

傭兵団の料理番

3

Youheidan no
Ryouriban

Ko Kawai

川井 昂

illustration

四季童子



h-e-o-文庫

Cook of the Mercenary Corp

– Youheidan no Ryouriban –

- Volume 3 - Me and the Bride-san

**-Author-
Ko Kawai**

**-Artist-
Shiki Douji**

[konobuta]

Chapter 37

Long time no see and Tofu Hamburg Steak (Part 1)



If there are meetings then there are also separations. That is something that we've all encountered in life.

However, there are also reunions. Because separation is not the end.

It's Shuri. I was finally able to reunite with everyone. I wonder how long we haven't met? It feels like we haven't met for several months already.

It's someone like me but, there have also been various changes for me.

First, there are new additions to the cooks of the mercenary corp.

“That’s how it is so, long time no see everyone”

“””Yes, Sensei!”””

Meeting all the cooks again at long last, tears were flowing as I was being delighted at our reunion.

These were manly tears. Everyone was crying out loudly.

Somehow... it’s embarrassing. Hehe, I’ll scratch the tip of my nose to cover it up...

“It’s so great, Sensei came back!”

“With this, there’ll be no complaints about making Hamburg Steak!”

“Cream Stew as well!”

“Sensei, the women in the magician’s unit are complaining because there isn’t enough Amazake! Please do something about it!”

“Maybe the dip for the Boiled Tofu isn’t to their liking, they won’t eat it!”

“Alright, okay, that’s enough”

Alright, there needs to be a lecturing to all of the commanders. It somehow feels like it’s been a long time since I’ve been angry whilst smiling.

“Now then, I think that everyone already knows as well but, there will be new comrades joining our cooks.

Over here is, Gann Rubber-san. And the one over here is Adora-san. Get along everyone”

Yup, in the end, it was decided that Gann-san and Adora-san are to join us are cooks.

I promised them after all and, took action while thinking that it’ll be good.

The unexpected one was Adora-san. I thought he would think over it a little more and then give me an answer but, he gave me a relatively quick answer and became our comrade.

When I asked why, it seems that since he wasn't able to regain his pride and confidence which had been fractured by Cougar-san into mere pieces, it made him want to take the invitation without fail.

Of course, I'll certainly welcome him. It relates to the solution of the chronic-like lack of cooks and above all, the boost in strength is necessary.

Those two however, were surprised for some reason.

"What's wrong? It's alright to at least do a self introduction right?"

"A, ah, no. I was just thinking that you were missed more than I had thought... Something like sensei fits you?"

"Hahaha, that's..."

"Oi you! That's rude to sensei!"

At Gann-san's words, a voice sounded from amongst the cooks.

"Yea! Sensei is an indispensable person for the mercenary corp!"

"Because if he wasn't here then we wouldn't be here!"

E-everyone... to think that you guys missed me that much...!

I'm think I'm gonna cry. All my hard work... didn't go to waste!

"Right about now, we would be buried by Commander Riru!"

"We would be taking Commander Ahrius' anger outbursts about her skin as well!"

"When Sensei isn't here, we can't stop those people's rage!"

"Riru-san, Ahrius-san, that's it!"

We will have a loong scolding about this. What are you trying to achieve by threatening the cooks...

“I, I see...”

Look! Adora-san is completely terrified!

“And so sensei, what will we do for today’s lunch?”

Hn?

Ah, is it already lunchtime.

After that incident it has been decided that our mercenary corp is to live in the castle, so now it’s turned out that we can work in the kitchen now.

Accompanying that, Riru-san has version upped all of the stoves that use firewood to start a fire, to Riru-san’s deluxe magically engineered stoves. With this, our freedom of cooking expanded remarkably.

Now then, everyone is here as well, let’s make a light soup or.....

“Hamburg to you who is confused”

“If it’s for lunch then, Boiled Tofu”

The one’s who came in, opening the door with a slam, was Riru-san and Ahrius-san.

They were both smiling. They were making a smile with not a hint of suspicion.

Despite wearing a smile of extreme refreshing, and good will.

Murky darkness oozes out from their insides, their treachery cascading about as if all the evil in this world was forcefully crammed inside, and they were rapidly approaching me.

Shit, I gotta run.

There’s no way I can lecture these kind of people.

When I try to back away, thinking of that, my back hit something.

“Ga-Gann-san?”

From behind me, Gann-san was pushing against my back, making sure that I couldn't run away.

“Go, you're the only we can rely on”

“D-don't be ridiculous”

“If you don't fight, we will be annihilated”

Eh? Then I noticed, everyone else was one step ahead and were taking refuge close to the walls.

Traitors!

“B-but”

“We're counting on you, sensei”

Thud, my back was pushed, sending me out in front of Riru-san and Ahrius-san.

What was reflected in the corner of my vision was the moment, just as Adora-san was thrusting me away.

Et tu Adora—-!!

“Now, Shuri. Hamburg”

“Boiled Tofu, right”

The moment I tried to escape, my shoulders had been grabbed by Riru-san and Ahrius-san.

I was caught...!

It's no good, I can't escape!

I felt danger for my life however, something strange happened here.

The two of them, as they grabbed my shoulders, looked at each other with just their heads.

Eh? What is this? How horrifying?

“Riru. It’s also been a long time since Shuri has cooked. Isn’t it better for him to go in with something simple here and let him regain his senses?”

“Ahrius. Since it’s been a while, Shuri should go in with a dish he knows well. Riru is here for that reason”

You have drool drooping down. Saying that you are here for that sure is convenient huh? You just simply want to eat Hamburg Steak don’t you?

“Riru, no matter what dish comes I’ll eat it deliciously. If I had to, had to, haaaad to say then, I had thought that if he made Boiled Tofu here, I would be happy. No, I won’t ask if it’s impossible, naturally. However, my subordinates are also waiting anxiously for Boiled Tofu. Ah, if it’s something different then, that can’t be helped in that case. However, you know? It’s been a while so don’t you think you want to eat it? No no, if it’s not possible then don’t force yourself though.....”

So irritating! Although you were being indirect, you said exactly what you wanted!

It’s a first, trying to be so indirect and not deceiving anyone. It was something like, ‘Don’t you plan to misinterpret it at all?’. Somehow my heart seems to be running wild...

Even if he wanted to help me, Gann-san was only looking from afar. Hn? His lips are moving...

『If I try my utmost then I can pick up your bones?』

Shut up!

“Please wait. Since I’ve understood what you want to eat”

“Then I’ll go get the beef”

“No, it’s tofu”

The two of you, holding back, restraining your feelings... Your eyes are scary.

“Let’s use tofu”

I don’t think I would ever forget what I saw at that moment.

A chill washed down my spine! As if it was turning to ice!

Slowly turning over to take a look, Riru-san was.....

“Haha. What a funny joke.”

And as she said that, she cracked her knuckles! Which was followed by shoulder and arm stretches, and shadow boxing!

Stop! You’re not that kind of grappler character!

“Except, it won’t be Boiled Tofu”

Whiz, whiz, started to resound.

Looking over there, Ahrius-san was swinging her arms around.

She was moving her shoulders, elbows, wrist, and fingers, all the joints in the arms just like a whip, preparing for action...!

T-there’s no way... is she aiming to hit one of the vitals of the human body, the skin...?!

“Shuri. I wonder if my ears are hearing things... Despite saying tofu, it’s not Boiled Tofu... Could it be that, that was an excuse, I wonder..... Could you say it one more time?”

Hot damn, she has the eyes of a murderer.

Furthermore, Ahrius-san, who was normally responsible for releasing magic attacks from the rear, seemed to be a master at whip attacks using the hand. If I was hit by that, you would see blood everywhere from my skin splitting.

The airspace called the kitchen, was enveloped in the auras of the two. I want to faint in this extreme dread.

Ah, one of my subordinates fainted.

“Shuri, now, take the beef into your hands. You should be able to do this if tofu is a joke”

“If it’s tofu then, take the pot and hot water into your hands”

Why is it, why has it become a scene with an impression similar to that of a contract with an evil god or demon?

I could feel an overwhelming aura from the two of their backs...

However, I won’t lose here!

“It’s a Hamburg-like healthy food which uses tofu. It’s good for your stomach as well as your skin.”

“Shuri, now, let’s cook. Is there anything you need help with?”

“Riru will too. We’re together for the first time in a while”

T-these girls...! As soon as I said that, their smiles became refreshing, clear, and gentle...!

“No, since the training for the newbies will also take some time, we’ll do it, so if you can wait in the dining ha-”

-ll, before I could continue my words, Ahrius-san and Riru-san left the kitchen with a dash. Just like a storm. A typhoon. An existence which sends all of it’s surroundings flying from it’s root up, and then leaving.

What was left behind was, us, stunned.

Maybe, if I'm able to lecture them then, let's increase it by another hour. I carved that vow into my chest.

Now then, let's cook this tofu dish.

"Shuri, what should we do?"

"Gann-san and Adora-san, please peel the skin of the potatoes and carrots"

"Is that all?"

"The basics are important"

I think that peeling the skin off potatoes and carrots is good practice to learn how to use a knife.

Consideration of strength, angle, and the danger of the knife... etc, there are many things to learn. Because after cutting yourself with the knife, you will take care in using it, becoming careful.

Now then, the garnish should be fine with that. I don't know how long it will take Gann-san and Adora-san but, leaving it to the two of them, I start on the main dish.

"Ow, I cut my hand!"

"Are? There's not much left... did I cut too deep into the skin?"

Correction, once I finish, it seems I'll have to help.

"Now then everybody"

Let's start earlier for that reason, in my own way.

"Let's make Tofu Hamburg Steak today"

Tofu is, good boiled, good fried, good raw. It's an incredible ingredient.

If you boil it, the flavour of the stock is moderately absorbed, if you fry it, the fragrance and the juiciness is like that of meats, if it's raw, there are plenty ways of preparing it such as adding soy sauce to cold tofu etc.

This time, let's go the frying direction. I didn't say it but, I'll also use beef.

Basically, it means that while this dish is filling, by using beef and tofu, it is also healthy.

"That's how it is. Understand?"

""Yes, Sensei!""

"This time's main ingredients are, tofu, beef, nutmeg, sugar, salt, fish sauce and potato starch"

First, adding the beef into sugar, salt, and fish sauce which had it's smell extracted, and mixing it.

There, we add the tofu and the starch. One cake of bean curd for two-tenths of starch.

Stirring this, and forming the shape.

"Please make it with this procedure. Please also know that the insufficiencies of beef can be supplemented with tofu"

"Understood, Sensei"

"Also... Gann-san, Adora-san. Have you finished peeling the skins?"

"No, not yet..."

Oh? It seems not even ten have been finished. Gann-san has four, and Adora-san has three.

This can't really wait.

"Everyone, please continue making the base of the Hamburg Steak with the outline from just then. Since I'll be helping peeling the skins."

Requesting everyone's help with the rest, I take a knife and started to peel the skin of the potato in my hand.

"Gann-san, if you try too hard to cut it thinly, it'll be too slow"

Planning to be their example, I showed them how I peel the potato skin.

Turning the potato, whirling it around, peeling the skin.

After finishing peeling it with the skin still in one whole piece, Gann-san and Adora-san looked over here with an astonished look.

"What's wrong?"

"E-er... you're quick"

"Is that so? I'm used to it, you two will also be able to reach that point soon enough."

Saying that, I start on my second one. Time is valuable.

Peeling the skin in one go, whirling around. Free from thoughts. Peeling skins, free from thoughts as if I had attained enlightenment.

Somehow by doing this, I think, 'I had finally returned back to the mercenary corp hah'.

Because after all, when I was in jail, there was nothing similar to making food like this for the people of the mercenary corp.

Because at that time, it was for the sake of eating with Gann-san or, Ekress-sama's test or, for the sake of something I'm not quite sure about.

Now then, once I think about those kind of things as I peel the potato, I realised there was nothing when I extended my hand forth. *Are?* I think, as I wave my hand around, but I couldn't grab anything inside the basket.

Taking a casual look, there was nothing inside.

"My? There's nothing...?"

My my, I wonder if we have to restock our potatoes?

“Isn’t that obvious, since you did them all”

Looking next to me, Gann-san was shocked.

In his hands, there was a potato which has only been peeled until half way.

“Eh? I did?”

“Ahh, it was amazing”

Adora-san was also shocked as he said. In his hands, there was also a potato which was only peeled a third of the way.

“You wouldn’t answer us even when we called out to you, you were moving as if you were a potato peeling machine. Peeling with terrifying speed, they were all gone in an instant”

“That’s exaggerated, Adora-san”

“No, we’re pretty serious. Look, since we’re the ones holding the only remaining potatoes, you can do the rest of your work”

“Alright then”

“Because if not then... the remainder of my pride will also be smashed up”

Ahh!? Adora-san’s face is as gloomy as when we had first met!

“Alright. Since I’ll be leaving the rest of it to you, I’ll go back over there. I’ll leave it to you”

I wonder if both of their confidences have been broken... I made somewhat suspicious looking eyes... Because here, you can only gain confidence through practice...

From here on, I wonder if I shouldn’t try to meddle as much?

“Have you finished?”

“Yes, here is it”

Looking at them, indeed, the base of the Hamburg Steak had been made. I see, it's just as I had taught them, they were done beautifully.

If it's like this then, I think it can be done without even frying it unevenly.

“Very good. Now then, put this into a pan which had been oiled and heated”

Kneading the Hamburg base into a single portion, I put it in the pan.

The Tofu Hamburg Steak was frying as it sizzles.

“At this time, please set it to low heat and put on the lid. Once around 10 minutes has passed, please flip it trying not to break the shape.

With this the Tofu Hamburg Steak is complete”

“Understood”

“The number we have is all we have. We must make haste but, please try not to burn it, ok?”

Since after all, this is the amount for all the commanders to guards in this castle.

After the incident, the guards who were originally in this castle and everyone in the mercenary corp, were put into the same unit.

However, within these two units, there were still some people who weren't used to it. I hear that it's mostly it's the senior guards and the mercenary corp newbies who are quarreling.

Because of that when it's time to cook, I pay attention and think so that the delicious dishes can become topics of conversation.

Curiously, the senior soldiers here were able to easily get along.

This time I'm meeting Ahrius-san and Riru-san's request but, I think starting from next time I'll have to pay attention to the menu.....

And, the cooks who had been working at the castle until now were boycotting and there was not even a single one of them here. I am told that it seems they cannot work together with foreign chefs from a savage mercenary corp who came and took over from the outside. Sniff.

Currently the cooks of the mercenary corp and, the people who we had recruited in a rush are rotating around.

It's troublesome but, there's no way around it. I think that we'll have to do something so that they'll come back.

And then, there's also the castle's food shortage.

For the sake of ending the uproar, there was a large amount of ingredients used so, it's only natural but... Originally, due to the faction dispute, there were no food being stored, but there were still ingredients stored for emergencies.

However, the amount reserved was calculated for the people who originally worked in this castle. With the addition of everyone from the mercenary corp as well, the consumption increased more than expected.

Even deciding to make Tofu Hamburg Steak, one of the reasons is also because there's not enough beef guaranteed for everyone.

It seems something has to be done...

While I was thinking something ridiculous, I was just distributing the food to the soldier-sans gathered inside the castle's eating hall. Long desks were lined up, it was a large room.

The Tofu Hamburg Steak was completed with no problems. The sauce, is the fish sauce base that Riru-san took out initially. It'll probably go well with this too.

"Here you are, Riru-san. Ahrius-san."

I took out the Tofu Hamburg Steak for the both of them.

Both of them were expressionless. Looking at the thing taken out, concentrating on it

motionlessly.

What is it... What are they doing?

“Shuri, this is Hamburg?” (Riru)

“No, it’s Tofu Hamburg” (Shuri)

“Appearance-wise... it’s Hamburg Steak right?” (Ahrius)

I finally understood after having made a curious face.

It looks like Hamburg Steak but there isn’t much fat. However you can’t see the tofu.

Which is why, I think they are making sure whether it comes under Hamburg or Tofu.

If they didn’t then, it’s not like they have eyes that could see through everything... they shouldn’t.....

“You’ll know if you eat it”

“Indeed... it’s Shuri’s cooking for the first time in a while. Allow it to delight us”

“Hn, I’m looking forward to it”

The of two of them here, without knowing the conflicts someone like me has, takes a fork and knife into their hands, and started eating the Tofu Hamburg Steak.

Cutting into it with their knives in high spirits, both of them made a seemingly strange face.

“Somehow... the texture is different” (Riru)

“Indeed. The texture is different for a Hamburg Steak. It’s somewhat, soft and fluffy” (Ahrius)

“Indeed. Since I mixed beef and tofu, I think the texture is different. Since the mouthfeel and taste is also different, if you could enjoy that too” (Shuri)

The two of them, cut a small piece of the Tofu Hamburg just like that, and brought it to their mouths.

And then, paused.

Stopping as if to ascertain the mouthfeel, taste and flavour of the Tofu Hamburg that is in both of their mouths, then chewing it, and swallowed it.

And then, instantly stood up and started shaking each others hand.

What are they doing?

“Wonderful. It goes well with the tofu” (Riru)

“Indeed. Like this there isn’t too much of the meat’s fat either. The soft mouthfeel of the tofu meshes appropriately with the minced meat, making it even more soft.” (Ahrius)

“Furthermore, it goes well with the sauce as well. The refreshing sauce which was originally outstanding with the tofu, through the process of combining Hamburg and Tofu, yields a multiplying effect” (Riru)

“It’s ridiculous, that we fought” (Ahrius)

“Yes, it was a meaningless fight” (Riru)

Why is it I wonder, why did they become so friendly all of a sudden?

Becoming like this just from the combination of Tofu and Hamburg... From here on, when the two of them fight, I wonder if I can calm them down with Tofu Hamburg?

See, before I knew it, Riru-san and Ahrius-san are hugging, you see?

“LOVE & PEACE, desune” (Ahrius)

“Exactly” (Riru)

I don’t even know anymore.

For now, let’s leave the two of them be and return to my job as a waiter.

I was happy that all the soldiers who were eating around me too, seem to be eating happily.

However, the problem with the food isn't resolved. At this rate, it'll run out eventually.

Now then, what to do...

"Shuri! You here!?"

At that time, opening the doors to the dining hall, Ganglabe-san came inside.

Walking with big strides, once he found me, he rapidly approached to me.

"Ohh, I had thought that you would be here since it's lunch time, thank goodness. You were here"

"What's wrong Ganglabe-san? If it's lunch, today it's Tofu Hamburg Steak"

"That sounds good... no no, that's not it. It sounds good but, that's not the situa-

-tion, Ganglabe-san stiffened up as he tried to continue.

Hn? As I was thinking curiously, there was thick killing intent coming from behind!?

"Tofu Hamburg is just that? Ganglabe, do you want a wound which doesn't disappear on that neck of yours?" (Riru)

"Ganglabe. This is a wonderful dish. You cannot look down on it." (Ahrius)

Riru-san was cracking her knuckles as she warms up.

Ahrius-san was stretching.

Are? When did these two have personas related to punching and kicking?

"N-no, I was wrong. Ahh, I was the one wrong. So, won't you please stop that roundhouse kick aiming for the back of my knee?"

And then he took the damage?! Ganglabe-san, will your married life be alright?

“Ah, no, there’s urgent business. You guys come too” (Ganglabe)

“After we eat this” (Riru)

“In that case, hurry. This is seriously urgent” (Ganglabe)

“Did something happen?” (Shuri)

Ganglabe-san said with a peculiar expression.

“The legal wife, Renha Sounity has been found”

Eh? Legal wife... the ringleader of who made this time’s incident all complicated?

Hearing those words, Riru-san and Ahrius-san turned serious.

Looking completely different from the people who were being noisy over Tofu Hamburg up until now.

“Really?” (Shuri)

“Ahh. Rather than found, she was captured and brought over here” (Ganglabe)

“Captured? By who?” (Shuri)

“Ahh, by Tebis Newbyst” (Ganglabe)

Tebis... ahh, the little princess who was entranced by Mapo Tofu? How nostalgic. How long has it been since then?

I was thinking like that however, Riru-san and Ahrius-san’s expressions were, should I say, terrifyingly unpleasant or maybe, dark. That’s how they looked.

“The worst...” (Ahrius)

“Ahh, will you come?” (Ganglabe)

“Understood. Riru, the meal is postponed. If you have to no matter what then, now is the time to cram it all in” (Ahrius)

“Got it” (Riru)

Are? The situation is more severe than I had thought?

“Shuri”

Turning around as I was called, Ganglabe-san placed his hands on my shoulders.

That face, was staggeringly painful.

“Perhaps, there might be something inside you. I’ll try my hardest but, we’re facing that princess. Even I, might only be able to take away a draw.

Saying this right after you helped us is also awkward but... I have to borrow your strength again”

“Haa.....”

I don’t really understand it but... if it’s my strength you need, I’ll lend out however much you want.

Now, let’s go meet her.

For the first time in a long while, Princess Tebis.

Chapter 38

Long time no see and Tofu Hamburg Steak (Part 2)



Riru, is currently extremely cheery.

Why you ask? It's obvious.

Because Shuri came back.

Riru won't let him into something like a jail anymore. This time for sure, Riru will protect Shuri.

And, Riru wants to end these nightmares where Riru can't eat Hamburg anymore.

Two days after the incident.

It's decided that Riru and the mercenary corp are to live in the castle permanently. Or

rather, Gingus is placed as the Feudal Lord position but, in reality it's more like, Gingus has the role of organising the soldiers, Ekress is in charge of internal affairs, and above that is where Ganglabe is sitting. The people around him aren't saying a peep though.

At any rate, the current situation where the perpetrator that started that incident, Gingus, becoming Feudal Lord is strange. However, if you consider bloodline to be the most important thing then the heir for the Feudal Lord, must be either Gingus, or Ekress.

If Gann is recommended here then no problems should occur as he qualifies in regards to the Feudal Lord's bloodline however, a separate problem arises should that illegitimate child be recommended by the mercenary corp. Which is why, Shuri said to Ganglabe who had thought about how to deal with Gann.

"No no, Gann-san can be said to be my assistant or even subordinate. I mean I promised him to let him join into the cooks so. I'll be troubled if he is forcefully placed as Feudal Lord"

Because he said that, Gann became Shuri's subordinate.

For some reason, some large man called Adora also became his subordinate but, Riru wasn't interested.

No matter who becomes Shuri's subordinate, there'll be no problems if Shuri can calmly cook Hamburg.

As long as Hamburg, can be made... Whoops, it seems I'm being swallowed by my dark side.

Because of something like that, Gann's treatment ended.

In the end we decided on Gingus. That is because Ekress resigned. It appears Ekress is already sick of pretending to be a man. She said that from here on she wants to be able to work, and fall in love like a normal girl.

For some reason she said it whilst looking at Shuri but, Riru feels somewhat gloomy.

Ganglabe also frowned.

Like this, the problem with the heir... ended, despite leaving behind a somewhat bad

aftertaste.

The aftertaste is that, the people who had worked in the castle originally and the people of Riru's mercenary corp seem to have a subtle distance between each other. It appears that they do not approve of us intruding from outside, and suddenly taking up the role of leading the castle's army.

However, after having raged through the castle like that, there was no one opposing us publicly. But Ganglabe is vigilant. Because he doesn't know when this smoldering ember will combust.

Amongst those, the one's who opposed with all their strength were the cooks. The ones who originally worked in the castle.

These people left the castle, when Shuri was appointed as the head chef, to boycott.

Ganglabe was furious at this but, Shuri was relaxed.

"Because it's natural to be unsatisfied. Rather, I'm glad that they ended up boycotting. Since if they did anything bad to the food then, they would end up becoming obstacles to the job"

Shuri continues, even exerting himself to say as if he knew this would happen someday.

Although Ganglabe was troubled, he made peace with his anger.

And muttered.

"He's too kind, that guy... Normally that's punishment worthy"

Even though this is where Shuri should be angry, since he's dealing with this calmly without being angry, Ganglabe merely did that as well.

Honestly, Riru, and the others were also angry.

Since Shuri is coping with this calmly, everyone is also looking calm on the outside.

Riru was thinking that Riru wanted to do something to those cooks who boycotted.

As Riru was considering that, Riru punches at the wall inside one of the rooms of the

castle, connecting the room next door, and made a laboratory.

Because we became stationed at the castle, there was no need to move every single last small scaled machinery. From here on, Riru thinks that it would be good if Riru is able develop, and research various things at this location.

As Riru was setting in the machinery, having received instructions from Riru's subordinate, Riru suddenly felt as if an electric current was running inside Riru's body, rushing the information about.

Yes, it's lunch.

Hunger. The desire for a meal.

In order words, Hamburg.

Riru cannot stay like this. If Riru doesn't hurry and rush over to Shuri.

"I leave the rest to you"

"Ah!? Commander, where are you going?!"

"It's obvious"

Riru places Riru's hand on the door, turns around and the said.

With a smile that even Riru would say is brilliant.

"Hamburg is calling"

And then, Riru ran.

Riru has a grasp of the entire castle's layout. The number of steps on the stairs, the length of the corridors, the feel of the doors, the height of the ceiling, everything.

Using that information, Riru calculates the shortest distance to the kitchen, and ran singlemindedly.

Sometimes turning around the corners of the corridors, sometimes leaping from the stairs.....

Using all the strength Riru could muster, Riru ran. Running, running, and continued to run. It was then. It was then, when Riru turned the corner, someone was running parallel to Riru.

“! So it’s you, Riru”

“...Ahrius!”

There was Riru’s rival. Yes, a fellow comrade risking and fighting for lunch is here.

Ahrius was running parallel to Riru, right next to Riru. Or rather it may have been better to say that she was slightly floating off the ground and sliding.

She is probably using her magic to fly but even though she’s removed everything unnecessary and is concentrating on speed, seeing her accurately manipulate that technique at a speed that would just barely avoid causing an accident, it means Ahrius has definitely also prepared and has been training for this moment.

The truth of that which looks useless, is that it is a magic which had been calculated to it’s limits.

Splendid...!

“Hu. It seems that you are also prepared, researching and developing for this moment.”

“...What could you mean”

“It’s useless to hide it. You installed flight and weight-lessening magi spells, as well as a shock absorbing magi program on that white coat and shoes right? Which is why even though it’s a physique like yours, you’re able to bring out such speeds..... That’s not all there is to it though, I’m sure”

As expected of a strong foe (comrade). She understands.

Yes, even though Riru’s coat looks like this, there are magi spells and magi programs installed inside it. On the sleeves there are physical strength up and a protective barrier. On the torso there is a protective barrier against all kinds of attacks, stabs, slashes, explosions, blunt attacks. On the back are weight-lessening, sensing barrier and protective barrier. On the hems is flight. Everything which can be thought of, Riru

has hypothesized and created it.

Shoes, pants as well as clothes are all applied with the same configurations. Riru thinks that even if we're talking about all around the world, only Riru has installed so many.

And, a device that Ahrius had not seen through. That is the magi program directly engraved on Riru's body.

That is gravity control. Made by focusing on the concept called gravity that Riru had heard from Shuri, Riru's greatest masterpiece. The thing engraved on Riru's right arm is able to affect the gravity of Riru's body and the things Riru touched with Riru's right hand.

It can make Riru's body lighter, fly, lighten the objects Riru has touched and lift them, and even crush the things that had been touched using gravity.

Riru calls this, Magic Engineered Circuit Tattoo 《Magi Ladder Chart》. But since Riru doesn't know what would happen should it fail, Riru has no plans of doing it to anybody else.

In any case, using all of this, that is how Riru will be heading to the kitchen.

“However, I won't lose either”

Grinning, Ahrius laughed.

“Even though my new magic, Sliding Wings 《Skater Fly》 can be used by anyone, it's something which accounts for both safety and speed.

Making the forces of gravity I heard from Shuri oppose each other so that it can float just slightly off the ground, you use it to advance in the direction you desire with only motion. Like this, you can be at ease without getting caught up by the grounds unevenness.

If you practise with it, you could probably even fire magic while moving at high speeds. Establishing a high speed magic department wouldn't be just a dream either.

Right now, I'm only using it for my desires though”

This person is seriously a waste of talent, is what Riru understood.

By the time we had turned that last corner, Riru and her was equal.

Contrasting with Riru continuously interacting with the ground using both feet to release speed, Ahrius is travelling, using her more than excessive magic power to maintain a constant speed.

Even if Riru overtakes her, Ahrius's speed doesn't forgive that, and having said that, even if Ahrius tries to push her way past, Riru would use the ground to catch up. It's just as what Shuri said, a game of chase.

A showdown that cannot be lost, is being held right here.

“There it is!”

At long last, the door to the kitchen could be seen. So close, in the span of three seconds, we would reach touch down.

These three seconds are the moments of truth for this showdown. Riru spurts forth, and Ahrius too raises her speed.

At that time, Riru's ears had heard something unpardonable.

“So then Sensei, what will you be making for today's lunch?”

What will you make?

So basically, that means lunch hasn't been decided yet?

That's impossible. It's obvious lunch is going to be Hamburg. Does that mean, that even though Shuri is cooking, he'll make something other than Hamburg?

There is absolutely no way Riru can let that slide. As expected, it was correct for Riru to come.

“Hamburg to the wavering you”

“If it's lunch then it's Boiled Tofu”

We entered at the same time. We line up and reached our goal, the kitchen.

Tsk, with this Riru has no advantage over her. Ahrius also seems frustrated, bringing her brows together.

But no worries. Shuri is a person who understands if you talk to him. Riru'll let him understand if Riru talks to him with a smile.

"I can still make it... He should understand if I talk to him with a smile right..."

Damn! Ahrius is thinking the same!

But, still. It'll still work out, somehow.

Without a further ado, Riru approaches Shuri with a smile to talk to him, a step at a time.

That was the same with Ahrius. Smiling and walking.

Now that it's come to this, the competition comes down to the refreshingness and lack of ulterior motives in our smiles.

Despite that, Shuri is backing away a little. Why?

That kind of Shuri was pushed forth by his subordinates behind him, thrusting out in front of us.

They understand. That's right, there's no need to back away, there's nothing to be feared.

That's why this is such a smile with no ill will at all. A cheerful smile.

Even so, because Shuri is still trying to run away, we grabbed his shoulders and stopped him.

Now we can talk.

"Come now, Shuri. Hamburg"

"It's Boiled Tofu right"

.....

What is this. To think Ahrius was thinking the same thing as well. To think she would grab his shoulder to show her friendliness. As expected of Riru's rival, she doesn't slip up.

But as expected, a confrontation of opinions can't be avoided, huh.

Riru looks at Ahrius and, Ahrius too, once again was looking at Riru.

Riru understands. That the real battle starts from here on.

From here on, it's a battle of words.

"Riru. Shuri is cooking for the first time in a while as well. Wouldn't it be better to start from something simple and regain his cooking senses?"

"Ahrius. It's because it's been a while, that Shuri should start with a dish he knows well. That's why Riru is here"

Yes, Shuri's best dish is Hamburg. At any rate, because Riru will take the name of the one to sample that, relying on that to get him up to speed.

Compared with that, Boiled Tofu? Hmph, that's just boiled kelp and tofu. The one that is more complex to cook moreover delicious, and his forte is obviously Hamburg.

"Riru, no matter what dish comes to me, they'll all be delicious and I'll eat it. If I had to, had to, haaaad to say then, I had thought that if he made Boiled Tofu here, I would be happy. No, I won't ask if it's impossible, naturally. However, my subordinates are also waiting anxiously for Boiled Tofu. Ah, if it's something different then, that can't be helped in that case. However, you know? It's been a while so don't you think you want to eat it? No no, if it's not possible then don't force yourself though....."

W-what, such conversational art. Although she's Riru's enemy, Riru can't help but praise her...!

This confutation, nonchalant, yet has all the main points squeezed in.

Ku, at this rate Riru will end up losing..... if there isn't something, anything to change

the flow of the battle.

“Please wait. Since I’ve understood what you want to eat”

Somehow, Shuri has decided just now. There’s no doubt it’s Hamburg.

Ha, the flow was with me huh. Ahrius, this is it. Like this, Riru’s victory has been decided.

For some reason Shuri looks exhausted but, there’s no doubt it’s because he had chosen Hamburg after much thought.

“Then I’ll go get the beef”

“No, it’s tofu”

Wha... t?

Ahrius looks over here and, Ahrius also has a confused look on her face. This means that Ahrius too believed that victory was hers.

Ahrius had thought that it would be Boiled Tofu.

“Let’s use tofu”

And then, the death sentence.

What? Tofu? Not cow but bean?

Impossible, there’s no way...!

Before Riru had noticed, Riru pours all of Riru’s overflowing anger and fruitless pathos into Riru’s fist, and punched the kitchen table.

Due to the ability of physical strengthening, Riru can even destroy a kitchen table. But, Riru wasn’t happy.

“That joke isn’t very funny”

Not funny, yes, it's a boring joke.

No matter how you put it, even if something like "It was actually Hamburg all along~" was said afterwards, Riru would not laugh, definitely not laugh along with that. There's no way.

"Just that, it won't be Boiled Tofu"

Next to Riru, a whiz sound resounded.

Looking over, Ahrius had split a pot right in half with her magic.

Wow, she looks like she could kill someone. The killing intent from all that anger is leaking out uncontrollably.

"Shuri. I wonder if my ears are hearing things... Despite saying tofu, it's not Boiled Tofu... Could it be that, that was an excuse, I wonder..... Could you say it one more time?"

That's true. Thinking about it over, that means that he's making something that's neither Hamburg or Boiled Tofu.

Like we would allow for, such tyranny. Coming all the way here, there is no way we can let it slide if our grand ambitions are not fulfilled.

"Come now Shuri, take the beef into your hands. You should be able to do this if tofu is a joke"

"If it's tofu then, take the pot and hot water into your hands"

Smile, if Riru says it with a smile. Shuri should be able to understand.

I wonder why, even though Riru should be trying her best to smile. Surging fighting spirit ends up leaking out.

"It's a Hamburg-like healthy food which uses tofu. It's good for your stomach as well

as your skin.”

“Come now Shuri, let’s cook. Is there anything you need help with?”

“Riru will too. We’re together for the first time in a while”

Ahaha, why was Riru being so savage like that?

Being able to eat a new Hamburg dish, as expected of Shuri.

I see, just Hamburg wouldn’t be appropriate after such a long while so, we should celebrate it extravagantly with a new Hamburg dish.

In that case, Riru has to help out as well.

Ahrius is also smiling clearly. I wonder why Riru and her was fighting?

Even though fighting and savagery and such are unneeded for the world.

Even though the world is, indeed, the world is beautiful, and also cruel, and extremely bright.

Riru doesn’t really know what Riru is talking about.

“No, since the training for the newbies will also take some time, we’ll do it, so if you can wait in the dining ha-”

Before Riru and Ahrius finished listening to those words, we had already rushed out.

Wholeheartedly, as refreshing as youths running down a grassy field.

Passing the kitchen table, exiting the kitchen, just one straight line.

Forth to the dining hall.

The goal being, the seat closest to the serving table!

Sitting there motionlessly on the dining hall’s chair waiting, Riru seems to have gain enlightenment.

The closest seat is always, waiting.

Riru and Ahrius, reach the dining hall from the kitchen quicker by one or two steps and, surround the seat closest to the serving table.

Although, since it's still early, there wasn't a single person there. Not a soul. Not a trace.

"...Ahrius"

"Riru. I, won't give this up"

Tsk. She saw through Riru huh.

Riru was planning to lightly attack her with, 'It's a little early, what about your work?' But, as expected of a strong foe 《A comrade》. Riru was read.

Incidentally given that Ahrius said that to cover up her trying to say something, there's no doubt that Ahrius was also trying to say something similar.

Seriously cannot be careless.

"Ah, captain, here you are! I was looking for you!"

At that time, from the dining hall Riru and Ahrius' subordinate came in.

Tsk, what a hindrance.

"Come on, it's still early for lunch so let's go back. Since without you, we can't start the placement of the laboratory's devices and such, captain"

"Let's return Captain Ahrius. Without you, the subordinates won't train"

Damn it, you still need instructions even though Riru already said that Riru'll leave it to you huh. Even though Riru already left you the blueprints.

Ahrius is also looking bitter. Riru thinks that most likely, she wants to tell them that even if she's not there they should do what they have do.

That's the same as Riru so, Riru is also making a bitter face.

“I’m sorry, vice captain. Lately, I’ve been busy at night so I get pretty hungry. I mean, you know, Ganglabe”

What even, Ahrius said that whilst turning red.

Her vice-captain also agreed with her, grinning as she teases her with “That’s certainly busy”.

But Riru knows. That is not true as of yet.

It’s true, that Ganglabe and Ahrius are sleeping together. However they are just sleeping. They haven’t done it yet.

The reason being that if Ahrius ends up making a child now, it’ll affect the organisation of the army. Riru had heard this previously in the corridors when Ahrius was discussing about this and that with Ganglabe regarding this matter.

Riru too, might have that sort of conversation with the person Riru loves one day... Was the sentimental thought Riru had but, to actually let out that topic because she wants to eat the new dish... What a frightening woman!

“Come on, let’s go back Captain Riru”

Ha! Ahrius can stay due to her excuse but, Riru has no excuse!

What to do...!?

“Actually, at night”

“Bullshit! You were up all night with us setting up your laboratory right! You don’t even have a lover, please don’t try to bring up the same reason as Captain Ahrius!”

H-how did he know I was going to use that excuse? Even though it was perfectly natural...!

“I-if it’s a lover then”

“Ah, Head Chef Shuri doesn’t count. Please don’t try to balance this with a stretch that

Hamburg is the lover inside of you”

“Of course Hamburg isn’t Riru’s lover”

“Indeed...”

“It is Riru’s reason for being”

“That’s nasty. Come on, let’s go”

Kuh, so persistent...!

“Do you get it? Riru is going to be eating a new Hamburg dish soon”

“It’s still too early for lunch, it’s alright until after work right”

“No! Hamburg is Riru’s life. If that life is to be lit by a new fire then, Riru must make sure of that personally.

Even our unit’s foundation, what Riru expressed as Creativity, if we get down to the bottom of it, started from Hamburg.

Do you understand? Hamburg is the unit’s foundation. To refuse that without checking it is Riru’s declination, so in addition it connects to magic engineering’s declination.

If you belong to the Magic Engineering Unit then, treating the foundation preciously is the motto. Now, let us eat the new Hamburg dish together. It’s alright, Hamburg won’t run away”

“Please don’t change our foundation. To put it simply, since the new Hamburg dish came out, you just really want to eat it right?”

Guhhh...! It was no use copying Ahrius either...

However he doesn’t realise.

That Riru has already won.

“By the way Riru is just asking but”

“? What is it, I’m returning as soon as I call out to Captain”

“What time is it?”

Saying so, Riru’s subordinate looks outside and saw the position of the sun.

And then, drops his shoulders, completely exhausted.

“...It’s lunch”

“Then go back to the research lab, and go call for the others. Let’s take a lunch break”

“...Understood”

He makes a completely unsatisfied face, and left the dining hall.

Kukuku, did you see that. Riru had been aiming for this the whole time.

It’s true that time-wise, it’s too early for lunch. However Riru was aiming for the lunch break, through the repetitive exchange with Riru’s subordinate.

The time for the lunch break differs depending on the unit. The infantry and soldiers who go out onto the front lines are large in numbers as well as the portions they eat so they’re a little later. Although their time training and defending is brief, somehow or other they eat after lunchtime has passed.

However Riru’s Magic Engineering Unit is different. When you talk of training for the Magic Engineering Unit, it’s fundamentally just setting up the outdoor campsite and creating trenches, as well as the early reparation of the weapons and armour. They’re don’t have the strength nor equipment of Riru who can fight even in the front lines so, naturally they’re in charge of the rear. We also don’t have many in number so it had been decided that our lunch time would differ from the soldier’s lunch time so that we can eat quickly.

Furthermore today’s work is moving the research lab. It had been decided that today’s lunch break was even earlier so that we don’t take too long.

Riru’s subordinate who had forgotten about that. It’s your loss...

“What a minuscule fight”

Annoying.

After waiting, Shuri came bringing out the food along with the other cooks.

Putting it on the serving table, he nimbly splits and separates them into single servings.

And then, placed it in front of us.

A strange shape.

It has the shape of a, Hamburg. The elliptical shape of meat Riru is well acquainted with.

However, that which would normally be dripping with meat juices and fried to a nice colour, didn't drip that much and was white-ish.

“Shuri, this is Hamburg?”

“No, it's Tofu Hamburg”

“It looks like... a Hamburg right?”

Appearance-wise, it's definitely Hamburg. Even Riru's 《Hamburg Eye》 knows that it's Hamburg.

But it's different. This is Tofu Hamburg?

“You'll understand if you try it”

“That's true... it's Shuri's first dish in a long time. Let us enjoy this”

“Nn, Riru is looking forward to it”

Yes, thinking about it, this is Shuri's cooking. Additionally it's something we're eating for the first time in a while.

Up til now we had been made to eat the disgusting inn food and had been confined, not to mention Hamburg, we couldn't even have Amazake...

Ahhh, long live Hamburg. It really is so great that Shuri is back.

Now then, let's start.

Full of excitement, Riru tries to cut into the Hamburg.

However, there was a strange texture here.

It was somewhat, soft. Not like the softness of Hamburg, it was much more limber, the meat fibres couldn't stop the knife at all.

"Somehow... the texture is different" (Riru)

"Indeed. The texture is different for a Hamburg Steak. It's somewhat, soft and fluffy" (Ahrius)

"Indeed. Since I mixed beef and tofu, I think the texture is different. Since the mouthfeel and taste is also different, please enjoy that as well" (Shuri)

Hou, that is brilliant.

Riru takes a small piece of this Tofu Hamburg and eats it.

.....

This is... a new Hamburg.

Yes, Hamburg. It should be Hamburg. Riru should have eaten Hamburg.

However holding both the deliciousness of the meat and the mouthfeel of the tofu, Riru could only think of it as something new.

Whilst feeling the deliciousness of the meat, the tofu's gentle mouthfeel fills up one's mouth. It's softer than Hamburg and yet it wasn't too soft, without an annoying sticky feeling.

Above all else, the fat isn't too strong. When a Hamburg has been cut, meat juices overflow out from that opening. That meat juice is delicious but at the same it's also gives a belly full of fat. It's most suitable for dinner, where it's an appropriate feast to bring the day to a finish, however, for mornings or lunch, when the body isn't feeling too great, there are times when it's difficult to eat. For females as well, there are people

who are worried about their figures due to the amount of fat. Riru doesn't ever get fat so Riru can eat as Riru wants though.

However, what about this Tofu Hamburg. Meat and Tofu. Basically, the ratio of meat used is less so the fat is also accordingly less. However the tofu doesn't leave behind the meat's deliciousness, instead absorbing it so that it doesn't leave you unsatisfied. On the contrary, it makes it better, changing the flavour from being just meat through the gentle mouthfeel of the tofu and the slight taste of the bean.

I see, these were born so that they could meet.

Without realising it, Riru had stood up. From the depths of Riru's body, Riru is making a joyous expression of the soul.

Ahrius who was sitting next to Riru also stood up.

Ahh, we met so that we could chance upon each other (For the sake of this current moment).

"Wonderful. It goes well with the tofu" (Riru)

"Indeed. Like this there isn't too much of the meat's fat either. The soft mouthfeel of the tofu meshes appropriately with the minced meat, making it even more soft." (Ahrius)

"Furthermore, it goes well with the sauce as well. The refreshing sauce which was originally outstanding with the tofu, through the process of combining Hamburg and Tofu, yields a multiplying effect" (Riru)

"It's ridiculous, that we fought" (Ahrius)

"Yes, it was a meaningless competition" (Riru)

To compete, that is, to struggle.

Why were we competing so? Riru wonders.

Despite that we had only been lost as we continuously search for the place we had always been struggling for.

"Peace is the best (LOVE & PEACE), desune" (Ahrius)

“Exactly” (Riru)

Peace is the best.

“Shuri! You here!?”

When we were soaking in the peace, Ganglabe came into the dining hall.

That face had a look of slight impatience.

This... can't be good.

“Ohh, I had thought that you would be here since it's lunch time, thank goodness. You were here”

“What's wrong Ganglabe-san? If it's lunch, today it's Tofu Hamburg Steak”

“That sounds good... no no, that's not it. It sounds good but, that's not the situa-”

Riru shift changes into a Battle Ready state with a snap, crack, coming from Riru's wrist and neck.

It seems that, Riru must fight for the sake of peace.

“Tofu Hamburg is just that? Ganglabe, do you want a wound which doesn't disappear on that neck of yours?” (Riru)

“Ganglabe. This is a wonderful dish. You cannot make fun of it, ok?” (Ahrius)

Next to Riru, Ahrius is stretching, warming up her body.

Although we are still lost and searching for the place we will finally arrive at, we have to get over the walls that stand in our way.

“N-no, I was wrong. Ahh, I was the one wrong. So, won't you please stop that roundhouse kick aiming for the back of my kne-?”

As expected of Ahrius. It seems she's already trained her husband. Ganglabe is clearly frightened.

"Ah, no, there's urgent business. You guys come too" (Ganglabe)

"After we eat this" (Riru)

"In that case, hurry. This is seriously urgent" (Ganglabe)

"Did something happen?" (Shuri)

"The legal wife, Renha Sounity has been found"

Freeze, the mood stilled.

For this even Riru can't help but become meek.

Renha Sounity. The ringleader for what happened this time round.

The idiot that drowned in authority was found. That means, basically, it's time for the true cleaning up of the incident this time.

Take responsibility and accept your punishment.

However the opponent is the legal wife of a feudal lord. The problem is whether we are able to finish this quickly.

"Really?" (Shuri)

"Ahh. Rather than found, she was captured and brought over here" (Ganglabe)

Captured...?

It can't be Cougar or Teg's unit that found her.

"Captured? By who?" (Shuri)

"Ahh, by Tebis Newbyst" (Ganglabe)

Riru made an annoyed look immediately. Even Riru knows. It's an opponent enough to bring together Riru's brows.

Recently Newbyst has terrifying power. That's because of their profits from food trade, as well as the abundance of their resources due to mineral excavation of the neighbouring mining area and their developments of their crop fields.

The ones who did that, the King and the Chief Vassals hold excellent ability when it comes to domestic affairs but, that's not all.

It's because behind them is the genius, the existence of the 『Gourmet Princess』 Tebis Newbyst.

It's because on the surface although the King and the others are doing their job, behind the scenes Tebis is negotiating and trading, and gathering information all around the place. It's thanks to her working behind the scenes that everything can function smoothly on the surface.

Surely, if she even thinks about 'Doing it' she could even reign as the Queen, and should even be able to develop the country's internal affairs.

She's still just a young girl who has just turned 10 but, she contributes to the growth of her territory and fights on equal diplomatic terms with foreign countries.

The reason that bundle of talent is coming here. It's due to the incident that happened a while ago, it's about the fact that Shuri was arrested.

And now she carries with her an effective negotiation piece, the captured ringleader.

“This is terrible...”

It's as Ahrius says, it's hard to describe it with any other word than terrible.

What will she accomplish using that card of hers?

Perhaps she might snatch away the authority of the territory and reconsider the trade.

Is what Riru is pondering about but, there is something that everyone here is thinking of apart from Shuri.

The fact that, we might have to risk using Shuri himself.

That royal princess's attachment to Shuri is intense. It's to the level of handing him a

knife with their emblem carved on it after all.

“Ahh, will you come along?” (Ganglabe)

“I understand. Riru, the meal is postponed. If you have to no matter what then, now is the time to cram it all in” (Ahrius)

“Got it” (Riru)

As one would expect, even Riru can read the mood. Hurriedly gulping down the Tofu Hamburg then making my way to the laboratory. To face and put in order the objectives of Riru’s subordinates and Magic Engineering Unit.

Riru won’t let you snatch Shuri away. We’ll definitely protect him.

This time for sure, Riru will show you.

『Sounity’s Civil War’s』 chain of events. Here holds two important factors for the world to come.

The first being that Emperor Ganglabe would attain his first territory, and living through countless wars from here on. Later on, this territory would become the capital city of the country that King Ganglabe governs.

The other is the meeting of the “Successor of Meals” Gann Rubber and the “King of Meals” Shuri. This goes without saying but, it is an important event for the blooming of food culture to come.

『Sounity’s Civil War』 is something that has been written out into various plays and books. However, the one who enjoy it are only men.

“Then what did the women like?” When they were asked, is about the incident that happened right after this.

The kerfuffle written with Shuri as the focus. The incident that grabs a tight hold of the female heart.

The so called, 『Contest of Love』 .

Chapter 39

Princess and Mizuwari (Part 1)



It's Shuri. It's a Shuraba. *(TL: Scene of Carnage)*

It seems that right after I thought I could finally return back to everyone's side, the main culprit was somehow arrested.

Renha Sounity-san.

The mastermind this time, and a Miss Savage who left behind her husband and children and ran away.

And it seems that Renha-san was captured by Princess Tebis.

It appears she is currently inside the underground dungeon, the place that I was locked inside.

Well, I don't think I'll go and meet her though. Honestly speaking, to go meet someone who could make such a mess of things would require quite a bit of courage and since they caused trouble to Gann-san and Ekress-san, there's doesn't need to be any compassion given her.

So, the problem is the person who captured her.

"Ohh! Long time no see, *nou*. Shuri!"

"Ah, yes. Long time no see Princess Tebis"

In the conference room are all the commanders, Gingus-san, Ekress-san, and me.

Meeting with us on the opposite side is Princess Tebis, a maid, and several guards.

On this side, everyone other than me had a frown on.

On the other side, Princess Tebis is smiling cheerfully. The others were expressionless.

What is this, I wonder. This difference in temperature.

It's like it's both Summer and Winter here. It's as if snow is falling, even though the sun is shining down brilliantly.

"Good gracious, that recipe that you had provided us, that curry. It's still has some way to go before it's completed but, it's becoming more and more producible, *zo*. The current product is also delicious. It's terrific, *no*"

"Eh, yes. Well, maybe the mixing of the spices is a little bit difficult"

"It's probably not just a little bit. The imperial chefs in the castle are clutching at their heads, striving day and night to recreate your recipe"

"Is that so. Should I hand over the completed curry powder to you from now on?"

"No no, it won't do if we are not capable of making it ourselves in the end. It shall affect the honour of the Gourmet Major Power, Newbyst."

"Haa..."

Why is it, I wonder? Why can't I go along with this little Princess' high spirits... Was

this girl really such a talkative person?

“Ah right, a dish that combines both Curry and Mapo Tofu is under development, *jazo*”

“Eh?”

N-no way? Mapo Curry!?

“It’s a dish that’s both hot and spicy. Although it might appear to be completely spicy at first glance, *no*. We were thinking, if you would create this supreme dish with us.”

“That’s amazing. Even for me”

“Don’t say that 『You can’t make it』 ok, Shuri? You are the creator of this dish. The truth is that you have the recipe for that inside your head right?”

No way, you’re overestimating me.

It’s true that I knew about the existence known as Mapo Curry. That’s because a long time ago, some Manufacturer from somewhere sold it as some collaboration product.

However I’ve never made it before. No joke.

“I seriously can’t make it. It’s something that I’ve never even tried making before.”

“Hmph. But if I was to say ‘Make it’ then, wouldn’t you make it?”

“Well... I would need to trial and error it a bit though”

“That just fine. Come with me”

“Princess Tebis. I apologise for interrupting this pleasant conversation piece but, could you perhaps not do that”

The one who said those thorn filled words, was Ganglabe-san.

Underneath that happy expression of his, you could see an obvious irritation.

He probably wants to say something like this, huh.

'Just hurry up and tell us your terms!', and such.

"I have been rude, Ganglabe-dono. I'm quite indebted to you for the battle the other day, *no*"

"This is merely another part of our job"

"At the very least, the truth is that it's thanks to you overcoming that battle, that we were able to stave off that predicament, *ja*. You are even receiving praise from his Majesty."

"That is my greatest pleasure"

"If it were not for a fortunate chance upon like this, I probably would've hired you fellows already"

"That is, merely a passing thought"

"Indeed, *jano*. It is worthless. It wouldn't have happened even if I had asked of it"

Huh? They're just chatting and not proceeding to the main topic at all?

"I wonder what's going on, Ekress-san"

"Well you see, Shuri. In negotiations like this, you aren't allowed to just say what you want right away. If they know that 'that's' what you want then, taking advantage of that is also a role of diplomacy. If we are to say that what we want is Renha's person then, Princess Tebis would probably attach lots of conditions to us"

"I see"

"On the other hand, if Princess Tebis is to request what she wants then, we can demand Renha... the lady, and be completely done with it. That is what a negotiation is."

"Oh? In the end, if they have something they want then, wouldn't it be fine to just suggest that from the beginning and finish this altogether?"

"That would occur in an equal negotiation built upon stable diplomatic relationships and mutual trust. It cannot be said that we and Princess Tebis are on equal footing. It will absolutely proceed in a direction of reducing the other's request as much as possible before reaching a conclusion that both parties can compromise with."

Especially since we are in the weaker position. We have to reduce their demands”

“Then, isn’t it fine to just say that we don’t want Renha?”

“Yes. In the extreme case that’s what will happen. However our ideals are twofold. We will capture the lady and deliver punishment upon her. Maybe kill the lady by hanging. In any case, as long as the lady can no longer stir up the territory anymore. If we say we don’t want her, it would be terrible if she was to start up something from somewhere. Even though we are finally trying to lead the territory to a stable point, it would be intolerable if she did something strange right?”

However, that person is a card of Princess Tebis’. Once she has no more use to Princess Tebis and she was to be thrown away to the side somewhere, who knows what kind of calamity she might bring about afterwards. Which is why, punishing the lady is something we definitely want.”

I see.

“Behind the scenes, something like that is...”

“Exactly. From here on, it would not be good if you don’t focus more on the external affairs as well”

“By the way, what is with those clothes that look half male, half female?”

Currently, Ekress-san’s clothes were clothes which were similar to an interim between menswear and women goods.

The top is like that of a female, the bottom are male-like pants.

It’s a little unbalanced but, somehow goes well with Ekress-san’s atmosphere, and strangely fits her.

“This? It’s because I was raised as a man after all. It’s fine to live as a woman from here on but it doesn’t feel right somehow. I had this tailor made quickly.”

“It looks great on you”

“You’re making me embarrassed”

Ehehe, Ekress-san is slightly cute, laughing like that.

“You over there, what are you talking about?”

Looking over, Princess Tebis seems to be in a slightly bad mood.

Ah, no good. I forgot where I was. Right now, I was in midst of a negotiation in the conference room.

“S-sorry”

“Well whatever. Shuri is as carefree as ever, *jano*. You haven’t changed since the first time I met you”

“Is that so?”

I had thought I had become a bit more manly after surviving through various battlefields but... I guess I’m still the same old frail kid...

Man! I think I’m gonna cry!

“However, Shuri. You’ve faced misfortune this time around. To not have changed even within misfortune, I can say that is a strength of sorts”

Eh? Really?

“R-really? Living in a jail was a little harsh though”

“Ohh, that’s right indeed. The reason that I’ve come this time is regarding your circumstances in jail, *no*”

Oh? It seems that the flow of the conversation changed?

Somehow it feels like everyone is glaring at me with hateful eyes though...!?

“Um, you know... Shuri-kun... Even though she said it’s a misfortune, she never said anything about the jail, you know...”

What?

“So? What is that about? Ganglabe-dono, Gingus-dono. The cook that our country is on friendly terms with, had been receiving unjust treatment and locked in a prison. What could you possibly mean by not contacting me until just now?”

“That was, unavoidable for the time. For us to go and contact Newbyst, and considering the time it would take for Princess Tebis to visit practically, it would only be natural that for both Ganglabe Mercenary Corps as well as Sounity to be late.

However, in considerations with the time that it would take for Princess Tebis to come all the way here, it’s actually strange that Princess would actually be this quick though?”

“Is that, suggesting that I had something to do with this incident?”

“No, I did not mean to suggest something like that. However, would it be alright if you were to explain that?”

“We are the ones asking questions here. Don’t you think that answering a question with a question is not merely a poor move facing royalty, but also during a negotiation?”

Guh, Ganglabe-san was made speechless.

“...What does she mean?”

“Shortly put... it’s preemptive negotiation. Using the natural flow of the conversation, Princess Tebis was able to be the first to raise her questions.....

Before, if she was to ask this question all of a sudden then, we could look towards Princess Tebis, the one with control over the lady, with suspicion. Something like, 『 Since you were the ones to have arrested her first, doesn’t that mean you have some ulterior motive? Is that why you came to have this conversation with us?』 . If we’re greedy about the lady in a poor way then, we would instead be the ones who suffer.

However, if you're the one to speak of how you had lived in a jail then, she can naturally let out this question. If what Princess Tebis meant by 『Misfortune』 was about you living in a jail previously then we would be extremely suspicious about that. However you ended up saying it yourself.

From here on, no matter how we refute Princess Tebis, she will be able to lead by saying 『Shuri said it himself』 .”

Ehhhh? She can take the lead with something as nonsensical as that?

“But, if it's like that then we can just ask her questions in return”

“Shuri-kun, how would you feel if you were the one asking questions, and in contrast to that, the other party ignores you and comes at you with a different question?”

“Ahh... I'll be a little annoyed”

“In regards to the art of conversation, speaking ambiguously by answering a question with a question amounts to disrespect. Furthermore, the other party is Princess Tebis. To ask questions without even clearly answering the questions of Royalty is not good during diplomacy. Isn't that just much too rude?”

“Ehh?”

“Which is why, earlier Ganglabe-dono was looking for an exit to the conversation by evading her with idle chit chat. However, by changing the conversational point to Shuri-kun, Princess Tebis was able to find another opportunity, and picked at that”

“W-was that my fault?”

“Well, I guess it's out fault...”

What a blunder. I shouldn't be in this sort of place in the first place!

Looking at it from here, Ganglabe-san seems to be continuing the conversation with an awkward expression, and compared with that, Princess Tebis is just single-mindedly giving her demands.

It's a vicious cycle..... it'll be bad at this rate...!

“...So? Ganglabe-dono. How do you plan on cleaning up after this matter?”

“A major reconsideration over the management system of the territory. And perhaps a reorganisation of the army”

“Is that all? Wutin, bring that over”

“Yes, your highness”

The maid-san who had been waiting next to her, the person called Wutin-san took a step forward.

Wow, such a good-looking person.

A black bob cut do atop her cold looks. She was a maid-san who was shorter than me.

What that maid-san took out was, a stick looking thing covered in a cloth.

Taking off that cloth, a familiar sight was brought in front of my eyes.

“Ah! My knife!”

Yes, there within her hands is my knife. Ever since I had been locked inside the jail I had no idea where it had went, my cooking utensil.

Why is something like that here?

“I see, this was the knife that I had handed to Shuri as expected. Well well, isn't this interesting, *nou*”

Nn? Princess Tebis' eyes sharpened?

“Isn't that right Ganglabe? I had this carved with the emblem of the royal family, and bestowed. Why has something like that, come out from within your storeroom, *noja*?”

“That is-”

“Ahh, I understand. This was confiscated when he had been arrested right? However, from the time the riot started till now, to leave this alone in the storeroom is somewhat

inappropriate.

Don't you think so?"

N-no good. Somehow, the conversation isn't going well.

I have to do something to change the flow of the conversation. But, what to do?

My inner heart is completely nervous but, I noticed, looking on the table.

The drinks, have become completely warm.

"Excuse me!"

I had shouted out in the spur of the moment. Everyone here was surprised, and looks at me.

Ugh, it's tough being the center of attention. Furthermore with these members. My stomach hurts.

"Excuse me Princess Tebis. I apologize for interrupting your conversation.

However, if you would somehow hear me out"

"...I don't mind, say it"

"It appears that the drinks on the table have become completely warm. I will go bring over some new drinks so, won't you take a break?"

"Hmm, drinks is it. True, they have become warm due to the continued arguments, *no*.

However, there is no need for a break."

Princess Tebis exchanges looks with Wutin-san who was standing behind her and Wutin-san takes out a bottle.

Something that is filled with a deep green liquid.

"I knew that something like this would happen, so I have already prepared drinks.

Additionally, this is the best fruit juice our country has to offer. The brand is Nounels. Since it's such a rare opportunity, I shall treat you all a drink"

Nounels?

I make a face as if I don't understand, making the others surprised.

"Teg-san, is that really something that amazing?"

"It's not just amazing, su. It's a phantasmic fruit juice that even amongst the royalty of this continent, only the most exclusive can consume.

They were on the brink of losing it in the previous war though, su. It can only exist till now because we won that war, su.

Made from a fruit that grows in extremely miniscule amounts within the Holy Forest, crushing all of its skin and fruit, then squeezing it into a juice. That is, something that is filled with all of that juice, su. It has the dense fragrance of the fruit, with a strong sweetness. A most luxurious product, su"

It's something so amazing it warrants such a passionate speech?

Wutin-san brings forth some fresh glasses, pours that in and distributes it to everyone.

Even I was given some.

The smell is amazing.

Rather saying that it's sweet, it's more sour I would say..... But it's not an unpleasant smell. Somehow, it also has a herbal fragrance.

Looking at the glass, the inside of the glass is already completely green. It's thicker than Aojiru, but it's clear.

"Now, try drink it. It's a luxurious product even in our country, ja"

Hehh, it's something that good?

I take a sip to try.

Strong!

Inside the peculiar sweetness and sourness of the fruit, is a bitterness which is just right so that you couldn't come to hate it. The passing aftertaste is refreshing like a mint, a delicious drink.

Delicious. It's so delicious but...

"This is amazing, su...!"

"This is my first time but... This sure is amazing, isn't it" (Ahrius)

"S'also a first for I. So this is Nonels..." (Cougar)

Everyone unanimously says it's so delicious. Princess Tebis also made a haughty expression.

But this is... sigh.

"How is it, delicious right? Now then, there's no need for something like a break"

"Ah, please wait a moment"

I stopped her immediately.

"What is it, Shuri?"

"No just, could you lend me that bottle for a bit?"

Wutin-san made a suspicious look then looks towards Princess Tebis.

"Fine. I'll lend it to you"

Wutin-san handed it over to me.

“One thing. That, is precious. Breaking it, is forbidden”

Wutin-san told me with a slightly stuttering voice.

“No, I won’t be breaking it”

As a test, I took a sniff of the smell from inside the bottle.

Yea... As I thought.

“I get it now”

“I see, I see. Not just your tongue, but even your nose understands that it’s something great huh”

“Indeed, I do understand that it’s top quality. However, ah, please prepare some new glasses in the next room, enough for everyone. Also Ahrius-san. If I may have your cooperation.”

Saying so, I jump out of the room, rushing into the next room.

Ahrius-san followed behind me in a fluster.

“What’s wrong Shuri?”

“Ahrius-san. Can I ask you something?”

I asked Ahrius-san one thing in order to confirm something of mine.

“Yes... magic is indeed capable of doing that as well”

“In that case, I ask of your assistance”

After some trial and error, I returned to the room, having them carry over the glasses that I had finally finished.

“I hath returned forth!”

Princess Tebis makes an inquisitive look as I go back to my seat.

“What did you do?”

“I sorta, came up with something. Now then, please distribute it”

At my signal, the people waiting came in carrying the glasses.

When they had finished distributing out all the glasses to the people present, everyone made a strange expression.

“This is... what is this? Hey Shuri”

“It’s called, Mizuwari”

Yes, what I made was a juice made with Nounels.

In front of everyone is, precisely ‘that’ inside of a glass.

Ice floating, it had been made into a beautiful pale green drink, almost as if it was transparent.

“Mizu... come again?”

“Well, please just try it”

I take the initiative and take a sip.

Yup, it’s delicious.

The strong taste and the minty fragrance have become just right.

“I shall also guarantee this. This is, much more delicious than the Nounels we just had”

Ahrius-san said as such and drank it.

Well, I mean, it's delicious but... compared with what we just had...

The people who liked it, will probably like the one just now better anyways.

"Hou, you've said it now. The Nounels of our country. Luxurious even for us, the Nounels that even I have acknowledged. If you say that it's of a greater taste compared to that than we must have a taste"

Saying so, Princess Tebis also drank it down with a gulp.

The others too, were drinking it.

And then, everyone was once again surprised.

"Indeed... it's much easier to drink than the one from before" (Gann)

"That's true. If I had to say, then I guess I'd like this one better" (Ekress)

"Ore-sama likes the other one better but... For a palate cleanser, this would be good"
(Gingus)

Ohh, I'm getting positive reviews from everyone.

And then, the person in question, Princess Tebis, also opened her eyes wide and was in shock.

"This is impossible...! This is indeed Nounels. Furthermore, it should be something of top quality. But, why is it that this is something greater than even that!?"

The sweetness and the sourness are both just right, and there's no bitterness whatsoever...! The fragrance of the herbs escape through my nose and mouth, with a refreshing aftertaste!

Why!? Shuri, how is it that you are in possession of this type of Nounels!?"

"This is, the Nounels I had borrowed from you just now"

In front of everyone who was in shock, I returned the bottle I borrowed just now.

Even after seeing that the contents had decreased, Princess Tebis still made a face as if she couldn't believe it.

“That's impossible! Just what did you add in order to be able to make a Nounels like this!? Did you add some kind of secret seasoning!?”

“No, Shuri didn't add anything of that sort”

The one who declined that was Ahrius-san.

“Even I couldn't believe it when I had first witnessed it. I couldn't even in my wildest dreams believe that by doing something like that, it would create a drink like this.”

“Something like that? It's the ice huh! That means that the secret is inside this ice right!?”

“No, this ice is, no matter how you look at it, just something to preserve the freshness of this drink.

What was added to this was, “

Taking in a deep breath, Ahrius-san told her.

“Just water”

Everyone here was taken aback by those words.

Yes, that's what I had thought when I had drank this Nonels.

That it was too strong.

It's true that it really is delicious. It was just a small discomfort so tiny that you wouldn't be able to notice it if you weren't actively looking.

However, once you notice it, you'll be bothered by it...

For example, it feels similar to Calp*s mixed with the wrong amount of water?

Besides, I had noticed 'that' when I had heard the explanation.

A drink that the entire fruit.

In other words, it's what the society of Earth calls 100% Fruit Juice.

However, although this is delicious, there are some people for which this isn't palatable.

Why is this? It's because it's too strong.

You end up feeling an unpleasant aftertaste coming from the overbearing sweetness.

You can't state that 100% Fruit Juice is delicious as is.

That's where mineral water comes into play.

The juice that has been diluted down appropriately becomes delicious and easy to drink just like that.

All I did is apply that logic to the Nounels.

What I had asked Ahrius-san was, 『Can the water made with magic be both clear and drinkable』 ?

According to Ahrius-san, it seems that 『it can be clear and drinkable but, normal people don't do it. It's a waste of magic power』 .

Well, since it seems that it could be done, I had her make it along with the ice.

After I had made that explanation, Princess Tebis looks at the glass with a frustrating expression.

“I don't believe it... That with just water, it can bring out the taste to this extent...”

“It doesn't bring out the taste, it removes the taste.

To dilute and lighten what is hard to drink or eat. That is the basics of cooking.

Delicious and easy to eat. That is after all, the principle of cooking”

Once I had explained it like that, Princess Tebis immediately became quiet, looking grim.

Are? I wonder if I had done something wrong...?

“AHAHAHAHA!”

Then, Ganglabe-san laughed all of the sudden. Did something happen!?

“Thanks Shuri, it’s a good hint”

Eh? What is?

After that, the negotiations came to a still, and was decided to be deferred for tomorrow.

Ganglabe-san had thanked me but, I wonder why? Even though we hadn’t won.

Chapter 40

Princess and Mizuwari (Part 2)

I should've known since long ago.

That, when it comes to Shuri's cooking, it defies all sorts of knowledge and technique.

Which is why, I desired Shuri. And I wanted his skill to make such delicacies, to be just mine.

However, I know that I had made light of that.

Shuri's conceptions are much more advanced than even I, could have imagined.

"Hey Wutin. Are you ready?"

Before we enter into the conference room, we ask for a confirmation from Wutin.

Carrying with us the most luxurious of fruit juices, Nounels, we were about to tackle a meeting with Sounity.

Originally, the reason we came here was to ascertain the safety of Shuri, as well as getting an explanation regarding the reason why they had arrested a chef we had bestowed with an engraved knife, *ja*.

Naturally however, there is no way we plan to merely forgive the crime of unjustly arresting the chef we are friends with.

"Yes Princess. Here, as well"

Wutin nods and answered.

Wutin is a member of my trusted spy unit, and our means of communication. Furthermore she is also burdened with being our accompanying maid, as well as our personal guard.

In addition, Wutin's strength is the best within the unit. The reason why she isn't the captain of the unit is because Wutin cannot speak very well, *ja*.

Amongst the members of the spy unit, there are many who have special circumstances. In Wutin's case, her parents were abducted by soldiers right in front of her eyes, and she did not know of her whereabouts. Furthermore no one had taught her letters, and needless to say words.

When we found her, she was already no different to a wild animal. Her physical ability was high but, she couldn't communicate and did anything in order to survive. Fishing, hunting, and even attacking people.

At that time, she was captured by the captain of our spy unit and met us. That was probably when we were around five years old. At that time, it seems we had said this, *ja*.

『She's like a dog』

No, it wasn't like we thought of her like this due to our age. In any case, Wutin looked like a lost dog to us.

After that, we had looked over Wutin's training, and we also studied together. For some reason, we couldn't abandon Wutin, *noja*.

Anyway, when Wutin grasped the human language and common sense, she became our accompanying maid. There would be occasions when she would disappear for the sake of information but, given that she usually returns by the time we notice, it has never bothered us. Even if we left her alone, due to her sharp instincts as a guard, she would come back immediately.

For someone like us, Wutin is worthy of our trust.

This time we had her look for something.

“Hmm, as I suspected huh”

When I saw that, my cheeks seemed to be cramping.

That is the knife I had bestowed to Shuri. A sharp knife engraved with our Royal

Family's emblem.

When I had heard he was arrested, I had taken notice of this. Perhaps they did not realise this or even if they did notice, they had disposed of it immediately. I had been wondering which it was but.

“Where did you find it, Wutin?”

“The storeroom”

The storeroom huh. As expected, they had thrown it away huh.

If this knife is to be known about later, it'll become a definite problem if they didn't deal with it.

However, if this had been sold poorly it might circulate to our country through the circulation of goods and, on the other hand there's also the danger that if it's thrown away, an orphan or vagrant might pick it up.

Which means, there is no possibility other than to seal the knife up in the castle somewhere.

However, this is also a poor move in it's own way.

If it's now, after the problem has been taken care of, it's fine to merely return it back to Shuri. There's probably no need for it to collect dust like this.

Truthfully however, this is also something we had predicted.

You might think that everything would end once the knife is returned back to Shuri, but it's not.

On the flip side, if we knew that if Shuri had been treating this knife preciously, we would probably say, 『Even amidst that mess, the truth is that you protected the knife, without forgetting the considerations about our country, you deserve praise.』

And then we would probably circulate the information that in Shuri's heart, Newbyst holds a bigger position than Sounity.

Of course however, there is no way we are aiming for any effect to be had from mere words.

If things go well and that creates a ripple between Shuri and Sounity, we might think that it would be good if some action is taken though.

“Princess. I will, hold, this.”

“Alright Wutin. Nounels and the knife, let us corner them with these two items”

Our trickery against Ganglabe-dono’s trickery.

Indeed, shouldn’t we test which one of us is superior.

“Ohhh! It’s been a while Shuri!”

“Ah, yes. It has been some time Princess Tebis”

And thus the conference started.

On our side was Wutin and a few guards, on Ganglabe-dono’s side was all the commanders and Shuri, as well as Sounity’s legitimate child Gingus and... Someone who was wearing some strange outfit.

Who is it I wonder? Like a man, like a girl... do people like that exist?

Well who cares. It’s my first time seeing Shuri in a long while, *ja*. It’d be good to chat with him for a little bit.

“Good gracious, that recipe that you had provided us, that curry. It’s still has some way to go before it’s complete but, it’s becoming more and more producible, *zo*. The current product is also delicious. It’s terrific, *no*”

“Eh, yes. Well, maybe the mixing of the spices is a little bit difficult”

To Shuri it’s just a little bit, huh.

“It’s not just a little bit right? The imperial chefs in the castle are all clutching at their heads, striving day and night to recreate your recipe”

That's right, that recipe called Curry or something. That in itself, is extremely simple. Even my imperial chefs thought that it was simple in the beginning.

However, when they were about to start, they fell face first into a difficulty. Which was the ratio of the compounded spices, *ja*.

The chefs were at their wit's end worrying. If it's done wrong, it becomes too spicy or the smell becomes too strong...

The golden ratio which combines the taste, smell and fragrance. To find that ratio is as difficult as finding a single, tiny needle on this enormous continent. We think that right about now, our chefs are definitely thinking that we are going to get that answer from Shuri.

We don't feel like asking. Because if they aren't able to find it by themselves, there's probably no meaning to it, *no*.

"I see. Should I hand over some pre-mixed curry powder next time?"

"No no, it won't do if we are not capable of making it ourselves in the end. It will affect our honour as the Gourmet Major Power, Newbyst."

"Haa..."

Although Shuri sounds troubled as he replies, there is no way we could take such a favour from him.

I believe that eventually, our country's chefs will catch up to Shuri as well.

"Ah right, a dish that combines both Curry and Mapo Tofu is under development, *jazo*"

"Eh?"

Oh, Shuri is shocked by this. We had completely thought that Shuri had this recipe in his repertoire as well so, this was a surprise.

Yes, we had thought of this before. Curry and Mapo Tofu. Although their orientations are different, they are both mainly spicy and through a bestowal of various flavours, they bring forth a mysterious taste.

Mapo Tofu has a spiciness brought forth by a combination of seasonings. Curry has a spiciness brought forth by a combination of spices.

Thinking that it'll definitely create a wonderful dish then should the two of these tastes could be combined, we gave the order to the chefs to analyse and equally attempt to create a recipe for Curry and Mapo Tofu, *noja*.

"It's a dish that's both hot and spicy. Although it might appear to be completely spicy at first glance, *no*. We were thinking, if you would create this supreme dish with us."

"That's amazing. Even for me"

"Don't say that 『You can't make it』 ok, Shuri? You are the creator of this dish. The truth is that you have the recipe for this inside your head right?"

There's no loss to investigating this. Perhaps, just because he can't make it, it's also possible that he might be able to make it.

"I seriously can't make it. It's something that I've never even tried making before."

"Hmm. But if I was to say 'Make it' then, wouldn't you make it?"

"Well... I would need to trial and error it a bit though"

Fumu, as expected, we can guess that if it's the creator of the recipe then as long as he trials and errors it, he can make it huh.

We've heard something good.

"That just fine. Come with us."

"Princess Tebis. I apologise for interrupting this pleasant conversation piece but, could you perhaps not do that"

Hou, we had wanted to try draw in Shuri using the flow of the conversation.

Ganglabe-dono, has considerable skill in regards to seizing the flow of a conversation. He had cut in with exceptional timing.

Well alright. We had merely been playing up to this point.

“We have been rude, Ganglabe-dono. We’re quite indebted to you for the battle the other day, *no*”

“This is merely another part of our job”

“At the very least, the truth is that it’s thanks to you overcoming that battle, that we were able to stave off that predicament, *ja*. You are even receiving praise from his Majesty.”

“That is my greatest pleasure”

“If it were not for a fate like this, we probably would’ve hired you fellows already”

“That is, merely what could’ve been”

“Indeed, *jano*. It is worthless. It wouldn’t have happened even if we had asked of it”

Hmm, up to this point, there’s no holes coming out and not even a blunder. It’s hard to grasp the flow of the conversation.

However, well, it is true that we had wanted to employ Ganglabe’s Mercenary Corp. In that case, this enormous combat potential would be ours. Along with Shuri.

If so, it may have even be possible to reign supreme on this continent.

Well, it really would be useless even if we had said it.

“Other than that, Ganglabe-dono. What sort of goal are you working towards?”

“...You mean?”

“You have went and made a satisfactory living off the battlefield. Right now, your wealth and combat ability doesn’t lose to any other country, wouldn’t you agree?”

It’s not that ridiculous if you think about the recent wins in battle and the expansion of their corp.

And, the excessive growth of the mercenary corp can only influence the neighbouring countries negatively.

The reason being that, such an enormous and powerful combat potential that belongs to no one, is similar to having a doubled-edged sword in your grasp.

A weapon that may hurt you, should you grasp it. After all, if it is handed over to enemy hands, there's the danger of it stabbing back at you.

A mercenary corp is a free combat power, belonging to neither countries, nor organisations. Which is exactly why you hire them to create a balance in combat power during times of emergency.

Yes, from a country's point of view, a mercenary corp does not count towards combat power, they are merely an existence to achieve a balance with the enemy.

In exchange for buying combat power with money, it wouldn't be strange for them to stab you in the back at any time.

Amongst all that, the reason why Ganglabe-dono's mercenary corp can be trusted is because based on their results, if you hire them they will never betray that country or organisation, doing their work until the very end.

If it wasn't for that, normal mercenary corps would be useless in wars. At best they'll just be left with the dirty jobs or guard requests.

Amongst all that, when Ganglabe's Mercenary Corp was able to obtain a country is, even we were cautious. Only idiots thinking of peace all day and genuine idiots wouldn't be worried.

"You are thinking too much of us, Princess Tebis. I merely have good fortune"

"Good fortune, *nou*. We would imagine that good fortune is not a talent limited to just the mercenary corp, but also something necessary for those living on the battlefield, right?"

"You are not wrong in that aspect but, I think that to get to all this, there is no way other than hard work."

"Good fortune which works out somehow due to hard work cannot be called good fortune. That is called planning, Ganglabe-dono. Now then, we shall repeat our question.

Ganglabe-dono. What action will you take from here on? What are your aims as you take those actions?"

I look Ganglabe-dono right in the eyes and said.

This is something I should ask at all costs. Along with his wealth and combat potential, what sort of actions would Ganglabe-dono take from here on, and what sort of goal will he start to move towards now that he has gained authority?

However, Ganglabe-dono didn't try to say anything, holding a dumbfounded look on his face.

Closing his eyes, with a serious face plastered on.

Normally, for ignoring Royalty, we would be able to verbally abuse them in full but, we had no thought of doing that.

Because we knew that Ganglabe-dono is lost in his thoughts, *ja*.

Whether to speak of his goals or not. And, if that goal is pure, noble and wonderful then, he probably cannot speak of it to some degree.

Although it may also be something embarrassing... That goal, could also have the possibility of enveloping the entire continent depending on the circumstance.

"It looks good on you"

"You're making me blush"

Even as we say that, Shuri, who is behind Ganglabe-dono is having a fun and pleasant chat with the strange person next to him, who looked neither male nor female.

"You over there, what are you talking about?"

"S-sorry"

As expected, even we are unable turn a blind eye to this. After scolding him a little, Shuri says slightly awkwardly.

"Well whatever. Shuri is as carefree as ever, *jano*. You haven't changed since the first time we met you"

“Is that so?”

Ahh, he certainly hasn't changed.

You're completely unshakeable, no matter where you are, no matter who is in front of you.

You are like a river, quietly flowing. No matter what adversity or difficulties you face, you continue to flow on like that of a small stream, within an unchangeable course of events.

Which is probably exactly how you continue to survive, even now.

“However, Shuri. You've faced misfortune this time around. To not have changed even within misfortune, we can say that is a strength of sorts”

It's a little awkward trying to set a trap for someone like Shuri but, it can't be helped.

“R-really? Living in a jail was a little harsh though”

“Ohh, that's right indeed. The reason that we've come this time is regarding your circumstances in jail, *no*”

Alright, it seems that we were able to get into the main problem naturally. Additionally, the conversational flow has changed into where we are the ones to ask the questions.

We had wanted to hold this conversation from the get-go but, Ganglabe-dono is clever. If we had come about it badly, we would probably have received a severe retaliation.

Apologies Shuri but, allow us to attack from your mistake.

Ganglabe-dono is also looking as if he had bitten a bitter bug so, it seems he has noticed that it's become bad, *jano*.

“So? What is the meaning of this? Ganglabe-dono, Gingus-dono. The cook that our country is on friendly terms with, had been receiving unjust treatment and locked in a prison. What could you possibly mean by not contacting me until just now?”

“That was, unavoidable at the time. For us to go and contact Newbyst, considering practically the time it would take for Princess Tebis to come visit, it would only be natural that for both Ganglabe Mercenary Corps as well as Sounity to be late.

However, in considerations with the time that it would take for Princess Tebis to come all the way here, it’s strange, on the contrary, that Princess would actually be this quick though?”

“Is that, suggesting that we had something to do with this incident?”

“No, I did not mean to suggest something like that. However, would it be alright if you were to explain that?”

“We are the ones asking questions here. Don’t you think that answering a question with a question is not merely a poor move facing royalty, but also during a negotiation?”

We consider retaliating by asking questions in return.

“So? What excuse do you have?”

“...That is a misunderstanding Princess Tebis. We were also victims, in the very center of this incident. Our contacts outside were foolish, so it took all our efforts just to lay out an information network to our members.”

“In that case, it means that Sounity should be held responsible, *jana*. We suppose that’s true, given that the origin of this incident is due to the fight between the people of Sounity, *nou*.

So? Gingus-dono. How do you plan to explain this?”

“T-that is...”

Gingus-dono is hesitating to speak but, this also can’t be helped. If you look at it from the beginning, Gingus-dono’s self destruction is actually the cause of everything.

In the first place, the cause of the incident is due to Gingus-dono’s set up of trying to make the Feudal Lord retire, and Shuri seeing through that and having stopped it, *ja*.

If Gingus-dono explains it like that then, it will end with “It’s your fault. Take responsibility”.

And if our information is correct then, we hear that although Gingus-dono has extraordinary talent regarding military affairs, he is not quite there with domestic affairs.

He isn't very skilled at things like this, diplomatic exchanges and negotiations. You could even say these are his weaknesses.

"I, I..."

"Apologies Princess Tebis. Gingus had been used and thus does not seem to be able to explain himself well due to his sense of guilt, I shall explain it in his stead"

Ganglabe-dono cuts into the conversation, helping out the panicking Gingus-dono.

Hmm, his timing was good. Indeed, Gingus-dono does have a look combined with panic and guilt. He wouldn't be able to explain things properly like this.

Here, we could probably reject him by saying "We are asking Gingus-dono" but, it would be troubling for us too should Gingus-dono blow up annoyingly.

"Firstly however..."

From here on, Ganglabe-dono explained everything in detail.

Well, it's just adding onto the scope of what we already know, *ja*.

However, the real identity of the strange, neither male nor female, behind him. To think that she is the illegitimate child we were informed of, Ekress-dono..... There's should be a limit to being beyond expectations, *wa*.

"So that's how it is, *nou*. That was misfortunate."

"..."

"...So? Ganglabe-dono. How do you plan on cleaning up after this matter?"

"A major reconsideration over the management system of the territory. And perhaps a reorganisation of the army"

"Is that all? Wutin, bring that over"

“Yes, your highness”

We signal over to Wutin and she takes out the knife from her bosom.

The one we had bestowed upon Shuri, the emblem engraved cooking knife.

Actually, looking at this carefully, it looks like it’s been quite used and even the handle was kept well, we think he likes it.

Although it had been chucked inside the storeroom and been gathering dust ever since.

“Ah! My knife!”

Surprised, Shuri pointed at it.

Ganglabe-dono was left with an unpleasant expression at this as well.

Of course it would. To ignore the knife that was engraved with our crest, furthermore, the person himself had admitted it.

As his superior, there is likely no disgrace greater than this.

“I see, this was, as expected, the knife that I had gave to Shuri. Well, well, isn’t this interesting, *nou*”

Now then, from here on is our time for offence.

The mistreatment with regards to the cook that we are intimate with, furthermore the miscommunication regarding that, the lack of report from after the event, as well as, the sloppy treatment of a knife engraved with the crest of the royal family.

Will you accept these actions as insults towards Newbyst, and negotiate?

Or will you come after us, having betrayed our Shuri’s trust?

Now then, our gaze spontaneously sharpens.

We’ve forced Shuri into a bit of a tight squeeze but, we’ll ignore that for now, *ja*.

“So, Ganglabe? We have had this, engraved with the emblem of the Royal Family and had bestowed it. Why is it then, that it was brought out from within the storeroom, *noja?*”

“That is-”

“Ahh, I understand. When you had been seized, it had been taken away, are we correct? However, now that some time has passed since the incident, having this left in the storeroom is a little unsettling.

Don’t you agree?”

Guh, mumbles Ganglabe-dono.

As expected, when it comes to this problem even Ganglabe-dono can’t come up with a good solution, *jano*.

Now then, how will you counter?

However, here, something unexpected happened.

“Excuse me!”

All of a sudden, Shuri says and interrupts the negotiation.

His timing was impeccable and, even his words had no fault.

Obviously, even we had to stop.

“Apologies Princess Tebis. Sincerely sorry for interrupting your conversation like this.

However, would you please hear me out”

Shuri has something to say? How rare, this person who seems to be completely average at everything apart from his cooking, has something he wants to say such that he would stick his mouth into this conference?

“...No worries, say it”

Our interests swell slightly. A little interruption couldn't hurt.

“I think that the drinks on the tables, have completely warmed up. Since I'll go and bring out some new drinks, won't you take a break?”

“Hmm, drinks? Indeed, they have become warm due to the continued negotiations.

However, there will be no need for a break”

I see, this approach is just like Shuri. Was this also learnt from Ganglabe-dono?

Indeed, if a break was taken here then Ganglabe-dono's head could cool down properly, and might be able to take up a countermeasure, *no*.

But, we are not so kind as to let that happen so easily.

Sending a signal to Wutin who was behind us, she brought out the Nounels, that had been prepared.

Truthfully, this could have been a method as a way to flaunt our victory when this meeting had ended or, we had thought that we would try to bring it out as an emergency measure just in case but, who would have thought that it would be just the right shield to deal with Shuri's attack.

You never know what's going to happen in this world, truly. These words probably aren't words that a young girl, who is just a little older than 10 should say, *nou*...

“We had thought this might happen and, have already prepared a drink. Furthermore, it's a fruit juice of the highest possible quality taken from our country. The brand is Nounels. It's such a rare opportunity, let us all take a drink.”

Nounels. Hearing this word, the other side looked as if they couldn't hold in their surprise, *ja*.

Well, that's only natural. Nounels is, a saintly tree that only exists within our country's Holy Forest. It is said that there was once a god who took shelter under this tree, and at that time, the tree had absorbed the noble drops of liquid dripping from his body,

and through that evolved into such a being.

It is a fruit juice with no additives added, having its fruit taken from that saintly tree. Then wrung into a juice, after grinding all of the skin and seeds, we are left with just the flavours of the fruit sealed inside.

And although there are no faults with the flavour, along with the splendid fragrance and beautiful hue, it has become a phantasmic drink due to its lack of availability.

That is the Nounels our country produces.

“Now then, drink up. It’s a luxury even for our country, *ja*”

Distributing the glasses, and pouring the Nounels to everyone as if sharing it around.

We too take a sip, savouring it within our mouth.

A wondrous taste as always.

The wild taste of the fruit, sweetness, fragrance... Each of them of the highest quality.

The grade of Nounels, is determined by the overall wonderfulness of the taste. The wildness, the sweetness, the fragrance. After all that has been ranked, the ones which are offered to royalty are limited to those that have splendid hue and smell.

The one we had brought here was a product not inferior to those offered to royalty.

Everyone here had become a captive to it’s smell.

“This is amazing, su...!”

“This is my first time tasting this but... It sure is amazing, this thing”

“Tis also a first for I. So this is Nounels...”

Even Ganglabe’s subordinates couldn’t conceal the brilliance of Nounels.

Every single mouth was speaking of it’s delicious taste.

“How is it? Delicious? Now then, there is no need for a break”

There's probably no need for a break after having tasted a delicacy such as this.

Best of all, being able to casually take out such an extravagance, is also a method to display our country's might. From here on the negotiation will probably advance smoothly.

Thinking back, the carelessness we made this day, this moment, was probably the biggest blunder we had made.

"Ah, please wait a moment"

Right before we were about to resume the negotiations, Shuri put in the clincher.

"What is it, Shuri?"

"Just, could I borrow that bottle for a little bit?"

The Nounels?

What for? Was there a problem with the taste?

No, that's impossible. There shouldn't have been a problem with the Nounels that we had tasted just now. It was a delicacy even we approve of.

Speaking of which, Shuri had only been looking at the glass and looked as if he discovered something.

We had no idea what that might have been. However, was there something that only Shuri could see?

Our curiosity wells up.

"Fine. Have at it"

We gave our permission to Wutin, who was acting cautious. We wonder what Shuri had noticed and was trying to do? What could he possibly think of this perfect drink.

Wutin approaches Shuri and handed over the Nounels bottle.

“One thing. That is, precious. Do not, break it”

Naturally it seems, she didn't forget to warn him.

That Nounels is a product of utmost luxury. It's not something you can get your hands on just any day.

“No, I won't break it”

After rebutting her with a few words Shuri takes a sniff.

He quietly takes a whiff as if he was trying to taste it and then nods as if he had ascertained something.

“I get it now”

“I see, I see. Not just your tongue, but even your nose understands that it's something great huh”

So not only is Shuri's tongue and cooking skill excellent but also his sense of smell is excellent as well.

Fufu, if that's how it is then he should understand it more and more. The fact that Nounels is, something without fault, a top quality product that we have approved of.

“Indeed, I do understand that this is of top quality. However, ah, please prepare some new glasses in the next room, enough for everyone. Also Ahrius-san. If I may have your cooperation.”

Shuri says that and then rushes out of the room as fast as lightning.

Ahrius too hurriedly follows behind him, leaving the room.

What? What is he trying to do?

“Your, highness”

Wutin was also trying to run after them. I see, after all if we're careless then we wouldn't be able to do anything except watch as they run away, stealing the Nounels with them.

However we stopped her with a wave of our hand.

“No. Stay here Wutin”

“How... ever”

“If you were to leave, who do you think will guard us, *noja*. In addition, Shuri is not such a fool as to run and steal the drink. Most likely, he is probably trying to do something with the Nounels.”

However, even we don't know. What is he trying to make using that Nounels?

Using it to cook? No, we can't even imagine that. How is he supposed to cook using something with such a strong and peculiar taste, and such wildness?

Could he combine it with cooking creating a new dish? No, it makes no sense to do that right here. It's not dinner right now. Would Shuri do something as inappropriate as that?

Maybe he was making candy? It is true that I've heard that Shuri had previously made some candy in some country somewhere but, to make some candy right now is just completely out of place. He wouldn't make royalty like us, wait for such a long time just for him to finish making it.

Then what?

“Princess Tebis. It appears that our cook is, attempting to do something. How about it? Wouldn't you like to see how the greatest drink of your country will become, under his hands?”

Before I realised it, Ganglabe-dono was proposing such a matter.

With a smile as if he had just narrowly escaped death, no less.

Damn it...! I ended up giving him time!

“There is no need for that. We can hold a discussion even when the cook is cooking”

“However. We had borrowed a souvenir belonging to you. Letting you wait during the break of the negotiation, isn’t that a bit rude?”

“We do not mind”

“No that won’t do, since it is a question of respect and sincerity, from us to you”

Guh, that’s a legit argument. The usual look of confidence that Ganglabe-dono has, had returned.

Normally it is true that in the break while he is preparing our souvenir, if we were to continue working, it’s likely to ruin the atmosphere.

Furthermore, the souvenir that they’re holding is none other than our own. In other words, royalty.

My praises go to you, oh Shuri.

Your actions have allowed Ganglabe-dono to take back the flow of the negotiation.

Nothing we can do about it now. Right now we can but pause the conversation and, using the conversational flow of the casual chatter to try to find a clue and grasp at it.

“True. If we are indeed not to accept your respect and courtesy, then it would be us who are being rude”

“Princess Tebis is sensitive to such matters I see”

“Naturally. The job of royalty is not to just steer the country. It is to control the flow at every location, and to make the country develop in an even better direction. To divide and provide the wealth with the citizens, and to protect them. After all the country only exists because of the people, *no*.

A country which ignores its citizens will not be able to even sustain a long and prosperous glory from the very beginning. Our duty is to protect the citizens and to enrich the country. That is all”

“...Those are the same words that Shuri had said a long time ago”

“What?”

“It goes 『Man is a castle, man is a stone wall, man is a moat, mercy be my friend, revenge to be my foe』 ”

(TL: Famous quote from Takeda Shigen)

.....

“Did he want to say that man is the foundation?”

“No, it seems to mean 『No matter how sturdy be the castle, there is no cure in this world for a man’s determination, should it end up leaving. By dealing with things with sincerity, a man will be able to protect the country, let alone a sturdy castle, but should one behave in a vengeful manner, one shall be betrayed, no less, by those protecting one during a time of need.』

Deep, very insightful words”

What in the... Shuri had said such words?

“Impossible. Shuri is a commoner who has never influenced a country. Are you saying that he has comprehended such significant and insightful words?”

“Also, there was 『Don’t look up, understand your limits』 .

Ahh, this is not meant as an insult. It seems to mean, that the shortcut to success, no matter what it is, is to grasp the situation, and take it one step at a time.

It resembles what Princess Tebis just said. To calmly make sure of what one can do right at this moment, working for the sake of the masses. It’s a wonderful thing”

Is that so?

Is that how, we have been living?

Why? Why does Shuri know of such enlightening words?

Why, is our heart so disturbed?

“Apologies. It seems that, I have stepped out of line”

“No, it’s fine. We have heard something good”

This is bad, our heart is seriously in chaos. We must calm our heart down once more.

Agitation dulls the thoughts, chaos restricts action and makes one behave rashly.

In order words, our hearts unrest is something that our opponent can expose as our weakness.

We must control our heart once more.

“However, Shuri sure is a strange person. Ganglabe-dono, how did you come to win over that man?”

With the continuation of the conversation, we hide our agitation, preparing our heart.

This is how we always calm down our mind. This time is no different, *ja*.

“It wasn’t like we won him over or anything, he just came to be lost in my camp. That was quite a while ago. Right in the middle of our encampment, he had fallen there without a single asset on him. Thinking back to it now, that’s hilarious”

Hahaha, on the face of the laughing Ganglabe-dono there was no longer the previous fragility.

Somehow it appears he has made a complete recovery.

Like this, we must adjust to it and once again try to regain the initial control, *no*.

“Right in the middle of the encampment, you say?”

“Yes. Since he was in our encampment before we knew it, we had also suspected him of possibly being a spy. We were just about to kill him but since he wanted to show us his skill in cooking we let him live. After that, he has worked hard and is now an indispensable talent for our mercenary corp.

As a cook, he is the most trustworthy one I have”

Ganglabe-dono smiles slightly.

The commanders behind him also nod as if they were agreeing with that, and there was even someone who turned around and laughed.

...Somehow, it seems I’ve made a huge misunderstanding.

It’s not that Ganglabe-dono won’t let go of Shuri.

He’s become an indispensable existence, a large tie which binds them all together.

He’s become an existence who should naturally be there.

They probably can’t be separated anymore.

To pull that sort of person away from them, is no longer possible.

Now it’s come to this, we might no choice but to change our objectives.

After all we wouldn’t know what kind of terrible catastrophe may come about if we were to forcefully take away that tie from them.

However, even if taking him away might be impossible, we do want to have him be an ally somehow...

Regardless of his cooking skill and quick wit. Because these are skills we do not want to let go of.

Preferably we would like to take Sounity as a vassal country or something, then we could make Shuri permanently stay in our castle as our imperial chef or something?

No, if we did that then that would be much too complex.

While we felt like we were tackling the hardest problem in my life, we continued chatting.

Although we were continuing the harmless and pointless talk, no good ideas could come to mind at all.

No, right now if I had to say then, I can think of one, the objective of this conversation, to hand over the person Renha Sounity for a large sum.

It was when I was just thinking that.

“I hath returned forth!”

It was Shuri who opened up the door all of the sudden.

Making a determined expression, he returns back behind Ganglabe-dono.

“What did you go do?”

“I sorta, came up with something. Now then, please distribute it”

Receiving Shuri’s signal, people who appeared to be cooks carried in glasses.

Seeing the glasses distributed to everyone, we asked him with a dubious look.

“This is... what is this? Hey Shuri”

“It’s called, Mizuwari”

Mizuwari?

What’s in the glass is a drink that looks just like Nounels though.....

It’s far more transparent than Nounels and even had ice floating inside.

“Mizu... come again?”

“Well, please just try it”

Shuri takes the initiative and started drinking.

Hmm, so it's not some kind of poison. Well, Shuri would never do something like poison foodstuffs though.

Even Wutin, who was next to us, was extending her hand out, trying to test for poison but we quietly stopped that.

Telling her to think of Shuri's feeling, given it's been a while, and not to do such inelegant things.

"I shall also guarantee this. This is, much more delicious than the Nounels we just had"

However, Ahrius's next words hurt.

What did you say? It's more delicious than the Nounels we just had?

Could this be, Shuri's drink made with a secret formula?

We can't ignore this.

That Nounels was, a product we recognise of utmost quality.

"Hou, you've said it now. The Nounels of our country. Luxurious even for us, the Nounels that even I have acknowledged. If you say that it's of a greater taste compared to that than we must have a taste"

We take up a glass and bring it to our mouth, drinking the liquid inside.

Instantly, it was as if electricity had run through our body.

This is, what is it?

This is indeed Nounels. There is no mistake since the peculiar flavour of Nounels that we had drank was still definitely there.

However, this is!

This felt incredibly refreshing to drink. Going down the throat smoothly, unlike the Nounel's we've had up till now.

As if as soon as it went into your mouth it rushes down your throat and settles down into the stomach, it was that easy to drink.

Furthermore, the taste is wonderful.

It tastes like Nounels. It has the sweetness and refreshingness of the fruit. They burst out inside the mouth as if natural.

However, the bitterness and wild taste of Nounels wasn't there.

Originally we had to accept that as one of its tastes but when it has disappeared like this, the previous one yields an uncomfortable taste.

It might be easier to just say, basically, while the flavours of the fruit are still there, the bitter taste has gone.

And, you could imagine from the ice floating inside but, it has been cooled to the extreme.

Logically, cool drinks are luxuries which Royalty and nobles drink. If you were to hire a magician then you could drink it but, to hire a magician for that is absurd.

Basically, the highest grade of Nounels has been brought out in its optimal state.

It is delicious. It's delicious but...!

"This is impossible...! It's true that this is Nounels. And it should even be the highest grade one. But, what is it that's different to make this better than that!

The sweetness and the sourness are both just right, and there's no bitterness whatsoever...! The fragrance of the herbs escape through my nose and mouth, with a refreshing aftertaste!

Why!? Shuri, how is it that you are in possession of this type of Nounels!?"

Yes, this is indeed Nounels, *ja*. However, it is far better than the one I had brought here.

But I don't understand, why Shuri is in possession of a Nounels such as this.

"This is, the Nounels I had borrowed from you just now"

After saying so, what Shuri brought out was without a doubt the Nounels bottle that Wutin brought out just then.

The contents have lessened but, the amount it was less by was strange.

Compared to before, the amount it got reduced by was less.

Basically, it was a drink with Nounels inside mixed with another drink, *ja*.

However, we don't understand.

Even though we're tasting it with our tongue, we can't taste the ingredient at all.

"That's impossible! Just what did you add in order to be able to make a Nounels like this!? Did you add some kind of secret seasoning!?"

"No, Shuri didn't add anything of that sort"

The one who declined us was Ahrius.

Speaking of which, Ahrius had left the room together with Shuri.

Indeed. Maybe she also saw what Shuri did in that time.

However, he didn't do that?

If it doesn't have some sort of secret seasoning then, what exactly did he add to it?

"Even I couldn't believe it when I had first witnessed it. I couldn't even in my wildest dreams believe that by doing something like that, it would create a drink like this."

"Something like that? It's the ice huh! That means that the secret is inside this ice right!?"

We understood once we thought of that. Mixing the seasoning into this ice, making the flavour change as it gradually melts.

However, if that was how it is then once the ice had melted, the taste should change once again.

Is this something made for us to enjoy the change in those flavours? No, that isn't such

a small trick.

This taste, becomes better as the ice melts. Naturally, once it melts completely, there's a fear that the taste might be destroyed but, that hasn't happened just yet.

I don't understand. What exactly did he do to it?!

"No, this ice is, no matter how you look at it, just something to preserve the freshness of this drink.

What was added to this was, "

Ahrius coughs and then says.

"Just water"

...Ha? Water?

I doubted our ears. No, doubt doesn't even cover it. The words I heard just now, surely made our head doubt, at whether we had heard it correctly or whether you're insane.

Just water? The thing that was added to this is just water?

In panic we take another sip and, having it told to us, we finally realised it.

Indeed, it's watery.

It's because it's become watery than it doesn't feel like it's too concentrated, and precisely since it isn't concentrated that the deliciousness could be tasted.

"Regarding that, I'll explain it"

Indifferent to our shock, Shuri started talking.

"First, regarding that drink called Nounels, I do think it is very delicious. It's exactly as everyone drank and felt, and I just want to state that firm truth beforehand"

Shuri clears his throat.

“It was too strong for me. Nounels is extremely strong. If it is that concentration which is the delicacy then there is nothing wrong with that. After all this is merely my preference.

Which is why, I added water to it to dilute it.

I’m sure that adding water to dilute it gives bad impressions such as watering it down but, it is not limited to just that when it comes to cooking. Rather than adding flavour and cooking soups, there are also cases where merely adding water is more delicious, bringing out the flavour of the fish and broth.

Of course, should there be an error in this method such as when adding the water, it may become too diluted creating the danger of it not being edible nor even drinkable. However, that is only *should it go wrong*. If the amount, and creation was not incorrect then it becomes an easy method to make things this easy to drink, and eat.”

When Shuri finished his explanation, we seemed to be completely exhausted.

Exactly, it’s just like he says.

If it’s hard to eat, or drink then fix it, there’s a way to dilute it.

However, we were unable to realise that.

Why? It’s simple.

It was so 『simple』 that we didn’t realise.

A gourmet such as us, think of the delicious food and the appropriate reasons and technique involved.

That is something born from a chef’s diligent hard work and research, accumulated calculations and studies.

However, this Nounels is different.

It’s just too concentrated so dilute it. That’s all, *ja*.

“I don’t believe it... That with just water, it can bring out the taste to this extent...”

“It doesn’t bring out the taste, it removes the taste.

To dilute and lighten what is hard to drink or eat. That is the basics of cooking.

Delicious and easy to eat. That is after all, the principle of cooking”

We could only look bitter towards Shuri’s words.

Without using excessive expressions, simple, delicious and easy to eat. That is what we look for.

Which is exactly why, Shuri’s dishes are always original, somewhat nostalgic, delicious, and we continue eating it.

Shuri’s philosophy, he is always bearing that in mind, is what he is saying.

I see, that is the principle of Shuri’s cooking.

In other words, the heart...

“Ahahahaha!”

Suddenly Ganglabe-dono laughs out.

What is it? Exactly what is going on all of a sudden?

“Thanks Shuri, it’s a good hint”

Hint? Is he saying that Shuri gave him some kind of hint just now?

Is he saying that within this Nounels, Shuri had implanted some meaning?

“Princess Tebis, let’s return to our talk.

What I have to say is, regarding the matter of our future management of this territory. We want the acquisition of the former legal wife, Renha Sounity.”

What!? You're going to mention that now?

Out of the blue like that?

In addition, to just state what you want!

"Hou, I see. And? What will Ganglabe-dono bring out as an equivalent exchange, *noja*?"

"Naturally, it was all due to Princess Tebis who arrested for us the mastermind, Renha. In exchange for that gratitude and the criminal, we will provide to you a gift of an unquestionable value."

Hou, a gift huh.

It must be an item worth the handing over of the mastermind of the incident, the former legal wife of the feudal lord, Renha, and something appropriate to demonstrate their respect to royalty.

Naturally, this is also a problem to do with our dignity. And it can even result in showing the open-mindedness of Ganglabe-dono's heart.

Now then, what is it that Ganglabe-dono will bring out?

After thinking for a little bit, he says.

"First, about half a cart of vegetables such as daikon and carrots"

.....Ha?

"Next are the meats. This will also be about half a cartful"

What? What is he saying?

"After that, there will also be half a cartful of weapons and armours"

While we were in a shocked state of mind, Ganglabe-dono continues presenting ideas one by one.

Jewels and foods, weapons and armours, specialties, cloths, construction material.....

One by one, the items are being presented forth but, by the time they reached over 70 items, we couldn't help but speak out.

“Wait Ganglabe-dono! What do you mean by this!”

“What now? I'm confirming with you whether or not there's a problem with the goods”

“That isn't what we are talking about!”

“That? Ahh, maybe it's that there isn't enough variety?”

“Not that! There probably isn't any problem with the variety of goods!”

However, we had to say it.

This must be said.

“Rather than the variety, what are you thinking with such a small amount of goods?!”

It probably isn't a wrong amount for a reward to royalty. On the contrary, it could be said to be excessive.

However, the goods lined up right now, have an extravagantly small amount.

What is he thinking, giving roughly half a cart of vegetables? One box of jewels? Half a cart of armour?

Ganglabe-dono chuckles and says.

“No no, it's just that Sounity currently only has one type of goods and only gold or food exists in our inventory to pay as a reward.

I increase the variety, merely to make sure we do not disgrace ourselves”

-!

“Even if that’s the case, this is unfair don’t you think! Where do you get off merely giving half a cart of corn?! Once we return back to Newbyst, all of this will be worth nothing!”

“Yes, right. You’re probably right. However, we have also included other items as payment.

In any case, with what we have given you now, 『should you』 『sell all this』 『at an appropriate price』 『at an appropriate place』 then, what you will receive for having taken care of the mastermind of the revolt, the former legal wife of the feudal lord, Renha, will be more than sufficient and a more than ample value of items shall be handed over to you.”

This, this is what he was aiming for!

“To add to that, since even we are feeling awkward to give two or three carts for Princess Tebis’ gratitude gift, a member of royalty.”

Mu, we could do nothing but close our mouth shut.

We see, so that’s how you’re doing it.

Properly speaking, to pay using currency at this point is normal. However, the Sounity of current does not have that such financial power.

Therefore using a large range and a variety of jewels from every far and wide to try to deceive us, *ja*.

Of course, if we were to calculate the cost of all that with the cost of handing over Renha, it is more than enough, *ja*. From our memory, the worth of the items that Ganglabe-dono has provided right now does indeed match up to that.

In other words, so that we won’t be able to discern with one look any fatal insufficiencies, he’s taken out an amount of various superficial items from here and there, that shouldn’t lose to the value of Renha.

That is exactly, what Ganglabe-dono is aiming for, *ja*.

Regarding this strategy, if we had to say that there was something wrong about it then, it would be these two points, 『the number of carts being acceptable』 and 『that

there'll be no problem if we exchange it for its worth』 .

First, when it comes to the number of carts, there is actually a concern similar to that of reputation.

Once we receive our rewards and gratitude, yet return with merely one cart, it's possible the citizens will say unthinkable things. Things like 『You only got that much?』 .

If the number of carts are small then, it'll become a question of quality but, if there are a large number of carts then it becomes a question of quantity.

By increasing the number, even though the quality will continue decreasing, the value remains consistent, and serves as a way to compensate the nuance of reputation.

Basically, from outside it would appear there is no problem with the value.

And, if the value is exchanged then, there'll be no problems. This is the most crucial point about this strategy.

No matter how little the gifts are lessened, the overall value to be exchanged is not a disgraceful amount.

With this, should we complain in regards to this then we'll end up being taken as 『a greedy person who wants more than necessary』 .

Since there will be no problem once we exchange the value, if we pursue for more than this then, it'll just end up being a talk of adding in even more variety again.

I see, this is indeed a 『Diluted』 kind of strategy.

To dilute the concentrated damage into larger things, and as a result the damage is lessened.

However we are not able to accept it just like that.

Rather than saying there's not a problem, to merely accept it like this affects our honour.

“Ganglabe-dono, we thinks that what you have presented are extremely nice items”

“Is that so”

“However, I do not think we have to decide right now. Luckily, we have time. Shall we end things here for today?”

For the sake of earning just a little bit more profit to us, right now we must buy some time and fix up our strategy, we think.

To continue any further today should be unexpected even for Ganglabe-dono.

“That’s true. Let’s end things here today. There are too many things to have to include even for someone like me.

If it’s not too rude, since we have cleaned up, and renovated many of the rooms for you to stay at in this castle, what do you think about staying over there?”

“Hmm, let’s do that then. Wutin.”

“Yes, your highness. I shall, also, tell, the troops.”

“Also, Shuri”

“Yesss!?”

Shuri looked surprised.

Well, it’s probably because he didn’t think he would be called out to all of the sudden.

From here, he looks no different from the average joe.

“Your Nounels, was extremely delicious. Is it alright if we expect that for this evening’s meal as well?”

“Ah, of course”

Seeing Shuri scratch his head as he answers, we decided to wait with anticipation.

“Hmmm, we were outwitted today, *no*”

Having gone into the room that had been prepared for us, we sat down onto the bed and murmured.

There wasn't a single luxury quality furniture to be seen within the room but, perhaps it reflects Ganglabe-dono's personality to have only furniture which wouldn't interfere with daily life to be set up inside.

Most likely, due to the civil war, they were poor so they sold off all their luxury goods.

This sort of thinking, probably results from their line of work, drawing from their experience as a harsh mercenary corp.

It can be said to be much too frugal to let royalty live in.

"Princess"

As we were thinking that, Wutin came in.

Naturally, there were guards stationed outside the room as well but, the only subordinates who are able to come in and out of this room is pretty much only Wutin, *ja*.

"Inside, the room, outside. Spying equipment, devices, none. No, traps, either"

"You've done well"

"Also, the defense, has been, set up"

"Alright"

We also placed our trust on Wutin to do this sort of work. With Wutin saying that, it means we truly have no worries.

"However, today didn't go well"

"Yes. If this, continues and, we take offer, then there, may be a, problem"

"It's a problem we couldn't express it at that place and, there's an even more painful problem for us, *ja*"

Yes, if we were able to say out the problem then, it would be when we are leaving carrying all that, there is a possibility of the surrounding people retaliating against us saying, 『Even though you gathered all that random stuff, you still want money?』

We could image as royalty that, that is rather difficult to accept, *nou*.

What it means to be royalty is, rather than subduing your subordinates, your generals and officials, they should be loyal and your most trusted vassals. And above all hold financial power. Despite that, if we were to be taken as money grubbers, it would be an obstacle which interferes with our pride.

“Wutin. How do you think they will move?”

“From here on, they will extend, out the negotiation, supply inappropriate, gifts as gratitude, and such”

“Will they come at it like that we wonder...”

We have also thought of that but, it's THAT Ganglabe-dono, *ja*.

From Shuri's hint, he had realised a method to attack at us from an unbelievable angle.

We thought onwards with a bitter expression.

“From what we imagine, rather than to supply, it'll probably be to adjust”

“Adjust?”

“Wutin. Currently, Sounity has a certain thing, which is ungoverned land, *ja*”

This is especially so regarding the land such as mines and farm lands which cannot be developed due to a lack of people.

Indeed, Newbyst has the Holy Forest and the mines which we had won from the war with Yuyubi so, there aren't any problems when it comes to resources.

However, if they want to adjust their jobs to mining and farming the resources, then their population must increase. Naturally, if their population grows then, they would wish to further develop their soldiers, labour, tax, businesses, agriculture and

education and such.

Jobs can only increase, which is only if they have official positions.

Distributing all the excess talents, there'll definitely be a section which is corrupt. If there is a job which is far too easy then, from there a lazy person will be born and there is a possibility that the all things together related to that lazy person will rot.

Above all, it'll be bad if those without jobs are born. If the talents who end up like that gather into the backwaters, and establish a slum then, since there are a limited number of countermeasures you can take as a country, to be rid of the slum would probably take time and effort.

Before that, they need to provide jobs and roles. Those who will be mining at the mines or agriculture.

If the mining gets really active, that place will become a mining village where people and things gather. If land which is capable of being used for agriculture is developed then the production of food will increase. Creating an environment where one can work and eat, important rules will have to be set in place.

Right now, Sounity is right at the door of this problem. Father, his highness is also aware of this danger.

Which is why, as for us, rather than just receiving gifts, it would even be fine if we are able to just borrow their territory, as we had wanted this type of land.

That would be, satisfactory as a gift in terms of its value. It's the reason that we won't just accept the ever increasing variety of gifts.

“However, we were done in by Shuri”

Thinking back on it, we laugh bitterly.

Who would have thought that merely the act of mixing water would end up changing the flow of the room.

“That, weak, man?”

“Indeed. He was someone I had wanted, *ja*”

“Indeed, he’s wit, and imagination, is amazing. However, to be, obsessed about to, such an extent?”

“Yes, we are obsessed, *ja*. Don’t you know? The reason we are shaken by Mapo Tofu”

“That, it is delicious”

“Yes, because it is delicious. However, it is not merely just because of it’s deliciousness”

“Then? What sort of, reason, is there?”

“That is, because there was a new seasoning used in it”

“New?”

Yes, the seasoning used to make Mapo Tofu, Doubanjiang.

Regarding its appearance, it is a seasoning which does not exist on this continent.

He had created a completely new type of seasoning.

That, in regards to the cooking world, do you know how great of an accomplishment that is?

If there is a new seasoning then, new dishes can be made.

If new dishes can be made then, a never before seen distribution of food will be born.

If a distribution of food is born then, businesses will be developed.

It’s probably seems like a fantasy but, truthfully speaking, if a development of seasoning is possible then it’s not completely impossible.

And, Shuri still has more ideas and techniques.

Although he is an excellent chef, at the same time he is also a brilliant inventor.

Which is exactly why, we must have Shuri.

We had been looking to take advantage of the chance that right now, Ganglabe-dono still has not realised that possibility. But what we understood today is the reality that

we will be unable to have him.

Somehow, it's an unsalvageable topic.

"Speaking of which. If we can't have him then isn't it fine if he comes to us"

"Eh?"

"As far as it concerns Shuri, it doesn't seem like he even has a romantic partner anyway.

If he has a companion then, he would naturally come here, probably"

"To give him, a woman?"

"What a nasty way to say it... Well, if he has a bride in Newbyst then, he might spread his roots in Newbyst and come to live with us"

It might be a good idea.

The problem is, the woman, *ja*.

"Well, it would be fine if he married me"

"His highness, may, be angered"

"That's true. Then, Wutin. You go and ensnare him"

"Ueh!?"

Ueh, you say...

"In any case, you don't have a lover anyway right?"

"H-however"

"Well, we were half joking. We just thought that it would be nice if that happened"

Hmm, to look for a partner for him, huh.

Maybe we should think of something along those lines, *nou*.

Chapter 41

A Reckless Men's Gathering and Boiled Edamame



This is in, a corner of the castle.

Gathered here were those who held authority(?) in Sounity currently.

“No one followed you on the way here right?”

The one who said, making sure of that is the leader of Ganglabe’s Mercenary Corp, the current authority figure of Sounity, Ganglabe.

“Of course, su. I came here after killing off my presence, and even looked for other presences, su”

The one who was on guard about his surroundings is the leader of the mercenary corp’s archer unit, the spy expert Teg.

“This one too. I arrived here calling it training. My alibi is perfect”

The one who had been completely focused on creating an alibi is, the leader of the infantry unit as well as the strongest man in the mercenary corp, the sword expert Cougar.

“...Just in case, Ore-sama has finished enough work to take a break”

The one who worked overtime so that there would be no interferences tomorrow is, on the surface, the feudal lord of Sounity and behind the scenes, the lieutenant of Ganglabe’s military forces, Gingus Sounity.

“I, well uh, went to check? Check the ingredients”

The one who is on duty to check the soldier’s rations is, the former spy official, and now training to be a chef, Gann.

“Well, me too I guess?”

The one who was just following after what Gann said is the current cook in training, Adora.

“Everyone, thank you for waiting. This is the aforementioned item”

The one who was in charge of today’s preparations, was me, Shuri.

“Hey, Ore-sama can’t be behind this seaweed you know?”

“Ah! Gingus took advantage of us, su!”

“Traitor!”

“Please calm down everyone...”

Everyone raises their killing intent towards the calm looking Gingus.

“Today is a meeting for only us men, in other words, a men’s meeting”

Yes, today is a drinking party for just us men.

Hi, it’s Shuri.

In the afternoon, after we held the dispersal of the negotiation, Ganglabe-san quietly told me to gather up all our men, and hold a banquet just for us.

Why? I had thought but...

Well, since I had no reason to refuse, I had Gann-san and Adora-san get hold of the alcohol and snacks, which meant I was to cook for it.

“But a men’s meeting huh...”

“Aren’t the bunch of us a wreck...”

Ahhh, there’s a gloomy shadow on Teg-san and Gingus-san!?

“Ain’t that true, the only one of us here whose married or even has a woman is Ganglabe after all”

“Cougar-san. With that face, you’re pretty popular around the town and castle right?”

“Traitor, su!”

“Punishment to the traitor!”

“It’s a misunderstanding! A misunderstanding, I says!”

Let’s ignore those people over there. Teg-san and Gingus-san’s darkness probably can’t be rid off anyway.

“Stop making such a fuss inside such a cramped and dark room...”

Gann-san drinks down his alcohol with an astonished face.

Wait a sec, you. Weren't you an alcoholic?

"Ok, confiscated"

"Aaaah!? It's fine isn't it!? It's been a while since I've had some."

"Your body had been getting wrecked by alcohol right?"

I say as I take away his alcohol.

By the way, this was in a corner of the castle. Having reserved one of the guest rooms, this was a drinking party with only the men.

"You're not allowed to drink but... all you of guys as well, get a hold of your gloomy auras. Come on, let's just talk about something stupid and lighten the mood, ok?"

I put down the snacks I had prepared onto the floor, together with the alcohol, and then lowered down my waist with great effort to sit down.

In this world, it doesn't seem very friendly to sit on the ground but, this time the floor has been layered with carpet.

The bunch of us just aren't suited for sitting in chairs, drinking together with good manners.

"True. This time it's just us men, meeting to chat about some stupid things after all"

Adora-san drinks, then says.

"The reason for this, is to use this opportunity to deepen our friendships as men"

"Yes, yes, exactly Adora-san. Although me, Gann-san and Adora-san know each other because we're all cooks, there haven't been many chances for you guys to meet with the other commanders so, why not take this as a time to get to know each other.

Pretty much just, get along with each other as you talk about some stupid stuff”

“But well... I was completely crapped on by that swordsman over there...”

The gloomy aura has even gotten to Adora-san?!

Somehow, it feels like the atmosphere in this place is transforming into some sort of darkish object.

The unpopular duo Teg-san and Gingus-san.

The too popular for his own good, thus creating more enemies than he could handle, Cougar-san.

The nervous wreck from not being able to drink, Gann-san.

The one depressed about having to drink with the person he was done in by, Adora-san.

Huh? The source of this gloomy atmosphere, can't be helped you know?

“You guys, that's enough”

That's when, a solemn voice resounded.

“No matter if it's women, someone who defeated you in the past or the fact that you can't drink. It's not related to tonight”

That voice, as if it's the light which shines upon the path of darkness which had been clouded till now, sounded throughout the room.

“Right now, the absolute thing to do is to thank our comrades next to us. That's the most important thing, right”

Ahh, such words. It made everything they had been fighting about seem ridiculous and absurd.

“Come now, drink. Let us enjoy this moment”

Raising his cup, Ganglabe-san announced.

“But Ganglabe-san, you have both a wife, and authority, you’re completely satisfied aren’t you?”

“Our greatest enemy, su!”

“This damn traitor!”

“He’s so damn fulfilled, I’m so jealous, goddamn!”

“Who are you to say that!”

“S-stop, guys stop!”

Ahh, such ruthlessness. Ganglabe-san is being crushed by everyone.

I drink my alcohol and eat my snacks as I look on. Yup, it’s delicious. They turned out well.

Somehow, as if everyone had calmed down from kicking Ganglabe-san, they all sat down onto the floor and started drinking. Incidentally, I had prepared a non-alcoholic fruit juice for Gann-san. It wasn’t a Nounels though.

“Shuri... damn you...”

I feel like I heard the vengeful voice of Ganglabe-san but, it’s probably just my imagination.

“By the way, this side snack is pretty good hey, su”

Teg-san eats the snacks I prepared as he drinks the alcohol.

“It’s Edamame right? I used to eat this a lot in bars, su”

“Seems like it. But, the one here tastes better”

I receive positive feedback from Teg-san and Cougar-san. Good, good.

What I had prepared was Edamame. Boiled Edamame.

It’s the standard snack to go along with alcohol.

“Yea. It’s because I was particular about it, from my choice of Edamame to the way it was boiled.”

“If it was at a normal bar then, it’ll just be boiled in large volumes and then taken out, that’s all”

“I had thought that that was normal too”

Gann-san and Adora-san both pop open the beans, takes them out and throws them into their mouth.

“The point to selecting the Edamame is based on how packed together the beans are and the freshness of the pick.

And when boiling, there should be 4% Edamame compared to water... And then you boil it once there’s 96% water and 4% salt.

The other preparations would be to slightly cut off the pointed tip connected to the stalk of the Edamame. By doing this the water circulation improves and it gets properly flavoured by the salt.”

“I see... so that’s why it tastes like this”

Even Ganglabe-san who had come back to life took up a bean and ate it.

“This goes well with alcohol huh, Ganglabe”

“Ahh, it truly does. Even Edamame can change like this depending on the skill of the

person making it huh.”

“Even though that’s the best thing to go with alcohol, I can’t even drink any...”

There seems to be some sort of gloomy aura reviving onto Gann-san but, let’s ignore that. I will get infected by a negative wave by getting too involved with that gloomy aura.

“Now then, the snacks are good but should we start talking about some fun topics?”

“Right? Then let’s talk about women”

“Ganglabe-san. Did you want to revive the darkness? Despite being kicked so much?”

“No, not that. Stupid things like, the type of girls you like or, that girl was hot and such”

Ahh I see. That kinda stuff.

“Then let’s start from Ganglabe-san”

“Hey man, if I talk about other women here other than Ahrius, what are you gonna do if our bond as a married couple cracks?”

“Oh, then you’re saying that Ahrius-san is the best no matter what?”

“Hyuu~, aren’t you lovey dovey, su”

“As expected from the husband huh”

“Well, even from Ore-sama’s eyes Ahrius is a beauty..... Her chest is that though”

“Did you say something?”

“Nope”

Gingus-san turns away, avoiding his gaze and dodging the question but, everyone’s probably thinking of that except for Ganglabe-san.

I mean, even Teg-san is looking away slightly.

“Then Gingus. What about you?”

“O-Ore-sama?”

“True. I am interested in who Gingus likes, su”

“...Will you hear me out without laughing?”

Gingus-san’s face turns red.

Eh? Who is it?

“Ore-sama... likes Princess Tebis”

Ting. The atmosphere...

Time had, stopped.

“...I see”

“Ganglabe-san. Excuse me...”

“It’ll probably be safe if the marriage takes form as a way to form an alliance”

“I see, Ore-sama hadn’t been able to come up with that”

“IS THAT OK!?”

EHH!? That means Gingus-san is a lolic...

“Shuri... It’s normal even at 10 years of age to be married off for politics or alliances, su...”

.....

“Rather, I’m interested in what you were thinking”

“Stuff like corruption, no more like, indulgence and stuff”

“Our chef sure is a pervert”

“Alright, alright! I was wrong geez!”

Modern Japan’s way of thinking doesn’t work!

“Shuri... As you would expect, a 10 year old girl isn’t Ore-sama’s type.

What I do like is Princess Tebis’ wisdom, and cleverness”

“I’m sorry. I’m the corrupted one”

Ahh, now that you mention it, while Princess Tebis is like an imouto figure, she also holds a quality such that she would be the older one in the relationship, which may mean that she is irresistible to those who like them younger.

I see... Age is not the only indicator when it comes to the type of female one likes.

“Then, next be Teg-san”

“Eh?! How come it’s my turn all of a sudden!?”

“Well, you know, somehow”

It’s sorta fun, controlling this conversation flow.

“Well, alright, my type, su huh...

My type might be Ekress-san”

“Are you looking to sell an-all out fight with me”

“Wait Gann, su. This is talking about our types, the one I actually-”

“Are you saying my little sister isn’t attractive?!”

“You’re saying Ore-sama’s big sister ain’t attractive?!”

“Wai, please do something about these two berserk siscon brothers, su”

Ahhh, Teg-san is also pitiful.

“Gann-san, Gingus-san. Right now we’re talking about the type of girls we like. Ekress-san is attractive but, what Teg-san is saying here is that the girls that he likes are those boyish girls. Girls who have the lively spirit like that of a young boy yet also hold a faint sense of femininity.”

“Y-yes, su! It’s exactly what Shuri is saying, su!”

Teg-san agreed with my interpretation like that was exactly what he had said.

I see, so Teg-san likes them boyish.

If it was said in Modern Japanese terms then, it probably means that he likes girls with a short cut, the girls who belong in the track and field club, with healthily tanned skin. And, after seeing their kouhai doing high jump training all the way until the light of sunset shines down upon the track, puts a cool drink against them from behind, encouraging them energetically with something like “Work hard kouhai!”. He probably likes that feeling.

“Oh what, how strange of you Teg”

“*grumble* What about you, su, Cougar”

“I? I is... yes. The one next to Princess Tebis, Wutin was it? That’s my type”

“Cougar, you have choices don’t you!”

“Despite stealing away our chances of meeting other people, you’ll just straight up fall in love with the cool beauty right in front of our eyes, huh?!”

“You know~, I’ve said it so many times but, this is about the type of girl we like. Adora-san, Gann-san, please don’t unleash your darkness, ok~”

If I don’t warn them...

The darkness will end up spreading after all.

“And, what part of Wutin-san did you fall for Cougar-san?”

“Let’s see. Did you realise? That girl, is a member of their secret intelligence”

“What?”

The one who reacted to that was Ganglabe-san.

Even though his face was red from the alcohol, it looked serious.

“Is that true Cougar?”

“No doubt about it. The way she behaves, as well as the way Princess Tebis deals with her. She was in a stance where if she felt the slightest amount of danger coming from Shuri, she would shift her centre of gravity and attack”

“Ehhh!? If I did something inappropriate I could’ve been killed?!”

“Even if you weren’t killed, you would probably be restrained. It’s because Princess Tebis stopped her that nothing had happened though”

“Cougar. Even I couldn’t grasp that presence, su”

“Teg, what your eyes discern are enemy scouts. What I can feel are warriors or in a vague sense... 『those I have to kill』 .

But Wutin, even if she had a presence like that of someone I have to kill, she was good at hiding it. Just a little bit, if you didn’t really concentrate then you wouldn’t have realised so I had thought that she was a spy at first. And, it’s why that person trusted her”

“So that’s how it was... Speaking of which, I’ve also heard of something”

Gann-san places his hand on his jaw as he said.

“You see, I’ve also been a spy once and I’ve heard a few things in regards to the spies of other countries.

Even amidst all that, not much information came in when it came to the spies who work for Princess Tebis. But it was known that, that a young lady is always by Princess Tebis’ side as a contact.

So that was Wutin huh”

“Indeed... There needs to be some vigilance regarding this”

With a single sentence from Ganglabe-san, everyone nodded with a serious expression.

Hmm, I’m interrupting this serious conversation but... Oh well.

“So, what do you mean when you’re saying Wutin-san is your type?”

“Hn? Ahh that, yes. If it’s her then I could probably leave my back to her?”

“Oi, Cougar. Stop talking with your battle-filled head, su”

“Well there’s more than that too. If I can make her fall for me, her with her unsociable expressions and cold atmosphere then, doesn’t she seem like someone who would act spoiled only in front of me? I find that irresistible”

Ahhh, I think I understand.

The Modern Japanese’ Moe, as they say, the thing they call Kuudere.

The class rep who’s always expressionless but, when the two of you are going home, she would slightly lean in towards you. She would turn her head away but when you take a peek at her, she would be smiling with a blush. Having her expression seen, she would turn expressionless again from the embarrassment but, she wouldn’t stop leaning in towards you.

I wonder what this feeling is? Some sort of uncontrollable frustration towards Cougar-san who seems capable of accomplishing such a thing.

“I see, Cougar-san likes Kuuderes”

“Hah? Kuudere?”

“They would normally be calm but only in front of you, their expressions won’t change but, they would act spoiled as if they were like a cat. Think of it like that.”

“Yea exactly, that type of girl!”

Huh, listening up to this point, the type of girls that everyone likes is pretty, sinful...

No, is it the Moe factor?

“What about you? Adora-san? Gann-san?”

“The me of right now ain’t got no time for such thoughts. There’s a ton to learn as a chef in training. It’s pretty tough changing from a soldier to a chef yea?”

“Me too. Well, I’ll think ‘bout it after I see my lil’ bro and sis have their moment”

So these two are the type to put work first.

There are females even amongst our chefs so I was thinking maybe they could get hitched. Because as one would expect, being single your entire life could very likely be at the top of the ranking of the worst things to happen in this world.

“So, the main question at hand”

“The main topic, su”

“Main topic indeed”

“It’s the biggest question”

“Biggest question huh”

“It certainly has become the biggest question”

Hn? Everyone’s focusing their gaze on me?

“Now then, up till now, Shuri has been in control of the conversational flow but.....”

“Yea, su. Somehow it felt like I was made to go along with the natural flow of things but.

What type of girls do you like, su, Shuri?”

“Me?”

Me huh... now that it's come to me, it sure is troubling.

But everyone's looking so keen.

"Up until now it's been a year and a half of cooking earnestly on the brink of life or death so, I've had no time to look for someone or have the free time to fall in love."

"True. But, don't you think it better should you find one soon?"

Cougar-san looks concerned. Although he is still drinking the alcohol.

"I mean, Shuri, you've already passed 20 years old right?"

"Yea. It didn't feel like it's been that long already but, I'm 21. After a few more months I'll be 22."

"Hah!? You mean to say you're older than Ore-sama?!"

"You look pretty young... I totally thought that you were around 14"

Gingus-san and Gann-san were surprised but... I don't look that young.

Speaking of which, Japanese people who go overseas almost always seem to surprise people with their ages. It seems we look young, or childish no matter what.

"Well, Shuri you're already at such an age. Shouldn't you be getting married, and starting a family?"

"Hmmm..."

When you say it like that but.....

Once I get married and start a family, I feel like I wouldn't be able to return to my former world anymore.

Although I had set my heart to continue being the cook of this mercenary corp... I'm lost when it comes to this problem.

There's a large possibility that I can't return anyway...

"Shuri, did you have any family or lovers on the continent outside of the Outer Circular World, su?"

Teg-san asked with a worried looking face.

"No, that's..."

"What are you talking about Teg? What is that about?"

"Ganglabe, Shuri is a person from the outside, su. He came from outside of this continent, su"

"What!?"

Everyone is shocked by this for some reason. Eh? What?

"I see, so he was a person from the outside. It's no wonder I thought he had so many strange dishes and knowledge.

Shuri, is that why you don't want to fall in love?"

Ganglabe-san also asks with a half interested, half worried look.

"No, I don't have a girlfriend. I'm a man who hasn't had a girlfriend for as long as I've lived after all."

"Then, family?"

"Hmm... I don't even know if my family is still alive right now"

I had thought about this around a year ago but, the flow of time in this world and the flow of time on Earth might not necessarily be the same.

I don't even know if it's only been a few minutes over there or, maybe even several centuries.

Despite that, I've given up on the thought of going back.

What's smouldering inside me even now, are just my lingering thoughts and regrets.

"In any case, I've decided to live here"

"I see... it's been tough on you too"

The toughest time was, Ganglabe-san, the time when you had me put my life on the line to make that Cream Stew.

"Which means that it'd be better if you made a lover now, right.

If you've decided to live here then, someone who can protect your back, someone you want to protect, someone who'll be family.

Anyway, leave behind something that says you've lived.

People like us don't always leave the battlefield... You know"

Heavy. Cougar's words were heavy.

It's true... I wonder what would happen if I died just like this.

What Cougar-san just said, some sort of evidence stating that I had lived.

I... don't have that.

The dishes that I've left behind, that was from my culture, they're not mine.

I see.....

"You're right. I think I'll make it, whether it's something that indicates I had a life, or a lover"

"That's good"

Cougar-san chuckles and eats the Edamame.

“So, let me ask you but, what about Riru?”

Eh?

“Cougar-san. Riru-san is”

“No, rather than lovers or family, I don’t think that girl can live without your hamburg steak”

“I can’t refute that”

Hmmmm, now that he mentions it, Riru-san is also quite the beauty huh.

Her appearance at least.

Her other qualities are...

“Shuri, you’re looking quite bitter there, su”

“I mean, from what I’ve seen of her up till now, her spending of beef is the greatest enemy to a cook who’s trying his best you know?”

“And?”

“That’s all”

Where did you learn how to continue conversations like that Teg-san.

“But... I do think that Riru-san is cute”

That’s the truth after all.

“Ekress-san is also a beauty but... she’s too beautiful, to the point that it’s hard to approach her.

Just by having someone as beautiful as her so close to me makes me fear that out of somewhere, some scary Onii-sans are going to come and lead me to some back alley

somewhere”

“I don’t know whether your imagination is reliable or wimpy”

“Princess Tebis is... beautiful but her age is...”

“It’s not like we’re telling you to fall in love right now. What about after a few years?”

“Hmmm”

If you’re going to say it like that then, I don’t even know what to say.....

“Well just wait, we’ll find her”

“That’s fine.

Alright, let’s start the next fun topic. I’ve got some cards here. Let’s gamble!!”

“”””OOHHHHH!!”””””

“Ah sorry, I’m not playing”

I refuse and started to get up.

“Why not?”

“Gann-san. Actually I’ve been asked by Ahrius-san to get her some evening snacks”

“What?”

“It seems they’re having a girl’s night. She asked me to get them some snacks if I was free”

“You serious?”

Yes, actually when Ganglabe-san made plans to have a men’s meeting, Ahrius-san had also planned a ladies meeting.

At that time, I had already given the boiled Edamame to Ahrius-san.

“Then, I’ll be leaving for a bit”

I leave the room and walked towards the kitchen.

What I was thinking in that time was, the previous matter about making a girlfriend.

“A girlfriend huh... hmmm, who would I even...”

Now then, what should I do.....

Chapter 42

An Off-topic Women's Gathering and Fried Chicken



Hello, Ahrius here.

It seems that Ganglabe and the rest are having some sort of men's meeting, so I decided to start up a women's meeting as well.

Dinner had finished as well, so I went to borrow one of the guest rooms.

"I was raised as a man so, maybe it'll be fine if I was over there as well?"

"No. Since you're biologically a woman, you belong to this side."

I wash away Ekress' grumblings then ate a snack.

It's fine to start a women's meeting but, drinking alcohol isn't pleasant so I decided it be Amazake instead.

Those gathered here now are Riru, Ekress and me. The three of us.

The three of us drinking Amazake, sitting under the glow of the night... it's pretty lonely. It may be different if there were another one or two people though...

"Buuuut, Shuri is so cold-hearted as well. To actually go to something as filthy as an all men's meeting."

"No, Shuri is a man so, him being here itself would be weird."

"I think that it's a whole lot more fun here than over there though~"

Ekress drinks her Amazake as she complains.

Well, I also know what she's trying to say.

Most men wait upon women, and are mostly satisfied by drinking happily and boasting about themselves.

However, Shuri is, how should I say it..... If normal men are carnivorous then Shuri is a herbivore. That sort of image.

Rather than waiting on women, he feels like he is the type who would rather go crazy with his boys or girls who he has a good relationship with.

"Shuri is, *chew chew*. Like he's treating cooking *chomp* as his lover"

Riru's words, said as she devours nothing but the Edamame, are truly words which represent Shuri I believe. The Shuri who was devoting himself to nothing but cooking is, at this point, not an exaggeration even if someone said that cooking is his lifetime companion.

But... that is seriously a little.....

"That's true but Riru-chan. That's no good."

"*Chew*?"

"For a skilled person like Shuri, even if he takes up disciples, it'll be a problem if he doesn't pass down his techniques to his children. Something he wouldn't even pass

down to his disciples, he probably has a secret technique which he would only have a single child inherit.

Considering his succession of that technique and the preservation of his bloodline, it's best to welcome a wife"

Ekress' way of thinking comes forth from engaging in internal affairs as the assistant of the Feudal Lord, in other words something similar to a manager. However, that is an idea good enough to take a shot at.

Shuri's technique, his skill in cooking is more outstanding than the minds of two or three people combined.

That technique, knowledge, experience is something I definitely want the next generation to take over, I believe.

"Basically, if we don't increase the amount of people who can make Hamburg then, Riru-chan's share will disappear you know?"

"That cannot happen."

On the brink of accepting with just that, Riru is engulfed in Hamburg and..... I could see that within Riru's eyes, there was a brilliance like that of madness.

"However, let's see. Over there, they're probably talking about some stupid stories to liven themselves up as well. What should we talk about?"

"Stupid things guys say... So like, what type of girl they like? Then, let's talk about the type of guys we like, right?"

"Then let's start from Ahrius."

Riru.....

"You know this but, do you really think that I would talk about any man other than Ganglabe?"

"Oooh, you sure said it Ahrius. Aren't you just madly in love with your husband?"

Ekress makes fun of me but, it's the truth at any rate.

"I've only ever looked at Ganglabe since our younger days after all. We've gotten married and, although children are for another occasion, I'm happy"

"Ooohhhh, if you say it so bluntly, I'm the one who's embarrassed..."

Fufu, but I'm happy. Since I can be with Ganglabe.

"Then, what about you, Ekress? Who is your type?"

"I'm decided on Shuri-kun. No one else even comes into my eye."

Ekress too, puffs out her chest and puts it out to the air.

"Then, why Shuri? I'll just say it but, I don't think that it's been that long since you two met though."

"Well, you see. It's because Shuri-kun was able to overturn my fate."

Your fate?

"As you know, I was fated to live as a man. As the next generation Feudal Lord, I had discord with Gingus, and had to hide my relationship with Gann onii-san. I may have had to live in that strainful castle forever.

I wouldn't have been able to have a wife, and having said that, being in a romantic relationship with a man would be a dream within a dream. I was doomed to have a lonely single life."

"I couldn't imagine that."

"Riru-chan, sometimes as a Feudal Lord, in order to deceive my surroundings, I had to deceive myself, I had to pretend and tough it out.

But, the storm that Shuri-kun brought out, blew away all of my fences and restraints.

I no longer have to pretend to be tough, and I can also fall in love with a man. I don't have to stubbornly act as the Feudal Lord either”

“Your authority was snatched away by Ganglabe but, you don't resent him?”

“Nope. None of us hate him for it, I think. Not me, not Gingus, not Gann onii-san.

Gingus realised by himself through this mess that he was unsuitable to be Feudal Lord and so he's thankful that he was allowed to do what he was best at. Gann onii-san in the first place had no right of heir so, he doesn't want to be Feudal Lord either. I don't want to either.

Which is why, we are thankful to let Ganglabe take over the obligations we don't need.

And, the gratitude we have towards Shuri-kun who gave us that chance is simply something we cannot ever repay. Besides, his face and personality are also to my liking~”

Ekress looked very cheerful, chuckling lightly as she drank her Amakaze.

Ganglabe had been trying to grant his wish of gaining a country.

But Ekress did not desire a country even if she had it.

That is most likely, due to their motives being different.

The difference of having something from the beginning and, never having it.

Most likely, if the situation had been different then, Ekress probably could've become a brave heroine who would've expended no efforts for her country. She's just that talented a person.

The ones who were wrong was, most definitely her parents.

If her parents, the former Feudal Lord and proper wife had raised her correctly then, Ekress would probably have turned out different from how she is right now.

Well, now that it's come down to this, nothing will be changed no matter what is said.

The past is the past. At this point, even if it was said that it would've been better to have done this or that, the past cannot be changed.

“Is that so.....”

However, hearing Ekress' story an impatience was born within myself.

That is completely, and without a doubt Shuri' problem.

That, dense about female relationships, Shuri, has never heard about the conversation that had popped out just now.

If we think about this past year and a bit, and the frantic desperateness that came from him risking his life to survive on the battlefield, I do understand that he would have no such time to make a lover.

However, we can't have that even if that's how it is.

If Shuri was to marry someone outside of the mercenary corp then, there's a chance that he might leave the corp.

Or if he was to be together with someone from another country then, there's also a possibility of danger that he may be taken away by them.

As for me, if all possible then, I think I would want him to be with Riru.

She acts like this and, I can't imagine anyone who could understand her, apart from Shuri.

Above all, if Riru who has already had her stomach seized by Shuri was to separate with Shuri then, there may even come a day where she goes crazy.

I have also discussed this with Ganglabe but, it seems in his personal opinion, he can't stand the thought of Shuri being together with Ekress.

I hear him say that it's due to the fact he wouldn't know if Ekress married Shuri to use him in political purposes or to be protected from love.

In addition to that, to suddenly appear out of nowhere and snatch away their friend just rubs him the wrong way.

However, Ekress is already infatuated with Shuri. There's no mistaking this anymore.

With this I can't support Ganglabe's point of view anymore.

In any case, if it's the current Ekress then she should be able to protect Shuri.

However, if it's like that then Riru would seem so pitiful.....

“By the way, who do you like Riru-chan?”

Apart from my thoughts on the matter, Ekress asked Riru what can even be said to be the main question.

The one question I wanted to know the most was tossed out, without any timing, out of nowhere, without a damn.

“I’m interested. Riru-chan, let alone that kind of talk, I haven’t even heard of you being close to anyone special at all.

It’s because of that, that I don’t feel you’re intimate with anyone but Shuri. And you treat Teg-san and Cougar-san the same way you would deal with a childhood friend, which is why there is no way you would leave them.”

“HmMMMMM”

Riru swallows down an Edamame, and thought about it for a while.

Oh my, this is unexpected.

To be honest, I never thought that Riru would concern herself in this sort of topic.

Only holding an interest in Hamburg steak and Magical Engineering, always keeping to an inexpressive expression, that young girl who would never change her attitude nor expressions while biting into mountain heaps full of Hamburg, is worrying herself over love affairs.

This may bring forth some changes.

“Riru, doesn’t understand things like that.”

At the end of her thorough thinking, the words that finally came out were those...

“But something’s weird. When Ekress said that she liked Shuri, Riru felt strange.”

Eh?

“No matter who Shuri marries, Riru thought that he would always make Riru Hamburg so, Riru never thought about it.

But, suddenly Riru had a thought.

Shuri marrying someone else. If that happens then, how will Shuri come in contact with Riru?

Riru thought that it would just be like always, he would cook Hamburg with that smile on his face.

But... thinking that his most radiant smile won't ever be directed at Riru.

When Riru thinks that, Riru feels somewhat strange”

T-this..... There's hope?

“Riru-chan, isn't that anxious feeling of yours just what you feel because you think he'll definitely make especially amazing Hamburgs for his wife and won't give any to you?”

“So that's what it is.”

EHHHHHH!?

Riru got convinced from just Ekress' words!?

Hah!? Ekress' eyes are smiling...!

They're expressing, 『Awakening to your romantic feelings? If you realise them, I'll be troubled. My number of rivals will increase』!!

No good. At this rate Riru will end up mistaking her feelings of love for her appetite!

“Riru. Shuri is a nice so, I don't think he would cook something special for just one person.

However, Shuri is just one person. Even if Shuri has a lot of dishes, the person known as Shuri is just one person.

“Would it be alright if Shuri was taken away?”

“That’s...”

Riru started thinking again with a ‘Hmmm’.

Within Ekress’ eyes lit up a hint of anger.

Saying, 『Don’t get in my way』 .

Hmph, Ekress is quite the tactician.

If Riru is able to understand her feeling of 『love』 by herself, despite only being a hint of it then, I think *that* feeling would definitely flare up unstoppably. That’s what both Ganglabe and I want to see.

However, should that feeling flare up then, the one most troubled would be Ekress.

Right now Ekress is striving desperately to become Shuri’s number one female friend position. She’s definitely in the midst of constructing the righteous road of becoming friends, then lovers, and from lovers to spouse.

However, that’s something which can be achieved because there are only a few rivals who are currently aiming for Shuri at the present moment.

Sometimes although the righteous path exists, it leads the path to have a greater detour than a wicked one.

On the righteous path, in exchange for making the least amount of enemies, a large amount of effort is required in order to reach the finishing point.

However, once a rival called Riru appears then, she must proceed onto the wicked path.

And, once Shuri notices her method known as the wicked path, I truly wonder what he would think?

Since Shuri is quite shameless, the chance of it ending up with him forgiving her is probably the highest.

That’s if you put aside the point of her jumping the gun on his comrades though.

Despite that, Ekress is scared of having an enemy appearing by her side.

Given that even I want Riru to be happy, I plan to completely support Riru's side to this.

However, given that I've also become closer with Ekress, this is as big a burden as being stuck between a rock and a hard place.

"Riru. Think about it please. When it comes to you, who do you have the most fun with?"

"Hm? Hmmmm....."

"When it comes to having the most fun with, it might be your best friend I suppose."

Kuh, Ekress' follow up question is too cunning, I can't counter her.

As I was thinking of that, the door opened up.

"That conversation, allow Us to participate in it!"

What in the, Princess Tebis. All of a sudden Princess Tebis appeared.

Eh? Why?

"Riru's heart, Ekress' love and even Ahrius' meddling, We understand it all!

In addition to that, We have something to say:"

Princess Tebis sits next to us and said as she picks up an Edamame.

"Shuri is ours, *noja*. We shall allow for him being in the mercenary corp, and even making a lover. We are tolerant towards that, *ja*. We are royalty after all.

BUT! No matter how much he gives his body and position to the mercenary corp, his heart alone is something We will have! Fuahahahaha!"

"Ku, you damn homewrecker!"

What is all this? Suddenly coming here, what is Princess Tebis starting to say all of the sudden?

Also I don't really understand what Ekress said in reply. What's a homewrecker?

Above all else, why had today's party been exposed to Princess Tebis?

"Fuahahaha! Oh Ekress, that skill of yours to remove obstacles from your position as a friend is splendid however, that is an ancient way of battle after all, before the times of magic.

Now is the era of magic and magic engineering! It's alright as long as we can prepare wings capable of surpassing over Shuri's heart!"

?

As for me, I don't know what Princess Tebis' true motives are.

More than that, I don't know what this little girl is saying at all.

Her ears act all panicky but, her sense of hearing doesn't seem the type to worsen even if her ears were full of trash.

"Kuh, damn Princess Tebis..."

As for Ekress, she looked regretful as if she understood what was being said.

I rubbed at my eyes but even if they were fogging up, it didn't mean that I should be seeing hallucinations.

Somehow, it seems that there is something that my eye's cannot see that these two can.

"*Chew chew*"

And Riru was still doing nothing but indulging in Edamame, and continuing to drain the Amazake.

Why is it I wonder, this room's atmosphere had started to stray off course all of the sudden.

"...This Edamame, is really, truly delicious"

I don't mind even if you say that I'm escaping reality.

If I could leave this atmosphere then, I probably wouldn't hesitate to pay any kind of sacrifice.

"Good evening... Oh, Princess? Why are you here?"

The door opened, as if to completely destroy the entire flow of the conversation.

The one who appeared was the source of the storm, Shuri.

Eh? Why is he here?

"Ahh, there's just enough people. I've brought along more snacks like you asked but... I thought that I had made too much.

I made some fried chicken. This time I've prepared two different kinds, one finished with a crunchy coat and another which is moist. Please everyone, do enjoy."

Saying so, Shuri placed the large dish that he had brought along, down in front of us.

What was there, was a dish of meat wrapped in a light brown layer of skin.

From that, which had been made to bite size portions, you could hear the bubbling sounds of oil bursting open.

The smell was amazing too. The fragrance of the meat and the aroma of the oil travels around to every corner of the room, attacking our stomachs which should've been full with Edamame.

However, the two varieties look different.

One was deep-fried with a light brown colour, having crispy and crunchy skin. This one seemed to have a chewy texture, capable of stimulating the appetite.

The other one was deep-fried with a dark brown colour and had a moist coating. It had a simpleness to it which made it look like it was easy to bite into.

Both dishes had been stacked high. The steam raises up, and the fragrance spirals upward towards the top of the plate.

“Hey Shuri. Is this something where the chicken has been deep-fried?”

Chicken. When I heard that, my brows wrinkled slightly.

Speaking of chicken, they all come from hens who can no longer lay eggs or roosters who can't lay eggs. Normally hard and chewy, not a very popular food.

Even the beef that Shuri brought out was originally not a very popular food item. Normally it's something that's sold when cows who can no longer be milked are *disassembled* but when Shuri cooks it, it becomes surprisingly soft and becomes so delicious that, I didn't mind it.

However, chicken. Chicken is the devil's gate.

If this had been duck or pigeon then I may still have been interested in eating it. Those wild birds, despite having a strange wild taste, still have delicious meat after all.

Chicken meat... when I think of that my appetite just...

“Yes. However I've tried to make it so it's soft and delicious.

This one with the crunchy skin was fried in a pan full of oil and, this one here with the soft skin was made with the prototype machine I had asked Riru-san to make called a 'Microwave'.

It turns into this after coating it and heating it inside the microwave.”

“You made that sort of new machine?”

“...I mean, since Riru-san said that melty cheese is justice... I had her make something which makes it easy to do that...”

...Riru.

Well, since Shuri held such confidence in his words, I disregarded my doubts and went

to pick one up.

The one I chose was the fried chicken with the crunchy skin. This one here had a thin layer of skin which came together solidly, and even felt hard when I picked it up.

How... strange.

I wonder what's the best way to describe this? Even though I should've been touching a hard layer of skin, I somehow know that it's soft.

Poking at where the extremely thin layers were, a tender bounce came back as the response.

"Hm, it's soft indeed. The chicken that Royalty can bring out are, the ones from birds which have been grown in order to be eaten in the first place... However Shuri, is this that sort of bird?"

"No, it's just a normal one"

"Is there some kind of a trick to this, *no?*"

"Yes. It's been soaked in water."

...Hah?

Continuing from the afternoon, once again, it's the existence of water. Princess Tebis frowns at the mention of this as well.

"Water? Are you saying that if it's soaked in water it will become this soft and plump, *ja?*"

"Yes. Maybe for around 10 minutes.

This is what will happen should you soak the chicken in water before flouring the outside of the skin.

Also, I think a lot of the chicken breast may be dried out but, if that's also soaked in water then it becomes moist and the taste will be different once it's cooked."

I can't believe it. That such a method exists.

Princess Tebis too, changed her frown to a smile almost as if she was awe, looking at the fried chicken.

But it's water huh.

The techniques of cooking, in some disciplines, require as deep and far-reached knowledge as that of Magic Engineering, I suspect.

Using anything lying down near you and finding a hint of a new technique within that.

Shuri has had an extraordinarily many times when he was able to draw out that new technique.

Truly, I wonder who Shuri is?

"Then I shall take my leave here."

"Wait just one second Shuri."

Just about to leave the room, Shuri was called to a stop by Princess Tebis.

Shuri who was just about to place his hand on the doorknob, turns around with a puzzled expression.

"What is it Princess?"

"Coming all the way here, you should eat some too."

"Eh? But Ganglabe-san and the rest are..."

"You don't need to worry about them right? Those fellows, what are they doing right about now, *noja*?"

"They're gambling with cards."

"Alright, then leave them be."

Princess Tebis stated her opinion resolutely.

Shuri too, as if he couldn't refute this, sat down next to Princess Tebis. On another note, he was also next to me.

Ekress is looking over here with a bloodcurdling smile, but let's ignore that.

It's infectious, dealing with that smile, riddled with such a gloomy aura.

"I wonder if that's alright... Don't you feel that right about now Gingus-san is being strangled by Teg-san's han... trick?"

Shuri, that concern of yours hits the spot. Although Teg looks like that, he's good at lyin... tricks.

"Let them be. I can only think that the excitements of men are poison for Shuri."

"Um, I am a man."

"Shuri-kun, you are but, compared to Ganglabe and the others, you're lacking as a man. It's better to just stay here, have fun and talk!"

"...Is that how I am?"

There's a slight aura of darkness around Shuri...!

"Then let's start eating. Riru started eating already, at some point, *nou*"

Eh?

Looking at Riru, she's stuffing one fried chicken to the next into her mouth.

Ehhhhhhh? Isn't it hot?

"So soft, so juicy. So good."

My throat rumbles at Riru's mumblings.

That person, that Riru, is actually saying it's delicious. That Riru, who doesn't care about anything other than Hamburg steak is actually saying it's delicious.

I also placed a piece of fried chicken into my mouth.

This is amazing.

The first bite of contact was the crunchy skin. This is brought forth by a superb mouthfeel, it feels almost as if I'm eating something light and easy.

However, the umami of the oil is too strong to call this light and easy.

This is most likely, I daresay, due to it being cooked with oil. The skin had absorbed the oil, and had been controlled so that it wasn't too strong.

And then when I continue through to bite into the meat, this time it's the tender and juicy chicken which greets me.

Indeed, this is a softness you wouldn't think of scrap chicken. And now the satisfaction as it occupies the inside of my mouth.

Above all else, it seems as if this chicken had been seasoned beforehand and, as I chew, the umami taste of what I had chewed, both the chicken and seasoning melded together.

By biting the occasional soft meat along with its hard skin, the sensation of both crunchiness and tenderness, as if pleasing my jaw is born.

Ahh, this is delicious.

I swallow the fried chicken, and despite being immersed in its lingering aftertaste, I took a shot of Amazake.

The remainder of the oil left behind inside my mouth washes down smoothly, and I prepared myself for the sake of the next fried chicken.

The next one I taste is, the fried chicken made with a strong, light brown colour.

This is completely different from the crunchy one I just had, the skin would sink just by touching it with my finger, and from there oil would trickle out.

Putting it into my mouth, this, once again, has a different texture.

First, I thought that from the oil that trickled down, a reasonable amount of oil had been used but, it doesn't feel like that.

This one doesn't have a crunchy mouthfeel. However, it's amazingly tender and soft, and even without using that much power in my jaw, can be bitten right through.

And what I understood was, the oil that trickled out was not due to it being cooked

with oil but from the natural fat of the meat itself.

Despite that, the oil is extraordinarily light, making it easy to eat.

This had also been seasoned beforehand then cooked probably, so just the meat by itself is very delicious.

A tender, chewy, moist fried chicken, so easy to bite it seems like it breaks off.

This is also, extremely delicious.

If I had to pick then, the softer one is more my type.

The crunchy one also tastes good but, that one suits more for lunchtimes when you want bite into something solid and fill up your appetite, and I feel that the moist one is more for a light snack.

But this is all just my conjecture.

“*Chew chew*”

I don't know if she understood that or not but, Riru is eating as if she's mixing both of them in her mouth.

She's definitely within the group who as long as it's delicious, want to eat as much as they can.

I understand that but, I also want her to enjoy the taste of the food...

“Hmm, both the moist and crunchy ones are good. Though if We had to say, the crunchy one is more for meals and, the moist one might be better for a light snack.

However this is just Our opinion. There may be those who feel the opposite to Us and, those who find one irresistible and absolutely love it more than the other, *nou*”

Oh my, Princess Tebis is, one by one, courteously placing them into her mouth, thoroughly chewing it to ascertain the taste, and enjoying it's bouncy texture.

As expected of the Gourmet Princess, being aware of how to enjoy meals properly.

The taste, the texture, the smell. Immersing herself in it all.

That posture of hers is somewhat divine... Being an expert in the field, to truly

understand its beauty.

“...”

“Oh? Ekress?”

Suddenly noticing her, I hadn't noticed any words nor actions coming from Ekress.

And as I look to her...

She's sneakily placing an equal amount of both fried chickens into a container that she had somehow hiddenly brought in and, trying to take it home?

“Ekress? What are you...?”

“...Fu”

? This person just laughed all of the sudden...?

“Surely, I am in contact with fate.”

“Yes?”

“I wonder if I was born for the sake of meeting this dish?”

I gained enlightenment seeing her expression, drifting in melancholy.

This isn't good, does this mean, that we've got another “Junkie” in our midst now?

“Ekress...”

“You don't need to say anything Ahrius. I know. I know what you have to say.

That I'm acting strange right now. But I can't stop!

I CAN'T STOP!!!!”

For a period of time, she was just hugging that container filled with *that* and crying as if it was something precious.

.....

“Isn’t it better to just eat it?”

“When... would be the next time I can eat this?”

“Wouldn’t it be fine if you just asked me to make some?”

“Really, Shuri?”

Ekress’ moist, captivating pupils stared right through to Shuri.

Most likely, it held enough destructive power to make a normal man to fall right in love with her, with just one gaze.

“Of course, if I was asked then I could add it to the menu”

“YAY!” (Yattaa!)

However, it seems it’s effects were lacking when it came to Shuri.

As expected from a dense oaf. It won’t shake him.

“Hey Shuri, I want *that* as well you know...”

It’s a mystery as to why she thought to interrupt but, Princess Tebis said as she exposes her sex appeal, snuggling up next to Shuri.

If he held an interest in *that* then, it was a bewitching sex appeal which despite her being so young, would promptly lead him into a wicked path.

“Mapo Tofu...? I’ll make some tomorrow. Along with the fried chicken as a set meal.”

“ALRIGHT!!” (Oshaaa!!)

From her victory shout and seeing her punching a fist upwards, there wasn’t the slightest sign of the sexiness from before. There was not a hint of the tidy and trim

that comes with being a woman.

A tomboy. Yes, she was a tomboy.

Princess Tebis... Are you really fine with that?

“Shall we have the Boiled Tofu the day after Ahrius-san?”

“Eh, yes, since, since you say it like that then we can't not eat it, right?!”

I stuttered a little bit but, there's going to be Boiled Tofu the day after huh? Another thing to look forward to.

“.....”

And then comes Riru's silent pressure!

“..”

“Now then, it's about time I leave.”

However, it's not very effective on the dense Shuri!

“Shuri, what about the Hamburg steak?”

“Eh? There isn't enough beef so there won't be any right now...”

It's super effective on Riru!

Riru's body falls down with a refreshing smile...

She's on the verge of death, it's a fatal injury.

“However, it may end up being favouritism but, I'll guarantee only your share, Riru-san.”

“AS EXPECTED FROM SHURI!!!!!”

That was truly, as fast as lightning.

Riru nimbly gets to her feet, and embraced Shuri who didn't seem too happy.

Oooh, this is a good development!

“Fried chicken... Fried chicken...”

Luckily Ekress was still being captivated by the fried chicken.

You can do it Riru! Keep at it!

“Like I'll allow this, I want the opposite!”

Princess Tebis hugs him from the other side.

Oooohh, what a chaotic view...

Looking at this without context then, he has a flower in both arms. Hugging two beautiful women, this probably isn't bad for Shuri either.

Go for it Riru, keep pushing forth!

“Um, it's hot.”

Taking it at his own pace..... huh.

“However, I've never had a girlfriend or lover before so... um... I'm kinda embarrassed so, if you could just let go of me...”

“I'm going to ignore all that, and come from the FRONT!!”

Ahh! Ekress revives and hugged Shuri from the front!

Hah! There was no fried chicken left on the plate before I knew it...!

“Uh, um, to actually be hugged, by three people, it’s sorta, um...”

Oh? There’s a change to that dense Shuri?

“T-the stimulus is... Kyuh”

Thud! Shuri collapsed!

Eh?! What happened?!

“...It seems that the stimulation from being hugged by three girls was just too stimulating for him, *jana*. He fainted.”

Princess Tebis pats away the dust from her clothes and stood up.

“However, We’ve witnessed something good. Shuri is usually aloof as the wind but, he’s weak to the stimulation of women, *jano*.”

You could even say that this is something We could take advantage of.”

Princess Tebis grinned, and left the room just like that.

“...What should we do?”

We, the ones left behind, looked to each other with a troubled face.

Seriously, what do we do.

In the end, we called for Teg to take Shuri back.

Sigh... It would be nice if Princess Tebis doesn’t start up anything strange tomorrow...

Chapter 43

A Present and Gyoza (Part 1)



“Shuri-kun. Let’s go somewhere.”

This was, in the morning.

Ekress-san, who had come for her breakfast, said to me as I was setting up the tables.

“You’re probably working all the time right? Why don’t you let your hair down and have some fun?”

Hmm, have some fun, you say?

Hello, Shuri here.

I decided to go shopping since I was invited by Ekress-san.

Besides, I've been working so much as of late that I had wanted to take a day off soon anyway.

Actually, I don't have any day offs.

"How about it Shuri-kun?"

"Should be fine. I will take you up on that offer."

"Yay. Just as well, there's something I wanted to buy."

"Hoh. Something, you want to buy, you say."

I wonder if I'm going to end up being the baggage holder...

"Ah, I didn't mean to say that you're going as the baggage holder. It's lonely going by myself so I thought, maybe I should take someone with me."

"If that's the case then, did you invite Gann-san? If Gann-san says he wants a break, then I can give him permission for that."

"No I can't, this time I'm buying something for Gann-niisan."

"...Ah, I see."

So it's a present.

"So you see?"

"I understand."

“Then, I’ll go get ready so, let’s meet up in an hour!”

“Ah, wai-!”

Before I could stop her, Ekress-san left the dining hall.

Hmmm, this is a problem. Can I finish all my work in an hour?

Well, if it comes to it, I guess I can just leave the work to everyone else.

“Hmm, Oh It’s Shuri.”

The next to enter the dining hall was, Princess Tebis.

Following next to her was the maid... the bodyguard.

Princess Tebis looked slightly sleepy, but as expected of royalty, she came here neatly dressed and groomed.

The only problem is... you’re royalty right? Is it okay for you to eat here?

“For some reason Ekress left here looking quite pleased, what’s going on?”

“After this, she says she’s going to shop in the city.”

“HmMMM.”

“I’m going as well.”

“HUH!?”

Princess Tebis looked confused.

“Are you saying you’re going with Ekress?”

“Yes.”

“Then what’ll happen to lunch?”

“I’m thinking of leaving it to Gann-san and others maybe.”

Hearing that Princess Tebis holds up her chin as if she was thinking of something.

Even her thinking posture, looked *fitting* for her somehow.

It's as you would expect from an extremely talented person who, on a daily basis thinks about the royal matters in order to break down problems.

"We've got it. We'll come back in the evening as well. After all, We are looking forward to Shuri's cooking."

"Ummm, alright. Incidentally, when it's mealtime, will your attendants..."

"If you are here then, Our subordinate's will help out, *ja*. It'll probably be a good experience for them."

"No that's not what I'm saying. I mean, when you're royalty, isn't there like, a few things you ought to be careful with?"

Princess Tebis smiled bitterly.

"That's for certain. However, We wish to trust you. A poison test... will probably have to be taken though."

Obviously. Princess Tebis is a country's princess after all.

Which means that if that wasn't done then, there would be problems.

"In that case, in order to reciprocate that trust, shall I come back for dinner and make something delicious?"

"Yes, please do."

Princess Tebis smiled as she says so.

Hmmm, that smile made her look just like the young girl that she was.

However! Even though she's a young girl, she probably has many responsibilities as a member of royalty as well as various troubles coming her way.

I'm not sure just how much my cooking can help this person, but I sure want to try my best for her.

Well then, now that I've finished dividing down the work, I decided to leave for the city immediately.

In the outfit I'm always in, with the Magically Engineered Stove that I had already gotten used to carrying, I hurried over to Ekress-san.

It would've been fine if we left together, but for some reason Ekress-san said "When it comes to this, the best thing to do isn't to leave together, but to meet up together somewhere!", so we decided to leave separately.

It's so hard to understand a woman's heart.

As I was thinking that, I rushed over to our meeting spot, all the way to the center plaza's water fountain.

Dodging through the traffic, going past the shops and houses, I arrived at the water fountain that she said was our meeting spot.

There were a lot of people here at the water fountain. From normal townspeople to merchants, guards etc.

Oh by the way, the current guards maintaining the order of Sounity and defending us from the surrounding countries are formed by everyone in Ganglabe's Mercenary Corp, as well as the soldiers who accepted Ganglabe's rule.

The people who couldn't accept that all quit.

Just like all those cooks who couldn't accept me being the Head chef and went on strike.

Seriously, what's with these people. Saying that they "Had worked generation after generation for the Sounity clan" over and over again. Ekress-san and the others are still alive, so it just means that their main concern is that they can't accept their head chef changing.

I can sympathise with them, but to completely toss away their jobs is just...

“Shuri-kun?”

As I thought about some meaningless matters, a voice called out to me from the side.

Maybe it was because I had been thinking of some other things after coming to the water fountain, but I hadn't yet checked my surroundings.

Looking towards where the voice came from, stood Ekress-san...

“Hm? What's wrong?”

“Ah, no, nothing's wrong.”

Sunlight reflected off the droplets of water splashing out from the fountain, sparkling. With that being in the background, it looked like Ekress-san was sparkling as well.

Right now, Ekress-san looked just like a girl.

A tunic reaching all the way to her ankles, a skirt..... suitable of someone from a lord's family, and although you couldn't say that it's terrific, it was a quality outfit.

In addition, she was even wearing a headband and earrings, so it was totally clothes ready for a date.

Eh? Why is she wearing such a perfect battle outfit?

Hah! Unless...!

“Ekress-san... could it be... today's shopping is actually...”

“Eh? Um, well you see...”

When I tried asking Ekress-san, her face turned red.

This is, without a doubt...

“I’m going to take a guess seeing those nice clothes... After this, are you going to give the present that you bought to the person you like?”

“...What?”

“Saying that you’re going to buy a present for Gann-san and asking me, a man’s opinion, for a present recommendation, you’re probably going to go meet up with the person you like after we separate..... I see, in that case, BUFUN!?”

As I told her my deductions, Ekress-san’s punch struck into my collarbone.

The damage received to the bone that is said to be the weakest bone in the human body, almost made me faint. Wh-why?

“Shuri-kun. I know that you are a kind as well as a dense oaf, but don’t you think that those words are lacking too much delicacy?”

“So-soryi...”

I, I see... If I had revealed such a love affair in such a public location, then...

No wonder she’s angry... I did something bad.

However, it wasn’t a great follow up to the stabbing pain running through my collarbone. It hurts so much, my collarbone.

“T-then, what’s with that outfit?”

Let’s ask for the sake of it. If I were to misunderstand once again, my collarbone may be in danger of breaking.

“Shuri-kun, I wonder... do you want to take another hit?”

“EH?! Ah, I’m sorry! You’re right! If you’re going shopping with a man then, as a woman, you can’t let your guard down, right!”

“Yes, that’ll do.”

Ekress-san lowered her raised fist. I'm so glad I'm not gonna be crushed... If I got hit by that, my shoulder would probably shatter...

"That's right. You see, when a girl goes out with a boy, they have to dress up perfectly."

Ehhh, is that how it is? I should remember this. I don't know when I would make use of this information though.

Ekress-san spins, then says.

"So? How's my coordination?"

"I think it looks great on you. You're more feminine than usual."

"That isn't exactly the best of praises, but whatever. I'll give that a pass, although just barely."

Wha-what did I do wrong...

In the end, I, who had concluded that a woman's heart is like an autumn's sky, went shopping with Ekress-san.

Our destination, west from the water fountain.

Several different shops lined up just like I thought, selling many well-made tools.

I wanted to ask her, 'What did we come here for?', but I stopped myself. Even someone like me knew that when you go shopping with a woman, you really shouldn't question what they're buying.

Besides, she had already said it. 『A present for Gann-san』 .

There's no need to kill the happy mood of the person next to me all of a sudden by asking her about this and that.

As we walk down a paved pathway, I took another look at the city of Sounity.

As a town built around the castle, it was fairly neat and you could see both houses and shops, neatly lined up.

It seems the only thing not uniform was the materials used to build the buildings; either stone or wood.

“Ekress-san, this city is quite beautiful, don’t you agree?”

“You think? Maybe it’s ‘cause I’m used to the scene so I can see all its flaws.

The materials used for the buildings are all old, the deterioration on public property stands out, and I want to start paving the roads with stone, and I have to watch out because if I don’t manage those businessmen properly then they’ll start establishing shops by their own means, and the public safety is still quite chaotic right now so I want to recruit guards, and if we get better then the neighbour-”

“Stop! Stop desu, I won’t understand even if you keep talking.”

What a mess. If I’m careless, this person would just start filling her head with work..... Maybe she just can’t get rid of her old habits!?

She had said that she used to cross-dress and finish her domestic management work at a mad pace, so maybe she just couldn’t get rid of that habit of hers no matter what.

I should... treat her better.

“Look, Ekress-san. How about we forget about work, and just enjoy ourselves today? How about it?”

“Eh? Ah, ok, thank you. Shuri-kun.”

Ekress-san notices my concern and responded with a smile.

Yes, this is good. This is how it should be. I’ll make her forget about work and let her have fun today.

She’s worked hard up till now after all.

“Somehow, you seem gentle, Shuri-kun.”

“I’m always gentle. I’m... kind.”

“Shuri-kun, you’re not thinking about something bad, are you? What are you scheming at with that shifty smile of yours?”

She found out!!?

However, I won’t be stupid forever. Even I know how to flip this situation around.

“It’s nothing. So, Ekress-san, which way do you want to go? You said that you want to buy a present for Gann-san, but what do you have in mind?”

Here, we unleash the sealed question!

“Ah, un. I was wondering that it was probably about time that Gann-niisan would also need that. So I’m buying that for him. It would be good if there’s something good there.”

YES! A fantastic topic changer! I’ve grown!

And let’s end the ridiculous act here and resume being Ekress-san’s escort.

There’s no point continuing this strange tension anymore.

I followed behind Ekress-san.

The streets gradually changed and a shop that, if I had to say, belonged to a craftsman, came into view.

Basically, the items placed at the front of the store ranged from foods to handicrafts, and the place looked like it had been turned into a studio. I wonder if I could call it that?

Without a thought, I looked around restlessly.

I’m a cook as well, and there were some items of interest to me. Such as a pan.

However, most of the tools I use are made by Riru-san for me, and while I’m the one who cleans them, I leave it Riru-san to repair them. It’s quick and easiest to leave it in the hands of the person who made it.

Of course, the job of sharpening the knives and washing the tools, is left up to me.

“Ekress-san, this is...?”

“Oh that’s right, this area is the district where artisans set up shop. You could even think of it as our lifeline in our territory.”

“Lifeline?”

“Shuri-kun. It might be hard for you, someone who has the skill, yet no ambition, to understand, but people with skill, no matter whose territory they’re in, or what country they’re in, conceal themselves and are cut off from the world.

At any rate, many of their skills such as architecture, smithing and crafting, cannot be bought with money. Skilled artisans are treated well by all countries.

Skills and technique, are just that valuable a thing for any country.

Shuri-kun, that’s why Princess Tebis, having seen your skill with cooking, wants you.”

S-so that’s how it was... I finally feel like I slightly understand just what sort of position I hold.

I just wanted to show off the normal dishes of Earth, show off my normal skills. However, thinking from this world’s standards, they were abnormal.

Change with the abnormal, and then gain utility. That’s why, Princess Tebis is that devoted to me...

No, isn’t that just, her wanting to eat Mapo Tofu?

Seeing my worried figure, Ekress-san smiled wryly.

“But it’ll be fine. Ganglabe and the others, Gann-niisan, Gingus and even me. We’ve all decided to not put you in harm’s way anymore.”

“I-is that so.”

It made me relieved, having Ekress-san say that.

After all, Ganglabe and the others came here to protect me. And I repay that with my

cooking.

It would be nice if that relationship of ours continues to stay the same.

“So, here we are.”

The place that Ekress-san took me was a shop that looked like a blacksmith.

A shelf was placed at the front of the shop, and blades were lined up. Further inside, you could see a light coming off metal heating up, and hear a high pitch sound from metal getting hit.

This is probably... a Blades store.

Looking closely at the goods, there were quite a few kitchen knives lined up next to each other.

This is my first time, since coming to this world, that I've seen such strangely shaped kitchen knives.

“Ekress-san, what kind of...”

“Well, it's definitely a store that deals with blades, but strictly speaking, it's a rogue blacksmith. I guess I could say he... processes metal and makes something of them.

Look, you see that shop with that large metal symbol modelled after it right? That's also made by this kind of shop.”

Ahh, I see it now. So it's a shop that uses metal to make miscellaneous useful goods or handicrafts.

Ekress-san said looking excited.

“While it's true that in this day and age, if you give the request to a Magic Engineer, they may be able to make it for you immediately, however, there are only a few people with that capability. You either do it yourself, with your own talents. Or make a request with money.

However, blacksmiths won't lose out either. Without relying on Magical Engineering,

they trust their own skill, knowledge and experience to create a variety of items. It's brilliant."

"Ekress-san, do you like things like this?"

"Yes. I would often go take a look at construction sites during our territory's development, and go visit the studios of the blacksmiths that we commission jobs to.

Seeing the beauty in the work of skilled individuals, specialised in their one field, fills me with joy."

I see, so that's why Ekress-san has been glowing since a while back.

It certainly is true however, and it goes without saying that the works of those with top class abilities will be finished, but even the process itself is beautiful and produces no waste.

Furthermore, since they would naturally use the best method to create it, it really leaves you in disbelief.

"Ekress-san, it's fine to be excited, but can you please answer the real question here?"

"Ahh, alright. Sorry, when it comes to these sort of places, I really can't get sick of them."

It's not like I don't understand your feelings, but please restrain yourself.

Looking at Ekress-san's happy face, I'm also relieved, but for me, this was something I want finished as quick as possible.

If you ask me to stand next to Ekress-san all day just looking at some metals... that would be a little troubling.

"Excuse me. Are you free?"

Ekress-san called out to the lady working out front. It seems like this woman was similar to a receptionist.

The woman looks over here and then looked surprised.

“E-Ekress-sama!?”

“Hi, is the order I placed finished?”

“Ah, yes. Of course. I apologise for the mess.”

“I don’t mind. Maybe I should’ve sent someone here first.”

“No, we’re deeply grateful for Ekress-sama’s patronage. There isn’t a shop in town that would refuse Ekress-sama’s visit.”

“I’m happy you’ll say that. I’m already half-retired though.”

“No, I would like it if Ekress-sama would, as always, come by the city. Even if the lord changes, our feelings of gratefulness towards Ekress-sama will not. It is because you are here, that we stay.”

The woman glances towards my direction as she said that.

Ahh... she probably thinks that we usurped the territory.

Even though it was Gingus-san who caused all the problems, and it was Ekress-san who wasn’t able to stop that, and the one who was in charge of monitoring that situation, the previous Feudal Lord, who had let it slipped by.

By that point, it didn’t matter who stood on top, they would’ve been greatly looked down upon by their neighbouring countries...

Which is why Ekress-san stepped down as the next heir. Which is why Gingus-san, being unsuited for domestic affairs, is now focusing more on the army. Which is why, the previous Feudal Lord took responsibility and retired.

However, the townspeople feel different.

No matter what was wrong, Ekress-san and her family had been toiling themselves for the territory.

Which is why it can’t be helped that Ganglabe-san, who looked like he stole the position out of nowhere, might be hated.

Perhaps, Ganglabe-san accepted all of that and still took responsibility for the seat of the lord.

Being seen as a throne usurper, there’s a possibility that people would flock to hate us

because of what happened.

If it was Ganglabe-san then, he might be able to conduct himself much better...

“Well, let’s not talk about that right now. Rather than that, I just asked but did you finish what I requested of you?”

“Yes. It’s right over here.”

The woman takes out something wrapped in silk from inside the shop and handed it over to Ekress-san.

Ekress-san takes it, opens the silk and took out what was within.

She took out... a knife.

Even my eyes could tell that it was a good knife. I’ve seen knives made by people other than Riru-san, but none of them could compare with what I got from Riru-san or Princess Tebis, and so I’ve never used them before.

However, the knife in Ekress-san’s hand not only sparkled, but the splendid blade edge, was even installed into a plain wooden grip.

“Thank you. Please send the bill to the castle as always. We’ll send the commission afterwards.”

“Yes, thank you very much. We look forward to your next visit.”

The woman bends her waist and bowed.

“Thanks. Shuri-kun, let’s go.”

Quickly replying to that, Ekress-san walked out. I chase after her in a panic.

“That’s what you came for? A knife?”

Hearing my question, Ekress-san rewraps the knife inside the silk cloth as she answered.

“Yes. It’s for Gann-oniisan.”

“ ... ”

“Gann-oniisan has found a new way of life. A path called cooking. Gingus has also reflected on his past foolish self, and has decided to redeem himself. I’ve decided to... live the way I want.

This is the least I could give to my brother, who has always followed me... No, supported me, until now. My gratitude and encouragement for his life to be.”

Ekress-san smiles.

So that’s what it was... In order to give Gann-san his very own knife...

Hm? Wait, so that means.

“So, you going out on a date with someone was just, my misunderstanding...?”

“You’re still bringing that up?!”

I ate another hit... To my collarbone. Ouch!

“I’m starting to get hungry, should we head back now?”

Ekress-san says, after yelling at me.

I’m already feeling groggy at this point, so I couldn’t do anything but follow her. My collarbone is going to break. You can only take so many hits.

“Yes. I understand.”

Following after Ekress-san, we walk towards the castle.

However, a present for Gann-san huh... And to give such a splendid knife...

In all honesty I had imagined a scene where, after he had finished his training, I would be the one to give him a knife... But it might be better for it to be a present from a family member.

Although, with this to encourage him, it would be good if Gann-san could focus wholeheartedly on his training.

No I mean, he's giving it his best shot even now.

However, the person holding that present in their hands, Ekress-san, felt somewhat strange.

I wonder what's wrong...?

"Is something the matter, Ekress-san? You're don't seem to look too well."

"Ahh... so you noticed, of course you would."

Ekress-san smiled like she was embarrassed.

"It's nothing, I was just thinking about the words I just said. Gann-niisan is working hard towards his new path and Gingus is working hard to redeem himself yet, I'm just living the way I want to.

I was just thinking, if this is alright."

That's...

"Ekress-san."

"No, it's fine. Shuri-kun, it's really ok. This is a problem I brought upon myself after all.

If I look at it from a different point of view, all three of us are walking down the path that we had wished for. It's strange right? That I'm the only one to be troubled by this."

"That's..."

Wrong, is what I want to say, but it won't come out.

Ekress-san is still, up till now, struggling in a different way to Gann-san and Gingus-san.

Faking her gender, doing things she didn't want to, and now she has been released from that curse.

In my opinion, I think that right now, although Ekress-san has been released from her shackles, her curse, she's lost her way seeing all the countless possibilities lying in front of her.

If this continues, it might be good for her to finish off half of what she has been doing until now.

If it comes down to it, it might be good for her to find someone she likes, and get married.

She even be able to find something new, by starting down a different path.

However, I cannot be the one to tell her that.

No matter how close I think we might be, there are still some things I cannot intrude myself in.

If it was just some normal worries then, I can help, but if you're talking about her future then...

No, wait? Haven't I already heavily involved myself in a bunch of people's future?

...To keep to myself and not say anything is, already absurd.

"Ekress-san."

Thinking about thinking how I should tell her, we had already returned back to the entrance of the castle before I opened my mouth.

During the way here, although Ekress-san would be smiling, she would be giving off a gloomy atmosphere somehow.

I didn't want such a gloomy atmosphere around Ekress-san.

“Do you plan to hand over that knife to Gann-san right now?”

“Eh? No... I was thinking of giving it to him after he finished work...”

“In that case, please wait in the dining hall for me.”

I run off, heading for the kitchen.

In the kitchen, Gann-san was preparing for dinner.

“Oh, you’re back. How was shopping with Ekress?”

Gann-san asks with a smile on his face.

“Yes. Well, I don’t think it went terribly.”

“I see, in that case I’m relieved.”

“However, I have something like a question for Ekress-san.”

“A question?”

Gann dubiously questions.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s a problem concerning her future. In order to solve that problem,”

I lightly tap on Gann-san’s shoulder and said.

“I need both you, and Gingus-san’s help.”

“So that’s why you called Ore-sama over. And? What do want from Ore-sama?”

We called Gingus-san over in a hurry. This was a job for everybody.

Explaining the situation, Gingus-san gladly accepted my task.

Even though the two of them fought that much, I’m relieved because it seems they were able to reconcile.

“I have something to say to Ekress-san, but in order to tell her, we have to do this quickly.”

What I had prepared for this was, a lot of skin and filling.

Yes, dumpling skin and filling, desu.

There weren’t any supermarkets or anything here, so I had to make the dumpling skin from scratch. Kneading, stretching, cutting and shaping the flour into a circular shape.

As for the filling, I’ve prepared three different ones.

The first is normal, bok choy and pork.

More specifically, bok choy, pork, garlic, and ginger.

Cutting the bok choy into tiny pieces then draining the water. The garlic and ginger were also finely cut.

And then we mix in the pork, and salt and pepper, which had been kneaded until it’s become sticky.

After that, we add wine, nutmeg etc. to season it up.

The second type is chives.

It’s made from grounding beef, pork, chives and leek.

After finely chopping the chives and leek, we add wine, salt and pepper, garlic, and ginger to the meat, chives and leek, and then knead it until it becomes sticky.

Lastly, we have the vegetable dumpling. We won't add any meat, just vegetables.

The ingredients will just be bok choy and cabbage.

Eh? You're wondering if it'll still taste good without any meat? Tsk, tsk, tsk, even if you have no money, have no meat, as long as you're creative with the filling of the dumpling, it can be as delicious as you like.

We finely cut the vegetables and then get rid of the moisture. Afterwards we add some salt and drain the rest of the water.

Then we add a soup made from ginger, garlic and chicken stock.

Truthfully speaking, it would be better to add soy sauce and sesame oil here as well, but this'll have to do since there isn't any.

That's all three.

I laid all three out in front of Gingus-san and Gann-san.

"Now then, let's start wrapping."

"Huh?"

"What did you say?"

"I said, let's wrap these up like this."

Leading by example, I take some of the filling with the bok choy and pork, and made a shape, folding in the dumpling wrapper.

To make this shape requires practice, lots of practice. In any case, it won't work if we don't make enough.

I made around five of them, as an example.

"Now then, please copy me."

“Understood.”

“Wait a second. I understand why Gann would do that, but why do I have to do it? I won’t be able to make them very well.”

Gann-san understood and accepted it, but Gingus-san hesitated.

What is he scared of at this point?

“Ore-sama won’t be able to make great looking dumplings like you.”

“It’s fine.”

Hearing Gingus-san’s troubled tone, I reply with a smile.

“Even if they don’t look great, the whole point is to try your best.”

“Is that so... Well, if this will help Ekress then, let’s give it a shot.”

With that, Gingus-san grabs the dumpling wrapper and filling, and started to learn by watching me.

Gann-san began in just the same way.

Seeing the two of them, I called out to the others.

“Come now everybody. Watch me, and make some dumplings please. I’ve made plenty of dumpling skin and filling. Tonight’s main dish will be dumplings. Since we need to make a lot, please work hard.”

‘Understood’ they answered and my subordinates started to work as well.

Yet, here stood a conflicted person.

“Um, uh, us... as well?”

That's right, they were the helpers that Princess Tebis had been talking about this morning.

It seems that these people have been helping out since lunch time.

According to Gann-san, 'In my eyes, they're thugs who came here to steal our techniques.'

Well, since it would help me if they helped out, he tolerated it.

Although, Ekress-san did say in the afternoon about how important techniques, and skills were.

"Yes. This dumpling... This dish is a type of "Dimsim". It's a dish where you use the skin, and wrap the filling, made with your ingredients, inside.

If you were to put this to use then, you could make various types of skin and filling and thus, Princess Tebis' repertoire would also increase."

"I see."

"It's just that, for these type of dishes, if you don't make a lot of them, you can't present them very nicely. Since you've come all this way, please practice making some here."

"That's a given. Our only purpose here is to learn after all.

Come on, let's start!"

""Yes""

It seems that the helpers are also trying their best to make dumplings. They really are helpful.

At any rate, we have to make enough for the people who are working in the castle as well!

There really is a lot to make... I would never be able to do it on my own. Even if I made the skin and the filling, the most important part, the amount, is not something a single person can accomplish.

Fuhaha, let's make some dumplings!

“Now then, should I cook it?”

I had quickly made tens of dumplings, and prepared to cook them.

Using both a Magically Engineered Stove and a Frying pan, I added heat to them.

After heating the pan, I drip some oil in and fry the dumplings.

Is what I would normally do, but since the others would also be eating this time, I'll make it in a slightly more normal way.

First I'll boil some water.

Then, I heat up the pan, and pour some oil in, temporarily stop the heat and then lay down the dumplings.

After that, I pour the boiling water into the pan, turn up the heat again and put on the lid.

To steam before frying. Using a medium fire instead of a strong one. These may be the key here.

And then, once the water's about gone, I lift up the lid to check.

Once it's all gone, lower the heat, pour a little bit of oil on the rim of the pan and let it slowly enter in from the sides of the dumplings.

Afterwards, you tilt the pan to spread the oil around, and patiently wait until it's finished.

Once it's finished, you plate it, and it's done.

“...Ah, that's the one Ore-sama made.”

Gingus-san looked on from the side and said, seeing the finished dumplings.

“It looks a bit off...”

“And this one’s mine.”

Once again from his side, Gann-san contributed.

“At the very least, my ones look better than Gingus’.”

“Hah, Ore-sama’s ones are properly folded at the ends just like Shuri’s. Your’s Gann? They’re probably just squeezed closed.”

“The hell you say? It looks more or less right.”

“Nope, it’s a failure if it doesn’t have these folded parts.”

“.....Pff.”

“.....It looks so weird.”

Gann-san and Gingus-san laughed together.

“Ore-sama’s ones look better.”

“Hmph, then I’ll just quickly make a whole lot more.”

It made me relieved, seeing the two of them talking as they make their dumplings.

“And, is this the so called, dumplings?”

Since we made enough to give to Ekress-san, Gingus-san, Gann-san and I all went to Ekress-san’s room.

Ekress-san had changed in her room, and was looking at us suspiciously, but perhaps seeing the food we were holding, agreed to let us in.

This time, Gann-san and Gingus-san asked me, and so we all came together.

“Here you go, please try some.”

“Hmmm, I’m not quite sure what you’re thinking, but there’s no harm in trying some I suppose.”

I handed a fork over to Ekress-san and a plate which had the dumplings on it.

Ekress-san quickly brought the dumpling to her mouth, took a few bites and said.

“Yeah... It’s good.”

And then, she brought another one to her mouth, this time looking shocked.

“Hm? This one’s different... It has a very strong chive’s smell... And this one doesn’t taste like it has any meat...”

Eating one dumpling after another, she smiled.

“I see. Although they all look the same, they’re different on the inside.

This is... how should I say this... rather normal. But it’s delicious. This one is bok choy and meat, right? I never thought that these two could taste so well together.

This one... Has a very strong chives taste. It smells great... Makes me happy when I eat it.

This last one... doesn’t have meat, right? However, even if it doesn’t have meat, it’s still a dumpling. Since it doesn’t have the fat from the meat, it’s quite refreshing to eat.”

Ekress-san nods,

“Yes, there’s a lot of variation and it’s very delicious. Every one of them are top-quality.”

And said that.

Hearing that, I pointed to two dumplings and said.

“This one, was made by Gann-san.”

“This ugly looking one?”

“And this one was made by Gingus-san.”

“Hm, this one looks better, but the amount of filling inside kept changing.”

Ekress-san smiled wryly.

“However, they were all delicious right?”

“Yes, absolutely. Leaving the shape of it alone, it seems this was made just for me as well.”

“...Ekress-san. This is what I think.”

Ekress-san is currently lost in her own path. I wonder if this should be allowed to go on.

“Dumplings are delicious, no matter what shape it looks like, or what filling it has. There are plenty of variations above this after all.

Gann-san found the path to cooking.

Gingus-san chose to walk forth a path of redemption.

No matter what shape is has, how they tread their life, that way of living is beautiful because it has a belief.

Ekress-san. I know that you're lost, and don't know what path to tread.”

Thinking and struggling. Getting lost, and stopping.

In that case.

“Why don't you open up your heart for your precious family members, these two, who have already chosen their path to walk, and talk about your problems.”

Isn't it alright to rely on your family, who will support you?

"Until now, maybe the three of you have always done your best by yourself. Because of that, you have a habit of always doing things by yourself. You've gotten used to having to somehow rely on yourself.

I don't think you have to worry over things by yourself anymore.

Why don't the three of you gather together like this, and speak your hearts out?"

In the end, even if the three of them are close, I don't think they've ever met each other halfway before.

Right until recently, rather than rely on each other, they would order each other. Rather than trust each other, they would hate each other.

And now, even if it's just a little bit, they're losing their bond as well as their will to speak with each other.

Even if they don't fight, they don't look at each other.

That's not good.

Once they make peace with each other, I want them to be able to compromise, not fight and be able to face each other again.

"Besides, I think you understand after eating the dumplings, but I think all the dumplings are delicious.

Just like that, no matter what path you choose, Ekress-san, all of them are bound to be wonderful.

Just like how dumplings are delicious because they're dumplings.

You're Ekress. That's why I can believe in you."

After I say that, Gann-san and Gingus-san escape, deciding to run out of the room.

"The three of you should talk later. We've made a lot after all. As the three of you keep

poking at each other, don't you think that you would be able to talk to each other about the things that you normally wouldn't be able to?"

Leaving those words behind, I left the room.

"...Now then, time to clean up I guess."

Muttering that, I head towards the kitchen.

It's the three of them, and I'm sure Ekress-san would also want to clear away her worries.

Absent-mindedly, I hold onto that belief.

The next day Ekress-san looked completely refreshed.

Somehow, it seems that she's found something she wants to do. That's great.

Gann-san too, was holding onto a new knife, flaring with spirit.

Wonderful.

Chapter 44

A Present and Gyoza (Part 2)

“Shuri-kun, let’s go somewhere.”

On that day, out of the blue, I invited Shuri-kun out.

I said to him suddenly, as he was setting up the table for breakfast in the dining hall.

“You’re probably working all the time right? Why don’t you let your hair down and have some fun?”

Now then, will I get a OK?

Ekress here. I’m really, really worried.

It all started about a week ago, before I had asked Shuri-kun to go somewhere with me.

That night, after I had finished some simple work which had more or less turned into a hobby, I dragged my feet over to the kitchen for some reason.

I was thinking that, maybe, if I was lucky, then I could be alone with Shuri-kun, and maybe get some fried chicken.

But, what I saw in the kitchen, was someone surprising.

“What are you doing? Gann-niisan?”

Under the dim, gloomy light of the kitchen, Gann-niisan was holding a knife and a potato, having a rather tough time.

Since it was technically midnight, I wondered with some curiosity. What on earth was he doing?

“Hm? Ahh, Ekress. It’s just as you see, I’m peeling potatoes.”

Potatoes? Peeling?

Close to Gann-niisan was a pile of potatoes, stacked up high, a container to put the skin in, and a bunch of peeled potatoes, all rolling around.

I see, so it was peeling practice. That was how I came to understand it.

“To practise until so late at night, Brother really has completely become a chef, huh.”

I said as I leaned back on the kitchen wall.

The Gann-niisan of late has truly been hard working.

Even through just a few glances here and there, I could tell how hard he was working.

Brother, who had been working as a Spy officer, for the longest of times, was now engaged in a completely different line of work.

There were probably a lot of things that he had to learn, and relearn right from the beginning as well.

Despite that, Gann-niisan was trying his best without feeling downhearted, so I think he’s amazing.

“Ahh, is it already that time? Geez, Shuri really does peel potatoes at an amazing rate. And they’re so beautifully peeled, it’s as if they were peeled like that in the first place.

Which is why, I put in my effort, so that I can be like him.”

“You shouldn’t really be wasting all those potatoes though?”

“It’s alright, I have Shuri’s permission. It seems we’ll be making Mashed potatoes with them for tomorrow’s lunch.”

“I see.”

Certainly, if it’s that dish then, there needs to be a lot of potatoes. Perhaps, even all of

these potatoes that Gann-niisan had been practicing peeling with, would be used up.

...No, maybe, Shuri knew about that, and made Gann-niisan peel the potatoes.

“...Hey, Gann-niisan.”

“What?”

I decided to be bold, and try asking him something I had wanted to ask.

“Are you, having fun right now?”

Gann-niisan used to spy on Gingus under my orders. On the other hand, he was also asked to spy on me by Gingus, and was something of a double agent.

There were also other shady orders I had him do. As his sister, I made my brother, Gann-niisan, do many things.

Which is why, I wondered, how he was feeling right now.

“Of course. It’s something worth doing.”

Gann-niisan smiles and said.

“To do something for someone else’s sake. And to do it so that, that someone else can smile. It’s a wonderful thing, seriously.

Furthermore, at the moment, there’s a good-natured person teaching me from the beginning as his disciple. He’s also taking care of me in various ways, so it makes me warm inside. That is probably just how Shuri is though.

Besides, being a chef is surprisingly fitting for me.

Which is why, I’m having a lot of fun right now.”

“I see.”

I felt relieved, but at the same time I felt the inside of my chest hurt, as if I had screwed up.

Of course it would. If he was speaking the truth just now, then it means that I had always made Gann-niisan do things he didn't want to.

Being born from a concubine, being persecuted, having techniques he didn't want beaten into him, and forced to continue doing these things he didn't want to do.

I was also born from a concubine, falsified into the gender they wished for, had a skill I didn't wish for awaken, and forced to continue doing a job I didn't want to.

We, were very similar.

Now, we were freed from that, and are both able to do the things we want to.

However, I felt something tugging at my heart.

It was probably because I see Gann-niisan looking so happy right now. Also, because Gingus, who had been so naked with his hostility, is now working in his special field, while wearing a smile on his face.

The two of them, were doing the jobs they wished for, walking the path they wished for.

However, I'm different.

After being saved by Shuri-kun and the others, I was able to live however I liked. My jobs would also be simple, harmless, easy jobs, and after finishing that, I would be able to be with Shuri, be satisfied, then go to sleep.

Compared to Gann-niisan and the others, I was way too free. No, maybe I just lack their sincerity.

“Tsk, Fuck.”

Just as I was falling into a pit of self-hatred, I heard Gann-niisan swear.

Looking at his hand, the potato's skin that he had been peeling, had broken off. It looks like he screwed up in peeling.

If Shuri-kun was doing this, then he would probably be able to peel it all off into one beautiful string.

“The knife’s blunted... The way I’m moving my hands is also not good enough. Again.”

Reflecting upon himself, Gann-niisan starts peeling once again. Although he was starting from the middle, this time, he was concentrating so that he wouldn’t fail again.

Speaking of which, Gann-niisan didn’t have his own cooking utensils... his own knife.

Shuri-kun has a great amount of tools that he takes care of. I heard that everything other than the knife was made by Riru. The knife... might be the present from that Princess Tebis.

Now that I think about it... With the equipment, that is, the knife being safekept by them, it might be obstructive to Gann-niisan’s training.

That’s it, speaking of which, we’ve never given a present to each other as siblings before.

We’ve never done this for birthdays, celebrations, nor any kind of special occasion.

Although that’s natural, given that we have such a distance amongst us.

...Let’s get him one. A knife.

I don’t know how I came to think that, but I decided to give him a knife as a gift.

The reason doesn’t matter. I want to be able to help Gann-niisan.

“Well, Gann-niisan, don’t work too late.”

“Yea, of course. Good night.”

After saying that to Gann-niisan, I returned back to my room.

And then, I asked an acquainted blacksmith to forge a knife for me the next day.

Just a good blade, that had a sharp edge and easy to use shape.

I decided to prepare a knife for Gann-niisan, regardless of however much money I may need.

And then a few days passed. The knife was scheduled to be completed today.

Thinking about going to get it... Somehow, ended up making me feel embarrassed all of the sudden.

At any rate, I'm going to give a present to someone who has been working very hard in his job. Someone in my family, where giving a present, was something we've never done before.

It felt somewhat embarrassing, and my face seemed to go red.

On the other hand, not going to get it was out of the question, yet going by myself would be embarrassing.

As I was thinking that. That morning, just as I was in anguish, worrying about it in the dining halls.

I suddenly saw Shuri-kun.

Which is why, I asked him on impulse.

And right now.

I was inviting Shuri-kun.

"How about it? Shuri-kun?"

"Should be fine. I'll take you up on that offer."

Shuri-kun thinks for a little bit, and answered me.

"Yay. Just as well, there's something I wanted to buy."

"Hoh. Something, you want to buy, you say?"

Then, Shuri-kun looks plainly troubled.

Ah, I see.

“Ah, I didn’t mean that you’re going as the baggage holder. It’s lonely going by myself so I thought, maybe I should take someone with me.”

I’m not like that, but when girls go shopping, it takes some time. Since they also have fun when they’re choosing what to buy, they unintentionally forget about the people they’re with, and end up picking everything.

Although, being able to pay attention to us, and not say a single complaint while being together with us, is a show of a man’s reliability... You know?

Shuri-kun, you can’t make such a clear, and obvious, unpleasant face, you know?

“If that’s the case then, did you invite Gann-san? If Gann-san says he wants a break, then I can give him the permission for that.”

Shuri-kun said as if he remembered something.

Hmm, if this was a normal occasion then I would ask Gann-niisan.

“No I can’t, I’m buying something for Gann-niisan this time.”

“...Ah, I see.”

Ohh, the usually dense Shuri-kun is being understanding to me. This will speed things up.

“So you see?”

“I understand.”

“Then, I’ll go get ready so, let’s meet up in an hour!”

“Ah, wai-!”

Shuri-kun was confused and wanted to stop me, but I ignore that and left the dining hall.

I rush out without even eating breakfast, and fly into my room.

My face was completely red, and I pressed my hands against my chest.

My face was hot, and my chest was beating so fast.

I invited him out on a whim but this.....

“Wah, wah, wah..... Did I just invite him on a date!?”

That’s right! If I think about this carefully, this is a date. For a man and a woman to go shopping together. That’s obviously a date!

“Ah! I need to get dressed!”

I panic and take out all sorts of clothes as if I was turning my closet upside down, in order to choose my clothes.

What would be good? Should I wear boyish clothes like I always do?

Or should I do something unexpected and wear girly clothes?

No, that won’t work. I don’t know anything about girly clothes.

I can’t help it! After all, all I wear are men’s clothing!

I have to pick out clothes, accessories, and put on makeup!

Ahhhh! Why did I have to go and only give myself one hour!?

I curse at my carelessness as I continued looking for clothes to wear.

After some time, I somehow managed to choose my clothes, found some accessories, and started to put on my makeup, when I heard a knock into the room.

Who could it be? At this time.

“Ekress-san, Are you here~?”

Geh, Shuri-kun!? Why are you here?!

“It’s almost time, so why don’t we go together~?”

Hah?! It’s already been that long?! I haven’t even finished my makeup yet! I haven’t even finished checking my accessories yet!

I panic, and said to Shuri, who was probably standing outside my door.

“Shu-Shuri-kun! In these sort of situations, the man and woman should go out separately, yes!”

“Hah? No, but, it would be like, easier, if we left together...”

I could hear Shuri-kun’s bewildered voice from outside.

Wait, did he just say ‘Easier’? This once in a lifetime gamble of a date is, easy?

What an unromantic person.

I frown, and turn to the door to say.

“Shuri-kun! Don’t you know that all girls treasure the moments!?”

“Eh? I... do know, yes.”

Ahh, that monotone voice meant he had no idea.

“Listen carefully! In these sorts of moments, you have to be aware of the situation! You can’t say words like easy, and the like!”

“Ah, yes.”

“So you know? In these sort of situations, it’s best that we don’t leave together, but rather set a place to meet up at instead!”

“I see... Understood. In that case, where would be good?”

“Let’s see. Let’s meet up at the water fountain in the central plaza. That place has a good vibe to it, and it stands out quite well so it makes for a good meeting spot. Can you go on ahead?”

“Alright. Then, I’ll be waiting.”

With that last word of his, I could hear the footsteps of the person on the other side of the door going further away.

When I couldn’t hear that anymore, I subconsciously let out a sigh of relief.

“He bought it~”

I’ve earned some time with this! I have to finish my makeup in this time! And put on my clothes!

Ahhh, I don’t have enough time! There’s not enough time in the whole world!

Within the restricted amount of time I had, my head was spinning with thoughts, as I dressed myself up.

Finishing all that preparation, by the time I left the castle, quite some time had already passed.

“Oh no, will Shuri-kun be angry?”

I wanted to hurry up, but if I was to run too much, I would sweat and then the makeup would look terrible.

I go as fast as I could, and headed over to the water fountain in the central plaza, controlling the speed at which I was moving so that I wouldn’t sweat.

The time was, around when the sun was approaching the top of the sky. Basically, it meant that I spent all morning until now on dressing myself up.

Of course, people would normally be angry if you make them wait too long.

I hope Shuri-kun isn’t tired of waiting and angry at me.

Just as I was panicking slightly like that, I reached the water fountain.

There were a lot of different people here, and many of them were pleasantly chatting.

Some were like me, waiting for someone. Some were taking a breather here, having a rest. Others were passing by, going to someplace else from here. Many different people.

Now then, I wonder if the person waiting for me is here amongst the crowd?

Well, even if I say that, I found him immediately.

For some reason, he was looking a little troubled, which the surroundings probably couldn't see, but there stood Shuri-kun.

I don't know what he was worried about, but in any case, it seems the person waiting for me was here. Great. Although if I was in his place and forced to wait for so long, I would probably have gotten angry and left.

I knew Shuri-kun was nice.

But, I shouldn't be pampered by that kindness this time around.

It isn't very good, as a person, to make someone wait for a very long time even though you promised to meet them at a specific time.

I have to reflect on myself.

Anyway, let's try calling out to him for now. I approach Shuri-kun.

"Shuri-kun?"

Once I do so, Shuri-kun made a face as if he was shocked, and looked over here.

"Hm? What's wrong?"

However, after that, Shuri-kun had become frozen.

“Ah, no, nothing’s wrong.”

Looking as if nothing was wrong, Shuri-kun fixes himself up.

And then, he took a look at me, from head to toe.

How unusual, that dense block head Shuri-kun, would actually check a girl out like this.

And then, Shuri-kun, with a face as if he realised something.

“Ekress-san... could it be that... today’s shopping is actually...”

“Eh? Um, well you see...”

Ah, huh? Did I make him misunderstand something by looking too eager?

This is bad in its own way... I was thinking.

As expected, even Shuri-kun would think that this is a date-

“I’m going to take a guess seeing those nice clothes... After this, are you going to give the present that you bought to the person you like?”

“...What?”

He didn’t think that at all! This guy!

“Saying that you’re going to buy a present for Gann-san and asking me, a man’s opinion, for a present recommendation, you’re probably going to go meet up with the person you like after we separate..... I see, in that case, BUFUN!?”

My fist of fury was sent to Shuri-kun, who was spouting out words, completely lacking in delicacy.

I threw my fist at his collarbone, which I had heard from Gann-niisan was a vital joint which would cause great pain to the individual whilst not causing them any heavy injuries.

Shuri-kun fell to his knees as he screamed. Of course, I hit him with all my might after all.

“Shuri-kun. I know that you are a gentle yet dense oaf, but don’t you think that those words are lacking too much in delicacy?”

“So-soryi...”

Even though a girl had dressed up nicely for the boy she likes, if the boy was to say that it was for someone else’s sake then, it was the same as completely denying all of the girl’s efforts up till now.

Even though I tried my best for Shuri-kun’s sake, why did he have to say that I did it for someone else instead?

I think he should know why I’m angry.

“T-then, what’s with that outfit?”

As well as why that anger had been doubled!

“Shuri-kun, I wonder... do you want to take another hit?”

“EH?! Ah, I’m sorry! You’re right! If you’re going shopping with a man then, as a woman, you can’t let your guard down, right!”

I prepare my fist and Shuri-kun immediately apologises to me.

It seems that he’s understood somewhat.

“Yes, that’ll do.”

Which is why I lowered my fist. The fist that I had raised, planning to completely shatter his collarbone, was gently lowered.

“That’s right. You see, when a girl goes out with a boy, they have to dress their best.”

I tossed some half lie, half-truths at him.

If it was just some random guy then, I would probably only let them have a taste of my 80% effort.

But in a situation where it’s someone I like, or a critical situation then, I would pour more than 100%, even 120% of my effort, just so that they would turn to look at me.

I wonder if Shuri-kun understands this? Even though I tried my absolute best to look the best I can.

Although the design was simple, the tunic was made with quality cloth. The skirt too, which on first look, was rather plain, but was a piece of clothing that made one feel it’s purity.

Even my hair which had been left as is normally, had a headband with a silver flower decoration on it. And topping it all off was a simple earring which I normally don’t put on.

My makeup too, was done so it looked natural, matching the look.

If he was to not notice anything even with this, and even say that it was for someone else’s sake, I would be depressed for a week.

“So? How do I look?”

Might as well get Shuri-kun’s opinion on it.

How is it? What’ll you say?

Shuri-kun thinks for a long while, then said with a refreshing look on his face.

“I think it looks great on you. You’re more feminine than usual.”

“That isn’t exactly the best of praises, but whatever. I’ll give that a pass, just barely though.”

Feminine... Damnit! I’m the one who’s stupid for hoping that Shuri-kun would say

something decent!

It would be useless to keep explaining to Shuri! Was the conclusion I reached, and so decided to head towards my destination together with him.

My destination was the blacksmith where I had ordered for Gann-niisan's present. It was west from the water fountain plaza, located in the working streets.

You could say that *that* was where the heart of Sounity laid... It was a fancy little place created to surround in our skilled engineers.

Skilled engineers, are a type of people which no country, or territory, could afford to lose. Every single one of these people, capable of inventing new techniques, realizing them, as well as put their own original skills out on display, are indispensable talents for the country.

Which is why, they would be treated well, and stay in the said country to spread and display their skill.

For example, say, a carpenter from the Winter Country. They would be able to create buildings which had high insulation so that cold air wouldn't be able to enter into the buildings. And the Autumn Country would be plenty in knowledge regarding the foods that can, and cannot be eaten.

Talents like that... A resource such as intellect, is invaluable for any country.

Thus, in order to protect such people, I had pushed for this street to be constructed, and had it officially created officially.

Because of this, the number of workers who left for the outside had decreased, and this was great. Truly.

"Ekress-san, this city is beautiful."

Shuri-kun looks around at the surroundings, and said his thoughts to me. I was happy too, having that said me with such excitement. I mean, this was one of the greatest projects that I had planned and executed after all.

But...

“You really think so? Maybe it’s ‘cause I’m used to this scene so I can catch all of its flaws.

The materials used for all the buildings are old, the deterioration of the public property stands out, and I want to start paving the roads with stone, but I have to watch out because if I don’t manage those businessmen properly then they’ll start establishing shops by their own means, and the public safety is still quite chaotic right now so I want to recruit guards, but if we get better, then our neighbours-”

“Stop! Stop desu, I won’t understand even if you keep talking.”

Shuri-kun panics, and came to stop me.

Oops, I can’t do that. I was thinking about work. That’s no good. Even though it’s the long awaited date.

“Look, Ekress-san. How about we forget about work, and just enjoy ourselves today? How about it?”

“Eh? Ah, ok, thank you. Shuri-kun.”

Shuri-kun is worried about me all of the sudden?

He was consoling me with a gentle look.

“You’re somewhat, gentle, Shuri-kun.”

“I’m always gentle. So... gentle.”

“Shuri-kun, you’re not thinking about something bad, are you? What are you scheming behind that fake smile of yours?”

If this dullard, who was like a person magically engineered by combining a bigot and feelings of thick headedness, would suddenly show concern as if he could read a woman’s heart then, something was definitely up.

He looked gentle, but it’s obvious that it was quite forced. What is he thinking?

When I pointed that out, Shuri-kun looked a little surprised.

.....Ahh, seeing that he's worried about me, maybe it might be good to have him spoil me a bit. As one might expect, seeing him wearing a surprised face, a feeling of guilt started welling up.

But, I mean, Shuri-kun does have a history after all...

"Nothing."

Hm? That was such a natural attitude for Shuri-kun, and he dealt with it so easily?

In these type of situations, Shuri-kun would usually panic in one way or another, and trick himself out but...

This really is bad of me. I'm falling to the suspicious demons lurking in my heart. I shouldn't be doubting Shuri-kun's kindness.

"So, Ekress-san, which way do you want to go now? You said that you want to buy a present for Gann-san, but what do you have in mind?"

Was what Shuri-kun asked me just as I was reflecting on myself.

Ahh, speaking of which, I didn't mention it?

"Ah, un. I was wondering that it was probably about time that Gann-niisan would also need that. So I'm buying that for him. It would be nice if it's a quality one."

Let's give him a little breathing room, even though it was such an intentional side step. Well, I think that Shuri-kun would immediately realise what that is, seeing that chef's have quite a few necessities.

Let's just enjoy this... Being able to be with him.

Chatting idly as we talk, I gesture to Shuri-kun about our destination.

"Look, here it is."

The place I lead him to, was the shop I ordered the knife from. This was a well-known workshop around here. It was even a shop I was on friendly terms with.

A few days ago, when I came here to make the order, I only had the thought of giving Gann-niisan a present on my mind, and so I asked for the order so indifferently, that I didn't even know why I was being so mechanical.

Maybe something changed inside of me, after seeing the hard working figure of Gann-niisan.

Maybe I felt the guilt, seeing Gann-niisan's sincerity, and my lack of.

Nevertheless, even if I didn't understand that right now, my feelings of wanting to send him a gift were not false.

Shuri-kun was looking at all the lined up knives. Looking extremely interested.

"Ekress-san, this place is..."

"Well, it's without a doubt a shop that sells blades, but strictly speaking, they're rogue smiths. You could say that they..... Process metal, and make something out of them.

Look, there's quite a few big stores which are decorated with a metal symbol mark on them, right? That's also made by this kind of shop."

I answer as so, and Shuri-kun nodded in understanding.

There's a lot of misunderstanding around this, but blacksmiths do not only make weapons. They make all sorts of products, from daily necessities, to iron art pieces.

This shop also makes weapons, but it mainly creates daily necessities. Things like knives and pots.

Which is the reason why, for an order like today's, a daily use item, like a knife, this was the perfect shop.

"While it's true that in this day and age, if you give the request to a Magic Engineer, they may be able to make it for you immediately, however, there are only a few people with that capability. You either do it yourself, with your own talents. Or make a request with money.

However, blacksmiths aren't losing out either. They trust their own skills, knowledge and experience, without relying on Magical Engineering, to create a variety of items. It's brilliant."

Although there aren't many Magic Engineers, if the technology was to advance further, then the culture of relying on oral teachings and experiences, like this, may become obsolete.

However, selling metal, and manipulating heat is their thing. I'm sure that it will survive no matter what happens in the future.

Even for the jobs that Magic Engineers could finish immediately should you asked them, these guys will take their time and carefully finish it up for you.

Looking at them do that, I think that my worries were needless.

"Ekress-san, you like these sort of things?"

Shuri-kun asked me with interest.

"Yes. I would often go take a look at construction sites during our territory's development, and visit these blacksmith workshops where we commissioned our jobs to.

Seeing the beauty in the work by these skilled individuals, specialised in their one field, fills me with joy."

It's true. I feel so excited when I look at these sort of things. This part of me, may not seem that feminine.

"Ekress-san, it's fine to be excited, but can I please ask what we came here for?"

"Ahh, alright. Sorry, when it comes to these sort of places, I really can't get sick of them."

Shuri-kun reminded me. Un. It's quite true that if I was to merely look at these all day, it wouldn't really be fitting of a date. I should reflect on this.

I look at the shop, and search for the receptionist.

“Excuse me. Are you free right now?”

This woman at the reception, was also the same person who received me a few days back when I suddenly came by.

“E-Ekress-sama!?”

And right now, she looked just as surprised as then.

“Hi, is the order I placed finished?”

“Ah, yes. Of course. I apologise for the mess.”

“I don’t mind. Maybe I should’ve sent someone here first.”

That’s true. I surprised them the other day by coming by so suddenly as well.

That time, I had also thought that the next time I came I would send word first, but I forgot, having my head filled with thoughts about Shuri-kun. I must reflect.

“No, we’re deeply grateful for Ekress-sama’s patronage. There isn’t a shop in town that would refuse Ekress-sama’s visit.”

“I’m happy you’ll say that. I’m already half-retired though.”

“No, We would like it if Ekress-sama would, as always, come by the city. Even if the lord changes, our feelings of gratefulness towards Ekress-sama will not. It is because you are here, that we stay.”

Ahh... The receptionist is glaring at Shuri-kun...

That’s right... there aren’t that many people in this area who think well of Shuri-kun and the others. I even followed up on this though... How troublesome.

In our situation, it would’ve become a problem no matter who came up top. From

Gingus, the one who started the problem, to me, who wasn't able to stop him. No matter who inherited the title of the Feudal Lord, friction would have arisen somewhere.

In that case, there was only the option of passing it on to Ganglabe, the one who would cause the least problems.

『The hero who, despite having his subordinates unfairly arrested, and being dragged into the territory's problems, managed to regain his comrades and solve the problem』. Under such propaganda, both Gingus and I entrusted everything to Ganglabe.

In the first place, the two of us would not have been able to cross into the warring times ahead. It's better to leave this to a person who was brimming with talent, and has experience with war.

I do think though, that this method is rather rash. To leave every single problem of the territory to a mere leader of a mercenary corp. If we were even the tiniest bit unlucky then, this territory could have been in quite dire straits.

However, looking at Shuri-kun's cooking, and personality, and thinking of Ganglabe's military exploits, and the experiences he has faced until now, I could not think of any other method. If Ganglabe had any unruly subordinates then, that would have been the case where we would have had no choice but risk our lives. And, there was an 80% chance that we would have lost, and forfeit our lives.

It was a risky gamble... But we won. We had succeeded in leaving everything to them, and thrown away all the obligations that we've had up till then.

Which is why, if you look at the end results, I had won my gamble.

However, there would of course be those among the citizens who could not understand that.

Those who wanted a more suitable lord, those who wanted to protect the bloodline of the Feudal lord clan. Furthermore, those would couldn't understand, or accept it.

For those sort of people, we can only have them gradually understand.

That's what I think.

“Well, let's not talk about that right now. Rather than that, I just asked but did you finish what I requested of you?”

“Yes. It’s right over here.”

Since the receptionist also understood that there was no point saying anything more, she immediately went back into the store.

Yes, it’s already been decided and the authority of the Feudal Lord had already been transferred to Ganglabe. There’s nothing left to be said at this point.

Coming back from within the store, the receptionist brought out something wrapped in silk.

A single knife. With a plain wooden handle. It, having a metallic shine from having been recently completed, will probably be helpful to Gann-niisan from now on.

An emblem faintly revealed itself, showing on the flawlessly forged, sharpened blade.

Un. This is good stuff. It’s definitely worth the high price.

“Thank you. Please send the bill to the castle as always. We’ll send the commission afterwards.”

“Yes, thank you very much. We look forward to your next visit.”

The receptionist bent her waist, and bowed.

“Thanks. Shuri-kun, let’s go.”

I replied to her, and started walking. Shuri-kun also panics then chases after me.

“That’s what you came for? A knife?”

Shuri-kun asks as he looks curiously at the knife. As expected of a chef, he seems to have a deep fondness of cooking utensils.

I fix up the silk wrapping on the knife, and answered him.

“Yes. It’s for Gann-niisan.”

“...”

“Gann-niisan has found a new way of life. A path called cooking. Gingus is also reflecting on his past foolish self, and has decided to redeem himself. I’ve decided... To live the way I want.

This is the least I could give to my brother, who has always followed me... No, supported me, until now. My gratitude and encouragement for his life to be.”

Exactly. This is my thanks, and encouragement to him. This is very least I could do to repay him.

It’s the very least I could do for him, for all the painful tasks I’ve left to him until now.

I wonder if Gann-niisan will try harder with this?

Since this was a completely different field called cooking, I couldn’t offer any advice or help. What I can do, is give something of excellent quality, like this, to him.

I wonder how he’ll take into heart these considerations of mine.

Completely opposite to these feelings I had inside my heart, Shuri-kun seemed to be worrying over something.

And then, after a lot of pondering and worrying, he made a face that looked as if it said he finally understood.

“So, you going out on a date with someone was just, my misunderstanding...?”

“You’re still bringing that up?!”

I gave him collarbone smash worthy of a god’s wrath. Reflect on yourself!

After that, I gave Shuri-kun a big mouthful.

Basically that, he didn’t understand a girl’s heart.

That, he was too rash with his words and actions.

That, there was a limit to how dense a person can be.

And that, he should seriously get a hold of himself, and get to fixing that oaf-ish side to him.

There would be no end to it if I was to raise all the points, but I continued to extensively lecture him, regarding the numerous times he had made me upset up till now.

And then, after quite a bit of time had passed, I finish up talking, and said,

“I’m hungry, let’s head back.”

As if nothing had happened.

At any rate, it’s probably because a girl is complaining to a guy in the middle of the city that I’m getting all these strange look all around me.

Which is why, as a way to tell the people around me that, ‘This is already over’, I put on a face as if nothing had happened.

The people around us who seemed to have wanted to see something interesting too, dispersed as if feeling, ‘Aw, it’s already finished...’.

“Yes. Understood.”

Saying that, Shuri-kun was hanging his head down, obviously, from being lectured so thoroughly.

It was double the pain from both the hit to the collarbone and the lecture. It would be good if he was to reflect through this though.

Even though I say that, he’s guesses are just way too off!

I bet Shuri-kun didn’t even realise that this was a date!

...Realise, huh. I wonder if I can talk about others.

“Is something the matter, Ekress-san? You’re don’t seem to look too well.”

“Ahh... so you noticed, of course you would.”

As expected of Shuri-kun. To think that he would be able to catch it, even though my feelings had only swayed a little bit.

Shuri-kun excels at guessing the feelings of people. No well, he's still quite a blockhead in the ways of love though!

But... he really is a kindhearted person, seeing that he would so quickly call out to me in worry.

"It's nothing, I was just thinking about the words I just said. Gann-niisan is working hard towards his new path and Gingus is working hard to redeem himself yet, I'm just living the way I want to.

I was just thinking, if this is alright."

"Ekress-san."

"No, it's fine. Shuri-kun, it's really ok. This is a problem I brought upon myself after all.

If I look at it from a different point of view, all three of us are walking down the path that we had wished for. It's strange right? That I'm the only one to be troubled by this."

"That's..."

I spat out softly without a thought.

Both my older and younger both have found their own paths to walk towards.

However, I was the only one with nothing. I had found nothing.

I found Shuri-kun, but that's a different story. I haven't found the calling... My passion in life.

Which is why, I'm envious of them, who had found that, and were chasing after that wholeheartedly. I can't help but find them dazzling.

"Ekress-san. Do you plan on handing over that knife to Gann-san right now?"

"Eh? No... I was thinking of giving it to him after he finished work..."

"In that case, please wait in your room for me."

Hai!?

Announcing a super urgent development, that was more sudden than usual, Shuri-kun left this place in a rush.

We had already returned to the front of the castle, but that shouldn't mean that he should just leave me all by myself in front of the gate.

Ehhh... There's no way he would do that right.

What could he possibly be doing that warrants leaving a girl all by herself...

Jokes. It's Shuri-kun. It's obvious what he's going to do.

I wonder what he'll feed me this time?

I returned back to the castle, a little eager.

"And so, this is the 'Gyoza'?"

Just as Shuri-kun said, he had brought a dish over to me, who had been waiting quietly in my room.

It was almost night time, right about when the light coming from outside was growing dark.

It seems that this dish, was actually made with the help of Gingus and Gann-niisan.

Ahh, so that's why. That's why Gann-niisan and Gingus are here.

Since it was a dish that they helped out with, they wanted to hear about it tastes.

"Yes, please try it for yourself."

"Hmmm, I'm not too sure what you're thinking about, but I guess I'll eat up for now."

I take the fork and the plate of dumplings from Shuri-kun, and quickly eat one.

I put a nicely sized one into my mouth and chew.

“Un... It’s delicious.”

Delicious. Yup, it’s definitely good.

The layer of skin was crisp, and the filling inside was well cooked and juicy. I can tell that its... Meat and vegetables.

The umami of the meat juices and vegetables, sealed by the outer layer of skin, all burst out into my mouth as I chew.

The umami of the meat, and the umami of the vegetables... Held a balance with a sweetness that came from the result of being well cooked.

And there’s still quite a few left. I’m looking forward to this.

Thus, I put another one into my mouth, thinking of the umami from the meat and vegetables... but a completely different feeling spread throughout my mouth.

“Hm? This one’s a little different... There’s a strong chive’s smell... And I can’t taste any meat at all in this one...”

Thinking that it was strange, I put another dumpling into my mouth, when I felt another texture.

The former, was a dumpling with a strong chive’s smell.

Vegetables... I’m guessing this particular smell is... from the spring onion and chives.

Perhaps, the taste of the meat was also considered in this, as it had a completely different taste to the first dumpling.

Most likely, mixing the meat with the fragrance of chives and onion, also changes it up. I don’t hate the smell of chives in this, rather I would praise it for giving the dumpling its uniqueness.

Although, it may be a smell that females are a little worried about.

The latter dumpling however... I couldn’t taste any meat at all. There wasn’t a flavour of fat at all.

It was vegetables, soaked in a soup that complemented it well. Delicious.

The lightness of it really brings out the vegetable flavour... This is my favourite one.

“Yeah, there’s a good variety, and it’s really delicious. All of them are top quality.”

“This was the one I asked Gann-san to make.”

“This misshapen one?”

“This was the one I asked Gingus-san to make.”

“Oh, this one looks good, but there’s quite a difference with the amount of filling inside.”

The two dumplings that Shuri-kun pointed at.

Gann-niisan’s had a good balance with the filling, but it didn’t look appealing. It couldn’t even begin to be compared to Shuri-kun’s.

Gingus’ looked perfect, but if we cut it open and see then, the filling is all over the place. It feels like he only focused on the appearance and didn’t care about the insides.

“But, both of them tasted great right?”

“Yeah, they were delicious. Leaving aside how they look for now, it seems that these were made just for me.”

The two of them had been taking glimpses at me for a while now.

Perhaps it was because they were relieved that it tasted fine... Now they felt a little awkward.

It seems, I’ve worried them somewhat.

“...Ekress-san. I think that, no matter what they look like, or what filling they have, dumplings are delicious. There are a lot more types than you see here, after all.

Gann-san found his way as a chef.

Gingus-san chose to move forward on a way to redeem himself.

No matter how they look, or how they are inside, a way of life is beautiful due to its belief.

Ekress-san. I understand that you are lost.”

Lost.

That’s right. I’ve lost my way. I looked enviously at Gann-niisan and Gingus who had jobs they were proud of; jobs worth doing.

At the same time, I felt lost in my way of life, feeling that I wasn’t moving forward.

“Why don’t you speak your mind out to your precious family, to these two, who are already walking down that path ahead of you?”

Hearing Shuri-kun’s words, I felt like my head was being beaten.

Being asked why, I didn’t open up my worries to my family.

I had come from a complicated environment.

Even if we had feelings towards family, it was an environment where we couldn’t honestly rely on that.

It was a time where, if we weren’t cautious of each other, we might be taken advantage of by the people around us.

However, that wasn’t what was happening now. The time of discord is over as well. It should be fine to rely on them, to be spoiled by them, and to be relied on by them.

Despite that, I was holding all my problems to myself again.

This is the opposite of progress.

“Until now, maybe the three of you have been trying your best on your own. As a result, you’ve come to have a habit of trying to fix problems by yourself. You’ve mastered the ability to manage situations.

I don’t think that you need to worry all by yourself anymore.

How about the three of you gather together like this, and open up to each other?"

To open up to each other, from here on out, huh.

"Besides, I think you understand after having eaten the dumplings, but I think that all dumplings are delicious.

Just like that, no matter what path you decide to go down, it will definitely be a wonderful one.

Just like how delicious dumplings are, as dumplings.

You are who you are after all, Ekress-san. Which is why I believe in you."

No matter what path I choose, it will be a wonderful path.

So that's how Shuri-kun thinks of me. So that's how much he trusts in me.

Having that thought, my back itches. Something's itchy. So itchy I'm going red.¹

However, that makes me happy. That he would think that of me.

Just as I was thinking about what to say to Shuri-kun, he was leaving the room.

"I'll leave the three of you to talking then. We've made so much after all. How about the three of you talk about all the things you normally wouldn't as you poke at the dumplings?"

Saying so, Shuri-kun left.

The ones left behind, us, were stuck in an awkward situation.

All three of us were trying to say something, but couldn't.

In this frustrating mood, I look down at the plate that I was holding in my hand.

Since so much was made, let's all three of us eat it.

...I see... Shuri-kun had understood.

That, if we were thinking of talking like normal, then we would run out of honest things to talk about regarding everything that's happened till now.

Which is why, we would ignite the conversation by using food.

It was a consideration fitting Shuri-kun.

"Gann-niisan, Gingus. Why don't we eat, since you've already made it?"

"...Ahh, alright."

"Alright, I guess."

Gann-niisan and Gingus bring over a chair to sit on, and started eating the dumplings.

"These are great. Although all of the filling inside was prepared for us by Shuri."

"That's true. But... Brother(Aniki)..... hey. Brother's ones are, um, just like Sister(Aneki) said; they look pretty bad."

"Shaddap. Look at yours. The fillings all over the place. I bet there's hardly any filling in these."

The two of them were arguing like this, but it seemed fun somehow.

Actually, isn't this the first time that Gingus has called us Sister, and Brother?

Sister, huh. It feels a little embarrassing, to be called something new.

"Shuri said that, this would be perfect if there was a dipping sauce."

"Huh? You mean that this isn't complete just like this?"

"From what Shuri said, it seems he wanted to create a sauce that matches these. However, it seems that he doesn't have all the ingredients he wants. I just can't fathom it at all."

"Shuri's perfect sauce, huh. It certainly isn't something I can imagine. Just how precious it must be..."

Saying so, we started, bit by bit, to talk.

Having a conversation like this, we understood that we really did know too little about each other.

“Ore-sama likes this chive’s one. In the first place, Ore-sama likes dishes that smell good.”

“I like this normal dumpling. It’s simple and delicious. These are my fav.”

I didn’t even know the type of foods they liked eating.

“Actually, Gingus, leaving me aside, since you’re the one responsible for the army, how about you start looking for a partner? We talked about this before, and you said that you like girls like Princess Tebis. Not her age, but her intellect, right?”

“Shut up. It’s none of your business. Brother, if you’re not going to be staying in the shadows any longer, then go get married with a normal girl. You’re first, right Brother? Considering the order.”

“From here on, I’ll be on the path of a carefree chef, so it’s fine to think about that after I fall in love normally.”

I didn’t even know the type of girls they liked.

“Ahh, but recently, Ore-sama hasn’t been training my horse riding or swordsmanship, so my body’s been feeling a little weak. I need to train.”

“You like that sort of thing?”

“Rather than domestic affairs or paperwork, I like practising fencing and horse riding more. It’s a hobby, a hobby.”

“I don’t get it at all. I’ve come to enjoy cooking. It serves as both a hobby and a practical benefit.”

We didn’t even know each other’s hobbies.

We realised that, none of us knew anything about each other.

I see, so this is what it means to open up to each other. Shuri-kun, I get it now.

“I like Shuri-kun, and my hobbies are tabletop games so, it would be nice if I had someone to play with. It’s been so long... Since I’ve had someone to play card, or board games with.”

“Isn’t it fine to play with Shuri? You could try to telling him.”

“I wonder if Shuri-kun would do something like that with me?”

We went through a large variety of topics like this, and talked out our hearts.

Us brothers and sister had never had a proper conversation until now, but it felt like we’ve finally returned to some semblance of a family.

What is this feeling... It’s so warm.

Although the previous Feudal lord... Father, isn’t here, I wonder if this is the warmth of family.

Yes, it probably is.

“Sister. Speaking of which, you were saying something about being lost, and didn’t know what to do, right?”

“Eh? Un.”

Gingus suddenly brought up the subject, and honestly, I’m feeling perplexed.

“What are you doing right now? Serious question.”

“Eh?... Well... The transfer and supervision of the remaining domestic affairs.... And putting into books the relationships we have with our neighbouring countries... things like that.”

“No. Sister, you should just become a diplomat.”

Eh? A diplomat?

“To be honest, it isn’t a role I can take on. Although Ganglabe is a person who can do pretty much anything, there are probably some people who won’t agree or understand even if we left the territory to him.”

That was something I understood just by going out to the streets. The person at the blacksmith had been acting considerate towards me, but didn’t hold any good will towards Ganglabe and the others who... at its roots, seemed to have usurped the country.

I see, that’s the same for our surrounding countries as well.

The relationship that I had built up with our neighbours until now, will change. There may even be some who hold malicious thoughts.

So he means that, that’s where I come in, and reconcile the relationships between us and our neighbours, as well as with any other country further down the road.

“I see, that seems like something I can do.”

At any rate, the surrounding countries should still think that I’m a man. I mean, up till now, I’ve only ever interacted with them as a man, so of course that would be the case.

Diplomat huh, if it’s that then...

“I’ll do it. I’ll try being a diplomat.”

“Good. You’ve always had a way with words Ekress. You also look good, so it would be harder for them to hold ill-will against you.”

“Ore-sama has my own things to do, so I leave it to you. I mean, there’s no way we can just keep leaving every little thing for Ganglabe to do anyway.”

We all agreed.

I was finally at ease. So this is how much of a relief it is to finally be decided on what I would be doing.

In that case, there's something I have to do now.

For the relationship with our neighbours, as well as the future of Sounity.

A problem that I must clean up.

"Leave it to me. As well as the matter regarding that person."

I say so, and both of them stiffen up.

That person. Just with that phrase, the two of them had probably guessed who I was talking about.

It's just as they thought. It was about that person, who was locked up underneath this castle.

"...Sister, please. Please, anything but her life."

Gingus bowed. With a grave look on his face.

"No matter what she did, she's still my mother."

I know. Being the cause of the mess, if left as is, she was someone who would without a doubt become the seed of friction.

Gingus' mother... The legal wife of the former lord.

It was because she was arrested via Princess Tebis' hands, that we were finding it difficult to decide on how to deal with her.

"I'll try my best... So that she doesn't suffer. I promise."

"...Thanks."

Gingus made a truly apologetic face.

I must end this. For the sake of this territory's future as well.

As well as for Gingus.

After that.

I handed the knife to Gann-niisan, and properly told him how I thankful I was to him.

I want him to try his best from here on. Seeing that he's finally able to do something calming; something he wanted to do.

I will do what I can.

For the sake of my previous little brother as well.

Chapter 45

A Shriek and Steak (Part 1)



Perhaps their distant hearts had finally been able to come together? Recently, Ekress-san, Gann-san and Gingus-san all have a bright look on their faces.

Before, when they would pass by each other in the hallways, they would appear slightly awkward, and even saying hi to each other was somewhat weird.

However, recently it looks like when they would pass by one another, they would exchange a few short words with each other.

It warms my heart everytime I see that. It's not very pleasant to watch family members continue to fight each other after all.

Hello everybody, this is Shuri.

Having successfully gone through with Ekress-san's great present plan, I had also been relieved, and thus continued devoting myself to my everyday work. Gann-san too, has almost become even more passionate and motivated towards his work.

I tell him not to go overboard, but I can see that he's become quite keen, so I carefully, and cautiously guide him.

Today too, Ganglabe-san came to find me.

It was when I was in the middle of work, setting up the tables in the dining hall for breakfast.

"Renha isn't eating her food."

For some reason, Ganglabe-san had a meek look on his face.

"Eh? But I tasted all the dishes that Gann-san and the other cooks made, and there weren't any problems?"

Renha Sounity. The one who had been pulling the strings from behind the scenes in Sounity's Civil War this time.

It's a little hard to understand for people with the common sense of the Modern Japanese, but I'll do a quick explanation of it again.

First of all, the mistress... not the concubine, or the legal wife, a woman hidden from the world, gave birth to the eldest son, Gann-san. Then the concubine gave birth to the eldest daughter, Ekress-san. Who came to be Gann-san's sister from another mother.

So, the last one to be born is the legal wife's son, which basically means, he was to be the second son, Gingus-san. The youngest child.

If you would allow me, someone who possesses the common sense of Modern Japan to just say a word.

This was a ridiculously annoying, ridiculously heavy story. A story with a gloomy darkness hanging behind it. If this was Japan then, the relationships were on the level of novels or shoujo mangas.

Going back to the story.

That Renha-san is a criminal. The mastermind... She was the one who orchestrated this mess behind the scenes.

She tried to kill him, by taking advantage of the previous feudal lord's metal allergy. And then, tried to fix her own son, Gingus, into the role of the feudal lord. Although her reason for doing so is unknown.

That's how things came to be, so at the very least we had to prepare the meals for her, but that was left up to my subordinates, and Gann-san.

As a job that had been left up to Gann-san, he had been excited for it regardless of who he was making it for.

I taste tested the final product, and since there wasn't any problems with it, I sent it out but...

"No, she just keeps arguing back with 『I am a noble! Such dog food is unfitting!』 ."

How rude. Saying that what they worked on is dog food despite them not making any mistakes or anything... I knew it, she's still held a grudge against us.

However, Ganglabe-san seemed to have a rather flabbergasted look... and with his hands against his temples.

You could just ignore it, if it troubles you so much.

"But, for criminals like her, we need to treat her harshly, right? To withhold their food and such. Humans won't die even after two or three days without drinking or eating, so maybe it would be fine if we leave her alone until she really does need the food?"

If I had to say it, I don't understand why we would allow such a selfish criminal to do as they pleased.

Even in the current Japanese prisons, we probably aren't that gentle. I had thought that in this world which is two, three times more severe than Modern Japan, they would definitely be more severe.

However, Ganglabe-san said with a troubled tone.

“No, it’s just that...”

Hm? Ganglabe-san isn’t being direct with me?

“Well, Renha is the legal wife of Sounity’s lord. We can’t be overly rude towards her. Besides, her authority hasn’t exactly been cut clean yet, even now.”

I see, I think I understand it a bit better now.

Basically, if we were to just treat Renha-san however we liked, then something problematic would probably come into question.

Speaking of which, there was also a group of people who supported the legal wife. If we don’t punish her with a method that everyone agrees on then, there’s a possibility that *that* group of people would riot.

Just in case though, that so called party that supports the legal wife, has already been kept away from Sounity. And are being kept in watch by the Mercenary Corp.

“Is that so. Then I’ll cook something today.”

“Sorry for the trouble.”

“No, after all, appeasing customers who do nothing but complain with a dish that would leave them speechless is also the job of a cook.”

Now then, what to make? I think, placing my hand on my chin.

Be that as it may, it’s not like I know what she likes as well... For starters, maybe I should go bring her some soup and bread that’s has a little more detail to it.

As that thought came to mind, I suddenly look away and, I see the sight of Gann-san, peeling away at his potatoes, looking down in the dumps.

“Uhhhh, Gann-san?”

“Ahhh, it’s you, Shuri...”

Oh noes, he's really feeling discouraged. He has no spirit.

Maybe it couldn't be helped... to have something that you made with such efforts to be called dog food...

"Sorry, I couldn't get Renha to agree with my skills..."

"Gann-san..."

"Haha, I've still got a lot to go... I have to try even harder."

Even though he was speaking positive words, Gann-san's eyes were sunken. This is bad. His confidence has been completely shattered.....

I placed both my hands onto Gann-san's shoulders from behind.

"I used to fail a lot when I was cooking as well. Tons."

"....."

"There were also times when I wanted to stop cooking. I've had times when I wanted to run and eat outside, or something that was already made."

"...I see."

"But, every time that happened, I would try my goddamned best. Gann-san, relieve the stress in your shoulders. And then keep piling up on that training. If you do that then, you will definitely be able to cook a dish that would make someone smile."

"....."

"So, take it easy and try your best? Okay?"

Gann-san hung his head down in shame and nodded.

There's no need to look at his face. I didn't see anything. That's also a form of kindness, I believe.

Now then, I wonder what would be a dish that would appease Renha-san...

As I was thinking that, I moved to start.

“What did you come here for!? You damned territory thief! Don’t show that dirty face in front of me!”

Yes, that was the first thing she said. To be scolded as territory thief all of the sudden. No, well, I had thought that would happen though.

Anyway, I had prepared a dish, and brought it over to the underground jail where Renha-san was being kept.

And then, that was the first thing that Renha-san said upon seeing me.

I had denied it before, but I’m not a hardcore masochist. I’m not a pervert who would get excited by having someone scold me... I’m pretty sure?

In any case, hearing these words do nothing but irritate me. I haven’t been so annoyed since that first time I made Curry Rice for that stupid Feudal Lord of Alturia. I wonder what that stupid lord was doing nowadays?

Well, even if I say that, there’s no point in playing the clown like back then. I have absolutely no idea what I should be doing and, she would probably think that there was something wrong with my head instead.

“Ummmm... I brought you your food?”

But it really is scary. My voice is shaking. Even if you say that I’ve won and survived through countless wars, it wasn’t like I was actually on the battlefield, or have killed anyone. I’ve just been supporting everyone with my cooking.

Thus it really is a shock seeing a woman in front of me with dishevelled hair yelling at me.

“Go away! Did you think that such garbage would be fitting to my tastes!?”

Renha-san says in rage but... I mean, I don’t think there’s a problem with the flavour and it has nothing to do with fitting to your taste or not.

“This is an intricate soup that I, as the chef, cooked up. Please, do try it.”

In any case, it's not like I can just get angry here and leave. It's what Ganglabe-san asked of me after all.

This soup, is the Pot-au-feu that I made when I first came to this world.

"It's garbage! Get out of my sight!"

This person sure gets on your nerves... With a wave of her hand, she completely rejected the dish that I tried to pass over to her.

Geez, what if you knocked it over!?

"Anyway, please eat. I hear that you haven't eaten in many days already. There's a limit on how long you can live on just water, right?"

"Shut up slave! As invaders, don't speak as if you understand anything! You probably put poison in the food, right?!"

It's no use..... There's nothing I can do here. Maybe she's got hysteria?

Psychology doesn't exist in this world so I can't say for sure though. And I have no knowledge on the subject, so it's not like I can make a judgement either.

However, this is quite frustrating.

"It's not like I care at all whether you eat or not. However, it's just that I've been told that it'll be a problem if you keep up your selfishness, and that we'll be troubled if you end up dying, is all."

"How dare you speak to me like that! I am the wife of Sounity's Feudal Lord, Renha Sounity!"

"But you're just a criminal right now."

Whoops, maybe I've gone too far with that. But still, it's something that has to be said.

I just couldn't keep a hold on my feelings, being someone who works with food, and

been told such cruel things, such as poisoning my own food.

As I feel the temples of my head coming together to form a frown, I look straight at Renha-san.

There was no sense of fear like before. What was controlling me right now, was just the anger that arose from having my cooking being insulted.

“Stop joking around! What did I do and what crime did I commit?! There’s a limit to how much bullshit you can spout!”

“Preparing poisonous tableware for your husband, and then running away when it looked like it was getting bad. That’s exactly what a criminal would do.”

A person who would say they were innocent at this point probably have nerves are thick as a Yakushima Cedar tree..... In a certain sense, I’m impressed. It’s not an example I want to follow though.

However, I’ve done what I came here to do, so I guess it’s time to go~

“Wait, where are you going?”

“I’m leaving. If you don’t intend to eat then there’s no point of me being here.”

“What are you planning on doing with my food!?”

“I’m handing it over to the guards.”

I can’t stay here any longer. Her shrieking is giving me a headache. She’s gonna give me neurosis.

...Though, I can’t say it out loud.

“I’m joking, naturally.”

If I can, I want to grant Ganglabe-san’s request. After all, I’m forever indebted to that person for everything he has done for me up till now.

I once again turn towards Renha-san.

“In that case, what sort of dish do you feel like eating?”

“Hah! Nothing you make would match my tastes! There’s no way I would even feel like eating!”

“Hmmm... Stop being so tough and prideful. There’s probably something you want to eat right?”

Yes, it’s possible that Renha-san is irritated.

As a former authoritative figure, being arrested as a criminal, and tied down in an underground jail.

I think that if even her pride was broken then, she would go crazy.

However, she won’t be able to live like that now. She can’t.

At the very least, she should eat.

“You bastard... What are you planning?”

Perhaps Renha-san didn’t expect me to deal with her in this manner, so she responded with a bewildered expression.

Yea, I don’t think she expected this at all. Probably, the people up till now didn’t empathise with her at all, only looking down on her, and treating her like a criminal.

I calm myself down, as much as I can, and then said in a warm tone.

“Simply speaking, there’s a limit to how long you can hold out with just your will. I’m sure you don’t want to continue with this stalemate either. Besides, I’m sure that being on a full stomach for when you really need to be active, would not be a bad feeling at all.”

Yea, this is more like me.

Rather than be enticed by someone else’s hatred filled words, it’s better to just go with the flow, ignore their anger, and try to understand them.

After all, food doesn't only fill a person's stomach, but also their heart.

It's better to feel like this rather than to get all irritated.

"Hmm, alright then. It doesn't seem likely that I won't be able to dent your stubbornness. Which is why, it means you've left but one path available for me as well."

Renha-san puts a smile on her face, and said to me.

Those eyes were used to mock someone, and I could see that from her cold, emotionless eyes and smile.

"Something for me to eat. Come bring me over a luxurious meat dish. But, it has to be to my taste."

Hmmm...

"A meat dish, you say?"

"Indeed. Why don't you show me just how good, a peasant like you, truly are?"

A meat dish, she says... My, now I'm in a pinch.

I mean, the problem isn't with the meat itself, nor is it with the dish.

What I'm worried about is the difference in values.

Since I was born as a commoner, when someone says luxurious meat, I think of anything over 2000yen.

However, Renha-san is royalty. Basically, the equivalent of an oil tycoon on Earth.

Basically, someone who owns a private holiday villa, and could just casually drink some high class tea in the afternoon out of boredom. Our values were different.

Which meant that I had to choose a dish that was the equivalent of what wealthy people on Earth ate, for this royalty.

Hmm, in that case, I think I've got just the right thing!

"Alright then, I'll bring you something absolutely stunning!"

It's gotta be steak!

I immediately run back to the kitchen, and asked Ganglabe-san, who was waiting for me there.

"And so Ganglabe-san, please prepare for me some good meats."

"You've really been taken advantage of by that woman huh..."

Having explained the entire series of events to Ganglabe-san, he responded to me with a look of dismay.

This guy, did he request something of me all the while thinking that I wouldn't be able to do it?

Well, it is that insane, hysteric woman so it's not like I don't understand where he's coming from...

"I mean, anyone would realise, if they were hungry, that they couldn't just keep on toughing it out."

"These words sound rather dangerous coming from you."

It was the truth in a certain sense. As living beings, it was something we couldn't escape from.

"So, Ganglabe-san. What meat are you planning on getting?"

"Don't worry about it. It'll be the good stuff."

"Thank you."

And so, what he prepared for me was a cut of beef tenderloin. This really is a good section.

However, there weren't many cows in this world that were bred just for the sake of meat. All cattle were used as extra help in agriculture, or for their milk. It seemed as if Newbyst was the only country who actually ate beef, and would raise cows just for their meat. But, maybe that wasn't the case?

Because of that, even though I said it was a tenderloin cut, it was a little bit tough since it was the meat from an old cow that had been toiling away in the fields.

Furthermore, it was something closer to fillet mignon, a cut that came from the smaller end of the tenderloin.

Was there such a shortage of beef?

"Hey, are you really going to make fried beef with this?"

"Ganglabe-san. It's called a steak."

"Ooh, you're right. It really is a steak."

Hm? Is there such thing as steaks in this world as well? Since it had the same name, perhaps it was the same dish?

Well, I guess that's the case. No matter where you're at, there will definitely be grilled meat. Perhaps it's a coincidence that the names are the same.

"Even so, you don't hear of steak being made with beef very much."

"Really?"

"Ahh. Cows are generally used for agriculture or for milking right? You know about that, yeah?"

"Yes, of course."

"That's why there's not much beef from cows herded for their meat. You know about that too, yeah?"

"Yes. I've heard it in the passing from Gann-san."

After coming to this world, in order to increase my understanding towards this world's common sense and knowledge, I've tried to learn about as many different things from as many different people as possible.

Due to that, there have been times when I've been treated as a weirdo. How rude, I'm such a normal person.

Even if I'm from another world.

"Basically, there aren't even many Feudal clans or Royalty who would feast on beef. As a result, you don't hear about it often. That's all. I've never heard about how it tastes either. Even this, although it's a pretty good cut, came from a cow that was almost useless. Can this make a good steak?"

"Hmmm"

I tear a bit off and took a bite.

It's true. Isn't this a little tough for tenderloin?

But I don't think there'll be any problems with the taste.

"No problem. Although it is tough."

"No, that's definitely a problem. Since if you cook tough meat, it'll become even tougher."

"Cooking is an art that will take care of that problem one way or another."

This time I have a secret plan.

Leaving aside Ganglabe-san, who looked at me in daze, I called out to Gann-san.

I decided to ask for Gann-san's help for the dish this time around.

If this goes well then, I'll be able to reverse Renha-san's opinions, is what I said, and he agreed, full of spirit. I knew it. Gann-san was feeling depressed. Which is why I think he's so motivated towards this request of mine.

“Gann-san, how goes the onions?”

“Ohh, donnnn...”

Gann-san gave me a bowl full of the onions he grated.

However, his eyes were completely red, with tears rolling down his cheek. No way!

“Ah! Didn’t I tell you not to rub your eyes with the hand that cut the onions!”

“Sorree, I forgat...”

Arara... It seems he was too into this, and totally forgot about the warning i gave him about the onions.

Geez, he really needs to be looked after.

“Please put some ice on your eyes. It’ll help.”

“Alright...”

“Now then, I’ve got the garlic here so, let’s start.”

I can imagine a more high class, luxurious steak to be soft and juicy.

So, let’s create something similar to that.

First, knead the grated garlic and onions well into the tenderloin, mixing it in thoroughly. By doing this, it’ll add flavour, and make the meat even more tender because of the enzymes in the onions.

I then roughly scatter some pepper across it, then rub it into the meat nicely.

I then let this set for some time.

“Let’s start making this sauce.”

“Oi, aren’t you going to add any salt to this? Even I know you should add that.”

“While it’s certainly going to need it, that’s something you add right before cooking it.”

The pepper is mainly to get rid of the meat smell, and the salt has to be seasoned right before cooking.

The pepper has to be sprinkled on at least 15 minutes beforehand since there needs to be time for the smell to be dispersed, and the salt in particular, if it's added on too soon, will cause all the meat juices to leak out, resulting in it becoming really dry. There was a time when I had made the exact same mistake, and it was quite difficult to eat.

Furthermore, you can't add salt whilst you're cooking the steak. The salt wouldn't be spread evenly across the meat, and so the saltiness would be too much on one side. This would also lead to failure. One does not simply cook a steak.

That's why I won't add it now. Let's make the sauce first. And so I decided to make it whilst the tenderloin was marinating in the onion and garlic.

"Gann-san. Allow me to use the red wine that you secretly hold on to."

"EH!!?"

I mean, I do know. Even though your alcoholism hasn't gone away, you secretly hoarded away tons of liquor, and I even know where you hid them.

I turn away from the stunned Gann-san, and make the sauce.

I scraped half of the grated onions onto a plate I had prepared in advance, and finely cut them into small pieces... The garlic too, apart from four slices, was finely chopped. The other necessary ingredients were the fish sauce, to get rid of the scent, and butter. It would be best if there was olive oil as well, but there isn't any so it'll have to do. It's something I plan on manufacturing one day.

Then, I heat up the pan now that I've gathered all the ingredients, warming it up.

"...That took quite some time huh. Even though you're just gonna grill it."

"Even though it looks like I'm just grilling it, that's where a cook's skills, ingenuity and work are necessary."

Ganglabe-san was complaining, but well, it's not like I don't see where his coming from. The first time I tried cooking steak too, apart from my aforementioned failures, there was also a time where I had grilled it without any preparations other than taking it out of the fridge and defrosting it.

Once you take the meat out from the fridge, you have to get it down to room temperature. You might think, "Isn't that the same as defrosting?", but there are many different ways to defrost.

Usually this is done by putting it through running water. When you think of defrosting by running it through water, you usually think that you put a stiff block of beef into a full bowl of water. Or if the meat was a bit thick then to let running water continue flowing over it.

What you shouldn't do, was to defrost it unnaturally with a microwave.

By doing it that way, you would quite literally raise the temperature in a jiffy, and you would be able to defrost it, but if you do this then all the umami from the meat juices would leak out, so you really shouldn't do that. Even though it would look like it was defrosted on the surface, the inside would still be frozen! That's the sort of disappointing image it conjures up.

I said that you shouldn't defrost it with a microwave, but it's not all microwaves and ovens. There are also higher end machines that have better functionality which are excellent, but the simple ones, when they defrost would simply warm it up, albeit slowly, on low heat. So if you're gonna use the microwave, buy a good one.

Anyway, there are plenty of different ways to defrost meat. The one I have today is already at room temperature so I'll just be grilling it though.

Alright. Since the pan's already warmed up, let's get spread the oil evenly and start cooking.

I lightly sprinkle and season the steak that had been marinating with the pepper, onion, and garlic with a little salt, and put it into the pan. Even now, there was a trick regarding how strong the fire should be.

There are some people who cook it carefully on low heat, but I'll be opting for a high heat this time. It was so high that there was smoke silently coming out from the pan. You shouldn't be scared of this though.

And also when you're cooking, you absolutely can not touch the meat. There's a method where you have to constantly press on it too, but let's hold ourselves back. As long as we restrain ourselves, there will be a delicacy waiting for us.

I cook it steadily on a high flame, and once the meat juices start to leak out I flip it over. And, it looks like it's time to flambe it.

"Gann-san, your red wine will be used to cook up the finest of steaks."

I pour two large cups of red wine into the pan, inciting the flames further.

"Oi! Are you trying to cause a fire!? Someone! Get water!"

"Adora-san, I'll be angry if you do that, okay?"

I stop Adora-san's uproar with a single sentence, and calmly put a lid over the pan.

"With this... Alright."

"Is that it?"

"Yes, that's all."

Hearing Ganglabe-san's voice, filled with fear, I calmly replied.

Hmmm, I wonder if this world doesn't know about flambeing? No, there's no way, they definitely know about it.

After making sure that the fire from the flambe had gone out, I take it off the pan and arrange it onto the plate.

Now then, let's use the rest of the fat on this pan for the sauce.

I add the garlic, the aroma bursting out, and then the onions and fried them.

Once it was hot enough, I add red wine, and it started boiling, looking like it would jump out; the odourless fish sauce, and melted the butter. With this, it was done.

I pour the sauce into a small container I had prepared, and put it onto the plate with the steak. Done!

Hmm, this turned out well. The fragrance is entrancing, and it even looks good. It's perfect.

"Alright, time to take it to her, I suppose."

"Wait."

Just as I was going to take it to Renha-san, Ganglabe-san grabbed me by the shoulder. What for?

"Give me... just a little taste."

"Hah? There's no way I would allow that."

Since it was the Filet Mignon, there wasn't a lot of it already. If you split this up more, there won't be anything left for Renha-san.

However, Ganglabe-san just smiled, and didn't try to understand what I was thinking at all. Even worse, he was gradually coming closer to me.

Please stop, even if you keep approaching me I won't give it to you.

"Just... A little bit of that piece there?"

"Where did this come from... I'll make it again after so please just wait until then."

"Letting me smell such a delicious fragrance, and hearing such sounds, yet telling me to postpone... how cruel!"

"A person who would try to take someone else's food is even crueler, right?"

"We hath caught the scent of something delicious so We hath come!"

Bang! The one who opened the kitchen door was Princess Tebis. Wutin-san as well.

You guys, what happened with the meeting? Don't you guys have work? I'm pretty sure

I heard you guys did though?

In my stunned state, Princess Tebis walks into the kitchen triumphantly.

On the other hand, Wutin-san made a resigned expression, and was following behind her. You can't just give up, yo.

"Oh! Shuri, could that be a steak that was made by cooking it with alcohol!? We expect nothing less of Shuri, even knowing of Our Country's newest technique!"

"Ah, Princess Tebis."

"Come now, let us make way towards the dining hall! Allow me to try that wholesome steak!"

"No, this is for Renha-san."

"What a delicious smell, *su*! I could smell it all the way from the training grounds, *su*!"

"Truly, it is wonderful, *nou*. Tonight's dinner will surely be luxurious."

Ehh, Cougar-san? Teg-san? Even you two came?

"What a nice smell... I think I'm hungry."

Ahrius-san as well?

"....."

Ah! Riru-san is hiding in the door's shadow!

"Shuri-kun, I could smell something really nice, and heard something, but what's going on?"

Even Ekress-san boldly walked in!

“Ore-sama’s stomach seems to be rumbling now that I’ve finished work... What an irresistible scent.”

Ah, huh? Gingus-san!?

“Oh, is that tonight’s dinner! What is that, Shuri?”

“Um, Gingus-san. This is...”

“Wait, Gingus. I’ll be tasting this first. It’s a new steak after all, you know.”

“Ah, that’s not fair Ganglabe, su”

“Indeed! This one is tired after all my training!” (Cougar)

“Please wait a moment. The Magician’s troops are tired as well. We should be the first.”

“.....This new product will give Riru inspiration.”

“Riru-chan just needs Hamburg right? I should be first.” (Ekress)

“Cease. If we’re on that topic then fried chicken (Karaage) is all you need too Ekress! We should be the one who should confirm the taste first.”

“Awwawawa.....”

Wh-what’s all this? The charm of steak has spread!

Nevertheless, with all this time, the meat has probably rested enough.

For steaks, just because you cooked it, it doesn’t mean it’s immediately delicious. You have to let it rest a little, and allow the meat juices gathered in the centre to spread outwards to the whole of the steak.

Okay, let’s just ignore these people and go.

Trying to turn my eye away from these people causing all this noise, I take the steak with one hand, quietly disappear from their view and left the kitchen.

I can’t take this anymore.

So, time to head to the dungeon. I carry the steak and the sauce, covering them with a beautiful cloth so that no dust could get in.

I bet, around about now, those zombies (Commanders) above me are craving their meat, and are on the prowl right now. Once I get back up to them, I might have to make a steak in the shape of the cross.

Anyway... This time I cooked it in a pan, but if I had a choice, I'm pretty sure cooking it in a fry pan would've been even more delicious.

It's been such a hassle since there's no fry pans even now. Once I get back up there I should ask Riru-san to make me one. It'll probably make the Hamburg even tastier so she should happily cooperate with me.

"The scent comes through from here, *noja!*"

"Ah, Shuri-kun. Here you are."

Hah! I was found!

Princess Tebis and Ekress-san caught up to me.

"T'is just a prank. Shuri, did We hear correctly in that, that was food for Renha?"

"We came because we too, have some business with the Lady."

"Eh? Business?"

"Exactly. We want to speak with her."

"I'm her chaperon."

Hm? I wonder what's going on? It doesn't look like the two of them are being suspicious or anything either... I've got no reason to stop them so it's not like I can tell them no.

"Well, I don't mind. As long as you don't try to steal her steak."

“We cannot promise this, but well, We’ll hold ourselves back.”

“I can’t guarantee this. But, alright, Shuri-kun.”

Are? That means they’re just outright ignoring my condition right? How do I handle this, knowing that they can’t be trusted or believed in?

Embracing my worries inside my heart, the three of us go down the stairs, heading for the dungeon.

“By the way Shuri. The technique that you were using to cook the meat earlier. Was that Wine Cooking?”

“Wine cooking?”

“The technique where you added Red wine, shutting in the fragrance.”

“Ahhh, you mean Flambe?”

Wine cooking is exactly that though.

“Where did you learn that technique from?”

“Umm, mostly self-taught.”

The internet is a useful thing. When I was on earth, the internet would teach me things that I wouldn’t understand just by reading cooking books.

Flambe, in particular, was something I couldn’t get my head around. The timing, or the amount of wine to put in, I had to research all of that and practise.

When you’re trying this at home, please, please try to be careful. It’s a heck of a lot more intense than what they show on tv, so it’ll burn more than you’d think.

“Wonderful! Even in Our country, this is a technique that We had only recently started developing.”

“Is Wine Cooking really that amazing, Princess Tebis?”

Ekress-san looks confused, and asked.

“Indeed, that technique that Shuri displayed, was a method that would use a wine with high alcoholic concentration, pour it into the fry pan, and evaporate all of the alcoholic attributes all at once.

Making use of the final touches, if this was someone who was practised in the technique then, it’s possible for a brilliant fragrance to be attached to the dish.

As We have stated earlier, Even in Our country, Newbyst, it is a newly developed technique, and so there is still a lot of room for improvement. The first thing we did was to eat the steak that we made, but that did not this indescribably wonderful scent, *noja*.

You could smell it from afar, right Ekress?”

“Ahh... to think that I would be able to smell even from such a distance.”

Is it really such an exaggeration?

No, since this steak was a success, it let out such a great smell, that even I, the one who cooked it, could agree with.

“And, for such a wonderful dish to be first experienced by that woman. My, oh my. We have no words.”

Princess Tebis makes an exaggerated movement, and sighed.

“A wonderful new technique, and new sauce. And a new steak. No matter which one I choose, they would all be more fitting in Our mouth. We are even captivated by its fragrance.”

“Umm... if you praise it so much, you’re going to make my back itch.”

Getting such rave reviews... even though this was the exact opposite of the first time I

brought Renha-san food, this was painful in its own way.

I smile bitterly, and I could hear a mutter from further inside.

“Hmph, on top of being a peasant, can you not stay quiet even when you’re delivering food to a noblewoman.”

A voice reverberated throughout the dungeon. It seems as if we had reached the lowest floor at some point, and Renha-san was glaring over at my direction with an annoyed look on her face.

Arara... Perhaps we were a bit too loud.

“Refrain from calling him a peasant, Renha. A friend to the Newbyst Royal family is present after all.”

“!!... Princess Tebis is here as well I see.”

“It’s been a while Renha.”

“Although it seems like it was just yesterday for me! Did you come here to scorn me!? You too, Ekress!?”

“My lady, I have no such intentions.”

Oh noes, Renha-san’s annoyed meter seems to be reaching its breaking point.

Princess Tebis and Ekress-san were calm, but it’s almost as if they had been used as an comparison, as Renha-san’s anger felt all the more furious.

“And? You’re saying that, that cook there, has brought something fitting for me to eat?”

“Yes. Definitely.”

“Hmph, at best it would be fitting for the likes of a cook of a mercenary corp. There’s no way you would be able to cook something fitting of my tastes.”

“No, this here is a steak worthy of you.”

I place the plate with the steak in front of Renha-san, take off the cloth, and poured on the sauce.

A great fragrance immediately spread out. Yes, it's a success.

"Steak in red wine sauce, made by cooking it in red wine."

I tried saying it in a cool voice.

"Wh-what? This fragrance... The fragrance of the rich meat and sauce is filling up this dungeon...!"

Ooh, Renha-san's face finally loosened.

"What is that. You! What have you done to that dish!?"

"W-what, I did? I just cooked it..."

"Don't lie to me! There's no way a steak could release such a ridiculously rich and mellow flavour! You definitely applied some sort of magic to it!"

"Hmm, if you think that there's a trap laid inside using magic then, We shall go ahead."

Eh, I didn't even have enough time to stop her, Princess Tebis took the knife and fork from out of my hands, sat in front of the plate on the ground with the steak, and reached out for the dish.

"No need to worry, Wutin. Stay hidden."

As I thought, Eh?, Princess Tebis elegantly cut a piece of the steak and brought it towards her mouth.

On that face, a smile radiated.

"Ahh, how marvellous. We knew of the meat's tenderness, but it's so much more softer.

Soft enough for it to be cut apart with Our lip. And despite that, the mouthfeel of the meat remains, and every time We bite into it, a magnificent fragrance overflows throughout Our mouth.

The meat's flavour, the sauce's flavour, and the additional flavour that came from cooking it in wine all harmonises, ahh, an indescribable happiness is filling Our mouth. This is something that cannot be accomplished without cooking it in wine, and an occult-like flavour that could not be accomplished with anyone other than someone practised in the art. It's spreading through Our mouth and nose, ahhh, how wonderful.

And it tastes delicious, naturally. The sauce made with a new technique. The garlic, onions, red wine and fish sauce mix together with the fat that had remained from cooking the meat. Along with that sauce, the meat that was cooked just right, correctly, perfectly, releases a terrific taste. There isn't too much salt added, yet it's not too little, just exquisite. And the natural smell of meat has been erased using pepper.

Every single thing, whether it be the new technique, the new sauce, or the perfect cooking and calculations, it truly is the perfected form of how one should prepare and perfect steak. There will be nothing that will surpass this for the next hundred of years, I dare say."

O-ohhhh, Princess Tebis' explanation is amazing...

Both Ekress-san and Renha-san just had a look as if they were gulping down their saliva.

I then, once again, put the steak in front of Renha-san, wiping the fork and knife with the cloth that had covered the plate, and placed them down onto the plate.

Princess Tebis had a satisfied look on her.

"Now then, I apologize for using the knife and fork first, *no*.

However, not even We could resist any longer. How about it? Try a bite."

Renha-san, hesitantly grabbed the fork and knife, and put a piece of the steak into her mouth.

"....."

Renha-san stopped herself from making a face of shock.

“I see, this is indeed a dish worthy of me, no, a steak that even surpasses me.”

With a plunk, Renha-san puts down the fork and knife, and looked directly at Princess Tebis.

In that face, there wasn't the hate that she had previously. Her eyes, were almost as if they had seen through something.

“I see, Princess Tebis. Is this why you would try to attain this fellow to the point of even purposely exposing yourself?”

Eh?

“Shuri. We and Ekress, still have a few words to speak with this thing. Could you please return first.”

“Eh?”

Both Princess Tebis and Ekress-san, had a serious look on their face.

It appears like it's a topic that is out of my reach.

Although I'm not sure what's going to happen between these three, I should probably just obediently back off.

“Understood.”

I excuse myself with a single word, and decided to go back to wash the dishes.

The next day, I heard from Ekress-san that Renha-san had obediently accepted her sins.

Just what exactly had they talked about.....

It appears that even Ganglabe-san said that if she would quietly accept her sins then, he would be fine with her just exiled to some remote region.

It feels like there was some sort of secret backhanded deal going on...

I pray that nothing goes wrong.

Chapter 46A Shriek and Steak (Part 2)

Chapter 47 Divine Revelation and Fried Rice (Part 1)

Chapter 48 Divine Revelation and Fried Rice (Part 2)

Chapter 49 Divine Revelation and Fried Rice (Part 3)

Chapter 50 Wedding Ceremony and Grilling of Ise Lobster (Part 1)

Chapter 51 Wedding Ceremony and Grilling of Ise Lobster (Part 2)

Chapter 52 Wedding Ceremony and Grilling of Ise Lobster (Part 3)

Chapter 53 Wedding Ceremony and Grilling of Ise Lobster (Part 4)

傭兵団の料理番

4

Youheidan no
Ryouriban

Ko Kawai

川井 昂

illustration

四季童子





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