

The Black Knight Who Was Stronger than Even the Hero

- Yuusha Yori Saikyouna Kuro Kishi -

- Volume 2 -

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– SYNOPSIS –

In the shade of the dark forest,
a beautiful oriental maiden with a troubled expression sighs to herself...

“Why did I forget...?
No, I guess I wanted to forget.
He’s finally here; that harem eroge protagonist...”

—

Saitou Chie has a childhood friend that has always been the
stereotypically manga protagonist.
Because of that she is constantly annoyed by his “fanclub.”

She isn’t even surprised when he is summoned to a fantasy world and
wishes him luck when he suddenly grabs her yelling “Then you come
too!!” and pulls her in with him.

Now her body has been destroyed because it wasn’t meant to go through
the summoning and a god is saying I will give you a new body...

CHAPTER 18

EVERYDAY TALK & CARE

Within the Empire of a certain world.

It has been six months since I came to this world of Erudoa.

The current season was now Autumn.

I knew because the changing colors of the leaves had changed the scenery of the landscape.

When mentioning fall, Autumn Appetite, Autumn Reading, or Autumn Nap would be the expressions one would normally talk about.

As for me...

“Hahaha! It’s useless if all you do is run away~” [Chie]

—Gyaaaaaaa!

I was chasing the Mage Corps members around with Sakuya.

Fall Sports were in full swing.

We had been using the training method that was originally created from the game of tag.

As for the contents, I played the role of the demon and chased the Mage Corps members for about an hour.

Once a member was caught, he was stunned with a strike from the back of Sakuya. A hellish muscle training course would await them when they woke up.

The use of weapons was allowed, of course!

However, not a single one of them have had the time to fight back.

“Hey, hey! If you only run away, you’ll just end up like those guys!” [Chie]

I said and pointed to the guys who had already been caught.

So far, 50 people were receiving this training.

Among those, 30 people had been piled up and put to sleep.

The rest of the Mage Corps members turned pale upon seeing this and ran away.

Alright! This is fun!

There were still 15 minutes left.

Well, I wonder how many can survive.

Chie’s Work Room

As usual, after morning training, Conrad and I were in my work room organizing documents.

Like always, I had taken off my helmet during this period.

There was a ridiculous amount of paperwork, like always, but we couldn’t help getting it done.

“Ah~, my neck hurts.” [Chie]

I heard a wonderful cracking sound as I turned my neck.

“Just a bit more to do, Commander...probably.” [Conrad]

Conrad said, while going through the documents.

Uhn~, a man who works diligently looks cool.

Good looking, diligent, considerate, good judge of character; a very ideal man.

It's impossible to believe what he used to be like, although I had heard to stories of it from Alice and the people of the shopping district.

"What is it?" [Conrad]

Conrad asked when he noticed my gaze.

"Oh, sorry. No, well, I was just thinking, it's hard to believe that the person sitting in front of me is the same person from the stories that Alice and Byron told." [Chie]

"...What the heck are you talking about?" [Conrad]

Conrad asked with reproachful eyes.

"I mean, a delinquent who led a gang and got into disputes over territory while indiscriminately chasing women, shouting 'Found another good one!!'" [Chie]

"They really told you that?" [Conrad]

Conrad hastily interrupted me as his face became deep red.

Just from his appearance, you could really understand that he was surprised.

I only wanted to tease him a little, but I didn't think I would get this sort of reaction from Conrad.

He had a bright red embarrassed face that was full of despair, like it was the end of the world.

To showing such an expression...I guess he really didn't want it to be known?

"W-Well, everyone has a period of time when they're young and act out, so it's not strange!" [Chie]

Things like that could happen now and then, so I think it's alright.

Come to think of it, my older brother was difficult to handle when he was in high school.

He would bring home friends who looked like delinquents (though they were all actually really kind).

He also had a new girlfriend every month.

Other than his female relationships, he was a good brother.

Surely, Conrad must have been like this as well.

“My older brother was also like that, Conrad! So, it’s nothing you really need to be ashamed about!” [Chie]

“Older brother?” [Conrad]

Conrad reacted to the words ‘older brother’ and made a blank expression.

I had never talked about him before.

“What’s this older brother like?” [Conrad]

“Oh, he’s two years older than me. Like I said before, there was a time when he was a little delinquent. He’s a good brother, though. Once in awhile, I’d look outside and see him with the neighbor girl, and, if you ask me, that’s when he started to act strange...” [Chie]

“...(I cannot even begin to picture the Commander’s brother).” [Conrad]

Conrad kept silent, with a surprised expression.

I thought, ‘you probably can’t picture my brother’s personality just from looking at me’.

The reason being, we were not similar at all.

“Right, such a person.” [Conrad]

“Yeah. Let alone my older brother, I wonder how Mother and Father are doing?” [Chie]

“You haven’t kept in contact with them?” [Conrad]

Conrad said, with a surprised expression.

Perhaps he thought that I would have contacted them by now.

Though, not only was it a different world, but also a different time, so communication was impossible.

Unless I met Amaterasu again, it was unlikely that I would ever see them again.

“Communication is difficult, to the point that it can’t happen, much less being able to meet again.” [Chie]

“.....” [Conrad]

I said to Conrad while forcing a smile, then turned silent.

In response to my smile, Conrad also fell silent.

I averted my gaze from Conrad and looked out the window.

Outside, the blue sky spread far out into the distance.

A sky that was the same color as the one on Earth.

I suddenly felt very lonely and looked at that sky for a while.

—Conrad’s POV—

I witnessed the Commander’s lonely expression for the first time.

I wonder where the place, that was so far away from communication that she could never go back to it again, was.

A place where humans with the same hair and eye color as the Commander lived.

It was most certainly a place across the ocean, where nobody had ever gone before.

A place with many soldiers and exceptional people like the Commander.

People capable of defeating the cursed dragon Fafnir.

The Commander was only 17 years old, so maybe her brother was even more amazing.

However, I wonder why the Commander came to this Empire.

In addition to that, she had armor and a weapon made exclusively for herself.

Perhaps there was some sort of purpose in doing so.

Could it be related to the suspicious movements of the demons from six months ago?

If that was so, maybe the Commander had been chosen to resolve this incident.

It was enough to have been selected by the black unicorn.

Surely, her home country could contend with two of our countries.

Her swordsmanship and hands, covered in hard skin, could only be obtained after a high amount of training and discipline with the sword. I believed that she would become a great person.

I thought this while I organized the documents.

—Chie's POV—

Huh?

Just now, Conrad didn't respond to my smile?

I don't think he could have had some weird misunderstanding just now...

That sort of thing for example.

Like, my parents being taken while climbing a mountain and me being forced into a serious survival situation, or something like that.

Actually, last year, for summer vacation, I went mountain climbing alone with nothing but a few large bags and a survival knife.

Once, I saw a bear, and I thought my heart had stopped.

I wonder what kind of funny expression my brother would have made?

Ah, this is pointless.

I have to focus on finishing filing the documents.

I decided to stop reminiscing and started moving my hands again.

“Phew~! It’s done!!” [Chie]

“I am also finished over here.” [Conrad]

We had cleared up all of the documents as the day turned towards evening.

There was a sense of accomplishment when completing work, compared to training soldiers.

“Thank you for your hard work, Black Knight-sama, elder brother.” [Alice]

Alice said as she came out from the inner room.

Until a little while ago, she had been cleaning.

“Thank you, Alice. The days have certainly been getting shorter.” [Chie]

I said while receiving coffee from her.

“Yes, it has been quite cool in the mornings and chilly at night.” [Alice]

Alice agreed.

I sipped the coffee.

Yes, it was also delicious today.

This coffee heals me.

“Hrm?” [Chie]

“Is something the matter, Black Knight-sama?” [Alice]

I sensed a presence from the veranda as Alice tilted her head in confusion.

It seemed that Conrad was also unaware of it.

To completely erase his presence like this, he’s showing off now.

I instinctively put on my helmet and moved to the veranda door.

—Gacha

“What’s the situation in the town, Claude?” [Chie]

As I opened the doors, I called out to Claude.

“So far, no problems. Watching you get rid of Fafnir has made the people on the back side of town quiet down.” [Claude]

He unfolded his arms while hiding in the shade of the veranda, standing with his back against the wall.

It was just the right time of day for the veranda to become dark.

I brought Claude into the room.

There wasn’t really a worry about being seen, since it was the fourth floor, but there was no need to be careless.

“Oh, it was you, Claude.” [Conrad]

“Hello, Conrad-san.” [Claude]

Conrad exchanged greetings with Claude.

A black scarf was covering his face from below his neck up to his nose.

These two had become good friends in the last six months.

Rather than colleagues, they acted like brothers.

“Oh, Claude, hello.” [Alice]

Alice said with a smile and a slight laugh.

With flushed cheeks,

“Y-Yo! Alice.” [Claude]

Claude replied.

These two seemed so innocent when you looked at them.

I removed the helmet and sent them a warm gaze.

“...What’s with the look?” [Claude]

Claude noticed my gaze.

“Nothing~” [Chie]

I looked away while grinning.

“...You, acting like that is why you’ll never get a boyfriend.” [Claude]

—Twitch

Claude’s mutter tapered off and my cheeks started to cramp.

“What now, coming from someone who stands around doing nothing?” [Chie]

I drew closer to Claude as I asked him.

“Just like I said.” [Claude]

Claude said.

Well, does this guy like getting beat?

“Ah~, come to think of it, Commander, since when have you been wearing that belt?”
[Conrad]

Just when I was about to beat up Claude, Conrad unexpectedly spoke up.

“Oh this? It was sent over by Byron a week ago.” [Chie]

“It’s from Byron?” [Alice]

Alice asked while tilting her head.

The other two gave a similar reaction.

“Yeah, I’m wearing it because I think it suits me. It’s made from the skin of Fafnir.”
[Chie]

One of the servants brought it to me a week ago, while I was working alone.

I received it in a long, narrow box.

A letter, which was enclosed in the box, expressed the appreciation of the people from the shopping district and also said that it took nearly six months to make the belt.

When I looked in the box, I thought that the belt would look good with my armor. There was also a small tube on the left waist that could hold Sakuya.

I immediately put the belt on, stood in front of the mirror, and thought that it really looked good with the armor.

It was made from the Fafnir’s skin so it was undoubtedly sturdy.

When I talked about the belt, the three people showed expressions of understanding.

“I see, it is as you say.” [Conrad]

Conrad said while nodding.

“Even so, how did you carry the sword with the armor before?” [Conrad]

The other two also gave a questioning look.

Certainly, it was unusual for the sword to just hang there like it had done before.

“Oh~, how to explain. It sort of just always came with me?” [Chie]

“Huh?” [Alice, Conrad, Claude]

Three people asked in unison, with complex expressions.

It wasn't unreasonable.

“As I said before, Sakuya is a weapon made exclusively for me, so it will always stick to me, whether I wear the armor or not.” [Chie]

The three people listened with deadpan expressions.

Even without the armor, Sakuya would stick to me.

I only recently started to understand it, but this sword had a will.

Although we were not able to communicate, I could feel a holy presence from the sword.

Its feelings were transmitted to the point that I could feel that Sakuya also liked the belt.

“In other words, it's a magic sword, in case you were worried that it was a cursed sword.” [Chie]

“...Is that so?” [Conrad]

I said in response to Conrad’s bitter expression, which changed to relief.

Even I thought that it looked like a black, cursed sword.

Still, it was made by a God and unmistakably gave off the aura of a holy sword.

It looked intense from a first glance, though.

“That being said, regardless of the weak spot, it’s still a magic sword that was able to cut through the cursed dragon Fafnir. Even with advanced swordplay, such a feat is usually impossible.” [Conrad]

Ugh, Conrad’s sharp.

Indeed, only a holy or demonic sword was capable of cutting through a dragon, even with the weak spot.

“Well, I can guarantee that it’s not an evil sword! Anyways, about the martial arts tournament! It’s only a month away!” [Chie]

In an attempt to change the topic, I brought up the topic of the tournament that would take place in the Empire a month from now.

“Come to think of it, have this year’s participants been decided?” [Claude]

“No, the representative selection is one week from now.” [Conrad]

Conrad replied to Claude.

The topic of conversation was successfully changed.

The Martial Arts Tournament was held once every four years between the three countries, similar to the Olympic Games on Earth.

This year, the tournament was being held in the capital of the Empire.

The arena was located within the castle grounds and the general public would be allowed to enter during the tournament.

Obviously, there would be a need to strengthen security within the castle and in the surrounding town, so the Commander and Vice-Commander would be extremely busy.

The shopping stalls were going to put on a little show so, in truth, it might actually be a little fun.

I heard that four years ago, when it was held in the Holy Kingdom, Conrad won the contest.

That was the reason that Conrad was allowed to wear a cloak.

Before the tournament was established, the three countries had a 500 year long history of war, but the fighting stopped after the tournament was established.

Now, the armies mainly did demon-extermination or resolved criminal cases and such. To make it easier to understand, it was sort of like they were police.

Each army had a Commander and Vice-Commander, which was further broken down into groups with Captains.

A Captain was usually put in charge of a group of 30 soldiers.

During a mission, the Commander or Vice-Commander selects one group that best fit the needs of the mission and assigns them the task.

On rare occasions, the Commander or Vice-Commander would participate in the mission, but it was usually unnecessary.

“Nonetheless, the Commander will be chosen.” [Conrad]

“Eh? Me?” [Chie]

I was surprised at hearing myself be called so suddenly.

Regrettably, I did not hear the contents of the conversation.

“Yeah, since you have the ability to kill a dragon. If the representative is to be the ‘strongest’, then it could only be the Commander.” [Conrad]

Conrad said with a refreshing smile.

It used to annoy me when Yuusuke did it, but it’s somehow different now.

Is it the charm of an older man?

“As the previous champion, I automatically qualify. I look forward to my fight with the Commander.” [Conrad]

Conrad seems to have become excited.

Representative selection was between the Commander, the Vice-Commander, and the Captains.

It was a one on one knock-out fight, and whoever remained standing at the end was the winner.

The week after the representative selection, the winner was promoted to Commander and the second place to Vice-Commander. The Captains were selected last.

Such was this world’s meritocracy.

That was how the representative of the country, the Commander who survived the knock-out rounds, was determined.

It was simple, but also troublesome.

However, since I’m the Commander, it will be impossible to not participate.

It might be troublesome, but I have no intention of losing.

“Yeah, I also wanted to try fighting Conrad seriously one time. It’s a good opportunity to get excited about!” [Chie]

I said while laughing.

“In moderation, Chie. When you get serious, it gets dangerous.” [Claude]

Claude, how rude.

Well, I won't deny it.

However, a Martial Arts Tournament.

I wonder what kind of people the representatives of the other countries are.

I had a strong interest in the representatives of the other countries.

Participating in the tournament would probably lead to a lot of chances to learn about many things.

I was now looking forward to the fun that would be had in the tournament selection one week from now.

At this time, even I would not have expected the major incidents that would occur at this year's tournament.

CHAPTER 19

QUALIFYING DAY 1, KNIGHT CORPS (PART 1)

—Luke, Squad Captain POV—

- Arena

Six Captains, now including myself, and five Vice-Captains stood within the arena. Behind us, 180 soldiers from all of the different corps were arranged on the arena grounds.

The auditorium was filled with the nobles and citizens of the Empire.

The Imperial Family was sitting in the ceremonial seats in front of us.

“Henceforth! The martial arts tournament of the three countries shall begin!” [???

—Waaaaaaa!

The green-haired Prime Minister, who was standing in between us and the Emperor, raised his voice while the audience cheered in unison.

The stage was set for the fight to determine the representative of the country four days from now.

- Player Waiting Room

I was currently in the waiting room given to the Knight Corps members, along with about 30 other people, waiting for my match.

Today’s scheduled matches would determine the representatives of the Knight Corps and the Swordsmen Corps.

At any rate, the number of participants in the qualification round was much larger this year.

It would be unreasonable to have everyone fight in one day, so two teams would fight each day, and the representatives would be chosen from each team. On the last day, the chosen participants would fight to determine the representative of the country.

The order of the matches was chosen by lottery. As such, day one was the Knight Corps and the Swordsmen Corps, day two was the Archer Corps and the Spear Corps, and day three was the Mage Corps and the Fighter Corps.

The matches between the Knight Corps were currently taking place, and the matches for the Swordsmen Corps were scheduled to happen afterwards.

The fights began at about 10:00 am and would last well into the night.

There was a festival taking place around the arena, so there were stalls selling food and drinks and it wasn't a problem to stay the whole day to watch.

I was selected early in the qualifying rounds, so I was quite pleased.

The sooner your round was over, the faster you could rest and observe the other corps.

Besides, speaking of all days...

"Knight Commander, Knight Squad Captain Luke. Your match is about to begin, please move to the entry gate." [???

—Conrad's POV—

- Military Officials' Dedicated Seating

I was sitting in the authorized military seating section of the arena, together with Adolf, Celestia, Brandon, and Amy.

Alice was watching with some school friends, so she was sitting with the general audience.

Although I did not know where Claude was, he was undoubtedly watching from somewhere.

“Even though it happens every four years, it seems to be especially lively this time.”
[Adolf]

Adolf, who was sitting next to me, muttered.

“Certainly. Wouldn’t you say that there are more people than the last time?”
[Brandon]

Brandon said with his arms crossed.

Indeed, there was a much larger crowd than there was four years ago.

“Naturally! It’s because the Black Knight is participating this year!” [Celestia]

Celestia said proudly.

Amy nodded as she voiced her agreement.

“Not surprising. The Black Knight is the hero of the Empire, the person who stood alone against and defeated a dragon. Everyone gathered to try to catch a glimpse of the hero.” [Adolf]

Adolf said, in a convinced tone.

Hearing those words filled me with a sense of pride.

Truly, that person was amazing.

In fact, there was never a moment when I was not amazed...

—-Waaaaaaah!

Suddenly, the crowd began cheering.

I looked up and, just as I expected, the contestants had entered the arena floor from the entrance.

“Oh! The Black Knight is following along.” [Brandon]

Brandon said when he saw the Commander.

“Eh? Is the Black Knight carrying a wooden sword? The shape seems to have changed to a...” [Adolf]

Adolf tilted his head to one side.

That wasn't surprising.

The normal design of a wooden sword was a cross shape.

However, the Commander was carrying what looked like a long stick with a gentle curve.

When you looked at it closely, you could see that it was similar to Sakuya.

“It's apparently referred to as a 'bokken'. The Commander previously told me that the cross-shaped sword was difficult to use and proceeded to build a wooden sword specifically for this day.” [Conrad]

I gave a brief explanation.

“By himself? Not a woodworker?” [Adolf]

Adolf asked.

“He said something about the image not being transmitted well...” [Conrad]

I recalled when the Commander had told me about it while carving out the sword with wood working tools.

“I showed the craftsman Sakuya and explained what I wanted, but the overall image...I ended up deciding to build it on my own.” [Chie]

Was it because the explanation had not been clear enough? The Commander had worked on the sword with drooping shoulders, looking depressed.

“But, it looks kinda lumpy.” [Brandon]

Brandon muttered while looking at the wooden sword.

“Brandon, do not say that to the Commander. The person himself seemed quite sensitive about it.” [Conrad]

I remembered a figure that breathed a heavy sigh upon the completion of the wooden sword.

“About that? What kind of guy would have the personality to care about such small details?” [Adolf]

—-Beshi~tsu

As I was listening to Adolf, he was suddenly hit.

“What are you...” [Adolf]

Adolf sent a sharp gaze toward Celestia while rubbing the back of his head.

“Maybe he has a sensitive side to him.” [Celestia]

Nevertheless, the Commander, who usually said things like “it’s normal”, became so delicate that I had started to worry.

Besides, with the various things that had happened in the last six months, on top of coming to an unfamiliar place, it seemed like an odd thing to be so worried about.

However, Alice...

“Even if you hide the gender, she is still a woman.” [Alice]

...said that with a smile on her face.

Apparently, it was difficult for a man to understand such things.

When I told her that I didn’t understand...

“...You just don’t understand a woman’s heart, brother.” [Alice]

...She told me with half-closed eyes.

What did that mean?

“(giggle)” [Amy & Celestia]

For some reason, Amy and Celestia were laughing.

“It...is...cute.” [Amy]

“Truly.” [Celestia]

“What?” [Three Clueless Men]

We tilted our heads to the side, confused about what the two women were talking about.

—Claude’s POV—

-General Audience Area

“It’s the Black Knight.” [???

“Ah, finally.” [???

I was watching the matches with Alice and three of her school friends.

I didn’t have work today, so I was wearing plain clothes.

I was wearing cream-colored pants with black leather boots, as well as a dark brown jacket over a black shirt.

When Chie saw my clothes before I left...

“You, your casual clothes are rather plain.” [Chie]

...is what she said.

Even I had normal looking clothes.

Everyone had at least one pair of ordinary clothes...is what I would like to say, but Chie has never gone out in normal clothes.

Apparently, she wanted to hide her identity; her hair and eye color in particular.

Though, even I had no idea where she came from.

I hadn't even heard of any rumors about people with that kind of hair and eye color.

Was she from a group of people that lived in hiding somewhere or something?

"Claude? Is something wrong?" [Alice]

Alice spoke to me as I was engrossed in my thoughts.

Useless, useless. It was a rare chance to be with Alice outside of work. Thinking about these things was unnecessary.

Generally, it was unnecessary to dig any deeper into Chie's background.

"Uh, no. It's nothing." [Claude]

"Hm? Is that so?" [Alice]

I gave a slight laugh in response.

"It's just that his opponent is poor. The battle will be over in the blink of an eye."
[Claude]

I purposely diverted the topic.

Well, those were my sincere feelings though.

"Certainly. Even a Squad Captain wouldn't be able to reach the feet of Black Knight-sama." [Alice]

Alice said without hesitation.

Really, Alice always thought about her master first.

To be honest, I envied Chie.

“Oh~...” [???

In response to our conversation, one of Alice’s friends, who had short, blue hair and glasses, let out a voice.

Alice was wearing her maid uniform, while the other three were wearing their servant school uniforms: a white, one-piece apron over a brown servant dress.

They were wearing clothes meant for a normal student servant, unlike Alice, who was employed.

Alice was wearing a black dress with a white frilly apron. It was easy to tell that Alice had better quality clothes than the other girls.

It was certainly a lovely appearance.

Well, aside from that.

“Eh? What is it, Ashe?” [Alice]

Apparently, the girl with short, blue hair was called Ashe.

Even though we greeted each other a little while ago, she had not introduced herself.

“I was worried about it until a moment ago, but it seems like your acquaintance here and the Black Knight have a close relationship? Forgive me, but you don’t appear to be a noble and don’t seem to be a part of the military either?” [Ashe]

The other two nodded, agreeing with Ashe.

“That’s right! You and Alice seem pretty close!” [???

“How to say it? It’s like you received enough of an education but, at the same time, are still missing something?” [???

The girl with long green hair wrapped in a bun behind her head spoke first, and the girl with a black headband on her red, shoulder length hair followed up.

These two people carried an intense aura.

Honestly, I was weak to this type.

I liked elegant women, like Alice.

Though, sometimes she scares me...

“Alice, this girl...uh...classmate...uh, friend is?” [Claude]

I somehow managed to ask.

However, the girl with the headband and red hair...

“What ‘this girl’! Is that any way to address a lady?!” [???

She said sharply, with a red face.

As I thought, intense.

“Okay, okay, calm down, Karen. Claude, this girl is Karen, a classmate and friend from the servant school.” [Alice]

As Alice introduced her friend Karen and tried to calm her down...I gave a slightly cramped smile.

“Then, the girl with blue hair is Ashe, and the one with green hair is Lorna. They are also classmates and friends.” [Alice]

“Nice to meet you. Call me Ashe.” [Ashe]

“Lorna.” [Lorna]

I had one thought as the three were introduced.

Their personalities were completely different.

Ashe gave off a quiet atmosphere, and as a friend of Alice, that was understandable.

However, the other two gave off a very intense atmosphere, so the fact that they were friends with Alice was hard to imagine.

Lorna seemed to have a bit of a haughty attitude, while Karen was the type who would immediately go ballistic.

It was definitely a strange combination.

“Ladies, this is Claude. He’s a friend who I became acquainted with through my relationship with the Black Knight.” [Alice]

Alice introduced me to the other girls.

Well, she didn’t actually lie.

It was a fact that Chie and I are friends.

I also did meet Conrad and Alice through Chie.

“Please, your friend? This barbaric person?” [Karen]

Karen made a bitter expression while pointing her finger.

This rude woman.

The other two girls were surprised and opened their eyes widely.

“Hmph...sorry for being so uncivilized.” [Claude]

I retorted with a slight glare.

I expected this type of reaction, but it still didn’t sit well with me.

“Uh, Alice? No matter how you explain it to us, you are joking, right?” [Lorna]

Lorna asked Alice while trembling.

Now there’s two rude women!

“Hey, both of you...” [Ashe]

Ashe was trying to suppress the two.

Now, this girl seemed sensible.

“No matter what, it’s not a joke.” [Alice]

Alice told them with a smile on her face.

The tension in the air between two strong women was unreal!

Ordinary women would be completely intimidated.

“Rather than that, could you quiet down? I would like to focus on the match.” [Claude]

I dropped the tone of my voice as I spoke to Karen and Lorna.

The three girls besides Alice gave me a blank look for a few moments.

Although they seemed to want to retort, they also appeared to be interested in Chie’s upcoming match.

We all turned our attention towards Chie, who was in the arena.

She was currently standing in the center of the arena, lightly shaking the wooden sword while waiting for the match to start.

To be frank, I already knew how the tournament would end.

I could confidently say that Chie would be the representative.

For that reason, I hadn’t really come here to cheer, but to watch her fight.

Only Chie and I knew that we had once tried to kill each other.

We had become friends after we trained together.

Well, we didn't do that as much recently.

For Chie, I wasn't her only training partner.

Since Chie began serving as a training officer, the amount of time that we trained together has fallen.

Of course, it was also hard to get Conrad to train with me, since he trained the other soldiers as well.

Well, another reason was that I was the "Imperial Army Covert Investigator", and the only people who knew of my attachment to the military were His Majesty, Conrad, Alice, and Chie.

I couldn't participate in general training, so my training partners had all but disappeared.

Since that's the case, I'll use what I'm best at: observation.

However, I've never seen Chie in a one-on-one battle.

One of the several covert missions that Chie and I set out on was a long-term mission to suppress thieves.

At the time, it was believed by the general public that Chie had gone to subjugate some demons.

It was a thief suppression mission, so the battles naturally revolved around multiple opponents, and I was unable to witness a 1-on-1 fight.

Therefore, the tournament this time was a precious thing that I would witness, no matter what.

Sometimes, it frustrated me to know that I would never be able to win against her.

I mean, nobody had ever seen her get serious.

In other words, even though we had seen her fight before, her real power was unknown.

In the case of the thief subjugation as well, the only reason we were able to succeed was because of Chie.

It's not funny!

Just how amazing can she be!

She wouldn't mind this kind of thing, but I wanted to at least be comparable.

I remembered her figure that seemed to be crushed by anxiety when it had been time for her first mission.

On seeing such an appearance, I had called out to her.

However, she returned to her usual self shortly after.

After seeing such a thing, I finally understood.

She was just a normal person.

Everyone who lived in this city knew of her greatness, but it was different from the things that I knew.

Sure, Conrad and Alice could take pride in having known Chie ever since she first came to the Capital.

However, that made me want to become closer to her.

I wanted to reach the point where we could entrust each other with our backs.

Conrad might have had similar thoughts, but he was only thinking as a subordinate.

The feelings were similar, but different.

That was my goal now.

For a person who used the word ‘friend’ to describe a helpless assassin, it was only natural for a ‘true friend’ to return the favor.

—Chie’s POV—

At the moment, I was standing on the arena grounds with a wooden sword, facing my opponent.

My opponent was Luke, a Squad Captain who had thick, dark gold hair and was about 180 Kuameito tall.

He wasn’t an ikemen, but had a manly face with cool features.

He was equipped with chain mail, instead of plate armor and a helmet.

His wooden sword had the shape of a cross.

The use of real blades in the tournament was prohibited to prevent death.

Mages were provided with a bracelet that acted as a type of magic limiter.

Well, it was a festival meant for fun, not for killing people.

I quickly made a wooden sword for this day.

However, because of my lack of knowledge in woodworking, the finished product left much to be desired...

“Commander! Best regards!” [Luke]

As I gently swayed the wooden sword, dissatisfied, Luke bowed his head in a manner that clearly showed that he was nervous.

Hey, hey, even though it’s just a match, are you going to be okay?

“Hey, hey, if you’re so nervous before the actual match, you won’t be able to fight properly, you know?” [Chie]

I tried to encourage him to relax but...

“M-My apologies! Commander!” [Luke]

.....

It was useless. He was completely tensed up.

It can’t be helped. Truthfully, I wanted a normal match, but looks like I’ll have to change my plans.

Sometimes, it was necessary for the Squad Captain to take the field on behalf of the Commander or Vice-Commander.

Well, the more dangerous missions were lead by the Commander or Vice-Commander, but for small punitive missions like goblin suppression, the Squad Captains usually served as a lead.

Even then, no matter how earnest the person was, the tension and anxiety to complete their duties and make precise decisions could take a toll.

Well, this young man had only recently become a Squad Captain.

His skill with the sword was considerable, but if there was something that I could criticize, it was that he lacked the experience to lead people.

For that, he only needed the experience!

Therefore, my priority was to not make my opponent become too tense.

“Then, both contestants! Take your positions!” [Referee]

In response to the referee uncle, Luke readied his sword.

He held the sword in his right hand and lowered his posture.

He held the long sword with one hand because we had many mounted knights who often used a weapon with one hand.

Mounted knights held the reins with one hand and the sword with the other.

Knights could also use lances, but most used a sword.

As I thought about such things, I clasped my sword tightly.

I held the sword with both hands, holding it to the lower right and behind me. If someone looked at me from the front, it would seem as if I was empty-handed.

“Uh, that...” [Referee]

The referee let out a voice while noticeably perplexed.

“On your command.” [Chie]

I said to the referee.

To Luke, who was also perplexed, I said,

“Luke, on the command, give it everything you have.” [Chie]

“Eh? Ah, but...” [Squad Captain]

Luke was more and more puzzled by my words.

“It’s fine...come at me...with everything you have.” [Chie]

Towards the end of my statement, I dropped the tone of my voice.

When he perceived that, his confused face suddenly tightened.

He seemed to have switched to being combat-ready.

Good. Just like that.

“...Then...Begin!!” [Referee]

The referee gave the command.

Just as I told him to, Luke kicked off the ground and charged at me.

He attacked while brandishing the sword from above.

For a normal person in the military or a guild, it would look like a movement that was too fast to avoid.

However, I avoided it by pulling back.

Maybe it was within his expectations. Luke immediately threw out attacks one after another.

Attacks converged on me over and over from all sides.

I dodged each one.

What's this, he can fight perfectly fine after all.

With this, it's alright.

"Well, about time to finish this." [Chie]

"!?" [Luke]

After saying that, I created a little distance with a strong jump backwards.

I opened the distance between Luke and me in an instant, while fending off an attack, which left Luke surprised.

"Hey, hey, standing around surprised like that, you're leaving yourself open!" [Chie]

"!? Damn it!" [Luke]

It was useless once an opening had been made. I quickly stepped to the front.

And...

“...From below.” [Chie]

“...I am defeated.” [Luke]

Luke let out a voice of defeat as the tip of my sword stopped right before his throat.

“T-The winner! Black Knight!” [Referee]

—Waaaaaa!

The referee announced the winner without managing to hide his surprise and amazement.

The audience gave an enormous cheer.

I removed the wooden sword...

“Thank you very much.” [Chie]

...and lightly bowed to Luke.

“Ah, thank you very much!” [Luke]

Luke also took a deep bow, attempting to mimic me.

While my bow was about 45 degrees, Luke easily lowered his head to about 90 degrees.

In Japan, you only lowered your head 90 degrees for an apology, but since this wasn't Japan, I decided not to mind it.

The meaning behind how much one lowered their head was a cultural difference that was unknown to this country.

“It is best to react with good judgement and in a calm manner.” [Chie]

“! Yes!!!” [Luke]

Luke gave me a reply as I walked away, in order to leave the arena grounds.

Though no one could see because of the helmet, I heard him as I was leaving the grounds, and a smile spread across my face.

The training with Claude was totally worth it!

After I received this body from Amaterasu, my opponent's movement always looked slow. However, even if my physical abilities were improved, it didn't mean that complex and precise movement was possible.

Just because a human's stamina and strength are great didn't mean that they could do anything.

After secretly observing someone for a time, you could eventually read the signs and predict what actions and movement they might take.

It was originally a skill I got from Earth, where I observed the other person to find the precise opportunity to escape.

I never thought that the tactics I had used to avoid Yuusuke would be useful in a place like this.

When I was only recalling battles from manga, anime, and games, I could only mimic the form.

With the help of missions and the training with Claude, I was able to incorporate everything in a battle and finished a decent style.

In fact, while I was attempting to train based on my own knowledge of how to fight one evening, I was approached by Claude.

Since it was offered and it was a good chance, I immediately accepted.

Honestly, I could have trained with the soldiers, but then I would have wanted to hold back.

It wasn't like I was looking down on the other soldiers or anything.

My previous fight with Claude led me to understand the level of the soldiers in the military, so I became insecure.

However, I would never say that they were weak.

The difference in strength between Captains and Vice-Captains was still quite large, but most of the soldiers were at a more normal skill level.

Even when compared with Claude, the difference was clear.

You could say that Claude was at the level of a Captain.

No, maybe not yet.

Though he was inferior to Conrad, he could get a draw with a Captain if he was lucky.

It was because we fought each other one-on-one that I knew such things.

Therefore, I was comfortable with training together with him.

After training with him for so long, I began to understand his style better.

His best weapon was that he was fast and light.

He used acrobatic moves, and his speed sometimes made you lose sight of his movements.

For training, Claude used a wooden cross-shaped sword and I used Sakuya's sheath for training instead of real weapons.

Incidentally, I put a barrier around us that made us invisible to people outside, since I trained in normal clothes.

After all, if I always relied on the defense of my armor, the training would have no meaning.

Therefore, even if it was just a wooden sword, if it was aimed at a vital point, I would still feel fear.

So, I studied.

It was a fight against an experienced human.

Claude might have been confident, but I always won the battle, even though I was also always desperate.

He was always frustrated, but it was vexing for me too.

I am always being helped by him. He was strong both mentally and physically.

Conrad and Alice also supported me greatly, but in the end, the relationship was still master and subordinate, and as such, I was the one they relied on.

If Claude had not stayed, it wouldn't be wrong to say that I would have been crushed by my position.

The only person whom I could rely on as a 'friend' was Claude.

Therefore, I want to be comparable to him.

As for the current me, even though it was a fake strength, I wanted to reach a point where I was able to support him.

For now, my goal was to become an existence who, for the first time, would be called a 'best friend'.

As I returned to the waiting room, I clenched my sword even more tightly than before.

CHAPTER 20

QUALIFYING DAY 1, KNIGHT CORPS (PART 2)

General Audience Area (Claude POV)

As Chie went towards the exit, I thought:

She wasn't being serious at all!

"That is the strength of a knight who slew a dragon..."

"Amazing..."

"No doubt, that is the knight who was chosen by the black unicorn."

"....."

Karen, Ashe, and Lorna murmured with surprise beside me.

Since Alice was dissatisfied with their earlier comments, she didn't say anything.

It was natural, since they spoke as if they understood that strength, when they didn't understand at all.

"Black Knight-sama was not serious at all. Claude-san?"

Alice brought it up with me.

She faced me, seeking my agreement.

It seemed that Alice was angry at the three because their words reflected only that level of understanding.

As I was of the same opinion, I replied to Alice's question.

"Indeed. He was clearly holding back."

Alice looked happy with my words, contentedly smiling and nodding.

She's so cute...

"Oh, that wasn't being serious?"

When Alice and I turned to look at the three after hearing Lorna's statement, they were looking at us with shock.

It was natural for them to be surprised, since they had found out that that person was not being serious, which they had previously believed.

However, for their sakes, teaching them the truth immediately would definitely be good in the long run.

Even though I trained every night with that person, there were so many surprising things that my head was constantly filled with panic.

In the recent match, the opponent's sword skills were decent, and the speed of the sword was also considerably high, enough for me to believe that it would normally be hard to avoid (though I could dodge it with room to spare), but Chie easily and quickly dodged it with minimal movements.

In the eyes of an amateur, it might be understandable to think that that was her true strength.

However, that was before.

"Isn't it natural? In the first place, the difference in strength between Fafnir and the Imperial Squad Captain is already large, so of course he would be overwhelmed by that guy's power."

That's right. If one thought about it carefully, that person would not need to put in any effort against an ordinary person.

She was totally going easy today, wasn't she?

"" ""

When they heard my words, they became speechless.

Alice looked at them with a smug smile, then returned to watching the other squad captains' fights.

—Conrad's POV—

Military Officials' Dedicated Seating

"I understand, but still..."

"He didn't even show the 's' in serious, that Black Knight..."

(TL: Originally a play on the Japanese word for serious. 本気の『ほ』)

Brandon and Adolf murmured beside me.

"Of course! Against a squad captain, the Black Knight wouldn't need to put in an ounce of effort!"

Celestia proudly declared.

Amy and I agreed with those words.

It would be unthinkable for the Commander, who felled the Cursed Dragon Fafnir in one blow, to get serious against a squad captain.

"With that, there won't be any more noteworthy matches, will there?"

Adolf spoke in a disappointed tone.

At those words, a 'Kachin' sound was heard.

"Hey, Adolf. You, are you looking down on me and the commander's knight corps?"

'Girii'

I glared at Adolf and spoke with a threatening voice

Since it was important, I emphasized 'Commander'.

"Scary! That's not it! I just meant that the Black Knight's true strength was seldom seen, so I was looking forward to it, and since I didn't get to see it, I was disappointed! It's not like I was saying that the Knight Order was weak or anything! How much do you care about the Black Knight?!"

Adolf raised his voice while denying it.

How much did I care about the Black Knight?

"Always, without fail."

I declared with a serious expression.

For some reason, Adolf and Brandon's faces cramped, and they continued to be inattentive to their subordinate's matches.

Un, due to the Commander's guidance, all of their attacks were well performed.

"However, it certainly is disappointing to be unable to see Black Knight-dono's true strength."

"I...I wanted...to see it."

Celestia and Amy spoke with disappointment.

For them to earnestly admire the Commander so, I thought it was a little cute.

However, it was too early to be disappointed.

"What are you saying? If the Commander keeps on advancing like this, he will face Kyle in the finals. If it's him, wouldn't we see a different match from the ones against the other squad captains?"

At those words, the four of them looked towards me.

"Ah! Certainly, if it's him, we might see a different match."

Adolf assented.

“Indeed! If that person’s true strength...”

Celestia, with both arms crossed, also interjected.

Even Brandon and Amy nodded in agreement.

Since we knew Kyle’s true strength, I understood.

We watched the matches of the Knight Order while looking forward to the finals.

The match between the Commander and his Excellency the Imperial Prime Minister Reiz Strauss’s son, the former Knight Order’s Vice-Commander Kyle Strauss.

– After a while, the finals, in the arena

———Waaaaaaa!

After advancing smoothly from the first round, it was now the finals of the Knight Corps Tournament.

My opponent was the former Knight Order’s Vice-Commander, now Squad Captain Kyle Strauss.

I met him on my first day in this world, and he was one of the few people who knew my appearance and gender. He was a green-haired knight-san.

“Commander, please treat me well.”

Unlike the other squad captains, he bowed calmly.

As a Japanese person, upon seeing a 45 degree bow, I thought that it was very polite.

“Here as well, please treat me well.”

While saying this, I returned the bow fully.

That was basic etiquette.

After straightening up, I looked at Green-haired Knight-san...Kyle.

He had a calm expression, a well-featured nose and mouth, and a smiling face. He was like an ikemen-san.

I felt like this image was common in the western style world.

He wore a suit of plate armor painted the same shade of green as his hair.

His hair was cut short and even, and he seemed to be about 180 kuameito tall.

Due to his true ability being that of a former vice-commander, he stood out in comparison to the other squad captains.

Moreover, in the imperial family's dedicated seating, the whole imperial family was watching while seated side-by-side, but to the left, His Excellency the Prime Minister Reiz Strauss was glaring at me! Scary!

It would soon be half a year since I had joined, but I was still hated by the Prime Minister.

Our first impression was certainly poor, but other than that, I don't remember doing anything to make him hate me?

"Haah...~"

I sighed.

"?.....Ah."

Puzzled at my sigh, Kyle looked in the direction I had been looking just now.

He seemed to understand the reason why I sighed.

"...I'm very sorry about my father."

Kyle apologized.

The father and son have such different dispositions.

“I, what did I do to His Excellency?”

“Well, Father is only being stubborn.”

While telling me not to worry about it, Kyle apologized again.

This father and son weren't similar on the inside at all.

If you looked at their outward appearances, the father, the Prime Minister, showed a stubborn and harsh disposition, while the son exuded a calm disposition.

Kyle was surely more similar to his mother.

“Well then, both participants, get ready!”

While I was still deep in thought, the referee told us to get ready.

Come on, I must focus on the match.

When Kyle and I were about five meters apart, I took a midsection stance, while Kyle held the wooden sword in one hand with a natural stance.

I took a deep breath, then calmed my heart as I exhaled.

“Now then...Start!”

———'Dan'!

As soon as the signal was given, I leapt forward.

Although I had planned to make a light step, I instantly ended up right beside Kyle.

“!? Guh!”

Kyle reacted late, but he still almost blocked my bokuto's downward swing with his wooden sword.

Un, his reaction really was faster than that of the other squad captains.

Either way though, I thought that it couldn't be helped that he moved late.

As I exerted a strength substantially stronger than I had against the other squad captains, Kyle retaliated.

To be honest, for the matches up until now, rather than a match, they should be called spars.

In the previous matches against the squad captains, I had given advice like usual.

That's why, at least when facing Kyle in the finals, I decided to have a match, not a spar.

———Ga! Gan!

It may have been because I was concentrating on the match, but the sounds of the bokuto and the wooden sword clashing didn't enter my ears.

At times, Kyle undauntedly counterattacked and warded off my bokuto.

While recalling an image from a showdown in a period drama, I wielded the bokuto and mimicked it.

This continued for five minutes.

“Gu! Ha!”

“.....”

I forced Kyle, who was driving in and stabbing with the wooden sword in one hand, back.

I planned to silently dodge to the right.

It was no good.

Although I had the strength, if I dodged the stab, a gap would emerge.

I raised the bokuto from below.

———Kan!

“!? Damn!”

Kyle’s wooden sword went flying into the sky with a loud sound, and while he was surprised, I kicked the ground, moving towards him with the bokuto in my right hand.

The point of the bokuto, which was in my right hand, faced left, instantly crossing the surprised Kyle, who couldn’t avoid it. Its edge struck him in the abdomen. With just a little strength, Kyle was blown away.

He landed ten meters away and slid for five more meters.

———Karan !

As I held my lowered stance, with the bokuto in my right hand held straight out, I heard Kyle’s sword fall to the ground.

My surroundings were quiet for some reason.

“...Ha! Winner, Black Knight!! The winner of the Knight Corps Tournament is the Black Knight!”

———Haaaaaa!

Since it was silent, didn’t that mean that nobody was cheering?

Why was everybody silent?

It was so noisy before the finals started.

I let go of the bokuto and rushed over to the now face-up Kyle.

“Kyle, are you alright?”

“Ye-yes...Guh...”

Kyle groaned as he got up while holding his stomach.

I understood why, since his armor was dented.

Oops~, even though I had only put a little bit of strength into the bokuto.

Since all of the match participants wore armor, wasn't it bad that the magician had cast reinforcement magic that prevented the weapons from breaking?

Even then, Magician, what type of reinforcement magic was cast for even the armor to be dented?

“Sorry, I went too far.”

I apologized while reaching down.

“Nah, thank you for the instruction.”

Kyle said while grabbing my hand to help himself up.

Despite the pain that he should be feeling in his stomach, Kyle showed a refreshing countenance.

It seemed that his condition wasn't a problem.

“Commander! Please become the representative!”

“Okay!”

After responding to Kyle's support, we both left the arena grounds.

It was now 15:00.

The swordsman corps' tournament would begin after an hour-long break.

Fuu~, I'm hungry!

Since I had fought consecutive matches, I had not eaten lunch yet.

I had no more plans after this, so I decided to buy lunch at the stall.

It would be troublesome if it was too late, after all.

I hurried through the halls, towards the stalls in the plaza outside the tournament grounds.

Still, who was the magician who cast the reinforcement magic?

Military Officers' Dedicated Seating

"...It was dented."

"It was dented, huh."

"It was actually dented."

"It is true that it was dented..."

"That...was...too much..."

Adolf, Brandon, Celestia, and I spoke one by one while looking at Amy, who had reinforced the weapons used in the match.

Amy reflected in shame.

In the recent match, Kyle's armor had been dented by the bokuto.

It was just an ordinary piece of wood that the Commander had sharpened.

It wouldn't have been funny even if it had caused a small dent, but the reinforcement magic dented the armor like the bokuto was a bludgeon.

Even if it had been a woman like Celestia who attacked seriously, the armor would still have been dented like it had with the Commander. That was how strong the reinforcement magic was.

Our faces cramped up.

Even though the Commander was certainly strong, when compared with the reinforcement magic on the swords during the tournament four years ago, this year's reinforcement was abnormal.

“Even too much has its limits! Just being hit by an ordinary wooden sword hurts, so isn't that a lethal weapon!?”

Adolf scolded Amy while dripping with cold sweat.

I understood the feeling.

That reinforcement must have been for wooden weapons like bludgeoning weapons and arrows, rather than wooden swords.

“That isn't 'reinforcement', but 'misfortune' instead...”

(TL: Pun based on the pronunciation of “reinforcement” and “misfortune”. 『補強』 vs 『凶化』)

Celestia spoke with a cramped smile while breaking out in a cold sweat.

The word felt wrong, but the meaning behind it wasn't.

If this had happened in the other matches before we noticed, injuries or even deaths may have occurred.

It was truly good that we discovered this now.

“Tell the Commander the circumstances afterwards. Then cast all of the reinforcement magic again.”

“...Yes...”

Amy was dejected at my words.

To her, who revered the Commander so, it was a disgraceful mistake.

I felt sorry, but this time, it was inevitable.

“Well then, there will be no problems for the matches from tomorrow onward. However, the matches of the swordsman corps today...there is no time.”

Brandon’s face was stiff as he said this.

Certainly, those guys from the swordsman corps had to compete now.

Poor swordsman corps.

Well, my corps had no problems until the finals!

It’ll be fine!

.....

Don’t die.

—Alice POV—

General Seating Area

“““ ”””

Dumbfounded expressions were stuck on the faces of the three people beside me.

Claude-san went to buy food and wasn’t here right now.

He had asked me to save two seats.

Fufu, so that was it.

I understood who the other seat was for.

They truly were close friends.

Still, these three people...How long were they going to show those immodest faces?

Becoming a full-fledged maid was still a long way away.

“Hey, even though you are all classmates, maids shouldn’t show that kind of face!”

““!?””

The three of them finally came to their senses.

Well, well. I could tell that it would be hard for them.

“Good grief, even though Claude-san told you to be prepared beforehand.”

I said with amazement.

“No way! I knew that it would be abnormally fast, but that was so amazing that I can’t think straight!”

Karen protested.

I understood that they were this confused because they had not learned martial arts from Head Maid-sama and Head Butler-sama.

A servant must always be calm.

At every moment, they had to be able to carry out tasks for the master, as a support.

Even on a battlefield!

That was the mission of us castle servants!

That’s what I was taught when it was decided that I would work in the castle.

Though it was technically unnecessary for one to attend the servant school, according to the Head Maid-sama, it was recommended for one to attend and graduate.

Thanks to my friends, I was able to do many things.

However, I had always thought this.

If the butlers had a martial arts course, then the maids should also have one!

I, who had served in the castle since I was 12 years old, was also taught martial arts.

Compared to this, other aristocratic graduates of the servant school immediately served in estates without studying martial arts.

In that condition, could they support their master?

We servants were manual laborers.

I often saw the dirty sides of the nobles.

Some seemed to be mentally unstable.

For all those reasons, martial arts was indispensable!

Even Black Knight-sama has said that by training one's body, one strengthens their mind.

I completely agreed.

That was the difference between these three and me right now.

“A maid aims to always be calm! That's why I recommended that you study martial arts, but since you all said 'I don't want to,' you are now confused like this! That is proof that your minds are lax!”

It was a good chance to advise them.

By no means was it because I disliked them.

As a good friend, I had to advise them when they were wrong.

“It's not too late. Learn martial arts and temper your mind. It will be a step towards becoming a full-fledged maid.”

“...Could it be that all of the servants in the castle know martial arts?”

Ashe asked nervously.

“Of course. We who work in the castle must be able to deal with anything anytime, so of course we know martial arts.”

Since we never know what will happen in these times.

“E-even the duties of normal soldiers?”

Rona asked with a cramped face.

Was learning martial arts so disagreeable?

However, it wasn't like that!

“The ones closer than the soldiers are us servants! When an assassin or demon attacks, it is obviously the duty of the closest people to deal with it!”

In fact, the imperial family could be targeted.

At that time, we servants would struggle to protect the royals.

One may have to fight against a group of assassins.

“It is not that I hate you three. Rather, it is because you are my beloved friends that I say this. It does not have to be now, but take your time and think about it.”

“““ ... ”””

The three of them fell completely silent.

It was slightly harsh, but there was no other way to put it.

Previously, when I used calm words, they had not understood it.

“Well then, that's it for the lecture. Since Claude-san should almost be back with delicious things for us, let's enjoy the swordsman corps matches.”

I said this with my usual smile.

As a servant, a smile was also an indispensable part of the job.

“...Now that I think about it, it has been a while.”

Karen looked around as she said that.

Although it had been a while, I hadn't noticed it.

“The other person, the friend of Claude-san who was supposed to come...it seems that he hasn't arrived yet.”

It had been 40 minutes since the matches of the Knight Corps ended, but that person had not shown up.

Since she said that she had a break after this, she was certain to come.

“Eh? Another person will come?”

“Is it one of Alice's acquaintances?”

Lorna and Ashe asked.

“Well, I know that amazing person well.”

I answered with a smile.

Somehow, that voice seemed to bounce.

“Heeh, for you to go that far...”

Karen said with an interested expression.

It was an uneasy way of speaking, but I didn't mind it.

———“Aren't you being too lax?”

———”Hmm? I don’t think so...”

Two familiar voices sounded.

“Ah, it seems that he has returned.”

“It seems that the first person is the barbarian.”

“And the other?”

Karen, Lorna, and Ashe spoke.

It seemed that they only recognized the first voice.

However, the second voice...

It can’t be!

“Excuse me!”

“Eh? Alice is fast!”

I heard Karen’s voice behind me, but I didn’t mind it!

It can’t be! It can’t be!

When I looked towards the entrance, I immediately spotted them.

The figure of one of the people was just as I had feared.

“Ah, Alice, why are you so flustered?”

Acting normal, as if it were nothing, the one who was in front of me...Black Knight-sama asked me a question.

That terrifying visage faced me with both hands full of food and drinks.

“Ah...aah...”

“Alice? What’s wrong? Are you alright?”

“...It’s probably because of your appearance.”

Since I couldn’t get the words out, Claude-san spoke for me.

Thank you very much, Claude-san!

—Claude’s POV—

Aah, what is this!

For my master to have to go buy food, I am disqualified as a servant!

Right now, in front of us, Alice had unusually lost her composure.

I was positive that it was due to the Black Knight beside me, Chie.

As a maid, Alice seemed to be regretting that her master Chie had bought food and brought it to her.

Chie herself had the status of a duke, but she had the upbringing of a commoner, an unusual noble.

According to Chie:

“Please excuse me from such absurdities, one way or another! These are the principles of the Saitou house!”

So she said.

Sometimes, Chie’s family from her stories seemed powerful, wild, or honestly absurd.

Chie sometimes looked into the distance too.

Possibly because of her family’s upbringing, Chie did not rely on anybody.

After understanding this, I didn't think that Chie's everyday actions were surprising, but Alice the maid and Conrad-san were different.

It seemed that it was inevitable that they wanted her to depend on them.

That was why Alice appeared so flustered right now, since her master had taken her job away from her instead of relying on her.

However, it couldn't be helped.

When I originally met her, Chie had been planning to buy a meal.

Since we coincidentally met up, I bought meals for Alice and the others and walked back with Chie.

In the end, the two of us came back with five people's meals, a cake, and drinks, which led to the current situation.

It wasn't Alice's fault.

Since it was a holiday, one shouldn't need to work, but the Aiden siblings did not think like that.

I understood this in half a year.

"...Alice, since you have a rest day, it's okay."

Chie also seemed to understand why Alice was like this and tried to persuade her.

"Bu-but...Black Knight-sama...to help..."

She was so agitated that her voice shook.

As expected, only Chie could calm the Aiden siblings from this state.

"It's fine. Alice is only 14 years old, not yet an adult, so for today, please let adults like Claude and I spoil you."

Chie shrewdly included my name while urging her to act spoiled.

I felt happy when I understood that.

I'm sure that under her helmet, she is grinning!

"...Okay."

While calming herself down, Alice reluctantly agreed.

As expected of Chie the tamer.

"Well then, since I'm hungry, I'll take a seat. It is almost time for the start of the swordsman corps matches. We are keeping the other three waiting."

"Ah, that's right! Well, Black Knight-sama, I will take care of your belongings."

Alice returned to her usual smile and tried to take the food from Chie.

Chie refused.

"Didn't I already say so? Today, Alice can act spoiled and I will hold this. Depend on us, especially Claude!"

"You..."

I really enjoy this guy.

I was somewhat annoyed with Chie as we returned to our seats.

The three people who noticed that I had returned turned to me while showing faces of displeasure, but upon seeing Chie, their faces instantly froze with foolish expressions, as if cursed.

"Heeey, everyone?"

Even when Chie waved her hand, there was no response.

Since they weren't cursed and it wasn't a problem, we left those three alone and started to eat.

I sat between them and clapped my hands together.

““Itadakimasu!””

We said the greeting from Chie’s hometown and started eating.

The greeting was hard for me to pronounce at first, but I have been able to say “Itadakimasu” recently.

I really liked these words.

I ate the steamed potato with my disposable fork.

Ah, all was well.

The Swordsman Corps Matches will begin in 10 minutes.

CHAPTER 21

QUALIFYING DAY 1, SWORDSMAN CORPS

—Chie POV—

General Audience Area

I was now watching the Swordsman Corps matches with Claude, Alice, and her three friends.

“Oh, that blonde swordswoman is quite good.”

“Did you know? I heard that she enlisted sometime this year, but she had talent and was quickly promoted to a squad captain.”

“Certainly, she is quite agile. It seems like she does not have any wasted movements, but there is still a ways to go.”

“...”

Claude, Alice, and I complimented the swordswoman while watching the match.

Next to us, Alice’s three friends continued to watch in silence.

After I greeted the girls, they recovered from their shock, but continued to stay silent.

“But Black, seeing you hold a pastry in one hand while in your Black Knight appearance is extremely weird.”

Claude commented on my situation.

He just called me ‘Black’ when we were outside.

Certainly, I also thought that I looked weird when I ate sweet fruit crepes with this appearance.

“Isn’t it fine? I wanted to eat something sweet after exercising.”

When tired, eat sweet things.

“Also, I don’t want to hear that from you, Claude.”

The fact that he was munching showed that he was conscious of it.

“You...so defiant...Anyways, I didn’t know that you like sweet things.”

Claude said while amazed.

“Fufu, I know Black Knight-sama goes to the city two to three times a month to buy sweets.”

Claude and I were both surprised, in different ways.

“Wait?! Why do you know that, Alice?”

“Ha? That’s what you do on your holidays?”

Alice smiled on seeing our reactions.

No, wait a minute.

On my holidays, I would leave the castle alone while wearing my armor, enter a street with no people, release my armor while wearing a robe underneath, and then enter the café like that!

“Black Knight-sama, you will not be able to fool me with just that level of disguise, you know.”

I felt cold sweat appear as Alice told me that with a smile.

As expected, this castle’s employees were scary!

“You...wanted to eat sweets so much that you wore a disguise?”

Claude’s shoulders shook as he tried to stifle his laughter.

Therefore...

—Beshi

“OUCH!”

...I hit the back of Claude’s head with an open hand.

“Black, what are you doing!”

“Shut up! Don’t laugh at my secret pleasure!”

“Secret or not, why does a Knight Captain like you need to be shady about it?”

“It can’t be helped, right? If I wear armor, the other guests won’t be able to settle down!”

“Wait! Even if you kept your armor on, did you think you could enter quietly if you posed as a normal customer?”

“Of course! If possible, I want to chat with as many people as I can while I eat cake.

“I definitely didn’t want to know that.”

Claude and I continued arguing, without noticing that Alice and the other spectators were gathering around us.

—Alice POV—

“Oh this again? Master Black and Claude.”

“Haha! As usual, they have a good relationship!”

“Ah, I have seen this before, while shopping around the Fountain Square.”

“This won’t stop for at least 30 minutes.”

The peanut gallery watched the exchange between the Black Knight and Claude, like it was an everyday thing.

For them, it was a familiar sight.

“Huh? No one is surprised to see this?”

Karen asked with hesitation.

Lorna and Ashe had the same reaction as Karen.

“Oya~, did you guys not know?”

A plump and kind auntie near the girls spoke up.

She had brown hair, a brown shawl, a dark green shirt, and a long brown skirt.

The three people turned to face the woman in response.

“After Master Black defeated Fafnir, we occasionally saw this kind of scene. At first, I was surprised and thought that something important was about to happen, but nothing happened, and they reconciled and got along again.”

She said while remembering the scene with a wry smile.

“Now the people on the shopping street always watch it.”

The three girls just listened to her while feeling amazement.

“What about that blonde person? Do you all know him?”

Ashe asked the auntie.

“Yeah, that person is quite a spectacular swordsman.”

“Right?”

“...”

After about 30 minutes of bickering, the two people went back to watching the tournament as if nothing had happened.

Three people were looking at them.

The peanut gallery returned to their original seats to watch the match, after making sure that the bickering had stopped.

As usual, one side started cheering.

“You see, there is nothing to worry about.”

“!? What is it, Alice?”

The Black Knight heard me.

“No, I was just worried about the exchange between the two of you.”

The Black Knight nodded after hearing those words.

“Sorry, please don’t mind it. It’s just the usual.”

The Black Knight told me that it was nothing.

However, that wouldn’t be possible if it wasn’t normal.

“Ku, Black Knight-sama is really close to the commoners, isn’t he?”

Lorna asked.

“Oh, I was originally a commoner. Protecting the country and getting along with the people is just normal.”

Karen was surprised to hear this reply and asked another question.

“Duke-sama is a commoner?”

The Black Knight tilted his head.

“Duke or not, it doesn’t matter, right? To begin with, the aristocracy is supposed to work for the country and the people. That is why I think it is important to have proper communication with both the nobles and the commoners. There is nothing weird about that, right?”

“...Because you say things like that, you became a sworn enemy to part of the aristocracy.”

Claude replied to the Black Knight.

I thought about the Black Knight’s opinions on the way of the nobles.

Brother was also a commoner who rose to the position of a Baron. However, because he originally had a close relationship with the locals, he believed that the commoners were more important than the nobles.

For the Black Knight, though, nobility and commoners were all equals.

Like Claude said, this would attract the hatred of some of the nobility, but I also agreed with this way of thinking.

After hearing this, the three girls stayed silent.

These three were still showing faces of disbelief.

How should I put it? Hardheads?

“Did I say something strange?”

“You are fine like that.”

“Huh?”

Claude patted the confused Black Knight’s right shoulder with his left hand.

The Black Knight was still unable to understand.

As I looked at the Black Knight, I had a strong desire to continue following her until the end.

—Adelbert POV—

Finals - Arena,

I, Adelbert Abercrombie, was currently facing the Swordsman Corps Vice Captain in the finals.

A handsome man with red hair and a height of 185 Kuameito stood across from me.

He was dressed in silver plate mail and held a wooden broadsword.

Basically, he was a powerhouse heavy hitter.

As the sky started to turn dark, the mages around began casting 'Light'.

For a moment, the general audience became noisy in a certain area. I wonder what happened?

“Well then, both participants, get ready!”

On the referee's cue, both of us got ready.

“Now then...Start!”

—Dat-su

We both advanced on the cue, and the sound of clashing wooden swords rang out.

It seemed like our blades were sharper, compared to four years ago.

“Dean, it looks like you have improved a bit.”

“I am honored by your compliment.”

The Vice Captain Dean said as he was pushed back a bit.

Just as he was being pressed, he jumped to make some distance.

“It is because I was trained by the Knight Captain. If I do not improve, the Knight Captain will get angry.”

Dean said as he stood up straight.

Six months ago, that Black Knight appeared.

He appeared suddenly, out of nowhere, and became the Knight Captain and Royal Knight.

He was also given the position of Duke, and the aristocratic red cloak. Not only that, his position rose above mine, leaving my pride in shreds.

That was why, the first time I met him directly, I tried to use sarcasm to get him to understand our viewpoint. I was unsuccessful.

The Black Knight pulled back the hand I had been holding, and then punched me in the face at an incredible speed.

I had not understood what had happened.

I mean, it was impossible to believe that this kind of person was the Knight Captain.

I did not want to follow him.

After that, Adolf and Brandon got beaten up as well.

I wanted to believe that it was a nightmare.

The Black Knight who was reflected in my eyes at that time was a monster.

When the Black Knight came closer to me, I raised a pathetic voice.

He grabbed me by the collar and yelled at me.

Honestly, that was my first time experiencing something like that.

I, who had been born into a large noble family and had not lost until then, thought that standing above the people was common sense for human beings.

Esteemed Father and Mother had also taught me that.

However, this Black Knight yelled at that me with an extremely threatening attitude.

It was the first time I had experienced such fear...

...and most of all, surprise.

“Conrad is unrelated to the problem between us!”

I had received those words in shock.

I had not understood the meaning of getting angry for others.

Moreover, attaching that disgraceful nickname, ‘Stupid Swordsman’, had made me hate him even more.

I had thought that it would be great if he disappeared.

However, everyone else was attracted to the Black Knight.

The men listened to his advice and trained every day.

Then there was the kidnapping incident.

The case that went on for two years was resolved in about a month. The dragon, which a country could not be guaranteed to beat despite using their entire military strength, was defeated by this one person.

This was too unreasonable.

At first, I could not accept the Black Knight.

However, I have now accepted him!

“Hah!”

I attacked Dean.

“Gh!”

The attack forced Dean to try to maintain his balance.

I took advantage of this and continued to attack.

I slashed quickly, from different angles.

Dean had certainly become much stronger, but he was still weaker than me.

Also, if I did not win this, I could not fight the Black Knight.

Even if I admit that he is strong, I still hate him!

I know it is my childish pride, but I still want to beat him!

To do that, I must absolutely win this match!

“HAA!”

—Gan!

I passed Dean’s broadsword and thrust at Dean’s torso.

The impact blew Dean backwards.

—- Crash*

The sound of the wooden sword falling echoed.

“Winner! Adelbert! The Swordsman Corps champion is Adelbert Abercrombie!”

—Waaaaa!

Cheers rose from the audience at the referee’s declaration.

After listening to the declaration, I left the arena without worrying about the fallen Dean.

That was why I didn't notice.

My thrust had dented Dean's armor and he fainted, his eyes white.

I only found out the next day.

—Conrad POV—

Military Officials Dedicated Seating

"...He was carried away."

"...He was actually taken away."

"...Carried..."

"It is true that he got taken away."

"I'm...sorry..."

Brandon, Adolf, Celestia, and I had bitter faces.

Amy was apologizing in tears.

"Finally a victim..."

Celestia murmured, while becoming pale.

We understood the feeling.

We were wondering if a victim would appear or not throughout the match.

At last, in the finals, a victim appeared...the Swordsman Corps Vice Captain.

"Tomorrow is Celestia's and my turn. Fix that magic reinforcement quickly!"

Adolf drew closer to Amy and begged her in a cold sweat.

I thought to myself:

I'm glad that I'm exempted from the qualifying rounds!

While I thought that it was unfair for the other captains, it was better than hurting the other subordinates with that ridiculous weapon.

In order to ensure that the wooden weapon used in the qualifying rounds was safe, we carefully examined the spell while forgoing sleep.

—Chie's POV—

"I wonder if Dean is alright?"

"Well, he is the vice captain, so he should be okay?"

We journeyed into noble territory to walk Alice's three friends home.

Apparently, these three were born nobles.

Why did they go to a servant school?

"" ... ""

Even now, they wouldn't speak.

I still don't think I said anything strange a while ago?

"Um...Black Knight-sama..."

The silent Ashe started to speak.

"What?"

I answered normally, but she looked down and winced.

Ugh. Was I really that scary?

“Um...why do you think nobles and commoners are the same?”

Ashe asked as she looked downwards.

Her brows seemed to furrow a bit.

Claude and Alice had the same expression.

I thought it was a funny question.

“...Based on what you say, you seem to look down on commoners.”

I said in the usual serious and deep voice of the Black Knight.

The trio’s faces started to pale.

“No, I didn’t mean it like that...I mean that the nobility all have higher positions and identities, so the priority is usually given to nobles...”

As I listened to Ashe, I thought about it again.

Aristocracy looked down on commoners.

“The different way of identifying themselves certainly plays a role. That is true. However, in terms of priorities, I think it changes depending on the situation.”

“Huh?”

Ashe looked like she couldn’t understand what I meant.

This was the stereotypical way of thinking until now.

It was especially true for nobles like her.

We are great because we are nobles.

Therefore, commoners are an inferior existence.

Thanks to nobles like these, commoners like Aaron-san started to hate nobles.

However, this way of thinking was wrong.

The demons had begun to move. Humans had to help each other.

Nobles could abandon commoners. However, the reverse was also true.

In order to prevent that from happening, steps had to be taken to change it, one at a time.

That was why I told the girls the value of each and every human being.

“We humans are all equal, except for our being born into different situations. There are also people like Conrad and me, who were born commoners and became nobles. This is one of the reasons I do not treat them as mere ‘commoners’. We nobles are supposed to work for the sake of protecting them. Everyone lives by supporting each other, even if they aren’t aware of it.

That is why I have to respect the commoners. Without them, we can’t live. Don’t you guys go to a servant school? I might not be convincing, but how about looking at the outside world, instead of just the aristocracy. If you look at humans everywhere, I’m sure that you will improve in your jobs.”

“““ ...”””

They stayed silent after listening to my words.

While it might be difficult, there is no other way to get the girls to believe that.

While it might not be good to impose the values of my original world onto them, as long as I am staying here, I will try to make this a good country.

While I am the only one thinking about it now, I hope there will be others thinking about the future of the country.

It would be difficult.

As difficult as moving the world.

After all, it was something very simple.

Even then, when one person moved forward, everyone else would move to follow.

That was one of the Black Knight's jobs.

—Claude POV—

Equality, huh?

After sending the three girls home, I bid farewell to Chie and the rest. I then returned to a rented apartment in the commoner area.

It was slightly run down, but that suited me just fine.

It was a room with the minimum amount of furniture.

I thought about Chie's words of wisdom in this room.

I had never thought about commoner and noble equality.

Chie and Conrad were different. Until I heard those words earlier, I thought aristocracy should look down on commoners.

Another possible reason, that was the kind of world I lived in during my time as an assassin.

If I had met Chie earlier, perhaps I would never have done such a crappy job.

When I looked at her, I could only feel embarrassed.

Saying that kind of thing should be reality.

Talking about that kind of future as if it was something so simple.

Seriously, what kind of country did you grow up in?!

I have heard stories about her family, but I had never heard stories of her country.

.....

Ah, whatever. If she wants to change this country, then allow me to help.

It might be something that I have to do.

In order to walk together with my one best friend.

CHAPTER 22

PRELIMINARIES, ARCHER CORPS — SECOND DAY

Military Personnel Audience Seating

—Chie's Perspective—

“The reinforcement magic was too strong!”

Stupid Swordsman and I unusually spoken in sync.

It was the second day of the preliminaries. Conrad, Amy, Stupid Swordsman, Muscle Brother-san, and I were all currently in the Military Personnel Seating area.

The reason Stupid Swordsman and I were in sync was because we were confused when Amy suddenly apologized to Conrad after he drowsily came to the seating area. When Muscle Brother-san, Amy, and Conrad joined us, the three of them explained the reason for the apology to us in very sleepy voices.

The reason the three of them all appeared to be sleepy was because they had been up with Amy for most of the night, re-casting the reinforcement magic.

“So that’s why Kyle and Deen’s armours were dented.”

My face stiffened when I heard this.

“Eh? Deen’s armour had been dented?”

Stupid Swordsman asked me this like he was hearing it for the first time.

Oh yeah, this guy had left without making sure that Deen was okay.

“Umm, shouldn’t you be worried and check on your opponent after blowing him away?”

I asked him, flabbergasted.

Conrad and the others also looked at Stupid Swordsman with amazement.

“Wa-, wait! Why are you guys looking at me like that!?”

Stupid Swordsman said, while faltering before our gazes.

The room’s temperature seemed to rapidly drop at his reaction.

Then, as the tension in the room was reaching its peak:

“Ah! There you are, Swordsman Corps Captain!”

A man from the Swordsman Corps rushed over. He seemed to have been looking all over the place for Stupid Swordsman.

“Hmm? What is it? Why are you in such a rush?”

Stupid Swordsman asked the man.

What was going on?

“Don’t just say ‘What is it’! Vice-Captain Deen’s ribs were fractured, so he had to be hospitalized!”

“”Eh!?”””

Everyone was surprised by the sudden report.

Especially Amy, whose face had turned pale.

The Swordsman Corps man said:

“Please come visit him later!”

With that, he left.

We were speechless for a while.

“C’mon Amy, cheer up!”

Now, we were trying our best to cheer up the downcast Amy as we watched the Archer Corps preliminaries.

Amy was a timid person who took responsibility for her actions. In fact, it was one of her virtues, but it caused this incident to affect her deeply.

“.....”

Amy hung her head sadly.

It seemed that our attempts to cheer her up only made her more despondent.

“I mean su-sure, maybe you did cast the reinforcement magic excessively, and it’d be bad if you didn’t feel repentant about the whole thing, but the one who injured him was Stupid Swordsman. Just bring this stupid guy with you when you visit, and I’m sure everything will work out fine.”

“Hey! Who you calling stupid!?”

Stupid Swordsman grumbled beside me as I did my best to comfort Amy.

“Well, you did actually injure him, Adel.”

Muscle Brother-san tried to calm Stupid Swordsman down.

Stupid Swordsman went silent upon hearing those words, and looked down with a sullen face.

Sheesh, was he a little kid or something?

“Ah, that’s right. Commander, you watched the Swordsman Corps matches with Alice and the others yesterday, didn’t you?”

Conrad suddenly changed the subject.

It seemed as though he was trying to change the mood.

I really had to thank him. By changing the conversation to a more cheerful topic, Amy's mood could improve.

As expected of Conrad, he was a capable man.

"Well, I had originally arranged to meet with just Claude, but I stumbled into Alice by chance on the way there, so we ended up watching the matches together."

"So that's what happened."

Conrad nodded his head in understanding, leaving the other three to tilt their heads in confusion.

"Hey, who's Claude?"

Muscle Brother-san asked the question that Amy and Stupid Swordsman had on their minds.

What, they don't know about him?

As the Imperial Covert Investigator, Claude's identity was mostly a secret. He was, however, rather well known for his "excursions" to the shopping district.

"He's my friend."

Since explaining was a pain, I answered simply.

Besides being a comrade and a partner in crime, among other things, since he was my first peer, I used the word "friend".

"Friend...as in your companion?"

Muscle Brother-san said with a surprised expression.

It was a bit rude.

"Well, he's pretty much my friend!.....but, in the empire, he's the only one I have..."

“.....”

I responded to Muscle Brother-san’s question, but I became sad at the fact that, other than Claude, I had no one to call a friend.

It might have been my imagination, but the raucous soldiers seemed to have fallen silent since a while back...

“Uhhh, that, um... Sorry.”

Muscle Brother-san apologized to the crestfallen me.

Stop, it’s too sad.

Agh, everybody is looking at me with pity in their eyes!!

Even Stupid Swordsman is looking at me like that!!

An awkward silence came over the military personnel seating area.

This pitiful consolation continued past the start of the Archer Corps finals...

Archer Corps Tournament Grounds

—Adolf’s Perspective—

I was waiting for the starting signal for the match against the Archer Corps Vice-captain, Charlotte Aveline.

It seemed that the Military Personnel Seating Area had become quiet, for some reason. Had something happened?

A strangely dark and heavy atmosphere was oozing from there...

“...Captain, are you getting complacent?”

I heard Charlotte sullenly comment on how I was looking at the Military Personnel Seating Area, so I turned towards her.

She had long hair, tied into a ponytail, that flowed down to her waist and sharp, blue eyes, all complemented by a dignified face.

Her height was average, around 160 kuameito.

She was wearing leather armor over a white shirt, dark brown leather pants, and long black boots.

She was the Archer Corps' number two, with my help...or not.

“Sheesh, you’re always like that. Your attitude shows that you have no interest at all in your opponent. You’re really good at riling up your opponents, you know. But why? Do you really have no interest in your opponents? Ah, so that’s it. This is just your normal behaviour. Whenever we had to deal with paperwork, you’d always find some trivial reason to run away, and then, when you came back the next morning, you still wouldn’t even try to help with the work. Do you hate us subordinates? Is that it?”

Charlotte made no attempts to hide her ill-humour as she straightforwardly described her dissatisfaction.

Perhaps it was just my imagination running wild, but those words felt like arrows stabbing into my chest.

Charlotte’s attitude towards me was nothing unusual, but today she was twice as scathing.

“Haah~”

“Hey, Captain! Are you even listening?”

It seems that letting out a sigh was a mistake.

Her sardonic comments were becoming unbearable, so I decided it was time to call her out on it.

“Charlotte, why are you in such a bad mood today?”

“...Why...is it?”

.....Huh?

Was asking that question a mistake?

When I asked that question, it seemed as though Charlotte was emitting a black aura. Was it just my imagination?

Charlotte trembled as she clenched her fists tightly and began to reply in a low, dreadful voice.

“Do you think I don’t have a reason to be angry? You know I asked you to sign the papers due this week before the preliminaries. Yet, even now, you probably still haven’t even glanced at a single piece of the paperwork, am I right? I bet you went on a trip instead. You did, right? You probably went and made passes at all the girls you saw, both in the castle and on the streets, right? It must be great having servants. You can just throw all your work onto them and go off to do whatever you want, you...”

I broke into a cold sweat upon hearing Charlotte’s words.

Shoot, I forgot about those documents.

“Haah~, Why must the Archer Corps’ captain be so difficult... It would be so much nicer if you were like Black Knight-sama: zealous about work, considerate of his subordinate’s work, and, without abusing his power, truly concerned about the people and the country.”

‘Biku’

Hearing Charlotte’s words, my face twitched.

Why would she compare me to that guy, the Black Knight?

Why him of all people?

There are at least four other captains... Well, excluding Adelbert... three other captains.

“...Why are you comparing me to the Black Knight?”

This time, I was the one who was ill-humoured.

The nickname that the Black Knight gave was good, but I didn't know what it meant at first.

The bad feelings I had were gone, and we interacted normally now—thinking about it now, our attitudes were to blame back then.

Since he is the knight Conrad respects, I certainly couldn't deny that he was the best knight.

I knew all this...but still!

I just couldn't stand being compared to that Black Knight!!

However, Charlotte didn't know about these thoughts of mine and, as if the previous ill-humour was a lie, responded cheerfully.

“That person, as a commander, is unparalleled. He oversees the training of not only our corps, but also the soldiers of the other corps. Not only that, he also gives precise instructions during monster or bandit subjugation missions. And, best of all, he actually fills out paperwork on time.”

‘Gusa!’

If her words were like arrows, then that last line was the killing blow.

Her previous words were scathing on purpose, but the most effective one was unintentional...

Charlotte expanded further.

“Moreover, that person is just so dreamy~. When I fell behind while fighting an ogre, I thought I was done for! He gallantly rushed in while riding a black unicorn. Ah~, It was so lovely, even recalling it now. After slaying the ogre, upon seeing that I had not moved, he purposefully dismounted from the unicorn and worried about me. He carried me all the way to the headquarters.”

When I saw Charlotte blush and squirm while remembering this, I thought:

Who is this person!?

The person in front of me should be my vice-captain!

Charlotte, a beautiful but stern, hard-working woman!

She had followed me, her boss, for a long time, but I had never seen her look like a maiden in love.

Charlotte's demeanor was famous in the capital, so it was likely that no one else had seen this love-struck maiden side of her either.

As proof, the referee, who was close enough to hear the conversation, drew back in surprise.

Was that person really Charlotte?

"Ah, umm...Is it alright if we start soon?"

Either because he thought that we couldn't leave the audience waiting, or because he was thrown off by this never before seen side of Charlotte — probably both — the referee interjected.

"Let's start at once."

I immediately replied.

I wouldn't be confused by this any longer.

I held the bow in my left hand and adopted a battle stance.

Charlotte came to her senses and also assumed a battle stance.

She had completely returned to the normal Charlotte.

Well then, win or lose, let's have a fair fight!!

“Now then.....Begin!!”

At the signal, we both created some distance from each other.

“Create a block of ice: 『*Ice Block!*』 ”

“Raise the earth! 『*Gnome Block!*』 ”

We invoked each of our specialty elements and created many ice and earthen walls to hide behind.

Since the specialty of the Archer Corps was long-distance attacks, we were unsuited for close combat.

We could aim for the vitals and kill with the bow and arrow, but hitting a moving opponent was an art.

It was a hard-to-handle weapon, and not very effective against large monsters.

Since archery techniques alone were not enough, we had to use magic to compensate.

Just like how we were using the ice and earth walls.

Against another long-distance attacker, like an archer, protecting yourself against arrows was essential, so on the tournament ground, where there were no barriers, we had to make our own.

We often used this method in actual combat.

Of course, it wasn't suited for close quarters combat or against large monsters, but it was useful for protecting against most attacks.

However, it was impossible to hide forever.

I moved towards the walls of ice while staying behind cover.

Assuming that Charlotte was doing the same thing, we should be gradually approaching each other.

I nocked an arrow from the quiver on my back.

Normally, we would enchant the arrow with magic to increase its killing ability, but that would disqualify us for foul play in this match.

Though the arrows used in the matches were magically reinforced, they weren't reinforced to an extreme extent and only had the power to bruise.

Even if it hit the head, it would only cause swelling.

I thought that was the gist of it, but killing someone would be grounds for disqualification in this match.

Even when using the competition arrows, since they were strengthened with reinforcement magic, the arrows could be lethal.

That was why, if the arrows were enchanted, it would mean that there was an intent to kill.

As I searched for her, with my bowstring drawn, Charlotte and I passed by each other.

—-Ba!

I shot the arrow.

Military Personnel Audience Seating

—Chie's Perspective—

“As expected, since it's a match between the captain and the vice-captain, it's on a completely different level.

Muscle Brother-san commented on the match between Long Blue-haired Ikemen and Charlotte.

Had something happened, for there to be a chilling feeling shortly before the match started?

As I watched the finals, I thought back on how the two people were acting before the match.

Charlotte had been speaking harshly towards Long Blue-haired Ikemen as usual, but at some point, she became good-humored.

Celestia Aveline was the Archer Corps' Vice-Captain.

She was 20 years old.

Three months ago, she and I subjugated ogres together.

I brought the same few subordinates every time, other than that one time.

Normally, Conrad would come with me as my aide, but he had other work that day, so I brought Charlotte as a substitute aide.

Then, something happened.

I had never had an aide other than Conrad accompany me before, so I moved as if Conrad were with me.

Putting it simply, I gave orders to my subordinates without considering the difference in level between Conrad and Charlotte.

As a result, Charlotte's leg was injured by an ogre's attack.

I was separated from her, engaging another ogre, but my blood froze when I saw that.

Realizing that it was my fault, I dispatched the ogre in front of me. Luckily, I was able to get onto Hayate, and as he leapt at full strength, I drew Sakuya and decapitated the ogre attacking Charlotte.

I dismounted from Hayate as he landed, rushed over to her, and carried out first-aid treatment on her leg as I apologized.

It would have been better for her to ride back to headquarters on a horse, but since I was the only knight, there were no horses.

Hayate would absolutely never let anybody other than me ride him, so I had to carry her — in a princess carry — back to headquarters.

I had never been princess carried, so I didn't think a day would come when I would do the carrying.

After reminiscing about that, I returned to watching the match.

There was a slight difference in the rules for the Archer Corps matches.

If the arrows weren't magically reinforced, they would have minimal strength, so the arrows used in the matches would be ineffective, and nothing would happen.

For that reason, the match wasn't a pointless one. If the arrowhead hit the left side of the chest — meaning the heart — it would decide the outcome of the match.

Each corps had the same rules for the last day of the preliminaries.

It seemed like there were some people who were dissatisfied with the rules ending it too quickly, but I thought that it was pretty interesting.

In each match, they used their specialty magic to create a battle environment, and since it was never the same, it was exciting to watch the battles.

Then, when they moved to avoid the arrows, there was the suspense of not knowing when they would be hit!

Well, in the middle, I became crestfallen and only had vague memories of the matches, but the Archer Corps battles kept me on the edge of my seat!

The current match was especially exciting.

In these circumstances, the level of their technique, strength, and judgement far exceeded that of the others.

They anticipated their opponent's attacks and dodged them while counter attacking.

It looked easy to do, but it was actually difficult.

Unlike how it was with close quarters weapons, one could not be indecisive when attacking from a distance.

If they got closer, their accuracy would improve, but then they wouldn't be able to deal with attacks from swords, spears, and similar weapons.

It would be different if the arrows were made of metal, but in this world of Eldoa, they were made of wood.

There were some arrows that could withstand swords, spears, and blunt weapons, but either way, arrows were projectiles: long-range weapons.

Due to that, technique, strength, and judgement were as important as magic strengthening for an archer in a real battle.

Well, I only knew this from the knowledge that was given to me.

(ED: To clarify, she is probably talking about the knowledge the god gave her.)

Now then, let's focus on the match.

Though they were both strong, high level people, Long Blue-haired Ikemen would probably win.

After watching him several times, I understood that his technique was superior.

However, there was no apparent difference between them in the match.

There was also a chance that he would be hit by one of his opponents on the last day of the preliminaries.

During the Finals

—Adolf's Perspective—

"Well then, I have to go soon."

While standing behind an ice block, I gripped my bow.

It was about time for Charlotte's weakness to appear.

Well, she had been trying to mitigate that weakness recently.

I broke into a run in Charlotte's direction.

Charlotte was breathing heavily, about to raise her bow.

Okay, just as expected.

Charlotte's weakness was that she had less stamina than I did.

Though, that was my weak point as well.

Besides:

"Charlotte, didn't you last longer this time?"

Her stamina had increased from before.

"Of- of course! I didn't skip out on training once!!"

As she said that, she shot an arrow at me.

"Heh..."

I smiled as I dodged the arrow and sent one back at her.

Since I wasn't intending to hit her, she easily dodged the arrow, despite breathing heavily.

That is, the arrow had guided her to the perfect position, and now she had been caught.

"!?"

Charlotte noticed something amiss with the place she stepped on, but it was too late.

—Pikipikipiki!

I activated the trap magic under her feet, and Charlotte's lower body froze to the ground.

This was also one of the tactics we archers used.

There were many ways to restrict a fast-moving target, but a tired opponent like this was easy to lead into a prepared trap.

An opening would appear when a tired opponent was pressed.

“Sheesh, you let your guard down!”

As I said that, I shot an arrow towards the dumbfounded Charlotte.

The arrow flew straight at her.

—Ton!

It hit her on her chest.

Though I thought so every time, it was a pitiful sound.

“Winner, Adolf Addinsell! The champion of the Archer Corps Tournament is Adolf Addinsell!”

-Whaaaa!!

The crowd went wild when the referee announced the winner.

After we both erased our ice blocks, stone walls, and traps, we faced each other.

“Haah~, I still lost...”

Charlotte sighed and dropped her shoulders.

“Haha! Of course! Your defeat was inevitable!”

I happily said to Charlotte.

When Charlotte heard that, her face soured. It was really scary!

We gave our formal bows.

“Well, now I’ll head to where Conrad and the others are.”

“Huh? What are you saying?”

Charlotte responded in her usual tone.

Shoot, I should have tried to discreetly sneak over to where Conrad and the others were.

“Right now, you need to finish the paperwork. Finish it before the day ends.”

While saying that, she grabbed my neck and dragged me out.

“Gueh! Hey, cut it out! It hurts!!”

“But, if I don’t do this, you will run away, right?”

Tch, it was exposed.

It seemed that I would be doing paperwork today.

However, before that,

“I got it, I got it! Still, let me go to the Military Personnel Seating area once. I am supposed to report to Conrad after the match finishes.”

“Haah? Isn’t it fine if you send a message through a subordinate?”

Well, that was true but...

“It’s not only that! I arranged to train with the Black Knight after the preliminaries!!”

—-Biku!

“With Black Knight-sama?”

Charlotte reacted when I mentioned the Black Knight.

I saw her cheeks redden, and her face loosened.

...Hey, you really are...

“That’s an important matter! Let’s go! Let’s go immediately!!”

Charlotte, who had turned into a love-struck maiden, dragged me towards the Military Personnel Seating area by the neck.

When I saw this, I thought:

Black Knight, an unbelievable woman has fallen for you...

Since I knew how much of a pain Charlotte was, it was the first time I pitied that Black Knight.

I followed Charlotte while sighing.

Military Personnel Seating Area

—Conrad’s Perspective—

“Aah, I studied!”

The Commander said, after Adolf and Charlotte left.

“Hm? Black Knight, are you still studying, even now?”

Curious, Brandon asked the Commander.

“Ah, I need to find out what to do about the Archer Corps training going forward. From now on, you are going to spar with Long Blue-haired Ikemen, Muscle Brother-san.”

“...Don’t call me Muscle Brother-san.”

Brandon objected to the nickname the Commander gave him.

After half a year, he should have realized that it was futile.

“Haah, whatever. That aside, I’ve gotten hungry. Since it seems that Black Knight has work, you should wait here. Also, since Conrad is the vice-commander, you should send somebody to go buy it.”

Brandon stood up as he said that.

“Go, Adel!”

“Wait a minute! Why me!?”

Adelbert was taken along.

“Um...that...I...also...”

After that, Amy followed them, and I was left waiting with the Commander.

“At any rate, the finals were truly amazing!”

As I talked with the Commander, I saw that her face had become loose from the afterglow of the excitement.

“Yes, as expected of Adolf and Charlotte.”

I responded, delighted that the Commander had enjoyed it.

The Commander who had to conceal her appearance and had to constantly wear armor. I thought that she had to feel cramped a lot of the time.

When I had heard that she was not considered a mature adult at 17 years old, I doubted whether she could bear the burden of being the Commander.

However, despite those doubts, I saw that the Commander had worked for the good of the country with all of her effort, and I felt that it was good that I was serving under such a person.

Besides, Claude was there as a friend to the Commander, who was swamped with work everyday.

Whenever the Commander talked with him, she truly had fun.

Though I was jealous, I was also grateful for it.

Since she was from a foreign country, the Commander would sometimes look up at the sky with a lonely expression on her face.

I had only learned that she could no longer return to her hometown the other day.

When Claude arrived, the Commander seemed happier.

Whenever the Commander talked with a friend as an equal, she was truly lively.

It was different from how she was with Alice and me.

Although she trusted us, Alice and I were subordinates.

Of course, friends and subordinates were different.

That was why I trusted Claude and wanted to help him with Alice's matter.

Just like with the Commander, I didn't know where he came from.

However, as the one who saved the Commander from loneliness, he was indispensable.

Naturally, I didn't lose to Claude in supporting the Commander.

Besides, I wanted to protect the Commander's surroundings.

I respected the Commander, but I also felt another emotion.

I didn't know what this feeling was, but it was special to me.

I stayed close to the Commander while holding onto those feelings.

My thoughts changed to this as I sat next to the cheerful Commander.

—Chie's Perspective—

"Yo~, I made you wait..."

Upon hearing that voice, I raised my eyes.

There was Long Blue-haired Ikemen and, for some reason, Charlotte.

"Ah, thank you for your work."

For now, I replied, waiting for them to come here.

"Black Knight-sama, Vice-commander Conrad, good day."

Charlotte greeted us with a sweet smile.

As expected of a noble from high society, her movements were refined.

"Ah, hello Vice-captain Charlotte."

I returned her greetings.

Suddenly, Charlotte started blushing and squirming, and I tilted my head, puzzled.

"Aah, Black-Knight-sama is truly gallant and dreamy!"

As she said that, she walked past Conrad and clasped my left hand, holding it near her chest.

Charlotte's eyes were sparkling, and her cheeks were pink.

I knew that expression well.

It was the same expression that fangirls showed Baka-suke.

Eh? It couldn't be...

“Black Knight-sama, I would like to ask you something.”

“Eh? Ah, um, what is it?”

I replied nervously.

“Black Knight-sama, do you have a lover?”

—-Bu!

The soldiers around us did a spit take.

“N-, no...”

“Then, anybody you yearn for?”

—-Zazazaza~

This time, aside from Conrad and Long Blue-haired Ikemen, they drew away from us.

If I could, I would also leave.

“Tha- that, I don't have one either.”

—-Pah!

As I replied, my face cramping up, Charlotte's eyes sparkled.

When I saw that expression, I was convinced.

It was as I thought.

How did it get to this!?

“...Hey, don’t you think that the Commander is feeling troubled? Leave him alone immediately.”

While I was still bewildered, Conrad interjected and pulled us apart, putting me behind him.

Just when I thought I was saved, the atmosphere between Conrad and Charlotte became turbulent.

“What are you doing, Vice-commander Conrad.”

“That should be my line, Vice-captain Charlotte. Don’t you know that you are troubling the Commander?”

Sparks started to fly from their argument.

I called out to Long Blue-haired Ikemen.

“Umm, I still can’t believe this situation, so can you help me confirm it? What’s up with Vice-captain Charlotte?”

I asked him if I had misunderstood it, hoping for him to deny it.

“You understood the situation correctly, and I can understand your impulse to escape. In short, the scene before you is reality.”

As I feared, I received the reply that it was reality.

I fell to my hands and knees.

After placing a hand on my shoulder, Long Blue-haired Ikemen said:

“I sympathise with you, but accept it. Charlotte is heads-over-heels in love with you. Be relieved. I will pair you and Charlotte together. Conrad will try to prevent it, but Celestia and Amy will also support you. So, you should stay lively.”

I didn’t know what caused this, but Long Blue-haired Ikemen sympathized with me.

If it were like normal, there would be passion and teasing, but there wasn’t any here.

Why?

“Why is this...”

Just then, the three people who went to buy lunch returned and were astonished by the quarreling Conrad and Charlotte.

They asked a subordinate what was happening, and the soldier said that the Long Blue-haired Ikemen had been consoling me, who was on my knees, for about ten minutes.

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