TOWER OF KARMA

BOOK 01

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Tower of Karma

(カルマの塔)

by

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Synopsis

Al is a slave born of a prostitute. Constantly bullied and degraded, Al's life was hard but as long as his elder sister, the only family he had, was with him, he would feel like he could withstand anything. But one day his older sister sold herself to a noble to obtain money to free Al. Despairing, Al is ready to give up, but with with his friends' encouragement, he starts working, hoping to one day buy back his sister.

However, a few days later, a servant of the noble came to him and handed him a bag, claiming he was delivering the body back to its place because disposing of it was troublesome. At the very moment Al looked inside the bag, his mind broke.

"Why is it us, despite also being human, that are treated like trash by people? We all have the same ears and same eyes, and the same color of blood, but it doesn't matter to anyone. Are we not human?"

He needed to know. He needed to prove them. Al has decided. From now on, Al and his sister would always be together.

As he gently rubbed his belly, Al made a vow.

– The next time, it will be their turn to pay the price.

With those words in his heart, he devoted his whole life improving himself and planning for this single goal.

Knowledge, power, deceit, bribing, betrayal; everything was valid. The first step was to rise through the ranks of the military, no matter the means.

It was going to be him the one to stand at the top of this unsightly world full of madmen.

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01. *The Heaven Inside Hell*

This world isn´t just.

If there are people that can casually sip their wine in their glasses, there are many others that need to drink muddy water that was stepped on. If there are people that can cover their body in warm furs, there are others that can only cover themselves with thin rags.

There is no happiness in this world.

In the moment people are born, they fall in different classifications. Children born from rich people, from poor people, noble children, peasant children, children of slaves. If you are born as a slave, life isn´t good even if you crawl out through it.

This world is cruel.

Someone´s happiness leads to someone´s unhappiness. For resources, people fight each other, steal and kill. To live is to dance over corpses. People become crazy and eat, rape, and kill.

This world is hell.

☆

The kingdom of Arcadia. This kingdom whose name means

utopia in the ancient language had considerable power in comparison to its neighboring countries. This was the aggregation of their military power, their economy and the immensity of what they´ve been accumulating during their history. It was the kingdom that had the most honorable origin among the seven kingdoms.

At its royal capital of Arkas, differently from their beautiful and well maintained places, there were also places that were dark and desolate. The people that lived there were dirty and the mood was stagnant. Most of the people living in places like that were slaves.

“Nee-san, Arlette-nee-san. I got bread from the church.”

“Ara, did you properly said thanks to them, my cute little boy?”

“Of course. And by the way, stop with that “boy” thing. I am nee-san´s knight after all.”

“Yes, yes. Then, let´s split the bread in two halves, my little knight.”

There were clear class distinctions in this nation. Generally speaking, the king would be the top, and then there would be the nobility, the normal citizens and the slaves. This was something unchanging, and in order to change your social class, you would need a large amount of money.

“Munch munch munch... It´s tasty, nee-san.”

“Yes, it is very tasty. We need to give our thanks to the priest later.”

The siblings were slaves. Right after giving birth to the little brother, their mother died, and because their mother was a prostitute, they didn´t know who their father was. Their little family was only the two of them.

“Tomorrow, I will go buy eggs with the money I saved up.”

“Then, let´s buy two of them with both of our money combined.”

Finishing to eat the bread made of kabi, they made their plans for tomorrow. It was already hard enough just to keep themselves alive. With both of their effort combined, they would work from morning to night, to then finally eat bread, drink water and have some very diluted soup. Sometimes, they would have the luxury to eat one egg. This was the quality of life of slaves.

“Now, let´s go sleep. Tomorrow we need to be up early, so we have to sleep when it is night.”

“Then, nee-chan, sing a song. I will go sleep too if you do that.”

“Yes, I will sing you a song.”

Even if it was only a little kid, as long as the kid was a slave, he

would need to work. The view that child labor is something bad is something that has been created only recently. Children of farmers would help with the crops, children of merchants and of craftsmen would watch their parents doing their jobs, sometimes giving a try to that themselves, and would learn about it with time. The children of slaves would be included at society only as a form of labor force. Only privileged classes had access to education.

“Nee-san, the song!”

“Yes, yes.”

Putting down the small candle, the small family of only the two of them went to the small bed.With how the bed was so small to the point it felt to them like they would fall down from it if they didn´t hug each other and with them being covered by a very thin cloth that a bit of the cold wind would go through, the bed could be considered a bit too shabby to even be called a bed. But even so, the two were happy with that.

“Nee-san, it is so warm.”

“Forgive the robber. Forgive the thief. Forgive the murderer. Forgiveness has more value than anything; if you pray and look up to the sky, god will grant you forgiveness and compassion. Let´s forgive. Let´s forgive. Let´s forgive. My little treasure, love the beautiful world you were born in.”

While listening to the gentle song, the little brother could feel the warmth of his sister. He was hugging her tightly as if he wouldn´t

let go no matter what. They were a family of only the two of them. That´s why he couldn´t let her go.

“Nee...-sa..n”

The sister was hugging her little brother that had fallen asleep as if he was a precious treasure.

“Good night, Al, my cute little treasure.”

Slaves were human. However, the world wouldn´t recognize them as people.

☆

“Don´t slack, little ones!”

An angry shout went flying through the construction site. The job of the slaves here was to transport materials. Children, which were cheap, were specially prefered for hiring for the simple labor jobs. Even if it was a job that required strength, it didn´t matter. If they passed out, it would be fine enough to just buy another one as the replacement.

“Hey, Al. Let´s meet at that same place at lunch break.”

“Alright. Until then, let´s both do our best, Kail.”

In the instant they passed by each other, in a low voice, they exchanged words. If they showed any signs of slacking even if for only an moment, their owner would have no problems in having them whipped. Slaves like them weren´t considered people.

“I should have told you already you are not to slack!”

As they carried their stones, another child was being whipped to their side.

☆

“Really, it would be nice if the next guy that buys me is a bit more gentle in dealing with his slaves.”

“For stuff like this job we are at, people get really rushed up because of the deadlines after all. Well, but if you are talking about rich old men in particular, nine out of ten... It would be [that], right?”

“Ah... [That thing] is really bad news. Just by thinking about that, my butthole starts to hurt.”

There were varied types of slaves. It was obvious that depending on their types, the person who bought them would have them do different jobs. That certain building company bought Al and Kail in order to finish the work they were contracted for. The construction had a set deadline, and now the were in a position

they had to finish it in one go.

“If we are talking about ideal jobs, it should be the sort of thing like helping the guy with his personal assets, right?”(TL note: Apparently, slaves organizing your assets was a common thing in the ancient roman empire. Since the master can easily have his slave dead if something happens, it was safer to have a slave do this kind of job.)

“I don´t want that. I would need to be separated from nee-san in that case.”

“Here he comes; this siscon.”

“Shut up!”

Slaves didn´t have the privilege to choose their jobs; they would simply go to the place they were sold to. They were an existence that was there only to work. However, for the slave dealers, the mediators in the trades, there was a certain “situation” for the slaves that are easy to sell. While nobody wanted to be sold to a place like this one, a construction work that has a deadline set, if the slave wished for something in exchange for being sold to a place like that, it was more or less possible to have it granted. Al willingly accepted to be sold to a place like that just so that he could express his wish to the slave dealers. Everything was for the sake of him not being separated from his sister.

“Well, it´s weird though. Even though you are a slave, you are living in family.”

Kail was someone from a distant country. That country doesn´t exist anymore, and Kail himself didn´t know if he used to have a family there or not. All he knew was that his country lost the war, he was abducted, was made into a slave, and now, was bought by someone here in Arcadia.

“Things like the whole family being bought together happens a lot of times.”

“That wasn´t the case for you guys though... It must be very harsh.”

“I guess.”

“...I´m not talking about you.”

While saying that, Kail turned his eyes away from Al.

Tilting his head to the side in confusion, Al looked to another direction.

“She is late. She was supposed to be arriving by now.”

Al was anxiously looking around at the surroundings. However, he couldn´t catch sight of her.

“Sorry for the wait.”

A small rock hit Al at his head. The stone that was of about the size of a finger and it gave him more surprise than pain. Al staggered because of that. There was someone standing on the stone wall.

“Havella? You are late.”

The person called Havella looked at both of them with apathetic eyes, which gave off a feeling that was very different from arrogance.

“Sorry. It took time to lose them.”

After saying that, the girl threw to each of them a red fruit.

“Oh, is that an apple? Thanks for the treat! Munch munch”

Although Havelia was giving a side-look at the two eating their apples furiously, she herself was eating her own apple with the same speed, though in a methodical and calm way. The eating speed of the lower classes was fast.

“Fuah, this brought me back to life. Thank you like always, Havella.”

Havella nodded silently to Al, who was expressing his thanks. Her attitude and movement felt very mechanical, but the two of

them were somewhat able to understand her feelings even with that attitude. It wasn´t too long that they started to go along with Havella, but they were more or less able to understand her thoughts.

“But stealing things and so shouldn´t be so easy, right? We can eat apples like that, but maybe this isn´t really worth the risk.”

“There isn´t really any problem. If I am caught, I will only die and nothing more.”

“That is a problem, you know?”

Thievery was a crime. If she was caught, she wouldn´t be overlooked by only compensating for what she stole. She would be hit, be kicked, and she would be forever branded as a thief, having this documented in her ID for as long as she lived. This would be seen as a minus in various ways in her resume, and she also wouldn´t be looked at in the same way ever again.

“There are no problems on that. I am a pro after all.”

Havella wasn´t someone from this country. She was born here, but she was from a bandit family that came from far away from the east. Right after they illegally got inside the kingdom, Havella was born. And so, the kingdom wasn´t aware of Havella´s existence. She didn´t have the qualifications to be a citizen of the kingdom, and because of that, she didn´t have human rights. That was the only thing that was lower than being a slave. Even if it happened that she was killed, it wouldn´t have been different from someone

just having killed some bug or animal.

“Well, you became a member of the thief guild this year. Their standards for that kind of thing are different after all.”

Without saying any words, Havella proudly puffed her chest. It seems that even thieves had pride in being skilled in what they do.

The thief guild was one of the secret guilds in this country. They were a professional group that would undertake shady work. If you were able to win some trust among them, it was possible for you to join them. There were many privileges and advantages in joining them, but at the same time, you needed to have a suitable amount of money to pay them to be able to join the group. Hamella´s parents and herself; all father, mother and daughter were part of the group.

“Because of that, we can have some apples, I guess. Gochisou.”(TL note: It´s that word japanese people say after they finished their meal for those that don´t know.)

Kail was the first to finish eating. After having finished to eat, he sat down at the ground, which was chilly because of the shadow made by the stone wall. A few seconds after that, both Al and Havella finished eating their own apple, finishing it almost at the same time.

“After onee-san finishes her job, give this to her. This is my thanks for the flowers from before.”

“For nee-san!? Thank you Havella!”

Al was showing a broad smile. He looked to be happier than the time he got his own apple. Kail sighed, saying “good grief”, and Havella... As to be expected, she had an expressionless face on.

“But you know, Al´s onee-san is really beautiful, right?”

Kail was looking at Al with a look of contempt.

“You really look like her, but... You don´t really look masculine, do you?”

Al angrily looked at Kail. His beautiful and soft black hair that was just like his sister made he look a bit girly. He was thin, but this was because of the lack of food to eat. Although he looked even girlier than Havella, he still was male.

“Shut up. I will protect nee-san. I will protect her so that bugs like you won´t approach her!”

“You have courage to be treating people like insects. Despite being so skinny...”

Kail jumped at Al and got on top of him. Messing around, he started to pull Al´s cheeks. Seeing what was happening, Havella muttered something, but it nobody heard what she said.

“So, who is protecting who?”

“Shush up (Shut up)!

“Really… You are all talking.”

Kail took his fingers away from Al´s cheeks, which made them go back to normal.

“Hm?”

Right as he did that, the sound of a bell came from the construction site. This was the bell that showed the time when the break was over and also the time of the beginning of their rough work.

“Ah, I guess it´s the end of our playtime. Then, Havella, let´s meet again after our working time is over.”

“We will be whipped if we don´t hurry after all. Then, see you later.”

“Alright.”

The two went to the construction site and the other one vanished inside the city. All that remained at the back-alley distant from the people eyes were the seeds of the apples.

☆

Al was running. While holding the apple and egg by his chest, he hurried to his beloved sister. While being filled with thoughts of how his sister would react once he showed this apple, Al smiled. He wondered if she was going to be pleased and happy, or if she was going to get a bit angry about it, but after that, give him a hug.

Al caught sight of his house. It was very shabby. The house was small and filled with holes. But even so, this was the most important place to him.

“Nee-san, I am back!”

Al opened the door. What was reflecting in his eyes was a beautiful long hair that had the same color of his own; a black that could be mistaken with obsidian. This was enough to make him happy.

“You know what I got today? An egg and ta-dah! Havella gave it to me. It´s an apple! An apple!”

Al waited for a reaction. His sister calmly turned her head to him and showed a happy smile.

“Welcome back, my cute little knight.”

Al exploded with happiness with that smile.

“Uh? Today´s soup…”

When Al looked at the food that was on the table, he made a puzzled face.

He could still understand how it was possible that there were two egg dishes and the bread on their table. The bread could still have come from the church, and the flowers might have sold well. This was still possible to understand. However, the soup wasn´t the diluted one of always, but one that was filled with many ingredients; it was something Al had never seen before.

“Today´s sellings went really well, so I thought about making a stew. In the past, mother made one for me once, and it was very delicious.”

Al was showing a happy face to the words that his sister was telling him, but there were still signs of doubt remaining in his heart. He wondered if there was any reason why it was today that they were having this special dish.

“”It´s not like today is some holiday or anything. Well, but it looks tasty.””

Al´s belly grumbled. Showing a smile, Arlette urged Al to eat.

“Thanks for the meal!”

Al started to eat in big bites. The taste of the bread made of kabi together with the juice of the stew made him feel like he ascended to heaven. Was it really fine for it to be so tasty and so good? Because of how much happy he became, Al got a bit scared.

“Is it tasty? I wonder if I cooked it well.”

Al vigorously nodded at Arlette´s question. Arlette showed a cramped smile by how fast he was nodding. Even if it was only a single smile, it filled Al´s heart with happiness. Each and every single gesture of his sister was enough to make Al happy.

“”Ah, I am so happy.””

Happiness comes in more than one form. Even if they were poor and even if they were treated as slaves, as long as Al could be together with his sister, it was fine to him. He didn´t need anything else. Al loved his sister so much to the point that he could easily declare that. And in the same way, his sister loved him too.

“Hey, Al?”

She loved Al. That´s was exactly why they misunderstood each other.

“What is it, nee-san?”

Al tilted his head to the side. Some of the stew flew of from the corner of his mouth. Al hurriedly wiped his mouth.

“Hey, Al… is the job you are doing now too harsh?”

Suddenly, his sister asked. Al shook his head.

“It isn´t really that much. They don´t whip people for no reason like the last one, and they also don´t hit us for fun.”

Arlette´s expression became cloudy because of Al´s response. Al wasn´t telling any lies. He really thought it wasn´t anything special. He believed that this much of roughness was simply the normal. Other children of his same age wouldn´t go through this much. Even children of farmers wouldn´t go through such unreasonable experiences. Being punched, kicked, and receiving almost no pay for working through the whole day. For him, this was the usual. He didn´t know anything else other than hell…

“If Al was to be released and become a free person, what would you do?”

Al showed a wry smile.

“It´s impossible. We don´t have enough money to buy ourselves. Even if we work for our whole life, it wouldn´t be enough. That is specially for me. Even a slave like me that only works on labor still receive the lowest wages; it is still impossible.”

He had already given up since the beginning. This was the obvious. In this country, there weren´t ways for slaves to crawl out

from slavery. Even a child like Al understood that. He understood it was impossible.

“But what if it really happened?”

“That... I want to become free, but... Ah, if we keep talking about things like that, the soup will end up getting cold. Even though it is a stew you prepared with so much work...”

Rather than talking about impossibilities, the soup had better priority. Once again, Al began to devour the stew.

If Al had properly finished telling his feelings at that moment, perhaps he would have been able to change the future; whether that was for good or for bad.

“”But as long as I am together with Arlette-nee-san, I don´t care if I am a slave or not.””

This was something he would only come to know later on.

02. The Beast Born From The Crumbled Paradise

In the next day, Arlette was bought by a noble family. All that remained from her was the money for Al to buy himself.

Since a few days ago, despite being refused many times, Arlette had been begging for money at a market she had never been to before and had been accumulating money for paying for Al´s freedom.

Everything was for the sake of Al´s happiness...

Al wasn´t able to stop her. He wasn´t able to stop his sister from being taken.

Al wasn´t able to tell her. He wasn´t able to tell her not to leave him alone.

Al became alone. All this in exchange for him being released from slavery and also some money so that he could live for a while without concerns.

☆

“Yo, long time no see, freed man Al-kun.”

In the way back from Kail´s work, Kail and Havella visited Al´s

house. Al received them with a dispirited face.

“…You are shabby like always… Properly clean your room, hey.”

Kail quickly started cleaning. Havella didn´t move to help. She wasn´t good at housework in general. To some point, Kail was good at that overall.

“Here, Al.”

Havella handed an apple to Al. Al sluggishly moved his hand to take the apple, but Kail hit it before he could take it.

“There aren´t apples dead fish can eat.”

“…The apple I stole…”

Ignoring the murmured words, Kail glared at Al.

“I won´t tell you to go work. You aren´t anyone´s thing anymore, but a freed man. You won´t be treated as well as other people, but you can say goodbye to all the labor work. I am envious, damn it.”

Kail grabbed Al´s collar.

“But you know, why the hell are you making those dead fish

eyes? Don´t go start living like a dead log. Who do you think you own your freedom to!? Aah!? Who do you think that sold her own life for you!? For all the unhappiness that person will have to shoulder from now on, you should at least become happy, or it is no good! You idiot!”

Kail´s angry voice echoed at the shabby small room. Havella doesn´t stop Kail.

“But, nee-san is already…”

Kail headbutted Al, who was grumbling something. This made even Havella surprised.

“If you have the time to be talking about those meaningless things, then go work! Work, work and buy Arlette-san back. This is what you need to do to repay her!”

Al eyes became wide-opened. He had forgot that he could buy his sister himself. Something like that used to be something out of reality for him. It was the same as impossible… But that would only be the case for slaves.

“The limitations for people that used to be slaves are harsh, but people like that are still closer to normal people. The payment they receive has no comparison to the ones of slaves. It won´t be easy, but it also isn´t impossible. I can help you too if you need.”

“Now that all is said and done, what are you going to do, skinny knight.”

Al was embarrassed of himself. He felt he didn´t have the face to look at his two friends anymore. They were thinking about him and his sister much more than he himself was. Al was filled with gratitude.

“Thank you. I will work. I will work hard and buy nee-san´s freedom.”

The light in Al´s eyes were relighted. When, Kail saw that, he became a bit embarrassed of what he had done and extended his hand to Al, who had fallen down with the headbutt.

“Sorry, I exaggerated a bit. But you know, as long as there is someone you can repay the favor to… you can´t give up.”

Kail didn´t have any relatives. He didn´t know if his family was dead or alive. They were probably dead. Even if he had lingering debts of gratitude with them, he wouldn´t be able to pay them back for eternity. It was because Kail knew that that he faced Al seriously. Differently from himself, his best friend was still able to make it in time.

“Yes, thank you, my best friend.”

Al tightly grabbed Kail´s hand. Putting strength in his hand, Kail

pulled Al.

“Havella too. Thank you.”

“Yes. I am your friend too after all.”

She had an expressionless face. However, it wasn´t like she didn´t have any emotions. Al was able to understand the feelings that were at the other side of her expressionless face.

“Then, can you treat your two friends that are tired after working.”

“I don´t have any decent food with me. There is only water and bread pretty much.”

“I have food.”

Havella took out a pouch from behind her. Inside the pouch, it was filled foodstuff to the point that it felt as if she had stolen all this specially for this moment. Looking at each other, Al and Kail smiled. Havella was looking at the two smiling like that without saying anything or without any expression, but even so, she smiled at the two.

“Ahaha, thanks Havella. Leave it to me. I will do to the best of my ability and treat you with the best cuisine... Well, that is something I learned by watching nee-san though, so...”

Tucking his sleves, Al headed to the very cramped and meager kitchen. Kail and Havella were looking at him from behind, watching him cooking.

It was fine even if he failed. The worth in doing this lied on the fact that it was Al who was cooking. Besides, they were slaves. They were lower than humans. Even if Al failed, they would put to use their prided ability of being able to eat anything.

“Ugeh.”

“Disgus... Tast.... Disgusting.”

With how the result became a unrecognizable muddled mix of ingredients, Al´s first try in cooking became something that even surpassed the tastes in food of the three of them, who actually were capable of thinking of mudded water as something tasty.

“Ku, hahaha. This really tastes like shit. By the way, this fruit there really stinks.”

“It was the most expensive one. That stall is a fraud.”

“Like a thief can say something like that. Well, it is really a fraud that this shitty thing can sell for so much.”

“Even though it was so hard to peel that spiky skin... It´s cruel to

me how its insides smells so bad.”

At the house that would already be cramped for two people, the three of them were messing around at the dining table. His feeling of solitude weakened, and for some reason, he became filled with energy. It was something a bit different than family; it was friendship. This peaceful feeling was filling the house.

“Ahahahahhaha.”

Al smile came back to his face.

It could be said that at that moment, perhaps it would be the last time he would be able to truthly smile.

☆

In their way back to their homes from Al´s house, Kail and Havella were walking side by side.

“...For now, I will have Kail know about it.”

“Hm, what is it all of the sudden?”

Usually, except when the three of them were together, Kail and Havella wouldn´t really talk to each other. Besides that, it was rare for Havella to start the conversation herself.

“The noble that bought Arlette-san, that count Vrad... There is a problem with him..”

“Problem... Hey, are you saying that...”

“Al will need”

Kail was pulling his hair. Without having anywhere to release the anger he felt for his loved pme, Arlette, and his best friend´s misfortune, he could only vent his frustration by doing that.

“This is... unfair.”

The moonlight was being covered by the clouds, and the darkness of the night weighed upon them

☆

Al was now working his mind off. In the end, the only work Al, who couldn´t read and didn´t have any education, was able to do was physical work and other simple works. If he was going to work at those kind of jobs, the payment he would receive then wouldn´t become much better compared to what he used to receive. However, a person that had set goals was strong.

“I will definitely take nee-san back!”

With indomitable determination, Al was resolved to save up money to extreme extents.

One day, a certain person came to the front of his house. It was a man that was carrying a sack. While wondering what he was doing there, Al called for him.

“Sorry, do you have any bussiness with me?”

The man looked to Al´s direction. His gaze felt like he was looking at Al like he was an insect. This kind of gaze was something Al had experienced many times.

“Hey there, dirt slave brat.”

The man threw the sack to Al. Al angrily responded to him.

“I am not a slave anymore.”

“Hmph. So does it mean you became a human now? Listen, slaves like you can´t become human as long as they live. A slave is still a slave. Freed slaves are nothing but slaves that aren´t being kept by someone.”

This kind of opinion wasn´t something rare. In this country, probably most of the citizens had the same thoughts. Al had already become used with this extent of sneering, but it still didn´t feel good to hear it.

“…What is with this sack?”

Even if he continued to argue with him, it would be useless. Al decided to ask the man what was going to have benefit to him instead of talking about useless things. Seeming like the man wanted to quickly get out of this town, which was much closer to being a slum, he didn´t show any signs of desiring to continue to argue about that.

“The toy became became worn out. It would have been fine if this was in the Count Vrad´s territory, but the agency for dealing with these kind of things here in the royal capital are a pain to deal with. That´s why I came here to give it back to the place it used to live at. Really, what a pain in the ass.”

The word “toy” kept ringing in Al´s ears for some reason. The words “place it used to be” were also worrying.

“What do you mean?”

The man looked at Al with an annoyed face.

“What do you mean your ass. You are really bad at guessing, brat. The toy the count Vrad bought broke, so I came to give it back to its respective place. The rest is for you to deal with. That´s all.”

Saying only that, the man took his leave.

Al reluctantly moved his hand to the sack.

His heart was beating like an alarm bell. He should release his hand from the sack. He mustn´t go closer than that.

Al already understood since long ago. He knew what there was inside. It was because he knew it that he mustn´t look what was inside it. He was not supposed to look at it. He was supposed to throw it away without seeing what was inside. It would be fine if he just threw it away at a river; it was fine even if he burrowed it. But even though that was all he needed to do...

Al ended up opening the sack. What was inside it was...

“Gu-urgh.” (Vomit sound* -.-)

He was able to endure for a few moments. However, when he opened up, the rotten smell rose up. The instant he confirmed what was the[thing] inside, without being able to keep up holding it up, everything that was inside his stomach splashed out from his mouth. The gastric juice burned his throat. At the ground, there was a sea of the fluid he threw up.

“Ah... Ah.. Ah.....”

His broken heart was letting voices of agony. He started to feel like he wanted to abandon everything and run away. He wanted to forget. He would forget about all this and go back to the days filled with hopefulness. The Kail and Havella, all the three of them.

After all, Arlette-neesan had already…

“Ah, that´s right, brat… What the… That´s disgusting, hey!”

The man came back for some reason. Al raised his blank eyes.

“The payment for getting rid of the [thing]. Here, take it.”

A silver coin was thrown in front of his eyes. Despite that, Al continued to only look at the man´s face.

“Why, why…”

After seeing at Al mumbling nonsense, the man started to complain, spitting saliva as he talked.

“It´s up to the count what he wants to do with what he bought. The count bought it and broke it himself. It´s a pain to get rid of it, and I am even giving you some money because of that. What is wrong with you? Do you want a gold coin? Do you want it? You fucking miser. That´s why I don´t like slaves. You don´t need to pay horses or cows; they are much better. These shitty slaves..”

After spewing whatever he wanted to say, he kicked the sack. A corpse that had lost its limbs came out from the sack. Whether the limbs were cut so that it would become easier to carry or whether those were cut while it was still alive was something Al didn´t

know. He didn´t want to know either.

“Come to think of it, this woman... It looks like she used to be quite the beautiful woman. Aa-ah, what a waste. If she was born a noble, she would be pampered all over. Well, it can´t be helped. She was a slave after all.”

After saying that, this time, the man left the place for good.

Only Al remained at the place. He simply was standing there stonished. If only he was born a noble... If he wasn´t a slave... Those two thoughts were swirling inside his mind. Al was finally able to understand the meaning of not being considered human. All this that he was supposed to already know about... and all that he had been pretending not to exist until now.

“...I see.”

Al knew it now.

“...So it was that.”

Al ended up understanding the meaning of not being human.

“Ku, kuku, kuhahahahahhahaaahahahahahhahahahaha!”

Al laughed like a maniac. Rather, he was filling himself with insanity on his own stead. By doing so, he could have his heart

break down.

“We are not humans. Isn´t it weird, nee-san! Look, even we have red blood!”

Hugging himself, Al was scratching both of his arms. With his nails gourging at his skin, blood was flowing from his wounds.

“We walk with two feet and we even have two arms! We have five fingers and also two eyes. We have nose, ears, mouth... Even though we are all the same, we aren´t human!!”

Al shouted.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

With tears of blood flowing from his eyes, his black hair became mixed with white hair. Hatred, anger, resignation, hopelessness; all those varied emotions were swirling inside him, which lead to the gruesome expression he was making. Al broke down. Probably, his sister had also broken down at that time. He was crossing over humanity and becoming a beast...

“...That´s no good.”

However, right at the last moment, Al stopped. It wasn´t acceptable for him to become a beast. Even if a beast could kill humans, it wasn´t capable of destroying the human society. There was no meaning in becoming just a simple loser that was weeded

out by the civilization laws.

“So I guess if I don´t do this as a human, I won´t accept it myself? Yeah.”

Al understood this by instinct.

“Ok, I am calm now. I am a human. At least, there won´t be any meaning to it if we ourselves don´t think so. Isn´t that right, nee-san?”

Despite his sister now being completely changed, Al embraced her like he would always do.

“Sorry for having shouted before, nee-san. I became so happy we could meet once again, so I ended up shouting. Ahaha, isn´t it weird? It´s alright, nee-san is the most beautiful person of the world.”

Her arms and legs were severed, her teeth were broken, her nipples were cut out, her ears were cut out, her eyes were gouged out and the last expression she had made on the verge of her death was gruesomeness itself. In addition to that, because of the considerable amount of time that had passed since she died, she started to smell rotten. But even so, to Al, she still looked beautiful.

“Welcome back, nee-san. Now, let´s go back home. We. If we are together, we can do anything. If it is the two of us, surely…”

Carrying Arlette in his arms, Al went inside home.

He left the silver coin behind. There is no way he could take that. Fff. It was. There is no way he could downgrade his sister to a toy because of one silver coin.

“Are we really not human? Or are we? I want to know. I need to know. That´s why.”

Al closed the door. Inside his house, he was now alone together with his sister. The small house was only for the two of them. The walls were filled with holes, the dining table was very shabby, and the small bed the two of them slept at used to be where his sister would gently put him to sleep.

“Just watch and see, nee-san.”

And then, Al slowly opened his mouth…

“Watch all we will be doing together from now on from inside me.”

This was the first time Al became burdened with karma.

☆

“Al!?”

Al´s house was burning. The fire was rising high in the sky and the little house was easily being engulfed by it. He was going to turn all his memories into ashes.

“Is it Kail? Don´t

Kail turned his eyes to the direction the voice came from. At that direction, there was someone he was unfamiliar with standing in front of the burning house. With his beautiful chalk white hair that was shining with the light of the fire, the boy was beautiful to the point of it being scary.

“Are you… Al?”

Kail timidly asked. The boy laughed.

“Isn´t it obvious? Kail is the one who is being weird.”

Kail trembled. Kail knew most of what happened. Havella had been following what was happening with Al´s sister. From the information she received from the connections she had at the guild, it seemed that another slave had died by the count Vrad´s bad habit. And besides that, the one that died was a beautiful slave with black hair. His elder sister had died. To Al, his sister was supposed to be what he most loved without doubt. But even so…

“Havella too, long time no see. You´ve been busy these days. I was very lonely that I couldn´t meet you two.”.

But even so, Al was acting like he usually would to the point of it becoming scary. It seemed that he being able to keep his composure. No, actually he wasn´t even trying to keep it. He was completely calm. Without having even the slightest trembling, Al was standing there.

“I was thinking about changing where to live. See? I have a good amount of money with me for the time.”

He said that as if that was the reason why he had set fire on his house. He was calm, but without doubts, he had gone insane.

“I want to become capable of doing the things I want to do. And in that sense, I am no good in the way I am right now. I need more knowledge. I need more power. It´s no good if I keep being a little kid. So, you see…”

Al was looking at his own house burning.

“I need to say goodbye to the old things. Isn´t that right, nee-san?”

Al stroked his own belly. It was as if there was something inside it. Kail was looking at it startled. Neither Kail nor Havella were able to ask Al about that. They couldn´t ask where Al had put his sister´s body. How aberrant it would be if the case was really what they were imagining it was.

“What is it that you want to do…?”

Kail asked Al a question. In response to that, Al showed a innocent smile to him.

With his white hair fluttering, and leaving the fire, his old home and his memories behind, Al declared.

“I am aiming for the top. I want to do this so I can know if I… No… I want to do it to prove whether we are humans!”

The flames were rising high in the sky. Kail understood. The old Al had already died. The gentle boy that had the same black hair as his sister had already died. And the Al that was standing there now…

…Was a [white retaliator].(TL note: Kind of weird word o.o I think it is better than avenger or revenger though ;p)

03. *Premilinary Arrangements*

Since that day, it has been five years.

After a long winter, spring finally came to Arcadia. This year in special, the winter had been very harsh and there were many people that died by starving and were frozen to death. Because of that, everyone was waiting for spring. There was nobody that didn´t become happy by the arrival of spring.

That wasn´t an exception to a certain bookstore of imported books that was located at some nook at the royal capital. In the winter, while they would still could sell books, they would hardly be able to get any new books shipped. Without new books, there were less reasons for the regular customers to buy books, and in consideration to the literacy rate, it was very rare to get new customers.

They would get new shipments at spring. It was a happy season for the book store.

“Hey, take that book from the thirteenth shelf. Uhh, that one that was an anatomy book from Mahshia. Ah, I forgot the name.”

The owner of the bookstore had received th from a customer and now called for his assistant that was at the back of the store.

“It should be the “advanced studies of anatomy”, the one written by Danvour, right? Is it the copy or the translated one?”

“That one, that one. Wasn´t that one still untranslated? I have the feeling that we received new books recently though.”

“Cough*, I translated it myself.”

Getting surprised, the owner´s eyes became wide. The customer, who had heard that, also had his eyes wide-open.

In order to write a “translated book”, it would at least be necessary to know two different languages and for the translation itself, it was required of one´s senses for word choice, which was extremely difficult. And in addition to all that, the book that was translated was one that had arrived only a few days ago.

“Then, I will have the translated version.”

“Thank you for the patronage. Hey, give me the translated one.”

“Understood. Please, wait a moment.”

While his assistant went to get the book, the owner was having a short talk with the customer. Entertaining the customers was also an important job.

“Ah, he is really talented, isn´t him? That boy.”

“The first time he came here, he couldn´t read even a single

letter. But he desperately studied, read many books, and before I could notice, he was already even more knowledgeable about books than me."

As if he was bragging about his own child, the owner showed a broad smile.

"Now, he can more or less handle the transactions of the shop, and he can even have a normal conversation with the merchants from the other countries. He is even better at foreign languages than me. Not that I am bragging about it though."

Seeing how owner that clearly wanted to boast about his assistant, the customer could only show a wry smile to him.

"Well, but if you were to talk about his bad points..."

The owner turned his head to the back of the shop, wondering when his helper would come. The sound of footsteps coming closer. Finally, the assistant came.

"Here is the requested book. A translated version of the "advanced studies of anatomy". Cough*, I sticked to the original as much as I could in my translation. If there are any parts that are difficult to understand, please, contact me, and I will immediately come to help you."

It was a gray haired young man. His eyes were hidden by his unkempt long gray hair. His skin was pale. He was so full of dust to

the point that it looked like he was covered in ashes. He had a bent posture. He wasn´t short, but he seemed so because of his bad posture. His appearance was dull, unattractive, and he didn´t stand out. He was a youth that gave an extremely weak impression.

“If only he kept up his appearance. When he was a kid, he used to be cute, but after he got absorbed by the books, he became like that. Well, he is very exceptional, so I can´t be complaining.”

As if the youth had already become used to people talking bad about his appearance, he didn´t show any signs of caring about being talked bad about it.

“Well, isn´t it fine? Thank you. I´ve been waiting the whole winter for this book. However, I don´t know the language of Mahshia. Even if I had the original book, I still would have needed to get a translator to translate for me. You saved me from some extra hardships.. This really helped me.”

After saying that, the customer took out twice the price of the book from his pocket.

“This is the payment for your translations. Please, accept it.”

“Cough*, is it fine?”

The youth asked the owner. The shop owner nodded. This was something he had received directly from the client out of his own feelings.

“Thank you very much.”

The young man received exactly half of the price paid for the book. Seeing that, the client became content, and taking with him the translated book which was made with parchment paper, he left the bookstore. (TL note: Parchment is paper made out of the skin of animals, usually it being the skin of sheep or goats.)

“Is it really fine for me to take this?”

“This is something you earned by your work. You should take it.”

The young man once again confirmed with the owner whether he could really take the money. It was only after the owner said he could that he accepted the money. But at that same time he took the money, he violently coughed.

The owner suddenly looked over at the young man´s face. His complexion clearly seemed to be worse than the usual.

“You´ve been looking a bit sick these last few days. It´s fine if you take a break today.”

“Cough*, sorry. I will gladly accept it.”

It was still early for the bookstore to be closed, but it looked like the owner was more worried about the young man´s condition. He

started to prepare to close the shop. The young man was about to help him with that, but...

“I´m fine here. Instead of helping me, you should go rest. You are not allowed to read any books, and once you get to your home, you should just eat some food and go to sleep. Tomorrow, . Alright?”

“Understood. I will be going first then.”

The young man quickly bowed. And then, he left the bookshop from the backdoor.

“I hope it is only a cold.”

The owner worriedly looked at curved back of the young man as he left the book store.

☆

The young man didn´t catch the attention of any person. He didn´t stand out; his existence was like mist.

Even if he was to broke off from the direction of the flow of people walking in the street and went to another way, nobody would notice. The customer from before probably already forgot about the young man´s appearance by now.

Going to a back-alley, the flux of people that were walking by was

becoming smaller. Without losing his way, the young man continued to walk. Even at the royal capital, there were places that could be called “dead spots”. Nobody would go through those places. They were places that there wouldn´t be anyone. At the empty back-alley, a small ditch flowed under the street.

“You came. You are early.”

“It looks like I have talent for acting.”

The young man scratched his head. The gaze in his eyes became now filled with energy. The contrast was to the point of it being puzzling.

“Look, Kail, Havella. These are apples I´ve just bought with the extra money I received from a tip.”

The boy threw an apples for each of the two. He also had fixed his bent back now. The aura he gave off became completely different.

“Thank you there, Al.”

Yes, the young man was Al. The boy from five years ago that had lost his sister and pledged he was going to have revenge has now turned into a grown man. His voice had finished changing and sounded more adult-like, and the ghastly aura he used to give off before became fainter. But even so, he was Al without doubt.

“Well, I was thinking the new star of the gladiator scene and the

elite of the assassin´s guild wouldn´t want something like an apple though.”

Kail and Havella had also changed in those five years.

Kail became even taller. Because of his appealing large build, he was sold to the coliseum. And since then, he had been cheered at in his battles at the arena. He was a new up-coming strong combatant.

Havella joined into a guild that could be said to be one rank up from the thief guild; the assassin guild. She obtained the secret techniques from the guild which could put any opponent to shame, and by growing up, she also obtained the feminine charm, which also became a weapon for her. As a thief, she was first class.

“Then, what is it today, our so busy friend that wouldn´t even meet with us these days?”

It has been long time since Al met Kail and Havella. The last time he met with them was half an year ago, and even before that, he didn´t meet with them often.

“It can´t be helped. It felt like dying to have to memorize all those things. Studying too.”

Kail and Havella were also busy themselves, but Al had taken it to another level. For most of his time, he indulged himself in reading books without rest, accumulating knowledge, and he also exercised

so that his body wouldn´t become weak. Most of the times he would meet with Kail, he would practice with him in order to obtain the experience Kail had got in the coliseum.

“You already learned all there is to learn.”

Everything were all preparations for today...

“I also grew up a bit. Well, I´ve been keeping myself thin for the sake of keeping up with my character, but I should go back to normal after eating and sleeping a little.”

Al had been waiting for today. In these five years, he had continued to train in order to increase his strength. To Al, winter had been going on since that day. It felt to him as if this winter had ended today, and that it had become spring now.

“So, I understand that you are going to make your move now, but what are you exactly planning to do?”

Kail asked Al. He understood Al was now going to make his move. The three of them understood that what Al had been doing during these five years was all for this sake. However, they have never asked to Al what his plans were.

“That´s right. First, I will have myself killed.”

“Wha-!?”

Al declared something crazy all of the sudden. Kail and Havella could only become surprised by that.

“This is the first prerequisite. In this country, a slave can´t climb up to the top in their entire lifetime. Even if they are released from slavery, they are still [released slaves] and not proper citizens. We aren´t allowed to participate in wars to increase our social status like the normal people do.”

Released slaves had privileges that were close to the ones of normal citizens. But in the end, they still wouldn´t be able to leave from the boundaries of their label as slaves. The next generation of the freed slave, or in other words, their children, would have the same privileges as normal people, thus moving up to the position of citizens. But on the other hand, the person in concern himself would forever be branded as a slave no matter what miracle was to happen.

“And that is no good. If I can´t prove them, then there is no meaning to it. Isn´t that right, nee-san?”

Al stroked his belly affectionately. Seeing that, Kail and Havella made a kind of a complex face.

“No matter how much money I pay, as long as I am a slave, I won´t become a normal citizen, much less something above that. The spots for public jobs are monopolized by the nobility and besides that, they have more control in the politics than the common people to begin with. In the end, there are no other choice other

than going to war. There are no other choices other than get great achievements and raise my standing."

But if he was to do that, he would only be walking in circles. In the end, it was impossible for slaves to crawl out of their social status.

"That´s why I need to die. It is necessary that I am killed. If so, the freed slave called Al will be killed, and the label of being a slave that had been attached to me will be gone with it."

They understood what Al was talking about. It was impossible for a slave to increase their standing. Even if one reaches the top as a gladiator, it wouldn´t be possible to participate in wars. Slaves weren´t accepted by the society. However, having oneself killed was like putting the cart before the horse.

"So, for now, Kail, can you go tomorrow or so to the bookstore to tell that my condition went bad and that I want to have a few day offs? Say that I am very sorry and these other sort of things. Also, tell him that I don´t want him to get contaminated with my illness, so he shouldn´t come take care of me, and that I will be able to handle it by myself."

As he asked Kail to tell a message to the store owner, Al headed to the ditch. Taking some water in his hands, he washed his face. The pale color of sickness and the dark circles in his eyes vanished. Behind all that, a clean and youthful skin appeared.

"Havella, I´ve also been troubling you with favors. Those were

very nice makeup. Maybe it is because women use these often? Kuku, women are very good swindlers it seems."

"But I don´t use makeup."

"I see. It kind of feels like foul-play by you saying that. Well, I guess it´s fine."

After raising his face, it could be seen Al reincarnated into a beautiful youth that was beyond recognition to his previous self. But all this was because of the makeup. In these last three years, he had never missed putting the makeup for even a day. Just by using it, it would feel like his aura would become one of another person. And in addition to that...

"After washing up my hair, it will be complete."

The gray hair. His hair that certainly was supposed to be white was looking like it was dirtied by the gray color. However, after washing his hair, it became white as chalk. This was also part of his disguise. Until know, he had been accumulating all those minor acts. All these were the preparatory steps for having the freed slave Al killed.

"Well, let´s leave the rest for later. For now, I will be counting on you, Kail. Make a face as much sad as you can."

Al wiped his wet face with the hem of his clothes.

“I have many favors to ask Havella after that. Pass by my home later when you can.”

“I don´t mind.”

“What are you going to ask her?”

“Ah, just a few little things.”

Kail looked at Al with a puzzled face, but Al acted as if that didn´t concern him at all. He completely deflected Kail´s question.

“Now then, after a few days, let´s meet here again. I will be talking about things in more detail then.”

And so, the three left the place.

04. Al Dies And A Nameless Person Is Born

“I told you before, didn´t I? Didn´t I say I had a plan? I don´t need my ID anymore.”

“Is there even anyone that would destroy their own ID!? If you are going to do something as reckless as that, you might as well go look for a solution for getting high status as a slave! If it is you, you surely would get appointed as a translator somewhere, you know!?”

“Hah, translators are just people that are used by those rich nobles as nothing more than chess pieces for their companies. They would want to use me as a chess piece!”

“But then, what about your ID!?”

Al and Kail were having a bit of a discussion. Sparkles were scattering around between them. Havella maintained a posture of not involving herself in their quarrel.

“I told you before, didn´t I? It´s impossible to rise up as a slave.”

“But people that lost their documents are worse than slaves, you know? They aren´t even treated as humans.”

“So do you mean slaves are treated as humans?”

Al was glaring at Kail. He was giving off something that was similar to killing intent.

Seeing how Kail started shrinking away after Al said that, Al was able to calm down a bit.

“Fuh, sorry. But it is no good to go on as a slave. It is impossible for me to do it as myself. From the instant you are born, you are destined to be a tool. That is what it means to be a slave.”

After Al had his haircut done by Havella, he became like a completely different person. Rather, he came back to his true form.

“It is impossible in this kingdom. Do you understand what I mean by this?”

“...!? Are you leaving the kingdom?”

Kail finally understood. It wasn´t allowed for slaves to get high in life. However, if he was to go to another country which had different laws, it would be possible to do so.

“Half correct. Well, I will really be leaving the kingdom. Secretly, so that nobody finds out.”

However, it was there where the problem begins. In a similar way to illegal immigrants, people that didn´t have an ID wouldn´t be permitted to go out of the country, much less secretly. To begin

with, the existence of people without ID wasn´t tolerated.

To Al, who destroyed his own ID, just leaving the kingdom was already a problem.

“Hey, hey. Don´t say stupid things. How do you think Havella is here now? From where do you think Havella´s parents came through to get here?”

Kail scratched his head while saying “I see”. Havella didn´t have an ID, and both her parents secretly entered. In other words, by backtracking the way they went through...

“It is possible to get out of this country. However, the path is rough.”

Havella spread a map she had prepared beforehand. That was the map of the sewers. Seeing that, Kail let out a big sigh.

“Al, this is impossible. The sewers are filled with human waste. Besides, pushing your way through all that distance to outside the kingdom isn´t something sane to do.”

Hearing Kail´s words, Al made a wry smile.

“Kail. No matter how much unpleasant it is, no matter how much hardship there is, as long as it isn´t impossible, it still can be done. What´s the matter with human waste? If that is the case, should I take a sip at it so that I can prove you? If it is for the sake

of advancing to the top, I can take a sip on anything."

Al had already set his resolve since very long ago. No matter which methods he had to use, he was going to rise in life. If if the most he had to face was human shit, he wouldn´t spare himself from eating it if necessary.

"There won´t be any problems going through the sewers. Later, you need to check if you don´t have any injuries just in case though."

It was going to be a sea of excretes filled with germs. Al was going to go through such kind of sea. If he had even the smallest wound get in contact with all the bacteria, he would get ill, and so getting diseases such as tetanus.

"Alright. However, what are you going to do after you leave the kingdom? Even if you make a name for yourself in another country..."

"You are also wrong about that, Kail. I will make my name here. There won´t be any meaning to it if I am only recognized at other countries, right? I am leaving for the sake of being able to rise to the top right here. This will only be temporary, you see."

Kail had a doubtful expression. Havella also wasn´t able to understand. Seeing them act like that, Al giggled. He put his hands on the shoulders of the two.

“Well, just watch. I won´t be waiting for a miracle to happen to me. I will snatch the opportunities myself.”

The two of them couldn´t see the expression Al was making.

“The next time I come back here, it will be the start of a new [me]!”

After all these five years of staying low key, today was going to be the beginning of everything. Now was the time for the grudge demon to make his move.

“Ah, that´s right. Havella, did you send the letter I gave to you?”

Remembering about it, Al clapped his hands together. He turned his eyes to Havella.

“Yes. But, why did you tell me to send it [to that place]?”

Kail looked blankly at them. He didn´t know what Al had asked Havella to do for him. If he knew, perhaps he would have stopped them from doing so.

“Because I need to die, right? I need to die in the documents and also in the memories of people, you see.”

Al laughed.

“That´s why it can´t be helped.”

Kail would only understand the meaning behind that smile after all had already been done. Without having the time to stop him, and without such chance having been given to Kail, Al went his way.

At the same night Al entered the sewers in order to leave the kingdom, a book store had disappeared from the capital. It used to be a store that was loved by the intellectuals of the capital that were intimate with it, but in the end, it had been wrapped up in fire. All the paper burned. Books were something that easily caught fire.

It was bad luck on top of bad luck. Unfortunately, by the tragedy of the fire at the store, the shopkeeper, his wife, and also his [assistant] had died. That was how the incident was taken as. And then, that single bookstore would be forgot and would fade away from the memories of people.

The existence of those three people would be erased from the kingdom. They would be erased from the memories of people, and also from the documents.

There truth about this incident was hidden in the darkness.

☆

“Fuwah, really, it´s nice that I could act all brave back then, but

this really wasn´t any good.”

Al went through the sea of human waste and escaped the capital. Al went to a forest that was located far away from the capital, and when he got there, he was able to find a spring. He was finally able to wash his body and clothes. Maybe the way his nose had stopped working was a defense function of the body.

“I won´t go through those sewers ever again.”

After going through the sea of human waste, Al was able to leave the capital. No matter how much he washed himself, there were no signs of the stench fading away. In fact, it had become to the point that it would be better to throw away the clothes.

“Now then, for now let´s buy some clothes from a peddler, and after that...”

Al was working out his mind. Until now, he had never been so concentrated to this point. There were many uncertain factors on the table, and this was also the first time he left the capital. Al reached the conclusion that thinking too hard about his situation right now wouldn´t mean anything.

“I have all the basic skills for surviving. I can do well even at improvising.”

Those five years of preparation. He prepared himself for everything he could. After that, all he needed to do was to put what

he learned to use.

“Hey, nee-san. This is the start of our journey.”

Al took out the travelling clothes from the water and wore them. However...

“S-stinky.”

As to be expected, Al decided in his heart he wouldn´t go through anything like those sewers ever again.

05. [William]

“That guy´s height is not good. That one is too bulky. This one is a bit too old…”

Al was resting by the side of one of the main roads connecting the various countries. This road was somewhat far from the capital. Here was where many other roads converged, connecting all those roads to the capital. Somewhat near the place, Al was observing the people passing by, being there in the pretense of taking a rest.

He had already bought new clothes from a peddler during his way. The peddler made an ugly face when he saw Al, but even money stinking like shit was money. It wasn´t like it was impossible for it to be used. The peddler still made a sour face though.

“There really isn´t anyone with the traits I need. I can´t be impatient with this, but if their appearances continue to be unmatching, I might need to change my plans a bit.”

Losing a bit of his confidence, Al´s expression became clouded.

“Yeah. I guess there is no other way… Hm?”

A certain person entered in Al´s sight.

“Stature, body shape, age; all the requirements fit perfectly. The rest is up to his nationality, I guess. Right now, I already forgot

how many people had it been, but well, let´s check it out.”

Standing up, he started to walk behind the person he spotted.

☆

“Yah, nice to meet you. Could I borrow your fire?”

Having suddenly been talked to, the young man looked at the person who called for him with surprised eyes. He probably understood that those words were being directed to him, but it seems he didn´t catch what that person was talking about.

“....? Ah... I, still, word, difficult.”

“Uhm... Where are you from?”

In response to that, saying as few words as possible, the person slowly spoke.

“...Rushitania.”

The young man guessed he was being asked about where he came from. Hence, the young man answered that. However, the young man didn´t think that the person would know about the name of his country. The traveller who asked him the question would definitely become confused. When the young man was about to sigh...

“”It seems you´ve been traveling for a long time. Welcome to Arcadia.””

“!?”

Suddenly being talked to in his mother language, the young man became the one surprised instead.

“I´ve also been doing some traveling myself, so I am more or less familiar with other languages. Ah, what I asked before was whether I could borrow your fire.”

“H-here it is.”

The young man was surprised. Rushitania was a place located between many other countries. Moreover, it was a small country that couldn´t be compared to one of the seven kingdoms, Arcadia. It was already surprising just by having someone that knows of its existence, but to have someone from outside speaking its language was outside of any expectations.

“Ah, it is very incredible for someone of about the same age as me to be traveling around for so long.”

“No, I´m not that much great. Besides, I think you are much more incredible for being that much proficient in another language at my age.”

“I think Rushitania is much more famous than you give credit. Their wooden handicrafts are very famous among the nobles here, and Rushitania is also many levels ahead in medicine when compared to other countries. It is an amazing country that is incredible at the field of forging, making swords that can´t be compared with the ones of other countries.”

The young man was little by little becoming more open about the traveller, who was now smiling.

“Yes, now that I think of it, I didn´t introduce myself, right? My name is Norman. And yours?”

“William. Nice to meet you, Norman-san.”

The young man called William now completely dropped his guard The man called Norman was someone that possessed a strange charm. The fact they were around the same age played a big role too. In either case, William already started to think that Norman and himself were a nice match.

“Why is Norman-san traveling?”

“Right. I wanted to see the vast world, so I went on a journey. However, it isn´t easy. Because I had it difficult for getting money to eat, I´ve been doing a bit of a “treasure hunting” sort of stuff, ahaha.”

“Treasure hunting!? That´s awesome! Could you let me hear

some of your stories!?”

With how William was biting the bait, Norman gave a smile. Seeming like William became a bit embarrassed about what he was asking, his face became a bit blushed.

“I don´t mind. ...Right. There was one time I was at one of the seven kingdoms...”

The two talked with each other through the whole night. Becoming good friends, after a few days passed, they already decided they would be travelling together to the capital.

☆

A carriage passed by the side. Suddenly, William glanced at Norman´s head.

“By the way, Norman. Why do you use a bandana?”

Both of them had already dropped any honorifics and already deepened their friendship by calling each other by their names.

“There are many people with white hair. It makes me lose my appeal.”

“Having white hair at young age... In my country, it is said that having white hair at young age is a sign of healthiness. It is also

said that people with red hair like me is a sign of luck."

"Hou, this is the first time I´ve heard of that. I wonder if I should take off my bandana the day I am travelling to Rushitania."

"When the time comes, I will show you the place around myself."

"I will be in your care when I do so."

At that time, William was certain. He was certain that he was going to be able to get to the capital of Arcadia safe and sound. The reason for that was because he was able to make such a good friend.

"I wonder if we can already be considered friends."

"To me, you already became my friend long ago."

William showed a broad smile with those words.

☆

The night was still cold at this season. The two were close to the fire, pulling through the coldness.

"I have a fiancee. I wanted to become a man worthy of her, so I came all my way here. I will definitely rise in the world, and then, I

will triumphantly return to my home. This is my dream."

William started to talk. He was sitting at the other side of the bonfire.

"She said she would only marry with a strong man. That´s why I decided to come here. But even so, that girl... Right when I was about to depart, she started crying. She was telling me not to go and so on. Isn´t this kind of selfish? But I am happy that I am loved. Now, all I need to do is raise military achievements!"

"William, is your family wealthy?

William started to ponder for a bit.

"Hm, well, I guess it is more to the rich side, but it is nothing compared to the people from the seven kingdoms; the place I live is only a boring place filled with forests and mountains."

"I see. I want to go have a look there one day."

"You should come! I will always give you a warm welcome!"

Their conversation started to become lively. Soon, they would arrive at the royal capital. But even so, William wasn´t anxious about that. This kind of feeling had vanished a long time ago. Everything was thanks to his friend, Norman.

☆

Those days they had been travelling together were soon going to be over. They were going to arrive at the capital tomorrow at the afternoon.

At that night, William was feeling a bit lonely.

“Would it be fine if I went there just for a moment?”

“Where are you going to?”

Norman suddenly stood up.

“Well, it´s that “treasure hunter” thing. Apparently, there is a bandit treasure buried under a certain tree at that forest. The bandits had already been executed in another country, and it is said that only their treasure remains.”

William´s eyes started to sparkle. It could be said that he was overflowing with interest.

“Do you want to come with me?”

“Yes!”

Hearing William´s answer, Norman showed a smile.

Distancing themselves from the road, the two of them went towards the forest. Obviously, there weren´t any humans passing by at that place; it was a place ruled by the darkness of the night.

“It should be here. I will need to dig for quite a bit, so please wait I am digging.”

Taking out all the equipment for digging, Norman stuck the spade into the ground. The sound of the ground being dug could be heard. Without putting a considerable amount of strength, it wouldn´t be possible to dig the wet earth.

“Fuoh, it´s really tough.”

Norman seemed tired. Seeing that, William, who had only been watching Norman, now stood up.

“I can help you too. Let me do it, Norman.”

“Thank you very much. Let´s take turns then.”

William started to dig. He was surprisingly doing well.

“It´s because I´ve been playing at the mountains since I was a kid. I am very good at these kind of things.”

William continued to dig using an incredible amount of strength.

In contrast, Norman

“By the way, William. Did you leave your luggage at the bonfire?”

“Dig dig... No, I brought the important things here just in case.”

“Hohoh, and what do you mean by saying “important things”?”

“Dig dig, hmm... Obviously money, but also the sword my father has forged for me, and also my identification documents. I am going to need those three to be able to live here after all.”

“Oh, could I have a look at the sword forged by someone from Rushitania, the kingdom of blacksmiths?”

“I don´t mind. By the way, until when am I supposed to keep digging?”

“Only a bit more.”

Rummaging through the luggage, Norman found the sword. After finding a certain paper lying next to it, the corners of his mouth rose.

“Dig dig... Still not yet?”

“Not yet. Oh, that is very nice. It is a very beautiful sword.”

The blade of the sword shone right after it was drawn from its scabbard. How much money was it necessary to get your hands on a sword like this in Arcadia? Except for nobles, it would be impossible to have a sword like this. The combination of beauty and toughness charmed Norman.

“Isn´t that right!? My father isn´t good at using swords, but he is first-rate at making them. By the way, is this still not enough? I´ve already dug a lot. Isn´t it perhaps at another place?”

Digging and digging; even after digging a hole a person could fit in, there was no treasure to be found.

“No, there shouldn´t be any mistake. It certainly should be a bit deeper there.”

“Is that so? A place someone has dug before should be supposed to be a bit easier to dig though. Sorry Norman, I am a bit tired now. Is it fine for us to change turns now?”

William said to Norman, who was standing behind him.

“Yes, alright. Let´s change turns.”

William was about to turn his head and give the spade to Norman, but...

“From now on and forever, right.”

At William´s stomach, there was a beautiful silvery shine. It was the product of many his father´s drops of sweat. And that was now piercing through William. He couldn´t understand. He couldn´t understand the misfortune he had fell into...

“Wh-why?”

William was staggering. The viscous blood was dripping from the blade.

“Why did Norman...?”

William couldn´t believe Normal had stabbed him. He believed he was his friend. He believed they had become best friends. Even though he had already.

“Haha, Norman, is it? To begin with, my name isn´t Norman.”

The young man named Norman took off his bandana. It was a silky and smooth white as chalk hair. Perhaps, the shine of the moonlight being reflected on that white hair would normally be thought as beautiful. However, right now, the only impression it gave was of fear. Coupled together with the expression of the young man...

“My name is William. I will be taking it from you. Be happy, your name will spread through the world and your existence will reach the top of Arcadia. I will be raising all the military merits. And for that, you will need to die.”

The white haired man thrusted the sword at William. That which was made for the sake of protecting William was now easily cutting through his body. His right arm was cut off.

“I don´t understand what you are saying! We were friends! Was all that meaningnesssssss!?”

William shouted. However, his voice wouldn´t reach anyone. Nobody lived in this forest. And besides that, they were far away from the road. William´s lamentations wouldn´t reach out to anybody. Not even to the man in front of his eyes...

“Friends and friends, you say? No, maybe it is impossible. I hate you, and I don´t think I would ever come to like you.”

William´s eyes became wide-open in desperation.

“I can see that you were blessed with a good home and was raised with love. You have a family and also have a fiancee. This kind of extravagance.... This kind of happiness... There is no way [we] can forgive you for thiss!!”

The blade of the sword shone brighter. William´s left hand flew away. William´s screams didn´t reach out to the young man in

front of his eyes. The young man´s heart had already been broken five years ago.

“You were supposed to value this happiness! You weren´t supposed to come to a place like this and try to aim for somewhere higher! You overestimate yourself. In either way, someone like you would be dying someday anyway. That´s why you should be thanking me. Just like you wished for, I will have your name thunder through the world!”

William´s consciousness was gradually becoming blurred. He was bleeding without stop from his wounds. His life was flowing away. His friend, Norman, had destroyed his hopes for the future.

“Yes, I will also tell you something. That “treasure hunter” talk was all something I took from a book, and Norman was the name of the owner of the bookstore who used to sell books just like that one. And...”

The white demon kicked William. William fell into the [hole].

“This is your grave, Wiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiilliaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaan!!”

By that time, William couldn´t think clearly anymore. All that remained was his happy memories from his hometown. Those memories were going through his head. His memories about his beloved fiancee. The idle chattering he would have with his family. His elder and little brother, his little sisters, the memories of him going through the mountains...

“Oh, I will be taking your head, William.”

Cutting off him from those memories, the blade cut off William´s head.

“Goodbye, Willan. I have to thank you.”

The fallen head was already a corpse that couldn´t answer back. Picking up the head by the red hair, the young man threw the head inside the hole.

“Fuh, it was unexpectedly… very easy to cut his neck. Or maybe it is because this is that much of a good sword?”

Going back to using the language of his own country, the young man heartily tasted the sensation of having cut the life of a person.

“It´s alright nee-san, don´t worry. Even I am surprised. I thought my heart would hurt at the first time I killed someone…. Yes, it is fine.”

Having a calm expression in his face, the way the young man was acting made it feel like he indeed had something broken about him.

The young man picked up all the parts he had cut into pieces of [William] that were lying around near the hole and threw inside

the hole. After getting rid of all the vestiges, the young man let out a big sigh.

“Well, it´s fine. Now is the main act. This will be the crucial part of my life-time that will decide whether I will rise up in that kingdom. Now, let´s bury this guy already, shall we?”

The young man started to fill the hole. He didn´t have any expression in his face.

The white haired man, Al, had once again built up his karma.

06. The Third Class Civilian William Rivius

“I wonder where that guy is by now.”

Kail was together with Havella at the back-alley the three of them would usually meet together.

“…”

Havella was acting as if she was somewhere else. Kail could only show a bitter smile about that.

“You are really silent when that guy isn´t here.”

“…Is that so?”

“That´s right.”

“I see.”

And with that, their conversation would end. The three of them would usually be talking to each other without stopping, but now that one of them was lacking, the conversation became in that state. No, it was definitely because Al specifically was there that their conversations would be like that at those times the three of them were together.

“Havella, at the time that guy comes back…. Please, don´t stop

me.”

“…?”

Havella tilted her head in confusion. Kail frowned.

“I already know how he returned those five years of good will in cruelty.”

Havella averted her eyes. Without caring about that, Kail continued to talk.

“By using your connections and having you send a request to the assassin´s guild… he had the owner of the bookstore and his wife killed. In order to destroy any evidences, they burned the shop. They even prepared a corpse to take Al´s place just to be safe, didn´t they?”

Havella, the accomplice of the murder of the owner of the bookstore and his wife, still didn´t look at Kail in his eyes. Kail continued with his words. To Havella, not being the one blamed was what felt the worst to her.

“It´s no wonder I had been thinking I was taking things too lightly. Wanting to have a day-off my ass. He had everything burn up, had him be forgot from the memories of people and documents…. But is that supposed to be how it ends!? Are you kidding me?”

Kail was mad. Havella was feeling guilty.

“It´s really nice you aren´t someone from the military or a guard, Kail.”

A voice that was definitely supposed to be impossible to be heard at this time here in this place reached the ears of the two. Shocked, the two turned their heads to the direction of the voice. The one standing there was...

“Yo, how is it, you two? You are even making such stupid faces.”

It was Al, who was supposed to be outside the country doing something by this time. For whatever was he planning to do, the two of them didn´t think he would come back so early.

“Why? Al, didn´t you leave the country?”

Despite Havella usually being very composed, her voice was trembling. Surprise and happiness and many other emotions were surging through her. Seeing that, Al smiled just for the sake of it.

“Who said I was going to be outside for long? I said it was only temporary, didn´t I?”

After jumping down to where the two of them were standing, Al approached them.

“Well, I had enough of that sea of shit. I won´t go through that place ever aga…”

Al made a “good grief” pose.

“Sorry, Al.”

Kail dived his fist into Al. Being sent flying, Al fell into the ditch. His face became twisted by the pain and the surprise.

“What are you doing!?”

“Those people… They said you were like part of their family. They said that one day, they would let your succeed the bookstore. They didn´t have a son, so they would let you, let you…”

Kail was trembling. What Al had done was something that couldn´t be forgiven. Whether it was by fairness, or in the ethical sense, and obviously so by the laws as well, such thing couldn´t be forgiven. Five years ago, the owner of the bookshop hired Al despite him not being able to even read. To Al, he was a benefactor that granted him knowledge. All the things Al owed to him were supposed to amount to the size of a mountain.

“Ah, they were very nice people..”

While wiping the blood that was at the corner of his mouth, Al muttered in a disappointed tone.

“Really nice people.”

If Al still had regrets about that, it would still be possible to start it over. If he had even a fragment of regret, it would be possible for him to redeem himself.

“They were… very convenient for me.”

If there is no regret…. there wouldn´t be any feeling of awareness of having done a bad thing. Not even the slightest.

“They gave me wisdom. They gave me knowledge. They gave me a place to study. They were very nice people. They have my appreciation. I hope they can live happily at the other world.”

Kail couldn´t recognize who the person in front of his eyes was. Al was someone that aimed for the top no matter what he had to go through. He was someone that wanted to have revenge for his sister. Kail knew that. He understood that. But then, what about the monster in front of his eyes? Wasn´t it simply making everything worse than before?

“The only family I have is Arlette-neesan. The only friends I have are the two of you. Except for that, everyone else has nothing to do with me. Why care about other people? Whether they will be useful to me or whether they will become a step for me to step on; that´s all that matters.”

During those five years, Al became distorted and filled with a certain something. What that certain something is was something that was out of Kail´s expectations.

“It had been that way since ever and it will be from now onwards.”

Al took out an old parchment. That was a document that consisted of only one piece of paper. It was his ticket to the future.

“This… It´s a third class citizen ID. How… did you get it?”

A third class citizen. In this kingdom, people that had the IDs from the first class to the third class all had the privileges of being a citizen of the kingdom. It was a miraculous document that was impossible for a slave to get his hands on even if he was to spend all his life on trying to.

“That´s right, you guys can´t read. This ID… I stole it, you see? From the little William-kun from Rushitania.”

Kail and Havella couldn´t read. Even if they were able to recognize that the design of the paper represented that it was a third class ID, there would be no way for them to read the name that was written there. That´s why they didn´t realize right away. They didn´t understand that the written name in there wasn´t Al ´s name.

“Stolen, you say? Then, what about that William guy?”

“Who knows? Maybe he is deep inside a dark hole somewhere?”

Al didn´t show any signs of hesitation in saying that at all. On the contrary, he had an expression that made it feel as if he was boasting about it. Forgetting all his anger, Kail became completely astonished. He didn´t know what he was supposed to say now.

“IDs have the information of the little traits of one´s body; there should be ways to confirm the fingerprint of the owner of the ID. It will be difficult for you to make use of it.”

Havella became surprised for other reason. There were many times that people tried to use false documents. However, most of the times, they would get exposed. It was difficult to get your hands on a proper ID even at the most shady of places. Sometimes, the ID of other people would appear for sale at the black market. However, having the ID of somebody else didn´t have any meaning; it didn´t even have any demand for it in fact.

“Yes, you are correct, Havella!”

Al acted as if he was waiting for this question. Al turned his eyes to Havella.

“The identification documents of the kingdom are very complex and detailed, and are impossible to forge. If you use the ID of someone else, there won´t be any meaning to it. After all, there is also the problems with the digitals. Even if they are in decline, the seven kingdoms are still holding for their name. However, this isn

´t the same for the other kingdoms."

Kail looked at Al with confused eyes..

"I´ve seen many documents in the time I´ve been working at the bookstore."

Al was happily explaining the reasoning behind his plan.

"All the countries uses identification documents for people, but they aren´t the same. Even if there are documents that are full of details.... there are others that are simpler. And besides, even among the simpler ones, the ones used in Rushitania are among the simplest. The only things stated there is the name, residence, the gender, age and the social status in the home country and the official stamp of the country; nothing more. And with all that... I won´t be hindered from impersonating that guy."

It was a method the people of this kingdom had never thought of. Except in business trades, the identification documents of other countries weren´t really seen by people. Al knew about the IDs of the other countries. That´s why he was able to think of this plan.

"Rushitania is a country located deep into the mountains. It is a gathering of various communities. They social positions don´t have much disparity, and to begin with, most of them live their whole life in villages anyway. They use identification documents for the sake of external affairs, but it isn´t considered very important. That´s why it sucks. It is filled with loopholes."

Al licked his lips. Among the many Al had been listing until now, the ID used in Rushitania was one among the candidates. During those same years he had been doing his listing, Al had been camouflaging himself as a defenseless youth. It was surprising, but the logic behind it was very simple.

“But I was very tense at the time I went through the gates. If I had done any misstep at that time... Well, I would be dead. But after I was able to get my credentials as a foreigner, all my worries and anxiousness were over. With that, I can finally stand at my starting line to the top!”

Havella gave an applause with an expressionless face.

Al indeed had done great. He was able to obtain something that it would definitely be impossible for a slave to reach out his hand.

“Al, you are wrong.”

However, all his miraculous exploits were gained by stepping over corpses.

“Kail, what´s been up with you? Don´t worry about other people. No matter how many of them die, they have nothing to do with us, you see.”

Havella nodded, agreeing to Al. If Havella had to say, she had the same opinion. To her, the demarcation that separated the ones she cared about from others was very clear; she didn´t care about

other people.

Kail gave a sharp glare at her. Havella felt despondent.

“Hey, I didn´t really want to say that, but you know. Because you are a gladiator, you too should already have killed one or two people, right? Havella also had been stealing things. You´ve already done these kind of things. But even so, why is it that only me am to blame? Don´t you think you saying that is a bit inconsistent?”

Kail hanged his head. Seeing, Al snorted.

“...Yes, that´s right. No matter how much that is supposed to be your job, this is definitely something that can´t be forgiven just because of that reasoning. Someday, I will receive my retribution, and probably so will Havella. That´s what karma is.”

Al started to feel goosebumps. The air around Kail had completely changed.

“But I only wished that you wouldn´t need to enter in this world. You became free after all. I wished you could succeed the bookstore and keep living your life in a honest way!”

Kail moved his hand to the sword at his waist. The instant the blade could be seen out of its scabbard, it became filled with killing intent.

“It´s still not too late. You should live honestly while redeeming for your sins. I was too late to stop you, but there is still time left. This ID… You should use it to live a new and honest life.”

Kail still wished that Al would give up on his ideas. It wasn´t possible to receive punishment by the laws anymore. No matter what arguments one was to present, he would definitely still receive death penalty. That´s why Kail wasn´t going to irresponsibly open his mouth about it. However, he at least wanted Al to repent for his crimes in his heart.

“Jokes, I´ve just started. I will use anything I can! I won´t take any round-about ways; I will crawl up to the top while trampling everything!”

The moment Kail heard that, he drew his sword. In order to put down silly ideas, sometimes it was necessary to use force. It was because Al was his friend that he was going to do it.

Al was trembling. The aura Kail was exerting was completely different from the one at the times he would practice with him. Al had never seen a shinigami before, but even so, he started to associate it to how Kail was right now.

“Then so it will be, but until I put a stop to it. I will use my sword. You won´t die… but it will hurt.”

“Stop it, Kail. There is no reason for us to fight.”

Havella tried to stop Kail.

“It´s alright, Havella. I am a bit angry too anyway. You´ve always been scolding me in the high horse... Until when are you intending on act like you are my big brother or something!?”

Declining Havella´s calls, Al also drew his sword. It was a sword from Rushitania that was forged by William´s father. It was a masterpiece that is rarely seen.

“It´s a nice sword. Did you steal it too?”

“Yes, it is a little parting gift William-kun left for me. You won´t want to face this sword, Kail!”

Al tried to threaten Kail.

“So what?”

A crushing feeling of calmly being looked down at from a high place assaulted Al. There wasn´t anyone that suited being called someone that does things by force more than Kail. Besides, in terms of experience, Al also couldn´t compare with him. This was the strength of the man called Kail.

“It won´t be my fault if you end up dying!”

Raising his sword overhead, Al charged at Kail. For someone that

used to be buried in books, this was a very sharp move. It had rationality backing up those movements, and in addition, there were minute details in the movements. It was a swordplay that matched with Al´s personality. However...

“Don´t worry.... You won´t be able to kill me.”

With the speed that surpassed Al´s reflexes by far...

“Gh, ha!?”

...Kail hit Al´s stomach with the side of the sword. It had been only one hit, however, the amount of raw strength in Kail´s attack was something of a different level. Being made to yield to the superior swordplay, Al was sent flying to a wall. Even Kail´s techniques were in a higher level.

“Give up. You still can start it over.”

“Shut uuuuuuuuuuuuuuup!”

Standing up, Al once again faced Kail. He himself was exceptional. He was going to stand on the top.

“This is of no use.”

Such blind confidence collapsed.

As Al was heading towards him, Kai hit him without any mercy. Making the difference between their strength become clear, Kail was hitting Al with the side of his sword. In terms of the strength of the blow and techniques used, doing this would make a great handicap for Kail. But even so, Al couldn´t touch Kail despite that. Even if Havella tried to stop them, neither Kail nor Al were able to stop.

“Stop it.”

Havella was crying. Her expression didn´t change. But even so, tears were falling from her eyes.

“How about we stop it already? Havella is crying. We two wish you to be happy. We wish you can live your life in a proper way. Please, understand this, my friend.”

Kail seemed like he was about to break in tears. While looking Al, who was lying on the ground, he felt his eyes swaying in pity.

“Stop, kidding, me.”

But even so, Al stood up and pointed his sword to Kail.

“Be happy? Live honestly? Stop kidding me, stop kidding me, stop kidding me!”

Al was roaring. Those screams were coming from the depths of his heart.

Raising his sword, he thrust his sword at Kail. At that instant, Kail could only block the attack.

Both had their sword locked onto each other.

“Who was the one to steal from us first!? Who were the people that stole all from us!? Is there any reason for us to leave them all alone and just sit through!? We need to kill them all. The guy that killed nee-san, the ones that sold her to him, and the society, who allowed this to happen; we need to kill all of them! Where is happiness supposed to be in this world!? Will you resurrect nee-san? Kail!?”

Throwing a tantrum as if to argue his way through, Al started to act frantically. Those feelings that had been confined since that day now exploded.

Kail could only block the attacks. He couldn´t do anything but block them. Parrying Al´s sword, Kail once again hit him with the side of his sword. With his skill, it was possible for Kail to kill Al, but there was no way he could kill Al, who was his friend.

“If you can´t do it yourself, then don´t try to stop me. Don´t deny my life. I only have you two left. You know what happened with nee-san... Please, don´t deny me.”

Al broke in tears. It was as if that day five years ago had come back to him. A child was now the one standing there.

“Al, you…”

For the first time, Kail saw Al´s inner feelings. His heart was solely set on revenge. It was filled with the feeling of revenge, and Al could do anything for that sake; that was what Al´s life became. Perhaps, there wasn´t anything inside him other than his resentments remaining.

“If you are going to deny me, then kill me. Kill me, kill me, kill me, kill me, kill me, kill me, kill me, kill me, kill me, kill me!”

Because of how straight-forward it was, there was nothing it could be done. To Al, his sister was everything. There was only a little space for the two of them. All Al pretty much had in his life was his sister, so it can´t be helped that he wants to have revenge.

“If you kill Al, I won´t forgive you.”

Havella took out a dagger from somewhere and pointed it to Kail.

“We are friends… aren´t we?”

After Havella´s words, Kail could only lower down his sword. Even if he was to say anything, it wouldn´t change anything. Even with Al in face of death, Kail wasn´t able to stop him. Kail couldn´t kill his friend.

“Al, I won´t accept this. However, I can´t stop you now.”

Kail sheathed his sword. He went back to the usual Kail. With a expression of resignation in his face, Kail was pondering about something.

Seeing that, Al made a relieved face.

“I will do my best so that Kail can accept me. We are friends after all”

Al´s words didn´t correspond to his true intents at all. Even if both knew about each other´s false intentions in their words, neither of them could do something about it. Even if Al died, he wouldn´t change his mind. Kail also couldn´t kill his best friend. And also, the two of them were close friends after all.

“So, what will you be doing from now on?”

Al´s face became bright once Kail said those words. After also sheathing his sword himself, he once again looked at Kail.

“That´s right. Ah, right.... As to be expected, I guess I need to go to wars in the beginning if I really want to make fame for myself. That was the reason why I got this third class citizen ID. I am going to volunteer to the army and go to the frontlines. There, I will get achievements and build a foothold for my rise.”

Al looked at the two with a sad face. By going to the frontlines, he

won´t be able to meet them for some time. Depending on the situation of the war, he might not be able to come back for years.

“I see. All I can say is: don´t die. All I can tell you is for keep living.”

“Good luck, Al. We will be waiting for you.”

“Thank you, you two. I will do my best.”

The three were good friends. However, even so, it wasn´t possible for them to understand each other. Even in the cases they were able to do so, there were still things that couldn´t be touched.

“Also, Al. That swordplay from before wasn´t bad.”

Al made a sulky face.

“You say that even though you easily beat me.”

Kail put his hands on Al´s head and started to mess up his hair.

“It´s because I am strong. Still, your skill is quite a bit for the battlefield standards, skinny-kun.”

“Stop it, let me go!”

“Gahaha, as if.”

“...Fufu.”

“”Havella smiled!?””

They went back to the three. The three of them knew that this was only in the surface. But even so, it was exactly because it was only in the surface that the three of them valued it. It was because they knew that this wouldn´t last forever...

“Either way, don´t die, Al.”

“I know that, Kail.”

Al was going on a journey. A journey to rise to the top.

Today was the turning point. If Kail had to stop Al, today was the only day it would be possible to do so now. Kail was going to regret his decisions in the future. He would regret it to the point of wishing he had stopped Al even if he had to cut his arms and legs. Rather, Kail should have stopped Al much earlier, when the karma still wasn´t weighing down onto him.

However, there are no “ifs” for the past that already happened.

Al went forward. Even if his path was to be soaked in blood, he wouldn´t stop.

07. Karl

The south region of the kingdom of Arcadia, Raconia. It was a contested region, and originally, it belonged to one of the seven kingdoms, the kingdom of Ostoberg. Before that, it used to be Arcadia´s territory, and even before that, it also used to be from Ostoberg; that so on.

In a land like this, there wasn´t anyone at the fields working; it was a desolated place that had kept changing owners. There was anybody eccentric enough to want to settle in a place like this. There weren´t any benefits for conquering this land anymore; the kingdoms continued fighting for it only for keeping their faces.

Once again, another battle that seemed to be as if it had been arranged by both sides was taking place today.

“...I am tired of this.”

A bit to the front of the fort, at the field the battle was happening, there was a white haired man.

“Ah, yes yes. It is really nice you are full of energy, yes.”

“Uryaaaaaaaaaaah Hyueeeeeeei!”

“....Get a hoe or something and go work on the field. In the next world, though.”(TL note: Literal translation... I guess this would be in the meaning that the guy there is so weak he wasn´t

supposed to be in the war, but doing farm work instead.)

One more head was cut. The white haired man was dejected.

“This is only a little quarrel of small fries. Even if I fight here, I won´t get even a single copper coin.”

Nimbly parrying the attacks of the enemy soldiers, the man casually continued to cut off the heads of the enemy soldiers. However, even if you more or less stood out in the battle, it didn´t mean you would make a good impression to the upper brass. To begin with, you wouldn´t even get their attention. If William was to stood out, the most he would get would be he being used for whatever dirty work there was by his small fries officers that were only able to get to their position by slowly rising up.

“The superiors are also desperate about their own life anyway, so they aren´t even looking at me.”

The young man was spilling idle complaints. To him, there wasn´t anything to learn in this place, and there wasn´t any gain from it either. This was exactly how the land they were fight for could be described as.

““Let´s eat something and go to sleep after this war is over.””

The young man fought with lack of motivation while he was thinking that. Before he could notice, it was already becoming morning. The war was close to its end.

Today, another of the usual battle from everyday had finished. Just like always, it ended in a draw.

☆

The fort of Raconia was replete with merchants. Even if there was no productivity in this land, the soldiers would still buy things, and besides, the money gained from that wasn´t bad. As the result of that, the place was unexpectedly very prosperous. Most of the shops were stalls, but there were some that would rent buildings for setting their shop.

“Rabbit stew! It´s filled with meat.”

In a shop that hadn´t prospered as much as the other of the many other shops, a white haired young man was having lunch.

“Here it is.”

The dish that was crudely served was a bunch of food piled up in the bowl in an unorganized manner, but the amount of food served was very much, the price was cheap, and the taste...

“Like always, it is disgusting.”

Although the youth bluntly said so, the owner of the eatery didn´t even bat a glance. As if the young man wasn´t feeling the

horrible taste, he sipped the stew and ate the rabbit meat.

Ignoring the taste, the youth continued to eat. He noticed the presence of someone sitting next to him, but without caring about that, he continued to move his spoon.

“Uhh… Give me the same as that person there.”

An order that lacked individual opinion. Without either the white haired young man or the owner of the eatery caring about these details, they continued to do their own business. From the cooking pot, the owner took a healthy amount of stew and put it into a bowl that was of the appropriate size. Because of how much appropriate the amount was to the size of the bowl, the people that would order for the food would get surprised. There really weren´t many people that would ask for seconds in this eatery.

“Here it is.”

The person became lost for words after seeing the food that being was served to him. After trying it, he once again became lost for words. And then, after looking at the remaining amount, he felt like foam was about to come out of his mouth. This was the pattern the people that would come to this eatery for the first time would do.

“Yo-you are really incredible. For you to be able to eat this…”

It seems the person next to the young man was talking to him.

The young man raised his head.

“Ah, uhh, I am nobody suspicious. I am from the same squad as you. My name is Karl Teirah.”

After looking at the youth that named himself Karl, in an instant, memories that there had been a new recruit at their squad went through the young man´s mind. It was possible to feel the quality of his bringing only by giving a glance at his curled golden hair.

“William Rivius. Nice to meet you.”

After saying that, William went back to eating his meal. William used to be the freed slave called Al, but right now, he was called William Rivius. He was a third class citizen that came from Rushitania.

“I know it! Everyone has been talking about you. They said there was a strong guy with white hair. And also that... you weren´t much of talking...”

Karl nervously said the last part in fear the owner of the eatery would hear it. In a sluggish manner, William once again raised his face.

“Your business?”

“Uhm... Well, I was wondering if we could be friends.”

At that instant, William was assaulted by a feeling of deja vu. Karl´s face was being overlapped with the face of the red haired boy. Even though the red and golden were different colors, their character were similar.

“...Sorry, but I will refuse. I don´t want to make any friends here.”

Because of that attitude, William wasn´t a very likeable person.

“Ah, I-I see. I guess it can´t be helped in that case. Ahaha.”

Karl disappointment was clearly seen. His face looked very alike [himself]. The face of the [himself] that he took the place of, and that should have already been dead...

“What about you go eat your food? Your stew will end up getting cold.”

By saying that, William forcefully ended the conversation and went back to eating his food. Answering “U-uh, yeah”, Karl looked at his stew. After moving the stew to his mouth, he fell down.

“He-hey!? What happened!? Was the taste that bad!?”

As to be expected, even William became surprised at that. The owner of the eatery didn´t pay any mind. This eatery should be

demolished already.

“Dear customer, the bill.”

The owner of the eatery was demanding the payment of both the serves from William. He wasn´t even looking at Karl, who had fallen down. It was weird how this eatery could still keep functioning up to this day. It was the number one eatery William wished that it was destroyed in Raconia.

“I will pay it. I just need to pay it, right.”

After finishing taking care of Karl, William reluctantly paid for both the food and ate the two servings.

“Disgusting!”

Whether it was because William was able to eat the food despite the bad taste or because he was able to eat two servings of food, as to be expected, even the owner became surprised.

“I will come again!”

After saying that, the moody William left the eatery in a dignified manner. Whatever may there be to be said about this, for William, who was still in his growth period, it was important to have somewhere where he could get that much of an amount of food in a cheap price. Even if it tasted bad, it should be very nutritious.

“Shit, today is my unlucky day.”

Because William couldn´t just leave Karl somewhere, he had to carry him in his back. If it was at the time he had, he would have ignored Karl, but right now, he was in his same squad. It would be troublesome if bad rumours about him were to spread.

“I should at least carry him to my room.”

William carried his “baggage” to the room he had rented.

☆

“M, mmmm.”

Karl woke up. After opening his eyes, he noticed he was at a very simple room. In that room, there was one simple bed and a window and table that received exposure from the sun. There was someone hanged at the window frame. Seeing Karl had woken up, that person went down the window.

“U-uwah!?”

It was William. After he had heard Karl´s surprised voice, he released his hands from the window.

“It looks like you woke up. Then, go back to your own room. In

case you aren´t staying at any room, then go back to your sleeping bag."

"Ah, uhm, William-san... What happened?"

Maybe because he was still startled by William having suddenly gone down the window, Karl was still having a surprised face. William scratched his head.

"I was training. Pull-ups exercises the whole body. I can add weights to it as much as I want, and besides, it´s the only training I can do while being inside my room after all."

"Pull-ups? Weights?"

For someone from Arcadia, Karl´s confusion wasn´t a weird reaction. To begin with, Arcadia´s training consisted of only swinging the sword, the spear and having mock battles. Trainings methods like pull-ups and others of the sort weren´t really done, and it would be downgraded to it being some kind of a child´s game. There wasn´t the concept of adding weights to improve the training either.

"There are training methods like that as well. If you want to know about it in more details, then go read a book named "Spartyi". Since it is the libraries of Arcadia we are talking about, there should be copies of this book and also translated versions."

In the past, there was a time William used to be Al. This book was

one Al had read many times. There were training methods in that book that the other training methods used in Arcadia wouldn´t even suffice as a comparison.

“So Willan-san can read books. You are really knowledgeable.”

The nonchalant words that came from Karl made William startled.

“We-well, it is more or less like common sense though.”

“Besides, you came from Arkas, right? I am also from Arkas. Ah, my brother also likes to read books, so I think Willan-san would be able to have a good conversation with him!”

Before he could notice, William was already digging his own tomb. It looks like he became careless and slipped his tongue, ending up talking about useless things. After giving a long breath,, he was able to calm himself down.

“I am a third class citizen from Arkas, so I am more or less from there although II am a foreigner. Isn´t it fine already? I have things to do tomorrow too, so I want to rest.”

“So William-san is a foreigner! I´ve heard many things about.... Ah, I can´t, I can´t. I have many things I want to ask you, but I need to let you rest. Thank you for taking care of me! Then, see you tomorrow!”

Karl dashed out the room full of energy. He didn´t forget to bow to William before closing the door.

After seeing the door being closed, William put his hand in his head.

“This is really… a pain in the ass.”

William´s sigh resounded through the small room.

08. *The Fall Of Raconia*

“William-san! Good morning!”

“...You are already so energetic at morning. Good morning.”

Karl was looking at William, who had an annoyed expression on his face, with sparkling eyes.

“Oh, are you two acquainted with each other? Then, you go take care of him.”

“Wha-!? But!”

Because of the sudden arrangement, William let a few words escape.

“Hm? Do you want to talk back, foreigner guy?”

Being glared at, William flinched. The other man was his superior, and also a second rank civilian. There were many reasons why William couldn´t talk back.

“No, I understand. Come Karl, the place we were stationed at is to that direction.”

“Ah, yes!”

The superior officer was glaring at the back of both William and Karl.

☆

William and Karl got to the place they were assigned to. It was at the higher floors of the fort, behind the archers. Like how it would always be, from the distance, an army was starting to arrange into a formation outside the fort. Exactly like how it would always be, it was an attack that went in accord to the programme.

“You are very unlucky. For you to have to stick with a hateable guy like me.”

Maybe because of how bored William was, he started a conversation with Karl. Karl was being afflicted by the pressure of the silence. After being talked to, his face brightened. And so, he went to test the waters and said...

“William-san, are you disliked by the others?”

Karl looked at William with a blank face. It seems he didn´t understand why William had said that before.

“I am. This is because I didn´t know the scale of it at the first.”

Karl tilted his head to the side, not understand what William was

talking about by saying scale.

“No, it´s only that… It´s just that I didn´t think there so many soldiers that were like that to that extent, and that I also underestimated the feeling of envy of humans.”

Turning his eyes away from the open-mouthed Karl, William looked to outside the fort. Today wasn´t a battle at the field, but a defensive war; it was one which you would be shut inside your castle. William was looking at the army that was approaching towards the fort of Raconia.

“Hm, just like alwa…. Isn´t there too many?”

The battlecries started to resound through the fort. And in response, the surroundings of the castle also started to make a stir themselves.

“Rather than just saying they have more than us, it would be better to say they have many times our numbers.”

Just like always, the sounds were. The idle mood was blown away from the Raconia fort.

Karl couldn´t keep his back straight because of the fear. Yesterday was his first battle, and that battle was only a small skirmish. Compared to the army that they were facing today, it had been a very small scale battle.

“You are lucky, Karl-kun.”

Karl looked at William's face.

“You will be able to have a taste of battle. You will overflowing with it.”

It was a gruesome smile.

Today, the tranquilness in Raconia was no more.

☆

The battle started. The battlefield was filled with corpses. The allied forces weren´t standing in front of the fort of Raconia anymore. There were many places that had ladders which permited the advancing of enemy troops. Things like what squad you belonged to or where the spot you were assigned to didn´t matter anymore. It was a clear defeat. It was a lost battle.

“It isn´t that bad.”

With a smile, William cut down the invading enemies. By comparing him to Karl, it was like comparing a baby and an adult; it was to a level that even comparing was presumptuous.

“This is good just like this. Yes, this is the best!”

Leisurely piercing his sword at the openings of the armor of his enemies, William. Tearing through their throats, the sword made the sound of cutting through the wind. Being deprived of their throats, the enemy soldiers couldn´t even scream.

“I am really lucky.”

William kicked with all his strength the enemy that put out his head as he was climbing up the ladder. William saw off the scene of the many other people falling together from the ladder one after another with a smile.

“Now then, I guess I will keep cutting them up until the command of retreat is given.”

Jumping into all the confusion, William was cutting the enemy soldiers. He would evade the attacks of his enemies, and sometimes use his allies as a shield. That gapless style of fighting was in a different different to the concept of the battle in ranks and formations.

“I am not like you, you bunch of worms! My practice partner is as giant as a fucking gorilla you would see at the circus. Other than that, I am not like you that kept doing practice-swinging like retards. I used my head and trained my body in a efficient manner. To begin with, the world I am living is different from you brain dead worthless trash that are lower than insects.””

As to be expected, there was no way William could speak out those thoughts. If he spilled them out, he wouldn´t be able to stop

doing so.

“”Hm, oh, isn´t Karl-kun still alive? Well, he looks like he is about to die though.””

Karl was desperately swinging his sword, but it was obvious his moves were amateurish. The enemy soldiers weren´t too much of a threat either, but that guy was to the point that dying was only a question of time to him.

“He-help!”

He was asking for help to his surroundings, but obviously, nobody reacted to it. They didn´t have the spare time for it, and everyone was concentrated on themselves. With nobody reacting to his pleads, the spear of a enemy grazed right at Karl´s cheek. Karl fell down and soaked himself in piss. And right in the verge of his death…

“So-some-body.”

At that instant, William´s and Karl´s eyes met. It was only an instant; it was a momentary meeting.

“”As if anyone would be helping you. After all, you too lived a happy life, didn´t you? You had a family, warm food to eat, a soft bed to lie on, and also, and also…”

William turned his eyes away from Karl. This was equivalent to a

death sentence to Karl.

“Dieeeeeeeeeeee!”

The enemy soldier, a soldier from Ostoberg, was also risking his life. He should also have a family. A family he was supposed to love, to protect. He was here in order to... protect his family.

“Eeeehhhhh!?”

The spear was sent flying in the air. It wasn´t only the spear. The arm that was swinging it also flew to the air, and the blood scattered. The spray of blood covered the soldier´s sight. He didn´t comprehend what happened. He couldn´t understand it, but...

“Die.”

The soldier understood that he was going to die.

His head flew. As to not have blood spilled at them, William kicked the headless corpse away from them.

“What... am I doing?”

William couldn´t believe what he was doing. His hand was trembling. It wasn´t trembling because he had killed someone. It was trembling because he had saved someone. He saved a human that was unrelated to him. He saved a young man that looked to be

fortunate, to be happy, and whose character didn´t match this place. It couldn´t be believed.

“”For an instant. Just for an instant, the face of that man overlapped with his face. That red haired rich boy.””

The red haired youth he had killed himself. The man whose existence he stole. His face; a face full of resentment was smiling at him as he called for him, mumbling the name “Norman”.

“Ah, ahh, William!”

Being overcome with emotions, Karl started to cry. Even forgetting to add the “san”, he clinged at William and cried. He continued to mutter “thank you, thank you”. William was looking at this scene with a cold look.

“It wasn´t much... Can you stand up?”

Without looking at Karl´s eyes, William extended his hand. There was no way he could let the expression he was making now be seen. He couldn´t let it be seen by anyone, not even by Kail or Havella.

“Thank you, William. ...Ah, -san.”

Remembering to add the “-san” at the end, he forcibly added it at the end.

“You can call me just by William. You should ready up to leave here soon.”

“Eh, but is it fine for us to leave our position?”

William casually killed several of the approaching enemy soldiers in one sweep, and then, turned his eyes to Karl. His expression has already gone back to his calm one now. He already couldn´t see the illusions of “himself”.

“It is not that it is fine. It is just that everyone that would reproach you for doing that has already died.”

William remembered using his superior as a shield in order to escape from the enemy´s pike a few moments ago. There was no mistake that he did it in the heat of the moment, but it had been something necessary.

“”To begin with, the ones I need dead the most are the many high ranking officers. The surviving ones... I need to have them to die by their own, or it will be a problem to me.””

It was more than stupidity to be carried away by an already lost war and die.

“”Well, this guy should have its own uses. If I don´t think it in this way, I will lose my motivation in protecting him.”

William looked at Karl´s face, which now had a stupid expression on it. Karl finally remembered about the embarrassment of having wet himself, and now he was blushing. Even though they were still right in the midst of a war, he was acting very carefree.

“Let´s go. If you don´t want to die, follow me.”

“Ye-yes!”

With Karl following behind him, William went down the fort. If they wanted to escape, it was natural that they needed to go down to the northern gate first. Because of how conspicuous they were being about escaping, it should become an unnecessary burden to them later.

“”I need to get out of here... I won´t be part of the massacre of this boring as shit place.””

Looking behind him, William sighed.

“”Ha, really, what am I doing?””

Behind him was Karl, who was following him with sparkling eyes.

At this day, in only a short moment, the fort of Raconia had fallen.

09. That Which Dwells At Arkas, The Lebensraum

“My innards went cold l when I heard that Raconia had fallen.”

“Yes, yes. Kail was all nervous.”

“And you were crying.”

“I wasn´t crying.”

It had been a week and a little since Raconia had fallen. Al, who pretended to be William Rivius, came back to the capital, Arkas. After the order of retreat was given, Al and also the other soldiers of Raconia were sent back to the places they lived at in order to reorgarnize the army and also for resupplying their armament. Of course, Al would need to go back there after some time.

“Either way, cough*, it looks like you had bad luck. Well, if it is you, you should soon be recognized by your skills.”

Al smiled at Kail.

“Bad luck? Don´t joke, this was so lucky to me to the point that it is scary.”

“Lucky? Weren´t you caught up in a defeat?”

“Yes, it was quite the hopeless war. And because of that, the people that used to despise me also died. Because they lost many soldiers, there will be vacancy in the military positions. Well, the positions that will be opened up aren´t that much great... but it is still true that it is necessary for me to get the people on those positions to step aside so that I can have them.”

Al spread his arms.

“I won´t be promoted by having fought a lost war. However, this is much better than the shitty drawn out method of building up achievements day after day. Do you know why, Kail, Havella?”

The two immediately shook their heads. It felt a bit disappointing to Al because of how they didn´t feel like trying to guess it.

“It is because after that defeat, the wars I will be sent to will be ones that will happen for the sake of winning. This is a matter of honour for them. Now that the balance of the contest for Raconia was broken, Arcadia will do its all to take it back.”

Kail clapped his hands together.

“I see. So this means you will get to go to wars that you will definitely win.”

Al wagged his finger to Kail, who had jumped into conclusions.

“It is not like we will be definitely winning those. I said it before, didn´t I? It is a question of honor. The other country will definitely prepare its forces for the war so that they can win. Now that Raconia was captured, from here out, it will become the so called classical war between Arcadia and Ostoberg contesting for Raconia.”

There was no way for the lowly part of the populace Kail and Havella were part of to know about this, but the fact was that the true show really only started after Raconia would get captured. According to history, it has been close to ten years that Arcadia had maintained its control over Raconia. Capturing and recapturing the territory was a rivalry between the two countries based on the honor as fellow countries that were part of the “seven kingdoms”.

“It will be a war both won´t be conceding. It will become a huge war. If we lose the war, everything will go down the drain. However, if we win... there will be a bunch of opportunities for me. This is an once in a lifetime chance.”

From now on, any of their moves will be in a large scale. Even if Arcadia is to lose, the war will still be a great one, and with the expected vacancy in the positions, this will become a chance for the survivors. In case the war is won, the gains will be to the point that there will be no comparison. But even so, the chance of dying still wasn´t zero.

“Going hunting after some grimming small fries won´t be of any use. It needs to be in heads. I need to take the heads of big shots. Only then I will get promoted!”

“Well, I don´t know well about war. However, you should still take care.”

Kail said in a warning tone to Al, who was starting to get excited.

“It will be that much of a big war. There might be guys that are stronger than me. No, there will definitely be. You will be fighting guys of that kind.”

“I can´t feel any difference even by you saying that.”

Being warned about the war, Al lost his excitement. Kail showed a wry smile.

“That´s right... There should be people you would feel this kind of shiver from.”

Suddenly, Al felt a chill in his back. Al´s skin became full of goosebumps. It was the same feeling he had felt at that time...

“Don´t go. You should be able to understand that. One day, you will become capable of winning against guys like that. However, the you of right now won´t be able to.”

What Al was feeling right now wasn´t something rational. It wasn´t something that made sense. However, Al could understand. He could feel the disparity between him and the man in front of his

eyes. That man was the one warning him about the war. He needed to consider those words. More than anything, Al´s own instincts were also telling him that he wouldn´t be able to survive, which confirmed what Kail had said.

“I understand. I won´t go for them.”

Al took a pose of resignation. Seeing that, Kail smiled.

“By the way, Al, where are you staying? Do you have somewhere to stay?”

Al lost the rights of the house he used to own together with his identity as Al, a freed slave that [died by burning to death]. Right now, another person was living there. Al also didn´t feel like returning there either. If he was to do that, the fact that Al, who he was able to have dead after all the troubles, was still alive would get exposed.

“If you don´t have anywhere to stay at, I can let you stay on mine. I live by myself, so there is nothing to worry about.”

“”No, I would be worried about it. For many reasons.””

Both Al and Kail´s had the same thoughts in their mind. The three friends were soon going to be adults. There were many things that could happen between a man and a woman.

“It has the space for three people. It isn´t that big though.”

Havella indirectly revealed that both her parents had died, but neither Al nor Kail became that much worried about it. To Havella, parents weren´t an existence one was supposed to love. She didn´t love them. They only raised Havella so their lineage wouldn´t die out, and except for that, they didn´t want much with her. For all the love she lacked, Al and Kail replaced it with theirs.

“Sorry for having you guys take care of me so much. Well, but for now, I already have a place to stay.”

Havella dropped her shoulders in disappointment. But even so, as to be expected, her expression didn´t change even the slightest at that time.

“Where is it?”

“I will be staying at the house of an acquaintance. Even though I tried to refuse… I was pressed on with that.”

The instant Kail heard that Al had an acquaintance, his face became bright, and Havella frowned. It was rare for Havella, whose expression wouldn´t really change, to have it change so much to that point.

“Is it a friend!?”

Kail´s eyes were sparkling. After hearing those words, both Al and Havella spat at the same time. (TL note: Kind of in the way

people spit out their drinks when something “surprising” happens, but without any drink.)

“Spare me from jokes. You are the only ones that are my friends. That guy has nothing to do with me. Although he is not one of us, I just don´t want to get on his bad side. I had many problems at Raconia for rubbing people the wrong way.”

There was that man that was his superior at Raconia. After some time, he had him killed by using him as a shield for himself, but even so, the annoyance in his surroundings still didn´t stop; Al still had a long way to go over this problem.

“I see, I see—. Then you should go have a stay there. Become good friends.”

Kail was pushing Al´s back. Without saying anything, Havella kicked Kail on his back.

“He-hey, we still have time!”

“It´s fine, it´s fine. Just go there already.”

Kail ignored. Havella continued to kick him.

“Fine! Well, let´s get together one more time before I leave to the war. See you then!”

And just like that, Kail was able to push Al away from the place. By that time, Havella was out of breath.

“It hurts if you do that, Havella.”

“It´s Kail´s fault.”

“This will be a good thing for him.”

Kail was smiling. Becoming annoyed at that face, Havella once again kicked him.

“Ouch! Don´t kick my jaw!”

“Shut up! It´s because Kail is stupid!”

Saying only that, Havella disappeared from the place to somewhere.

Kail, who was the only one remaining there, sighed.

“Both of them rely on each other to carry on... I guess I can´t say much about it myself though.”

Now by himself, Kail spoke his thoughts out as he scratched his head.

☆

“Ah, William!”

“”...Why is he already here?””

There was still time from the arranged time. But even so, Karl was already waiting for him. But more importantly than that...

“You came very early!”

“Ah, yes. Well, I didn´t have anything to do.”

It was a difficult to accept reality for William that he had also come early. It was extremely annoying how Karl was looking at him as if he was having fun about it for some reason. If one was to ask him how something like that was supposed to be annoying, in the end annoying things still were very annoying.

“So, we will be arriving there just after a little walk.”

“Alright.”

William glanced around the surroundings.

“”Arkas is separated in four districts. The slums, the merchant´s district, the residential district and the noble district. Other than

that, there lifestyles of people in the same district will vary depending on the person´s assets and social standing.””

The place they were right now was an area that was prosperer in comparison to the rest of the residential district. So in the end, was Karl a spoiled kid of some rich family as William had expected?

””He probably is a first class citizen. There shouldn´t be any second class citizens living here.”

Even though they were part of the citizens, the first class citizens had the privilege of getting a great sum of the paid tax. At least in the overall numbers, the privileges they had were close to the ones nobility had. Of course, there was still a great gap between them and nobility, but...

“You know, my father said that he wanted to meet you after I told him about you.”

Karl talked nonstop, spewing words like a machine gun. William continued to be silent.

””I´ve never been that far into this section of the district. With how rich the people that live here seem to be, it should be possible for them to hire common slaves and servants, and even buy the whole slave company.””

The feeling of grandeur the buildings gave off started to increase. Being comparatively as much prosper as the place, the people that

lived there could only be appropriately prosperous too.

“”Wait a second. This guy... Does this mean he is absurdly fucking rich!?””

William looked at Karl´s eyes. Karl gave a puzzled look to William.

“It seems you are very rich.”

“Yes, but the other houses around mine are even more awesome. My house isn´t that much of a thing.”

“”Did they force their way into living in here? But they should still be very rich just on how they are able to do that. This guy.... It seems that he will have some utility.“”

William´s thoughts were dripping in malicy. William started to imagine the many ways he could use Karl, who was far-off much more rich than he expected.

“Are we arriving there soon?”

“Just a bit more.”

William made a puzzled face. Ahead of here, although it was still at the residential district, only the truly prominent rich people lived there. The place was already heavens itself...

“It is right through that gate. Please, wait for a bit, ok?”

“Thr-through that gate!? He-hey, wait a second!”

After getting all the way to the said gate, William´s face became grim. He had a great amount of sweat on his back. His breathing started to get rough. His heart started to beat like an alarm.

“What is the matter, William?”

Karl was making a innocent face. That was what it was the most scary right now.

“At the other side of that gate.. It was definitely supposed to be the place the nobility lives at.”

“Ah, you know really well. It is really incredible for someone that came from outside!”

Karl happily said. However, something like this didn´t matter at all to William. The important thing now wasn´t that. The most important thing now was...

“Are you... a noble?”

“Yes. Well, I am a fifth class noble; it is the ranking of a baron, so it is not that much of a thing. I also still wouldn´t really be

considered a notable figure.”

Karl declared the shocking reality as if there was nothing special in doing so.

The instant William heard that, he became pale and immediately fell to the ground. His head hit the floor with full force and he completely fell prostrate.

“Eh, William, what happened!?”

Karl became surprised seeing that. This was what William would commonly refer as a “Dogeza”. His trembling back didn´t give any impression of firmness.

“Nonetheless the fact I was unaware, I am extremely sorry for all the acts of rudeness I have committed!”

Noises of chattering started to appear at the surroundings. To William, the noble district was a place that could mean life and death. If he acted wrong, or if he misspoke something, he would immediately be executed.

“What´s the matter William! Aren´t we friends? You are my benefactor who saved my life! There is no need for you to lower your head!”

Karl said as William faced his words with his lowered posture.

“No, it is a fact that a third class civilian like me has overspoken too much to the son of a noble! I will do anything possible to compensate, and I will also accept any light punishment! Therefore, please, somehow spare my life at least!”

There was no way William would accept dying in a place like this. There was no reason at all to believe in Karl´s words. The moment Karl, who William used to think as a worthless individual, was to want his life in a whim, his life would be brought down. Just like his sister had....

“Like I said before, you are my benefactor, so...”

“I was thinking of leaving you to die at that time!”

Yes, if William didn´t commit any mistakes, he could instead use this opportunity. However, William had committed a single mistake. It was a mistake he would definitely not have done if he knew Karl was a noble. His mistake was that he had been about to leave Karl to die. And then, Karl, who had seen it with his eyes, should be aware of that.

“It was in the middle of the battle, so it can´t be helped. Besides, didn´t you help me in the end? You helped me without knowing that I was a noble.... This made me really really happy. That´s why please, raise your face. Please, be your frigid self like before.”

William was afraid of raising his face. If he was to raise it, and then, if there was a smile of contempt in Karl´s face, he would die.

He would die because of something he had just heard about...

“”Like I am going to die. As if I am dying in a place like this!””

William raised his face. What he saw was Karl´s smile of relief. But even so, William´s anxiety didn´t go away. He [himself] knew of people that could smile despite planning on killing you. He [himself] knew it to the point of hating it. There was nobody that could really say Karl really wasn´t someone of that sort.

“Now, stand up.”

William slowly held the hand Karl extended to him. He didn´t lower his guard. He was vigilant. But even so, he had no choices other than taking that hand.

“Ahaha. In the end, even you are troubled about me being a noble.”

“Indeed. There is the possibility I could get killed by displeasing you, sir.”

“Ah, there is no way I would ever kill William! Besides, nobility can´t so easily have people killed.”

“”As if. Even though nee-san got killed like she was some piece of trash.””

William was anxious, but he didn´t do the foolish thing of letting it show in his face.

“Now, polite speech is prohibited from now on!”

“That is… impossible.”

No matter how much Karl was to reproach William, there is no way he would be able to change that. There were other eyes watching them from the surroundings. There was no way for him to know whether there would be other nobles that would look at his lack of manners towards a fellow noble and find a fault in it.

“Mu, well, let´s fix it up step by step then. For now, let´s get to my home first.”

William and Karl once again started walking. William was walking a bit behind him.

“Understood, Karl-sama.”

“Using -sama is not allowed!”

“However, adding honorifics to Karl-sama´s name is only appropriate.”

“In either case, it is prohibited for now!”

William showed a troubled face. He was scared of Karl´s angry face, but from hereon, there would a unknown number of nobles he would have to face. To the puny William, he wouldn´t make it through if he was too cautious.

The two of them stood in front of the gates.

“It is Karl Von Tirah.”

“You should be Lord Teirah´s son, correct? Please, make your way.”

The guard threw a glance at William.

“It is my friend.”

Karl immediately declared. If one had to say, a lowly person such as the gatekeeper didn´t have the rights to have a saying on who was and wasn´t supposed to go through in that case. That was what it meaned to be a noble. It was being privileged from the time you are born; if a noble wanted black to be white, the black would become white.

“Please, make your way.”

The gatekeeper didn´t stop being suspicious of William. There was no way he would.

William was feeling out of the place. He was being overwhelmed by the place; he was being overwhelmed just by the buildings there.

“This way. It is a bit embarrassing that my house doesn´t really amount to much, but treat it as your own home.”

William´s senses were paralysed. If he had seen this house before all the houses he had seen until now since he had gone through that gate, he would probably be overwhelmed by it. However, after going through the gates, he was able to touch a bit of the air of this [world]. And because of that, the house felt a bit lacking.

““No, I am stupid. It is obvious. The owner of this house is a baron. It is the lowest class among the fifth ranked nobility.””

To begin with, the people that lived here were of a different level. Here was the perfect world. It was too much of a lack of sense to be comparing this place to the lower world. William could understand a bit of Karl´s feelings of embarrassment. In this world, that house was indeed lacking.

But William wouldn´t forget…

““I… wasn´t supposed to even have the qualifications to be standing in a place like this.””

The whole world denied William´s existence; it denied Al, who used to be a slave.

“”However, I will definitely eat up all of you.””

Saying this was still a bluff at the moment. His strength, knowledge, experience; everything of his was insufficient.

But even so, Al advanced forward. He could only do that, and that was the only type of life he would live; he didn´t wish for anything other than that anymore.

10. Lord Teirah

The residence of Lord Teirah was unexpectedly not very splendid. However, the furniture of good taste and each of the decorations of the residence gave it color. With the airs given off by the decoration being very uniform, it could be seen that there was only one theme being used. There was a good feeling of honesty in it; it was something that wouldn´t be felt from the tastes of the first class citizen rich upstarts.

“Because my father has the principle of not using much money in material objects, people often say that we are being too much of misers for how we keep our house like that, . Bt even so, I really like my home.”

William mentally nodded at Karl´s words. It wasn´t gaudy, but it was elegant.

“In my opinion, I also think it is graceful.”

“As I said before, stop with the polite language! It is starting to feel creepy.”

“”Isn´t it obvious that doing this is impossible, retard.””

William got angry at Karl, who was looking at him with dissatisfied eyes, and complained in his mind.

“”Their garden isn´t too big and their walls aren´t that high. If

necessary, it will be possible for me to escape from here.”"

The garden wasn´t that much wide, but as to be expected, its decoration had good taste. There was a water fountain at its center, and it was surrounded by a pond. If right now was the habitual state of affairs, perhaps William would be able to have a comfortable rest at that garden, but he didn´t have the spare time to be doing this at the moment.

“"I can´t find anything eye-catching in the structure of the house. Even without having a good look at it, I can already imagine how the corridors are organized.”"

It was indispensable that William made his preparations for escaping in case Karl was to go back in his words or if Karl´s father wanted to have William dead.

Perhaps the chance for this to happen was low. However, the percentage wasn´t zero.

“This way. They should already be done with the preparations for dinner by now.”

Karl signaled William to come with a hand gesture. There were many servants in front of the door. It was possible to notice that they were wearing maid clothes of quality and that they had been well trained in their conduct and way of movement.

“...Understood.”

William´s expression didn´t change. Since he came all his way here anyway, he was able to set his resolve. Him meeting a noble, an existence he couldn´t even imagine about, was an opportunity that had came early for him. Yes, this was an opportunity.

“”I... won´t lose.””

His resolve was now completely set.

“Please enter, Karl-sama, Rivius-sama.”

A maid that seemed to be of old age opened the door. Then, the person sitting at the farthest seat of the table said...

“Welcome to the Teirah residence. I welcome you, William-kun.”

It was Lord Teirah. It was the first genuine noble William had seen in his life.

“It is my deepest honor to be invited by you, Lord Teirah.”

William deeply bowed his head. He had some etiquette imbued in his body. This too was knowledge he acquired from books. It was the first time he put it in practice. Since this was the first time he had met with a noble, such was obvious, but...

“Your hair is really as white as chalk. I was thinking the man

would have white hair mixed with his hair, Karl."(TL note: I think he is saying that he thought William was an old man. Karl should have told him that William was very knowledgeable, so it should be the case."

William turned his eyes to the direction of the voice. At that direction, there was a man that had a wavy blonde hair tied together in one bundle. He looked to be slightly older than both Karl and William.

"I am very sorry, elder brother."

Anger could be seen in Karl´s response.

"I am being rude to the visitor for not introducing myself already. My name is Ainhart Von Teirah. My profession is being a scholar and I am Karl´s elder brother."

Seeing Ainhart respectfully bow to William, William himself bowed to him in reaction. Seeming that that scene was amusing for the Lord Teirah, he laughed.

"And the one sitting to my opposite side is our most beloved little sister, Lutogarde."

The girl that was sitting to Aingart´s opposite side of the table bowed in an embarrassed manner. The moment her eyes met with William´s, she immediately averted her gaze.

“”...Is it too disgraceful for her to meet eyes with a commoner?””

William´s expression didn´t change the slightest, but he wasn´t calm in his mind. William couldn´t help but feel that the man sitting at the back of the table, Karl´s elder brother Ainhart and even Lutogarde were looking down on him. Rather, it was definitely only him imagining that.

“Ahaha, Lutogarde is very shy when meeting new people. Really, you need to properly greet him!”

Karl puffed up his cheeks. Looking at that, Lutogarde made an apologetic face.

“M-my name is Lutogarde. Nice to meet you, William-sama.”

“I am from Rushitania. My name is William Rivius. It is my pleasure meeting you, Lutogarde-sama.”

William carefully told his false story. No, in fact, he [himself] was without doubt William, who came from Rushitania, so there weren´t any lies.

“I guess I am the last in the self introductions. I am Lord Teirah, Louran Von Teirah. I will be in your care, William-kun, Karl´s friend and benefactor.”

William was slightly troubled at how a noble had lowered his head to him.

“Now, have a sit. Albeit it is a meager one, let´s have dinner.”

“…Excuse me.”

The arrangement of the seats was that Louran, the head of the house, was at the back; to the left was Ainhart and Karl, and to the right was Lutogarde, and now…

“…Uhm, is it fine for me to sit here?”

“Ah, yes, by all means.”

Lutogarde answered in a very meek voice. William sat down.

“Fill your plate with the dishes of your desire and let´s start our dinner.”

With Louran´s call, the dinner started.

☆

“”I don´t recognize this taste. What am I eating right now?””

Every single one of the cuisine lined up in the table were tasty food William had never eaten before. But even so, he was having trouble with the table manners, was also worried about how the

conversation would go, and in addition to that, he had to talk about Rushitania, his home country he actually had never been to. Because of the extreme feeling of tension and the too tasty of a food he normally wouldn´t be able to eat, his tongue became completely numb of taste.

"...But it seems William-kun has been studying very well."

"No, this is nothing to be that proud of."

Putting his elbow on the table, Louran smiled.

"No, it is quite something. For you to be that much fluent in a language of another country, and also even paying mind for learning the etiquette of another country, and the intelligence you have show during parts of our conversation. In addition to all that, at least as far as I heard from Karl, you are also strong."

William was scared of that smile. It was obviously a smile that was different from the one Karl was doing. Louran´s gaze was one that was analyzing him. He had been thinking there was something strange with William since a little ago.

""Is this man testing me?""

It was an act for the sake of making William delve inside more detailed subjects regarding Rushitania. Thinking about that now, perhaps all the self-introduction from before had also been something for the sake of examining the man called William.

“Despite not being very knowledgeable about it, I desperately studied about Arcadia after deciding I was going to come here.”

“This is incredible. Studying the language of a country so distant from your country Rushitania shouldn´t be something average.”

William´s back was soaked in sweat. The other three were listening to their conversation as they ate their food; they couldn´t even begin to understand the tension William was feeling right now.

“However, why is it Arcadia? It could have been Ostoberg, which is also one of the seven kingdoms. The closest to Rushitania of the seven kingdoms is the kingdom of Estaado, and walking a bit further from there, there should be the kingdom of Nehderks. If you want to rise to the top, then it should be the superpower, Garias, and by crossing the sea, there is also the developing kingdom of Arkland. I am having the feeling there aren´t any reasons for you to have chosen Arcadia.”

William also used to have the same doubts about this question. Why had William chosen Arcadia. William wasn´t a person to leave such a question that would definitely be asked to him buried.

“...My explanation for that might sound a little rude, though.”

William was making a humble face. Looking at it, Louran uttered an “Oh”, with his increasing interest showing on his voice.

“The superpower, the kingdom of Garias, is less than average for raising your fame. There aren´t many countries that would pick up a fight with that country, so there aren´t any opportunities to get achievements there. Even if I raise my name at the developing country of Arkland, I will still have my doubts on whether I would be able to go back to my home. And not to mention, the kingdom of Estaado had been known for having invaded my country a long time ago... The remaining choice is either Arcadia, Ostoberg or Nehderks. But between those three... there is a decisive difference that sets it all.”

William was smoothly giving his explanation. Everything was the pure truth William had heard from the [person himself]. There weren´t any reasons to be anxious about that. There was no doubts all this was the truth.

“The difference would be on how foreigners are treated. Compared to Arcadia, who consider foreigners as people of their own country, giving them the title of third class citizens, Ostoberg and Nehderks at most treat foreigners as nothing more than foreigners. I left my country to make a name for myself. In that case, I think it is inevitable that the place I need to enlist myself at is Arcadia.”

He didn´t put in even a single lie. If there were any lies found, he would be seen as nothing more than a scammer. However, even with that said, the identification documents were still making lies become the truth...

“You are quite the ambitious person.”

Ainhart said..

“I am grateful for the compliment.”

William bowed his head to Ainhart.

“Fumu, perhaps it is as you say. Arkland if there is the opportunity for it, and Arcadia otherwise... Ah, sorry for having asked you so many things. The dinner could have ended up getting cold. Now then, please eat to your heart´s content.”

As if the questioning had ended for the time, Loulan declared that William could go back to eating his dinner. William nodded. Now, all the people that were present at the place had their mind focused on the food.

“Ah, could I ask you one last thing?”

“...?”

William finally became relieved. But that was until Louran talked to him again, as if he had seen through that and was only waiting for the timing.

“Isn´t Karl a nuisance for you who is so ambitious?”

In an instant, the mood of the room became petrified. Karl loudly

stood up from his seat.

"...What are... you saying?"

William was at loss for words. It was obvious. There was no way he could answer that question in his current situation. It was inevitable he would get Karl´s dislike by that. In result of that, as far as the influence Karl had as the son of a noble, it would an easy feat for him to have a single foreigner murdered.

"Yes, please don´t mind about that. It´s just that I don´t like very much that Karl is going to war. Like Ainhart had said before, he is a scholar, and because of that, he won´t accept becoming the heir. In order words, Karl must be the one to succeed the Teirah household. I want him to learn things about the business we do, and if he is going to give up on that, it would be best if he does so early on."

Karl was about to glare at his father, but because Louran´s gaze was by far much sharper, Karl was suppressed without him even having the chance to say any word. As to be expected, there was no comparison.

"I am aware that Karl doesn´t have talents that suit the military. Let´s put an end to this dream. I will entrust my son to you. If it is your words, he might be able to wake up. Could you make him give up?"

Karl was looking at William with eyes that asked for help. William swallowed the saliva in his mouth.

This was an extremely difficult situation for William. If he was to stand for Karl, he wouldn´t do so for Louran, and if he was to stand for Louran, he wouldn´t do so for Karl. In terms of power, it was clear the Louran was the one most powerful. In that case, it was only logical that William needed to follow Louran´s will.

“”However, resentment from that will remain. The feeling of trust that Karl has right now will be destroyed, and the moment this turns into hatred, all the violations I had done will become a big vulnerability…”

William had committed violations before. They were things Karl had ignored. At the present moment, it could be said that he doesn´t mind about them, but it was inevitable that he would change his mind about that if he was to be betrayed. For all the trust he had, his anger would only become more intense.

“”To begin with, is there any necessity for me to stand on Louran´s side? If he really wanted to have Karl stay away from the battlefield, my opinion would have been unnecessary. At most, all this is only feigned. However, those are only assumptions. In either case, I will face against both of their opinions!””

William looked at Karl for only an instant. Karl head was hanging down. He was biting his lips, having his clenched hands trembling, and he was also making a frustrated face. Karl was aware of it. He knew that he didn´t have any talent. Since he had gone to war, he ended up becoming aware of it…

William let out a small sigh. It was as if he was making sure whether it was really fine to do what he was about to.

“Karl-sama…”

Karl became surprised in reaction. Louran looked at William with a composed attitude.

And then, William said…

“Karl-sama. No, Karl… I need you!”

William had set his resolve. Karl became moved by those words.

“At that time I still didn´t know you were from a noble family, I was about to betray you. In the middle of the battle, I didn´t have the spare time even for myself and many of our companions were in danger too. I was hesitant whether it was right for me to go save only Karl himself despite everyone else, so I averted my eyes from you for one time. Even if I saved you in the end, it is the reality that I had been about to leave you to your death. Without any twists to the truth, it is a fact that I had hesitated at that time.”

Because of the sudden confession, aside from Ainhart and Lutogarde, even Louran had his eyes open wide.

“Karl told the me who had abandoned him for that instant that I was his friend. He forgave the stupid me who had been about to leave him to his death; a simple foreigner and third class citizen

like me. He even called me his friend. To me, Karl is a friend that is impossible to replace. It was the first bond I was able to make in this country."

The first one to become surprised after hearing William´s confession was Karl himself. William continued his speech. He didn´t give him the time to think over what had been said.

"Indeed, Karl might not have talent to be in the military. However, I believe that Karl has an even more important power. It is the power to bond people together, the power to have people open themselves, the power to gain the trust of people. This power perhaps might not be of any use to a solder. However, how would this fare for someone that commands? What if he was to stand above people? This definitely would become the most powerful talent to have over any other. Therefore, I absolutely need Karl!"

William declared. To be fair to himself, William didn´t have the confidence that this kind of route was even viable. Whether it was the correct answer for him to choose Karl´s side, or whether he should have chosen Louran´s side, or whether he should have dropped all the pretense to begin with, he didn´t know what he was supposed to do. The situation he was now wasn´t one he could make all of it off as a joke. The person he was dealing with also wouldn´t allow him. Loulan Von Teirah wasn´t soft to that point.

"But if he dies as a soldier, there won´t be any meaning to it."

Louran´s cold words pierced through William.

“I will protect him. No matter what may happen, in the name of my motherland, and more than anything in the name of our friendship, I will protect him.”

Since he came all the way here, Karl would keep his stand even if he was to die. If he was to rub the lord in the wrong way, it would be fine for him to run away from the residence. Since he was close to the door, it would be possible for him to escape. He memorized the way outside the house. He had already gone his way to outside the kingdom too. It would be fine even if he was to get all covered with human shit for that sake.

“Father!”

Karl´s voice resounded through the room. Louran turned his frigid eyes away from William and now was looking at Karl.

“!?”

Karl´s had pretty much never went against his father´s words. He had never received such a cold gaze from him before. But even so...

“I-I, indeed am weak. I became aware of the reality with the war. I am weak. It is a fact that won´t change. However, if I am together with William, I have the feeling I will be able to become stronger. I will become strong and be able to stand alongside him. I want to become a man worthy of being his friend. That´s why there is no way I can run away now! In the name of my friendship with William, he who said that I was necessary to him!”

Karl has for the first time gone against his father. This was different from a child that had been spoiled by his father and was now talking about his selfish desires. It was a firm opposition. Ainhart, his brother, was surprised. Those were caustic words that he would have never imagined coming out of Karl´s mouth.

"...Fumu. I am beaten. Well, I wasn´t being that much serious about it though."

Before one´s notice, Louran´s eyes became mild. It was as if his cold gaze had been blown away, and that now the usual Loulan was the one sitting there.

"It´s fine, do as you wish. Sorry there, William-kun. I ended up having you caught with our family affairs. But it was really fortunate I asked you that. Thank you for becoming Karl´s friend."

Karl blushed. He was giving glances to William. Becoming embarrassed, William averted his eyes from him. And due to that, Karl made a happy expression.

"Only, you should think about the family´s business a little bit. Karl, since our company has many employees, please keep in your heart that we mustn´t let them be thrown to the roadside. Also, you must definitely not die. Can you promise me that?"

"Yes father!"

Becoming satisfied with Karl´s response, Louran turned his eyes to all the people in the room.

“Oh my, I am really sorry. Now then, let´s once again proceed with our dinner. If we let it cool down, our old caretaker will get angry at us.”

With a clap of his hands, although with a few difficulties, they went back to eating their dinner.

The strange mood from before faded away to its last pieces, but even so, William still couldn´t feel the taste of the food in the end.

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“You can use this room.”

After finishing the dinner, Karl guided William to one of the rooms of the second floor. Right now, both were standing in front of it.

“Thank you Karl.”

William extended his hand for a handshake. Karl happily took his hand.

“Don´t worry about it, William.”

Their friendship had been accepted by Karl´s father. If that wasn´t the case, it would have been impossible for him to have gone against the will of the head of the family. It was exactly because this would have normally been impossible that this friendship became mutual trust.

“Then, see you tomorrow.”

“Yes, see you tomorrow.”

The hands that were firmly holding each other now broke off, slowly leaving to each side. Both were looking at the position they were holding their hands with regretful eyes. Noticing that, Karl showed a happy smile while William showed a wry one.

“Good night, William.”

“Good night, Karl.”

The two of them went their own ways. Karl turned his head a few times as he waved his hand.

On the other hand, William just waved his hand for a little. After that, he entered inside the room that was given to him.

Leaning his back at the door…

“Fhuuuuu….”

William gave a very long sigh.

“I pulled it through, I guess.”

A feeling of coldness gradually started to embrace his back, which was now dry from all the sweat.

“The room next to mine has nobody living at. Because my room is at the corner, it should be fine even if I don´t pay too much mind about those things. This is enough. This should definitely be enough, myself.”

With his exhaustion coming at him all at once, William´s expression became a weak and completely exhausted one. It was an expression he wouldn´t show in front of anyone. William sluggishly walked towards his bed, and then he fell with his back onto it.

“I am much more tired than at those times in the battlefield. This shitty thing…”

His abusive language lacked its usual force.

“Those nobles… Are all of them jerks like that?”

William remembered about Louran´s surveying gaze and the conversation between them. Thinking back about it now, it was

possible to imagine that their whole conversation had been a test to see if he could be trusted. This was the difference in experience. All the people he had seen until now couldn´t be considered real actors.

“So that is how a baron, the fifth one, is like?”

The top was feeling even more distant to William.

“…Hm?”

The stairs were a bit far from his room, but even so, he was able to hear footsteps from there. That person who went up the stairs came towards his room and was now standing right in front of his door.

“…”

Fixing the position of his body, William turned his head to the door.

“You don´t need to open the door, William-kun.”

The owner of the voice was Louran. William´s feeling of tension increased.

“You are very smart. At that time, you were deciding which side to take; whether to take Karl´s or mine. ….No, since then, you´ve

been choosing the most suitable words and actions all the time. You are smart; so very smart. But you might be a bit too much smart."

William wasn´t able to say anything. Who in hell was the one that was now standing at the other side of his door? It was different from everything he had experienced until now.

"I don´t know what you were thinking by coming to this country. I am considering the story you´ve told us a bit ago with a grain of salt for now, but I am not softhearted enough to be believing in that. Isn´t it obvious? For a person like you that is so strong and intelligent, because of how excellent you are, there isn´t any reason for you to go to another country to begin with, or even for you to name yourself as a simple foreigner. The risk of making a name in another country makes doing that illogical; there wouldn´t be any reason for you to do that.

A cold feeling was going through William´s skin. It was a feeling that was similar to when Kail was preparing for battle or at the time he confronted with him.

"That´s why I cannot believe in your story."

Forgetting even to gasp, William kept only staring at the door.

"However, I will recognize that you are very capable. In that time you are being Karl´s [friend], I believe you and I are going to become good friends."

William was clenching his teeth. He had already been seen through. The reason for all the acting from before...

“Please be good friends with Karl. That child is too gentle and too simple-minded. I sincerely wish you won´t betray him. Alas, I don´t want to become your enemy.”

His opponent was too strong. The William of right now couldn´t compete. In the end, all he was able to protect was the lie called [William]. All the rest had been exposed.

“Sorry for having you follow that old man´s conversation. You should have got tired because of that, right? You should have a good rest.”

The presence that was at the other side of the door had vanished.

“Ah, that is bad. I can´t win against him.”

His complete exhaustion was showing in his face, but on the other hand, at that same face there was a smile.

“What a man. That Lord Tirah.”

William was acting very cautiously. However, Louran had been able to clearly see through his over cautious attitude. There was no mistake that William´s actions at that time had been very funny to him.

“”There was no meaning to all the cheap drama I engaged with Karl. No, perhaps for Karl there is a meaning to it.””

The response that inspired Karl. In result of that, William was able to win his trust, but the problem was on how Louran interpreted that. That was where the scary part was at. Only…

“”In short, would this mean that as long as I am protecting Karl and as long as I am being useful to the Tirah house, all that scene from before will be overlooked? Without giving any interest to my cheap drama, they only wanted to know whether I was going to protect Karl.””

War had value to the nobility. If their own son is serving the army, people would look differently at them. William didn´t know what Louran thought in regards of that, but there was no mistake that he wanted to draw in a win-win situation for the two of them.

“”Well, to me, this is definitely not a bad condition. They shouldn´t pursue the matter of me having abandoned him once, and for a foreigner like me, it is very nice for me to be under a noble family. I will make use of you as much as I can.””

Most of the reason why William gave that speech from before to inspire Karl was because not only Karl himself aimed for the top, but he also had useful qualities in him. From what William learned at their time at Raconia, it was definitely not a lie that Karl was necessary in other to make up for what William himself lacked. Because it was a win-win exchange, both would get the benefit.

William believed in benefits; this was all there was to it.

“”Today´s defeat was a complete disaster. However, one day, I will definitely win against him.””

William extended his hand to the ceiling of his room.

For now, he needed to reach for that ceiling. Reaching his hand to the skies was something for later on.

11. *Departure*

Hyun!

The blade of the sword shone with a gleaming light, cutting through the morning mist.

“Sh, fuh, seyah.”

At first, William would move by copying what he would find in the books. He would learn a whole page, then two, three, ten... The more he knew, the more he had for forming his own fighting style. He would read through the vast and deep world of books, test what he learned, and would decide whether he would adopt what he learned or not. And so...

“Ha!”

A beautiful and rational blade. This was William´s swordplay. It was the collection of his knowledge and testing.

William would train with his sword only when there was nobody around. It would be deep in the night or early in the morning. This was a habit he had since the time he used to be called Al, and it was a daily routine he wouldn´t skip even if it was raining, snowing or windy.

“...”

William had noticed long ago the gaze that was directed to him.

“Fuh.”

William wiped the considerable amount of sweat he got by training and turned his eyes to the direction of the gaze. The figure that was looking at him from the window hurriedly ran off.

“...I don´t really see how it is fun to watch me though.”

It has been that way in those last few days. At the first time, the ones to watch him training were Karl, Ainhart, and even Louran himself.However, because Ainhart and Louran became tired of watching him train, they wouldn´t wake up early to watch his training anymore. Karl still wanted to train together with him, but when the time would come, he would be sleeping. The only remaining person was...

“”Lutogarde...””

Since their first meeting, she hadn´t been able to look at him straight in his eyes, and besides, it was difficult for William to deal with her in his position. Just so she could have a peek at William, she would do all the effort of waking up early in the morning. Probably, the person herself still didn´t realise that William had already become aware of her.

“”Even though they said she was shy with strangers. What is she thinking about.””

When William turned his eyes away, the gaze would suddenly come back. While feeling annoyed at the gaze he was receiving from his back, he kept pretending not to notice it.

“”Well, this the last day. If I keep caring about that, I will be the one at loss.”

☆

“Now then, I will be going!!”

Karl said his goodbyes in good spirits. Louran was waving his hand with a smile, Ainhart had only come to show his face, and Lutogarde was restlessly covering her face.

“William-kun, you too should take care.”

“Thank you for the concern.”

William deeply bowed his head. As if Ainhart didn´t have any particular interest in William, he didn´t even glance at him. To William, the fact he was receiving that kind of dry reception made him more at ease than otherwise.

“”The problem is…””

William´s eyes met with the ones of a certain someone that had

been giving him glances since a few moments ago.

“Hya!?”

And in that same instant, she immediately looked away.

“”...It is Lutogarde.””

To the point it had already become a standard custom, just like always, Lutogarde was looking at William. It wasn´t a dignified look, but one that was closer to a peeking look. Besides that, if their eyes were to meet, she would turn her eyes away.

“”Really, what is she thinking... I have no idea.””

Pushing away all the troublesome thoughts, William kept his expressionless face.

“Ah, by the way, it seems that Lutogarde has something to give to you.”

Lutogarde became startled with Louran´s words. Then, she hesitantly curled up behind her elder brother and gave Karl a necklace that had a blue jewel at the center. Karl´s face became bright.

“Wah, it´s a sapphire. And it sparkles with the light... So as I expected, this is...!”

It had the beauty that even caught William´s attention. With light shining on it, it became even more beautiful. The six tones of light shone like stardust. This was an gem William, who had dealt with many merchants, has never seen. Moreover, the gold decoration enveloping it was also beautiful. No matter how much one was to sell this for, there would never be enough money for someone to buy it.

“That sapphire… Is it fine, father? This is something that we are supposed to be selling, right?”

“The one who bought it and made the decoration was Lutogarde herself. Well, it is a protective charm, so I think it would lose effectiveness if you won´t get excited about it even if a little.”

Getting excited about it even if a little. Those words made William´s face twist for a second. If he was to sell that jewel, he would probably get enough money to buy a stand-alone house here in Arkas. As to be expected, it is a bit lacking for one to be able to buy a house at the noble district, but even so, the argument was still valid.

“So, does this mean they would be able to get a much bigger house than the one they have?”

Even for nobles, something like that was expensive to the extent that one wouldn´t casually gift it away. But if that was the first campaign of their son, it might just happen. Just maybe though.

““…First campaign…. Well, I guess it is. The battles that will happen from now on will be on a different scale from the little skirmishes at Raconia. It is definitely not a gift you would give for your son to be a footsoldier on a skirmish.””

William deeply thought about it.

“Uh, ummm.”

While William was being distracted with his thoughts, Lutogarde approached him. William got surprised by that. And in reaction, Lutogarde also got surprised.

“Wh-what would it be, Lutogarde-sama.”

Seeing William´s cramped face, Louran laughed.

“I said Lutogarde had something to give you, didn´t I? This is your share. Of course, the decorations were handmade by Lutogarde herself.”

Lutogarde gave William the necklace while looking downwards.

“I-is this… for me?”

William´s eyes became wide-open by being given that. The words he uttered left his mouth in a trembling voice.

“Is it not good?”

“I-it´s not that!? Rather, for me to so suddenly be given such an expensive item!”

What was in front of his eyes was a deep crimson gem. There was a decoration made of silver enveloping it. The decoration made of silver by itself was already something that had the cost common people wouldn´t be able to pay. In addition to that, the crimson gem was a...

“Hou, is it a ruby? It looks like father is really daring.”

It couldn´t be helped that Ainhart became surprised about that. In this age, rubies were one of the most expensive gems, only next to diamond. Its price couldn´t be compared to a sapphire. The ruby was a rarity that couldn´t be found in the territories the seven kingdoms controlled. That was the main reason why its price had increased.

“Hm, this is something Lutogarde insisted me to do. She would say only a ruby would suit you and she wouldn´t hear anything I would say. She even said it was fine even if she had to sell all her jewels for that.”

With her face red in embarrassment, Lutogarde angrily looked at her father. Louran made a wry smile and shook his head while saying “Good grief”.

“Please, accept it. She had already prepared the one for Karl beforehand, but yours was one she made in hurry. She also had prepared its design the day after she met you, and she probably pulled through the whole night at that. It will be very heart-breaking to her if you won´t accept it.”

William didn´t know what kind of face he should do right now. When William moved his trembling hand to get it, he ended up touching Lutogarde´s hand, which gave her a fright. However, right now, there was no way she could allow herself to act frightened. The size of the ruby, and also its color and shape were all nice. With only this gem, it is possible to build a whole mansion just like the ones around here.

“”This isn´t something you would gift a person you just recently met, you know!?””

William was looking at Louran. Louran was showing a happy smile.

“”...Is he planning on investing on me? It looks like I am valued absurdly high.””

William tightly grasped the ruby in his hand. A feeling of ardor that felt as if he was holding heat itself was going through his hand. The gem was only a inorganic substance. It had no consciousness. But even so, with how much of a rarity it is considered and also because of its colossal price, people would be welled up with excitement and start imagining things.

“Thank you very much, Lutogarde-sama, Louran-sama. I will definitely answer to your expectations.”

He would answer to them. What Louran probably wanted from William was for him to protect Karl. Even if he wasn´t given something like that, William had already intended on doing so, but now that he was gifted that, he once again made up his mind. this meant that Karl had at least more value to Louran than this gem. If William was to make a blunder and fail at protecting Karl, he couldn´t even start imagining what kind of retribution would come.

“...Uhm, ma-may you have good fortune at war.”

“Ye-yes.”

“”In the end... I can´t understand what Lutogarde is thinking. Really, what is this person thinking about.””

While giving out that response, William was being held back by those complex feelings. It was easy to understand Louran´s intention. He wanted him to protect Karl, and in addition to that, be of use to the Teirah household. However, William couldn´t understand Lutogarde´s intentions at all.

“Hmph, giving the jewel to the man.”

Lutogarde was glaring at Hainhart, who had thrown a remark of profound meaning. While saying “How scary”, Ainhart returned to

the residence by himself. With blushing cheeks, Lutogarde, who was left behind, kept being silent.

“Then, shall we go, William?”

“Yes, that´s right, Karl.”

Both hanged the necklaces they received at their neck and looked south. From here, they wouldn´t be able to see it, but distant in that horizon was Raconia, which was the place their campaign would happen.

“”Finally the opportunities are coming to me. If Karl, who is from the nobility, is promoted, I will naturally be promoted as well. If Karl advances forward, so will I. For now, let´s make our name in his shadow. And then, one day…”

Both William and Karl started to walk. Whether there was something ahead, nobody knew.

“I will be leaving Karl on your care.”

Louran was making a gentle face, but the voice he used to call for William felt like needles that were pricking him. While saying “Of course”, William showed a smile.

“”I will also eat him up. Isn´t that right, nee-san?””

The reflected light of the crimson gem that was waving by his chest made it look like it was burning. This expressed very well the scorching heat that was flaring up inside William´s heart.

“…Please, be safe.”

After seeing the two walked far enough so that her voice wouldn´t be heard by them, Lutogarde muttered. By her side, Louran could be seen making a complex face.

“”Now then, what will his existence bring to our family?””

Whether he would be a remedy or poison, Louran couldn´t know.

“By the way, Karl.”

Going through the gates of the noble district, the two of them were now walking through the residential district.

“Hm, what is it?”

William asked Karl one thing he had been wondering about.

“What does your family do for living? I´ve heard a bit that you own a company.”

The Teirah household was one that dealt with trading. Their family by itself didn´t amount to much, but the influence could clearly be seen. They were so filthy rich to the point of giving a ruby necklace to a complete stranger. This was something that made him wonder about it.

“Hm, our company deals with clothing and ornaments. We also work with the crafting of jewelry made of gold, silver and gems. Because of all that, the Teirah family is very popular. Lutogarde is also a very famous ornament designer. The daughter of a noble working makes up a bit of a bad reputation though.”

The surprising reality. William was finally able to understand. Many of the companies that dealt with jewelry and clothing that William knew of probably belonged to the Teirah household. It seems they are very rich. It is said that jewe business was something profitable even at normal occasions, and since that´s the business they deal with...

“I-I see... This is very incredible.”

Because of William´s reaction, Karl made an expression that was filled with mixed feelings.

“It isn´t that much. My father is only the third generation in the history of our family, and we don´t have any accomplishments in the military. As nobles, we are only second or third-rate.”

“”...You might be second-rate as a noble, but you probably have a lot of money when compared to other nobles. The Teirah family is

incredible.””

William once again was made to understand how incredible the Teirah family was.

“”Well, maybe I was able to get a bit relieved only because he was just a baron, I guess.”

The top William aimed for was distant. For the moment, he needed to get achievements in the great war that was going to happen at Raconia.

12. The Sword Of Karl Von Teirah

“Wah, this is awesome.”

The massive arcadian army crowded around the surroundings.

“There are three thousand footsoldiers, five hundred cavalry; in total, our numbers are three thousand five hundred. Right now, the army is organized in columns, but when the battle starts, the should change it into a more linear formation.”

William spoke out about information he had took out of nowhere. Karl looked at William with admiration.

“We are the light infantry. We have the role of fighting in the front row. And...”

William looked behind him. What was in his sight was...

“... the heavy infantry are the stars of the battlefield. Our role is to stall until the heavy infantry arrives.”

Heavy infantry. To both the kingdoms of Arcadia and Ostoberg, the heavy infantry was definitely the star of the battlefield. They had the most powerful fighting strength and were regarded more highly than cavalry. The heavy infantry was essentially the regular army of the kingdom; the soldiers of career would be at this branch. Because of that, they were provided with equipment of high power and top quality. That fighting powress was respected

throughout the whole world.

“The soldiers of Arcadia are the ones wearing white armor and the Ostoberg ones are the ones wearing the black armor, right?”

“That´s right. Well, once we cross to the other side of that hill, you would be seeing them even if you didn´t want to.”

The two of them were positioned in the middle of the front row. The ten man squad they were assigned to was a group that was composed of survivors from Raconia. Taking into consideration their experience with surviving a defeat, they were positioned in this place.

“”Generally, the ones positioned in the front rows are the ones that lack experience. We are survivors, and besides, most of the people that had more experience than us died. Because of that, this position… isn´t bad.”

The front row started to get restless. The enemy troops probably entered in their sight. The leading cavalry and scout cavalry were coming and going by the side of the army William and Karl were part of. This kind of anxiousness was part of the battlefield. The feeling of extreme excitation naturally came to William.

“”Calm down me. If I became too excited, I will be killed. I need to have my head cooled down more than anyone and carry on with composure during the fight.””

“We need to hide our charms deep inside our clothes.”

William was able to confirm one more time the reason why he was able to keep calm.

“Yes. This is to prevent the enemies from stealing it from us, right?”

Karl put his hand at the center of his chest. At that place, the important thing he was entrusted with by his family was there.

“Correct. Besides, even our allies would want those gems. It´s not like only the enemies that are dangerous. For now, there is no reason for us to give the small fries an impression that will be troublesome for us.”

“”That said, if we can´t stand out in a good way, my plans won´t work out.”

And at the same time William was pondering about that...

“Ah!?”

A mass of black color appeared in front of the eyes of the two. Those weren´t at a distance the two would already need to be engaging them, but they weren´t at a distance that the two were safe. Before one´s notice, the front row that used to have considerable fighting power was now having it toned down. Karl, who was standing beside William, was trembling. This kind of

feeling of intimidation. This was what war is.

“”That is no good. That is no good, me.””

But on the contrary to that, among all those people…

“”This is no good; it is really bad nee-san!”

there was a person that was becoming excited by the pressure.

That person knew of pain more than anyone in that battlefield. He would drink muddy water and would live like a rat. He would scramble around at trash and would be oppressed just by trying to live. As if living was some kind of punishment, and as if it was only natural that he was supposed to serve under others; that was how the young man defined such kind of life.

“…William?”

A life of continuing to be stolen of everything. A little while ago, he was finally standing at the side of the ones that would steal away things. But it wasn´t enough. He was lacking too much. His most beloved person was stolen away. Everything from his life was stolen away.

“Are you… smiling?”

He himself was superior. People have taken away many things

from him, who is strong. In retribution of that, he needed to break this world down. If he didn´t steal back something of equal valor to his sister, the trade off wouldn´t be fair.

“No, I am not smiling, Karl. Calm down. You must definitely not go away from me.”

“Ye-yes!”

In that case, he should steal. He should steal everything of this world.

“”Ah, nee-san. The masses are crawling like insects. Dullards, dullards, dullards; it is a flock of dullards. They are much inferior than me, who was labelled as a slave. If so, it isn´t enough. Even if I get all of them, it wouldn´t be enough. Compared to all the happiness that was stolen from us, trash people like those won´t even account for anything.””

There was no mistake the one that was the most insane in this battlefield was that man. The slave named Al died, and the freed slave that was also called Al also died. The one that was standing here now was...

“Now then, let´s eat up all of them!”

It was a white beast that had lost even the name he had stolen.

This was the true meaning that campaign had for William Rivius.

☆

“Is it fine if we stay here like that, William!?”

“Yes, it is fine.”

It was a mayhem. They were facing the enemy head-on. It was a clash that dispensed any kind of scheming. The ones to charge at them first were the knights, which were the diversion. After them, it was the light infantry, which had then led to that direct confront. At the current situation, the light infantry of both armies were entangled onto each other in the center of the war.

In the midst of that, William and Karl were calmly fighting in the middle row they were positioned at. Sometimes they would need to engage with an enemy that would come at them with his sword, but before they could approach Karl, William, who was standing next to him would bisect the enemy with swift movements. The war was clearly much slower-paced when compared to their previous battle.

“Even if they do their best in the first clashes, all that would happen is death. Not only the enemies, but allied arrows and javelins would be showering at them. Being right at the front isn´t something good. It is good everything is still flowing well. To the point I can´t find any faults.”

Karl was hesitant about the fact, but the risks of being at the front lines weren´t worth the military gains. That was the case

specially because of the mutual preliminary test of the first clash. The ones that are fast to die out are the light infantry. They wouldn´t be able to get any heads that would be worth anything at the first phases of the war.

“”Now then, this should be over soon . Which of them will make the first move?””

The reason why William insisted in staying at their position was because he could look at the whole battlefield from there to some extent. Of course, the amount of vision he would get by doing that wasn´t much, but he still had enough leeway to be looking around while he would do proper reactions to enemy attacks by only relying on sensing the danger and the enemy movement.

“”It doesn´t seen like either side is planning on doing any kind of tactics, such as the echelon formation. In that case, I guess they will be competing in their earnest with their heavy infantry in the same way the theory tells to.”

Bit by bit, the enemy troops that were coming to the place William and Karl were standing at started to increase. The vanguards of both armies started to jumble up together and the chaos was spreading. If William wanted to make his move, it must be now. Even if he doesn´t, soon enough, it would be the time their heavy infantry was going to move.

“William! There is something behind us!”

It was Karl´s voice, who was standing behind William. William

also noticed the irregularity, although a bit later than Karl.

“Behind us… cavalry!?”

It wasn´t that William could hear the sound of the hooves hitting the ground. However, the amount of allied arrow showers had diminished, and angry yellings that were loud enough to be heard even from their position started to approach them. The light infantry was in the middle of an engagement and it was in a state of equilibrium. The situation of their rear was that they were receiving a surprise attack. And also…

“There is no way the scouts wouldn´t have noticed the troops in such easy to look around plains like this one. There weren´t any signs of ambushes spotted at the surroundings of the hill. In that case, it should be the forest that is located at the other side of the hill. There soldiers that were positioned at the forest should have moved after the war broke in. Besides that, in order for them to be faster than the light infantry can pull back, it is essential that they have the speed of the cavalry.””

Therefore, those were cavalry. That was the showcase of their be speed, and also their power.

“The first play was of Ostoberg. This was probably something already planned. In that case… the next move should also be Ostoberg´s.”

While the people in the vanguard were looking at the rear, William glared at their front.

“”The rear is in chaos. In that case, it is obvious their next target is the front.””

William noticed the position where the clashing was happening was moving. Actually, the enemy´s vanguard was slightly stepping back. However, it didn´t mean that the Arcadian army was pushing them back. They were changing turns. And the ones to take place was...

“He-heavy infantry!?”

The black shinigami. Ostoberg´s prided unparalleled soldiers.

“U-uoh!?”

The light infantry immediately threw their javelins. Those were met with their black armor.

“...”

The heavy infantry casually blocked those javelins with their shield. Since they were made of wood, the thrown javelins received a shock to the point that made them split in pieces.

And then, in a way that felt as if they weren´t particularly doing that as the retribution for the javelins, the heavy infantry was quickly mowing down the light infantry. Thick long spears that

had a black luster to them assaulted, suppressed, ran over and overwhelmed them.

“He-help me.”

“Retreat.”

A big spear that had a very thick tip crushed the head of the soldier. The head was burst open just like a pomegranate would have been. The frontlines became a land of corpses in just an instant. All this was because of the black shinigami, who would bring forward blood, guts and corpses. It was because of Ostoberg ´s heavy infantry.

“They really do their job well.”

William muttered in an excited voice. He muttered it low enough so Karl wouldn´t hear him.

“We should move soon.”

William drew the sword he had been keeping in his scabbard. That silvery blade attracted the eyes of many people. This was because of the beauty of that sword, and also because of the handsomeness of the young man holding it.

The mood of the battle changed.

“Go back, Karl. I will be killing some small fry until a good head to take appears.”

His attitude made one wonder where all his apathy from a few moments ago went to. The glint in William´s eyes was like that of a predator that had its prey right in front of his eyes. He was looking at the black shinigami as if he was licking them all over. They were his prey.

“Small fry, you say. Don´t be so pretentious, brat!”

There was no way the heavy infantry would hesitate because of those words. They were warriors of long military service and were brave man that went through situations they were close to dying many times. At that very most, those words were only nonsense of a single soldier of the light infantry. Even if you could say the mood had changed a bit because of him, he...

“Shut up and be killed by me, small fry.”

“!?”

Speed, judgement, head, flew.

“You aren´t worthy of eating. I will crush all of you.”

He muttered in a low voice so that the people at his back wouldn´t hear what he said. Being cut precisely through the joint part of his armor, the soldier had his head cut off from his torso. He was

still living, but he didn´t have the life functions to keep living. The part that had the requirements for understanding words was now soaring at the air.

“Impossible!?”

The frontlines fell in uproar. The eyes of his allies and also enemies were all gathering on William.

“My name is William Rivius! I am the sword that serves Karl Von Teirah! If you do not fear the power of my master, then come at us!”

Nobody at that place knew about Karl. They probably didn´t know even about the Teirah household. However, that was fine regardless. This was where all started. Here was where his life as Karl Von Teirah´s shadow and sword would start. It was the first step for eating up the skies.

“You stopped moving, you know? Hey, heavy infantry. Are you trembling in fear?”

“Youuuuuuuuuuuu!”

The shinigamis that were made fools of were now rushing at the white beast. As if he was looking at them from a place above, and as if he was going to trample all of them without letting any remain, eating up all of them without leftovers, William moved.

The stage had been prepared.

☆

“Your Excellency, just like you have planned, we are having the predominance at the frontlines. We should soon pull back.”

It was a cavalry company of black knights. As they rode their horses, the sound of the hooves resounded through the battlefield. Among those knights, there was a noticeably big man that took off his helmet and turned his eyes to the main enemy forces.

“Guhaha. Like always, they are unyielding to pull back, Baldias.”

Seeing his perfect plan in action, the man became even more agitated. The big man showed a smile to the opposing army that was showing no signs of pulling back.

“As expected of the immovable Baldias. He won´t move one step even with my plans. However, it is unfortunate how him not moving was considered in my plans.”

His strategy was the surprise attack. The big man had moves prepared in case Bardias was to move in fear of the surprise attack without consideration, and if he didn´t, in the end he would have revealed his plans for only a little bit of advantage. This war was much more balanced than it looked like.

The only things that truly moved the battlefield was one´s own

power and one´s military power. That was battles between armies was about.

“Hmph. Back to the old style of war, but I like it. You don´t use petty tricks in that after all.”

Old war strategies. To this big man, they were easier to understand and also easier to have fun with.

“Those are completely different from those skinny fellows from Garias. Gahaha.”

Arcadia didn´t know, but recently, Ostoberg had fought against the superpower, the kingdom of Garias. The war wasn´t in that much of a large scale to the point of it being able to be called a war, but it was because of many accumulated reasons, that war had lead to this one they were right now.

“Well, since I found something interesting, I will leave it there. For now, we are going to battle.”

Their long history of enmity. The many battles between both sides that had accumulated to a number that was to the point that counting them became annoying to do brought forward this dignified battlefield. This one wasn´t those make-believe wars, but the true thing itself.

“The main army should go uphill. If we bring them down from there, they will get some of their bones broken.”

In contrast to his words, he was being all smiles with joy.

“Now, let´s end this war once for all. Let´s pull back.”

“Ou!”

The big man withdrew from the battlefield he had threw into chaos together with his subordinates. If one was to say, he needed to have the perfect timing to escape if he wanted to regroup with his army. It was at this kind of situation that his experience shone. His ability as a general could see a way through this.

“…?”

During his escape, the big man looked at the two armies clashing against each other at the vanguard. At that battle the light infantry and the heavy infantry were fighting each other, the ones having an overwhelming predominance were the ones of his army, of the Ostoberg army. However…

“Hou…”

It was at one place; at a single place. It was just a little part of this vast battlefield that one normally wouldn´t keep his attention to.

“Interesting.”

There was something that caught the man´s eyes.

13. The Centurion VS The White Beast

“I-impossible.”

The black armored crumbled down. The white beast glared at them.

“Yes, thank you for the effort.”

William was dancing at the battlefield. Most of the black armored bodies lying on the ground were an army of dead bodies William created himself. Both enemies and allies couldn´t recklessly move. It was only a single part; only a small part of the battlefield. But even so, that was a part William completely ruled over.

“Guh! How dare you.”

The ones that were just defeated was a ten-man heavy infantry squad of Ostoberg. For the heavy infantry, which all of its soldiers were regulars of the army, a ten man squad was definitely not a small number. It wasn´t a small number, but even so...

“”It´s not enough.””

Right now, William was risking himself. He was taking the risk of making himself stand out too much while fighting at the frontlines. He was obviously scared of being surrounded and taken down, but the chance of friendly fire from behind was also very possible. It was a considerably risky situation for him.

“”I can avoid the risks with my abilities. I can simply act whenever necessary. Now is the time. And so, I want a better recommendation. But for that, it is still not enough.”

Soon, he would need to pull back. The vanguard army seemed like it was going to be broken, and soon it would be the time for the heavy infantry, which were the tigers of Arcadia. There was a limit for how long William could act.

“”Come, come, come!””

William prayed. Even if he killed that many, all it would happen was that everything he did would simply become evaluation for the small fries around him. Because of that, his deeds wouldn´t reach the ears of the top-brass. He wouldn´t be able to reach out for them. What he needed was something that would certainly spread his name. This was something that was impossible for him to get his hands on no matter how many small fries he killed.

“”Come!””

He needed a head.

“Hey, hey, it looks like you´ve been making my subordinates suffer quite a bit, aren´t you?”

The mood completely changed.

“William!”

Karl´s voice filled with worry the reached his ears.

“”I know that. Now, it seems you´ve finally revealed yourself, centurion!””(TL note: Centurion =A hundred man commander)

A centurion. If one was to go find similarities between Arcadia and Ostoberg, it would be that their core army was their heavy infantry. That core army was divided in squads of a hundred man, and the ones who commanded those were called centurions. In the battlefield, they were the stars among the stars. If William was to take the head of one, it would be possible to raise his name in one go.

“You have quite the showy hair, brat. Did you dye it?”

The man was lump of self confidence. However, William would definitely...

“”He isn´t just a fox that made his way there by borrowing authority.”

This one wasn´t a simple fake. Until now, William´s opponents had only been soldiers of the heavy infantry division. However, the man in front of his eyes wasn´t simply only a single man. He was the man that commanded a strong army. It was the man that would mold his army with strength.

“Centurion of Ostoberg´s heavy infantry division, my name is Haian Von Krokkas.”

“Soldier of the Arcadian light infantry, sword of Karl Von Teirah, William Rivius.”

The two of them named themselves. There was a overwhelming difference in their character. Haian was surrounded by many black shinigami. William was only a simple soldier. Perhaps this would seen like a funny play for the people watching from the sidelines.

“You have a nice spirit. Come.”

An oppressing aura surrounded Haian.

“”...This thing once again?”

A cold feeling assaulted William. It was the feeling he felt when he fought against Kail. Although it was of a different nature, he had also felt the same feeling from Lord Teirah and the air that wafted around that noble district.

“...Really, I can´t understand.”

William sighed in a way that couldn´t be considered him either letting out a sigh or gasping.

“Won´t you come?”

“…I will.”

The warning Kail gave him etched in his mind. He shouldn´t fight people that gave off this kind of cold feeling. However…

““If I take the risk…. I will be able to go to the top!””

There was no way William could stop. His heart screamed him to go forward. The ardor in his stomach increased. Eat, eat, eat, eat. Something inside him was insanely screaming that.

“Hyu!*”

“”Besides, I´m not feeling the same amount of cold I felt from Kail! Physique, technique; there are no factors that suggest I will lose. I can win!””

Therefore, William advanced forward. Like always, he charged, attacking at the gap of the armor and aiming for the neck.

“You are very light, white brat.”

“!?”

Haian blocked William´s attack that would have brought death if it hit too much easily. In a rational way, the attack went through the shortest trajectory to hit, and therefore it was the fastest

William could bring. It was the sword that represented the accumulation of much knowledge and training. This sword was stopped.

“Sorah!”

Haian forcibly came out from his position of having blocked the attack and swung his big sword at William.

William´s eyes became wide-open. Both were pushing their swords on each other, but William had the advantage in the stance. In terms of physique, William was only slightly unfavored, but there was no way there could have been so much difference. There was no way William, who had been training his body, could be falling behind in strength for that much.

“I said so, didn´t I? That you are [light].”

“!?”

Despite all that, William felt confused. The disadvantageous stance of his opponent, the rationality, and everything else too was blown away. William was overthrown and was blown away in the same way.

“”Wait… a second.””

William couldn´t follow what was happening. Because of that delay…

“You don´t have the time to be dazing around!”

An opening William would normally not have given away appeared. It was a diagonal slash that went by the books. Even though he was in panic, he was able to properly ready his sword with both hands and protect his head. Blocking the attack, he slashed back...

“Gah!?”

Or so he had intended to. In the end, the result was that the skin of his neck was slightly cut and his body was sent flying. Even if his stance was hadn´t been good, the attack that he was supposed to have completely blocked was too much heavy.

“This... impossible!”

William couldn´t have imagined that there would be so much difference between them simply because Haian had better strength. He couldn´t see the difference between the build of their bodies. But even so...

“”Why does the gap feels so big!?””

An one-sided defensive battle. William was gritting his teeth. It wasn´t supposed to be like that. He was supposed to win and ascertain how superior he himself was. He was strong. And now, it was when he was supposed to be confirming that fact. That was

what should have happened.

“Don´t you know? You don´t know, right? Your sword is light. Your own existence is light. You didn´t go through any trouble in your life, you see.”

His life... was light.

“You can stop acting all brave now. You are indeed very good. Your swordplay is beautiful and your movements were impressive. Your physique isn´t bad. But that´s all. You aren´t [strong]!”

While he was blocking the attacks, William had his head hanging down.

His heart exploded.

There was no way William could tolerate the things the man in front of his eyes was babbling. William had lived a life he had to drink water from the ditch. He lost his sister and was now living for the sake of vengeance. He had been desperately accumulating knowledge, and besides that, he also trained his body. He had the confidence he had lived the most effective way possible. He would brag he lived while making use of every moment of his life.

“...op”

William was superior than others. It was fine even if he wasn´t a genius. He didn´t mind even if he didn´t have any talents. It would

be enough if he was just a normal person. A simple slave that had trained himself while aiming for the skies. He desperately trained, not letting even one second go to waste. He desperately used up everything all for being able to improve himself. There was no way someone like [him]...

“ShUt Up.”

There was no way [he] was lower than someone of the level of the man in front of his eyes.

“Th-this guy!? Were you hiding such face all along!?”

It was a face his allies behind him couldn´t see. Haian didn´t know what the thing in front of him was.

“I am awesome, you know, nee-san!? We are better than anyone! So watch thiiss.”

“St-stop kidding me! There is, there is no way someone like this...!?”

William pushed away the sword. It was the completely opposite of the fight that was happening moments ago. The surroundings didn´t know what was happening there. All they knew was that William was pushing Haian back. They understood it. But despite that, nobody was able to move.

They continued to fight, and after the sword reached next to

Haian´s neck, he couldn´t act anymore.

A feeling of dread wrapped around the battlefield. Those were scorching feelings. Haian was being buried by the strong pressure that surrounded him.

“ThaANkSsS fOr The MeALLLLLLLLLLLLLLLL.”

Hopelessness could be seen in Haian´s face. He was pushed down, and as his neck was eaten by the blade, his meat was raising sounds of being split apart. Calmly, steadily, with any resistance being in vain...

“Sto-save me!”

The flesh blood dyed the two of them. The white beast was dyed in red. It was a red, a crimson and beautiful beast.

“See, in the end I was superior.”

The allied soldiers didn´t know of the expression he was making. However, the soldiers of Ostoberg could see that face.

It was a beautiful and terrifying thing. It was to the point one would have to swallow a mouthful of saliva after looking at it. They couldn´t believe that [thing] with a face full of ecstasy and bathed in blood was of the same race of them. It was as beautiful as it was insane...

The white beast stood alone in the battlefield.

“W-William?”

Karl timidly spoke to William. He couldn´t understand what happened, but he could more or less see that that was an unnatural situation. However...

“Hm? What is the matter, Karl-sama?”

The face William had when he turned his head to him was his usual one. His hair and clothes were dyed in red, but it was the usual William that stood there.

“Please, take this.”

William cut off Haian´s neck into a proper shape and threw it to Karl´s hands. Karl took the head in panic. That face with dead eyes made Karl want to throw up.

“Did something happen?”

The Arcadian heavy infantry finally arrived after all this time. They made a puzzled face because of the weird mood that wafted around the place.

William showed a happy smile.

“Karl Von Teirah has taken down the centurion Haian Von Krokkas!”

The well sounded voice echoed through battlefield. As to be expected, when looking at the battlefield as a whole, it had been only a small part of it. However, all the people that were present at the place had the name of Karl Von Teirah carved in their memory. The voice that declared that had both a charming power and a devilish feeling one couldn´t resist.

“Wai-, William!? It wasn´t me, but yo…”

Even if Karl raised his voice in order to correct the misunderstanding, it was already too late…

“Uoooohhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

Many loud cheering voices resounded. William drew Karl´s sword and stuck it at Haian´s head. When confirming it was firmly stuck into the sword, he had Karl hold it and have it displayed to the soldiers.

The bursting shouts of joy became even stronger.

“A lowly light infantry soldier killed a centurion of the heavy infantry army?”

The white heavy infantry had this doubt in their minds. William stood in front of Karl.

“This person is the son of a baron, you know? I, William Rivius, won´t tolerate the disrespect of looking at Karl-sama in the same eyes of simple light infantry soldier.”

The son of a baron. In other words, a noble. Most of the heavy infantry soldiers were common civilians. Karl´s military position was lower than theirs, but in terms of hierarchy set by the state, Karl was overwhelmingly ahead of them.

“Wh-why is the son of a noble together with the light infantry army?”

Seeing that the soldier was backing off, William looked at him with eyes of scorn.

“This is something the likes of you don´t need to know. Let´s go, Karl-sama.”

William extended his hand to Karl. Karl hesitated.

“Eh, but, for us to be going as we please….”

“The light infantry is supposed to pull back when it is time for the heavy infantry to burst in. Or could Karl-sama be intending to have the light infantry keep fighting?”

It was an argument one couldn´t say anything against. To begin with, the heavy infantry was late to take the place of the light infantry because of the confusion at the rear. But even in that case, William normally wouldn´t be someone that would be able to leave the battlefield as he wished. However, right now, he had actual results(the head of a centurion) and Karl (a noble) to back him up. Therefore, they could go.

“Then, let´s go.”

“Ye-yes.”

William and Karl leisurely went to the backlines. The astonishing thing wasn´t only that Ostoberg had its command killed, but the Arcadian army itself. It was that much of a striking duel. And the victory went to Arcadia. After that, shouts of cheer that were as if they had already won the battle itself kept resounding.

The heavy infantry, which until now had remained unused, appeared unexpectedly, and the Ostoberg army, which had already been losing their momentum, was pushed back. The ones to make up for the mistakes of this first battle was the heavy infantry. The white army divided the Ostoberg army in two from the [center], which was where the Ostoberg army hadn´t been able to push through for some reason. They were successfully able to break in at the center of their army.

Because of this battle, the one to seize the initiative of the field was decided.

The first war of the first campaign of both William and Karl ended up in victory after a turnaround.

14. A Night Of Reflection

William was somewhere a bit away from the encampment by himself.

By glancing through the field, it could be seen the soldiers getting drunk, cheering for their victory. However, William didn´t have the spare time to being happy about his victory or to be having a taste of the high-grade beverages of victory.

“”How… did I win?””

Instead, his complexion was bad. He was very pale.

“”My memories are missing. From what I can remember… I was in the disadvantage. No, it would be fine to say that I had already lost.””

What William was trying to remember about was about his one-to-one fight with the centurion Haian. He didn´t have the confidence that he was going to win then, but he betted it would have been a good battle. The result ended in his victory, but he didn´t have memories about that.

“”By going on what I asked from Karl, he said I won by sheer power, but… Is something like that really possible?””

It would have been one thing if the case was in technique, but in case of strength, there should have been an overwhelming gap

between them.

“”To begin with, I can´t understand how I am at disadvantage in strength. Did he train just like I did? Did he have the same knowledge I did? That man?”

William thought it was impossible. But when he thought about, his confidence wavered. He, who worked at a bookshop of imported books that would gather the information of all the seven kingdoms, had carefully examined the necessary information. To say nothing about it, there wasn´t much difference in the apparent form of their physiques.

“”I even took care about my nutrition by eating that disgusting as shit food at Raconia. I was supposed to be working with a body of the same type of build that man had. Even if I was to be a bit worse on strength, there shouldn´t have been that much of a [disparity].”

He had been sent flying. He was completely beaten up. It was to the point he couldn´t do anything about it...

“”That feeling of chill I felt from Kail before was similar to that one I felt from him... Would [that] be the key here?””

Normally, this would simply be some stupid occultish kind of thing William would have refused to believe. To William, who had trained himself in a rational manner, that was an inexplicable wall he had never bumped at before. However, now that he actually tried to overcome it and had lost his awareness while trying to do so, there was no way he could let it by.

“”Something that wasn´t in any book. Something that was present only in actual battles. That thing Kail and that man possess…. I need to have my hands on that. As soon as I can.””

His situation was one close to having no clues. William didn´t know how he was supposed to investigate about something that wasn´t written in books.

“”Well, let´s ask Kail. Will he teach me, that guy?””

After thinking about Kail, someone that wouldn´t be lenient when it was about swordfighting, William showed a little smile. In the end, no matter where he was to go, those two people were his home. Nothing would change that. Even when he was to die, it would definitely not…

“”Even if I let this by for now, it is still not good that I have missing memories. It is very bad in fact.””

Sometimes, William would lose his awareness. At the times it was at its worse, he would even lose his memories. There were many times it happened for short periods of time. It would happen at the times during his trainment with Kail, and also at the times he would get too much agitated. Because those would happen for very short period of times, William didn´t mind too much about it. Kail had also told him not to worry about it as well.

“”But now that something like this happened, there is no way I can keep ignoring this.””

Now that William thought about it, he couldn´t hide his surprise at how he hadn´t made any measures about it until now.

“”What became of me, really.”

He lost sight of himself. William, who had been taking many meticulous precautions during his life had overlooked such a big hole. In a certain way, this gave much more of a shock to William than the time he had been defeated at the duel.

“…”

Suddenly, William turned his eyes to the small lump that was at his chest. He held the thing that was by his chest.

It was the red like blood ruby, which ardently burned in red. If a diamond had the brilliance of the stars, then the ruby would be the sun which stood over the sky. That ardence was similar to the ardent feelings of people.

“This is supposed to suit me, right?”

It was the ruby that Lutogarte insisted in giving him. He didn´t think too deeply about that, but now he got a bit interested about the reason why it had been a ruby rather than something else.

“”It would be easier for me if those “feelings of ardor” was

something she found in my childish third-rate play.”

However, would Lutogarde really insist so much for it to be something as much expensive as the ruby with feelings of this extent?

“...Does she favor me? No, it lacks too many points for that to be true no matter how much she had done for me.”

No matter how much William searched through his mind, he definitely had never confronted with a girl like Lutogarde in the past. Even at the time he used to be called Al, there weren´t any of this kind of memories....

“Well, I guess it doesn´t really matter.”

Pushing away all thoughts, William put the gem that was supposedly given him because it suited him inside his clothes. Those things about Lutogarde were only trivial. Comparing to the piles of problems he had right now in front of his eyes, its priority was lower. To be said frankly, to William, Lutogarde´s existence didn´t matter.

“My missing memories and the power that doesn´t make any sense; my problems lie in those two points.”

William shouldn´t spare his resources into thinking about Lutogarde´s feelings. Deciding that was the right call, he started to think of his priorities.

“Now then, what should I do?”

15. The Shine Of The Hero

With their victory, the Arcadian army was able to push in to Raconia. The morale of the army of Ostoberg was definitely not high; after having some battles between the them, the situation became one that they had to hold their defenses at Raconia. The one that had been having the superiority in the skirmishes and at the defensive war at Raconia was Arcadia.

“The situation of the battle doesn´t seem to move.”

The few words Karl muttered were about the siege.

The fort of Raconia wasn´t a fort that was that much strong, but even so, as a fort, it served its purpose. It had a stone wall that surrounded the fort, and while its gates were made of wood, they were massive, and wouldn´t be easily destroyed.

As for the ways of attacking into the fort, the most basic one was to shoot arrows from the distance, and during that gap of time, have the soldiers place ladders at the wall. This was the basic way of attacking into a fort, but because carrying on with the basics was all it was possible to do at their current situation, it couldn´t be said that it was going well. It was commonly said that it was necessary for the attacking side to have about three times more the army strength, but who would have thought that [this saying] was the literal description of their present situation.

“Just like those times before, these ones from this time are retar... aren´t very intelligent.”

“Retar... what?”

Puzzled, Karl asked.

“Don´t worry about it. Ah, see that they are starting to put the ladders there? It is a honor to raise achievements, and the ones that do receive a treatment proportional to that. That´s what those guys that are clinging at the ladder are aiming at.”

As their conversation was smoothly flowing, William pointed his finger at the people that were hurrying to go up the ladders like it was first serve first come.

“However, there aren´t really many stories of these kind of things having success.”

The ladder where his finger was being pointed at had been taken down by a soldier from the Ostoberg side. Karl gasped. William looked at the allied soldiers falling down with a disappointed gaze, having already already given up hope on them.

“The chance for successfully raising achievements is low. The risk is also big. Now that the situation is leaning towards us, we, who have already raised enough achievements, do not need to raise more of them.”

Because of that, the two of them gave detailed instructions to the people of the ten man squad they were part of, and so they were

slowing down their own march in purpose. During the time at this war, they were already able to win this much authority. What happened about the noble Karl and his sword had already become open to the public.

“”Yes, it is fine even if we don´t take this too seriously. I took the head of a centurion; I don´t need to act recklessly.””

In a way only him would hear, William spoke to himself as a way to confirm his thoughts. The answer he got from thinking that much since that time was that he didn´t need to recklessly go after achievements anymore during this war. There was no need to commit to risks like at that time when he fought the centurion. It would be only natural if Karl had already got his ticket to being promoted to a ten man squad captain by now.

“”Even if I take the head of another centurion, there won´t be any promotions.””

In that case, he didn´t need to make any moves. However....

Let's make up..

Somewhere in his heart, it started throbbing. William himself wasn´t aware of that; it was a part of his heart he couldn´t feel that was throbbing.

“”Am I being impatient? How foolish. I am calm. I am more rational than anyone, and I am able to carry things through with

more composure than anyone here. And it is not only that. Right now, doing this is enough!""

In the depths of his heart, he...

"I am the supreme general of the kingdom of Ostoberg, my name is Strakules! Brats of Arcadia, if you want my head, come take it! Gahahahaha."

The eyes of William, Karl and of everyone in the battlefield were focused onto a single place. It was that much of a large battlefield; people wouldn´t give a shit about only a single person. However, that man was clearly different from all the other men.

"...Karl, what is that?"

William looked at [that] in confusion.

"Didn´t he just self introduce himself? More importantly, who would have known that the supreme commander Strakules was really here! Uwah, this is the first time I saw him."

While Karl was being all carefree, William was trembling in fear. The shine of the man in front of his eyes. No, the shine of the man that was supposed to be far away from him was oppressing. It was possible to say that this shine was his aura. William, who had intended to not allow anyone to be above him in his life, for the first time had yielded. He ended up yielding.

““What… happened to me.””

It was a monster that stood in a distant, high and unreachable place. It was probably stronger than Kail, and besides, his power was at a different dimension that William had never seen before. All in all, its power was at a different magnitude to the one of a human.

“”Where am I right now?”

From the outer wall of the fort, William started to compare himself to the man that was standing at an even higher place. To one side, one was radiant, and to the other side, the other one was buried in the ground. There was too much difference. The difference between nobles and slaves could be seen there.

It was to the point all he could do was to accept it…

“”What I am…””

“Kaaaaaaaaaaaaaaarrrl!”(William)

“Hyai!? Wh-what is it, William!?”

William was restless.

“I will go ahead. However, this is the battlefield. I don´t know what might happen. You must definitely not go away from the

squad and move in unison. You guys too, protect Karl-sama. If Karl-sama happens to die, I will kill all of you in the name of Lord Teirah.”

“Eh, but...”

William bursted out into a dash. He wasn´t the usual calm William. With a grim face, he turned into another person; one that greedily wanted to look up at the skies.

“William!”

Karl´s voice wouldn´t reach him. In an extreme velocity, he ran through the battlefield.

“I can´t lose!”

William himself didn´t know what he was angry about. He had no idea why he had dashed out, or why he was running now. The only thing he knew was that...

○

“Your Highness! This is too reckless. What would we do if your Highness was to be hit by arrows.”

“Umu, sorry, sorry. But look, the livelier ones got baited.”

Strakules and his subordinate were looking at the battlefield from a high place at the outer walls.

“I see. By looking at their equipment, those are the light infantry. In other words... The white brat that had done Haian in should be among them.”

“Indeed. Though not as much as I do, that brat really stands out. Guhaha.”

It was impossible to discern the normal soldiers from one another. It was a war that could only be seen as a bunch of specks of sand squirming around. However, the two could clearly see the dangerous sprout that was in the midst of that.

“Whether you are genuine or false, you will prove it yourself. I will go down here and mess you up.”

“May that be your will, but the heavy infantry has already flanked the enemy from the east gate.”

Ignoring Strakules, who was surprised by what his subordinate said, the subordinate was looking around down at the battlefield.

“They broke in.”

The Ostoberg army suddenly appeared from the side and completely ate up the Arcadian army, who were looking only upwards at the walls. Those numbers were overwhelmingly lower

than the Arcadian army, but the advantage in the terrain, battle formation and also in the quality of the soldiers were all inclined towards Ostoberg.

“Guhah. Like always, that detestable guy is too much serviceable. Even though I wanted to go do that too.”

“We should let the soldiers do the surprise attacks. After all, this war is meaningless.”

Strakules´s subordinate narrowed his eyes. It was a gaze that somewhat looked like the one of a tiger. Interrupting his subordinate thoughts, Strakules held the shoulders of his subordinate.

“And that´s why; let´s make this have some meaning. There aren´t that many fellows that stand out like that. That white brat is all unstable, and lacks experience, but on the other way around, doesn´t it mean he still has space to grow? Try him. If he is worth eating, let him live. If he doesn´t, you can remove him.”

The man beside Strakules was well aware that the eyes Strakules had when he spoke that somewhat had an air of certainty. Moreover, Strakules himself told him to go test the white brat.

“As you wish. Please, leave the trifling matters to me.”

“Umu. I will leave it all to you. I will go fight at the war!”

After Strakules took his leave, the man once again glanced at the scenery of the battlefield.

“This is a worthless war for his Highness to have come. Make it at least have any meaning, white brat.”

The heavy infantry forced their way in. The [whiteness] the man was steadily gazing at was obstructing their advance. It was worth watching the manner he was able to make his way from the place he was before all the way there.

“Hou, it seems that you can do some work.”

The man narrowed his eyes at the gust of splashing blood.

16. The Chaotic Battlefield

“Shh!”

Without the slightest hesitation, and without doing any blunder, William´s sword severed the head of a black armored shinigami.

“Gaaaaaah!”

Putting away all carefulness he had been paying his mind to until now, he simply madly rushed ahead. He cut through all that hindered him.

“Uh, Darah!”

He didn´t have the time to be going after the complete victory he had been preparing for until now. He would barely be able to run through all his enemies in high speed. Because of that, he was continuously getting more and more light wounds and was being dyed in the splashed blood of his enemies and in his own blood.

William advanced forward using his techniques, which were elegant and silent, ferocious, and also sometimes rough.

“You, don´t pe kidding me! …Wha?”

Despite all things, the power of the sword that was made in Rushitania was very useful for cutting heads. The movements

William had been using before now were all ones he would be able to cut people with just a simple sword, without needing to use the might of his weapon.

But right now, he was using it to its full potential.

“That guy, is strong!”

That certain man that had no doubts about his superiority smashed William´s confidence and made his true [himself] come out.

“I am strong, I am excellent, I am smart I am strong I am I am I am....”

His bottom line was gradually fading away. There was a feeling that William and [himself] were getting driven apart.

To begin with, he didn´t have any more intentions on risking himself in this war anymore. It was meaningless after all. As long as he didn´t take the head of a general, there wouldn´t be any meaning to all this. The usual William would definitely not do something like this. The usual William, who would have been carefully taking measures the more reckless he would need to act was now...

“I am, strong you knowww.”

He broke down. Just with the appearance of the supreme

commander Strakules, a man that would act like a machine had been broken down. However...

“You see, I am nee-san´s knight after all. Right, nee-sannnn.”

It was because he had been broken down, and it was because he was now exposed in his true self that he was such a dreadful existence.

“You can´t go flirt with guys more amazing than me. I will eat those kind of peoplee..”

The white beast was dyeing the battlefield in blood.

○

“I see.”

The scene he watched under his eyes. There was a place in the battlefield that was clearly stood out from others. The one leading the charge at that place was a white beast that could be spotted even from the distance.

“I can see how Haian had been eaten. That guy is on a different level.”

Haian was his own subordinate. He was an exceptional centurion. However, this was his limit. Compared to the white

haired boy, while he looked like he was used to the times of peace, now that he released [his self], there was an extremely wide disparity. He had disordered movements and unnecessarily stood out, but even deducting points because of that, his total score was something Haian couldn´t compare to.

“His impression to the soldiers isn´t bad, I guess.”

Him being in the lead wasn´t simply that he was madly running at the front. The reason why the white haired man wouldn´t get left on his own was because there were people following his lead. Similarly to the white haired, those people had also lost their sanity. They were completely influenced by the one leading them, and now were a group of insane people that would madly fight until their death.

“Hm, I wonder what is this he had been hiding all this time.”

All the people in this battlefield were affected by hearing Strakules´ [voice]. That was without distinction between allies and enemies. That was the power of a general; the power of Strakules, the sword of the kingdom. Once the soldiers heard his voice, they would get full of energy, and the weaker ones would lose their strength. However, sometimes there would be someone that would be affected in another way other than those two.

“Whether he is just an insane person or the egg of a warrior, I will have you show it to me.”

William, the white haired man. What would the man´s

impressions of him be.

○

“Cavalry charge from the west! It is proba…”

“Strakules, right.”

A big man slowly stood up from his chair. He was wearing white armor and helmet; it was the appearance of a war hero. In paintings, he would be pictured as the god of war. That was who this man was.

“General Baldias, we must depart”

The unmoveable Baldias.

It was a man that gave off a strong impression of always being late for doing things, and since the beginning, he had been losing the initiative for having a certain victory. He was characteristic of letting his opponent choose his first move and let his weak point appear, and then, he would lead a heavy attack, making that his [heavy war] method. Because of that style, Baldias owned the title of chief general in the kingdom of Arcadia.

“Black gold. Like always, he is such a carefree man.”

“Hey, an unmovable bastard like you is just some gloomy old

man.”

Who would have thought both the generals of both armies would be glaring at each other from their horses as the assault of the castle was happening. Normally, this was something that would never happen. The reason why both generals expected this from each other was because both were close acquaintances.

“Your second in command isn´t there. I believe he was the one commanding the army at Raconia.”

“Umu.”

Baldias answered with only a few words. Even so, there could be seen weight in them.

“...Will Ostoberg throw away Raconia?”

“Who knows? I am merely some guy serving the military. We have the policy of not putting our heads into politics.”

“Because of how competent you are, you should have noticed how they don´t have the intent to win, Strakules!”

Both of their armies were furiously fighting. Both sides combined had less than a hundred cavalry. But even so, the heat of that battle was in a similar proportion to the assault at the fort. Rather, it was even more. It couldn´t be compared in terms of brutality.

“It is fine as long as I can take your head, Baldias!”

Both charged at each other at the same time. The cavalry were being ridden by huge men in fast speeds. Baldias was using a long spear and Strakules was using a big sword. Both swung those weapons normal people wouldn´t be able to even hold.

Both passed by each other in a flash.

“Ku-ooh!?”

It was a roar that even made both armies falter.

“Guhah!”

“Nm!”

The two rivals continued to exchange blows. The speed and weight of the attacks were to the point of it being terrifying. The cleanliness of their technique were to the point that the difference completely outmatched those of simple soldiers.

The white and black danced. Without one´s notice, it had become a one-on-one duel. This was also the same as always. Baldias and Strakules were fighting each other. It would be very rude to interrupt them now. There was nobody in this battle that lacked those manners. If they lacked those manners, the battle

would have quickly become a chaotic war full of death for both armies. Of course, the people that lacked the manners were immediately cut down.

“Why do you act!”

“Good gracious, you just can´t forgive me about that. Many things happened, you see.”

Strong and tenacious. Clever like geniuses. Heavy to its utmost.

“Well, it´s already done. Let´s have fun for now, unmoveable!”

“If you keep playing around, you, who sullies this battlefield, will die!”

With even more strength, both clashed against each other.

17. The Black Haired Girl Vs The Black Sheep

At the outer walls, a pool of blood was made at the front of the ladders. It was the accumulated blood of both the armies of Arcadia and Ostoberg. With more life being lost, the profundity of that pool increased. The battlefield was a place that consumed the life of people. No matter how much people deluded themselves with the romance of the war, this reality wouldn´t change. There were many reasons and questions of righteousness connected to it. War was a complicated thing. However, in fact...

“Fuhjururuuuuuhuh”

It was simpler than anything. No matter the intentions of people, there was only one thing that controlled the battlefield.

“Hah, hah, baaah?”

It was only power. A beast had lost his way into the battlefield. It was a beast that was like the embodiment of power.

The crimson gem splattered in blood that hanged by its chest shone as if it represented the beast´s destiny of being covered in blood.

His body was slim and flexible. He had supple muscles, and its nimble moves hid danger.

“How horrendous. And also...”

The man that was looking at that beast could see a crowd of spirits coiling around it. At most, they were only illusions, but even so, they also represented the beast´s nature. That was something that could be said to be his aura. It couldn´t represent the situation of his twisted mind any better. It was its own insane world that was disgusting just to look at.

“….strong!”

“Jaahahahahah!”

The white beast jumped in front of the man. It had its hands at the ground and moved like a four legged beast. It had thrown away all its reason. It would simply do things because it wanted to. And that was a nuisance.

“Surround him.”

With the words of the man, the beast was separated from the soldiers that were as much insane as the beast. The beast wasn´t bothered about that.

The beast and the man were surrounded and the tall shields stood around them as the walls of the circle. The subordinates of the man acted in order to exterminate the mad people outside the encirclement. With that, it was perfect.

“With that, I guess I will be able to examine you to my heart´s

content.”

The man blocked the fang of the beast. It wouldn´t be weird that he would have already died if he was at the level of a centurion. For how he was able to parry the attack of the beast only proved how much power he had.

“Grrrr”

As soon as the beast noticed it wouldn´t be able to win by fighting directly, it took impulse by kicking one of the shields that were surrounding him and took a [higher] position.

“Nu, coming from the skies!?”

People were weak against attacks that came from above. The more one would fight in a certain way, the more one would get used to fighting in that way. For people that were used to fighting at the ground, this was overwhelming and outside expectations. Therefore, it became a weakness. It was the weak spot of warriors.

“Slow.”

The man easily handled the attack. By that, it could be seen that he didn´t have an average historic of wars. He recognized his weak point and took measures against it. It was possible to react to attacks that had no thoughts put behind them. Because of that, there were no gaps in his defenses.

“Fushyaaa”

However, the beast wasn´t any weak. No, it was because it had thrown away its weakness that it was a beast. It was because it could throw away its humanity and because it could follow its instincts that it was a beast. Humans had humanity. The instincts knew the weakness of men.

And so, it aimed for the legs. From a stance so low that it would be impossible to stay in that while standing on two feet, it attacked the man at his ankles. Of course, for humans, who stood in two feet, this could only be a weakness.

“You are still slow.”

Sticking his sword onto the ground, the man defended the attack. Seeing that his sword was blocked, the beast threw it away without hesitations. Since it was a beast, it still had its claws that could cut through flesh and fangs that could break bones. Closing upon the man, the beast jumped at him and aimed for his neck, but...

“I already said you are slow!”

The man snached the neck of the beast and hit it at its stomach with all his strength using his free hand.

“Ghaaaahgogeeeaahhh”

The beast staggered as it threw up. Falling down, the white beast

writhed in pain on the ground.

“That´s what happens when people fall to the level of beast. You big fool.”

The interest in the eyes of the man was fading away. He was already about to be finished in examining the beast.

“You can find people like that as many as you want on circuses or coliseums. All of them are considerably strong, but in the end, they are nothing but beasts. They will definitely not become true warriors.”

Seeing that the beast didn´t show any signs of listening to his words and kept repeating “It hurts, it hurts”, the man sighed. The one in front of his eyes wasn´t the egg of a warrior. It was simply a beast.

“His Highness will probably become disappointed. Even though I thought I was going to be able to bring some meaning to this farce even if it is only a little.”

All meaning had already been lost. All that remained was the routine of tidying up. He was about to turn his head to his soldiers to order them to start the tidying up, but...

“It´s alright, Al. Nee-san is together with you. Pain, pain, go away. See, it doesn´t hurt anymore, right?”

Hearing that weird tone of voice, the man quickly turned his head to the beast.

“Uuu, it hurtss. I´m scareed.”

“That´s right. That big, strong and [black] sheep... It is very scary, right?”

The man frowned.

“Uuu, it´s scaaryyy.”

The white haired man stood up. The aura from before had completely changed, and while his appearance didn´t change, he had completely regressed to becoming a child. And then, the man saw something he couldn´t believe.

““What, is that? I´ve never seen [something] like that.””

The spectacle that was happening in front of his eyes. The aura that was supposed to represent the white haired young man. In there, the crowd of corpses filled with insanity were squirming around and being formed into a single body in the shape of a skeleton. This was the usual illusion of death that could be seen in that aura, but in the middle of all those corpses, there was a single person. As if she was protecting the young man, and as if she cared for him, the black haired girl gently held him in her arms.

It was something that existed outside of all reason. The man had

never felt something like that from someone else before. In the long war experience of the man, and during his whole life, he had never seen such an unreasonable sight.

“It´s alright. Nee-san is together with you. I will protect you.”

“Uuu, thank you, Arlette-neesan.”

And then, the young man that was talking to himself once again became a lump of mystery. By himself, the man would use two different tone of voices and would do this little play, making it look like he was talking to someone. No, perhaps the person himself was really thinking he was talking to another person.

“.....”

And then, the body of the young man was engulfed by the crowd of dead bodies. If this was the [usual case], the person would have its ego engulfed and would become completely insane. The man had seen people that ended up becoming like that many times. At the battlefield, at the colosseum, at circuses, at very dangerous places...

“Huhu, isn´t he cute? This child is still not strong. He is still a crybaby; a cowardly and sensitive boy. He won´t sleep if I don´t sing him a lullaby; my cute little treasure.”

The amount of dead bodies increased. The one controlling them was the black haired girl. She embraced the man and protected

him like she was his guardian angel that would stay beside him. That girl gently opened her mouth.

“Steal from the thief. Rob from the robber. Kill the murderer. Forgiveness won´t grant you anything; even if you look up at the sky, god won´t give you anything. That´s why let´s steal. Let´s rob. Let´s kill. My little treasure, kill this mad world that has stolen me away from you♪”

The content of the lyrics was filled with so much despair, hatred and sorrow that one wouldn´t have imagined that by how gentle the lullaby was being sung.

Blood was gushing out from the dead bodies. Tears of blood flowed from the eyes of the girl. The young man also cried.

The ruby beautifully shined in anger in place of the sorrow, despair and hatred. Even in this inexplicable situation, that everlasting shine from the crimson that represented all the young man was would continue to express those feelings.

“Ufufu, such a beautiful red. It is just like this child.... It makes me envious.”

The mood of the black girl changed. The man was paying attention to that scene, and so, he wasn´t able to expect their next move.

He had lowered his guard after being carried by his surprise, and

so, while he was distracted, the white haired man jumped at the walls built of shields that surrounded them with all his strength. Without anyone having been able to stop him, he put his hand into the wall of shields and stole a sword out of it. Nobody at the place was able to hide their surprise at such feat.

“I am still an amateur…. so please take easy on me.”

As if he was dancing, the white haired man cut off heads of two of the people close to him. At that instant, the dead bodies raised a voice of cheer all at the same time. As if they were giving reception to a new comrade, the dead bodies were getting happy at the unhappiness of the death of others. This was the representation of their twisted hearts.

“Because we are two, we are twice as strong. Don´t you think?”

The man narrowed his eyes in discomfort. An aura gushed from the man´s body.

Looking at that, the white man that was being manipulated by the black girl also narrowed his eyes.

“…Hmm, a really big sheep. You are strong, right?”

At the man´s surroundings, there was something that wasn´t mist flooding his surroundings. It was a black sheep that had two horns.

“I am black sheep Kimon. Kimon Von Guntar. Name yourself, monster!”

“William Rivius.... This is [our] name. We will engulf everything in the world. We will make it submit to us and take control of the world! We are so thirsty, so hungry that we cannot help!”

[Willain] moved. Swinging the sword he stole, he rushed at the man that named himself Kimon. Inside his body, a red haired youth was singing with a voice full of resentment. It was a chorus of corpses.

In a flash, the sword was about to reach Kimon´s throat...

“Did you think your sword would reach me, woman? My name is Kimon. I am the strongest man of the kingdom of Ostoberg and the right-hand of the supreme general Strakules. Your desire... It is so bland that it won´t even make for a joke!”

The man´s sword; Kimon´s attack had hit [William]´s whole body; his body and spirit. [William]´s sword broke into two pieces and the aura of dead bodies vanished like mist. All that remained was...

“Ara, as expected, we couldn´t win against him.”

...the black haired girl and the manipulated young man. [William] immediately dropped the broken sword and evaded Kimon´s sword. However, they received the force of that diagonal

slash and fell down to the ground without having lost their life.

“Then, let´s go with the plan B.”

The place he fell to was where he had dropped his sword before.

“Are you going to face me with that?”

Giving one glance at William, Kimon pointed his sword at him. William showed a smile, and then...

“If we can´t win, there is no way we would be fighting you, right? We are running away.”

William jumped back. Nimbly doing a backflip and making use of its momentum, William cut the head of a soldier that was serving as part of the wall. It was a move nobody at this place was expecting. Even Kimon didn´t expect that.

“Such bland taste. It won´t do anything even if we eat it, but well... Thank´s for the treat.”

Spinning around like he was dancing, William was cutting heads off. He was cutting life as if he was picking up flowers. His gentle smile and the ruby that was vividly shining made a contrast to the tragedy.

“Tch, scatter! Open up a path!”

Even so, Kimon´s orders weren´t able to accomplish anything in this abnormal situation.

“Fufu, here, come here.”

The place was tightly crowded with people. It would have been impossible to do such inhuman movements. However, William was moving around as he liked. A proof for that was the bodies that had their life stolen away accumulating.

“You might be stronger, but because you(plural) are being tied by limits, we will surpass you. Limits like comrades that won´t catch up with you ever again once you surpass them... Limits like regulations, laws, ethics.... It´s really stupid.”

William was standing at the edge of the wall. The red of blood and of his ruby colored his gentle smile in a bewitching manner.

“That is your dead end. I will now be cutting you down!”

Pushing away his subordinates, Kimon went towards William with a face full of anger.

“This kind of common sense is not good. If you keep up with that, this child will soon reach to your level. This child is cowardly and sensitive... But he is diligent, hard-working, and more than anything, he is starving.”

The instant William said that, he inclined his back towards the edge of the wall.

“Wha!?”

William was in the middle of the air. Under the wall, there was only the ground, and if he hit it, only death would be awaiting him.

“Let´s meet again. And at that time, this child will definitely eat you, and you will become part of us.”

The illusion of dead bodies all became excited. Kimon could also see the dead bodies of his subordinates in that clump of bodies.

“Wait!”

As Kimon stood still in vain, William was pulled by gravity and fell from the wall.

“Tch.”

Kimon went to the edge of the wall and looked at the ground. Under the wall, all he could see was the Arcadia army moving around, and he couldn´t see the surface of the ground. It was unknown if William was dead or alive.

If he had gone against Kimon, he would have definitely died. But

if he was to fall down from there, it was still possible that he wouldn´t die.

“...I guess I don´t know if he is still alive.”

It was a gamble that would put your life on the line. It wasn´t a gamble of fair chances. However, even then, this was the choice with the most chance of survival at that situation. It was the culmination of logic. Without discarding all your emotions, it would be impossible to take on a gamble that risked your life.

“To all troops. This battle is our defeat.”

It was an order he had given with regret. Kimon´s actual job was to have the troops properly evacuated from this battle once they were to lose. The battle was nothing but a farce. Just like Baldias had guessed, this siege at Raconia was nothing more than a farce.

Hearing the order of retreat, the soldiers immediately started to move in order to carry it out.

“...”

While looking at the field down the walls by himself, Kimon was thinking about the opponent he had fought moments ago. This opponent was very different from all people he had faced until now, and so, Kimon was unable to examine him. He had no idea what that man had gone through.

“Sir Kimon. We should soon leave here.”

Kimon´s subordinate called for him. Kimon nodded without saying anything and turned his eyes away from outside of the walls.

“…”

He turned away from the edge and went to leave the place. One step, two steps…

[Let´s meet again.]

A feeling of cold assaulted Kimon. He felt that whispering voice next to his ears from [behind him]. Kimon immediately turned his head back, but there wasn´t anyone there.

“…That´s bad. Perhaps, I might have let an outrageous monster escape.”

Kimon was certain that [William] was alive. He wondered in anxiety whether this would influence him, Strakules and Ostoberg in some way.

18. The Outcome Of The Battle

“It seems you were able to successfully pull back.”

“Well, Kimon is really exceptional after all. Kahaha.”

After they had exchanged many liters of sweat and both of their preys started to dwindle, both took distance from each other as if they had planned to do so beforehand. Both Baldias and Strakules could feel that the battle had ended.

“Are you going after us?”

“Won´t. After all, you would scatter around using the speed of your cavalry in the end.”

“Gahahahaha! Thanks to you, I was able to have some fun in this battle!”

“Hmph, in the end, this is nothing more than a play.”

"You aren´t honest, are you? Well, it is that thing... Well, I still don´t know well, but let me tell you one thing.”

“...?”

Strakules showed a smile that had profound meaning to Baldias, who was curious to what he was about to say.

“Times change! An era we know nothing about is coming!”

Strakules spread out his arms and shouted. It was to the point his happiness could be felt even through the helmet. Baldias raised his visor.

“Did you see something in all this farce?”

“Many things. To begin with, it isn´t just this war. Let´s just say that I´ve gone through a lot of things.”

Saying only that, Strakules made his horse turn around by skillfully handling the reins.

“Both of us won´t want to be late for what is about to come, guhahaha.”

“I don´t have any intend on following with such worthless things. If you are going to retreat, then do it already.”

“Gahahahaha. Well then, farewell!”

That back that gallantly left the battlefield was overflowing with ambition to the point it couldn´t be thought of that being the back of a defeated general.

“A new era, is it? How stupid.”

However, Baldias had a presentiment. He felt that something was going to change. In this case, the fact they were able to take Raconia back being the sign of that...

Until now, the territory of Raconia had been drawn as part of Arcadia in the maps for less than ten years. This was a very extended period of rule comparing to how the historic went. This time, Arcadia decided to govern this land for a even more extended period of time. This was the beginning of this war between the kingdoms of Arcadia and Ostoberg.

To which of them the advantage leaned towards, nobody knew yet.

○

“...an , William, William!”

“...Hm.”

When William opened his eyes, he saw Karl with a crying face in front of his eyes. At his surroundings, there were the people of the ten man squad he was part of. Since there was a ceiling, it meant that he was inside the encampment of the Arcadian army.

“I... What happened to me?”

“It isn´t just what happened to you! You suddenly ran off and went up to the walls. We desperately tried to follow after you, but there were so many people… When you jumped down the walls, I entered in panic and didn´t know what was happening anymore!”

Unusual to him, Karl was showing an angry face. William felt a strange feeling of exhaustion when he looked at that face. Letting aside Karl´s scolding shouts for now, William needed to put his mind in order about his current situation.

“”This time, I lost. This time, only faint memories are remaining. There was a black sheep that was burning intensely. I can´t remember where those memories came from, but because of the heaviness of that last attack… my hand got burned.””

The numbness in the palm of his hand still didn´t fade away. This was a hint that his memories were true.

“”Beast, it was like a beast. The me reflected in their eyes was just like an horrendous beast.”

William remembered the reflection of his appearance at the eyes of the people he killed. He was drooling saliva mixed with blood, his face was twisted into becoming unrecognizable and his eyes were bloodshot. William´s appearance was so terrifying to a point there was nothing that could be done about it.

“”After that, I… met with nee-san. We had a conversation like we would always do…. No, after we talked, I became her? As if. Something like that is just stupid.””

However, the numbness that remained in William´s hand and the memories that remained in his head about the monologue between his sister and himself, who had returned to his childhood self, were definitely there. It was difficult to believe on that, but when he was facing the enemy, William couldn´t control his body at all.

“”I was affected by that thing that was wrapped around that man and lost control of myself. Besides that, I picked up a fight with someone much more distant in the world than me. ….Kk, kakah…””

“Khahahahahahahah!”

The people around him were startled.

“Wh-what´s the matter William? Are you angry? Did I say too much?”

“Haha, no Karl, you are not at fault. It´s only that I am really not good at all, and that I was only able to notice that after all this time. I thought of myself as someone that was rational; I thought of myself as someone calm. However, after opening the lid… It was all this. I can´t help but laugh at that.”

William was burning in the anger he had of himself. He wanted to kick the himself that had been so full of confidence until now. He wasn´t superior at all. He only mistook himself as someone excellent. He thought everything he learned from the books was

the truth and only looked at things on the theoretical side. He, who was the embodiment of all that, mistook himself as someone superior than others.

“William is already good enough. I am not good at anything after all.”

William was thankful of Karl´s consolation. He had received the comfort of Karl, who was at a overwhelmingly lower standing than himself. This was a complete disgrace. However, right now, this was something comfortable. He needed to throw away this feeling of anger, this stupidness, all all those negative feelings.

“Thank you Karl. It really helps me that you say that.”

This was the level of William´s driving force. He was quickly expelling those feelings of anger that were directed at himself.

“Sorry everyone. I´ve troubled you.”

Why did he need to lower his head to small fries that weren´t worth of even remembering the name? This was all due to his mistakes. Because he failed, he needed to lower his head. This was the meaning of losing.

“”I won´t lose… ever again.””

Since he wouldn´t allow that, all he could do was to keep winning. He needed to keep winning and seize a position where he

would have people lowering their heads to him. He would become superior than anyone, stand higher than anyone...

“”I won´t lose. I will win keep winning.”

William made an absolute vow to himself. He swore he would be winning all his battles from now on.

19. The World Of The Talented

The kingdom of Ostoberg. It was a kingdom located to the southeast of Arcadia. They had about the same amount of lands compared to Arcadia and their climate was pretty much the same as well. If one was to say a difference, it would be that the temperature was slightly higher there. Besides that, to the south, they bordered with the superpower, the kingdom of Garias, a military country that was famous for how they kept Ostoberg´s invasions in check. The kingdom of Ostoberg was a country that was considered one of the seven kingdoms.

“Gahaha, congratulations, your Majesty!”

At the major power of the kingdom of Ostoberg, a change was happening. At the present moment, the hero of Ostoberg, the [Black Gold] Strakules, was lowering his head to a certain person…

“No, it´s nothing to be proud of. It was Strakules that did all the hard work. I believe it is very unforgivable that I asked a hero like you to lose a battle not many days after I had asked you to meddle with Garias.”

It was a skinny youth of fifteen years old. His lustrous hair made it feel like “a good person” aura flowed from his eyes and his whole body. In addition, this aura would dissolve any kind of suspicion against him. Everyone would come to like the youth and nobody would be guarded around him. If one was to describe him in a few words, it would be that he was a very likeable person.

The youth lowered his head to Strakules and the place became noisy.

“...You majesty, if a king thoughtlessly lowers his head, it sullies his reputation.”

Hearing Strakule´s advice, the youth showed a surprised expression.

“However, gramps...”

“Cough*!”

“Ho-however, Strakules. I have responsibility in having sent you to do unfavorable tasks. It is impossible for me to ignore that and keep holding my head high.”

The youth showed a smile. With just that, the place became calm again. Strakules sighed and showed a smile to the youth. In response to that, the youth made an even broader smile. Simply by that, despite all the people at the place being in the presence of their king, there could be felt a trace of a cozy feeling in the mood.

“Because the previous king has died and the domestic situation of the kingdom is unstable, it is now the time we need to be careful the most.”

“Uh, sorry Kimon, for not being so reliable.”

“…If your Majesty makes such a face, I will be the one looking like the villain.”

Strakules second in command, Kimon, who had been in his guard all this time, had immediately been charmed by the youth´s demeanor.

“Well, but since we saw through the instability, we´ve already cut out the most important factor for the instability. That place we were at disadvantage; all they value is honor.”

They had thrown away Raconia on purpose. This was something everyone present at the place had agreed on.

Originally, they didn´t have any reasons to attack, but the last command of the previous king was that they were to take back Raconia at all costs, which resulted in that big war. Even if they had taken Raconia, Ostoberg, which now had just changed kings, wouldn´t have the spare time to be able to hold onto that. Therefore, they had thrown it away. So their plans would not be seen through, and so their instability would not be clearly shown, they meticulously took measures…

“The previous king was a good man. He properly chose his successor and took precautions about the question of the succession line so that things wouldn´t get problematic. The last invasion at Raconia was reckless, but this too was for the sake of his Majesty.”

“I know that, Strakules. Father has given me the chance of prestige to the me who is still weak by having me have the chance to capture Raconia. Why would I have any reason to resent my father´s last act of love.”

Kimon listened to the conversation while having dreary thoughts in his mind.

The previous king wasn´t a fool, but he definitely wasn´t a wise person. The invasion of Raconia he ordered at his last moments was all for him to be able to leave his name in the history. He didn´t have any love for his son; only after all the efforts from Strakules and Kimon was that the youth was able to be elevated to the position of the successor of the crown. If Strakules had remained neutral, it wouldn´t be possible for the youth to be sitting at the throne now, and instead, much more now, he would have been caught at the dire affair the dispute for the throne was.

“Besides, even if father is not here anymore, all of you are here for me. You all are like my own father. I will be counting on you, everyone. Let´s all work together and have Ostoberg prosper!”

It was a voice that had no ambition in it. However, everyone in the place became filled with energy. This too was because of the virtue the youth held. Although this was the only weapon the youth had, it was the most potent of all.

“By the way, I have some sweets. Let´s eat them together.”

He was a swindler.(TL note: I am not sure if this is being said in

the literal meaning. It might mean in the way that the youth swindled the people by “honestly being nice to them”, but it still being swindling because all those people yielded to him just because he was nice to them. Later on, in the text, it doesn´t say anywhere the youth is really deceiving the people. Rather, it feels more like the youth is really like that.)

Strakules had the belief of not participating in the politics. However, that power was the reason why he had supported the youth to become the king to the point he would go against that belief.

At the present situation of his reign, there already weren´t any more political enemies. No, while there had been, all of them were drawn to the king´s side. This wasn´t something done by deceiving; all was simply him gathering his enemies and meeting them with the intent of naturally becoming friends, which ended up as all of them coming to his side. It was a power that didn´t have any selfishness, and moreover, it was the strongest and it was an unparalleled power.

He didn´t have any enemies. Therefore, he was invincible.

He was the eighth generation in the reign Ostoberg, Elunst Dar Ostoberg. He was the wise rule of their next generation that the hero, Strakules, had fallen in love with in the first sight. There was nobody that could oppose that jaded smile.

○

“By the way, Kimon. About that brat... Did you kill him or let him live?”

After having finished his report to Elunst, Strakules was now walking at a corridor at the royal palace together with Kimon. In respect to Strakules, Kimon was walking slightly behind him.

“He was able to stay alive by his own efforts.”

In a very simple way, Kimon simply stated the outcome of the test. Strakules became slightly surprised after hearing that.

“He had ran away from your hands? From the [Black Sheep]´s hands? Gahahahaha!”

As if he had become satisfied with the report, Strakules was showing a smile and started to imagine about the next battles that were to come...

“...I regretted having let him escape.”

Kimon was in a mood different from his usual. Compared to how he would usually be, he was lacking confidence.

“Perhaps, one day, he might become a poison to his Majesty and your Excellency. I am having the feeling it will. Each day I think about it, I feel as if I am becoming more certain about it.”

To Kimon, who would usually answer things in a simple way, those were soft words that didn´t come out of his mouth very often.

“I can have enough of it; I can´t! To think I would be able to taste new things even after becoming of this age! That´s why I can´t stop going to war! Guhaha, I can´t have enough of it!”

Kimon´s worries were wiped away in an instant. That unripe young man wasn´t someone that would be able to do as he pleased against the monster in front of his eyes; this monster that had been born just for the sake of war. At least, he wouldn´t be able to catch up in time while Strakules is still in good health. After becoming confident of that, Kimon was now certain.

“The black brat from Garius and the white brat from Arcadia, and then, his Majesty. Also, with those knights from the prospering kingdom of Arkland, even if the seven kingdoms are still going strong, I can´t read what is going to happen in the future at all. It is because of that that it is so great. It is really great!”

The existence of that man was too heavy. Would even this world in chaos be capable of shaking that man..?

“Will they be eaten by me, or will they eat me... Guhah, now it became interesting!”

Much more now that he grew old, the hero became even more domineering.

○

“Hey, Volf. Where are we going next?”

At the north was Ostoberg, and at the south was the central sea, which was the foundation of all commerce. To the east was a mountain range, and at the west, there was a conglomerate of small countries, which was the greatest nation of the world in this generation, Garius.

Those people were a group that were now near the proximities of the borders of the western side. Their encampment was built to make space for a hundred people. The night shone with the red of the bonfires.

“Ah... For now, how about buying a beautiful nee-chan with the money we got from the war and going to paradise at some island at the central sea in the south.”

The one named Volf was a person that one couldn´t be distinguished between a man or a woman. His head was hit.

“We had to come all our way to Garius to pay for all our debt because you did that the last time! B-besides, you took the money of the whole company all to yourself for that!”

Volf, who had his head beaten, looked at another direction from the eyes of the woman while saying “ouch ouch”.

“…It´s just because they are women that those slaves keep escaping.”

“…The reason my charm doesn´t reach them is because they don´t have any sense of beauty, yes.”

“You are always too greedy. Besides, you are too soft on women. If I was around at that time, I would have killed that slave woman.”

“Like I said before, I did it in the spur of the moment.”

“Thaaat´s why I said you are too soft on women!”

The two quarreling was the usual sight. The people at their surroundings kept doing their business, treating that as something normal. Actually, there were pretty much nobody that was on guard duty. All of them were each relaxedly taking their time as they wished.

“Fine then. I can forgive that you are soft on women and that you are too negligent. …But there is no way I can for having been about to die.”

With the tone of that voice suddenly being lowered, the girly man became dejected. Volf´s expression became cloudy.

“…Sorry. To be fair, I was being too pretentious. I didn´t know a monster of that power existed in this world.”

What Volf was talking about was something that happened one month ago at a skirmish between Garius and Ostoberg. They didn´t know why that skirmish was happening at that time, but Volf and her company decided to participate at that war that suddenly happened as mercenaries. The result of that was that they raised many achievements. However, at only one occasion, they suffered a very rough defeat.

“[Black Gold] Strakules. That guy is a monster. He was stronger than anyone I´ve ever met. He was good at commanding, and so was his personal strength. I couldn´t compete with him at all. Besides that, he actually spared my life!”

At that moment, everyone´s eyes who had been looking somewhere else before all gathered at that place.

“That genius, strong, cool and handsome man had spared me!”

If it was the usual, Volf would have done some kind of tsukkomi somewhere at that declaration, but because his angry expression and also because of the black shadow that was gushing out of Volf for those that could see it, the people around were feeling pressured.

“I agree with you about the genius and strong part, but about him being cool and handsome…. Besides, this ruins all your point.”

Among all the people, there was only one that was calm.

“Shut up Nikka. Either way, that was really humiliating. Even though it is already surprising that there were people more outstanding than me, even that general´s sheep bastard is stronger. I am depressed. Really depressed.”

The macho woman named Nikka violently scratched her head.

“Yooou knooow, you are going against the army of a country and his general. Besides, it is one of the seven kingdoms. It would be stranger if you were to win. How many times do I need to tell you?”

Volf became teary and started to sniff because of Nikka´s scolding words.

“It´s because… I promised I would definitely not lose.”

“It was Lilya, right? I know about that. But even so, you should know it is the end once you are dead, right? You need to live in order to have a chance to get revenge. If you die, I will be alone. If that happens, it will be reeeeally lonely.”

There was a small locket hanging by Volf´s chest. In the whole world, probably only the two of them remembered about the person drawn in the picture inside the locket. To the two, that person was an existence there was no replacement to.

“I know, I know. I won´t lose. And I also won´t die. I might be reckless, but I won´t overdo. It should be fine like that, right, Nikka?”

Volf silently opened the locket and looked at the picture of the smiling girl that was inside it. Those were the vestiges of the memories about the little country distant at the north Volf used to live at before it had been destroyed. They weren´t able to do anything. They weren´t able to save anyone, nor able to allow the dead to rest in peace. Just like that, all they could do was to remain alive. All they could do was to blame their weak selves.

“...Ou. Then, let´s have it decided in the next battle. We aren´t weak anymore. However, we aren´t strong enough to be letting our guards down. In order to become strong... we need to experience more of the world! We are ten years early from the paradise at the south countries.”

Nikka sat at the big bonfire located in the middle of the encampment which many people were gathered nearby.

“Thank you for the manzai.”(TL note: Manzai = type of japanese comedy.)

“What!?”

Whistlings and cheers like “How hot!” and “It´s fine even if you are a macho woman. Please, let me do it with you!” came from the surroundings. Nikka looked at the man that called her a macho man and threw a knife she slipped from her wrist. The man fell

down in surprise.

“I am not your wife, and I am also not a macho woman! I am a fully-fledged girl, you stupid bastard!”

Now would be the time for people to fall silent. For those that started to laugh at such time lacked one or two screws in their head. After giving a snort, Nikka returned to the place she was sitting.

“Ten years, huh. Will we be able to get to that level after ten years? At the level of that monster.”

The man sitting next to Nikka said while sighing.

“We will catch up. It´s just that Volf is that much of a genius, strong and also hardworking. There is nobody that battles on worse conditions than him. That´s why all we need to do is to surpass him. Once we surpass him, there will be nobody that will be able to get to our level. Volf is an awesome guy after all, yes.”

Nikka´s cheeks were slightly reddened. Whether it was because of the bonfire, or because or something else...

“Well, it is because Volf is [fast]. All we are doing is desperately running after him so that we are not left behind. If. While we are desperately running after him, we might leave everyone else behind. And then... the [Noir guard] will become the strongest.”

Noir Guard. This was the name of the mercenary group everyone here was part of. The leader was Volf. The second-in-commands were Nikka, and also the mild man she was talking to right now.

“Wolfs will band together after all. There isn´t any living thing that can win against wolves that stay together.”

The black wolves were silently sharpening their fangs and claws. They were still a small group, but for the sake of one day gourge their fangs onto the word, they would go to wars and diligently train themselves.

“Hey, so it is really no good even if it only one?”

“It´s obvious it is no good! You bastard, I will have you do a rocket dogeza a hundred times!”

Under the starry sky, the jet black wolves were lively moving around.

○

Distant to the east, across the sea, there was a big island. On this continent that was called Garnia, there were many small countries. Those would get destroyed, and many others would be founded, and then those would be destroyed; and so on the cycle would continue. This displayed well the aspect of this generation of warring states that was whirling in chaos.

Among all those small countries, there was a country that shined like brilliant stars. Its name was Arkland.

“Hime-sama, the wind of the night is poison to the health.”

“Yes, I will be here just for a short while.”

Since its founding, it has been five years, and not even three years has passed since its name changed to Arkland. However, in only those two years, its name was made know throughout Garnia, and after those three years after the change of the crown, let alone Garnia, it had its name thundered through even the seven kingdoms, which were across the sea.

“At the other side of that mountain, across the sea, there are wars bigger than those at Garnia. Doesn´t it make you excited, Sir Beilin? In my case... I am so excited, but so excited I can´t bear.”

The man called Beilin could see the big fire blazing inside the girl that hadn´t even come to age.

“I love war. I also love the blood, the iron; all this is dear to me. I wonder if I am mad. Is this fire that burns my body the evidence of this curse, or not?”

The beautiful red haired girl tenderly stroked the sword that was at her waist.

“Mad is fine. Hime-sama may stay as the warring maiden

Apolonia of Arkland. All of us Arknights accept everything hime-sama will face against, and will cut all enemies.”

Seeming like she was satisfied of his answer, although the girl named Apolonia was looking at the night sky full of stars, at the great lands at the other side of the mountains, she was showing a gentle smile.

“Leave some for me to kill.”

“As you will.”

The girl that didn´t have even seventeen years, Apolonia of Arkland. This girl was Arkland´s main factor for their rapid progress, and was without doubt, the person ruling Arkland.

“Besides, I am not a princess anymore. You should stop calling me princess, Sir Beilin.”

“Ha, I am very sorry, your Majesty, queen Apolonia.”

“...This sounds creepy.”

“Ha.”

Three years ago, at the young age of fourteen, Apolonia succeeded the throne. The king abdicated the throne by his own will and gave the crown to Apolonia. For the sake of Arkland´s

prosperity, the strongest person must be the one to become the king. Therefore, Apolonia became the king. She became stronger than anyone and became more capable of being the king than anyone. Because of that...

“From times to times, you may call me princess. Now then, tomorrow will also be war. Today we should rest, and tomorrow we are to trample down the enemy!”

“As you will!”

The continent of Garnia was being burn by a fire called Arkland. At the moment, this fire was only gathered at Garnia. However, if one day it comes that it spreads outside of it, it wasn´t known whether even the seven kingdoms would be able to stop it. A fire that would burn to this extent was what the kingdom of Arkland, and its ruler, Apolonia, were waiting.

“Ah, where is the battlefield that will make my heart race.”

The fire called Apolonia was becoming more intense and was burning the continent.

20. *Unexpected Encounter*

William was walking at the capital of Arcadia, Arkas, by himself. He actually didn´t have any specific intentions to be doing that. He was simply wandering around to get some fresh air. To William, who didn´t like pointless things, this kind of period of idleness was very rare to him. He had too many things he had to think about that his head completely stopped working for the time. It was because of that that William was now doing this pointless action.

“”Kail is at his job at the colosseum and Havella is also busy because of the work at her guild. Well, it´s fine… At any point, earlier then at that time….””

“It seems what you are talking about is really serious, but isn´t things of that sort the type that you should ask other people to teach you? People that can do things will be able to them, and people that can´t won´t for the eternity. Whether it is for talent, or for sense, and other things.”

“…You bastard, are you saying that I have no talent?”

“I´m not saying that. Rather, you have too much of it, or so I think. Well, but you should have been able to immediately get to use it as long as you just had the basic perception of it. Though, saying “get to use it” is a faulty expression, I guess.”

“I don´t get what you are saying. Explain it in a way I can understand.”

“This is impossible. I can´t just let you know everything about me. The opposite would be the same too.”

“...Miser.”

“Sorry. Well, if I was to give you one advice... It would be for you to accept yourself, I guess. ....No, actually, forget it. This would be too harsh on you.”

“I don´t get what you are saying.”

William remembered about his conversation with Kail the previous day. In the end, he wasn´t able to understand anything, but a lingering discomfort remained inside William.

“Aa-ah, is it impossible for me to get stronger in an easier way?”

To William, in a certain meaning, this was his first bottleneck. There were many deep bottlenecks he had to go through, but after pondering about it, and after putting effort, he would be able to break through it for the most of it. If he needed to learn about it, he would get a place he would be able to study about it, and if he didn´t have enough muscles, he could simply eat things that were very nutritious and have an adequate amount of exercise. He would obtain knowledge and put it into practice. Before, just this sufficed.

“I wonder what I am supposed to do from now on.”

He also couldn´t keep being in the care of the Teirah family forever. Even if it was impossible for him to have a whole house for himself, it was obviously still possible for him to think about renting a place. Since he was a foreigner, him living at the slums would be suitable, and besides, the rent there would also be cheap.

“”No, I would stand out even if I was to cause the smallest trouble, so I might need to go live in an inn... But is it too expensive to be possible in the end? There are some small shitty rooms that are really cheap... but as expected, since I´m not a slave, I would be looking bad in the eyes of society....”

Even for such a simple thing like that, William couldn´t think of an answer even after thinking about it.

“”What is it about reputation, this stupid thing. I am really not thinking well right now. If I don´t go back to normal soon, I don´t know what kind of mistake I might end up making.”

William scratched his head. Being able to quickly think about things no matter the circumstance was one of his strong points. At his current situation, this strong point was as good as dead. Even if he was to think about the things he needs to do now, no matter how he tries, those thoughts would lead to [that thing]. That mysterious power spike, and also, the terrifying himself that was reflected on those eyes.

“”Shit, forget about it for now! There are many things I need to think about right now!””

But even so, those thoughts kept clinging onto his head and wouldn´t go away.

William was in agony.

“That´s troubling, ojou-san. For you to be putting all the blame onto the merchandize I sell... If you want me to sell it cheap for you, I wish you would say it directly to me, you see.”

“No, that, uhm....”

“If my reputation declines, how are you supposed to take responsibility?”

William looked ahead. What came to his sight was a crowd of people. Right in the center of the crowd, there was a stall that was selling cloth. The shopkeeper was probably having a quarrel with his client. If it was the usual William, he obviously wouldn´t poke his nose onto it. However...

“What´s the problem here?”

Right now, William was stressed.

“Yes, it is this client here. She started to complain about my merchandize. She was saying this silk wasn´t made in Nehderks. If this beautiful silk isn´t from Nehderks, then where is it supposed to have come from? Isn´t this unreasonable, onii-san?”

William approached the shopkeeper of the stall. He glanced at the customer that had complained about the cloth, but because her head was hanging down, there was no way for him to see her face. William also didn´t have any interest in seeing it.

In the end... he only came to vent his stress after all.

“I see, it is a beautiful silk. Can I touch it for a bit?”

The shopkeeper hesitated for a moment. At that instant, William was able to know who was the one at fault.

“What, it´s not like I am suspecting you. I have no idea how to identify the quality of cloth. I simply want to have a touch at this beautiful and refined cloth.”

“Ah, yes, of course, be my guest.”

After that, all he needed to do was to bring him down.

“I see, this is a good silk. By the way, owner, this... Do you know what kind of weave is this? No, no, it´s just that I want to have a reference.”

At that instant, the complexion of the shopkeeper´s face changed. The client that had issued that complaint from before

also showed a reaction of surprise.

“Something like that dooesn´t matteeer! It has nothing to do with you. Take your hands off it already and just go somewhere else!”

William showed a smile. At first glance, William looked like an agreeable young man, but...

“The silk of Nehderks is made in satin. This is the same silk, but it is made in plain weave. I don´t have the intention to say which one is of better quality by that, but I would have to say that you promoting this is Nehderk´s silk is just lies.”

Once all the pretence was peeled off, William became filled with wicked feelings. His smile was of the devil himself.

The shopkeeper´s face became palid.

“Yo-you said you didn´t know how to identify the quality of cloth...”

“Yes, I don´t know. I have no idea what kind of cloth is of good or bad quality. I simply have some knowledge about it. I know that the silk from Nehderks is made in satin and that the one made at the northwestern side of Arkas is made in plain weave. In terms of selling price... even if both are silk, the price is different by twice the amount, and it should be clear which of them is the higher priced, right?”

The shopkeeper couldn´t even gasp. The crowd of people around the stall were all at once giving angry glares at the shopkeeper. Now that it became like that, he wouldn´t be able to sell anything at this place.

“Well, the plain weave is very firm, so I think that it by itself is a good product. To unknowledgeable eyes though.”

Saying that, he turned away from the stall and walked his way out of the place. He glanced at the shopkeeper, who fell on his knees, and let his mind be carried by the dark feelings of having his appetite satiated.

“”Ah, I feel refreshed now.””

His thoughts were more or less flowing better than before. Defeating others, kicking them down their place and eating a part of their life. After knowing of the feeling of victory once again, William got in a bit of a good mood.

“”But despite being the kind of middle-lower class that would be coming at a open-air market like this, that girl was really able to see through the quality.””

Satin and plain weave had many differences, but there was no mistake both were silk. If a first class citizen, who would often deal with shops specialized on that, had gone to this stall, the shopkeeper would have definitely had problems. However, for second and third class citizens, and others that would be coming at

such market, it would be unexpected that there could be someone who would be capable of knowing the differences between different weaves.

“”To begin with, she was the one at fault to be issuing the complaint at a place like this. There is no way there would be something of good quality here.””

While it was possible for there to be an imitation product here just for the attention of customers, there was no way there would be a product of good quality at a stall like this. For her to come all her way to point this out only proved she didn´t understand that. She probably underestimated the shopkeeper.

“...Now then, since my mind is better now, let´s go fish out for something to buy here.”

William, the slight feeling of relief from before increased.

“...-ello.”

“”For now, let´s find a room to rent. After I am done with what I need to do, I will go.””

“Uh, hello...”

William´s sleeve was twitching.

“Hm?”

William´s sight were first at his moving sleeve, and then, it was at the thin fingers that were holding it. Then, it reached to the gorgeous arm, and after that, it reached to the person standing next to him. At that instant....

“What!?”

William´s face became stiff.

“Ah, thank you for having helped me before.”

The one saying that with a timid and small voice was Lutogarde Von Teirah. She was Louran Von Teirah´s daughter and the younger sister of Karl Von Teirah, who was currently working at the military together with William.

“N-no. I just said what was the truth, yes.”

William´s cheeks were twitching and he was making a false and crude smile. Because of how much of a surprise attack it was, he wasn´t able to control his expression.

““I-I was caught in an awkward moment. No, rather than that, isn´t her the one that made the complaint?””

William looked at Lutogarde in a way that wouldn´t be

disrespectful. After having another glance at Ludogarde, he was startled by the lack of aura that she had. It was to the point one would lose sight of her once she got into a crowd of people. While she was a beautiful girl, it couldn´t be felt any kind of presence from her as a person.

““What are the chances of me passing by an acquaintance that is a noble in the big capital of Arkas, and moreover, at a run-down market like this!? Shit!””

He felt like swearing in his mind.

“Um, I´ve heard before you were going to fish out for something to buy, but…”

While she had so suddenly appeared, she didn´t hold out with her questions.

“Ye-yes. There is no way I can forever be in the care of the Teirah family, and since I am receiving wages for being a regular soldier in the military just like Karl-sama, I thought that I should soon find a place to live.”

As Lutogarde was listening to William´s words, her face was becoming cloudy in an obvious manner. Seeing that face, William became anxious in his mind about whether he had said something bad carelessly.

“There is no way… anybody in the house thinks of you as a

bother... probably."

By the end of the sentence, her voice almost couldn´t be heard. Because of how much small her voice was, it took all his effort for him to be able to catch what she was saying.

"Be-besides, I-I think you should save your money until you have a good amount of money to live without problems. If you can save enough money, you can use it to buy a property and other things... b-but right now, I think you don´t need to be in hurry... Yes."

"No, but...."

"..."

Ludogarde continued to hold William´s sleeve without saying anything. William couldn´t understand what she wanted from him. To begin with, he didn´t know the reasons behind her actions.

"B-by the way, what would Lutogarde-sama be doing in such a place like this?"

Thinking he should break out from his current weird situation, he brought up a subject which he actually didn´t have much interest in particular. Lutogarde sluggishly raised her face.

"...Shopping. Uhm, because my family manages a company that works with clothing, and I also do a bit of sewing and designing

myself, and because I was entrusted with the clothes for the party by my friends, I... Uhh.... I went shopping. I still didn´t buy the cloth I need though...”

Because of how Lutogarde came to buy cloth, she was probably planning on making the clothes from the scratch. Choosing clothes and making clothes obviously were completely different things. It was only a guess, but her friends probably requested her to choose the clothes. However, Lutogarde decided that it was the latter, and so, she came all her way here to do shopping despite being a noble.

““Sh-she is too stupid.””

William felt like holding his head. Lutogarde was other-worldly and completely different from the standards of how William imagined a ojou-sama from a noble family would be like. It was this type of person that William had the most trouble with. This was because he couldn´t predict or make calculations of her actions...

“”Besides, she won´t release the hem. I don´t understand what´s up with her.””

If this was to continue like this, the day would soon be over. He needed to think of some way to make Lutogarde move; think of a way to have those fingers release his sleeve. The answer he came up with was...

“If you don´t mind, could I accompany you in your shopping?”

It was to give in to her. For now, he needed to give up on all his plans for today and go along with her. William believed there would have been a chance for him to get away. However, there wasn´t. Thus, he gave in.

“I don´t.. mind. I am really… thankful.”

Ludogarde was showing a happy smile. It was lovable how she was still firmly holding onto the sleeve.

“Then, let´s go. By the way… isn´t it difficult to walk like this?”

William intended to implicitly tell her to release his sleeve by saying that, but…

“Is that, so?”

It seems that he couldn´t get the message across at all.

The weird shopping of the young man, who was leading the way, and the girl behind him who held his sleeve began.

21. The Mask And Lutogarde

There were many varied things Lutogarde bought during their shopping. Seeming that Lutogarde intended to make everything herself except for what was made of gold, she bought many varieties of cloth and also bought things like jewels that could become used as pins and hair ornaments. The baggage increased, and when the amount became so much a noble girl couldn´t carry, William gave up on running away and delved himself into carrying all of it.

“That´s quite the amount. Will Lutogarde-sama participate in the party too?”

William was carrying the great amount of baggage by himself. Lutogarde had many times suggested she should carry half of it, but as to be expected, William firmly refused. He had to keep the appearances to the eyes of society, and he also had pride as a man.

“No, they invited me, but I refused. I am not good at showing my face at at parties... When I am at them, I often feel like leaving early.”

With that being the case, the amount of things she bought was weird. Seeming that she had noticed William acting puzzled, Lutogarde added .

“I am intending on making many sets of clothes, not only one.”

Lutogarde readily declared that, but because of how much hard it

felt that this would be to do, William could only show a wry smile. He didn´t know how much important her friends were to her, but this was just putting too much time and effort. If she was actually doing all this without compensation, then she could only be considered a complete idiot.

“Sh-should we go have a look there?”

The shop that was ahead of Lutogarde, who was walking to its direction in a steady pace, was a mask shop.

“”That´s weird. Or is it that the party is a masquerade?””

There were many masks hanging at the stall. The open parts for the mouth and eyes were like an abbys looking back at him. To William, masks were something unrelated to his life until now. He never wore one, nor has ever thought of wearing one.

“Masks are carved in wood, but there are many kinds of materials like gold or porcelain that can be used for making it. While it is easy to make one of wood, it is very difficult to make one from the scratch with other materials. Because of that, I want to buy one first before I make the masks.”

What William had been wondering about since moments ago was about how even though Lutogarde would usually be very silent and talk in a small voice, she could become a bit talkative when talking about things related to clothing. It seemed that she really liked that kind of thing.

“Masks, right…”

While Lutogarde was focused on evaluating the masks, William was looking at them since he had nothing better to do. Just like Lutogarde had stated before, William was able to spot masks made of wood, porcelain and other various materials. All of the masks gave off some kind of weird feeling.

“”Something to hide your own form. Your expression can´t be read, and so, you can´t get the other party´s suspicion because of that. If I had to say, this is something useful.”

However, to wear a mask is the same as saying that you had something to hide.

“”This is something unnecessary to me. I don´t need to go all my way to make reasons for people to be suspicious about me.””

Deciding his own conclusions were right, William took his eyes away from the masks.

The weather was cloudy and very gloomy. The people at their surroundings were nervous, wondering if it was going to rain. It could be seen that the stalls, which didn´t have roofs, were all quickly closing.

A raindrop dripped at William´s cheek. It seems that it was going to rain.

“While masks are something used to hide yourself, it can also be used to see your inner side.”

William looked to Lutogarde, who had started to talk. William couldn´t see Lutogarde´s expression, who was with her back turned to him.

““A mask is a thin line that interposes between you and the outside. A thin boundary. Because of that, you can become aware of yourself, obtaining an outside perspective of that. I believe masks are something for you to become aware of you own existence.”

The image that was wildly going through William´s mind was the figure of himself changed to an ugly form.

The rain got stronger.

“Even for me, it is not like I can understand myself. I don´t understand myself, and you surely don´t understand yourself. I believe it is appropriate if those illusions can become of help.”

Lutogarde turned her head to William. It was a beautiful smile she had been hiding all this time. William gulped. He saw a smile he had never seem from Lutogarde, whose mind he had believed to have already understood...

“Take this. I believe it will definitely suit you.”

The [thing] that Lutogarde gave him was a white mask. That, which covered the expression of the eyes, had a very lonely shape. At one glance, the feeling it gave off was similar to the helm of a knight, but it was shaped in a strange whiteness that would more or less gave the impression of a skull. The red line that was drawn on the mask as decoration resembled the fires of war and the vast amount of flesh and blood.

“This, to me?”

“Yes, I am giving it to you. It is my thanks for having accompanied me in my shopping today.”

To simple people, they would think of a knight by looking at that mask. [That], which had both beauty and strength, was something fitting for a knight.

However, what William imagined after looking at the mask was something completely different. The king of death, the king that controlled the deceased souls. It was as if that was the reflection of [himself]. He was feeling chills in his body. To think there would be something that would suit himself this perfectly.

The rain worsened. Most of the stalls were hurriedly closing, and the shop that was right in front of his eyes had already vanished. The only ones that were standing at the place were only two people soaked wet.

Before one´s notice, William put on the mask he had received. The ruby by his chest that was supposed to have been hidden

inside his clothes was trembling. Both were things he received from Lutogarde. Also, both were things that matched William well. Whether it was on the outside, or on the inside...

Unfeeling thoughts came over to him. After being isolated from the outside word by that boundary, he was able to perceive himself in a more objective manner. He was able to feel the coldness of the rain much more acutely than usual. He could feel the rain touching his skin, the smell of the rainy weather, the sound of the raindrops hitting the ground, the taste of the droplets of the rain wafting in the air...

...and with his sight, he could see the girl soaked by the rain that stood in front of his eyes.

“Be careful of father.”

Lutogarde spoke to William, who had put his mask on.

“Father is a person that can do anything if it is for the sake of the household. The Teirah family has accumulated a great amount of fortune at my father´s generation. As a count, he had a fortune that nobody among the viscounts could compare. However, Louran Von Teirah still has one thing he lacks. No matter how much money father has, in the end, he is considered just some rich upstart. What father really desires is status. He said this is what it is truly necessary in order to be recognized in this country.”

William´s impression of Lutogarde completely changed. Before, he saw her simply as a weird girl and as a stupid person that was

shy around strangers and that William couldn´t see through her actions. All this had been completely destroyed.

“To father, all it matters is if a person can be used or if not. Me and Ainhart-anisama were considered the type that can be used, and Karl-anisama was considered the latter. In the surface, we are loved, but except for Ainhart-anisama, father has never had expectations from us, neither has ever loved any of us. Ainhart-anisama knew this, so he choose the path of a scholar in order to put resistance. Father easily consented to that. ...The reason he did so was because he had completely lost his interest about anisama. I think he will soon lose his interest on me too. Because I lack grace as the daughter of a noble... Because it will be impossible for me to be married into a household of high status.”

The content of her story was really miserable to her, but there weren´t any dark feelings in her expression at all. It felt as if it was overflowing with happiness. William had the feeling she was.

“But after learning about you, father changed the evaluation of Karl-anisama. It was because father decided that as long as he has the support of William-sama, it will be possible to raise military achievements. Hence, it will be possible to raise the status of the Teirah family. Father is expecting a lot from you. That is exactly why I wish you to be careful. Now that father decided you are the type of person that can be used, you need to be careful... careful about what father will make you do and what he will decide to do with you once he gets the status after using you.”

Lutogarde´s words were ambiguous, but it answered all questions. It was obvious there were only a fixed number of seats

at the [top]. In order for the Teirah household to go to the top, it is necessary to have the person sitting at one of the seats to move out. And from then on, it would be necessary to remove anyone that wanted to sit on their seat. It was difficult to believe that the Teirah household would leave William alone once they sat onto the seat.

“I will take those words to my heart.”

William didn´t know why Lutogarde was telling him those things. This could even be Louran´s trap. But even so, it was necessary for him to bear it in mind. To bear in mind that Louran Von Teirah was more troublesome of an existence than William had expected.

“By the way, why are you telling me all that at a time like this?”

With William´s question, Lutogarde showed a smile different from the one she had been showing before. She was showing a pure smile.

“As a gift for having helped me.”

She happily answered. William felt a bit of deja vu, but he couldn´t remember anything out of it.

“Ah, we are wet to the skin. Let´s go back home, ok?”

“Yes, let´s go.”

Lutogarde firmly held William´s sleeve. Because of that action, which William had already lost any kind of discomfort or displeasure about, and also because of how the Teirah household really seemed like they were going to be problematic to him after all, William showed a wry smile under his mask.

“”I see, this is useful.””

Out of his expectations, William ended up becoming interested in masks, and also in the girl called Lutogarde.

“”Now then, how shall we make use of it?” “

The expression William was showing right now was also something being hidden by the mask. If he was to be careful about the expression of his lips, nobody would be able to notice his feelings. William now got in his hands two new weapons. The mask and Lutogarde. He didn´t have the slightest intent of trusting her, but he could see there was usefulness.

22. Nightmare

The servants of the Teirah residence warmly received the two, who were soaked wet. Wiping their body with a towel, they warmed themselves at the fireplace, which brilliantly burned. They drank a whole cup of warm stew. After finishing warming up themselves, the two parted ways.

One went to her room in order to make clothes for her friends.

The other one went to the room he was borrowing.

“Hey, William-kun. Could we talk for a bit?”

“Yes, of course.”

William was at his room. Louran Von Teirah was standing outside the room. Without any intentions of entering inside it, he was leaning onto the door.

“Let me give my thanks for having helped Lutogarde today. Thank you.”

“No, by thinking of how I am being looked after by you, doing this is only the obvious.”

“Ahaha, is that so?”

“Yes.”

The two fell in silence for a moment. In situations like that, William couldn´t carelessly open his mouth. Silence was golden; it wasn´t good for the [weaker side] to be the first to open the mouth.

“Lutogarde is smart, isn´t she? With how smart she is, she would have been useful if she was a man.”

Louran´s mood suddenly changed.

“Most of what that girl said is correct. I also won´t deny that. You are being used by the Teirah family, and you are using the Teirah family. It is a win-win situation that is extremely easy to understand. A wonderful interrelation. Let´s leave our emotions outside this. This is business. As long as it remains true, I will be [expecting] from you. I definitely want you to answer my [expectations].”

Even the very gentle Louran was like this under the cover of his pretense. Now that William knew about it, hiding it was unnecessary. Without his facade, Louran was much bigger and much more twisted than William had imagined.

“I understand.”

William could only say that. Because of many reasons, he couldn´t win right now. It was fine even if he was caught into a fight he couldn´t win. As long as he didn´t fight, he wouldn´t lose.

It was because of the mask. To the point of surprise, William was able to hold himself back in a collected manner and avoid fighting a war he couldn´t win. He was able to define the situation with composure. Without even noticing, William, whose mind had been chaotic these last few days, had gone back to clarity.

“”It is fine if I win another day. If I win in the end, it will be my win.””

William was showing a very dark smile. Louran, who was at the other side of the door, was probably having the same expression on his face. It was a relationship which both ate each other in their own interest.

Who was going to be the one eaten in the end?

At this night which William used a mask for the first time, he had a dream.

A black haired boy was hugging his legs and crying. There was a crowd of corpses in his surroundings calling for him in voices of resentment, and their hands would try to strangle him. Filled with malice, their bodies burned in hate. In the midst of that eternity of hate, the boy cried.

And only a single person, only a single corpse protected him.

“It´s alright, you are not wrong. It is not your fault.”

The girl spoke to him in a gentle voice. She had the same hair and the same eyes the boy had.

“Really? Is it really not my fault?”

The dead girl nodded with a smile. The surroundings booed. Even though the voices filled with resentment felt like they would crush them, the black haired girl protected the boy from everything.

William, who was wearing his mask, was simply watching the spectacle. At first glance, it looked like a love themed play, but...

“...glare*”

But to William Rivius... to Al, which of the two was the salvation? Which of them was appropriate to him? Was it the corpses? Was it the girl? Was it destruction? Was it salvation? Was it hatred, was it love?

“Stop kidding me!”

William extended his hand. The black haired girl glanced at him and smiled. The corpses at the surroundings noticed that and charged at William as if he had become the target in the place of the boy.

“Gh!? I-I…!”

The wave of dead people engulfed William. When he was about to have his consciousness blown away, at the very last moment, the black haired girl embraced William. Just like she protected the boy, she was protecting William from the cluster of malice; she protected him from the crowd of corpses filled with hatred that burned his body.

“…”

The girl didn´t talk. She wouldn´t say words of comfort just like she was saying to the boy. Even though he wanted her to say something, even though he wanted to talk with her, no words came from her mouth. All she would give him was her smile and nothing more.

“Nee-san!”

At that instant, William´s world turned upside down.

“Hah, hah, hah, hah…”

A nightmare. It was a strange dream he didn´t even know if it was really a nightmare.

William got out of the bed. He could see from the reflection of the mirror that his whole body was covered in sweat and his appearance was very unsightly.

“Gulp*”

William gulped. He didn´t know what happened, or what meaning it had, and neither did he understand any of it. All he could feel was a feeling of happiness that was difficult to resist from and discomfort mixed up in a complex way.

“… What a wretched appearance.”

William moved his hand to his mask. There was no way he could show this face in front of people. Because he is performing as William Rivius, it definitely couldn´t be said that his current situation was fine.

“…”

William saw the world through the mask. His sight was being limited; with the outside world being covered in darkness and his view being restricted by the thin boundary, William was able to return to normal.

“..Fuh.”

William regained his calmness. He needed to go through his daily routine. Moving his heavy body, he stood up.

“Really, what has been happening to me recently.”

Being amazed at how his mental state was unstable, he shook his head, saying “good grief”. Then, he left his room in order to partake his routinely training.

Right now, William didn´t know that from now on he would have to convive with this nightmare for the eternity.

23. Commerce

“By the way William-kun, if you have your hands free now, I would like to have you help me with a job. Of course, I will be paying you for that.”

It was the first thing Louran said when he came to William´s room. Although William had just now been suppressing himself in his inner battle reasonably well, his consciousness now returned back to where he was, the Teirah residence, Arkas.

Besides that, Karl had things to deal with their ten-man squad, so he was out at the moment.

“A job, you say?”

William was someone that only had basic knowledge about jewels. He didn´t have technical knowledge about it.

“It is something that anyone that can read, write and do calculus can do. And unsurprisingly, there aren´t many people like that in Arkas.”

William had nothing to do right now. He had been thinking about going out to meet Kail or visit Havella´s house, but this would be him just killing time. It was obvious to William which choice was the one that would let him learn the most things.

“In that case, I will give you my help.”

A job the rich dealt with. It was the ideal opportunity for him to learn from the experienced people.

“First question. How do you think “we” earn money?”

While they were in the carriage heading to the working place, Louran was asking William.

“By saying “we”, do you mean your company?”

“No, it would be better to say “we” in the meaning of the commerce as a whole.”

The commerce as a whole. If he had to answer it in only the general idea, then this was to the scope that William, who had experience in business, had knowledge of.

“The most primitive form of making money is by changing useless things into gold. The next thing we can do to earn money is by producing agricultural products. By exporting and importing, we can use the difference in the prices to make money. For instance, exporting water from a region that has abundance on it and selling it to a region that lacks it. And then, you just add some to the price. Also, working iron into houseware or into swords. By adding the service price, they can be sold for higher than simply selling just iron.”

Satisfied, Louran nodded.

“That´s right. To trade is to do any of those things you said, or perhaps, a combination of them. Whichever product you deal with, the basics don´t change. Buy cheaply and sell expensively. Everything is concluded in that.”

Louran paused for a bit before continuing...

“Then, why is it that our company can buy things cheaply? Why can we get gold for shipping expenses and indirect labor costs? Do you know it?”

Louran asked William. This too was part of the basics of trading.

“To make the most use of the prices in different locations and the added value of services... Stocking up the product in great quantities... I guess.”

“Incredible. The third one in particular is one that surprisingly most people don´t notice. Just like you said before about the difference in prices and the added price for services, we buy gems in from the regions that produce them in great quantities as cheap as possible, cut in shapes and make ornaments with them for the added price, and then, we sell. From of all the money from the sellings, the money for the shipping charges and the additional services becomes our profit. This is how the flow generally goes. “We”, the companies affiliated to the Teirah family can then buy even more products from the same place, and so, cutting the unit cost for having purchased it in a big batch.”

“However, can we really cut the costs to such extents?”

Louran answered with a smile to William´s question.

“Once you start working, you will understand. You will understand about the foundation of trading, and also how much money we actually get from it.”

Louran said with confidence. Did he really earn that much money just like he was saying?

“This is something you still don´t need to know, but there is something you must never do as someone that runs business with jewelries; a certain flow you must never let yourself be carried by.”

Louran looked at William. That was something William needed to know now that he was going to participate in the business. By looking at Louran´s eyes, it could be said that he had dropped all the pretenses for a bit at that moment. William´s face became slightly stiff.

“It is to lower the price. Rather than that, you are to raise it. What people want is gems that have high prices put on them and not cheap stones that sparkle. What we deal with is something that is not part of anyone´s basic necessities in life. It is not even beverages or extravagant foods. If it is not precious, there is no meaning to it; once it is thought as having no value, it is the end. This is the same for the gem that is hanging at your neck. You should take this to your heart.”

Do not lower the prices. This was a strict rule, or so Louran said. Once again, William had no power over the situation. However, if he can help Louran, it is possible that he might be entrusted to a position that would deal with things of that sort. Rather, it was exactly with that intent that Louran asked William to take the job. The proof of that was how Louran was teaching William starting from the flow of commerce.

"Now then, we should soon be there."

The carriage stopped and the two went outside. It was the best region of the residential district of Arkas, which was controlled by the first class citizens. Because it was prohibited for common people to enter the noble district, and since Louran was running a company, it was this kind of place that was the best to settle at. The place where most of the money flowed in Arkas was at this district.

In this place, rather than prestige, it was money that controlled everything. Because of that, the instant Lord Teirah left the carriage, the ambience at the surroundings completely changed. Many gazes pierced them.

"Good morning Lord Teirah."

"Yes, good morning."

They were quickly greeted by the people at the place, who were standing in a row. Louran invited William to come.

“Now, come here, William-kun.”

Once William got inside the building, a plain and organized place entered his sight. Unnecessary gaudiness wasn´t required at the workplace.

“Teach him how things work here.”

“Understood.”

Louran left William´s orientation to an office worker.

“Ah, I forgot to say one thing. I am thinking of having him one day become the president here. Guide him with that in mind.”

The workplace became in uproar. Everyone´s eyes gathered at William. William looked at Louran in surprise since he hadn´t heard anything about that.

“One day, Karl will succeed me. If his sword, you, are not in a position like this, you wouldn´t be able to discipline him, right? What, it isn´t anything difficult. All you need to do is to make money. If you think of any ideas, you should consult with me. From the next day on, you will become the president of this place.”

Louran was being lenient on William. Lenient to the point that it was too much. However, this was clearly a trap. That said, it wasn´t possible to avoid this trap. It was because he had chosen path to rise to prominence as Karl´s sword. Because of that, he was too

much deeply indulged into it. He was too much deep into the position of the sword of Karl Von Teirah. By the time he noticed it, there was already the possibility that William was getting tightly bound by those chains.

“Do your best. During your assignment at this office work, do your job while thinking and feeling what the companies affiliated with the Teirah family lacks and what can become of advantage.”

William finally noticed Lord Teirah´s aim. William intended to throw Karl away once he got some extent of power. If he was able to obtain money and status, he woulnd´t need to be a shadow. His plan was to leave someone of the likes of Karl behind and stand at the top.

“”However, Lord Teirah is giving me all these favors so that I can ´t cut off from Karl. If I become the president of a company affiliated to the Teirah family, he will be able to see the depth of the friendship between me and Karl. By the time I obtained enough power so that I could do as I wished, it wouldn´t be forgiven by society if I was to cut off from Karl. I see, so he had this sort of card in his hands.””

There was no way for William to refuse this request. After guessing some things, it was clear that their relationship was one ruled by power. Refusing such a good proposal was the same as saying that he had ill intents, and in his present situation, something like that was obviously a minus. In the end, it was preferable for him to jump into the flow.

“”Really… In just one move, I got my hands tied.”

Indeed, Lord Teirah was on a different level. He was an existence that managed companies. He was able to make such amounts of fortune. It was obvious that he wasn´t average.

“”Well, I will jump into it for now. It is more convenient this way.””

He was still being played around by the flow. Besides that, all he could do was to choose the best option. Once William obtained the power to create flows like that, he would show Lord Teirah what he could do. Rather, it couldn´t be helped that he was getting excited for what was to come.

“First I will teach you starting from how to use the account book.”

“Please take care of me.”

For that sake, it was necessary for William to gather everything he can. If he was able to get knowledge, there wouldn´t be disadvantages to it after all.

“…They earn that much money, those guys.”

After having a look at the account book, William made a surprised expression. He wondered if it was fine for someone to make so much money, and also wondered if the price for the gems in raw form was really that much cheap to begin with.

William looked at the ruby that was hanging by his neck.

“”You… If it wasn´t for how you don´t appear on the market, you would be surprisingly cheap.””

To make a price. Once again, William realised that the jewelry companies were manipulators, and that people would pay their money for “labels”.

24. Karl´s Undefeatable Ten-Man Squad

The mountainous region of southwest Arcadia. Here was where Arcadia bordered with the small kingdom of Taiyar. One may ask why a little country was could border one of the seven kingdoms, but rather than that, it was exactly because it was one of the seven kingdoms, and because Arcadia was such a big kingdom that there were many country borders like this. Even if there was a difference in military power between the countries, it wasn´t possible for Arcadia to perfectly take control of all regions around.

The degree of priority of Taiyar wasn´t high for Arcadia. Because of that, they would fight in skirmishers. No, it used to be that way. Until now, that is...

“Now then, let´s go. You two will guard Karl-sama; leave the rest to me.”

It was a group with green mantles covered in dirt. By looking at them from close on, it looked like the earth and the scenery they assimilated with were moving. Throwing away their mantles, they went down the slope all together at once.

“Wha!?”

It was a surprise attack from above. By the time they were noticed, it was already too late. The flank of the enemy formation was caught from above.

“Hyu*”

There was no way the enemy could do anything. In addition to that...

“Orah!”

Except for the person leading, all were armed with long spears. They had the high ground advantage, the advantage in equipment and also the tactical advantage. Complete and flawless. The formula for a decisive victory. In the end, the battle...

“White mask!?”

“It´s... the end.”

...had ended before it begun.

The amount of corpses in this battlefield at the borders of the kingdom had increased by ten. In an instant, the life of ten people were wiped out.

“William! Are you alright!?”

The blonde man who came running was Karl Von Teirah. The white masked man he was running in direction of turned his head to his way.

“Does it look like I am not alright?”

The white masked man, William Rivius, showed a refreshing smile and said in irony. Looking like Karl had calmed down, he made a relieved face.

“Alright, let´s move to the next place. It is a mountain battle after all. We need to get a few more achievements.”

“Compared to open-field battles, there is a wider viability of usage of tactics in mountain battles, isn´t it? Because the effectiveness of terrain is huge, just by getting a good position makes great difference in the battle, and because of the limited view, you can make ambushes and surprise attacks, right?”

“You studied well, didn´t you?”

“Ehehe. I did all the homework William gave me.”

“...If possible, I would like you to study on your own volition.”

“...I-I will do my best.”

It was the conversation between master and servant that would give inversed impressions their subordinates had already become used to seeing. Karl was the captain of the ten-man squad while William would be his counselor, but their relationship was one that Karl looked up to William independent of their positions. Of course, it was Karl who stood in public, and they wouldn´t cross that line. However, that relationship was a weird one which Karl

was instead dissatisfied about being the one to get the fame.

“Even if we are getting only a few more, in mountain battles, it is easy to raise achievements. The sun is still high, so I still want to take two more heads. Ignahts will be at the front and Frank will be at the flank. If there aren´t any unexpected movement in the battlefield, we should be fine if we follow the same plan from yesterday. Karl-sama will stay in the middle and command the squad while I will protect the rear.”

“Understood.”

Ignahts was a small man full of spirit. Frank was a gentle, tall and calming man. Both were talented man taken from the companies affiliated with the Teirah house at the time Karl was forming his ten-man squad. They were so-so in handling the sword, but because they were loyal to Karl, their value was different from the other soldiers. However, considering how their family and companies were being used as hostages to them, this was only the obvious.

Ignahts was at the front and Frank was together with the remaining ones. William, who was at the rear, wouldn´t let the squad move out until he confirmed that everyone took their positions. Recognizing that everyone had gone to their positions, he would wait in his place until there was a certain distance between them and him. This looked as if he was isolating himself in his own accord, but for William, him having the vision of their rear guard had a great effect. In addition, even if the enemy caught them, as long as the enemy didn´t surround him, it would be possible for him to run away. Therefore, he would take some

distance from the others. And so, he would have some free time before moving out.

"...Hmph."

Just for fun, William kicked the head of the enemy ten-man squad captain that he had sent flying moments ago. Seeing the head rolling on the ground made William well up with a strange feeling of exaltation and a bit of a feeling of having conquered something.

"How was your life until now? Were you happy? Were you unhappy? Did you have a wife? Did you have a daughter, a son? Did you have friends?"

William couldn´t resist showing a smile filled with excitement.

"What a shaaaame. It is the end if you die, you incompetent. It doesn´t change anything if you were happy, or unhappy, or rich, or poor, or if you were a noble or a slave. You, who has died, is the one who lost, and me, who is still alive, is the winner. This is how everything goes."

Being carried by the of the words, he stepped at the man´s head. And at that instant...

"Hm?"

A bad feeling went through his chest. It felt like pain, it felt like

sadness; it was an indescribable pain.

The image of the masked William was being reflected on the eyes of the man that were opened in a gruesome manner. An ugly beast. A scary beast that changed the death of the others, change unhappiness into his own pleasure. The [himself] that was being reflected deep in those eyes had a sad face.

“This… is everything, you ordinary.”

Saying that, William stepped onto the man´s head and crushed it with all his strength so he could ward off those illusions. The head became squashed. The blood splashed at William´s cheek, which he then wiped it off. The illusions, and also the pain disappeared. All that remained was…

“In the end, it is really good… War. It iss nice how so close to death it is, how the communication is simple, and also how plain simple it is to understand.”

A beast that wore the skin of human.

He covered his mouth with his hand and hid his smile. This was something even he knew. Just as he was aware of, that smile wasn´t something that would give people a good impression. Rather, it would give them discomfort. That was why he was hiding it.

“”Yes, masks are also useful for spreading [fame], so it isn´t that bad. It is also stylish.””

Since that day, William had been going to battles. Among those battles, there wasn´t even a single one that he went mad just like at that time at Raconia. In a composed way, he would sometimes let some of his steam off just like now, but after that, he would have everything under control.

“”Except at night...””

Since that day, he had kept seeing the same dream. The black haired girl and the boy, and also...

“”The crowd of corpses that keep increasing.””

The more battles he went in, the more corpses there was. The boy would hug his legs and cry like a victim. The girl would gently embrace him and protect him. It was a scene that for some reason really made him want to throw up. These last few days, rather than the corpses, it had been about those two that would make him feel uncomfortable. Why was that was something William didn´t know.

“”Oh, I should soon move out.””

William immediately removed all unnecessary thoughts. He could do that because the mask would reflect his self.

““Fuh, I´m really being able to switch over it, aren´t I?””

As he would get in many battles, his fame would suddenly rise in the battlefield. William Rivius, the [white mask] that was part of the powerful ten-man squad: Karl´s ten-man squad. It was the undefeatable squad that kept changing the tides of battle. The name of [white mask], their cornerstone member, was bit by bit, starting to resound through the battlefield.

25. The Reason Behind The Undefeatability

“Ah, William-san. Come over here.”

Frank signaled with his hand for William, who had been following after him, to come.

“Right on the mark”

Just like William had planned, they had reached at the rear of the enemy. The enemy was ten men strong and were spread out in a square formation. There were pretty much no numeric differences, and for their attack, it was the ideal circumstances.

“……”

If this was the normal situation, they would have attacked them without hesitations. However, William was being silent.

“”...The enemy is probably a centurion. His armor is different from the others.””

At the center of the enemy formation, there was a man that was using a different armor. William narrowed his eyes.

“”My mind says that I can win. However...””

The place ahead William was looking at. Ahead was the figure of

a man filled with confidence that waited for his enemy. By looking at the slight coldness being emitted by him...

"...We are pulling back."

....he decided to pull back. Although William had been putting everything in order for this favorable situation, he had given the order of retreat. This was something William would argue against if he didn´t care about Karl´s ten-man squad. However...

"U—su, then, is it fine for me to be in the front next time?"

Ignahts immediately accepted and recognized the order. The other people didn´t show any surprises in particular. When William says to pull back, it was because they were pulling back. This was the ironclad rule.

"Yes, we are going to wait for another opportunity at our next location. I will once again be at the rear."

The reason why Karl´s ten-man squad was undefeatable; William abandoning fights. Because of his insights, he had consistency in when to attack and retreat. He would take won battles with carefulness so he would not lose for nothing, and he would pull back from battles he couldn´t win.

"Then, everyone, let´s go."

With Karl´s orders, they started to retreat and moving to another

location. Their well-organized and without hesitations movement was so orderly to the point of it being scary. They had no hesitation in retreating; having soldiers not lusting over battles was actually something unexpectedly difficult. It was difficult for one to get his intentions across over a whole squad.

“Alright, let´s go fast, but silently.”

“Captain, if you keep talking, William-san will get angry.”

“Mugu!?”

It was difficult, but with William´s military experience and Karl ´s personality, they were able to get their commands accepted. Because of the persuasive power of William´s experience and achievements and Karl´s likeable character, they were accepted without any objections. The atmosphere of their squad was considerably good. Their fighting power was also increasing.

“”It is fine like that for now. This is the best possible.””

William was doing his best. Him being thorough with everything was him doing his best.

“….”

But even so, the person himself…

“Shit.”

...couldn´t accept it.

“Hm?”

The man at the center of the formation.

On the man´s eyes, a presence that was slightly surging up reflected.

“Oh, white mask, is it? Kuku, he is a coward just like the rumors.”

The white mask´s squad had pretty much already finished retreating. It was commendable how the white mask was using the terrain so well and had made a situation which was difficult for them to be pursued. However, this was all. To the man, there wasn´t anything to [fear].

“Heeey white mask! How about we fight each other without you running away!?

While there was that, this was a war that had been making the man very stressed. In terms of strategy, everything he tried to do would be neutralized, and expect for the man himself, most were being led around by their nose really well. Because the man had

confidence that he would be able to win if he was attacked head-on, he was filled with frustration.

“Hey, hey! Is it running all you can do!? The undefeatable white mask!”

If he couldn´t get very good trades, it wouldn´t be enough to make up for all they had lost. Actually, by looking at the whole battlefield, it could be seen it was their complete defeat. The equilibrium had already been broken. All the man´s main troops were doing was to pick up victories around and somehow mending the situation of the war. It was painful how he couldn´t even pick up those little victories.

“...Tch, he is really pulling back all the through.”

He was irritated, but he was also feeling admiration. The white mask had battle tactics that could perfectly read through the structure of his army and cut him from advantageous points, and his intuition that could see the opponent´s strength and judge whether to attack or retreat. Both of those were at a high level. And if one was to ask how badly the man was suffering because of that...

“...I need to hold out somehow until reinforcements come.”

His plan of making himself a bait in order to attract enemies misfired. The Taiyar side´s situation was definitely not good.

“This… shit.”

Thinking that it was good there was nobody around, William hit a tree with his fist with all his strength.

He couldn´t hear voices behind him anymore. They weren´t coming after him either. That´s why William didn´t hide his irritation.

“Even though I was supposed to be the one [superior]. Even though I was supposed to be stronger than a small fry like that, than a simple underling! Why am I!?

The fist he used to hit the tree was bleeding. Under the mask was a horrendous expression.

“For how long am I supposed to keep up like that! Strakules, Kail, those guys can understand it. They can even accept it. But… Why can´t I win even against a small fry like that!?”

Small fry. That was how that man reflected in William´s eyes. Because of the same reasons for others, he had kept retreating. His instincts were telling him that he couldn´t win against the man, but by its side, his reason was screaming, saying from the depths of his heart that William was the one superior.

“Until when will I keep… I… Even though I was supposed to be more capable than that.”

William had hit a bottleneck.

26. At The Encamptment

The hundred-man army Ekkart. Those were the main forces of the Tayar region and they have been on the rise in their performance recently. At the encampment, the cheers continued. The war was pretty much already won. The regular soldiers would be able to go back to their home, and the dreams of the mercenaries and irregulars were welling up with ideas of what they could do once they got their payment.

“You are so noisy, Frank. It´s not like you guys were doing anything.”

Ignahts puffed up his cheeks.

“But you know, how bad would it be if he wasn´t here... The reason why we could move around freely as we well wished was because those two smashed through everything into a path for us.”

Frank looked downwards to Ignahts due to their difference in height. Ignahts showed an angry face and straightened his back. Even so, it was to no use. Frank tilted his head, wondering about the curious action, and Ignahts twisted his face in annoyance.

“All was because of William-san´s... Rather, all was because of Karl-sama´s strategy. We simply attacked at the places they would told us to. And then, we would gladly take the enemies on...”

“Haven´t William-san said so himself before? That strictly speaking, even pebbles count? As long as you can put some amount

of pressure, anything is fine. That´s why.we were useful too. He said numbers are also important after all.”

“Hah, you can´t put the rewards we will receive and the ones the little pebbles will in the same level.”

“I guess. But I still think that we are getting it very easily. It doesn´t change the fact that all we have been doing was following what was being told to us.”

“With you putting it like that, it feels like we are pretty weak.”

Iknahts sat down. Frank followed him by lowering his head. In the end, there wasn´t anyone that could work their heads other than William, and except for the centurion of the Ekkart army, all the other ten-man captains had already perished.

“Ah, sorry for having you wait, you two. The meeting is over now.”

Karl suddenly showed up from the tent and approached the two people who were waiting for him.

“No, please don´t mind. So, how did it go?”

Iknahts, who was sitting down, stood up, and Frank also corrected his posture.

“Hm, I guess it is the same as always?”

The three exchanged glances and quickly left the place. Once they were far enough, Karl sighed.

“However, as to be expected, it is really depressing. The way people talk about the plans William came up with as if they were mine…”

With an angry face, he let out those words.

“But even so, didn´t William-san said that was fine?”

Karl´s face became even more frowny because of Iknahts´ question.

“Rather than having accepted it, it is more like he is entrusting it to me. He said that it would be more persuasive if I was the one talking to them.”

If it was by Karl, he would have everyone know about William´s incredibleness. He was feeling guilty because of how it looked like he was taking all the fame for himself, and he also didn´t like how he was using William.

“Perhaps this might be a bit rude, but as to be expected, I believe that the words of a noble and those of a foreigner have different weights. Perhaps, from an outside perspective, it might be easier and better for people to accept if William-san is the sword and

Karl-sama is the head.”

It was an explanation very much Frank-like. It was probably the truth, but Karl had many things he couldn´t accept about it.

“Well, wouldn´t it be fine to just put up with it? If we follow William-san´s plans, we will never lose, right?”

“I don´t think it is good to be proud about that…”

“Yes, yes, Frank is really the goody two shoes.”

“Ahaha, I guess for now we should go get William and ready the arrangements for tomorrow.”

“Yeah.” “Yes.”

In order to have the arrangements prepared, the three went to where William was waiting for them.

The three went inside the tent that was given to Karl´s ten-man squad. The tent wasn´t big or spacious, but it was still an incredible item that could be carried around by packing it, was light to carry and also could protect them from the wind to some extent.

“We are bac… Hm?”

William, who would normally be there thinking about the battle plans with the map spread out on the small table, would be greeting them now, but this time...

“.....”

William was sleeping.

“.....”

The three of them were dumbfounded. He was sleeping, peacefully breathing while sitting on the stool and having his mask on.

“...H-how early... I just witnessed something unbelievable.”

Iknahts expressed his surprise with a low voice so that he wouldn´t wake William up. Frank silently nodded, agreeing to him. Karl was also surprised, stupiditly looking at that scene.

“Wh-what´s the matter?”

In surprise, Frank hurriedly asked Karl.

“...Let´s for now leave the tent.”

As if all the three had been already planning on doing so from the

start, they left the tent.

The three were being surrounded by a mood that made it hard to talk.

“So even that person sometimes does show his weak side just like that.”

Frank quietly muttered. Inahts responded, saying “Indeed”.

“He looked tired these last few days, so I guess even if it is William we are talking about, there will be times he can be like that. Yeah.”

“Well, we were in a series of battles after all. We didn´t get to go back to Arkas for some time.”

“Also, these last days, it had been pretty much William-san that was moving our hundred-men army from behind the scenes, so I guess he would be having a proportional amount of anxiousness.”

Through Karl, William had been giving proposals about the movement of their army. In order for the proposals to be accepted, they also had to do things like bribery and flattering so that they would get Ekkart´s favor. It was only the obvious that William, who was by himself being responsible of the forefront work and the work behind the scenes, would get exhausted. In addition to that, he had to constantly keep their military exploits at the top, so what he was doing was not something ordinary.

“What will we do about our strategy meeting?”

Because of Ignahts words, Karl gave an irritated groan. After thinking for a bit, he said.

“Let´s more or less think about our plans, and then tomorrow, we will have William check it up. If we don´t rest for a bit, William will punish us.”

“Right. Since right now we are pretty much at a winning position, there shouldn´t be anything that would give us problems... What do you think about it, Ignahts?”

“I will leave that for you to think. After all, I´m not good at thinking just like you and Karl-sama.”

“Well then, let´s the three of us think about tomorrow´s plans... and then, let´s go sleep together!”

“!?”

Karl was being all excited. Yes, because the tent was being occupied by William, Karl needed to stay together with the other squad members. Karl, who had immediately risen to be the leader of a ten-man squad after the great battle of Raconia, had the privilege to sleep inside a tent. However, Karl himself wanted to sleep outside together with everyone. Right now, William, who would keep babbling about his image, wasn´t nearby like he would

usually be.

Even though they were at a winning position, they wouldn´t wake up William, who was needed for the planning. All this resulted in Karl being able to sleep outside. This was the outbursting of Karl Von Teirah´s supreme plan.

“Bu-but for the noble of the Teirah family to be sleeping outside…”

Frank let out a trembling voice. If it became known that Karl had slept outside, it couldn´t be imagined what Frank´s father, whose company was affiliated to the Teirah family, would say to him. What was even more scary was if that would incur Lord Teirah´s wrath. In the worst case, his family would be wiped out. Ignahts, who was more or less in the same position, also had his face become pale.

“At the end of the day, father is just some rich upstart. Now, now, let´s have our strategy meeting, and then, we are all sleeping together.”

“…It can´t be said that a noble family that had just three generations is just a simple rich upstart family though…”

“The other nobles say that though!”

“The-then, the conduct a noble should be taking…”

“Really, I will stop asking then. This is an order. The order of a noble!”

While the two couldn´t even let out any sounds, being in a different page, Karl was all cheery, seeming as if he was mistaking all this as some kind of sleepover. And then, the two...

“”That can´t be good.””

....said in unison.

27. Tower Of Karma

[William Rivius] was raised at a world that stinked of darkish sewer water. He was at the bottomest and was poor to no. This place was the beginning of the world, and was its end too.

He would drink muddy water. He would eat bread made of Kabi in small bites, and he would believe that was happiness. It was an unhygienic life where you would be the one of the first ones to die if disease spread. It was a daily life where people´s death was common. There were also times where the starving people would need to nibble on copses in order to make it through the winter. Anything would be done if it was in order to keep living.

If they were beasts, it would be fine like that.

If they weren´t humans, it would be fine like that.

However, may the world take care.

The ones that can change the world are people that at some point in time strayed from the path of humans.

[Al] was crying. [Arlette] would gently embrace him. Just like the [usual], the surrounding corpses would move around them and would keep raising voices of resentment. But there was something different from the [usual]....

“...I can... move?”

It was the fact that [William] could move. This spectacle of a dream where [William] wouldn´t be able to do the slightest movement changed into a world where he somewhat unconsciously was able to move. [William], who in his dreams would only be able to have the point of view that was in a certain way that of a god, for the first time was able to step onto this world with his own feet.

“...Am I wearing my mask?”

Sweeping his hand at his face, he found a foreign object. That roughness he was familiar with let [William] know that the object was the mask he would usually use.

“Well, fine.”

One step.

“Wha-!?”

The ones that were coiling around his legs was the owner of the bookstore of foreign books that had taken care of him in the past, Norman, and his wife. Their appearances were gruesome, and at their eye socks, there was an abyss nothing could be used to describe. With horrid corpse-like looks that had parts with skin and others with only bones, they clinged onto [William]´s legs.

“Why did you betray us? Even though we trusted you so much.

Even though we thought of you as our own son. WhhhhhhhhhhhhhhHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHYYYYYYYYYY!?”

“Tch, move over! You were in my way! In order to have myself killed, I needed to kill everyone that knew about [Al]. As to be expected, even with my presence being weak, you guys would´t forget about me. That´s why I killed you! If you understand that, get lost!”

[William] swung his leg and sent Norman and his wife flying.

Two steps.

“You aren´t William. I am William. You aren´t Norman either. You aren´t even Al. Then, who are you? What are you? WhAt aM i? WhY dId I HavE To DiE?”

A red haired corpse was hanging onto William´s right arm while being dragged on.

“Ha! Aren´t you stupid and miserable, William-kun! In any case, you would have died a dog´s death along the way anyway. Rather than that, you should be thankful, you know? For me to be using your name!”

[William] shook off the corpse that was clinging on his right arm and sent it flying.

Three steps.

“WhY?”

Four steps.

“I dOn´T WaNt To DIe.”

Five steps.

“I WanT tO mEet wITH My FamILY.”

Six steps.

“fOr tHe sAKE Of mY nAtiON.”

Seven steps…

[William] shook off everything and moved forward. He wouldn´t take any notice of the corpses he had killed. It didn´t matter. It didn´t matter what happened to other people. He wouldn´t even give them a glance.

“…As expected, you guys are really annoying, aren´t you?”

After going through the crowd of corpses, the ones who were ahead was [Al], a black haired boy who was crying while hugging his legs, and [Arlette], a black haired girl who comforted him.

“You are doing such a pathetic expression while using my face.”

[William] threw some words at [Al] as if he was spitting them. Getting frightened in reaction, [Al] raised his face. After looking at [William], he twisted his face in dislike.

“What are you making this face for?”

[William] moved his hand to the sword at his waist. [Al] got surprised, but at that instant, a certain person got in between them. [William] frowned.

“Ha, so at the end of the day, you are going to get in my way? Arlette-neesan!”

[William] had raised his voice aggressively, but the hand that was holding the sword at his waist didn´t move.

“You aren´t me. I am nee-san´s knight. I am not a monster like you.”

A straight refusal. [William] became irritated at that.

“...Don´t be kidding me. You say that even though I became like this because you wished for it! Because I am nee-san´s knight, because you wished that I cleared away nee-san of her regrets! We wished for that! That´s why I am here!”

“That´s wrong! What nee-san wished was for me to live in peace. Despite how I wished to get her revenge, what are you doing now? You killed so many unrelated people and committed crimes that had no meaning, and you still don´t even know the face of the man that killed nee-san. Are you supposed to be nee-san´s knight like that!? All you´ve been doing had nothing to do with nee-san!”

“Th-those were necessary steps. Nee-san is everything to me. That´s why, because they stole her from me, I need to steal from them even more.”

“Even if nee-san wished for something like that, that was only killing count Vrad. It´s not more, nor less than that.”

[William] was being talked down by the [himself] who was far smaller and weaker than him.

“Just like Kail had said before, you should have backed out from this war. You are twisted. Too twisted. You forgot her original wish, and you were doing bad things while using nee-san as an excuse. You don´t have any intent on taking revenge on nee-san at all. You don´t really love nee-san. You can´t be loved by anyone.”

At some point in time, a mountain of corpses had piled up behind [Al]. They were wiggling around and roaring out their resentment, waiting for their time to move, wondering when they would be able to engulf [William].

“Someone as bad as you can go die. We will kill Vrad in your

stead. And after that, it will be over. And then, just like nee-san wished for, we will live in peace. We will live quietly in modesty together with Kail and Havella. Yes, let´t become friends with Karl and Lutogarde too. If only you were to die, everything would....”

While [Al] was in middle of his talking, [William] threw his sword, which pierced [Al]´s belly. [Al] stopped talking and looked at [William].

“I see. I see... It is just like you said. I am mad. I am a failure as nee-san´s knight. ...But, what about it?”

The eyes that were deep inside the mask were trembling. The ruby hanging at his neck was shining like blood.

“At that time nee-san was eaten, I was born. I thought you had died at that time. But you were still living, weren´t you? And while you were hugging your legs and crying just like that... you were just waiting to eat me! Kuhaha, there is no salvation for me!”

As if to protect [Al], [Arlette] silently stood in the way. [William] showed a smile.

“Arlette-neesan. She would always protect me. Even after dying... she was preserving my heart. But I don´t need to be babysitted anymore!”

[William] straggled [Arlette]´s neck. With both hands, as if he was gently hugging her...

“I loved her. I loved her more than anything in the world. Even now I love her. But even so, that´s why I won´t use her as an excuse anymore. I can´t do that. Even if it started like that, this path I am going through isn´t revenge.”

He was twisted to a point of no hope. Since the beginning, he was already completely twisted. He didn´t have even a bit of sense of guilt for stealing from others. Rather, it was as if he felt only joy at doing that. There was no way this could be considered a revenge of Karma.

“I am quitting using her as an excuse, lying about doing revenge and trying to make justifications for myself. She is part of me; the excuse that this desire of revenge that had been dormant somewhere in my heart is... But, it is fine now. I became strong. Even if she isn´t here anymore, I am fine.”

Even while she was being strangled, [Arlette] didn´t stop smiling. That was an illusion that existed somewhere in [William]´s memories. It was a dream he wouldn´t be able to reach out his hands to for the eternity. It made him want to drown himself into those dreams. It made him want to jump into those sweet dreams. However, [William] wouldn´t allow that to happen.

“Are you going to kill Arlette-neesan!?”

[Al]´s angry roar strongly reverberated through [William]´s earlobes. With a twisted face, [William] looked at his eyes.

“Hey, hey, rather than me wanting to kill her or anything, nee-san had already died a long time ago. This I am holding in my hands right now is just a dream. Would she always be smiling like that? Did she love me? Nobody knows that kind of thing!”

[Al] was trembling.

“The nee-san that would [sell flowers] we don´t know of. The reason why nee-san wanted to leave that shitty house despite the money she would leave to me that we didn´t know of. Did you think you knew her true self? We were satisfied just with the one side of her that was given to us, and we were averting our eyes from the bitter reality. This is what I´ve been doing. This is what you are.”

“That´s wrong! Nee-san loved me, and I also loved nee-san. Here was the world that belonged just to the two of us! That´s why there is meaning in the revenge!”

“There is no way for us to be sure of that anymore. Nee-san is dead. Before we could hear her true words, and before seeing her bad side that perhaps might have existed, nee-san died. Of course, even if I were to know of it, I have confidence I would still love her. Even if she didn´t love me that much, I have confidence I would always love her. However, there is no way for us to know that. This thing that is in my hands is nothing more than a convenient dream after all!”

Without the slightest hesitation, [William] broke the neck of the illusion he loved with his hands. Raising a dry sound, [Arlette] had crumbled down for the eternity. [Al]´s scream resounded through

that world.

“I won´t use her as an excuse. Of course, I will give Vrad, who stole her, a suitable amount of pain. However, even that I will be doing it because I want to do so myself. If I hate, I will steal. If I am angry, I will steal. If I want, I will steal. In the way I see fit, I will be mad to my heart´s content.”

With his hands, [William] broke the revenge called [Arlette].

“The next will be you, little boy.”

[William] and [Al] were exchanging glances.

“You are mad.”

[Al] took out the sword the sword that pierced his belly and pushed it at [William]´s stomach with all his strength. Without quivering, [William] received the attack.

“Yes, I am mad. And from now on… I will continue being mad.”

[William] hit [Al] at the side of his face. [Al] was sent flying.

“You had always been inside me. While I was killing people, you were whispering: This is wrong, you can´t do these things. Sometimes, this would hurt, sometimes it would make me hesitate. … The conscience filled with gentleness, love, moral and

ethics I was supposed to have already thrown away a long time ago… That is what you are.”

Even while he was down on the ground, [Al] continued to glare at [William].

“You are doing wrong!”

“Maybe. But I won´t stop going forward.”

With his right foot, [William] stepped on [Al]´s head with all his strength.

“I kept denying you. I didn´t want to see you. The me who kept using nee-san as an excuse. I didn´t want to accept those things.”

[William] was rubbing his foot at [Al]´s head. He could hear cries. He could feel the sensation of conquest at his feet. This was joy. This was Karma.

“But I will accept all of you. I am good and evil. I am also the one that stepped over both good and evil. This increasing number of corpses, you, who keeps giving me a glare of disapproval, and also all these excuses; all this are things that composes me.”

“If you want to stop me, you can´t try as much as you want. I will rise even higher. I am so thirsty, but so thirsty that it can´t be helped. I want it so much, but so much that it can´t be helped. I want this and that; money isn´t enough, status isn´t enough, to

the me that has nothing, there is no way other than stealing.”

[William] headed towards the crowd of corpses. The corpses faltered at the irregularity.

“To steal is to satisfy oneself.”

[William] stepped over Norman´s wife, who he had a great debt of gratitude.

“To satisfy oneself is to win.”

He stepped over the red haired William.

“After continuing to win and after I satisfy myself, what will be the scenery in front of me? Will it be glittering? Will it be warm? Will it be pitch black? Will it be cold? To begin with, is there even anything that can satisfy me?”

He was stepping over the numerous corpses and was rising up. He didn´t have any hesitations anymore. Without faltering with his steps, he looked straight to the [top]. An absolute confidence, a firm pride. In order to prove that he was himself, step by step, he kept walking and kept proving himself of that.

“You… are doing wrong!”

He could hear [Al]´s shouts from [below].

“Kuku, keep shouting. Resentment is blessing, struggling is commendable; this thundering gospel of cries!”

The shouts of the corpses reverberated. The cries of resentment filled with hatred and the pulsation made by the corpses crawling away so that they are not stepped over followed along his feet. All this was turned into his joy, and also turned into his strength.

“If I show you any openings, you may kill me. If I show weakness, you may overthrow me anytime.”

Of course, [William] had no intentions of showing nor openings, neither weakness. However, he was on his guard. The karma he had built up was still midway, but even though he had just started, it was already this tall. If the day he satisfies himself and reaches the top comes, not even [William] could imagine how high would it become, nor how many lives would he need to step over.

Because of that, he needed to be cautious. Much more now that he reflected over the number of inhuman misdeeds he had built up, he asked himself whether he would be able to advance forward without hesitations or not. Of course, the answer for that question was...

“This starts from here. World, have you made your resolve? I did mine; the resolve to eat with might. We are hungry. We are thirsty. We can´t tend ourselves in any way other than stealing. This is who [we] are; a born usurper. May we head forward through our path!”

On the tower of corpses, a king was reigning. Now, the tower was still small, and the king was still weak. However, after he continues to reap life and continues to steal, this tower would definitely become far taller. The authority of the king who would reign over it would increase to no bounds.

All this would become the king´s power.

“I won´t give up! One day, I will stop you… and then, I..!”

“Fuh, though I think you were late on that a long time ago… Well, do your best.”

Now that [William] had become aware of himself, even [Al] was nothing more than part of the pile of corpses.

“…Do as you wish. With your own feet, through your own path…”

Whether those words were [Arlette]´s, or then…

“I intend on doing that. Thank you for taking care of me until now.”

[William] gave his thanks. He thanked to [Arlette]´s and [Al]´s existences. It was because they spent all this time on him that

[William] could get the strength to be reigning over at the top of the corpses. If they weren´t here, once he was engulfed by the corpses, he would have been downgraded into nothing but a beast.

“Now then, let´s move on.”

The masked king reigned by himself at the top of the tower of dead bodies.

28. William's Awakening

"....."

William slowly opened his eyes. As if he was certifying himself of his own existence, he swept his hand at his face. He could feel the roughness and the inorganic coldness of the mask at the tip of his fingers.

William checked his current situation. The shine of the candle had been gone long ago and the sounds of the banquet that was supposed to be happening outside the tent had vanished. In fact, most of the sounds had been gone and all he could hear was the sound of the trees.

"...Midnight, is it?"

William left the tent.

It was the usual darkness of the night you couldn´t see pretty much anything. The shine of the stars were distant and small to be of help.

"...I can see."

William slowly walked outside. He sneaked away from the encampment that was built in the middle of the mountains and he walked by himself at the deep night that even beasts would be sleeping at the time. His steps were as if he wasn´t actually

walking deep at the night. His steps that lacked any hesitation would properly find their way to the ground. The uneven ground felt as if it was flat.

“…I can hear.”

As if he was dancing, William´s heart was beating faster. The music was the orchestra of the night wind and the sound of the trees.

“It smells.”

The mountain was filled with smells. The smell of earth, the aroma of the trees, and from the distance, the smell of humans and iron, and some traces of the fragrance of blood. It was filled with scents; the world was filled with smells.

“Was it this much? Was it really to this extent!?”

Everything he was seeing was new. Everything he heard was fresh to him. Everything he smelled was vivid. The things he would touch, and the things he would taste were probably going to be new to him as well. The world had changed to these extents. Simple sceneries were enough to the point of making his eyes shine, simple sounds were to the point of making him want to dance, simple scents were to the point of making him “erect”; he was sharply feeling everything.

“Ku, kuhaha. Aren´t you mean, Kail! You´ve been seeing this

kind of view all along, weren´t you? You were feeling this world. This is not fair, you guys!”

The world was this much beautiful.

“Ahahahahahahaha!”

The world was this much fragrant.

“Is this the world you guys see? .....It is beautiful, and also....”

The masked man was pouring out a great number of corpses from him. A crowd of dead bodies. He was the king of the dead, who was surrounded by them and reigned over them.

“...and also, it is such a cruel and shitty world! It is cruel, noisy, and it stinks! But it is good. This is good. It is fine like that! I will paint this beautiful world with harshness. I will get my hands over everything that beautifully shines, and also that which horridly rots, and I will not leave anything for any of you. Everything, will be mine!”

William Rivius ruled over. (TL note: He will lose again, won´t he? -.-)

“Now then, world. Let´s begin! Will I eat you, or will I be eaten. Let´s face each other!”

The being that would usurp everything has been born.

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“...Eh? What is it now?”

“We are changing plans. We are in a good form today.”

William patted Karl, who was making a reluctant face, on his head.

“Believe in me.”

Karl was feeling anxious about how William´s aura was different from how it was until yesterday. But even so, Karl could only believe in William. He could only nod to him.

“Thank you. I will put my trust on you.”

What results would this change that Karl was anxious about bring?

“...Tha-that´s a joke, right?”

An unimaginable view unfolded in front of Ignahts eyes.

The banner of the Arcadian army was hovering over the summit. By the maps, that location would be considered part of the Tayar region; a land which Arcadia had never committed to. Perhaps this would be only temporary for now, but in either case, it had fallen to Arcadia´s hands.

This had been any better than they having taken over a single base, and looking at it in a good way, at most, they had taken control of one mountain. However, if the ones that had captured it were only a ten-man squad, this would become a different story.

“Sure, we didn´t go that much further, but even so, is it fine for nothing more than a ten-man squad to have come all the way here?

The enemy was splitting their army in groups, so all of them knew that they couldn´t leave it up to raw fighting strength. But even so, nobody thought that their base would fall. If it was the fighting strength of a hundred-man squad, it might not be impossible. However, the risk for doing that would be high.

“Don´t worry. We are doing war. There is no such thing as winning being bad.”

They were at the front lines at the borders of the enemy country. It wasn´t possible for one to know what was happening inside the country. It wasn´t known exactly how many soldiers they had. That was why usually people wouldn´t take the risk. Even for a hundred-man squad, it was difficult. To a ten-man squad, doing this wasn´t being sane.

“If we see the number of soldiers from the deployment of troops of the next few days from now, we will be able to more or less know how many soldiers they will commit to this war. Despite how much badly they had been cornered into a position of disadvantage, they didn´t reinforce their defences. They couldn´t. This was because they didn´t have spare soldiers for that.”

There was a body fallen by William´s feet.

“This guy made a mistake in his plans. He needed to throw away his pride and reputation and focus all the strength on their base. If he had done that, we wouldn´t have been able to take it down. The reason why they didn´t do that was because of their pride, and also because of his mistaken self-conceit.”

William looked at the lined up heads. One of the heads was the head of the centurion William had ran away from on the day before. The rest were the ten-man squad captains that were protecting the base.

“Because they believed that they would win against me, they had faced us right in the middle of the battlefield with the same square formation from the day before. They had misread me; misread us.”

William turned his eyes away from the heads as if he held no interest on them. William´s interest wasn´t being directed at them anymore.

“That´s why they lost.”

It was just like William said. Yesterday, they were in the same place they were previously, and they were organized in the same formation they were before, and they received an unexpected surprise attack from William and his squad. Because of that, they lost.

“”It was in an instant. It was only an instant until William-san´s sword cut through that centurion´s head. Somehow he feels like he is in another whole level. I can´t say anything but that. To be fair, the William of today is as much strong as he is being scary. He is sharp like a blade.”

Was it because today in particular he was in a good condition? Or will he continue being like that? This was something nobody knew. All Karl knew was a single thing...

“Karl-sama. We shall win. For the sake of the Teirah house. I will also do to my utmost.”

“Ye-yes.”

William raised his hand to the sky.”

“Let´s keep winning.”

One of the bases of Taiyar had fallen by just a ten-man squad. They had taken down a centurion. It had been a victory for Arcadia.

Since then, all the scorn Karl´s undefeated ten-men squad would receive vanished, and they started being known as the strongest ten-man squad of Arcadia in the true meaning of those words. The battles Karl´s ten-man squad was deployed would be won. They were strong to the point of that being spoken of them...

29. William And Kail

William was walking at the city of Arkas. His plans for the night were very tight in time, but right now, he had free time. Because Karl was playing around at the garden and glancing at William´s room with longing eyes, it ended up that William had to quickly run away. It couldn´t be helped that he was already exhausted from the reception he was receiving from Karl since the start of his vacation.

“And so, with all that explained, please train with me.”

“...Yesterday I had a match, so I am tired right now though.”

William had come Kail´s house, and was now standing at the front of it. Because of how he would only visit Kail sometimes, and because his white hair would stand out, he would wear a wig and a hat. Because the mask would do the opposite effect and stand out too, he wouldn´t wear it.

“Wait a bit. I will sort myself out.”

In the end, Kail had a soft spot for William.

“Dzua!”

“Mu!”

A parade of corpses enveloped William. When Kail saw that, he knew. He knew that William had understood the monster that was inside him. William had understood himself, and now had learned the technique to bring himself to his limits.

“How is it, Kail! I also learned how to do it too!”

The corpses laughed. “Katakatakatakatakatakatakata...” Both in joy and in displeasure...

“That´s right. With that, it became even easier to understand it, right?”

Suddenly, a chill. William´s skin was full of goosebumps. And then, the corpses stopped laughing.

“Both of us are now able to clearly see our current limits. Or then, well, something like that.”

Kail let out from his whole body something unimaginable. It was a giant, or better said, a giant warrior. The William of right now couldn´t imagine how much training would he need to do, and how much carnage did he need to go through in order to bring forward something as strong as that warrior.

“I will be relying on you to take easy on me.”

“I´ve been doing so all this time though? Skinny-kun.”

By looking at the difference in power they had, it was possible to understand it liking it or not. It was possible to understand the distance he had from Kail as a warrior.

“Daraaah!”

“Slow, light, weak.”

Recently, William had been undefeatable at war, but even so, it didn´t feel like he had even the slightest chance of winning against Kail. William was in a situation that he would be sent flying by his humming.

“Ouch, take it a bit easier.”

“I am taking it very easily. Even if you are in that state.”

William was all sweaty, and in comparison, Kail didn´t have even a single drop of sweat. The difference between them was experience. William´s friend was an existence that was very far further than him as a warrior to the point of it being annoying to him.

“There are only monsters at the coliseum after all.”

“No, I think you are going on the right track. I have said it before, right? I am strong.”

There was a trace of fatigue somewhere in Kail´s words.

“Could it be that you became the champion?”

“No comments. Well, even if I became it, there would be no meaning. Even if I have money, I have no way of using it, and even if I am surrounded by glory, it would be ignored by the people that want part of the glory.”

Dejected, Kail dropped his shoulders. William, who more or less guessed the situation, patted Kail´s shoulder. And then, remembering how he was being beaten, he started to feel a bit playful.

“By the way, I haven´t seen Havella around these days.”

“W-we weren´t talking about Havella though?”

Kail was flustered to the point it clearly showed on his face. When William looked at him acting like that, it took his all to hold his laugh back. He might have even Pfffed* a bit.

“Her busy season has already ended though? The summer festival has already passed, so if it is just like it had been these years, it should be her vacation right now.”

Kail silently nodded at William´s words.

“I had nothing to do at the time, so she treated me with a meal.”

“…Yesterday, is it? Could it be that it was also yesterday that you became the champion?”

“…No comments.”

William wanted to go to a bar to hear more of Kail´s too easy to understand excuses while ordering a lots of drinks, but because there was something he was worried about and because he had plans at night, there was no way he could be getting drunk.

“Once I finish this job, let´s the three of us hang out. Let´s put emphasis on the “three of us”.”

Kail put his hand on head. William ignored that and started thinking.

“Hang out, “the three of us”? That´s weird, even though

He knew about Havella´s attachment about the “three” of them being together. But letting aside Kail´s ideas, it was weird how he would propose this, which in his current situation it wouldn´t be possible to do, despite how even Havella understood how that wasn´t possible. No matter how much William was to disguise himself, if all the three were appear together in public, it was possible that he could be exposed by some kind of chance. Right now, except for places that there weren´t many people, it couldn´t

be said that it would be acceptable.

Despite all that, for the three of them to hang out, and besides, about the reason for Kail to go his way to say that could only be...

""Well, no matter how much I think, this can´t be helped, I guess.""

He didn´t have enough information to consider about his situation. Even if he was to think, all he would do was to go in circles.

""Besides, if I don´t go soon..."""

By looking at the sky, it could be seen that the sun was leaning towards the east considerably. He needed to make the preparations for tonight´s plans, so he couldn´t be late.

"Then, I will be going now."

"Hm, are you busy with something?"

Kail, who was intending to do the whole course of training, looked at William.

"Kinda. There will be a very important party. The one being invited isn´t me though."

“I see. I don´t really know about it, but do your best.”

Kail would be very careful about this kind of things. He wouldn´t inquire William about it, nor would he try to step into it. He was the type of person to separate private life very clearly.

“The next time we meet, I will be so strong that I will beat you to a pulp.”

“Then, this would mean that we won´t be able to meet for ten years.”

The two laughed. Whether it was for William or Kail, they could only show their smile among the three of them. Those bonds were more important than anything. Or at least, they still were...

30. Eahart Von Arcadia

The carriage William and Karl were on was shaking. They were sitting in a position which both were facing each other. Karl had a slightly frowny face.

“Where did you go on the afternoon? Even though I was planing for us to play together until night…”

“…Have you finished your homework?”

“…Oh, I am so excited for the party… Hehe…”

The conversation stopped there. The number one method to have Karl shut up was that. It was to give him some kind of question to solve. Then, he would keep quiet until he finished solving it. Karl would do his utmost to solve any questions given to him, but it was weird to him how William would give him questions that while were solvable for him, who didn´t have much knowledge, were still ones that would take him time to do. That was the method for those magic words that could shut the talkative Karl to be set up. Doing this might end up becoming a problem if William was to overuse it though…

“Who is the one that will be organizing the party?”

Because William thought it was a bit too pitiful for Karl, he brought up a topic to talk about. At that instant, Karl´s face brightened in happiness.

“Hmm, I believe it is the general Baldias. It seems like there were many people that received medals and promotions, so there will be many people related to the military. But because there will be very terrifying nobles, I am kind of nervous.”

The unmoveable Baldias. He was the ultimate knight; the one Arcadia was the most proud of. The way his name would thunder through the nations was one of the things that William aimed for. Of course, he didn´t intend on getting satisfied with only that.

“”The problem is the nature of the nobles. It is obvious their family ties aren´t firm. There is something there. That said, I don´t have enough knowledge about this world to be able to guess what it is.””

Regardless of that, Karl´s promotion to centurion was something that has been already decided. It was possible to be certain of that from the time Karl was invited to the party. It was just how many military achievements he raised. It is rare to see in the history for a ten-man squad to raise such achievements.

“”That said, neither I nor Karl have the power to eat up people of that level. The one to receive spotlight here is someone else. We are at most just extras.””

Even if they were only extras, once Karl was to become a centurion, the extension of their military tatics would widen immensely. To William, who felt that he was being limited by being on a ten-man squad, that moment was something he

anticipated.

“For now, let´s carry on calmly and without carelessness.”

“….These last few days William has been so much untalkative.”

The carriage was transporting the two of them. They were going to Baldias´s mansion, which was at the inner part of the noble district.

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Luxurious and gorgeous. It was a mansion that could be described by those words. Baldias apparently was someone that didn´t like gaudy decorations himself, but his position wouldn´t let him do as he pleased. The gaudiness of the inner part of the mansion wasn´t something one could casually have in their home.

“It´s really amazing how big this place is for how it can easily accommodate this many people.”

“Yes, as to be expected, you must have a house of this level in a place like this. Even if you had the money, you wouldn´t be able to buy the land. There is the eyes of people surrounding you after all.”

The land of the noble district was bound by unique rules. At the underworld, as long as you had the money to pay for it, you could have anything granted. However, at this place, there was

something called status that would come in need. In contrast, if you had status, even if you didn´t desire for it, you would need to live in a residence of those standards. The noble district was a place where status had the priority over money. Perhaps it was because of that that Lord Teirah was racking his brains to solve this problem.

“…Who is that masked man?”

“You see, it is that Teirah family´s…”

“Yes, that jumped-up…”

From their surroundings, eyes filled with wonderment were looking at the two that obviously didn´t have enough status to be there. Even Karl, who was supposed to be a noble, was being treated like that. As for William, his treatment was lower than that of a worthless nobody.

“You came with your mask on?”

“Yes. I am here as Karl´s shadow. Besides, there is no way the [White Mask] would just remove his mask.”

Together with William´s military fame, his nickname [White Mask] also spread. It was only limited to the countries neighboring Arcadia, but there were signs it was spreading little by little. This time, William had been invited as a soldier, and so wearing his mask was in fact part of his courtesy.

Of course his true intention was to have the mask make him stand out. Hence, in this place where standing out was next to impossible, it was a very convenient item.

“Karl, it really seems you are doing good, doesn´t it?”

Karl received a fright. His expression wasn´t really one of happiness. Rather, it looked to be one of dread. For the time being, William decided to observe what was going to happen. He was leaving him by himself.

“Karl´s invincible ten-man squad; is that how they call it? Isn´t this amazing?”

A female came over next to Karl and embraced his neck.

“That all sickly Karl is so lively now.”

“N-no, compared to Hilda, I am nothing…”

“Compared to Hilda? Since when did I become something that you can just compare to? In the end, it is Karl-chan´s bad habit to get all cocky.”

Raising her eyes, the woman called Hilda looked at William.

“Or could it be that you are all happy after finding your so

excellent sword? Hm?”

There wasn´t the slightest warmth in her eyes. Rather, it was killing intent that overflowed from it. Wind gushed out from her body. Like a windstorm, it hit William´s whole body. It carried a distinct killing intent.

“”This guy too… can use it?””

William evaluated his opponent. The wind-like aura gushing out from her whole body was her peculiarity. Seeing that he couldn´t feel malicious intents coming from her, she should be a good person. However, the hostility being brought against William wasn´t something average.

“Hahan, so you can see it too. My name is Hilda Von Gardener. Dame Hirda you may call. That´s quite the good mask, handsome.”

Dame. In order words, it was a woman that received the title of a knight. The knight positions in Arcadia weren´t passed down by heritage. They were titles that could only be obtained by making achievements in the battlefield. It was because of that that the nobility desired it. It was because that would become a symbol for what they achieved in the battlefield.

“It is an honor to receive your praise, Dame Hilda. My name is William Rivius. I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”

Even without her knight title, William could see that she wasn´t

average. And besides that...

“I am eagerly waiting for the day we can fight on the battlefield side-by-side.”

William was also someone abnormal. The stench of corpses followed him to the point of it being lightly fragrant. Hilda´s eyebrows moved in surprise.

“Heh, the disparity between you and Karl is more and more.”

Throwing Karl aside, she approached William. Hilda´s eyes were set on William. She had just been trifling around with Karl.

“I don´t care what happens to this sickly, to his old brother or to that suspicious-looking old man, but if something happens to Lutogarde, I will be killing you, so best regards.”

After saying that, Hilda left them. The two were left with surprised faces.

“...Is she Lutogarde-sama´s acquaintance?”

“No, I guess... she is her best friend? Like you saw before, Lutogarde doesn´t have many friends. Among the few she has, Hilda is the only one that still hangs out with her. But Hilda is busy, and there is also her family lineage, so it is not like they meet often.”

Hilda´s family lineage. Even though William got a little bit caught up into all that, he decided that he didn´t need to inquire about that in particular. In brief, being the daughter of a marquis, the Teirah household couldn´t match Hilda.

“”From what I saw, she has a lot of acquaintances and is very sociable…. I can´t imagine she being friends with Lutogarde.””

Many people surrounded Hilda, coming to greet her. Most of those people were Hilda´s acquaintances. Could those be her connections? The familiarity she showed them was transparent.

“Hilda is a primi ordines. She is the most successful centurion among the young ones. You see, those people that are talking to Hilda right now are other centurions from her same generation. All of them came from the same school. …I dropped out from it though, ehehe…” (TL note: Primi ordines is basically a high-ranked centurion.)

The people that were talking to Hilda indeed had a different air to them. While they had the airs of nobility, they still smelled like the battlefield. Among them, there were ones that had a considerable aura around them.

“You are being too humble. Even without the school or something else of the sort, won´t you be catching up with them today?”

“Eh? What do you mean by saying catchin…?”

At the same instant Karl said that, the place became silent. At the second floor of the saloon, the organizer of today´s party, Baldias had showed up at a place he stood out. His presence didn´t lose to the gaudily decorated mansion. That was what nobility was; that was what a general was. It made everyone swallow a mouthful of saliva.

“”I see, as expected of the unmovable Baldias. He is quite up to his standing.””

Before, William was worried about how he would react if he was to be hit by his aura, but for some strange reason, he was very calm. Having the mask and having met Strakules had been both very consequential for him right now.

“I am sincerely grateful for all of you to have come to my humble home. Although modest, I have prepared you food and beverages. However, before that, I would like to hold the nomination ceremony. If possible, I would like you to stand up.”

Including the ones that were sitting before, everyone was standing. With that said, there weren´t many people that were sitting at that time.

“Today, as the organizer of this party, I was supposed to be the host of the ceremony we will be holding. However, due to last-minute circumstances, the host has changed. I will be entrusting the nomination ceremony to this person. Everyone, please, give a round of applauses.”

Troubled about what to do, the applauses given were sparse between the people. Some were clapping with all their energy. In particular, it were those that had so high status to the point the standards of the place didn´t match theirs.

“”Why? Is something coming?””

The answer to William´s confusion was….

“Your Highness Eahart Von Arcadia

“Hahaha, like always, you are really bad at giving introductions of this sort, Baldias.”

The one that appeared was a monster enveloped by a golden aura.

“Ha?”

At that instant, William´s consciousness was blown away. He couldn´t properly be conscious of that person whose eyes shined in gold. That person had this much amount of power. His aura and everything else was different.

“I-it´s the second prince. Th-this is the first time I´ve seen him.”

Karl´s legs were trembling. It was as if the god up in the skies had

descended. It wasn´t impossible to compare the prince to that.

“Your invitation for today´s party is more than I deserve, your Excellency, the unmovable Baldias.”

“I would like to ask your Highness not to bully the aged. Now then, I will be leaving it to you, your Highness.”

Eahart was now standing at the place Baldias stood before. Eahart ´s presence was so incredible to the point of one being able to believe that the place he was standing at was the center of the world.

“Everyone, I believe some of you are seeing me for their first time. I will immediately introduce myself to you. My name is Eahart Von Arcadia. It is an honor to have made your acquaintance.”

Despite of how the prince was depreciating himself and humbly introducing himself, it was difficult to give a response to him. All the people were petrified, thinking on how were they supposed to react to that. Eahart was bitterly smiling in a bored manner.

“I am sorry. As I am nothing but the second prince, for such complicated standing, there was no way I could act prideful to all of you. I cannot become the king because of my elder brother after all.”

An explosive declaration. Out of all things the second prince

could say in that place, it was something related to the crown. That was enough for it to be a great incident. The shock coming from the stage was so strong it made everyone paralysed.

“Your Highness, please, stop playing around.”

Baldias spoke. With those words, Eahart showed a playful smile.

“Now then, let´s immediately begin the ceremony. First, I would like to say that everyone has been working for the sake of Arcadia very well. In our last war at Raconia, we have been vigorously piling up victory after victory. All this was due to everyone´s support. This evening, we´ve prepared as many satisfactory promotions, medals and special rewards as possible to us. We cannot blunder the following feast after all.”

As if he was already used to the prince treatment, Eahart was showing a small smile.

“Now then, we will be starting the. First…”

From a position that was higher than the military, the promotions and medals were being told.

Regarding that, William was frowning his face under the mask.

“”My power and knowledge is above them. Despite that, there was that much of a difference between them and me. Those are people that stood on the top of the skies since birth. ….This really

shakes the heart.”””

After people died, they would become the same. William believed that. Because all of them were people that would similarly be taken by death, then it didn´t matter who was above or below. It didn´t matter who was nobility and who was the slave. He believed that.

However, whether that was really the truth, and whether death was truly equal despite how there was so much difference at birth, then where was the reason proving why only death was equal? William didn´t know whether the paths they would go would differ after they died, or if a monster like that could really die to begin with. He didn´t know any of it. He started to feel like he didn´t want to know.

“”Eahart Von Arcadia.””

That was the second prince. Then, how much distant was the first prince, not to say the king.

Suddenly, William´s and Eahart´s eyes met. It happened so quick that it wasn´t clear whether their eyes really met, but William knew of one thing. He knew about the distance between them. William used to believe the speed he walked was fast. He used to think his growth speed was fast enough. However...

“”It´s not enough. Not enough at all. With that pace, how am I supposed to catch up with those guys!?””

He was fed up with his own naivete. He needed to run up faster, and much higher.

“”Heh, so that´s the rumored white mask?””

In the same way, Eahart also noticed the abnormality within William. To him, William was just a very small existence. He could easily be blown away. That was the position William was standing at. However, that small existence was struggling. Eahart could see it was desperately extending its hands to heavens.

To Eahart, this was so unbearingly humorous, but so much that...

“”Isn´t he nice? That guy.””

...That it got his interest.

William and Eahart. Heavens and earth had for the first time met. At that time, nobody knew whether it was heavens that would crush earth, or if it was earth that would eat heavens.

31. Knighthood And Citizenship

“Hilda von Gardener. Step forward.”

“Yes!”

Finally the turn of the young aspirants came. Soon it would be Karl´s turn. William was looking at Karl, who was beside him. Because had his hands full just on himself, he hasn´t been paying attention to Karl. But then, just to be sure, William....

“...”

Karl was frozen stiff. Despite seeing that, William let out a smile instead.

“...I guess it will be difficult even if I was to tell him to calm down.”

As he was trembling, Karl turned his eyes to William.

“Wh-wh-what should I do. I-If I do any mistake in front of his Highness, my family will...”

Destruction would befall the Teirah family. It was obvious. This was the place Karl and his family were standing at. This was the feeling of tension of not knowing which words would inquire the anger of the monster that supported a kingdom in its back. It was

more unreasonable to tell him not to feel pressured.

If there was the chance that the people William cared for were to get involved with that problem, he also wouldn´t be able to stay calm like he was now. Family was something distant in the past; him being by himself was the reason for his carefreeness. Perhaps in a certain sense this could be considered not being restrained by that heavy pressure.

Hence, William thought it should be fine if he was to lend his shoulder to Karl for just a little bit.

“That´s right... If you fail...”

With words of failure being spoken, Karl´s tension increased.

Hilda, who had received a special reward, was glancing at Karl´s direction with a worried face. If Karl was to fail, Lutogarde would also suffer for that. Perhaps it was because of that that she was being worried, or then, it was the pity of seeing an acquaintance suffering. If not, then perhaps...

“If you fail... then let us crumble together.”

“Bh!?”

Karl spat out in a weird manner. Fortunately, because the two were in a far away place, nobody heard it. Of course, something of this sort is to be taken into consideration.

“I will take the prince as a hostage and have negotiations with the king. Then, we would seek asylum in Ostoberg or Garius or some other kingdom. While it would be a long travel, it would also be interesting if we were to go to the distant Arkland. How is it? Doesn´t it make you excited?”

William was saying absurd things. Even Karl knew all that were just dreams.

“This is not the time to be saying jokes.”

One after another the young aspirants were being called. It wouldn´t be weird if Karl was to be called next now.

“I´m not saying this as a joke. If you make any mistakes there, all I have to do is to simply do that. I have already visualized how it would happen. I will protect Louran-sama, Aianhart-sama and Lutogarde-sama too. From the beginning, since that time, I became your sword. I am not serving Arcadia; I am serving Karl von Teirah.”

In the inside, William was filled with lies. William felt a bit uneasy on how he was able to tell all that so smoothly. It was because of how it felt as if he was telling the truth that...

“Am I unworthy of it?”

William looked at Karl´s eyes. The eyes tell as much as the

mouth. And that was why…

“You aren´t, you are good enough!”

Karl´s trembling stopped. It´s body that was stiffened had some of its limpness returned.

“Karl von Teirah, step forward.”

Karl´s turn came at last. Before, it wouldn´t have been weird if Karl had fainted at that moment. However, right now…

“Yes!”

He stuffed his chest with pride and walked forward.

“Be calm. I will be following behind you.”

“Yes!”

Karl advanced forward. William was the sword that protected Karl´s back. A sword of such loyalty that approached the extents of absolute sincerity. Karl didn´t have any doubts on such absoluteness. Because of that, Karl walked forward filled with confidence.

“Hou, so that´s the one of the Teirahs.”

The surrounding eyes slightly changed seeing his imposing standing figure.

“Karl, you…”

Hilda too showed surprise at the change Karl, who she knew since they were little, had.

“”William is together with me. He told me that. In that case, all I need to do is to believe.””

Without hesitations, his sight was directed to heavens. He looked at Eahart von Arcadia.

“”To me, William… is even higher than his Highness.””

Wind blew. Although for only an instant, there was no mistake. It was only a breeze, but it definitely happened.

“…Karl?”

This was the growth that not even William…. No, it was because it was William, who had been together with Karl all this time, that he had never expected: the growth of Karl von Teirah. It wasn´t just William to have come to that realization.

Karl got down on his knees and bowed his head down. His

conduct was what was expected of a noble; it was refined.

“Ten-man leader Karl, the rumours about you have reached even my ears. Your military results were incredible. In the whole history of Arcadia, there hasn´t been any ten-man squad that has made as much excellent achievements as you. Therefore....”

Eahart took out the sword in his waist.

The place became in uproar. Cold sweat ran through Karl´s back as he wondered if he had committed any mistake. That was an instant of tension for William, who was watching that scene. If what he thought it was going to unfold happened to be the case, he would need to make his move.

“Karl von Teirah will be promoted from a ten-man squad leader to a hundred-man commander. In addition, I will grant Karl von Teirah the title of knight!”

The place was in clamor. There were many that expressed their surprise with loud voices. Karl himself was also surprised. He was desperately making all his efforts to not let that feeling out of his mouth. However, sweat only increased on his back. What happened was something out of expectations for William. A ten-man squad captain receiving the title of knight was something unheard of. Moreover, among the nobles, Karl was only an emerging low-class noble family that didn´t even have any connections. What just happened was impossible.

“Do you swear you will become a sword for the kingdom?”

The sword was softly put onto his shoulder. An impossible occurrence was happening.

“I swear on my sword.”

Eahart smiled when he heard that answer. He sheathed his sword and went back.

“Karl von Teirah, you may go now.”

“Ha!”

It happened for only a short time, but to Karl, it was like eternity. He had resolved himself and walked forward, but he couldn´t have expected that what awaited him was such an overwhelming thing.

“Th-this is bad William. I can´t breath…”

“You´ve done well. Even I was surprised. Who would have thought you would become a knight. And not only that, but even someone of the royalty was present.”

With his arms. William supported Karl, who had his strings cut by all his tension, and started to think.

He started to think about the reason why someone from the royalty was present in the party. The reason was simple. Let aside

knight titles, even giving nobility titles was limited to the royalty. Karl received the title of knight, and therefore, someone of the royalty went his way to come here for the sake of granting it to him.

“At last… William Rivius, step forward.”

“Eh?”

Before, the place was all boiling with excitement with Karl´s entitlement to knight. That same place immediately became silent.

Karl was surprised. Once again, for William to be called was something that was the most unexpected out of the things that were outside of expectations. It may be possible for people being nominated centurions to be called, but it was impossible for people being nominated a ten-man squad leader to be called there. In that case, why in the world was William called?

“William Rivius.”

“Ha!”

For the moment, William had to walk forward. Moving Karl out of the way, he stepped forward. The voices of the many people gossiping about things such as “That guy is a foreigner, isn´t he?” “He isn´t even a ten-man captain yet” “Why is the white mask being called for?” “Could it be he got his Highness displeasure?” reached William´s ears.

William arrived in front of the stairs. He turned his eyes to heavens. The golden monster was right in front of him.

“”He seems tasty.”

Drool overflowed his mouth. He slurped it back. With his tongue, he hurriedly held back the saliva that was about to drip out of his mouth. William started feeling like laughing. Having to step forward to such place and getting into a situation he knew nothing of what was about to happen, William enviously desired the man in front of his eyes. He desired to steal from him from the depths of his heart. He wanted that light. If he stole it from him, his thirst, his hunger would definitely be satiated.

“Now then, first I would like to apologise for having suddenly called you. This might sound like an awkward question, but.... Could it be you are an ugly person?”

Eahart suddenly asked William something unimaginable.

“I cannot decide for myself whether I am ugly or not, but I have confidence my appearance is fine for exposure to the public.”

William laughed under his mask satisfied. This was a question about his mask. In that case, many answers could be thought about. If William had been brought here only for the sake of this question, then this was something that he could be thankful about. This place was somewhere that made him stand out very well.

“Then, do you wear this mask for some reason?”

Just like William had thought.

“This is a tool to separate my warrior self from my normal self. At the battlefield, there are times I start feeling a deep killing intent. At those times, due to my mask interposing between the two, I can have composedly make objective decisions.”

“Is that the motive behind Karl´s ten-man squad success?”

“All achievements were accomplished by Karl-sama´s strength, of course. My strength is nothing but negligible. Moreover, if your Highness were now to ask whether this mask is important to me, the answer would be yes, your Highness.”

William kept his head bowed. Eahart looked at him from above.

“Fufu, I won´t make such inelegant action such as taking the mask away from the white mask. All I wanted is to ask about it. Now then, to the main point at hand.”

It seems Eahart didn´t call William here to chit-chat. He called him with a motive. Something must have happened.

“I´ve heard a lot about your achievements. You´ve taken down the high-ranked centurion Haian at Raconia. At Tayar, you´ve also

taken the high-ranked centurion Urkeus. A few days ago, you´ve even taken down the [Polar Bear] of the small northern country of Ratolukia, the centurion Shulvester Niklainen."

The people that had military connections to Baldias´ troops became open-eyed at that information. Hilda and the other youngsters were also open-eyed in surprise.

Shulvester Niklainen, the [Polar Bear], was an old experienced centurion that boasted of his tremendous popularity with the populace. He left his name in history when he battled Baldias at the days Baldias was still a centurion. Because he was a commoner, he couldn´t be promoted higher than that, and much more now that he became old, he had been battling in the frontlines of Ratolukia. William had killed this caliber of a man.

""Rumours travel fast. I thought this time it wouldn´t be included in the investigations.""

William having killed Shulvester was really recent. Recent to the point that even Baldias wouldn´t have been able to know about it. For Eahart to have caught such information so fast, it could be seen he wasn´t a simple royalty. But even so, there should be a reason for that...

"Of course, your achievements until now have been incredible. However, it is not enough to call your achievement of having killed the [Polar Bear] just incredible. Do you know why is that?"

The battle against Shulvester has indeed been heroic. Even with

how William was now, he had been considerably puzzled when making his decisions. Because Shurvester himself was old, he had lost his edge. Not only that, William barely defeated him.

Cooperating with the centurion responsible of the front, they had encircled Shulvester, and when he was about to forcefully break out of the encirclement, William attacked. Despite how Shulvester was supposed to be all weakened and full of wounds, he was much more powerful than before. After William and that monster having clashed their swords many times, William was finally able to kill him.

For having killed such monster, it wasn´t weird that William was receiving that extend of praises. It wasn´t weird, but in the end, it was the leader who received the price; the centurion. Besides, his golden days of fame had passed long ago. He didn´t think he would get something special from having done that. In the end, it would be considered as if he killed nothing more than just some simple soldier...

“Ratolukia, you know, has surrendered to Arcadia. That was something I´ve heard last night though.”

William was still with his head down. Karl looked at William. It wasn´t only Hilda and the other youngsters, but rather, all people in the whole place were open-mouthed. This was how much it was a shock to them.

“Originally, that country didn´t have resources left. They were in a condition which their land was becoming barren and infertile, and they were starting to stray from the image of what a nation is

supposed to be. It was only a question of time until they crumbled. However, this last push was the defeat of the hero [Polar Bear]. It was the victory of Karl´s undefeatable ten-man squad and the centurion responsible for that. I thought not giving anything for the one responsible of bringing down a whole country was something improper as to be expected. That was why I have come here."

While there was the reason of giving Karl the knight title, this was the main reason. William was finally able to understand. He also understood the reason why Baldias didn´t know about it, and only Eahart knew of that. Matters about a country crossed over the jurisdiction of the military; that was the territory of the government. Eahart took his information from there.

"However, you are still not even a ten-man squad leader. Even considering your achievements, this is still a fact. While I believe saying this makes it too small of an evaluation of you, it is difficult for me to promote you in one go. Besides, Karl-kun is from noble descendancy while you are a foreigner. Giving you the title of knight so suddenly is difficult."

Eahart drew his sword.

"Therefore, I will grant William Rivius the status of a second class citizen. Of course, with the condition you will continue to work for the sake of our kingdom as a ten-man squad leader."

Even if one was to marry someone, while the born child would be a second class citizen, the person himself, who was a third class citizen, wouldn´t have his social position changed. This was the

exceptions among exceptions. Perhaps for Karl and the other nobles it didn´t feel like that big of a deal, but to William, he could only feel surprised.

He believed that he could get detached from his third class citizen status by becoming a noble. This was a very narrow path. William believed those were matters that were still distant in the future.

“Do you swear on becoming a citizen of our nation?”

It wasn´t like anything would change if he was to be recognized as a citizen. It wasn´t like his privileges would increase, and his standing and merit simply became that of a [normal citizen], which was so distant from him before.

“I swear. I swear on my life.”

However, William was showing a smile on his face. He had finally went up a step that was actually definite. It wasn´t like William wanted to rise in the military. At most, the military was just a tool for him to step onto. This was the only method.

“William Rivius, you may go now.”

His objective was to rise in power in this country. It was to eat up all the people that would scorn at him as if he was lower than worms. The has finally decided the reason behind this goal [now].

“Ha.”

It was possible for the king to give position to people. This power was one similar to the one of god. Something like that was only possible after standing over ten thousand people. In that case, all he aimed for was only one thing.

The top of people. In other words, [king].

William turned around and saw the scene that had been unfolding behind him. Nobility, nobility, nobility; the bunch that were chosen. William once again realized that this was still half-way. He realised that he was still at the bottommost position, and that his origins were the lowest. It was because of that that all this had meaning.

“”Hehe..!””

It would be interesting if a lower class was to eat up all this. It would suffice as a comedy show, truly.

“”I will eat all of them. But that after I am done eating the ones at the back.””

Under the white mask, a beast of greed quietly boiled.

32. The Young Lion Cubs Of Arcadia

The promotion ceremony ended and the hall was turned into a buffet. There was wine made with high-class grapes, toasted bread, fresh meat and vegetables, and there was even high-quality fish dishes even though Arcadia didn´t have access to the sea. All people separated themselves into many groups and would eat, drink and engage on interesting conversations. The groups were composed by people that had a corresponding standing to the place. And so...

“There is nothing to do.”

“Yes.”

William and Karl didn´t have anything to do. To silently keep eating would give a shabby impression, and they didn´t know what to talk about either. Karl didn´t have enough status to mingle with other groups, and William was at most nothing more than a second-class citizen.

“”However, there are people that are giving glances at us. Whether it is for vigilance, interest, or some kind of expectation.””

William was aware that sometimes eyes would be gathered at them. Let alone Karl, who was granted the title of knight, it was William, who received the title of second-class citizen, which was something unprecedented in history. Once William got better status after raising a few more achievements, it would be him the leading actor in this place. Today wasn´t that day. That´s all there

was to it.

“”There is no need to be flustered. There is the need to hurry up though.””

He would raise military achievements. Now that the Karl´s ten-man squad became Karl´s hundred-man squad, the variety of strategies that could be employed increased. The influence they could have on the battlefield was something that couldn´t be compared to the time they were still a ten-man squad. The amount of achievements would increase too.

“Karl, whity, can you come here for a moment?”

“Eh, Hilda?”

Hilda, who had been talking to a crowd of people before, came to where Karl and William were standing isolated. There were some people waiting at the place Hilda was pointing at. Karl caught his breath. Even though he made a face of not wanting to go, he was dragged by the ears.

““I see, it is the nobles´ little young masters.””

It was the graduates of the school Karl couldn´t get in. They were sons of nobles that swiftly made it through the elite course, and probably had already been given positions as centurions from the beginning. And also...

“”Comparatively, they are pretty good.””

From what William could see, the people Hilda was introducing them to had probably been gems she sorted out from the lump of raw ore in the past. They should be people that Hilda could put her trust at to a certain extent. Their aura were also reasonably good.

“Well, since he stood out before, you should know, but this feeble guy is Karl. The white one is William.”

Hilda gave a vague introduction. Hilda didn´t know about William to the point she could introduce him to begin with, and it probably wasn´t necessary to tell them about Karl either. But even so, two of the people were looking at them with their interest deepening, though one didn´t even look at their eyes.

“I am the centurion Anzerm Von Krulgar. Please take care of me may we meet in the battlefield.”

The black haired and blue eyed Anzerm. He was the eldest son of the household of Krugar and possessed the title of knight. His father was a marquis, and by the Arcadian law, he automatically had the right to the title of viscount. Noticeably embezzling his title of viscount, he had the evidence of his merit in the battlefield by having the title of a knight. His well-shaped body and his virile face would tell he had gone through many experiences.

“My name is Gregour Von Tundar. Because of the sudden death of my father, I currently have the position of count. Nice to meet you!”

Although it was inferior to the household of Krulgar, bulky Gregour had come from a distinguished family. Because of his father´s sudden death, he immediately succeeded his title of count. Swinging his huge weapon by using his big physique at the battlefield, he trampled down many soldiers. Although he didn´t name himself as such, he was a centurion.

“I don´t feel the need to name myself to those people. I beg your pardon, Hilda.”

The man that didn´t name himself left without looking at neither Karl´s nor William´s face even once. Hilda sighed. Karl breathed out in relief.

“Sorry there, Karl. He had been that kind of guy since way back then.”

Gregour placed his arm at Karl´s shoulders in a friendly manner. Karl was shrinking away.

“His name is Gilberto Von Osvalt. His family is at the title of duke. I guess he is probably the one with highest standing here in terms of family prestige if you take out the prince? He is a disagreeable guy, but… he is very strong.”

Hilda looked at William and explained. William expressed his gratitude by saying “thank you very much”, but this was still something that was clear just by looking at. His aura was different. Well, the same could be said to the three people at the place.

“Is Lutogarde doing well? Let me meet her this time.”

The instant Gregour said that, Hilda gushed forward a huge amount of killing intent. Although Gregour evaded the topic, saying “It´s just a joke, just a joke”, Hilda kept glaring at him.

“”What a weird guy. Is that plain girl really any good?””

William didn´t know any good points about her at all, and there also weren´t many men that Lutogarde was able to properly have a conversation with. It might have indeed been a joke just like the person himself had said...

“I had fought against Haian once. I´ve wanted to meet you, who killed him.”

Anzerm extended his hand for a handshake. He had strength, and also seemed to the the type that would handle people without favoritism. That is, if the other party had strength.

“Please take care of me, Anzerm-dono.”

Anzerm´s fighting prowess could be felt by the grip on his hand. Probably it was the same for Anzerm from William.

“Although Anzerm is a viscount, he hates being called in that way. If you are going to use honorifics, you should use the “sir”

used for the title of knight, white mask.”

Now it was Gregour that extended his hand. William could feel the same amount of power he could see from his appearance.

“So, you were the one that defeated that Shulvester Niklainen? No, it is not that I am glorifying you, [White Mask]. The legends about that person spread not only to the bordering Arcadia, but also to distant countries. He was indeed a living legend. If this had been when you would had already become a ten-man squad leader, you would have got a set promotion of centurion and the title of knight without any problems…. Such a shame!”

Gregour praised William´s military exploits of having killed Shulvester. However, his eyes weren´t smiling. Rather, a faint jealousy of having taken down the legend could be seen. This was probably the same thought Hilda and all the people from the military that were present at the party had as well.

To be lucky and have killed a legend after it had grown old.

“I would like to hear how you took him down for future references.”

Although Anzerm´s expression didn´t change, he was overflowing with interest.

“Then I may overstep the bounds a little. First, I had cooperated with the local centurion. And then, we planned to surround

the....”

If this was so he could deepen his bounds with centurions that were truly strong, doing this was nothing. If he was to do large-scale strategies in the battles from now on, coordinating would be essential. Telling the general idea of the plan as it being something Karl had thought, William continued his story.

Looking like Hilda got bored out, she was using Karl to play around. It was Karl´s game of pulling his cheeks around. This was one of the reasons why Karl was bad at dealing with Hilda since his childhood.

“That´s bad.”

“たてたてよこよこまーるかいてちょん！” (TL note: Hilda is saying that while pulling Karl´s cheeks Romaji: Tate tate yoko yoko maru kaite chon. A rough translation would be something like: Up down, up down, left right, left right, draw a circle, chon. (Dunno what chon is -.-) This would be the directions the person is pulling the cheeks. Looks like this is used as “punishment” for games that have that. -> “Batsu geemu”)

“It hurds!?”

Despite all, this was still an exchange between two centurions.

33. The Ones That Watch Over From The Top

“Baldias, would it be there the people that had good prospects are gathered at?”

Eahart was looking at one group in the buffet party happening at the lower floor. The young centurions were talking to each other. Away from them were many other groups, but they didn´t give off auras that were as thick as the aura being given off from that one group. Eahart picked people by their auras. Their goodness and wickedness would appear in their appearance. One´s aura was individual; it was like a meter that would show one´s characteristics. Whichever field may the person be good at, as long as the person has talent, it would naturally be retained in the aura.

“That´s right. But I didn´t think Karl von Teirah would be together with them.”

The blonde blue eyed young man. He was still young in terms of age, but his figure made him seem childish. At first glance, he didn´t give off any aura. In Eahart´s view, that person was someone he wouldn´t think of appointing to an important position.

“He is that man´s front cover. The excellent one is the masked. He is very good; I really want him.”

Slurp*

Eahart was drooling. Eahart was a collector of talented people. It would be no problems for him to get capable pawns no matter how many he wanted. What would shine the most was the talented. Eahart was fond of that shine.

“Why did you have to call me for such worthless gathering.”

Behind Eahart was an peerlessly beautiful woman who elegantly relaxed and felt at her own home as maid servants washed her feet and fanned her with a traditional fan.

“Don´t say that Claudia. Isn´t their resume reasonably good?”

“They don´t have enough prestige. Not enough to see me.”

To Eahart, it was exciting for him to have so many talented people gathered together, but for the woman called Claudia, they didn´t have enough status. To her, there was nothing to be seen there.

“This is the first time I have seen so many people together, ani-sama.”

In contrast to Claudia, there was a girl that looked at the lower floor with interest. The girl was also an unparalleled beauty. If Claudia was bewitching, the girl would be sweet. It was a type of

charm that went into another direction. Of course, both were still beauties to the point that if there were a hundred man, all the hundred of the men would ask them for marriage. It was beautifulness they had since they were born.

“That´s right, Eleonora. Hey Claudia, you come over too.”

Claudia was feeling annoyed from the depths of her heart. Eleonora was excited and full interest. Because this was the first time she left the royal palace, all she would see and hear would be new.

Both of them were the princesses that held the surname of Arcadia. The first princess was Claudia, and the second was Eleonora. They had royal blood and held a status that was different to the common crowds.

“Oh, this is a face I have seen before.”

“He is from the Osvalt family, your Highness.”

It was a face that drew Claudia´s attention and which she had seen before. In other words, except for the royalty that was present at the place, that person was the one with the highest standing. It was Gilberto, whose family held the title of duke.

“He is reasonably skillful and has also raised military achievements. He is a prodigy that will one day carry the kingdom on his back.”

“Hmph, but he is the second son, isn´t he? If so, he doesn´t have the standing to meet me.”

Even though he would still get a good share of power from his family, he didn´t pose as worthy to Claudia´s eyes. She didn´t have any consideration for the others either. Claudia believed their lack of status was too much.

“The one that defeated that polar bear is him?”

Eleonora asked Baldias. Baldias nodded. As soon as he did, she put on a cheerful expression. The battle between Baldias and Shulvester that happened at their young age was one that became a legend in both countries. They had many times met their blades at the northern plains that were filled with snow. Sometimes he would win, sometimes he would lose. Those numerous tales originated from there. There was no way the man that ended this legend wouldn´t excite the interest of this story-loving girl.

“But I´ve heard Shulvester grew very old though?”

As to be expected, Eahart was composed. To him, strength had priority over established reputation. While Shulvester was a legend at his period, by now he was just an old man. There was still a great gap until William could reach the likes of Baldias, the cornerstone of the military.

“Although old, that man is strong. The only ones present here that are capable of bringing him down is me and that brat; only us.

Although I had faced him head-on, brat probably plotted a plan against him... Besides, it should be a plan so childish to the point it makes me up in arms."

Baldias was grinding his teeth. The general Baldias was strong to the point his strength could be seen just by looking at him. He became far stronger than he used to be, but even so, he wasn´t strong enough to the point of do as he wished when moving head-on against Shulvester. Even if he had plotted a plan, it wouldn´t have made enough difference to the point he would have been able easily surround him.

"That´s right. The local hundred-man squad was pretty much annihilated at that time. It was because of that that centurion wasn´t invited."

The devastated hundred-man squad. They were probably used to their skin of their bone for William´s plan. There were many arrow wounds and contusions made by throwing stones in Shulvester´s body that had been recovered. To begin with, his army had been cut off from the supply line, so his body was considerably thin due to the lack of food. He wasn´t fighting at his best.

"But it´s Ratolukia´s fault. They stationed such a legend at that little garrison after all. It was as if they were telling us to kill him.... Well, but it is on us for how he hadn´t been killed until now."

The humane characteristic in the plan; though the lack of respect for a legend, it is an fact he killed Shulvester. The old soldier that

kept leisurely holding back Arcadia´s invasions wasn´t there anymore. With that, peace came to the north. The little country that had been difficult to deal with was no more.

“Well, he is talented. A type of talent I cannot stand however.”

William could be seen as crooked for someone of the military. This was something Baldias couldn´t stand no matter how.

“A man that is only skilled is boring. A man has to be wise.”

The parts that Baldias couldn´t stand became the parts that were valued for Eahart. In the end, Eahart became interestested in William; interested in such ambitious man that aimed for the sky, going beyond means or position.

“Now then, I am tired of eating. Let´s have some after-meal exercise, shall we?”

Eahart stood up. The party had only just begun.

34. The Foe Before His Eyes

The hall was becoming livened up. The crowd began to dance in the tone of the musical performance of the orchestra playing at the back.

The cheeks of the noble ladies redenned for Eahart after he had gone downstairs. The beauty of the two princesses that had finally gone down to the hall made the men in the crowd catch their breaths. Eahart and Claudia started to dance. Baldias and Eleonora were casually dancing as well.

“Alright, let´s go dance to our heart’s content!”

“N-no. I am bad at dancing.”

Karl was once again being dragged around. William made a wry smile as he looked at it. Gregour and Anzerm were also dancing with other ladies. The finesse of their dance was what it could be expected of nobleman. Even if William was to go dance himself, he wouldn´t be able to have the same elegance.

“”This will come to be necessary though.””

William still hasn´t been invited to dance. He didn´t have the status nor the technique to be invited either. All he could do was to quietly watch.

“You suck!”

“Sorrwy!”

He had the confidence he would do better than Karl, who was stepping onto Hilda´s feet all the time, though…

“…But good graciousness, count has a really good taste for alcohol.”

“What, there is nobody that can be compared to viscount-dono in regards of that.”

Suddenly, that conversation entered William´s ears. It was a talk that didn´t have any particular significance.

“Only wine from the south is good. However, the ones from Garius aren´t tasty. Why is it?”

“It should be something of their. They have the mentality of utilidy. They won´t improve the quality of their luxury products no matter what. They rely only on their imports for that.”

Garius was a big country. It was the biggest kingdom in the world; there was nothing they couldn´t obtain. However, this would be accounted mostly for imports. It wasn´t like they were producing those products on their own.

“”Conversation between drunktards. How boring.””

William slightly regretted listening to their conversation. That said, even if there was to be any proper conversation, it would still be meaningless. It wasn´t like William expecting much from it either though. The problem was that he was incredibly bored. It was to the point he could listen to such boring conversation...

“As to be expected of count Vrad´s knowledge.”

William immediately turned his face to them.

What entered in his sight was an elderly gentleman with a gentle face. He had a honest and gentle aura.

“Vraaaaaaaaaaaddddd!”

It was possible he had the same name. It wasn´t possible to think that man was that kind of person. William imagined him to be a more low-life, more vulgar type of person. But William´s instincts told him...

...That he was the man that stole his beloved sister.

In an instant, a vast amount of killing intent gushed out from him. Without laughing, the corpses started running amok, with anger in their faces. Kill, kill, kill, kill; the hatred, anger and despair coming from the sole of feet was tainting his mind. He would break that neck that still moved, gouge his eyeballs, smash his chin, slice off his nose, destroy his eardrums, crush his genitals

underfoot. William was being overrun by the desire of wanting to torture him to death with all sorts of methods.

“!?”

Hilda and the others noticed his charge. Eahart and Baldias also turned their eyes to William´s direction. The hall which silence was something impossible before fell in a period of stillness.

“”Calm down, stupid me. There is no way I can do as I wish in this place.””

The silence let William recover his composure. However, it was already too late by that time. Many people were looking at William with faces that clearly had puzzled expressions on them.

“You bastard, what are you intending to do?”

The one standing in front of William was Gilberto. Hostility was clearly mixed in his gaze.

“What would you mean by asking me that? I cannot understand what you mean.”

William answered with a voice as clear as possible so that people could easily hear him.

“How shameless. What is the reason for you to have shown such

vulgar display!? Answer me, you foreigner bastard!”

The killing intent became a sword and grazed at William. The aura Gilberto had was like a sharp blade. It was a sword that would protect its country, and also the symbol of his loyalty to the country as a noble. He was a noble to his bones.

“”That´s bad. Really… He caught me in such a bad time.””

It seemed that Gilberto didn´t have the intention to let William off.

“”How am I supposed to escape from this place…. It will be difficult, shit.””

The fact there were many talented people gathered at the place made it even more difficult for William. It hadn´t been an amount of killing intent of the extent where he could fool them. One´s aura was one´s traits. Even if he was to say it wasn´t his, the people that could see it would immediately expose his lies.

“William!”

Karl tried to come towards him, but Hilda stopped him. The situation was too bad. It wasn´t like William had done anything in particular, but it was a fact that he had avoided the topic using an excuse.

“Answer me. Depending on how you answer, the Osvalt family

will do anything to eliminate you.”

Yes, even if Gilberto was not going to do something about William himself, he had enough influence to eliminate him. The family of a duke had this much power.

Sweat was running through his back. He was in a predicament. He was in a much more desperate situation than at the times he was at the battlefield.

“”....Hm?”

Nobody had noticed the thin mist surging at the feet´s height yet.

“”This... Could it be?””

William searched through his memory. This place shouldn´t have the requirements for mist to appear. Besides, it wasn´t natural that mist would collect by his feet. In that case....

“”...Fuh, it seems my luck is really good.””

The source of the mist. William thanked those people that were supposed to be there. William showed a smile.

“Why are you smiling? Are you belittling of the Osvalt family?”

“How could I. I was only surprised how let alone the common nobles, even sir Gilberto hadn´t noticed what is happening.”

“Noticed? Noticed what?”

Gilberto showed a puzzled face. William smiled.

“We have a visitor. An uninvited guest, if you may.”

Then, he turned his eyes to [there].

35. A Dance Party For William

Everyone present in the hall noticed the abnormality once the mist reached to the height of the knees. The mist was tasteless and odorless, and it probably wasn´t poison or something of the sort. The mist was simply… for concealment.

“What is this, you bastard.”

Gilberto asked William. William ignored him and started acting.

If one was to ask what he was intending to do, it would be that he was going to provide his assistance. If William was able to do well, this predicament would instead turn into good fortune for him.

“Karl, protect his Highness. Don´t let them pass through even if you are to die.”

In a few words, Karl also made his move. He didn´t understand the meaning behind those orders, but it was his obedience and honesty to move as he was commanded that had let him rise up to where he stood today. The undefeated Karl´s ten-man squad was made up by that mindset.

“William, what are you going to do?”

William answered with a smile to Karl´s question.

“I… will go hunting, you see.”

William took a tableware knife, doing one turn with it in his hand. The only one that had a sword here was Eahart, the prince. If it became that he had to use it, it would be checkmate at that time. There would be no future for the people of the military that were not able to protect the prince. However, if they are able to…. There wouldn´t be better reward than that.

The mist thickened. Screams of the noble ladies echoed through the hall by the time the mist was covering half the body. Including Karl, all the skilled warriors were protecting the prince and the noblewomen. They were completely defended.

“”In that case, the target shouldn´t be the prince.””

In such situation, it was only William that didn´t focus on protecting the prince. There was nobody that would be so idiot as to aim for someone that was being so much protected. On the contrary, it was natural for one to think the target was someone else. But it wasn´t because of that that it would be fine to leave the prince on his own. However, with this rightful role being taken up by Karl, this part was settled up.

The mist completely covered the place. The line-of-sight was obstructed.

“”I need to cover for my bad impression from before for as much as I can.””

An evening suit and a knife. William wasn´t in a position where he could really attack someone. However, this was just enough...

To deal with them...

“They are coming! Don´t let even a single ant go through!”

“Ou!”

Even if the assassins were skillful...

“First.”

...William was far more outstanding.

Blood flew. To William, it would be the true dance party from now on.

Inside the mist, people couldn´t see. Only William was able to freely move around. Even for the people that could feel aura, they woulnd´t be able to move naturally like that. However, it was different for William. It was exactly because he was crooked if by military standards that he was capable in a more variety of things. The amount of knowledge he had compared to the people that would only train for the battlefield just wasn´t the same.

William´s five senses were sharpened to be much more keen than they were before. It wasn´t like he would simply became stronger

by wrapping his aura around his body. His five sense became sharper, more profound and more extensive.

“Second.”

If your eyes can´t see, you can just listen with your ears.

The knife William held slit through the neck of an assassin in a straight movement. The instant this knife that would usually be used in a gentle, beautiful, nimble, and also casual manner was used by William, the knife was immediately turned into an excellent blade.

“Third, fourth.”

If your eyes can´t see, you can just smell with your nose.

William was dancing. Nobody was watching him; his audience consisted only by the masked assassins in front of his eyes.

In such predicament, the ones that were the most perplexed were nobody else other than the assassins. Their plan had been perfectly arranged. There wasn´t supposed to be any obstacles in between their objective, and even if there was any, all the people there would be unarmed. The assassins were armed, and moreover, they were specially trained so that they could see even inside the mist. There was no way they would be in the disadvantage.

“Fifth!”

If the eyes can´t see, you can feel with your skin.

However, at the moment, a single monster dominated the place. Even if they were to face him, all it would happen was that the amount of corpses would increase. The assassins decided to change their plans.

“”So they scattered around… Who is their target?””

They changed their strategy and started to ignore William, taking the roundabout way so that they could kill their target. They were too late to react, but William´s existence was something too much outside of expectations. They had stolen away the most important sense out of the five senses. Who would have thought there would be someone that wouldn´t suffer from that.

“”For now, let´s go for the sixth!””

William threw his knife. It pierced through the temple of the assassin´s forehead just like as if it had been an arrow. Once again, another life was immediately reaped.

“”Four small fries remaining. My two preys… Ah, how unfortunate. They got too close to them.””

The one assassin that came too near to the prince became victim to Baldias´ mighty arm. Because of how strong he was, the assassin ´s spine was broken. In the time the assassin was writhing in the

ground, Baldias crushed him with his big foot. The other one was hit at the chin Gilberto and lost his consciousness, soon to be assaulted with kicks by Hilda, Anzerm and Gregour, having his life pulverized.

““They can really do well. So the little young masters weren´t just talk?””

As William was thinking that, he took the life of his seventh victim. Not picking up the knife he threw, he used another knife from the many knives that were on the table, and passing by the side of the assassin at close range, William pierced the knife through the back of the assassin´s head.

“”One remaining!””

However, the last person was clearly different from the other ones.

“”That´s some really good moves, hey.””

It was swift, and also flexible. Moreover, differently from the other nine assassins that would move like dolls for the sake of completing their mission, intelligence could be felt from his moves.

“”He is avoiding me... He is not going towards the prince. Where is he going to? Who is the target!?””

The assassin was moving in a way William couldn´t guess the target. He erased his presence inside the crowd of people like a thief; his movement was without faults.

“”Not much sound. The smell too; a perfume suitable to the place. Hah, it looks like I will lose track of him.””

The flawless assassin; the last remaining one. William was eager to hunt him down, no matter what. However, William was about to lose track of him. Thorough technique; quiet footsteps and smell that let him cloaked himself into the surroundings.

However...

“”He is leaking his killing intent! Did he find his target and became too hasty!?”

William was guided by the killing intent of the assassin he had lost track of. He barely made it in time.

The mist started to grow dim.

“I fooooound youuuu!”

William got in between who probably was the assassin´s target. William was right in front of the assassin. The assassin was using something similar to a knife. Compared to that, William was using a tableware knife.

“Don´t, get in my way.”

The assassin said in a voice louder than expected. The assassin readied his weapon.

William thrust through the gap in the assassin´s movements, having his knife slip through the assasin´s defenses. The assassin twisted his body and nimbly avoided the attack. At the same time William was suprised by the flexibility of the assassin, the assassin ´s knife was being aimed at William´s throat from an unbelievable angle.

“”This guy… is strong!””

There was no sound in those movements. The unnatural movements were made naturally. Differently from the strength of the strong, those movements were like the apex of the strength of the weak. It was the lack of the faults of the valor in military arts that made it the most problematic.

“This guy; I will kill!”

William felt goosebumps. He had never felt this much killing intent; never had felt such blade of killing intent with such resolute aim. No matter how much the assassin hated the person behind him, William didn´t think he would be able to display this much pressure.

“Fuh.”

Exhaustion.

“Hyu”

Nimble movements the whole body jumped about like a spring. Those weren´t maneuvers that were made for aiming for openings, but ones that were done for creating openings. The opponent wasn´t a warrior at all; he could only be seen as an assassin.

“”Those moves… Could it be?””

It was because William was familiar with those moves that he didn´t let any gaps appear. He followed the movements of the assassin with his knife. The assassin once again swung the knife, aiming for William´s life.

Both knives clashed.

“Th-is… How could this be?”

The mask of the assassin cracked. What appeared behind the mask was a beautiful dark brown-skinned girl. She was one of William´s only two childhood friends, Havella.

“This is my lin…. !?”

William noticed the identity of the person he was protecting. The identity of person behind him; the target of today´s assassination. He also noticed the reason for Havella to have joined in. There could be no reason other than that. It couldn´t be anyone other that person.

William glanced behind him. It was difficult to look through the mist, but there was no mistake, nor did it seem like there would be. The figure of the man that was burned in his eyes moments ago was before him.

“”So it is like that.””

William didn´t know the details, but it seemed that Havella knew that count Vrad, who was the killer of his elder sister, would come to this place, and probably because there was a request for his assassination to begin with, Havella took advantage of it and hoped on. With how Vrad had done those things with Arlette and many others, he should have taken enmity of as many people as there could have. It wasn´t strange that there would be an assassination request for him at the assassin´s guild. It also made sense that Havella would take part on it.

“”We agreed we would do it with the three of us together…. Stupid””

It wasn´t like that anymore. Their daily lives wouldn´t traverse each other anymore. There were parts about it that Kail somewhat already guessed, but Havella seemed to still not be able to understand it. It was because of that that this kind of incident where there was lack of communication could so easily end up

happening.

William pulled Havella´s confused face towards him.

“Run away to that same place. We will kill him together later.”

Those words were whispered in a gentle voice, but they were more akin an order. They could understand each other just by looking at each other´s eyes. Those eyes told Havela how much William was angry right now to the point it hurted.

It was an instant. The instant William released his hand, Havella ran away, making use of the mist. Her feet were fast and soundless. Now that the mist was thin, Havella was making use of the darkness of the night.

And by the time the mist cleared up for the most part and commotion started over the gruesome sight at the surroundings....

“You... must be the White Mask, right?”

Vrad spoke to William. To Vrad, William was his savior. No, the same could be said to the other people. He was the hero that warded off the assassins. More so than the indescribable mood in the hall was his achievements. The achievement of having protected them and the achievement of having killed most of the assassins was more than enough proof to indicate he wasn´t thinking of doing anything bad to the people of this place.

William touched his own face. Seeming that both masks had been destroyed at that same time, it was on the floor, broken. He was standing there with his own face. It should be fine like that. Strictly speaking, [this] wasn´t his own path, but the path of vengeance of [Al], who was inside him. There wouldn´t be meaning to it if he wasn´t there with his own face.

“Yes, count Vrad. I am the White Mask, William Rivius. Pleased to make your acquaintance, count.”

This was his declaration of war. It was something that had been left undone by himself, the White Retaliator. It was going to be his first revenge and it would be his last. Vrad was his target. Originally, the brother and sister had very similar appearances. They used to have the same hair color, same eyes; he used to be a gentle and mild boy. Perhaps Vrad would have recognized him if it was the him of that time. It was also possible that he wouldn´t have remembered about someone of the likes of a slave however.

“Thank you, William-kun. You are my benefactor.”

Vrad extended his hand to William, commoved. William gladly accepted the handshake.

William was different now. With the death of that gentle and little boy from that time, his hair became white and he came to carry bottomless amounts of despair. Using his hatred as the White Retaliator as a source of motivation for an amount of effort that couldn´t be counted as average, he obtained knowledge and strength. He came to understand karma and made his resolve to build a big tower.

Because of that, Vrad was already just triviality. William wouldn´t fuss over someone as little as a count. Compared to the height he aimed for, how tiny was Vrad. But even so, it was necessary that he put it to an end. Even if this was something trivial to William, this was everything to [Al]. Now that he accepted [Al] as part of himself, he should at least satisfy him a bit.

“This wasn´t anything, count.”

And because of that, William gave Vrad the greatest of smiles.

The despair he felt at that day... He would give him back ten times the amount. That smile was like a silent declaration.

(TL note: Thank god William didn´t end up killing Havella o.o)

36. A Man Becoming Of The Moon

The hall quieted down. The mist cleared up and the nine dead bodies were being taken away from the place. Nobody was paying attention to that gruesome sight. As if such thing wasn´t even entering their sights, their eyes were focused at only one place.

At the handsome face that was behind the white mask.

The white hair that even almost seemed translucent reflected the light of the candle stands, giving off a red shadow. Those eyes that had wisdom deepened his impression much more than when he was wearing a mask. The lump of rationality his body was with the elimination of any pointlessness in his training had a tender form and made people long for it.

It was a man becoming of the night. A man becoming of the moon. If one was to meet him under the moonlight, one would caught one´s breath by his [beauty]. The moon attracted people.

He was a man that was like the moon.

“...Karl-sama, due to my negligence, I have ended up letting one escape. Now, I will go track the assassin down, so please leave this matter to me.”

Word by word, the view was turning into a picture. Most of the people at the place didn´t even have recollections of what happened before. Not only that, the impression they had of William itself became entirely different. Having been painted into

something else, the past wouldn´t surface in their minds at all. They were completely filled by William´s charm now that he was unleashed from his mask.

“Take care, ok!”

The only one calm was Karl, who had become used to it after seeing William regularly. Even Eahart and Baldias didn´t expect that a man of such charm would come out under that mask.

“I see. This acting really does its effect.”

Eahart was impressed. The strong image William had implanted in the people and his fascinating impression came about only because he would usually hide himself under the mask. Whether he was an ugly man, whether he was a handsome man; he would be leading people astray, would be bewildering them. The white mask would incite people´s interest.

It was because he had confidence in himself that the act of hiding his face had better effect. It was a cycle made for charming people. Both the people that saw what he was like under his mask and the people that didn´t became more interested in him the more they came to know about him. They were interested in the man named William Rivius.

“William...sama.”

It was only the people that stood in the light....

By the time William had already gone out from Baldias´ residence to pursue the one assassin he had let escape, the princesses and the noblewomen had all been temporarily evacuated to another room, and Hilda and the others were working on sorting out the aftermath.

“So a tableware knife can deal such injuries... That´s really impressive.”

Anzerm let out a voice of praise. Hilda, who was in a bad mood, also couldn´t help but nod at that. If someone was to ask her if she could do this feat with that sort of knife, she would have to say she couldn´t. She wouldn´t be able to move like William once her vision was denied from her to begin with. It was because she couldn´t do that that she devoted herself to the defense of the party members, but...

“But really, to think he could move like that inside that mist.”

Gregour was surprised that William was capable of moving around like that to that extent. Gregour´s sight was completely gone once the mist thickened, so no matter how strong he was, he wasn´t in a situation he could make use of his strength. It took his all just to keep guard. To Gregour, who was a warrior, it was obvious that he would see William in a good light with how he was capable of assaulting the assassins by himself inside that mist.

“So this is the rumoured white mask.”

“To think he would be able to defeat seven people by himself… It is vexing, but I cannot help but commend him.”

“That Karl got a great pick-up.”

The other centurions were surprised by the number of people William killed. It was easy to understand what that number meant. Inside that mist, William overturned the advantage of the assassins that were used to the darkness. If someone was to ask them whether they could do the same, they couldn´t answer in any way other than that they could not. To begin with, there was no way that they would be able protect count Vrad, who was the one being targeted, if it had been by themselves.

“…Hmph.”

Gilberto snorted. Perhaps William had intended to make it through his predicament, but Gilberto´s senses weren´t rusty to the point he wouldn´t know that the killing intent from before that was clearly being pointed to someone of the party. What happened was that William was lucky to have the assassins invade at that time. Gilberto believed that in his mind, and also believed this was a big chance.

“How scary.”

Hilda ended up leaking her real thoughts with those words. Much more than the sharpness in the injuries of the assassins, much more than the fact he was able to move despite having his vision hindered, and much more than how he dealt with seven of the

assassins, it was his standing figure in those last moments that was etched in her eyes; that white handsome man that appeared from inside the mist.

“What is scary?”

It wasn´t only his appearance that was beautiful. There was his aura too. A darkness that felt like it would engulf everything, and an unknown certain something that was bottomless. At the same time humans feared the darkness, they also had the trait of being attracted by it. For what there was for William´s darkness, his strength also wasn´t any less bewildering. From now on, the number of people that would get attracted by him will definitely increase. That was what it was scary.

“Haven´t you started getting cocky now that you´ve become a knight, you green horn?”

“Ouch, ouch, ouch! Don´t pull my cheeks!”

Whether this kingdom would be wrapped up by the curtains of the night; it was so scary it couldn´t be helped.

37. The Strongest Appears

The capital of Arcadia, Arkas. It wasn´t the most outstanding capital among the seven kingdoms, but there were only a few people in the whole world that would say it wasn´t a great capital. Its productivity as a capital and also how it is able to hold such a big amount of people could only be said to be something that could only be expected from one of the seven kingdoms. However, it was because it was so big that there was unsightly things, and also people hiding in places that was difficult to find in this kingdom.

“!?”

Lurking around Havella were the people that lived at this dark side. All of them were using the same uniform. They had masks on their faces, so their expressions couldn´t be guessed. What filled the place was an inorganic killing intent. Seeing they came to that place, Havella wielded her knife.

“An assassin that fails in killing is not an assassin.”

“Death to the one that isn´t an assassin any longer.”

“This one must die.”

There wasn´t anger, nor sadness, nor happiness, nor anything at all. They were existences that were made only to kill people. Those were the assassins that were members of the assassin´s guild. All the people were lacking any kind of emotion.

“…I can´t die. I still, can´t…”

The one f with emotions nobody else other than Havella. Even though she was normally an expressionless girl, there were many emotions jumbled together that simply wasn´t shown in her expression. She didn´t know how she was supposed to express them. Those emotions even without her expressing it in her face to begin with, so she didn´t care.

“The three of us, I will live together with them!”

The three of them: Al, Kail and Havella. They were connected.

“That one must die.”

One of the assassins jumped in front of Havella. Havella readied herself for battle.

“Sh!”

Havella skillfully handled her knife. If it is of the level of the opponent right in front of her, then she should be able to cut through. Actually, once they started crossing their blades, it was Havella that was at the advantage. However…

“This one must die.”

With two of them…

“Not yet!”

Taking on two opponents, it became a balanced fight. Havella´s movement wasn´t limited to just being nimble. Gravity not being felt in her moves would be an accurate description of it. But even so….

“You will die.”

With three of them…

“Gh!?”

Havella was kicked from behind and fell down. Havella moved around like a butterfly, but once she was caught, all was to no use.

“You will die.”

Without unnecessary movements and without even an instant of hesitation, the knife covered in poison approached her throat. It was a deadly poison that would immediately kill by a single scratch. Without pain or agony, Havella was now going to….

“Sorry, Al, Kail.”

And so those were Havella´s last moments....

“Really.... If you were going to apologize, you should have done it right from the beginning.”

The three assassins that were fighting Havella. At that same time, their torsos were cut off. The wound was brutal; their organs were thrown out to the surroundings. The one to have set up that display was...

“...Kail.”

“I will scold you later. Now, about you guys.... Go die.”

Kail, Havella´s and Al´s childhood friends, and also a man that lived as a gladiator.

An assassin lurked from behind Kail without giving off any presence. Against such move, Kail casually hit him with a back fist strike. With only that, the head of the assassin was burst open. The head that was blown away had its mask broken in pieces. The face was caved-in to the point one wouldn´t make out how it used to be from it.

“!?”

The emotionless assassins.

“You better run. Right now, I… won´t be able to stop [myself].”

The aura of a strong person was gushed out. A thick scent of death of the extent that even the assassins that were supposed to be emotionless couldn´t approach. No matter how many assassins were to attack at once, they wouldn´t be able to live. The absolute power was standing there.

“Sorry there.”

The strongest moved. He grabbed the head of an assassin and crushed it in his hand. There was no need to use his weapon to fight off small fry. With only his physical strength, it was enough to trample them down. His fist pierced through the stomach of one of the assassins. Doing so, he took hold of the assassin´s movement by grabbing his spine. The assassin who was caught was then finished off by another strike.

“Ru-run away!”

The assassins that were supposed to not have any emotions. How much training and how many experiences did they have to go through for that sake? They had the confidence and the resolve to not be shaken even if death was in front of them. However…

“Run away by all means. I won´t go follow after you once you escape.”

The scenery the monster in front of their eyes brought forward

would easily blow away something as trifle as resolve. Here was the capital of Arkas. Even if they were at a place people wouldn´t pass by, there was human activity just one street away. Even behind the scenes there wouldn´t such repulsive display brought about by this hell.

The escaping assassins. Kail didn´t do any effort to follow them.

“Hah, hah, hah, al-alright, I surviv… Hya!?”

For some reason, in their path of retreat…

“There was no way I would let you escape, retard!”

The path had already been blocked. The heads of the assassins flew. What shone was a silvery sword.

“I will start it by killing all of you. You can start babbling all you want then.”

It was a man wearing a cheap-looking wig and using a mask he had bought without much thought at some stall around there. The image of corpses were leaking out from the man. All the assassins that were standing before him understood.

They weren´t going to escape.

“”Die””

Blood flew to the air mercilessly.

38. The Three Make Their Move

The three came to stay at Kail´s home. It has been a long time since they´ve come to stay at one another´s place. Havella became happy just by that, but seeing the grim faces William and Kail had, she hanged her head down. Of course while she herself was depressed, she was still expressionless as always when looking up close.

“So it is about Count Vrad... I understand your feelings, but that was stupid. Far too stupid.”

Kail said as if he was spitting those words. He was angry at Havella´s imprudence, but he was much more angry at his powerless self that was, nor was consulted. They would have definitely stopped Havella if she consulted them, or if they were to at least help her, they would have definitely been able to deal with Vrad.

“Havella, the end of an assassin is about whether to die during the mission or to die after it; that´s all there is to it. It isn´t something you can r from. You should be aware of that, right?”

William said in a persuasive tone. However, his heart was far from being tranquil.

“...But, it was a chance to kill Vrad.”

Havella tried to make an excuse. Kail immediately clenched his fists, but William calmed him down.

“Because of all that happened, I will be bluntly telling you that. To me, Vrad is nothing more than a little problem anymore, and besides, in this city, there is no way the three of us can live comfortably together. What you´ve done was completely useless.”

For the first time now Havella´s expressionless face was dismantled enough to the point anyone would notice it. Kail gave up on stepping forward and calmly leaned against the wall.

“I think of you as my important friends that are even more important that my life. I never had any doubts about that, and it won´t be from now on that I will. I swear this on this path I follow that this will definitely never pass up on that.”

William lightly hugged Havella, who seemed to be about to fall in tears.

“But you know, it is exactly because of that that we being too close to each other is dangerous. If I make any blunders, of if any of you do, we will all be goners in case we are too close to each other. There are many risks that can be avoided just by not getting too close too me. I would rather not entangle you two into my ambitions, Havella.”

“You can´t! There is no way I can accept!”

No matter where William was to go, to Havella, he would be nobody else other than Al. William gave a wry smile. It was exactly because of that reason that Havella couldn´t understand why they

had to part ways. No, perhaps rather than understanding, it was something that was instead difficult to accept.

“Let´s put off this for later. We should focus on Havella for now.”

Composed words. Havella glared at Kail due to the coldness she felt from those words. In the end, Havella prioritized her own opinion over theirs. That was the same case for the other two. It was because of that reason that they wouldn´t fight over about those kind of things. If the time they would do so came, then...

“It is just like Kail said. Not only there is the pursuers from the assassins guild, but the city too has also started to become turbulent. The amount of time we bought is not much.”

William released Havella and sat down onto a chair. He put on a thoughtful posture.

“Are there any methods? I can´t think of any way other than to escape from the country.”

Havella shook her head when she heard that. It was inadmissible that she would have to get separated from them. Havella liked the two to the point she would prefer death if that was to be the case. In any case, she emotionally dependent on them.

“The worst way to do it is to keep up running around the city like that until it cools down. Because the kingdom is the assassins guild special playground, they will definitely not give up. If me and Kail

were able to protect you all day and night, then it would be different, but the amount of time I will be fighting in the wars is too long, and Kail has his job too."

"...You don´t really need to protect her the whole time."

William ignored Kail´s comment.

"The most safe and reliable way is to escape the country. Once you cross the borders, it will be difficult that the influence of the kingdom and the influence of the guild reaches you. Even the guild doesn´t have the spare time and have limited personnel. Even if one or two follows, then Havella should be able to do something about it herself. If Kail goes along with her, then she should be completely safe."

William wanted they would go for this method. After thinking back on how it would be like then, he started to feel it would be lonely, but it was still the best option for both of them to have a future. William´s path was too distant from other people. If the possibility for the two of them to become caught in his affairs was to become absolutely zero, he would be able to feel relieved.

"Impossible."

Havella rejected the proposal. Kail also agreed on the rejection. Although that was a method William himself had told them, there was no way Kail would accept escaping from the kingdom. There was no way he could leave William by himself and run away. There was no way he would do it. He was going to do imprudent things

by himself for what he knew of ulterior motives there was behind him saying it.

“Then, the other choice it is. It will become a bit of a gamble. Of course we will be betting one or two of our lives. I will make it clear: This bet is a very unfavorable one. I still recommend you to leave the country. It has William´s stamp of guaranteed safety that this plan is perfect and agreeable in case you choose that one. I can give you two those two options in total.”

Even with all William said, he didn´t think they would agree to doing that. They would stand firm to the end. All he could do was to hint that from here on out, it would be the hard part, and depending on the situation, it was possible the three of them could lose their lives.

Kail and Havella didn´t waver. Seeing that, William let out a sigh.

“...We are going to march into the assassins guild and negotiate with them. We are not many by ourselves, but with me and Kail we should somehow be able to bring something to the negotiation table. If it goes well to that point, we should be able to do something about it.”

William answered without any confidence. Actually, the situation was much more difficult than it seemed. They were going against the kingdom and its covert forces. Either of them would already be troublesome on their own, and moreover, they would have to live on the country while running away from those two from then on.

“I see. So the focus of this is on the raw strength.”

Kail held his object he would do business with. Just by that, the atmosphere around became fiery.

“That´s right. I´m expecting a lot of you, champion.”

Their friendship was one that they could understand each other just with an exchange of glances. In addition, there was also the Kail strength, which was put in action moments ago. This also made them be more confident about it. As long as Kail is there, they should be able to do something. Since the past, he always had the strength that made them think of him like that. This time, all they could do was to count on him. The leader of the three had always been Kail after all...

Being able to under each other´s feelings was the connection between the thr....

“...What do you mean by champion?”

The two felt like they were about to fall to the ground. It seemed that Havella didn´t know that Kail had reached at the top of the colosseum. Well, it still felt like she would still be pondering over it even if she was aware of it.

“Cough* Well, you know what? Maybe it is irresponsible to say it, but... it became a bit exciting now.”

What William said was something the three of them were feeling about their situation. Since that day, the time the three would be together became less. That distant past they would steal apples from the stalls; how long was it since the last time they worked together? There was no way they could go back to their child mind, but at least they were feeling a bit excited.

It was a do-or-die wager that risked the lives of the three. What they were putting on the line was their life. There was not many situations which all the three would be risking their lives. It was because all of their lives were being in the same amount of danger that they were able to wish for their friends without any hidden intentions.

“Now then, let´s go.”

That chance wasn´t one that would come up often after all...

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“This... What is this?”

That was a place in Arkas nobody would pass through. Normally it would be a deserted place there wouldn´t be any people going through. However, right now, the image of hell made of scattered viscera and smell of death unfolding at that place. The surroundings were filled with the rich fragrance of feces, urine and vomit mixed with blood. This wasn´t a feat normal people would be able to accomplish.

“The [Wind cat], Havella is definitely exceptional, but she doesn´t have the strength to accomplish this.”

He sent twenty people. Considering their numbers and quality, there was no reason they would fail. If there was to be a reason, it would be reinforcements. And besides...

“One of them.... is a monster.”

The man hurried up to give his report to his master.

It was necessary he hurried up. If the organization becomes aware of the aura that filled the place and made their move now, things wouldn´t end well.

39. Kail, The Beast

“Mo-monster!!”

A storm of slaughter was devastating all it met to the point nothing could be done against it. There was a monster that was trampling through the assassins guild main base, located at the darkness of Arkas; the abyss in the deepest part of the slums. Against it were the skilled assassins. They had considerable experience, technique and power. Suppressing their own emotions and getting rid of them, they were complete and perfect assassins. But now...

“Helllp!?”

They were trying to run away. All just to escape from the hands of a single monster.

“Rage!”

The monster was a warrior. It had a huge body that was covered in something similar to steel. With just one swing of its sword, flesh and bones would be completely torn to pieces. It didn´t have anything to do with the technique of a warrior anymore. Even if the warrior was holding a stick, it could still marsh them to pieces. Not to mention, even if his sword was to be blunt, the warrior would still deal fatal damage by its driven will.

“Nun!”

The humans were being split into two clean halves. If it was a horizontal cut, it would still be doable, but if it was in vertical, it would be a different story. That could only be understood as the strength being applied being unimaginable. To aim at the joints was the theory of swordfighting. Completely ignoring this theory, and moreover cutting through bones in vertical was the swordfighting technique of this monster. The one capable of that was that man.

With one swing, many would turn into lumps of meat.

With two swings, even more viscera scattered around.

By the third swing it could already be understood... The fact that nobody could win against that monster.

“Really, I won´t have my turn at all.”

William had been leisurely fighting off the assassins too, but this was being brought to a different level by the man in front of his eyes.

“”In terms of pure strength, even Baldias or Strakules would be helpless. I see, this is how you are at the colosseum. The gladiator that reached the top, the Kail I didn´t know about.””

Kail was so strong to the point that all of William´s guesses about his strength were easily overwritten. The surrounding area was

heavily pressured by his warrior´s aura. It didn´t only make the skin be full of goosebumps. The killing intent made the assassins bent their knees, had them evacuate their waste and beg for forgiveness in tears. The emotions the assassins had thrown away at great troubles were being forcibly called back. And then...

“Triumph!”

Kail completely swept through all of them. It was an amount of strength that made even William, his friend, tremble. The scenery that had been created couldn´t be anything but hell. The misfortune of the assassins was due the fact that Kail was a gladiator, and also because he was the producer of this spectacle. A spectacle must be gaudy; the audience desired for that.

Much flashier, much more horrendous, much more repulsive.

Kail knew by heart the techniques for creating such hell. It was the job of a gladiator on how to make the audience have fun, to make them happy, to make them excited and satisfied. It was to bewilder them; to go over their expectations that was the apex.

“Out of the way.”

The neck of the assassin was crushed with one hand. The warrior didn´t have any compassion. Their greatest misfortune was for them to have brought this warrior´s wrath upon them; it was for them to have put their hands of that warrior´s most valious treasure. All was resumed on that.

“I see. It is the [Wind Cat]´s friend, Kail, the [beast].”

The one standing in front of the warrior was a man that had a slightly different ambience to him even when compared to the other assassins. Kail, who had reign over the pool of blood, gave one sharp glance at him. Any of the enemies until now would have lost their fighting spirit by that, but the man calmly warded the pressure off.

“Being too strong, all people avoided fighting against the champion. Thus, having no opponents to fight against, he is always forced to go against beasts that were supposed to be on the opening matches for junior gladiators. A genuine monster. The scenery you made there is still acceptable. However, I would like you to stop there.”

That man´s killing intent was sharp.

“Do you think you can win with only this much?”

What the man was holding was a knife covered in poison that would give instant death just by touching it, and there were more of those hidden in his clothes. He wasn´t going to gallantly attack head-on. An assassin´s battle happened silently. He had the skills to make such possible. Moreover....

“...”

Behind the man were assassins that had about as much strength

as the man. They were extraordinary and were the pride of the assassin´s guild. This was power that would cost as much as the amount of money to buy a house. Besides that, there were many of them.

“So you really feel you can beat me, right? Looks like this [me]... has been underestimated.’

The top has been provoked. Being at the top meant winning even against a group of strong, skilled people. This was the duty of the strongest. Even if they were in greater numbers, the strongest would trample them down in a flashy manner. Kail would have them intently watch this warrior´s true strength.

“Step back Kail. Your role is done there.”

William stopped Kail, who was about to move forward. As to be expected, Kail showed dissatisfaction, but it was William´s role to use his head to think. In addition, this situation was what William originally planned to happen.

“Would you mind if you let us meet with the head of the guild.”

The man made a suspicious face due to William´s question. Only Kail has been standing out, but William too had killed a good amount of assassins himself. It was because of that reason the man was cautious.

“What business do you have?”

The man was completely on guard and didn´t go out of his battle stance. There were also no signs of the people behind him moving at all.

“I want to have a deal with you. I would like to meet the one with the highest standing in the guild; I want to meet with your leader.”

At that instant, the man and the assassins at the surroundings that were watching William´s group from a distance turned their killing intent onto William all at once. A torrent of killing intent was gathered at William alone. Even though he received all that, he didn´t falter.

“In our side, we have Kail and myself. Even Havella isn´t weak. It won´t be constructive for us if we prolong this for any longer and build up a mountain of corpses, right? Of course, it is fine if we do the negotiations at your own territory. It would be the most suitable for killing us in case the negotiations break.”

One of their chips for negotiation was their fighting strength. They had a killing fest just so that the assassins guild could recognize they were making problematic enemies. Having that onto the negotiation table one way or another was the first step. If they weren´t able to get to this point, all would have been for naught.

“You may die here.”

The man didn´t have any intent on backing out, nor assassins

behind him or the ones at the surroundings. Seeing that, William couldn´t help but show a wry smile. The place they made their step; to them had been a land mine...

“”I wonder if we can go on for a little longer?””

“”If you are wondering about that, then yes. Those guys are just being hard pressed over the decision.”

The situation made a turn that wasn´t very good. The man before their eyes and his followers were clearly different from the enemies they faced until now. Of course if it were only one or two, Kail would just trample over them in the same way he had been doing, but it would be problematic if it became a group battle and the assassins were to move as one body. Not only that, the ones they were facing could easily achieve this much.

“When we die, we die together.”

Even though it was at a time like that, Havella seemed to be happy for some reason, although Kail and William didn´t know to what extent. Seeing that, the two smiled. This was the chance for them to be able to die together.

“Let´s kill them to our heart´s content, shall we?”

“Yes!”

The strong warrior and the army of corpses raised their war

cries. This was the increasing fighting spirit; the killing intent bursting out.

They were probably going to die here. However, they would die. It was for the best that they caught many of the assassins in that. They needed to pile up many corpses and have them regret. The possibility of William´s group to be able to get into the negotiations hasn´t really been quite there.

Their resolve was set. Blatantly, they would...

[Both sides, stop. What are you being all fired up for [Bai Long]? What I ordered you to do was to test them out, wasn´t it? Are you intending to make more losses for me by losing even more of our assassins?"

A voice came out from somewhere. It was as if that voice had leaked from the depths of earth. The fighting spirit of Kail, William and the man called Bai Long, who were all ready for battle, completely vanished.

"B-but they lack the manners too much for me to let them meet with mistress, the ruler of the night. There is no way we could permit that."

[How stupid. Whether they lack or not; does it matter? Here is the kingdom of the night. What am I supposed to do if the politeness of the kingdom of daylight starts being adopted here?"

Bai Long had his mouth shut. All the grandeur he had until now vanished and he was now with his shoulders shrunk, trembling.

[My guests, it won´t be the extravagant palace towering high like the one of the kingdom of daylight, but I invite you to come to my place, to the depths of the dark night. Bai Long, lead their way. The rest are to get rid of all evidences. For the sake of peace in my country.]

The assassins scattered around. The only people remaining were Bai Long and William´s group. After pushing out all of his unwillingness, Bailong finally moved his head, signalling them to follow him.

“What should we do? I... am starting to think that we should have gone for the choice of escaping from the country now that we came all the way here.”

Kail became fearful. His strength as a gladiator was authentic and he didn´t have any intention of letting himself be defeated in terms of strength. However, that voice from moments ago was unnatural. It exceeded Kail´s comprehension

“Don´t worry. I think so too. But perhaps we could...”

“There hasn´t been anyone that survived after refusing that person´s invitation. Not even the man that used to be the king of this kingdom. You would rather not have unnecessary thoughts.”

Bai Long´s warning. It stole away their path of retreat.

“So we have no choice but to go…”

Cold sweat ran across William´s cheek.

40. Nyx, The Ruler Of The Night

The kingdom of the night; the headquarters of the assassins guild that was located at the abyss of Arkas. Although it wasn´t known how they were able to dig a place like that with the current engineering technology, nor was it known for how long such place existed, it was still a majestic place that wasn´t any inferior to the palace of Arcadia.

The kingdom of night that soared to underground. A lawless place the ones that lived in the darkness gathered.

“This is unbelievable. To think there was something like this under Arkas.”

“I also didn´t know about it. This is the first time I heard of it.”

The way not even Havella knew of this place could only mean that this place was one only people that were submerged even deeper in the darkness could reach. To know of this place basically meant that you reached where the darkness is. By the time you became aware of it, you couldn´t back out anymore.

“...Really amazing.”

What unfolded before William´s eyes was a kingdom colored in night. It was unorganized and dirty, and it was run-down because of the concentration of slums there was, but for some reason, it was a good point for this place. It was the pride of the people of this unfading darkness. For the people that lived in dark, this was

paradise. At this world that lacked any illumination, there wasn´t any light that exposed the darkness.

“It is deeper in. Don´t lose sight of me. If you get lost, you won´t be able to leave this place for eternity. This is specially for people like you, residents of daylight.”

It was even deeper in. Even so, they had already gone down for quite a bit. The darkness of Arkas was deep to the point it made them speechless. It was the darkness that hid at the undersurface the of history. Compared to the size of the light, it was even bigger. That was Arcadia, middle-ranked among the seven kingdoms. If so, what sort of darkness lied in Garias, who was much bigger and had deeper history? With his current knowledge, William couldn´t even imagine.

“Hurry up. Mistress is waiting for you.”

William senses suddenly felt displaced. He felt he wasn´t going down, but going up. There was no way Kail or Havella could understand such feeling. Perhaps, not even that Bai Long could comprehend it. However, the ruler of the night that awaited for them up ahead definitely possessed that same feeling to her.

Heavens and earth were reversed. This was the abyss; the kingdom of the night. It was the world of darkness that soared to the underground.

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“From this point, not even me am allowed to proceed. However, make no blunders. Do not hold onto worthless aspirations. That person´s strength is of another realm. No matter how strong you are, it is completely impossible that you can kill her. On the other hand… it is possible to kill people of the likes of you anytime. Do not forget that.”

Bai Long probably had a very high position even inside the assassins guild. Back then, it was clear that him by himself already amounted to a considerable fighting strength. It wasn´t to the level of Kail, but it would make a good fight against William, and he might have been able to even kill him if he got careless. This was how much powerful he was. They were heading to a place that not even a man of such caliber go in.

Bai Long moved to the side of the big door.

“There was one time I entered this place. At that time, I was foolish, ignorant and conceited. I used to misunderstand what strength meant. Once you see her, you will know. You will know that all your senses of value were only a fantasy when faced against that person….”

The door started to open by itself. That was even though nobody was touching it…

“…The ruler of night, Nyx-sama.”

The door closed. Since they were already inside by the time they noticed it, it seemed that they had already gone through the door

then. Kail and Havella were about to fall in despair. Everything was outside of common sense. Strength was useless. Everything they had built up until now became meaningless.

[I have no need for courtesies. What I desire is only one clever idea that can soft-land the matter. If you can satisfy me, then you may live and be free. If you cannot satisfy me, then it shall be your death.]

The curtains for the night were swiftly to opened. Behind of the curtains, hair of the color of night that reached the floor could be seen. It wasn´t possible to imagine for how much time one had to live in order to have the hair reach such length. Following the river of hair with the eyes and reaching at the upstream, the one that was there...

[Now then, Al the slave, Al the freed slave, Norman, William Rivius. You wanted to make a deal with me, right? I have the time. Let´s talk about it to our heart´s content.]

Everything was exposed. William and the others were surprised about that. There wasn´t supposed to be anyone that knew about that. They dealt with all the people that knew about it. This didn´t make sense. However...

“”Since she knows about it....””

...there was no way he could let her live.

William raised his eyes. With definite killing intent in those eyes, it pierced through her.

[Nice to meet you, my cute little boy.]

Rather, so was it supposed to happen....

[What are you being all surprised for? Kuku.]

The ruler of night. That face was one he was very familiar of. Kail and Havella were also surprised. It was the face of a person all the three remembered. It was none other than...

“Does my face look like someone you know? Hmn, William?”

Arlette. She was engraved in their memories. It was William´s most beloved elder sister that set up the beginning of all this. [William] was born from her loss, and so was the current [White Mask].

[I´ve been curious about this face recently. I´ve been using this face for about ten years now. The story between you brother and sister was too interesting. I hope you may forgive me.]

After hearing those words, the one trembling in anger wasn´t William, but the two people behind him.

“Don´t make fun of this guy´s past, woman. I will kill you.”

“I will skin your face.”

This was because they knew of Al´s despair. They were the ones closest to him, but they couldn´t even save him. The anger of themselves they had was deeply ingrained into them. This provoked them greatly. That anger was so profound and great that all their fear about Nyx was blown away.

[You have wonderful friends. What is interesting about it is how your paths don´t interconnect despite you sharing a bond of such extent. The world is indeed complex and weird. It is because it is like that that it is interesting.]

Her unmoving figure despite receiving Kail´s and Havella´s killing intent; she could only think of them as amusing.

[So your fear of me has lessened? I would like to soon get into the main topic though. To me, time is infinite, but to people, time is finite. The nighttime is finite as well after all.]

William signalled to the two with one of his hands to tell them to calm down. In the end, that was a place for negotiation. Hence, from then on, it was William´s field.

“Now then…. Allow me to introduce myself to you, ruler of the night Nyuks-sama. My name is William Rivius. I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”

[You don´t need to add the sama in. There is no courtesy here. All there is is only gain and loss. Of course, this might change depending on my mood. Other than that, you should take off this unsightly mask and wig. While your usual white mask would have been fine, this you are using is a bit too shabby, don´t you think?]

William took off his mask and wig just as it had been told him. Nyx already knew of everything. Thus, there was no need to hide anything.

[Hmph, what a nice face. It looks like mine in a way it doesn´t. Though, it doesn´t look like mine in a way it does. It is indeed very interesting. Now then, should we start the negotiations? What, I only have one demand. It used to be the disposal of the assassin that failed her mission. However, the situation changed. Do you know why is it?”

“Of course, it is because of our opposition to that.”

“That is right. There is the fighting force I lost and the payment for the assassin that has failed her mission. Prepare a compensation that settles the two. Well, you are here to present the to me, aren´t you?]

William was breaking in cold sweat due to Nyx´s evaluating gaze.

The lives of the two were being held onto William´s shoulders. It had a different weight to the time he was by himself. It was completely different. William let out a deep breath. What he prepared her was...

“There is one point I have for why this cannot be done by this premise. The lost fighting force was the result of legitimate self-defence. I believe that the only point there is to settle is about Havella´s failure.”

He didn´t have anything. There was no way he could prepare something to compensate for all that. He didn´t have the time or the money. All he had that met the requirements was pretty much the ruby that was hanging on his neck, hidden under his clothes.

[Kuku, that is nonsense. Fine, continue. I will hear all you have to say, and if I don´t like what I hear, I will kill the three of you. If I like it, you will live. Simple, isn´t it?]

It was because it was simple. In case he makes a mistake in his choices, he dies.

Nyx´s smile lacked any emotion.

41. Making A Deal With The Ruler

“Then, let´s change up the conditions and carefully analyze Havella´s case. First... Her assassination mission wasn´t successful. This was unrelated to her contribution in the battle. The reason behind the failure was because I was at that place. With there being just the strength of the assassins that went to that place, I could easily overwhelm them, thus making the chance of them killing Vrad being zero. I would like you to have knowledge of that.”

Nyx raised her eyebrows.

[You held a grudge over that man, didn´t you? Then it shouldn´t matter that assassins came to kill him. There was no reason for you to protect him. Are you also going to say that you couldn´t let him die because of this girl?]

“I can tell you without doubts that my answer is “no” in regards of that. I am not so naive to the point I would have thoughts such as having Havella avoid dirtying her hands. To begin with, all the people present in this place, with me included, have already dirtied their hands before. If I was thinking of Havella, then it would make more sense to let her kill him already and let her escape.”

[Hmm, makes sense. Continue.]

“There is no mistake that the matter about me holding a grudge over Vrad is correct. I do not have the slightest intention to hide it. My hatred for him was my starting point after all. It is because of

that that I want to kill that man with my own hands. And it isn´t just simply killing him. I want to have his death be dramatic; I want it to be perfect; I won´t rest if I don´t gift him the best despair there is. Because of that, it would be troublesome for me if I had him die at that place.”

Nyx was looking at William with the same eyes of someone looking with interest at a toy.

“I have a proposal for that. There is nothing that can write off Havella´s faults of the failure of the assassination other than having it be successful. Could you entrust this whole matter to me?”

[The deadline?]

“Within five years.”

Nyx eyes became wide open. Those eyes were cold and had a hint of hopelessness in it.

[Are you making fun of me? To say you will kill him in five years even though you need to kill him right now…. As to be expected, not even me can stand such a bad excuse. So are we settling this with all the three of you dying here, William Rivius!?]

The shout was too cold to be thought of as a shout of anger. However, Nyx was angry. If this was to continue as it is, the three were going to die. They didn´t know which way they were going to

be killed, but they didn´t feel like they would be able to run away from the killing intent of the person in front of their eyes at all.

“It is close to impossible to kill him now. Even if we were to have that Bai long with us to kill Vrad, who surely fortified the security, it would not be enough combat strength. I would like to remind you that the second prince, Eahart, was at that place. Presently, the count Vrad is probably being protected by the royalty with their dignity in line. To kill him right away... only you would be capable of succeeding in such outing.”

The anger in Nyx eyes wouldn´t vanish. She was expecting the impossible to be made possible. Having Vrad killed within five years was something that any assassin would be capable of. This was too weak for a proposal.

“To begin with, why was his assassination planned to happen at that place? It would have been just fine to have him killed in his own residence without any people knowing of it. Rather, this way would have been much easier for the assassins. In that case, would there be any need for it to happen there?”

The anger in Nyx eyes dimmed, and a hint of interest started to appear.

“This was done to be set as a lesson for him. To die in front of the royalty is the most unsightly way to die for a noble. That was the condition of the mission. The client is a noble, and also a person that hates count Vrad extremely, am I wrong?”

The nobility had the role of protecting the royalty. That same nobility was going to be killed in front of the eyes of the royalty. Just by having the royalty caught up into the matter is enough to cause discomfort. If one gets their displeasure, not only would that very person die, but his honor would be blemished, and it was also possible for the whole household to be destroyed. It was possible to imagine that this was the vengeance plan of a noble.

“Hence, thinking about the client´s wishes, I´ve thought of a even better plan to have the count taste the hell of this world. I need about five years of time to set it up. Of course, if it is to just kill him, I can do so anytime then. However, in order to satisfy the desire of revenge… time is necessary.”

The eyes Nyx was looking at William with completely changed.

“I will prepare for the count an exuberant and dramatic death; the ultimate living hell that is impossible for assassins to prepare. It shall be to the point that he will regret not having died then… How is it? Although it is impossible to kill him right now, to kill him in a suitable place for the deed is to respect the client´s wishes. For that sake, would you give me time and wager on me?”

The darkness of the night fell in silence. An instant of tension; she could kill them if she simply wanted to. That feeling of tension assaulted William.

[…This will suffice for the assassination. However, it is not enough.]

Although it had been a very difficult bridge to cross, William was able to cross over it. There were many holes regarding his plan to take over the assassination mission. In first place, all William had was an assumption about the client´s motives. If he had been wrong, he would have been immediately killed. He hoped he was correct. If it wasn´t, there would be nothing that he could do. Pretty much all of it went just the way he hoped for. William had been lucky.

“While it is fine for me to take over the mission, I still need to make up for the assassin that has failed her mission... Would it be something along this line?

[You are really good at guessing. I will leave this job to you. However, that girl has already set her foot onto the path of an assassin. I don´t need compensation for those that died, but I need people that are alive. The compensation for one life; can you pay for it?

William was indeed really lucky. William took away the thing that he had hanging on his neck and hidden at his chest. It was a red, bright and beautiful...

“It is this ruby. It´s size and cut quality is of the highest grade. The craftsmanship was done by a designer employed by the Teirah family.... Could you accept this as the compensation?”

The ruby he received from Lutogarde. It was aching that he would have to hand it over, but to protect something precious, he needed to sacrifice something of equal value.

[That´s not a bad article. This is indeed a very extraordinary price for a single little girl. You are not bad at striking deals.]

Nyx had a somewhat bored expression. William was able to reason with her, but he might not have been able to satisfy her, which was the essential part. Everything that happened at this place happened according to Nyx´s mood. She could get the ruby if she just killed William. She also didn´t have any obligation in letting William take on the assassination. Originally, it was the client´s fault for being stingy on the money despite setting absurd conditions. If Bai Long and his other followers had been deployed, the assassination would have been successful even though William was there. The risk of failure certainly must have been informed to the client beforehand.

There was no reason for the three not to be killed there. All the benefits, with its demerits included, were being offsetted. On the other hand, there were only benefits for killing the three. It was still weak. It was no good if he simply tackled the matter head-on. Without giving one more step forward, he wouldn´t be able to satisfy the ruler of the night.

“Now, I will be talking about more personal matters.”

Contrary to the expected conclusion of the negotiations, William opened his mouth.

“To me, this ruby is too much to let my hands go of. More importantly, it isn´t something that I can casually say I just lost

somewhere; I received this treasure because I´ve pledged loyalty to a certain family. Of course, I can´t compare that to the life of my friend. Thus, I have one proposal."

In her eyes that were tainted by boredom...

"I am the sword of Karl Von Teirah, the successor of the Teirah household. I have official connections with them and I completely won over their trust. Previously, I´ve been invited to be part of their business. I´ve been told that if I thought of any ideas for projects, I could promote it by using the company affiliated to the Teirah family anytime. And with that, I´ve thought of a very good idea that could prove to be beneficial to both of us."

... great interest appeared.

"The assassins guild certainly must deal with poison and things of the sort. Poison and medicine, or better said, pharmaceutical products, are very expensive. It must have been very difficult for you to use illegal routes of some distant place to get your supplies. That is both in terms of money and personnel expenses. However, if you were to get into the Teirah family´s business, the importing cost will greatly decrease. After all, one needs to jump into the prevailing flow... In addition, you won´t need to make use of smuggling as much anymore. The Teirah family is a noble family. Even though this usually wouldn´t be approved it is another story if it is the company owned by a noble. It will be difficult for them to deny the entry of the goods if we just say we are selling it to medics or scientists. Of course, we will actually be selling to them in the end after all."

What William was speaking of was the most unexpected of proposals. It was about business. This wasn´t something to speak about in such place and at a time like this. Of course, this wasn´t a place you could come and go as many times you wanted. So was the case, but the proposal still deviated too much from the track. This wasn´t something to be talked about when you were putting your life on the line.

“If the assassins guild, the kingdom of the night has many requests, then at that same time, it becomes a company. This is a deal with the Teirah family, the one that rules over jewels and that is spread throughout the whole world. There isn´t anyone that wouldn´t make use of a deal like this. How is it? How about both of us obtaining profits in this business, and then once the net profit surpasses the cost of the ruby, you give it back to me? There are no disadvantages. There are only gains for us both.”

To such proposal, even Nyuks…

[Ku, kuku, fuhahahahaha!]

… couldn´t help but laugh.

[You are the first fellow to come to me with such a shameless proposal. Very interesting. It is just as I expected… [You people] are much more human than I am]

Before one´s notice, Nyx was standing right in front of William. She touched William´s cheek. William´s whole body raised screams at the coldness of her finger. That was the coldness of the

dead.

[So you will be using me to rush up to above. That really is about the depth of the karma. Fine then; there are many conditions, but I will agree to your deal. The ruler of the night Nyuks vows. However, you must keep the promise of driving count Vrad into the depths of despair within five years, and also to satisfy my interest. Is that understood?]

Nyx spoke next to William´s ear as if she was chirping like a bird. The coldness of her breathing would also give the sensation of death. But whether this coldness represented that she could have the three killed any time if William hadn´t proposed that deal, or whether this represented something else...

“Very well. I will prepare a cost estimate sheet and other things for our future plans.”

[You are to directly hand it to me... I will give the right of entry to this kingdom and also the permission to enter this place to only to you. The rest... I won´t give you the permission since you can´t become residents of the night.”

Without even looking at the faces of the two people behind, she looked solely at William.

[Don´t disappoint me. The night is always looking at you. We will meet again, white child becoming of avarice.]

With those words becoming the turning point, the door behind opened and the curtains of the night closed. Nyx vanished, and what was before their eyes was the door that had been closed before and Bai Long, who was standing next to it.

“...So you came back alive. Then I have nothing to reprove. Now, you will be leaving this place.”

It wasn´t clear what unfolded there, or whether this was reality in first place.

“What was... that thing?”

Kail let a few words slip his from mouth. Hearing that, Bai Long snorted.

“Nobody knows. It is said she have been living since the founding of Arcadia. It isn´t even known whether she is alive. Whether she is a human or a demon... Her power goes far beyond a small fry like me.”

Bai Long started walking without saying anything else. The three hurriedly followed behind him.

“If something such as a living corpse exists... perhaps it should be something like that. The dead can´t die, so its time is infinite. If one fears death, as expected, one must not oppose the ruler of night. The one you would be facing is [death] itself after all...”

Words that could be heard, although it wasn´t known where they came from. The fact that the one that spoke them was the king of daylight of a previous generation that had suffered a unnatural death was something William and the others didn´t know.

42. A Fresh Step Forward

The instant William and the others got out to the superfice, they were met with the bright morning sun. It was the morning sun of the next day, but it felt as if William and the others didn´t see it. It definitely wasn´t a refreshed expression they made once they saw the sun. They were still frightened. It was only obvious they were. Death was much closer than they thought. Realizing that, they couldn´t stop trembling in their heart.

“Don´t ever... don´t associate with them ever again. I can´t win against that thing.”

Kail said to Havella while making a sour face that was as if he had eaten a bug. Havella nodded. Her face was expressionless, but it seemed it was a bit pale.

“So they cordially left us a corpse, is it? I am really grateful...”

There was a dead body of an assassin that had a similar uniform to Havella fallen by their feet. Perhaps they were telling William and the others to deal with the last dead body. Getting the dead body onto his shoulder, William turned to Kail and Havella.

“Leave the rest to me. Havella, the situation might get problematic to you, and even to Kail, so wait for the remaining heat to cool down. Just in case.”

William playfully winked to Kail. Kail made a wry smile.

“I will be taking some distance from you for some time.”

Hearing that, Havella was about to object. Interrupting her, William said.

“Of course our bounds won´t change. Only, I am someone whose master is a centurion. Moreover, I also need to get my business started. I will be busy, and I will also be committing to risks. It might have been that a slightly harsh period of time came for me, and for the two of you as well.”

William made a bitter smile. Havella, who would usually throw a tantrum at these times, didn´t say anything. There was no way she could. William and Kail fell into a big problem because of her own fault.

“It´s not like we will never meet ever again. We will just meet less frequently, and we will be able to meet often once I get free time.”

But would William ever stop being busy?

“Be careful. If you are at risk of dying, you must do anything you can to live. If it ever becomes like this, you can count on me. If you ever need my strength for something, I will go help you.”

Kail´s words gave William courage. Would there be words that were as reliable as those? The strongest person among the people

he knew was his best friend.

“If there is anything I can do for you, I will do it.”

Havella was another one of William´s best friends. It was because of that that he had to take distance from them. William got himself involved too deeply into the matters of this time. In order to not lose his precious friends, it was necessary that he had them away from danger. William was a lump of danger involved with many risks. Beside him was somewhere he didn´t want them to be.

“So then, see you again.”

William turned away from them. This wasn´t his last farewell, but he didn´t feel like meeting them again for some time. It wasn´t his wish to have them caught into his personal matters any further. The problem in question this time happened because they tried to take on William´s revenge. Hence, it was mostly William´s fault.

From now on, he would need to focus on the battlefield, in his business, on his revenge, and also on his relationship with the ruler of the night. Those were matters that were so important to the point of requiring him every bit of his mental resources. All of these matters had danger following along. It was enough for him to shoulder those risks by himself.

But before he could accomplish all those things, there was a place William needed to go.

“First I need to have this dealt with properly.”

It wasn´t necessary to have them entangled with his path. Doing so is what would do bad to them. William didn´t even want to imagine how would it be if that was to happen. Is there any person that would wish to see their friends burn by the fault of one´s own deeds?

○

“Hou, medicine, is it? You´ve put your eyes onto an interesting place.”

After having finished dealing with various complications, it was only after a few days that William could go bring his business project to Louran.

Louran attentively looked over the project sheet William had written. William was waiting for Louran with his chest filled with pride. There was no need to be cowering in fear. There was no way Louran would barge into William´s affairs with the kingdom of the night. It was because William was confident about it that he awaited for the next moment brazenly.

“Yes, we can work with what is written here.”

The outcome was that it went through, even if a bit too easily.

This was a great leap in the life of William Rivius.

The military was a place to earn status and honor. However, his goals weren´t something he could achieve with just that. Money; William also needed assets. It is simply good just to have it. With excessive money always come new possibilities. Although he would be helpless if he only had money, he wouldn´t be able to do anything if he didn´t have money. Both were necessary to rise to prominence.

“Thank you, my lord.”

William deeply bowed his head.

“I have two… three questions. Can I ask you them?”

“As you wish.”

It was the confirmation that came after the decision. There was no way he could give careless answers. However, the need to be tense wasn´t existent anymore. Although there was a [part] William needed to fool Louran about, he could come up with as many good excuses as he wished.

“First, you´ve really done well for getting such a good supplier. It seems you thoroughly investigated about the medicinal herbs all sorts of medicine are composed of, about poisonous herbs, and even rare herbs that are considered too rare to be circulating in the market. It should have been very difficult for you to get this sort of information, and also for that kind of business circle.”

Louran was indirectly asking William how he was able to find all that information. It wasn´t necessary for William to lie here.

“I became good friends with a smuggler, so I was able to learn from him with the condition that I would include him in our distribution channels. There is nothing better than to profit from your sales without holding high risks. It was because of that that allowing him to make use of the channels is part of the plan.”

Louran looked at the project sheet. There was one point Louran was curious about.

“I see. The supplier is this person called [Martin], right? But that is quite the big budget. I have no complaints to his gross profit. As for what kind of person he is... Let´s not ask about that. Although the danger of letting him through our routes is a problem, if we can properly go right [in between], we will be able to make money.”

The man named Martin. It was the merchant that would sell various kinds of “remedies” at the kingdom of the night. In order for William to start his business, he first needed to obtain the necessary [information]. The man that had the necessary information was Martin, a resident of the night.

Receiving, he exploited everything from Martin in one night. Because of that, he was able to get this information that could literally be translated to money. This was who William´s “supplier” was.

“I understood the conditions of the supplier. Now my next question: There are many other companies that deal with products related to medicine. As for the bigger ones, there are also major companies that have connections with the royalty. How are we supposed to win against them?”

The competition between companies. They obviously exist. But how to win against them? That was Louran´s question.

“I do not have the intention to contest against them for the time being. We will be dealing mainly with rare materials and dangerous goods; things they do not have the qualifications to deal with, much less the means for knowing about. The price of those are considerably high, so even if they put considerable effort to try to compete with us, they will be fighting in a field they cannot contest.”

Louran nodded in satisfaction to William´s answer. You don´t fight opponents you can´t win. The method of fighting in business and in war are the same. Whether you are fighting with swords or with money: that´s all there is of difference to it.

“I see. Then, one last thing... How will you deal with the labor force? There is no way you would be able deal with lords of distant countries by yourself all the time, right?”

The question regarding the prerequisite for doing business. In either case, William´s project sheet was one that had convincing power, and its project would definitely earn them money. There

was no way Louran, a businessman, would refuse the offer.

“We will borrow some of the people from Frank´s and Ignats´ companies. Employees of companies under the Teirah family are not allowed to do their job poorly, and since they have experience in doing business, the amount of things we need to teach them will be less.”

“In that case, I can approve your project. I will be counting on you, chairman William.”

William received a firm handshake from Louran. The coldness of his hands or the heat of his eyes; it wasn´t necessary to think to know which of those he needed to pay heed to.

“Please, leave it to me, my lord. I will not fail you.”

The foothold for William´s rise. Although he was still inexperienced, William finally obtained both a weapon and the control of a company.

○

“Ah, ga, aaah, ga.”

It was underground room where water from the sewers were oozing out, having a stinking smell wafting around. Inside this dark room that not the slightest ray of sunlight could get in, there was only one light. Every time the fire trembled, the man raised

his groaning voice.

“What, so you got broken?”

The one that appeared at the room was a man wearing a cheaply made mask used for comedy plays and a red wig that one could see it was cheap to buy with one glance. That red haired man brought the fire closer to the groaning man. At that instant....

“Agiiiiiiiiii. Agyaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

“Kuku, it´s because you wouldn´t open your mouth that you became like that. Since you were going to speak up after all, you might as well had done so while you were still a human.”

The name of the man that ceased to be a human was Martin. It was very miserable how this was the end of the man that had built up a position in the kingdom of night. He was the authority that supervised all the smugglers of the guild of darkness. However, to the man the ruler of night fell in love at first sight, he was nothing more than a tool.

“Well, I must give you my thanks, my dear friend Martin. Your information has saved my life and the life of my friends. And so, I give you my gratitude. You should be grateful too; for having been chosen as my stepping stone.”

The red haired man gently broke the neck of the thing that used to be Martin with his hand. It was such a quick death to the point

that makes one wonder what was all the unceasing pain Martin had been given until now.

“I will leave you to get rid of him, Bai Long. Tell me the bill for the cleaning job.”

“Don´t use me so leisurely. For once, I have a high position here.”

“Kuku, I know that. Now then, give my best regards to the ruler of the night. Tell her: “Let´s both of us make profit together”.”

Without saying any words, Bai Long left the red haired man´s side. The cleaning was probably going to be done once the man left the place. With that said, there was no way Bai Long would be the one doing it. To buy mochi, you go to the mochi shop. Bai Long would leave it to the cleaning people, the specialists in that business. Without having any interest about that in particular, the man left the place.

“While I have new in business, but as for the battlefield, from now on I will be controlling a hundred-man squad. Ah, I´m iching to put it to test.”

The man took away the red wig and the funny-looking mask and threw them away while he was for the future. The one who showed up was a beautiful figure of a pure white hair that would be seen on the aged. Showing a smile that would make one´s heart excited, it looked as if he became younger somehow.

Like that, the man disappeared into the city of night.

43. Numerous Battles After Numerous Battles

Karl´s hundred-man squad, previously called Karl´s ten-man squad, has been piling up victories with great momentum. Because they could influence the battlefield with a much wider range than the time it was still a ten-man squad, its war achievements naturally became larger too. William would completely defeat his opponents with his strategies and strength, and Karl would seize allies with his friendliness.

Of course, they didn´t stop bribing their allies and superiors. If they could control the will of others with money, then it was cheap for the price paid. If William could keep gaining victories and piling up achievements, he would be able to obtain something of a value that the money he invested on bribing wouldn´t ever buy. It was good to make money, but status and honor were things that you couldn´t buy with money.

“Gh, White Mask!?

“Too late.”

Hyurun

Quickly cutting a path through the enemy´s troops, William´s ten-man squad went into the enemy´s weak point. The enemy couldn´t have ever imagined that scene. It was only William´s squad that would move at night, hiding behind the scenes.

“Su-such a thing… Impossible!?”

Frank and Ignats were having a hard fight. Both ten-man squad leaders that used to be part of Karl´s hundred-man squad. Who in the right mind would have thought that was acting?

“Sh-shit!”

The one pressing forward in desperation was probably at the centurion level. This was a mounted warrior against one on foot. Originally, and without doubts, it was the knight that was supposed to be at the advantage. The spear held overhead was swung down at full strength. Matching his movement with the attack, William also swung his sword. The clash was becoming fierce.

“What?”

The spear was broken into pieces.

“Hin!?”

With that flow of events, the head of the horse was beautifully cut off, spinning and completing a revolution.

“So this is the White Mask!?”

Following that, the man was also split in two halves.

Since then, William´s sword had become even sharper. He increased his experiences in the battlefield, and the business he had just started was doing well. The confidence he obtained by those things made William soar higher.

Together with his brand-new mask, William Rivius stood at the battlefield.

While there also was how their commander was killed, becoming aware the man that was standing before them was the White Mask, the hearts of the enemy army were shaken. Each respectively scattered around to their own direction and ran away. William didn´t go after them.

“It was very tough, William-san.”

“I am completely exhausted.”

Frank and Ignahts were weighed down by their exhaustion and sank down to the ground. The surrounding soldiers were busy

robbing off weapons and armor from the dead bodies. With such good weapons, they would make quite the money.

“”If I am able to make a lot of money, I wonder if I should try doing business with weaponry?””

A big reason why Louran didn´t do business with armaments was because he didn´t have connections with the military authorities. Right now, it still couldn´t be said that William had influence inside the military circle. His name was well known, but he was nothing more than just a ten-man squad leader. However, henceforth, he wouldn´t be limited by that. When the time comes, the merit of being able to do business with armaments might become inestimable.

“”I will control everything. For that sake... I need to not only do business with jewelry, but also deal with many other types of products.””

William´s thought process was exactly like the one of a company. Not of a company that specialized in only one product, but one that dealt with several. It was his objective for all kinds of products to not be buyable or sellable without first passing through his company one day. If he was able to do that, in a certain meaning, he would become an existence that was even higher than the king.

“Ah, I guess it won´t do much help even if I keep only thinking about things so much further in the future.”

As to be expected, if he was to look too much into the distance, he

would become careless in the present. William needed to stop dreaming and look into his next battle.

“Now then, let´s return. Karl-sama must be eagerly expecting our arrival.”

“Right.”

“I can easily imagine the scene.”

○

“You are late! How much were you making me wait!”

The angry face with the veins popping up at the forehead their knight-sama was making was exactly the expected. Not only Frank and Ignahts, but even William ended up sighing. Seeing that, Karl became even angrier.

“Don´t be angry, Karl-sama. We have defeated the enemy. With that, we will have complete control of the region.”

Although small, they had gained control of a territory. This was huge. The achievements of a centurion were also about the number of enemy generals killed, but then, the long term gains of having captured a territory would start to seem appealing too. Because of that, this time´s expedition had great value.

“We´ve advanced considerably here in Arnika, which is at the southwest of Arkas. I was just wondering if we delved into it too much. Even considering it is just a small country, that is.”

Recently, little by little, Karl have been starting to speak of his opinions. This was a good inclination for him to take. Even for William, he wouldn´t simply come up with a plan all of the sudden, so he was thankful that Karl would do close analysis on the matter and question about it. Of course, it would be a nuisance if Karl was to impose his “wisdom” too much, but...

“That´s correct. We won´t go further than that. This is the limit.”

Rather, they had already reached the point of limit long ago. By hurrying Karl´s hundred-man squad, they were able to march at lightning speed. If there was to be coming any counter-attacks, it would be from here. And by that time, William and the troops wouldn´t be there anymore.

“Then, we will finally be able to go back to Arkas, right?”

Frank´s expression loosened in happiness. Ignahts also a let out a sigh of relief. William and the others haven´t been back at Arkas for approximately half a year. William himself also wanted to go back so that he could do various close adjustments in his business.

However...

“Reporting! At the northwestern front, the battle at the borders of one of the seven kingdoms, Nehdarks, will commence. The command has ordered Karl´s hundred-man squad to immediately proceed to the location and regroup with the local army!”

For things not to go well was a common thing in this world. Frank and Ignahts sighed. Karl also frowned. William had a dejected face under his mask.

“Unfortunately, our vacation will be postponed. Let´s make our preparations.”

Despite all, Karl and the others were still men of the military. When the order is given, even if it went over the limits, they still needed to respond to it.

“Order acknowledged. Karl´s hundred-man army will now be proceeding with haste to Arbas, the region bordering with Nehderks.”

This sort of unreasonable order was something they were already used to.

44. Rudolf Le Housburk

The fort city of [Frandelen], which faced the territorial borders of the eastern region of Arcadia. It was a major city of Nehderks, and it was the center of commerce with Arcadia, one of the seven kingdoms. Right now, the blue army was gathering there.

At the center of that plaza, there was a carriage that greatly stood out. The one inside that out of the common carriage that had more than ten horses pulling it was...

“So many oppai♪”(TL note:Oppai = boobs for those who don´t know -.-)

It was the successor of the archduke that was rumored to have even more political power than the royalty of Nehdarks, Rudolf le Housburk. He was an unparalleled playboy and he also had a swingy mood. He was the problem child of Nehderks.

“Young master, what is happening here?”

Big breasts, small breasts; Rudolf was surrounded by varied big and small breasts. Whether it was white ones, black ones, tan ones, yellow ones, varied types of breasts were gathered all together.

“Fugofugo. I will dive into those oppai. Fondling attack.”

“Kyaa, Rudolf-sama ecchi.”

“Yes, Rudolf-chan is ecchi♪”

The one watching Rudolf act like that with surprised eyes was one of the three warriors of Nehderks, Lainberka li Parittida. She was the only female among the three warriors, and was also someone that was given the freedom of [color], who were few in number in the military of Nehderks, whose theme color was blue.

“I would like to ask why you put your hands onto Arcadia. Currently, our country does not have any reasons to meddle with Arcadia, and we might unnecessarily be giving other countries of the seven kingdoms such as Ostoberg, Garius and Estaado an opening for them to attack us.”

Rudolf was completely absorbed in fondling breasts. Lainberka´s words wouldn´t enter his ears anymore. A vein popped up on Lainberka´s forehead.

“There is that talk about which place has the fire, right? That isn´t Ostoberk, which has changed reign, nor the superpower of Garius, and much less Nehderks or Estaado, which can´t even keep up their stability. The one that has it is Arcadia. If we don´t hit them now, they might become a problem later. That´s how your young master has read the situation, you know?

One more vein popped up on top of the already popped up one. In a flash, Lainberka was about to point her sword, but...

“Hey, hey, I came here just because you called for me. That kind of treatment is really cruel, you know?”

Drawing his blade from the scabbard, the man in black blocked the attack. Lainberka´s sword is very distinguished by its technique even in the whole kingdom. For him to have casually taken that attack proved he wasn´t average.

“Shut up, lowborn. Despite how it normally would have already been disrespectful for you to even meet eyes with me or the young master, it is outrageous for you to make use of such brash language. Do not regret if I cut off your head right now at this place.”

“Oh, scary scary. If you can do it, then you might as well try. I became a mercenary because I hate that kind of shitty difference in status thing. Let it be fair and square. I won´t accept the job if that ´s not how it is.”

There were two people behind the man in black that were filled with killing intent. Both were quite skilled. They weren´t opponents one could remain unscratched after fighting them.

“...This guy is my guest, you see. If you get too over yourself, I will kill you, ok?”

Before one´s notice was Rudolf, imposingly glaring over the place while sitting at the throne of boobs. Lainberka´s face quickly became pale.

“I-I am very sorry, young master. I´ve overstepped my bounds.”

Rudolf´s eyes weren´t like those lukewarm eyes from before that were flirting with breasts, but cold blue eyes that rejected all warmth. Rudolf had a swingy mood. If someone got his mood, even if it was unreasonable, he would drop the hammer down at that person. That was just to show how much influence he had. His position was pretty much already that of the head of the Housburk family. Not to mention, the royalty greatly trusted him.

“But to be equal to me, is it...? That´s talking big, Volf, the [Black Wolf]. If you don´t get the fitting results, it won´t match. Those words of you being equal to me, you see.”

“I am well aware, your Excellency Rudolf le Housburk, the [青貴子]. We are pros, so we will properly get the results. After we are done with that, won´t you share some of those boobs? If possible, I would like the big ones.”

Rudolf gave a wry smile. Lainberka was trembling.

“No-pe. Allll this is mine. Well, but.... only one. There is a man I want to have killed without fail in this war. If you can kill him, I will give you your desired oppai.”

Volf made a surprised face. It was impossible for Rudolf to hand over something that was his. Volf thought that this was how his personality worked from what he saw of him. Even with how Volf was, he said that more as chitchatting in the middle of negotiations. It wasn´t like he was saying that seriously.

Rudolf, with the way he is, was saying that he would share something of his. This was probably for the sake of setting a stage for this upcoming war.

“That man, [White Mask] William Rivius. If you can kill that guy, I will give you one of my oppais. Ah, how can I have such a big heart!? I have the feeling my generosity outstepped even that of god♪”

[White Mask]. Volf smiled at how this name had reached even this place. It was the mysterious man that recently made a name for himself. With the weird appearance of white hair and mask, it was boasted that he still remained undefeated in battle. Of course, with him having the senses to predict defeats and retreat before it happens, it made Volf even more interested in him.

“Then, taking word for what you said... I would like that oppai there if I get to kill him.”

“What!? There are limits to jokes! More importantly, how dare you refer to me as “oppai”.”

Lainberka li Parittida. She was one of Nehderks´ prided three warriors. To other countries, the three warriors would be akin to the position of general, or better said, great general. Volf was telling Rudolf to have that as his prize.

“Heeh, the cost for nominating Lainberka to you is high, you know. I can count on you, right? Volf-chi.”

“Of course. I am also undefeated in battle just like him.”

“…Hm? But from what I heard, at Ostoberg you….”

“That one didn´t count. Besides, on the whole, I won the war. Now then, I have some things I need to arrange… so just wait for me, my oppai-chan.”

“Do you really intent to hand me over to him, young master?”

“Yes. That is, if he can kill him.”

Lainberka was dejected. Rudolf was extremely calm, massaging breasts.

“That´s just how much worth the deal is. This time, there is no mistake that he will be the one that will give Arcadia its momentum. Arcadia´s inclination has changed ever since he came up. Karl von Teirah is probably a puppet. After all, I´ve never ever heard of his name before he got the [White Mask] as his subordinate. He is worth much less than Gilberto, Hilda and others of the likes of them. But even so, the hundred-man squad that has the most momentum now is his; the Karl´s hundred-man squad.”

Stopping to fondle breasts, Rudolf bit his own nail. Lainberka and his other close aides knew well. It was when Rudolf was like that that he could anticipate what was to come more perspicaciously than anyone else.

“Right now we can still kill him, but if he is to become a centurion; if he is to become the commander of a regiment; if he is to become a general… By that time, I don´t think Nehderks, which borders with Arcadia, will still exist, you see.”

Rudolf suddenly grasped the neck of a tan-skinned “oppai-chan” that was next to him. Groaning, her legs were convulsing and she was revealing a unsightly look.

“That´s why we will kill him now. No matter what I need to do… you see.”

There wasn´t even a sign of warmth in Rudolf´s face after he broke her neck with his hand. Even after looking at the girl fallen on the floor that had died, he didn´t think anything about it. To him, women were only decoration. All that he valued was only himself solely. And so, he needed to deal with anything that could possibly threaten the place he owned.

“Now then, I am in the middle of a oppai festival, so I will be leaving the rest to you. While you are at it, I will also leave it to you to replace that oppai♪”

Seeing Rudolf´s figure of him burying himself into breasts, Lainberka was hit by a feeling of dread.

“Your will.”

She could only answer that way. There was nobody that could go

against Rudolf in this country after all.

45. The Lion Cubs; The Key Pieces Of The Offensive

Both troops were glaring at each other from each side of the Lulia river. The part in the area that stood out the most was the mountainous region at the direction of the upstream of the river. Battle has already happened in this place. Attacking and retreating, retreating and attacking; this has been repeating many times. With the river showing signs of calming down and the flat ground under it revealing itself, since the day Arcadia got careless and let the enemy built their base within their borders, the possibility that they could greatly lose ground was inevitable. Because of that, all they could do was to spare reserve soldiers.

William´s squad was deployed to the mountain area as an active force. The ones at the surroundings of their encampment were Arcadia´s lion cubs. For each of them, one could only wonder whether it was that they were far ahead from Karl or that it was just that their experience was simply much greater.

“Yo, Karl. There really isn´t a fragment of ardor in you. As to be expected, the undefeated Karl-sama is really different from us.”

Both Gregour and Anzerm, who outdid themselves at the party, were also called to the borders. Already getting a bit used to the place was Gilberto. Walking along him were his centurion followers.

“Unfortunately, Hilda is in a campaign at our opposite direction in the east, so she isn´t here.”

Seeing Karl lost, timidly looking around, Gregour came up to him. Then, Karl made a weird expression that was as if he was relieved, but at the same time as if he was bored. Behind him, Frank and Ignahts were smiling.

“As always, impressive battle results. As to be expected of William-dono.”

Anzerm raised his hand to give William a handshake. William answered him with a troubled face.

“Those are Karl-sama´s achievements.”

“…Don´t be humble.”

There was nobody that heard his muttered words. Anzerm didn´t want anyone to hear them either.

Anzerm was the only one that noticed it. He noticed a peculiarity about William.

“Though mountain warfare is where you specialize at, I would still like to ask you how you would fight here, sir Karl.”

“Hmm….. I still didn´t think about it. We still don´t know the enemy´s formation after all.”

“We should go soon, Karl-sama. We need to meet the regiment commander. The two of you, we will have to see you later. We still have many things to talk to the commander.”

They pulled out before their pretense was exposed. Karl learned the basics of military strategy to some point, but the times he could think of a proper and suitable plan for the actual battle were still few. His current situation was that he didn´t have neither enough knowledge or experience to command a hundred-man squad, the core composition of the military. It would be problematic if people were to notice that.

“Yeah, see you later Karl! Next time, please let me have meal together with Lutogarde! I will be counting on you, aniki!”

Gregour said something in which it wasn´t possible to decide whether he was being serious or lying. Karl made a troubled expression.

“...Well then, see you later.”

Anzerm looked at William without saying anything. Noticing his gaze, William averted his eyes from him. Whether Anzerm was being suspicious of William or perhaps there was something that picked his attention on him, there was no way William could act based on guesses. But even so, he thought deep in his heart that he needed to be wary of Anzerm´s actions.

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After getting through the meeting with the regiment commander, William´s squad received their assigned position. Taking William´s position as the center, Anzerm and Gregour positions would be his left and right wings, while Gilberto was assigned to a considerably far place: at the downstream of the river. Presently, the most important positions were the upstream area Anzerm was assigned to and Gilberto´s both wings at the downstream area he was assigned to. That was specially the case for Gilberto, whose assigned place was one where the army could move as it pleased when the time of need would come; a place where army movement was the key. The weight of the expectations the higher-ups had of them was at a different level.

“What I need to do is clear. We need to get into the enemy´s encampment at the area they invaded our borders. In other words, the mountains is our main attacking point. The reason why many of the younger generation that is so much held in anticipation is being reunited here is for that sake. Right now, they don´t have the means to keep up the supplies. It´s like they are telling them something like “go show results” or so.”

The regiment commander was also of the younger generation, so people were full of hope about this war. It was because of that that losing was impossible. Even though they might be showing an opening to other countries, they had gathered this many talented people. It was clear they already won. They were already counting their chickens before they hatched.

“What is the special trait of mountain warfare? This is revision for you, Karl.”

Only Karl and William were at the place. Frank and Ignahts were outside putting their troops together.

“Uhmmm... First it would be that the advantage in numbers is less. And then, you also need to be careful of places that have divergence in elevation. Other than that, it would be that infantry is the core composition and that mobility is lessened... I guess? How did I do?”

William smiled. Seeing that, Karl made a cheerful expression.

“You got the rough idea. Well, if you were to put it in detail, there would be many little factors, but the point would be that nature makes up for a crowd of people. The one that has a map and has a deep grasp of the terrain is the one to come out victorious. With that said, here isn´t a minor battlefield, but a place where Arcadia and Nehderks have clashed many times. Both sides should hold a good grasp of the terrain.”

Normally William would usually make use of many methods to get a understanding of the territory, but only this time he wouldn´t need to do so. This was because both armies already knew about the region even to the point of loathing the fact. They wouldn´t need to make a detailed map of the place since they could just get one at a low price.

“With that being the case, do you know where it is that one can take advantage at?”

Karl tilted his head. Having done so, Karl didn´t have any ideas

left. Only William had the answer for it. Although Karl grew, his main traits didn´t change. If it was to ask, one could say he was still Karl-ish.

“The place one has to take advantage at is at [speed].”

William gave a broad grin.

46. The Start Of The War At The Mountains

“I guess we should be focusing on speed.”

At the mountain area, at the other side of the Lulia river at the upstream part, there was a black colored group. The attire of the man that was at its center was a combination of black pelts and his black armor. His aura was much like that of a wolf, and his appearance was also like that of a wolf. It was a wolf in the shape of a human; the one called the [Black Wolf], Volf.

“Han? Isn´t our mobility restricted here? Then why go all the way? It´s just better to just beat them up with strength like the usual, isn´t it?”

Volf saw Nikka as an idiot. Thinking about it, and adding in her lack of sensuality too, he sighed.

“Hey, what´s that sigh for? I will fucking kill you, bastard.”

Leisurely dismissing Nikka´s voice that was filled with anger, Volf looked at the other person that was with him.

“It´s because of that that were are focusing on it, Nikka. It is because the mobility is being restricted that its value skyrocketed. In the situation both sides know well about the terrain, mobility for taking better positions than the opponent is essential. The speed in execution, movement speed, the cooperation with the other troops; every thing related to [speed] becomes important.”

Nikka clapped her hands as if she had reached an understanding. She probably still didn´t understand.

“That´s the essential at the first days of the battle. However, there is a part there that we definitely lack.”

“That is the cooperation with the other troops, right?”

At the same time Volf was starting to talk about their strategy, Nikka started to fish somewhere in the area. She had no desire to be part of the discussion about their strategy. She didn´t have even a bit of interest in strategy. She also didn´t want to study about it either. Seeing her old friend act like that, Volf gave a long sigh.

“Well, I guess. The one in charge is that man after all. He isn´t the type of person that would want to hear us with our lack of status. Cooperation is impossible.”

“Even among the seven kingdoms, social status is very valued in Nehdarks after all... As a mercenary, it is so difficult to deal with this.”

It was Nehdarks´ troops that were pressing on the mountain side, but it seemed this was happening only for the moment. It didn´t seem like they would be able to take over it. If Volf was able to take the command of the whole army, the first thing he would do would be to take the mountains as fast as he could even if he had to greatly exhaust his military strength.

“The commander is such a pussy. For him to stand out like that and then get isolated… How stupid! For how long has he been keeping this up? The mountain is a natural stronghold, you know? If you get to take it, even if you are isolated, it´s possible to hold out somehow. It is because an incompetent that can´t even realize that is at the command that the situation is like this.”

Volf made an ugly face.

“The bad side of the conservative Nehderks is showing up. They are too scared to make a mistake.”

“The worst is that the enemy side is composed of the younger generation… It will be a headache.”

Although Arcadia was also had a big conservative side, since their troops were composed from the younger generation, they should be able to push back. Moreover, at the present time, Arcadia had the enough momentum to permit a few mistakes. They had more than the enough foundation to be holding the intent of attacking.

“They will keep losing their battles at those first days. Well, it´s fine… My target is the [White Mask] after all.”

Nikka, who had been fishing, suddenly turned around and threw a knife. It would be in trajectory of hitting Volf if he hadn´t dodged it. Volf´s cheeks were twitching.

“You bastard, you are still aiming for that oppai! Are you waging war for boobs!? Do you like them that much!? Don´t kid me, shit!”

Nikka was holding a grudge over the “oppai negotiation” (So nicknamed by Nikka). Volf was half joking half serious about that. The fact he liked boobs was the undeniable truth.

“Calm down. Although there is that about the boobs, if we can get the head of [White Mask], that ten-man squad leader, we will still be getting one of Nehdark´s three warriors. There is no mistake she has remarkable talent. She seems like she will be difficult to use, but then, gradually… Guhuhu, it should be just fine like that.”

“What´s with that “Guhuhu”!? Don´t start making that weird face, stupid!”

“Weird face!? What are you saying of this super handsome Volf-sama! Do it rightly! Say: Volf-sama is handsome and super cool!”

“It´s that part about you that´s weird, stupid, stupid!”

“Whaat!”

Once the married couple manzai begun, the time of seriousness was over. Volf had probably given up on the starting phase of the war. It was due to that that he stayed at the rear, at the Nehdarks´ side of the river despite how the army was pushing forward.

“For you to have come all the way there… You are really a man as cunning as a wolf.”

Arcadia´s troops still didn´t know. They didn´t know there was a pack of wolves among the enemy. Right at the time they would be confident of their victory, the fangs of the wolf would bit off their throat. That man could already see that scene happening.

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Arcadia was fast to start acting. Just when one would think that the Anzerm that was handling the upper part had moved away, Gregour at the other wing would push. When the center started to be short in hands, Karl´s troops would completely crush them. That was the strategy they had decided at the war council on the previous day. Karl proposed the idea, and Anzerm and Gregour supported it, thus having their strategy decided immediately. The one displeased was Gilberto. With that said, as to be expected, it was a bit premature to have Gilberto, who was the keystone that tied the mountain side and the flatlands together, to move now. Although speed was important, they mustn´t let any gaps appear.

However, at the first day of battle, they weren´t able to cause the complete downfall of their opponents.

This was because the center was considerably tenacious.

“…Tch.”

William was clearly unsatisfied. He was unsatisfied that the first day had ended without him having been able to cut down the man at the enemy´s rear guard he had crossed blades with earlier. However, this was something that couldn´t be helped. The opponent William was fighting against was the right-hand man of Lainberka, who one of the three warriors, the [Crying Spear] Anatour. He was such an skilled fighter that his spear would sing for the grief of the dead with the sounds it made.

“So that is the [White Mask]? It seems it isn´t completely impossible that he had killed Shulvester.”

Anatour, the regiment commander of this army, firmly held onto conservative fighting techniques. It could be said he would only do moves that went by the books, but in terms of one-on-one combat, he was still considered a top expert even in the whole kingdom of Nehderks. The reason why Arcadia´s offense only amounted to that much, and the reason why they couldn´t thoroughly press onto the center was all due to Anatour.

“He isn´t to the point of being unmanageable. But he also isn´t to the point I can be optimistic.”

Anatour evaluated William´s strength like that. Presently, Anatour could still push him back. However, the real issue was that he didn´t have the slightest idea how much he would grow from now on.

“I can understand a bit the reason why Rudolf-sama said we should kill him before he grows up.”

With that said, Anatour felt that he wasn´t such an opponent to the point that Rudolf would have to go all this way for. People that were this much strong in one-on-one battles was very common in this world. Since there wasn´t anything in particular that went over what was the expected in current situation, Anatour didn´t feel the need to report to Lainberka.

Anatour had a plan he could have used to bring William down. If Anatour had been able to notice William´s other face; one of deep knowledge even in warfare, he would have used it. Unfortunately, although Anatour could see through simple strength, he didn´t have the capability to guess the [power] William had.

If still in this day had the [Noir Guard] moved, perhaps Nehdarks would have been able to avoid the hell that was going to start from now.

47. Arcadia´s Steady Advance

Everyday was consecutive defeats. Those results were stabbing at Anatour´s body. Their position of pushing forward was long gone. They had crossed the river and were now at the foot of the mountain holding their ground. Even trying to go fight with all his might himself in order to break out of their situation, they were being singlehandedly pushed back by Arcadia. Because he couldn´t let himself get isolated and surrounded, and also because nobody would take him as an opponent, the sole horseman Anatour had his destruction power negated.

“So this is Karl Von Teirah´s plan? Ah, I must say it is very splendid.”

Anzerm´s subordinates were praising Karl, who proposed their plan.

“Indeed…. It is a very splendid plan.”

Anzerm was expressionless. Nobody could tell his thoughts. However, he perfectly completed the task he had to. The tall man whose household was of the Krulgar was a very balanced centurion. He had both knowledge and courage.

“To all troops: There is no need to be in haste. However, you must move while having in mind we must push them all the way back yet today.”

Today, they were going to take over the mountains. With that

done, the favored side of the war was decided.

“Osshaa! Crush them with all you have!”

The one brazenly attacking was Gregour´s hundred-man squad. The vigour of their army advance that was like raging fire hadn´t lessened even at the mountains, where cavalry couldn´t be used.

“Gregour-sama. Aren´t we advancing too much?”

Hearing his subordinate´s timid words, Gregour laughed at him.

“Fool. What am I to do if I was to run away when I am at this winning battle? I will destroy the enemy´s base ahead and get the most merit out of them. It won´t be Gilberto, nor Hilda, nor Anzerm, nor even Karl; it will be me, Gregour von Tundar!”

Gregour showed a ferocious smile. He had an expression filled with ambition. This was also Gregour showing his honest side.

Gilberto was unmoving. The time Gilberto, who was the link that connected both the mountains and the flatland, moved would be the time this battle was going to be decided. The reason for him to stay there was about to be over now. Within Karl´s proposal, there wasn´t any part that said Gilberto had to go move somewhere. Gilberto also didn´t feel like doing so.

“Sir Gilberto. Is it fine for us to stay here?”

Gilberto showed a displeased face.

“Although it is annoying that I have the same opinion as that lowly born man…. Now isn´t the time to move. That´s all.”

Snorting, Gilberto watched the battlefield. If Nehderks was to make its move, it would be only at this timing. It would be Arcadia ´s end if he was to move now. It was because of that….

“Really…. I won´t let you do as you please.”

…that only their side was at leisure.

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“Now, Anatour-dono. Have you already made up your mind to ask for our assistance?”

The black group appeared in front of Anatour, who had been constantly getting at his wits´ end.

“Bastards! What are you slacking for! Since you have been hired by our army, then you must show the corresponding amount of work you were hired for!”

Hearing that, the leader of the group bursted in laughter.

“Buhah! That´s exactly like you said. We are hired. If it becomes a pain, we can just get our asses out of there. It might be a good idea to watch your destruction as a side dish for our drinking party.”

Anatour´s spear was headed to the man´s throat as it rised a cry. That sound came from the spear technique that mourned for the dead. The incoming attack was that of the [Crying Spear], a name that has thundered through not only Nehderks, but its neighboring countries too.

Gakin*

The ones to block the attack were the two people standing beside the man. It was a woman that looked like a man and a man that looked like a woman. Anatour´s eyes were wide-open. Though it still wasn´t perfect, he was a man that had accomplished with the spear to such degree. It would be one thing if it was the [Black Wolf] himself, but he didn´t even start imagining that his close-aides would be able to stop the attack.

“I will be warning you beforehand. We are strong. We have the power that can still break out of our current situation. However, if you bastards keep doing as you wish, we won´t be able to win even with that. I have one condition for us to win this battle. Whether you accept it or not, you are free to choose.”

Even to someone such as Anatour, the situation he was at was one which there was no coming back from. If they were to lose there, there is no mistake that his head would be cut off from his torso. In addition, they might do the same with all his family and followers too. Since it was about Rudolf it was being talked about, it wouldn´t be weird if he were to do that. Even if Anatour survived, he would still have the disgrace to carry such shame.

“...Can you win?”

“Of course. Who do you think I am?”

In as situation like this; a situation there was no coming back from...

“….Say… your condition.”

…he had no way other than to rely on someone. To rely on the one that had a plan that could lead them to victory.

Until now, everything went just as the [Black Wolf] had planned. As for how it would go hereafter…

“The condition is…”

48. The Noir Guard Appears

There was a small feeling that something was out of the place around. The one to first notice that was Gregour, who had been leading the offensive . Although he wasn´t a witty person, he definitely wasn´t a fool. The battle line was extended because he was hurrying to finishing Nehderks off. There were few roads at the mountains, so it was difficult to have an army in line formation. Because of that, they were in a file formation. And so...

“How weird... It´s too silent at our rear.”

...because of that, a gap appeared.

“Could it be that.... we got isolated!?”

There weren´t any allied troops behind them. Gregour was soon to take notice of it. If he had been too late to realize that...

“We are going back!”

If he had advanced even further...

“Tch! Isn´t he clever for how bulky he is!”

He would have got completely surrounded and taken a rain of arrows. The soldiers whose theme tone of their uniform was blue jumped from the shadows of the trees and bushes. Having already

started to retreat before seeing that, Gregour was definitely capable. However, even so…

“Chararan! That´s the [Noir Guard]´s debut.”

The [Noir Guard] swiftly cut off their path at the rear without making any sound. About ten people of the black colored group were standing in front of Gregour´s retreating path. It would be easy to overcome only ten people. Without even thinking about that, Gregour charged. That decision was correct.

“Hahan. Did it seem like you could escape from me? How naive.”

The woman that looked like a man got in stance with her long spear. It was at a size that it usually would have been impossible for women to be capable of swinging. It was to the point that even men would hesitate to use it in battle. Seeing that, Gregour´s subordinates smiled.

There was only one person; only Gregour that wasn´t smiling. Only Gregour knew it. Only him understood that the macho woman in front of his eyes….

“Heave-hoooooo!”

…was capable of lot.

“Hm?”

It was only Gregour, who was being careful, that was able to dodge the attack at the spur of the moment. The two people that were behind him were unsurprisingly cut in half. With the casual swing of the woman, the two men that were wearing armor were cut in half. Not only that, it was two people at the same time.

“This guy!?”

There was no way the macho woman was using her strength to handle the spear. Making the best use of her soft body, and her skeletal structure that was as broad as she could have been born with, she could move the spear well enough without pretty much not adding strength while also having it hold more than enough destructive power.

Moreover, this wasn´t an attack that had been done with only a single blow in mind, but one that was among the consecutive flow of attacks coming after it.

“Nuooo!? This sharpness!”

Gregour, who had decided he wouldn´t be able to escape, blocked the great spear with his own sword in an inadequate stance. Receiving that attack that carried speed, a slight crack appeared on his great sword.

“Tch, so you still won´t die. Looks like you have a bit of spine.”

There was no way Gregour could waste his time with such an opponent that was in front of his eyes. This was because the soldiers that ambushed them in order to surround them were following from behind.

“I, the commander of the second hundred-man squad of Arcadia, Gregour Von Tundar, will immediately push my way through you!”

Gregour raised his great sword upward, giving off pressure. His subordinates entered in their combat stance.

Seeing that, the macho woman sneered.

“I will give you good memories for your afterlife. Your opponent is the vice-leader of the [Noir Guard], Nikka-sama. Remember that in the next world.”

The macho woman, vice-leader Nikka, flexed her muscles with all her power and amassed strength in them. Following behind her, the black mercenaries charged at Gregour and his subordinates.

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The centurion Anzerm kept his carefulness. The centurion Karl slowed down his movement as if he had guessed something was happening. Only the centurion Gilberto that was distant from the main battle was able to react to the enemy´s table-turning

offensive. For what the momentum of their armies was strong, they received a big counterblow in response.

Anzerm was supposed to have been able to properly hold on his own over this, but...

“Gh!?”

....he was being considerably pushed back.

He reacted to the enemy´s counter offensive. His decision of taking position on an advantageous ground and going on the defensive was good. He was completely prepared for the enemy´s direct attack. He was properly using the terrain advantage of [high ground]. But despite that...

“That´s impossible. Our side should still have the advantage in terrain. Despite that, why!?”

It was unreasonable that they were being pushed back.

“Just like the strategy books. For you to be thinking of war with just theories... You are still too green.”

Together with those words, an arrow flew next to Anzerm, grazing at his cheek. At the origin of the arrow´s trajectory was a single effeminate man. It was a man that looked like a woman. His equipment lightly had the tone of black. That despite the theme color of the uniform of Nehderks´ army being blue.

“Who?”

Hearing Anzerm´s question, the man smiled and shook his head

“Information is a weapon. Thoughtlessly spouting it is something only fools do. Well, I think Nikka would have named herself though... Nothing will come out from my mouth, and nothing will be taken from it. Yes, I will just tell you the objective of our operation.”

A feminine man. A man that looked like a woman. A man that was mild, delicate and gave off the feeling of gentleness....

“It is that place you are standing at.”

He showed a cruel smile that was like one of a wolf. His appearance was just like that of a wolf.

“This guy.... All troops, focus your attention on that guy! That man is strong!”

Anzerm´s orders flew. Focusing their attention, his subordinates gazed steadily at the man in front of their eyes

Seeing that, the man laughed.

“In the end, you really can´t see. By the time you say whether I

am strong or weak, you´ve already failed. War isn´t something done by a few individuals... A wolf isn´t just by itself, my little sheep brought up in a pen."

Before Anzerm could understand the meaning of those words, soldiers pinpointed the place his formation became weaker due to the terrain at and got their teeth on his troops. It was a surprise attack. The swiftness of the attack surprised Anzerm.

"We are a pack of wolves. We are a fast, strong and smart pack. There is no defeat to the pack of black wolves."

The fangs of the wolf were being deeply dug into Anzerm.

49. Confusing Battlefield

William was surprised. He imagined they were going to change their strategy. He expected it to be the apex of idiocy. Because of that, he intended to act as a balancer so that he could deal with anything the enemy might try. It was because of that that he slowed down his marching speed. He didn´t let anything escape his eyes. He thought so.

“This… What is happening?”

The spectacle he was watching from that spot that had a good view was the spectacle of the white being exterminated by the blue. Until yesterday, it had been the opposite of that spectacle that was unfolding. Today, it suddenly was completely turned around. Their standing, the precision in their movement…

“William! How will we move?”

Karl´s desperate voice expressed the ugliness of the situation.

“Sorry. Let me think a little. Give me a bit of time.”

William had his eyes shut behind his mask. Needing nothing but just a bit of time, he was diving into his deep vast sea of knowledge. Holding everything stored inside him, he studied the situation.

““First of all, I can´t imagine Nehderks army had been easing up

on us until yesterday. There is no reason for them to do that, and I couldn´t smell any kind of trick of the sort in their movement. They were not playing dead. This is the first thing to consider.””

Nehderks was extremely scared of making a mistake. Because they were a conservative country, commanders hated the most to suffer defeat and have their career damaged. They feared failures, so they wanted to win at all costs. Although they were also scared of mistakes, they were much more scared of changing their methods. The people of their kingdom had this type of mentality, and this influenced their military.

“”Besides, why did they suddenly change their strategy today? Thinking about their desperation charges, they were clearly too focused on the results. It couldn´t be helped that their [bad side] would be completely in display along their advance. With how Gregour and Anzerm are being pushed back, it can be seen that the enemy is taking note of where to emphasise and lay destruction. From that, I can without doubt declare that the [head] has changed. Someone who isn´t Anatour is moving this army.””

The army movement before William´s eyes was completely different from yesterday. He couldn´t think of them as the same enemy. He couldn´t think of them as the same army. He couldn´t think of them as having even come from the same country.

“”To begin with, why can them move like that? Even though they are deviating from the way the army of Nehderks has been moving... Have them been sparing time for doing these kind of drills regularly? If so, then their crushing defeats they´ve been having until yesterday would be impossible. I can´t understand.

The change in their movement…. I can´t understand.”

For the first time William headed out to the battlefield, he was assaulted by a fear whose nature he couldn´t understand. All the enemies he had faced until now, and even that Strakules, had never made any deviations in their strategies. Although his strength had indeed surprised William, he didn´t have any parts about him he couldn´t understand. However, his opponent this time had.

“It really feels bad to leave it like that without understanding what´s happening though.”

William muttered those words. His closed eyes opened.

“Karl, let´s move.”

It was a battlefield that required mobility. Until yesterday, they were supposed to be the ones having the advantage on that. However, that advantage was now backfiring.

“”There is no mistake about them having gathered their combat strength at the two ends of the battlefield being a bluff. Anzerm and Gregour aren´t opponents one can easily ignore. The proof of that is how they are sending forces even at Anzerm, who had set his defensive position. They are doing that in order to keep them stranded. And so, their goal must be…””

Before William´s eyes was their main army. Looking to the sides

along them was their battle line. Their fighting force was focused in the two ends of it. Because of that, there was a gap open. It was a very indistinct gap that only William, who had complete understanding of the terrain, noticed.

“”You´ve really been doing as you wished. Allow me to take it from you. To take your head!””

William was angered at how he had been led by his nose. The White Mask moved out.

○

Gilberto couldn´t move. He knew that his allies were losing. Looking at it superficially, they were at a situation they immediately needed to be sent reinforcements to rescue them. However, by looking at it in the long term, it was simply impossible for Gilberto to move. He was the link between the mountains and the flatlands. If Gilberto was to move from there and participate in the battle, he would leave an opening at this vital position.

“Gilberto-sama.”

“Don´t say anything. If we move, we will be eaten. That´s the kind of opponent we are facing.”

Their position being captured would mean that the defeat of the whole battle would have been decided. Although right now they

are separated by the river, if he lets his position fall, Nehderks would be able to advance into the borders of Arcadia pretty much without needing to care about the river. They would lose the buffer zone of the mountains, which was a natural stronghold, and which would also become a strong strategic point for Nehderks.

“Who is it? Who is the one that surpassed that underhanded man?”

The underhanded man was William Rivius. Although he wasn´t a likeable person in Gilberto´s eyes, Gilberto couldn´t help but recognize his intelligence. Including the fact that he had been using Karl and also the evaluation Gilberto had of him, he thought of him as an existence he wouldn´t be able to

But someone surpassed such person.

“So he moved? Whether he read into that or not... Since he moved, he knows about the strength of the enemy.”

Gilberto predicted William´s moves. Understanding his aims and following along, Gilberto decided to defend their fatal weak point. It was because of that that he decided on his own to protect his position.

“”I will see whether the strength of that underhanded man will win or lose.””

Gilberto´s decision was an extremely honest one. If,

Of course, the enemy obviously also predicted that. If Gilberto had done something as reckless as moving out, William wouldn´t have entrusted him the protection of that position.

○

“Ah, as to be expected of the army of Arcadia. They´ve been well trained.”

The one running through the battlefield was Volf, the [Black Wolf]. He was wearing black pelts and light armor. The group following along him were similarly wearing black. Volf had elected those few to go with him. It was a composition that put emphasis on speed. With that, they were going to bite at their enemy´s throat.

“White Mask. A strength that doesn´t differ from the rumours, and also your intelligence. You are really good, aren´t you?”

Volf praised White Mask. He was still a ten-man squad leader, but by properly using his master who was a centurion and bribery to get the favor of the other officers, he moved the whole army. Volf wasn´t sure whether he could give an immediate reply on whether he was capable of the same or not. Volf had the personality of liking to be at the leading position. He couldn´t endure being in the shadows. William´s maneuvers required him to do that. It was because of that that he couldn´t give a reply on that.

“He has a good head. He also has strength. Besides, he is young. The only difference from me would pretty much be the face. I am the most handsome, but he hides his face. In other words, he has a plain face.”

“B-but you can´t decide it with just that…”

Hearing his subordinate´s comment, Volf snorted as if he had heard something stupid.

“The only one chosen by god and can be intelligent, strong and handsome at the same time is me, you know? Well, he still doesn´t lose at strength and intelligence. But even then, it is still my complete victory!”

Volf was looking at a certain direction while smiling.

“Okay. So you started moving, White Mask. So we will be bumping heads at that place? I see you got really mad.”

The speed of comprehension, the speed for deciding to make his move. He indeed wasn´t average.

“I still say I have the crushing victory over you though, White Mask. There isn´t much difference between you and me. That is, for now.”

His subordinates´ eyes became wide-open by the surprise. It was rare for Volf to praise others. At the times he would be comparing

them to himself, that would be much more the case. Even his men, who had lived together with him for a long time, didn´t know of any person Volf had acknowledged to that point. Volf was a man that declared that even compared to Strakules, all he lacked was experience, and didn´t fall behind on anything else.

“The same amount of intelligence… Strength… Well, I wonder if I am a little bit ahead? It is my complete victory in handsomeness though…. Sorry there White Mask. It can´t be helped, you know? Heavens don´t give people more than one talent. Now to give three is already unreasonable. You have two. I am at the same class as god, so I have three. Can´t be helped.“

That man was someone Volf acknowledged. Volf though that decision was very close to his. He could guess his strength from the draw he had with Anatour. Yes, there wasn´t that much of a difference between the two. Even so, Volf was sure of his victory in this battle.

“The difference between you and me isn´t something about talent. It is the difference between light and darkness, plain-faced-kun.”

Volf advanced. He was certain of his victory.

50. The Perfect Surprise Attack

Sensing a group nearby, William showed a smile seeing that the enemy was heading to their fatal weak point. There was still a way to get through this. If he could fight against whoever is in the control of the army, even if he isn´t able to get his head, he will still be able to carry the battle over to tomorrow. Besides that, Gilberto was also able to understand his own importance and kept standing in his position. Gregour and Anzerm also didn´t look like they were going to be killed. They could still recover from their position.

“Well… I´m not planning on letting him escape though!”

If William is able to get the head of that person, he can end this battle tomorrow. This was just how much that morale was moving the enemy soldiers through this battlefield. It was his bad luck he was going to meet William. Sprouts like that had to be plucked early.

“William-san! I can see the enemy troops! It´s [blue colored]!”

At that instant, his smile broadened. His guesses were turned into certainty.

“Kuhah! I will be taking your head!”

The enemy advanced. William attacked from the flank. Their columns were cut through, and their front and rear were broke apart beyond repair. There would be no forgiveness to the one that

had shaken his chances of victory.

“I see. As expected of the [Black Wolf]. So he was able to predict it to this point.”

Words of lamentation came from deep in the bushes. Just before that voice, William didn´t know what was happening. Once he got to the bottom of things among the few possibilities there was, his soldiers at the rear had their heads blown up.

“That.... Impossible.”

William was more surprised at the state of affairs than his own predicament.

“It has been some time, [White Mask].”

The one facing him was the [Crying Spear] Anatour, someone he was fighting against at the first day to the point of despise. For a regiment commander class to go to the front lines in his own accord was something that didn´t even come through his mind.

“Well, don´t be in such rush. Your opponent is me.”

Hearing those words, William sighed. He had been read through to this point. And then, there were also those words about Anatour being the one responsible for dealing with him. Connecting one point to the newly discovered one, it became a line.

“Could it be!?”

William looked behind him. He ended up understanding what was happening. He had finally noticed the full picture behind the enemy´s movement.

“You could really guess. However, you can´t be looking away!”

Aah!

Although William barely blocked the [Crying Spear] with his sword, his face was pale to the point it was possible to notice it even behind his mask.

“Could it be I… was outwitted?”

His pride that had been building up crumbled. There were many of his opponents he was inferior in power. However, there hasn´t been one time he was inferior in strategy. This was a first-time experience for him. It was as if his body was burning by the humiliation.

“Shit… Move aside, you smaaaall fryyyy!”

The crowd of corpses surged. They didn´t have their usual smiles. Those corpses were burning with the black flames of humiliation, and they were raising screams and angry yelling.

Seeing that, sweat started to appear in Anatour´s forehead. Although there was no mistake William was using his full strength in the last time they fought, there was still a part of him that was carefree at that time. Taking off his exterior appearance, a cruel monstrous figure appeared. This was William´s true form.

“However, this is the same for me. Flavour this [Crying Spear] to your heart´s content!”

His fighting spirit was rising. What appeared was a lamenting spear. It was Anatour going at his full power; a power that was born from surmounting numerous deaths that piled up more than the necessary to fill the dark abyss. This was also his true form. He was one of the only four regiment commanders of the army Lainberka led. He was Anatour, the [Crying Spear]. The number of lives he stole with his spear were to the point it couldn´t be counted.

“You are in my wayyyyyyyy!”

“Come!”

Although he was directly meeting William´s attack, this was Anatour calling for him after having already read through all his moves. The preparations of the blue army were complete. Karl´s undefeated hundred man army and the elite troops directly in control of Anatour. Both armies were now killing each other.

○

“What we lack is the amount of chess pieces. I have won by the amount of pieces I could move. Whether it would have been me or that guy, if you had more combat strength, and also men that are good enough for you to entrust tasks to, we wouldn´t have been able to empty this path. In other to have everything go perfectly, it was obvious you needed to have this place locked down.”

The place Volf was standing at was the place William was standing at before. It was the place William, a man of such caliber, had been protecting. Not only was it a good position to be, but it was also..

“Yep, I am perfect. I wanted to have oppai-chan too if possible, so there was also that part about me wanting to kill White Mask. But then, there is no meaning to it if I lose. In battles, you gotta win whatever the circumstances. Don´t you agree?”

Volf asked William, who wasn´t present at the place. Of course, there was no response.

“Now then, let´s win, shall we?”

Before Volf´s eyes was the headquarters that had lost the barrier called “William”.

The black wolf dashed. His prey was before his eyes.

○

Gilberto caught his breath.

It was already too late for him to make his move. Even if he was to move now, he wouldn´t get in time. The enemy troops arrived at the headquarters this much quickly. Soundlessly, and more than anything, fast, the black colored group assaulted the main army.

“Gilberto-sama! What should we do!?”

He was in doubt over what to do. Even though it was a certain fact that the headquarters was going to fall, it was still possible to fight against the group attacking them if they were to move there with all their power now. And so, with that being the situation, it would be enough if they were to take the head of the unknown commander leading those troops and bring the head so that they could declare it as a tie.

“”However, would someone of such caliber really believe that I wouldn´t go after him even in a situation like this? If I leave this place open and go after him, it would be a complete checkmate for him. Should I move? Or should I not?”

In that short period of time, Gilberto had to come to a decision. There wasn´t time. Whether to go or to stay; out of these two options, he could choose only one. His decision was indeed to...

51. The Two Vice Leaders

“Gh!? Could it be the headquarters are...!?”

During his fight, Gregour spotted there were smoke signals coming from the direction where the headquarters were.

“Ooh! Don´t go looking elsewhere!”

The supple spear casually and effortlessly bent. In result, the increasing destructive power at the impact point. Nikka´s fighting was light and flexible; a fighting style that made most use of the good point of her female traits. She couldn´t win against men with just raw power. And so, she devoted herself to improving her technique. The result she came up with was this method of fighting.

“Tch!?”

Gregour could only block against the long spear. It was a continuous and fast barrage of attacks. Nikka´s spear undulated phamtasmagolically. Gregour, who had been blocking the attacks, was also amazing. In this war composed of only men, he had never seen any traces of that spear. There were few men that could block Nikka´s continuous attack when seeing it for the first time.

“Ora ora ora ora ora ora! That´s all you got, you blockheaded boy!?”

While feeling the enemy troops advancing from behind with his skin, Gregour´s squad were moving to the side. They were completely cut off at the front and the back by Nikka´s squad, so there was no way to move other than there.

“Shit! Those guys are strong!”

They weren´t only common soldiers. The black soldiers they were facing against were all skilled. They put up a good match against the elite soldiers that were on the direct command of the household of Tundar, which Gregour was head of.

“I won´t let you escape. After I finish killing all these guys at the rear, I will have you crushed flat in between.”

At the rear, the retreating soldiers were being trampled down. Gregour couldn´t do anything about it. Even before that he couldn´t think of a way to escape from this predicament.

“So I can´t escape no matter what!?”

While barely parrying the enemy´s attacks, Gregour was looking for a way to get away from this situation somehow.

“It´s impossible. There wasn´t one time Volf´s plans went wrong. You guys will be massacred.”

Gregour wasn´t really the thoughtful type. He wasn´t at a really good situation to be pondering in the middle of war. In result of

that...

“Wha!?”

“What. Have you made your resolve to die?”

Gregour retreat was stopped by a tree that was at his blind spot, and also there wasn´t enough space for him to swing his great sword either. This was something that happened in an instant. In only an instant. However, this was fatal.

“Your head is miiiinee!”

Gregour was completely in trouble. His death was certain.

“D-don´t take my head!”

Gregour wasn´t very clever. However, Nikka...

“Ah!?”

... was a natural idiot. Whether it was the stomach, the leg, the arm, or some other part, if Nikka was to cut any of those, her victory would be pretty much assured. However, Nikka was stupid. She aimed for his head just as she had declared she would. And so, Gregour was actually able to stop the attack as he made a ruddy face. And then...

“Ah————————!”

Although it took all his hair along with it, Gregour was able to evade the attack of the spear. Continuing its trajectory, the spear cut the tree, completely halting when it was about halfway through.

“Fuh, hii. I-I´m alibe*.”

Gregour had snot dribbling at his nose. Nikka had a lot of sweat running through her body.

She couldn´t pull her spear out of the tree.

“Gregour-sama!”

Coming to his senses by his subordinate´s words, Gregour charged at Nikka without swiping his snot. Seeing that, Nikka released her hands from the spear as fast as she could and stepped back.

Of course, Gregour went after her. He wouldn´t give her time.

“On the contrary. Your head is mine!”

Gregour´s moments of joy. When he had his victory at his hands...

“Tch, even though I was still in the middle of practicing now… Can´t be helped.”

Nikka took at hands a thin longsword and main gauche that were at her waist. With the main gauche that was on her left hand, she parried Gregour´s attack.

“Wha-what!?”

That movement was of an expert. Nikka laughed.

“These days people fighting on the horseback have been increasing after all. That from before was me training with polearms, stupid. I´m just saying, but this is my main style. Dual wielding sort of stuff. Do you get it?”

Gregour´s face was pale. However, what Nikka was thinking in her mind was…

“”…Those aren´t made for attacking though. After all, those are self-defense techniques.””

Nikka readied her stance. Gregour was cautious and didn´t move. Even though the battle was overflowing with spirit, the place they were standing at was incredibly silent. It was such a disappointing match.

The time continued to pass.

“…What, she won´t come!? I-is it fine if I run?””

“”Come attack me, trash. I will cut your head in one go with my counter.””

ひゅ*(TL note: Sound of the wind?)

“”Wh-what should I do?””

“”Come already you blockheaded boy!””

Seeing Nikka, who was openly showing her irritation, her subordinates watching her from the side thought…

“”Well, our objective is to stop them here, so I guess that´s fine.””

…thus, deciding to leave her be.

○

Regardless whether something was happening at the headquarters or not, Anzerm was heading there even if it had to be done so forcibly. Although his current situation was harsh, he believed it was the first priority to protect the headquarters.

However, the [Noir Guard] was getting in his way. The one preventing him from getting out the mountain was the mysterious feminine man.

“...Fast.”

The centurion Anzerm was very skillful. His troops too had into them the strength Anzerm, who held the title of knight at such young age, possessed. He would go to war since his teenage years, and many of his core soldiers had long service since those days. They were tempered by the real battle. Anzerm was sharpening himself as well.

But even so, they were being overwhelmed in terms of speed. They couldn´t lose them, thus getting stuck on top of the mountain.

“We are different from nobles like you that only fight in your spare time. We are professionals that are on the special list, you know?”

Because of that, he couldn´t lose him. No matter how much experience he had, in the end he was only considered that among the nobles. Compared to mercenaries, who make a living at the battlefield, he certainly fell behind in terms of experience.

“In the spare time, is it...? Perhaps.”

Anzerm sent hand signals to the soldiers at the rear. Of course it

was done so in a way the enemy wouldn´t see it.

“Perhaps the true hero isn´t the one from nobility, but one that was born in the streets. If so, I don´t mind being the shadow. I serve the light, and I swing my sword for its sake. That is the reason I live for.”

Anzerm´s body surged with energy. Seeing that, the man frowned.

“”Anzerm von Krolkar. I´ve heard he was a man of wits that had no gaps…. Is the man I see really the same person? This is as if….””

So the man thought in that instant. However, Anzerm made his move first. The man was still in the middle of battle after all.

“I will break through!”

A lighting speed endeavor. Standing in front of his troops, Anzerm advanced without a break.

He had enough speed. He was going to attack the enemy while he was unguarded.

“So you are fussing over protecting the headquarters to the point you even throw away your terrain advantage? You are really faithful. However…”

Anzerm and his elite troops were filled with fighting spirit; what leaked from Anzerm was black fire. It was as if it dirtied Anzerm. As it wrapped around his subordinates, the madness-like fighting spirit increased. If it hit, it would destroy. To the point it would give off such illusion, Anzerm´s aura was distancing itself from what it was normal.

"...Poor move."

A platinum shine that didn´t suit his black colored attire filled the man. This was the shine of a king.

Anzerm, who was enveloped by the black flames, and the man surrounded by the platinum shine. In terms of intensity, Anzerm was winning. To begin with, the man didn´t even move. Once again, Anzerm won in terms of physical strength. There was no reason for him to lose. He didn´t have any parts he fell behind the man.

The first clash. A slash that held the aura of the black flame that seemed like filth. The man casually blocked the attack. That attack that carried power was so easily blocked to the point surprise could be seen at Anzerm´s eyes.

Barrages of attacks after barrages of attacks. Anzerm´s resolve was set to break his way through. Despite that, his attacks were easily being blocked. It was as if they were only practicing.

Anzerm´s momentum was greatly diminishing. At the same time, the intensity of the black flames also weakened.

“Do or die… This kind of thinking is the cause of defeats.”

The feminine man that held the platinum shine completely suppressed Anzerm. The man had been hiding his true strength since then. But as for why such a remarkable person was a mercenary…

The man´s light grew. It stole Anzerm´s eyesight. The shine he gave off was his proof of being king; it was the figure of a lion.

“Sir Anzerm!?”

Being stolen of his eyesight, Anzerm was standing still. In response, the man drove his sword in. With his slender arm that was like that of a woman´s, and with his gorgeous body, he unleashed his swordplay.

“Oh!?”

It was fast, strong and beautiful.

Although Anzerm barely blocked it with his own sword, he was sent flying back by a lot. He ended up flying into his subordinates.

“You blocked this? …. So you really can do it. Arcadia´s standards are really deep.”

The man didn´t pursue Anzerm any further. Many times until now it was possible to see signs he didn´t really want to defeat Anzerm. However, this time it was clear to the eyes. The man wasn´t aiming for victory.

“…Do you intent to buy time?”

The man smiled at Anzerm´s words.

“Yes. Today is my boss´ stage. There is no way I can hinder that, right? My task is to steal the position you are standing at away from you. I will meticulously take my time and defeat you with the minimum sacrifices.”

Today, the man had declared his animosity. Although he ultimately was going to capture Anzerm´s position, he would carefully take his time before taking it away. This was so he wouldn´t stand out more than his boss. However, was that man really someone that stood under others? The enchanting aura from before was above that.

“It is impossible to get out of here. I need to fortify the defenses.”

Anzerm gave up on trying to escape and decided to prioritize their own protection. If he attacked, he would die. He ended up realising that.

‘Who are you?”

Anzerm asked the man as he retreated.

“I am just a mercenary. Just a simple mercenary, you see.”

That man that declared himself to be just a common mercenary took the eldest son of the Kolgar household, a prominent and distinguished family even in Arcadia, as his opponent, and yet was carrying on with superiority on pretty much everything. It was close to impossible for Anzerm´s hundred man army to get away from that man. Even if Anzerm had the advantage in terrain, he had to give his all just to hold the ground.

“…I am deeply sorry.”

The centurion Anzerm was completely entrapped on the top of the mountain.

52. The Outstanding Ones

“What in the world… is happening?”

The young regiment commander. He had been walking in the highway of the elites. He didn´t have any harsh defeats in his military record. Moreover, the upper brass of the military would raise him carefully and do close investigations before sending him in the battlefield. It was because of that that…

“I don´t understand.”

…he couldn´t understand what was happening.

“Whistle*, that was a pretty nice defense. It wasn´t bad. It wasn´t bad, you know.”(TL note: English onomatopoeias for whistling are all weird o.o)

Said the man that would run around the battlefield like a hurricane. After seeing his smile filled with confidence on his face, it was impossible to think he could be defeated. The headquarters were being devoured; devoured by black wolves that suddenly attacked.

[My name is Volf, the [Black Wolf], and those guys are the [Noir Guard]. Engrave it in your heart. I, we will devour you up!]

The man had a bloodthirsty and vivid shine to him. The man that leaded the black wolves: Volf, the [Black Wolf].

“Don´t… be kidding me!”

The young regiment commander was stubborn. They were being defeated by the smaller group despite being the position of superior numbers. Having his pride on the line, there was no way he could accept such thing.

“Hou. That´s an ok aura. People that “have it” are really different.”

His aura intensified. The regiment commander charged. Seeing his figure, his subordinates were inspired. With the spirit of the regiment commander increasing, the morale of the soldiers also skyrocketed. As a commander, he was a model to follow.

“However…”

However, that “model to follow” was too far away from that man ´s standards. His way of fighting, and his war strategies were all self-taught. The man couldn´t act in accord to the textbooks. He couldn´t bear to receive assistance from average people. As a commander, he was filled with holes. However, there was just one thing; there was only one part the man excelled at more than anyone.

“Uooooooooo!”

That was vitality. More than anyone, he had the strength

acquired by living in a world of desperation. Because of that, he was strong. Because of that, he was wise. It was because of that that he could brought forward.

“...anything you may have, I have it much more!”

The regiment commander´s sword, the aura he exerted, and his body and equipment were all cut within an instant. Besides, there were two slash marks. The claws and fangs of the black wolf tore through everything.

“Oops, I forgot to ask his name. ....Well, I guess it´s fine. After all, I would forget it.”

There were two canine teeth. A. The absurdity of his sword techniques were due to it being self-taught.

“See you, average guy I don´t know the name.”

Volf didn´t learn from anyone. That was because he knew for sure he was the best.

Volf didn´t rely on anyone. That was because he knew for sure he was the best.

Volf didn´t acknowledge anyone. That was because he knew for sure he was the best.

“With that, we are all the way in the lead. I just need to walk forward to victo… or I guess not.”

Volf was controlling flow of the war. However, there was still a persisting irregularity. Although Nikka failing her task was still within expectations, it was rare for there to be someone persisting through to that point. But more importantly than that…

“To think he would get the upper hand while being up against Anatour… You really can do it, White Mask.”

Originally, Volf had planned for himself to be the one fighting there. But it ended up not being possible. He didn´t feel like he would be able to make a regiment commander like Anatour move after all. The reason why Anatour was fighting there was because he decided to take the same route William did.

“The “held pieces” decides victory and defeat. Don´t think badly of me, alright?”

If William didn´t make his move, Anatour would become the arrow for their certain victory. But even after moving, Volf would still pierce through the enemy as the second arrow. That was the difference in the chess pieces. Considering the setup, no matter how he was to move, it would be checkmate. There was nothing that could be done anymore. It was the difference on the “held pieces”; whether one side knew of Volf´s existence or not, and the other of William´s existence. It was nothing but that. That difference brought forward this situation.

“Also… There is one more that made a good move.”

The other person that caught Volf´s eyes. Volf really didn´t think he was going to move out. To not move was a conclusion based on logic. Normally, one wouldn´t move. That was much more the case if one was talented. That was just how the circumstances were.

“Fuhah, how interesting.”

However, if the person was a genius, then he would move now.

○

Gregour was r. The very capable black mercenaries were blocking all sides. And then, although a bit stupid, there was also that problematic opponent, Nikka, the vice-leader of the Noir Guard. Although Gregour and his subordinates weren´t being annihilated due to the mercenaries´ few numbers, it didn´t mean they could get away from them. The approaching army from behind defined their time limit.

“Tch. Even though I wanted to kill you myself… That´s the end, huh?”

The rear was falling in commotion. Believing that was the end, Gregour shut his eyes.

“…If you aren´t looking here, then is it fine for me to cut your head off?”

Nikka made fun of Gregour. Gregour didn´t have any willpower remaining to be responding to that.

“That said, it´s really noisy. Too noisy, hey!”

W Nikka was really stupid. However, it indeed was loud. It was cla. Too c.

“Nikka, it´s kinda strange. M... Why is there the sound of hooves?”

“Horse hooves... You are at the battlefield, so it´s obvious there is.”

“...Aren´t we on foot because we can´t use horses at the mountains?”

Reaching an understanding, Nikka clapped her hands together.

“Then, you are hearing it wrong. There is no way the if there isn´t any horses he...”

Stopping her words midway, she focused her eyes at one point. The wild intuition she had was telling her something.

“...Shit. We are pulling back!”

Nikka started running away without even batting a glance at Gregour, who had been about to be killed. Without even holding the slightest doubt that her command, her subordinates followed after her. With only a little time difference, the blue army had reached at Gregour.

“What… is happening?”

The group that appeared before Gregour´s eyes were all ragged. The blue uniforms that were once beautiful were now covered in dirt and filled with holes. It was a hard scene to watch.

“N-no. I don´t… want to di….”

A big shadow jumped at the ragged group. It was a horse. Being crushed with the frontal hooves and being sent flying by the back ones, they were being trampled over without being able to put up any resistance. Just like the word would infer, those soldiers didn´t have as much “horse-power”. As living beings, there was a big gap between the essential specs in the build. With the horses pressing on them, all the could do was to run. Not to say the least, they were muscular battle horses after all. The soldier´s numbers were withering away just by standing up against them.

“Cavalry? That´s impossible. It´s a mountain here. Although there are some parts that are easy to move through, it should still be impossible to dispatch them to the battlefield unless one has confidence in the skills of one´s cavalry.”

Gregour´s subordinates raised their voice in surprise. They were dazzled by the sight of Nikka and her subordinates retreating. The blue army that was running away wildly. Seeing that and assuming he escaped his predicament, Gregour heavily fell down on his butt onto the ground.

“He has the confidence in it. If it is that man…”

Gregour scratched his hair while grumbling in discontent. That man was one of the three people he couldn´t win against at the military academy.

“What are you doing there, Gregour. Immediately reorganize your soldiers and close the enemy´s path to our headquarters. Don´t let those lowly invasors return with their lives.”

It was Gilberto Von Osvalt. He was the second son of a duke household, and was the outstanding talent acclaimed as the most brilliant among the young generation in Arcadia´s military. Although he was adept in strategies, he showed his true worth in his strength. He had skill in mounting, sword fighting, and was also capable in the spear and the bow. All of those were top notch.

What was being highlighted this time were his mounting skills.

“You are a noble too, right? Show some spirit.”

Gregour twisted his face. Gilberto was always like that. He expected excellence from the nobility. It was the nobility that were

the excellent ones. He would display it in, and would also expect the same from other nobles. Gregour hated Gilberto, who would do all this as if it was the obvious thing to do and push those ideals onto others.

“All of you as well, don´t dare slow me down. Since before, your riding have been ilacking to some extent.”

“Ha! We are deeply sorry, Gilberto-sama.”

“I don´t need apologies. Show your with your weapons.”

“Ha!”

Those were Gilberto´s most recently recruited subordinates. Those were soldiers serving under the Osvalt household. They had enough skill and experience to the point it wouldn´t be weird if each of them actually commanded a whole army. Even so, they chose the path of being Gilberto´s subordinates.

“Go.”

A single word. With just that word, the mood of the place changed.

The aura surrounding Gilberto was like a sharp beautiful sword. It was the true image of a [noble], brought forward by a spirit of self-indulgence that would cut the enemies, the allies, and even oneself. That was the impression it gave.

“Your will!”

That image had stolen their hearts. The reason why they followed the still inexperienced Gilberto was none other than because they were enchanted by his charm.

Without any hesitations, Gilberto rode his horse. The way he handled the reins was so perfect that it felt as if he had forgot he was at the mountains. Every single action of his had grace.

“”First I must head to Anzerm´s position. If can capture that point, it is very possible I can checkmate them strategically.””

Gilberto rode his horse through the roadless path. His subordinates desperately followed after him. In an instant, they had left the place.

Gregour, who remained at the place, started moving just as it had been told him while spouting idle complaints. Gregour knew. No matter how much Gilberto wasn´t likeable, his words were valuable.

“I still hate him though!”

Completely forgetting that his life had been saved by him, Gregour was thinking of Gilberto´s shining figure with envy. The fact both were from the same school would show Gilberto´s brilliance. It was to the point that envy would turn into

resignation.

53. Black And White Meet Each Other

“What! Why is that guy here...? Besides, using horses is cheating!”

Having intuitively thrown away her advantageous position, Nikka pulled back. Considering the result, it had been the correct decision. And because of that, she was irritated.

“That´s bad shit. That guy... Is he at Volf´s and Ywain´s class?”

Nikka glared at her whining subordinates. Her subordinates had their heads hanging down.

“Let´s run away for now, Nikka. We will get killed by Volf if you get taken down.”

“...Don´t treat me like I´m his woman.”

“We know well enough about your strength. We know you´ve been putting effort so that you can keep up with those two. We are your subordinates after all. But as to be expected, we can´t be loitering around here wasting time against someone like him, or we won´t be able to escape. If we run into him, we will all get killed.”

Although Nikka was making a sullen face, she didn´t say anything against. She at least knew that they couldn´t win. But even so, it was really tormenting to receive such a special

treatment. Even if she had given up in being a normal girl, the others around her wouldn´t do the favor to so as well. That was vexing to her.

“Let´s leave that guy to Volf and Ywain. Perhaps even Anatour-ossan might kill him for us. Right now, there isn´t anything we can do. Even that blockheaded boy. He isn´t someone we can do anything against with our few numbers now that he reorganized his troops.”

Although in dissatisfaction, Nikka nodded. So that she wouldn´t show her twisted expression on her face, she didn´t meet her eyes with her subordinates.

Nikka´s group momentarily retreated. Bit by bit, the battlefield that had been leaning to their side started to become balanced.

○

“That´s bad. Even though I predicted he wasn´t going to move.”

The centurion Anzerm had taken a defensive stance. The man confronting him was met with his thorough defenses. He had been slowly tearing down his defenses whose gaps were few until the sunset came. Although he was looking forward to it, now that it became like that, having this sort of leisure was fatal.

“...As to be expected of Arcadia´s prided sword family. Worthy of having inherited the blood of the [Heavenly Sword], Siegfried von

Osvalt. Does this mean the rumours that their unparalleled talents throughout the generations was true?”

The sound of hooves approaching from the back that weren´t supposed to be hearable in this battlefield. It is as to be expected from the one whose aura that stood out from others to be able to catch those sounds even from the place he was at. Having Anzerm at the front, it would be fatal if the man was flanked. There was only one option.

“Good grief. This will become a joke for some time.”

The carelessness and arrogance he brought upon himself resulted in the failure of his given task. He didn´t have enough time to completely reorganize his army in a formation. It had been the clumsiness of the man for having extended the battle on purpose. It had been his blunder to try having fun.

“With that said, only fools are stubborn and don´t retreat. We shall be pulling back from here.”

The man immediately sent the sign to retreat to his subordinates. Without a single one of them having any objections, the black group started moving. None of them held doubts over the orders given by the man.

“If you intend to go after us, you will need to resolve yourself.”

Noticing the mood of retreat, Anzerm was showing signs of

wanting to pursue them. Without even giving a glance to him, the man stopped Anzerm with just his words. Anzerm intended to take him by surprise, but it seemed that the man didn´t have any openings. Anzerm now realized the fact.

“Let me ask you one thing. What is your name?”

Despite the man having said before he wouldn´t say it, Aznerm asked for his name once again. The man pondered about it for a moment.

“...Anzerm von Krulgar. In consideration of your strenuous effort, I will tell you my name. My name is Ywain. The vice-leader of the [Noir Guard], Ywain. Now then, let´s meet another time somewhere in this battlefield. I beg your pardon for I won´t take easy on you when the time comes.”

Ywaint of the [Noir Guard] gallantly left. Although he was the number three in the company, in terms of strength, he stood shoulders to shoulder with Volf.

“Ywain? C-could it be!?”

The man of platinum that didn´t suit the color black. His existence took part on the rapid progress of the [Noir Guard]. It was how strong that man was.

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“That´s bad. Even Ywain gave up!”

With his face pale, Volf was desperately going down the mountains. Although he captured the headquarters, it was impossible to keep it with his few numbers. Although it was a shame to give up on it, he did so anyway, deciding it was enough that he took the regiment commander´s head.

“Now then, I gotta go through a route I can escape all the way so that I won´t run into the young master Gilberto.”

Having had to come here, the fact that Gregour´s soldiers regrouping, and how he was letting them get back on their feet were all a hard blow. Gilberto´s efforts that could as well be called a “spirited offensive” returned the calmness to the Arcadian army. Though Arcadia was pushed back to some extent, the battlefield became smaller on the other hand, decreasing the amount of openings for them.

“...That said, hasn´t it become kinda cold?”

Obviously, he had no uses for incompetent subordinates that wouldn´t retreat at such situation. Including Ywain and Nikka, all his subordinates understood their situation. It was because of that that Volf could focus onto himself. He could focus on how to escape, and nothing else. But even so, his male instincts told him it was a bit too lonely around.

“Young master Gilberto is with ten cavalry and left the rest to protect the point. I see, having such good subordinates almost

makes me envious.”

Gilberto divided himself and his ten soldiers that were able to ride a horse at the mountains from the rest of his troops. Although it couldn´t be said that he wasn´t gambling on this strategy, it still didn´t feel like so. Volf felt like Gilberto wasn´t capable of taking gambles. In result of the strategy, his winning position became simply one of advantage. It had been a good move. Gilberto only attacked the troops that were at the parts of the slowing down battle line of Nehdarks´ side that were sticking out forward, elegantly assaulting them. If one isn´t capable of having a wide overview of the battlefield, such feat would be impossible. Being able to do this feat proved his ingenuity.

“Well, he obviously isn´t as good as me though!”

Volf didn´t doubt he was the most brilliant to the end. He was running down the mountain. That wasn´t the retreat of the defeated, but a strategic retreat. It was a tactic necessary for him to win tomorrow. Of course, it hadn´t been his defeat. Rather than that, he took the head of the commander of the army. Arcadia might not have a tomorrow due to that.

“Hey, Volf. Aren´t you going too fast.”

Volf had chosen only the elites just in case, so they were properly following after him. But even so, his speed was faster than usual. It made doubt root among his subordinates.

“Nah. It´s just that I am having a bad feeling, or that something

might have slipped my eyes. My senses are telling me to hurry up. Have I ever been wrong in this sort of thing?”

His subordinates shook their heads. Volf´s intuition had never been wrong. But if so, what was the...

Fyun*

Something passed by Volf´s side and pierced the back of one of his subordinates.

“Hey, hey, seriously that?”

Without giving a glance to the subordinate that fell down, Volf turned his eyes to the direction the arrow came from. His eyes became glued at the one that was there. The name of the man that was standing on one of the trees holding a bow was...

“White Mask, William Rivius!”

William Rivius. Although he was bleeding and was full of wounds, he quickly moved to that position in order to catch Volf. Volf was desperately suppressing the himself that wanted to fall in thought over what happened to Anatour. It didn´t matter how he ran away from him. The real issue was...

“You´ve really sullied my face, haven´t you! You dare, the likes of you, mercenaries lower than animals!”

...was how to kill that blood-covered monster wielding a sword. It was only that.

“Ha! As I thought, you´re really interesting. War gotta be like that!”

Volf drew both his swords. The one running up the mountains and the one running down the mountains; black and white. The two were about to clash.

54. Black And White Mixing With Together

Using the gravity in his favor, Volf increased his speed even more. None of his subordinates were able to keep up with him. Similarly, William was going up the mountain, running to meet his opponent. Looking at both, whose moves would go over their expectations, they could see there was a big disparity between them and the two.

The white was anger. The reason for it was due to his failure of letting Volf escape from the hole he made. It would greatly damage his career if he was to be responsible for their defeat. Because of that, he was overflowing with anger.

The black was happiness. He didn´t imagine William would display such technique that would go against his expectations to that extent. He was leaking a genuine smile due to the existence of William Rivius, a worthy opponent.

“Mercenary!”

The slash of the white, William Rivius, shone. Using the attack made with the advantage of the height and his jumping strength, Volf swiftly avoided the attack. At the instant Volf landed, he turned around and decisively slashed at William. Even though Volf should have got him from the back, William raised the scabbard that was at his waist and stroke it at the base of the sword, making it turn away.

“White Mask!”

The black, Volf, still had one sword left for use. The absurdness of dual wielding shone at situations like that. Against William, who was still with his back turned to him, Volf swiftly swung his sword. It was a cut aimed at the upper part of the knee; the most difficult to avoid However, there was no way William would be done with just that while still having his back exposed. Turning around with a swing from the opposite direction of Volf´s slash was his sword.

“つお!?”

“Gh!?”

Volf´s sword won in the speed. However, William won in terms of force. Guessing that he would be in disadvantage in case he was to keep up in this exchanges, Volf overextended himself in order to keep up with William´s blade. Both William, who repelled the sword before it could build up power, and Volf, whose stance became bad due to how he got the trajectory of his sword forcefully changed, were sent back by each other´s force.

“““This guy!?””””

Although the two had a similar upbringing, the paths they walked were completely different.

White polished his sword while having as his instructor the books; what composed the accumulation of knowledge he had been piling up. He stole the wisdom of the predecessors of that

knowledge and reached this height. That was William´s blade.

Black polished his sword with only his own experiences. Without learning from anyone or stealing from anyone, he had come all this way by bringing out from inside himself his peerlessness. That was Volf´s blade.

The two were contrastive. However, there was one point they had in common. Only one very important point that they were similar in.

It was that they believed themselves to be the best of all without having any doubts or hesitations, and that they would carry on without giving in at all. There were no deviations. There were no distractions. Even if there were, they would crawl out of them and use it as nourishment for themselves. It was because of that that the two looked similar.

The youngsters William and Volf; white and black...

“Hey, hey... Isn´t he on par with our leader?”

They were at the same height. If one was to take in account their age, both were very young for their strength. Besides, the white still had much room to improve. Their endlessly increasing craving for strength of the two was similarly originated from despair. It was because of that they didn´t stop. They couldn´t stop.

“Aren´t you really good, hey!”

The black wolf howled. The path of seeking the truth he has been walking on. There was another idiot that had also followed through that path up to that point. The thirst of the aloof wolf was satiated. He wasn´t alone. It existed in enmity. In there was an existence comparable to him.

“Die already!”

The crowd of corpses raised cries of resentment. The black wolf that has been walking on the path for the top was standing in his way. He was just like William, believing oneself to be superior than anyone. To believe he was ahead more than anyone of their generation.

That was happiness/hatred.

“To think there would be someone of the same generation that was as capable as our leader.”

William continued to well handle Volf, who surpassed him in speed, with his movements that embodied rationality. Volf had speed; William had certainty. It was a battle for. The wolf and the crowd of corpses were both eating each other, and making each other rise. Both increased in absurdness the more they would trade up blows.

“““Uooooooooooooooooooooooooaaaaaaa!”””

Forgetting even to breath, they were madly dancing at the mountain. With the swords grazing the two, the blood of both flew. They were coloring the world of harvesting flowers; swords that sprouted on the ground as flowers. It was impossible for others to enter the world the two built.

Volf´s subordinates gulped.

To them who couldn´t help but keep watching the battle, the spectacle of the ones at the apex continued.

○

It was a battle that seemed to continue endlessly. However, the end suddenly came.

“William!”

It was Karl and his troops, who had finally arrived, allbeit late. If it was only this much, Volf could still run away if including his subordinates. There was no need to be in hurry over his match. However...

“Volf! The sound of horses is getting closer! It will be bad if we keep up like this!”

The sound of hooves. In other words, Gilberto´s cavalry were

approaching. As to be expected, it would be too heavy of a baggage for Volf to take on both William and Gilberto.

“Shut up! It was just starting to get good! Don´t get in my way!”

However, Volf wouldn´t yield now that he was absorbed on the battle. Even in this situation, he wanted to continue the duel. All his subordinates could do was to get in panic. And then...

“Two foolish people. One way or another, that one is our ally. Kill the black one.”

With an overwhelming speed, Gilberto and his cavalry appeared at the place. That was checkmate. In ill feelings, sweat ran down the backs of Volf´s subordinates. Annihilation: the word that surged at their head and expressed their despair.

“Trample them down.”

Gilberto gave his orders as they were charging. Their aim was Volf and his subordinates.

“Shit! If I knew that was how it would be, I would have spent all my money to buy a woman.”

The black mercenaries prepared for battle. They was no way they weren´t capable. They went along with Volf to take down the enemy headquarters after all. They were considered very skillful even among their mercenary group.

“Hmph! As if footsoldiers can best knights!”

Infantry and cavalry. The fundamental disparity in specs. Moreover, the enemy were knights directly under Gilberto´s command. They were people that originally weren´t supposed to be under a centurion.

“Even though we took quite the big head there, if our leader gets taken down, then we will all be dying for nothing, damn it!”

They were mercenaries. They have set their resolve to lose their lives long ago. But even so, it wasn´t their real hopes that they would be dying in such manner. They had to have their leader make it through this situation of checkmate somehow. They had to keep their wolf leader, who they were fascinated with, alive at all costs.

“That´s our resolve to bring you down along with us, retard!”

They brazenly wielded their swords against the incoming knights. Seeing that, the knights showed a smile. It was impossible for the sword of a footsoldier to reach them. It was the incontestable advantage of being on the horseback. That was the identity of the arrogance that sprouted in the hearts of the knights, and which also made an opening appear.

“That shouldn´t be the time to be fooling around!”

Along with the scolding of the opening in their guard, a line flashed. One of the knights fell down from his horses as he was still smiling over their advantage. It was fast and strong. Moreover, it was unparalleled. It was a display of the single arrow shot against the moving armored opponent killing him.

“Who was it!?”

It has only been Gilberto to comprehend what happened immediately after the arrow was shot. But even so, it was too late...

It was a single man mounted on a horse, going up the mountain by himself. It was a precise archery skill on the horseback. The only person in the battlefield to know the name of the man that killed one of the knights as if it was the easiest thing was Anzerm and the man himself.

“Ywain!”

The two, and also the black mercenaries.

Seeming that William and Volf were still d b, they hadn´t even noticed it happen.

Without even giving a glance to the others, Ywain got in the fight between Volf and William. Lightly jumping off the back of his horse, he landed in [between] them. It was only a few seconds. In that brief moment, Ywain deflected the sword of the two. And then, he sent William flying with a kick and punched Volf at his

stomach with all he had.

“Ghue!?”

Holding Volf, who was fainting in agony, under his armpit, Ywain threw Volf onto the back of the horse. As Volf was groaning, he was placed on the horse. He was someone that made the decision of rescuing Volf in that split second while having a calm expression. It was the vice-leader of their company, Ywain.

“As to be expected of Ywain! He can really be counted on!”

The black mercenaries livened up. However...

“Die, lowly mercenaries!”

Gilberto was already on the move. His sharp killing intent was like a sword itself. It was the overwhelming advantage of cavalry. It was also his fierceness.

“You have force.”

Ywain prepared his bow. Calmly leaning his body and without having the slightest fear reflected in his gaze, he shot Gilberto´s horse down with a precise shot. Crumbling down along with the momentum, the horse went past where Ywain was. While still riding on the falling horse, Gilberto directed an attack with all his might without having his stance broken.

“However, you are too young.”

Ywain had already let go of his bow and was holding his sword. It was a clash between blades. The platinum light became the fang of a lion and broke Gilberto´s sword. Gilberto was sent flying into the air. After glancing at Gilberto´s neck, he went onto the horse his leader was being carried by.

“Sorry there all of you. Please die.”

Ywain´s words were directed to his companions. There was only one horse. No matter how, only one person would be able to ride it. There were no choices other than to leave the rest behind.

Hearing that, the black mercenaries smiled.

“We can collect this debt in hell after all. Make sure to live long until you can build up enough for the interest.”

“Our price is high, you know?”

“Yes, I will tell him that word by word.”

Ywain turned his horse around, showing signs he was going to run away.

“Don´t let him get away!”

Gilberto´s shout thundered through the battlefield. Having lost his horse and having his sword broken, the acclaimed Gilberto was in rags. But even so, without forgetting his duty as a commander, he moved his troops.

“Your will!”

The knights rushed at Ywain. With one hand Ywain was holding Volf, and with the other he was holding the reins. Bringing him down should definitely be easy. But even so...

“”“Die!”””

Even with two attacks coming from two different angles...

“...”

He let go of the reins, drew his sword, and cut off the hands holding weapons. He casually performed the endeavor as if it was a simple thing to do. With a second flash, the arm of the knight was sent flying. Without even having his eyes looking at them, Ywain retreated.

“Tch, as if I would let you escape!”

Gilberto tried to go after them.

“Since we can´t run away anyway, we will be your opponents, nii-chan!”

Gilberto received the heavy assault of the black mercenaries. Dodging, Gilberto picked up a sword.

He couldn´t spot Ywain anymore. Only the grinning men in front of his eyes remained.

“...Do not to lay your hands. I will be the one to kill all of them.”

The pride. It was necessary to follow after Ywain in order to take the lost pride back. But even so, they were stopping him. This couldn´t be forgiven. It couldn´t be helped he was angry for being hindered by the likes of stones at the roadside.

“By yourself? That´s underestimating us too much!”

The mercenaries jumped at him all at the same time. The eyes of the man glaring at them was sharp.

“It is you people... who are underestimating me too much.”

Without the slightest warmth, he cut everything.

55. The Blue Intruder

“We lost capable subordinates. It was a mistake on your judgement.”

Ywaint pressed Volf against a tree. There wasn´t the slightest of the usual warmth there would be in his eyes. It was only overflowing with disappointment of his superior.

“I won´t make excuses. I admit I looked stupid out there. Do as you wish.”

“Then, I won´t hold back.”

Ywain hit Volf´s face with all he had. Volf fell to the ground due to the punch.

“Wai... Stop! Although Volf really is to blame here, didn´t he take the head of their regiment commander? Then, it´s fine not to blame him that much, isn´t it? Right?”

There were no changes in Ywain´s eyes even after Nikka´s words. Only the cold feeling permeated in his eyes.

“You are soft to Volf where you mustn´t. To take the head of the regiment commander is only the expected, but to perfectly pull back that it is what the [Black Wolf] is, isn´t it? He wasn´t able to do that, so he needs to take responsibility. Don´t you think so too? Volf, the [Black Wolf].”

Volf quietly nodded at those words. He wasn´t in a position he could make excuses. He also didn´t feel like doing so. Volf understood more than anyone the how hard the blow of the loss of his pieces was.

“Sorry there. Everything was my fault.”

Ywain once again raised his fist. Nikka went in between Volf and Ywain in order to stop him. As to be expected, there was no way Ywain could just hit Nikka. Making a bitter face, he lowered down his fist.

“Aren´t you guys all moody? But what, we are at the mountains. At the mountains, you know? It´s the perfect place for a picnic.”

Rudolf le Harsburk appeared at Volf´s camp site. Everyone present at the place became stiff. They were met with an impossible situation. Who would think that someone of the Halsburk family like him would come to a place like this on foot. No matter what, it was simply impossible.

“By the way, where is Anatour?”

Lainberka, one of the three warriors and also Rudolf´s attendant asked to the people at the camp site. Everyone kept silent.

“That guy? Did he die?”

Although Rudolf had a comical tone in his voice, his eyes weren´t laughing.

“He didn´t die. However, he was heavily wounded.”

Ywain´s voice was heavy.

“Who asked you that? I am talking to Volf-kun, you see?”

Ywain pulled back without saying anything. Volf and Rudolf; their eyes met.

“Anatour-ossan got his arm cut off by White Mask and is now sleeping. Although he isn´t dead, he won´t be of use for some time. I took the head of their regiment commander. The battle line was pushed back a little. That´s all.”

Volf said as if he was spitting.

Lainberka was angered by his disrespectful attitude. Without giving any regard to that, Rudolf stepped forward.

“With that said, the situation isn´t one I can commend you on. Giving off the [Crying Spear] for some nameless regiment commander doesn´t pay off. Besides, there isn´t any meaning to it if you don´t kill White Mask.”

Rudolf criticized Volf even despite all. However, Volf didn´t

object. Actually, Rudolf was satisfied enough with the result of his battle against White Mask. Rudolf was able to understand it by that. He understood that just like himself and White Mask, that person was chosen by god. Indeed, the man in front of his eyes was similarly a chosen one.

“As to be expected, the reason for this mistake was due to having entrusted someone like this. If so, I shall head out and slay the White Mask.”

Lainberka declared. However, Rudolf didn´t give any regard to her. Lainberka felt dejected.

“Is it impossible for someone of your caliber?”

The ones to react to those words were Ywain, who was supposed to have stepped back, Nikka, and also all the members of the Noir Guard. All of them were silently sending killing intent to Rudolf. Lainberka´s glare was to no use.

“It´s not impossible. I was just a bit too greedy today.”

Volf stood up. Then, he stepped forward with vigor. There was a considerable difference in height between Volf and Rudolf, who was confronting him. The aura Volf held made that difference even bigger.

“The White Mask, and this war too. I will properly eat up all of it, so you can just go grope your boobs or something and wait until I

´m done.”

The fangs of the black wolf. They were sharpened by his feelings of frustration. He gave off an aura that made even Lainberka open her eyes wide. It was a pressure that felt like it would crush. Feeling that pressure, Rudolf smiled.

“In that case, I will be leaving it to you for the time. I will prepare a suitable substitute for Anatour. Now then, may you have fortunes of war, Black Wolf-kun.”

Volf didn´t know what Rudolf came there to do. However, it was a fact that he was able to sort out whatever he came up to him with. Although Rudolf was quibbling for all faults he could find, it was still their side the ones to have the advantage. They killed the regiment commander of the enemy, and although their own regiment commander got heavily wounded, he didn´t die. The difference between the two was great.

“We will soon clean up this disgrace. If I don´t earn enough for their share, I won´t be making up for those guys.”

The enemy was also considerably pushed back and had its fighting force shaved. To begin with, it wasn´t known whether Arcadia would make up to the next day after having lost their regiment commander. Rather than having lost, they were still in the winning position. Now wasn´t the time to be dispirited.

“Tomorrow we will win again. But this time, perfectly.”

There wasn´t anything as much scary as a wounded wolf. The black wolf was sharpening his fangs.

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“Why is it I am not qualified for fighting White Mask?”

In their way back, Rudolf, who had come there in incognito, was being carried by Lainberka on her back. He hated walking the most. Although it wasn´t like he was going all the way back to Frandelen, there was still quite the distance until the headquarters. Because of that, he was receiving a piggyback. It was simple principle.

“Hm? It´s because you can´t win. Although you might be able to in a one-on-one battle, it would be difficult in the mountains, right? To be frank, Nehderks is at the lower end in military. We can´t win in a clash between armies. Because of that, we are getting outside help. One of a specialist.”

Lainberka was discontented. She believed she could deal with this amount of fighting force one way or another if it was her the one at command.

“It´s not good if you underestimate them. No matter how strong you are, you die if you get cut by a sword. If you get hit by a lot of arrows, you also die. The three warriors aren´t undefeatable. Rather, there are many things you still need to be careful of.”

Laiberka dropped her shoulders. Because of that, Rudolf was about to slip off her back. And so, he knocked at her head. Lainberka deeply apologized, repeating “I´m sorry, I´m sorry”.

Once she calmed down a bit, Rudolf spoke to her.

“Between White Mask and Black Wolf, who do you think is stronger?”

Answering Rudolf´s question, Lainberka said:

“The Black Wolf, right?”

It was an immediate reply. Rudolf laughed indiscreetly.

“That´s right. It´s because I thought so that I left it to him. I was a bit hesitant... but I guess I thought it would be fine since he is a mercenary? No matter how much capable he is, a simple mercenary can´t change world. They seem to be intending to do that, but...the world isn´t a kind place like that.”

Rudolf yawned.

“The stronger one is the Black Wolf, but the one to be scared of is the White Mask. It is because Volf-kun also knows that that he ended up overextending himself. It seems that his [pet lion] didn´t notice that though.”

Lainberka didn´t understand what Rudolf meant. Seeing that, Rudolf let out a “Funyaa” yawn and went to sleep.

Realizing Rudolf had slept, Lainberka started pondering about the conversation they had until now. And then, looking at the sky, she frowned.

“Scary, is it? Is that man [scarier] than me?”

Her murmurs were absorbed by the veil of the night.

56. Dangerous Opportunity

At the same time, tumult and discussions also broke out in Arcadia´s side. Not only the signs of their defeat started to become more visible, but the head of their regiment commander was also taken. It was already impossible to prolong the war. In case they had to do so, then where were they supposed to find another regiment commander? To begin with, who was supposed to take responsibility of this situation? The scapegoat was obviously going to be...

“How are you going to take responsibility for this, Karl!?”

Karl was startled. Next to him at both of his sides were Frank and Ignahts, who had a sullen complexion in their faces, giving him their support. They already knew this was going to happen.

“Didn´t the enemy attack from the gap you created? If you hadn´t moved out, the regiment commander wouldn´t have been killed. Am I wrong?”

Karl wanted to say he was wrong, but Karl had no basis to say that. Although his troops would have been put in a hard position by Anatour if he hadn´t moved out, by the end results, it was the undeniable truth that he fell in the enemy´s feint by doing so. Letting the [Black Wolf] pass through and get to the regiment commander was without doubts William´s and Karl´s fault.

“Then, are you telling us that he should have brought Anatour down or stopped the [Black Wolf]?”

Anzerm spoke. The other centurion held his tongue. Anzerm was above him both in terms of nobility status and achievements in the military.

“That would be the same for the others, wouldn´t it? There are many others that were broken through by Nehderks´ troops without being able to react to their sudden change in the movement pattern. If that didn´t happen, this situation wouldn´t come to be. Although it is fine to look for flaws on others, you might as well be digging yourself your own grave. More importantly than that, shouldn´t we be thinking about our strategy for tomorrow´s battle?”

Anzerm´s words were extremely reasonable. However, he couldn´t keep up his speech. Everyone knew it after all. They knew they were completely cornered.

“The arrangements for a new regiment commander are already under way. We must at least put our earnest efforts to hold our ground. If we lose more than we already have, all the people present here will need to resolve themselves for the punishment there will be to come.”

Those were the words of the centurion with the highest status present in the place, the centurion Gilberto. Everyone became even more silent because of those words. It was only the trembling of the candles that showed movement at the place.

“...Karl von Teirah.”

“Yesh!”

Karl bit his tongue because of how surprised he became due to how Gilberto suddenly called him.

“How is that man?”

“That man”. Karl knew who Gilberto was talking about from the moment the question was asked.

“William is… Uh, the ten-man squad leader William is currently resting. Uhm…. Do you have anything you want to ask him?”

Hearing Karl´s words, Gilberto frowned. Karn became frightened. However, Gilberto wouldn´t pay any mind to Karl. Rather, the one he was interested about was at the man behind his merit.

“Let´s end this for the moment. Each of you properly rest up. We will be taking this up early in the morning. Anzerm, Gregour, and also Karl. The three of you stay here. The rest are dismissed.”

Gilberto ended the meeting with just a few words. All the other centurions unsteadily left the place. The only people remaining there were Gilberto, Anzerm, Gregour, and Karl.

“Go call that man; that ten-man squad leader of Karl´s army. The

two of you don´t need to return after that.'

Frightened, Frank and Ignahts became petrified. They deeply lowered their heads and left the place.

"What do you intend to do, Gilberto?"

Gregour asked. He couldn´t understand the reason behind calling William in the current situation. It was because only the four of them remained at the place that it wasn´t going to become a hunt for someone to take responsibility. To begin with, the one responsible for this was Karl after all. In addition, the one to thought up their strategy was also [Karl]. There was no reason to call William, his sword, to ask him for his wisdom.

"We should end this worthless farce already. Right now, we are at a situation we need to lend that man´s wisdom after all."

Gilberto´s face was filled with repugnance.

○

William was wrapped up with bandages tainted in blood at all places. He didn´t have his usual air of leisure, and it was possible to hear the sound of him clenching his teeth at the times he was assaulted by the pain. Right now, he had wounds throughout his whole body. It was visible how much he had overextended himself in today´s battle.

"Do you know the reason why you were called?

William had vacant eyes. He flatly spoke.

“Could it be I was called because I let the enemies get through?”

Once he heard that, Gilberto pointed his sword to William. It was at a speed that Anzerm, Gregour, Karl; none of the people present at the place were able to react. William was silently looking at the sword.

“Do not speak worthless gibberish. I am in a very bad mood. My hands might get out of control.”

Gilberto turned his eyes to Karl.

“Teirah. If you tell me any lies, I will destroy your household. Answer with that in mind. The one to have controlled you from behind the scenes until now was that man, wasn´t it? Though his strength is certified, even the strategies... were all controlled by that man. Am I wrong?”

Karl tried to look at William. In response to that action...

“Karl von Teirah! If you are truly a respectable noble, do not inquire for the face expression of the likes of this commoner! I am asking this question to you. Yes or no; I will have you give me your answer.”

Gilberto´s rebuke flew. Now that it became like that, whether it was Karl, whether it was William, neither could act carelessly.

Karl casted his eyes down. It was impossible to keep silent any longer. Although Gregour didn´t understand very well what was happening, Anzerm awaited for Karl´s answer with a calm face.

Besides, Karl´s conscience couldn´t endure it anymore. The feeling of taking away all of William´s achievements, and the way he was one-sidedly using him (of course, without noticing William ´s goal) made up a completely crooked friendship. Although it was only after all this time after coming all the way here, Karl was still going to be William´s friend at the end. A friendship of equals. Because of that...

"...That´s right. Everything... were all William´s plans. I was only using him."

Karl muttered while hanging his head down.

"Wha... What did you say!?"

Only Gregour was surprised. Anzerm kept silent without moving.

"It is not like I am reproaching you for that. You are misunderstanding me. I am just confirming a few things, Teirah."

Gilberto once again turned his eyes to William.

“You have bribed your superiors, made use of Teirah, and thus made your will get across. That is quite elaborate of you. As I thought, I can´t come to like you. Even if you were a noble, I would still hate you.”

Gilberto sat down on his chair.

“You may sit as well. From now on we will be starting our war council. It is better to have some of your cunning than nothing.”

Even William became surprised at that. There was no doubts that Gilberto hated William. He was supposed to detest William. But even so, Gilberto requested William´s opinions on the matter. He acknowledged William´s strength, and also forgave the things exposed now.

“I would like us to discuss about our strategy for tomorrow and henceforth. Does anyone have any ideas?”

There was nobody that raised their hand. If any of them had any idea, they would have spoken up about it before to begin with. Though this would be expected of Gregour, not even Anzerm had any ideas. Of course, Gilberto too was lost. Although he had a few ideas, he couldn´t think of any lead that would verify their use.

“...I would like to confirm one thing.”

For the first time, William spoke in a strategy meeting. Not

through the use of Karl´s mouth, but by his own mouth.

“You may speak.”

Gilberto gave him the permission to speak.

“Though I don´t mind proposing you a plan, there won´t be any meaning to it if I don´t have human resources I can apply it to. Do any of you have any idea why is it?”

William kept his eye on Gilberto, Anzerm, Gregour and Karl.

“Of course, you don´t. If I had those kind of human resources, or if you had any plans, we wouldn´t be in this situation, and I also wouldn´t be here now. Am I wrong?”

William had finally realised he was at the same [standing] as them. That [Black Wolf] obtained it in the same way. He obtained his own hands and feet to move. He let them pile up defeats and create themselves an absolute predicament, and then he proclaimed only himself could save them from their situation. If the [Noir Guard] was to properly function, they would still be capable of fighting to some extent even with the military tactics of Nehderks. However, the Black Wolf didn´t choose that. He chose a much more effective, and a much more self-centered move.

His pain had already vanished. The feeling of exaltation prevailed. Just by thinking about the [power] he might be able to obtain made him feel like he would start trembling.

“The reason I am here now… This would be whether I am able to prepare you a winning strategy. I would like you to give me full control of the army under that condition. Would that be acceptable?”

When William said that, Gregour stood up and glared at him. The aura coiling around him was heavy, and bluntly shone. Although the military was important to him, he was still a noble over than anything.

“You have become too carried away, commoner.”

Those heavy words pierced William. However, to William, Gregour´s words didn´t have any meaning anymore. After all…

“Then how about you think up of a winning plan, count Tundar?”

“Gh!?”

Bitter words. After that, Gregour couldn´t come up with any follow ups. It was as if his ferocity vanished like mist.

“Giving full control of the army to a ten-man squad leader commoner is a bit too unreasonable. Don´t you think so, everyone!?”

But even so, Gregour still asked the others for their assent. Karl was silent since the beginning, and even Gilberto didn´t say anything. Even Anzerm was...

“I believe it is fine if we bet on [White Mask]. Of course, that is my personal opinion. It is fine if you dismiss the idea.”

Gregour was surprised. Then he turned his head to Gilberto, who was his last hope. Gilberto hated William. As to be expected, it didn´t seem that William´s nonsense would make it through. So he believed it would be.

“I will decide after I hear the plan. If you can convince me, then... I will put a figurehead as the new regiment commander. You will be at command. And if we are defeated... you will definitely die. We, who nominated you as the head, will die as well.”

“Tha-that´s absurd. To speak of our own deaths so easily.”

Gregour was baffled. Anzerm once again opened his mouth.

“This is the most recent great war since Raconia. Differently from Raconia, Arbas is abundant in fertile soil, and it is also the center of commerce. If that city cooperates in becoming a bridgehead for the enemy, it won´t be surprising that we lose our heads. We have two options. We either keep sitting here like that and die, or we can bet our lives on White Mask. We have only those two choices, Gregour.”

Anzerm, who was usually silent, was being very talkative. Gregour became speechless. It didn´t matter what Anzerm was telling him. It was clear he was going to support White Mask. Karl was also a puppet to begin with. By now, William had the favor of half the numbers of the people present at the place.

“It seems that Krulgar has voted on you. It seems that whether you will gain complete control of the army will be depending on my choice. Very well, I shall hear it. This strategy of yours that can win us this war.”

No matter how much Gregour was to be against it, in terms of numbers, if William was able to convince Gilberto, his proposal would be accepted. Of course, if the plan is one that doesn´t convince Gilberto, then surely Anzerm will also give up on it.

“”Now then, the turnaround will be starting from now on. Run around at the mountains as much as you want while you still can, wild dog. From tomorrow on… this will become my battlefield.”

Under his mask, William was smirking. There wasn´t something such as a perfect plan that would definitely succeed in this world. However, there were innumerable plans that could possibly lead one to victory. William showed his true worth in his acting and in his talent of presenting a plan that might succeed as one that will definitely bring victory. The one that can casually deceive even the whole world; the man that used to be a slave was now standing there. Compared to that miracle, turning tables on such situation was nothing special.

“Now then…”

He had a plan. He could bring out as many of those as he wanted to. The reason why he had been respectfully bowing down for such a long time, and the reason why he had been burying himself in the books of various countries of the world were all for the sake of this day.

57. The Clash Of Strategies Of Black And White

Compared to yesterday, the time which was branching the possible paths, today was very calm. In fact, [Black Wolf] and his company sent out fast and fierce attacks. However, Arcadia endured all of it. It was because Arcadia was in such a fortified position that the attacking side also couldn´t be recklessly attacking.

“That´s a pretty solid formation once again. The whole army is all the way going defense, defense, defense.”

Dejected, Volf threw himself onto the ground. Beside him, the young regiment commander who became the substitute for Anatour was watching him with doubtful eyes.

“Doing a very boring war, aren´t you? But well, that´s the correct approach.”

Going for a turnaround in one move was a double-edged sword. It is fine if takes the match. However, if it doesn´t, it can create a huge opening. The decision of going for the defense wasn´t bad. Rather, it was the best decision even if that was about what the enemy was aiming for.

“But even so... Didn´t their army movement get much better? Rather, maybe it became too good. From a great ambitious offensive to complete defense. Usually they would get a bit unstable after changing their strategy by that much.”

There was no instability. He couldn´t see the instability that would appear after the change. Instead, the movement of the whole army became remarkably better after this much of a change in the strategy. The flexibility when defending also increased.

“”I can´t find any gaps. The few I saw were clearly baits. Even if I get through those, the terrain isn´t that great. Those are dead ends... They would definitely surround and crush us.””

It was a formation that took advantage of the terrain which wasn´t being put in display until this day. The defense was thorough; the link was properly closed up. He wasn´t sure where he should attack from. Being that lost, Volf couldn´t get the energy to be proactively attacking them.

“”The most important thing here is the fluidity and cooperation of the army that has skyrocketed now. I wonder if that guy did the same thing I did.””

Yesterday the war was greatly tilted towards Nehderks´ side due to the participation of the [Noir Guard] in it. Due to Volf´s little idea, the army of Nehderks was transformed into their own.

The basis of his plans were that: All the people of the Noir Guard understood to some point Volf´s movement, so they were able to move along with Volf´s movement. He allocated one or two of those subordinates throughout Nehderks´ squads and put them at a commanding position.

That was the reason why Nehderks´ army had changed.

“”With that being the case, the boss gotta be one with a good head. There isn´t any bastard like that other than that guy.””

That was what Volf, who had done the same thing, believed. The way how easily they were executing their very detailed and flexible strategy was to the point it wouldn´t be possible to explain it if that wasn´t the case.

The Arcadian army has changed. Volf´s plans also changed in accord. Even if he was to force his way, no openings would show up. Rather than that, if he was to do something like that and exhaust his own troops, he might be crushed by the counter-attack instead.

“Now, haven´t it become interesting, White Mask!”

Volf battle plans were now taking place. It wasn´t going to be a move that would destroy them in one hand. He was going to take his time and breach through. It was at those circumstances that were the moment for a tactician to shine. That was what Volf believed.

○

William glanced over the battlefield on his map. Soldiers were pieces, and the gathering of them were a piece on the table. The collection of those units was what it is called “army”. Although it

would be only a single piece if looking at the army as a whole including the troops stationed at the flatlands, there was still no reason for William to ignore the things that were at a more minor scale. Even if he did so, there wouldn´t be that much of an difference however.

“So Ywain moved upstream.”

Nehderks had three special pieces. One of them was Ywain.

“I can´t let this piece move as it wishes. Must strike back at it on the spot.”

William moved another piece nearby his hand. He put it next to Ywain. That move was the expected. It was necessary to prioritise the high ground advantage in mountainous battlefields. It wasn´t difficult for one to realise it was necessary to attack the [pet lion] from that position. William had already sent the order for the attack earlier.

“The other scary pieces would be the dog himself and the [Crying Spear]. Just like me, Anatour´s injuries won´t allow him to fight today and tomorrow. Now that all the opportunities vanished, the dog won´t recklessly choose to attack. If he does, then I will be the one thanking him for it.”

The ones mentioned above were all the important pieces. William didn´t see Nikka, the other vice-leader, with importance. He didn´t find any faults in her personal strength, which was on an equal level to Gregour. However, this was a war, and not an

one-on-one duel. He decided she wasn´t a scary opponent as long as he was to fight her from afar.

In fact, Nikka wasn´t able to show her power at all in today´s battle. That was one of the plans he had spread across his army through Gilberto. It was to not engage with the vice-leader Nikka and simply take a defensive stance. Fighting while pulling back. Fighting from the distance. Not attacking. That was the foundation of the plan.

“In either case, they just need to fight in accordance to the manual. Not more nor less is necessary.”

It was the manual William had made; the instructions book handed out to all the centurions. That was the main reason why Arcadia´s army was moving as one. It was written in a way as much simplified as it was possible, doing so until it reached the point where their movement, thought process, manner of fighting and retreating became concise just as desired. Although all the units that received the manual moved differently, there was a correlation between them in some way. By looking at it on the outlook, it could be seen that it became very coordinated once the centurions started to faithfully follow the manual.

“A sword isn´t necessary to kill a hero. One arrow is enough.”

There were also information related to the armament in the manual. Although all of it was already common knowledge to the whole army, the point was to focus on range. That was the point being emphasized. Not a sword, but a spear; not a spear, but a bow. The longer the range was, the better. There wasn´t any truth more

indubitable than to attack while not being attacked. Although the effectiveness of the bow would decrease because they weren´t at a flatland, it remains unchanged that the advantage of the bow was its range.

“Other than that would be the terrain. To prepare the formation in a good position. And then, to not move away from there. If one properly fights while minding the distance, no matter how heroic the opponent is, he will easily fall. Even if he doesn´t despite that…”

William glanced through all the units on the map.

“…there are many substitutes for the losses. Now then, let´s have this dirty match, dog.”

He wouldn´t with a wild and intricate plan. If one was to do such plan, one would first need to take the opponent into consideration. He didn´t think his opponent would fall into his plans. He mustn´t believe he would. His opponent was the Black Wolf. He will come in with a plan of the same level.

“I will win by doing what I need to in order to win. This is what makes who I am.”

The man that vowed he would continue to win bared his fangs.

William made the army became his own arms and legs by making the instruction book. Volf turned the army into his own by making

use of his subordinates he personally brought up. Although the methods were different, both reached at the same conclusion: It was to make the whole army their own. To the two who believed themselves to be superior to all, no matter how much others were to become close to them, they would only become the means for their plans.

Presently, the two sent out their best hands for what it was possible now. It was a dire situation resulted by that. From now on, they will be sending out their best hands. Although the one to miss would become the loser, both were probably not making any mistakes in their decisions. Hence, the question was the strength of their pieces, and also the various external factors present.

William and Volf. There wasn´t the slightest disparity in their strategic minds.

58. The Battles Of Each Of Them

“How come…. They are making such a bold move.”

Until yesterday, Ywain´s opponent was Anzerm. Anzerm had persisted very well at that day. Ywain believed there wasn´t any other commander more enduring and capable on the defense than him. However, it seems that Arcadia had come with a hand that greatly exceeded his expectations.

“I will be paying you back from yesterday, Sir Ywain, the [Lion Marquis]!”

His opponent was now Gilberto von Osvalt. He was Arcadia´s prided centurion that was famed for being the most talented among the younger generation, and had a strong the blood of the heavenly sword of the Osvalt family.

“So our opponent is that acclaimed Lion Marquis. This makes me eager to display my strength.”(TL note:Probably a soldier speaking…)

The [upstream] was a position to begin an offensive the enemy had to hold at all costs. It should be impossible for them to not take it seriously if they intended to win. Although it was a very daring swap, it still made sense. Who would the one to stop the [Lion Marquis] if not Gilberto?

“Lion Marquis, you say? I am nothing but a mercenary.”

Seeing Gilberto´s troops filled with morale, Ywain showed a wry smile.

“You can´t change yourself once you are born. One´s blood is honest, Ywain, one amongst the twelve knight kings of Garnia. I don´t know why you would disguise yourself as a mercenary, but I swear on the honor of the Osvalt that I will kill you.”

Distant at the limits of the west, there is a big island across the seas people call Garnia. In that island, many kingdoms stand. Many are born and then fade away; many faded away for then new ones to be born. The cycle repeated.

Over ten years ago, the twelve knight kings appeared in the midst of the many countries. Though those kings were young, they had power. It was said they would spend all their time in wars, and that their twelve kingdoms joined in the mix at the same time of their rise. Due to their military prowess, they were called the knight kings. Their names thundered even to the distant lands of Arcadia.

Among them was the [Lion Marquis] Ywain. He was the most aggressive of them. It was also said that his strong point was fighting harsh wars. Although there were many things Gilberto didn´t know, such as why a man of such caliber was part of a mercenary group, or why he served under Volf, there was one thing that was clear.

“So you become even more willing to obtain victory now that you

came to know who I was?”

No matter who was the enemy, there was only victory. That was the destiny of the one born as an Osvalt.

“Of course! The blade of the Osvalt knows no defeat!”

Fighting spirit. Being exposed in their fighting spirit, both armies became wrapped up in their aura. One of the was a sword. By the number of soldiers, this sword prided by Arcadia was turned into countless blades. The other was a lion. The wolves led by the platinum lion roared.

The sword and the lion. The two clashed against each other.

○

The one fighting against Nikka was once again Gregour. Because both of them knew what each other had in hold in their hands, they didn´t want to fight each other. To begin with, Gregour was ordered by Gilberto (William) to not proactively attack and to fight from the afar after taking a good amount of distance. Even someone like Nikka didn´t want to attack the opponent that not only had the range, but also had the geographic advantage and lose soldiers unnecessarily because of that. The swift assault she was so good at was sealed off.

In result, the battle turned into a stalemate. The commanders of both armies muttered:

“””I´m bored.”””

It seemed that the day was going to end with neither being able to draw their blades even once.

○

Anzerm was defending the position Gilberto had been defending until now. The enemy troops hadn´t been able to go through to his position. Because of that, there weren´t many things for Anzerm to do. Even so, there was no way he could leave his post, so he did everything he could do.

“Carefully fill it in with earth. The construction of this wall will decide our future.”

The fortification of their base. Back then, both Gilberto and Anzerm were relatively unconcerned with that. After all, there has never been a time a high ranking officer like him had done this sort of carpenter job. With that said, it wasn´t like this had never happened before in the world. The superpower of Garias treated this as a necessary ability, thus making it one of their strengths.

“Garias is constantly reforming itself. Even in the military, there are many points in which we can take them as an example.”

Until half a century ago, the kingdom of Garias wasn´t a country that stood out among the seven kingdoms. However, just after ten

years since the enthronement of the reformist king, Garias turned into the greatest country of the seven kingdoms. Since then, it kept its standing as a superpower.

Honor and social status were the norm for the seven kingdoms. Tradition held great importance. Despite being among them, Garias was able to abandon those traditions. Because of that, they were able to act with rationality without having to be picky about their decisions. That was the case for the government, for the commerce, and also for the military.

The soldiers that were born from this ideology would engage carpentry. There wouldn´t be the need to hire workforce if the soldiers themselves were capable of doing the job right at the place. They didn´t have the spare time to be hiring them either. Time and money were interconnected. That was an important point especially in war. Seconds and minutes decided life and death.

“The cause of our defeat yesterday was the naivete in not fortifying the headquarters. The carelessness due to the belief they wouldn´t be able to get past created this gap. I must not spare any efforts. We won´t have a second chance after all.”

The one to have shown Anzerm this method of fortification was William. That was Garias´ forte; it was the point Garias most excelled at from the other seven kingdoms. They didn´t have the leisure to not be copying them. Gregour and Gilberto made an ugly face when they were told about that. However, the complete control of the battlefield had already been given to William. They could only yield.

“”William´s strategy isn´t one that can be considered reputable. Instead, it is an uncouth and simple measure. This plan is the embodiment of methodicalness. ...There is no plan that accomplishes such more than this one.””

William´s current strategy wasn´t ingenious. There were some parts that strayed from the theory on the part about not attacking the enemy and completely focusing on defense. But even so, it still wasn´t to the extent it could be considered elaborate. The point about focusing on the usage of range didn´t make it an innovative plan either. Using the advantage of the terrain wasn´t brilliant, but the basic. However, it was because the army was properly pulling it off in coordination that they were strong now.

It was called 王道 because it was strong.

The black wolf´s group should have felt it themselves. They should have felt this 王道 becoming of William, who knew of every sort of 王道, the 王道 formed by the foundations of a multitude of military strategies of the many countries of the world he studied. Its foundations were firm, its elements were elegant; before the ultimate 王道, clever plans had no meaning. (TL note: I gave up ^^)

“”Indeed... It is strong.””

Anzerm deeply sniffed the smell in his hands. With a slightly flushed face...

“Ah, how wonderful.”

He let out a praise. Nobody but Anzerm himself knew who he was directing that to, or the reason why.

Although this was a construction work he wasn´t used to, he made complete use of his inherent commanding power and all-purposeness. By the time the sunset came, he had completed the fortifications, and was hit by a bountiful sense of gratification.

59. A Lax And Long War

The war fell in a stalemate. Although the Arcadian army was fighting with a handicap, lacking pieces, which were now owned by William, their had set their defenses, and also had a wall being built other than that. With the heavy defenses that denied Nehderks´ army (commanded by wolf) their strong point of [speed], even the Noir Guard, which had won many battlefields, was in a situation they couldn´t completely break through the defenses.

In the third day since his failure, Volf attacked. Not having the peons that couldn´t properly follow his orders, even though his Noir Guard was eating through the enemy formations, he still lacked the troops to make a follow-up. In result of that, he was thrown into a situation he could only pull back since he couldn´t go forward by himself.

Thinking of a counterplan at the fourth day, Volf and Nikka launched at fierce assault at Gregour´s position. Against the plan of breaking through in one go, Gregour´s command shone at the defensive battle. By buying time, the other centurions were able to come to reinforce in time. In result, the battle ended in both armies suffering more losses.

At the fifth day, Volf´s self-taught tactics exploded, displaying its true strength. In order to once again try to break through, but this time not from [above], but from [below], he took most of Ywain´s troops and attacked from a shallow point at the river that was barely passeable. Even though Arcadia´s army was greatly surprised, it was then that the wall Anzerm prepared denied them of their mobility. In result, they were pushed back. When Anzerm

himself also had to move out himself, he showed his true worth and prevented their defeat.

As both armies were losing great amounts of soldiers, the war slowly advanced.

“...This might be the first time meeting an opponent that had me wo.”

Volf had put his head in a situation all doors were closed to him. His situation wasn´t really bad. Nehderks´ army was on the attacking side, and Arcadia´s was on the defending side. The number of casualties wasn´t that much different. In fact, the reason why the number of losses was even despite how the defending side was supposed to be on the advantage was because of Wolf´s ability.

“It´s not like he isn´t aiming for the win. With that said, it doesn´t seem like reinforcements will be coming for him. No, even if reinforcements were to come, I can just threaten the young master here and borrow more troops. The battles at the flatlands are still only skirmishes, so it won´t be that much of a problem if I was to move some troops from there. Of course, it would become a gamble if I was to do that...”

Though defeat would become distant to Arcadia if they were to continue to defend, they wouldn´t get closer to victory. In such situation that the number of losses are close on both the attacking and defending side, even if it is just flattery, it is impossible to say that Arcadia has the lead. Rather than that, if Nehderks was to keep pushing at Arcadia, sooner or later a [hole] would open. There

was no way William wouldn´t notice that.

“I can´t read into his goal. Even an idiot can realise he is buying time, but… where is the follow-up then?”

A war without follow-ups. The war they were doing was this kind of war. If Arcadia was to keep themselves shut in their shell, at some point they would fall in bankruptcy. That was the reality for any sort of mobilization.

“Is he doing this so that he can recover from his injuries? Rather, how can he even push back the army if he is that hurt? There must definitely be a reason. There is no way there isn´t. That guy is the White Mask.”

Volf was worrying about his trust in White Mask as an enemy.

○

“I guess soon will be the time?”

With most of his injuries healed up, William was removing his bandages. Of course, the main problems wouldn´t be solved just by him participating in the battle. His [aim] wasn´t resolved on that.

“I will also go tomorrow. I guess I should go shake the enemy up a bit.”

William patted Karl, who has been looking to always be in a deplorable state since they were exposed.

“Really, for how long are you planning on having this teary face? It was better that way. Gilberto and Anzerm probably had already guessed before that. Hilda´s group were suspicious about that from the beginning. It is difficult to fool those guys. It is better to let them know about that since we´ve been exposed anyway. ....Well, I have the feeling I´ve been saying this since yesterday... and also the days before.”

Karl became dejected.

“Or could it be that you thought I was going to leave you behind?”

Karl became surprised. Of course, he was being really apologetic to William due to how his own strength and William´s has never been at the same league, and also how their relationship became exposed. But even so, the real thoughts he had deep in his mind wasn´t that.

“After all... there won´t be any reason for us to be together.”

Karl wasn´t stupid. Karl had long ago guessed the utility William had by going along with him. Of course, he didn´t doubt that William was his friend. But even so, he was still a bit anxious. For how long would William, someone that had both might and knowledge, serve under Karl? Despite being exposed, Gilberto and the others recognized William´s [strength]. Was there really any

space remaining for Karl to be with him? He was nothing but the successor of a household of baron status. Could really somebody that only had this much of use to him be able to stand next to him?

“Was that the extent of our connection? Of our friendship? You saying that makes me... a bit sad.”

“Eh?”

William made a sorrowful face. Seeing that, Karl showed a surprised face.

“To me, my daily life with you has always been one full of surprises. You´ve received me with the same eyes despite being a noble, and I being lower than a commoner. This is more than enough of a surprise. I was happy. Ever since I came from Rushtania to Arkas, everyone would at best treat me as some foreigner. Treat me as an outsider... As a weirdo with white hair. This was the sort of treatment I would receive.”

William gently hugged Karl. Karl became even more surprised.

“Meeting with you has saved me. Status and birthplace isn´t everything. Friendship sprouted between me, someone lower than a commoner, and you, a noble. I was able to realise... that such a thing is possible.”

William´s warmth reached Karl. Karl´s tear gland started to feel loose.

“I am your sword. I also ask you to always be my friend. Would this… not be acceptable?”

“I-I´m sorry, William. I… I… Uwaaaaaaahhhn”

And at the back of the crying Karl, William…

“”That guy is really a pain in the ass. Really.””

Despite his gentle hug, his emotions were completely clear at the undersurface.

“”I will still be making use of you. To the point all that will remain is an empty husk.””

William had only two friends. Everyone else were only prey to eat. It still wasn´t the time to eat Karl. That was all there was to it.

“”If you had met me when I was still a slave, you would have definitely looked at me as some insect.””

William wouldn´t trust him. William didn´t forget those [eyes].

60. The Second Encounter Between White And Black

The war was still on a stalemate. Both the attacking side and defending side were lacking enough momentum to break through each other. Excluding the soldiers fighting a battle to death between Gilberto and Ywein unfolding at the upper stream, the whole battlefield was attrition war. It was clear that both armies were already sick of it. The Nehderks side had the upper lead for the moment. They have been able to keep their advantage while still maintaining grasp of their front lines. This was not the time for Volf to be standing behind helping the strategical value of the army. That is why he decided to push onto the middle.

“Now then, let’s put an end to this, shall we?”

And with that being said said...

Though they weren’t able to bring the center down, Volf was indeed worth his name [Black Wolf]. They had speed, fierceness and great momentum. The troops Volf led was indeed strong. As if turning their shields into umbrellas, they were advancing through the rain of arrows as if they already knew it would be their victory once they engaged. Charging at the enemy position, they braved through the arrows.

“I don’t really get your intentions on that you’re doing... But you will end up being eaten if you carry on with just that.”

The air of the battlefield in the center changes with Volf’s

fearsome offensive.

○

“Tch, it’s that blockheaded boy again. I already got bored of f.”

Before Nikka’s eyes was Gregour’s barricade. Much like how Anzerm experienced himself, Gregour soon saw the effects of the defensive measure, even though it had been hastily built. Once effect is shown, others are to soon follow the suit. Going through the instructions on William’s booklet, he built up a makeshift earth fortification.

This was giving Nikka some difficulties. She was never able to capture the position no matter how many days were to pass. The loss ratio on both sides were quite on Gregour’s favour. Even to the battle-crazed Nikka, this was not funny at all.

“Ahhhhh!! So annoying!! Get out of there already, you shut-in!”

No matter how much Nikka shouted, Gregour wouldn’t move one foot outside.

“”You know, this really makes things easy.””

It was easy to see the difference just after one fight.

That was the fruit of the knowledge William earned from a

variety of books. That accumulation of knowledge equated to the experience of a thousand lifespans, if not ten thousand. Simplifying that knowledge, William wrote down instructions in an easy to understand manner while focusing only on the essential points. The effects it had affected the mindset of the whole Arcadian army to the point of surprise.

“”I feel as if I won’t lose as long as I can build up a good defense.””

It was inevitable that it would turn out into a bloody fight if both sides were to fight face-to-face. The fighting strength of both were almost equal. In a battle such as this, it was expected that Gregour would constantly have his life at risk. Gregour’s usual fighting style was chivalrous, noble-like; it couldn’t be said to be following any sort of rational thought. However, this time Gregour has been experiencing the logical way of fighting first-hand.

“After being able to ward them off so many times, I am really starting to feel like we won’t fall.”

Gregour’s troops had the terrain advantage. His unit was strong enough to be capable of fighting off Nikka’s troops even on the plain field. Being on the defending side, a situation of absolute advantage was created. Defeat was impossible on these terms. At least so Gregour believed based on the effectiveness he saw in the fortification.

“Besides, today…. Things will become a little interesting. Guhuhu”

Having nothing but a mysterious smile on his face, his subordinates were left out a bit confused.

○

What came up before Volf's eyes was clearly a fortification that was on another level. The fortress was built in many places with wood; the quality was definitely high. That wasn't something that was made in just one morning and one night, but something built based on the assumption that Volf would have been able to push through all the way there. There was only one person Volf knew that would be insane enough to presume that.

"Alright! Let's have our rematch, White Mask!"

The White Mask, William Rivius looked down at Volf from above on his fortress. He had such a calm demeanor to him to the point one could feel it even with his mask blocking his face. It seemed that he was now in a good condition for the most part. His complexion was fine, and there wasn't any visible wounds in his body.

"I will play with you if you can come all the way here."

William provoked Volf. Hearing that...

"You cheeky little bastard!"

Volf suddenly rebutted the provocation.

There were no doubts that was a very well-built fortress. William was able to built this in such a short time. He even already had the workforce prepared beforehand. No matter which angle one was to look from, it was incredible; there weren't any flaws. However, even with that Volf did not doubt his superiority own even once. He stepped forward, confident that he could break through that fortress; confident that he would win.

"I will bring that fortress down!"

With his characteristic speed allowing him, Volf rushed in. It was much more now in this battlefield horses were unuseable that the speed of the wolves knew no limits to stop.

"Hou, you can really do it."

Any army can do something as simple as guarding against a rain of arrows. However, Volf's troops to be able to maintain this much speed in such circumstances while still being able to have flexibility in his attack; it was very commendable.

"Shara!"(Tl:シャラッ！sound of the arrows being released)

As long as one paid attention to the direction of the arrows, one could make the rain of arrows not feel like a rain anymore. In a mountain range there were many obstacles present on the mountains and below. Even the most overwhelmingly effective

weapon in plain terrain in existence, the bow and arrow, would be made useless by trees, its branches, and even the leaves.

There was no way Volf would let the opportunity created by that fault escape his eyes.

“Excuse me, I will be intruding here.”

He was fast. With a speed there was nothing left to say but that, Volf shortened the distance in one go. As long as one knew how to properly deal with it, even something as scary as a rain of arrows wasn’t of any problem. Now that he was able to get inside the fortress....

“Let’s have our second match.... White Mask.”

Volf’s two swords sent flying the head of two soldiers in an instant. Using that as the breach point for their invasion to begin, Volf’s troops were entering inside the fortress; fast and unwaveringly.

William could see the spectacle happening from where he was standing. Volf’s speed was indeed very troublesome. One thing would be if that was just his own speed; however, even the speed of his warriors led by him was on another class.

“Hmph, you are not my match.”

William had already prepared a plan in order to deal with that

troublesome mobility.

White and Black. Once again, both were going to meet each other; now in a group battle.

61. The Pincer Attack

The front to have had the most development was not the bloody battlefield unfolding at the upper stream, nor the clash between the actual two commanders of each army, but the front a little below the center; the battle between Gregour and Nikka.

“Alright!”

Gregour made a fist pump. Nikka had completely fallen into his trap. Now it was the surprise he prepared for today to take turn.

“You have left your back wide open!”

It was the gamble of having Anzerm Von Grulgar move away from the. Though at the cost of leaving the keypoint he was defending vulnerable for one hour in order to do that, it was for the benefit of taking down Nikka, the vice-leader of the Noir Guard mercenaries. Her surprise was caused due to none other than his firm and solid defense. The stagnation of the battlefield took a toll on her judgement, preventing her from even considering the things she was supposed to normally expect.

“A-are you fucking with me?”

Nikka has been sending attacks one after another without taking account for the losses of her own troops. Each attack was fierce enough to the point it made one believe they actually should have been able to break through Gregour’s defenses. However, that action created a weakness. Not bothering to take any extra

measures when moving out, she would end up leaving an open unprotected space behind her troops every time she would go attack. That is where Anzerm aimed for.

“Give up, woman! You’ve done well enough facing me, Gregour Von Tundar! But at the end of the day, you were just a woman after all; just a mercenary. You were not my match to begin with. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

Ignoring Gregour, Nikka sent out commands to her troops. Even Nikka wasn’t stupid enough to carry on attacking after what happened. She had to run away with all she had.

“Do you think I will let you escape?”

However, Anzerm cut off her path. He wasn’t the man to make a mistake at such crucial point of the last stages of the plan.

“Tch.”

Nikka clicked her tongue.

Turning her eyes to the middle, where Volf was fighting...

“Sorry there, I’ll be going first.”

She made a feminine smile.

○

The first to notice the irregularity on Nikka's side of the battle was Ywain, who was fighting at the upper stream of the river over the mountains. Ywain has been keeping up with Gilberto's well until now, having been able to keep his superiority, and was, little by little, just about to get hold of the battle.

"Volf!"

There was nothing he could do. He was too far away. Going after Nikka would be meaningless at that point. But even so, there was no way he could keep himself from shouting; from at least hoping...

To Volf, the man Ywain has recognized as his master, Nikka was almost like his soul. Nikka was a support to Volf in various ways. If Volf was to lose her, he wouldn't be able to act like himself anymore. Even if Volf wouldn't show anything on the front, he wouldn't be able to fool himself inside his mind.

"Do not turn away your eyes, lion marquis!"

Gilberto's sword fell upon Ywain. He was able to evade the attack barely. From the slash appeared a line from his eyelids to his cheek. From that line, blood flowed.

"I do not have time to fight you."

Ywain's sword blocked the next attack. Both faced each other with their swords intercrossed.

"Gh... Uooooh!"

Gilberto had thrown away all courtesy and put on a mindset of fighting with all his power. Because of that, he was being able to oppose Ywain. Among the younger generation, there is probably nobody that could compare to Gilberto on a one-on-one fight. This fact was being put at the stake much more so now with the opponent he faced.

""It doesn't seem like he will be able to take me down. However... I also do not feel like I can take him down either. So you were this strong, oh descendant of the xxxxxx.""

Ywain was anxious. The situation was far too bad. The moment he couldn't move was the moment it became settled for Nikka. Volf shouldn't be in a position he can easily move away either. They have planned to push the center today in order to bring the White Mask out in the open. He most likely is in the middle of his offensive by now.

"Please survive, Nikka!"

All Ywain could do was to hope.

○

Volf soon noticed the irregularity in the battlefield. Currently he was in the middle of invading William's fortress. It made one wonder if perhaps Volf would have had a change in his plans if only that had happened before he moved out, or if there was even enough time to spare for that to be possible.

Or if despite Nikka's predicament... he would still only seek victory.

"....Push at the right where the defense is tight."

"Understood."

Volf decided to abandon Nikka. Nikka wouldn't wish for herself to be saved on the cost of throwing their victory away. Nikka was his childhood friend. She was the sole living being that knew of his whole past from the time he was born. Undoubtedly, she was a precious friend to him.

His subordinates did not object. They knew more than enough that their relationship was in no way simple. It was because of that same relationship that Volf abandoned Nikka despite how he felt. There was no way they were in position to raise any objections on that matter.

"So you think I'll quit just because of that!?"

The black wolf laughed. The himself that did not step back; the himself that couldn't muster even a bit of will to do so.

“”If it is well defended, it is because there is something to be protected. Once I get it taken down…. Their organization will crumble.””

At the himself that hungered, thirsted and desired for battle….

“It’s not over yet. Attack! Attack until they are down to our feet! Just wait for me, White Mask. I will be killing you soon enough.”

…Volf laughed.

○

“…As expected, he did not pull back.”

William followed Volf with his eyes while giving orders to his soldiers, controlling their movement with nothing to restrain him. Volf was gradually advancing through the defenses. He did not show any hesitation even for an instant. It seemed that he wouldn’t be showing any openings he could sploit. The fall of their vice-leader Nikka did not cause any major changes to their front. It didn’t seem like there was any changes to the front at the upper stream of the river either. But even so, it was good enough of a trade to have taken down someone of Nikka’s caliber.

William’s analysis of the battlefield was very spot on to the actual situation.

“We are a close match in terms of tactics. Perhaps I am just a little behind. That would be the same in terms of personal prowess.”

In terms of fields that were related to war, Volf was a little bit ahead of William in most of them. At the present moment, William did not have any way to win against Volf in the tactical level. There was nothing he could do but to let them keep invading little by little, delaying them as much as he could.

“But even so, the one to hold the victory will be me.”

William laughed.

62. Nikka, The Vice-Captain Of The Noir Guard

Nikka fell into a hopeless predicament her demise was certain. At the front was the fortifications Gregour had solidly built; at the rear was Anzerm's army coming towards her, spread out so as to not allow her to escape. Just watching their approach would make her unable to breath. A hopeless situation nothing could be done.

"Nikka, can't we do something to get out of this mess? It doesn't matter even if it's only you that gets to live."

The voice of one of her subordinate broke the silence. Hearing that, Nikka snorted.

"Retard, I would have already been acting now if there was even anything to do."

Perhaps, if Nikka was to throw away all her shame and reputation and use the fact she was a woman to her best advantage, she could at least save her own life. One could always get back up as long as one was still alive. This might be the only path which she would be able to one day walk along with Volf once again.

"I'm... a warrior."

She renounced her identity as a woman. Rather, she rejected the path of selling herself out as a woman. Relying on men, clinging to men, fawning on men; she rejected the path of living like a

parasite. Nikka's mother was this kind of woman. All the women around her then were like that.

"If I'm supposed to live like after all I've been through... I might as well die here!"

But she was different. She had chosen to fight alongside Volf. From the time she had lost the only person she considered her best friend she decided to follow the same path of the man that used to love her. To survive, she must fight. There is no meaning if you don't take victory with your own hands. Forget about living by relying on others.

Nikka's spear roared. The boldness of her moves might fool one's eyes, but her technique was sublimity itself. Attacks aimed at the joints of the armor and the neck; indirect approaches; to sharply tear through where the defense of the armor is light. Fast, sharply, with flexibility, the head and limbs of the enemy are sent flying.

"Come with all you got! You won't be bringing me down so easily!"

Recklessness and eagerness to fight even before her demise. That was the way she lived.

"Really, our vice-leader.... I guess we got no choice but to fight it through!"

One must not forget. There is nothing scarier than cornered a

wolf.

The pack of wolves howled.

Anzerm immediately noticed the change in Nikka's troops. He wasn't one to underestimate Nikka. She had been able to push back Gregour, the one to possess one of the most destructive and penetrative force in offensives among the young generation. Hence, it wasn't unrealistic to assume she had even more prowess than Gregour himself. The one to look down at someone like that is a fool. Anzerm wasn't going to be the one to.

"Keep the formation and kill them from afar with arrows. Something unexpected might happen if I let them get too close."

Anzerm made the decision that not directly engaging with the wolves overflowing with killing intent was a better choice.

"There mustn't be any mistakes. I must carry out the plan flawlessly."

Putting his hand onto his mouth, Anzerm took a long breath.

Brim with arrows stuck on them, the wolves howled, standing on a great number of corpses. With Nikka leading their charge, they attacked. Inside the rain of arrows, they continued to avoid them,

making use of the trees, rocks and difference in height. Of course, it was impossible that they could continue to forever avoid the arrows. Many arrows had deeply pierced Nikka's flesh. There were comrades of her that had already perished. There were ones that had even become an arrow daruma.

(TL: Daruma is a japanese doll that is oval-shaped. Imagine it prickled with many arrows and you would get the image.)

"There's still more from where it came!!"

A howl that has already lost any reasoning behind it. So that she could live through this battle, she stood, she moved, she fought. Kill the enemy and be the one to remain standing. She was just like a wild beast.

"How meddlesome! Let's take them on from both sides, Anzerm!!"

Unable to stay put anymore, Gregour prepared his troops to attack.

"Don't engage them, you fool!"

However, it couldn't be helped as Gregour had already moved out. Surrounding the enemy troops, Gregour attacked in close combat so that he could end the battle for once. Indeed that could be considered a correct move; however, many sacrifices would have been made to accomplish that. It lacked elegance. It was as if the act itself could tarnish Anzerm's now acquired aesthetic sense.

“”That thick-headed fool! You dare fool around! What am I supposed to do if that person start regarding me as incapable because of that!””

The dark flames flared up. The strategy must be beautifully and perfectly carried out. Arcadia must succeed turning the tables, not allowing the enemy to move as he wishes, ultimately obtaining a decisive victory through strategy. Completely eliminate the enemy without any casualties: that was what Anzerm visioned; that was the intent behind the plan he has prepared.

“Woman! For all your strenuous effort, this Gregour von Tundar shall respond with the same might!”

With his great sword raised, he advanced. Mincing Nikka’s subordinates like a monster, he made his way through and now stood before her.

“Hah! Did you just come here for your own death, stupid!”

The spear moved. Gregour blocked the attack with his sword.

“This head of yours, I won’t be able to sleep well at night if I don’t take it myself!”

Both faced each other in many charges, both equally matched. It was then that…

“Die.”

Anzerm jumped into the fight. Leaving behind his troops, Anzerm came by himself with the flames of anger burning throughout his body. The sword covered in the dark flame was headed towards Nikka’s neck.

“Zwah!?”

Nikka barely defended the attack with her spear. The price for saving her life was her own spear. The spear was cut in half at the handle.

“Anzerm! Don’t butt in.”

Ignoring Gregour, who was surprised by his sudden appearance, Anzerm ruthlessly went for the unarmed Nikka. Without a single change to his expression, he raised his sword, once again aimed for Nikka’s neck.

“You will die this time.”

Anzerm declared. Those were absolute words of the one possessing Nikka’s life in his own hands.

“”….Aha.””

It was hopeless. Nikka was done for the moment she was

surrounded by Gregour and Anzerm. It couldn't be helped that she was going to die. Her heart that believed in that....

"Like I'm gonna die here!"

...was gone at that moment. Anzerm's words were the trigger to spark off her spirit.

"Oh!?"

That swordplay was so beautiful to the point even Gregour gasped in surprise. Nimbly, dancing like a butterfly, she deflected Anzerm's sword so naturally as if Anzerm himself intended that to happen, causing the sword to be swung outside her range.

This mastery of the sword was the first thing Nikka learned: the power to protect herself. A dual-wield style; one sword for offence and the other for defense.

"Yooooooooouuu!!"

Gregour unconsciously ended up putting all his strength on his attack. He didn't know if that was because the fighting spirit Nikka brought about affected him in some way, or perhaps for some other reason. He didn't know at all. However...

"Hwa!? So that's how you are going all out!"

Gregour's sword too was parried. Through the created grap, Nikka thrust her sword. Gregour's armor was damaged. Not allowing Nikka any moment of rest, Anzerm attacked once again, but using the sword in her left hand, she deflected Anzerm's sword. All that while keeping the rhythm of the dance.

"Impossible!"

Neither Anzerm nor Gregour were holding back. They didn't have the leisure to spare any effort against her to begin with.

"I won't die. I'll keep fighting and survive until my time comes!"

It was two against one. To Anzerm and Gregour, this was nothing but humiliation. Being surrounded by the two warriors, her vitality demonstrated her desire to live. It was the howl of when life is put at the brink of perishing; the time when life truly shined. A beautiful shine of obsidian. A charming wolf clad in obsidian black fur.

Just a single wolf was beautifully living through the attack of the two warriors. Their swords only hit the air, her fangs bore into their armor. They should have been able to overwhelm her. However, they couldn't beat her. She just wouldn''t die.

"You!"

Gregour's all-out attack was smoothly diverted.

“Damn it!”

Anzerm’s sword passed through the air.

“Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

In that short period of time that seemed to last forever, Nikka desperately continued to live, forgetting even to breath. She wasn’t scared of death. Rather, she was scared of the herself that would believe that death was scary; of the herself that would even think of forgoing her life of battles just because of fear of death. She herself was the only thing that she feared.

She had thrown away her weak self the moment she decided to walk on the same path as Volf. Resolved, she cut her long hair and desperately followed after Volf’s steps. All so that she could fulfill her promise with her friend; for her dreams that couldn’t be realized, and to fight the world itself that has engulfed her.

(TL:I assume Nikka’s friend is a woman because it was mentioned Volf loved her.)

The one standing there was a wolf.

63. The One-Armed Warrior

It was short: a very brief period of time. The wolf's death struggle was being etched in their mind. The vividness that short moment of time contained became engraved in the hearts of everyone present to see. The flow of Nikka's movements would be broken just by even breathing. That was how much she was exceeding her limits. Because of that, she could have only lasted for one to two minutes at most.

""Haham. I'm really strong, aren't I? Are you watching over me right now, xxxxxx? I'll...."

The instant Nikka was about to counter attack after deflecting the sword of the two, her knee suddenly gave out. It was the price for having continued to move without breathing for this long. The color on her became pale and her lungs ran wild desiring for air. Her breathing sounding as if she was having an asthma attack, her over the limit state of imprenetrable defense that could even be considered a "zone" of sorts was now broken.

"Wh-at."

Both Gregour and Anzerm became surprised for a moment. Because the two were fighting together, the thought Nikka was overexerting herself didn't didn't even pass through their minds. That was just how much hard it was to fight Nikka, seeming as if she was being possessed by something.

"Hah, hah.... This.... Hah... Damn shit."

The conclusion came suddenly.

“I’ll be havivng your head.”

Anzerm understood it was the end of the battle. Gregour raised his sword with a serious expression on his face. That wasn’t the expression of him looking down on Nikka for being a woman, but one filled with respect for the valiant enemy he fought against.

“You were a fine opponent. You may have my appreciation.”

Nikka twisted her face at Gregour’s praise. She wouldn’t give up until the end. No matter how desperately she tried to move her body, her body would refuse all attempts due to the lacking of oxygen.

Seeming to not hold any interest in claiming Nikka’s head, he begun thinking about the next battle that awaited them.

“Now, with her out of the scene, tomorrow we will….”

Her rescue too came suddenly.

アンゼルムの耳が片方消し飛んだ. The last sound he heard before what was about to happen resembled the crying of grief of the deceased.

(TL:Did he got his ear cut? This sentence doesn’t make much sense)

“Gregour…”

Before Anzerm could warn Gregour to raise his guard, Gregour’s big body was sent flying along with the great sword he held in his hand. It was a fast, fierce and heavy attack.

“Wh-what is happening!?”

He couldn’t be helped but be surprised at the destructive power of that attack; surprised at the opponent that wasn’t supposed to be standing there. The one that shouldn’t have been able to come out in today’s battles; the one that should have already been taken care of.

“That was a praiseworthy performance. As a fellow warrior that live by fighting wars, I commend you with honor.”

The [Crying Spear] Anatour stood on the battlefield.

“Why!? It was reported that the [Crying Spear] had lost one of his arms to White Mask.”

If one was to look closely, one would notice that Anatour had only one arm. He was carrying his spear with only one hand.

“Could it be… that you just sent my body flying with just one arm?”

Anatour still didn’t completely recover from his injuries. The bandages tainted by the blood and his pale complexion proved that.

“The remaining wolves may go send off the ones that perished with a proper burial.“

“I… Still… can do it.”

Behind him, Nikka said as she was still gasping for air. Hearing that, Anatour smiled. He had seen her performance. Hence, there was no way he wouldn’t get excited as a martial arts practitioner.

“I shall take the two fledglings as my opponents.”

The spear cried. Even though he had just lost his arm, his spear moved around without any trembling, or even looseness to its movement.

“”Damn it. So the decision of spreading out the encirclement backfired.””

Anzerm regretted. He should have either gradually surrounded the enemy as they approached them, or had the troops at the rear be on their guard. If he had done either of those, there would be no way Anatour would have been able to get inside the encirclement. Anzerm would have been to eliminate Nikka without problems. However, that wasn’t going to be possible anymore.

“Gregour… Let’s join forces and kill him together.”

“I know.”

The two knew. They realized the fact that the man filled with wounds throughout his body was stronger than the two of them. They knew they would immediately realize that once the fight began. Their previous fight with Nikka was because she was going above her limits. Besides, that was their first time fighting against her defense-focused fighting style. It was only because of those reasons that it had been a difficult battle. However…

“It’s not enough.”

Anatour’s case was a whole another story. He didn’t really get much attention because William Rivius, the [White Mask], had taken care of him. However, in reality, Anatour was a master of the spear know throughout all of the seven kingdoms by his title of [Crying Spear]. It had actually been William the one amazing for having defeated someone like Anatour. It was just that the [White Mask] had proven superior to Anatour, having taken one of his arms.

“Oh!?”

Without any stance taken, Anatour’s spear was brought down upon them. Somehow the two were able to react to the attack, preparing themselves. But even so, they were only barely able to defend themselves. Anatour was clearly fighting with leisure, only

testing the two out first.

The disparity was evident.

“Naive.”

That single word was enough to flare up the two young warriors. Facing the [spear] that carried the stench of death, the black [flames] and the hard [rock] roared. If they were to lose to Anatour even with the power of the two combined, them it would be impossible to reach William feet even if the two were to stick together.

“Still too immature.”

The laments of the dead came upon two young talents, clashing against them.

In a general perspective, the battlefield was still a stalemate. There were places where battles were at their climax. However, all in all, both armies were tired and lacking morale. However, despite the lack of development, the situation of the war was still slowly turning in favor of Nehderks, the attacking side. With that said, that subtle fact would be left unoticed by the soldiers standing at the more extremities of the war.

At the mountainous region of the center front, the intense battle had come to a close.

“Ha! Are you running away, White Mask!?”

Looking at the figure of the escaping William provoked ire on Volf. In regards to that, William’s smiled, not turning back his face.

“Congratulations, little doggie. It is your victory this time. You may pride yourself on that.”

Volf frowned at the sarcastic courtesy.

The victory went to Volf, the attacking side. Even before the obstinate offensive onto William’s fortress, Volf had already destroyed Arcadia’s encampment. So that they couldn’t so easily rebuild their encampment, Volf completely trampled over it so that not even traces of its existence would be left. Hence, the victory of this battle marked Volf’s victory on the war.

“…Today was your last chance, right? Wasn’t that fortress here your last chance of winning!? Are you telling me that’s the end!? Were you supposed to be just this little strong?!”

It could be said that this was the first time Volf found a good opponent of his same generation. William was an opponent Volf had recognized as worthy previously, but he never expected that he would become disappointed on him like that. All his disappointment turned into flames and flared up as Volf’s anger. For all the expectations he had, the bigger was his reaction to that.

In order for the Arcadian army that was in the disadvantage to attain victory, it was essential they would not allow Nehderks to push them further. That was much more the case for the center, an important position for Arcadia to keep. It wasn't unreasonable for them to make a plan based on using that position as a bait in order to bring Nikka down. However, in the end, because of the unexpected reinforcements, they weren't even able to get any results on that side either. The center was taken, Nikka survived, Anatour was back into the fight.

The wind was blowing in Volf's favor.

"I can't win against you with my current strength. That was the conclusion I came with."

All the possible plans were now used up. It is impossible for Arcadia to win.

"However..."

With the contrast to the setting sun, the shadow created by it made it impossible to see William's expression.

"I will win the war."

Declaring his victory, William left the place. His figure didn't look at all like the one of the defeated, which in turn made Volf even more confused. Despite having accepted his own weakness,

William still held on to his desire to win.

"...Well, I guess that means he at least still have some spirit on him."

Volf's anger was blown away somewhere by the wind. Expectation welled up inside his chest. Though Volf was still superior to William in all aspects, that was by a narrow margin. He couldn't say that he would absolutely always be able to win against him. What was going to happen from now on. What sort of plans were William going to bring forward. Many things were going through Volf's head.

"Haha. That's good."

Pondering one thing after another, Volf laughed. Many plans started being weaved inside his mind. Those would be then countered by other plans. Finally, there were no plans left in his mind. In order words, Volf couldn't think of any way that William could possibly bring himself back from his situation.

"Do you really have a plan that can win this war...? I will have you show it off for me."

"So that was the [Crying Spear]..."

Though not to the point of having their whole bodies filled in wounds, Gregour and Anzerm were now all tattered. From the

beginning to the end. Anatour was always at the advantage. The opponent they have faced was indeed a monster. This battle only served them by indirectly confirming the fact that William was above their league for having been able to beat Anatour.

“We can’t fight him head on. It is impossible.”

It could be possible to beat Anatour in the battlefield. Today they have fought him in close combat, his specialty. From now on they mustn’t allow him to engage them again. Throwing away their pride in order to win, they were going to fight from the distance from the beginning to the end. It would be impossible to stop him if they weren’t to do so. That was just how strong Anatour was.

“It looks like it will become one tiresome war from now on.”

“Indeed. I will go back to my position for now. Gregour, you should hurry on rebuilding your defenses.”

“I am well aware of that.”

From tomorrow on Anatour was going to be back into the war. It was good that they at least managed to make Nikka unable to continue to fight the war. If the two were to end up join forces, their combined strength would be unimaginable.

The progression of the war entered into a very complex stage.

64.

Contrary to William's declaration of victory, the following days carried on with the same dullness. A war that accomplish only exhausting both sides. The morale of the warriors was rapidly decreasing because of that. Missing Nikka and the Noir Guard on their side, Nehderks offensive capabilities decreased and they couldn't make any progression in the war. Both Gilberto and Ywain were occupied with each other on their battles while William and Volf held each other back, constantly trying to catch each other. It was only the recently recovered Anatour that has been able of showing his brilliance in the war.

"Everything is going according to the plan."

William showed a smile to the ones present there: Gilberto, Anzerm, Gregour and Karl. The many stale battles that have been endlessly continuing. The amount of sacrifices were huge, and so were the amount of sacrifices of the opposing side. It was because of that fact that victory was possible. The birth of a miracle was possible.

"It has been going like this for a while until now, but... will everything really go according to the plan?"

Gregour showed an uneasy expression. The others also had their own doubts regarding the plan. Was it really possible for the war to be won from that point? Of course William only had been able to receive the command of the army after they had agreed to his plan. But even so, doubts would still remain.

“The signs are evident. Except for the front Anatour’s troops are fighting, all the other front are either at evenness or greatly on our favor. Of course those results aren’t very surprising considering that we are are on the defense…. However, everything is going in accord to the preliminary stages of the plan.

Anzerm argu. It was necessary that they. Most of the doubts had already been explained in the by William at that day. It was a plan that was going to take very long to complete and that lacked the element of certainty. Gilberto and Anzerm were going to reject it at first, but Karl and Gregour supported the plan.

“It should be fine, I think. After all, even us the ones carrying out the plan are getting exhausted…. Their side are definitely the same.”

Karl said. Despite the small voice, his words had confidence. Gregour nodded in agreement.

“Other than that it would be Anatour’s return. They still haven’t noticed it yet because they are relying on Anatour’s charisma, but well, I’ll be very thankful to him if he continues dragging all the attention to himself like this.”

William’s smile deepened. Everything was going according to his plan. Not only that, it was going very smoothly. The absence of Nikka, the bad condition of the Noir Guard, and the blue army that suddenly became livened up again with the return of Anatour.

“Nothing more than a mercenary. You will be experiencing that

fact yourself first-hand.”

Everything was going just as planned.

The first one to notice the irregularity was the greatly injured Nikka, who now was recovering from her wounds at the Nehderks’ base.

“..For some reason... It kinda feels like those glares have returned.”

One thing would be if that was the case just for Nikka since she had been overwhelmed by the strength of Anzerm and Gregour and was incapacitated for battle. However, the stares of the Nehderks soldiers were the same even for the other members of the Noir Guard that were commanding the other troops. Volf and Ywain didn’t put much thought on that, but the bad feeling Nikka had about it would still recur inside her heart.

“Those glares are just like the ones on first time we got together. It isn’t like they are looking down on us, but instead it sorta feels like rejection. Even though they were treating us as their saviors a while ago, you know....”

It wasn’t like there was any very noticeable change. However, the mood they were giving off was completely different. Their expectation on the Noir Guard disappeared, and now they had skeptic looks.

“Tch, let’s go talk to Volf about it. It’s not like I’m hurt to the point I can’t stand.”

Nikka carefully stood up.

“Ouch, ouch. Damn it. I’ll definitely kill that blockheaded boy and that “ｷﾓﾄﾞﾛ” bastard.”

Leaving her tent, Nikka went to find Volf.

Nikka realised that her bad presentment was spot on the moment she found Volf .

“Are you retarded, you bastard!? We are going to win the war after just bit more, you know!? What kind of nonsense are you even spouting there!”

The one Volf was directing his anger to was the commander that used to be in place of Anatour when he was out of the field. Even though his position as the commander of the army changed with the recovery of Anatour, he was still a commander, the top of the cream.

“Then when are we going to win!? We have waited long enough. There were already many opportunities for us to win.! As if I’m going to leave the command to some incompetent mercenary that

show no results!”

A vein popped up on Volf’s forehead. When Volf was about to swing his arm and give the commander a punch, both Ywain and Anatour intervened.

Looking at Volf’s attitude, the commander said.

“You rowdy bastard. I suppose that’s what there is to expect from someone of lowly birth like you. I don’t know what kind of luck you had to be able to bring the war back to our favor, but I wasn’t commanding the army at the time we were losing. It was all the [Crying Spear]’s fault at that time. I can do much better than him as long as I am the one at command. I have confidence I will.”

His unyielding posture was solidified. One couldn’t help but be surprised that Volf was able to let this be despite his anger. the commander wouldn’t even be of any comparison to Anatour in terms of individual strength. In addition, Anatour was also ahead in terms of military tactics, though the difference wasn’t that big since both were from the Nehderks army. Looking at it from an objective perspective, it would be impossible to consider such idiotic claims. However, logic wouldn’t go through the head of the commander so engrossed by status.

“I will be taking the command from now on. I am about to be fed up with your exotic tactics.”

“Wait. It was Rudolf-sama’s will to allow these people to have the command of the army. Are you going to ignore Rudolf-sama’s

will?”

Anatour argued.

“All I’ve been told by Rainberka-sama was to become your substitute in commanding the army. I’ve been following the orders of those mercenaries until now just because of your urges, but in the end they didn’t raise any, and their vice-commander even fell into one of the enemy’s ploys and was heavily wounded. We can agree there isn’t any good reason for us to keep them telling us what to do.”

Hearing that, Nikka made a dejected look. She believed she had just held Volf and the others back because of that. The moment Volf heard those words, his expression turned into a cold one, just like the sand underneath is revealed when the tide lows..

“Alright. I’ll give the command back to you guys. Fight the way you want. We’ll be doing as we wish on our side too.”

Giving a short response, Volf turned around and was about to leave the place.

“Wait! I won’t allow you to do as you please. You are part of our Nerderks army. You must follow my or....”

The commander held his tongue in the middle of his speech. The reason for that was because of the great of killing intent coming the back of the man before his eyes.

“Let’s go, Ywain, Nikka.”

A presence that wouldn’t allow any qualms. Volf quickly left the place, followed by Ywain. Nikka did er best in trying to follow after them as she dragged herself on her feet, but because of her hurry, she ended up tripping on herself due to the unevenness of the ground.

“Be careful. You are still heavily injured. Don’t force yourself too much.”

Anatour put his spear aside and went to help Nikka stand up.

“So-sorry there.”

Nikka apologized. Nodding to her with a smile, Anatour shouldered Nikka without even giving a glance to his subordinates that were losing their heads over Anatour’s social status in regard to his actions, leaving the place soon after.

65.

“He is an incompetent commander. I must apologise for letting that happen.”

Anatour lowered his head. Both Ywain and Nikka were surprised. As for Volf, seemingly like he was pondering over other things in his mind, he was.

Anatour recognized the strength of the Noir Guard. Not only was their individual strength strong, but so was their prowess when they acted in group. That same strength was never shown in Nehderks’ troops. Let alone recognizing their strength, Anatour was also resolved to let them be the focus of their operations. That was what he had been intending to do.

“But for something like this to suddenly happen... Even though we are very close to winning the war.”

Ywain tilted his head in puzzlement. The war has been on their favor ever since the Noir Guard took command. But despite that, something like that ended up happening at this stage. This was something that Ywain found difficult to understand.

“Well, it’s really weird but... I don’t really get it but did it really seem like we were winning?”

Ywain made a wry smile at Nikka’s stupid question. Her individual strength as a warrior was reasonably good, but her insight as a commander was still lacking. It didn’t seem like the

person in question herself would be putting much effort to fix that either. She would always leave the thinking to Volf. After all, it wouldn't make any difference even if someone inexperienced was to join in when making new plans.

But it was because of her lack of insight....

"...So that's how it was... That's what that was all about!"

...that her words became a revelation to Volf.

Volf suddenly shouted, surprising the three. Without caring at all about their surprise, Volf excitedly began spouting.

"That bastard! He was aiming for that from the beginning! The ordinary soldiers don't know about the little details on the battlefield. All they know is the exhaustion and the stagnation of the war."

Volf's mind began working at full speed. He began thinking about the enemy aims he only now had caught on. All of Volf's strategies were based around the battlefield itself. He had been mistaken to believe that strategies would only revolve on using the terrain well, getting the upper hand in the battles, and defeating the opposing army.

Ywain's wry smile became twisted. He finally realized what happened. It was a small hole the [Lion Marquis], a man to have fought countless battles, hadn't noticed. A hole Volf and Ywain

hadn’t noticed exactly because they were the [Black Wolf] and the [Lion Marquis]. This hole had been spreading up open throughout the long war.

“We are mercenaries. Results are expected from mercenaries. We brought those results just like we were supposed to. But…”

“They couldn’t grasp the value of these results. Our advantage didn’t get conveyed to them. Instead they only saw the harsh side of the war.”

Volf desperately held back his desire to laugh out loud.

Volf was above William in all aspects. He was stronger, faster, and was even a bit above in strategy. Because of that, William gave up on trying to win through those aspects. Instead, he carefully began growing the sprouts of his victory outside the battlefield, right inside his opponent’s army.

“The main reason this happened is because we are mercenaries. Outsiders acting arrogantly after taking the command of the whole army. There is nobody that would like that happening to them. Besides, we even took down the positions of the decarions and centurions before so that we could increase our mobility. While they had to accept all those conditions because they were in a hopeless mess back then, all this just serves to get them angry now that the war is stale.”

Volf’s defeat was set the moment he had decided to go for the long war. Volf forgot two main points he should have considered.

Firstly, they were mercenaries, while on the other hand, the soldiers were ordinary people. Secondly, looking at the two in the same light is a fatal mistake.

"Nikka, and even Anatour were done in just to add to the fire. The effects of their defeats on the war might have been pretty much nothing, but at the end of the day the truth stands that they were brought down. How come, an unmatched genius like me was just...."

Volf has finally reached the scenery William had visioned. Volf couldn't hold himself back from laughing. Just how far has William seen it through; a single man that was nothing but a decarion. Who would have thought that William was this good in leading people by their noses at such young age.

"I gotta admit. He is also a genius like me. The thing that really pisses me off is that... he is an ordinary person at the same time."

Volf scratched his head as he was laughing. There would have been many measures that he could have taken if only he had noticed William's goal earlier. It was his responsibility that they were now in this predicament. It was his narrow vision that had allowed this to happen. Even if they were to try to appease the Nehderks' army again, it would be impossible for them to take the command of the battle anymore now that they had lost their credibility.

"...Fine then, we'll be doing the menial tasks if that's what it takes."

Due to all the frustration he had, blood began flowing from the corners of his mouth as he laughed.

The next day it became clear that the movement of the Nehderks army had changed. The nimbleness they had before was no longer there. In place of that was tight formations focused on muscle. The important part wasn't comparing which one of the approaches was good or bad: it was the fact that it changed. The reality which Volf stepped back from the command has been realized....

"I've been waiting. I've been waiting for this!"

It was the moment William had been eagerly waiting for. The results of the most anguishing period of time in his life have finally shown. There was no way he could be certain about the success of his plan, but it would be impossible to win if he hadn't taken that bet. The sole thing he has been relying on in his plan was the weakness of humans. The one to have taken advantage of this time of weakness was someone else other than Volf.

"Alright! Alright, alright!"

Very unlikely to his usual self, William was very cheerful. It couldn't be helped he was this much happy this time around. The opponent he was facing this time was above him in all aspects. William has done all he could have possibly done, carefully putting everything in place. Originally the defending side had the absolute advantage. But despite that, all they had been able to do was to

slowly shave away the enemy forces. Whether it was in the perspective of a strategist or a general, this could only mean defeat.

“I accept that I am weak. However, the one to win will be me!”

William loudly declared. It was his final plan he had put all his heart into. Now that it has proven a success, he could finally declare that everything was settled perfectly.

At that day, Arcadia’s army had greatly retreated. It seemed as if the stalemate from before was nothing but a lie. They have suffered a great defeat to Nehderks’ troops.