

Ch 42 : Pinned to my bed.

Angeline was tucked into her bed. Around her bed, were the dumbfounded-looking Anessa and Byaku, a smirking Miriam, and a worried-looking Charlotte.

Angeline moved her feet flabbergasted.

「Why not? Why is everyone saying no?」

「As expected.... 」

「Ugh, there's no man in Orphen who's as good as my father and no, it's not just Orphen, I have been looking all over the Empire! 」

「You're not making any fucking sense... 」

「Ugh, Angie, you've been sleeping over me, don't you give a damn about anything. 」

At the relentless words of those around her, Angeline bent her navel and turned over.

This was Angeline's room.

It's been a while since the attack of the Puppeteer and the battle with the Shadow Creature. It's the end of summer, and although it's still hot, the greenery in the trees seems to be fading.

Since the defeat of the Shadow Creature, the people who are trying to revive the Demon King and the Puppeteer have completely disappeared.

I'm not sure if they're waiting for us to let our guard down again, Angeline thought, but it seems that's not the only thing that's going on.

Once again, political change has occurred in Lucressia, and the papists, who used to boast of their near absolute power, have lost their majority.

For the anti-papal faction, there is no longer any need to pull a new puppet from the outside, and the papists can no longer take the trouble to eliminate Charlotte, who is in a distant principality.

Hence, it was safe to say that the danger was considerably reduced.

Lionel said that the faction that had attacked first were probably those who had come as an advance party, and because the chain of command had been disrupted by the mess of political upheaval, the will of Lucressia's home country had not been conveyed to them.

「It's annoying, there was a political upheaval in Lucressia two days before the attack... If it's a secret agency, I hope they at least have a way to communicate with us... oh my god, how shall I deal with the lord...」

A large number of soldiers are struggling with the cost of treating their injuries. Lionel's stomach ache is not likely to stop yet.

It was Byaku's opinion that the people who once had Charlotte would not be so likely to come to the next step since the powerful force of the Demon King had been defeated.

They didn't have much information about their organization, and erasing it would mean a lot of showmanship. The odds of them taking a risk and coming at us are low. It's not so much that they have a problem with that as it is that it's more of a problem for them to have their affairs out in the open.

Anyway, that kind of thing made Angeline lose her mind.

It felt like an awakening, but it was frustrating that the problem instantly disappeared and there was no place for it to go.

Maria had come forward to say that she would investigate the melted demon king, and the petty politics were annoying to Angeline.

So, as if to relieve her exasperation, Angeline was once again on the hunt for Belgriff's wife.

She had intended to do what the tavern master had told her to do and not to give too much of a hint of an arranged marriage, but whether that was obvious from the way Angeline talked or whether she really didn't like tavern master's idea in the first place, she wasn't sure, but anyway, none of the women had shown up to say they were going to accompany her on her autumn homecoming.

Angeline slumped onto her back and stretched her arms and legs upward.

「It's okay. I'll take my time looking for it...」

「No no no no Angie, I think you're completely spinning your wheels...」

Byaku nodded in agreement with Anessa's words.

「Quite. You need to be a little more thoughtful. What you're doing is a waste of time.」

Then he leaned against the wall in dismay. Anessa seemed a little happy to have more of a tweaking role.

Angeline sulked.

「I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't go into the family situation...」

「Hey, big sis, why can't we just get your father to come to Orphen? 」

Angeline suddenly got up.

「Well it's kinda tough because he refused me once, but if you mean for fun and not immigration, it should be okay... I guess...」

With a shining expression as if she had a revelation, she patted Charlotte's head with a good-natured smile.

「Good idea...! Great job, Lottie. 」

「Yeah, hehe... 」

「Alright, let's go back in the early fall and convince your father. Orphen sightseeing tour, the sneaky blind date part is about to begin...! 」

Miriam fluttered happily at Angeline's declaration.

「Wow, I'll show Bel around when he comes. I'm looking forward to it!」

Anessa nodded. Her expression was relaxed somehow.

「I'm not sure I'd consider an arranged marriage, but I'm kind of glad Bel-san is coming...」

「Hehe.....fun.... 」

The three girls who knew Belgriff had completely changed the color of their eyes. For some reason, even Charlotte's cheeks were stained and flushed.

Byaku, who was watching from afar, sighed in dismay.

「I don't know what it is but you're on your own now. 」

○

The shadows of the mountains in the evening gradually lengthened and the glistening sunset was hidden. But the sky was still bright, and the west was red as if a great fire were raging.

On a hilltop overlooking the village, there were four shadows.

Belgriff, Duncan, and Marguerite were sitting where they wanted to be, each sitting still and closing their eyes. They held their weapons in their hands. Graham walks around holding the child.

What the three of them are doing is meditating to increase their sensitivity to the weapon. They focus on sharpening the senses and magic in their bodies to become one with the weapon in their hands.

Belgriff didn't move at all, except for his chest rising and falling for his breath, while Duncan and Marguerite occasionally shifted restlessly and fidgeted. It's not a good idea to do this kind of static practice.

Marguerite opened her eyes and opened her mouth timidly.

「Oh, great uncle.....still.....? 」

But there is no reply. Graham was silent as if he was a statue as he held the child in his arms.

Marguerite closed her eyes again, as if she had given up.

Belgriff let himself drift off into a strange sensation.

His body was not moving, but there was an amazing rush of magic and sensation inside it. He felt the flow of blood in his thin veins, as if a mountain stream was going down a narrow valley with great force. The magic power rode on every drop of it and went through his body.

Eventually it flowed from his fingertips to the sword, around the hilt, sword blade, and cutting edge, and back to his body again.

The shiny, sharp magic power that passed through the steel is cold as if it stings you.

Every time it hits your heart, it collides with the warm magic power produced inside your body, creating a kind of tension in your body.

It's as if a battle is taking place. It was as if my body was heating up, even though I didn't even flinch.

But gradually, each of the magical powers that were resisting each other began to mix together in a whirlwind.

The magic power that came through the sword and the magic power produced from the body, mixed together, finally felt as if it was a single line.

Belgriff opened his eyes and stood up. He sheathed his sword and stretched out his body.

「Let's go home.」

「Hmm. Okay」

Graham nodded. Marguerite's mouth twitched.

「What, you didn't even respond to me, why respond to Bel? 」

「Marguerite. You must understand the difference. Bel finished everything and stood up. You just got sick of it along the way. 」

「Uh..... 」

Marguerite stood up silently, as if in surrender.

Duncan stretched wide and popped his back and shoulder bones.

「Oh dear.....a certain person is not good at this kind of training. It seems to me that swinging an axe single-mindedly is more in line with my nature. 」

「Don't be so sure of yourself. If you can break free from that, you'll be a better fighter, Duncan. 」

「Mmmm... well... 」

Duncan crossed his arms and grunted.

「Graham, shall I take care of Mito? 」

「Hmm. 」

Graham handed the dark-haired child he was holding to Belgriff.

The child, named Mito, didn't look much different, but he wasn't shy and he missed everyone the same way. Mito hugged Belgriff quietly.

「Oto-san.....」

「Yeah, let's go home. 」

The four of them descended the hill and walked back to the village through the tall summer grasses.

Here and there they could hear sheep and goats crying and the sound of dinner being prepared in every house. The sky had turned purple, and the crescent moon was shining as it floated in the midst of the big stars.

It had been a while since that commotion.

The forest had returned to normal and the demonic beasts were completely gone. The lumberjacks were happy to be able to work as before, while the youngsters were somewhat disappointed with the lack of stimulation.

Life was calm again in Tornella, and Belgriff plowed the fields and practiced his sword as before.

But unlike before, there were more housemates now. It's much more lively. He liked the quiet life, but this wasn't too bad either.

Back at the house, I was making a fire in the fireplace and preparing dinner when Kelly came in. Burns and his girlfriend, Rita, were with her.

Belgriff nodded his head, oh well.

「What, all together?」

「Hey, I got all worked up about it last time, so I thought I'd sneak you in today. 」

Kelly lifted the basket in her hand. It seemed to contain some food. Barnes was holding a wooden box with a bottle of liquor in it. Marguerite's face lit up with a puff.

「Yes! Booze! 」

「...Marguerite, be considerate. 」

「That's your great-uncle, right? I'm not the least bit of good at this. 」

Graham scowled, but he couldn't say it back because it was true, apparently, and he sighed in resignation. Barnes chuckled.

「Marie, don't drink it all, okay? We're all going to be drinking. 」

「I know, I know. 」

Seeing Marguerite in a hurry, Rita poked Barnes, who relaxed his expression in a fit of rage.

「Cheating ... no.」

「No, no, no... 」

Rita pinched Barnes's cheek and looked at Marguerite with a muffled pout.

「Don't take him from me, okay.」

「I won't take him. I'm not gonna take him. 」

Marguerite chuckled and poked Rita. Rita still hugged Barnes as if she were wary.

She pulled out a table and brought a chair from the barn to serve a cup of tea. It was a calmer atmosphere than the big feast the other day. Graham only has to take his first drink, too. But he looks like he's already turned, and he's talking less and more in a daze.

Mito had been plodding around among the adults, sitting on their laps and climbing on their backs.

Now he's on Kelly's lap, rubbing the flesh of her belly and giving her a strange look.

「Kelly, fatty... not like Oto-san.」

「Hahaha, come on, Mito, don't compare me and Bel in the same room! 」

「But my dad and Bel, even though they're the same age, their builds are completely different... Bel is cool, but my dad... 」

「What are you talking about, son? It's me, I used to be the most handsome man in the village! Right, Bel? 」

Belgriff chuckled and sipped at his glass.

「How did it go? Well, I'm sure I was thinner than I am now. 」

「Seriously? I can't imagine a skinny Kelly or anything like that. 」

Marguerite giggled as she dried her glass in a buoyant manner.

Kelly raised an eyebrow and slapped her belly.

「You don't understand, that's a sign of success! I mean, to be a farmer and get so fat! 」

「Yeah, I know that. You're doing great. 」

「Ha ha ha, Bel knows what he's doing! Hey Mito, don't hit me in the belly. You don't have to imitate me. 」

He was amused to see Kelly smack himself, and Mito on his knees was popping Kelly's belly.

Duncan laughed and picked Mito up.

「Utterly naive, isn't that what you call naive! 」

「Duncan, Beard. 」

Mito was picked up, and now he was pinching and tugging on Duncan's beard.

「Come on, Mito! A man's beard is not a toy! 」

「It's lumpy... 」

「Hahaha! I don't like it! 」

Even as he said this, Duncan seemed happy.

Mito fiddled with Duncan's beard for a moment and then reached out to Graham.

「Grandpa, hug.....」

「Umm..... 」

His eyes were down, and Graham slowly picked up Mito and placed him in his lap. Mito rested his back against Graham and reached for the thin bread on the table and began to giggle and chew on it.

Mito was so comfortable with Tornella that it was hard to believe that the former was the Demon King.

Of course, he didn't tell the villagers that he was the former Demon King. It's assumed that Belgriff picked it up in the forest. I'm sure that the villagers also accepted the fact without a doubt, since there was a precedent of Angeline in the past.

I'm sure you'll find that Mito is much closer in form, but he's not human, according to Graham.

It's a good idea to be aware of the fact that you can't get the scissors to cut through his long hair. It seems that he can change the shape of his hands if he wants to. If they can change their hands, they can change their bodies.

In short, he likes to take the form of a human right now, but his substance is more like a shadow priest who is not fixed in reality like the Demon King.

However, it also seemed to be true that he was quite fixed in this form. Not long ago, his figure would suddenly waver like a black shadow while he was asleep, but that's hardly the case these days.

I don't know what the logic was, but Graham and others were watching Mito closely and examining it with interest.

Marguerite has been fighting the Demon King and similar monsters for a long time, so her interest in them seems to be quite deep, and she sees Mito as a valuable object of observation.

But that was only in the beginning, and now the innocent loveliness characteristic of the young child seems to have completely overwhelmed her, and she can often be seen talking to Mito, at the very least, impatiently taking care of him.

Rita looked at Mito, who had finished his thin bread and was paddling his boat dazedly, and muttered to herself.

「Children huh, must be nice.」

「...Oh, dear. 」

He stared at me and Barnes squirmed his mouth. Duncan laughed and poured Barnes a drink in his glass.

「When will you guys be ready to celebrate? 」

「Hey, Mr. Duncan! 」

「I'm embarrassed. 」

Rita puffed her cheeks and took Barnes' arm. Kelly laughs.

「Hurry up and let me hold my grandson! 」

「Oh, shut up! 」

Barnes foolishly dried his glass of liquor in one gulp and swallowed heavily, apparently going into a strange place.

Rita rubbed his back and said.

「Speaking of which ... Mr. Duncan...」

「Hmm? 」

「What's going on, Hannah? 」

「What? 」

Duncan choked on the roasted meat he was about to eat and pounded his chest with his fist. Kelly chuckled.

「You guys seem to be getting along great lately! Duncan, you can quit traveling and settle down here, too! 」

Duncan is a warrior with a war axe in his arsenal. Because of his skill with the axe, he often goes out to help the lumberjacks. Because of his unpretentious nature, he blends in easily, and starts to show up at the gatherings of the woodcutters.

The one who cooks and cooks for the group is Hannah, a thirty-something woman who has lived alone since her husband, a woodcutter, was killed in a fallen tree accident.

She is cheerful and vivacious in spite of her status as a widower, and she often seems to get along with Duncan.

Duncan managed to swallow the meat down and his eyes were black and white.

「No, no, no, a man doesn't do that sort of thing yet! 」

「What the hell are you talking about, you're in your mid-30s. You'll get old in the blink of an eye if you keep talking like that. Even Hannah misses you, and I'm sure you'd be happy to oblige. 」

「Gulp... 」

Duncan's blush grew even redder and he fell silent.

It was obvious that he didn't hate Hannah, either.

Belgriff, who was stirring the stew by the fireplace, held the wooden tub.

「I'll get a little water for you,」

Then he left.

Marguerite opened her mouth as if a thought had occurred to her as she poured the drink into her glass.

「Well, what about Bel?」

Her gaze fell on Marguerite. Kelly tilted her head.

「What do you mean?」

「I thought he didn't have any desire to get married. 」

「Come to think of it, that's true. If you're as high as Lord Bel, I'm sure the women wouldn't leave you alone.... 」

「What do you think, Kelly? Wasn't Bel a popular guy? 」

Kelly frowned and waved her hand.

「He walks so naturally now that you wouldn't even know he had an artificial leg, but when we got back to the village he couldn't walk like that. He couldn't walk with a cane, he was wobbly, it was a painful sight. Even at work, all he did was hold me back at the beginning. The women were very disgusted with him. 」

Belgriff had just returned to the village, and his movements were not smooth, partly because he had not yet been rehabilitated and trained sufficiently. He couldn't walk without leaning on a cane, and it took him a long time to do the tasks that everyone else normally performed.

In Tornella, where self-sufficiency was the basis of life, no woman would lean on a man who couldn't do his job. Belgriff was teased and ridiculed for the fact that he had once abandoned the village and left.

Nevertheless, he continued to quietly rehabilitate and train without a single disagreeable look on his face, and eventually he became better at his job, and eventually he was able to do more work than humanly possible.

「That's why we all apologize to Bel and rely on him now, but somehow there's a drawback to the guys of our generation that we've left behind once. Bell doesn't mind, but it makes me feel bad about it. That's why it's best not to ask for a marriage proposal. 」

Kelly said, drying her glass of liquor and sighing.

「And it doesn't look like he's in the mood for it either. 」

「Hmm. 」

Marguerite sipped at her glass as if she were choking.

「What a waste. Right, great uncle?」

「Hmm? 」

Graham, who had apparently been preoccupied with petting Mito, looked up and tilted his head.

「What?」

「No, your great uncle is. 」(Dunno what this means, just delete it?)

That's when Belgriff came back. He transferred the water that had filled the wooden tub to the water bottle.

Then he looked at the table and tilted his head with his mouth gaping open, apparently amused by the different atmosphere.

「.....What's going on guys? 」

「I respect you more than ever, Mr. Bell... 」

Seeing Duncan and Barnes in tears, Belgriff scratched his head in confusion.

「Nah, what is it, all of a sudden...」

「Hey, Bel. You don't have a crush on anyone? 」

「Hmm? I like ... all the people in Tornella ... but yeah, Angie, and my daughter is important, too. 」

「I don't mean that! I'm talking about not even thinking about getting married! 」

Belgriff sat down in his chair, chuckling.

「Me? I'm forty-three now. I can't even think about that now. 」

Marguerite looked irritated and poured the drink into her glass. The momentum was too much and a little spilled on the table.

「What a waste! Forty or fifty, he said, one or two wives wouldn't be punished for it. 」

「No, we're not noblemen, and two is no good...」

「...There must be a woman in love with you. 」

Graham muttered. All eyes in the room turned to Graham.

Graham, who was stroking Mito in his lap, looked up and looked at Belgriff.

「An elven woman named Satie, isn't it? 」

「Hmmm. 」

Belgriff scratched his head in annoyance. Kelly, who had been pouting, leaned forward suddenly.

「Bel, you were in love with an elf? 」

「Was in love with her, or something... 」

「Bell! You met another elf before me and your great uncle? 」

Marguerite grabbed Belgriff's shoulder in excitement. Belgriff chuckled and poured his drink into his glass.

「It was a long time ago we just fought in a party together for a little while. 」

「Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey... I've never heard of that before! 」

「No, because it's not something I'm going to bother saying... 」

「What do you mean, it's nothing? Just give me some details! 」

Kelly moved her chair toward Belgriff and leaned forward into a listening position. Marguerite, Duncan, and even Rita looked at Bel with interest. Graham seemed to be too busy with Mito to do that, though.

Belgriff laughed in annoyance.

It's a bit embarrassing that at his age, he's going to be talking about this kind of stuff.

Memories are sometimes bitter. However, if you say it out loud and make it into a funny story, it will drown it out a bit.

Thinking about that, Belgriff opened his mouth to think.

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The tavern is always crowded. All sorts of adventurers, high and low, drank and brought food to their mouths.

There was a brawl-like rage and a relaxing feel. The smell of stew, alcohol, and body odor, all of which drifted in a mixture to give that feel.

「Ha, I'm tired!」

The elf girl chuckled and reached across from her to pat the red-haired boy on the shoulder.

The red-haired boy chuckled and scratched his cheek.

「You look ready for the next adventure.」

「Hmmm, because it's exciting. I am looking forward to my first dungeon. 」

A brown-haired boy sitting next to me chuckled as he shared his food.

「Don't you think it's a good idea to have too much energy? 」

「That's not gonna happen. 」

A boy with dead grass colored hair sitting next to the elven girl said.

「If you're well, we can go that far ahead. Right? We will try to go further. 」

「Hmm, yes. We're still low ranked right now, but eventually we'll be high ranked!
」

「No, we will become S-rank. 」

With that, the boy with the subtilis-colored hair poked the elven girl. The elf girl giggled.

With a thump, the red-haired boy's chest rippled.

He didn't know what it was, but every time the boy with the subtilis hair and the elf girl laughed at each other across from him, something strange struck him. The fact that the girl's smile was directed at someone other than him was somewhat painful.

No. That girl likes that guy.

The red-haired boy gently placed his hand on her chest. The brown-haired boy sitting next to him narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

「What's wrong? Does your chest hurt? 」

「Hhh.. No ... the fish bones ...」

「Well, that's just not for you. Have a nice day. 」

「Oh...」

The red-haired boy chuckled and dried his glass of liquor.

The elven girl looked at the red-haired boy with a smirk.

「Hmmm, this is fun. I can't think of a better day than this in elven territory.」

「Oh, yeah? 」

「Yeah. Where can we go tomorrow? 」

The boy with the dead grass colored hair laughed.

「Tomorrow we're going to another dungeon. We'll have a number of targets to defeat in a few minutes. Then we'll rank up! We'll be able to take more difficult requests! 」

「Wow, you did it. Good for you. I'm looking forward to it. 」

「Yeah, this is gonna be fun. The four of us can go far on our own. You'll see a different world. 」

A boy with dead grass colored hair gently tapped the flailing elf girl on the shoulder. The red-haired boy sighed so small that no one noticed.

I wouldn't be able to drag her around like this.

The red-haired boy laughed and listened carefully to the sound of his heart beating like a crunch.

Is this a love? Or is it something else?

Either way, seeing the elven girl smile at the boy with the withered hair seemed to make his heart beat faster in wonder.

I'll take good care of her, I thought.

Even if it's a thought that will never be fulfilled, this is certainly a feeling I have. I don't mean to bother you with that, but it's okay to be free, at least in your mind.

The girl glanced at him and smiled at him. The boy laughs back with a small smile.

Right now, it was nice to see her smile at him like this.

It was cool and cool outside the house where I'd gone to drop Kelly and the others off in the midnight breeze. It was just right for my skin, which had been warmed by alcohol.

As they talked, Kelly and his friends escalated more than the person who was speaking, and ended up getting more and more booze to cool their excitement, and ended up being sick and unable to control their temper and ranting about something in a tone that made them unsure whether to cry or get angry. It seemed to be getting out of hand, so I cut the story short for good and ended it.

Kelly, who had borrowed Barnes' shoulder, wobbled and followed the path and turned around suddenly.

「Bel ... go for it! I'll always be on your side, you know! 」

Belgriff chuckled and said.

「Don't be a fool and get the hell out of here! You'll be hungover tomorrow! 」

Kelly and the others wandered off.

Belgriff exhaled with a hoarse breath and looked at the sky without a care in the world. The crescent moon drifted away and disappeared behind the mountains, the stars shining over the sky instead.

I remember looking up at the night sky like this when I was in Orphen, when I was out on a long term commission. Then, and now, this sky seemed to be the only thing that hadn't changed.

If they were still alive, would they be looking at the stars in the same way?

Belgriff wondered about that.

They were talented adventurers. Belgriff still didn't know why they had formed a party with him. He had lost touch with them now, but they were probably still going strong somewhere.

The reckoning of the past was not yet done, Belgriff thought.

Even though it had been over twenty-five years ago, he was surprised to find himself able to talk about that elven girl.

「Maybe that's why.」

It's not so much the bane of my marriage.

I thought about that.

I wonder if she is still an adventurer, too. If so, where would her rank be? Would she have been seriously injured? Or did she retire and marry someone else?

「So ... you're an adventurer. 」

My thoughts turn and I think of Angeline.

If night has dawned on Tornella, then the same is the case with Orphen. If that girl is looking at the same starry sky, she's not so lonely. As long as she is alive, she will be between the same sky and the ground.

Belgriff took a deep breath and spun on his heel to return to the house.

An owl hooted loudly amidst the glow of the stars.

