

# 麻雀と咲の事姫

ヴァナディース

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王魔と神の  
姫

ヴァナディース

\* Tigre \*  
ティグル

\* Lim \*  
リム

\* Mila \*  
ミラ

\* Elen \*  
エレン



# 登場人物紹介

## リュドミラ=ルリエ

七戦姫のひとり。十八歳。愛称はミラ。ジスタート王国の南にあるオルミュツツを治めている。竜具は槍の“凍漣”ラヴィアス。エレンとは犬猿の仲。

## ソフィーヤ=オベルタス

七戦姫のひとり。二十二歳。愛称はソフィー。ジスタート王国の南東にあるポリーシャを治めている。竜具は錫杖の“光華”ザート。外交に長ける。

## アレクサンドラ=アルシャーヴィン

七戦姫のひとりだった。オルシーナ海戦の後、病で命を落とす。愛称はサーシャ。竜具は双剣の“煌炎”バルグレン。

## エリザヴェータ=フォミナ

七戦姫のひとり。十九歳。ジスタート王国の北西にあるルヴーシュを治めている。竜具は鞭の“雷渦”ヴァリツァイフ。『異彩虹瞳』の持ち主。記憶を失ったティグルを重用し、そばに置いていた。

## オルガ=タム

七戦姫のひとり。十五歳。ジスタート王国の東にあるブレストを治めている。竜具は斧の“羅轟”ムマ。アスヴァールでティグルと行動をともにした。

## ヴァレンティナ=グリンカ=エステス

七戦姫のひとり。二十三歳。ジスタート王国の北東にあるオステローデを治めている。竜具は大鎌の“虚影”エザンディス。

## レギン

ブリュース王国の王女。十七歳。亡き父に代わり、ブリュース王国を治めている。ティグルを慕っている。

## マスハス=ローダント

ブリュース王国の伯爵。ティグルの父ウルスの親友で、彼の死後、ティグルの世話を何くれとなく焼いている。現在は、旧友である宰相のボードワンと共にレギンを補佐する。

## ボードワン

ブリュース王国の宰相。猫髭の容貌が特徴的。マスハスとは、若き頃からの親友同士。

## ヴィクトール

ジスタートの王。戦姫たちの戦力均衡に力を注ぐ老練な手腕の持ち主。多くの戦姫たちと交友関係にあるティグルに興味を持つ。

## ルーリック

ライトメリツツの若き騎士。弓の名手であり、自分以上の技量を持つティグルに心酔している。禿頭。

## メリザンド

テナルディエ公爵の未亡人であり、レギンの従姉。レギンの統治を快く思わず、彼女を排除しようと陰謀をめぐらせる。

## ガヌロン

ブリュース王国の公爵。ブリュース内乱の際に行方不明となり、世間的には死亡したと思われている。魔物を喰らう能力を持つ。

## グレアスト

ガヌロンの腹心。ブリュース王国を混乱に陥れるべく暗躍している。

## ティグル=ルムド=ヴォルン

本編の主人公。十八歳。愛称はティグル。ブリュース王国の伯爵。客将としてジスタート王国のライトメリツツに身を置く。海に落ちて記憶喪失となるも、魔物との戦闘を経て復活を遂げる。



## エレオノーラ=ヴィルターリア

七戦姫のひとり。十八歳。愛称はエレン。ジスタート王国の南西にあるライトメリツツを治めている。竜具は長剣の“銀閃”アリファール。



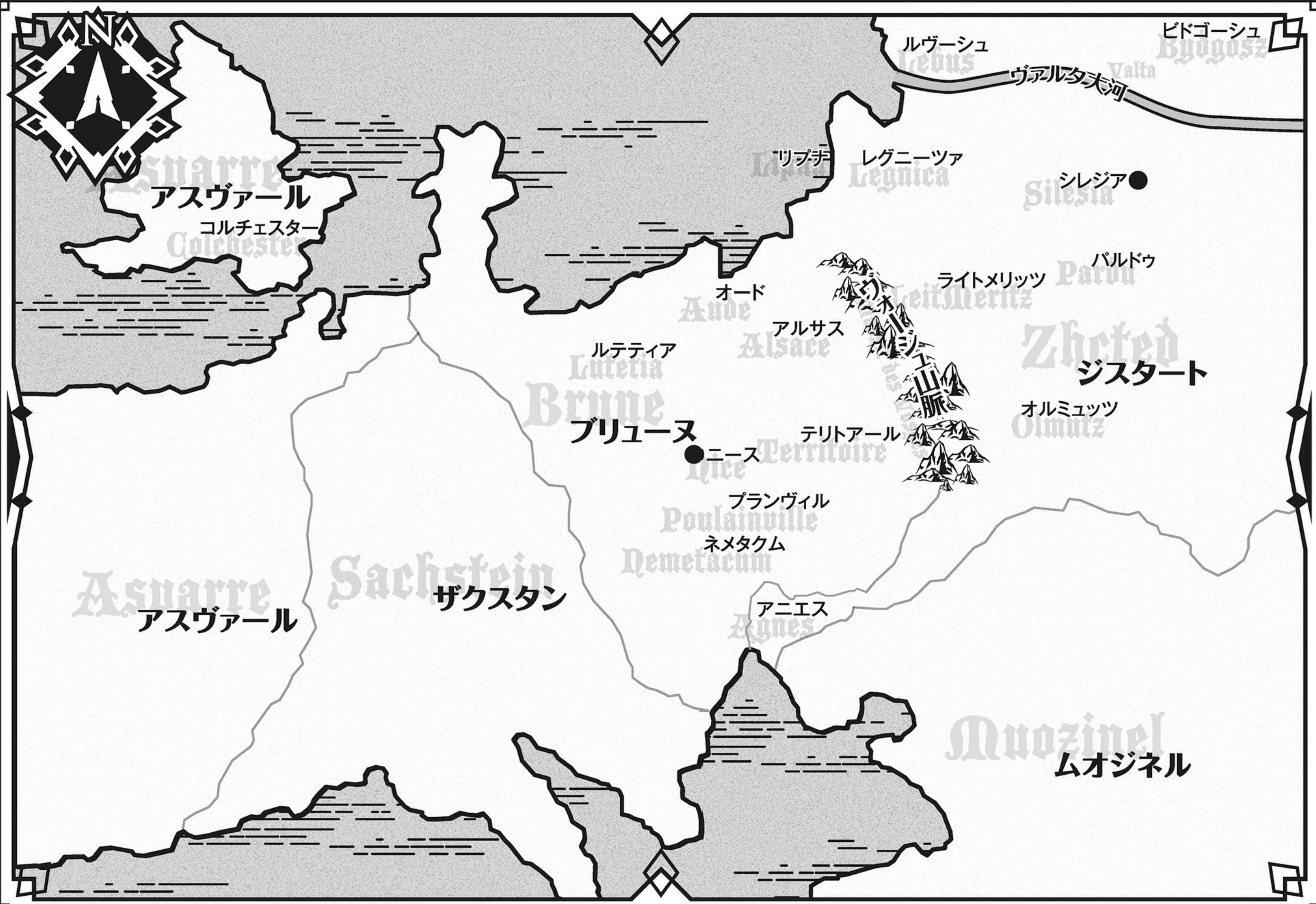
## リムアリーシャ

エレンの副官で、昔からの親友でもある。二十一歳。愛称はリム。



## ティッタ

ティグルに仕える侍女。十七歳。現在はライトメリツツに身を置く



## *Prologue*

The moon rose highly in the bright winter night sky. The silver disk whose edge was greatly waned was casting a soft light onto the earth.

There were three silhouettes lurking in the darkness, avoiding that moonlight. It was not only because it was midnight that their figures melted into the darkness. It was also because they wrapped their bodies in black clothes. They wound a black cloth on their head and only where there were the eyes and nose, small openings were made.

The place where they were hiding themselves was the Brune Kingdom's royal palace. More exactly, they were in the garden located in the royal palace's courtyard. Hiding in the shade of beautifully decorated sculptures and flower beds, the three people were inquiring the situation of the corridor.

One civil official walked down the hallway while rubbing his eyes as he seemed to be sleepy. The three people knew that this civil official worked until late at night every day. They were waiting for him to leave.

As the three people exchanged looks, they stealthily left the garden. They walked into the hallway.

Torches lit with fire were established at regular intervals in the corridor and soldiers were standing on watch. While sometimes clinging to the ceiling and then sometimes hiding behind pillars, the three people were cautiously advancing along the corridor.

What they were aiming for was the princess's bedroom. The bedroom of this country's ruler, Regin Ester Loire Bastien do Charles.

About 20 days ago, they had individually crawled into the royal palace posing as a servant of a certain noble, as a maid or even as a rookie soldier. And they thoroughly investigated about the pathway until the princess's bedroom and the places where soldiers stood on watch.

In order to assassinate Regin.

Before long, the assassins advanced until near the princess's bedroom.

Before the bedroom's door, one knight serving as a guard was standing on watch. He attired himself with armor and a helmet and wielded a sword in his hands. The dark gray sword blade was glittering reflecting the flames of the torches. Unlike the soldiers whom they went past so far, he drifted a presence with no openings.

One of the assassins took out something like a small stick. He took off the cloth covering the bottom half of his face and stuck it on his mouth. Another assassin approached the knight while bending his body.

Perhaps because he sensed a presence, the knight looked his way. He raised the face guard of his helmet and looked hard into the darkness.

It was at that moment that the assassin who put the stick on his mouth began to emit a small breath.

Immediately after, the knight opened wide his eyes and leaked an anguish groan. The assassin had used a dart smeared with poison. The dart small like a nail pierced the knight's cheek and made his body become numb.

Although the knight greatly staggered, he tried not to collapse as he put strength into both his feet. However, it was just what the assassins wanted. If he had fallen, the armor would let a loud sound reverberate.

The assassin who was approaching the knight ran at a stretch and brandished the dagger he was hiding. The knight, unable to even lift his sword, could only glare at the assassin.

The assassin drove in the dagger with a blade like a thick needle into a gap of the armor. It deeply pierced the knight's chest. He held the knight's mouth with his other hand. It was so as to not let him scream.

The other assassin rushed over and grabbed the sword which was in the knight's hand. Almost at the same time, the knight's whole body lost all its strength.

Two assassins supported the knight's corpse and carefully laid it down on the floor. Then, the one who held the dart came walking. The three people exchanged looks and one quietly touched the door. With a hand gesture, he conveyed to the two others that it was locked.

One of them took out a strangely bent wire from inside his clothes. He plugged it in the keyhole. About five seconds haven't yet passed when a sound of the door being unlocked quietly resounded.

The three people unsheathed their daggers. As soon as they opened the door, they jumped all at once.

At that moment, something which flew cutting the bedroom's air attacked the assassins. One of them was blown off and fell. His head and chest was smeared with blood, and a bolt used for a crossbow pierced him.

The remaining two realized that they were caught in a trap.

Within the darkness, three figures of people were standing as to protect the bed with a canopy. They were wearing armor and each had a crossbow in their hands. The crest of the Calvados Knight Squadron was carved onto the left chest of the armor.

"You scoundrels who dared sneak into Her Highness's room! We won't let even one of you escape!"

One of the knights raised a loud voice. It was a man in his prime who grew an abundant beard from under his nose and his cheeks and he was called Auguste. The other two were his subordinates.

While Auguste was shouting, the other two knights casually tossed aside the crossbow which had already shot its bolt. They picked up their sword and shield which they had put on the floor. They were here since two koku. Their eyes which had gotten used to the darkness properly perceived the assassins' figures.

The assassins' judgment was slightly later than the knights'. As they bent over on the spot, they cut the throat of their friend, who fell down after receiving the bolt, with their dagger. Fresh blood spouted within the darkness and

depicted a distorted dark red parabola. They sealed his mouth.

One of the remaining assassins headed towards the knights, and the other ran to the bed that had a canopy. Even if they just ran away, they would not succeed. A hostage was necessary.

Auguste who set up a sword and shield broke in before the assassin who ran to the bed. The assassin brandished his dagger aiming at Auguste's feet while rolling on the floor. But, Auguste bashing him with his shield was slightly faster. With a strong striking sound, the assassin was blown off.

The assassin raised his body while enduring the pain. When he tilted his head and glared at Auguste, he took out a small tube, put it on his mouth and shot a dart. However, Auguste swiftly moved his shield and protected his face. The dart struck against the shield and fell to the floor.

It was not like Auguste saw through the fact that the assassin had a dart gun. He was just cautious of the existence of a projectile weapon. They were people who sneaked into the princess's bedroom. He could not make light of them.

The assassin stood up, tightly grasped the dagger in his right hand, held the tube for shooting darts in his left and confronted Auguste. He no longer had any path aside from outwitting Auguste and capturing Regin.

It was about ten days ago that the Calvados Knight Squadron was appointed as Regin's guards. That day, in

order to report the situation of the northwestern area, Auguste had visited the capital with 30 subordinates. And then, he was called by Prime Minister Pierre Badouin.

Auguste looked puzzled at the order to protect the Princess. There should be guards under direct supervision for Regin. Why does he not use them? The old Prime Minister's answer to that question was clear.

"I leave it to them while Her Highness is awake. When she sleeps at night, I would like to leave it to you people. Also, it must be known only to a restricted number of people."

Auguste understood in the last part of his lines. It meant that Badouin's aim was that he wanted to pretend that the situation was the same as usual outwardly until then. By openly increasing Regin's guards and revising the time when guards were changed, he probably thought of making those aiming at the Princess find it suspicious.

Auguste wholeheartedly received the appointment. As he and the 30 knights pretended to have left the capital within that day, they spent their days in one room of the royal palace so as to not be noticed by the public gaze afterward.

Although short, a fierce fight unfolded. The assassins were killed and were lying in the pool of blood that they made themselves. Auguste also lost one of his subordinates. It was an instant death as poison was smeared on the assassin's dagger.

Auguste lay down his subordinate's corpse on the floor and closed his eyelids. Then, he looked down at the assassin's corpse with a bitter face. He was such a tough opponent he had no leisure to capture him alive.

"We weren't able to make them spit out whom they were hired by..."

Before long, a little less than ten knights showed up in the bedroom. They rushed after hearing Auguste's shout. To them who gasped as they saw five corpses lying down outside and within the bedroom, Auguste told in a serene tone.

"Her Highness is safe. We've killed all the enemies who attacked here. But, there's no telling if they were the only intruders. Tell also that to others, and look around in the royal palace."

"Yes sir."

The knights split into groups, some of them went outside to inform the others and the remaining knights carried out the bodies of their comrades and the assassins.

At that time, from the back of the canopy covering the bed, the Princess called out to Auguste.

"—Auguste. Could you tell me about the situation?"

Auguste, startled, turned around to the bed and bowed to Regin. Since the light of several torches illuminated the bedroom, the Princess's shadow dimly floated on the other side of the canopy.

Though her voice was fraught with tension, she stayed firm and showed no signs of being frightened. Even though there had just been ghastly killing on the other side of this piece of thin cloth.

Although feeling deeply impressed to Regin's attitude, Auguste once again explained what happened just now this time though it was to the Princess.

"I apologize for having made her Highness's bedroom stink of blood."

"I don't mind. What are the names of the two knights who died?"

Although puzzled about her question, Auguste told the knights' names.

Regin prayed to the gods so that the two knights' souls rested in peace.

"I will not forget their brave fight. Could you convey so to the two's bereaved families?"

"I will not fail to convey it word by word."

Auguste took off his helmet and deeply bowed his head.

"By the way, how about you change the place where you will be sleeping? Because even if this room is cleaned immediately, the smell of blood will remain for a while."

"If I am not a hindrance for you people to accomplish your duty, I do not mind staying here."

"As you wish."

It was certain that this bedroom was most suitable if they wanted to protect Regin. An unexpected joy welled up in the heart of this knight in his prime.

*—This calmness of hers is admirable. Even the fact of having prayed for the subordinates...*

When Regin had come to govern Brune as she succeeded King Faron, honestly speaking Auguste felt anxious.

This was because this young Princess did not have any firm achievements. Regin's delicate, gentle appearance and calm demeanor looked somewhat unreliable for a ruler.

But, that impression was an error. She possessed both strength and gentleness.

Afterwards, the knights cleaned the pool of blood on the floor and respectively returned to their posts. Auguste let his subordinate, who survived, take a rest and in his stead chose two persons among the knights who were on standby.

*—I don't think that we will receive another attack by the end of tonight, but...*

He could not say it with absolute certainty. For Regin's sake, too, he should be prepared.

"How was this?"

The knight who picked up the crossbow asked in a low voice while loading a new bolt. Auguste too answered in a low voice so as to not disturb the Princess sleeping within the canopy.

"It's a tremendous power. It certainly takes time, but it's worth it."

"But, this is also a kind of bow, right? I don't think that it's necessary for us to use it though."

In Brune Kingdom, the bow was made light of.

It was considered to be the weapon of hunters, farmers, cowards and those who couldn't decently handle a sword or spear and was by no means highly valued. Even in the Calvados Knight Squadron which Auguste belonged to, that viewpoint did not change.

But, Auguste himself did not have such a narrow-minded opinion about the bow.

Though there was also the fact that he was born commoner, this was because in Alsace where Auguste was born and raised, there was little prejudice regarding the bow. On the contrary, the lord there Tigrevurmud Vorn also known as Tigre was a skilled archer to the extent that he was praised by other countries.

When he was appointed the Princess's guard by Badouin, Auguste gave a condition. That he wanted to give a crossbow to his subordinates, but he wanted it to go by the Prime Minister's order.

"Even if we become Her Highness the Princess's guards, the enemy aren't the kind of people who will fairly challenge us head-on. Above all, if we think about Her Highness's safety, our honor as knights is something worthless."

Auguste added such a reason and got Badouin's approval.

There were several reasons why he thought about using a crossbow.

Through the battle with the Muozinel army and the civil war, the Calvados Knight Squadron had nearly 20% in casualties in their ranks. Even if they got rewards from the Kingdom, it was not like they could supplement new knights immediately. It requires time to bring up an apprentice knight to a full-fledged one. It was necessary to raise their military power quickly.

Also, the crossbow did not require so much training in comparison to the bow. Extremely speaking, it was fine as long as one understood how to pull the string, to load a bolt and to shoot.

In addition, Auguste also aimed for the fact that if they came to familiarize with the bow, they might come to properly acknowledge Tigre's bow skill.

This was because it was reality that even those who admired Tigre as a hero having ended the civil war were reluctant about highly valuing his bow skill.

"Still, why would Her Highness be targeted at such a period?"

"It's precisely because it's such a period, right?"

Auguste shortly responded to his subordinate's mutter.

In preparation for the Halo Festival — the New Year Festival several days later, a great number of people

gathered in the capital Nice. They were various people such as local feudal lords, nobles of foreign countries, peddlers, itinerant entertainers, Shinto priests, wandering knights and the like. As a matter of fact, their numbers were increasing as the New Year Festival approached.

If something were to happen to Regin in such a situation, Brune would probably fall into great confusion. Truth and rumors would be jumbled together and fly about all over the country; and there was no doubt that those away from the capital would be shaken.

As they load the bolt to the crossbow and set up their swords on the floor, Auguste and company turned the lights off.

They didn't notice the fact that they were also people beside the assassins who sneaked into the royal palace this night.

At the time when a great number of soldiers were busily running around in the royal palace, there were four silhouettes that went down the slope of Luberon Mountain and appeared on the street.

Those four were people who succeeded in escaping after sneaking into the royal palace and accomplishing their purpose. All of them were dressed up in black from head to toe, and small gaps were made at the places of the eyes, nose and mouth.

Two stood at the vanguard and kept watch on the surroundings, and the other two were carrying something

wrapped with a black cloth. It was rod-shaped, big and heavy to the extent that two people were needed to carry it.

Just as planned, they went into an old house as they blended into the darkness. The inside of the house was pitch-black, but someone was present in there.

"—Good work."

A low voice resounded from inside the darkness and a small fire appeared. It was the owner of the voice that turned on the light. As the intruders did not reply to it and quietly advanced, they put the thing which they were carrying on the floor.

As the fire flickered, the voice's owner appeared. It was a young man who grew gray hair up to his shoulders. Owner of well-ordered features as to let one feel dignity, he was holding a lamp in hand.

The man's name was Charon Anquetil Greast. He was once a Marquis of Brune and was known as Duke Ganelon's confidant. It was this man who worked out and led the plan of this time.

As Greast walked until before it which was wrapped with a black cloth, he went down on a knee to the floor and put the lamp to the side. He put his hands on the black cloth and removed it with careful hands.

Having appeared from inside was one large sword sheathed in its scabbard.

"Durandal". It was Brune Kingdom's treasured sword. Roland holding the nickname of Black Knight wielded it before, but it was displayed near the royal palace's throne after he passed away.

—*I see. This is...*

Greast could not help but hold his breath. He had several times seen the so-called famous sword, but he had never been moved by it even once. Even when he saw Durandal at the time when it was in Roland's hands, he did not feel anything.

But when he took the treasured sword up close and stared at it like this, he was almost overwhelmed by the mysterious power that Durandal wore.

"It is said that Durandal has the power to wipe away evil; this may be true."

As he sighed, Greast once again wrapped the treasured sword in black cloth. He wiped the sweat which floated on his forehead, raised his face and looked at the men in black.

"You did a good job. I prepared a change of clothes and a reward over there. You may rest until tomorrow morning."

Greast pointed at the back of the room. He was sincere with those who showed talent. Saying nothing, the men in black quietly walked to the nearby room. When the day dawned, Greast planned to load Durandal into the carriage he had prepared and leave the capital with them.

*—They will not think that aiming at the Princess was a diversion.*

Durandal's acquisition was Greast's purpose. Of course, so that it wouldn't be seen through, he also prepared the master hand of Regin's assassination plot and gained enough time.

It was Greast who was the intermediary with the assassins, but it was the merchants based in a port town on the southern coast of Brune that prepared funds to move them. The merchants held dissatisfaction towards Regin's reign and they thought about whether they could remove her.

Having lost the treasured sword would definitively become a great blow for Regin.

"Aside from the merchants, there is also Melisande. And even the Sachstein Kingdom. It looks like it'll become an enjoyable show."

Melisande was the woman who was Duke Thenardier's wife. She was from the royal family and Regin's cousin.

Holding the treasured sword wrapped in the black cloth with both hands, Greast suddenly talked to himself.

"Still, I wonder what Lord Ganelon is doing. He said that he'll come back here before spring, but..."

It was at dawn that the people of the royal palace noticed that Durandal had disappeared. The reason why it was

noticed late was because everyone was focused on Regin's welfare.

While understanding that it was too late, Regin ordered to look for those who stole the treasured sword. But since it could not be made public, it was clear that they would run into difficulties.

Furthermore, the Princess also had to deal with the situation at hand.

Durandal was always displayed behind the throne. If it disappeared, anyone would question it. It would not take that much time until question changed to doubt.

There were still a great number of domestic people who were hostile to Regin. There was no doubt that someone would press questions.

If wrongly dealt with, Regin's reign would be greatly shaken.

"There is only one way..."

Regin, who was talking with Badouin in the office room squeezed her voice as to spit out blood while shaking her shoulders with anger and disgrace. In her heart, she muttered Tigre's name. The darkish red-haired youth's name always gave her courage.

"We shall prepare a fake Durandal."

Tension and determination were shining in the Princess's pair of blue eyes.

## ***Chapter 1 – The Sun Festival (Maslenitsa)***

The Sun Festival was a festival held since ancient times in the Zhcted Kingdom.

To celebrate the end of winter, the beginning of spring and the beginning of the New Year, bread smeared with honey and vodka were served, and candles were given to people in the capital Silesia.

“Satiate your hunger with bread. Quench your thirst with vodka. Repel darkness with candles.”

While humming as if singing these words transmitted from old days, government officials went around distributing bread and vodka. By the way, kvass <sup>[1]</sup> was given to those who couldn’t drink vodka.

The Sun Festival was carried out over a period of three days, but the population of the capital at this time was more than double of the usual one. In addition to those coming for festival sightseeing all the way from towns and villages, this was also because peddlers, itinerant entertainers and female dancers from inside and outside of the country gathered.

No matter which street one walked, minstrels and clowns were conspicuous; they sang, danced as if competing and exhibited rare shows. Applauses resounded, cheers flew, and copper and silver coins danced in the sky.

Words flying about were not just the Zhcted language. There were also languages of neighboring countries including Brune and also the language of far-off countries such as Yafa.

The Muozinel people with dark brown skin spoke the Zhcted language with a strong accent, and the red-haired and blue-eyes Sachstein people lined up some poor foreign words. If there were those who quarreled there, there were also those hitting it off with others with only gestures.

There were also more stalls than usual, spit-roasting of meat and fish let a savory smell drift and multicolored accessories and handiworks lined up on carpets spread on the ground. If there were those who displayed various articles and received games of chess, there were also figures of fortunetellers who put a crystal ball on a table.

A martial arts tournament was held in the royal palace's front yard. It was a competition for sword, spear, bow and a horse's ability. It gathered participants widely, ranging from a widely known knight to a certain soldier with a familiar skill, and from a traveling mercenary to people from cities.

The knight struggled hard so that he won't fall behind the soldier and mercenary, and the soldier desperately fought so as to not miss the opportunity which presented itself. The mercenary too, as he wanted the reward, stayed close to them in order to embellish himself up.

The people of the capital sent them cheers, some people also amused themselves in secretly betting, and the martial arts tournament was greatly enlivened.

Domestic nobles and knights, their wives and daughters, their attendants, well-known scholars and craftsmen, and ambassadors of neighboring countries were gathered in the royal palace. If there were those resting in guest rooms

until the banquet, there were also those who were pleasantly chatting as they gathered in the very long corridor. There were also those who were busy going around greeting people.

"Somehow, I can't calm down..."

While standing at the edge of the corridor and looking at the banquet hall, Tigrevurmud Vorn could not get rid of his discomfort. If he had not made a promise to meet here, he would have long left.

The youth was called by his nickname Tigre from those close to him. Entering upon a New Year, he turned 18 years old.

Currently, Tigre wrapped his body in black formal clothes. His darkish red hair was also carefully arranged. If he stood with a dignified attitude, he would probably look like a gallant and noble young man.

However, as he was absentmindedly looking at the banquet hall with a puzzled face, he looked at best like an ordinary countryside noble.

In fact, Tigre was only a mere countryside noble until two years ago. He was an Earl of the Brune Kingdom and was governing a small land in the frontier called Alsace.

Two years ago, there was a civil war in Brune. Duke Thenardier and Duke Ganelon, the great nobles who represented Brune tried to eliminate King Faron and grasp real power. Having stopped their plot was Tigre.

Tigre got the cooperation of Eleonora Viltaria, one of the seven Vanadis of the Zhcted Kingdom and defeated Duke Thenardier's army. He protected Princess Regin whose whereabouts were unknown and brought peace to Brune.

Afterwards, there were negotiations between Brune and Zhcted and it was decided that Tigre would stay in the Zhcted Kingdom as a guest General for three years. It was decided that he would stay in the LeitMeritz dukedom governed by Elen.

But, his daily life as a guest General only lasted for half a year. This was because after receiving a request of the Zhcted King Victor, Tigre proceeded to the Asvarre Kingdom as a messenger.

Tigre who visited Asvarre was rolled up in the quarrel between the two Princes for the throne. After twists and turns, Tigre cooperated with a young General called Tallard Graham and they brought the civil war to an end. In that way, he was going to return to Zhcted with his companions.

However, the return ship was attacked by a demon and Tigre was thrown into the night sea. Although his life was saved by a frightening existence beyond human knowledge and he was washed ashore to Zhcted, he lost his memory.

It was really just recently that he regained his memory after meeting with Elen.

A guest General is not a subordinate of the King. Setting him up as a messenger to a foreign country and moreover because he almost died was a serious matter. Mashas

Rodant, a noble of Brune, demanded an audience with King Victor in order to question about this matter.

King Victor apologized about two points namely the clumsiness of the message to Brune, and the fact that the cooperation to Tigre was insufficient, and in addition to indemnity, consented about letting Tigre return to Brune without waiting for the three years of the promise. This was an apology within the possible range for Zhcted.

At this time, Victor made one suggestion.

"How about Earl Vorn returns home after the Sun Festival is over? I would like for him to enjoy this festival. Also, in the middle of the Sun Festival, I will be able to get time to talk with the Earl."

Mashas accepted that suggestion. In the current Brune, there were also other people whom they should be wary of. He had to avoid doing something like crushing Zhcted's honor and making an enemy out of it.

Tigre too had no objection. This was because they were things he should do while he was in Zhcted.

Thus, after seeing off Mashas who returned to Brune one step earlier, Tigre visited the capital together with Elen, her adjutant Limalisha and his maid Titta.

Probably because he was standing idly, Tigre was called out by young noble men and women several times. After responding each time with a short greeting and forced smile, he saw them, who walked away, off.

After standing here and counting to about 1000, at that time the person he was waiting for appeared.

When he wondered about why commotion occurred in a slightly remote place, one girl showed up as she slipped out between people. When she found Tigre, she revealed a shining smile.

"Sorry for having kept you waiting, Tigre."

"Yea", the youth could only give such a vague reply. As he was fascinated, other words did not come out. Even the nobles present in this place, regardless of men and women, leaked sighs of admiration.

Her silver hair which reached up to her waist was carefully done up, makeup was lightly applied on her well-featured face and her shiny lips let one feel a feminine charm. Her pupils which harked back to rubies were full of vitality and furthermore increased her beauty.

She wore a blue silk dress and both her shoulders were bared. Though her cleavage slightly peeped out, her necklace which imitated spreading wings shone on her chest and gave a calm atmosphere.

She did not wear gloves but a silver bracelet on which a hunter was carved shone on her left arm. That arm was trained and firm, but it was by no means boorish, it gave a flexible impression. Her threefold skirt which used frills abundantly was loosely made and was long so as to reach her feet.

On her waist, there was a long sword sheathed in its scabbard. There was a thin silver belt to the waist of the dress and the sword with a blue obi around it.

Bringing a weapon into such a place was strictly forbidden. Only knights and soldiers guarding the royal palace were allowed to have one.

But, this weapon and she were an exception. This long sword with the name of Silver Flash Arifal was called a Dragonic Tool, and she was one of the proud Vanadis of Zhcted.

Her name was Eleonora Viltaria. She, who was called by her nickname Elen, turned 18 years old like Tigre in this New Year. She continued growing up both as a warrior and a girl.

"No... I didn't wait that much."

What came out from the mouth of the youth who finally pulled himself together were such silly words. Then, Tigre noticed the bracelet that Elen wore on her left arm. When he went to Asvarre, he bought it as a souvenir for her.

"Thank you."

He said so unintentionally. Elen seemed to have noticed what the youth was talking about from his gaze. As her cheeks dyed red, she revealed an embarrassed smile.

"In such times, you should say something like 'it suits you very well'. By the way, how do you find it? Your first Sun Festival."

Tigre did not attend last year's Sun Festival.

He'd also received King Victor's invitation and intended to attend it, but his departure was one day later than Elen and Lim's as he was pressed by the preparations of beginning his life in LeitMeritz, and moreover the highway leading to the capital couldn't be used due to a snowstorm and he finally desisted from attending it.

"I can't quite say anything yet, but I'm more interested in what is outside than inside of the royal palace."

The state of the capital that he saw before entering the royal palace was full of liveliness as to be overwhelmed. For Tigre who did not have too good a memory about banquets in a royal palace, he felt like the streets crowded with many stalls, street performances and the likes and the atmosphere brought about by people enjoying the festival suited him much better.

"Though it's impossible today, I'll take you outside tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. —Now then."

Elen approached Tigre and grabbed his hand.

"Let's go, Tigre."

"Go? Where to?"

Tigre stared at the silver-haired Vanadis with a wondering face. He thought about waiting here until the banquet begins. Elen answered while walking and pulling the youth's hand.

"There are several guest rooms for resting over there. Lim and Titta are there."

Tigre nodded as he understood that they're going to meet the two girls.

Lim — Limalisha was Elen's close friend and adjutant. For Tigre, she was his teacher of politics and military affairs, and he was also taught various things other than that. They have also fought shoulder-to-shoulder on many occasions and she was almost as important as Elen.

Titta was the maid who served Tigre since a long time ago. When Tigre came to live at LeitMeritz as a guest General, she bravely followed the youth as she wished to stay by his side. She was an important existence for Tigre after all.

Tigre and Elen walked the very long corridor and stopped before a certain room. Urged by Elen's gaze, the youth lightly knocked on the door. When he called out through the door, Titta replied.

The door was opened. Within the wide room where furniture and furnishings were put were Lim and Titta.

Lim turned 21 years old. She tied her dull golden hair on the left side of her head. Though she had an unsociable expression, Tigre knew that she possessed both gentleness and strictness.

Lim wrapped her tall figure in blue formal clothes. It was not a dress like Elen's, but it was close to what Tigre was wearing. The area around her chest looked slightly cramped. The reason why she wore not a skirt, but trousers was because she gave priority to the ease of movement.

Titta was 17 years old. She did up her hair, which was usually done in twin tails, into a ponytail and she wore a dress dyed bright golden yellow. Dark blue ribbons without decoration were tied on her chest and cuffs, and it rather drew out her simplicity and loveliness.

"Both of you, your clothes look very good on you."

When Tigre praised her, Titta hung her head down with a face which turned bright red.

"Lord Tigrevurmud. For Titta aside, I think that for me there is a slightly different way of saying it though."

Lim's talking was like that of a teacher admonishing her student's mistake. It was not like she felt offended, but she warned him to be careful about his choice of words. Tigre shook his head.

"Of course, I'll be careful in the case of other people. It's true that I think it looks good on Lim. The range of good looking clothes is vast, huh."

Lim silently bowed to the youth's words. Elen revealed a nasty smile.

"Lim. If you're happy for being praised, shouldn't you say so?"

Her blond-haired adjutant raised her face and turned a blaming gaze to her lord teasing her. However, what Elen said was correct. After having shown a demeanor of thinking, Lim indifferently said.

"Lord Tigrevurmud too, you look good in that."

"I-I also think that Tigre-sama looks great in that!"

Titta who was immersed in happiness after being praised pulled herself together and bounced her voice.

"Thank you, you two."

Tigre returned a smile. If those two girls said so, it seemed that even these stiff clothes were not bad. Then, as she recalled something, Elen asked.

"By the way, Lim, have Sofy and the others already come?"

"Sofya-sama and Ludmila-sama came some time ago."

"What, even Ludmila?"

Sofya Obertas and Ludmila Lourie were Vanadis like Elen. Sofya had the nickname of Sofy and Ludmila had the nickname of Mila; and Tigre called them so. For the youth, the two girls were important comrades in arms.

But, Elen who had a bad relation with Mila by no means called her so. It was also the same for Mila.

When Elen turned to Tigre, she asked with a happy smile.

"Tigre. Whose place do you want to visit?"

After regaining his memory and having returned to LeitMeritz, Tigre wrote a letter to inform those, whom he was close to, of his safety commencing with Mila. However, he had not met them yet.

If he thought about giving priority to someone, the other might be offended. Tigre who realized the intention of Elen's question answered with a wry smile.

"Let's visit in turns from the nearer room."

"The one who is in the nearest room is Ludmila-sama."

Lim answered and although Elen pouted and made a sour look, she immediately pulled herself together.

"It can't be helped. I also have to meet her after all. Let's quickly get it over with."

As Lim and Titta also accompanied them, the four people headed to the guest room where Mila was.



The guest room, where Mila was, was only three doors away from the room where Lim and company were.

Although only three, it was quite distant as each room was big.

When Tigre lightly knocked on the door and named himself, a reply came with a stiff voice.

"Come in."

Tigre pushed the door open. There were three people in the room. There was a blue-haired girl standing in front of a dresser mirror put at the back — Mila and two court ladies standing beside her. Near the dresser mirror, Mila's Dragonic Tool, a spear — the Frozen Wave Lavias was leaned.

Tigre could not help but stand stock still on the spot. Mila wore a dress like Elen's, she was so beautiful that he stopped moving and fixed his eyes upon her.

She wore her blue hair up and put on white and red corollas (flowers). The dress was composed of light blue and snow white colors and boldly exposed her shoulders, it would probably give an impression of purity more than lusciousness to the beholder. Red and golden ornaments given everywhere emphasized the white of the dress well enough.

The gloves extending to the elbows were also white and gold was treated on the cuffs. The skirt reaching up to her feet was two-fold, and light blue and white carefully overlapped there, too. The white obi wound to her waist was big and harked back to wings as it softly opened.

"She looks like a snowy fairy coming out of a fairy tale..."

Titta standing behind the youth muttered. Tigre was also of the same opinion, but at the same time he felt slight confusion.

Mila was staring at Tigre with a slightly displeased face. However, Tigre had no memory of having done anything which soured her mood. In the first place, it was their reunion for the first time in a half year.

For the time being, Tigre walked until before her. Elen and the others also followed later.

"It's been a long time."

Tigre said so with a smile, but Mila, not returning any words, intently looked at the youth from head to toes. After a short pause, she slightly nodded.

"It doesn't look like you were seriously injured so as to lose an arm."

"So that's it" Tigre finally understood.

"Yes. As you see, I'm safe and sound, the very image of health itself. I'm sorry for having worried you."

"...I wasn't particularly worried."

As she deliberately said in a cold tone, Mila turned her face away from the youth.

"I know you well after all. You aren't the kind of person to die easily. I was just a little anxious."

"What. I was sure that you would have hugged Tigre while crying aloud."

Elen who was watching the two people's exchanges from behind sarcastically said. Mila's face suddenly turned bright red and she glared at the silver-haired Vanadis.

"T-There is no way I would do such a shameful thing before people!"

"Finding it shameful there is your shortcoming... No, wait. Would you have done it if it wasn't before people?"

Not overlooking even one word, Elen frowned and asked. Mila opened wide her eyes as to say "oops", closed her mouth and let her eyes swim. Her eyes meeting Tigre's who was standing next to her, the blue-haired Vanadis abruptly changed the topic.

"—The tea."

Not understanding the meaning of her words, Tigre fixedly stared at Mila whose cheeks flushed. She pouted in displeasure and spoke vehemently.

"I'm talking about the souvenir which you bought in Asvarre. It wasn't bad. But, I wanted to receive such a thing from your hands properly."

When Tigre proceeded to Asvarre, he bought souvenirs for people close to him. While the youth went missing, they were delivered by Sofy and Elen's hands to those who should receive them. While thinking that she said something unreasonable, Tigre was happy about her words.

"I'll do so at the next opportunity. I'm glad that it was to your taste."

"Yes. Next time when you come to Olmutz, I'll treat you with the one I brewed."

As Mila finally regained her usual mood, Lim and Titta once again greeted the blue-haired Vanadis. Mila was welcoming towards Lim as usual, but she showed a somewhat different reaction regarding the chestnut-haired girl.

"Speaking of which, it was written in Tigre's letter, but... It seemed that you went until Lebus to meet Tigre."

Titta nodded with a wondering face.

It was at the time of Brune's civil war that Titta and Mila got to know each other, but Mila has never spoke familiarly with her until now. This was because due to the difference of position between a Vanadis and a maid, Mila had not

paid that much attention to Titta's existence. Titta understood that, too.

However, now, Mila revealed a sympathetic smile and praised Titta.

"You really accomplished a winter trip even severe for an adult. It's really admirable."

"T-Thank you! But, it was because Mashas-sama and Limalisha-san were there. I couldn't accomplish that alone..."

Although blushing with an embarrassed face, Titta showed an honest smile and bowed to Mila. Tigre too smiled broadly at the pleasant exchange. He was also glad that Mila recognized Titta.

Once again, Elen and Mila exchanged greetings. Though it was courteous, it was shameless to the extent that not only Lim, but even the court ladies standing beside Mila knitted their eyebrows.

"We're done with the greetings. Well then, let's go see Sofy."

To the words of Elen who turned to Tigre and company, Mila, who was making a face as if to say "leave quickly", reacted.

"Has Sofy already come, too? I'm going too."

Elen and Mila had by no means a compatible relation, but Sofy was a common friend to them. Although the silver-haired Vanadis made a sour look, he did not refuse.

As Mila picked up Lavia which was leaned against the wall, she told the court ladies to take a rest. She left the guest room with Tigre and company.

According to Lim, the guest room where Sofy was seemed to be two rooms away from the room where Mila was.

During their short walk, Tigre and company who increased to five people felt multiple gazes. The degree of attention increased as there were two Vanadis together.

Regarding Lim and Titta, they could guess that they were servant and maid from their attires. Then, it was natural that the question of, who was the man walking together with them (the two Vanadis), sprang out.

"We might as well walk with arms linked."

Elen walking next to Tigre teasingly laughed, and Mila unusually agreed with her.

"It isn't a bad idea. It looks like it's necessary to properly seize him."

"Give me a break. I'll be unable to walk as I'd be afraid to step on the hems of your dresses."

While they were talking about such a thing, Tigre and company arrived before Sofy's room.

*—I haven't seen Sofy since that time, huh...*

The last time when Tigre and Sofy were together was when they were returning from Asvarre. On the ship that the two of them were boarding, there were also the Vanadis Olga

Tamm and the former sailor of Legnica, Matvey. It was around the end of autumn.

That ship was attacked by a demon and Tigre who fell into the sea lost his memory.

Tigre who regained his memory was worried about whether or not they were saved. When he heard from Elen that Sofy was safe, he heaved a sigh of relief.

By the way, he had met Matvey again in Legnica where he stopped by on his way returning to LeitMeritz. As he let his atrocious face distort, Matvey was glad about Tigre's safety and the two of them that day spent all night long talking.

Knocking on the door of Sofy's room, Tigre named himself. It was also the same when he knocked on Mila's door, but this was Elen's consideration. It was her idea that Tigre should meet them first so as to reassure the other party.

"It's opened. You may come in."

Sofy replied and Tigre opened the door.

It was a room with a calm atmosphere. Sofy's Dragonic Tool, a bishop's staff — Light Flower Zaht was leaned against the wall and a beautiful woman was sitting on a chair put at the center. She was Sofya Obertas.

Sofy arranged her long golden hair in three braids and put on a leaf crown. Surprise and joy respectively spread in her beryl-colored pupils.

She, who held the nickname of "Brilliant Princess of the Light Flower", also wrapped her body in a dress like the

other Vanadises. It was a green dress and the chest and back were greatly opened. The skirt which reached up to the feet alternately piled up a deep green and a white color, and it reminded one of a calm forest covered with snow.

The gloves made of laces covered from the wrists to the elbows, and a golden necklace with the shape of her bishop's staff was shining on her thin white neck.

Sofy stood up from the chair and silently walked towards them. She stood before Tigre and no sooner than she stared at the youth with moist eyes, she extended both her hands and strongly hugged him.

To this sudden event, Tigre stiffened as he was surprised; Elen, Mila and Titta were staring at the two with dumbfounded faces. As Lim, who was the one among the five people standing the very back, hurriedly pushed Titta inside the room, she also came in and immediately closed the door.

Thinking from an angle, if one did not try looking into the doorway, they would probably not see Tigre and Sofy's figures. And, there were many people in the corridor. So, there was no need to be so cautious.

Sofy, showing no signs of noticing the girls' gazes, was hugging Tigre with all her strength.

"—Thank god. I'm really glad that you're safe."

Sofy's feelings were transmitted from her voice mixed with sobbing and at the same time that Tigre recovered from his confusion, he became fraught with emotion. He thought

from the bottom of his heart that he was glad that he could save her.

However, as her abundant chest wrapped in the dress was pressed against him the whole time, as expected he was more preoccupied by it rather than being deeply moved. Sofy's face and golden hair were touching his cheek. Mixed with some slight make-up, a sweet fragrance tickled his nose.

As a part of his body began to boil hot, Tigre softly tried to part from Sofy while feigning calm; but contrary to her graceful impression she was strong and it was futile to just push her a little.

*—Have I no other choice than slightly changing my posture so that she doesn't notice and leave it as is until she calms down...?*

It was when Tigre thought like that.

"—Sofy. Isn't it already time you let go of him?"

Mila said in a penetratingly cold voice. When she approached Tigre, she caught his left arm and pulled him back. The youth's body staggered and Sofy finally raised her face. Still hugging Tigre as is, the golden-haired Vanadis squinted in displeasure and lightly glared at Mila.

"It's the long-awaited reunion, Mila. I think that you may give me a little more time."

"How long do you mean when you say 'a little more'?"

"Let's see. About all night long? If possible, I want to be together with him during the Sun Festival."

Mila opened wide her eyes to Sofy's answer. This was because Mila understood that she was not joking, but was seriously saying that. The golden-haired Vanadis calmly continued her words.

"Hey, Mila. I was saved many times by Tigre. Not only my life, but also my dignity. However, I wasn't able to save Tigre. When he, who fell from the ship, was not found in the end, I even thought that I might as well jump into the sea."

As she recalled about that time, Sofy's expression got cloudy for only a moment. However, she immediately returned to a serious expression and held Tigre's head in her arms.

"When I saw the letter from Tigre, I was really surprised and I was so glad that I wanted to cry. That's why I want to convey my feelings like this."

Sofy's look was overflowing with a sincere light, but Mila's reaction was cold. The blue-haired Vanadis twined her arm around Tigre's left arm that she caught.

"I understand your feelings, but Tigre looks like he's troubled."

"Is that right?"

The beryl-colored pupils were turned towards the youth. When Tigre was lost at how to answer as he was fixedly stared at, Mila opened her mouth.

"I don't think that it's good to force the answer you want like that, Sofy."

"I'm asking Tigre, Mila."

The two Vanadis' gazes clashed with Tigre in between them. The youth looked up at the ceiling with a troubled face.

He was happy about Sofy's feelings, but he couldn't afford to stay being hugged as is. After all, not only were Elen and the others looking, he also ended up remembering about what happened with Sofy in the large public bath in Asvarre. When he calmed down after taking a small breath, Tigre put his right hand to Sofy's arm.

"Sofy. There is also something I want to tell you."

To the golden-haired Vanadis staring in puzzlement, Tigre smiled somewhat awkwardly. As expected, he could not follow her example and hugged her in return. He should convey it with each of his words.

"I'm sorry for having made you sad. And for having exerted yourself in order to save me, thank you. I'm really happy that we were able to reunite like this with a smile. I also have many things I want to talk with you about. But, there are also other people I want to greet."

As he said that in all sincerity, Sofy released her embrace speedily and without delay. She smiled at the youth.

"If you say so, then it can't be helped. Well then, we shall slowly talk in the near future. I'm looking forward to it."

Bending her head slightly to one side, Sofy said as she behaved like a spoiled child. Her smile seemed to have a mysterious charm which made one unable to refuse her every request. Tigre became somehow embarrassed and without matching his eyes with hers, he answered "I will handle it carefully".

While Lim and Titta were quickly fixing their hair and clothes which became disheveled, Elen and Mila greeted Sofy. Elen eagerly suppressed her laughter and Mila was depressed.

As Titta bowed her head while mustering some rivalry, she mostly lost her fighting spirit after her head was kindly patted. Sofy was five years older than Titta, but the golden-haired Vanadis seemed to think of her like a younger sister.

After Lim politely bowed, she asked pretending to be casual.

"Sofya-sama, have you not brought court ladies or maids along with you?"

"Of course, I did. Slightly before you guys come, I told them to take a rest."

If those court ladies were there, would Sofy have still done something like suddenly embracing Tigre? Lim thought so, but also considering that it might be precisely because of that she asked them to take a rest, she quietly watched Sofy's situation.

The golden-haired Vanadis was smiling, but her innermost thoughts were unfathomable.

Then, when Tigre praised Sofy's dress, she joyfully made a rotation before the youth.

"Would you like to dance with me later?"

Normally, a Vanadis' invitation was the best one could ask for. However, Tigre rummaged his darkish red hair and apologetically declined it.

"I'm sorry. I'm not very good at such things."

Tigre, who had almost never gone out from his birthplace Alsace, had no affinity with court dancing. Even if there were opportunities where he could learn it, he had no will to do so. Sofy took the youth's hand with a smile.

"It's fine as long as you learn it from here on. It might become necessary in the future. Besides — if it's with you, I don't mind being laughed at together with you."

"U-Um, I'll think about it. By the way, did Olga come?"

Tigre blatantly changed the topic. This was because if he didn't do so, he would have been led into Sofy's pace and he really would end up promising to dance with her.

"Ah, the one that you said you want to greet was Olga, huh. I heard that she just arrived in the royal palace. I also intend to go see her, but may we go together?"

Tigre did not immediately reply because he recalled the situation between Sofy and Olga when they were in Asvarre. Even if he could not go as far as to say that Olga bore hostility towards Sofy, it was clear that she harbored unfriendly feelings towards Sofy.

But, Tigre reassessed. Perhaps, there might have been progress between the two girls that he was not aware of. Besides unlike Elen and Mila, Sofy was one of the few people who understood the girl called Olga to some extent.

"Yes. Let's go together."



Tigre and company which increased to six people headed to the guest room where Olga was. Nobles and knights loitering in the corridor and having friendly chats, and the soldiers patrolling turned gazes mixed with surprise towards them.

There were three Vanadis representing Zhcted. All of them beautifully dressed up and were breathtakingly gorgeous. Although not to the extent of their splendor as they were formally dressed respectively as attendant and maid, there were also Lim and Titta. Tigre who was surrounded by all these girls was also paid attention to.

Tigrevurmud Vorn was not that well known by Zhcted noble feudal lords.

Even if the great nobles who had interactions with Brune and Asvarre knew Tigre's name, there were none who had seen his face. This was because even if he was called a hero, he was a person of a foreign county and someone whom they had not directly interacted with.

The three Vanadis walking together with the youth were all casual and revealed natural smiles. Tigre too was not timid; he was also exchanging words with them.

"You should get a little more used to women. No, isn't it fun in its own way?"

"I don't mind that you find it fun, but help me at least."

"If you don't get over it by yourself, you won't grow accustomed to it, right? But, earlier was a sight to behold. It's the first time I saw a scene where Sofy and Mila glared at each other."

"Was that why you watched it without saying anything?"

Tigre looked at Elen who laughed while reminiscing.

"It's rare that Sofy strongly insisted like that after all. As far as I know, it was as much as when she insists about Lunie."

Lunie was a young dragon kept in LeitMeritz. It had the size of a fat cat and since it was let to run free, it willfully walked inside the Imperial Palace and sometimes hustled about.

Among those working in the Imperial Palace, it was the most attached to Titta who came not long ago. There were also times when Tigre brought it along when he went hunting. Sofy liked Lunie very much, but probably because her expression of love was a bit excessive, she was avoided by the young dragon.

Tigre suddenly stopped. From the other side of the corridor, a woman was walking towards them. Elen and the others stopped after seeing her.

“—Long time no see; or time hasn’t passed that much so to say, eh. Eleonora.”

Red hair. Blue and golden pair of eyes. She was the “Flash Princess of the Thunder Swirl” Elizavetta Fomina.

She was clad in a purple dress which exposed her shoulders and chest, wore a loose obi from the left shoulder to the right waist and fastened it with a butterfly-like decoration. There was a black whip roundly bundled on the left of her waist. It was her Dragonic Tool, the Thunder Swirl Valitsaif.

Her skirt was so long as to reach up to her feet, but there was a deep cut on the right side and her right leg was also boldly exposed. A decoration of a small cross could be seen on the shoe of the exposed right foot. It was a gorgeous dress like her.

“Thank you for having taken care of us the other day, Elizavetta.”

Although Elen revealed a complicated expression after seeing her, she returned harmless words. They seemed to find it difficult on how to approach each other.

Just recently, Elen and Elizavetta fought together shoulder-to-shoulder. At that time, the two girls certainly experienced each other’s feelings. But, it did not mean that they got to have a close relationship. This was because there were several connections between Elen and Elizavetta.

Mila and Sofy were staring at the two Vanadis with surprised expressions. The two girls knew the discord

between Elen and Elizavetta. They were thinking that they must tear them off with their own hands should a dangerous atmosphere arise.

"Elizavetta-sama. I'm feeling extremely delighted that we can meet again."

Unable to remain indifferent to Elen and Elizavetta's clumsy attitudes, Lim calmly stepped forward. She bowed to the red-haired Vanadis. Following after, Titta also bowed her head to Elizavetta. The Vanadis of Rainbow Eyes generously nodded to both of them.

Waiting for Lim and Titta to finish their greetings, Tigre also stepped forward.

"I'm glad that you seem fine. Um, how is your right arm...?"

When he asked in a sympathetic tone, Elizavetta finally revealed a wry smile. She walked up to Tigre and held out her right arm.

"Try to touch it."

As he was asked, Tigre softly touched her hand. Elizavetta lightly grabbed Tigre's hand. From the fact that her hand was white, he could understand that she put strength into it as hard as she could. However, for Tigre it felt like the grip of a small child.

A demon's curse was applied to Elizavetta's right arm once. When that curse was lifted due to the demon's death, she was no longer able to lift her right arm. She could not muster strength with it at all. In comparison to that time, it has improved quite well.

Before long, Elizavetta released her hand. She took a small breath and smiled.

"Now, it's as far as I can go. I became able to take a writing brush, write characters and use spoons and forks. It's only all I can hold though."

"Don't say it in that way. It's really good."

Tigre shook his head and gently grasped Elizavetta's hand with both his hands. The red-haired Vanadis revealed a bashful smile.

Mila and Sofy were surprised at the two people's exchanges. While Elizavetta was greeting Lim and Titta, Mila pulled Tigre's sleeve and keenly asked.

"Tigre. What is the meaning of this? I knew that she sheltered you in Lebus, but you look quite close."

"Speaking of which, I told neither you nor Sofy, huh."

Since it would have definitely become long and because there were also many other things to write, he mostly omitted the part when he served under Elizavetta in the letter to them. He thought that he should talk about it in detail when they met at the Sun Festival.

"At the time when I lost my memory, I was taken care of by her. For about 40 or 50 days."

Sofy muttered "Oh my" as she was surprised, Mila suspiciously frowned and they respectively stared at Elizavetta. The Vanadis of Rainbow Eyes, unable to conceal

her confusion, shrugged her shoulders, but there was also something that she was concerned with.

"Wait a moment — Lord Tigrevurmud."

The red-haired Vanadis drew her face close to Tigre's and asked in a low voice.

"Why are you calling those two by their nicknames? Also, they call you by yours as well..."

Tigre, not knowing what Elizavetta meant by her question, pondered for a moment. But, he lightly clapped his hands as he immediately understood.

"I told the two of them that it's fine to call me Tigre, and the two of them also told me the same thing."

The Vanadis of Rainbow Eyes stared in turns at Tigre, Mila and Sofy with an amazed face. From her viewpoint, it was something unbelievable.

She could understand that Elen allowed him to call her by her nickname taking into consideration her friendly personality. Sofy, too. However, she could not believe that Ludmila Lourie, whose pride as a Vanadis was strong, allowed a foreigner to call her by her nickname. And also that she would familiarly called Tigre by his nickname.

"What's the matter?"

Elizavetta who was standing stock still in utter amazement came to her senses with Tigre's voice. The youth anxiously looked into Elizavetta's face.

"Are you feeling bad? Then, let's find somewhere you may rest..."

"T-There is no problem."

Elizavetta's cheeks turned bright red and she cursed in a low voice. Then, she strongly grabbed Tigre's arm with her left hand. After confirming that they went to a place slightly away from Elen and company, she quietly whispered with a voice so that only the youth could hear.

"I have a request."

Retaining tension in her eyes of different colors, Elizavetta fixedly stared at Tigre. The red-haired Vanadis further increased her left hand's grip.

"Please, allow me to call you Tigre, too. A-Also... I want you to call me Liza, too."

It was the first time for Elizavetta to do such a request. Though Tigre looked at her with a surprised face, he soon nodded with a smile.

"I got it. Then since you have no objection of me calling you so, I will call you Liza."

Elizavetta — Liza's face suddenly turned bright red. Perhaps her heart became light, she asked Tigre in a tone friendlier than earlier.

"Where are you guys going? It doesn't seem to be the banquet hall though."

"We're going to see Olga. Why don't you come with us, Liza?"

If anything, it was for Olga's sake that Tigre asked so. After having become Vanadis three years ago, Olga was wandering various countries until just recently. She did not seem to know the other Vanadis, too. As for the youth, he wanted to let Olga meet with them.

Liza who heard Olga's name sharply narrowed her eyes and revealed a displeased expression. Liza did not know about what kind of circumstances pushed Olga to leave the land of Brest which she should govern. But in Liza's eyes, Olga's action was reflected as the abandonment of her duty as Vanadis.

"—Yes. I will greet her, too."

Liza said with a defiant attitude.

Tigre and company which increased to seven people, walked down the corridor in a long and narrow line so as to not hinder other people. People's noises became louder than a little while ago. Moving at the seven people's vanguard were unchangeably Tigre and Elen.

"There're four Vanadis, huh. It looks like we can easily kick out even 100000 enemies."

"It doesn't sound like a joke."

"I'm not joking. Although, it's very improbable, for this number of Vanadis to make a common front."

"Certainly, I don't feel the need of Vanadis making a common front."

Each of them was literally a Vanadis with power of being a match for a thousand, but not only were they outstanding warriors, but they were also commanders and lords of dukedoms.

Unless they faced an overwhelmingly large army or special existences like a swarm of dragons, or demons, gathering them at one place and making them do a common front would be inefficient.

However, the reason that Elen spoke about did not seem to be only that. As she broadly grinned, the silver-haired Vanadis asked.

"What do you think it is?"

While wandering his gaze to the corridor's walls and the ceiling, Tigre thought.

"Is it the problem of the position of the dukedoms?"

"That's right. For example, LeitMeritz which I govern is in the southwest of Zhcted. The threats to the west and south aside, it's too far away to deal with the problems to the east and north. In addition, although I said the north, we can't lay our hands to the sea."

LeitMeritz did not face the sea and had no navy either. When using rivers or lakes, either they built a small ship or recruited from somewhere.

"Besides, it isn't like it's only the Vanadis who fight. If we don't give noble feudal lords a place for distinguishing themselves, they will harbor dissatisfaction."

There were not only those thinking that there was nothing better than if they could go on without fighting. Nobles also wishing for a battlefield in order to achieve distinguished military services could be find anywhere. If there was an opportunity where interactions with other nobles could be born from the activity in the battlefield, there were also a possibility where they might catch the King's attention.

"Above all, I don't think there will be someone who can bring us together. Even if there are four Vanadis, there would be not much meaning to it if each of them moves separately."

"It'd be amazing if it could be realized."

While they were exchanging such a conversation, they arrived at the room where Olga was. As Tigre knocked on the door and named himself, a reply came immediately; and he opened the door.

Within the room, two court ladies, who wrapped their bodies in peculiar clothes never seen in LeitMeritz, much less in Brune, and a small-sized girl were standing. The latter was Olga Tamm. The axe decorated with elaborate ornaments that was leaned against the wall was her Dragic Tool called the Roaring Demon Muma.

The dress that Olga wore was of a structure which emphasized her loveliness rather than her beauty.

It was light red and the shoulders greatly swelled out. Gloves completely covered her upper arms to her hands and a design of floral embroidery was given on her round skirt.

The white hair ornament looked very pretty on her short, light pink hair. An obi with a strange pattern was wound around her shoulder and waist.

Olga was from the Horse Riding tribe which lived by hunting and nomadism. The various patterns coloring her dress and the court ladies' clothes were peculiar to the Horse Riding tribe.

"—Tigre."

After the girl, who turned 15 as she welcomed the New Year, called Tigre's name, she remained silent on the spot. Surprise and joy harmoniously floated in her pupils harking back to black pearls.

When Tigre walked up to her, he bent his body so as to match the height of their gazes.

"Long time no see. I'm sorry for having made you worry."

She replied not with words, but action. Olga jumped to Tigre and clung to the youth's waist. Tigre embraced her and kindly stroked her back. He did not stroke her head because her light pink hair was carefully arranged and a hair ornament was put on.

Among the six women who watched that scene, someone muttered that she was envious. One did not know whose voice it was.

Since Olga didn't part from him even after 20 seconds passed, more than Tigre Elen and company began to get impatient. It was Elen who took action the foremost. Mila followed after her.

"Tigre. I understand that you want to indulge in the joy of a reunion, but shouldn't you already introduce Olga to us?"

"That's right. I think that there are many persons here who are meeting her for the first time."

Even Tigre felt uneasiness to the two girls' thorny voices and released his embrace. Olga also parted from Tigre and faced the Vanadis.

"Sorry for the late greetings. Nice to meet you. I am the Vanadis Olga Tamm governing Brest."

The words "nice to meet you" were turned to all the women except Elen and Sofy. Olga had met Elen only once a few years ago. But, since both didn't have that much interest in the other, the impression they felt from each other was light.

There was no fragment of amiability in Olga's expression and intonation was also lacking in her voice. Mila frowned and Elen turned her gaze to the youth as to check.

Tigre gave a small nod so as to reassure Elen. It was neither because Olga was nervous as she was in front of her senior Vanadises nor because she deliberately took a businesslike attitude. This was just her usual self.

"It's been several years since we met, but do you remember? I'm Eleonora Viltaria, the Vanadis of LeitMeritz."

Elen took a step forward and named herself with a dignified attitude to Olga. Though Mila and Liza hesitated a little, they followed the silver-haired Vanadis.

Then, Sofy, Lim and Titta followed in turn with the greetings. When Sofy said "long time no see" with a smile, Olga slightly loosened her expression.

When the greetings ended, Mila asked at once in a cold tone.

"I heard that you left Brest which you govern and had been wandering for two years, but what were you doing?"

"In order to know about what being "King" means, I travelled to various countries."

Showing no signs of hiding it, Olga answered. Not only Mila, but also Elen, Liza and Lim frowned to these words.

*—Speaking of which, she also told me that.*

Tigre who heard the story from her in Asvarre made a nostalgic face, and Sofy also smiled. Titta was looking at the Vanadises with a blank face.

Half out of interest and half out of nastiness, Mila continued her inquiry.

"You said something interesting. Did you find what you wanted to know?"

Olga nodded and took the hand of Tigre standing next to her.

"Tigre here is the King I think of."

Silence accompanied with surprise filled the room. Except Olga, the Vanadises' and Lim's gazes concentrated on Tigre. Even Sofy stared at the youth in utter amazement. It

was only Olga and the court ladies accompanying her who were calm. Titta looked puzzled.

"Tigre-sama, King...?"

The named youth looked down at Olga with a wry smile. He was used to this girl's erratic behavior. If Matvey of Legnica was here, he would agree with Tigre and heartily laughed.

However, as expected even Tigre was speechless at the lines which came afterwards out of Olga's mouth. The light pink-haired Vanadis looked up at the youth and said this.

"Tigre. I want to have your child."

"Eh."

Having unintentionally raised her voice was Titta.

"Ti- Tigre-sama's child...?"

Lim promptly supported her (Titta) who shook her chestnut ponytail and almost collapsed to her knees due to too much shock. Tigre looked down at Olga with a face as if he seemed to be enduring a headache.

"Wait a minute, shorty. I mean, Olga Tamm."

Elen gave off anger from her whole body and she advanced to Olga with long strides. Mila and Liza did not move, but their expressions did not try to hide their displeasure. Although Sofy sighed, she watched the situation without saying anything.

"What do you mean by you want to have his child?"

Even before the senior Vanadis' coercion, Olga showed no signs of being daunted.

"It's exactly what it means literally."

"Tigre is an Earl ruling Alsace in the Brune Kingdom. Though he's currently staying in LeitMeritz as a guest General, he'll eventually return to his hometown. Even you shouldn't be able to leave Brest. Do you understand that?"

"That's why I said that I want to have his child. Otherwise, I'll make a marriage proposal."

"Marriage!?"

Titta and Lim simultaneously shouted. Elen tightly grasped her fist, the edge of Mila's mouth became cramped and Liza shook her shoulders. Only Sofy revealed an expression of admiration. She still intended to stand as a bystander, thus showed no signs of interfering.

Tigre was greatly perplexed. He could not come up with appropriate words about how to explain to the three Vanadises who were enraged. As he reluctantly turned his back on Elen and company as if protecting Olga, he once again bent his body and asked in a calm tone.

"Olga. Could you talk a little in detail? With only what you said, even I don't understand well."

The fact itself of marrying at 15 was not that surprising a thing in both Brune and Zhcted. Even about giving birth to children, although early, it was by no means unusual, either.

However, Olga's declaration was too abrupt. The light pink-haired Vanadis let unexpected feelings ooze in her black pupils, but she immediately nodded.

"As Miss Eleonora said just now, Tigre and I can't get married. Because we both have status, and I don't intend to abandon it."

Tigre nodded his head as he agreed. Olga continued.

"For the people of Horse Riding Tribe, a marriage attaches importance to the connection between Houses. There's also the saying that the bond of Houses exceeds 10000 sheep. On the other hand, harvesting the blood of someone possessing superior skill is also promoted; regardless of whether the other party is someone of the same tribe, a passing traveler or a mercenary."

*—So that's it.*

Tigre finally understood. A long time ago, he had been taught by his father and Mashas that there were regions with such customs. Although Alsace did not have it, he was told that it also existed somewhere in Brune.

Tigre guessed that Olga who returned to Brest told and asked about Tigre to the people of her tribe and they agreed saying "only if he is such an outstanding bow user".

"But then, wouldn't it be a child without a father? From what you said, it doesn't seem that those who become fathers stay there though."

"Of course, children born in that way don't usually have a father. But, they are brought up impartially by their

grandfather, grandmother, uncle or aunt as children of the tribe. They aren't scorned just because they don't have a father."

After having replied to Tigre's question, Olga vehemently added.

"I don't want you to misunderstand, but I'm not saying that I want Tigre's blood just because he has a superior skill."

Blushing, Olga, although hesitating, continued.

"As I also said earlier, tribal marriages emphasized connections between families. It also isn't unusual to not be wedded to someone you love. Therefore, there are also girls who conceived the child of the one they loved, through the pretense of obtaining superior blood. In other words — it's like that."

As soon as she finished talking, Olga averted her face which became bright red. Tigre was at a loss for words this time for sure. Elen and company also stood stock still with eyes wide open.

It was the first time for Tigre to be confessed to so frankly. But, there are too much problems with the other party. Even if it was proper as a person of the Horse Riding Tribe, it was bad as a Vanadis of Zhcted.

Tigre ran his eyes to the two court ladies. Though they were standing aside with a calm attitude, it looked like they were appraising the youth.

Silence once again filled the room. But, this silence was more awkward. Tigre fixedly staring at Olga, and put his

thoughts in order. After a little less than ten seconds, he calmly took a breath.

"Olga, did you talk about this to somebody else?"

Olga nodded. As expected, she said that she consulted with the civil officials working in the Imperial Palace of Brest, the two court ladies whom she trusted and the people of Horse Riding.

"The people of the tribe were very glad. But, the civil officials said they will first talk with Tigre in an unofficial place."

Tigre was thankful to those civil officials from the bottom of his heart. He had broken out into cold sweat, however if they were to properly listen to the story, it seemed to be a story like her. The youth smiled wryly and put his hand on Olga's shoulder.

"I'm happy for your feelings, Olga. But, I can't accept that request."

Among the people of Horse Riding aside, the reputation of a Vanadis controlling a dukedom becoming an unmarried mother would not be good for the country of Zhcted. In addition, if it was to be known that the father was Tigre, a foreigner, neither Tigre nor Olga would get away with just that.

"Is it impossible no matter what?"

Olga narrowed her eyes and made a troubled face. When she made such a face, it would feel awkward to bluntly say that it was impossible. This girl understood that she did not

have enough experience. After all, Olga has lived only in the world of the Horse Riding tribe until she was 12 years old.

"In that case, could you wait for five years?"

Olga tilted her head to the side to Tigre's words.

"If your thoughts haven't still changed even after five years, we will talk again about it."

Tigre's proposal was a clumsy escape. He could not think of something aside from putting it off.

However, the youth thought that it was the best plan for now. During the five years, Olga would probably learn many things as the lord of Brest. She should have various encounters. She would grow in both body and mind, so there was a possibility that her thoughts would change.

Tigre proposed that while taking all these thoughts in consideration, but Olga frankly nodded.

"If it's three years, then I'll wait."

"...I feel like that's a little short."

"Then, four years."

Since it was likely to become an argument even if they continued this conversation over, Tigre consented while praying for a change to happen during those four years. Behind the youth, some people heaved a sigh of relief.



Tigre and company which increased to eight people headed to the banquet hall. King Victor soon appeared in the banquet hall and the banquet began.

When they entered the banquet hall, noise and enthusiasm of the noble feudal lords wrapped Tigre and company.

The ceiling was high and the windows were small, but many chandeliers which gave beautiful decoration were suspended and the flames of numerous candles brightly illuminated the vast room.

If there were people who made a circle and amused themselves in pleasant talk, there were also people who called out to ladies or young women as they sought a partner to dance with. Bottles of vodka, wine, honey wine and the like were placed in a corner of the large hall and there were already people who have already begun to get drunk, too.

When they noticed the figures of Tigre and company, they interrupted what they were doing and poured their gazes on them. As he couldn't afford to leave from here, Tigre called for help to Elen with a look while revealing a troubled smile.

"Be more dignified. You're one of the main guests after all."

Elen lightly struck the youth's back from an angle where it was not visible to other people. Tigre softly sighed. He has never been exposed to so many gazes in Brune's royal court.

"You should get used to it from now on. There will be many of such opportunities from here on."

Mila who stood on the opposite side of Elen across Tigre smiled. Although also exposed to numerous gazes, she remained calm. She was used to it.

Tigre suddenly looked up at the back of the banquet hall. Eight flags were decorated there. There was the Zhcted's Black Dragon Flag (Zirnitra) and the seven flags indicating each Vanadises' dukedom.

This symbolized the founding myth of Zhcted.

A travelling man self-proclaimed the incarnation of the Black Dragon borrowed the power of seven tribes, defeated other tribes and founded the Zhcted Kingdom. The seven tribes which cooperated with him were respectively a dukedom.

Elen's eyes were turned to Legnica's flag. Her ruby-colored pupils were tinged with sorrow. The Vanadis of Legnica, Alexandra Alshavin passed away last year due to illness. Elen was her best friend and she tended to her last moments.

Since then, a new Vanadis has not appeared yet in Legnica.

When Tigre was thinking about words to console her, one feudal lord came their way. Tigre recognized that man. It was Duke Bydgauche Ilda Krutis.

"It has been a long time, Eleonora-dono, Elizavetta-dono."

Ilda greeted Elen and Liza first. This was because among the Vanadises present here, he knew only those two. Liza bowed with a smile and Elen also responded to Ilda after

pulling herself together. Then, Ilda turned his gaze to Tigre.

"I will ask, but would it be fine if I call you Earl Vorn?"

Ilda had met Tigre only once. It was when Tigre called himself Urz as he had lost his memory and was serving Elizavetta. When the army led by Elen and Liza and Ilda's army clashed, it was Tigre who had made him fall from his horse.

Ilda's attitude was cheerful and openhearted, so he showed no signs at all of dragging a grudge from the battlefield.

"Please call me like that, Duke Bydgauche."

"Thank you. At any rate, your bow skill was really remarkable. There is no one in Bydgauche who can shoot an arrow like that. If there is an opportunity, I would like for you to teach it to me."

Tigre was surprised, yet held a favorable impression at Ilda's words. Tigre understood that he was not pretending, but that it was this man's original disposition. Elen and Liza also introduced the other Vanadises and Ilda responded to them with an attitude which followed courtesy as a Duke.

At that time, the wave of people divided and the figure of one woman appeared.

"Oh my, I see that all of you are together."

Another kind of gentle, calm voice different from Sofy's.

Glossy black hair.

She was Valentina Glinka Estes, a Vanadis. She was calmly carrying a large scythe composed of a shining red and deep black color on her shoulder. Although, it was not necessarily heavy as its appearance suggested. This was because this large scythe was her Dragonic Tool with the name of Hollow Shadow Ezendeis.

Valentina wore a pure white dress and like Elen and Mila, her dress greatly exposed her shoulders to her chest. She wore a thin cloth decorated with small embroidery on top of it.

Her long black hair was tied to the back of her head, she decorated her head, chest and waist respectively with a white rose, a red rose and a blue rose. Although the right, left and the back of her skirt reached up to around her ankles, only at the center was the hem slightly lifted and from the knees to below could be seen. There were also decorations of red roses to her shoes.

She was also as beautiful as the other Vanadises. Not only that, she let an indescribable charm drift out. For example, like a whirlpool of darkness which swallowed all lights.

And, her large scythe which should in no way spoil her beauty strangely blended with Valentina's dress' figure without any sense of incongruity.

"Long time no see, Valentina. Are you feeling well today?"

If anything, Elen returned words with a courteous tone. For the silver-haired Vanadis, Valentina whom she has only met once or twice was a person whom she only knew the

face and name. Unlike Mila and Liza, Elen had no connection with her.

There was also no interaction between each other's dukedom as LeitMeritz was in the southwest of Zhcted and Osterode governed by Valentina was in the northeast.

"Yes. Since it's the Sun Festival, I thought to overdo it a little and fortunately too, I've been feeling good since this morning."

"That's good."

Having said that was Sofy. Though she revealed a smile, her beryl-colored eyes were tinged with the color of caution. Perhaps not noticing it or pretending not to, Valentina nodded without breaking her smile one bit and moved her gaze to Tigre.

"So you are Earl Vorn. I am Valentina Glinka Estes. Please to make your acquaintance."

Valentina held out her right hand. Tigre too took her hand as he nodded.

"The hero, who rescued Princess Regin, defeated Duke Thenardier and brought peace to Brune. Your achievements have reached even my ears that are ignorant of rumors. I have by all means wanted to see you at once. My desire has finally been realized."

"I am honored."

To Valentina who bent her head slightly to one side and smiled, Tigre returned a somewhat awkward smile. He has

many times experienced being praised face-to-face, but he was not used to it at all. All the more so if the other party was a beautiful girl like Valentina.

The black-haired Vanadis, gently grasping Tigre's hand as is, slightly leaned forward. She quietly whispered so that only the youth could hear.

"In reality, this is the second time I meet you."

Tigre unintentionally stared wide-eyed and fixedly at her. He wondered whether they had met somewhere before? However, it was also a strange thing to inform him about that matter after she seemed to have been hiding it.

When he was going to ask her about it in detail, one man appeared on the one step tall platform that was located at the back of the banquet. He was in his mid-forties. He had a slender face and grew a long gray beard under his chin.

"Lord Eugene..."

Elen muttered as she saw the man. Tigre also looked up at the man with slight surprise.

—*So that person is Eugene Shebalin.*

For both Elen and Lim, Eugene who taught them about etiquette in the royal court was a teacher whom they looked up to.

After seeing Eugene, Ilda who was next to Tigre revealed a complicated expression for a moment, but he immediately changed it to a stern one.

For most people present in this place, Eugene would be a local feudal lord whom the King had a deep trust in. But six people, Ilda, Tigre, Elen, Liza, Lim and Valentina knew it.

That Earl Pardu Eugene Shebalin has been determined as the King of the next era.

"Silence. Soon, His Majesty Victor will make his appearance."

To Eugene's words, the noise stopped immediately. Musicians holding musical instruments lined up to both sides of the platform and began to play an elegant music. Then one old man who wrapped his body in a luxurious robe showed up. It was Zhcted's King Victor.

Eugene stepped aside and Victor stood on the platform. The music stopped in accordance with that.

His gray hair and beard were carefully arranged, but his skin turned dark and his arms coming out of the hems of the luxurious robe were thin. The fact that his blue pupils were tinged with some vigor might be because his mood uplifted as he welcomed the New Year.

"—Lords, thank you to have all gathered in this place on this day."

Victor said as he glared at the nobles. Although it was not like he raised his voice, the old King's voice echoed to every corner of the banquet hall.

Eugene received a golden cup from the Grand Chamberlain, went down on his knees beside Victor and respectfully held it out. That cup was filled with cold water. It was water

fetched from the large river of Valta flowing through the north of the capital.

Victor took the golden cup and raised it very high.

"Oh Gods. Heaven God Perkūnas, God of Honor Radegast, God of Livestock Volos and moreover the many gods whom run Heaven. Oh Black Dragon which defeated all enemies and subjugated the Earth. For this new year, we promise glory, prosperity, triumph and crops of Zhcted without change!"

The noble feudal lords said in chorus. Only this time, even Elen, who did not think very well of Victor, followed the King and recited the words of prayers. Waiting for it to end, Victor drank only half of water in the cup and sprinkled the other half.

The golden cup symbolized the sun. Zhcted, namely the King receives half of the blessing that the sun brings and pours the remaining half to the earth. That was the Sun Festival.

The ceremony ended and cries to celebrate the New Year were raised. However, these voices subsided immediately as King Victor held them back raising his hand.

"I am sorry to have stopped your pleasure, but there is something that I should tell you now."

The old King and Eugene who was standing by behind him until then stepped forward next to Victor. Victor looked at him and continued his words.

"Here I declare. I make Earl Pardu Eugene Shebalin, the King of the next era. You lords present here are witnesses."

The banquet fell silent. Everyone was staring at Victor and Eugene, unable to hide their surprise. But, several people revealed expressions of comprehension and some others revealed relieved expressions.

Victor had a son named Ruslan. Had nothing happened, he should have become the King of next the era following the traces of Victor; but he had ended up suffering from disease.

Afterwards, Victor did not disinherit his son nor did he establish his successor. Many people were concerned over that.

Someone applauded. Following it, several people clapped their hands, many people followed furthermore and finally grand applause harking back to flood filled the banquet hall in the blink of an eye. Eugene only bowed so as to respond to it.

Waiting for the applause to stop before long, Victor said.

"Well then, you should fully enjoy the banquet."

Accompanied by Eugene, King Victor left the banquet hall.

Noises of pleasant talks soon revived in the banquet hall. The musicians, so as to not hamper them, played a quiet and calm sound. Circular tables were displayed at a corner of the banquet hall and luxurious dishes were carried in one after another.

By just each and every one of the dishes such as barbecue piglets that used spices abundantly, bread packed with deeply fried mushroom and potatoes, beef and red turnip soup which let steam rise in a large pot, something which steamed shrimps as big as an adult's arm, rolled eggs which packed with dried meat and cheese, finely sliced pickled salmon and the like, appetite welled up.

Tigre suddenly saw Valentina standing in a slightly distant place.

When Victor announced about his successor, she was the first one who applauded. For some reason, that left him with an impression.

Tigre enjoyed the banquet until nightfall.

He ate dishes with relish, danced and talked about various things with the Vanadises. Together with Sofy and Lim, he acted as an intermediary to the quarrel between Elen and Mila, he heard about Lebus' situation from Liza and assertively brought Titta and Olga who did not readily joined the circle into it.

Unexpectedly, Olga and Titta immediately threw off all reserve with each other.

Judging from Olga, Titta was a maid serving Tigre, so she didn't seem to brace herself so much regarding her. In addition judging from Titta, Olga, although a Vanadis, was a girl two years younger than her, so she didn't seem to be so tense around her.

The two girls' talk bounced and reached until where they talked about each other's hometowns. When Sofy joined in their talk, Olga who burned with rivalry towards her set up verbal provocations several times; but they were easily dealt with.

Mila and Liza, who had not talked very much until now, perhaps thinking that this was just a good opportunity, exchanged words about various things. However, something which could be called friendship was not born between them. If anything, their intentions matched; but the difference in their way of thinking could be strongly felt, too.

It might also be said that the dukedoms which they were governing were contrastive. Olmutz which Mila governs is in the south of the Zhcted Kingdom; it has many mountains and shares borders with the Brune Kingdom and the Muozinel Kingdom.

On the other hand, Lebus which Liza governs is in the western part of Zhcted; it did not have that many mountains and it faced the sea. It had interchanges with the Brune Kingdom and the Asvarre Kingdom through the sea route.

Mila was born in Olmutz. Her mother was Vanadis and her father was a civil official who worked in the Imperial Palace. When her mother died of an illness and Mila became Vanadis, her father left the Imperial Palace and became the proprietor of a small inn in the castle town. He acted as such with the thought that the position as the father of a Vanadis would cause a bad influence.

Liza was not born in Lebus, she did not know much about her mother and her father was a noble who betrayed the country. Moreover, she knew about him when she was 10. Before it, she lived as an abandoned child in a poor village. With this, there was no way that they would be on the same wavelength.

In addition, the topic of Tigre brought about a strange feeling to the two girls' hearts.

At first, it was a conversation in order to know how close the other party was to Tigre. Both of them also knew about Tigre's temperament, his bow skill and the black bow. It was essential to know whether or not the other Vanadises knew about those in detail.

"I have secretly slipped out of the Imperial Palace and went out to the castle town together with Tigre."

"Is that so? I too have eaten rice porridge together with Tigre. There are also many times when I treated him to tea."

So far, it was a silly/childish talk.

"I have fought side by side with Tigre. Not Urz, but Tigre you see?"

"I haven't fought side by side with him, but I have fought to protect him and I have also been saved by him. Tigre properly remembered it, too."

"The Asvarre tea that Tigre gave to me as a present was delicious."

"The clothes of when I went out incognito had been prepared by Tigre."

"I heard that you made Tigre a stableman. Even if he had lost his memory, you saw his bow skill, right? I can't believe it."

"I heard that without even knowing Tigre's temperament well, you fought against him. I understand that there are circumstances where you must respect the interchanges with other Houses, but weren't there any other ways?"

The two Vanadises clashed fiendish smiles. It was not like they seriously got angry, nor was it like they have come to dislike the other party. They could probably eat together and engage in small talk. But at the same time, the two girls held onto the conviction that they could not have an amiable relationship together.

On the other hand, there were close resemblances in their way of thinking after all.

For example about Olga, though they knew the reason of her wandering, they both agreed on the matter that as a Vanadis, it was not something to do. It was also the same for the part where they did not usually defy Sofy so strongly.

No matter what one said, it was certain the common topic of Tigre was a hot one.

By the way, Mila deliberately avoided the topic of Elen. This was because when Mila bad-mouthing the silver-haired Vanadis, Liza looked openly displeased. While having such

a reaction, the Vanadis of Rainbow Eyes didn't make even one statement so as to cover up for Elen.

But, it was not like Tigre and the Vanadises were only enjoying the banquet. They also had to deal with the Zhcted nobles who came for greetings one after another.

As for them, the Vanadises who were lords of dukedoms were people whom they could not miss to greet. And, they could not be rude to Tigre who was close to them.

Besides, the Nobles were interested in him too. There was not even one person in Zhcted so close to this number of Vanadises. For example for a noble having a territory in the south, he had an opportunity to interact with Elen, Mila and Sofy.

But, Legnica and Brest, where Olga was, were far. Lebus where Liza was and Osterode, where Valentina was, were so far that they were as good as a foreign country. Just coming and going was not easy. Even a great noble like Ilda had no interaction with Vanadises other than Liza and Valentina.

Despite this, Tigre who was a foreigner was actually friendly chatting with 5 Vanadises.

Elen and company too seemed to enjoy it and they let Tigre keep them company whenever someone came to greet them. Even Valentina whom he'd just met rode on the opportunity. Although they were meeting for the first time, in his position, it was hard for Tigre to turn her down; and it was also hard for Elen and company to object since he himself agreed to it. They could only watch.

"Still, Tigre is quite popular."

While watching Tigre speaking with noble feudal lords together with Valentina from afar, Elen sighed as she said that in a way that one didn't know whether it was out of admiration or amazement. Then, Sofy walked up to her.

"Elen, I have a request."

"No can do."

While tilting a silver wine cup filled with wine, Elen replied in a curt tone.

"I haven't said anything yet."

"I can guess. You want me to lend you Tigre before he returns to Brune, right?"

"Indeed."

As she chuckled, Sofy brought her shoulder near Elen. Her beryl-colored pupils were tinged with a faint heat and were turned to Tigre who was in a distant place.

"It's fine, isn't it? Even a detour is all right. Even though he saved my life, I haven't thanked him at all yet."

"When you say thanks, what do you intend to do?"

There was a sound of caution in Elen's voice. Sofy's nature was trustworthy, but she had the habit of being overly attached to what she loved. It was the case with Lunie the young dragon that Elen had. Even when she reunited with Tigre a little while ago, she un-hesitantly hugged him before people.

"I just want to invite him to my Imperial Palace and treat him to some food."

"If it's only to treat him to food, then there's no need to go to your Imperial Palace, is there?"

"I want him to meet the people of my Imperial Palace; because everyone wanted to say thanks to him. Besides, I also want to talk with him, just the two of us. I have so much to talk about with him that one or two nights won't be enough."

Elen lightly glared at the golden-haired Vanadis with an astonished face.

"Sofy. Don't tease me on this topic. There was also a time before when you asked me to lend you Tigre, but..."

She was speaking of about two years ago, when Tigre and Sofy met the first time. Sofy shrugged her shoulders with a smile.

"It's really nostalgic. Certainly, it was a joke at that time. What would you do if I say that I'm serious this time?"

"I'll also say to you exactly what I said to Olga. Tigre is a noble of Brune and you're a Vanadis of Zhcted."

"You're right. But, he's a man and I'm a woman. I don't intend to disregard my duty as a Vanadis, but I don't intend to lie to myself more than necessary, either."

Elen sighed once again.



When he took a breather after finishing dealing with the nobles, Tigre was completely exhausted. Although he was trained by hunting and war, this fatigue was again something of a different nature.

Supported by Lim and Titta, the youth who drank some wine finally regained his composure. Looking at his state, as expected even Elen and company reflected (were sorry).

"I guess we went a little overboard?"

"But, it's important for a noble to meet other nobles."

Though Mila raised an objection, Liza cocked her head in puzzlement.

"Even so, weren't there too many? In the first place, Tigre is a person from Brune, so wouldn't it have been all right to narrow it down to the royal palace service and the nobles with a territory to the west?"

Then, Sofy shook her head.

"I'm sure about that, too. I can also say that it will be enough that even Tigre comes to Polesia which I govern in the future."

Olga too silently nodded strongly to the golden-haired Vanadis' words. Brest governed by Olga was in the east of Zhcted.

While listening to their conversation, Tigre vaguely thought about the future.

*—I wonder what will happen to me.*

It was at that time when one man approached Tigre.

"I am sorry. But who are you?"

Titta stepped forward as if protecting Tigre. The man, not giving his name, said this.

"Earl Vorn. His Majesty King Victor is waiting for you."

Tigre nodded. Victor told him before that he wanted only the two of them to talk when the day went down.

"Is it all right? Shall I accompany you midway?"

Elen said anxiously. It was not only her, even Titta, Lim, Mila, Sofy, Liza and Olga also turned anxious looks to him. Tigre laughed and shook his head.

"It isn't like we will have that serious a talk. I'll come back right away."

When he lightly stroked Titta's head so as to relieve her, Tigre left the banquet with the man.

"You are being loved, eh."

The man said as he laughed. Tigre rummaged his darkish red hair as he returned a wry smile.

"I myself don't think so, but for them, I seem to be unreliable when they take their eyes off me."

"His Majesty was extremely sympathetic."

To these words, Tigre couldn't help but fixedly stare at the man. Was it a joke? Or did that aged King really say that?

The man, cutting off there and saying no more, silently walked down the corridor.

The man stopped before a certain room. He urged Tigre to enter with a gesture. Tigre opened the door after knocking on it. Then, he stepped inside.

It was a large room. The interior design was luxurious and even the ornament of the fireplace provided on the wall was stunning.

There was a big chair in the center of the room and Victor was sitting on it. The luxurious robe which he wore was the same as the one which he had when he showed up in the banquet hall, but he did not wear the crown.

In front of Victor, there was one other big chair across a small table.

"You should sit down."

Following Victor's words, Tigre sat down opposite of the old King after having bowed his head. It was so soft that his body sank in and he almost lost his balance.

The man who guided Tigre until here filled two silver cups with wine and put them on the table between the two. Then, the man bowed and left. Tigre heard the sound of the door closing behind him.

A tense atmosphere drifted in the room.

"It is about the matter of Asvarre."

Without any introduction, Victor got straight to the point. Although Tigre was confused, he caught his breath and carefully listened to the old King's words.

"I certainly requested that I would like you to become a messenger. But, I do not remember having forced you. What can I force on someone, who is not from my country? The fight in Asvarre was also of your own free will. The return ship having sunk was an accident and I have no concern about it."

Tigre stared at Victor as he blinked several times. What the old King said was correct. However, it was obviously a speech which could be treated as nothing other than a provocation. At least, Mashas and Princess Regin would fly into a rage if they were to hear it.

As he was at a loss on how to reply, Victor continued speaking without changing his expression.

"—Or so I could have also said, but where do you think these words are bad/wrong?"

"...Wouldn't they stir the anger of Brune?"

Although surprised at the abrupt question, Tigre carefully replied. The old King shook his head.

"That's not accurate. It will be bad to stir up the anger of those close to you. Your acquaintances are not only limited to those in Brune."

Elen and company's figures floated in Tigre's mind. He might possibly have more acquaintances in Zhcted. Seeing the youth's expression, Victor twisted his mouth.

"Therefore, by no means can I make a statement like the one just now."

Then, Victor brought down his body forward and deeply bowed his head to Tigre.

"I am very sorry."

Tigre held his breath. He stared at King Victor's back of the head covered with gray hair. He was speechless.

Tigre heard that he already apologized to Brune through Mashas. On top of that, it was inconceivable for someone like the King of a country to bow his head. If this were to be known by others, it would become an uproar that the King's authority was disgraced.

Victor raised his body. It looked like no emotion appeared on his face. Tigre calmly and eagerly told himself.

Actually, Tigre bore no grudge against Victor. Certainly he had piled up harsh battles in Asvarre, but he encountered Olga and Matvey and was able to rescue Sofy with his own hands. In addition, he got to know many people including Tallard Graham.

What happened afterwards, as Victor also said, could only be described as an accident. Who could have guessed that a demon would lead a sea dragon and set up a night attack?

For the time being, Tigre spoke of words which he carefully thought about beforehand.

"The Asvarre Kingdom shares a border with my homeland Brune. Confusion in Asvarre would have a bad influence on Brune, right? It's precisely because I considered my country's peace and the friendship between Zhcted and my country that I consented to go there."

Though Victor had bowed his head earlier, Tigre asserted anyway. However, not even a slight change could be observed from Victor's expression. Tigre had no idea at all about what he was thinking.

"Your heart's kindness is something valuable, but I cannot afford to let it end with just lining up words of apology and praise. After all, thanks to your hard fighting, you saved the life of one of our country's precious Vanadis and moreover, a friendship between our country and Asvarre has been concluded. Thus, I intend to reward you."

We're finally here, huh, Tigre inwardly muttered. After talking with Elen and Lim, he had predicted about the fact that he would be given a reward.

*—There will be no territory, but an honorable title or a mansion like a villa (Dacha [2])... Elen and Lim said that, I think.*

Tigre also thought the same. However, Victor's words took the youth aback.

"Well then, what do you want?"

To the unexpected words, Tigre could not reply at once. The old King continued.

"Let me hear it. If it is something which I can grant, I shall give it to you."

"Is anything all right?"

Tigre's voice was trembling. He did not ask that for confirmation, but he did it for buying time in order to regain his composure. Victor replied immediately.

"I do not mind. As I said, only if it is something which I can grant."

Sweat ran on Tigre's forehead. Sweat suddenly streamed down his back, too. It was due to this room's warm air. Tension and anxiety wrenched the youth's heart.

"When you say anything, I can't quite think of something right away, so..."

"Then, for example how about the throne?"

Tigre came close to raising a loud voice. King Victor did not change his expression at all since some time now, and only the wrinkles and beard of his face moved when he spoke. He remained calm as if engaging in small talk.

"I am sorry. But, what do you mean when you say throne?"

"Of course, I'm talking about the throne of Brune."

As if it was nothing, King Victor replied.

"I'd also investigated about your homeland's state of affairs. If you desire to be King, I shall lend you soldiers and funds."

Tigre was dumfounded. If he interpreted it exactly as stated, Victor is recommending usurping the throne for himself. Or might he be trying to draw a verbal slip from the youth's mouth?

"I feel like I have somehow been told something which doesn't match my stature."

Tigre laughed and tried to dodge it, but Victor did not allow the youth to escape.

"Depending on your way of doing things, you might be able to choose a path with little bloodshed. After all, currently ruling Brune is a young Princess."

Tigre held an illusion as if he was swallowed by the aged King's deep marsh-like eyes. It was difficult to accept or refuse.

When Tigre picked up the silver cup on the table, he drank the wine and appeased his highly strung feelings. Then, he said.

"With all due respect, let me ask. Why did you speak about the throne?"

"You are close/friendly with the Vanadises of our country."

King Victor too picked up his silver cup and drank the wine.

"There is no one like you in our country. Even among the previous Kings, there should only be a handful that was close to many this Vanadises."

"For His Majesty, the Vanadises are his retainers; but for me, they are friends. Is there not that difference?"

"That's why I recommend Brune's throne to you. If someone like you becomes the King of a neighboring country, it will be easy to deal with him."

The shade of perplexity reflected in Tigre's black pupils increased its deepness.

"Do you intend to set me up as a puppet King?"

Although he hesitated, Tigre resolutely asked. He understood that it was a dangerous statement, but he thought that if he did not go as far as to ask this much, he would not be able to sound out this King's real intention

As expected, Victor moved his eyebrows. This was the first time that he showed facial emotions.

"I will not do such a troublesome thing. Like you, I also think about my country's peace. A puppet King will only bring about confusion."

Saying up to there, King Victor somewhat changed his tone to a happy one.

"I would like to ask you one thing; do you not have any ambition? I won't speak about the throne, but do you not desire a larger territory, a higher position? A preeminent bow skill. Brilliant and distinguished military services. In comparison to those, have you not thought of your position as insubstantial?"

"I am satisfied with my present position. Even after returning to Brune — to Alsace, I don't intend to desire such things."

"That's a pipe dream, eh."

A sneer flashed on King Victor's lips. His words went straight through Tigre as they became an immaterial gleaming sword. The youth opened wide his eyes and stared at the old King. This was because this was the first time that the old King clearly revealed his feelings so far.

Victor took his eyes off Tigre and shifted his attention to the fireplace.

"I like hunting, you see. At the time when I was as young as you, carrying a bow, I often rode a horse to the hunting ground under the royal family's direct control. I raised a hawk that I'd ordered from Brune and also had a hunting dog."

Victor's face self-derisively distorted.

"But, when I passed 20 years old, my bow and horse were taken away. So were my hawk and hunting dog, too. I was told 'you will become this country's King'. A king should not personally carry a bow and arrows. Even when I proceeded to the hunting ground, many people came along, and there were always more than 10 soldiers around."

Tigre was silently listening to Victor's story. Victor's way of talking was too much indifferent and it was uncertain whether he was speaking to Tigre or he was muttering about the old days.

"If I say that I want the bird which flies around in the air, the most prominent person with the bow will bring it down and hold it out to me. After I have taken a look at it, the master chef will cook it. That is the hunting of a King."

As Victor took a small breath, he returned his gaze to Tigre.

"I, who was given a new position unconditionally, am different from you who seized your present position with your own power. But, are we not the same when it comes to the fact that we cannot return to our former position? You could not possibly seriously be thinking that once you go back to Brune, you will return to your position of Earl governing Alsace like before."

Tigre was at a loss for words. King Victor's words threw the anxiety lurking in Tigre's mind into relief [\[3\]](#).

"You suppressed Brune's civil war. In the midst of it, you repulsed Muozinel which attacked with a big army. And this time, you cooperated in ending Asvarre's civil war..."

While folding his dead twig-like fingers one by one, King Victor enumerated Tigre's achievements. The youth silently stared at the old King's fingers.

"Those are not easy things to accomplish even with enough soldiers and funds at hand. You accomplished it mostly by your own effort. Brune will probably not acknowledge your bow skill. Besides, prejudice and narrow-mindedness are not things which can be fixed in a short time. But, your military gains cannot be disregarded. You cannot look away from the existence of those who will support you."

"It is too great an honor for me to be highly evaluated by His Majesty."

Tigre eagerly uttered these words. He feared that if he did not say anything, he would have been led into a direction, which he did not want at all, at this rate.

"However, I pledge allegiance to Her Highness Princess Regin. If something were to happen to the Kingdom, I intend to rush over as soon as possible. Above all, Alsace where I was born and raised is enough for me. I do not intend to desire greater status and territory than now."

"Are you saying that you will not want the throne no matter what happens?"

To Victor who asked to make sure, Tigre strongly nodded. Those were his true feelings. When he would go back to Brune after this, he intended to decline even if he was told that he would be granted status and territory.

"Then, let's see. Why don't you serve me?"

Tigre blinked his eyes as the topic seemed to have suddenly changed. He wondered what Victor's intention was this time? Seeing the youth's expression, Victor said as if it was nothing.

"If you do not want the throne, I must grant another reward. If you serve me, I shall provide you a status or whatever is appropriate for your distinguished military services"

Tigre was puzzled. He should have clearly conveyed his intention just now.

"I, um, intend to return to Alsace, so..."

"Alsace is currently under the joint control of Brune and Zhcted. Also, if you agree, it will become a territory of our country. A feudal lord changing his stance along with his territory to another country is not something unusual since ancient times."

As expected, even Tigre got angry at these words.

"Are you asking me to become a traitor?"

However, Victor calmly eluded Tigre's anger. The old King was silently staring at Tigre, but his look suddenly became sharp.

"You will die, you know?"

Those words made Tigre regain his composure for a moment. He wondered whether his earlier words were overly impolite. However, there was no way that he could remain silent after being told to betray his country. Tigre tightly grasped his fists on his knees. He stared straight at King Victor and waited for him to continue speaking.

"You have no ambition. You have no desire. That is your greatest weakness, but openly revealing it too much is bad all the more. Many people will be rather suspicious of you. They will think: 'he pretends to have neither ambition nor desire', but in reality, he must have so much ambition and desire that he can't say to anyone."

Tigre sank into silence as he was caught off guard. Both his anger and tension vanished, and he stared at King Victor without hiding his bewilderment. After a silence of about five or six seconds, he timidly asked.

"Is having no ambition and desire a weakness?"

"It will do nothing even if someone with no talent and achievements were to have ambition, but it is also not good for someone like you to be unselfish. Retainers who do not know your nature/temperament will hold doubt towards the King. They would think 'he did not righteously reward him for his achievements'. There is also the way of making an impressive tale about you as an unselfish person, but other people will turn eyes of jealousy to you. It is not like the territory people and everyone else will be pleased with an unselfish lord. If the feudal lord receives a reward, there will also be people who desire a small piece of it."

Each and every thing that King Victor said was right. Unable to argue at all, Tigre could only stay silent.

"Now then, what do you desire?"

"Then... May I receive gold coins suitable for my work?"

"Very well. I shall prepare 20 two-horse carriages of large barrels filled with Zhcted gold coins. Of course, not only gold coins, but the carriages and horses are also yours."

"Yes."

Tigre unintentionally spoke. Celesta, Alsace's central city, and his mansion located there came to his mind. It would without doubt not fit in.

Even if the problem of gold coins was settled, there were 20 carriages and 40 horses remaining. Since he received

from the King, discarding them would be outrageous. He would have to make large-scale garages and stables.

King Victor seemed to have interpreted Tigre's surprise in a different meaning. He calmly asked without so much as making a wry face.

"Are you dissatisfied? I may double it if you want more though."

Tigre deeply bowed his head in a hurry and expressed gratitude to the old King.

The talk was over and Tigre left from the room.

"It was quite meaningful. —Lord Tigrevurmud."

At last, King Victor hailed Tigre and said this.

"If it is fine with you, could you speak with Earl Pardu tomorrow before leaving our country? I do not think that it will be something bad for you."

Tigre who left before Victor threw up a breath mixed with feelings of freedom and fatigue. He thought that he wanted to lie down in the corridor as is.

*—King? King, you say...?*

He did not utter it. He must not have it heard by someone. Though Olga also said something similar, Victor's words were full of problems beyond comparison. He intended to frankly speak about what they talked about to Elen and Lim and consult them about it, but he had to give it up.

He suddenly remembered about Tallard Graham whom he met in Asvarre. He was a young man who, despite being born a commoner, piled up distinguished military services, ascended until the position of General and said to Tigre that he will become King.

*—No, he and I are different.*

Shaking his head, Tigre began to walk down the dim corridor.

It did not look like he would forget today's conversation with Victor.




Though the sky of the Capital Silesia was wrapped in the night darkness, numerous multicolored lights glittered on the ground. Many people lighted the candles that were distributed, drank, sang and danced. The government officials and palace guards were also used to it as it was done every year. If there was no fight, they left it as is.

At the time when the Sun Festival's first day would end in about one koku, seven people, one man and six women gathered in a room of the royal palace.

They were Tigre and the six Vanadises. Tigre had not taken off his formal clothes, and Elen and company still wore their dresses. A big round table was placed at the vast room's center and the seven people were sitting around it. Tigre's black bow and the girls' Dragonic Tools were respectfully put near their master.

According to Elen, it seemed that this place was one of the rooms which the nobles used when they gathered and pleasantly chatted while relaxing. Tigre first thought about the fact that it was about the same size as his mansion in Alsace.

A blue carpet was spread on the floor and a brickwork fireplace was established on the wall. A fire was lighted in the fireplace and it warmed the indoor air. A circular-shaped chandelier was hung from the ceiling with fire lit on dozens of its candles brightly illuminating the room.



Other than the chairs where Tigre and company were sitting, a sofa and a short-legged bed were put and cushions where flowers and animals were embroidered were piled up on them.

Elen folded her arms, leaned her back on the chair and was staring at the fireplace's fire burning bright red. She did not mind that her dress was wrinkled. Tigre who sat next to her noticed that slight loneliness blurred on Elen's profile.

—*It's about Sasha, huh.*

Alexandra Alshavin. She was the black-haired Vanadis who was Elen's close friend and used the Dragonic Tool Bargren which held the power of flames.

Elen doesn't usually show such an expression. But, when the Vanadeses were assembled in the same room like this, she couldn't help but remember her after all.

“—Elen.”

Although he hesitated, Tigre called out to her with a calm tone. If they were the only two people in this place, he would have left it as is, but that was not the case. As her name was called, Elen slightly opened wide her eyes and shook her silver hair, but she immediately revealed a smile and turned around to Tigre.

“It looks like I'm a little tired. Maybe it's because I'm wearing clothes I'm not used to.”

“I too want to be quickly freed from these clothes.”

Tigre pulled the hem of his formal clothes while also returning a smile. It was half his true feelings.

"If you're fine with loose clothes, I may give you advice."

Along with a lively voice, a white porcelain cup was placed before Tigre. Tea was filled in the cup and a refreshing fragrance mixed with the rising steam tickled the nose.

When looking next to him, Mila holding a tea jar was standing with a smile. It seemed like she was the one who made it. White porcelain cups filled with tea were also put respectively before the other Vanadises.

"It won't be a disadvantageous thing if you choose to stand together with me. What do you say?"

"If there's such a thing, then by all means. And while we're at it, if you could also do something about my hair—"

"Wait, Tigre. I can choose them for you too. You don't expressly need to ask this of Ludmila."

Interrupting Tigre's words Elen said in a clearly displeased tone. Mila, still holding the tea jar as is, scornfully laughed as she glared at the silver-haired Vanadis.

"I don't think you know that much about clothes like me though."

Although Elen flinched for an instant, she did not just withdraw as is.

"Certainly I don't know that much, but what is important is whether or not you understand what suits Tigre well, right?

I think that blue clothes will look great on him. They'll also match well with his hair."

"That isn't even worth considering, Eleonora. It's obvious that white would suit Tigre better."

As she shrugged her shoulders, Mila turned to Elen with a smile full of contempt.

Tigre who was sitting between them looked around at the other Vanadises with a troubled face. Sofy put her hand on her mouth and laughed. Olga looked their way as she seemed to be interested, and Liza and Valentina turned eyes of surprise and amazement towards them.

"I think that green would look good on Tigre. More precisely, the color of a grassy plain spreading through thick and thin."

Olga spoke. Elen and Mila turned their heads which showed that they had found a new rival, at the pink-haired Vanadis. Sofy agreed with Olga as she slightly bent her body to the side, and put a hand on her cheek.

"You're right. I think that green will be fine."

"I won't say that it isn't fine, but it'll be the same as the clothes which you always wear, right?"

"I also think that green would look good on him. But, there is a color which will suit Tigre better."

"—Until when do you intend to continue with that?"

Liza butted in with an amazed face. Then, Elen and Mila finally pulled themselves together.

The blue-haired Vanadis sat down on her chair and picked up her white porcelain cup. She drank a mouthful of tea. This was to prove that there was nothing put in the tea [4].

Though Tigre had no intention at all of doubting her, gathered here were the Vanades supporting Zhcted. Regardless of how much concern there was, it wasn't to the extent of being too excessive.

"The reason why I had all of you gathered here is but for one thing."

Having started the discussion was Sofy. She looked around at everyone with a serious expression.

"I would like for us to exchange opinions regarding the existence called demons."

"Demons...?"

While lifting her white porcelain cup, Valentina cocked her head in puzzlement.

"Sofya. I was told that there will be a very important talk today, but that's..."

"It may sound like a joke, but this is a serious talk, Valentina."

Sofy answered without smiling. Valentina seemed to be perplexed, but as she saw not only Sofy, but everyone else having a tense look, she kept her mouth shut. She seemed to have decided to hear the story for the time being.

The golden-haired Vanadis talked first about her own experience. About the fact that last year, when she

returned from the Asvarre Kingdom, the ship which she boarded was attacked by a demon called Torbalan. Tigre and Olga were also on that ship, so they supplemented Sofy's explanation.

While Sofy was talking, the Light Flower which was put next to her was continually blinking, as if to guarantee the correctness of its master's words.

Then, Olga explained.

"The first time that Torbalan and I met was in a fort of Asvarre. He had disguised himself as the human called Lester. According to the story I heard in Asvarre, Lester seemed to have existed for many years. I don't know whether Torbalan had disguised himself as a human from the beginning, or he had replaced the human called Lester midway."

At the same time that Olga finished speaking, the Roaring Demon which was put at Olga's feet slightly shook. As if saying that it would protect its still too young master.

Having taken the role of explaining after her was Liza.

"The demons I encountered were called Torbalan and Baba Yaga."

At that time, Tigre turned an anxious gaze at the Vanadis of Rainbow Eyes. Liza who noticed his gaze smiled so as to reassure the youth. Some joy was contained in her smile, and some Vanadises slightly knitted their brows.

Liza first talked about the fact that she fought against Torbalan on the sea together with the late Sasha. As to

supplement that, Elen also talked about what she heard from Sasha.

Then, the red-haired Vanadis did not fail to speak about the fact that a curse had been placed on her by Baba Yaga. Thereby, she also told about the fact that her right arm was still inconvenient/disable.

Blue sparks scattered from the Thunder Swirl which was at her waist. As if to praise its master's brave fight.

"I didn't see Baba Yaga's corpse, but I can tell that that demon died. Also that the curse has been lifted. In addition, I can wield the Thunder Swirl with my left arm without problem."

Without breaking her dignified attitude until the end, Liza ended her talk. Without delay, Elen opened her mouth. It was also in order to blow off the atmosphere which became awkward due to the word "curse".

"The demons I happened to meet were that Baba Yaga and a guy called Vodyanoy who was with her. About Baba Yaga, I too know nothing aside from what Elizavetta has told."

There, Elen cut her words once. Her pupils which emitted the brightness of rubies were sharply narrowed.

"As for Vodyanoy, he had the appearance of a human. He was a man in his mid-twenties. His physique was average; he was neither tall nor thin nor fat. But, that guy blocked my Arifal barehanded."

A shiver ran among the Vanadeses. Elen's Dragonic Tool, which held the nickname of Brilliant Be-header of the Fallen

Spirit, was able to easily cut through even a dragon's scales, let alone iron and armor. Mila, Sofy and Liza knew well the sharpness of Arifal's blade.

Vodyanoy's body was able to withstand a blow from it.

"Sorry to interrupt you, but I have also met Vodyanoy."

Mila said with a depressed face. Elen surprised looked at her. Mila continued.

"When I heard about the name and appearance, I thought maybe it was the same person. I encountered him two years ago, when I was cooperating in Brune's civil war. My Laviax did not work on him, too."

The Frozen Wave which was in Mila's hand wore a white chill, as if remembering her anger at that time.

"How did you drive him away?"

Mila did not immediately answered Elen's question and turned her gaze to Tigre. Then, she returned her eyes to Elen. She revealed a nasty smile.

"Do you want to know?"

"I'll say this just in case, but if it's about the fact that you borrowed the power of Tigre's bow, then I did it too."

As Elen deliberately said with an indifferent expression, the Silver Flash which was in her hand proudly raised a gentle breeze. It let her silver hair and the hem of her dress flutter.

Furthermore, Sofy, Olga and Liza nodded too. With a dumbfounded face, Mila looked around at the Vanadises' faces in turn.

"If not for that power, we would have been defeated by Torbalan."

When Olga indifferently said that without changing her expression one bit, Liza shook her head as if reminiscing about an unpleasant memory.

"We would have also been eaten by a Double Headed Dragon."

After Mila lightly glared at Tigre as she pouted, she shrugged her shoulders. Sofy turned her gaze to Valentina who has kept silent since a little while ago.

"Up to here, do you understand the story?"

"Thank you for your concern, Sofya. Please you can go on without minding me. If there's something I don't understand, I'll ask."

The face of Valentina who answered so was serious; so it seemed that she was seriously listening to the story of Tigre and company. Tigre, impressed, fixedly stared at Valentina.

If there weren't that many "testimonies" in addition to his own experience, even Tigre would absolutely not have believed these fantastic existences beyond human knowledge.

However, unlike Tigre, Sofy seemed to have strengthened her wariness towards Valentina. The golden-haired Vanadis asked the black-haired Vanadis.

"By the way, Valentina. What about you? After hearing our story, haven't you recalled anything? Like a story where you might have seen a demon somewhere."

Valentina wandered her gaze in the space as if exploring her memory, but she slowly shook her head before long and slightly bowed her head to Sofy.

"I am sorry for not being able to help you."

"—I see. It's a shame, but it can't be helped. Well then, Tigre, could you tell us your story?"

To Sofy's words, the Vanadises' gazes focused on Tigre. After the youth rummaged his darkish red hair, he picked up his black bow which was put at his feet.

"As far as I can remember, this black bow was in my mansion. I was told by my father that it is an heirloom bow transmitted for generations in the Vorn House. He also told me to use it when it was absolutely necessary."

"Isn't there anything else your father said about the bow?"

Tigre shook his head to Elen's question.

"At least not that I know of. Besides, my father wasn't using the bow that much. He taught me the basics though."

"Thinking about it again, a bow being an heirloom in a noble family of Brune is a strange story."

Mila said. There was a trend of despising the bow in the Brune Kingdom. It was said that a sword and spear were a warrior's weapon and that the bow was a weapon used by those without redeeming features in martial arts and poor people. It wasn't that they didn't use the bow, but its achievements weren't worth praising.

"It's hard to think that a person like you grew up in Brune."

Elen also agreed with Mila. Tigre revealed a wry smile.

"I was brought up in the countryside after all. The first time I went to the capital was when I was 10 and I was already used to the bow at that time."

"Tigre. The first time you knew about the power of that bow was when you shot down Zaian Thenardier and a Wyvern, right?"

Sofy asked so as to confirm. Tigre nodded with a tense face.

"Yes. Until then, aside from when I maintained it, I had not touched it."

Zaian was Duke Thenardier's son. When dozens of days had passed since the battle of Dinant, he was ordered by his father to attack Alsace leading a Wyvern and an Earth Dragon in addition to 3000 soldiers.

But, he was defeated by Tigre and Elen leading LeitMeritz's army.

Zaian tried to escape while riding the Wyvern, but at that time, the black bow called out to Tigre's consciousness;

saying to shoot the dragon. Power flowed from Elen's Arifal and wore wind to the arrow that Tigre held.

That arrow which was fired by the black bow flew at a surprising speed. It shot down and blew away Zaian along with the Wyvern flying high in the sky. He had not forgotten the shock of that time even now.

"A voice from that bow? Do you have any idea about it?"

Mila asked. After a short pause, Tigre replied in a careful tone.

"I think it's probably Tir Na Fa."

When they heard that name, everyone could not help but frown. Brune and Zhcted believed in the same gods. Tir Na Fa was the goddess who ruled night, darkness and death; and it was said that she was the chief god Perkūnas' wife, big sister, little sister and lifelong enemy.

It was often discussed among priests about whether she should have had her name entered to the ten gods.

The claim about whether they should remove a goddess, who ruled darkness and death, and was Perkūnas' lifelong enemy, from the line of the gods worshipped had been advocated many times. But, the fact that this goddess was Perkūnas' wife, big sister, and little sister repressed that claim.

By the platitude that both darkness and death would eventually come and the opinion which praised Perkūnas who took his lifelong enemy as his wife, the discussion was settled.

In that way, Tir Na Fa's name has continued existing without being erased.

"It isn't like I doubt your words, but why would Tir Na Fa help you? Tigre, was there a priest in your family lineage?"

Mila asked as she furrowed her eyebrows. It was a natural question.

"As far as I know, there were neither priests nor shrine maidens. It seemed that the Vorn House's founder was a hunter. The fact that one day, he saved the King and was given a title and territory remains in the records."

"And your mother?"

"I heard that my mother was the daughter of a gardener who worked at the royal palace. And that she met with my father when she was alone after losing her relatives."

"If it's a gardener who worked in the royal palace, I don't think that she came from that distinguished a House, but..."

"I don't know about my mother's House. It was when I was 9 that my mother passed away, but I haven't heard about such a story from her."

To Tigre's reply, Mila said "sorry" as she bowed down with an apologetic face. The youth shook his head so as to say that he did not mind it.

—*About my mother, huh...*

When asked about his mother, Tigre would immediately reply that she was a gentle, talkative mother. Also that her

body was weak and she did not go out of the mansion that much.

However, Tigre could almost say nothing about his mother's lineage.

Despite the fact that she was born and raised in the capital Nice, his mother hardly talked about the capital. Neither about what kind of life she spent nor about her family.

Instead of that, his mother liked to talk about fairy tales and folklores.

When he was a child, Tigre was told various stories until he fell asleep while having his mother sleep together with him in the same bed every night. More than 90% of the fairy tales and folklores that Tigre knew were those he heard from his mother and Mashas.

From the stories he heard from his mother, there was a story about a bow user and also stories about heroes fighting against demons. But, he has never heard a story concerning his heirloom, the black bow.

If there was something which he did not look over and which was written about his mother, it would probably be his father's diary. Besides, he might hear some stories from Mashas and Augres who were his father's friends.

"About my mother, I will investigate when I return to Brune."

"Please, do so. But, don't overdo it."

As she worriedly said that, Sofy returned the main topic.

"The demons were calling us "Staff" and "Axe". For them, we are probably just accessories of the Dragonic Tools."

"And they also called Tigre, "Bow". But, the attitude that the demons have towards us is clearly different to the one they have towards Tigre. For them, we Vanadises are just a hindrance. But, it's not the case for Tigre."

Waiting until Mila finished speaking, Liza opened her mouth.

"Baba Yaga clearly tried to take Tigre away."

"Vodyanoy also tried to do so at the time I'd fought him."

When Mila also responded so, Olga looked puzzled.

"But, it did not look like it for Torbalan."

"I assume that even the demons — though I don't know how many there are, aren't monolithic."

When Sofy said that, Valentina interjected.

"I understand the story, but what do you people intend to do from now on?"

The black-haired Vanadis' gaze was turned to Tigre.

"Earl Vorn will return to Brune after this, right? When that happens, he will not be able to frequently visit Zhcted, right? Rather, taking the matter of this time [5] into consideration, he might not be able to come to Zhcted for several years."

What she said was rational. The reason why Tigre was to return to Brune earlier than expected was because the

youth had almost died after Zhcted used him as a messenger to another country. Even if Tigre entreated, Regin would probably not let him get close to Zhcted.

Conversely, it would also be difficult for the Vanadises to go to Brune. They were princesses governing dukedoms. Unless there were either war or important negotiations, they could not be absent from their dukedoms.

"How do you think about it, Earl Vorn? Will you track down the demons and exterminate them?"

"I haven't decided yet. After all, I know neither their purpose nor their number."

Tigre's words, rather than being a reply to Valentina, were turned to the Vanadises present in this place.

"The reason why everyone was gathered here was, as Sofy said, because we want to share the fact that demons existed. We wanted everyone to know what each of us knew. We thought that if there was something new that someone discovered, it would be better to tell us now."

Saying up to there, Tigre looked at Valentina.

"If possible, I also want you to cooperate. May I ask you of that?"

"Yes. I will do what I can."

Valentina nodded without erasing her smile. Elen looked at her with a dubious face.

"I'm thankful that you say that, but you consented quite easily, eh."

"One or two aside, it's something that everyone except me said. As expected, I can't help but believe in it, right? It's not like you people have hobby of conspiring beforehand to tease me."

As she said so, Valentina quietly stood up. She carried her large scythe on her shoulder.

"If it's over with this, I shall excuse myself. I have gotten a little tired."

"Sorry. Thank you for having spared us your time today."

When Tigre said so, Valentina nodded as she shook her black hair. Elen and company respectively threw greetings of separation, too.

The black-haired Vanadis left, Sofy silently stared at the door which she closed.

"Judging from our conversation, she looked like a good person."

When Tigre leaked his impression, Elen sitting next to him extended her arm and lightly pinched the youth's ear with a painless attitude.

"Your impression for women is unreliable. Your cheeks were loose the whole time, you know?"

"Is that so? I don't think that at all though."

"To think that you aren't even aware of it; it's quite a serious illness. I must firmly educate you so that you aren't deceived by this kind of woman."

"You've become quite jealous, too, Elen."

Seeming to have pulled herself together, Sofy teased her with a smile. Elen blushed and hurriedly released her hand from Tigre. Seeing that, Mila let out a small breath. If Sofy had not said anything, they were about to throw sarcastic comments at Elen.

Olga who was silent until then opened her mouth with a difficult face.

"For me, too, as Tigre said, Valentina did not look like a bad person. Just..."

Although she hesitated for an instant, the pink-haired Vanadis continued her words as everyone's gazes focused on her.

"I'm a little anxious about the fact that she didn't ask us anything. She might not have believed it after all."

If she had really believed in Tigre and company's story, wouldn't she have asked about the fine details? That was the doubt Olga held.

"Maybe she didn't know what to ask. She seems to have never encountered a demon."

When Tigre said so, Olga nodded, seemingly not intending to be fixated on her doubt.

"For the time being, we can't help but be satisfied about the issue from the fact that we have said what must be said, right? It would be impossible to believe with just this much."

As Elen said that while turning both her hands to the back of her head, Liza also agreed as she shrugged her shoulders.

"In fact, among the soldiers who saw the demon, those who want to think that that was a dream aren't small in number. Nothing can be done about it even for a Vanadis."

"Besides, the problem we should settle as of now is how to get in touch with Tigre who will return to Brune."

Mila said so and the six people talked about it for a while. However, unable to come up with a concrete plan, they decided to talk about it somewhere once again before Tigre returned to Brune and ended the meeting.



While walking down the royal palace's corridor, Valentina neither erased her smile nor say anything. Without breaking her slow pace, she entered the guest room which was prepared for her.

"Vanadis-sama, welcome back."

There were a man and a woman in the room. They were the servant and maid that Valentina brought along from Osterode. The two were husband and wife and they both were 50. They, who were pleasantly chatting sitting on chairs, stood up and respectfully bowed to the black-haired Vanadis.

Fire was blazing in the fireplace and the room has been warmed enough. On the table near the bed, there was a bottle of Valentina's favorite wine, and a silver cup turned

upside down. Seeing that, Valentina smiled at her two attendants.

"Thank you for your hard work today. I'll rest, so you two should rest, too. If there's something you need, I don't mind you guys using my name."

The servant and maid expressed words of gratitude to their young master and left the room. The two people's room was next to Valentina's. As Valentina who was now alone sat down, she put her Dragonic Tool, which she was carrying on her shoulder, on the blanket. She gave a small sigh.

"As expected I'm tired."

A happy smile was floating on the face of the girl who talked to herself.

There were a lot of harvests. One was that she was able to meet Tigrevurmud Vorn.

When he appeared surrounded by Elen and company, he looked somewhat unreliable; but when she saw his interactions with the nobles, she noticed that Tigre dealt with everyone with a composed attitude. While attending to him jokingly, Valentina was secretly impressed.

"Even at the place of the meeting just now, he wasn't just playing a listener's role; he also properly took part in the conversation. I wanted to meet him earlier."

Personally, she did not dislike a man like Tigre. Honestly speaking, the fact that he was lacking ambition was

unsatisfactory; but even if one deducted that, that youth was appealing enough.

"When this Sun Festival ends, he will return to Brune. It'll be better to take action after that."

If possible, she wanted to create an opportunity where she and Tigre were alone somewhere just the two of them; but it would be difficult while he was in Zhcted. Elen and company were by his side. Especially, Liza and Olga were quite attached to him and Sofy was cautious of her.

"Still, to think that that Elizavetta was so meek..."

As she repeatedly shook her shoulders, Valentina leaked a stifled laugh. From what she knew, the Vanadis Elizavetta Fomina was the kind of person who put on a bold front as she was always stubborn without breaking her arrogant attitude.

When she stood before Tigre, she looked just like an immature girl her age. Even her competition with Ludmila Lourie for some reason was somewhat childish.

The black-haired Vanadis did not think that it was their encounter with Tigre that changed them like that.

"It's not that it changed them, it's probably..."

A Vanadis was chosen by a Dragonic Tool. One suddenly became Vanadis one day without any previous notice. Mila's mother, grandmother and great-grandmother were Vanadises, so Mila probably received training in order to become a Vanadis; but there was no guarantee that she would definitely become a Vanadis.

It was not like one suddenly changed just because they became a Vanadis. Even if one learnt how to behave as a Vanadis, it was not like their previous self was lost. It was just that they only stopped displaying it in public. Tigre might be good (skillful) at drawing out that part which they stopped displaying in public.

Valentina stood up and picked up the bottle of wine and silver cup which were put on the table. She poured wine into the cup herself. She drank a mouthful and spilled a sigh.

She switched her thinking. There were plenty of things she had to think about.

“—I unexpectedly met everybody.”

The existence called demons. Vodyanoy. Torbalan. Baba Yaga. These were the names of demons that came out of the talk from a little while ago. This was the second harvest for Valentina.

“From how it looked, I don’t think anyone was hiding something, but...”

With the bottle of wine and the cup still in her hand, Valentina once again sat down and lost herself in thought.

*—Does nobody know about Drekavac and Duke Ganelon? Even though I thought that it wouldn’t have been strange even if Earl Vorn, Eleonora and Ludmila have encountered them.*

Drekavac was the old man who once served Duke Thenardier. He disappeared along with Thenardier’s defeat,

but his real nature was a demon with the ability to train dragons.

In Brune's civil war, Thenardier used several dragons, but those were all prepared by Drekavac.

It was rare that even a wild dragon showed up before a human. There should be no one other than Drekavac who could gather many dragons to obey a human.

Duke Ganelon left Brune, not fighting against Tigre and company and also avoiding a decisive battle with Thenardier. He also burnt away his own mansion in Artishem. Taking that into consideration, it couldn't be helped even if they didn't know.

*—There are as many demons as there are Vanadises. There should be another two demons, but...*

Either they haven't yet showed themselves before anyone, or they have been destroyed by the previous Vanadises or were consumed by Ganelon.

*—It's pointless even if I think about it. They will eventually make a move, so I shall just wait.*

*Now then, how should I move?* She thought. Thinking about her duty as a Vanadis, she should cooperate with Tigre and the other Vanadises and exert herself in destroying the demons. She did not mind it. Valentina herself thought that she had to destroy the demons someday.

However, it was certain that there were still many mysteries about them. Among the other Vanadises, even

Sofy who has probably investigated more about the demons said that she did not know their purpose. Valentina decided to watch their hard fight for a while.



Within the darkness, cold, dried air was drifting.

Quietly stirring up that air were one old man and one young man.

They were walking in a space, where not even one line of light shone, with calm steps. In their eyes, the scenery of the surroundings shut in darkness seemed to be natural. Even the walls which were cracked, the gray floor full of cracks and the high ceiling.

That place was a temple which had turned into ruins.

The old man wrapped his small-sized body in a black robe and put on a hood over his eyes. The young man walking next to him had a medium build; he wound a green cloth around his short black hair and he was wearing a thick coat which treated fur to the collar and sleeves. The old man's name was Drekavac and the young man's was Vodyanoy.

"Why did you let Yaga-baasan die without helping?"

In a tone as if engaging in small talk, Vodyanoy asked Drekavac. In fact, it was something like a small talk for them. Drekavac, without so much as looking at the young man, gave a short answer.

"Because it was Koschei."

It was the name of the one who destroyed Baba Yaga. Though Vodyanoy did not seem satisfied with that answer, he did not inquire any further.

The two demons who reached the deepest part of the temple stopped and looked up at the gray wall towering before their eyes.

The image of a goddess riding on the back of a huge dragon was carved on the wall.

But, how many people were there who would understand that that was a goddess?

The goddess wore a thin cloth, but the part from her left shoulder to her breast was exposed. She placed the head of the dragon she was riding on her knee and put her hand on its mane. It looked like she was stroking it, and it also looked like she was holding it down.

One did not know what the goddess, who gazed at the dragon, was thinking about.

This was because the goddess had three faces. Three facial expressions lined up on the heads which were on her neck. The central face had a gentle smile, the right face was dyed in anger and the left face expressed no emotion at all. Those three faces were looking down at the dragon.

"...Probably because the "Bow" grew up, it looks good. If it continues at this rate, the day we wish for is not so far away."

"Will our world come? A world where the black sun and red moon will shine in the sky, the purple earth and green sea

will spread and where there will be humans, dragons, gods and creatures of fairy tales."

Seeming to have finished what they should confirm, the two men turned their backs on the image on the wall's surface. They quietly went back the way they came. Within the darkness, dried air once again settled.

## ***Chapter 2 – Homecoming***

The day dawned and the Sun Festival's second day was about to begin.

Tigre woke up on the bed of the guest room which was assigned to him in the royal palace. He finished changing his clothes in the dim room, put on formal clothes and came out to the corridor. Today, he had business with a person whom he would meet this morning. Yesterday, he had been informed on where he should go.

Tigre arrived in front of that room. As expected also due to the fact that it was early morning, he hesitantly knocked on the door. There was a response with a calm voice.

He opened the door. It was a room about half the size of the one which he used. There was also little furniture and it gave a plain impression.

At the center of the room, there was a small table placed between two sofas. The man who was sitting there stood up. It was Eugene Shebalin.

"I am sorry for having set this meeting this early in the morning; the reason being that I cannot readily get time."

"Please, do not be concerned about it. I am used to getting up early after all."

Although polite, Tigre gave a reply which would probably amaze Titta should she hear it.

As recommended by Eugene, Tigre sat down on the sofa opposite to him. Tigre expressed words of congratulations about the fact that he would become the next King. Though

Eugene returned words of gratitude with a smile, his expression was stiff as he did not look so happy.

*—Elen said that this person wanted to remain a local feudal lord as is, but...*

Suddenly, Tigre recalled yesterday's conversation with Victor. He wondered how Eugene felt about the face that it's decided he would become King. He cast away his pipe dream of continuing being a local feudal lord.

*—It isn't something to ask, eh...*

He inwardly shook his head. It was not something to ask someone that he met just recently. Even Elen, who was close to him, would not ask unless there were serious circumstances.

Eugene poured the tea, which cooled, into the two silver cups which were prepared on the table. When he put the tea jar on the table, he slowly opened his mouth.

"Although it is something of the past, I have met your father several times."

Eugene has often been dispatched as a messenger to Brune before.

There were three paths to go from Zhcted to Brune. Either taking the sea route, taking a roundabout path from the south by making a detour around the Vosyes Mountains lying down on the border of the two countries, or going over the Vosyes Mountains.

By crossing over the Vosyes Mountains, one would set foot in Alsace. Eugene solely chose that path.

"I would like to pray for the souls of your father and mother."

Eugene closed his eyes and advocated the gods' names. Tigre deeply bowed his head to him.

"Thank you very much."

"And, I also give you my thanks regarding Eleonora and Limalisha."

To Tigre who revealed a wondering face, Eugene laughed and continued.

"It is hard for a Vanadis to make friends because of their position. Although Limalisha thinks dearly of Eleonora, it is precisely for that reason why she does not break her behavior of always pulling back a step. I was not able to do anything, but then you appeared."

Eugene's attitude was exactly just like that of a teacher speaking about his precious students.

"I have heard about you from them. They said that you are a reliable man who possesses both strength and kindness. I had observed you in the banquet hall, but frankly I was relieved. I thought that their words were right."

"I too think of them as irreplaceable and important friends."

Eugene smiled at Tigre's words. Or he might have noticed the youth's feelings that he could not put into words. However, even if it was the case, he did not mention it.

"You have your own position. So, I will ask you this fully of aware of it. Please take care of them from now on, too. No, that is wrong. I would like you to support each other."

Tigre strongly nodded. Then, Eugene asked as he changed the topic.

"By the way, what do you intend to do after you returned to Brune?"

After a little thought, Tigre told him a part of what he talked about with King Victor.

That he said that he would not be able to remain in Alsace.

"It seems like something His Majesty would say."

Eugene nodded with a wry smile.

"You might be offended, but could you consider those words as an encouragement of His Majesty?"

"Encouragement...?"

Tigre unintentionally knitted his brows. It did not really look like it. Eugene erased his smile and put on a serious face.

"Even I can easily imagine it. Earl Vorn, you, who returned to Brune, would be rolled up in political strife whether you like it or not. I am sorry for letting you hear an unpleasant

talk, but in your homeland, there are still people who harbored antipathy towards Princess Regin's rule."

Tigre made a bitter face and tightly clenched his hands that were on his knees. That was something he understood. It was not like those who were following Thenardier and Ganelon were swept away after all. In addition, there were probably people who held dissatisfaction and doubt towards the rule of the Princess without achievements and rebelled against her, too.

For such people, an existence as unpleasant as Tigre's was not needed. Even if he peacefully lived in Alsace, there was a possibility that they would start something.

Mashas also said that he wanted people who would support Regin, even if one. As for Tigre, he intended to help the Princess in any way which he could.

*—Even so, I think that the idea of becoming King is too extreme.*

However, if it was an encouragement as Eugene said, it might mean something like it was fine for him to have returned to Brune possessing that much fighting spirit.

"Thank you for your advice."

Tigre answered so and bowed his head to Eugene.



It was in the early morning that the news was brought to King Victor. It was about the time when Tigre was meeting Eugene in one room of the royal palace.

The old King carefully listened to the report without changing his complexion one bit; and after finishing his meal, he headed to the banquet hall together with the chamberlain. At that time, Tigre also finished his talk with Eugene and was entering the hall to join with Elen and company.

When King Victor showed up in the banquet hall, Tigre and company were pressed with dealing with the nobles who requested to greet them. Those who were not able to talk with them yesterday and those who arrived at the capital this morning were in no small numbers.

Although surprised at the old King who showed up without prior notice, the nobles stopped their chats, stopped their hand putting food into their mouths and looked up at Victor.

Originally, when the King showed up in the banquet hall, someone would announce it beforehand like Eugene did yesterday. Nobody could hide their confusion at the fact that it was not done.

Especially Tigre, who couldn't help but remember his conversation with Victor last night, he frowned and fell silent. Elen who was immediately next to the youth looked at him with a wondering face, but in a situation where the King was about to talk about something, she could not ask him what was wrong.

Victor, not opening his mouth right away, slowly looked around. As he felt like his eyes met with the old King's, Tigre frowned.

*—He looked at me...?*

Tigre reconsidered that he might be misunderstanding. There were great nobles such as the Vanades and Ilda in his direction. There should be no reason to look at him.

“I am sorry to disturb your fun moments, but there is something I would like everyone to hear.”

With an expression which had no trace of joy, Victor glared at the nobles and plainly said.

“The Sachstein Kingdom has invaded Brune whom is a friendly neighbor for our country.”

The banquet was wrapped in tension and stirred. Tigre looked up at the old King with an amazed face. So, it was not his imagination to have thought that their eyes met earlier.

“Sachstein? I remember having heard about it somewhere.”

“Come on, the one to the west of the Brune Kingdom...”

“The one said to frequently attack Asvarre and Brune...”

Such conversations could be overheard from between the nobles. Their knowledge was roughly something like that. As expected, Victor probably talked with the intention of informing Tigre.

It was something serious to the point of reaching Zhcted. It was not a skirmish, but a full-scale war. The faces of close people, who were in Brune, appeared in Tigre’s mind.

Because Alsace is located in the northeast of Brune, it would be safe for the time being. But, the thing called warfare spread just like prairie fire/wildfire.

He was also worried about Regin and Mashas. He should go back to Brune as soon as possible.

Pushing his way through the nobles, Tigre advanced before Victor. The old King looked down at the youth.

"Earl Vorn. I allow you to speak. If you want to stay in our country until your hometown regains peace, I shall gladly accept you."

Tigre, not hesitating at all, got down on a knee on the spot.

"I am really thankful for your Majesty's kindness. With all due respect, please allow me to leave."

"After leaving, what will you do?"

"I will go back to Brune. In order to fight against Sachstein."

The youth's black pupils were filled with strong determination. The old King contentedly nodded.

"As one would expect of Brune's young hero. In respect of your courage, I shall give you a present."

Victor's gaze was turned to Elen. The old King told in a dignified tone.

"Eleonora Viltaria. You shall cooperate with Earl Vorn and go to Brune with 2000 soldiers. LeitMeritz has fought

continuously since Dinant two years ago, but can you do it?"

"I shall do my best with my poor ability."

Elen wore a dress today, but she got down on her knee on the spot without minding it and bowed her head.

King Victor might have ordered the dispatch of troops in order to reduce LeitMeritz's power, but it was something thankful for her. This was because even if the old King did not say anything, Elen would have asked herself. Although the number of 2000 was little, it was better than none at all.

"Your Majesty. It will be a disgrace for our country to be able to send only 2000 soldiers in the crisis of a friendly neighboring country. Please, give me the order to dispatch troops, too."

Advancing as she said that was Ludmila Lourie.

"I will not."

However, Victor responded to her with a clear rejection.

"Recently, Muozinel has been showing strange movements. Both Vanadises of Olmutz and Polesia should be cautious of Muozinel. I shall have the Vanadis of Brest ready as the two Vanadises' rear guard."

The color of shock spread to Sofy and Olga's faces. The three Vanadises kneeled while inwardly holding irritation and impatience.

Victor's words were indeed sound. They were first and foremost Vanadises and had to move for Zhcted and their dukedoms. But like that, it became almost impossible to help Tigre. The old King continued his words.

"I shall have Lebus prepare for the Asvarre Kingdom. If Sachstein was to move, Asvarre might also show some movement."

"...As you command."

Liza, repressing her feelings, also got down on her knee in front of the old King.

Victor's gaze was then turned to the black-haired Vanadis.

"Osterode shall cooperate with Earl Vorn together with LeitMeritz. You should go to Brune with 3000 soldiers."

A new wave of surprise ran. Tigre's and the Vanadises' gazes focused on Valentina. The black-haired Vanadis quietly got down on her knee and bowed her head.

"I shall respectfully accept your order."

"Your Majesty. With all due respect, there is something I would like to say."

Sofy stood up and stepped forward. Her face turned somewhat pale.

"Isn't Osterode a little too far from Brune? Of course, I believe that your Majesty has some sort of plan. Please, would you mind sharing even only a part of it with us?"

"Currently, there is no conspicuous threat around Osterode. Isn't that alone enough? Valentina, what do you think?"

"Your Majesty said that Brune is a friend of Zhcted. I also share the same thought."

Valentina calmly answered. This meant that she had no objection.

"I really thank your Majesty for his kindness."

Tigre once again expressed his thanks to Victor. He was given two Vanadises and 5000 soldiers. It was indubitably extraordinary for reinforcements.

However, slight uneasiness crossed Tigre's mind. He ran his gaze to Valentina who was on her knee immediately nearby.

—*Why is it her?*

Tigre did not know at all what King Victor was thinking about.

"Well then, I shall excuse myself."

As he stood up, Tigre left the banquet hall. Elen, Lim and Titta followed after him. Furthermore, the other Vanadises also quickly left the hall. The King walked away as if nothing happened, and noise returned to the hall.

After leaving the hall, Tigre and company gathered in a corner of the very long corridor. The youth looked at Valentina.

"Lady Valentina. I am grateful to you for sending soldiers for my country."

Tigre straightened himself and expressed his gratitude to Valentina. The black-haired Vanadis, who wrapped her body in a white dress, shook her head with a charming smile.

"It is also an order from His Majesty. Do not mind it."

"It saved me when you say that. I intend to first proceed to LeitMeritz with Eleonora-dono and then go to Brune, but what will you do?"

This was something that he should ask. He did not mean to rely on Valentina's military power; but if he did not ask her about her plan, he would not be able to explain about reinforcements to Brune. One wrong move and there was a possibility that Valentina's soldiers would be considered as invaders.

The black-haired Vanadis wandered her eyes into the air as she seemed to ponder, but after a little while, she turned her purple pupils to Tigre.

"I'm thinking of heading to the north of Brune along the coast by using the sea route. Several ports of my dukedom finally became usable after all."

In Osterode governed by Valentina, there were only one or two ports which could be used in winter. The harbors and sea surface froze and ships could not be taken out. But, several ports became available when spring came.

Even 3,000 soldiers could be carried all at once if she prepared a fleet. They should arrive in Brune faster than crossing Zhcted.

"I understand. I shall also tell that to my country. Well then, let's meet again in Brune."

"Yes. Then everyone, I shall excuse myself."

Valentina elegantly bowed and turned her back to Tigre and company. She walked down the hallway. After seeing off her back figure, Tigre turned to Sofy.

"Sofy, is there anything you know about the Sachstein Kingdom?"

"Well, I don't know a lot about them, but there's no doubt that it's a country used to fighting. They will often cause skirmishes with Brune and Asvarre."

Zhcted and Sachstein did not share any borders. However, there were interchanges between them as such.

"The current King is someone called August. In that country, the status of local feudal lords called powerful local clans is strong, but he's without a doubt an excellent King. Besides that, I would say that they are famous in making good crossbows and catapults."

"They are also famous for their mercenaries. It is said that mercenaries from Sachstein are good at fighting. I had also happened to meet some in the old days, so they also know when they should attack and when to withdraw."

Elen interjected. At her words, Tigre remembered Simon a mercenary from Sachstein that he met in Asvarre. He was a skilled mercenary and a reliable existence.

"Lord Tigrevurmud. I think that now we should hurry to Brune without brooding too much. After all, we know neither Sachstein's purpose nor the size of their army."

Lim said as to intercede. It was as she said.

Tigre held out his hand to Mila.

"We part here, but we'll meet again."

"Yes. I expect good stories from your travel."

Mila grabbed back Tigre's hand, too. The youth also exchanged handshakes with Sofy, Liza and Olga, and received words of encouragement from them.

"Elen is there, so I think it'll be all right; but don't overdo it."

"There's probably no one who can defeat you, but don't be careless."

"Win."

Sofy gently smiled, Liza warned him like an older sister and Olga finished briefly. Then, Tigre looked at Titta. Just for a moment, anxiety crossed the youth's black pupils.

Titta was only a maid who could not handle a sword. Would it really be all right to take her to Brune where damages of war swirled?

However, Tigre changed his thought. This was because he noticed that firm determination was dwelling in Titta's hazel-colored pupils.

As usual, Titta had a small stature and a delicate body appearance. Compared with the time when she set foot in Zhcted for the first time two years ago, the noticeable difference between her and Elen or Tigre hasn't shortened much.

However, Tigre knew of her resolve and willpower. In the civil war in Brune, she followed Tigre until the end and recently, she had also travelled together with Lim and Mashas from LeitMeritz to Lebus in Zhcted's winter.

"Titta. Our return will be quite busy. It'll be harsh, but bear with it."

"...Yes!"

The chestnut-haired girl cheerfully replied with a smile full of relief. She was the most afraid that she would be left behind. It was precisely because Tigre understood that that he decided to take her along. Elen put her hand on Titta's shoulder with a contended smile.

"All right. Titta, help me change my clothes. Lim, go prepare the horses. And, send a messenger to LeitMeritz; to tell to immediately prepare 2000 cavalrymen."

"Understood."

Lim answered with a bow. Respect for Elen overflowed in her unamiable expression.

And then as a half koku has not yet passed, Tigre and company left the capital.

The four of them changed to their travelling clothes and were on horseback. Elen and Lim were riding a horse each, but Titta was riding the same horse as Tigre as she got on behind and was clinging to the youth.

The sky was clear blue and the sun was shining white while rising to the east sky.

The Sun Festival still continued. Tigre and company were riding their horses with the noise, which could be heard until outside of the ramparts, behind them.



It was about five days later after leaving the capital Silesia that Tigre and company arrived at LeitMeritz.

"We have been waiting for your return."

Standing in front of the gate surrounding the Imperial Palace and welcoming the four people was Rurick. He was currently 23 years old. He further honed his skills in military arts and as commander of troops through many battles, and although young, was an outstanding existence even among the knights of LeitMeritz.

Regarding his bow skill which he was proud of, although the distance didn't reach 270 Alsins (about 270 meters), his accuracy had improved. Generally, the number considered to be the maximum flying distance of an arrow in the continent was 250 Alsins. Compared to it, the

distance in which he could fly an arrow was a number remarkable enough.

By the way, Rurick was bald headed as usual even when entering upon the New Year.

Tigre who was the cause of him adopting this hair style has several times asked him "why don't you already go back to your original hair style?" until now; but Rurick's latest reply to it was a followed.

"I also thought so and I have consulted with a girl whom I'm close with, but she said that it was better like this. It's a girl who knew the me before I shave my head, so..."

By the way, since there were four girls who were "intimate" with the current Rurick, he would not know who it was if he did not ask for the name.

"Are the preparations of soldiers already done?"

Elen asked in a strict tone from horseback. Rurick calmly answered.

"There are 2000 cavalrymen. They are all ready."

"Did you get any new information from Brune's direction?"

"So far, there is no important information in particular, but..."

Rurick's reply was evasive. Although they shared the same border with Brune, it was not like they could immediately receive information from that country. Moreover, the war this time occurred in the west of Brune. Since she understood that, Elen did not blame Rurick.

"I got it. Gather the captains in the courtyard by a half koku."

When Elen quickly finished bathing, she changed into her combat outfit with Lim's help and wore armor. It was a light equipment of shoulder armor, breastplate, gauntlets and leg guards. Accompanied by Lim, who was similarly clad in armor, and Tigre, who only wore leather armor on top of his hemp clothes, they headed to the courtyard of the Imperial Palace.

In the courtyard, about 20 soldiers including Rurick were standing in line. All of them were captains leading more than 100 cavalrymen. Among them, there was also the figure of Aram who was close to Tigre.

Though Aram always had features harking back to a beaver, Tigre felt that he more and more resembled to one recently. When his eyes met with Tigre's, he raised the edge of his mouth only for an instant and gave a small laugh.

When Elen stood before them, she looked at them with a strict expression.

"I think that you've already heard the story, but the country called Sachstein attacked Brune. By the royal order, we will go to Brune's rescue from here on."

Elen cut her words once there. She observed the soldiers' expressions. None of them conspicuously expressed their feelings on their faces; they noosed their mouths and were staring straight in front of them. Elen continued.

"Among you, there will probably be people who hold dissatisfaction. And those people will probably think 'we are LeitMeritz's warriors, not hired soldiers of Brune. Why do we have to risk our lives and shed blood for them?'"

Although an order of the King, they would fight against another country in order to save a foreign country. Soldiers holding feelings of non-consent in their heart should not be small in number.

Even so, if Elen appealed for taking the field, the soldiers would follow her. That showed how popular she was among the soldiers.

But, it was not good like that. That way of doing things by relying on their loyalty would fail someday. Above all, it was not to Elen's taste.

"Saving Brune will also be to LeitMeritz's benefit after all."

Elen clearly said.

"Two years ago, we've participated in Brune's civil war. And, I concluded several covenants with Brune. Asking them to develop the mountain path of Vosyes and the like are all intended to make LeitMeritz wealthier."

She did not give a concrete explanation. This was because for example, unless they were people with enough ability and knowledge to be suitable as Elen's assistant in government affairs like Lim, or people governing a territory like Tigre, they could not understand. What was important was to make them understand that it was not somebody else's problem.

"But, Sachstein is trying to destroy it."

Staring at the soldiers, Elen sharply declared.

"If Brune were to fall and Sachstein becomes our neighbor, we wouldn't be able to live in peace as before. The skirmishes in the Vosyes Mountains would increase and a large-scale war would eventually break out."

It might be exaggerated, but these were not groundless statements. Hasn't Sofy said so? That they frequently caused skirmishes with their neighboring countries. There was no doubt that the current Sachstein King was an enthusiastic and ambitious person who thought of expanding his territory.

As for Elen, she did not want to share a border with such a troublesome country.

"So, as to not let that happen, I'll go to Brune. Do you intend to come along with me? Do you have the guts to display LeitMeritz's military power to people of a far-off country?"

When Elen asked, the captains saluted immediately. They move in perfect sync. Seeing their reaction, the silver-haired Vanadis contentedly nodded.

"Good. Then everyone, go back to your posts. We'll depart for the front in a moment."

And then, the LeitMeritz army of 2000 marched towards Brune.

Tigre asked Elen to let one cavalryman, to whom he gave a letter which he wrote, go ahead to Alsace. There was something which he wanted his territory's people to prepare before they arrive at Alsace.



A few days later after leaving LeitMeritz, the 2000 cavalrymen led by Elen and Tigre crossed the Vosyes Mountains and entered Alsace.

The mountain path which connected Alsace to LeitMeritz, although it was only 30% of the whole, was well maintained. Pebbles and rocks were removed, the soil was leveled evenly, palisades were erected and a mechanism in order to drain the rain water to the outside was given to key points

Although it was only 30% as of yet, it was certain that the LeitMeritz army's March speed temporarily rose thanks to it.

"It looks like Regin is properly keeping her promise. It's good."

When Elen joyfully laughed, she ordered the soldiers to rest as they have passed through the Vosyes Mountains.

While the LeitMeritz army was taking a rest of about a quarter koku, Tigre with only Titta advanced his horse slightly away from the army.

Spreading in the youth's view was a vast grassy plain where only a deep black forest far away could be seen. Although called a plain, there was not one speck of green;

only jonquils<sup>[6]</sup> and myosotis<sup>[7]</sup> bloomed here and there and they let the beholder feel spring. The sky was blue and the sun was shining in a position where it passed the zenith.

The wind which blew from behind shook grass with a rustling sound. While hearing the sound of grass rustling in the wind, Tigre stared at the grassy plain.

"We've come back, huh."

"Yes, we have come back."

Titta who was sitting behind Tigre answered the youth as she let her chestnut-colored ponytail flutter in the wind. Like the youth, many emotions were contained in the young girl's voice.

It has been more than one year since Tigre left Brune. But, even more so before leaving Alsace, had he not strengthened his determination to fight Duke Thenardier?

Of course after the civil war ended, he passed through Alsace on the way to go to LeitMeritz as a guest General and stopped by the town of Celesta where he was born and raised.

However, it was really just stopping by. The season then was winter, so he was unable to stay for many days as he had to pass through the Vosyes Mountains when the weather was good.

Even after experiencing many battles, a life in another country and a trip to an unknown land, the still unfading scenery was here.

This blue sky, grassy plain, the forest visible in the distance, the river and lake which should be far ahead, the mountains where beasts lived, the small town where he was born and raised that was also his hometown.

"Titta. We'll arrive at Celesta tomorrow. But..."

With his back still to the girl, Tigre said. However, he did not continue his words further than this.

Titta clung to the youth's back. Though the girl's warmth was not transmitted as it was blocked by the leather armor, Tigre could feel her feelings from her small body weight; also the feel of her chestnut-colored hair which tickled the nape of his neck.

They would stay only one night at Celesta. He did not mean to complain about it. Rather, he had to be thankful. This was because staying at Celesta was the result of Elen and Lim's consideration.

If they were to head straight for the capital Nice after passing through the Vosyes Mountains, they would have not stopped by the town of Celesta. They would have passed through the highway located to the west of Celesta.

Then, Elen and Lim coordinated the troop's marching road and time. While stopping by in Celesta, they thought so as to arrive at the capital as planned without being late.

Thanks to the two girls, Tigre and Titta were here now.

—*Will I be able to come back here again?*

Looking at the grassy plain, Tigre thought about such a thing. When they repelled the foreign enemy and Regin's reign became firm, would Tigre be able to return to Alsace?

"We should return soon to where Elen and company are."

Tigre turned the horse and rode it towards where the LeitMeritz army was. At that time, Titta extended her hands and clung to Tigre.

"Tigre-sama. I will accompany you no matter where you go."

Putting strength in her arms which she put around the youth's body, Titta appealed desperately. When Tigre nodded with a smile, he put his left hand upon the girl's hands.

"Thank you, Titta."

The horse which the two of them rode slowly walked towards the LeitMeritz army.

The next day, the LeitMeritz army arrived at Celesta.

The town of Celesta had no room for accommodating 2000 men and horses. 50 horsemen led by Tigre and Elen went to the town; the remaining soldiers started setting up a camp in a place about 500 Alsins (about 500 meters) away from the town.

In addition, Titta was riding behind Tigre without change.

"Tigre-sama, you came back!"

The gatekeeper who was standing before the opened door conveyed it in a loud voice in the town as he found the figure of Tigre standing at the army's vanguard. He did not watch out for the Black Dragon Flag at all.

That was natural because when the Thenardier army led by Zaian attacked the town the year before last, it was the LeitMeritz army who drove them away. Since Tigre was with them, there was no reason to be suspicious.

The gatekeeper's voice reached up to Tigre and company as it rode upon the wind. Elen who was riding her horse next to Tigre chuckled and lightly poked Tigre's side.

"You're popular as usual."

"Even though I'm a lord who left his territory alone."

Tigre shrugged his shoulders and answered Elen. His voice was slightly tinged with a sound of self-deprecation. Seemingly having heard it, Titta who was behind him tightened her hold on the youth's body.

"Tigre-sama, I do not think that it is good to say such a thing."

"I got it, it was my bad Titta. So, release me."

Tigre hurriedly surrendered. If he was clung to by Titta as such, his dignity as a lord would also be ruined. Usually, he did not mind about such a thing; but when thinking that it has been a while since he returned to his home, he somewhat wanted to look good. He had to do something quickly before they were seen by someone.

"Titta, I'll allow it. You may stay just like that until we enter the town."

"Give me a break."

While protesting to Elen who was enjoying it, Tigre advanced his horse. He arrived before the castle gate. The scenery which could be seen from inside the gate did not change at all compared to one year ago.

However, Tigre was not able to indulge in nostalgia any more than that. From inside the town, the residents of Celesta were running towards them. Even if they were few, there were 20 to 30 people.

Tigre hurriedly got down from the horse. Then, he helped Titta to get down. The young lord and his maid were surrounded by the people in front of the gate.

"Tigre-sama, so you have finally come back!"

"After hearing that the lord came back, I rushed out!"

"Welcome back, Tigre-sama! If Urz-sama was still alive, he would have been very happy."

They were happy about Tigre and Titta's return and unanimously expressed words of congratulations to them. There were also people who were crying in joy.

"Everyone seems to be fine. Sorry for being absent for a long time."

"Everyone, it has been a long time! Thank you very much for coming to welcome us!"

Tigre and Titta either exchanged handshakes with each person, or hugged them for the happy reunion. Elen was looking at this scene from a remote place with a smile.

At that time, among the residents, one man stepped forward.

He was a little thin and had tied his black hair in the back of his head. Judging from his face, he should still be around 30 years old and several wrinkles were carved on his broad forehead.

Tigre remembered the man. It was Elvin, a chief administrator whom Regin dispatched.

"Your Excellency Earl Vorn. It is good above all that you have returned safely."

Elvin politely bowed his head. Tigre also nodded and asked him.

"Have there been any changes in Alsace?"

"I have acted as best as I could to keep it as is. If it is alright with you, please let's walk around the town. The people will also be relieved after seeing your Excellency Earl's figure."

At the same time he finished talking, Elvin moved his gaze. His eyes were cautious about Elen and company — the LeitMeritz army standing in a remote place. The wrinkles of his forehead became deep.

"Elvin, they are allies. The people of the town think so, too."

In a tone as calm as possible, Tigre persuaded the black-haired chief administrator. He could not bring himself to blame Elvin's attitude. Foreign troops being immediately near the town could only make the people with the position of governing that town anxious. Moreover, he did not experience Zaian's attack.

It looked like Elvin who heard Tigre's words seemed to immediately change his thinking.

"I am sorry. I have heard that they fought for Brune, but..."

When he showed an honest attitude, the wrinkles disappeared from his forehead. Although slightly formal, Tigre got the impression that he was a sincere man.

Because Elvin would guide the 50 LeitMeritz cavalrymen to an inn, he bowed to Tigre and walked off at a quick pace. In his stead, the town's representatives showed up before Tigre and Titta.

They respectfully bowed to Tigre and smiled at Titta standing next to the youth.

"Tigre-sama. It has really been a year since then. You seem to be fine..."

"It is good above all to see that you people too don't seem to have changed."

Seeing their faces, Tigre smiled broadly. Titta too nodded with a smile. The representatives were all in their fifties and they have lived in this town even before Tigre and Titta were born.

While walking down the main street guided by them, Tigre and company headed to the mansion. The citizens waved their hands, and he felt nostalgia and a sense of security from the unchanged townscape.

"Can you prepare the soldiers?"

When Tigre asked, one representative revealed a wrinkled face and nodded.

"Yes. 60 people holding a spear or a bow. I will gather them in this Celesta. Everyone has the resolve to strain themselves for Tigre-sama."

This was the reason why Tigre asked Elen to have the cavalrymen go first to Alsace. While understanding that he would let the citizens head to their death, the youth deliberately ordered it.

"Thank you. I will trouble you..."

A very small amount of bitterness was contained in the voice of Tigre who thanked him. 60 territory people, 2000 cavalrymen and the apology to Elen were mingled with each other. The representative laughed so as to say that he did not mind it.

"What, the people of Zhcted thrust themselves into the battle, so how will we feel if we do not accompany Tigre-sama? We will not shame Tigre-sama. If not for my position as a representative, I would also accompany you."

Tigre smiled wryly. This representative should have already exceeded 50. After all, he was the same age as Bertrand who was the youth's personal attendant before.

"I leave Celesta to you people. Because there are people who are protecting this town, we will be able fight without worry."

When Tigre said so, the representative happily and bashfully laughed.

That day, though modest, a feast was held in the open space of the town. Although it was to celebrate Tigre's return, it was a feast also intended to welcome the Zhcted troops and to send off the sixty Alsace soldiers.

Alcohol was also served to the LeitMeritz troops who established a camp outside of the town, but there were about 2000 cavalrymen after all.

If Lim had not said "I will allow only a small quantity", it might have not been sufficient.

Tigre did not drink alcohol that much and talked with Elvin and the representatives throughout the feast. Though Elvin might not be outstandingly capable, as Tigre had thought he was a sincere man and he felt that if it was him, he could leave Alsace to him.

A big bonfire blazed in the center of the open space and the residents sang and danced around it. Titta went to meet her family and the people of the shrine. It seems like she would spend this night with her family.

When the moon rose highly, the feast was also over and most people returned to their houses to sleep.

Tigre and Elen were sitting side by side in the grassy plain on the outskirts of the town and were looking at the starry

sky. Beside them, there was one wine bottle and two bronze-made wine cups.

Although it was spring, the night air was chilly; but it was not something to worry about as they had put on an overcoat. Besides, Elen had Arifal. As long as it was by her side, this long sword could soften the night air's coldness with the power of wind.

"It was an enjoyable feast for the first time in a while."

Elen contentedly said. Her face being red was probably due to the fact that she greatly enjoyed wine. Tigre's face was not that red, but alcohol was mixed in his exhaled breath.

"I'm glad to hear that."

Until the feast had ended, Tigre did not have even an opportunity to meet Elen. It was because he gave priority to the residents. Because Elen also understood that, she did not meddle in. for that alone, he was thankful for Elen's consideration.

"I'm not saying that as a compliment. After all, warmly welcoming a foreign country's army is hardly thinkable."

While saying that, Elen brought her body near Tigre. Her warmth was transmitted over the overcoat; and Tigre also brought his body near her. As if snuggling up, the two people glued their bodies to each other.

"A hometown sure is something good, huh."

To the silver-haired Vanadis' mutter, Tigre asked something which he suddenly recalled. It has been on his

mind for some time now, but he unintentionally missed an opportunity to ask it.

"Where is Elen's hometown?"

He has already heard before that before becoming a Vanadis, she was a mercenary. However, Tigre knew only that much about Elen's past.

"I don't know."

Elen plainly answered. Seeing Tigre's wondering face with a sidelong glance, she smiled.

"When I was a baby, I was picked up by a mercenary group. As far as I remember, I tried asking the guys of the mercenary group where I was picked up, but everyone's answer was different, so I gave it up."

Unless they participate in a long-term war, a mercenary group would not stay in one place. They could stop by in a town with the reason of rest for the group, the supplement of the staff, food, supplies and the like, but moving from battlefield to battlefield was basically their daily life.

"I love LeitMeritz and the people living there. But, it's difficult to call it my hometown. It has only been four years since I became Vanadis after all. The time when I was a mercenary is longer."



Although Elen's tone felt refreshed, Tigre did not miss the slight gloom in it.

When she ceased to be Vanadis one day, what would Elen do? Would she live somewhere in LeitMeritz? Or would she go out on an aimless journey?

"Elen. If you don't mind..."

Why don't you come to Alsace? He was about to say that, however Tigre was not able to say more than that. While looking at the starry sky, Elen changed the topic.

"How will we move from tomorrow on?"

Or, she might have sensitively guessed what the youth was going to say. After a short pause, Tigre switched his thinking as he rummaged his darkish red hair.

"We will go south to Territoire. It seems that Lord Mashas is there."

During the feast, Tigre asked Elvin about the present situation, but he did not know the concrete details. In a remote place like Alsace, concrete information was not available.

But, Elvin talked about something important.

He said that a few days ago from now, a messenger sent by Mashas visited this town. As the messenger conveyed that Mashas went to Territoire with several hundred soldiers, he left the town.

"Lord Mashas believed that I would come back. We first have to join with Lord Mashas."

"Well, it's plausible. As we don't even know where the enemy is, it would be terrible to wander around in Brune and eat up all the food supplies."

Territoire was the land governed by Viscount Augres. On the occasion of the civil war two years ago, he was the next person to cooperate with Tigre after Mashas. In addition, the Viscount's son Gerard supported Tigre as he demonstrated surprisingly accurate calculation abilities.

It would be reassuring if they could join with Mashas and Augres.

"Speaking of which, what will you do about the brides?"

As she recalled, Elen changed the topic again. Tigre gave a small groan.

At the place of the feast, Tigre was asked by the town's representatives and Elvin in a modest tone.

'How about you begin to think about a heir?'

Elen had probably heard about that from someone.

Tigre was 18 years old. It was an age where it wouldn't be strange even if one has already gotten married. Be it Brune or Zhcted, when it came to only the engagement, there were many nobles whom it was decided for at a young age; whether or not they have already turned 10. Speaking extremely, there were also Houses where a fiancé/fiancée was decided as soon as one was safely born and the gender could be confirmed.

Tigre was born in the remote region of Alsace and although an Earl, their property was also small. Because he was not frequently going to the capital, he was unfamiliar with such talk.

If it was at the period when his father was alive, it would have still been all right. But, he already must think seriously about it and if possible, put it into effect at an early stage.

While drying up the wine cup, Elen said.

"Their worry is reasonable. The year before last, you only ran about in the battlefield; and last year, you weren't in your territory since you stayed in a foreign country as a guest General. Although the story about the fact that you struggled in Asvarre did not seem to have reached here, they will become anxious if they don't hear about your whereabouts."

If Tigre lost his life, the Vorn House would die out. If that happened, a noble or knight appointed by the royal family would become a chief administrator and govern Alsace.

Unlike a feudal lord, a chief administrator had what was called "term of office". When that term of office expires, the chief administrator would leave the land. Therefore, chief administrators abusing the territory's people and spreading tyranny while thinking only about the results during their tenure were not unusual.

Of course, there were also good-natured chief administrators like Elvin who thought about people, but In such case, standing out was the usually the wrong way.

If just the tax payment was correctly carried out, the kingdom would not interfere in the chief administrator's acts. Although there was also the fact that an inspecting group was rarely dispatched in order to inquire about a chief administrator's administration, it was a really rare instance. In addition, even the inspecting group could be won over by the chief administrator.

Such precedents piled up as time passed and adding some exaggerations, stories of retired nobles going on a trip with their attendants to punish heinous chief administrators were completed.

"I understand their feelings. I was also taught by my father that it was a noble's duty not to let his blood die out."

Tigre inclined his glass while being aware so as to not look Elen's way as much as possible.

"But, I didn't have that kind of talk."

Though the youth clumsily tried to escape, Elen did not allow it.

"There have been such talks from the nobles of Brune through Princess Regin, right?"

"I saw them, but they are only people I don't know..."

Before the Sun Festival was held, Tigre heard about them when he returned to LeitMeritz from Lebus. He was given a large quantity of letters by Elen and Lim. They said that Gerard Augres had carried them when the youth left for Asvarre.

About when winter was over, Tigre saw them for the first time.

*In the event when you will eventually return to Brune, I by all means want to deepen my friendship with you. First of all, could I have you greet my daughter?*

Although the word “daughter” could also be referring to a younger sister or niece, such was in a great part the contents of the letters; and Tigre came to have a headache after reading the fifth letter.

Even Tigre understood the necessity to expand such interactions. However, it was also a fact that he was fed up with the fact that their ulterior motive was obvious from the beginning.

“Regarding them, it’ll take time to deal with them. I want to consult with Lord Mashas and Viscount Augres first and it might also be better to ask her Highness about it.”

“You don’t know when that’ll be, right? How about Titta? Wasn’t the reason why that girl was allowed to become your maid for such an aim?”

“Probably. I didn’t even think about such a possibility in the past though.”

If I could make a child with Titta, the danger of the Vorn House’s blood dying out would be avoided for the time being. Then, he could adopt the measure of slowly looking for a legal wife. Although, in that case Titta would become the favorite concubine and the child made with her would be illegitimate.

Tigre's expression became bitter. Although it did not seem noble-like, he has never seriously thought about marriage so far. There were several reasons.

The year before last, until he had gone for the battle of Dinant, Tigre did not so much as think about the fact that he might die. Before that, he had gone on a battlefield only once and at that time, his father was with him.

Tigre was all right as long as he straddled his horse next to his father's. At that time, oddly enough he did not feel the danger of death.

In addition, the surroundings too did not rush Tigre. When Urz died due to illness, the territory people should have approached Tigre so as to urge him to make a child; but they did not do that.

Originally, in addition to his carefree nature, Titta felt relieved just being by Tigre's side. Many people came to know that Titta was harboring light feelings towards the youth.

Nobody said 'since Tigre is a noble, he should take a nobleman's daughter as a wife'. Judging from the late Urz, although his wife was born in the capital, she was the daughter of a gardener.

Moreover, there was Mashas' presence. This old man, who was Urz's close friend and took care of Tigre in various ways, has several times said to the territory's people that he would someday find a suitable girl for Tigre. The territory's people were also close to Mashas and believed his words.

It was not impossible if Mashas were to use his personal connections. But, the civil war two years ago and the contract about Tigre living in Zhcted as a guest General have caused it to be delayed. Above all, Tigre did not assertively requested to Mashas about such a thing.

“Titta is important to me. But—”

Tigre cut his words there. He had hesitation on the fact of putting Titta in the position of beloved concubine. Although a noble having a concubine was not unusual, there was also opposition about keeping the concubine before welcoming the legal wife.

“In your case, even if you make Titta a concubine, how about doing it after you’ve decided about the legal wife at least?”

As Elen accurately saw through about the part which he did not put into words, Tigre stared at her with a surprised face. The silver-haired Vanadis proudly laughed.

“Your thoughts are easy to read. Then, how about Lim?”

As the name of someone close to him was voiced out, Tigre looked at Elen with an amazed face.

“Considering it’s a joke from you, it’s not really funny. If I take her as a wife, she will have to come to Alsace, you know?”

“I know that. Lim is already 21, too. It won’t do well if she doesn’t think about marriage. But, as for me, I don’t have any intentions of giving Lim to the mob around there. I’ll allow it if it’s you.”

"Who to choose is her own will, right?"

"I don't think that Lim will reject if it's you. Or, don't you want it?"

Being asked by Elen, Tigre sank into silence. Though Lim was a commoner, she was a knight. Moreover, she had the position of Vanadis' adjutant. For Tigre, it would feel rather rude if he had to take her as the legal wife. She was a person from Zhcted, but it was not like there was no noble who had a foreign wife.

Above all, if it was her, there would be no problem even if Titta became the concubine.

"There's no way that I wouldn't want it. I'm worried about you."

Tigre answered so in a joking tone.

"Can you manage without Lim by your side?"

"Oh my, it looks like I'm being underestimated."

Elen pretended to have gotten angry. However, she immediately returned to a serious expression.

"I find the ties of obligations quite bothersome."

"Doesn't a Vanadis have ties of obligation?"

As he casually asked that, Elen nodded while looking up at the starry sky.

"Vanadis is one generation after all. If I feel like it, I can move without thinking after having ceased being Vanadis. Although, I don't know when I'll cease to be one."

"In that case, what would you do about marriage?"

"I'll be able to do normally. I can also conceive a child even when being Vanadis as is. Ludmila's mother and grandmother are good examples. And, it's hard to become a target for political marriage. When I ceased to be Vanadis, I would become an ordinary woman; after all, there are many Vanadises with backgrounds of commoners."

"Is that so?"

To Tigre who revealed an unexpected face, Elen casually answered.

"I was a mercenary. Ludmila's great-grand mother should have been a commoner. Sofy's father is a Knight. Sasha had said that she was born and raised in a small village. I think that only Elizavetta and Valentina are Vanadises of noble birth. How was it for Olga?"

"Olga is the grandchild of the head of the Horse Riding people."

"Hmm... It's difficult to make a judgment. She's from an important House, but I would say that it isn't a noble one. So returning to the topic, the marriage of a Vanadis is freer than a noble's. Though, the one who becomes the husband will have to live in the Imperial Palace. Conversely speaking, it can be said that that's the only condition to become a Vanadis' husband."

That too was one of the reasons why it was hard for a Vanadis to become a target of political marriage. The noble side must become the bridegroom<sup>[8]</sup>. Moreover, Vanadis

was not something permanent. Unless one was greatly driven into the corner or there was something that one wanted to get even if temporarily, a political marriage was impossible.

"Well, let's stop talking about me. This fellow will look for the one who will succeed me after all."

As she lightly laughed, Elen lightly tapped the sword guard of Arifal which she held in her hand. As if answering to it, the long sword which was put in its sheath caused a small wind which rustled the two people's clothes.

"But, I'll be thankful if you do something about Lim. After all, there isn't any male presence around here. I don't mind interceding, but it'd be troublesome if I were to appear to be favoring her."

"You're right. I'll give it some thought."

Saying that was the best Tigre could do. Of course, it was not like he did not like Lim. However, she would have hated it no matter what the decision as the person herself did not know about this.

The next morning, the LeitMeritz army in addition to 60 people led by Tigre and Elen were seen off by Elvin and the territory's people and left the town of Celesta.



It was three days later after leaving Alsace that Tigre and company joined with Mashas. Soon after they entered Territoire, the scouts who were sent discovered thousands of soldiers.

"Do you know the color and design of the flag which that army was floating?"

"It was a green flag with a brown wild boar drawn on it. There were some others beside that though."

Tigre's face brightened at the scout's answer. It was the flag of Earl Rodant's House.

Tigre and Elen immediately released the messenger and reunited with Mashas in the field of Vesoul located in the west of Territoire. When he saw a knight with a grey beard riding a horse at the vanguard of the army, Tigre unintentionally shouted.

"Lord Mashas. You are safe!"

"You too. I'm glad that you came as well."

Mashas also nodded with a smile to Tigre. He wore dark grey armor on his short and stout small-sized body and hung a sword to his waist. While being endowed with enough dignity, there was youthfulness in his black pupils.

It was about ten days before the Sun Festival that Mashas had met Tigre and company for the last time. When King Victor made the promise that Tigre would return to Brune after the Sun Festival ended, this old knight immediately returned to Brune.

As Mashas stepped forward in front of Elen, he observed courtesy as a noble as he deeply bowed his head.

"This is an earlier reunion than I expected, but I glad that you came safely. I give you my gratitude in the stead of Her Highness Regin."

"What, don't mind it. I'm not coming by means of morality here, but I'm moving by the royal order to help Tigre."

Elen answered so while laughing, and Mashas revealed a dubious face. It was probably hard for someone like Mashas to understand a royal order of helping a person from a foreign country. Elen explained about the fact that King Victor often ordered the dispatch of troops in order to chip/weaken a Vanadis' power.

"That sure is hard for you... That said, since he is helping us this time like this, I cannot really speak ill of him."

Afterwards, Elen also called Lim and Titta. Mashas lightly tapped Lim's shoulders and exchanged a handshake with her. And then, he kindly patted Titta's head. He also noticed the face that Titta had and how she did her hairstyle as a ponytail and praised her that it looked good on her.

For Mashas, Titta was like a daughter and Lim was a comrade in arms with a great difference in age. In the civil war two years ago, Mashas and Lim cooperated and commanded the soldiers.

These three people have also made a trip to Lebus in order to meet Tigre who lost his memory. That memory was still fresh in Tigre's mind.

Mashas led 3000 soldiers. The soldiers of Aude which was his territory were about 500. The remaining soldiers were those of various nobles of the neighborhood.

Tigre thought that since they were in Territoire, Viscount Augres was also here, but his figure was nowhere to be seen. When he asked, he was told that Viscount Augres was in the capital Nice together with his son Gerard.

"It seems that Augres thought that it was soon time for him to hand his title over to his son and retire, but Badouin doesn't want to let go of Gerard. They are talking about that in various ways."

Badouin was the Prime Minister who pledged allegiance to Regin, he was also an old friend of Mashas.

It was a shame that he could not meet the Augres father and son pair, but Tigre reconsidered that if they repulsed the Sachstein army and then went to the capital, he would be able to meet them again.

Then, a sharp-looking man appeared, standing beside Mashas. Tigre who saw that man's face revealed a smile mixed with nostalgia and joy.

"Lord Gaspar! It's been a long time."

"I am glad to see that you look healthy. Earl Vorn."

The man called Gaspar bowed to Tigre with a broad smile. Mashas introduce him to Elen and Lim who made wondering faces.

"He is one of my sons. Gaspar, this is Eleonora Viltariadono, a Vanadis of Zhcted, and Limalisha-dono who serves as her adjutant."

"I am the second son of the Earl Aude House, Gaspar. Since my elder brother, Urbain, is protecting the territory on behalf of my father, I'm acting as an attendant of my father. Please to make your acquaintance."

Gaspar courteously bowed to Elen and Lim. The two girls also returned the greeting to him.

"However, Tigre — Lord Tigrevurmud, you grew up magnificently, eh. The last time we met was four years ago."

Gaspar who called Tigre by his nickname corrected himself at once. Although a shadow of loneliness flashed on Tigre's face for an instant, the youth immediately revealed a smile and nodded.

"That's right. It was about when I succeeded Alsace."

Looking at this exchange, Elen and Lim roughly understood the two young men's relationship. Until Tigre succeeded to the Earl Vorn House, they probably got along well enough to be able to speak with each other in an informal tone. Although Tigre used a polite way of talking, it must be because Gaspar was older.

"I am really sorry for having been unable to do anything on the occasion of the civil war two years ago. For this war, I shall frantically exert myself and be helpful to you, Earl Vorn."

"I am relying on you, but please do not overdo it too much."

Both of Mashas' sons did not participate in the civil war two years ago. Mashas did not permit it. Since the eldest son Urbain would succeed him should anything happen to him, he could not let him participate.

For the time when those with a suitable position would have to move, Gaspar also had to stay on standby in their territory.

Tigre and company established a camp in the field of Vesoul. The soldiers dug trenches and while looking at the state of the fence being set up, the youth muttered impressively.

"That reminds me of the "Silver Meteor Army"."

But, this was not the time for nostalgia. As they left the command of soldiers to Rurick, the trio: Tigre, Elen and Lim headed to Mashas' tent.

Several men were already inside the tent. They were Brune nobles who had interactions with Mashas and would participate in the battle leading their private army. After getting the greetings over with, Tigre and company sat down as they formed a circle. Having opened her mouth first and foremost was Elen.

"Let's get to the main point at once. How is the situation?"

"Honestly, it isn't good."

The other nobles alternately looked at Mashas and Elen with eyes wide opened. They were surprised at the fact that Elen of Zhcted was the first to speak and that Mashas honestly replied to her. While stroking his grey beard, Mashas smiled at them.

"They are friendly troops. So it's natural I would explain the situation without concealing anything."

Although the nobles nodded, there were those with faces showing that they did not consent from the bottom of their hearts. They also turned curious gazes towards Tigre. They were probably wondering how he was able to make the soldiers of Zhcted accompany him.

While spreading several maps so that everyone was able to see, Mashas explained the situation.

"Sachstein attacked us from the south across the sea in the middle of the Halo Festival — the New Year festival in our country. Their army numbered 20000. Those guys passed through the port towns of the coast and went north little by little."

The fact that he expressly restated the Halo Festival as the New Year festival was probably in consideration towards Elen and Lim who were people from Zhcted. Mashas proceeded with the explanation.

"The Knight Squadron and the nobles with territory located to the south were ordered to repel them by Her Highness Regin. However, about ten days ago, the Sachstein army also appeared at the western border this time. And they number 50000."

Two pieces were put on the map depicting the entirety of Brune. It seemed like the Sachstein army was aiming for the capital Nice from the south and the west.

"Here, a change occurred in the enemy's movement. The enemy who attacked from the south began to retreat. On the other hand, the enemy on the west side continued to advance as is. The nobles possessing territory to the west and the Knight Squadron there seemed to have ambushed them, but as far as I know, they performed two battles and they were defeated those two times."

Tigre who finished hearing Mashas' story gasped. Although the enemy's numbers were frightening, he felt pain as if his stomach had shrank when he heard they had lost twice. The situation was far more serious than he thought.

"So they first attacked from the south, attracted attention there and then the main troops went in from the west, huh."

"Probably. Therefore, most of the Knight Squadrons and the nobles' private armies are heading to the west. It's too far to contact them, so I don't know their specific number."

"Then, who is heading towards the enemy of the south side? I'm guessing that it won't be only the 3000 soldiers led by Lord Mashas."

To Elen's question, Mashas greatly nodded.

"Of course; with the addition of the Lutece Knight Squadron and the troops of noble feudal lords commencing with Earl Bouroullec, an army 10000 strong will be heading

there. It's half the enemy's number, but we should be fit as a diversion."

Tigre did not know the person called Earl Bouroullec, but when he heard the name "Lutece Knight Squadron", he took a breath of relief.

The Lutece Knight Squadron was one of the Knight Squadrons who rushed to Tigre's help when the Muozinel army invaded two years ago. They continued to fight against Duke Thenardier's army under Tigre's command afterwards, too. Tigre remembered a man called Scheie.

"Now then, about how we will move from now on. South or west, where will we head?"

"Let's go to the south" Tigre immediately replied. He pointed at one point of the map that spread out, with a finger.

They were only 5000. If the enemy's numbers were 50000 and 20000, they should fight the enemy side that had fewer soldiers. Besides, considering the distance, it was hard to think that the two armies of Sachstein did not get in contact in enemy territory. If they could deal damage to the army of 20000, the situation might change.

"If we can join with the soldiers of the Lutece Knight Squadron, we will number 15000 in total. I think we'll be able to put up quite a good fight."

Elen leaked a smile meaning the worries were resolved; when it came to war, her ruby-colored pupils shone with vitality and fighting spirit.

Since other troops and Knight Squadrions were heading to the west side, they just had to fight the enemy in the south with all their might.

While hearing Elen's words as he was next to her, Tigre still observed the map. From what was said so far, there was a part which he was not somewhat fully satisfied with.

Tigre suddenly ran his gaze around. His eyes met with Lim's. Usually, a faint smile would appear on the lips of this expressionless girl. But, she guessed that Tigre was harboring a question and demanded with a gaze expressing that they should solve it by themselves.

Rummaging his darkish red hair, Tigre once again scowled at the map. He did not understand. In a casual movement, Lim traced the coast in the southern part of Brune with a finger. From an outsider's perspective, it would look like she just brushed off dirt. So, there was no one to blame her.

Tigre greatly opened his eyes wide and stared at the map. The youth finally understood the part he was not satisfied with. Tigre raised his face and asked the nobles.

"A while ago, Lord Mashas had said 'passed through the port towns of the coast', but what had happened to those port towns?"

Normally thinking, two or three of the major port towns would be captured and they would become the enemy's foothold. But when thinking back upon Mashas' explanation, the enemy's assault on the port towns was

frighteningly fast. One could only think that they captured them in one day.

"About that..."

Mashas answered with an evasive tone.

"There are reports that some port towns are cooperating with the enemy."

A wave of shivers ran throughout the tent. Tigre, Elen and Lim unintentionally looked at each other.

"Are you saying that the port towns deflected to the enemy...?"

"According to the scout's report, it seems that the port towns La Mer, Agde and Massilia taken by the Sachstein army didn't suffer much damage. It said that the merchants there actively cooperate with them, too. The notification of the Sachstein army's invasion also came late."

"So, isn't it like they surrendered without fighting after being shown an overwhelmingly large army?"

Elen cocked her head in puzzlement at Mashas' explanation. One of the reasons of gathering a large army was to coerce the enemy, thus making them lose their fighting spirit.

"There's that possibility, but with the three port towns I nominated just now, all in the same situation, it's hardly conceivable. Besides, the Sachstein army has been in enemy territory for nearly 20 days already; without

starving. There are no signs of them having attacked towns and villages for resources."

Mashas said in a depressed tone.

How did they supply food and fuel to support a large army of 20000 soldiers? Even supposing that they attacked cities and towns on the way while marching, there was no guarantee that they would get enough food.

And it was also not like the Sachstein army just passed those cities and towns without attacking them. When marching, they attacked towns and villages considered to become strategic positions. But, those<sup>[9]</sup> numbered few.

Tigre was inwardly puzzled. For some reason, Mashas seemed to persist on the thought that those port towns deflected to the enemy.

*—Other than what he told us, is there any other information he got a hold of?*

He thought, but he passed on asking him about it here. If Mashas did not say it, there was probably a reason.

"So depending on the situation, they'll be more troublesome than the enemy of 50000 who is attacking from the west."

Elen snorted as she folded her arms. If possible, she wanted to avoid fighting an enemy whose preparations were near perfect. But, that could not be considered when thinking about the situation.

Tigre raised his face from the map and asked about a different matter.

"Is Her Highness Regin safe?"

"She's in the capital. Soldiers are gathering one after another in the capital, so there's no problem."

Mashas cocked his head in puzzlement while answering and quickly winked at Tigre. It was in the blind spot of the other nobles, so they did not see it. Having noticed it were probably only Tigre and Elen sitting next to him.

"Eleonora-dono. If you do not mind, could I ask you about the interaction with Zhcted?"

The implication of Mashas having said so in order to reassure the nobles in this place was strong. The reason why the other nobles remained silent since a while ago, was because they were too cautious of Elen and Lim, thus they left it all to Mashas who was close to them.

Elen, also aware of that, revealed a smile as she looked around at all the members present

"His Majesty King Victor, as he cannot overlook the crisis of a friendly nation, ordered 2000 soldiers of my LeitMeritz to be dispatched. Of course, I won't say that it's for free, but I shall have a talk with Her Highness Regin about it after having driven away the fussy eagle."

When she said "fussy eagle", she spoke about the Sachstein army. Elen did not know that much about Sachstein, but even she knew about their flag that had a white Steller's sea eagle. She made fun of it.

"Other than us, reinforcements from Zhcted are scheduled to be dispatched. But, they will need a little time to arrive."

Lim indifferently supplemented. It was about Valentina leading the Osterode army. Judging from her tone, it did not look like she counted that much on them.

In fact, it would take a great amount of time for them to come from the faraway Osterode until this place. Moreover, their commander was Valentina who was known for having a weak body, as well as for her slow sortie and early withdrawal.

"What, it's nothing. As for me, I'm thankful enough that at least you guys have come. I'd have to apologize to Victor. By the way, Tigre, I'm thinking of having you take the supreme command of this army, but will you do it?"

"Me?"

Tigre looked at Mashas with a face which could not hide his surprise. Most of the nobles gathered here were people he did not know. Therefore, he thought that Mashas would take the supreme command.

"Your name is known in Sachstein, too. Let's surprise them."

Mashas broadly grinned. Tigre strongly nodded.

After the war council's first stage had ended, because Mashas said that he had a lot to talk about with Tigre, Tigre remained in the tent. Elen and Lim also made up a proper reason and stayed together with them. It was for this purpose that Mashas gave a wink a while ago.

"Do you know a woman called Melisande?"

Being asked by Mashas without beating around the bush, Tigre cocked his head in puzzlement. It was a name he had never heard of. While shaking his short and stout body, Mashas answered with a serious expression.

"She was Duke Thenardier's wife, which means that she is a widow now."

To his words, not only Tigre, but also Elen and Lim opened their eyes wide. Thenardier was a formidable enemy and an unforgettable existence even for Elen and Lim.

"What's it with that widow? Since Thenardier was responsible for having made that much of a mess, even his wife won't be left off the hook."

"Of course, is what I would like to say; but Melisande is a person who inherits the blood of the royal family. She can't be treated roughly. After that civil war was over, Her Highness the Princess entrusted her to a shrine in Nemetacum. Since she behaved herself, Her Highness left Melisande alone, but..."

Nemetacum was located in the southern part of Brune and was Duke Thenardier's territory before. After the end of the civil war, Nemetacum was requisitioned by the royal family and a chief administrator dispatched by Regin governs it now.

"There's a possibility that Melisande invited the Sachstein army in."

Tigre became speechless to Mashas' words. That was a reckless action that even Thenardier would not do. Lim asked in a serene tone.

"Lord Mashas. As for the group of port towns in the southern part which deflected, is it highly probable that they did it by Melisande's instructions?"

"You're quick on the uptake."

Mashas spilled a sigh mixed with a wry smile. However, the old Earl returned to a serious expression right away and pulled the map put aside towards him.

"I don't need to say it now, but Duke Thenardier's power at the time he was alive was great. You may even say that Brune's southern part with Nemetacum as its center was mostly that man's sphere of influence. Even the port towns of coastal places; for those port towns, Duke Thenardier was a powerful protector."

Thenardier protected the group of port towns that brought in vast profits by trade. For example, when the Muozinel army had attacked from the sea, he personally commanded a fleet and repelled the enemy.

"I spoke about it during the war council, but the Sachstein army which appeared from the sea went through the port towns and is going north towards the capital. After an investigation, we found out that the enemy had passed Nemetacum when going north. If it was only that, then it'd be fine; but they seem to be receiving support such as food from Nemetacum."

"However, the current Nemetacum is governed by a chief administrator that Her Highness Regin had dispatched, right?"

Tigre looked puzzled. But, the youth immediately understood a certain thing.

Just like the group of port towns of the coast, if those, who either felt indebted to Thenardier or have distanced themselves from Regin, occupied an important post in Nemetacum, the chief administrator would be helpless by himself.

"Because it's difficult to send scouts into Nemetacum now, I can't assert it. But, it's probably just as you think."

"In other words, you're saying that the current enemy isn't only Sachstein. And that it's very likely that we'll have to deal with Nemetacum and the port towns of the coast. Where is that Melisande now? In Nemetacum?"

Mashas shook his head to Elen's question.

"She's in the capital Nice. She's locked up in one room of the royal palace."

"That's good for the time being. But, gathering domestic discontented members and borrowing soldiers of a foreign country since she has no soldiers on hand, huh. It's one method, but..."

While Elen nodded with folded arms, doubt spread in her ruby-colored pupils. Tigre responded with a sigh.

"You're wondering about what she intends to hold out as compensation, right?"

"Yes. Taking the size of the army into consideration, Melisande's aim might be to drive out Regin and sit on the throne herself."

"Our country's Prime Minister said the same thing, too."

Mashas nodded with a bitter face. By Prime Minister, he meant Badouin.

"It's better to think that the Sachstein army has grasped the positions of major towns, cities and forts. Even the topography around Nemetacum. Although we will fight in our own country, we're in a situation where it's hard to fully make use of the geographical advantage."

*—So that's why Lord Mashas did not voice out Melisande's name in the war council just now.*

Depending on Melisande's actions, there was the danger of those, who would betray Regin and follow her, appearing. Moreover, Melisande had Sachstein as a supporter. In the worst case, Brune might be divided into two camps. And if that happened, war would spread through the whole of Brune.

*—We have to look after Her Highness Regin...*

The golden-haired Princess's smile flashed across his mind. While keeping his determination in his heart, Tigre cheered up the old Earl with an especially bright smile.

"However, Lord Mashas, I think that both Melisande and Sachstein haven't expected yet that Zhcted would intervene. Even during the civil war two years ago, Elen brought victory to me. Lim and Rurick were there too. No matter who the opponent is, we'll be the ones to win."

"That's it. You sometimes say very good things, Tigre."

Elen revealed a fearless smile and tapped Tigre's shoulders. Though Lim saw through the fact that it was to hide her embarrassment, she did not forget to give a warning.

"Lord Tigrevurmud. I ask you not to spoil Eleonora-sama too much."

The silver-haired Vanadis, not faltering, counterattacked as she broadly grinned.

"You too, I feel like you're spoiling Tigre even more since before. Even in the Sun Festival, along with Titta, you took care of him in various ways, right? Before long, you might feed him mouth-to-mouth like a parent bird does to a young bird."

"Eleonora-sama!"

As her cheeks unintentionally dyed red, Lim fiercely objected. Then, she turned around to Tigre and said with a stern expression in an unusually low voice.

"I won't do it."

"No, I know that even without you saying it."

Tigre waved his hand aside with a serious face. Mashas changed the topic while smiling wryly.

"By the way, about the other reinforcements which Limalisha-dono said a while ago, who will come?"

"A Vanadis like Elen; a person called Valentina governing Osterode..."

At Tigre's reply, Mashas groaned and stroked his gray beard.

"Tigre. What kind of person is Valentina-dono? If it's Ludmila-dono, Sofya-dono and Elizavetta-dono, I know those three, but..."

Mashas' life had been saved by Sofy before. He fought with Mila in the civil war two years ago. He met Liza when he went to Zhcted in order to rescue Tigre last year. He has never met Valentina.

Tigre looked at Elen with a troubled face. Elen too shrugged her shoulders as she was at a loss for a reply.

"I'm sorry, but I also don't know her too well."

"Osterode that Valentina-sama governs is located in the northeast of our country. For that reason, there's hardly any interaction with Eleonora-sama."

As Lim explained in an apologetic tone, Mashas sighed as he was discouraged.

"Isn't the northeast, a direction directly opposite to Brune? I see, so that's why you didn't voice out Valentina-dono's name during the war council."

Among the nobles gathered then, it was quite unlikely that there was someone who knew Valentina's name; but if

there was someone who knew her, they would have been discouraged like Mashas just now. There was the fear of the whole army's morale lowering if they were to tell that to the other nobles.

As she considered it, Lim only gave a vague explanation.

"Limalisha-dono, is it better to think that that Vanadis is untrustworthy?"

"What I can only tell is that Valentina-sama is a person with a weak body and therefore, even if she has been ordered by His Majesty, their departure from their Imperial Palace will be slow and if her troops received some amount of damage, she will immediately withdraw."

Somewhat indirectly, her manner of speech also could to be regarded as slander; but Lim did not retract her words. At least, she spoke of a fact. It should have been better than talking with speculation.

"I thought that Vanadises generally were brave people, but I guess there are also exceptions."

"I wonder about that. There's also the possibility that she pretends to be so."

To Mashas' doubt, Elen shook her head as he answered.

"At least, Sofy thinks so."

"As for me, I don't expect too much from her. After all, I want to kick out the Sachstein army as soon as possible."

When Tigre said that, Mashas smiled broadly.

"You're right. It's a shame that your home coming turned out like this."

Afterwards, the four people called Titta and had her prepare something to drink and along with her, once again talked about the current status. Although it only lasted a quarter koku, it was a happy time.



It was about when it began to get dark that Tigre returned to his tent after parting with Elen and company.

They planned to stay for one night in the plain of Vesoul as such today and depart at sunrise. They wanted to grasp the Lutece Knight Squadron's position. In Brune, there were a lot of grassy plains without ups and downs and although the view was good, it was quite difficult to look for about 10000 troops.

Since there was still time until dinner, Tigre decided to tend to his black bow. He prepared the tools for tending to his bow and even with just the lamp's light it was sufficient for him to perform it.

*—Although, I don't think this bow needs to be tended to...*

While carefully taking off the bowstring from the bow, Tigre thought about such a thing. In the first place, the youth did not even know what this black bow was made of.

He did not feel coldness like from a metal. Its feel was close to that of a wooden bow which he was familiar with. Therefore, it might be said that he did not notice until when he used this bow's power two years ago.

He carefully polished the bow with a dry cloth. He removed dirt and wiped off moisture. He put back the bowstring and tried it by pulling it with a finger several times. The feel was not bad. At that time, he heard a voice from outside the tent.

"Lord Tigrevurmud. Can I have a little of your time now?"

It was the voice of Gaspar, Mashas' son. When Tigre said "you can come in", Gaspar went in.

"What's the matter, Gaspar-niisan?"

There were only Tigre and Gaspar in this place. Tigre called Gaspar like he used to call him before. Gaspar has never praised Tigre's skill with the bow, but he has never laughed at the youth's poor skill with a sword or spear, either.

"There are many nobles weak with the sword and spear after all. There are also nobles whose way of life is to leave the fight to other people and devote themselves to governing. I can't do anything about the bow though."

Tigre had been saved by these words of Gaspar. For the youth, it took time in order to come up with an explanation for why it could not be help that he could not skillfully handle a sword or spear.

"What, I meet you after a long time and I have been worried in various ways. Tigre, you're already 18 now, so have you decided about plans for marriage?"

For Tigre, Gaspar said in a nostalgic, casual tone. However, most of the contents were a surprise for him. Tigre was

flustered to the extent that he was about to drop the quiver in his hand.

"M-Marriage...? Even though there's no partner?"

As he replied while blushing, Gaspar revealed a wondering face.

"That's not true. I heard it from Father and Viscount Augres' son; that several nobles want to match you with their daughters or younger sisters."

By Viscount Augres' son, he meant Gerard. Remembering the pile of letters which he saw when he returned to LeitMeritz, Tigre revealed a dejected face.

"Anyway, I have no plans for marriage."

"Well, marriage sure is a troublesome thing after all. Then, did you welcome even one concubine?"

"Unfortunately, I'm not that resourceful."

He shrugged his shoulders as he finally pulled himself together. Gaspar revealed an unexpected face.

"What about Titta? Both my elder brother and I thought that that girl is the only one able to look after you though."

"Titta is important to me, but I have no intention of making her a concubine."

"Hmm... Then, during the one year you were in Zhcted, did you find a good girl?"

Tigre kept quiet for a moment. Gaspar grinned at that reaction.

"Did I hit the bull's-eye? Vanadis-dono's adjutant, was she called Limalisha-dono? She's a beautiful girl after all."

It was at that time. Gaspar took out a piece of paper from within the sleeve of his clothes and held it out to Tigre. A short sentence was written on the paper.

『At night, I want you to come alone to my tent. Mashas』

The youth unintentionally swallowed his words and stared at the paper. It was without a doubt Mashas' handwriting.

—*Was there something he forgot to tell me?*

After thinking so, Tigre shook his head while saying "impossible". There was no way that Mashas would make such a blunder. Perhaps Gaspar thought "is it fine already?" he quickly squeezed the piece of paper in his hand. With that gesture, Tigre recalled the earlier conversation with him

"We're about to fight an enemy from here on out, so please stop teasing me by saying strange things. I certainly trust Lim—Limalisha, but that's different from love..."

"Just now, you clogged up when you call her name, right? Don't tell me, were you about to call her name in the way that only a pair of lovers would openly do?"

"Gaspar-niisan!"

Tigre shouted as he unintentionally raised his voice. Gaspar shrugged seemingly wanting to say "how troublesome" and turned his back to the youth. This was because he already

said what he had to say. Even if he was to be questioned by someone, he had enough room to make up a reason.

"I got it, I got it. Anyway, find a good partner."

Waving his hand, Gaspar left the tent. Tigre stood stock still on the spot. He took a small breath and thought about the sentence written on the piece of paper.

—*Alone, huh...*

Even excluding Elen and Lim, he wanted to talk to only Tigre was what Mashas said. And a talk, that he must hide from people to the extent of going as far as to use such a way, at that.

Tigre silently stared at his feet.

Late at night on that day, Tigre slipped into the darkness and visited Mashas' tent.

"Ah, you came. It looks like Gaspar properly did his work."

Mashas, his short and stout body wrapped with an overcoat, was sitting down on the carpet. A lamp lit with fire was held in the old Earl's hand, but it was also covered with a cloth so as to minimize the light.

"What do you want to talk about?"

To Tigre who asked at once, Mashas silently beckoned. It looked like he was asking Tigre to approach some more. Tigre went down on his knees on the carpet and sidled up to the old Earl. As he approached until before Mashas, Mashas whispered into Tigre's ear.

"Listen. Don't be surprised. —Durandal has been stolen."

Although he should have resolved himself enough as he was warned beforehand, Tigre almost unintentionally raised his voice. That was how shocking those words were.

The youth peered into Mashas' face and asked in a low voice.

"Stolen? Who on earth did that...?"

"One person might have an idea of who it was.  
—Melisande."

"That person<sup>[10]</sup> brought Sachstein in..."

As he said up to there, Tigre frowned.

"You said 'might have an idea', but how did you reach that guess?"

To Tigre's question, Mashas revealed a sullen face and began to explain.



Nearly 20 days ago from now, it was about when the Halo Festival which celebrated the New Year was held in the Brune Kingdom.

Regin, who wrapped her body in a formal dress was enjoying friendly chats with noble feudal lords in the banquet hall of the royal palace. In the hall, sumptuous dishes were lined up and alcohol too was gathered in abundance.

The luxury of the dishes aside, they probably exceeded those of the Zhcted's royal palace in diversity. In fact, Brune was bordered by three countries while the north and south faced the sea. It also continued trade by sea with Muozinel.

When it was peaceful, and the highways and ports were maintained, caravans would gather from various countries of the east and west, fleets with the purpose of trade would appear in the sea in the north and south, and many people would come and go bringing wealth to Brune.

While enjoying the dishes, the people were happy with the peace of last year and were talking about how they hoped for the New Year to be peaceful as well.

After the civil war in the winter two years ago had ended, Brune was steadily walking down the path to revival without being hit by a big disturbance.

The people also recognized Princess Regin's existence. There were also those, who scornfully laughed at the oracle and turned suspicious eyes; bringing forth the fact that she had once been brought up as a prince.

But, even these people would have to recognize Regin's reign. No matter what they said, she was the sole child of the previous King Faron and since he also recognized it, there was no problem.

A temporary throne was put at the back of the hall, Durandal was decorated near it.

Only a few people were told that this sacred sword was an imitation.

Many people came to greet Regin. In order to avoid unnecessary confusion, it was decided beforehand who would appear in which turn before the Princess.

Mashas carefully kept a close watch in a slightly remote place from Regin.

Immediately near Regin, two knights serving as her escort were standing. Although they did not wear a sword as they were in a place of banquet, they casually looked out for every single move of those who approached the Princess. Besides, Viscount Augres, Gerard and the like should also be somewhere in the banquet hall.

Since the night when the Princess's assassination luckily ended in an attempt, not that many days have passed yet. No matter how cautious they were, they did not overdo it.

Talks were stimulated by food and alcohol and it was about when the party got more and more excited.

When a certain noble was going to greet the Princess, one woman broke in from the side.

"Your Majesty — Please, forgive my rudeness, your Highness. I would like to ask something."

It was a beautiful woman. Not only that, she was so gorgeous that she attracted people's attention just by standing there.

She should be around 30. She carefully did up her long golden hair and wrapped her voluptuous body in a luxurious dress studded with small jewels. What

particularly stood out was the silver bracelet stuck on her left arm that was treated with a big jewel.

Mashas was about to hurry up and rush over to Regin's side, but faster than his action, the Princess responded to the blond-haired woman with a smile.

"Oh, I was wondering who it was, but isn't it Lady Melisande?"

Originally, she would not have to listen to someone who just broke in. But, in this woman's case, she could not afford to do so. She was Melisande, the late King Faron's niece and the wife of the now late Duke Thenardier.

In addition, it was none other than Regin who invited her to the Halo Festival. If she did not do that, Melisande would have not been let outside from the shrine that she was entrusted to.

There were two reasons why Regin invited Melisande to this banquet. One was that inviting the woman who was the wife of an enemy showed Regin's generosity to various nobles. That could also be said to be the official reason.

The other reason was to see Melisande's reaction. It was confirmed by Badouin's investigation that she has been investigating about Regin's personal life since last year. The cat faced Prime Minister explained to Regin that she might be involved with Regin's assassination attempt and Durandal's theft.

Depending on the circumstances, she had to confront Melisande head on.

"What is it that you would like to ask me? Lady Melisande."

Showing neither a fragment of hostility nor wariness, Regin asked with a calm smile. Melisande revealed an open sneer.

"I am sorry to have broken in. But, it has been on my mind no matter what. It is about our country's sacred sword, Durandal, which is near the throne."

The gazes of the people who were in the banquet hall gathered on Regin and her. As that too was probably calculated, Melisande continued her words in a pretentious tone in addition to theatrical gestures.

"Is that really Durandal? It looks somewhat different from the one I saw before."

*—What an obvious act...*

Anger welled up in the heart of Mashas who was watching the two women from a distance. He had expected something to happen somewhere in this banquet, but he did not think that it would be so early.

Some nobles raised voices agreeing with Melisande. They were probably people secretly connected with her. Although those who didn't know the circumstances turned suspicious eyes to Melisande, they were just watching the course of events without trying to stop it.

Regin tilted her head to the side seemingly wanting to say that she didn't know what Melisande was talking about.

"Aren't you mistaken? This is unmistakably our country's sacred sword Durandal."

"It's a lie, right?!"

Erasing her smile and with an angry expression, Melisande harshly impeached Regin.

"I can tell. The Durandal over there is an imitation. Your Highness Princess Regin, what did you do with Durandal?"

The banquet began to get noisy. Melisande was a woman who was royalty and the late Duke Thenardier's wife. Although she individually had no influence, her influence could not be ignored. People who agreed with her words also began to appear.

Regin answered calmly to the bitter end without flinching.

"Lady Melisande. If you go as far as to say that, can you prove that this is an imitation?"

Mashas unintentionally nodded. Even if Melisande did steal it, there was no way she would say it. In addition, even if she only knew that it was stolen, Regin could question about how she knew about it.

"There is a simple method to prove it."

As if waiting for Regin's words, Melisande revealed a triumphant smile.

"You should cut the floor with that Durandal. If that is indeed our country's sacred sword, it will just smash the floor without bending or even breaking, right?"

It was a frighteningly violent suggestion. The neighboring noise increased and Regin knitted her brows; as though to say that she was amazed at Melisande's suggestion.

"Lady Melisande. You have gone too far."

From the crowd surrounding the two women, Viscount Augres stepped forward and rebuked Melisande.

But, even when rebuked by the old viscount who was about 20 years older than her, she did not falter. She ignored Augres and took a step forward.

"You cannot do it, your Highness?"

Regin glared at Melisande without hiding her discomfort.

"Are you saying to thoughtlessly use our country's sacred sword for such a foolish side show? Lady Melisande. As a person belonging to the royal family of Brune, are you not ashamed?"

If it was the real Durandal, it would indubitably smash even this banquet hall's floor.

But, the one used now as decoration was an imitation which only had the same form. Both its sharpness and strength could not be compared with the real one. As Melisande said, the sword's blade would either be bent or break.

"Your Highness Princess Regin. Before entering the royal palace today, I heard a bad rumor."

Ignoring Regin's words, Melisande loudly said in a tone as if she was intoxicated with herself.

"That the sacred sword has been stolen by someone."

"Are you telling me that someone of your status believes such a worthless rumor?"

"Your Highness, as a minor person of royalty, I would by no means tell such nonsense. When I got wind of that rumor, I laughed it off. However, when I set foot in this banquet hall and saw the sacred sword, I doubted my own eyes; to think that the rumor was a fact."

"Your Highness. How about doing as Lady Melisande says?"

One noble said in a calm tone. It was Viscount Armand who possessed a territory in the south. He was a big man with a sturdy body who possessed arms and legs whose thickness was more than double Regin's. On the battlefield, he stands at the vanguard while carrying a long sword on his shoulder and was known as a man who fights bravely.

"Lady Melisande is also someone from the royal family. She has probably expressed this after having thought it out. As for me, I think that it is not good to leave a threatening shadow in the place where we are celebrating the bright New Year."

*—What a shameless man.*

Mashas cursed him without voicing it out. Armand was a noble who declared neutrality in the civil war two years ago. But, Mashas knew that he had promised behind the scenes to cooperate with Duke Thenardier, and also about the fact that he had a connection with Melisande.

"Viscount Armand, aren't you lumping the blunt sword which is in your house together with the sacred sword Durandal?"

Having appeared while saying that was Augres' son, Gerard. As he combed his dark brown hair upwards, Gerard continued in a sarcastic tone.

"You thoughtlessly say 'we should just cut it', but you people, who are much older than me, should know well that a remark is always accompanied with responsibility. If times had not changed, you could expect that Durandal's sharpness and strength would be tried by cutting off your head."

Although Regin looked up at Armand with cold eyes until then, she moved her gaze to Gerard and rebuked him in a severe voice.

"Lord Gerard. You should know that even impoliteness has a limit."

Mashas also agreed. Cutting off his head was as expected saying too much. Even if Regin was inwardly thankful to him, she first had to scold him.

"Hmph, how sluggish."

When Armand clicked his tongue, he began to walk in long strides as he pushed his way through noble feudal lords. He went towards Durandal which was at the back of the hall.

"What do you intend to do?!"

Although Regin yelled out loud, Armand did not stop. Augres and Gerard's reaction was also late. The nobles were also watching the course of events in utter amazement.

Armand who arrived near the throne grabbed Durandal. When it unsheathed from its scabbard, he brandished it with both hands. The big viscount filled both his arms with strength and one could understand that muscles swelled from the clothes. In a state where he did not hear the voices of restraint, Armand slashed at the floor with the sacred sword.

A high-pitched metallic sound echoed in the banquet hall. A straight silver light soared in the air while rotating. It was Durandal's blade which broke and flew.

While the screams of the people present overlapped, the broken blade rolled over the floor.

"It's broken!"

Armand shouted. Regin looked at the big man with the broken sacred sword with a pale expression. Behind her, Melisande raised a surprised voice.

"You Highness, ah, your Highness. Our country's sacred sword has been broken! Good lord!"

The noise of the hall gradually increased. Regin silently began to walk to the throne. Her expression where she pursed her lips looked like she desperately tried to keep her calm. Only her two guards were following after her.

Regin who stood in front of the throne, turned around and looked at the nobles.

"I am sorry to have caused anxiety in the place of an enjoyable banquet. —There is another thing that I have to apologize for to you people."

There was a slight shake in the young Princess's voice, and one could understand that she was about to lose her calm. Even so, she firmly straightened up her back, moved only her head, looked up at Viscount Armand and ordered him to step back with her gaze.

Armand revealed a faint smile, and put the broken long sword on the floor and returned to where the nobles present were. He had already accomplished his purpose. There was no longer any need to remain near the throne.

Confirming that the big viscount stood near Melisande, Regin took a small breath. After having briefly muttered something, she looked at the nobles who still had surprised expressions and said.

"I did not want to give you unnecessary anxiety, but rather, letting you hold doubt would be putting the cart before the horse. As Lady Melisande says and as Viscount Armand has proved, this sacred sword is not the real thing."

In a serene tone, Regin admitted the fact. The banquet hall was wrapped in noise. Melisande revealed a smile harking back to a carnivore which had captured its prey and stepped forward from the group of nobles.

"Your Highness. Then, what did you do with the sacred sword?"

The banquet hall once again fell silent. The noble feudal lords held their breath and inquired about Regin's reaction.

Regin looked downward without returning any words. A triumphant smile appeared on Melisande's and Armand's faces. To their eyes, it looked like Regin sank into silence as she could say nothing.

However, the Princess was not trembling in humiliation. While dipping her body in strong tension and being exposed to countless eyes tinged with doubt and confusion, she eagerly investigated the nobles' expressions.

After having slowly counted to ten in her heart, Regin feigned calm and raised her face.

"There is no helping it. —Prime Minister."

Turning her gaze to Badouin who was standing at a corner of the hall, Regin composedly nodded. The cat-faced Prime Minister greatly bowed and went into the room at the back. After ascertaining that, Regin turned towards the nobles.

At this time, she had regained her calm. On her paled face, vitality returned. In contrast, a color of confusion appeared on Melisande, Armand and several nobles' faces.

"The other day, thieves snuck into the royal palace. Those people had two aims: my life and the kingdom's sacred sword, Durandal."

The hall was wrapped in noise different from a little while ago. Regin raised one hand as to calm their agitation. Melisande and Armand stared at Regin with pale faces. It looked like they haven't noticed that Augres and Gerard were casually moving behind them.

"Thanks to the guards, I am standing like this before everybody without a scratch. However, it is a fact that the royal palace has been infiltrated by ruffians. I revised the security system and decided to hide the sacred sword until it calms down."

As if waiting for the Princess to finish speaking, Badouin showed up from the room at the back. It was not just only him; he was accompanied by two soldiers. The two soldiers were carrying a long sword sheathed in a black scabbard. With careful hands, they raised it up highly, as if to display it to the noble feudal lords.

"This is the real Durandal."

Reflecting the light of the chandelier, the sacred sword's guard and scabbard emitted a golden brightness. Sighs of admiration leaked out from among the people present. After a short pause, Regin continued.

"It is my immaturity that made me unable to attract your attention. But, please do not forget. The sacred sword left by the founder Charles is always protecting us."

When Regin finished speaking, the soldiers once again carried Durandal and returned to the room.

Silence fell in the banquet hall. Both Melisande and Viscount Armand lost their voices and sank into silence. Regin threw a chilled glance at them.

There was no longer anyone who turned dubious eyes to the young Princess.



“—Is what happened. It’s no longer a question to make a guess after it was so openly revealed.”

Tigre who finished hearing Mashas’ story heaved a sigh of admiration.

“So, you prepared two imitations of the sacred sword, huh.”

“Yes. One which looks good and another which doesn’t look that good. Then, we displayed the one which doesn’t look good near the throne. That Armand would do such a reckless action was unexpected, but things went according to plan.”

After having admitted an imitation as so, if one were to show something which looks better than the latter and shouted that it was the real one, there would be no one doubting it. Moreover, speaking of those who touched Durandal these past several years, there was only the late Roland and Tigre to whom he entrusted the sacred sword with.

After the end of the civil war, Durandal had always been behind the royal palace’s throne and there was no one who

carefully observed it immediately nearby. Regin gambled there.

"It's the method often used when you know the trick, but... Lord Mashas, was it you who thought about it? Or was it Badouin-dono?"

Mashas shook his head to Tigre's question.

"No. It was her Highness the Princess."

Tigre was very surprised at those words. He had heard from Mashas and Gerard that Regin was eagerly working as a ruler, but he had never thought that she was the kind of girl who had such strength of personality.

*—Oh, but it may not be so.*

Tigre immediately reconsidered. At the time of the civil war two years ago, there was a time when Regin tested Tigre. She exposed her back before the youth's eyes and had him wipe it.

As he was about to remember the scene of that time in detail, Tigre shook his head and chased away the idle thoughts. He pulled himself together and resumed the talk.

"However, the fact that the man called Viscount Armand assertively acted as such means that he definitely had the conviction that Durandal was an imitation."

"Yes. But, it doesn't necessarily mean that it was Melisande who stole it. Granted that, there's no doubt that she has some kind of connection with those who stole Durandal."

Tigre exchanged looks with Mashas, folded his arms and lost himself in thought.

They stole Durandal and brought in Sachstein.

It was extremely effective for a method to shake Brune from the inside and outside, but Tigre could not remove the impression that they were naive about the matter in the banquet hall.

Taking into consideration the fact that domestic noble feudal lords were gathered at the Halo Festival, it was probably the greatest opportunity. But, it should not have been necessary that Melisande herself stood head on and cried out loud. Were they convinced of their victory and let their guards down? Or, was there another purpose behind it?

"Melisande being locked up in the royal palace is..."

"Yes, it's the truth. Guards are posted on watch by turns. We can't carry out torture as she's royalty, but Badouin is investigating. Melisande's crimes will eventually come to light."

"In Nemetacum..."

As he started to ask whether they could not investigate it, Tigre remembered the map he saw during the war council. To investigate Nemetacum which was probably Melisande's base; that place was currently the sphere of influence of the Sachstein army. They would not be able to investigate there if they did not eliminate them.

"In any case, about the matter of Durandal being stolen, I haven't told it even to Gaspar. The only ones knowing about it in this army are you and me. Keep that in mind."

"I got it."

The next day, the combined troops of 5000 of LeitMeritz and Brune headed to the south.



It was not only Zhcted who was surprised at the fact that Sachstein invaded Brune. This has also become a hot topic even in the Muozinel Kingdom located in the southeast of Brune.

"Hahahaha. I never thought that Sachstein would have taken the initiative before us."

Kreshu Shaheen Baramir, known by the nickname of "Red Beard", laughed inside a luxurious tent decorated with gold, silver and jewels.

While approaching 40 years old, his medium build body was wonderfully tightened as usual. The silk clothes which wrapped his body were made by using seven colors so that if there was even one mistake, it might have given a vulgar impression; but he was splendidly dressed.

Although, precisely because of his strange look of greatly hollow eyes, long nose as well as long ears and a red beard extending up to around his chest, it might seem to look good on him.

Damad, one of his close aides, got down on a knee in front of Kreshu. It was this man who got a hold of the information of Sachstein's Brune invasion.

"What should we do? Although they went ahead of us, I do not think that Sachstein will be able to overthrow Brune so easily."

"In the first place, do they have the intention to overthrow Brune? There's also the possibility that they will only cut the territories that they wish for and pull back."

For what purpose did Sachstein invade Brune? Kreshu was concerned about that. If they conquered and annexed Brune, Sachstein would become an existence which greatly surpassed the surrounding countries. However, there were considerable preparations to that end.

From the information that Kreshu got, Sachstein's forces was a total number of 70000, with 50000 from the west and 20000 from the south. As far as the "Red Beard" thought, this was somewhat lacking for conquering Brune.

"Or, is there a way to enable the conquest with this number?"

Having military power did not determine everything. He has never heard a story saying that Sachstein excelled at strategy, but the possibility that they had such means was sufficiently conceivable.

"However given the situation, I'm wondering about when I should attack Brune."

Kreshu had also planned to take action in this spring.

If he were to rush now and advanced his soldiers to Brune, who knows what might happen. Would they be able to be on par with Sachstein and trample down Brune?

*—Either we will go to fight against Sachstein; then we will be attacked by Brune when Sachstein and we are mutually exhausted. Or we will fight against Brune and we will be attacked by Sachstein then.*

In the worst case, one could also consider that Sachstein would shamelessly propose a common front to Brune, Muozinel would then have to fight against both Brune and Sachstein.

Kreshu thought that if he was in Sachstein's position, he would approach Brune with the premise that the proposal might fail. He was that kind of man.

"Damad."

Suddenly, Kreshu called the youth's name.

"Tigrevurmud Vorn is alive, right? How will he move? Do you think he will remain in Zhcted?"

"With all due respect, I will say this. If he was that kind of man, he would have never done something like standing in the way before our army two years ago in the first place."

Last year, Damad was ordered by Kreshu to investigate about Tigrevurmud Vorn's whereabouts. In doing so, he investigated various things about Tigre.

What particularly surprised him was, as he said just now, that Tigre had fought against the Muozinel army on the

land of Agnes. This was because as far as Damad investigated, Tigre had no particular reason to assertively fight against the Muozinel army.

In those days, Tigre only possessed soldiers he borrowed from LeitMeritz and the private armies of a few nobles who cooperated with him. Moreover, half the number of soldiers of the LeitMeritz army had returned to Zhcted and only 2000 soldiers remained under Tigre's command.

Even taking into consideration the possibility that the Muozinel army would go north, Tigre should have looked after his own territory, Alsace.

In that case, he would know what the Muozinel army was aiming for and should have hoped for the LeitMeritz army to come back. He might have also bet on the possibility that Duke Thenardier would attack the Muozinel army's flank.

On top of the fact that Tigre's action was reckless, it could only be described as futile. Who on earth would praise the fact of confronting the enemy with 2000 soldiers? In fact, there was no doubt that Tigre would have lost his life if not for the fact that several miracles occurred simultaneously.

Why did Tigre fight? Damad kept thinking about the reason and finally reached a conclusion. Tigrevurmud Vorn was a man who would not abandon people.

That guess turned into conviction when he investigated about Tigre's activity in Asvarre.

Damad explained about it to Kreshu.

"Rather than thinking it is strange, I can only think that he is that kind of man. It is not as if that man is an unparalleled virtuous person, but he will not abandon the people."

Damad carefully chose his words. There was also the fact that it was because the other party was the King's younger brother, Kreshu; but it was also in order to restrain himself who occasionally became enthusiastic when he was going to talk about Tigre.

"Then, if we capture the people and make them hostages, would Tigrevurmud Vorn surrender?"

To Kreshu's question, Damad shook his head.

"He will not do it. There's been such a precedent in the fight of Agnes."

"So, he is fundamentally a good person, but at the same time his eyes are not clouded over by it, huh."

"However, he will not give up, either. He will certainly come back; even if he is to ride alone into the enemy line."

"All right. Then, I shall send a messenger to Sachstein for the time being."

Kreshu issued instructions while laughing.

"To propose to them to join hands with us and share the land of Brune. Until then, I will observe the situation."

"Then, would we not move the soldiers?"

"It also isn't good not to move them at all, eh. I will make about 20000 go towards Olmutz of Zhcted."

To Kreshu's words, Damad asked as to confirm.

"Will it be a diversion?"

"That's right. But, they won't think that it's a diversion in order to attack Brune. They will think that we're scouting in order to attack Zhcted. Hahahaha."

In other order words, he would play tricks so that it looked like it.

"After lightly clashing with Olmutz, I will send about two reconnaissance units to the land of Agnes. Do you know why, Damad?"

Seeming to be in a good mood, Kreshu asked Damad while humming. The black-haired warrior thought a little and carefully stated his opinion.

"Among the two units, one will investigate the terrain in order to attack Olmutz and the other will inconspicuously investigate the path leading to Brune... something like that?"

In a way as if to say "well done", a smile was on Kreshu's lips.

"That's right. I won't break the stance of attacking Olmutz until the very last minute. Brune probably gave the land of Agnes to Zhcted because they intended to use Zhcted as a shield. But still, there is a method."

The Muozinel army has not yet moved even one soldier. But, the battle has already begun.

Kreshu imagined several future scenarios in his head. He intended to seize the future scenario he hoped for this year for sure.

## *Chapter 3 – Invaders*

There are many forests and few plains in the Sachstein Kingdom's territory. It might be the reason why it's called "the country of mountains and forests" by the neighboring countries.

The geographical features unsuitable for interactions between fellow villages and fellow towns gave birth to countless small countries in ancient times. After crossing one or two mountains, the area would become a foreign land already. The mountains which surround them, and namely, the little level ground and the forests which are still dark even at noon, were respectively the domains that the kings ruled over.

Sachstein was born by crushing such small countries one by one and annexing them.

Because it held such a past, the loyalty of each powerful local clan was still low even now; even though it's been more than 250 years since the founding of the country. A powerful local lord is what is called a local feudal lord in Brune and Zhcted, but they took pride in themselves about the fact that they are descendants of kings of the once small countries.

In addition to the noble feudal lords, the name of the one who controlled such troublesome powerful local lords and governed Sachstein was August Benedict Von Rothschild Sachstein. He was 42 years old this year. He was a King whose peculiarity was his stern face finely chiseled as if made by sharpening a rock.

August was known for the fact that he rarely laughed. It was said that even when he welcomed a queen and also when a prince was born safely, he did not even grin.

"Your Majesty, are you not happy?"

When the queen anxiously asked while holding the newborn baby, August replied "there is no way that I would not be happy" without changing his expression at all.

There was a rumor that such an August had been seen with a smile all over his face one day two years ago. It was when he got to know that Brune's civil war had ended and Duke Thenardier and King Faron had died.

For August who's aiming for Brune's territory, the existences of Thenardier, Faron, and Roland known by the nickname of Black Knight were really annoying.

While Roland was at the western border, August kept losing no matter how many times they tried to invade. Even when he decided to appeal to means other than military power, he was obstructed by either Thenardier or Faron.

Although Thenardier was a man who did not pay attention to the King of his own country, he was faithful and eager when it came to protecting his sphere of influence. Faron too was aware of that; thus there had been several times when both of them cooperated and dealt with Sachstein.

August had also attempted to cause a crack between Faron and Roland, but this also ended in failure. Roland's loyalty and Faron's trust to the Black Knight did not waver in the slightest no matter what scheme he used.

Those three people have disappeared from the face of the earth. It was no wonder that even August would broadly smile. However, he did not do something like immediately gathering soldiers and invading Brune.

"Roland was premeditatedly murdered and Faron died from illness, but I heard that Thenardier was killed in action. In other words, the one who defeated that man is in Brune."

It would be embarrassing to assertively invade thinking that there was no longer an enemy and have the tables turned on him. Besides, he was also concerned about Regin who became the ruler of Brune succeeding Faron.

While arranging his military preparations, August investigated about Brune's internal situation. He investigated in detail about Regin and Tigre and finally decided to move his soldiers.

"The time has come. We will have the white Steller's sea eagle feast on the Red Horse."

The Red Horse (Bayard) is Brune's symbol and the white Steller's sea eagle is Sachstein's. It was said that the white Steller's sea eagle — Hraesvelgr sent the souls of the dead to heaven.

Out of the three Generals whom he trusted, August ordered Brune's invasion to two men: Leonhardt Von Schmidt and Hans Von Kreuger.

The two men respectfully received the appointment.



A flag which depicted a white Steller's sea eagle with its wings spread fluttered as it was struck by the wind.

The 20000 Sachstein troops led by Hans Von Kreuger took up position in a land called Plainville.

Plainville was a place about one or two days march from Nemetacum in the north. It was a very large grassy plain where there was only one hill. The Sachstein soldiers were on standby all over from the top of the hill to the foot of it.

This army called the southern attack troops or also the Kreuger army was mostly composed of infantry and the number of cavalry was less than 100. Only the supreme commander Kreuger, his close aide, the scouts and the messengers were straddling horses.

Kreuger was 31 years old. With gray hair and blue eyes, he had finely chiseled and virile features like a person from Sachstein. Partly because he was born a commoner, he was loved by the soldiers.

"It's going well for the time being."

While rolling two dices in his hand outside of the tent he established on the hilltop, Kreuger muttered. He got those dices made with pebble at the age of 15. The corners became round as they were worn down.

It was practically the only thing which Kreuger always carried on himself.

Kreuger suddenly threw the two dices on the ground.

The numbers which appeared were 2 and 4; Kreuger frowned.

Whenever he rolled the dices on a whim like now and the sum of the numbers which appeared was an odd number, it meant that things were mostly going as wanted. However, when the sum of the numbers which appeared was an even number, it meant that something troublesome might stand in the way.

Of course, it was not absolute. It was generally just Kreuger's personal intuition. There were times when he had failed even when an odd number appeared, and also times when he had succeeded even when an even number appeared. Anyway, the number of pips<sup>[111]</sup> visible after the throw of the dices was enough to make him be cautious.

More than ten days have passed since they stopped in Plainville. So far, the Brune army has attacked them only once. At that time, they (Brune army) were beaten and had fled.

"There might soon be a second battle."

For Brune, there was no way that they could leave Kreuger's troops forever as is.

Kreuger called a subordinate and ordered him to increase the scouting parties.

At that time, the army led by Tigrevurmud Vorn and Eleonora Viltaria was at a distance of about two days from them.

The next day after having left the plain of Vesoul, the Brune/Zhcted combined troops with Tigre as the supreme commander succeeded in joining the Lutece Knight Squadron and the army led by Earl Bouroulec.

Tigre and company who saw them stared wide-eyed. Every one of them was dirty with mud, blood and sweat. If there were people who wounded up bandages all over their bodies, there were also those who had an incomplete outfit as they have lost their weapons and guards. Above all, there were fewer than what Tigre had heard.

—*So they fought and lost, huh.*

“What a cruel way to lose.”

In contrast with Tigre who did not voice out his thoughts, Elen was direct and bitter/harsh. Although Mashas and Lim were there, they did not blame the silver-haired Vanadis. As there were expectations that their military power would increase, they could not hide their discouragement.

“Lord Mashas. Can we distribute medicine, bandages and the reserve of weapons to them?”

“I’ll do it. You should go meet the commanders.”

While stroking his gray beard, Mashas made a wry face.

There was the fact that he should hear the story from them, and it was also decided that Tigre and company would take a rest of about half a koku. They did not establish a camp. This was because they intended to move immediately after they finished resting.

Before long, two men on horseback guided by Rurick, appeared before Tigre and company. One was a knight clad in armor and he looked around 30. Tigre recognized his large build and stern face. He was Scheie of the Lutece Knight Squadron.

"So, the Lutece Knight Squadron's commander is you, huh."

To the surprised Tigre, Scheie brazenly laughed with his face dirty with mud and spurts of blood. The fact that he could make such an expression was probably proof of his mental strength.

"It's been a long time, Earl Vorn. Sorry for reuniting with you in this slightly unsightly appearance."

"No, I am very happy that we could safely meet each other,"

The other man was probably in his mid-twenties. He had well-ordered features and the tips of his chestnut-colored hair were curled. Although it was a strange hairstyle, it strangely suited him well. He wore dark gray armor on his tall figure and hung a sword like hatchet to his waist. This man was probably Earl Bouroullec.

Bouroullec did not break his firm attitude, his words were few.

"Please to make your acquaintance. I am Bouroullec."

There was a sound of anger and humiliation in his voice. The defeat might have been very frustrating for him. After a little thought, Tigre decided to not give words of comfort.

There was the fact that this was their first meeting, but he also judged that a man such as Bouroullec should be left alone as is.

Then, Mashas, Elen and Lim respectively introduced themselves. Although, Bouroullec plainly frowned when he heard that there was a Zhcted army, Scheie interceded and bowed to Elen.

"Although it's a little sudden, could you tell us the story in detail?"

"Then, I shall explain" responded Scheie with a deep voice.

"When walking for about one day from here to the southeast, there is a region called Plainville. The Sachstein army has encamped at the hill there."

Tigre and Elen, who were listening to the story next to him, gave a small nod.

Brune's grassy plains were not so rich in ups and downs. That level ground gave birth to and developed the tremendous rush power and mobility of knights. Taking that into consideration, it might be said that it was rather a matter of course that the Sachstein army would take up their position on the hill.

Scheie kept quiet there, and blew a violent snort. Seemingly having settled as to how he should explain it, he once again opened his mouth. Earl Bouroullec kept silent with a bitter expression.

"The Sachstein army has stretched trenches and fences around the hill. Not only that, they also changed the

structure of the hill itself. The enemy soldiers that we took prisoners called it "Hill Fort (Gelfort)".

"Hill Fort...?"

Tigre frowned to the words he heard for the first time. Seemingly also the case for Elen, she cocked her head in puzzlement. Scheie unconcernedly continued the story.

"It was yesterday that we clashed with the enemy, but before that we have been glaring at each other for about eight days."

Receiving the order to repel the Sachstein army, Scheie made a sortie with the 4000 cavalrymen of the Lutece Knight Squadron. Along the way, he joined with the 6000 cavalrymen of various nobles with Earl Bouroullec as the supreme commander, and they had marched towards Nemetacum.

Then, they engaged the Sachstein army of 20000 which took up their position on the hill of Plainville.

Both Scheie and Bouroullec held anger towards the Sachstein army who was the invader, but they didn't try to attack them (Sachstein). This was because there were many trenches and fences around the hill and they felt that they couldn't be attacked easily.

Above all, both of them understood that they were greatly inferior to the enemy in terms of numbers.

They set up a camp in a place about 500 Alsins (500 meter) away from the Sachstein army and decided to wait for reinforcements. Even assuming that the reinforcements

did not come, it could be said to be fully their victory if they could block the movement of 20000 enemies with 10000 soldiers.

The Sachstein army, which judged that Scheie and company were taking the stance of a long term war, actively set skirmishes from that day on. They attacked by crossbow and stone-throwing from far away; and when the enemy was going to attack, they immediately escaped.

In the case where they didn't use weapons, they used words. They disparaged that the Knight Squadrons could do nothing other than charging, and ridiculed Princess Regin with indecent words. What particularly angered the Lutece Knight Squadron's members was the abusive insults to the Black knight Roland. Still, they endured it.

As the eighth day was about to pass in that way, the Sachstein army came out of the hill.

They put on semi-spherical helmets, wore either an overcoat or armor on a chain mail and hung a small sword to the waist. There were people with a spear and a circular shield and people with only a crossbow without a spear or a shield

All the Sachstein soldiers did not come out of the hill. The number was 10000 though. They tidily formed ranks and approached Scheie and company.

When they were more than 300 Alsins away from the Hill Fort, Scheie and company finally moved.

"We did not think that we would lose on an open field. Even if they escaped to the hill, we would just run through and

trample them down. Although it's surrounded with trenches and fences, it's just a hill after all. This was what we thought, but it was a terrible misapprehension."

Scheie raised a corner of his mouth and revealed a self-deprecating smile.

The Lutece Knight Squadron rode their horses, brandished their spears and carried out a frontal assault. These several days, they kept enduring it. They let their emotions that they had accumulated so far explode.

It was also the same for the army of various nobles led by Bouroullec. They were attacked with crossbow and bolt almost every day, thrown stones at and were exposed to ridicule.

In addition, the enemy was only the infantry. So by making use of the mobility of the knights, they could probably cut off the enemy's back.

While raising clouds of dust, the Brune army rode the grassy plain fast and struck their spears with anger. They pierced the enemy's faces with spears and blew them off with ramming attacks from the horses. And they trampled them down with the horses' hooves when the enemy fell on the ground.

The screams were drowned out by the sound of weapons and new fresh blood scattered on fresh blood. Fragments of chain mail were scattered about on the ground, and broken spears and crossbows were thrown away.

It was also not as if the Sachstein soldiers were one-sidedly beaten. They drew down the knights on horseback by

hanging spears on the horse's legs and cut at them with their small swords. They stabbed at one horse with three or four soldiers and injured it at the stomach or legs. Also, bolts fired with crossbows pierced the knights' armors and they died with a single blow.

The Sachstein army's defense was solid. Even when there were people falling, the soldiers at the back would immediately fill the hole made by those falling. Even when they received the knights' charges, they would huddle up together and hold out until the end and never greatly broke their ranks.

Even so, the Brune army gradually made the Sachstein army retreat. The momentum was clearly on Brune's side.

At this time, Scheie noticed that they have got too close to the Hill Fort. It was only natural as they charged and the Sachstein soldiers retreated, but he got a bad feeling.

No matter how much they attacked, the Sachstein army did not collapse. And yet, they had retreated several hundred Alsins in a short time.

Scheie tried to retreat, but the Sachstein army did not allow it. They fiercely advanced as to fill the gap and stuck to the Brune army. However, when the Brune army began to counterattack, they retreated once again. They drew in Scheie and the others to the Hill Fort.

Bouroullec proposed to Scheie that they should charge. He said that since they have already approached the Hill Fort this far, they should run through until the other side of the hill at once by making use of the knights' charging power.

Scheie got on it. There being 10000 of the enemy here meant that the remaining 10000 were on the hill. But with their current momentum, they should be able to break through.

Scheie and Bouroullec used a battle formation called the "Spear". Brune's Knight Squadrons had several battle formations which matched with the current topography and situation. The "Spear", when seen from above, was something which, as the name suggested, looked like a spear with a triangular tip.

"Charge!"

The Brune army decided for the Nth time to charge. They sent the Sachstein soldiers flying, trampled them down or broke through by knocking them down with spears. They fiercely jumped to the Hill Fort as such.

"That was certainly a fortress."

At that time, Bouroullec opened his mouth for the first time in the stead of Scheie.

The Sachstein army had dug trenches, and used the soil obtained from that to change the hill into a solid fortress. They made stairs, walls, and steep slopes and built a space which would be advantageous in a fight for them.

The Brune army's charge was stopped and the soldiers became stranded.

The battle in the Hill Fort became one-sided. We were divided with fences, separated in passages with zigzags

and were attacked with spears and bolts from countless blind spots. Stones were thrown from above as well.

The Brune soldiers fought hard, but one soldier, who should have charged with a group of at least ten people, would find himself alone and surrounded by enemies before he noticed. He would be skewered by spears; his head smashed by stones and he would be shot with a crossbow.

"So, their retreat was a trap in order to drag us in?"

When Scheie guessed so, it was already too late. If their advance became almost impossible, they had no way but to retreat. Scheie made the 500 cavalrymen who were in the rear make a detour and tried to attack the Hill Fort from another direction. He was going to retreat while they were dealing with the Sachstein soldiers there.

But, this failed. The Sachstein soldiers swiftly moved about in the Hill Fort and were about to pour bolts all at once on the 500 cavalrymen. Meanwhile, the attack on Scheie and Bouroullec's side did not stop at all. The Hill Fort was made so that no matter where they attacked from, they would immediately be dealt with.

When Scheie and Bouroullec commanded the soldiers and knights who somehow survived and went away from the Hill Fort, the number of soldiers had decreased to less than 7000.

"It was a complete defeat."

When Scheie finished with that short sentence, a heavy silence swooped down.

—*They changed the structure of the hill...?*

Tigre made a low groan. His idea was different from things such as building an embankment or taking up position in an elevated place. The enemy's commander would end up being able to make a convenient fortress if there were a hill of such size.

Elen also looked downward with a difficult expression and did not utter a single word. She was probably not able to think of a countermeasure immediately. Pretending to be calm, Tigre said to Scheie and Bouroullec.

“Thank you for the valuable information, both of you.”

“Will it be helpful to you?”

Scheie laughed exaggeratedly baring his teeth. Tigre nodded.

“I will show you that it will.”

Afterwards, Scheie and Bouroullec consented to coming under Tigre's command. Although their troops were nearly 7000, there were many injured people, too. Only about 5000 were able to fight.

“Combined with ours, it'll make 10000, huh. Well, it's better than 5000.”

Elen lightly laughed as she said so and Tigre also agreed with a wry smile.

“Even if the allies increase, we should be thankful that we can go on without worrying about food and fuel.”

This was because they could purchase them in cities or towns of the neighborhood as the Brune army if necessary. They had trouble with that at the time of the civil war two years ago.

"By the way, Tigre."

When they had finished their rest and had resumed the march, Elen suddenly made a serious expression and said to the youth.

"How long do you intend to stick with the name  
"Brune/Zhcted combined army"?"

"The official name is the "Brune's feudal lords and Zhcted's Vanadis combined army". I intended to consider it, but..."

Tigre answered so with a straight face. Elen shrugged her shoulders.

"But it cannot be called considerate to just line words up like that."

It was as Elen said, so Tigre could only play it off by rummaging his darkish red hair.

He had no intention to use the name 'Silver Meteor Army' again. This was because it would make him remember the civil war and there were also people who didn't have a good impression of the Zhcted army.

However with Tigre's poor vocabulary, he wasn't able to think of a good name.

"It can't be helped. I'll think of something before we engage the enemy. A name which will make the enemy

shudder and tremble with fear just by hearing it will be good."

"Then, shall we go with "Wind Princess of the Silver Flash (Silvfrau) Army"?"

As Tigre jokingly said so, Elen lightly poked the youth.

When the sun inclined to the west sky, Plainville could be seen in the distance. Tigre and company stopped and set up a camp.

The evening meal was wheat rice porridge cooked together with plenty of wild grasses, a mass of cheese and salted salmon; moreover with one cup of wine. One might eat the salmon as is or put it in the wheat rice porridge. Since the salmon was awfully salty depending on the kind, it was necessary to be cautious.

Among the soldiers, there were also those who warmed their salmon over the bonfire. A fragrant smell drifted in the area, and the people around also came to warm their salmon. While biting the warmed salmon like that, there were also some complaining that they wanted alcohol.

At the place of the evening meal of that day, Tigre consulted with everyone about the new name of the army. There were Elen, Lim, Rurick, Mashas, Gaspar and Titta.

"Then, how about we use the name "Black Meteor" army likened to Lord Tigrevurmud's bow?"

"If you want a long one, isn't it all right with "Red Horse (Bayard) and Black Dragon (Zirnitra)" army?"

Rurick and Gaspar gave names for the army as if competing, but before Elen and Lim said something, they were rejected by Mashas who had an amazed face.

"Then, what about "Moonlight Knights (Lune Lumen)" army?"

At that time, Titta who prepared the meal for everybody said that in a casual tone. Mashas shook his gray beard, raised a "Hou" voice of admiration and Lim nodded so as to say that she had no objection. Gaspar shook his body as to say he agreed and Rurick put his hand on his bald head.

Titta's face turned bright red as their gazes concentrated on her and she waved her hands in panic.

"N-No, um, I think that the moonlight is beautiful, so... Besides, her Highness Princess Regin also seemed to like this title."

Tigre broadly smiled as he was somehow happy about the fact that the Princess' name came out of the chestnut-haired girl's mouth.

On the occasion of the civil war two years ago, Titta had acted as Regin's personal caretaker. There was no one more suitable than her. Regin had also said that she did not mind if it was the maid serving Tigre and accepted Titta. Although it was a very short period, there had certainly been an exchange of feelings between the two girls.

"You will be able to meet her Highness soon. She will surely be glad."

When Tigre said so, Titta's face became more and more red and she looked downward. When she finished preparing the food, she hurriedly left the tent. Elen who saw her off turned happy eyes to Tigre.

"Which reminds me, it seems to be a very old title. Well, I think that 'Moonlight Knights' is okay."

"That's right. Then, let's go with that."

Tigre easily accepted it too and the "Moonlight Knights Army" was born here.

It was about morning on the next day that the Moonlight Knights Army confronted the Sachstein army which was on the hill of Plainville. As he let the whole army go on standby in a place 500 Alsins (about 500 m) away from the hill, Tigre alone advanced his horse and approached the hill.

A grassy plain was spread out around the hill and there were no places where one could hide himself. Scouting was almost impossible. In that case, Tigre thought that he might as well see it with his own eyes.

*—They have crossbows, so I must proceed carefully.*

If Elen was with him, she could stop the arrows with the power of her Silver Flash; but Tigre did not want to use her power as much as possible. He didn't want to reveal their cards to the enemy.

Tigre stopped his horse as he approached up to a place about 400 Alsins away from the Hill Fort by eye measurement. It was said that the flying distance for a crossbow was 350 Alsins. Whether or not he would be aimed at by a bolt was another story, but it would be dangerous to approach further.

Tigre who strained his eyes and observed the Hill Fort's dignified appearance leaked out a breath of admiration before long.

Trenches and fences surrounded the foot of the hill. But, the trenches were not only dug in a horizontal straight line, they seemed to be dug both vertically and horizontally and were combined together. Also in regards to the fence, only one was in sight, despite that it was erected in double, triple layers.

The Sachstein soldiers standing on watch were watching the situation as they hid themselves in the fence and shade.

"I see. A fort, huh."

There was neither an attack nor heckling from the enemy. Since Tigre was alone, they would probably just keep waiting and see.

While being wrapped in a tense atmosphere, Tigre deliberately feigned a calm attitude and returned to his own army. Masha welcomed him.

"Didn't you get a little too close? I felt chilly just watching you, you know?"

In a scolding tone, the old Earl thanked the youth. After Tigre laughed and returned "it was all right", he shook his head with a difficult expression.

"I don't understand it clearly, but it seems to have quite a troublesome structure. Even considering Lord Scheie and company's story, it doesn't seem to be something where you can say 'if we can break into it, we'll be able to manage somehow'."

"This means that we should seriously think about a castle siege battle, huh."

"But, we don't have siege weapons. Neither do we have enough time too."

While answering, Tigre thought that this was probably the enemy General's aim. If they proceeded to the battlefield with the plan for a field battle and then were suddenly forced to a castle siege battle, they could not fight unless they had a very large army.

*—A castle siege battle, huh...*

There were two kinds of castle siege battles which immediately came to Tigre's mind. Either surrounding the fort with a large army, attacking and annihilating the enemy, or setting up a drawn-out battle, hold out and win. If they had siege weapons, they would have the means to boldly attack. And while daunting the enemy with catapults, they would destroy the fences with battering rams and invade the fort.

But, neither of the two could be used at the present situation. Their side had only half the enemy's number. It

could not be said that food and funds were abundant. There were no siege weapons, too. Even if they were to prepare one, it would take considerable time and effort.

"What do we do? Even if we add Lord Scheie and company's soldiers, we will be 10000 excluding the injured soldiers. I think that we can also choose to wait for further reinforcements while restraining the enemy."

Mashas showed a careful stance. Their allies have already lost once. There was no doubt that this news has reached the capital Nice and also the enemy and their allies who were to the west.

When considering the fact that he would influence the overall morale, Mashas' opinion was also sound.

"Then, let's sneak around to the south side of this Hill Fort."

If the Sachstein army were supplied food from Nemetacum and the port towns group, they should interfere with that. Although they couldn't completely cut off the supply road with a military force of 10000, it was possible to delay supplies even a little by making a detour.

"You're right. When sneaking around the south side, there is a narrow river. Let's go up to nearby it."

Tigre's order was conveyed and the Moonlight Knights Army started their march while keeping a constant distance from the Hill Fort. The sound of horses' hooves and the sound of armor intermittently shook the atmosphere.

When the Moonlight Knights Army appeared in Plainville, Kreuger was drawing up a plan on a parchment on top of the hill. Although called parchment, it connected several pieces of paper and was big enough that a human could lie down on it.

The writing brush was the stem of a reed which had become hard. Something which dissolved soot and glue was put on the tip. While grasping the writing with his right hand and rolling the dices with his left hand, Kreuger was thinking about whether or not there was a method to further strengthen this Hill Fort.

It was not like Hans Von Kreuger had this name since he was born. When he was a child, he was called just "Hans" or "Son of Paul, the carpenter".

He was a commoner who was born and raised in a small town.

In the Sachstein Kingdom, commoners did not have a family name. They were given a family name only after they reached a rank higher than knight. Moreover, the honorary title "Von" included between the name and the family name was not allowed unless one belonged to a powerful clan, noble or royalty.

Hans' mother was a good-natured housewife. She often went to visit his father's workshop with her very young son and delivered bread and water. There was a well near the workshop, and since there were also other housewives there, it was ideal for them to engage in idle chats.

While his mother was engaged in idle chats with the other housewives on the side of well, Hans was spoiled by his father's fellow workers. They taught two things to Hans. Work and hobby — that's, the structure of a building and gambling.

Hans had fun betting with them as they used pebbles or fruits of acorn as currency. Although his father was a man who never did gambling, he did not stop his friends and also only told Hans "not to bet money".

At the age of 15, Hans went on a war. Although a war, it was just a subjugation of bandits. In order to defeat the bandits who made a certain mountain their stronghold and attacked towns and villages, the feudal lord recruited soldiers.

From the town where Hans lived, 15 people including him followed the feudal lord as soldiers. The elder man among them acted as the captain of the 15 people.

His father's fellow workers gave him two dices made by sharpening pebbles.

Being roped into a war, although depending on time and circumstances, was not necessarily a disastrous thing. During that time, one could have food and, although little, there was a salary, too. One could expect a reward if he achieved a distinguished service. The number of those, who were unable to endure a poor living and a living with an unknown future, thus dreamed of distinguishing themselves in a battlefield, were not few.

Hans' house was not that poor, and it was expected that the young boy himself would succeed his father. His skill as a carpenter was so-so, but more than that his plans and adjustment of work were better. Battle should have been only mere work for Hans.

But, Hans showed talent here. He pointed out the problems in trenches and fences around the ally camp and discovered that there was an opening in the defense of the enemy who had shut themselves in the mountain.

The captain who heard Hans' talk reported it to a soldier serving the feudal lord. That soldier likewise reported it to his lord, too. The feudal lord, far from being displeased, was greatly impressed and took an interest in the young boy.

The battle ended in a one-sided victory on the feudal lord's side. The feudal lord had assaulted the weak point of the enemy defense that Hans had discovered and utterly defeated the bandits.

Afterwards, Hans was promoted by the feudal lord and came to work in the lord's mansion.

The boy learnt about castle construction; other than the work in the battlefield, he raised achievements even in the improvement of buildings and was given the family name of Kreuger with the title of knight. Furthermore, over the years he obtained achievements of military services in battles with the neighboring countries such as Brune and Asvarre, and was recognized as a noble and was given an honorific title.

Kreuger had a dream. It was to build a fortress which did not let any enemy come near.

This Hill Fort was one form of his dream. Trenches combined in length and breadth, divide the enemy; or twofold or threefold fences to impede the enemy and stairs and walls in order to fight effectively.

Kreuger made a simple hill change into a solid fortress in one night. He built a battlefield that the enemy did not imagine. What was left to do was only luring the enemy to attack and repel them every time.

As he received the report from his adjutant that the enemy had started to move, Kreuger folded up the parchment.

Dream time was over. He now had to return as a General of an army.

"It looks like the Brune army as well as the Zhcted army intends to sneak around to the south side of this Hill Fort."

"Well, it's the right decision."

After answering so, Kreuger said to his adjutant.

"It's good and all to be serious, but I don't mind naming them the 'Brune army'. According to the report, the Zhcted army is approximately 2000, right?"

While looking at the adjutant who answered "as you wish", Kreuger pondered a little. They had walked up to a place where they could look down at the Hill Fort's south side.

—*The Zhcted army, huh... Then is Tigrevurmud Vorn there?*

There were several reasons why Sachstein decided to have their invasion in this time, but one of them was regarding Tigre.

The young hero who killed Duke Thenardier proceeded to Zhcted as a guest General and lived there for one year. As far as Sachstein had investigated, Tigre was expected to stay there for three years. There was no doubt that Tigre had become the bridge that connected Brune and Zhcted.

*—Supposing that Brune informed Zhcted of our invasion and Zhcted decided to send soldiers, I feel like they responded too quickly.*

While he kept thinking, Kreuger stood at the south end of the top of the Hill Fort. A large quantity of armors and thousands of horses were clamoring in the grassy plain. Among them, many of the Brune army's Red Horse Flags and the Zhcted army's Black Dragon Flags were floating. With the river at their back, they took up position.

Judging from the number of battle flags, the Zhcted army being 2000 was probably true.

"Still, taking the right flank, they're quite assertive. I thought that they intended to aim only for a good place without fighting if possible, like the mercenaries of our country, but..."

For Kreuger, that point was unexpected. Even if the Zhcted army appeared as reinforcements, he thought that they would force Brune to a dangerous place and shove their neck in only the local battle they think they would be able

to win. Weren't reinforcements from another country something like this?

Since the Zhcted army intended to fight, the clash with them was inevitable.

"Shall I clash with them at an early stage?"

Kreuger muttered. He hasn't yet fought against an army for Zhcted.

If he left them as is, the food carried from Nemetacum and the port towns group would be delayed. Besides, it was a matter of course to reduce the numbers of the enemy in front of him before reinforcements came.

Kreuger called his adjutant and ordered him to take the field with 10000 soldiers.

"I will lead 5000 soldiers and sneak around to their left side. The remaining 5000 will stand by within the Hill Fort and they will strike the enemy after we have dragged them in."

The Zhcted army was there. They could not let their guard down.

The report that movement of the Hill Fort has begun to become busy was brought by the reconnaissance units.

*—Do they intend to attack?*

Tigre once again confirmed the current battle formation. In the center, the main force led by Tigre and Mashas was 4000. The right wing with 2000 soldiers led by Elen and Lim. 3000 soldiers led by Earl Bouroullec and Scheie of the

Lutece Knight Squadron on the left wing. And the reserve unit of 1000 in the rear.

The right wing's numbers being less than the center's and the left wing's was because it was only organized with the Zhcted soldiers.

Wind blew letting a dry sound resound through the grassy plain. The sun was about to reach the zenith and the clouds floating in the sky temporarily blocked the sun as they were spread by the wind.

It was then that the Sachstein soldiers appeared from the south side of the Hill Fort. When they came out one after another from the Hill Fort, they quickly formed their ranks.

This time, Tigre witnessed the Sachstein soldiers for the first time.

Their armaments were different from the Brune soldiers'. They put on a semi-spherical helmet; they either wore an overcoat on top of a chain mail, or an armor and hung a short sword to the waist. In their hands, they held either a crossbow or a spear and shield.

After a quarter koku, the Sachstein army finished their lineup. The number of soldiers was 10000. They were all infantry and judging from the battle flag, their center was 4000 and the right wing and the left wing were respectively 3000.

"I see. They're attempting to lure while pretending that they want to attack."

Next to Tigre, while stroking his gray beard, Mashas said. Tigre agreed, too.

The two of them were roughly in the middle of the main force which was in the center.

A flat terrain with nothing obstructing. And, Brune's Knight Squadrons excelled at charging power. As they rode fast the grassy plain, they spearheaded towards the enemy many times.

The sound of a horn echoed and both armies advanced little by little.

In the Moonlight Knights Army, those who set up a bow were only the Zhcted soldiers of the right wing. Almost all the Brune soldiers set up a long shield either horizontally or held it upwards. They intended to endure the storm of bolts of the Sachstein army without engaging in an arrow battle.

The long shield had a thin iron plate affixed to the board of oak and moreover it was lined with fur. Although heavy, it was solid and could block common arrows.

On the other hand, 5000 to 6000 soldiers set up crossbows in the Sachstein army.

A change occurred in the Moonlight Knights Army's movement. In contrast to the center and the left wing which continued to advance, the Zhcted army stopped their advance.

This had been arranged beforehand. Neither Elen nor Lim would do something like jumping into the range of crossbows without holding a shield.

As the distance shortened, the Sachstein army began the attack. The sound of thousands of bowstrings snapping intensely struck the atmosphere; the shot bolts pierced the atmosphere and attacked the Moonlight Knights Army at a tremendous speed.

A sound as if a storm had struck a very high, steep cliff echoed on the battlefield. Most of the bolts shot by the crossbows of the Sachstein army were blocked by the long shields also partly due to the distance helping block them. Even so, several hundred of them crushed shields, penetrated the armor and pierced the soldiers' bodies. Groans leaked here and there and screams were raised.

"Advance!"

Elen who led the right wing of the Moonlight Knights Army shouted as she raised her long sword. Although the Zhcted army also had injured soldiers due to the volley of bolts, in addition to the fact that they took enough distance, there were only a few injured because Elen had created a wall of wind with Arifal's power.

The Zhcted army quickly advanced and, as they shortened the distance to the enemy before them up to about 150 Alsins, they stopped their advance. They nocked arrows on bows and shot the arrows as payback for a little while ago.

The rain of arrows poured down on the Sachstein army. Although the Sachstein soldiers held up circular shields, it was not something which could be defended against. Screams rose in various places, and the Sachstein soldiers fell down one after another as they either put their hands on their faces or held their shoulder or arm.

"Second salvo! Get ready!"

Elen shouted once again. The advantage of the bow was that second shots could be released immediately. On that point, it was different from a crossbow which took time, where one must cock the string again every single time. Moreover, Elen even ordered a third salvo and a rain of arrows was poured down. Regarding the 2000 Zhcted soldiers, the left wing of the enemy before their eyes was about 3000. At the stage of the arrow battle, their numbers should have decreased by even a little.

"So far, it's a simple battle, huh."

While standing at the vanguard of the Zhcted army and watching the progress of the battle, Elen squinted seemingly wanting to say that she didn't like it. Both armies clashed head-on in this vast plain. It was a picture where either the side with the numerical superiority or the one with momentum would have the edge.

"However..."

Lim who was next to her looked up at the rear of the Sachstein army. The Hill Fort where several mechanisms were performed towered there; as if lying in wait for Elen and company.

In addition, Elen had one more factor of concern. She quietly dropped her gaze to the long sword that she tightly grasped in her right hand.

*—There isn't one here, huh.*

She took a breath of relief. What she was concerned about was demons.

It was said that Torbalan had disguised himself as a human. Vodyanoy too, when he was repelled by Tigre and Mila, it seemed that he appeared immediately close to the camp.

They were not afraid of humans. It was not like they frequently appeared only in the middle of nowhere or in wastelands, either.

If they felt like it, they (demons) could appear anywhere.

In preparation for the appearance of a demon, she had to refrain from using her Dragonic Skills as much as possible.

In the first place, Elen didn't intend to use her Dragonic Skills on a human. The black knight Roland was the only exception.

But, she had to enforce that stance more thoroughly from here on out. At most, she might create a wall of wind in a wide range to weaken a rain of arrows.

"Eleonora-sama?"

Lim wonderingly looked at the Vanadis who was her best friend as well as her master. Elen pulled herself together and focused on the enemy. At that time, the Zhcted army also put away their bows and set up swords or spears.

As Elen put up her long sword, she shouted while riding her horse.

"—Charge!"

Raising a war cry, the Zhcted army let the sound of horses' hooves roar in the grassy plain.

With the charge of the right wing as a signal, Tigre also ordered the center and the left wing to charge. He could not move the soldiers elsewhere. The Hill Fort was in the way, forcing one unit circle around to the rear.

In the center and left wing, the Brune soldiers clashed with the Sachstein soldiers.

They struck the enemy's heads with the long handles of their spears and swatted the points of their swords on the enemy's faces. Along with wordless voices of agony, they were intensely choked by the smell of blood hanging over. The sky should have been blue and the earth covered with green. But now, one part of the earth was changing its color into something ugly due to blood, mud and corpses.

Raising a beast-like roar, a Brune soldier struck an enemy's face with a sword. He did not cut him. He just brought him down with all his strength. A dull sound resounded and the Sachstein soldier whose face was bloodstained fell down.

But, as that Sachstein soldier, not losing consciousness, extended his hand and caught the Brune soldier's leg, he forcibly dragged him down. Another Sachstein soldier stabbed the Brune soldier who fell many times with a spear. There, another Brune soldier cut him, and thus bodies piled up on other bodies.

At the moment when they clashed, the momentum of both armies seemed to be on par, but the Sachstein side began to gradually retreat. Their movements were flexible and

when Tigre noticed it, the battlefield had moved to the north about 200 Alsins (about 200 m) from the start point.

The Hill Fort looked bigger than a while ago.

"It's bad."

Tigre gave the entire army an order for retreat. But, a retreat when there was momentum on the ally side was difficult. There was the easy to understand reason that the Brune soldiers wanted to drive away the invaders and that raised their morale. The army of the Lutece Knight Squadron and Earl Bouroullec from the left wing also held a desire for revenge.

Moreover, the Sachstein army didn't forget to do a modest counterattack while retreating. They provoked the Brune army by throwing stones and shooting bolts with crossbows, and tried to draw them in. Without any other choice, Tigre decided to move himself. He tightly grasped his black bow and checked the quiver attached to the horse's saddle.

"Lord Mashas. Can I leave this place to you?"

"It can't be helped, huh... Please, don't overdo it. Also, keep track of the arrows' range."

He meant that he should hide the fact about making an arrow hit the target in the marking point of 300 Alsins.

When the old Earl said so, Tigre advanced his horse so as to weave his way through the soldiers. The youth replied to Mashas by raising up his black bow highly.

The leading group of the central forces could be seen soon. Tigre nocked an arrow to the black bow.

He calmly observed Sachstein's leading group. After confirming the person giving instruction to other soldiers, the youth set up his bow and drew it to the limit.

The sound of the bowstring shaking was drowned out by the sound of weapons. However, the arrow flew to its target as if being sucked up and pierced the back of the neck of one Sachstein soldier. When that soldier raised a beast-like groan and fell down, Tigre nocked a new arrow to the black bow.

It was accurate to a frightening extent. In a situation where he might hit an ally if he was to make one mistake, Tigre shot three more arrows and killed three Sachstein soldiers looking like captains. The Sachstein army's movement became noticeably dull and disorder resulted.

—Now!

Tigre advanced his horse at a stretch and jumped to the vanguard of his army. On horseback, he looked back towards his army.

"Retreat! Retreat!"

At the time when he raised his black bow and shouted, a bolt was released from the Sachstein army. Tigre, who caught in the edge of his field of vision that something was headed towards him, reflexively twisted his body.

The bolt pierced the atmosphere and flew as it tore the overcoat that Tigre was wearing. If it had been three

fingers off to the left, Tigre would have suffered a serious wound.

In addition to the order, the fact that the supreme commander was aimed at with a crossbow made the soldiers around him regain their calm. They first began to retreat, and their movement was spreading little by little to other soldiers.

Though the left wing led by Scheie and Bouroullec was considerably pushing out as they were drawn in by the enemy, they noticed the central forces' movement, finally stopping their advance and forcibly began to retreat.

Tigre slowly advanced his horse and returned next to Mashas. Considering the fact that he was aimed at by a crossbow, he should have hurriedly withdraw; but there were also circumstances on the fact that he had to keep dignity as supreme commander. It would also not look good if he hid himself at the horse's neck.

Until he was distant enough from the enemy, as expected even Tigre wasn't released from tension.

When he returned to Mashas' side in that way, a new report was brought.

"Enemy on the right side! The number is about 5000!"

It was the detached force led by Kreuger. Tigre gave a small groan. The enemy was fully making use of the advantage of a large army. At this rate, the Zhcted army led by Elen was in danger.

"Move all the reserve units. And have them attack the flank of the enemy's detached force."

As he couldn't directly say "go help the Zhcted army"; it was difficult to lead combined military forces.

On the other hand, Elen commanding the right wing wasn't so shaken at the report that a detached force had appeared. The silver-haired Vanadis left the command to Lim, cut several times through the enemy's left wing and repeated the action of withdrawing after killing a Sachstein soldier.

She alone has already slain nearly 30 to 40 enemy soldiers. Although only sweat has yet to cling to her silver hair, spurts of blood was scattered on her breastplate and gauntlets. It could be summed up as the Vanadis that was famed for being a match for a thousand living up to her reputation.

Thanks to Elen's active role, the Sachstein army's left wing greatly retreated. It was not that they attracted to this side, they were purely cautious of Elen.

"Lim. I'm going all out."

"Don't tell me you intend to cut through 5000 enemies?"

"Yes, I do. Don't you think that I can surprise the enemy? Although, it's just if the enemy's detached force approaches our side. Unexpectedly, I've the feeling that they won't get closer any more than this"

While asserting so as her eyes shone with fighting spirit. Elen calmly watched the flow of the battlefield. While

sighing with a resigned face, Lim nodded at her lord's words.

"When the enemy understands that their left wing doesn't match our movement, the detached unit won't attack. Then, we'll retreat together with our allies."

"I understand. Then just in case, let's head to the direction where the enemy's detached force is."

The Zhcted army retreated little by little. The detached force led by Kreuger didn't recklessly set an attack as Elen and Lim predicted.

When the Moonlight Knights Army came up to the position where the river was at their back, they stopped their retreat. The Sachstein soldiers who saw that began to return little by little to inside the Hill Fort.

"So, the first round is over, huh..."

As Tigre took a small breath, he checked their damage. During the short fight of about one koku, there was a little less than 200 dead people in the central main force. Mashas shook his head with a bitter face.

"We've been pulled in by the enemy more than I thought. We've incurred a fair amount of casualties at the stage of retreat."

Less than 100 casualties had appeared for the Zhcted army of the right wing and as for Scheie and company of the left wing, they have more than 300 casualties.

The enemy's number is greater, so if they incurred almost the same amount of casualties as them, it would be the Moonlight Knights Army that would become disadvantageous if they continued to fight.

For the time being, Tigre ordered the retrieval and burial of corpses, the scouting out of the vicinity and the setting of a camp. This must be done before it got dark.

When the setting of the camp was over, Elen, Lim, Mashas, Scheie and Bouroullec came to Tigre's tent. Clear fatigue could be seen on Scheie and Bouroullec's faces.

"I am sorry. I have let the soldiers die needlessly."

As he let his face distort with bitterness, Scheie bowed his head. Next, Bouroullec also expressed words of apology. Tigre shook his head and respectively tapped their shoulders so as to thank them.

"There is still an opportunity."

He said only that. It was certainly a severe blow that they lost more than 300 soldiers, but it would be troublesome if they weakened due to it. In addition, he was also trying to persuade himself like this.

The six people sat down as to make a circle. Titta appeared with a tray with porcelain cups for the number of people here. She put a porcelain cup in front of each person. They contained wine diluted with honey.

While putting the porcelain cup on his mouth, Tigre asked Elen and Lim.

"What do you think after having clashed with them?"

"They're a troublesome enemy. After seeing the central main force led by Lord Tigrevurmud and Lord Mashas, I understood very well that the enemy was skilled at pulling us in."

Having answered so in a serene tone was Lim. While commanding her own army, she also kept a close eye on her allies' movements. She noticed the fact that the central main force was advancing — no, was made to advance little by little.

"Can you tell us how it was dealt with by the Zhcted army?"

Scheie asked with a serious expression. Lim kept quiet and showed hesitation, but Elen calmly answered while drinking the wine with honey.

"I cut through the enemy line several times and make them retreat."

Tigre and Mashas revealed wry smiles, and Scheie and Bouroullec looked at each other. After a short pause of two breaths, Bouroullec asked reservedly while playing with his curly hair.

"Is that Zhcted's style of fighting?"

"But, when you think about it, it's quite effective. Surprise the enemy, scare them and force them to retreat, huh"

Scheie seemed to be very impressed and began to ponder over something as he put a hand on his chin. Tigre looked once again at all the people present.

"How do you think that the enemy will move from now on?"

Tigre was thinking that they would probably come up with the same move.

"It'll probably be the same strategy. While shutting themselves in on that hill, they will send out soldiers and try to lure us in. Until we possess a military power higher than the enemy, we'll be able to fight satisfactorily with them."

Elen answered, and Mashas and Lim nodded at the same time. Scheie and Bouroulec accepted her words while frowning. Bouroulec bitterly struck his knee with his hand.

"If we could just bring them into the open field, we wouldn't lose against those Sachstein stray dogs."

"So, unless we somehow drag the enemy out of that hill, a short term decisive battle will be impossible, huh..."

Even Elen, Lim or Mashas could not seem to come up with a plan which could make this possible.

At that time, a voice from outside the tent called out to Elen.

"I am sorry. I have something to tell Vanadis-sama..."

Tigre and Elen looked at each other. This was because it was Rurick's voice. Although Elen revealed a quizzical

expression, she immediately stood up. She could not say "feel free to speak here".

"I'll be right back."

Elen went out of the tent. Tigre and company who were now five once again thought about a countermeasure. Each expressed the best plan which he/she could come up with, but some sort of flaw was always pointed out by someone else and they could not settle it.

They dismissed for tonight for the time being and decided to hold a war council when the day dawned and after they watched the enemy's situation.

On the other hand, there was Kreuger in the Hill Fort.

The damage that the Sachstein army incurred in this battle was about 1000. It was as Tigre and company had guessed.

"We did a poor battle. Just because it went well so far, I might have gotten a little cocky."

Kreuger sighed while playing with the stone dices in his left hand. While challenging the opponent with a numerical superiority, they suffered almost the same number of casualties as them. Although it could not be said that they lost, if anything, it was an unpleasant result.

"But, that was a Zhcted's Vanadis whom I heard rumors about, huh..."

While issuing instructions to the soldiers, Kreuger leaked a mutter which mixed admiration with annoyance. He had seen the figure of Elen who freely swung her long sword when she charged alone into the left wing of the Sachstein army.

The silver-haired Vanadis showed no signs of being daunted by the Sachstein soldiers' drawn swords and spear points; whenever she let her sword flash, a Sachstein soldier fell down as he became a corpse which did not talk.

Before attacking Brune, Kreuger had investigated about Vanades.

『They are owners of extraordinary beauty, wielding a weapon in a battlefield and are battle maidens who are a match for a thousand that skillfully consigned their enemy to oblivion.』

When he heard such stories, he thought that it was an exaggeration.

"After all, there are only men in a battlefield. Those who would take an old woman for a beautiful woman are also few in numbers. Even regarding skill in military arts, a woman would be praised for just being able to swing a sword as she was taught."

He had once talked so in a joking tone and made his subordinates laugh.

"I guess if the black knight Roland is a storm which mows down all, that girl would be a gale which sharply cuts and tears. It was a terrible misunderstanding. This is what it means to 'surpass one's expectations'."

What surprised Kreuger was that it was not just the Vanadis. In the enemy's central main force, there was a man who shot arrows in succession and killed Sachstein soldiers one after another.

Speaking of a Brune person skilled with a bow, there was no one other than Tigrevurmud Vorn. According to the report of a soldier, his outward appearance also matched with the one from the information he obtained prior.

"They're indeed a formidable enemy. Now then, how will they move? Do they intend to remain near the Hill Fort as is?"

Kreuger was thinking that it would be convenient like that if that was the case. After all, it was his duty to hold back such a formidable enemy.

When the army of 50000 led by General Schmidt approaches the capital Nice, his side would just abandon the Hill Fort. They had food, water and fuel for 10 days. Even if the supply from Nemetacum and the port towns are late, they would still endure it.

But at this time, one concern/worry was born in Kreuger's mind.

Tigre and Elen. If he managed to defeat Brune's young hero and one of Zhcted's Vanadeses in the battlefield or capture them, it would definitely be an extraordinary achievements. In addition, there was no doubt that it would have a big influence in the future battles.

Kreuger was a man who climbed from being a commoner to his current position. Apart from his dream of building a

fortress that he envisioned, he also had great ambition as such.

He had the self-confidence that this Hill Fort was an impregnable fortress. But it would be difficult to defeat Tigre and Elen while secluding himself in here.

They should probably come out for a bout at some point. When he thought so, Kreuger stared at the dices within his left hand. After having hesitated a little, he put the dices into his clothes without rolling them.

He decided to watch the situation for a little more.

## *Chapter 4 – The Illusory Princess of the Hollow Shadow (Shervid)*

It was a half koku after the war council barrenly ended that Tigre was called to Elen's tent. In the sky, the veil of darkness went down and only the moon and countless stars were shining.

It was when the youth had just finished eating his evening meal with Titta, Mashas and Gaspar.

He came to her tent as he was led by Rurick. A carpet was spread out, and there, where a lamp with a firm structure was put, was one woman other than Elen and Lim.

"I have kept you waiting, Earl Vorn."

Her bluish black hair was long enough to reach up to her waist and her hair ornament of a white rose shone. Red and purple roses also garnished the coloring of the pure white dress which she wore. Coupled with her transient smile, that gave her a graceful impression.

She was the Vanadis Valentina Glinka Estes with the nickname of "Illusory Princess of the Hollow Shadow". Though there was an ominous long-handled scythe composed of red and black in her hand, it mysteriously looked good with her.

"It looks like she arrived just a while ago; by carriage."

Elen sitting down next to Valentina explained with a frown. Lim was quietly sitting a step away. Porcelain cups were put respectively in front of each of them; they seemed to contain wine.

Tigre looked back towards Rurick, unable to hide his confusion. When the bald headed knight revealed a wry smile as he was troubled, he bowed and walked away. His action was very correct, but only this time did Tigre feel like Rurick ran away from him.

*—So, this is the reason why Elen went back at the time of the war council, huh.*

If a Vanadis came, then a suitable person would have to receive her.

Anyway, he couldn't go back to his tent now that he was here. Tigre turned around to face Valentina, sat down on the spot and bowed his head again.

"Lady Valentina. I thank you again for having come."

"I'm an allied army, so please do not be so stiff. I will be glad if we are able to speak in a more relaxed way. Also, when calling me, just Valentina is fine."

"Yea", Tigre raised his face while giving a nonchalant reply. Although Valentina revealed a happy smile, he did not know at all what she was thinking about.

"By the way, how did you know that we were here?"

As he asked what was bothering him, Valentina bent her head slightly to the side and answered.

"That was a coincidence. I didn't know that you people were here."

Valentina briefly explained the sequence of events until she arrived here.

After having parted from Tigre and company in the capital Silesia, Valentina sent a messenger to Osterode which she governed and she herself headed to Legnica.

"After boarding a ship from the port town of Prepus, I arrived at the north of Brune. Afterwards, I was supplied with a carriage and went ahead through the highway. Because I knew that Sachstein attacked from the west and the south, I decided for the time being to go to the south where there were fewer enemies."

She told that as such, she heard that the Sachstein army and the Brune army were in Plainville and had the carriage proceed there.

While she was talking, Lim prepared a new ceramic cup. When she opened the wine bottle put in a corner of the tent and poured its contents into the cup, she put it before Tigre.

While Tigre thanked her and received the ceramic cup, he asked Valentina. He was able to mostly consent with her story, but there was something which bothered him.

"Um, where are your soldiers...?"

Valentina put a thin finger on her shapely chin and wandered her gaze in the air.

"I think that at about this time, they are probably boarding ships heading towards Brune."

Tigre stared at Valentina with a dumbfounded face. He had never thought that only she would go ahead. Although a Vanadis was famed for being a match for a thousand, he

had heard that she had a weak constitution. Even at the time of the Sun Festival, he had rarely seen her.

*—she's different from Elen after all. She only came here by order of the King, so...*

*I should be thankful just for the fact that she showed up here.* Tigre decided to think so.

"I understand. You must be tired, so please rest properly for today."

"I will do so; but if you are fine with it, could you tell me about the present situation?"

To Valentina's words, Tigre revealed a wondering face and looked at Elen. Elen folded her arms and answered with a face which was unable to clear away her irritation.

"You're the supreme commander after all. So you should talk up to where you think it's good."

When she finished saying that, Elen gulped down the porcelain cup at a stretch. What she said was reasonable, but there were probably parts where she was flabbergasted at Valentina. Tigre nodded and turned to the black-haired Vanadis. He talked about the Sachstein army as far as he knew.

"Currently, we're having a hard fight. The enemy is strong, so we cannot find any means of escape."

"That looks tough, eh."

Valentina said so in a calm tone which did not let one feel seriousness. Tigre could not help but feel spent, but she patiently continued her words.

"If it is fine with you, could I lend you my wisdom?"

"Rather than wisdom, you want to borrow your Dragonic Tool's power, right?"

Elen butted into the conservation. She turned a dangerous gaze to Valentina.

"Valentina. I heard that your Dragonic Tool has the ability to travel far distances in an instant. With that power, can't you do something like jumping to where the enemy General is, and take his head and come back here?"

In a provocative tone, the silver-haired Vanadis grinned at the black-haired Vanadis. There were only Tigre, Elen, Lim and Valentina in this place, so although there was the fact that she spoke of it, she also said it with the intention of sounding Valentina out.

Elen had always thought that Valentina would not come to Brune. This was because with this much distance, there was room for making up plenty of reasons not to come. Besides, the first time Valentina met Tigre was at the Sun Festival, so she has no reason to actively lend him her help.

Elen wanted to know how far Valentina intended to fight seriously. Moreover, she also wanted to know whether her Dragonic Tool really had such a terrifying ability.

Valentina lovely tilted her head to the side and answered.

"Certainly, this Dragonic Tool Ezendeis of mine has such a power; but unfortunately I cannot satisfy Eleonora's expectation."

"Hou. Why is that?"

Tigre and Lim were silently watching the two Vanadises' exchanges. This was because both of them understood Elen's intention. Besides, they were definitely anxious about Valentina's ability.

"I get extremely tired when I use that power just once; to the extent that I can't stand on my feet. Eleonora, is it not also the same for your Dragonic Skill?"

"I certainly have such a Dragonic Skill."

Elen reluctantly admitted. The silver-haired Vanadis' Ley Admos greatly consumed physical strength. If she fired it successively two or three times, she wouldn't be able to stand on her feet.

"But, there's something we can do. Do you want to hear it?"

Saying so, Valentina meaningfully stared at Tigre. Although the youth made a wondering face, he urged her to continue by nodding.

"First, please propose a talk to the enemy General in Earl Vorn's name."

Tigre perceived a disquieting shadow flashing in Valentina's purple pupils. While tracing the handle of the scythe which

she put beside her, the black-haired Vanadis happily continued her words.

"At that moment, we will establish the conditions. That only two persons such as attendants or guards shall escort each commander—"

"That's a severe condition. Won't the other party be cautious?"

Tigre frowned. For such a talk, the enemy would carefully investigate about the place and the number of attendants. This was because dragging out the other party under the pretext of a talk and committing assassination was not that rare an occurrence.

"They will certainly be cautious, but do you think that they will decline?"

Tigre pondered as he was asked by Valentina.

"That's right. If the other party feels inclined to do negotiations, I guess they'll accept. But, they'll set the condition of letting them choose the place though."

"Indeed. Then, if the other party doesn't feel inclined to do negotiations?"

"Although it'll depend on the other party and the situation, it can't be said that there isn't any possibility that they'll accept. Like gaining time, for example."

"Or, in the case that they thought that we'll use the pretext of a talk and kill them."

As Tigre faltered, Valentina continued her words then. As if she had completely seen through what the youth would say.

Tigre stared at her, unable to hide his surprise; Elen and Lim too. Tigre, with a face devoid of interest, accepted Valentina's words.

"That's right. There is also the way where they might break the two conditions and have many soldiers hide around."

"Yes. What's important is that."

Valentina happily nodded. Tigre was puzzled by that reaction of hers. He did not understand at all what she wanted to say. Elen said, not hiding her irritation.

"Don't keep him in suspense. Tigre is serious."

"I know, Eleonora. Then, I shall answer. We will propose a meeting with their conditions. Let's suppose that the other party consents and really shows with more than two attendants. In that case, we'll kill the three of them."

Valentina said with her smile as is as if it was nothing.

The atmosphere of the place froze. Tigre gulped and stared at the black-haired Vanadis with a pale face. Elen and Lim also revealed expressions as if they had forcibly swallowed something bitter.

Valentina continued her words without breaking her smile.

"Suppose that the other party consents, but appeared accompanied not with two, but many soldiers. In that case, we kill only the enemy General and escape far away with

my Dragonic Tool's power. Afterwards, we will blame the other party that they didn't follow the conditions.  
—something like this."

Valentina traced the scythe's curved blade with a finger. Reflecting the light of the lamp, the scythe quietly emitted a shine.

"This is the way in which my Dragonic Tool will be able to be helpful to you, Earl Vorn."

"...In the case that the other party follows the conditions, how will we gloss it over?"

Tigre somehow managed to squeeze out his voice and asked only that.

"After annihilating them, we can prepare as many reasons as we like. For example, we can claim that because the other side flew into rage and drew their swords, we had no other choice but to respond to their attack."

"But, can we kill the other party so easily?"

"I think that it would be fine if the three of us, Earl Vorn, Eleonora and me were to go. There are not that many people who can match Eleonora's sword skill and I heard that you are a master with the bow that can hit a target about 300 Alsins away without erring."

Once again, silence descended into the place. Nobody issued any words.

After about ten seconds, Tigre finally opened his mouth.

"Valentina, did you make that suggestion to other people so far?"

"This is the first time."

As she answered so, the black-haired Vanadis sweetly smiled. Tigre sighed.

"Then, it's fine."

Tigre answered briefly and shook his head. It was a declaration of his intention not to accept Valentina's suggestion.

"Although it's something we asked you, you shouldn't use such a power in the battle and just keep it to protect yourself. As we talked about in Zhcted's royal palace."

To Tigre's words, Valentina fixedly stared at the youth with her eyes wide opened.

"You are a strange person. I thought that you would think this and that about whether there is not a more effective way to use it."

"I'm not good at using my head for such things."

Tigre laughed as he said so in a joking way. While laughing, he inwardly asked himself.

*Am I naïve? If it's to win a battle, should the choice of the means matter?*

The people whom he brought from Alsace. The people whom he brought from LeitMeritz. The people who gathered from various places in order to protect Brune.

If he could avoid battle by dirtying his hands and save as many of their lives as possible, wouldn't that be rather the right method?

Thinking up to there, Tigre shook his head.

—*It's no good after all.*

There was something that he had said to Ludmila Lourie once. That he did not want to do something which would make him unable to face those important to him.

He might be selfish. But, in order to continue being who he is, it was a line that he could not cross.

“—Then, I shall make another suggestion.”

Valentina said with a smile, and Tigre stared at her with a surprised face.

After the four people ended their talk, Valentina elegantly bowed and left for her tent. By the way, because she did not prepare even a tent, Elen lent her a spare tent.

Elen returned her gaze to Tigre and revealed a wry smile.

“Tigre. Why didn't you accept her first suggestion?”

The youth frowned and looked at the silver-haired Vanadis.

“There's no way I'd accept such a thing.”

“But, it's effective. In order to investigate our intention, there's probably someone who will respond to the discussion.”<sup>[12]</sup>

Tigre frowned. He agreed with Elen's words. And precisely because he agreed with them, he was irritated.

As she seemingly had no intention of ending the talk, the silver-haired Vanadis' ruby-colored pupils stared straight at Tigre. The youth turned to Lim seemingly requesting her help. However, Lim too requested an explanation from Tigre with her gaze. Tigre answered as he gave up.

"It's because I didn't like it. It doesn't match my nature. Are you dissatisfied with this reply?"

"No, it's enough."

Rather, as she greatly nodded as that was exactly what she thought, too, Elen stood up and went around behind Tigre. She sat down so as to lean her back against the youth's. Her warmth and weight were transmitted to Tigre through his clothes.

"Even I didn't like her suggestion. Though there's also the fact that it runs against my principles, more than that, I can't trust her. For example, supposing that the enemy has prepared 100 soldiers, there's no guarantee that Valentina would escape with you and me after I killed the enemy General."

"As expected, I don't think that she'd do something so vicious, wouldn't she?"

Although Tigre said that, he had no confidence. He knew nothing about her after all.

"And in the case that that came to light, the honor of Lord Tigrevurmud and Eleonora-sama would be ruined as

despicable persons. The reason of the winner may get by for a time. There'll be also people who will shout that the victor is definitely right. However, such a thing will by no means last for long."

Lim unusually raised her voice. Quiet anger was dwelling in her blue pupils.

"The terror of a bad reputation will become a fatal blow not when one wins, but when one leaves an opening. As for me, I do not want you two to be burdened with something like that."

At the same time as Lim finished speaking, Elen pushed her back.

"Honestly, I'm glad that you rejected her suggestion."

After saying so, Elen smiled at her blond adjutant.

"Come on Lim, how about you show your feelings with action? Since your words from just now were plentiful after all."

Lim did not return Elen's words, but she quietly stood up and walked up to Tigre. She went down on her knees there and patted the youth's head. As to say "you did well".

While his face turned bright red, Tigre however stayed as is between the two girls.



The day dawned. The Moonlight Knights army did not move out of their camp, nor showed any signs of moving.

On the hilltop, Kreuger who received that report from his adjutant lost himself in thought.

*—Does this mean that they're waiting for reinforcements while letting the soldiers rest?*

"Shall we try to go on to the enemy?"

The adjutant asked. By that, he meant to provoke the enemy by stone-throwing, crossbows, abuse and the like. However, Kreuger shook his head.

"Let's watch the situation for the time being. Don't neglect the check and watch."

By check, he meant the checking of all the equipment/devices inside the Hill Fort. The adjutant responded with a bow.

At this time, Kreuger had not yet made up his mind.

That day, not even one skirmish occurred sunset.

When the day was about to go down, Tigre left the camp and walked towards the river nearby.

He intended to bathe. Valentina's suggestion last night still left a heavy feeling of antagonism in Tigre's heart. Although afterwards, an alternate plan was presented by her and he accepted it.

If he drank alcohol and got drunk, he might feel refreshed to some extent; but a supreme commander could not afford to get drunk in the face of an enemy. In that case,

he thought that he should take a bath; he had told Titta and Mashas about it.

*—It'd be good if I were to consult with Lord Mashas, but...*

Tigre, Elen and Lim were the only persons who knew about Valentina's first suggestion. It was not something that could be told to anyone with only the Dragonic Tool's power as the reason why.

The river could be seen. Although a grassy plain was spread in this area, there were shrubs and bushes near the river. In order to avoid public gazes, Tigre set foot in the area with shrubs.

Suddenly, Tigre knitted his brows. He heard the sound of water. It'd be fine if it was a beast's doing, but there was also the possibility that someone has come to bathe just like him.

Tigre quietly left the place. He went about 20 Alsins (about 20 meter) downstream.

When he confirmed that he did not hear the sound of water, he took off his clothes. After undressing, he sat down on the riverside. When he scooped up water and poured it on his chest, it was cold, but not to the point where he could not endure.

After having sprinkled water on his body several times, Tigre set foot in the river. He let his body sink little by little and was soaked until his shoulders. He often swam and dove in rivers even in Alsace.

When he put water on himself from head to toe, stretched out his body and swam, he finally felt refreshed.

He then raised his body. He did not swim for that long, but it was probably enough given his current position.

Suddenly, an especially strong wind blew. The water's surface made a boisterous noise and Tigre couldn't help but curl himself up. The youth noticed that something white was washed away from upstream. It was one size smaller than a clenched fist.

As Tigre pushed his way through the water and approached it, he casually picked it up.

"A rose...?"

As he observed it thinking that it was rare, it was an artificial flower. Many petals made of something appearing to be silk were attached on a thin flat stone.

"Why is such a thing..."

Tigre cocked his head in puzzlement. Although the fact that an artificial flower was washed away was strange, it had a structure that Tigre did not know of. Titta had made an artificial flower before, but it was not like this. Though this was made using stone, it was light enough to float on water.

Though he thought about what he should do, Tigre got out of the river holding it. It was then that the sound of footsteps as someone was running was approaching.

One woman appeared from the shade of the shrubs. Tigre stood stock still on the spot with his eyes wide opened. Although he was also surprised that the woman was Valentina, she was not wearing anything. The black-haired Vanadis's white naked body was exposed before the youth's eyes.

Her wet long hair clung from her shoulders to her chest and two hills were bouncing under there. Her waist was thin and her legs which extended from her round buttocks gave a flexible impression.

Her perfectly balanced beauty could be found there.

"Oh my"

Similarly, Valentina seemed to be also surprised by Tigre's presence. But, earlier than being bashful, she was looking at the youth's body with admiration. Tigre was also naked.

Tigre hurriedly turned his back on Valentina. However, it was too late in various ways. Her naked body has already been etched into his mind and did not look like it would easily disappear. In addition, the various reactions that Tigre's body showed have also been reflected in Valentina eyes.

"S-Sorry...! I didn't mean to do such a thing..."

Before he finished speaking, Tigre felt the sensation of a cold metal on the nape of his neck. As he moved only his gaze, a huge red and black curved blade came in from the side and touched his chest.

"...Did you see?"

A stifled low voice could be heard from behind. Tigre answered "yes". His body has already answered honestly after all, so he had no other choice but admit it.

"It's good that you're honest. Now then, what should I do?"

The scythe went down little by little while keeping a distance at whether it would touch Tigre's skin or not. It stopped at the area of his waist.

"Whatever the circumstances, a punishment is necessary after all; so shall I cut down here?"

Tigre's whole body grew pale. Nonetheless, a part of his body was tinged with heat.

One wrong move and it might really be cut with the scythe. As he could not move at all, the scythe suddenly went away.

"It's only a joke. Please, give me what you hold in your hand."

A bright voice reached his back. As Tigre held the artificial flower in his right hand, he carefully turned behind.

The artificial flower parted from the youth's hand. Tigre then asked as he regained his composure to some extent.

"Was it yours?"

"Yes. The wind blew and it had inadvertently dropped into the river... And I came to pick it up in a hurry. I did not think that you would possibly be there."

After apologizing once again by saying “sorry”, Tigre realized a certain thing and asked.

“Um, where did your Dragonic Tool come from...?”

After a slight pause, Valentina answered. Rather than having thought about something, she did not seem to be able to guess the meaning of the question.

“I had explained it in the war council, hadn’t I? If the Vanadis calls for it, the Dragonic Tool will appear in her hand no matter how far it is.”

*Now that she mentions it, she did say that;* Tigre remembered. Precisely because Elen also confirmed it, he accepted Valentina’s second suggestion.

“Still, I guess that artificial flower is very important to you...”

Tigre’s words paused there. This was because he felt that the presence behind him had gone away.

“I guess there’ll be no problem if I dry it. As thanks for having picked it up, I will leave this matter as is without question.”

Along with her voice, the sound of footsteps faded away little by little. Tigre unintentionally asked.

“I am thankful for that, but are you fine with that...?”

“Let’s both keep silent about it. It’s enough like that, isn’t it? Since similarly to your body, you are someone who cannot tell lies.”

Tigre blushed as he was teased.

"I'm counting on you to properly take care of the rest."

Leaving behind a bright voice as if it was nothing, Valentina walked away. After her presence completely disappeared, Tigre once again soaked in the river for the time being.



It was about when the day had gone down that a messenger of the Moonlight Knights army showed up in the Hill Fort. At this time, Kreuger was having a slightly early evening meal. His meal's contents were: bread, dried meat and wheat rice porridge with dried vegetables.

As he had eaten about half of the wheat rice porridge, Kreuger stopped his hand which moved the wooden spoon.

This wheat rice porridge was made using the wheat harvested in Brune. When he ate it for the first time, Kreuger was assailed by a fresh surprise.

Wheat could hardly be harvested in Sachstein. Instead, oats could be harvested abundantly.

Oat rice porridge had a bitter taste. Even when one ground them and ate them with bread, the bitter taste would not disappear. But, Kreuger had been eating it as if it was something natural.

When he emptied the wooden bowl containing the wheat rice porridge, Kreuger received a report from his adjutant. At this time for the first time, he got to know the official name of the enemy army which he was fighting.

However, for Kreuger, such a thing did not matter. He was attacked by a surprise that was far more incomparable than that.

"Vanadis...?"

He said that it was a young, beautiful girl who came as a messenger. And that she had long black hair reaching to her waist, and wore a white dress not suitable on a battlefield and carried a scythe with red and black colors on her shoulder.

"Except the ominous scythe, she looks like a noble lady."

Was the report of the soldier who interacted with her. Kreuger frowned.

"Wasn't there another girl, one with silver hair?"

"There was, but..."

There was clear confusion in the adjutant's voice.

It was said that two girls had appeared in a place about 200 Alsins away from the Hill Fort. Both were on horseback and the soldiers who saw them could not uniformly hide their surprise.

Regarding Elen, there were many soldiers who had seen her figure on the battlefield. However, it was the first time for them seeing Valentina.

Unlike Elen who wore armor, although a light one, Valentina wore a white dress. She also rode her horse sideways<sup>[13]</sup> and even the weapon she carried on her shoulder was a boorish scythe which was puzzling.

Elen did not move from the spot; only Valentina got down from her horse and walked. And, she announced that she was a messenger.

—*So, the silver-haired girl acts as the guard, huh.*

It was a common thing, secretly killing a messenger who was inconvenient for his army and burying their corpse, and then insisting towards the other party that no messenger came. The silver-haired girl watching from a distance probably meant that they would not forgive such a means.

—*Which means that if I do something careless, I will completely make an enemy out of Zhcted, huh?*

Kreuger lost himself in thought while rolling the dices in his hand. He hesitated to send the messenger away without meeting her. Above all, he was concerned about the fact that not a Brune person, but a Zhcted person showed up as a messenger. He was interested in what they would say in the war of another country.

“Fine. Keep hold of her weapon and let her through here.”

Kreuger waited for the other party in a tent stretched at the hilltop.

The black-haired Vanadis appeared before long. Kreuger fixedly stared at her. Though there was also the fact that he was captivated by her beauty, he was dumbfounded by the fact that she was really wearing a dress.

“Did you perhaps sneak out of a dance party?”

"You may find it surprising, but this is my military outfit. I would choose a more gorgeous dress for a dance party. Should an opportunity arise, I would like to show it to you."

She answered without erasing her smile and introduced herself as Valentina Glinka Estes; that she was a Vanadis of Zhcted. By the way, the conversation was carried out in Brune's language.

*—I have heard about that name.*

Kreuger had actually never seen Valentina.

The reason why he thought Elen was a Vanadis was because he saw her way of fighting. However, a warrior-like atmosphere could not be felt at all from Valentina. Even regarding the weapons, in contrast with Elen's weapon which was a long sword, it was said that Valentina's was a scythe.

*—Isn't a large sickle (scythe) a farm tool?*

Hiding his doubt and suspicion behind a smile, Kreuger asked in a casual tone.

"I saw a beautiful silver-haired woman in the battlefield the other day though."

"She is called Eleonora Viltaria, also a Vanadis of my country."

"Then, are you saying that out of the proud Vanadieses of Zhcted, two are actually in Brune?"

"We two are indeed here."

Kreuger deliberately showed that he was surprised, but Valentina did not fall for it as she broadly smiled as is.

*—She's really something being able to smile without breaking her calm attitude while being in the midst of the enemy.*

Whether or not Valentina was a Vanadis aside, Kreuger recognized only that point.

"I am sorry for not being able to provide a decent hospitality as we are in such a place. Though it may be sudden, may I ask for what kind of business you have come here for?"

"I came to advise you people to surrender."

Valentina answered. She insisted as to persuade him that because they were many brave soldiers in Brune that blame the Sachstein army's injustice and loved justice and peace, they should hurriedly withdraw.

Though Kreuger did not change his facial expression, he could not inwardly suppress his disappointment and sneer.

He mocked Valentina about whether she came all the way here just to say such foolish things. He even wondered whether she was an insolent noble lady with just beauty as her redeeming feature.

As he waited for Valentina to finish speaking, Kreuger answered with a smile.

"I have heard your valuable words, but we also have our own troubles. You should go back."

"Those troubles, may I ask what they are?"

Valentina asked. Rather than doggedly opposing it, it seemed that she asked it as she really did not know. Even so, Kreuger, not immediately replying, thought for a short while.

"Among those from the royal family, there is someone called Melisande. If times had not changed, she might have succeeded the previous King, His Majesty Faron and be governing this country."

"Lady Melisande? What kind of relationship does she have with Princess Regin?"

Kreuger frowned. Valentina's way of asking questions was too innocent and she really did not seem to know.

But, that rather aroused Kreuger's wariness. Be it her white dress or her way of talking, he doubted whether all of that was not an act.

"She is Lady Regin's cousin, and was the late Duke Thenardier's wife."

"Was Sachstein relied on by that person?"

"That's right. Lady Regin governs Brune, but there are many mysterious points about her. For example, the fact that she was brought up as a Prince until two years ago. Also that she was recognized as a Princess by an oracle or something to succeed this country as King Faron's successor."

"When you say oracle, I cannot say anything. Especially since my country and Brune believes in the same gods."

A smile appeared on Kreuger's lips. It was not a bad way of escaping. He would probably say the same thing even if he was in her position. There was nothing as convenient to use as the gods.

"However, Lady Melisande was suspicious of it. As I said just now, Lady Melisande has legitimacy for sure. Precisely because we believe so, we have moved soldiers for her. In order to expel Princess Regin and make Lady Melisande Brune's true ruler."

"I see. So that's it."

Valentina struck her hand as to say that she understood. Kreuger was going to call a soldier to make her return. However, the black-haired Vanadis opened her mouth earlier than that.

"I have another thing I would like to talk about, but could you hear it?"

Kreuger squinted his eyes and returned his gaze to her.

"What is it?"

"It is a talk as a messenger of Zhcted."

Valentina answered without erasing her smile. Kreuger frowned once again.

Her smile did not change even one bit, too. However, a clear change occurred in the atmosphere she was wearing.

Kreuger inquired the other party's reaction by playing dumb.

"If it is about the advice of surrender, I have just listened to it though."

"That was the message as the Moonlight Knights army's messenger."

To Valentina's reply, Kreuger rebuild his posture. He stared at her.

"Let me hear it."

"I will go right to the point. Could my country and Sachstein share Brune's land?"

Kreuger opened his eyes wide. He did think about it as one possibility, but he did not think that they would really do that suggestion.

"Isn't Zhcted a friendly country to Brune?"

"Of course. But regarding the friendship, if there are the ones which last long, there are also those which doesn't. Especially between a country and a country."

"What is the reason for you to join hands with my country?"

"There are too many obstacles for Zhcted alone to cut Brune's territory. Of course Brune will resist; but including your country, the neighboring countries such as Muozinel and Asvarre will interfere right? In that case, it would be better for us to join forces with one of those countries. Am I wrong?"

"Why with my country and not with Muozinel or Asvarre?"

"We are fighting Muozinel on land and we have trouble with Asvarre in the sea. Fortunately, we have no antagonism with your country. There is also the fact that we do not share a border."

Kreuger took a small breath. He poured forth questions in succession, but Valentina answered all of them without faltering. And all her answers had a persuasive power at that.

*—So this out-of-place dress and her large sickle are things to deceive the beholder, huh.*

"Which means that you're betraying Tigrevurmud Vorn?"

As Kreuger said as to make sure, Valentina shook her head.

"No, Earl Vorn is already a Zhcted person, after all."

Kreuger raised a "hou" voice as he seemed to be surprised.

"This is the first time I've heard about that."

"Ostensibly, he is still a Brune noble after all. I have no evidence that I can show, but I can explain it."

Kreuger urged her to go on by nodding.

"Two years ago, after this country's civil war ended, Earl Vorn stayed in Zhcted as a guest General and Alsace that he's governing became a condominium of Brune and Zhcted. Do you know about that?"

Kreuger nodded. He had investigated about it to that extent.

"At that time, the preparations for welcoming him as a person of my country have already been done. Just like how you people had your troubles regarding Lady Melisande, we have planned to shave off Brune little by little as a state ceremony of Earl Vorn's existence."

Tigrevurmud Vorn was a man with a strong sense of justice and a person who loved his homeland. He was a man who could not help taking action if danger fell upon Brune.

And, if he asked, Zhcted was ready to move as mercenaries. Of course since they are mercenaries, they would not just work for free.

Valentina talked fluently and added.

"We were also planning to step onto the stage and make Alsace a territory of our country. After all, if we were to immediately make it a territory of our country, it would cause a backlash. In addition, as expected Earl Vorn also has a profound attachment to the land where he was born and raised."

"I see. It's an interesting talk."

It was a talk that Kreuger could consent with.

In the first place, in the civil war two years ago, why did a Vanadis of Zhcted lend her power to a small noble who had only a territory in the frontier? He could only think that she used Tigre as an excuse to intervene. In fact, Zhcted obtained the land of Agnes and jointly manages Alsace.

He could also understand if thinking that Tigre also staying in Zhcted as a guest General was a foundation made so that he became a person of Zhcted.

"Do you know of this? Last year, Earl Vorn was requested by His Majesty King Victor and proceeded to Asvarre who was in the midst of a civil war."

Of course, Kreuger knew of it. For Sachstein, the Asvarre Kingdom was an opponent whom they had a deep connection with. Regarding the civil war in that country, there was no one among the Generals of Sachstein who did not try to investigate about that.

"Although a request of a King of one country, why do you think that Earl Vorn, who is a person of a foreign country, had undertaken it? It was in order to prove that he is a person who pledge allegiance to Zhcted. To that end, the more dangerous the duty, the better. Earl Vorn had always wished for such a duty."

When Valentina finished speaking, silence fell within the tent. But, it was just for a really short time. The gray-haired Sachstein General looked at Valentina.

Kreuger inspected in his head what she told one by one. There was no contradiction with what he knew. Rather, he was able to understand the reason why Zhcted lent their power to Tigre and why Tigre cooperated with Zhcted and proceeded to Asvarre.

He jumped to Asvarre which was in chaos and ran through battlefields. If he went to such an extent, even the people

of Zhcted would recognize Tigre. There was also a rumor that he rescued a Vanadis.

"So that's why Zhcted taking advantage of this opportunity and is trying to shave off Brune's territory, huh."

In that case, he could also understand why they were two Vanades here.

"As I said just now, it'll depend on how you will move."

Valentina revealed a smile.

"If what Sachstein sets up were to be just skirmishes, you will make Brune indebted to you. In case that I judge that it is a full-scale invasion and that Brune cannot resist, I will take back this proposal."

Kreuger hesitated. Valentina's proposal was attractive. Certainly, if he were to obtain Zhcted's cooperation, the future battles would become favorable.

"I would like to confirm it once more. Do you people intend to destroy Brune?"

"As I've also said a while ago, we intended to go little by little. I wondered whether you people also do not intend to destroy it."

"For the time being, we intended to take the west and the south."

This was because if they were to extend their hands to the north and the east, they would share borders with the two countries Zhcted and Muozinel. It was not that good a thing

for Sachstein. Until they held down/controlled Asvarre, they did not want to have their enemies increase too much.

"We are demanding the north and the east."

If they got their hands on the northern part, Zhcted would get a hold of their long-cherished port which did not freeze even in the winter. The eastern part's fertile earth was also precious.

"Wouldn't it better for us to leave you some parts just to the extent where both our national borders do not come in contact without whittling off the whole Brune? In so doing, you will be able to achieve your duty towards Lady Melisande."

"That's an interesting suggestion."

Kreuger laughed in a low voice. But, he immediately returned to a serious expression.

"However, I wonder whether your words are to be trusted. If I believe what I've just heard, I cannot find a lie in them."

If Valentina's words were true, accepting this proposal would be the greatest achievement for Kreuger. For that reason alone, he had to deal with this carefully.

"Well then, how about we do like this? —Tomorrow night, I will cause a commotion in the Moonlight Knights army's camp. I can even give rise to flames."

Valentina was saying that she would create confusion in her ally camp.

"May I make another demand?"

"Please, go on."

"Before that confusion, could I have you, the other Vanadis or Earl Vorn come to my army?"

"Then, I will come."

Valentina easily consented.

Thus, the black-haired Vanadis returned to the camp of the Moonlight Knights army.



The following day, too, there was not a big fight. It was to the degree of a skirmish set by Sachstein side. The Moonlight Knights' forces were going to fight back immediately, but because the Sachstein side immediately pulled back, it had ended with only them growing irritated.

There was no conspicuous movement from the Moonlight Knights army. It was only to the extent that cavalrymen who, were probably sent for reconnaissance, were going around the Hill Fort. They were probably searching for whether there was an opening somewhere.

The sun passed the zenith and went down to the west, and the sky was covered with darkness little by little. It was about one koku after the day had set that Valentina showed up at the Hill Fort.

"Thank you for waiting."

"You must be tired, right? How about you take a rest on the hill?"

Kreuger finally trusted the black-haired Vanadis. Even if this night attack ended in failure, he would still have a Vanadis in his hands. Wasn't it enough of a harvest?

Suddenly, Kreuger took out the two dices that he kept inside the sleeve of his clothes.

Should he try rolling them here and now? He understood that it wouldn't necessarily be exactly as what was wanted. His feelings were the problem.

He held his breath. His heartbeat could be heard awfully greatly.

Making up his mind, Kreuger rolled the dices on the ground. The numbers which appeared were 2 and 3. It was an odd number.

Kreuger took a small breath. Before he had noticed, sweat was blurred on his forehead. It looked like he was fairly tense.

*—But, like this it'll go smoothly.*

Kreuger put the dices back inside his sleeves. He called his adjutant and ordered him to increase the guard of the place where Valentina was.

"Have 100 people stand guard. Deploy them in every key point so that she doesn't escape."

"Is it necessary to go to such an extent? Even though we keep her weapon."

The adjutant looked puzzled. What he was skeptical about was the fact that, in addition to Valentina's attire which was a dress treated with flowers, he has not seen her fighting style. The adjutant was thinking that even if an unexpected situation occurred and she was to resist, they might hold her with even ten people.

"It's just to be safe. Perhaps she might be an excellent warrior at the same level as that silver-haired Vanadis. Even if it isn't the case, that girl has that much value."

Afterwards, Sachstein soldiers came out of the Hill Fort one after another under the cover of darkness. So as to not be seen by the Moonlight Knights army, other than those for Valentina's lookout, they left 500 soldiers and made them stand in a conspicuous place.

After nearly half a koku, a little over 18000 Sachstein soldiers unfolded around the Hill Fort. Their helmets, chain mails, spears and short swords were also covered with mud; their faces, too.

Because chain mails made noise, they were not suitable for a night attack. Aware of that, Kreuger let the soldiers put on chain mail. This was because on this occasion, he did not intend to let the soldiers attack.

The plan was that after confusion occurred in the Moonlight Knights army's camp, the Sachstein army would take that opportunity and charge. There was the calculation that the fact of hearing a sound would be able to give fear to the enemy.

When about half a koku had passed, the Moonlight Knights army's camp suddenly became bright; that it was in flames could clearly be seen. Several screams of confusion resounded and dancing shadows of people could be seen.

"Charge!"

In the center of the Sachstein army, Kreuger shouted. If things went well, they might be able to annihilate the enemy in this one night. In doing so, they might abandon the Hill Fort and even join with Schmidt.

The Sachstein soldiers raised battle cries, tightly grasped their spear or short sword and ran through the grassy plain at night. It was expected that the combined chorus of more than 18000 chain mails echoing would spread a new confusion in the Moonlight Knights army's camp.

It was at that time that an unusual phenomenon occurred ahead of their gazes.

From within the camp, battle cries not at all inferior to those of the Sachstein army were raised. The Brune soldiers who should have been in confusion had spears and set up shields, ambushing the Sachstein soldiers.

Holes were dug in the ground, oil was scattered and the Sachstein soldiers who rushingly charged faltered as they received a severe surprise attack.

"Shoot!"

The Zhcted soldiers, who were lying hidden in the darkness away from the camp, poured down arrows on the Sachstein soldiers. Because they shot them low so as not to roll up

their allies, there were more arrows that dropped on the ground than the ones that hit. However, it was enough to let the Sachstein soldiers fall into chaos.

While the flames flickered, the Brune soldiers fiercely attacked the Sachstein soldiers. They slashed at them with swords, stabbed them with spears and struck with maces to the best of their power. There were also those who hit them with clubs lit with fire.

The Sachstein soldiers desperately fought back, but because they hadn't yet recovered from their agitation, there was no force in their counterattack. When it comes to crossing swords, they were being pushed back. Meanwhile, arrows flew from the side and the rear.

While being illuminated by the fire, the Sachstein soldiers were falling down one after another.

"We've been tricked, huh...!"

To the ghastly situation unfolding before his eyes, Kreuger made a low groan. He had been deceived by Valentina.

Angry roars, screams, and the sound of swords crossing were sucked up within the night's darkness together with the smoke. There was a silver-haired girl boldly riding a horse within the flames and cutting down the Sachstein soldiers one after another. It was Elen.

— *Vanadis...!*

While wielding her long sword, Elen looked around. Her eyes met with Kreuger. Suddenly, the silver-haired Vanadis fiercely rode her horse.

Elen did not know Kreuger's face. However, she noticed that soldiers were standing so as to protect him. It was enough to judge that he was someone in a high position.

"Your Excellency. Please escape."

When the adjutant said so, Elen was shortening the distance. Before her slash, spears and chain mails looked like a child's toy. The tips of spears were sent flying and chain mails were cut and torn down along with the bodies. It looked like there was no one able to stop her now.

Kreuger had no choice but to draw his sword. Elen narrowed down the distance.

Silver sparks scattered along with a shock. Kreuger repelled the blow brought down from horseback. Numbness remained in his hand and the gray-haired General, although he dipped his body in tension, shouted to Elen.

"It looks like in Zhcted a Vanadis' life is quite light! To think that one would be used and then thrown away in such a battlefield."

"That's just your belief."

Elen heartily laughed without being shaken.

"Man of Sachstein! My name is Eleonora Viltaria. With my name and LeitMeritz's military power as a souvenir, you should run back to your native land!"

They clashed swords once again. A shrill metallic sound resounded in the depths of Kreuger's ears. Kreuger was forced to recognize Elen's ability.

A Sachstein soldier raised a wordless cry and attacked Elen. At that opportunity, Kreuger went away from Elen. He desperately ran in the darkness.

At that time, an arrow flew from somewhere. The arrow bounced back as it hit Kreuger's helmet. Kreuger's body staggered. But, he did not fall to the ground.

Kreuger kept running as is and succeeded in withdrawing from the battlefield.

The Sachstein army which found itself in a pincer attack from the front and rear was torn asunder and stampeded. The enemy's numbers from the front and rear, even if summed up, were fewer than theirs; but those who understood that were a small fraction.

When Elen made Kreuger take flight, Tigre hurried to the Hill Fort leading 2000 horsemen of the Scheie Knight Squadron.

They had to rescue Valentina who was left as a hostage.

"Charge!"

To Tigre's shout, the Scheie Knight Squadron answered with angry roars. They galloped letting the horses' hooves roar.

There was only a sporadic resistance from the Hill Fort. Although there were people who were hit by bolts from crossbows and fell from their horses, the majority destroyed the fences and jumped into the Hill Fort. Tigre also rushed into the Hill Fort while being protected by the Knights.

Bonfires were lit in various places of the Hill Fort and the shadows of people were busily moving around them. It was a suitable situation for Tigre. Whenever the sound of the bowstring resounded, Sachstein soldiers fell down on the hill one after another.

The Scheie Knight Squadron showed ferocity as to release their anger of these past several days. When they went down from their horses, they brandished their swords in spite of their armor's weight and ran up the hill. They cut down the Sachstein soldiers.

"It looks like the enemy is quite confused."

While going up the stairs of earth and approaching the top, Tigre knitted his brows. He was worried about the fact that the hilltop was in flames.

"Valentina!"

He shouted the name of the girl who should have been held hostage.

"Yes."

Tigre was surprised at the fact that a reply came immediately near him. When he looked back, Valentina wearing a dress covered in mud was standing there.

She had said that she would safely sneak away, but he did not think that she would have already gone down to such a place.

"Don't tell me you use your Dragic Skill...?"

When he asked that in a low voice, Valentina cutely tilted her head to the side.

"I said that that is very tiring, right? I did not use it."

The black-haired Vanadis approached Tigre and whispered in his ear.

"I will specially tell you. I set it on fire."<sup>[14]</sup>

"Set fire? How?"

There was no way that Sachstein would allow her to be in possession of something that can ignite.

"Haven't you noticed something when looking at me?"

When she said that, Tigre fixedly stared at her face. He shook his head. Then, Valentina chuckled and said.

"Please, look at my whole body."

Tigre carefully looked at Valentina from head to toe. Although his eyes have long since gotten used to the darkness, it was hard to tell in a situation where there was only the light of the moon, the stars and the far-off fire. Even so, Tigre noticed a certain thing. There weren't any roses decorated on her dress.

"No way, did you use those artificial roses?"

"That's correct."

As she chuckled, Valentina pointed at her dress with a finger.

"With two cores, that burns well when you place it between petals and rubbed them together."

Tigre was dumbfounded. When he had picked up that artificial flower, he had thought that it was something unusual; but he did not notice it at all.

Valentina who was led inside the Sachstein army's camp entrusted the scythe, which was her Dragonic Tool, to them and was taken into a tent on the hill. Although she was not restrained, she was told to wait for Kreuger's return there.

There was only a chair, a table and wine in the tent. Outside the tent, ten soldiers alternately stood guard over her, and moreover another 90 soldiers were on alert in various places of the Hill Fort. Valentina had taken off the roses from her dress with a casual gesture and rubbed them together in her skirt.

"There were things such as a pillow and a chair which seemed to be able to burn, so I started smoke with them. I slipped out of the tent under the cover of the commotion and went down the slope. I also have the possibility to summon my Dragonic Tool at hand, but then I will have to literally cut my way through."

The fact of having put 100 people standing watch was a misfortune for the Sachstein side. The sudden fire and smoke accelerated their confusion.

As she finished explaining, Valentina stared at Tigre with a wondering face.

"Still, you really came to rescue me."

"Obviously!"

Tigre had promised to Valentina that he would immediately rush to the Hill Fort as soon as they defeated the Sachstein army. At that time, the black-haired Vanadis laughed and nodded; but judging from her way of talking now, she did not seem to expect him to really do it.

After Valentina smiled with one not knowing what she was thinking, she suddenly leaned coquettishly against the youth. Tigre asked her in panic.

"What's the matter? Are you injured somewhere—"

"I've gotten tired."

In a tone which did not sound that way, Valentina answered.

"I have talked about the fact that I have a weak constitution, right? Please, carry me on your back."

"...Could we leave it for later?"

Tigre asked her with a troubled face. There were still arrows remaining in his quiver. The fight between the Scheie Knight Squadron and the Sachstein soldiers was also going on. It didn't look like he would take a breather until they made them (Sachstein soldiers) surrender or wipe them out.

"Snatching your subordinates' achievements? I cannot say that you are a good commander, eh."

While coiling her thin arms around Tigre's neck, Valentina argued vehemently. In fact, the fight was proceeding in favor of the Scheie Knight Squadron.

"...I got it."

Tigre could not help but carry Valentina on his back. He thought that it might not look like it but she might really be tired. He thought that he must take her to a safe place for the time being.

*—Speaking of the nearest safe place from here, it would be the top...*

There were still enemies in the top's vicinity, but there were many allies, too. On the other hand, if leaving the Hill Fort, the whole area was wrapped in darkness. There was also the possibility that Sachstein soldiers who did not lose their fighting spirit were lying hidden.

Because she wore only a dress, Valentina's soft body was pressed onto his back. Though Tigre wore leather armor, he could feel elasticity even from above it.

When they arrived at a place only slightly away from the top, Valentina suddenly asked.

"By the way, why did you accept my second suggestion?"

"Because I thought it'd go well."

Tigre answered with a serious face. Then he added "however" with a difficult expression.

"If I didn't know about your Dragicic Tool's ability, I'd have probably rejected it."

The problematic point in this plan was the part where Valentina said that she would remain in the Sachstein's camp as hostage when the other party requested a compensation to merited their trust. Of course, there was no guarantee that she would have come back safe from there. Not to mention that she could have been killed; there was no doubt that she would have thoroughly been put to shame if she got caught right.

But, Valentina had Ezendeis with which she could travel to another place in an instant. Although her safety was guaranteed, even with that Tigre thought that he might at least bet on it.

"But, this is the last time I accept this kind of plan. It's dangerous judging from the way how you escape."

"How rude."

Valentina lifted her right arm and pinched Tigre's ear.

The youth raised a short scream.



The darkness covering the sky gradually faded and the day was about to dawn.

Under the indigo blue sky, Sachstein soldiers dragging their exhausted bodies looked like black shadows.

While reorganizing his army's troops, Kreuger chose soldiers who still had a lot of physical strength, and organized reconnaissance units and sent them one after another. He was covered with blood and mud and was

exhausted; but there were a lot of things he had to do before taking a rest.

Currently, Kreuger's army was to the south about 10 Belsta (about 10 km) away from the battlefield. The number of soldiers following Kreuger was approximately 13000. Which meant that he lost 30% of his soldiers in one night.

*—No, it'd be better to think that it was somewhat larger than approximately 1000.*

Adding in those who had fled during the night battle, the soldiers who lost sight of their allies within the darkness and confusion should have not been small in number. Because a grassy plain with gentle ups and downs was spread in this area, it would not be difficult to find their figures.

Even if they suffered a crushing defeat, the soldiers still followed Kreuger. There was probably the fact that it was because they were in a foreign land, but this General with a commoner origin had earned popularity from the soldiers.

The reconnaissance units returned before long. According to their reports, it seemed that the Moonlight Knights army had hardly moved from the battlefield. Looking up at the east sky which had turned grey, Kreuger began to ponder.

"Now then, I wonder how the enemy will move. Will they come chasing us, or head to the capital? Or will they go to the west in order to stop Schmidt-dono...?"

They would probably come chasing after them. Although their number was reduced, the number of Sachstein troops

present here exceeded 10000. There was no way that the Brune army would leave them as is.

Kreuger had long since decided about his army's action.

"We will go to the south."

Kreuger's army existed at the south side in order to attract the enemy. If the Moonlight Knights army went south as they pursued Kreuger's army, the enemy would become more distant from Schmidt's army.

Besides, for Kreuger, there was a problem which he couldn't ignore. They left food and fuel in the Hill Fort. Thus, by abandoning the Hill Fort, they lost it.

To satisfy the hunger of about 10000 soldiers, just attacking villages and towns would not be enough. It would probably last one or two days, but it would quickly run out. They only had two choices: either waiting for it to be sent by Nemetacum and the port towns group, or defeating the Moonlight Knights army and taking it back.

While looking up at the sun which gradually rose, Kreuger's army advanced to the south through the highway.

As they entered a region called Bauval plain, Kreuger stopped the march. Other than one small, flat hill, it was a ground where a grassy plain was spread as far as one looked around. He decided to wait for the Moonlight Knights army in this place.

As they checked their weapons, there were enough spears and short swords; but the number of crossbows did not reach 1000. Bolts were even fewer as their number did not

reach even 500. As they were heavy, many crossbows were thrown away during the flight.

As expected, Kreuger was depressed, but they could not afford to go recover them. They would have probably been picked up already by the enemy. He only had to think about how to fight in this situation.

The soldiers that he could deploy on the hill were at most around 500. Kreuger set up camps respectively on the top and the foot of the hill. He once again sent reconnaissance units to the north and south.

*—As scheduled, food should arrive from Nemetacum tomorrow.*

Then today, a group of horses loaded with food and water should arrive at this place which was to the south nearly 20 Belsta (about 20 km) away from the Hill Fort.

However, Kreuger did not inform the soldiers of that. In case an accident occurred and they were late, the soldiers' morale would fall at a stretch.

While letting the soldiers rest at the foot of the hill, the gray-haired General called two subordinates.

"I will give each of you funds, food and soldiers."

He ordered one to head to Schmidt's army and tell him about the current situation.

"Listen well. You should absolutely report that the Zhcted army is participating in the war and that they are two Vanadeses."

Then, he ordered the other subordinate to head to the Capital Nice.

"I don't mind what kind of means you use. Spread the rumor that 'Tigrevurmud Vorn is a puppet of the Zhcted Kingdom and he intends to hand over Brune's territory to Zhcted' in the Capital. Make it so that it reaches the ears of every person from royalty and titled nobility to commoner."

Valentina's scheme made Kreuger come up with this plan. If a crack arose between the Capital and Tigre, the future battles should become advantageous.

As he sent his subordinates as such, Kreuger looked up at the clear blue sky. He talked to himself.

"One day..."

Just one day is fine. Food, time and enough material for one day.

If only he had that, he could make even this small hill into a strong fortress. There were many drawings in accordance with the size and shape of the hill in Kreuger's head. If he was able to build up a Hill Fort, there was no way that he would lose whether the enemy was Brune's Knight Squadrons or the Zhcted army.

However, there were no materials. Even if there were, he couldn't make the soldiers work in this situation. They were tired, and it would be the wrong cause of their demise if they could not move when they had to fight.

After about half a koku, the reconnaissance unit sent to the south returned.

"A unit with food and water from Nemetacum are heading this way!"

A smile giving way to joy appeared on the face of the soldier who made the report. Although Kreuger stopped at only nodding composedly, he inwardly shared the same feeling, too.

However, he couldn't just be happy. The reconnaissance unit which headed to the north also returned, but they reported as followed.

"The enemy is heading this way. We estimate their number to be less than 10000."

Kreuger who received that report on the hill looked hard at the north direction. Far away in the distance, something like a lump of black cotton could be seen. It was probably the Moonlight Knights army.

"They came, huh. But, it's not bad."

As Kreuger muttered, he issued instructions so that the soldiers were told that food and water would arrive before long. And also that the enemy was approaching.

"The Brune and Zhcted people (army) probably wouldn't give us time to eat a meal. Tell all the soldiers. —Win and survive; in order to satisfy your hunger and thirst and to dispel the humiliation."

Before long, ferocious battle cries were raised from the camp of Kreuger's army.

The Sachstein army's battle cries reached up to the Moonlight Knights army as they (cries) rode upon the winds.

After having taken the Hill Fort, the Moonlight Knights had rest and food by turns. Then, they reorganized the troops, left the Hill Fort to 1000 soldiers and pursued the Sachstein army. Although they took a rest, the soldiers were dirty with mud, sweat and blood as they didn't have any room to take a bath or wipe their bodies.

"Their morale is quite high."

Tigre who rode a horse at the vanguard of the army knitted his brows. It was not that welcomed a thing that the enemy still had fighting spirit. Regarding the numbers, the Sachstein army was still superior.

Elen who was riding her horse next to Tigre looked at the youth.

"I can't imagine that they were tormented and became enraged, but... what do we do?"

"We'll fight here."

Tigre's voice was filled with an unshakeable determination. They must not give any more time than this to Kreuger.

The Hill Fort which they succeeded in capturing had a structure so wonderful that Mashas and Scheie were struck with admiration.

"One can't win against this if he doesn't use a clever scheme."

The old Earl nodded as he let his gray beard shake, and Scheie shivered as his stern face stiffened.

"It's irritating, but it's really well made."

The structure, which was fixated on the fine details such as stairs to move quickly from the top to the bottom, walls to block the enemy movement, fences and pathways to divide the enemy and the like, was something that even the Brune people who were made to have a hard fight could not help but recognize it.

"Does it look like it can be useful to us?"

When Tigre asked, the Lutece Knight Squadron's commander shook his head.

"That's not possible. The walls and stairs which are on this hill can't be fully put into practical use if they aren't built in a place with the same form as this hill. We have no choice but to abandon this."

He did not doubt that the Hill Fort was something born from the brain of the General called Kreuger. As for the Brune army, they had to eliminate him before he built up a new Hill Fort.

The Moonlight Knights army stopped their advance and formed their ranks. They distributed the soldiers, whose number did not reach 8000, to the central main force, the right wing and the left wing.

The central main force was about 4000 that was composed of the private troops of the Brune nobles. The right wing

was the Zhcted army of about 2000. And the left wing was the lineup of the Lutece Knight Squadron of about 2000.

Tigre commanded the central main force and Mashas assisted him. Elen commanded the Zhcted army of the right wing and Lim assisted her. Scheie took command of the Knight Squadron of the left wing.

"Lord Mashas. So to be prepared just in case, there is something I want you to prepare."

When Tigre explained what he was thinking about, Mashas revealed a grim face. But, he did not reject it. The enemy had the numerical superiority, so even one extra trick was necessary.

Like that, when Tigre adjusted the battle formation of the main troops, Elen's figure similarly on horseback appeared from between the soldiers. Letting her silver hair flutter to the wind, she rode her horse until before Tigre.

"My side is already ready."

She said with a brilliant smile. Tigre revealed a bitter smile. That was the duty of a messenger, not something a commander should do. Even knowing that, Elen came to report personally.

"Thank you."

Tigre answered with a smile, too. He was happy about her feelings.

"By the way, I think we should talk about it, but..."

As her smile suddenly became gloomy, Elen brought her horse near Tigre's.

"It's about Valentina. She said that her physical condition is bad and is waiting on standby in the rear of the right wing. She has gotten on a two-horse carriage, you see?"

Even Tigre was dumbfounded by this. He had met with the black-haired Vanadis two koku before, but she did not look at all like she was in a poor condition.

However, he could not ask her, either. He did not have such a time, and in the case that Valentina was really sick, he would not get off with just an apology.

"Well, whatever. She has already worked enough."

Tigre cheered up Elen as he said so. But, the silver-haired Vanadis glared at the youth with half-opened eyes.

"I heard that you walked around the Hill Fort carrying her on your back."

Tigre stared wide-eyed. Someone of the Scheie Knight Squadron probably talked about it. To the flustered youth, Elen said with a face which did not hide her displeasure.

"Don't tell me you possibly got ensnared by her?"

"I swear to the gods and also you that it isn't the case."

As he promptly answered as such, Elen looked at Tigre with a face mixed with admiration and amazement.

"You don't have to go to such lengths. It will also be a nuisance for the gods that you mention them for such a thing."

"If it's to have you believe me, then it's worth incurring the displeasure of the gods."

When the youth shrugged his shoulders and returned these words, Elen laughed. She seemed to have cheered up.

"Tigre. Leave the right wing to Lim and me, and focus on the command overall. Lord Mashas is there, so I think you'll be all right; but don't overdo it."

To these words, Tigre answered back with a smile.

"You too, be careful so as to not do something like leave the rest to Lim and jump right into the midst of the enemy."

"How unexpected. I only do that so to not let go of a chance of victory."

"It's the same for me, too."

Tigre stretched out his hand. Elen held that hand. There were places of the silver-haired Vanadis' hand which became hard/stiff as she has continued holding a sword. And, it also had warmth which made the youth feel calm.

The youth thought that he wanted his hand to be like that for her, too.

Without either noticing, they released their hands. The youth's black pupils and her red pupils intersected.

"See you again later."

The two people uttered the same words. And, Elen turned her horse.

Around when the Moonlight Knights army finished adjusting their battle formation, the Sachstein army similarly finished their lineup.

Kreuger divided the soldiers, who numbered about 14000 adding those who joined his army late<sup>[15]</sup>, into five groups. The main force of 500 on the hill. The central unit before the hill with 7000 soldiers. The right wing was 3000. The left wing was also 3000. Furthermore, he let 500 spare troops in the rear.

The Moonlight Knights army was approaching the Sachstein army little by little which did not move from the top and the surroundings of the hill. Under a cloudless sky, wind blew and the three countries' battle flags fluttered. Slightly before the sun reached the zenith, both armies confronted each other.

"Oh King of Gods Perkūnas, God of War Triglav. Witness our battle!"

"Oh God of Thunder Sor, God of Wisdom Wotan. Oh maidens whom possesses wings. Grant us your divine protection!"

The Moonlight Knights army and the Sachstein army respectively began to advance.

The Zhcted army poured a rain of arrows on the enemy. The Brune soldiers too, those who had a bow fired arrows and those did not attacked by means of stone throwing. The Sachstein army held up their shields and defended against the arrows and stones which swooped down on them.

As the arrow battle completed the battle's first stage, the Sachstein army's central unit began their advance.

It would be more accurate to call it a charge. Raising beast-like roars and holding either a spear or a short sword in their hands, the Sachstein soldiers ferociously rushed onto the Brune soldiers.

Pushed by their force, the Moonlight Knights army's central force was about to collapse. From the start, the Sachstein army had the numerical superiority. The Moonlight Knights army quickly retreated while losing soldiers.

In the rear of the main force, Tigre was watching the lead group's fight while gritting his teeth. Although they were putting up a hard fight, they were falling one after another in a spray of blood.

"Tigre. It'll be soon."

Mashas who was beside him said. Tigre nodded and gave an order.

Receiving it, about 200 soldiers who were waiting in the rear of the central main troops moved. They did not even wear armor, but they were holding crossbows in their hands. Commanding them was Mashas' son, Gaspar.

The 200 people led by Gaspar moved in a form depicting an arc. They set their aim at the Sachstein army's right side. Gaspar himself set up a crossbow, too.

"Fire!"

Bowstrings snapped and 200 bolts went straight through the empty sky. Screams broke out from the Sachstein soldiers.

"...This is really amazing."

While feeling the crossbow's recoil throughout his body, Gaspar leaked a breath of admiration.

After the battle of the Hill Fort was over, it was him who proposed whether they could use the crossbows and bolts that the Sachstein soldiers had abandoned. Precisely because he had a good relationship with Tigre and he did not hold that much prejudice to bows and crossbows, he was able to think like that and proposed it.

As Tigre and Mashas approved it, Gaspar eagerly acted and gathered 200 people who did not mind using crossbows in only half a koku. It was this military unit.

The crossbows' volley/fusillade slightly stopped the Sachstein army's fierce attack. Soldiers whose arm or foot was shot by a bolt fell on the ground and writhed in pain and agony. But, there was no one to listen to their screams. Even their allies advanced stepping over them.

Then, the 2000 cavalrymen led by Earl Bouroulec charged. They were similarly a unit which was waiting in the rear.

The moment when Gaspar's unit moved that became the signal to him (Bouroullec).

"Don't always let the Zhcted people look cool! Show the power of the Brune people!"

Bouroullec's unit attacked the Sachstein army's left side. Bouroullec shook his curly chestnut-colored hair, wielded a hatchet-like sword and cut down the Sachstein soldiers one after another.

Receiving attacks from two directions, the front and the left side, as expected the Sachstein soldiers stopped their charge. As for Tigre, he thought that it would be good for the time being if he could take/bring the battle at the center into a stalemate. At that opportunity, the right and the left wings would break through both flanks of the enemy and eventually intend to surround and exterminate them.

But, a miscalculation arose here. The Sachstein army's right and left wings showed an extraordinary tenacity. When the Lutece Knight Squadron attacked, they would retreat; and when the former tried to reform their ranks, the latter would advance. Even against the Zhcted army which constituted the right wing, the Sachstein army moved in the same way.

Elen who wielded the Silver Flash at the Zhcted army's vanguard cursed them saying "they're an enemy hard to handle".

The movement of both wings of the Sachstein army was due to the command of Kreuger standing at the hilltop.

Actually, his true value as a General was in his flexible manipulation of troops. Precisely because he had that, the Hill Fort was not an impromptu stronghold, but he changed it into a fearsome fortress to drag the enemy in and exterminate them.

"Did you think that the Brune knights were the strongest if it's a grassy plain?"

At the hilltop, Kreuger spitted so out. The reason why he concentrated 7000 soldiers in the center was from his conviction of being able to take charge of the command of the left and right wings.

"We'll push our way through as is."

The Moonlight Knights army was gradually pushed.

In the rear of the central main force, Tigre was desperately racking his brains. Even if he jumped out to the vanguard and shot all his arrows, it would be almost impossible to change the flow. Gaspar and Bouroullec were respectively attacking the Sachstein soldiers from the right and left, but they were unable to force the enemy back.

*—In that case...*

Tigre's eyes were turned towards the hill where the Sachstein army's main troops were. The hill's defense was insufficient. In order to change the flow, he could not help but aim at the supreme commander Kreuger.

"Lord Mashas. I'm sorry, but..."

When he turned to look at the old knight beside him, Mashas ostentatiously grieved.

"In the end, you really aren't suitable to be a supreme commander, eh. I had wanted you to follow Her Highness Regin's example."

"I, too, if I could rest at ease, there'll be nothing better than that."

The old Earl scornfully laughed at the youth's words. He immediately returned to a serious expression and said.

"It would probably be useless even if I say it, but... if you fail, come back even if you have to use the soldiers as a shield."

They were severe words considering it was Mashas, but he was serious. The youth's existence was that much important for the whole Moonlight Knights army. Tigre nodded as tension filled his whole body.

When Tigre finished the preparations, he started to move leading 300 soldiers from the rear of the central main force.

He had to hurry. If he was to hesitate, the central main force would end up being destroyed. As he passed the side of Earl Bouroullec's unit, the 300 cavalrymen with Tigre at the vanguard ran through the battlefield.

Agonizing screams echoed here and there and when looking around, corpses were scattered about. If there were corpses of Brune soldiers, there were also ones of Sachstein soldiers.

The Sachstein army's central main force went away from the hill by repeated dashes. There was an opening there for Tigre's unit to get in.

Suddenly, Tigre looked towards his right side. There was one horseman's shadow which parted from the Zhcted army and was running to this place. Silver hair and ruby-colored pupils; it was Elen.

"What are you doing?!"

Tigre shouted at her. With a calm face, Elen lined up next to the youth.

"I left the rest to Lim and came; same as you."

Tigre was at a loss for words. But, he immediately changed his thoughts. He took his gaze off her and stared at the front; more precisely, at the hilltop.

"Crossbows are probably lying in wait for an ambush. I think that I can defend against them with Arifal to some extent, but"

To Elen's words, Tigre shook his head.

"No, I won't depend on Arifal here."

He didn't know whether or not Kreuger had a move other than using crossbows. If he had, he should then use Arifal's power against it. Tigre explained so. While letting her silver hair flutter, Elen turned wondering eyes to Tigre.

"I understand your thoughts, but do you have any other way?"

Tigre nodded.

Kreuger, who was at the hilltop, calmly looked down at the group of about 300 cavalrymen heading towards the hill. Among them, there was also that silver-haired Vanadis.

The outcome would probably be decided on whether or not he could repel them.

Kreuger made the 500 soldiers on standby set up crossbows. Bolts had already been loaded. It was a battle formation where they could ambush the enemy no matter which direction they came from.

*—No matter where you go up from, several hundred bolts will attack you if you step on this hill.*

But, the Moonlight Knights army did not step onto the hill. While riding their horses along the foot of the hill, they gradually slow down the speed letting the horses' legs loosen.

Tigre nocked three arrows to his black bow. Fire was burning on each of the three sickles.

The other cavalrymen set up strings for stone-throwing, but what were inserted in the strings were not stones. But bags filled with oil. Both fire and oil were the things which Tigre had Mashas prepared.

Tigre let the bowstring vibrate. The three fire arrows which were shot, while letting fire flicker, flew in the empty sky as they drew a splendid parabola.

—300 Alsins...!

Kreuger inwardly raised a scream of surprise.

The number which he thought was exaggerated. But, the reality was more than that.

The fire arrows which flew high in the sky dropped in accordance with gravity and struck around the hillside.

The season was spring. This hill was likewise covered with lush flowering plants. They were wrapped in fire.

Next, the cavalrymen threw the oil bags. As expected, they did not fly as high as Tigre's fire arrows, but they were thrown around the hillside.

"Do they intend to attack with fire? Well, that's if fire reaches up to here..."

Tigre had a soldier running alongside him prepare fire and nocked a new fire arrow. Each time the youth shot a fire arrow, fire spread to the hill. Seeing several lines of black smoke rising up, Kreuger guessed Tigre's purpose.

"So, it isn't fire, but rather smoke that's his aim, huh..."

Kreuger groaned. Although he was confused, and he rebuked the soldiers in dismay, it wasn't as if there were no means against fire and smoke. He was unable to come up with a means other than leaving this hill, and also unable to issue instructions to the spare military forces in the rear. Smoke obstructed the soldiers' view and mercilessly harmed their eyes and noses.

While running at the foot of the hill, the 300 cavalrymen led by Tigre threw bags of oil. The fire spread more and more and the quantity of smoke increased, too.

From the top of the hill wrapped in smoke, bolts were shot all at once. However, they were shot in a completely wrong direction.

"Charge!"

Tigre shouted. Elen and the cavalrymen raised battle cries. The Moonlight Knights army ran up the slope wrapped in smoke at a stretch.

There, the Sachstein soldiers set up spears and short swords from within the smoke ad swooped down on them. But in a clash from the front, infantrymen cannot beat cavalrymen. They were sent flying by the swarm of men and horses and fell down onto the ground. There were also people who jumped into the fire.

Tigre and company ran up to the top without stopping their horses' feet and run down the slope of the opposite side as is.

Since it was wrapped in fire and smoke, they couldn't stop.

And, Tigre and company finally caught sight of Kreuger.

*—It's him, huh...!*

Kreuger was running down the slope away from Tigre and company as he was protected by about ten soldiers. Tigre silently took out an arrow and nocked it to the black bow.

Wind blew scattering the smoke just for an instant. At that instant, the youth shot the arrow.

The arrow flew as it drew a curve and pierced Kreuger's throat.

The gray-haired General of Sachstein staggered and fell down to the ground.

When he thought that he'd received a shock to the back of the neck, Kreuger's body fell down to the ground.

He did not utter his voice. His body rapidly became cold.

He wondered whether he was dying. When he wandered his gaze, his dices fell. They seemed to have jumped out of his sleeve due to the shock of him falling down to the ground. He could not see the numbers of pips well.

Kreuger stretched out his hand to pick up the dices, but it did not reach. Even though they fell to a distance three or four steps away if one stood up and walked, he felt as if they were beyond the horizon.

"Uh huh", such a blurred sigh leaked out from his mouth.

He did not realize his dream of building a castle fort that he had pictured. He was frustrated.

The faces of his family that he left behind in his homeland floated in his mind. He wanted to tell them goodbye.

He once again stretched out his hand towards the dices.

Unable to reach them as is, Hans Von Kreuger gave his last breath.

With Kreuger's death marked the end of the battle of Bauval Plain.

The Sachstein soldiers who learned of their supreme commander's death threw away their weapons one after another and surrendered. There were also those who still continued resisting, but were either persuaded by their comrades to surrender or they were knocked down by the Moonlight Knights army.

The number of Sachstein soldiers who surrendered amounted to 6000. Their mediator was the person who acted as Kreuger's adjutant.

Tigre looked down at him and plainly said.

"I won't take you guys as prisoners. You may go to a port town along the coast after burying your comrades' corpses."

"What do you mean?"

Perhaps because he took it as an insult, the adjutant's voice was trembling.

"If you mean to say that prisoners will be a hindrance, shouldn't you just kill us? If you set us free, we might join with our allies who are in the west."

"If you want to fall down on the battlefield, you should just do it. But, I want to ask you. Is it really all right for you not

to send your supreme commander's corpse to your country?"

To Tigre's words, the adjutant dropped his shoulders and hung down his head. Several lines of tears streamed down his blood- and mud-stained face. And so, they followed Tigre's advice.

It would have been very troublesome for the Moonlight Knights army to cope with 6000 prisoners.

Taking prisoners meant that they would have to give them food. They would also have to worry about escape. If they half-heartedly discard them, there was the fear that they would become bandits.

If they sold them to Muozinel slave merchants as slaves in some big city, not only would they immediately dispose of them, they would also obtain funds. But for Tigre who had the experience of having become a prisoner before, it was something he did not want to do if possible; even if it was self-satisfaction.

Therefore, Tigre recommended for them to return to their country.

The Moonlight Knights army and the Sachstein army cooperated in order to put out the fire wrapping the hill by covering it with soil. Afterwards, the Sachstein army buried their comrades' corpses in the south side of the hill, and the Moonlight Knights army buried their comrades' corpses in the north side.

Although the Moonlight Knights army's casualties did not reach 1000, three soldiers who came from Alsace lost their lives. While ostensibly, Tigre dealt with it silently, he asked Titta to send words to mourn over their death to the Alsace soldiers.

After having finished the burial, the rest and the reorganization of the army, Elen asked.

"Now then, what do we do from here on Tigre?"

There were four courses of action that Tigre could take.

Either heading to the port towns of the coast or going to Nemetacum

Or heading to the west and fighting the other forces of the Sachstein army

Or heading for the capital.

"—Let's go to the capital."

Tigre calmly said. If they were to report that they repelled the Sachstein army of the south and made them flee, the capital would liven up. Princess Regin would definitely feel relieved, too. Besides, he had to give rest to the soldiers. At this rate, they could hardly fight against an army of 50000.

Tigre did not know.

About the plot that Kreuger threw to the capital Nice.

"Looks like it's over."

While lightly stretching herself inside the carriage, the black-haired Vanadis muttered with a yawn.

During the time from when the battle of Bauval began until it ended, she was sleeping buried in the cushions that she piled up inside the carriage. Although her pure white dress grew wrinkly, Valentina did not really mind such a thing.

"As I thought, when I act together with him, he's really a fun person."

As she looked at the outside scene from the small window of the carriage, Valentina muttered.

She did not know the real intention of King Victor who dispatched her to this land.

Because it was slightly different from the harassing, the dispatch of troops that happened quite often up until now, he might intend to interfere with something in Osterode during her absence.

*—If that happens, then so be it; afterwards I can make time to talk with His Majesty King Victor just the two of us, so I don't mind.*

For the time being, her interest was in the outcome of the battle between Brune and Sachstein. Then, in how Tigrevurmud Vorn would move.

"I expect a lot from you. Earl Vorn."

After muttering so, she suddenly remembered about the fact that Elen called the youth 'Tigre'. Moreover, also about the fact that Elen's adjutant called him 'Tigrevurmud Vorn'.

*—Shall I tease him on that point the next time?*

She intended to fully make use of this opportunity.



Around the midway point between Zhcted's capital and Legnica, a wasteland was spread out.

There was one woman there.

There was a vermillion short blade in her right hand and a golden one in her left.

"This is a Dragonic Tool..."

With a surprised face, the woman stared at the twin swords in her hands.

Those twin swords appeared just now before her eyes. And, it calmly called out to her consciousness.

Saying "**Thou will become a Vanadis. If thou accept it, take us into your hands**".

The woman was an itinerant mercenary. Since it wasn't as if she travelled assertively looking for a battlefield, it should be correct to call her a former mercenary. Although there was the fact that she was hired by a small village to drive away bandits who settled in the forest and mountain nearby, she was not that much in need of money, so she was not desperate.

"Which reminds me, was she called Eleonora? That girl whom Vissarion took good care of that became a Vanadis."

She muttered as she recalled.

There once existed a mercenary group called "Silver Gale". It wasn't like the woman had belonged to the mercenary group. It was just that she strangely got along well with the man called Vissarion who was the leader of the "Silver Gale", she had helped him with work several times and conversely, she had had him help her.

In the "Silver Gale", there was one girl, something which was unbecoming of a mercenary group. It was said that she, who was named Eleonora, was a child who had been picked up by Vissarion.

The "Silver Gale" no longer existed. Vissarion was no longer in this world, either.

Several years ago, she had heard that the girl called Eleonora had become a Vanadis. When she thought "no way" and inquired about her features to those who saw her, it seemed that there was no mistake.

*—To think that I'll become a Vanadis like that girl...*

When the woman put the twin swords into the belt of her waist, she began to walk towards the capital.

Her name was Figneria. She was a former mercenary once called by the nickname "Finé of the War Blade".



Ludmila Lourie received in the Imperial Palace of Olmutz the report that the Muozinel army had appeared near the

border of Zhcted. About ten days have passed since she returned from the capital Silesia.

At that time, the blue-haired Vanadis was in her office. Since it was right at the time when she was putting in order some troublesome documents, she listened to the soldier's words with an expression somewhat showing her bad mood.

"It is a report from Fort Fordney. Near the Molave River, approximately 5000 Muozinel troops showed up."

Fort Fordney was at the south end of Olmutz. Although small, it was known for the fact that its defense was solid. The Molave River which was to the south about 5 Belsta (about 5km) farther away from this fort substituted for the borderline of Zhcted and Muozinel.

"Thank you for your work. Take a rest for today."

As she gave words of thanks to the soldier, Mila rang the bell on the desk and called one civil official. She issued instructions to give a room to the soldier and then added to bring a map.

*—Now then, I wonder which it is.*

Since the time when she heard that Sachstein had invaded Brune, Mila believed that Muozinel would probably move. The problem was Muozinel's aim.

Either a full-scale invasion; or would they wait and see like last year?

Before long, the civil official brought a map. Mila took it and spread it on the work desk.

*—The soldiers protecting Fordney number less than 2000. The enemy is 5000.*

Fort Fordney towered halfway up a mountain and there was a range of steep mountains to the north and west. Even if they gathered five times the number of soldiers, it would be difficult for them to attack. That said, she could not let her guard down.

*—If they intend to attack, there's no way they will with only 5000. Let alone five times, there's also the possibility that ten times the number of soldiers are lying in wait.*

After a half koku, the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave gathered the chief Knights in one room and held a war council. When she explained the situation, she told very naturally to the knights.

“I will head to Fordney with 2000 soldiers. You too should prepare yourselves so you can deploy at any time.”

“Vanadis-sama. I do not think that it's necessary for you to personally depart for the front for such a battle.”

“Could you give us the opportunity to distinguish ourselves here? Please, Vanadis-sama. Just wait for the report of victory here in the Imperial Palace.”

The knights unanimously showed disapproval, but feelings of worrying about their lord overflowed in their eyes and voices. If Mila who was their princess and Vanadis personally proceeded to the fort, the soldiers' morale would

rise and they would definitely easily triumph no matter if it was the Muozinel army.

However, not knowing what might happen was what a battlefield was. They wanted Mila to remain in the Imperial Palace.

To her subordinates' words, the blue-haired Vanadis shook her head.

"I am thankful for your courage and loyalty. But, it is not yet certain that we will fight against Muozinel. That's why I will go; in order to ascertain it."

Then, Mila ordered to send messengers to the neighboring nobles and Sofy who was in Polesia. It was also likely that the troops which appeared near Fort Fordney were a diversion and that they were aiming for another place. She invited caution and that they should make preparations for cooperating with each other when necessary.

Moreover, she sent messengers to the various cities along the highway. This was in order to have them prepare food, fuel and the place where the soldiers would stay at. By doing this, she could raise the March speed in her territory.

Early morning of the next day, Mila left the rest to the knights and civil officials whom she trusted and left the Imperial Palace with 2000 infantrymen.

Even if spring came, snow still remained at the surroundings of the castle town. But when going ahead on the highway to the south, snow gradually became invisible. In the grassy plains spreading right and left of the

highway, flowers indicating the coming of spring displayed a vivid color.

The 2000 soldiers hung a small sword to their waists and held either a spear or a bow. They wore leather armor reinforced with iron scraps and also put on hats reinforced with iron scraps. There was a shroud/hood on both sides of the hat and that protected their ears and cheeks from the cold.

Their gloves and shoes were also made with fur. Although Fort Fordney was to the south, it was still cold even in the mountains. Mila took that into account.

Mila herself only wore a silver breastplate on top her blue clothes, and covered around her white skirt with a piece of metal and put on leg protectors. The Frozen Wave in her hand protected her from the cold.

*—Muozinel soldiers should be weak in the cold. Also taking that into consideration, is them appearing at Fordney a diversion after all...?*

Four days later, Mila and the 2000 soldiers arrived at the foot of a mountain where Fort Fordney was. When they took a rest, a little less than 100 soldiers ran down the slope of the mountain. They were floating the Black Dragon Flag and Olmutz's battle flag. The flag which depicted a plain, blue spear diagonally fluttered in the wind.

They were soldiers of Fordney. While letting the soldiers rest, Mila was waiting for them to show up.

"We did not think that Vanadis-sama would come."

When the commander of the Fordney's soldiers came until before Mila, he went down on a knee and bowed his head. Mila placidly nodded.

"I was waiting. Well then, let's go to Fordney."

Led by the Fordney soldiers, Mila and the 2000 soldiers went up the mountain which had snow remaining. In about a half koku, the fort could be seen with the white sky and the ashen mountains in the background.

"Vanadis-sama. I am glad that you have come safely."

When she entered the fort, the chief of the fort Rezanov appeared to greet her. Though he was 35 years old, in addition to his white hair, his beard covering his chin harked back to an old man. His voice was low and strengthened the impression that it was hoarse.

But, just from the fact that his voice was usually like this, Mila knew that he was a man who could raise a loud voice in a battlefield. That was why she left this fort to him.

"I feel relieved to see that you and the soldiers seemed to be fine. How is the situation?"

Returning a smile for just an instant, Mila immediately returned to a serious expression.

"For the moment, they're staying near the Molave River. A few numbers of people have crossed the river, but they immediately returned to the other side of the river."

"Did you do something?"

"I had the soldiers go out only once, and then asked them what the Muozinel soldiers were doing. They answered that it seems to be a training march."

Rezanov answered with an indignant tone. His snorting shook his white beard.

Together with the white-haired commander, Mila went out onto the castle wall of the south side. A cold wind rustled her blue hair and white ribbon. When she smoothed her ribbon upwards with her hand, she turned her gaze to the south. She could overlook the Molave River from here.



On the other side of the river which glittered reflecting the spring sunlight, 5000 soldiers were hovering in a deep black background. What was drawn on the fluttering flag was the golden helmet of the horned ox and a sword. It was Muozinel's battle flag.

"From here, we can only see those people, but I do not think that that is all of them."

Rezanov standing next to Mila said while exhaling a white breath. Mila nodded without taking her eyes off the Muozinel army.

"I agree with you, too."

Two years ago, when the Muozinel army attacked Brune, they were composed of an advance party of 20000 and the main force of 30000. This time, too, they might intend to watch the situation with 5000 soldiers.

Lavias was quietly clad in a chill; as if to respond to the fighting spirit of the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave.

Would it be over as is with just facing each other? Or would they clash?

Nobody could tell.

## *Translator and references notes*

[1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kvass>

[2] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dacha>

[3] the state of being clearly visible or obvious due to being accentuated in some way

[4] like poison for example

[5] the matter of him having been sent to Asvarre

[6] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonquil>

[7] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myosotis>

[8] this part means that the groom becomes part of the wife's family like take on their last name and stuff

[9] the towns and villages they attacked

[10] person here refers to the one who stole Durandal

[11] pips like 'any of the spots on playing cards, dice, or dominoes'

[12] the discussion here is referring to the possible talk between the two armies

[13]

[http://875357559f655c0fd9842374.eventingnation.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/DSC\\_0148.jpg](http://875357559f655c0fd9842374.eventingnation.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/DSC_0148.jpg) looks something like this – DualxBlades

[14] 'it' refers to the hill fort

[15] as in the ones who were lost after the night battle –  
DualxBlades