landed on the ground, confirming their victory. Millicia had turned the Bone-Eating General into dust with her Sacred Arts, and the giant skeleton with its broken rib cage was no longer moving either. This was all proof that they'd won.

"We may have emerged victorious, but we have put the townspeople through a lot of trouble..." Millicia said, her expression brimming with sorrow. "If I had not been targeted by assassins, they would have been able to keep living in peace... How can I apologize to them...?"

"I don't think that's right," Caim interjected with a frown as he kicked the remains of the giant skeleton. "You're just a victim of whoever hired the assassins. We even tried to avoid towns so as to not bother anyone. Don't put more responsibility onto yourself."

The ones truly at fault were the killers and whoever had hired them. Millicia was just a victim and wasn't to blame.

"Still, I am a member of the imperial family. I am responsible for anything that happens to the people of this country," Millicia replied, a strong sense of duty shining in her eyes despite her sorrowful expression. "There must have been a better way. If I had been wiser and stronger, I might have been able to avoid this outcome. But since the damage has already been done, I must bear the consequences!"

"Oh well, you do you." Caim shrugged with a sigh. Despite appearing meek and docile, Millicia was actually far more stubborn than Tea and Lenka. Once she had decided something, she wouldn't budge no matter what Caim said.

You have a strong sense of duty, you love your people, and you're obstinate and willful... Yeah, you really are cut out to be a ruler.

"Anyway, let's get out of town. Nothing will happen if we stay here."

"Yes... Ah, but there might still be skeletons left over. We must search for them and—"

"Wait." Caim suddenly stopped. "What's happening...?" He'd just gotten goose bumps and had a very, *very* bad premonition. Something like malice and hostility, but different from either, was now being directed their way, sending a chill down his spine.

"Is there a problem, Caim?"

"Something is coming, but I don't know what..."

The next instant, an explosion erupted in the distance. The sound was accompanied by a blast that sent waves of scorching heat and smoke their way. "Millicia!" Caim hurriedly grabbed Millicia and dove inside the giant skeleton, earning a yelp from his lover.

The next instant, the entire town was engulfed in flames.

"Damn it... What the hell was that...?"

Millicia coughed. "I thought I was going to die..."

After a moment, the fire and the smoke cleared, and the two of them crawled out of the giant skeleton. If they hadn't hidden inside it, Caim might have been fine, but Millicia would surely have been hurt.

"It didn't feel like a magical attack, and I didn't sense any mana..." Caim said.

"Perhaps explosives have been placed inside the town. I do not know who did it, but they must have been targeting me," Millicia replied.

Millicia was right—the explosion had been the work of the Company, led by Mistress. They had concealed the explosives in town, using the Bone-Eating General as bait to kill Millicia themselves. Even if the old assassin had won, the Company would still have detonated the explosives in order to deal with a troublesome business rival and take the reward for themselves.

"We're fine, but what about Tea and the rest...?"

"Master Caim!"

"Are you hurt, Princess?!"

"Well, there's the answer." Just as Caim started to wonder about them, Tea and Lenka ran over to them through the destroyed buildings and remaining flames. Rozbeth followed shortly after.

“Seems like you’re all fine.”

“I’m glad you’re all right too, Master Caim! I was really worried!” Tea must have been truly anxious, because she had tears in her eyes as she jumped at Caim, pressing his face against her chest.

“You weren’t caught in the explosion?” Caim asked.

“No, we were outside of the town!”

“What about the hostages?!” Millicia questioned in panic.

“Do not worry—we have rescued them. They are waiting outside of the town,” Lenka answered. It seemed the three of them had accomplished their mission without any trouble. “Still, I am surprised the Bone-Eating General uses explosives as well as necromancy.” She scowled at her surroundings. “He blew up the whole town... What a truly vile man!”

“No, that wasn’t him,” Rozbeth interjected. “This kind of method is actually right up the Company’s alley. They’re weak, so they use guns and explosives to kill their targets.”

“You mean those black-clad men from before? Did they team up with the Bone-Eating General?” Caim asked.

“I don’t think so—probably they were using him. Their boss, Mistress, is very cunning, so she wouldn’t hesitate to use a fellow assassin as bait,” Rozbeth replied with a sarcastic shrug. “Once they know that we’re... Or rather, that Princess Millicia is still alive, they will try something else.”

“If they’d just attack us head-on, I could kill them easily... These kinds of underhanded tactics are honestly annoying.” In a way, they were a more formidable enemy than the Bone-Eating General. “If we’re gonna have to fight anyway, I’d rather do it now and be done with it...” Caim sighed, displeased.

And with that, the battle in the town of Orwell was over and everyone lived happily ever after...

No, of course that didn’t happen.

When the returning townspeople saw what had become of their home, their expressions were painted with despair.

“Is this...our town...?”

“Damn it! There’s nothing left!”

While Caim had defeated the Bone-Eating General, the Company

had completely destroyed the town. The women had been saved, but they had lost everything else.

"The shop I inherited from my father...!"

"My brother was killed... Why did this have to happen to us?!"

"Where is my husband? Give him back!"

The townspeople complained with tears in their eyes.

"Hey, you..." One of them approached Caim and the girls and talked to Millicia. "The old man asked us to find a blonde woman. That's you, right?"

"...Yes."

"So everything happened because of you?"

Millicia didn't answer.

"I lost my house, my wife and daughter were injured, and other people had friends or relatives who died. And you're saying all of that is *your* fault?!"

"Yes. You were used to bait me," Millicia confessed without trying to give excuses.

"You...!" The man's face flushed with rage.

"I am truly sorry," Millicia apologized with a perfect bow before the man could shout at her. "I sincerely apologize for involving you in my circumstances and causing you harm. Though I understand that money is not enough to make up for what has happened to you, and I cannot do so immediately, I will compensate you fully as soon as I am able."

The man was speechless in the face of such a resolute apology. He understood this wasn't just lip service—she truly meant what she said. Moreover, despite how Millicia was currently dressed, it was obvious from her manners and her way of speaking that she was of high birth. And yet she had bowed to him. In a society where one's position was of utmost importance, even a commoner like him knew how significant it was for someone of higher status to lower their head to someone below them.

"Uhh..." The man faltered, but it was too late for him to back down. He understood Millicia's apology was sincere, but they had all lost too much for him to simply accept the destruction of their town. "You... You...!"

Driven by his anger, he moved to grab Millicia, but stopped when he noticed Caim's cold gaze behind her. Next to him stood Lenka, her hand on the hilt of her sword. The both of them were silent, but the intent in their eyes was clear—if the man touched Millicia, it would end very badly for him.

With no other choice, the man gave up and began to talk. "I loved this town... I was born here, and I inherited that shop from my father. But now..."

"...I apologize again."

"Shut up!" The man stamped his foot on the ground in fury and wailed. "Just get lost already! Never show your face here again!"

Millicia, however, continued to bow.

"Princess..." Lenka placed a hand on her shoulder.

Millicia's face wasn't visible, but she was also crying, her tears trickling down her cheeks and dampening the soil.

Caim and his companions left the destroyed town of Orwell. Millicia wrote a letter asking for the lord to shelter them and gave it to the townspeople's representative. She also gave them most of the money she was currently carrying, as well as some of their precious provisions, vowing to formally compensate them someday.

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That night, the group made camp in an inconspicuous spot on the side of the main road. No one said a word while they did so, staying silent even through dinner. Millicia was especially depressed.

After finishing their miserable meal, they went into their tent to sleep, keeping watch in turns starting with Caim.

"Caim..." Millicia poked her head out of the tent.

"What's up?" he asked, adding broken branches to the fire. "If you don't rest, you'll wear yourself out. Tomorrow's another early morning."

"I just cannot sleep..."

"Still bothered by what happened today, huh? There's no point in dwelling on it now," Caim said with a sigh.

"I know. There was no way I could have predicted that the Bone-

Eating General would go to such lengths to kill me. The same goes for the explosion. There was nothing I could do to prevent what has happened to Orwell."

"Then—"

"Still, this occurred in *my* country. Moreover, this was to assassinate me. I cannot shrink away from my responsibilities."

"Man, talk about being way too upright... Or rather, too stubborn." Caim thought she should just throw all of that away, but he didn't say it out loud.

Millicia isn't like me. She loves her homeland. As someone who had defeated his father in combat and left his birthplace, Caim couldn't understand Millicia's affection for her motherland and her desire to protect its people.

"Do you mind if I stay with you?" Millicia asked.

"Come in." Caim spread out the blanket on his shoulders, letting Millicia slip beneath it after she sat next to him.

The two of them sat in silence for a while, and the only thing that could be heard was the crackling sound of the fire.

"Caim... I..."

"Do you want to cry?"

"Huh?"

"If so, I'm sorry, but I don't have any comforting words for you," Caim said with an awkward frown. "The only thing I can do is beat people up. So instead of consoling you, I'll just kill anyone who makes you cry. So, well... Umm... Relax, I guess."

"How am I supposed to relax after hearing that?" Millicia smiled wryly at her lover's brutal statement. He truly *was* terrible at consoling people. And yet, his words were so much like him that, in the end, it *did* make her feel relieved. "You are right. I have you with me, so there is nothing to worry about." Her expression brightened a little, showing her burden had become a little lighter. "Actually, I have come up with a plan to deal with all of the assassins targeting me at once."

"Really?"

"Yes. I do not know if it will work, though, and I will have to rely on everyone else yet again..."

"Kinda late to be bothered by that now."

They had been dragged into trouble on account of Millicia multiple times, but Caim thought that the benefits of her presence outweighed the trouble. Or at least, the benefits for *him* did.

"One more thing, Caim. You are wrong."

"About what?"

"There *is* another way to console a woman." Millicia closed her eyes and turned her face in his direction.

"Ah, so that's what you want." Caim wasn't an idiot—he understood exactly what he needed to do. He pushed his lips against Millicia's, gently pecking at her like a bird drinking water. But quickly, their kiss became more passionate as they started to intertwine their tongues.

Millicia flushed, her expression melting in pleasure. The reason was, of course, Caim's saliva. Being the Poison King, Caim's bodily fluids contained poison, but to women compatible with him, they were a strong aphrodisiac. For Millicia, who had been completely intoxicated by it, Caim's saliva was sweeter than sugar and honey.

"Aaah... Caim..." pleaded Millicia the instant they paused in their kiss, her moist eyes brimming with lust.

Caim understood what she wanted and opened her top, exposing her chest. He then grabbed her soft and springy breasts, currently dripping with sweat, enjoying their wonderful sensation. No matter how many times he fondled them, he never got tired of them.



“Aaah... Caim... Caim...!” Millicia called his name before resuming their kiss as he caressed her chest. Sometimes he groped her breasts in a circle, sometimes he squeezed them, others he flicked her nipples—and every time Millicia would moan sensually as Caim enjoyed the sensation of his fingers sinking into her supple breasts. “Caim... It feels good...” Millicia fawned over him, pressing herself against him. She wrapped her arms around Caim and scratched his back with her nails as she struggled to endure the pleasure. Now sweating profusely, Millicia’s entire body trembled and saliva dripped from the corner of her mouth.

Noticing that she was rubbing her thighs together, Caim continued to grope her breast with one hand as he moved his other hand down to her skirt, rolling it up and revealing her wet underwear.

“You are being so rough, Caim...” While she complained, Millicia’s expression was filled with rapture. She liked when her lover was a little rough and didn’t resist as Caim forcefully slid her underwear down and attacked her weak point, making her moan even louder than before.

Caim’s finger moved like it had a mind of its own, grazing her warm walls in all directions while continuing to fondle one of her breasts, gradually building up the pleasure, until...

“Come,” he ordered.

“Aaaaaaaaaah!” Millicia climaxed, screaming loudly, her body spasming a few times before going limp.

“Gotcha.” Caim quickly grabbed her by her waist before she could fall. “You okay?” he asked Millicia, who was still basking in the afterglow of her orgasm.

“Caim...” Millicia stared at him with glazed eyes. Her body was exhausted, but her gaze was filled with lust, showing that coming only once wasn’t going to be enough to satisfy her. Her tongue was peeking out of her mouth, moving around greedily.

“Good grief...” Caim sighed. He was on the lookout, and even he would have a hard time keeping watch while having sex. “Oh well, let’s do it. Spread your legs.”

“Yes...!” Millicia beamed, obeying.

Caim took out his “sword” and thrust it deep into the crevice before him.

“Aaaaaaaaaah!” A beastly moan rose from the meadow up into the starry sky.

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At the center of a certain city, in an Adventurers’ Guild...

“The town was taken over by skeletons?!”

“No! It was a wanted assassin!”

“Is it true it was engulfed in flames?!”

“Damn it! My sister and her husband live there!”

“Send adventurers there to check the veracity of the intel! We need to rescue any survivors!”

The guild was in an uproar after learning what had happened to the nearby town. Staff and adventurers alike were overwhelmed by the situation.

“Excuse me.”

Suddenly, a woman wearing a light-blue dress entered the building. She had blonde hair that cascaded down her back, and her blue eyes were looking straight ahead as she walked into the boisterous guild. Behind her were a female knight and a young man who seemed to be an adventurer.

“Ah...” A guild staff member who had been busily running around reflexively stopped when she saw the woman moving as gracefully as a lily in bloom. Even though the staff member ought to have been working, the woman’s presence was impossible to ignore.

She must be a noble... But she doesn’t look like the lord’s daughter...

“Am I correct in assuming that you are the receptionist?” the woman asked.

“Huh? Ah, yes! What can I do for you?!” the receptionist rushed over to the woman. “I apologize, but the guild is currently very busy and we cannot—”

“Please look at this.” The woman presented something to the receptionist, not letting her finish her sentence.

The receptionist accepted the object dubiously, but she quickly widened her eyes in shock when she realized what it was. “Th-This is...!”

In her hand was a gold pocket watch inscribed with the Garnet Empire’s crest. The only people allowed to own such an item were members of the imperial family.

“I am Millicia Garnet, the first imperial princess of the Garnet Empire.”

“The princess?!” The receptionist was completely taken aback and almost dropped the pocket watch, hastily catching it before it could fall.

Noticing how strangely she was acting, the other staff members looked toward the reception counter.

“I am here to make a request as a member of the imperial family.”

“A-A request from the... Um, what is it...?” the receptionist asked, still overcome with surprise.

“I want you to spread what I am going to say to everyone in this city... No, to everyone in the nearby towns and villages as well.”

“Y-Yes...?”

“‘Millicia Garnet is currently at the top of Mount Garank in the southeast. She will neither hide nor escape, so go there if you want her head!’”

The receptionist was speechless. Naturally, Millicia’s words hadn’t been for her, but for the people who were after her head—assassins. Such was her plan: She would use herself as bait to gather their enemies in one place, which would allow Millicia’s companions to take care of them all at once. This was a very different strategy than what they had been doing before—now, they would stop fleeing and instead take on all comers.

The imperial request was immediately executed, and soon enough Millicia’s invitation was spread to all the villages and towns in the area.

In a certain town there stood a back-alley bar managed by a gang. It was a place where outlaws and denizens of the criminal underworld exchanged information and stratagems, and currently it

was occupied by a certain group.

"Our dear Millicia sure has done it now..." said a woman in a red dress, sipping at her glass as she sat at a table surrounded by a dozen black-clad men. She was Mistress, the boss of the Company, a criminal organization. "Quite the drastic action. We should come if we want her head? She might look docile, but she's got guts."

"What should we do, Mistress?" asked one of her men.

The Company had tried to kill Millicia twice and failed both times. They had used guns and explosives, but it had all been a waste of resources—both money and people. Finishing the job of assassinating two members of the royal family would pay well enough to more than make up for their expenses, but...

"But for that, we need to succeed... Maybe we should consider cutting our losses here." Mistress sighed alluringly, tracing the rim of her glass with her finger.

Generally, one ought to cut one's losses when an investment failed or when gambling. By accepting a small loss, one might avoid further damage. In this case, stopping now would mean she'd lost those resources for nothing, but it would allow the Company to avoid the casualties that would come from continuing to try to assassinate Millicia.

"And no matter how you think about it, it's got to be a trap. Only idiots would jump at a chance like this."

The location Millicia had designated was a rocky mountain not far from here. It boasted an excellent view, making ambushes difficult and giving the advantage to Millicia and her companions. On the other hand, it also meant that there was nowhere for her to run, so it wasn't a completely disadvantageous location for the assassins.

"From what the men spying on her have said, she is indeed heading toward the mountain—and it does not appear to be a body double," reported one of the black-clad men.

"Hmm... What to do..."

"You hesitating, whore?" Someone interrupted Mistress's thoughts. He was a large, dark-skinned man wearing tattered black clothes and a bandana on his head. His face and arms were riddled with scars.

“My, isn’t that Deed the Gravedigger? Are you also after Millicia?”

“I heard the old man died,” Deed ignored Mistress’s question. It was as though he was monologizing instead of speaking to someone. “I didn’t like him. Despite his age, he was foolish and hot-tempered. He looked down on the other assassins, and the way he killed was dull, showing no respect toward the lives he took. I considered offing him countless times.”

Mistress listened silently.

“Still, he was an acquaintance. So is it wrong to fight to honor his death despite all that? No. No, it’s not.”

“I see... You do know it’s likely a trap, right?”

“So what?” Deed actually replied to Mistress for the first time, turning his back to her. “You can just stay here, whore. The target is asking us to come assassinate her, and I have a motive to kill her. Do I have a reason to hesitate, then? No. No, I don’t.”

And with that, he left the bar.

Just after the door closed, a woman who had been sitting at the counter stood up.

“I shall go too.”

“Immortal Butterfly...”

The one who had stood up was a girl wearing a Gothic Lolita dress and sporting black-and-red pigtails. She looked no more than twelve or thirteen, but she had actually been an assassin far longer than the Bone-Eating General. Thus her name—the Immortal Butterfly.

“The one I seek is there as well, so this butterfly shall fly straight into the spiderweb,” said the girl, walking out of the bar, her heels clacking on the floor.

Seeing this, the other customers hurriedly stood up.

“The reward for killing a member of the imperial family is as good as ours!”

“We won’t lose to the veterans!”

“The Headhuntress and the Bone-Eating General have been defeated. It’s time to make our names known!”

“She’s really underestimating us, inviting us like that!”

While less renowned than Deed the Gravedigger and the

Immortal Butterfly, these men were all up-and-coming assassins too. Money wasn't their only objective—they wanted the fame from succeeding where the Headhuntress and the Bone-Eating General had failed.

"Notable figures such as the Golden Hammer, the Silver Flash, the Wild Bird, and the Hanging King seem to be joining in. If we do not act soon, we will fall behind," said one of the black-clad men solemnly.

"I see... So that's your aim, Millicia..." Mistress's lips twisted into a sneer as she watched the assassins leave the bar one after another.

The job of killing members of the imperial family was first come, first served. In other words, they were all now competing to receive the reward. As such, Millicia's guards weren't Mistress's only enemies—the other assassins were now her foes as well.

Everyone knew that Millicia's invitation was a trap. Still, wanting not to be overtaken by their peers, they had no choice but to jump straight into it. After all, if they didn't and someone else ended up killing their target, all their efforts up until now would be rendered meaningless.

"Oh well... This is a gamble with long odds, but I suppose we must bet on it nevertheless." Mistress resolved to walk into the trap. After all, if she didn't, her reputation in the underworld would be dragged through the mud. As its boss, she couldn't afford to let trust in her organization be damaged too much. "We're going. Make the preparations."

"Yes, Mistress!" the black-clad men replied in unison.

Thus, the final stage was set at Mount Garank.

The decisive battle between Millicia and the assassins was approaching its climax.

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Mount Garank was a rocky mountain in the southeast of the Garnet Empire. There were no ores to mine, nor any medicinal plants to harvest—only monsters like rock lizards and stone apes could be found there. As such, nobody ever visited the place besides

eccentric martial artists wanting to train.

"I wonder if they'll really show up..." Caim said. He was waiting for the assassins at the mountain's peak with his companions. They even had planted a flag to show their position, which also served as a provocation. "Using your name and telling them to come kill you... Doesn't that make it way too obvious it's a trap?"

"I think this will work," Millicia answered. She had dressed well to suit her status as a princess when she'd gone to the Adventurers' Guild, but now she was wearing an outfit more suited for horseback riding. "What Rozbeth said made me realize something. The assassins' greatest enemies are not you and the others who are acting as my guards."

"Then who is?"

"Their fellow killers," she declared. "Usually, they are forbidden to steal someone else's target. But now, they have invoked the 'first come, first served' rule. Right, Rozbeth?"

"Indeed," Rozbeth nodded. "The instant I failed, this job became a free-for-all to see who would get the reward. Such are the ways of the assassin community."

"So, the thing they fear most is that someone else will kill me and take the reward first," Millicia continued her explanation. "They are not comrades but rivals, and they are cautious of each other. So by challenging them, I am forcing them all to act before someone else does."

If Millicia had stayed in hiding, the assassins would have scattered, each of them competing to see who would find her first. But Millicia had exposed herself instead, making sure they all knew where their objective was. The competition had now changed from a hunt into a race to see who could reach her first.

"Naturally, I am sure they are aware this is a trap. But if they don't want to lose to their fellow assassins, they have no choice but to walk into it."

"I think it's a good plan," Rozbeth said, approvingly. "And it isn't just about being first. Assassins are a pretty prideful lot. They tend to have an artisan's outlook, always wanting to perfect their techniques, and the ones taking a difficult job like this are

particularly so.” Rozbeth unsheathed one of her knives, flipped it into the air, then caught the tip of the blade between her fingers. “For assassins who are absolutely confident in their skills, a provocation from their target is humiliating. After all, she’s throwing down the gauntlet, telling them where she is and challenging them to kill her. Anyone who would give up here would never have taken the job in the first place.”

“Meaning they’ll definitely show up. Man, assassins are twisted,” Caim commented.

“They trade in people’s lives. What did you expect?” Rozbeth shrugged indifferently.

Anyway, it suited Caim just fine that their enemies would show up on their own. He would gladly fight all comers.

“Mmmh!”

“I see them!”

Lykos and Lenka signaled.

“Here come the assassins!” Caim looked down at the figures climbing the rocky mountain, their number gradually increasing. Their plan was working. “Well then... I wonder how many are gonna make it to the top.” Caim’s lips twisted into a savage grin as he glared at the incoming foes.

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“They’re really underestimating us!”

“Do you think the target’s really up there?”

A pair of assassins—the Golden Hammer and the Silver Flash—was climbing Mount Garank from the south. They weren’t yet as renowned as veteran killers, but their reputation was on the rise.

“Well, at the very least, we know that lady assassin is headed here. Also, look up.”

“Huh?”

They both turned their gaze up toward the mountain’s peak and saw a flag with a woman standing next to it, looking down at them. Thanks to their sharp assassin’s eyesight, they immediately recognized her as their target—the imperial princess.

“That bitch! She’s provoking us!”

“Doesn’t seem like a body double... Heck, even if it was one, I’d never back down after being mocked like this!”

“Yeah. I won’t be satisfied until I’ve smashed her head in!”

The Golden Hammer and the Silver Flash readied their weapons—a golden hammer and a large silver sword respectively—as they continued to climb the mountain. On the way, they spotted other killers who were using different routes to reach the summit.

“We can’t let anyone else beat us to the punch...”

“Yeah, especially the Company. All they’ve got is numbers, not skill.”

“We’re gonna be the kings of the underworld! Soon, everyone will know the Golden Hammer and the Silver Flash!”

The two talked as they kept climbing laboriously, their heavy weapons in hand. That obviously made the climb harder, but the duo would never change the arms that defined them.

“Wait, do you hear that...?”

Suddenly, the two stopped as they heard chirping and saw something move. A three-meter-long lizard with stony skin appeared before them.

“A rock lizard...”

“Leave it alone, bro. We can’t waste any time.”

They had researched Mount Garank beforehand and found that while rock lizards were heavy and tough as stone, they were actually pretty fast—and that they didn’t attack people. They survived by eating rocks and ingesting their mana.

“We’ve come to hunt our target, not monsters.”

“Yeah, I know. We just need to stealthily skirt around—”

The rock lizard screamed...

“—and— Aaaaah?!”

...then leaped at the Golden Hammer, biting through the muscle of his shoulder all the way to the bone.

“Bro!” the Silver Flash called out to his companion, who was screaming in pain. “You bastard! Get away from him!” He swung his giant sword at the monster, but the rock lizard dodged it and made some distance between them.

As for the Golden Hammer, he collapsed on the ground, blood pouring out of the holes in his shoulder. His robust body convulsed a few times until he finally stopped moving.

"Goddamn! What the hell?!" the Silver Flash cried and charged at the rock lizard after witnessing his partner's death.

Usually, rock lizards didn't attack people, but this one was different—its eyes were completely red and a large quantity of saliva was dripping from its mouth. That was definitely strange.

And the Golden Hammer and Silver Flash weren't the only ones who encountered such abnormalities.

"Aaaaaah!"

"Damn iiiiit!"

Rock lizards, stone apes, and other monsters living on Mount Garank began to assault the assassins climbing into their territory.

"Fire! Shoot it!"

Explosions rang out as countless bullets were fired, eventually managing to pierce the rock lizard's tough skin and kill it.

"Finally..."

"But we lost three men!"

"How many has it been now? I thought the monsters here didn't attack people!"

The black-clad men were holding weapons of the same color in their hands—firearms known as guns that used gunpowder to shoot bullets. That was how they had defeated the rock lizard.

"Are you hurt, Mistress?"

"No, I'm fine," answered a woman wearing a red dress.

All of them were part of the criminal organization called the Company. They had come to Mount Garank to assassinate Millicia, but they'd been continually assaulted by monsters on their way. The members of the Company were divided into several groups, all of which were climbing the mountain separately. This group was the main one, as Mistress herself was part of it. However, the attacks they'd suffered had already reduced their number by half.

"There are only ten of us left," Mistress sighed. "And the other groups must also have been attacked... Our dear Millicia's really got us."

Mistress had researched Mount Garank beforehand and knew that the monsters residing here usually didn't attack people—and yet, this was already their fourth assault.

"Do you think the target did something to cause this?" asked one of the black-clad men.

"That's the only possibility. Clever of them to make up for their numbers with monsters, though I don't know how she managed to incite them..." Mistress dismissed the question of how the monsters were being controlled—but regardless, the situation was bad. If they wanted to reach the summit, they would need to get past the frenzied monsters. That made the flag at the mountain's peak seem even farther away.

"What should we do, Mistress? Should we descend and reorganize ourselves?"

"Hmm... That would harm the trust in our organization, but it would be pointless to lose even more people..." Mistress pondered what to do, tracing her lips with her finger. Giving up even though they were near their target would harm the Company's credibility, but continuing like this would only result in more casualties. However, as she tried to decide which prospect was worse, something happened.

"Ooooooooh!"

"What?!"

"Isn't that...?!"

Suddenly, a man leaped at them from above, swinging his large sword at one of the black-clad men, cutting him in half.

"It's the Silver Flash!" one of the other men screamed.

The Silver Flash was breathing strangely, glaring at the members of the Company with bloodshot eyes. "How dare you...? How *dare* you do that to my bro...?"

"What is he saying...?"

"Kill, kill, kill, KILL! I'M GONNA KILL YOU!"

"Shoot him!" Mistress ordered, and her subordinates obliged, riddling the Silver Flash with bullets.

"Has he gone mad...?"

"We're not his allies, but still... Why would he attack us like this?"

The black-clad men wondered aloud as they looked down at the Silver Flash's body. They might have been after the same target, but they hadn't been on such bad terms that he would attack them like that. Even if it was a contest to see who would get the reward, outright killing a fellow assassin was taboo.

"He was acting strangely, like the monsters who attacked us..." Mistress trailed off, then gasped in realization, hastily covering her mouth and nose with her hand.

"Is there a problem, Mistress?"

"We must descend the mountain at once!"

"Huh?" The black-clad men were baffled by the sudden command to retreat.

"We cannot stay here! If we breathe the air here too long, we're going to—"

"Aaaaaaaaah!" a beastly roar interrupted Mistress. The Silver Flash, bleeding everywhere from all the bullet holes in his body, stood up with a yell.

"What?!"

"How is he still alive— Gah!"

"Damn it! Shoot him!"

"KILLLLLL!" The Silver Flash swung his large sword, bisecting yet another black-clad man.

The members of the Company frantically fired at him. Screams and gunshots echoed throughout the rocky mountain until, finally...they stopped.

Chapter 4: Showdown at the Summit

Shrieks and screams resonated all over Mount Garank, some from people being attacked by monsters, others from assassins fighting each other.

"Seems like this is working great," Caim commented, curving his lips in an ironic grin as he looked down the mountain.

Caim and his companions hadn't climbed the mountain without a plan. They had incited violence among the monsters—and hopefully the assassins as well—in order to reduce the number of enemies. And, of course, such a thing was possible thanks to Caim's poison. He had created a stimulant that would drive the monsters into a frenzy, making them attack the assassins. Moreover, anyone bathed in the monsters' poisoned blood would be similarly affected, causing the killers to fly into a rage and fight each other.

Naturally, some monsters also had tried to attack Caim and the girls, so they had scattered monster-repelling incense around them and combined that with Millicia's barrier.

"Perfect score. A hundred points," Rozbeth said, starting to descend the mountain, knives in her hands.

"You're heading out?" Caim asked.

"Yes. Their numbers have decreased enough."

While many assassins had died—either to the monsters or each other—there still were some left. In order to be certain they were all wiped out, Rozbeth was going to deal with the survivors.

"Also, maybe that poison is working on me, because I *really* want to hunt some heads."

"Please be careful..." Millicia said in prayer to Rozbeth, who didn't turn back. Instead, she only raised a hand before sliding down the slope.

“Once again, though, I am in awe of your plan, Princess.” Lenka praised her master.

As unexpected as it might seem, Millicia had been the one to devise this fearsome tactic. It had come to her when she thought that if it was possible to arouse people with Caim’s poison, then perhaps he could produce one that would stimulate monsters to be more aggressive, causing them to attack the assassins. It frightened Caim a little that Millicia, who was usually so meek, could come up with such a devilish plan.

“I know this is a cruel strategy... But we are not in a situation where we can choose our methods,” Millicia said, looking down the mountain. Her expression was unusually painted with rage. “If we allow those criminals to roam free, the peace of this nation will be at risk. We must use any means necessary to eliminate them as soon as possible.”

A ruler couldn’t simply be kind. They had to be both good and evil when necessary, and possess the resolve to dirty their hands.

“I knew it. You are fit to rule. I guarantee it,” Caim declared. Millicia wasn’t just any kindhearted princess or naive nun. She clearly was part of the Garnet imperial family—she was meant to stand above ordinary people. “Anyway, I should go too.”

“Grrraow. You too, Master Caim?”

“Yeah. It seems we have an important guest. I need to welcome him,” Caim answered, pointing down.

A man was climbing toward them dozens of meters away—the first of their foes to arrive. While his clothes were tattered and soaked in blood, he didn’t seem to have been injured. The man was large and dark-skinned, wearing a bandana on his head and holding a shovel on his shoulder as he walked straight toward the summit.

“From his appearance, I guess he must be Deed the Gravedigger.” Caim had heard the names of several famous assassins from Rozbeth.

Deed looked up and exchanged glances with Caim.

“Oh... He’s good,” Caim whispered. Just a look had been enough for him to understand that the Gravedigger was a powerful opponent. Of course such a man wouldn’t lose to the monsters like

the other riffraff.

"Do your best, Master Caim!"

"Be careful!"

Tea and Millicia cheered Caim on.

"Of course. I'm gonna win this quickly and come back, but I'm counting on you if someone else makes it here." Caim entrusted Millicia to Tea, Lenka, and Lykos before charging at Deed the Gravedigger.

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Deed the Gravedigger had literally been born in a grave.

His mother had been murdered by a man testing his sword on innocent people during the last month of her pregnancy. When his mother died, Deed should have met the same fate, but that hadn't happened. Perhaps it was love, regret, or even the grudge she held for her death, but his mother turned into an undead and gave birth to Deed in the grave where she was buried. She then brought her son to the temple before being purified by a priest.

After that, Deed was raised in the temple. Since he was born from an undead, his father was terrified of him and fled. Despite the special circumstances of his birth, though, Deed wasn't undead himself—he was a fully living human being. It was a true miracle, and yet people shunned him. It didn't help that his body was different from an ordinary person—he was immortal, but not like an undead was.

Whether he slipped in the mud and struck his head on the ground, or got stabbed in a fight, or was in flames during a magical explosion, or ate a poisonous mushroom by mistake...he never died. Even when his mother's murderer sliced his chest open, Deed had only lost a little blood before beating him to death in revenge.

Deed's body was far tougher than other people's, allowing him to escape the grim reaper every time. Because of that, the inhabitants of his hometown found him strange, rejected him as a monster, and tried to put him back into the grave he'd come from. He'd been insulted, stabbed, burned, and finally pushed from a cliff into the

sea, never to be seen again.

The boy's fifteen years of life had both begun and ended in tragedy.

However, a few years later, an assassin called Deed the Gravedigger started to make his name known in the underworld for his many successful kills.

Strangely, his first official target was his father. After his wife had died and he'd abandoned his son, the man had fled the town and become successful as a merchant in another city. Because of the speed of his success, many people hated him, and eventually someone hired an assassin to get rid of him. Deed didn't know if he'd been chosen by the mediator out of malice or concern. Maybe it was just pure coincidence. Either way, Deed had bathed himself in his father's blood and buried him—just as he did with everyone else. After all, he didn't know any other way to live.

As such, no matter if his target was a princess or anyone else, he would kill them all the same.

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Caim and Deed clashed near Mount Garank's summit.

Deed swung his shovel at Caim, who dodged it. Each time the shovel struck the ground, it broke through the earth, scattering rock fragments around. While each blow was extremely powerful, it was only brute force and no skill.

He's...strong. Absurdly so! Caim thought, avoiding another strike. Deed might have been relying solely on his strength, but his sheer destructive power was unbelievable. Moreover, the fact that he wasn't using any techniques made it harder to read his attack pattern, and he kept swinging his shovel at Caim from all directions. *And he isn't* just *strong...!*

"Kirin!" Caim backstepped and sent out a spiraling shock wave of condensed mana. But while it did strike Deed's body, it was simply dispersed without doing much damage.

"Hah!" Deed continued to attack as if nothing had happened. He hadn't done anything special, like using a barrier. No, his body was

simply so tough that Caim's attack hadn't done anything to him.

"Come on... How can you be so tough even without using Mana Compression? Are you a monster?!" Caim complained. Deed wasn't using mana to strengthen himself like Caim did, and yet he was incredibly tough and powerful. "To think that someone could resist the Toukishin Style's Mana Compression with pure physical strength... The world truly is vast!" Caim said while he consecutively struck Deed in the face, the stomach, and even the crotch. But the assassin didn't flinch, immediately counterattacking with his shovel.

Caim clicked his tongue, avoiding the horizontal swing by ducking down. The blow destroyed the rock behind him instead. If Caim hadn't dodged, it would have crushed his head.

"You're fast... I'm surprised," Deed said solemnly.

"That's my line! Also, how can you still move after being injected with several shots of my poison?" Caim replied, annoyed. His mana was toxic, so every time he struck Deed, he'd been putting poison into the assassin's body. And yet, Deed was fine.

So he isn't just tough, but also resistant to poison?!

"Seiryuu!" Caim slashed at Deed with a blade made of compressed mana, but it only scratched his skin, drawing a slight amount of blood and a grunt from the assassin. "This is the first time I've ever faced someone so sturdy! Are you some kind of legendary hero who bathed in dragon blood?!"

Caim had read about such heroes in his childhood—a warrior would defeat a dragon, bathe in its blood, and earn a body as tough as steel. Then after a few more battles, he would gain great riches and even the hand of the beautiful princess.

"I don't know. At least, I don't remember ever slaying a dragon."

"Of course you don't. Becoming immortal by slaying a dragon is just a fairy tale anyway." Dragon blood *could* be used to produce a miracle drug, however, so the legend likely came from a misinterpretation of that fact. "Do you have monster blood? Or were you experimented on with some unique magic? Nah, that's not possible either. How *did* you get a body like that, then?"

"It doesn't matter how I was born. No. No, it doesn't." Deed traced his cut with a finger, scooping some blood, then licked it. "We

have a motive to fight. Our enemy is right before us. Isn't that enough? Or is there some reason we should stop fighting? No. No, there isn't."

"Yeah, you're right... Sorry, I'm talking too much." Caim had been so surprised by Deed's toughness that he hadn't been able to contain his curiosity. He shouldn't be so interested in his opponent to begin with. It was pointless to learn more about someone he was going to kill, after all. The man in front of him was his enemy—someone who wanted to assassinate his woman. There was only one thing to do.

"I'm gonna kill you."

"As will I," Deed replied.

The both of them saw eye to eye. From now on, there would be no meaningless chatter. They would only punch, kick, and strike until one or the other was dead.

"Shiyuu." Caim used his strongest weapon—the only Secret Stance technique he knew—and faced Deed. Then, clad in stormy mana, he leaped at the immortal assassin.

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While Caim was fighting Deed, other battles were coming to an end halfway up the mountain.

"Ugh..."

"Sorry. I hope you can forgive me." A trigger was pulled and gunfire echoed. Groaning in pain, the man died with a bullet in his head. "Dear me... Now everyone is dead..." Mistress, the boss of the Company, muttered with a sigh, gun in hand.

Countless monsters and people—both enemies and her own subordinates—lay collapsed on the ground around her. Because of the monsters and other assassins who had been driven into a frenzy by Caim's poison, Mistress had now lost all of her men.

"In the end, our biggest enemies were our business rivals."

The one Mistress had just shot was an assassin known as the Wild Bird, a wicked man who drank the blood of his kills. Because of that, he had tasted the blood of the frenzied monsters, directly

ingesting Caim's poison and losing his sanity before assaulting Mistress.

"I suppose the other groups must have been annihilated too..." Mistress sighed, pulling the trigger on her empty gun multiple times before giving up and dropping her shoulders. Her subordinates had been divided into several groups to climb the mountain, but they had all probably ended up like the men in her group had—killed by monsters or other assassins.

Now that it had come to this, completing the assassination was impossible. In the end, they'd suffered heavy losses and gained nothing.

"This is our biggest failure since I became the boss of the Company... I wonder what kind of blame our backers are going to push on me."

"If you don't want that, how about fleeing far away? I recommend heading all the way to hell," a voice replied to Mistress's monologue from behind her.

"Ah, you were here?" Mistress said without turning back. "To think I'd meet my end by your hand. What a surprise." She threw her gun to the side and held her hands up. Before she knew it, her former fellow assassin—Rozbeth—was standing behind her, holding a knife. Mistress knew Rozbeth was close enough that it would be impossible to escape or counterattack. "My loss. Could you at least make sure I don't suffer?"

"How gallant. Why not resist?"

"I know it'd be pointless, my dear Rozbeth... And even if I die, there's someone to take my place," Mistress answered with a detached tone. She was the boss of the Company, but just like its members could be replaced at any time, so could the leader. After her death, a new boss would rebuild the organization. "Or rather, I'd be a hindrance if I stayed alive. It would bother my successor if the previous leader lingered around, wouldn't it?"

"If you say so. I guess it's fine to kill you, then." Seeing that Mistress wasn't pleading for her life, Rozbeth knew that further talking was meaningless and thrust her knife into Mistress's back.



“Ugh... You’re not...taking my head...?”

“You helped me a few times, so I’ll let you off with this.”

Rozbeth and Mistress were almost the same age and in the same profession. They had been rather friendly, drinking together and sometimes teaming up for jobs. But they were professionals—and they were merciless against their enemies.

“I see... Thanks...”

“It’s nothing. Don’t worry about it.” Rozbeth pulled her knife out and Mistress collapsed. With her heart pierced, she would never wake up again.

Rozbeth looked down at Mistress’s corpse, her expression slightly sad. When was the last time she had felt sorrow over killing someone? Had she been influenced by Caim and the girls? If so, the woman once called the world’s strongest assassin had become quite softhearted.

“Farewell,” Rozbeth whispered before walking away to find her next prey.

“Hiyaaaaaaa!”

“Grrraaaaow!”

A little after Deed’s arrival, other assassins had started to arrive at the summit. However, Caim was still fighting Deed, so repelling them fell to Lenka and Tea.

“Ugh... How annoying!” Lenka complained as she avoided one rope and knocked another away.

The one who had attacked her was the Hanging King, an assassin who fought with ropes. While this was a strange way to fight, he was very skilled at it, controlling the ropes like living beings, which troubled Lenka greatly.

“You’re...strong...!” Lenka said, panting.

“You shouuuld just give uuup alreeadyyy! I shaaall wring youuur beautiful neeeck!” The man spoke in a very annoying manner as he twirled his ropes, preparing to launch them.

“I am the princess’s shield! I’ll never give up!” Yes, the opponent was strong—but Lenka didn’t retreat and faced him bravely. “Hiyaaaa!”

“Whaaaat?!”

Lenka propelled herself with a burst of mana from under her feet, closing the distance between them in an instant. The Hanging King may have been a troublesome enemy at a distance, but not so much at close range. There, Lenka had the advantage. He was unable to escape due to Lenka's unexpected speed, and she stabbed him in the chest.

"Gah... Spleeendid..." The Hanging King collapsed. As he did, his ropes twitched, but they didn't attack Lenka.

"I won..." Lenka said in between heavy breaths.

"Are you done, Lenka?"

"Tea... What about you?"

"No problems here. I killed them all," Tea boasted, showing off with her three-section staff. She had taken care of her enemies while Lenka fought hers.

Thus, all the assassins who had reached the summit had been dealt with—well, everyone but Deed, who was still battling Caim.

"Master Caim doesn't need our help. I'm certain he'll win."

"Yeah, there's no way Sir Caim would lose. We should focus on playing our own parts."

Tea and Lenka nodded to each other and were going to return to Millicia when suddenly...

"It appears you truly believe in that boy," said a voice.

"Of cou—" Tea almost answered by reflex, but then she and Lenka realized what was happening, and a chill ran down their spines. They hastily looked around, searching for the voice's owner.

"Lenka! Tea! Above you!" Millicia shouted, and Lykos barked next to her, pointing upward.

Tea and Lenka listened, and both of them looked up.

"Who is that?!"

"Is that...the Immortal Butterfly?!"

A girl wearing a Gothic Lolita dress was standing in midair. She had red-and-black pigtails and stayed in the air without any wings, looking down at Tea and Lenka. Based on what they had heard from Rozbeth, they deduced that this girl was the Immortal Butterfly, the oldest assassin in the underworld.

"We need to protect Millicia!"

"Ugh... I was careless!"

Tea and Lenka hadn't thought about surveying the sky and thus had been taken by surprise. They hurriedly headed toward Millicia, but...

"You don't need to be so hasty, girls." The Immortal Butterfly waved her hand and hundreds of black butterflies with a red pattern on their wings swarmed over Tea and Lenka, stopping them in their tracks. "That should do it. Be good little girls and stay there."

"No...!" Lenka tried to stretch out her arm, but it did nothing.

The Immortal Butterfly waved her hand again and another slew of black butterflies flew toward Millicia. With a noise like breaking glass, they easily destroyed the barrier Millicia had conjured.

"Ah..." Millicia feebly blurted out. She couldn't fight and had nowhere to flee.

The black butterflies swallowed *her* up, and *she* vanished.

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"Oooooh!" After activating Shiyuu, Caim had been continuously punching and kicking his opponent. His eight chakras had opened, and his mana erupted out of him like lava from a volcano. Freely using its destructive power, he showered the immortal assassin with a barrage of attacks.

"Aaaaaaah!" Deed was also fighting back with every single one of his limbs. Blows as powerful as cannonballs struck him, but his otherworldly life force refused to allow him to die. Before he knew it, Deed had lost his shovel. Perhaps one of Caim's attacks had knocked it away, or even destroyed it entirely.

The sounds of bones breaking and flesh tearing echoed as blood sprayed everywhere—and yet, Deed continued to fight.

What is this feeling...?! A strange exultation overtook Deed as he suffered more wounds than he ever had before. Not only was his body nearly immortal, but he also felt no pain. Even when his fellow villagers had stabbed him as a child, or during any of the battles he'd fought as an assassin, he had never felt that death was close.

This man... He's different! He's amazingly strong! Caim was

stronger than anyone Deed had fought before, and for the first time, Deed finally began to sense that the grim reaper was looming over him.

"Hah!" Caim aimed a high kick at Deed and struck him right in the face, breaking his nose and making his neck produce an ominous crack.

"Ugh..." *It hurts. It's painful. I'm scared... Ah, I see. This must be what it means to live!* Deed thought. Despite being born from a grave as a living human, he had always suspected that he was actually already dead. True, he had a warm body and a beating heart, but the way he could resist any damage had made him think that he might not truly be among the living. *I was wrong, though! I'm alive! Yes, I am!*

By getting closer to death than he had ever been before, Deed felt he was well and truly a living human for the first time. He had been born from an undead mother, but he *was* human...just a really tough human.

"Aha ha ha ha ha ha!" Deed cried out in joy at the endless pain that assaulted him.

"Don't laugh as I punch you! That's creepy!" Caim said as he continued his onslaught. He struck Deed in the stomach, kicked him in the crotch, grabbed his hair, and punched his face—Caim kept attacking him without rest, and Deed's movements gradually slowed as time passed.



“I’m alive... Yes, I am!” Dead declared.

“I know that already! Now, die!” His face full of displeasure, Caim punched and punched and punched Deed like he was a sandbag until Deed finally began to grow unsteady on his feet. At first, Deed had somehow managed to keep up, but after a while, the battle turned into a one-sided beatdown. “Seems like you’re finally on your last legs...” Caim declared coldly. “I can see on your face that you’re close to death.”

It seemed even the immortal assassin had limits. His life was clearly reaching its end, and the battle was coming to a close.

“This really is the end... Yes, it is...”

“Yeah, it’s over.”

“This was fun... Thanks to you, I felt alive for the first time since I came out of my mother’s womb... Indeed, I was alive,” Deed said with delight.

“I don’t know what the hell you’re saying, but if you’re done talking, then I’m gonna kill you now.” Caim mercilessly kicked Deed in the chest, the intense impact stopping his heart.

“Gah...” Just when Deed was finally feeling truly alive, he was instead overwhelmed by the sensation of death, and he tumbled down the mountain.

“Phew... That’s finally over with.” Once Deed was out of sight, Caim deactivated Shiyuu. The next instant, he was overwhelmed by deep exhaustion and almost collapsed, but he managed to endure it. “I wonder if Millicia and the rest are fine...”

Rozbeth had gone on a hunt, but Tea and Lenka had stayed to protect Millicia, so he expected her to be all right as he forced his tired body to return to the summit.

“C-Caim...”

“What the hell happened...?” While her face was pale, Millicia was here. So were Tea and Lenka. But Lykos was missing, and there was a black sphere in the sky that pulsated from time to time.

“The assassin called the Immortal Butterfly attacked us and took Lykos...” Millicia explained, her voice trembling. The Immortal Butterfly, one of the assassins Rozbeth had warned them about, had indeed shown up—but just when they’d thought she would attack

Millicia, she had abducted Lykos instead. Both of them were currently inside the black sphere in the sky, out of reach.

"Hey... Is that made of insects?" Caim asked, observing the black sphere. It had a diameter of about three meters, and when he looked at it carefully, he could see it was made of countless black insects crowded together.

"To think even the Immortal Butterfly would come here..."

"Rozbeth..."

Rozbeth returned to the summit. She held her knives in her hands, and although there was a lot of blood on her clothes, she didn't appear to be injured.

"Those black insects are butterfly monsters called hell butterflies, and they are under her control. They're both venomous and carnivorous. A swarm of thousands—or even just hundreds—can easily devour beasts, monsters, and people alike. The Immortal Butterfly uses them to kill her targets."

"Then you mean Lykos has...!" Millicia gasped, tears starting to form in her wide-open blue eyes.

"No, I don't think so," Rozbeth refuted with a shake of her head. "The Immortal Butterfly is quite the eccentric assassin and is very particular about who she kills."

"What do you mean?" Caim asked.

"That she's really picky—unlike me, who will assassinate anyone." Rozbeth spread her arms. "Basically, as long as I'm paid, I'll kill anyone. But not her—she doesn't kill anyone younger than forty, and they must be evil murderers. I told you her name just in case, but to be honest, I never expected her to show up."

If so, then the Immortal Butterfly wasn't targeting Millicia. Then what was she doing here?

"Why did she take Lykos away, then? What's her objective...?" Caim wondered. He didn't understand what the Immortal Butterfly's aim could be. "Anyway, we need to save Lykos. I guess I'll try punching it first."

Caim leaped high in the sky and struck the black sphere. However, his fist was repelled with a dull thud. The surface of the sphere was hard, and it felt like punching a rock, not insects.

“They’re being strengthened by mana!” Just as Caim used Mana Compression to increase his physical and defensive abilities, the butterflies were being strengthened with mana and had gathered together to create a defense as solid as rock. The Immortal Butterfly must have been truly skilled to accomplish such a feat.

“I could probably break it if I went all out, but...” Lykos was inside, so Caim couldn’t go too hard at it. The same went for using his poison, which might affect her. “We’ve taken care of all the other assassins, but of course another pain in the ass pops up right at the very last moment...”

“Lykos...” Millicia muttered.

Caim and his companions gritted their teeth at the unexpected development, powerless to do anything but watch over the black sphere.

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Before she knew it, Lykos found herself somewhere unfamiliar. Everything was dark, so she understood it was night, but there weren’t any clouds, stars, or even the moon in the sky—just darkness on all sides. There was a path under her feet that stretched out in front and behind her, and on each side was tall grass that towered like a wall blocking the way.

“Mmmh?”

“’Tis a strange, surprising sight, isn’t it?”

Hearing the unfamiliar voice, Lykos immediately jumped back and prepared herself for a fight.

“You do not need to be so cautious. I won’t eat you.” A girl wearing a Gothic Lolita dress appeared before Lykos, her lips curved into a half smile. Despite looking barely older than Lykos, her voice had depth to it, and she gave the impression of someone much older. “This is the entrance to the realm of the dead. I brought you here because I wished to speak with you.”

“Mmmh!”

“Ah, yes, I should introduce myself. My name is Ageha. Most people call me the Immortal Butterfly, but I have never named

myself thus. I make my living as an assassin," she said, her tone friendly. Not an ounce of hostility could be felt from her. She was very gentle and soothing, as though talking with the child of a relative. "And these are a kind of monster called jigokuchou—or in the uncouth tongue of this country, hell butterflies. They serve as guides for a person's journey to the other side. They are my friends, my servants, my siblings, and my parents," she explained as a black butterfly with a red pattern alighted on the tip of her finger. The butterflies fluttered around in the darkness in an uncanny manner that tended to unsettle people. "Well then, let us get to the main topic. The reason I want to talk to you is related to your birth."

"Mmmh?"

"You were raised by monsters, no? Just as I was." The Immortal Butterfly smiled and spread out her arms. Countless black butterflies flew in all directions before slowly circling around her. "Rarely, a monster will decide to raise a human, giving that human their milk and blood. No... Actually, it is misleading to call them 'human' at all."

Lykos listened silently.

"From the moment they are born, such individuals drink monster milk and eat what monsters eat—which in most cases means the meat of other monsters. Can we really call children raised that way humans? Nay, we cannot," the Immortal Butterfly said, sounding very much like a certain mad scientist.

People's bodies were made of countless individual bits called cells. They constantly split and died, eternally renewing themselves. And for young children with a good metabolism, it happened all the faster. In that case, just how "human" was a child nurtured with monster milk and meat? Wouldn't the child's cells be entirely replaced with those of monsters?

"While we look like humans, our bodies are different. We are monsters in human form. I call us lycanthropes."

They weren't like Caim, who had obtained overwhelming power while staying human and had called himself a daemon. Nor were they like Tea, who was a beastfolk mixing human and animal features. They weren't monsterlike humans, but humanlike monsters —lycanthropes.

“Just like you, I was raised by monsters—by the jigokuchou.” The Immortal Butterfly smiled fondly at the butterflies flitting around her. “As I was starving and simply awaiting death after my parents abandoned me in a forest, the queen of the jigokuchou swept me up and brought me here, to their nest at the entrance to the underworld. That was more than five hundred years ago.”

Lykos kept quiet.

“I do not understand why they did so—usually they devour people. It is the same for you, is it not?”

“...Mmmh,” Lykos answered with a brief whine. While her grasp of language was still far from perfect, Lykos still understood what the strange woman before her was trying to say. Perhaps there was a sort of sympathetic link that surpassed language and species between the two of them, who had both been raised by monsters.

“I came to you because I wished to welcome you as one of my brethren.”

Still, Lykos did not reply.

“Somewhere far away, where humans cannot reach, is a hidden village for lycanthropes. Would you come live there with me?” The Immortal Butterfly held her hand out with an honest, kind smile. “Human society is suffocating, no? Come with me, child.”

Lykos looked at the hand before her, then before long, she extended her own and...

“Mmmh!” She slapped the Immortal Butterfly’s hand away, causing the assassin to blink in surprise.

“Hmm... Is my proposal unsatisfying?”

“You’re not. My pack!” Lykos snarled. If Caim and his companions had been present, they would have been very shocked—after all, Lykos, who usually only whined or barked, had just spoken words, though her speech was a little broken. “They are! Not you!”

“I see... So that is how you think.” A troubled smile crossed the Immortal Butterfly’s face as she looked at Lykos like an unreasonable child. “You like your companions and want to stay with them.”

“Mmmh!”

“I see. Yes, indeed... I was once the same. However, this way will be as painful as going into the abyss,” the Immortal Butterfly

admonished her. Her tone wasn't one of denial, but understanding. It was clear that she empathized with Lykos's claim. "We *can* live with people. However...we cannot die with them," she said, her voice heavy with emotion. Sorrow, anger, despair, and many other feelings were intertwined in a complex knot, each one asserting their presence clearly. "While we resemble humans, we are truly monsters. We have different lifespans. The ones you call your pack will age and die long before you. Unless you commit suicide, you will not be able to die together."

Lykos fell silent again, listening.

"I have seen many of my friends off to the realm of the dead, but I could not go past the entrance..."

"Mmmh!" Lykos then mercilessly punched at the Immortal Butterfly's shapely face with the speed of a beast.

"Hmm?" The Gothic Lolita girl easily dodged, though, as if she were dancing.

"You. Are annoying."

"Well, I *am* old. I apologize for nagging you," the Immortal Butterfly replied, her voice still kind even after Lykos had tried to hit her. She was full of love, as though facing a child throwing a tantrum.

"Shut. Up. I'm. Fine."

"You mean to say that you are fine with how things currently are? As expected, the young truly cannot understand the wisdom of the old," the Immortal Butterfly muttered with a sigh, then raised her right hand. "Still, I cannot allow a young child like you to act so willfully. After all, it would be negligent of me to do nothing when I know that you are heading down a hellish path. Even if you will hate me for this, I must bring you with me." Countless butterflies swarmed around the assassin's arm, forming a small tornado. The impossible sight of a storm created by the fluttering of butterfly wings was equally beautiful and bizarre. "If you wish to have it your way, child, then you will need to defeat this old woman. Jigokuchou no Mai."

The butterflies flapped their wings even more vigorously, creating sharp blades of wind that mowed down the tall grass around them.

“Grrr...!” But Lykos didn’t falter—she bared her fangs, growling like a wolf. She knew the enemy before her was far stronger, and yet she lowered her stance, preparing to fight without showing a single ounce of fear.

Then with a bark, she bravely leaped at the swirl of wind blades. Her boldness bordered on savagery, with a pride that was bestial but noble. The way she resolutely faced a fearsome enemy resembled her foster parent, the Lycaon King.

“Grrraaaaaaaaaw!” Lykos let out a beastly howl as she jumped into the whirlwind. It looked like a suicidal charge—anyone watching would assume that her small body was going to be torn to shreds.

However...

“Mmmmh!”

“Oh?” Lykos crossed through the tornado and threw her fist at the Immortal Butterfly’s face. “What a surprise... To think you would just charge head-on!” she exclaimed as she blocked the blow with a barrier of black butterflies. Then she leaped back, her Gothic Lolita dress fluttering, and watched Lykos with a pained expression. “You are quite the tomboy...”

Lykos whined, in pain from the countless cuts all over her body. Indeed, Lykos hadn’t defended herself or even managed to avoid the wind blades—no, she had simply gone straight through the tornado, paying no mind to her injuries, as though she felt no fear at all.

“You used mana to only strengthen your vitals and avoid being fatally wounded. Your resolve is splendid!”

“Mmmh!” Lykos kicked the ground and charged at the Immortal Butterfly once again.

“Oh my... How reckless.”

The Immortal Butterfly manipulated her butterflies to launch more wind blades, but Lykos paid them no heed and continued her headlong rush. She twisted her body, making herself as small as possible to minimize damage as she continued to attack repeatedly, ignoring the blood dripping from her wounds.

Even risking her life like that, however, didn’t allow her to reach the Immortal Butterfly. And yet, there was something chilling about the way she had just attacked without fearing death.

"Mmmmmmmh!"

"I never intended to underestimate you, but I suppose that's youth for you. It is quite frightening that you can attack so recklessly," the Immortal Butterfly said with a troubled smile as she continued to repel Lykos's punches. If she wanted to kill Lykos, it would be simple—she just needed to continue the fight until Lykos died from blood loss. However, the Immortal Butterfly did not intend to cause Lykos's death—she only wished to take one of her kin under her care. "It appears that bringing you to the hidden village is going to be quite difficult... You truly are forcing this old woman's hand."

"Mmmmh!"

"Oh well, I suppose you do not leave me the choice," the Immortal Butterfly sighed and spread her arms. "I shall take this a little more seriously." The next instant, countless butterflies gathered around her.

Even if her opponent was now concealed behind a barrier of butterflies, Lykos didn't hesitate to throw a punch. However, immediately after her fist touched it, Lykos was blown away. She quickly spun in midair, safely landing on all fours, but was shocked by what she saw when she looked back at the Immortal Butterfly.

"You must be surprised, no? This is one of the abilities available to us lycanthropes." The one who spoke wasn't a young girl wearing a Gothic Lolita dress, but a beautiful woman in her twenties. The color of her hair and her clothing were the same, but her pigtails had come undone and her dress was now too small for her, exposing some cleavage at the neckline. "Despite my appearance, I am actually in my fifties—fifty decades, that is."

"Mmmh?!"

"Now then, 'tis time for the true battle to begin."

The Immortal Butterfly had been dominating until now, but the fight became even more one-sided as an invisible force took hold of Lykos, immobilizing her as though she was bound with strings like a marionette.

"I have sealed your movement, and thus you shall stay."

"Mmmmmmmh!" Lykos tried to shake off the wind keeping her pinned in place, but she couldn't even move a finger. The pressure

was overwhelming. Just how much mana had been infused into the air to solidify it like this?

"Do not worry. I shall heal you after this, and then I shall instruct you on the harsh reality of the world," the Immortal Butterfly said with affection as she stepped toward Lykos in her adult form. "Be at ease, child. You shall soon meet our other brethren. I am certain you will like—"

"Mmmmh! Mmmmmmmmmmh!"

"—them... Oh?"

Lykos howled as her body convulsed and her flesh started to expand.

"This is not completely unexpected, but still... To think you would be able to imitate it after only seeing it once," the Immortal Butterfly muttered with a troubled smile.

Lykos's appearance was changing. Her body grew, tearing apart her already tattered clothes, exposing her nakedness. All of her injuries had now been healed, revealing skin that was perfect and unblemished.

The beautiful woman with green hair roared, baring her sharp canines as her ample breasts jiggled. Now looking around twenty, Lykos shook away the wind binding her and once again punched at the Immortal Butterfly.

"Ugh...!"

This time, Lykos's fist landed. The Immortal Butterfly had defended herself with a barrier of butterflies, but the impact was so strong it still knocked her back. The blow must have been extremely strong, because the Immortal Butterfly bounced on the ground several times before stopping dozens of meters away.

"What incredible physical strength... This is not looking good for me."

"So you say, but your tone implies that you are still quite confident in yourself. You do not doubt your victory even for an instant."

"Huh?" The Immortal Butterfly blinked a few times in surprise as she got up. "You have become very fluent."

"Strangely, my thoughts transform into words of their own

accord... I am just as surprised as you," Lykos said, placing a hand on her abundant bust, covered only by the few shreds of clothing that remained on her shoulders. Apparently, her mind had grown along with her body, allowing her to speak freely instead of just whining and barking.

"I see... So you *were* just like me. Your young appearance does not reflect your age."

"No, I am not nearly as venerable as you. Far from five hundred years, I have barely lived twenty," Lykos replied politely as she rushed to the Immortal Butterfly and kicked her like a ball, sending her flying once again.

"Ow... That hurts! You've really done it now!" The Immortal Butterfly stopped in midair, controlling the wind in order to float in the air without wings. "Jigokuchou no Mai." She then swung her arm downward, and a storm of butterflies assaulted Lykos. Her attack was far more lethal than before, proving she had truly been holding back until now. This time, the wind blades were so powerful that they wouldn't just cut Lykos—they would completely pulverize her into juice. "What will you do?! Are you going to let yourself be torn to shreds?!"

"Mmmh!"

"Oh?"

In answer, Lykos simply swung her arms. She didn't do anything special—she just strengthened her arms and swung them with all she had. They were faster than the speed of sound and created a shock wave that knocked the swarm of black butterflies aside.



“Splendid!” the Immortal Butterfly praised her.

“Why, thank you!”

Lykos kicked the ground and leaped to where the Immortal Butterfly still floated in the air, whirling around and swinging her leg like a guillotine. Lykos slammed the Immortal Butterfly into the ground, but she didn’t stop there, kicking the air to propel herself downward. Caim produced mana footholds to move in the sky, but what Lykos did was different—she simply kicked the air so fast that the wind pressure launched her forward.

“Dieeeeee!”

“Ooooh?!”

Lykos struck the Immortal Butterfly repeatedly, punching her so many times it formed a crater in the earth. It was as though Lykos was trying to pay her back for everything she’d done by making mincemeat out of her.

“Fine, fine... I give up,” the Immortal Butterfly suddenly said, and black butterflies swallowed her up.

Lykos paid them no mind and continued to punch, but it did nothing—the Immortal Butterfly was no longer in the crater at all.

“That’s enough... I understand. You can do as you like.” Lykos could hear the voice but couldn’t find its source. The only thing she could see was black butterflies, so it felt as though they were the ones speaking to her. *“If you really are that strong, then you should not be one-sidedly used and abandoned. You can live as you wish.”*

“Are you sure you want to let me go?” Lykos asked with a snarl. “Bringing me to the hidden lycanthrope village was not just for my sake, was it? You fear what will happen if people realize what I am.”

If Lykos continued to wander the outside world, one day people would learn of her power. While some would want to exploit it, others would fear it and try to kill her.

“My existence might bring harm to all the other lycanthropes,” Lykos continued. “People may even seek to destroy the hidden village, after all.”

“...You understand everything, and yet you still refuse to follow me. What a cruel child,” the Immortal Butterfly said in a low tone.

“There is no need to worry. What you fear shall not come to

pass," Lykos declared. "After all, my master gathers far more attention than myself. He vanquished my mother and shall one day carve his name in history as a true conqueror. A wolf cub like me is nothing but a mere ornament by his side."

"Do you mean that purple-haired boy...? For you to praise him like that, he must be quite the man." The black butterflies distanced themselves from Lykos and spiraled inward in the sky, vanishing gradually. *"We do not have the same lifespan as humans, so I shall extend my invitation again in another hundred years. Also, you no longer need to worry about any assassins. I have a great deal of influence in the upper echelons of the underworld, so I shall soon cancel the job of killing two members of the imperial family."*

Lykos listened silently.

"Well then, stay in good health, my adorable child."

Then the last butterfly disappeared and the space around Lykos burst open, revealing the scenery of Mount Garank.

"Ah..."

"Huh...?"

Below Lykos were her master and her companions.

Still practically naked, she dove toward them.

"Damn it! It's too tough. Is there no way to break it from the outside?" Caim clicked his tongue as he observed the black sphere in front of him. It had been created with butterflies by the assassin called the Immortal Butterfly. Lykos was currently being held inside, so he had been trying to rescue her, but no matter how much he punched or kicked the black insects, the sphere didn't break. Perhaps he would be able to destroy it if he got serious, but he didn't want to harm Lykos. "What does she want with Lykos anyway?"

"I cannot understand it either..." Millicia replied, her face pale from worry. "She did not pay me any heed, so I think Lykos must have been her objective from the beginning."

"Master Caim!" Tea exclaimed, pointing at the black sphere.

Caim looked up and saw that a crack was running along the sphere. Finally, it burst open—but what emerged from inside was a beautiful woman with green hair.

“Huh...?” Caim blurted out, dumbfounded. His eyes went wide as saucers at the sight of the unfamiliar woman. He could swear he didn’t know her, but the color of her hair and a certain something in her facial features did seem familiar. “Wait... Is that Lykos?!”

“Mmmh!” The green-haired woman kicked the air and propelled herself toward Caim, who was still in shock. As she neared him, her body slowly shrank, and by the time she landed in his arms, she was back in the form of a young girl. “Mmmh! Mmmmh!” She rubbed her cheeks against Caim’s chest affectionately.

“What the hell was that...?” he muttered. Had he just seen an illusion of an adult Lykos?

“For a moment, I thought I saw Lykos looking...sexy.”

“That was not our imagination... Was it?”

Tea and Millicia said, bewildered, while Lenka and Rozbeth tilted their heads in confusion behind them.

“Yeah... It doesn’t make sense...” Caim replied.

“For now, we should give her some clothes... This is all I have.” Millicia laid her coat over Lykos, who snuggled inside.

“Oh well, more importantly—everything should be over now, right?” Tea asked, watching around at the corpses of the assassins on the ground. It appeared that no one else had made it to the summit, nor did it look like there would be new arrivals.

“I think so... And it seems the Immortal Butterfly has gone as well.” Rozbeth sheathed her knives after checking her surroundings. “We’ve dealt with the Bone-Eating General, the Company, Deed the Gravedigger, and even the Immortal Butterfly, so I don’t think there will be any more coming after us. After all, if the assassin community suffered any further losses, it would collapse.”

The assassin community had an order to maintain and could not afford to let it crumble just to kill Millicia. Even killers had to calculate profit and loss very strictly.

“Of course, I can’t guarantee we’ll be completely safe, but I’d say we should be fine for now. We’ve won,” she added.

“I see... Thank goodness. This means the princess’s life won’t be in danger anymore.” Lenka exhaled in relief as she looked at the western sky. The sun had just started to set, painting the horizon in

a vibrant orange.

The others did the same as Lenka and stopped to watch the sunset.

“It has been a long day...” Millicia muttered solemnly, and everyone nodded as they soaked in the afterglow of their victory against the assassins.

Chapter 5: Lance Garnet

"I'm still alive...?" Deed the Gravedigger muttered gloomily as he lay collapsed below a cliff halfway down Mount Garank. He had been struck hundreds of times by Caim and rolled down all the way here. His limbs were broken, his ribs were shattered, and his head was twisted backward—and yet he was still alive, his heart stubbornly beating.

"Still... It's not so bad..."

Deed looked up at the blue sky with his backward head. He didn't think it would feel bad to die like this. In fact, if he could pass away while he was still basking in the pleasant afterglow of his battle with Caim, that would be wonderful.

"It was a good fight... Yeah, it was really fun..."

Indeed, it had been really, *really* fun. Pure bliss. A real thrill. If possible, Deed would have loved to fight with Caim forever.

"Then why not make it a reality?" a voice suddenly said, putting a damper on Deed's reminiscence.

"What...?" Deed's expression went from one of rapture to one of annoyance as he turned toward the source of the voice—a girl in a red dress. "Who are you?"

"Ah, sorry for not introducing myself. I am Mistress, the leader of the Company," declared the petite girl with a hand on her small chest.

"You're lying. I know that whore's face, and you're not her."

"My predecessor was killed in the line of duty. I am the new representative of the organization. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

"I see..." A look of slight sadness crossed Deed's face at hearing that an acquaintance of his had died. "If you work in the business of killing, you can't complain when it happens to you."

"Exactly."

“Still, as her acquaintance and fellow assassin, I should be allowed to offer a eulogy, even if only in my mind. Yes. Yes, I should.”

“Thank you very much. I am certain my predecessor would be grateful for your words of mourning.” The new Mistress bowed.

“Your business with me should be finished now... So leave.” Deed looked away from Mistress. He was going to depart for the other world and wanted to appreciate his last moments alone.

“Unfortunately, you cannot die,” Mistress said.

“What...?”

“It seems you lack self-awareness... Someone on their deathbed would not be able to talk as much as you are. Your complexion seems good as well, so I think you could move if your head was twisted back to its original position.”

“I see...” Deed partly closed his eyes in regret. He wished he had died by Caim’s hand, but once again he had failed to meet his demise.

“Heave-ho!”

“What are you doing...?”

“I am trying to put your head back into place, but it’s very stiff...” Mistress tried her best to turn Deed’s head back in the right direction, groaning with the effort. Now that she was closer to him, Deed realized how young she was. Her tone and her manner of speaking were mature, but she looked to be only in her early teens.

Or maybe even younger...?

“Why are you trying to help me?” he asked.

“So that you owe me, of course,” Mistress immediately answered. “The Company lost a lot of manpower over this affair, and failing the job cost us a great deal of trust. Many of our business rivals also died, though, so I suppose it comes out even in the end.”

Deed listened silently.

“We will need skilled individuals to rebuild the organization. Ones who will become the pillars of the new Company.”

“And you want me, a lone wolf, to become one of those pillars...?”

“I would not mind if you only stay until the organization is rebuilt.

Please, become my knight.”

Deed was as far removed from a knight as one could get—a man born from a grave who stank of dead flesh.

“If you do,” Mistress added, “you might be able to fight *him* once again.”

Deed gasped in realization. There was only one person she could be referring to—Caim. And if Deed became her knight, she was saying he could fight that powerful warrior again?

“I shall set the stage for your battle. After all, they need to face retribution for what they have done to the Company.”

“I see...” Deed muttered, closing his eyes. He truly was content with dying right now—that wasn’t a lie. But he *had* survived. So, in a way, his fight with Caim was not yet over. “If I want to confirm the meaning of my life, meeting that man once more couldn’t hurt. No. No, it couldn’t.”

“Then it’s all settled. Now, I just need to put your head back...!” Mistress took Deed’s monologue as acceptance and returned to putting back his neck into place.

Deed opened his eyes and looked at the young girl. “Mistress.”

“Heave-ho, heave-ho... Yes?”

“You’re turning in the wrong direction.”

“Huh...? Ah!”

“Ugh...”

Deed’s head went from a 180-degree rotation to a 360 one. It was technically back in the right direction now, but even Deed couldn’t help but groan at the pain caused by his head being twisted all the way around.

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In a back alley of a certain town, a young man stood very still, hiding in the shadow of a darkened building.

“So nobody managed to complete the job...” he muttered with a sigh, looking both regretful and resigned to this result.

The young man, with his perfectly arranged hair and clothes, looked like a merchant or even a noble. At the very least, nobody

would ever suspect he was a middleman for the assassins of the underworld.

"The assassination of Princess Millicia was a failure. The Headhuntress betrayed us, the Bone-Eating General and the Company's boss perished, the Gravedigger's condition is unknown, and the Immortal Butterfly withdrew from the job. Likewise, the assassinations of the two princes, Arthur and Lance, have failed. The former killed the Thousand Blades, and the latter captured the Bitch..."

The mediator shook his head, troubled. While it was true that this was the most difficult mission they'd ever offered, he hadn't expected so many casualties.

"Prince Arthur is one thing, but I thought Princess Millicia would be easy... I didn't expect her to actually be the hardest."

While some assassins had lost to Arthur and Lance, most of the casualties had been against Millicia. Despite appearing to be the easiest target, she had actually turned out to be the most difficult to kill—an unexpected dark horse.

"I don't think the Gravedigger is dead, and the Company should select a new head soon."

Still, this job had left quite a big hole in the underworld. The mediator gloomily tapped his temple with his index finger a few times, then shook his head.

"While it's true that it's the assassins' responsibility if they die during a job, it's not out of the question that I'd end up being blamed for all these casualties. After all, they wouldn't have died if I hadn't become the middleman for such an unreasonable request, and not a single target was eliminated."

Losing so many of its members would risk the integrity of the assassin community. Someone would have to take the blame for this disaster.

"I'm afraid of the elders' scolding... I don't want to go back..."

"Be at ease, brat," a voice said.

"Oh?"

"I have a message from the elders." The source of the voice was a pretty girl wearing a Gothic Lolita dress—the Immortal Butterfly.

"The request has been withdrawn. Also, I must dispose of a certain foolish subordinate."

"Jeez... That was fast." The mediator drooped his shoulders. The fact that the Immortal Butterfly had been chosen to deliver this message proved how serious the elders were about it. She was very particular in choosing jobs, but once she had selected a target, she never failed to kill them. "If you'd killed Princess Millicia, maybe they would've let me live."

"Unfortunately for you, I could not care less about that girl. The assassin community and my village have a symbiotic relationship, so while I have nothing against you personally, letting you live would be troublesome," she declared, ignoring the man's opinion. The bloodlust she gave off was completely different from when she had faced Lykos.

"I surrender."

"A wise decision. Then I shall make sure that you do not suffer."

"This is very generous of you..." And also meant that if he had resisted, she *would* have made him suffer. While he cursed his fate, the mediator congratulated himself on making the right decision at the very end.

"Well then. Farewell," the Immortal Butterfly whispered. The next instant, the middleman's head fell to the ground. "Be at ease. Hell isn't as bad as you might think. May you rest in peace forever."

As if that would make me feel any better... Now only a head, the mediator passed away without being able to voice his last words.

With that, the mission to kill the members of the imperial family had concluded. However, having lost most of its main forces, the assassin community was forced to slow down its activities, and the underworld entered a lull.

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"Aaaaaaaaah!" Loud moans rang out as Millicia and Lenka climaxed simultaneously.

Caim and the girls had continued their journey eastward after their battle against the assassins. Having dealt with the threat from

the killers, they had decided they no longer needed to rest in the wilderness, as long as they didn't lower their guards. Currently, they were in a town not too far away from Berwick, where Lance Garnet was. There, they were finally able to enjoy the comfort of a bed at an inn. The survivalist lifestyle hadn't turned out to be that difficult, but as young people, they couldn't help but lose themselves to the pleasures of the flesh once they were all in a bed together. And so, even though the sun hadn't yet set, Caim and his four lovers were already engaging in a bout of intense sex.

"Mmmh... Aaah..."

"J-Just...kill me..."

Millicia and Lenka lay down listlessly after their orgasm, falling asleep with their bodies drenched in sweat.

"Seriously... They're like animals." Caim—the one who had made the two beautiful women climax—wiped the sweat from his brow contentedly. Just like the girls, he was naked. He had a balanced physique, muscular without being bulky. The "sword" attached to his lower half still stood valiantly despite having just conquered two fair maidens.

"Ah, you're finally done. We've been waiting."

"How cruel of you to make two pretty girls wait like this."

Tea and Rozbeth commented after seeing Millicia and Lenka sink into the bed. They had been waiting for their turn sitting at the table in the corner of the room, having lost a game of rock-paper-scissors against the other two.

Incidentally, it went without saying, but Lykos wasn't present. Perhaps she was being tactful and knew that they wouldn't do anything with her present, but regardless, she had jumped out of the window and gone on a stroll in town.

"Tea got tired of waiting and is all wet now."

"Same here. If we don't start soon, I'm going to lose it."

Tea and Rozbeth were already in their underwear before even starting. Today, Tea was in white and Rozbeth in blue. Millicia had worn yellow and Lenka red, so they might have all just decided to match with their hair color.

"Still, your body fluids are really impressive," Rozbeth said. She

scooped some from Millicia's skin, earning a moan from the latter in the process, and licked them. "It's so sweet it feels like my tongue is melting. This is what blew my life completely off course."

"Just saying, but you drank the poison on your own," Caim replied indignantly to Rozbeth's criticism. Rozbeth had drunk the poison Caim had made to kill the wyverns, which had aroused her, and the resulting addiction had caused her to fall into Caim's clutches. But it wasn't as though he'd forced her to drink it, so he didn't like her talking as though he'd done something to her.

"I know. Besides, well... I have no complaints with my current self, so I'd forgive you anyway." Rozbeth sat to Caim's left on the edge of the bed, then licked his neck. "You must be tired, so I'll service you."

"That's unfair, Rozbeth!" Tea protested, sitting on the opposite side. She also started licking him like a dog.

Caim moaned as Tea and Rozbeth competed for the chance to lick his sweat on both of his sides. Pleasure coursed him at the sensation of the two beautiful women's tongues. They started with his face, then gradually descended—his neck, his shoulders, his arms, his armpits, his chest, his hips—until eventually they reached his "sword," kissing its tip together. Two beauties with glistening eyes and flushed cheeks lovingly licking his "sword" made for an incredibly sexy view.

"Here."

"Ah!"

"Mmmh!"

However, Caim wasn't satisfied and wanted more. He unhooked the girls' brassieres while they buried their faces between his legs.

"You've got beautiful breasts. Would be a waste not to use them," Caim said.

"You're awful! What a cruel thing to say." Rozbeth pouted at Caim's audacious demand. While she and Tea were both stunning women, there was a clear difference between them in the chest area—Tea's was overwhelmingly larger. Rozbeth found it insulting that Caim had ordered her to service him with her breasts alongside Tea, since it obviously highlighted her inferiority.

“I will gladly do it myself, so you can step back if you want, Rozbeth,” Tea suggested, swaying her breasts happily.

“...No, I’ll do it too.” With a frustrated frown, Rozbeth pushed her breasts together, trying to gather as much flesh as possible to challenge Caim’s “sword.”

“Oooh... As expected, this is amazing!” Caim rejoiced as his “sword” was engulfed by their wonderfully supple breasts.



Tea's chest was as pleasant as usual—bouncy and so soft he felt like he could melt into it.

Rozbeth's breasts, on the other hand, were lacking in size. Still, they were also very soft, and the hard bit at their centers didn't feel bad at all. More than anything, though, her expression as she bit her lip in embarrassment and tried to stop her face from going slack with pleasure was very exciting to see. Rozbeth the Headhuntress, who had once been called the strongest assassin in the underworld, was now looking at him like a female in heat. It gave Caim the same sense of accomplishment as he'd felt when he'd made Millicia his.

"Here I come...!"

"Grrraow!"

"Aaah!"

Caim rewarded them with his aphrodisiac, staining their faces and breasts with white poison.

"Aaah... It's so delicious..."

"Mmm... *Slurp*..."

Tea and Rozbeth both swallowed the special aphrodisiac, making them climax lightly—but their eyes were still full of lust as they looked at Caim longingly, sticking out their tongues in invitation.

"Upsy-daisy." Caim stood up, lifted the girls, then threw them onto the bed, which made them yelp in surprise. "Prepare yourselves," Caim said, smiling savagely as he approached the pair of beauties. Rozbeth was on top, with Tea below, their private parts perfectly aligned. Caim aimed with his "sword" and thrust forward.

"Aaaaaaaaaaah!" The beastfolk maid and the former assassin moaned loudly, their voices echoing throughout the room as Caim brought them to orgasm over and over again.

Some time later, four listless girls in a very unladylike state were all lying on a makeshift king-sized bed created by pushing together the three smaller beds in the room.

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After that, they continued their journey, and a few days later, their destination at last came into view.

“We have finally arrived at Berwick, where Lance resides,” Millicia said, excited, peeking out of the carriage and looking at the town’s castle gate at the end of the road. It was obvious from her tone that she was very eager to reunite with her brother. It wasn’t just because she wanted to meet him, however—she was also deeply moved at reaching the end of their long journey that had started in the Jade Kingdom.

“Seems like it’s prospering. There are quite a lot of traveling merchants, considering a civil war is brewing,” Rozbeth commented, noticing the long line of peddlers in front of the town’s entrance.

A civil war was on the verge of breaking out, so there should have been fewer people, and yet Berwick’s gate was so crowded that Caim and his companions would likely have to wait more than an hour before they could enter.

“It is a trading city connected to the southern nations of the continent, after all. Many foreign dignitaries are staying here too, so they must not anticipate it turning into a war zone,” Millicia explained.

The Garnet Empire had two princes.

The first one, Arthur, excelled at military affairs and had a great deal of combat experience. He had achieved numerous victories in skirmishes against other nations and foreign tribes.

The second, Lance, was more of a diplomat. He had averted a few wars thanks to his negotiation skills and forged many profitable trade agreements.

The two princes couldn’t be more different. However, if they joined forces and Millicia—who embodied love and faith—assisted them, surely, the Garnet Empire would flourish even more.

“War and diplomacy are like oil and water. As the leaders of their respective factions, perhaps they were destined to fight,” Rozbeth commented, which made Millicia bite her lip in vexation. She likely was thinking that if she’d managed to become the bond connecting her brothers, then maybe...

“This is not your fault, Princess. Prince Arthur is the one to blame for everything!” Lenka comforted her dejected master, hugging her. “The current mayhem in the empire is all due to Prince Arthur

exploiting His Imperial Majesty's illness to do whatever he wants. This is not your responsibility to bear!"

"Lenka..."

"Don't you agree, Sir Caim?" Lenka asked, thinking that Caim would console Millicia too, but she received an unexpected reply instead.

"Huh? Sorry, wasn't listening." Caim turned her way, just noticing he was being talked to. Apparently, he had been gazing outside of the canopied carriage, focused on the scenery.

"Caim..."

"Sir Caim..."

Millicia and Lenka were disappointed that Caim hadn't listened to their important conversation.

"Hey, I can't help it! Look, it's the sea!" Caim pointed outside of the carriage in answer to his lovers' condemning stares. The road to Berwick ran parallel to the coastline, offering a beautiful view of the blue ocean. "I was surprised when I saw that big river separating the empire and the kingdom, but to think that a puddle of water *this* ridiculously huge existed! Who could've created it?!" Caim cried, excited, his eyes sparkling at seeing the sea for the first time.

Seeing their lover act so childishly, Lenka and Millicia's anger and anxiety faded.

"Good grief, Sir Caim. Sometimes you can be so..."

"You are adorable."

The knight and her master smiled at the heartwarming sight.

However, Caim wasn't the only one seeing the ocean for the first time—Tea and Lykos were also gazing out at the sea.

"This is incredible... You'd never lack drinking water with so much of it," Tea commented.

"Oh, you didn't know? Seawater is salty, so you can't drink it," Rozbeth said. "Most salt comes from evaporating seawater, though there's also rock salt that can be mined from the mountains."

"Isn't the ocean being salty just a myth? I think I heard that the giant who created the world dropped a pot that produced salt in the sea or something."

"I heard that legend too, but no, seawater really is salty. That

part's not just an old tale. You can see for yourself when we reach the town."

"I will—no, I *must*." Tea nodded to herself.

"But if salt comes from seawater, then why is it so expensive? Can't people just get some directly from the sea for free...?"

"Mmmh?"

Caim and Lykos tilted their heads in confusion.

The group talked to pass the time, waiting for their turn to be inspected at the entrance of the town.

Caim and his companions were finally reaching the end of their long, difficult journey. But would they be able to meet with Lance Garnet without trouble?

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"Hey, Millicia. It's been a while. How have you been?"

It turned out they were able to meet him easily. So easily, in fact, that it was almost anticlimactic. When Millicia had revealed her identity to the guard at the castle gate, she was immediately escorted to the lord's mansion, where Lance resided.

"L-Lance...?" Millicia was so surprised by the lack of complication that she couldn't even rejoice at her reunion with her brother. Because of how harsh their journey had been, Millicia had assumed something would happen to prevent her from meeting her brother so readily.

"I went through the trouble of helping you to abscond to another country, but you just came right back. Oh well, I suppose there's nothing I can do about it now. You're a worrywart after all, so of course you wouldn't abandon your homeland when a civil war is brewing."

Lance was a tall, handsome young man with silver hair. While he had well-defined facial features, he didn't resemble his siblings at all. He looked intelligent and kind, but his affability made him come off as unreliable.

"I'm busy preparing for my fight against Arthur, so I won't be able to spend much time with you, but don't mind me and make yourself

at home," Lance said, greeting Millicia at the entrance of the mansion, and with a "Well then," he turned back and headed back inside.

Millicia stared at his back for an instant, dumbfounded, but she quickly came to herself and called out to him. "P-Please wait!"

"Yes?"

"Th-This is it? Even though we haven't met for so long...?"

"Um... Is there anything else to talk about?" Lance cocked his head. "It hasn't even been a year since we last met, no? Compared to when you were at the abbey, I wouldn't say enough time has passed for us to have a moving reunion."

While Millicia could understand Lance's point, for her it had been a long and grand adventure to make it here from the Jade Kingdom. She had been kidnapped by bandits and almost raped before being saved by Caim. After the two of them had become lovers, they had crossed the Flumen River, marking her return to the Garnet Empire. When they'd arrived in the capital, they had fought Arthur and been forced to flee from their pursuers. Finally, after dealing with all the assassins targeting Millicia, they arrived here.

In short, while her reunion with her brother was a moving event for Millicia, to Lance, it was nothing special—thus the difference in their enthusiasm.

While Millicia was speechless, Lance continued. "Thanks for protecting my sister, Lenka." He gazed at Caim and the girls. "Still, there's plenty of people I don't know here. Are you Millicia's boyfriend? I guess she's at that age now. I still remember when she was toddling along behind me all the time. Anyway, please take care of my sister."

"...Sure." Caim nodded with a complex expression, glancing at Millicia next to him. Her face was red and her clenched fists were trembling.

"Lance, you are so...!" Millicia was angry, pouting like a child.

Well, yeah, of course she would be angry at her brother reacting like that after all she's been through... After her confrontation with Arthur, Millicia had resolved to fight alongside Lance. And yet, he was acting so nonchalantly, completely unaware of the hardship his

sister had endured. *She must feel like it cheapens her resolve...*

"Why are you so angry?" Lance asked, tilting his head. "You don't need to worry—I'm not against your relationship with him. In fact, I support it, and I'll even think of names for your children. We shall hold a grand wedding to celebrate the start of your new life."

"...Do you realize how dire the situation is?"

"You mean how Arthur's punitive force is going to attack this town in around a week?"

Millicia's eyes widened in shock. She had known this was going to happen, but it was different to be given an actual time frame. The battle against Arthur was about to begin.

"With only a week, we'll have to arrange a wedding venue in a hurry. As for the officiant, it'd be great if your guardian, Mother Ariessa, could do it. I want to invite as many guests as possible, but I suppose Arthur won't come, huh?"

"You..."

"Ah, wait. Maybe if we had the ceremony right when he attacks, then we'd be able to spend some time as siblings privately and... Huh? Why is your face so red, Millicia? Do you have a fever?"

Millicia was reaching her limit—the decisive battle was only a week away, and yet her brother was acting so casually. Caim and the others covered their ears and stepped back.

"You are such an idiooooooot!" Millicia shouted angrily.



“Whoa?!” Lance lost his footing in surprise. Thankfully, his nearby servants hastily caught him.

“...Is he really the right choice?” Caim couldn’t help muttering. Millicia’s plan had been to install Lance as the next emperor instead of Arthur, but having seen how carefree the second imperial prince was, Caim wondered if it truly was a good idea.

Their fight against the assassins had just ended, and yet they’d already found themselves in a new crisis.

The battle with First Imperial Prince Arthur Garnet—the child of the battlefield, the lion incarnate, the prodigy of war—was only one week away.

Extra Story: Mating Wolf

"Where am I...?"

When he came to his senses, Caim found himself alone in a deep forest full of luxuriant trees.

"Tea? Millicia? Lenka?" Caim called out the names of his comrades, realizing they were nowhere to be seen. "Rozbeth? Lykos? Just where did everyone go?"

Had they gotten lost in the woods? For that matter, when had he entered this forest in the first place? Caim's memory was fuzzy and he couldn't remember anything.

The trees rustled.

"Huh...?" Caim sensed a presence that wasn't one of his companions. Something beastly was approaching. "An animal...? No, a monster..."

Caim immediately prepared for battle, wrapping himself in condensed mana and readying his stance.

"Grrrraaaaaw!" A large wolf the size of a calf roared and leaped at Caim's throat. Caim easily dealt with it, though, punching it in the head and pulverizing both the monster's skull and brain. However, the wolf wasn't alone—others emerged from the trees and joined the attack.

"Bring it on!" Caim shouted, repelling the monsters with punches and kicks. But after a while, he noticed something strange.

"Huh?" The corpses of the ten wolves he had already killed had melted into a slime-like black sludge. The strangeness of the situation befuddled Caim, which created an opening for a wolf to attack him from behind.

Though his reaction was slightly late, Caim quickly turned around and prepared to counterattack, but...

"What?! A woman?!" he exclaimed, shocked by the sight. What had jumped at his back wasn't a wolf, but a human woman who

seemed to be around twenty, the same age as Tea and Lenka. She had long green hair that reached the ground and, most surprisingly, she was naked.

Caim couldn't bring himself to swing his fist at the naked woman, allowing her to grab his shoulders and push him down.

"Ugh... Who the hell are— Whoa?!" Just then, another unexpected thing happened—after straddling Caim, the woman started to lick all over his face. "What the hell! Are you a dog or something?!"

"Master!" The woman spoke. It was natural for humans to be able to speak, but for some reason, Caim found it very out of place for this particular woman to do so. "I have been waiting to engage in intercourse with you for so long, Master!"

"What the...?"

"Allow me to service you." The woman blushed, her eyes glistening, as she licked Caim's face. Her expression was full of lust and her voice flirtatious—something Caim was quite familiar with, as he was used to seeing females in heat.

"Wait, is my sweat affecting her?!"

"Your sweat is delicious, Master. I cannot stop myself from licking it!" The woman, in a state of complete arousal, ripped Caim's shirt open, tearing through the buttons and revealing his muscular chest. Her tongue moved like it had a mind of its own, tracing from his face down to the base of his neck, smearing his collarbone in saliva. Then she continued toward his chest, and even sucked his nipples, marking them as hers.

"Ugh... You can't just do whatever you want! That's not even where you should be licking!"

"Aaah!"

Caim tried to push her back, but ended up grabbing her breasts instead of her shoulders. They were rather big—larger than Millicia's but smaller than Lenka's—and pretty soft, and their springiness even outmatched his four lovers.

"Aaah... Mmmh..." the woman moaned happily as Caim groped her breasts. She put her hands above his and moved them, pleading for more.

It was at this moment that Caim was able to get a good look at the woman for the first time. She was tall and slender, but her chest was substantial. Though her long hair was disheveled, she wasn't bad looking—in fact, she was rather attractive. If she combed her hair, put on some makeup, and wore a dress, she could pass herself off as a noblewoman.

"Wait... Do I know you...?" Caim felt a sense of déjà vu as he looked at her face and green hair. This should have been his first meeting with her, and yet he couldn't help but feel it wasn't. "It can't be... Are you—"

"Knowing who I am is not that important. But *this* is!"

"Whoa!"

The woman, who had been enjoying having her breasts rubbed, couldn't endure it any longer and went for Caim's pants. She quickly removed his belt and slid down his pants and underwear, revealing Caim's "sword." It stood valiantly, ready for action.

"Aaah... Master's master is so big... I am so happy!"

"Wait... You want to do it right here?"

"Of course. I shall not let you flee." The woman lowered her hips toward Caim's "sword," pressing her most precious part against it. Thanks to the wet sensation he was feeling, Caim knew the woman was also ready for what was coming next.

"Ugh... To think a woman would end up taking *me* like this..." Caim muttered in resignation. The next moment...

"Aaaah!"

For the first time ever, Caim was completely on the receiving end as the woman's unexplored cleft engulfed his "sword." His mind blanked at the pleasure and sense of conquest from stealing her virginity.

The woman's expression was filled with rapture, her tongue hanging out as she shook her hips above Caim. Wet slapping sounds echoed throughout the forest, gradually becoming louder.

"Aaaah! Master!"

"Here I come!" Even with the woman in the lead, Caim found an opportunity to counterattack.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!" the woman moaned loudly, brought to

climax by a thrust of Caim's "sword."

"Huh...?"

When he came to his senses, Caim was in his bed. Sunlight streamed through the gap in the curtains, and the chirping of birds celebrating the arrival of morning could be heard from outside.

"That was a dream... Right?" It had felt pretty real, but had to have been a dream.

Right now, Caim and his companions were resting at an inn during their journey. Because the rooms and beds at this inn were so small, everyone had slept individually instead of together as they normally did. This was the first time Caim had gotten to enjoy a night alone for a long while.

"Still, having a wet dream like that... What am I, a horny teenager or something?" Caim grumbled and rolled up his blanket to check if he had stained his underwear. "Huh?"

"Mmmh..." Under the blanket was a young girl with green hair, curled up against him and sleeping soundly. She was one of his traveling comrades—Lykos the wolf girl.

"Did she sneak into my bed while I slept?"

As he watched Lykos sleep peacefully, Caim remembered his dream. Though their age and their figure didn't match, Lykos's face and her green hair were very similar to...

"...I should go back to sleep," Caim muttered, pulling the blanket all the way over his head, as though trying to escape from reality.



Extra Story: Sister Arnette’s Days at the Royal Palace

At the center of the capital, which itself was at the center of the Jade Kingdom, stood the royal palace, where the royal family lived, and where the nobles and servants worked. And currently in the garden of the royal palace, where seasonal flowers were in full bloom, was a certain pair who looked like they didn’t belong.

“I feel so out of place...” said a boy in butler’s attire, unable to bear it anymore. He was Luzton, an apprentice butler serving House Halsberg.

Luzton had been working inside the royal palace for the past half a month. He hadn’t exactly wanted to do so, but one thing had led to another, and somehow he had ended up here.

It had all started when Arnette Halserg, the lady Luzton served, had kind of forced him to accompany her in her search for her brother. After multiple tribulations, they had finally arrived at the royal capital, but in a twist of fate the fifth prince of the kingdom, Roussel Jade, had fallen in love with Arnette at first sight. The pair had then been invited to the royal palace.

As the prince’s object of affection, Arnette was treated as a guest of honor. She ate luxurious food every day, and she was even allowed to bathe in the large bath reserved for the royal family.

On the other hand, Luzton, who had come with her, didn’t enjoy the same privileges. He was both a commoner and a servant, so naturally, the royal family didn’t treat him like a guest. While they hadn’t driven him out, they were working him to the bone.

“Well, I don’t mind working, but it’s uncomfortable being around so many people of higher status all the time! Someone like me shouldn’t be here!” Luzton shouted.

The servants working in the royal palace were mostly nobles.

There were a few commoners, but they were all elites who had passed an extremely difficult test to get their jobs. In other words, they all practically lived in a different world from Luzton. As an intruder into the royal palace, they looked at him like he was a stray dog, not even bothering to conceal their disdain.

"All the servants of House Halsberg were commoners. Nobody had any education or status, but they were all kind and warm people. Here, everyone's harsh and cold. I can't even make some small talk! I want to go back home! Tell me I can, please!"

"You can't! You're my butler, so you must stay with me!" Arnette rejected Luzton's tearful plea, then folded her arms glumly. "But to be fair, it's the same for me. I'm forced to wear dresses, and I can't even train. How am I supposed to find Caim like this?"

Sitting on a chair, Arnette spread her arms and looked at her attire. She was wearing a red dress of high quality, adorned with ribbons and frills. It reached all the way to her ankles and suited her well, but for a lively and sporty girl like Arnette, it was quite restricting. She was also under a lot of stress, being unable to do her daily practice of the Toukishin Style.

"The prince said he would search for Caim in my stead, but I want to move and run. Just let me punch someone..."

"Whoa..." Luzton let out, exasperated by his lady's dangerous words as she stomped on the ground in frustration. At this rate, he felt like all the frustration she was bottling up was going to burst out in one big fit of violence.

Th-This is bad... Please save me, Master... Luzton prayed to his master, Kevin Halsberg—but naturally, being far away from here, there was no way he would rescue the young butler, who could only fearfully watch Arnette as she groaned like a beast.

"My, my! No wonder it smells so dreadful—there is a filthy stray cat here!"

"Huh?"

Someone joined the conversation. Luzton and Arnette turned toward the shrill voice. In front of a flower bed stood a noble lady wearing a gaudy dress. Her makeup was done perfectly, and her hair was set in drill curls. She laughed haughtily, surrounded by her

servants and guards.

"The presence of that thieving cat who's trying to approach Prince Roussel ruins the whole atmosphere of the garden! She's such an eyesore!"

"Err... Who is she?" Luzton whispered to Arnette.

"She's a girl who's been talking to me recently. I think her name's...Ammonia?"

"It's Sammonia! Millissa Sammonia. Remember people's names correctly!" yelled the girl with the drill curls, her face completely flushed. "Honestly! Why is Prince Roussel keeping such an unmannered, vulgar, and downright ugly stray cat around?! This is unbelievable!"

"Umm... Lady Arnette, could it be that she...you know...Prince Roussel?"

"I don't know. I barely know her. Every time we meet, her face turns entirely red, and she starts yelling at me for some reason." Arnette cocked her head, puzzled. "Also, she's always talking about a stray cat or a thieving cat—which is weird, as I don't see any cats around. I wonder if she's hallucinating."

"I am not! How rude can you be?!" Lady Sammonia flew into a rage, swinging the folding fan in her hand. "I am trying to make you understand that a mere rural noble like you should not approach Prince Roussel! We were supposed to be engaged, but ever since you showed up, he's been ignoring me! So stop getting in the way of our relationship!"

"So I was right..." Contrary to Arnette, who was clueless, Luzton understood the situation immediately. Lady Sammonia had feelings for Prince Roussel, and she was jealous of Arnette, whom the prince had invited to the royal palace and devoted all his attention to.

Lady Sammonia gritted her teeth in anger. "If you will not leave the royal palace on your own, then I will *make* you!" The brawny guards behind her stepped forward. "These are elite soldiers serving the marquisate of Sammonia! If you don't want to obey me, then I shall use force!"

"Yes! Thank you!" Arnette beamed at Lady Sammonia's ultimatum. "I've been wanting to punch someone! How nice of you

to grant my wish, Ammonia!”

“Excuse me...?”

“Let’s get started... But first, this is in the way!” Arnette tore the skirt of her dress, revealing her legs. It had been a present from the prince, and yet she hadn’t hesitated even a single second.

“What?!” Lady Sammonia exclaimed in shock.

“Say, Luzton. This is legitimate self-defense, right? So it’s okay to fight, right? I’m not in the wrong, right?!”

“Um... Please, someone! We need a soldier!” Luzton called out for a guard, tears forming in his eyes as he watched his lady prepare to go on a rampage. But for some reason, none of the soldiers protecting the royal palace were present in the garden right now. “Wait... Did she clear the area?! This is bad, at this rate...!” Luzton paled.

Lady Sammonia had likely cleared the guards out of the garden herself—but unfortunately for her, that had been a bad idea. Now, there was nothing stopping this rabid dog from going on a rampage.

“H-Help!” Luzton started running to find help, but Arnette moved before he could.

“If you’re not coming at me, then I’ll come to you!” Arnette threw a kick at one of Lady Sammonia’s guards that was so fast no one could react to it. The man spun like a top before collapsing.

“What?!”

“That’s impossible!”

Lady Sammonia’s guards were shocked to see a noble lady move so fast. They hurriedly tried to assume a fighting stance, but they were too late.

“I’m not done yet! Seiryuu!” Arnette cut the men’s clothes and armor with a blade of condensed mana. They didn’t bleed, which proved she wasn’t completely out of her mind, but Luzton was on pins and needles as he watched her.

“Eek! Violence in the royal palace?!” The servants who were present panicked, only for them to be knocked down like the guards. Finally, only Lady Sammonia was left.

“You’re last. Anything you want to say?” Arnette asked.

“H-How could you defeat my family’s elite warriors so easily...?”

“If you let me hit you without resisting, I promise not to go for your face.”

“Eek!” Lady Sammonia yelped as Arnette approached her, punching the air. “D-Do you think you can get away with this?! I am the daughter of Marquis—”

“Kirin.”

“—Sammonia... Yikes?!” A bullet of compressed mana grazed her cheek. Just a little closer and she wouldn’t have been able to show her face in public ever again.

“I won’t miss next time.”

“No... Please... Forgive me...” Lady Sammonia pleaded, falling on her rear and starting to cry.

“I won’t,” Arnette said with a gruesome smile. “All of this is your fault, so it’d be unfair to everyone else if you were spared. As their mistress, you need to be punched too.”

“B-But...”

“Just stay put. Won’t be my fault if you move and I hit the wrong place.”

“Nooooo!” Lady Sammonia shrieked.

Arnette raised her fist but stopped midway. “Ah...” She looked at Lady Sammonia—or to be more precise, the ground between her legs. She had wet herself from fear. A puddle of warm water that smelled of ammonia spread on the ground.

Arnette’s smile faded. Her desire for violence fled and was replaced by sympathy.

“Um... Well... I’m sorry. I didn’t think you would...” Arnette apologized awkwardly and tried to help Lady Sammonia to stand up, but someone appeared before she could.

“What are you doing, Arnette?!” someone called out from behind them. They’d come after hearing the commotion, and If they had arrived in time, they would have been a savior. Now, though, their late arrival was only going to create a new tragedy. “Were you the one who did this? Just what— Gah!”

When the person who was yelling at her grabbed her shoulder from behind, Arnette’s body moved reflexively, and she punched the person in the face.

“Wh-Why...? My lady of the red rose...”

“Ah...”

“Oh no...”

Arnette let out a dumbfounded gasp, and Luzton looked deathly pale from witnessing his lady’s barbaric act.

The blond man who’d just been struck in the face, ruining his good looks, was none other than Roussel Jade, the kingdom’s fifth prince and the one who had invited Arnette to the royal palace.

A member of the royal family—someone who should never be punched—now lay unconscious on the ground in a pitiful state.

Afterword

Long time no see, everyone. This is LeonarD, the eternal chuuni author.

The series has now reached its fifth volume. And on the cover is...!

If you have read this volume, you should know who that busty beauty with green hair is already—yes, it's *her*.

As usual, I'm grateful to Won-sensei for his wonderful, sexily cute illustrations, as well as everyone involved in the publication of this book!

Now, please allow me to get a little personal.

I had eye surgery the other day because of a retinal detachment—you know, the thing boxers often get because of all the punches they take. Basically, what happens is that the retina at the back of the eye pulls away from its regular position, so the eye can no longer transform the light coming in through the lens into a proper image. Your vision gradually starts to fade, and if left untreated for even a week, it can lead to blindness.

I had surgery the same day as my consultation. They did a lot of things to my eye with needles and lasers, and thanks to that, I avoided going blind. Seeing the anesthetic syringe approaching my eye was the most terrifying moment of my life.

Worst case, I thought that I would have to stop writing, but my fears turned out to be unfounded. The recovery is going well, and I'm relieved that I can continue to write without issues.

So please take care of your eyes, everyone! If the edge of your vision starts going dark, go see an ophthalmologist immediately!

Until then, I shall pray to all the gods, Buddhas, and devils for us to meet again.

LeonarD

Bonus Short Stories

The Bewitching Forest

Early on in their journey, when it was still only Caim and his first three lovers, they decided to travel by carriage through a forest to avoid being noticed.

"We're lucky there's a back road here," Caim commented.

"Yes. That kind villager really helped us," Millicia said. One of the townsfolk had shown them the path, claiming that only locals knew of it.

"But he also said that this forest was full of monsters who trick people," Tea interjected. "I can't sense any danger nearby, but my ears and tail are shivering."

"Then there must be something. We need to stay on guard," Lenka cautioned, watching around as she drove the horse. While there was enough space on the road for a carriage to pass, the luxuriant trees that grew abundantly in the forest made for poor visibility.

"Well, even if monsters do attack us, we can just defeat them," Caim said.

"Indeed. With you, Lenka, and Tea, unless something unexpected happens, there should not be— Huh?" Millicia suddenly stopped mid-sentence, cocking her head. A thick fog rose around them, and before long they couldn't see farther than a meter ahead. "It's getting more and more difficult to see..."

"I shall stop the carriage." Lenka was about to pull on the horse's reins when she suddenly stiffened. "Ah..."

"What's up, Lenka?" Caim asked.

"Is that a rope...? Or maybe a whip...?"

"What?" Caim was confused by Lenka's strange muttering. He

grabbed her shoulder and turned her his way, only to see that Lenka's eyes were drowsy like a drunkard's. "Hey, you okay?!"

"Why is there a bed there...?"

"What fine meat. I can't stop drooling..."

Lenka wasn't the only one who was acting oddly—Millicia and Tea were too. The three of them stared blankly ahead, unresponsive to Caim.

"What the hell is happening? Is this because of the fog?"

"Mister... Could you please help me?" someone called from outside the carriage. Caim turned toward the source and found a beautiful young woman with chestnut-colored hair sitting at the base of a tree, rubbing her ankle. "I lost sight of my companion and sprained my ankle." Her skirt was pulled up, exposing her thighs, and her top was disheveled, revealing a deep cleavage.

"Could you please lend me a hand?" the woman asked, extending her hand toward Caim. He descended from the carriage and approached her. "Thank y—"

"Die." Caim didn't even let her finish her sentence as he pierced the woman's chest with a sharp punch, leaving a gaping hole in her chest. "Sorry, but toxins don't work on the Poison King. Tough luck for you."

The woman vanished—and a humanoid mushroom appeared in its place. It was scattering spores from its head, which were likely the cause of the illusions.

"Oooooh!" Several other humanoid mushrooms emerged from the forest, charging at Caim. There hadn't been just one.

"You think outnumbering me is gonna matter?" Caim activated Seiryuu, creating a blade of condensed mana and cutting all of the humanoid mushrooms to pieces. Their main weapon was their hallucinogenic spores, so they weren't particularly strong. Once their illusions had failed, there was no way they could win.

Once the monsters were defeated, the thick fog cleared, and the forest went back to normal.

"And that's it. Time to get up, girls." Caim tried to wake up his lovers, but the three of them all suddenly hugged him.

"You are so wonderful, Caim..."

"Tie me up tighter..."

"Now for some after-dinner sex..."

It appeared the illusions they'd seen had completely turned them on. They all undressed, pleading with Caim for more.

"So it's the same as usual in the end..." Caim exhaled a resigned sigh before groping the breasts of his sex-fiend lovers to satisfy their urges.

Rematch Against the Headhuntress

Rozbeth the Headhuntress had joined Caim and his companions in their journey. She was a beautiful woman with navy blue hair woven into a braid, and her skills as an assassin lived up to her moniker.

"I'll hunt your head," Rozbeth declared to the monster roaring before her. She swung her knife, drawing an arc with the light reflected off the dull blade. The next instant, bright red blood sprayed everywhere.

The orc barely managed to utter a sound as its piglike head flew into the air before joining the others of its kind on the ground.

"I'm done. That was pretty easy," Rozbeth commented as she twirled her knives and turned around.

The sound of clapping echoed.

"Good job. I guess weak monsters like them don't hold a candle to you," Caim praised her. He had watched over her fight against the orcs just in case, but his help had ended up being unnecessary.

During their journey, a group of orcs had attacked them, so Caim had been planning to deal with them—only for Rozbeth to ask to do it instead, wanting to prove her worth as the newest member of the party.

"That was perfect. You're pretty agile," Caim said. Rozbeth was strong, and she even rivaled Caim in terms of speed. On top of that, she was a very skilled knife user, and the clean cut to the base of the orcs' necks clearly showed her abilities. "I'm more than happy to welcome a strong comrade like you among us. I'll be counting on

you from now on.”

“A strong comrade, huh? Sounds like sarcasm, coming from you,” Rozbeth replied with a conflicted expression. Then, thinking of something, she suddenly thrust her knife at Caim’s throat.

“Oh?” Caim let out, surprised, though he easily dodged the attack.

“Just saying, but I don’t think I lost to you.”

Caim listened silently.

“I’m still pissed that you just did whatever you wanted to me.” Rozbeth’s lips curved into a belligerent smile. “We’ve got some time, so how about a little spar? I want a rematch.”

“I don’t mind. Let’s do it,” Caim agreed.

“Excellent!” Having received Caim’s permission, Rozbeth charged at him, swinging both of her knives in a flurry of attacks.

“Whoa?!” Caim shouted, impressed by the speed and sharpness of her swings, but he reacted immediately. A metallic *clang* resounded as he parried her strikes with his arms wrapped in condensed mana. “That’s an impressive barrage. Looks like you are just as strong as I thought.”

“You say that, but... Look at you, calmly parrying all my strikes! If you want to praise me, then do it after I’ve severed your head!”

“Sorry, but I don’t wanna die.”

“Hiyah!” Rozbeth swung her knife with everything she had, aiming her sharpest slash yet at Caim’s neck. However, just before it could land, she suddenly lost her strength. “Ugh...”

“This won’t be a simple spar anymore if we continue like this, so I’m ending things here,” Caim declared.

“Ugh... Y-You coward...” Rozbeth collapsed. Before she knew it, she had been enveloped by a sweet scent—a poisonous gas released by Caim through his breath. “Aaaah!” Rozbeth moaned loudly.

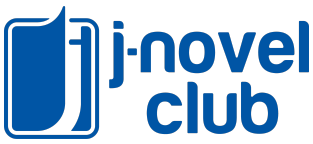
Caim’s toxins were like an aphrodisiac to women compatible with him—and right now, Rozbeth was convulsing in pleasure in Caim’s arms.

“If you want to know which of us comes out on top, then let’s go back to the carriage. I’m gonna show you some love,” Caim said.

“Aah... You little...!” Rozbeth tried to resist, but she couldn’t put

strength into her limbs in her intoxicated state.

Caim brought Rozbeth into the carriage and thoroughly reminded her who, exactly, was on top.



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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 5
by LeonarD

Translated by Boris Lecourt Edited by Sarah Tilson

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