

Beloved Dog 221

Chapter 221

Mr. Ekenhart Explained The Reason That He Brought Her

“Well, I’ll leave Anneliese to you, Claire...”

As Ms. Claire glared angrily, a cold sweat dripped from Mr. Ekenhart’s forehead as he returned to the main subject.

“Your Grace, you were speaking of keeping Anneliese here...”

“Ah. As you can see, her feelings of guilt are... Well, she knows nothing of the world. And so I had no choice but to bring her here to be educated.”

“Educated...you say? That is very... But what has Count Barsler said about this?”

“Hahaha. He is in no position to be saying anything. Because I told the royal family about what he did.”

“The royal family...”

The people who control the nobles...the people who stood at the top of this country.

I didn’t know anything about them, but I had heard that it was their responsibility to keep the nobles in line.

“A malicious store that sells herbs... Through an investigation, we know that the Barsler family are involved. Well, I’m sure there is a lot more that will come to light soon enough. And the royal family will know it all.”

“I see. So people must be monitoring them now?”

“Aye. There is evidence of some things but not others... And so people have been sent to keep an eye on Barsler’s mansion.”

When a noble has committed a crime or is suspected of committing one, the royal family will send people to acquire evidence through monitoring and investigating.

Because of this, Count Barsler was being monitored, which would make it difficult to complain of others or act behind the scenes.

“Once everything is exposed, we will finally be punished. But I was asked to take care of Anneliese in the meantime.”

“Asked by who? It wasn’t Count Barsler, was it?”

“Of course, not. The request came from someone connected to the royal family, but... Her ignorance of the world is a real issue...she understands Barsler’s crimes...but does not know why using her mind to make suggestions is so reprehensible...just as Claire said.”

“Ha...”

Apparently, Mr. Ekenhart was asked to take care of Anne by someone related to the royal family.

Well, it wasn’t hard to see why someone would be troubled by this lady, who was acting so innocent, just because she only made suggestions and didn’t actually act them out.

Perhaps she led a sheltered life...and was unable to think of others.

“And well, Claire has one of the finest reputations of any young noblewoman, and has done me much credit as the one who raised her. So it was only natural for their eyes to turn to me. A reeducation from none other than a duke might be just the thing! After all...Anneliese is Count Barsler’s heir.”

So Ms. Claire had a good reputation in the king’s court.

Indeed, in spite of her high position, she had no prejudices against the common folk, and was loved by the people of Ractos.

It had been the same at the orphanage. She never acted like she was better than others.

...Though, she only wore clothes that were tailor-made, and her way of thinking was often that of a wealthy young woman...

“So the count’s heir is to be educated in this house?”

“Exactly.”

“However, wouldn’t the nobles object to this? It will look like you are trying to take over the count’s house...”

“Yes, I’m sure there will be plenty of gossip. However, the royal family will show their support.”

“I see... It is a matter settled by the royal family and Your Grace. I can do nothing but aid you as your butler.”

“I thank you for that, Sebastian.”

And so Mr. Ekenhart and Sebastian’s conversation about Ms. Anne ended.

Between the other noble houses, it was possible that less than complimentary rumors would be spread. But since this was something involving the royal family...it surely meant that she would be properly educated in order to take on the role as heir.

Well, if Mr. Ekenhart and Sebastian were satisfied with the arrangement, there was nothing for me to say.

Besides, I’m sure that Ms. Claire would go about it with that fiery will of hers...

I glanced over and saw that she was still using Leo as a weapon against Ms. Anne... But I decided it was best to leave them be. I did not want to accidentally attract her rage.

Also, I had learned another thing. In this country, nobles had a hereditary system, but there were no rules about it being through a male line.

But then again, the founder of this very house had been a woman, so it wasn't actually a surprise.

I suppose...it was gender equality?

"Now, I will leave Anneliese to Claire and... We should move on to this blasted store."

It all seemed a little disorganized to me, but I didn't feel like contradicting Mr. Ekenhart.

And while Ms. Claire and Ms. Anne were still being quite loud, Mr. Ekenhart ignored them and continued with a serious expression.

Aside from Tilura, who looked a little jealous at all the attention that Ms. Anne was receiving from Leo, everyone else became quite serious as well.

Sebastian and Ms. Lyra even straightened their backs.

"Well, now that Anne is here, and Count Barsler is being watched closely, and cannot move... Sebastian."

"Yes, Your Grace?"

"Aside from what is happening outside...are you certain of what is happening inside of the store as well?"

"Yes. We have gathered a lot of information, everything, from the reason the disease was spread, to the timing of the store opening, it all connects."

"I see... A glass sphere... Hmm?"

After finding the glass sphere in Range village, we had all the necessary pieces to act. But Mr. Ekenhart had now acted, and would take care of everything now.

After confirming this with Sebastian, Mr. Ekenhart showed interest in the glass sphere once again.

He had already heard about it from Ms. Anne, who thought of how to use it, and from Sebastian's report. But he still had other questions.

"The glass sphere is a magic tool. I had Isabelle, who runs a magic tool store in Ractos, look into it. And according to her..."

And so Sebastian explained to Mr. Ekenhart about the glass sphere, Range village, and the merchants, as well as the orc attack, and everything else that had happened.

Chapter 222

I Was Thanked For Helping Range Village

"...I see... So that's what happened... Mr. Takumi..."

"Yes."

"While Sebastian has already thanked you on my behalf... I must thank you again."

After the explanation was finished, Mr. Ekenhart, who had been listening, closed his eyes and thought for some time. And then he called me over and stood up.

"Range village...a village within my lands, was threatened by monsters. But thanks to you, the damages were minimal. You have my gratitude."

Said Mr. Ekenhart with a deep bow of the head.

And then Sebastian and Ms. Lyra bowed as well.

“Uh, um... It was really nothing. Well, I was protecting myself as well... And as I said before, it was mostly Leo’s doing.”

“Still. Without your help, Mr. Takumi, it might have been too late by the time that Leo arrived.”

“That...might be true... But then I have you to thank for teaching me to use a sword, Mr. Ekenhart. And Sebastian also taught me magic.”

Sebastian had already thanked me after the battle with the orcs.

I thought that the matter was finished then, and so it was a little awkward to be thanked again now.

Though, it was true that had I not bought more time, Leo’s arrival would have been too late.

But it was still thanks to Mr. Ekenhart teaching me to use a sword, and the magic I was taught by Sebastian. That’s why I was able to delay the orcs.

If anything, I should be the one who was grateful.

“Magic? ...Is that so, Sebastian?”

“Yes. I told him that instead of focusing only on winning with a sword, he should also consider using magic to survive.”

“I see. I suppose that is something that I should have taught him. It’s not just about defeating opponents, but about survival.”

Mr. Ekenhart hadn’t been told that I was taught magic.

And so he asked Sebastian, and now understood the reason.

Still, it wasn’t as if Mr. Ekenhart had enough time to teach me other things. So it could not be helped.

He was the lord of this house, and had only stayed for a short while, as he was busy. It was good enough that he taught me to use a sword.

“Your Grace, what should we do with the imprisoned merchants?”

“Hmm... Well, they will have to be punished for what they did. But I think I will leave it to Ractos.”

“Of course. I will let them know that it must be severe.”

While they hadn't attacked the villagers themselves, they had released the monsters.

I didn't know anything about the laws of this country, but that was clearly a crime.

Perhaps...they might be executed.

“Well, I shall ride there tomorrow then. I need to get rid of those who would harm my people.”

“About that, Your Grace. I do have one suggestion.”

“A suggestion?”

“Yes. I told you about the wine that Leo was able to sniff out... The thing is, Mr. Takumi purchased it.”

“That wine... But why? It is something that makes people sick... Surely it should be disposed of?”

“Mr. Takumi...”

“...Yes.”

Sebastian then urged me to tell Mr. Ekenhart about why I had bought the wine.

It was a waste. I thought it could be drunk somehow... Perhaps by using herbs, it could be changed into a medicinal wine. I told him everything I was thinking.

"I see. I understand it now. And what is your suggestion, Sebastian?"

"To take some of that wine...to the store."

"...I see... You are thinking of something very mischievous, aren't you, Sebastian..."

"They worked much evil on your lands... I am not so saintly as to forgive them."

It was easy enough to guess what Sebastian meant to do.

Mr. Ekenhart looked at Sebastian and chuckled... And due to his physical appearance, he looked just like a villain.

And Sebastian just grinned back.

...I had seen something like this before... Ah, that's what it was. It reminded me of some evil magistrate from a period drama.

...And while these two men weren't actual villains, their expressions were so similar.

"Excuse me. Phillip has returned."

Just then, there was a knock on the door and a butler entered.

It was then announced that Phillip had returned.

"Hmm. This is good timing, Your Grace."

"Mmm. Mr. Takumi, let's go and meet Phillip."

“Yes.”

I then had to follow Mr. Ekenhart and Sebastian as they went to meet Phillip.

Ms. Claire, Ms. Anne and Leo were still causing a scene on the other side of the room, and Tilura stayed in her seat. Sherry and Ms. Lyra also stayed as the three of us went out to the entrance hall.

...While I couldn't argue with them, it felt awkward to follow people who had such sinister grins.

“Phillip. Welcome back.”

“Mr. Sebastian. I am... Your Grace!?”

“Mmm. At ease, Phillip.”

“Hello. Phillip.”

In the entrance hall, the servants had split up into teams and were rolling the wine barrels.

They were moving them to a storage room.

After being called, Phillip turned and answered Sebastian, and then noticed Mr. Ekenhart.

Now that I thought about it, he didn't know that his master would be home...so it would have been a great surprise.

I greeted him as well, but he didn't seem to hear me.

“Phillip. I want you to leave one of the barrels here. Also... Helena.”

“Certainly!”

“What is it, Your Grace?”

Mr. Ekenhar gave the order to Phillip to leave some of the wine, and then he called over Ms. Helena.

Chapter 223

The Wine Was Boiled And We Drank It

“As for this wine that Phillip brought back... It cannot be drunk like this, yes?”

“Yes. That is what Mr. Sebastian said.”

“I believe...that it will be drinkable if you boil it... So do it with this barrel. Mr. Takumi, I will buy this barrel from you.”

“Certainly. I will prepare it right away.”

“Huh? I don’t mind, but... You can just have it if you want?”

He must have decided to have Ms. Helena take one of the barrels and boil it so it could be drunk.

As there were many, it would not be a bad idea to set one aside so we could all drink it.

“Well, I still have my pride. So just allow me to buy it from you for now. Also, Ms. Helena. Save a few bottles of it before boiling.”

“Yes, Your Grace!”

Or perhaps it was better for everyone to drink something that was bought by Mr. Ekenhart, and not someone who wasn’t a noble...such as myself?

I wasn’t sure, but I decided to go with it.

As Ms. Helena turned to leave, he also told her to set some of the wine aside.

It was probably so they could take it to the store.

You could get dozens of bottles from a single barrel, so a few bottles was nothing.

“Your Grace, here it is.”

“Hmm... It smells good enough... But it cannot be drunk like this... Phillip. Take this barrel to Ms. Helena.”

“Yes, Your Grace!”

After the barrel was rolled over by a few men, Mr. Ekenhart smelled it.

The fragrance was a mixture of the barrel’s wood and the wine, and it was indeed quite pleasant as it wafted around us.

...Did Mr. Ekenhart know a lot about wine?

He did look like someone who drinks a lot. And I suppose most nobles would be educated on wine.

“Now, let us return to the drawing room and wait until Helena is finished.”

And so I left the entrance hall with Mr. Ekenhart and Sebastian, and we went to the drawing room.

By now, Ms. Claire’s anger had subsided, and she was quietly drinking tea. Leo and Sherry were playing with Tilura.

...Leo seemed to enjoy it a lot more compared to when she was forced to play with Ms. Anne.

Though, she also glared at me when I returned...but I pretended not to see it.

As for Ms. Anne...she looked very tired... Even her rolls were a mess, and she looked quite different now.

Well, she had been forced to play with the embodiment of her fears, so it was no wonder.

“Excuse me. Master, the wine has been processed.”

“Mmm.”

As we relaxed silently in the drawing room for some time, Ms. Helena entered with the wine... which was now more like a juice.

As it had been boiled, I thought that it would be hot, but it had been cooled until it was cold.

...I suppose it was done with magic?

“Now, Mr. Takumi and Leo. Is this...drinkable?”

“I can’t say... Leo has to check... Go on, Leo.”

“Wuff? Sniff...sniff... Wuff!”

Everyone sat down at the table, and cups of the juice were placed down in front of them.

There was no smell of alcohol, and I could detect nothing but grapes.

After Mr. Ekenhart’s question, I had Leo smell it to confirm.

After tilting her head to the side, she nodded firmly. So it should be fine then.

“She says it is fine.”

“I see. Then let’s drink. This is my first time drinking wine from Range village. ...Though, I would have preferred to drink actual wine...”

Apparently, Mr. Ekenhart had never drunk Range village wine before.

Mr. Hannes did say that they sent the wine to Ractos and the count’s lands.

I felt a little bad for only buying undrinkable wine, but it would have to do for now.

“Mmm...”

“...Glug.”

Mr. Ekenhart, Ms. Claire, Tilura, and Ms. Anne all started to drink from their cups.

And after taking one sip, their eyes widened in surprise.

I took a sip as well... Hmm, due to the way it was stored, as well as the boiling, I was a little worried about the taste. But it was just as sweet and delicious as the wine I drank in Range village.

Perhaps, while the alcohol was burned out, it became more concentrated... Though, I didn’t know much about such things.

“Wuff-wuff.”

“Kyau.”

“Oh, what is it? Does Leo and Sherry want some too?”

“Wuff.”

“Kyau.”

As I drank the juice with some surprise, I heard Leo and Sherry's pleading voices.

Both of them wanted to drink it as well.

But Leo had shown no interest in the wine back at Range village... Was it because there was no alcohol now?

"Sorry, but is there any for Leo and Sherry?"

"There is plenty. I will bring some now."

When I asked Ms. Helena, she said that she could prepare some for them right away.

They wagged their tails and faced the direction that Ms. Helena stood, so they must really be looking forward to it.

"Now this is a surprise. I didn't expect it to be this good..."

"It really is. Father, I am quite ashamed that I didn't know about it before."

"It's delicious! I want to drink more!"

"It is wonderful...the very idea of using this to spread a disease... How abhorrent..."

"But it was you!"

"...Oh. Yes, it was."

Mr. Ekenhart and the others were all surprised by how much they enjoyed it.

And they drained their cups in no time.

Ms. Helena took the cups and left in order to bring more, as well some for Leo and Sherry.

Ms. Anne was also surprised. But it seemed like she was the forgetful sort, and Ms. Claire had to give her a reminder.

“Mr. Takumi, this was a good idea. It would have been a great waste...to dispose of all of that wine.”

“Yes. It was because I drank it there and knew how good it was. I couldn’t let them just throw it away. However...”

“Hmm? What is it? Is there a problem?”

“No. But regarding this whole incident...I talked to Mr. Hannes, the chief of Range village...”

Chapter 224

Leo Wanted Some Grape Juice As Well

And so I told Mr. Ekenhart about what happened before I returned from Range village. To be precise, what I talked to Mr. Hannes about while waiting for Phillip to arrive with the wagons.

It was a village that relied on its wine. But while it was doing well, the children were often neglected.

We were worried that once bad rumors of the wine started to spread, that people would stop buying it.

Furthermore, now that the relationship between the count and the duke could not be worse, they might not be able to buy grapes. Besides, they could hardly trust any merchants from that side now...

“I see... Yes, there will be some effect from it.”

“Indeed... There will be no way to stop the rumors. And once they spread, they will keep spreading. Besides, I think it will also be impossible to retrieve all of the wine that has already been sold.”

“Well, those with good intuition will realize that it’s the wine anyway...”

Aside from the rumors, it would also be difficult to retrieve the wine that was already out there.

Even if they were able to track down each bottle, most of it would have already been drunk or perhaps given to someone else.

In fact...I doubted they could even be tracked in the first place.

“It will be sad to lose this flavor... Sebastian. Is there anything that can be done about Range village’s wine?”

“Indeed... I cannot say... But it sounds like the village chief has given up on producing wine. I think it will be necessary to discuss the matter seriously.”

“Mm. Yes.”

“I will not allow something this good to disappear! I promise you now, my house will continue to send a good supply of grapes to the village!”

“...Anneliese... You aren’t even in charge yet. You have no authority. Besides, it’s not for you to decide. It’s up to the grape merchants and Range village.”

“Hmph... Who would do such a.... Who would think of using something so wonderful to spread a disease...”

“You! It was you!”

Neither Mr. Ekenhart or Sebastian could think of anything to do for Range village now.

But they would talk to Mr. Hannes in the near future and decide... I would try to go with them. Though, I didn’t know if there was anything that I could do.

Still, what was wrong with Ms. Anne...? Or was she doing this on purpose...?

But Ms. Claire was forced to remind her repeatedly.

...They were starting to look like a comedy duo.

“I have brought more for you all. And here you go, Leo...”

“Wuff-wuff!”

“More!”

“Kyau!”

As I thought of such nonsensical things, Ms. Helena returned to the drawing room with more juice.

Leo, Tilura and Sherry were overjoyed as they rushed towards Ms. Helena.

And after waiting for their turn, they each acquired their drinks.

Ms. Lyra then came to the table and poured it into each of our cups.

“Leo. Calm down. You’ll make a mess if you drink it like that.”

“Wuff-guff-gubb-gubb... Wuff? Wou! Guff-guff-gubb.”

“Kyab-kyab...kyau...”

“It’s delicious!”

“Tilura, drink it slowly.”

“Okay.”

After telling her to be careful, Leo pulled her head out of the bucket and looked at me with a puzzled expression. But then she quickly started drinking again.

It was delicious, so it was understandable, but... She definitely wasn't listening to me.

Though, Sherry was now drinking slowly...

Leo was supposed to be the one educating her, but had worse manners... Well, it might also be due to Sherry's small size.

Tilura was also drinking greedily, but calmed down after Ms. Claire warned her.

That was fine, but I hoped everyone wasn't drinking too much?

After that, we talked about our plans for the next day, and then dispersed.

I went out into the back garden in order to train with Tilura.

Ms. Claire was now excited about Ms. Anne's education, and dragged her away by the collar.

Sebastian must have had other reports to make to his master, as the two went off to his study.

“Ah, I see you two are training.”

“Mr. Ekenhart.”

“Father!”

“Wuff?”

“Kyau.”

After training for some time, Mr. Ekenhart came out into the garden.

Apparently, he had finished talking with Sebastian.

“While I’ve been away for a while, I see that you’ve continued with your training.”

“Yes.”

“Hmm... And you’ve been in a real battle. So, how was it?”

“Uhh... I was so nervous and had to be careful so that my arms didn’t shake. But...”

“Yes?”

“Previously, you told me that I must never stop moving during a fight. But I wasn’t able to follow that.”

Mr. Ekenhart then started questioning me about the battle with the orcs in Range village.

And so I told him honestly of my failure.

“Hmm. I see. And why did you stop?”

He had told me never to stop many times.

And so he looked at me sharply when I told him about it.

...It was a little scary.

“I don’t want to make excuses...but it was Weed Cultivation.”

“Weed Cultivation? You used Weed Cultivation during combat?”

“I wasn’t trying to use it. But I started thinking...if only there was a convenient herb for such times...”

“And then you froze?”

“No. I activated Weed Cultivation on the orc.”

“You did? And what happened?”

I felt like I was being interrogated, but I told Mr. Ekenhard about what had happened.

What I hadn’t been able to say before, because of Ms. Anne’s presence.

Tilura, who had been training with me, looked at us seriously and listened.

And so I told him everything, including what Ms. Isabelle had told me.

Chapter 225

I Trained With Mr. Ekenhart

“I see. Weed Cultivation... The Gift really is a strange ability.”

“Yes. But it won’t activate on humans easily, so there shouldn’t be any risk of it happening when I touch someone.”

“I’m relieved to hear that information. However, as for whether or not it will with monsters...that is another issue.”

“Yes. If what Ms. Isabelle says is true, it also depends on the magic energy. So I am really not sure.”

Perhaps it will only activate on monsters with a certain degree of magic energy. Regardless, I was not likely to be able to find out for a long time.

It would be much too dangerous to go out and seek a monster just so I could put my bare hands on it...

"I see. If it was something you can do easily and count on, it might help you during combat... But though it is a Gift, I suppose it can't do everything."

"Yes."

I shouldn't expect it to solve all my problems.

Besides, while it was supposed to be related to plants, it could not make any farm produce.

Instead of being able to do everything, it was something that made certain things more convenient.

And I felt that if I relied on it too much, things might head in a bad direction.

"Well, you should train then. While it's too bad you froze during combat, you need to teach your body so that it doesn't happen again."

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

"Wuff!"

"Kyau!"

Said Mr. Ekenhart, and the tense training began.

Even if I'm thinking about something else, my body would be able to move naturally and dodge attacks... That would certainly be ideal...but difficult. And I would have to train all the harder.

After Tilura and I answered enthusiastically, Leo and Sherry answered as well.

I knew that Leo was worried due to seeing my injury...but Sherry probably had no idea what we were talking about.

Now that Mr. Ekenhart had joined us, things became much more severe then when it was just me and Tilura.

Especially since I had now experienced a real battle, there were a lot of mock fights.

Unlike my training with Leo, Mr. Ekenhart would also attack with a wooden sword.

While it was soft wood, if his precise blows landed, I would still get bruised.

"Hmmm. I can see that the way you fight is now different from Tilura, Mr. Takumi."

"Is it really?"

"I don't know what is different..."

After our training was done, I used Loe to heal all of the bruises while talking to Mr. Ekenhart.

...Should you really be using Loe so casually...? Mr. Ekenhart seemed to ask, but I ignored him.

Of course, I was very thankful to Weed Cultivation.

If I didn't heal the bruises and scratches, Ms. Claire and the others might worry about me.

"Tilura. When you fight, what do you target first?"

“The vitals! If you cut them, then you can defeat your opponent quickly!”

“What about you, Mr. Takumi?”

“I...would target the vitals if I could...but perhaps the arms or legs. It will be easier to fight once they are slowed down.”

“There. That is the difference between you two.”

Tilura said that she would target the vitals in a battle.

But I had a different opinion... Was it really just because I had fought in a battle?

“If there is a difference in skill between you, then aiming for the vitals first is not a bad idea. Once you reach a certain level...it will be about how fast you can take someone down. However, if the skill level is the same, then I doubt either side will be able to land such a blow easily.”

“...Really?”

“Mmm. Trade blows and wait for an opening...that is what will usually happen. But not always. So Mr. Takumi is smart. Target the legs and arms and slow their movements. If your arm is cut, then you will not be able to hold a sword. If your leg is cut, you will not move as well. Once they are weakened, the rest is easy.”

“...I see.”

“Yes.”

Tilura and I nodded at Mr. Ekenhart’s explanation.

When I had fought the orcs, I first targeted the arms that held the spear.

It was because with my skill level and sword length, I would not be able to reach its vitals very easily. And I suppose I had been right to think this.

I had thought and searched for the right way to fight, and I suppose that was what set me apart from Tilura now.

“Your Grace, Lady Tilura, Mr. Takumi. Dinner is ready.”

“Ah, good. That’s enough training and lecturing.”

“Thank you.”

“Thank you!”

Ms. Gelda came to call us, and so the training in the garden ended.

Thanking the person who instructed you was something they did in kendo. And I suppose it was the same anywhere, once your relationship became that of master and apprentice.

“Tomorrow...we’re going to the store...”

After dinner, I took a bath and retired to my room.

As the training was more severe than usual, Mr. Ekenhart told me to rest without doing my swings.

Perhaps he was worried because of our work tomorrow.

By the way, during dinner, Ms. Anne sat at the same table, but was the farthest away from Leo, because she was scared. I nearly burst into laughter.

Mr. Ekenhart ate his meat in the same ill-mannered way as before.

And Ms. Claire had to admonish him again.

“Well, I don’t want to stay up too late. Good night, Leo!”

“Wuff.”

We were finally going to confront them. I didn’t want to be tired.

...Though, I’m sure it wouldn’t turn into a fight.

As it was related to the herbs, Mr. Ekenhart said that I would accompany them.

And I had always meant to go.

And so I moved my hand away from Leo, who I was petting, and rolled into my bed.

Leo rolled into a ball next to the bed, and I said goodnight before drifting off into a dream.

I would be very glad to see that store gone, and to have only good quality herbs sold throughout Ractos.

Chapter 226

I Prepared To Visit The Store

“Good morning, Mr. Takumi. I trust you slept well?”

“Yes. I’ve already eaten and am ready... I am fully prepared.”

The next morning, Tilura came to play with Leo, though she pretended that she had just come to wake me. And then we went to the dining hall.

After eating breakfast there, I returned to my room and prepared to leave.

That being said, it wasn’t going to be a long journey, like when I went to Range village, and so I was finished very quickly.

I left the room and greeted Mr. Ekenhart, who had arrived at the entrance hall first.

By the way, since we were going to Ractos, Sebastian had told Nick that he didn't need to come today.

It would save time to just give the herbs to them directly.

"Anne... You are coming too?"

"Why wouldn't I? It concerns my family, after all."

Ms. Claire and Ms. Anne were talking as they came down the stairs.

Ms. Claire did not seem pleased about this. But I was starting to believe what Mr. Ekenhart had first said, that they were more friendly than they appeared to be.

...Perhaps they were friends of the same age... And Ms. Claire just wouldn't admit it.

"Your Grace, we are ready to depart."

"And the wine?"

"We have loaded a few bottles of it."

"I see. Good."

Sebastian came to tell us that everything was ready, and now everyone who was going was present in the hall.

It was me, Leo, Mr. Ekenhart, Ms. Claire, Ms. Anne, Sebastian, with Phillip and Johanna accompanying us as guards. And then there were Mr. Ekenhart's three private guards as well.

So that was eleven including Leo... It was quite a crowd.

“Be safe!”

“Kyau.”

“See you later, Tilura and Sherry.”

“Please be safe. We await your return!”

I called out to Tilura and Sherry before leaving, and then we all stepped outside.

As always, the servants formed a line and raised their voices in unison. I was used to it now.

Though, I did see Milina with them... I suppose she had been practicing?

Perhaps I could join them one day...

“Your Grace, here is your carriage. You too, Lady Claire.”

“Mmm.”

“Thank you.”

As there were many people this time, instead of the carriages for two to three people, we would go in something much more luxurious.

...It was practically a small room on wheels... I had never seen a carriage with doors like that.

But then again, maybe this wasn't anything fancy for a duke...

“What about you, Mr. Takumi?”

“I...will ride on Leo.”

“Wuff-wuff.”

“Anne. I can see that you are just dying to ride on Leo as well?”

“Do not joke about such things. I will take a seat in the carriage.”

“Hahaha. I think you should ride on Leo after you are more accustomed to being around her. All right, Leo. Let’s go.”

“Wuff!”

I called Leo, who had been playing with the horses, and then I climbed onto her back.

I suppose that Ms. Claire was just joking about Ms. Anne riding on Leo.

The others all entered the fancy noble carriage, and Sebastian climbed onto the driver’s seat.

The guards all mounted their horses as well. And we were ready to go.

“We will depart now, Your Grace!”

Phillip said, as his horse moved to the lead.

And the other horses and carriage began to move.

Unlike other lightheart excursions to the town, there was a nervousness in the air. I suppose it was because of the duke.

“Leo, don’t get too excited.”

“Wuff.”

As Leo was faster than the horses, she would often run around them and go back and forth playfully.

While Phillip and Johanna were used to this behavior, Mr. Ekenhart’s guards were not.

And so it would be best if she didn’t do anything that was unnecessary.

...Besides, I had seen them flinch a little when Leo got close.

“Why won’t that thing calm down? It is most indecent.”

“Don’t mind Good Leo, Anne.”

“Mmm. Leo is a Silver Fenrir. She is like the symbol of our great house. It is proper for her to be free and live as she chooses.”

When Leo moved close to the carriage, I heard the conversation happening inside.

Well, the window happened to be open, and I saw that Ms. Anne glared at us. So I knew she would say something that wasn’t kind.

I suppose she now felt safe since she was in the carriage.

“...A Silver Fenrir...? Is that true? Well, it does have silvery fur...”

Oh? Apparently, Ms. Anne hadn’t known that Leo was a Silver Fenrir.

Now that I thought about it, no one had explained to her about Leo or me... I just assumed that she knew, because she was a noble. But maybe it was only this house.

“Yes, it is true. There is no doubt that Good Leo is a Silver Fenrir. She can destroy monsters with ease. I have seen it with my own eyes.”

“I wish I had been so fortunate... But Anneliese, Leo is definitely a Silver Fenrir. And since she obeys Mr. Takumi, he is our honored guest.”

“...But surely...no human could command a Silver Fenrir...”

While Ms. Anne knew about Silver Fenrirs, she had not connected them to Leo.

Well, if they were supposed to be ferocious monsters that yielded to no one, then the quiet Leo might not have fit her image of them.

Though...Leo is just my buddy, not a servant.

“So...this Mr...Takumi, did you say? He is not some commoner?”

“Mr. Takumi is special. And kind. And bright...”

“...You seem to have a high opinion of him, Claire... Well, you are not wrong. He has improved much with the sword as well. And yes, he is not stupid. I think he is talented.”

“That is a lot of praise from the both of you...”

Oh, now they were talking about me.

While Mr. Claire and Mr. Ekenhart were both rather generous in their estimation of me, I felt like I was still a far way off from deserving it...

Perhaps they felt it was necessary for them to do so, to prevent Ms. Anne from feeling too much disdain towards me...?

Chapter 227

We All Arrived In Ractos

“Oh, Mr. Takumi? You were listening to us?”

“Hahah. Well, Leo moved close and the window was open...so I heard.”

“Wuff-wuff!”

“Ahhhh!”

“Mr. Takumi, Leo seems to be in very high spirits today?”

“Leo likes being able to carry people and run. And so she always gets very excited when going to town.”

“I see. In that case, it was a good thing that she came along.”

As Leo ran parallel to the carriage, Ms. Claire noticed that I overheard them.

It was a little awkward, but the others did not seem to mind.

Though, Ms. Anne did shriek a little when Leo barked... But that was fine.

Mr. Ekenhard observed that Leo was in a good mood, and so I explained to him that Leo liked to run.

As she was so large, she could not move so freely when inside of the mansion. And that was bound to be stressful.

She had always liked to run, even in our previous world...so it was no surprise.

“Your Grace, we have been waiting for you.”

“Mmm.”

The carriage stopped in front of the entrance to Ractos town, and everyone stepped out.

Usually, we would get out in the plaza with the fountain, but since Mr. Ekenhart was with us, we might attract a lot more attention.

Indeed, with such a fancy carriage that was different from any other, people would take notice.

“We were informed by Mr. Sebastian.”

“I see. So you know what business brings me here?”

“Yes! Though, it is a great shame that you have been forced to come here in person. We apologize for not being able to deal with it.”

“That is fine. As it is related to the count, it would be difficult for the people here to act.”

Ten guards were standing in a line at the entrance in order to greet Mr. Ekenhart.

Apparently, Sebastian had contacted them in advance.

They seemed to deeply regret that Mr. Ekenhart had to come all the way here in person.

But as Mr. Ekenhart said, it was an important matter...

And since it involved the selling of medicine, it was not something the guards could handle alone.

“Then we shall accompany you...”

“That won’t be necessary. Besides, we are drawing enough attention as it is. I want to get a glimpse of what the town is usually like. So my guards will be enough. And...”

“Wuff?”

“Leo will be with us.”

“Yes, of course!”

While the guards meant to accompany us at first, Mr. Ekenhart refused their help.

Leo tilted her head after Mr. Ekenhart’s gaze turned to her.

He meant that with Leo here, we didn’t need any other guards.

They agreed and stood back.

“Now, what should we do... Sebastian?”

“Yes. We should go to Mr. Kalis’s store first. And from there, Mr. Takumi and I alone will go to the other store...”

“Me?”

“Yes. So we can take the wine to them...”

Sebastian then explained to everyone what would happen now.

Apparently, it was just me and Sebastian who would go first.

“Wouldn’t things move faster if Mr. Ekenhart is there?”

“That is true, however...”

“It will end too soon. And where is the fun in that? They have caused much mischief on my lands... And so it’s only right that we have a little fun, is that not the case?”

“...Father... This is a very bad habit of yours.”

“How terrifying... My father was a fool for ever working against you.”

“And yet you were the one who showed him the way, Anne...”

Apparently, Mr. Ekenhart was amused by the idea that the store could be toyed with.

Both he and Sebastian were grinning mischievously.

...Ms. Claire and Ms. Anne looked a little concerned, and I couldn't help but feel the same.

“Now, let us go to Mr. Kalis's store. And there, I will explain the details to Mr. Takumi.”

“Very well.”

“I haven't been to the store in a long time. But Mr. Takumi's herbs are already being sold, yes? How are things going?”

“Better than I had expected. Of course, part of it is due to the quality, but it also helped that the other store's offerings were so poor.”

“I see. So the timing was good. ...Though, it is a shame that so many people suffered from the illness...”

“But thanks to Mr. Takumi's herbs...things were not as bad as they could be. At least, there have been no reports of people dying from it. Besides, Mr. Kalis's store is doing something special.”

“Special? What is it?”

As we walked away from the guards and towards Mr. Kalis's store, the conversation turned to the herbs that were being sold.

But as there were so many people, and Leo was with us, many heads turned...

Children were especially excited when they saw Leo.

After all, Leo had played with them before in front of the store.

Some of them tried to rush towards her, but their parents noticed Ms. Claire and held the children back.

While Mr. Ekenhard rarely visited, Ms. Claire was well known to the people of the town.

“He lowered the prices of the Ramogi.”

“He did? But did Mr. Takumi agree to that?”

“Yes, of course. He insisted that he be paid less...”

“True. It was Sebastian’s idea, and I accepted. That way, it will be more accessible and curb the spread of the disease.”

“I see... So it was for the people. I thank you, Mr. Takumi.”

“No, not at all. I just wanted the poor to be able to buy it...so fewer people would suffer.”

Seeing the children suffering at the orphanage was also a big part of it.

After all, they had been fooled into using what little money they had on ineffective medicine.

Of course, the money didn’t really matter... I just didn’t want to see children suffer.

As Mr. Ekenhart bowed his head, I answered with a smile, and we continued on to Mr. Kalis’s store.

Chapter 228

We Made Arrangements At Mr. Kalis's Store

"Well, well. Your Grace. You do us great honor with your presence."

"Indeed. And things seem to be going well here."

"Yes. It is all thanks to Mr. Takumi's herbs. Have you heard about the Ramogi discounts?"

"Sebastian and Mr. Takumi have informed me."

"I see. Thanks to that, the store is filled with customers every day, which keeps our staff very busy... But we can hardly complain about that."

When we arrived at Mr. Kalis's store, there was a line of customers waiting to get in.

It had definitely not been like this the last time we were here. Was this because of the Ramogi discount?

One of the clerks saw us, and went inside to call Mr. Kalis, who then came out to greet us.

"We cannot talk out here. Please come inside. Though, it is not a very large store."

"Mmm."

And so we followed Mr. Kalis into the store.

...Except for Leo. She waited outside.

As some of the customers brought their children, Leo could play with them.

And since the clerks had learned from the last time we were here, they were able to smoothly create a line for Leo as well.

“This way.”

Unlike last time we were here, Mr. Kalis guided us to the second floor of the building.

As there were too many customers on the first floor, he probably thought that we wouldn't be able to relax.

Well, there wasn't enough space to put out chairs.

The second floor looked like an office, and so everyone except the guards and Sebastian sat down at the table.

“Now, Mr. Takumi and I will go and pay the rival store a little visit.”

“I'm counting on you.”

“Yes. Mr. Takumi. Once we arrive there...”

“Yes...”

Sebastian then told me about how things would play out once we were there.

And all I could do was nod in agreement.

It seemed like Sebastian could handle everything himself, but he said that he wanted me there, so that I could pretend to be a merchant who could appraise the medicine.

Sebastian was already known as the duke's butler, and Ms. Claire and Phillip were also known as well. Besides, they didn't look at all like merchants.

And Mr. Ekenhart's guards had to stay with him, just in case something happened.

...Though, Leo would stay here. But I suppose it was their job, and could not be helped.

“Ah, it's you! What brings you here today? Of course, I did hear that I didn't need to go...”

“Hey, Nick.”

After Sebastian's explanation was finished, and we were about to leave... Nick came up to the second floor.

Apparently, he had been dealing with customers, and had now come up to rest.

“Ah, so this is Nick...I've heard of him from Sebastian.”

“...Who is that old man?”

“Hey, stop that. This man is...”

“Hahaha! So that is your reaction upon seeing me... Well, it cannot be helped if you do not know. It has been a while, but I am amused!”

“Now he's laughing...”

So Mr. Ekenhart had heard about it from Sebastian.

Well, he seemed to report everything to him...and this store was owned by the duke.

And now Nick was being quite rude.

But when I frantically tried to correct him, Mr. Ekenhart began to laugh loudly.

In fact, he was slapping the table... Was it really that funny?

“Father is used to people paying him the utmost respect...and so such unusual reactions are amusing to him.”

“I see...”

“Ah, hello Lady Claire!”

“Hello, Nick. ...This is my father, you know?”

“Oh...your father... Wouldn't that mean...”

“The duke.”

Ms. Claire looked at her laughing father with a hint of annoyance.

And then Nick went to greet her. As he visited the mansion often, he knew Ms. Claire well enough.

Ms. Claire then introduced her father, and as Nick looked confused, I answered him bluntly.

...It was my duty, as the one paying him.

“...The d-d-d-d-d-d-du-duu...”

“Doo-doo?”

“Hi-his Grace the Du-duke!?”

“Hahaha! Indeed, that is I. Ekenhart Liebert.”

“Fo-forgive me! I did not know, and have been very rude! Please don’t chop off my head! Anything but my head!”

After sputtering like some bird, Nick was finally able to spit it out.

That was how nervous he was.

But Mr. Ekenhart still seemed to be enjoying the situation.

“I won’t cut off your head. You have hired quite the clown, Mr. Takumi.”

“Uh...”

“I think I will have him entertain us while you two visit the other store.”

“Hahaha...! If-if-if you insist!”

“...Well, good luck, Nick...”

Apparently, Mr. Ekenhart had taken a liking to Nick.

Sebastian and I then left Mr. Kalis’s store, but Nick was left on the second floor.

He looked a little like an abandoned puppy, pleading for help... But I pushed all thoughts of it from my head.

Well, it was good that Mr. Ekenhart was enjoying himself. As long as he didn’t go too far, I suppose.

It was with such thoughts that I headed to the rival store.

Leo looked like she wanted to come with me, but as she would draw too much attention, I had her stay with the children who wanted to play with her.

Well, it was a safe enough town. But just as a precaution, Phillip and Johanna followed us from a distance.

“Ah, that’s right. Sebastian.”

“What is it?”

We talked while walking to the store.

“Take this, just in case...”

“This is... The body strengthening herb? And the sense enhancing one...”

“Yes. I thought it might be useful.”

While walking, I took out the herbs from my bag and handed them to Sebastian.

We had used the same herbs in the forest before. The one that enhanced your senses, and the body strengthening one, which I had made by accident.

I had made them yesterday, along with the herbs for Mr. Kalis.

Chapter 229

We Entered The Rival Store

“However, is it necessary...?”

“I don’t know. It’s a precaution. I don’t want to have any regrets, like I did in Range village.”

Especially with the body strengthening herb.

During the orcs attack, had I had such herbs, I might have been able to defeat more of them, and fewer people would have been injured.

Perhaps I wouldn't have been injured at all...

While I couldn't change what happened, I could prepare so it wouldn't happen again...

"Very well. Though...I shall not be of much use if it does turn into a fight..."

"Even still. Being able to move a little better might help you until Phillip and Johanna arrive."

Sebastian did not know how to fight, and so I would have to do my best... I thought this as I checked the sword on my belt.

My sword had been shattered during the battle with the orcs. When Sebastian heard of this, he prepared a new one for me once I had returned to the mansion.

It was of a better quality than the previous one, which was comforting.

While Phillip and Johanna were following us, they could not enter the store.

We had thought of having them pretend to be customers, but that would only give rise to suspicion. They looked too much like soldiers.

Still, they would wait outside. And if anything happened, they would charge in to help us.

Otherwise, we might be caught and used as hostages.

"But why sense strengthening?"

"If I use that herb, I will be able to detect small changes in facial expression. It is the same with any suspicious movement within the store."

“I see...”

I was being extra cautious.

From what I had heard from Nick, the other store had a bouncer or guard type person. So things could get rough.

There was a saying about how caution does no harm. It’s not like this was a great hassle, and it could help keep us safe.

“Mm...it tastes terrible as always.”

“Well, that can’t be helped. Don’t you know...the best medicine is always bitter?”

“Oh? Is that a saying from your world, Mr. Takumi?”

We ate the bitter herbs and talked while heading to the store.

“There it is.”

“That...”

We arrived at the store and looked at it from a short distance away.

In terms of appearance, it was not much different from other stores. It blended in with the rest of the town... Unlike Ms. Isabelle’s store.

But unlike Mr. Kalis’s store, it looked very empty.

The rumors that Sebastian had spread must be the cause of this great decrease in customers... And there was also the discounts.

“There is no one outside of the store.”

“Indeed. They are not calling out to customers... It is quite eerie.”

The storefront was empty and quiet.

As this was a store I had been wanting to deal with for some time, there was a nervous and eerie feeling in the air.

“Just leave all of the talking to me. You act as we planned, Mr. Takumi.”

“...I am supposed to agree with you, right? I understand.”

After that, the two of us walked to the store.

Not only was it quiet outside, but it seemed very quiet inside as well.

The only thing that I could hear was...footsteps...but no talking.

As my senses were enhanced, the quietness nearly hurt my ears.

“Well then...”

“... Yes.”

Sebastian put his hand on the door and nodded at me.

I nodded back, and then he pushed the door open.

“Excuse me. Is there anyone here?”

We stepped inside, and then Sebastian spoke in a gentle voice, which was different from the low voice he had a moment ago.

Here, he was a pleasant old man and a customer.

“What is it, old man? Herbs? Medicine?”

The low voice came from the back, behind a counter. And then a large man appeared.

Perhaps he was the clerk. But he looked very intimidating...

“Both. I would like to have a look at your products. ...Uh, who is in charge here?”

“...Is that so! Forgive my rudeness. I will call the master right away.”

Upon hearing Sebastian, the man immediately started to smile.

Since customers were so rare now, they were probably desperate to please him.

I suppose he didn't think we were customers at first.

...Though, that sounded very strange to me, since we had entered the store.

“Sorry to keep you waiting. I am in charge here. You can call me Wood.”

“Hello. I am Sebastian.”

“Mr. Sebastian. ...Have I heard that name...”

The man in charge had a great grin on his face and a stout frame.

His skin shone, and his clothes were extravagantly decorated.

...He reminded me of those people who had become rich overnight.

By the way, the last part was muttered under his breath, but thanks to the herbs, I was able to hear him.

As Sebastian often visited the town, perhaps he had heard the name before.

“The herbs and medicine here have such a high reputation, that I simply had to come and see for myself, as I am thinking of making a great purchase.”

“Indeed! Indeed! We carry only the best herbs and medicine you have ever seen! Every customer leaves us with great satisfaction!”

Mr. Wood’s smile broadened at Sebastian’s words.

Good reputation... Sebastian was clearly lying, but the man seemed quite oblivious to this.

“May I have a seat?”

“Yes! Yes! Please make yourself comfortable!”

The walls of the store were lined with shelves of herbs and medicines. But the center was empty.

There was a counter in the back. And to the left corner, there was a table and chair so people could sit down and talk.

...That was likely where they lied to their customers and made them buy their awful herbs.

Chapter 230

We Talked With The Man In Charge

“Excuse me.”

“...Excuse me.”

I sat down on one of the chairs after Sebastian.

“So... What are you looking for in particular?”

“Indeed... I hear that a disease has been spreading in this town. Can you show me something that would be effective for that? I do not live here, but I want to have some, just in case. Buying things in advance is one of the basics of business.”

“Of course, of course... I see you have a good eye! In fact, we detected the spread of the disease earlier than anyone, and have prepared some medicine!”

The mad sauntered away to the counter on the right.

And then he came back with a bottle of light purple liquid, which he placed on the table.

...Thanks to my enhanced senses, I had seen the man's face twitch at the mention of a spreading disease.

“This medicine was made with herbs. One sip of it and you will be healed... Quite wonderful!”

“Oh... I see. May I?”

“Hmm... Yes, it seems to be of good quality.”

While he listened to the man's explanation, Sebastian pushed the suspicious looking bottle towards me.

I picked it up and pretended to inspect it while singing its praises.

“Yes, it is! It is! In this store, you will find only the best medicine!”

I did not miss the smirk on his face when I said that the medicine was good.

“Now, let’s see something else...”

Sebastian urged, and a few other herbs and medicines were brought out.

All of them looked quite strange in color, and it was obvious that they had been diluted.

As for the herbs, most looked wilted.

...The man insisted that this state made them more effective, but I knew that it wasn’t the case.

As for how I knew, it was because I had made the same thing for Mr. Kalis’s store.

Through Weed Cultivation, I transformed them into the best state. And they did not look like they were on the verge of dying.

“Hmm... What do you think?”

“Yes. They are all of astonishingly good quality.”

When Sebastian asked me this, I exclaimed that the herbs and medicine were all excellent.

I was not a very good liar... I felt nervous, and knew I wasn’t being very convincing.

...And even though I smiled... I probably looked very tense.

“I see... Well, Mr. Wood. What would you say to a contract with His Grace, Duke Liebert?”

“The d-du-duke!?”

The man was startled when he heard this.

Well, it had come so suddenly.

“Yes. In fact, I am a servant of that house. And I heard that you are well-connected to a certain count... And since you have such an undeniable reputation, His Grace thought it would be a gesture of goodwill to the count.”

“I-I see. Of course. Yes, the count will be very happy to hear it! ...I thought that I heard of you... So you must be the butler... Yes, what an opportunity this is.”

The last part was muttered quietly, but I still heard it.

While he had been cautious at first, the idea of being able to sell great quantities of medicine to the duke had eased his mine.

“Well, we must make a contract at once then! Which medicine will you buy?”

“Mr. Wood, please calm down. These things should not be rushed.”

“Ye-yes, of course. Hahaha! I forgot myself for a moment. Do forgive me.”

“Hohoho. It is not a bad thing for a merchant to be very aggressive.”

Due to this sudden opportunity presenting itself...the man became rather flustered and hurriedly tried to move things along.

But Sebastian stopped him. Also...I was not sure that I agreed with him that merchants should be so aggressive..

Well, nevermind that.

I saw that Sebastian’s eyes looked sharper. Was it time...?

“Mr. Wood. Before we get to the details of the contract, I have something from His Grace.”

“Oh...you do? And what is it?”

“Here it is.”

“Wh-what is that!?”

Sebastian took out the two bottles and placed them on the table.

It was the bottled wine that had been prepared at the mansion.

“My master was incredibly pleased when he heard of the splendid quality of your products, and how you have contributed to the unfortunate townspeople. And so he wanted to make a gift to you...of wine made on his own lands.”

It seemed rather odd for a duke to send a mere store some wine...but the man was just staring at the bottle. It seemed like he hadn't even been listening to Sebastian.

...Well, at least things were going according to plan.

“Excuse me, but could you provide the wine glasses? We will make a toast to celebrate the contract. My master wanted me to make you drink it immediately, to see if it is to your liking.”

“Bu-bu-but... Is that wine...”

“What about it? This wine was selected by the duke himself. The taste and quality is among the best...”

“I-I see... Very well. Hey! Bring some glasses!”

“Yes!”

Sebastian began to push, as if this was the pivotal moment. He emphasized that this was the duke's wish.

Which had a lot of sway... For who could deny Mr. Ekenhart. While he still hesitated, the man called the clerk in the back and had him bring wine glasses.

“Sebastian, things are going well.”

“Indeed. He hasn’t noticed how strange this is... Though, he clearly knows about the wine.”

As the glasses were being prepared, Sebastian and I whispered to each other.

Thanks to the sense enhancements, we could talk even though our voices were barely audible.

Apparently, Sebastian had been making doubtful excuses on purpose.

But the man didn’t notice. And because he knew about the wine, he didn’t realize how strange this turn of events was.

Why would wine be prepared for strangers who were not favored? And why should the duke insist on it being drunk right away?