

Forgiveness

"---These guys have only recently turned into zombies. Some of them were alive just a few hours ago. We can't be sure if those who died in this battle are coming back to life one by one...we can't confirm that yet."

"But, we do understand that they've just become zombies. Everyone seems to not know their own weaknesses. It's not just us who don't know much about zombies..."

"They themselves are the same. However, if they have a head to speak, they might also have a head to think. The more time we give them, the more they'll fill in those unknown parts, and any potential weaknesses might disappear."

"That's why we need to attack before they're at their best---ah."

"What's up? What did you realize?"

"-----"

"Don't be so dramatic, just say it."

"I'm not being dramatic. It's just that zombies don't know much about their own bodies either. If that's the case, maybe if we teach them about it in reverse---"



Holding Louis on his back and tightly embracing Beatrice on his chest, Subaru maintains the same basic posture as when he was riding on the back of the swift horse. However, the situation he's in is quite extreme, leaving him with no room to be concerned about the girls.

The scenery around them changes in an instant, and just after, Subaru and the others appear in mid-air beside the house that is being shattered by a fierce attack, taking the rear of the hostile zombies.

Tanza throwing the house and Idra throwing debris in a wave-like attack-- it was quite a ridiculous strategy in terms of wording, but it was not only ridiculous in terms of wording, but also in terms of the picture. It's not about why the child, not the adult, is throwing the larger object. To begin with, the strategy of throwing a house is ridiculous in itself.

Nevertheless---

"If I am the recipient of Lady Yorna's favor, I can handle this much."

As long as it was confidently accepted like that, the impact of the picture was temporarily shelved. In reality, the mysterious enhancement of the entire Pleiades Battle Group is applied to Idra as well, but it is a disadvantage compared to Tanza's doubly applied state due to Yorna's enhancement. It's a matter of the right person for the right job.

From such a perspective, wave-like attacks with large and small throwing weapons-- after attracting the opponent's attention with it, Subaru and the others make a surprise transfer, focusing on Todd once.

"-----"

The zombie twisting in mid-air, whose characteristic single-eyed face catches Subaru and the others, has its white part of the large eye in the center of its face turned completely black, with the golden pupils shining brightly.

A cruel, blood-scented grin is etched on his mouth, making one's spine shiver. It's unclear whether he was originally the type to grin maliciously during combat, or if that changed after becoming a zombie.

But---

"El---"

Swiftly, Subaru and Beatrice simultaneously hold up their hands and aim at the enemy in front of them. If the opponent shows a move to dodge Subaru and the others' attack without caring about appearances, their strategy will fail.

Even if they did their best, they probably couldn't catch up with this enemy.

However, Subaru--- no, they had cornered him, believing it wouldn't turn out like that.

"---!"

Sure enough, the zombie, which turned around with an amazing agility, aimed its large single eye at Subaru and the others and, instead of evading, took a posture to swing the battle axe it held.

As Subaru and the others' attacks hit, the zombie's counterattack attempts to finish them off--- a traditional tactic of cutting off the flesh to break the bones, but the desperate determination behind it is different.

A zombie's body regenerates any wounds it has sustained almost without taking any time.

That's why the enemy thought it could take Subaru and the others' attack with no risk and connect it to their own counterattack.

And that's when---

"Minya---!!!"

——Unaware that this was the path to defeat Subaru and the others had carved out.

In the posture of swinging the counterattacking battle axe, the enemy takes the purple arrow fired from Subaru and Beatrice's outstretched hands head-on. Three vividly sparkling purple arrows pierce the left half of the single-eyed tribe's body.

"The strategy is brilliant, but——"

Ignoring the purple arrows sticking out of his body, the enemy bares his teeth and howls at his prey, Subaru and the others. Strangely enough, a zombie's body, while maintaining a certain degree of strength, breaks in a fragile way like pottery when shattered.

The broken body is repaired like a video playing in reverse, and the zombie continues its attack as if nothing had happened——,

"What...?"

——Or not.

The purple arrows piercing the zombie's body do not shatter the body, but instead transform it into the same purple crystal as the arrow. The crystallized area then cracks, and the zombie's body breaks apart, but that area does not regenerate.

The undead-specific Yin magic——that was the enemy's weakness that had been confirmed during the course of the retreat so far.

——Though there had not been an abundance of chances to verify it over a long period of time, several common characteristics of zombies were recognized.

For example, the fatal weakness of a zombie is closer to the heart than the head.

However, since they do not die even if their chest is pierced, the expression "fatal weakness" may not be correct. Still, it was a fact that zombies, who regenerate the wounds on their bodies with abnormal healing abilities, recover more slowly when the wounds are closer to the heart.

Although their arms and legs do not bleed when lost, the heart seems to not be fulfilling its role of pumping blood to the body, but it seems that it has not lost its function as a vital spot of the human body.

In the midst of revealing such zombie characteristics that would not lead to defeat, it was Beatrice's Yin magic that was recognized to have an effect that could certainly defeat zombies.

According to Beatrice's explanation, Yin magic's "Minya" has an instant-death magic-like effect that freezes the target's time, and it seemed to be particularly effective against zombies, who rely on regeneration.

According to Todd, if a zombie's body is burned to ash, it can stop the enemy's regeneration in the same way as when Minya is applied, but there's no point in asking for something that doesn't exist.

"This is the strongest way we can use the cards we have!"

Regardless of the strength of the enemy zombies, they can be defeated if Beatrice's Minya is applied.

As a result of thinking about strategies to apply it, they decided to deliberately make the enemy, who continued to demonstrate their abilities from their lifetime, understand the advantage of becoming a zombie themselves.

"Even if attacked, we won't get hurt. If we can heal quickly after being injured, anyone would think of relying on that power."

"If you were still alive, you would have easily dodged it."

"Ouch!"

That was a declaration of victory from Subaru, Beatrice, and Louis—or rather, a mix of praise and pity for the enemy.

The warrior who had been resurrected as a zombie was undoubtedly a highly skilled individual in his lifetime. His combat prowess remained undiminished even after becoming a zombie, but his approach to battle had become warped.

If only he hadn't been so arrogant as to think that taking hits wouldn't hurt him.

"There's no way you would have taken this hit head-on."

"_____"

Spinning around from the impact of the magic, the zombie's eyes widened.

Subaru bit his lower lip as he saw the whirlpool of complex emotions, a mix of astonishment and the realization of his own defeat, swirling in the enemy's eyes, cursing the unjust fate that had befallen this warrior.

Even if he were to be scorned for looking down on an opponent he had crystallized half of and forced to taste death a second time——,

"——Lord Schwarz!"

It was right after a moment of sentimentality had passed through his chest.

His name called out in a desperate voice by Tanza, Subaru snapped back to reality and noticed the change in the color of the enemy zombie's eyes as it spun in the air, turned its back, and faced him again.

It wasn't that the golden eyes peculiar to the dead had changed.

It's just that the astonishment and understanding that had been floating there had faded, replaced by intense hostility.

For a moment, the enemy had begun to accept their own defeat along with the shock.

But then the color of their eyes changed.—Probably triggered by Subaru's last words.

"Not yet——"

"——I'm not dead yet!"

As Subaru gasped at the enemy's gaze, the enemy, with the left side of their body crystallizing, kicked something in mid-air.

It was a fragment of the shattered cannonball. Kicking the fragment, which was as big as a person's head, the zombie's left arm shattered and flew off from the shoulder due to the impact.

In exchange, the kicked fragment flew straight towards Subaru's face——,

"Uwaaaah!"

Just before it hit, Subaru envisioned his skull being cracked by the fragment.

It would have been a lethal blow, but it did not reach Subaru. Louis stepped in and took the hit before it reached Subaru.

"Louis——!"

Louis, clinging to Subaru's back, forcibly pushed him down, moving him out of the fragment's trajectory and putting herself in its path.

As a result, Louise took the fragment completely unguarded, and was blown away from Subaru's body.

"Subaru! Don't look away!"

As Louise was blown away, Beatrice called out to Subaru, whose attention was about to shift in that direction. With Subaru entrusting his body to her, she extended her hand and launched a counterattack on the enemy.

However, the enemy was not easy enough to take a fatal attack twice.

"——!"

While sending the arm fragment flying in mid-air, the enemy skillfully read Beatrice's Minya counterattack and used the remaining left shoulder part to take the hit.

They accepted the damage with the already crystallized part, minimizing the progression of cracks.

It was indeed the technique of an outstanding warrior——.

"Ugh!"

The moment Subaru was in awe of the enemy's skill, an arm reached out and grabbed his collar.

Releasing the grip on the battle-ax——no, losing the strength to swing the ax, the enemy was determined not to let Subaru escape.

"Oooooo!!"

"Gah!"

With brute strength, Subaru, holding Beatrice, was forcefully thrown to the ground. As he gasped from the pain of hitting his back on the hard ground, he looked at the enemy's grimacing face up close and tried to reach out with his hand.

But their desperate expressions clashed, and Subaru's movement stopped.

——In the face of that unyielding spirit and fighting spirit that couldn't be believed to belong to an already dead body.

"——!"

"Subaru!"

"Schwarz-sama!"

As his throat was being strangled, Subaru's eardrums were struck by the desperate voices.

Hearing those urgent voices and the sound of his neck bones creaking dangerously, Subaru's arms still did not rise. It wasn't that his strength had been taken away, but that his heart did not rise in agitation.

Even though he knew he had to strike, or be struck.

Even though he knew he had to kill, or be killed.

"Minya!"

Instead of the immobile Subaru, Beatrice, who twitched, shot magic at the enemy.

Covering Subaru meant covering Beatrice in his arms. Naturally, the magic hit from a distance that should be called a direct hit.

However, the enemy endured.——No, they fiercely protected their right arm choking Subaru's neck, even if their body was crystallized, trying to at least take Subaru with them.

"It's because you showed unnecessary mercy."

Immediately after such an emotionless remark was uttered, the enemy, who had been trying to destroy Subaru with burning eyes, had their head severed at the neck.

Instead, appearing on the other side of the vanished enemy's head was Todd with a cold expression.

"_____"

Todd swung the ax in his hand and decapitated the zombie's neck.

The severed head, cut off by Todd, tried to direct its hatred towards him.

"How dare you!"

As that happened, Tanza's kick mercilessly blew the head away. As it did, the one-eyed head bounced down the street with the momentum of a soccer ball.

Then, left behind by the flying head and remaining in place, the body slowly turned into a deep purple crystal and crumbled.

"Are you alright, Schwarz-sama!?"

"...Cough, cough, I-I'm fine. Thank you, you saved me."

Brushing off the deep purple fragments from the crumbled enemy's body, Subaru got up and raised his hand to Tanza, who ran up to him, telling her he was fine.

Relieved by Subaru's response, Tanza's expression softened. Then, Subaru's face suddenly became tense,

"Louis! What about Louis? She shielded me..."

"She should be fine. She seems to have suffered a concussion from the impact."

Answering the anxious Subaru was Idra, who was crouching a short distance away.

Louis lay at his feet, blood flowing from her forehead as she was lifted up by the torso and swayed her head unsteadily.

"Head injuries are bad...! Beatrice, please!"

"——. Of course, I understand."

"Please...!"

Seeing Louis's condition, Subaru hurriedly stood up and pulled Beatrice's arm. For a moment, there was hesitation in her attitude, but Subaru didn't notice.

The only one who could use healing magic at this point was Beatrice.

The other user, Rem, had been asked to aim for the city by bypassing the battlefield with the non-combatants so that they could focus on fighting the powerful enemy without worry.

Although there was a high possibility that they would be able to safely leave the city due to the efforts of pulling away the powerful enemy from the city walls, the lack of healing support in this situation became apparent.

"Louis, you'll be alright...!"

Subaru crouched beside Louis along with Beatrice, who held her hand over Louis's forehead wound and activated her healing magic. Subaru held Louis's hand as well.

She squeezed back weakly, and Subaru apologized again, saying, "I'm sorry..."

All he could do was apologize. This was entirely Subaru's mistake.

"So, she can also use healing magic. You have many unusual users around you."

Todd, who had been watching Louis's treatment, spoke to Subaru.

With the ax that had decapitated the enemy's neck resting on his shoulder, he stared at Subaru's tense face and said,

"Even so, with you like this, their talents are wasted. Are you aware of that?"

"Todd..."

"People who entrust their survival to anything other than their own strength are fragile."

"_____"

"That applies not only to the one-eyed tribe we just killed, but also to you."

Subaru couldn't argue against his dispassionate words, as they undoubtedly hit the mark.

When he saw the enemy clinging to victory and shaking off the approaching defeat, a moment of weakness crossed Subaru's mind. As Todd said, it could be considered a result of being overwhelmed by the desire to live.

Subaru wasn't so insensitive as to brush it off as unavoidable, but——.

"Isn't that a rude thing to say?"

"_____"

"Schwarz-sama is the one who contributed the most to this battle. To say that about him..."

"Don't snap at me. I acknowledge his achievements. It's just that they're not enough. Besides, wouldn't the real MVP be you or the girl lying there?"

Tanza's cheeks tensed at Todd's words, as he jerked his chin.

The girl who had taken on the important role against the powerful enemy didn't care about the praise directed at her, but she was worried about Subaru, who had been struck by heartless words.

Her expressions might be lacking in variety, but the emotions she held inside were actually quite deep.

It made sense that she would show an attitude of anger on behalf of Subaru, who had been insulted since their relationship had deepened since the Gladiator Island.

The absence of Todd's fiancée, Katya, in this place also helped fuel the intensity of her words.

"Do you always think you're right? If so..."

"That's why I told you not to snap at me. What I said is just the truth. There are monsters who can be confident that they won't die because of their exceptional strength, and there are those who think they won't die for other reasons. — Neither you nor I belong to either category."

"That's..."

"The former makes things easier when they're on your side, but you don't want the latter as an ally. If they're an enemy, it creates an opening like the one we just saw. The strategy you devised for your own people was spot-on."

"——You dare to criticize Schwarz-sama?"

"Don't talk about it," Tanza was about to snap.

With anger tinting her face slightly red, Tanza tried to bite back at Todd. However, before Subaru could stop her, Idra intervened more quickly.

While supporting Louie's body, he called Tanza's name and said,

"That's enough. It's unlike you. Being calm at all times is your forte."

"...I'm just bad at expressing my emotions. Besides, you should understand, Lord Idra."

"Understand, you say..."

"Tanza and I are connected to Lord Schwarz. We should at least have an idea of how he feels."

"_____"

At Tanza's appeal, still with her back turned, Idra frowned and held his tongue. Seeing Idra's expression head-on, Subaru couldn't help but hold his breath.

The Pleiades Brigade's extraordinary enhancement through Subaru's "Cor Leonis" was a blessing, but the more closely related members—Idra and the others from the same "Group," as well as Tanza, who had a deeper relationship with him—also perceived such inadequacies.

Subaru felt somewhat relieved that Tanza and the others didn't consider his lapses and indiscretions. At the same time, he felt apologetic and that he still wasn't enough.

It was then that Subaru thought.

"Ah, uh..."

Suddenly, Louis squeezed Subaru's hand back and let out a weak voice.

As always, he couldn't understand the specifics of what her unintelligible words meant. However, he could tell that she was worried about him, even though she was the one injured.

"If you can talk, there's no need to worry. Once we finish treating you, we can take you outside and have Rem examine you."

"Yeah, that's right. We've finally cleared a path. If we keep dawdling..."

He was preparing for the reversal of priorities when other zombies might gather.

——A strange sound, like the wind being cut, reached their ears.

"——"

It was a sound like swinging a string with something light attached, but the events that occurred immediately after hearing that sound were anything but light.

"Ah!"

With a short groan, Tanza's body trembled.

As she trembled, she looked down at her body and widened her round eyes.——A sharp, tentacle-like object had pierced through her back and abdomen.

The tentacle that penetrated Tanza's small body extended from a place far away from Subaru and the others, in the direction of the collapsed street due to the aftermath of the battle.

The tentacle, which extended like a writhing snake, originated from——,

"...Huh?"

There was a zombie with a grotesque body growing from the severed head that had been kicked away, and its tentacles extended towards them.



——While chasing the fleeing targets, the thoughts of the "Giant Eye" Izmail were completely disordered.

"_____"

His vision flickered, his thoughts scattered, and his movements were far from refined, clumsy.

Dragging his mismatched limbs on the ground, with the instability of a newborn beast, he collided with walls and the ground while reaching out his hands and fingers toward the retreating figures.

Izmail couldn't remember why he was obsessed with the two fleeing enemies.

The grotesque monster, which was on the verge of forgetting that it was once Izmail, grew new limbs from the cracks that formed every time it fell, increasing its ugliness even more.

——It was indeed the runaway regenerative ability that Beatrice had pointed out.

However, the mutation that occurred in Izmail's body, which had been revived by the will of others and had exceptionally escaped death, was beyond the control of even the caster.

What would become of the monster after it slaughtered the two targets it was obsessed with?

"Ooooooh....."

To the monstrous creature, which let out a terrible, hollow roar, it was a matter of no interest at all.

"_____"

The two targets were fleeing, the larger one carrying the smaller one. As they tried to capture their backs, they retreated, continuing the situation where they could not be hit by the repeated attacks.

However, they couldn't keep running forever. As they continued their awkward running, new limbs grew from the various parts of their fallen bodies, and Izmail no longer stumbled.

Since he didn't fall, it was logical for the one with more limbs to run faster.

Therefore, Izmail gradually closed the distance between him and the fleeing targets, getting closer and closer, closer and closer——.

"Ah!"

Izmail's fingers, with a short bark, gouged the fleeing target's back and shoulder.

Blood spurted, the enemy's screams were heard, and a sinister smile spread across Izmail's face. It was delightful. It was so much fun that he wanted to hear more and more blood, more screams.

The target desperately tried to escape, feeling a different atmosphere than before, as they were chased by Izmail and caught by the monster, not wanting to be torn to shreds.

Aiming for their limbs, especially the upper body, he inflicted injuries. If he aimed for their legs, they would not be able to escape. And then, this would be over.

When it's over, it would be lonely. When it's over, it would be a pity.

So, to make sure it never ended——.

"Oooooooooon!"

While letting out a low, air-shaking roar, Izmail chased his target, shattering buildings, trampling streets, and kicking the waterlogged ground.

The distance between them was rapidly closed, and finally, the fleeing enemy, having exhausted their stamina, jumped into a nearby building, bleeding and cursing.

They made a foolish choice to jump into a dead-end alley with no escape.

Sensing the end of this hunting time, Izmail——no, the monster that was no longer Izmail——broke down the closed door and slipped inside.

With more limbs, an enlarged body, and a size that could not be compared to the original body, it was impossible to simply open the door and enter the building.

And so, the monster entered the dimly lit building where the target had fled and looked around.

The light source was scarce, but the special eyes that remained unchanged even after such a grotesque transformation switched the way the world appeared with a blink, searching for the hidden prey.

Searching, the monster realized.

"_____"

——Inside the building the monster jumped into, the powder danced, covering its entire body in white.

The reason the visibility was poor was not just the darkness, but because the powder filled the entire building. Looking around, there were several shelves lined up in the building, and each shelf was filled with bags stuffed to the brim.

Those bags were torn open, and a large amount of powder was stirred up inside the building.

"To defeat you, it's not magic or a special move"

The powder-covered monster noticed the state of the building at the same time the voice was heard from behind. Turning around, the monster saw a small, bright red shadow in its field of vision.

That was one of the fleeing targets——no, at some point, the fleeing targets had become just one. The smaller one, who had disappeared from the sight of the larger one, was there.

And then——,

"Take this, the essence of science——a dust explosion!!"

Immediately after that shout, the small shadow's surroundings were dyed red all at once——,

——A tremendous explosion blew away the flour mill, and the monster was swallowed up by the crimson flames.



"——Look, Schwarz, let's use that flour mill as a landmark. It's the building with the waterwheel nearby."

Idola, who led non-combatants and kept an eye on their surroundings while riding a swift horse, used to be the son of a miller before being sent to the Sword Slave Island.

Subaru wasn't precisely sure what role a miller played, but he had received an explanation that they used the power of waterwheels to grind wheat and produce flour.

In other words——,

"We can cause a dust explosion using the materials inside the hut."

A dust explosion occurs when flammable powdery substances are suspended in the air, and a spark causes them to ignite and explode in a chain reaction.

With the enclosed space of the flour mill and the large amount of wheat suspended in the air, a clear spark would——,

"...I never thought it would be this powerful."

Leaning his back against the wall that had been struck, Subaru coughed and muttered.

In front of Subaru's eyes were the remains of the flour mill, shattered by the successful dust explosion, and the monster's remains that were caught in the blast and burned to ashes.

When it was decided that Todd and he had to lure and defeat the monster, the strategy that came to Subaru's mind was using the flour mill for a dust explosion.

Of course, dust explosions don't easily succeed, and there was no guarantee that they could lead the opponent effectively.

So, the fact that it worked out this well wasn't just due to Subaru's efforts.

"...Are you alive, Todd?"

Blown away by the explosion's impact and with his head still throbbing, Subaru shook his head and stood up.

As part of their division of roles, Todd lured and evaded the monster until the flour mill was ready, while Subaru secretly infiltrated the hut and filled the building with dust.

Then, Todd jumped into the hut at the right moment, luring the monster while throwing in the spark. Todd had prepared that spark as well.

"Todd, Todd...!"

"...You don't have to call me with such a tragic voice. I'm alive."

"——!"

At the epicenter of the explosion, where the remnants of the fire still asserted their presence, Subaru heard a slightly hoarse voice and turned in that direction.

There, on a fallen wall of the blown-away hut that had landed in the street, Todd was kneeling on one knee. Seeing Subaru approach, he spat out saliva from his mouth and said,

"You almost killed me along with it, you know."

"...That's not how it sounds. I did explain that it would be very powerful, didn't I?"

"I've heard that accidents like this happen from time to time, but I understand the principle now."

Todd, struggling to breathe, plopped down onto the street. Then, he looked at the blown-away hut and asked,

"What about the enemy?"

"It's blown away. Look, see..."

Saying that, Subaru pointed to a part of the blown-away monster visible from their position. The scorched part crumbled like sand and lost its shape.

Just like the scattered remains of the other zombies, it was the result of completely crushing their regenerative ability.

"What about your injuries?"

Having confirmed that they had finally defeated the formidable zombie, Subaru asked Todd.

In dividing the roles, there was no choice but for Todd to act as the decoy, as long as he could keep running away from the enemy. However, he volunteered for that role himself.

He betrayed Subaru's expectation that he would definitely avoid a plan that would endanger his own life.

"If I spare myself the pain and fail to save our lives, then it's pointless. We both did what we needed to do. That being said..."

"Uh..."

"I've been cut up quite a bit. I feel like I don't have enough blood."

As he spoke, Todd raised one arm, revealing his injuries were quite severe.

Although there were no wounds deep enough to be considered fatal, his shoulder and thigh were soaked with blood, and his face was pale from blood loss.

If left untreated, his life would undoubtedly be in danger.

"I'll get——"

Subaru was about to call Beatrice.

Having been separated from Subaru and Todd, Beatrice must be frantic by now. However, she should prioritize treating Tanza's injuries.

They had to check on the safety of Louie and Tanza, and hurry to join Beatrice and the others.

And then——,

"At least with this much, even Katya won't be able to complain, right?"

"Eh?"

"Don't you remember what we talked about at the mansion? She seems to think I'm lazy. But I let you all escape, defeated a formidable enemy, and even got injured honorably. You wouldn't hog all the credit for yourself, would you?"

Shrugging his shoulders, Todd said this with a pale face. For a moment, Subaru was taken aback, then he let out a deflated sigh.

Despite being in such a battered state, he was still concerned about Katya. Perhaps he was also trying to ease Subaru's tension, but anyway...

"You really care about Katya, don't you?"

"Of course. She's my fiancée. Katya is my life itself."

Todd declared without a hint of embarrassment.

Subaru took a deep breath, held it halfway, and then pumped himself up with a "Alright."

Even now, Todd was scary. The things he had done still left scars on Subaru's heart.

But the fact that they had worked together to defeat the monster here was also unchangeable. Todd had done everything he could to ensure the survival of everyone, including Subaru, even at the cost of being beaten up.

Now it was Subaru's turn.

"Here... no, someone might come here after hearing the explosion. Let's go back together for now. When we find a suitable place, wait there for me."

"Alright, I got it. Just don't leave me behind when you go back."

"I won't!"

It seemed like Todd made it so that Subaru didn't have to do that.

Of course, even if they had remained in a hostile relationship, it was doubtful whether Subaru could have left Todd to die in such a state.

"No, overthinking it will get me stuck in a rut. Anyway——"

Even if Subaru offered Todd his shoulder, their height difference would make it difficult. At the very least, if there was something that could be used as a makeshift cane, Subaru looked around the blown-away cabin.

And then, finding a pillar of the shelf that had been blown away in the burning remnants——,

"——"

—— A sharp sound echoed.

"Why... why is this happening?"

The moment the sharp sound echoed, Subaru bowed his head and clenched his fist tightly. Trembling his lips, shaking his shoulders, and quivering his black eyes, he muttered.

"Why is this happening?"

"——"

There was no answer to his question, and Subaru turned back while exhaling.

In front of Subaru, who turned back, the blade of the swung axe stopped just a hair's breadth away from shattering his skull.

—— Restrained by the "invisible hand" that only Subaru could see.

"Tsk, failure, failure."

Clicking his tongue softly, Todd let go of the axe and jumped back. There was no sign of the effects of blood loss or injury in his agile movements, and Subaru gritted his teeth.

Even that was an act. The pain of the wounds, asking Subaru for help, and loosening Subaru's heart by talking about his feelings for Katya.

"Why the hell...!"

For the third time, he asked the same question, and Subaru glared at Todd with a tearful face.

Glaring at him, feeling the tears welling up from the bitterness, he said,

"Right now, you haven't done anything yet. You haven't killed anyone. I could have forgiven you!"

"Slowly and quietly, you destroyed my trust in you."

While listening to Subaru's cry, Todd took out a knife instead of the released axe and readied himself.

That was the declaration of an irreparable separation between Natsuki Subaru and Todd Fang.