

Beloved Dog 231

Chapter 231

We Made The Man Drink The Wine

“However, these sense enhancing herbs are quite useful. You can tell what a person is thinking just by looking at their facial expressions.”

“Indeed. Normally, you wouldn’t be able to catch such subtle differences.”

The man that Sebastian was talking to tended to smile a lot, perhaps to hide any other emotion. However, as Sebastian said, he would occasionally react to certain words in strange ways.

And we could also hear him muttering. It really was a good thing that we ate the herbs.

“Sorry to keep you waiting. Here are the wine glasses...”

“Thank you. Now, will you be so kind as to drink with us?”

“Ye-yes...”

Sebastian took one glass and filled it with wine from one of the bottles.

I then filled Sebastian and my cups from the other bottle.

“Let us make a toast then. To good medicine, and this great encounter... Is that fine?”

“Yes. Cheers.”

“Hah...cheers.”

We raised our glasses into the air.

The man was sweating and staring at the wine in his cup. But Sebastian and I ignored him and drank our cups in one go.

“Ahhh. The duke certainly knows how to choose the best wine.”

“Yes. He is very knowledgeable about wine, and is very particular when it comes to smell, taste and color.”

The wine that the two of us had drunk... We had drunk it at the mansion as well. It was sweet and fragrant. Good enough that I was once again glad that they didn't throw it away.

And while Sebastian and I smiled and talked, the man continued to stare at his cup and would not drink.

“Oh, is there a problem?”

“N-no...uh...”

“Perhaps you are not fond of wine?”

“In-deed... In fact, I am not much of a drinker at all...uh...”

“I see. How very rude of me. To give wine to someone who does not drink...”

While Sebastian understood the reason, he continued to talk to the man.

Sebastian was scary because he could talk like this without his face changing even a little.

...I would not want to make an enemy of such a person.

“Uh, yes...I'm sorry.”

The man was trying to get away by saying that he didn't drink.

His expression seemed to relax a little, once he came up with that excuse, but Sebastian would not let him go so easily.

After he had chuckled happily, he suddenly looked troubled.

"...Only, His Grace went out of his way to select this one... But if you hate it so much, it cannot be helped. I will make a full report of it to His Grace. ...It is unfortunate, as he so wished to have more people drink this wine..."

"We-we-well... Um, I... Can you not just tell him that I drank it...?"

"That would mean lying to him. And I cannot lie or deceive my master. I shall tell him what I saw and felt, exactly as it occurred."

"Bu-but... What will the count say about this...!"

The man was looking at the wine frantically. The pressure Sebastian was applying was making it so that he could not think properly.

If the duke should know that he didn't drink the wine... He might be so offended that there will be no contract after all... And what would the count do...? Such were the thoughts that must be on his mind.

I had an idea, as he would mutter to himself.

"However..."

"Ye-yes?"

Sebastian smirked.

The man was being toyed with on the palm of Sebastian's hand now.

...Sebastian. Do you realize how much you look like a villain now?

“Perhaps you could drink just one little sip? You really just have to lick it. And then I can truthfully tell my master, that Mr. Wood has indeed tasted the wine.”

“One...sip...? Very well... I can do that...”

Without noticing Sebastian’s expression, the man was led into drinking the wine.

I didn’t know how much of it you needed to drink to get sick, but the man had clearly decided that one sip was fine.

And so he tilted the glass and hesitantly brought it to his lips.

“...Mmm...glug... There. I drank it... Hah...”

It was not much, but he had indeed drunk some of the wine.

He let out a sigh as if he had just finished a great task.

“Yes, I have observed it. Now my report shall be a lot more positive.”

“Is-is that so? I’m glad to hear it. ...Cough-cough!”

The man began to cough as Sebastian smiled back.

There is a saying about how sickness and health start with the mind... Perhaps as someone who knew, he thought it was already starting to have an effect...?

Or perhaps he was trying to get it out of him.

His body might be rejecting it, as he knew it was infected.

“So, you have drunk the wine.

“Ye-yes. Now we can continue with this contract...”

“No, that will not be necessary.”

“What?”

While the man was now eager to move things alone, there was no way that Sebastian would ever create such a contract.

The man looked stunned when Sebastian revealed this.

Now the fun was about to start... For Sebastian and Mr. Ekenhart, that is.

“Mr. Wood... You know about the wine, don’t you? That this is no ordinary wine.”

“Wh-what are you talking about?”

“This wine... Due to certain reasons, we had to investigate it... And it was determined to be wine that must not be drunk. The reason is simple. Because this wine is the cause of the spreading disease in Ractos.”

Sebastian suddenly started to explain about the wine.

But now that the man knew that someone else had made the connection, he immediately became very pale.

Chapter 232

We Interrogated The Man

“Those who drink the wine become ill, and that spreads to the next person...that’s what happened here... But it is very odd.”

“...Wh-what is odd?”

“Well, this store started selling the herbs at just the same time as the disease started to spread. Perhaps it is only a coincidence... But it’s a little too convenient, don’t you agree?”

“I-I would...we only started to sell the herbs in order to help those who suffered. That was the only thing on our minds...”

“I see... In that case, it must be a coincidence then. However...”

“The-there is more?”

Sebastian explained little by little.

As for the man, his eyes continued to shift back and forth as he searched for excuses to make.

...At this point, I didn’t even need the sense enhancing herbs to know what he was thinking...

As for Sebastian, it was very evident that he was enjoying himself now. His expression was glowing.

After all, explaining and pressuring people he disliked were his two favorite things.

“There is a village that is close to Ractos. In fact, this wine was made in that village. A few days ago, that village was being investigated by someone sent from the duke. And during that time, the village was attacked by monsters.”

And that person was me.

While he said it was someone from the duke, I suppose it wasn’t wrong. Since I lived there and was on good terms with everyone.

“Mo-monsters...you say? How very unfortunate...”

“Yes, very. Thankfully, due to the efforts of the person investigating, things ended without anything too serious happening. However, this monster attack was orchestrated by someone.”

“Someone?”

“Yes. And that person...”

Sebastian then told him about the merchants.

How they had pretended to be carrying wine, and brought monsters instead.

These merchants used a magic device to infect the wine, as a way of spreading the disease.

“And these merchants told us...that they were acting on the count’s order...”

“Oh...”

The man became speechless once the count was mentioned.

“And this store is connected to the count, yes? I’ve heard your reputation. About how you bought all the herbs and medicine. You diluted and weakened them before selling them again...”

“Bu-but...we wouldn’t...”

“You cannot escape now. Your reaction to the wine was enough. Mr. Wood, you knew that the wine was the source of the disease... That’s why you hesitated to drink it, yes?”

“...No. Uh... I just don’t care for the taste of wine...”

“Oh?”

The man began to make the same excuses as before.

And to this, Sebastian raised his voice and laughed happily.

“But I heard...a few days ago, you became terribly drunk in a certain tavern.”

“Th-that was...”

“Yes, I’ve heard all about it. You and several friends made quite a scene as you drank until morning... And yet you claimed to dislike the taste...?”

Even I had not known this.

If it was a few days ago, it would be before Mr. Ekenhart’s arrival, but after I had returned to the mansion.

Perhaps Sebastian had been letting him run around freely up until now in order to catch him in such an act.

So not coming here as soon as I returned was all part of Sebastian’s plan... Just so he could push this man as far as he could...

“You actually can drink wine, but you hesitated... Surely this could only be because you knew what it was?”

“...Tsk...”

The man was no longer able to make any excuses.

Had he drunk the wine with a straight face when he could, he wouldn’t be in such an uncomfortable position now...

Well, in any case, with Mr. Ekenhart backing us, there was no way that we would fail.

“...Indeed, I knew that the wine was spreading the disease. But do you think that’s enough to catch me? I didn’t do anything to the wine.”

“That is true. You did not do anything to the wine.”

“Exactly. You cannot blame me, just because I happened to know about the wine!”

He was suddenly getting quite angry... His face was red and he started to shout.

Perhaps this was his true nature being revealed. He no longer talked with polite words.

But he was right. He couldn’t be arrested just because he knew what the wine was.

It was possible that he had just happened to hear about it from the count.

“However, you still sold medicine of poor quality on the duke’s lands. That is a great crime, you know?”

“But you do not have proof of that! All of the medicine and herbs I sell here are very effective! Surely it is not strange to want to monopolize the market in case there is such an illness!”

“Indeed. If you knew that a disease would spread, making a business of it would lead to great profits. However, we know that your medicine and herbs have almost no effect.”

“What are you saying? How would you know that!”

The man was now desperate to prove that he was innocent. But he seemed to be too frantic to be able to think straight.

As for the effect of the medicine...that could be confirmed easily with a pharmacist...

“...Earlier, you showed me this, saying it was the medicine that would heal the illness spreading in Ractos, yes?”

“...Yes, that’s right.”

Sebastian was pointing at the bottle of light purple liquid that the man had brought.

“Unfortunately, you cannot heal the illness with this medicine.”

“Ho-how do you know!?”

“It’s simple. Mr. Takumi. Can you take out the Ramogi?”

“Yes.”

I went into my bag and took out some Ramogi powder that was wrapped in paper.

I then put it on the table and unwrapped it.

“Tha-that is...”

“As someone who deals with herbs and medicine, I don’t have to tell you, do I?”

“...”

“These are Ramogi petals. Dried and powdered.”

To be precise, I had used the Gift to transform them into this state. But normally, that is how you would do it.

Chapter 233

Sebastian Got Carried Away

“The illness is healed by just drinking this. ...Unlike this medicine over here. And I tested it... If you dissolve a little Ramogi in water and leave it...it becomes like this, yes?”

He said, pointing to the bottle with the light purple liquid.

...So it turns into that color. I didn't know that.

Would it have been a darker purple if it contained an effective amount of Ramogi?

But then again, I didn't understand how dissolving it in water and leaving it was supposed to work.

“And yet you still insist that you were selling proper medicine? You bought all the herbs and medicine from other stores, and then watered them down until they were too weak to have an effect. And you think that selling such medicine is not a crime...?”

“...”

As Sebastian continued to accuse him, the man had no words for a reply.

He just looked down and listened to Sebastian.

“Not only that, but while this time the medicine was made of Ramogi...to others, you sold medicine that was completely unrelated... Yes, it's all been investigated. ...Though, thanks to the herbs that we provided, you've had very few customers here recently...”

“...You...”

“Once the Ramogi was discounted so that anyone could buy it, well, our store was filled with customers day after day...”

Sebastian was getting carried away now... He continued to talk without even looking at the man.

...This was strange. He had taken the sense enhancing herbs, but didn't even notice the difference that had come over the man.

“In the first place, the very idea of trying to monopolize...”

“So it’s all your faaultt!!”

“!?”

“Hey! Seize that man! It’s his fault that the business has been failing!”

“Aye!”

The man began to shout towards the back of the store.

Sebastian didn’t realize what was happening until the man reached this point.

In answer to him, three soldiers appeared with weapons... Were they going to capture or threaten us...? Maybe they would kill us...

Well, it wouldn’t matter, since Mr. Ekenhart already knew everything. They were just adding to their crimes.

...Damn it. Self-destructive criminals were the worst...!

“You’ll pay for this!”

“...Too slow!”

One of the men unsheathed a short sword and moved towards me.

He then shouted as he raised the sword and swung it towards me. But thanks to the sense enhancing herbs, I could read his moves.

Not only that, but I had taken the body strengthening herbs as well. And since this man was slower than even the orcs, I had nothing to fear.

“Mr. Takumi!”

“I’m fine!”

Sebastian swiftly moved back as he shouted to me.

I answered him, and then as the man’s sword missed me and slammed into the ground, I hit his hand with the flat of my blade.

“Gah!”

Not being able to stand the pain, he let go of the sword.

Unlike Sebastian, I knew what Mr. Wood was up to. And so I had stood up in order to be ready for what was going to come.

Had Sebastian’s reaction been any slower, he would have likely been targeted first, and maybe even injured.

...He had said that he couldn’t fight, but was able to hide behind me very quickly...

“Shit! You bastard!”

“Kill them!”

The man who dropped his sword moved to pick it up again, just as the other two jumped over the counter and walked towards us.

That being said, this was a small store. They could not surround us completely... Now was our chance...

“Sebastian. Call Phillip and Johanna!”

“...Certainly! I’ll be back immediately!”

As Sebastian was behind me, he could easily get out of the store.

Thanks to the body strengthening herbs, he was able to move in a way that was unbelievable for an old man.

As if to protect him, I faced the men who attacked. First, the one on the right... I blocked his sword, and then used my right foot to kick him towards the men on the left!

“Grr!”

“Shit!”

“Get out of my way!”

“What are you doing! They are getting away!”

I actually had no intention of running anywhere.

Thinking this, I held my sword in front of me as the men got back to their feet.

...It was a good thing that this store isn’t big... The men were being careful so that they didn’t damage anything, and so their swings were simple.

Even if they were short swords, if swung horizontally, they could hit the shelves and products nearby.

Once I knew that all of their attacks were vertical, from above or below, it was easier to deal with them, though they outnumbered me.

Otherwise, even with the herbs and their slower movement, I would have been in danger.

“You bastard!”

“Hey, move!”

“No, you move!”

When three large men tried to fight within a confined space, things were bound to get messy.

They bumped into each other and even started to argue.

Thanks to my experience with the orcs, and the right conditions, it was a rather easy fight.

“Mr. Takumi, are you alright!?”

“Phillip! Johanna!”

Two of the men practically had their cheeks pressed together as they swung at me. And just as I blocked them, I heard the voices coming from behind me.

Phillip and Johanna had burst through the door.

...And things were settled quickly after that.

As there was so little space, Phillip and Johanna faced the men without unsheathing their swords.

And while the men swung desperately, their arms were easily grabbed, and they were thrown to the floor.

One of the men was caught by Phillip, and he was thrown over his back and into the next man.

After being bashed together, their swords were taken away and they were swiftly tied up.

The third man took a punch to the throat from Johanna... She was wearing a metal hand protector, so it must have hurt.

He could not even scream as he fell to the ground... It looked like even breathing was painful.

“...N-noooo!”

“It’s too bad that the charges have doubled... There is no need to justify your actions now.”

Chapter 234

Mr. Ekenhart Appeared

After tying up all three men, Wood looked on in despair. Sebastian then entered the room and declared boldly.

Though...I couldn’t help but feel that this wouldn’t have happened had he dealt with things more calmly...

“Mr. Takumi, can I ask you to go and call the duke and leave this to us?”

“Very we-”

“That won’t be necessary!”

I was just about to answer that I would go to Mr. Kalis’s store, where Mr. Ekenhart was waiting, when the familiar voice rang, and a large man stepped into the building.

“Mr. Ekenhart!”

“Mr. Takumi, the time that we agreed on has already passed, you know?”

“Ah, now that you mention it...”

When we had discussed the plan at Mr. Kalis’s store, we agree that once two hours had passed after we left, Mr. Ekenhart would charge into this store.

This was because there was a risk that we would be captured.

Well, while they did attack us, thanks to the body strengthening herbs, I was able to buy some time.

Though, I would not have been able to capture them like Phillip and Johanna.

Still, I hadn’t realized that so much time had passed already.

Perhaps we had spent too much time looking at the herbs and medicine.

“Your Grace, allow me to introduce to you Mr. Wood. He is the one responsible for this place.”

“I see. So you are Wood... I suppose you have an idea of what is going to happen now?”

“...Wh-what! Who are you! I...I...”

“Oh? You take orders from Barsler, but do not recognize my face... Well, Barsler has never been good at playing games, so it cannot be helped.”

“Father only thinks about profit.”

“What! Lady Anneliese!? Why are you here!?”

After Sebastian introduced him, Mr. Ekenhart took a step forward and nodded.

Apparently, Mr. Wood didn’t recognize Mr. Ekenhart, but he was clearly intimidated by the large man who had suddenly appeared.

Well, it was no surprise... I would be scared as well, if such a large man suddenly appeared in front of me with his guards.

Not only that, but Ms. Claire and Ms. Anne had arrived as well.

As she was Count Barsler's daughter, Wood knew her.

...However, Ms. Anne really did not seem to think much of her own father... In spite of the fact that some of the blame lay with her as well.

"I haven't seen you in some time, Wood. And since you do not seem to be aware, let me tell you... This is His Grace, Duke Ekenhart."

"The d-duke!? Are you sure about that, Lady Anneliese!?"

"Yes, of course, I am. Isn't that right, Duke Ekenhart?"

"Mmm. I am indeed Ekenhart Liebert."

"...I don't know why you're acting so confident, Anne..."

Ms. Claire, maybe that's not too important right now?

Not that I disagreed entirely, when I saw Ms. Anne talk proudly while standing next to Mr. Ekenhart...

"...B-but..."

Now that he finally understood what was happening, Wood's shoulders slumped.

If the duke himself was here, there was no hope for him now.

There were no more excuses to make.

“Wood, was it? I know all about what you’ve been up to. How you bought all the stock of medicine in Ractos and resold weaker versions for profit. You tried to use the fact that people were suffering... Shameful acts for a merchant. ...Do you know what will happen next?”

“...Bu-but...Count Barsler will surely...”

Even if he couldn’t talk his way out of this one, he still thought that the count would protect him.

“Unfortunately, Count Barsler is being monitored by the royal family now. I suppose he has been a little too busy lately...”

“My father has all but lost his power as a noble.”

“Bu-but...”

Wood fell to his knees.

Then he fell forward and put his hands on the ground.

Still... Ms. Anne talked about her father as if he was a stranger.

They really must not like each other.

“You can expect a harsh punishment. ...Take him away!”

“Yes!”

“Yes!”

Mr. Ekenhart called his personal guards.

There were three, and two of them made Wood and the tied up men get to their feet.

Phillip also helped them.

“Mr. Ekenhart, it seems like there are others in the back...?”

“I doubt they are customers. So they must be related to this store. Take them away as well.”

“Yes!”

One of the guards who had been searching the back of the store consulted with Mr. Ekenhart.

And he was told to bring everyone related to the store with them.

After some time, about ten of Ractos’s guards arrived. Perhaps Phillip or the other guards had sent word. And together, they rounded up the people and escorted them out of the store.

“Fine work, Mr. Takumi and Sebastian.”

Once the store had been emptied out, it was just me, Sebastian and Ms. Johanna left.

And there was Mr. Ekenhart, one guard, Ms. Claire and Ms. Anne.

Mr. Ekenhart, Ms. Claire, Ms. Anne and I were sitting at the table.

For some reason, we had decided to stay here and talk.

Well, I suppose it was too much trouble to move?

Apparently, Leo was waiting outside.

“I really didn’t do much. It was Sebastian that talked and moved things along.”

“I could not forgive them for hurting the people. I only did what was my duty as your servant.”

“You are both too modest. But that is fine. Mr. Takumi, I am sorry about this incident.”

“Huh? Why are you apologizing?”

“Well... Sebastian, you tell him.”

“...Very well.”

I didn't understand why Mr. Ekenhart was suddenly apologizing.

He hadn't done anything that disturbed me, as far as I remember?

But Mr. Ekenhart looked apologetic as he urged Sebastian to explain.

On the other hand, Ms. Claire looked rather angry. I wonder why...?

Chapter 235

Getting Carried Away Was Part Of the Plan

“Well then, on His Grace's behalf... The truth is, Mr. Takumi. I knew that the man would become enraged and attack us.”

“...What?”

For a second, I didn't quite understand what Sebastian meant.

He knew that Wood would become violent...

I had just assumed that Sebastian was too absorbed that he didn't realize that he was going too far.

“When you headed to Range village, I told you that I would be investigating in this town, did I not?”

“Yes. And we came here...”

“From that day, I started to look into Mr. Wood and those related to him. Obviously, I couldn’t investigate everything, but there were several reports about Wood’s personality. About his short temper...in particular.”

“Ah.”

When heading to Range village, I had stopped at this village with Sebastian and Leo.

And he had indeed told me that he was going to look into this store... Apparently, he had gotten quite a grasp on Wood’s personality in doing so.

“Did you not think it strange? That I was saying much more than I needed to him...”

“...I did think you were going a little far...”

But I had just assumed that Sebastian was enjoying it so much that he could not stop himself.

Considering how capable Sebastian was, he could have gotten the job done quickly, and had Phillip and the guards arrest him without causing such a scene.

That would have been more typical of Sebastian...

“But I wanted him to become angry and attack us.”

“Why? Surely you could have arrested him regardless?”

Mr. Ekenhart was standing by, and Barsler was confined to his home. Wood could have been taken on the spot.

“You wish to know why I had him attack us...”

“I will tell you that.”

Mr. Ekenhart suddenly interrupted Sebastian.

Ah, Sebastian looked quite disappointed... He loved to explain things.

“Due to Sebastian’s information gathering, we were able to learn about Wood and those around him. And that included those soldier-like men that were here.”

“Is that so?”

“Aye. They would pretend to be soldiers and sometimes threaten the customers...though, they were mostly here for security... In any case, they were really just thugs from this town, or Barsler’s lands.”

“Thugs...”

Indeed, the way they talked and handled their swords had been very unrefined.

But in appearance, they looked similar to Phillip and Johanna, and wore metal armor. So I had assumed that they must be Count Barsler’s soldiers.

That at least explained why I had been able to deal with them so easily.

It also helped that I had taken performance enhancing herbs, and that we were fighting in a narrow space where they didn’t want to damage anything.

“And so we knew that these thugs would not be able to fight with any skill. They just looked intimidating, that’s all. And so I told Sebastian to make them attack.”

“...But why?”

It did not seem necessary for our purpose.

Without the fight, things would have been cleaned up so much sooner and simpler.

“...I’m sorry, Mr. Takumi. I wanted to test you. To be precise, I saw it as part of your training... After seeing how far you have come in your training yesterday, I was sure that you would not lose.”

“Uh... Is that why the training was so hard yesterday...?”

“Of course. So I could determine if you would be fine here.”

So he wanted me to fight the unskilled thugs so that I could gain some experience... It was just part of my training then?

“You fought monsters...orcs in order to save Range village, yes?”

“Yes.”

“And that was the result of my training and Sebastian’s teaching. However, humans and monsters are different.”

“Different...”

“In general, monsters do not think much. They just attack. Though, there are exceptions. However, humans think and then act. And they often attack in large groups. And so I wanted you to have experience with fighting multiple humans.”

“...I see. But it would have been nice if you told me...”

“That would have defeated the purpose. Humans always look for an opening so they can attack you when your guard is down. Sometimes monsters do that too... But I wanted to see if you could stop humans that attacked you suddenly.”

“...I see...”

I was in the palm of Mr. Ekenhart's hand then?

Had I known in advance, I might have become too defensive. And he wanted to see if I could react to a sudden burst of violence.

Hmm. As humans and monsters were different, I had to gain experience... I understood that, but I still wasn't satisfied.

"In the future, Mr. Takumi, if you are ever targeted by those who mean no good, you will be able to defend yourself. That is what I wanted!"

"But father, it is much too soon! Mr. Takumi has not been training for very long! And yet, you put him in such danger..."

"...Well, that is true... But he has shown much growth. Especially with that orc battle... And I think those recovery herbs he takes must also help..."

Ms. Claire had been listening quietly with a look of displeasure up until now, but her anger towards her father suddenly exploded.

Mr. Ekenhart was already at a disadvantage, especially after the matter with Ms. Anne the other day, but he still tried to make excuses.

But he was right about the herbs. Every time I felt that my muscles were sore, I would take the herbs and recover immediately.

Thanks to that, I was able to train a lot.

And grow that much faster... Well, perhaps. I didn't actually feel like I had grown that much.

Chapter 236

Ms. Claire's Anger Was Directed At Mr. Ekenhart

“But still! What if there was a mistake, and Mr. Takumi was badly injured!? If fighting humans and monsters is so different, then you could have just taught him yourself! Or even Phillip or Johanna or any of the house guards! And...you made him do...this!”

“Yes, that is all true... However, I want him to face an actual, relentless enemy...”

“But you could have allowed him to continue his training carefully and watch just a little longer! It didn’t have to be now! Father! And you too, Sebastian! I only just heard about it at Mr. Kalis’s store, you know? If you had any idea how worried I was...!”

As Ms. Claire raged on, Mr. Ekenhart seemed to shrink smaller and smaller.

And now her anger was spreading to Sebastian as well.

But since he was an accomplice, it wasn’t really a surprise.

While I hadn’t been satisfied, I did feel a little better now that Ms. Claire had become angry for me.

All I could do was gulp as I watched the duke being berated by his daughter.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Takumi...”

“Forgive me, Mr. Takumi...”

“Ahahaha. It’s fine now. Ms. Claire said everything that I had wanted to say.”

“...I’ve been so angry recently...”

One hour later, Mr. Ekenhart and Sebastian were apologizing to me again.

If anyone saw us, they would be wondering who I was to have a duke apologize to me like this.

...I suppose even if he was the duke...he was still weak when it came to his daughter... And since Sebastian saw her grow up, maybe he also saw her as something like a daughter as well.

I had seen it yesterday with Ms. Anne... It was true that Ms. Claire seemed to be angry a lot lately.

But none of it was because of her own selfishness. That was very much like her.

This wasn't like the time she went to the forest.

But after shouting so much, I was a little worried about Ms. Claire's throat... Perhaps I should try making a herb for that?

Something good for the throat... Like quince... Oh, wait. That's a fruit, and so I can't make it...

"Well, we should be leaving now. We cannot stay here forever."

"Yes."

"Certainly."

"...I still have much more to say to you when we return, father."

"...Oh, uh..."

"This was a very entertaining display."

Mr. Ekenhart was sweating from his forehead as we left the store.

The rest would be left to the guards.

Well, I suppose Mr. Ekenhart and Sebastian would give orders later, as to what will happen to this place.

...Perhaps it would go to some other merchant. Or maybe it will be turned into a civilian residence?

Still, Ms. Anne, this was not some kind of entertaining show. It was about punishing and arresting criminals...

I suppose it was because she had this personality that Mr. Ekenhart had to take her under his wing.

“Wuff!”

“Leo. Were you waiting here quietly?”

“Wuff-wuff. ...Wuu...”

“...Is-is Good Leo mad at me too...?”

“Of course, she is. And it’s your fault for putting Mr. Takumi in danger, father!”

When we stepped outside, Leo ran to me immediately.

Apparently, just like Ms. Claire, she had heard about how Wood was provoked into attacking. And she was now growling at Mr. Ekenhart.

So she had been worried about me... Thanks, Leo.

“...Good Leo. I am very sorry. This will not happen again...”

“Wuff? Wuff... Wuff!”

Mr. Ekenhart fearfully stood in front of Leo and bowed.

Really? Oh, well. I shall forgive you! Leo seemed to say with a nod.

Leo was acting a little self-important, but given that Mr. Ekenhart was in the wrong, I didn't say anything.

While Mr. Ekenhart had become much more used to Leo recently, he was still not completely over this fear of Silver Fenrirs, and he was shaking quite a lot.

"I'm sorry to make you worry, Leo. But thank you."

"Wuff! Wuff!"

"Hey, stop that! You can do it when we return to the mansion!"

"Wuff-wuff... Hah-hah...."

I thanked Leo and patted her on the head. Then she wagged her tail joyfully and started to lick my face.

I told her to wait until we returned, and pulled away from Leo. But Leo continued to pant excitedly.

Or was it just that it was very hot?

She had made that face often in our previous world. But I had never seen it here.

...Were Silver Fenrirs like dogs? Did they use their tongues to adjust their body temperature?

"She really does like him..."

"Leo and Mr. Takumi had such a delightful relationship... It almost makes one jealous."

"Ms. Claire?"

"It's nothing. Now, let us hurry home. I'm sure that Tilura is getting quite impatient."

“Haha. That’s right.”

Ms. Claire said something rather curious when talking to Ms. Anne, but when I asked about it, she brushed it aside...

In any case, Tilura was indeed likely to be waiting for use with excitement. I chuckled at the thought as we headed home.

“Ah, that’s right. Mr. Takumi.”

“What is it?”

“Wuff...”

On the way back, Mr. Ekenhart suddenly called to me as if remembering something.

I turned to him a little cautiously. And Leo looked at him as well. He flinched but continued.

“...! Uh, it’s about the wine... How did he react?”

“Ah... Yes... He was quite flustered and sweated an awful lot.”

“I see, I see. Hahaha! While they were the ones responsible for it, they would never have thought they would be drinking it themselves!”

Chapter 237

There Wine Had Been Tampered With

Mr. Ekenhart laughed happily, as if he was imagining the scene with Wood.

While he was not the person who attacked Range village, or the one who used the wine to spread the disease, he still knew about it. He had followed Barsler’s orders for his own profit.

And so the idea of him panicking was a very pleasing picture for Mr. Ekenhart.

“But Mr. Takumi...”

“Yes?”

As I watched Mr. Ekenhart laugh, Ms. Claire suddenly called me with a worried expression.

“According to the plan, you were to drink the wine as well. Was everything fine?”

“Ah, there is no need to worry about that.”

Ms. Claire was concerned that I had accidentally drunk the infected wine.

“The wine that Sebastian and I drank was the one that had been boiled already, so we should be fine.”

“I see... That is good.”

Ms. Claire looked relieved.

It seemed like she was worried that we might have accidentally drunk the wine that was supposed to be given to Wood.

But even if that did happen, I could just make some Ramogi and drink it. Still, it showed how kind she was.

“However, I am quite surprised. That you would think of doing that right before...”

“Haha. Well, it would look more natural, wouldn’t it? We had to drink if we wanted him to as well...”

It had no taste of alcohol, and was just a sweet and delicious drink. I had drained the cup.

Of course, the stuff we gavet to Wood was the wine from Range village that hadn't been processed yet.

That's why Sebastian had taken out two bottles. He checked which is which when pouring them into the glasses.

"Are you used to doing such things, Mr. Takumi?"

"No, not at all. But I did experience something similar, I suppose. When you want someone to do something, you will be more convincing if you try it yourself."

In sales, when introducing a product, it's easier if you tell them of the merits you experienced yourself.

...Of course, there were people who didn't need to do such things to get contracts.

"Wood only drank a few drops of it... But his reaction was enough. He didn't even want to drink the wine at first, in spite of being a known drinker... Anyone would think it was odd."

"Indeed. I don't really care about such things... But most nobles would be offended if a gift of theirs was rejected."

I didn't know much about the rules and manners of nobles, but it was like that whenever I went drinking with my company.

If my boss or clients told me to drink, it was difficult to refuse, even if I didn't want to drink it.

There were probably plenty of people who wouldn't even be offended...but it was hard to tell. And the pressure always weighed down during such moments.

"What is it, Mr. Takumi?"

"Nothing...I was just reminded of something... But it's not important."

“...I see.”

I had been scowling, as the bitter memories of running to the bathroom, only to come back and see my cup full again...returned.

Ms. Claire looked worried, but I smiled and assured her that I was fine.

...Such things would not happen now... I was living here happily, and need not think about the past like this.

“So, what will happen to Wood now? Since he drank the wine?”

“As it wasn’t much, he probably will not become ill. And even if he does...”

“He deserves it.”

“Yes. ...And we can always give him Ramogi.”

Wood really had just licked it.

It was hard to imagine that he could get sick from just that, but even if he did, he could be healed easily.

The only thing to worry about is that he could infect the nearby guards... If that happened, Sebastian and I would have to apologize to them and give them some Ramogi.

We talked about such things and headed to the west gate.

“Your Grace, thank you for everything.”

“Mmm. Well, I doubt it was something that you could have handled.”

Once we had returned to the town's entrance, we saw that the guards were standing in a line to greet Mr. Ekenhart.

A representative then stepped forward and bowed to him.

It was because the duke and their lord had come out all of this way to deal with the problem.

"Now...to the carriage..."

"Father, over here."

"...Oh?"

"Wuff. Wuff-wuff."

As Mr. Ekenhart was about to get into the carriage, Ms. Claire pulled him away and pointed to Leo.

Upon seeing this, Leo began to bark enthusiastically.

...Was this supposed to be like a punishment for Mr. Ekenhart?

"No...surely Mr. Takumi will ride her? And so I must..."

"Mr. Takumi will ride with us in the carriage. You will ride on Leo. Won't you?"

"...Very well."

He was weak when it came to his daughter.

Ms. Claire's anger had not subsided yet, and so she escorted Mr. Ekenhart over to Leo.

"Good Leo. Will you be so kind?"

“Wuff!”

Leo nodded reassuringly.

She was looking forward to this...

“...Leo. Hold back a little, okay?”

“Wuff.”

I was too scared to ask Ms. Claire, and so I told Leo to go easy on him. But her answer was not very promising.

Perhaps it was because Leo was still angry at Mr. Ekenhart as well...

I was happy that she was angry that he put me in danger in the name of training...but now I was starting to feel bad for him.

...Yes, when we returned to the mansion, I would ask Ms. Helena to give him some of that delicious grape juice.

Chapter 238

Ms. Anne Made An Unexpected Request

As my sympathy towards Mr. Ekenhart grew, and the idea of giving him some juice entered my head...I remembered something else.

Now that I thought about it, boiling wine wouldn't turn it into juice. That was strange.

I didn't know much about it, and just called it that because it was easier... I suppose it was because it was already a very sweet wine, so it tasted similar to juice.

Perhaps the grapes in this world were special, or Ms. Helena had added something to make it easier to drink after boiling it.

In any case, I would just assume that there was something different about Range village wine. Yes...

After all, there was Ramogi and Loe. Things that looked familiar but worked in very different ways.

“Ahhhhhh!”

“Wuff! Wuff!”

“Good Leo seems very excited.”

“...Yes.”

As I thought about such things on the way back to the mansion...Leo ran wildly down the road. Mr. Ekenhart looked like he could barely stay on.

She would run ahead of the carriage and then rush back repeatedly.

Mr. Ekenhart was holding on desperately and letting out something like a scream.

Ms. Claire was watching all of this from the carriage window, and smiled pleasantly at Leo.

Even the screams of a dear father could not shake her... That was a little sad.

...But it was another reminder that I must not get on her bad side.

She was scary, though in a different way from Sebastian.

“Still, that Silver Fenrir really does like to obey orders, doesn’t it?”

“Good Leo is very gentle.”

From within the carriage, Ms. Anne was looking at Leo with great curiosity as she muttered.

...Well, Leo was a very smart little Maltese... She had always been smart and listened to what I said.

“And he is the human that the Silver Fenrir obeys.”

“Yes. And you know all about it, don’t you Anne? How my family is especially attached to Silver Fenrirs.”

“Yes, I know about that. They even appear in the history books. All nobles in this country know about them. ...You are Mr. Takumi, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

Ms. Anne was talking about Silver Fenrirs. She now stopped looking out of the window and turned to me.

Now that I thought about it, this was probably the first time we talked directly... Yesterday, Ms. Claire had been so furious, that she set Leo on Ms. Anne right away. So there was no time to talk.

Besides, it seemed like Ms. Anne just thought I was a servant.

Well, I wasn’t a nobleman. So I was still no one of any consequence to a count’s heir. I would have all the significance of a pebble on the side of the road... Or maybe that was going too far?

“So, you are that Silver Fenrir’s master?”

“...Master...we are more like partners. I don’t think of myself as her superior. I think we are equal.”

“Indeed... Equal with a Silver Fenrir... Interesting...”

“Anne?”

After hearing my answer, Ms. Anne looked down as if she was deep in thought.

She started to mutter something, but the effect of the herbs had already worn off, and so I couldn't hear her.

By the way, the carriage was very spacious, and so even with the three of us inside, no one touched anyone else, and it was very comfortable.

There were two seats, and Ms. Claire sat with Ms. Anne, while I sat on the opposite side.

On both sides, there were doors between the seats, which you could go out from, and there were four small windows as well.

This provided a good view of the outside. You could even open the windows to let in some fresh air.

“Yes... With a Silver Fenrir tagging along, it may be a good idea. As for the face... Well, a passing grade at best?”

“...What is it, Anne? Are you thinking of something strange again...”

Ms. Anne continued to look down and mutter quietly under her breath.

Upon seeing this, Ms. Claire questioned her suspiciously, but got no reaction.

It had been Ms. Anne who came up with the whole plan used by her father... And so I had a bad feeling about this.

“Mr. Takumi. Are you... I suppose you are not already married, are you?”

“Huh? Oh, no...”

“What are you asking, Anne?”

Ms. Anne suddenly wanted to know my marital status.

I had never even been close to getting married... In fact, I often wasn't sure how to act around women...

But I had Leo, which saved me from feeling lonely... It's true!

Now that I thought about it, Leo had told me to stop beating around the bush...

“Then you simply must be adopted into the family as my husband. And then we could really make something out of House Barsler!”

“What?”

“Aaaaanne!? What are you saying!?”

“And why should you be so startled, Ms. Claire? Surely it's only normal for a woman to want to find a good husband?”

Anne had suddenly made a proposal of marriage.

And this was only the first time I had ever spoken to her. What had happened?

But as it was my first proposal, I was also inexperienced with rejecting them.

Ms. Claire was clearly outraged and confused as well.

“He has some worth, because of that Silver Fenrir he commands. And I'm sure that will be very beneficial for my family!”

“You-you think...Mr. Takumi...marrying into Barsler...the thought...”

“No, I wouldn’t...”

“Yes, it is a little surprising... But you wouldn’t even think about refusing, would you? After all, it’s not every day that Count Barsler’s heir makes such offers.”

“Uhh...”

This Ms. Anne was very straightforward...

Indeed, she was was pretty and supposedly not the most stupid.

But when compared to Ms. Claire... who may have her defects, when it comes to the bust, but... even with that considered, she was overflowing with appeal...

Even I would not have thought like that.

Yes, pretty was pretty... But there was also an unfortunate air about her... And did it matter if she was so beautiful that if she were to walk through the town, that other men would turn to look at her?

But this was the first time we spoke... Such things should not be decided so suddenly...

...Oh, the confusion was clearly getting to me.

Chapter 239

We Returned To The Mansion In The Carriage

“...Do I have to decide now?”

“Hmm, indeed... I do understand that this is rather sudden for you. Very well, tomorrow. As long as you can give me an answer by tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow!? You are surely in a great rush, Anne!”

“What do you mean, Ms. Claire? These matters are more about feeling and one should rely on their intuition. But perhaps you have experienced one too many proposals and attempts at arranged marriage, that it has dimmed your senses?”

“You only saw the advantage in it once you learned of the Silver Fenrir’s attachment. I don’t think you have any right to talk about feelings!”

“And why is that? A man who orders a Silver Fenrir... Such a man would be incredibly appealing to someone in my position... Can you really not see it?”

“Well... That is true, but... Mr. Takumi wouldn’t do...”

“Go-Good Leo! Arrghhh!”

“Wuff! Wuff!”

Ms. Claire was in a terribly bad mood again.

Well, I suppose my appeal really did start and end there... Though, I also had Weed Cultivation... But I suppose that didn’t really add to my appeal as a man.

And so I confusedly watched Ms. Claire and Anne argue as I thought of the right way to refuse her.

...Was this how Ms. Claire felt every time her father tried to matchmake her?

Regardless, the carriage continued to move along. Outside, I could occasionally hear Mr. Ekenhart’s screams.

“Welcome back!”

“...Hmm.”

“Finally... Hah... The journey was very tiring.”

“What a good welcome. I suppose that’s what should be expected from a duke’s house.”

It did not take long to return to the mansion.

We got out of the carriage, and with Mr. Ekenhart in the lead, we faced the servants who came out to greet us.

Mr. Ekenhart looked very exhausted after being carried around by Leo... But he had held up.

As for Ms. Claire, she had been arguing with Ms. Anne the whole time, and was tired as well.

Surely Ms. Anne must be the same, I thought as I turned to look at her. But she seemed rather cheerful as the servants greeted her.

...Perhaps she was tougher than she looked.

“Your Grace, will you have dinner immediately?”

“...Indeed. I am quite tired... I shall eat and rest right after.”

“Certainly. It will be prepared right away.”

Ms. Helena stepped forward and addressed Mr. Ekenhart.

Of course, the reason that he was so tired, was because of Ms. Claire and Leo.

As for Leo, running around seemed to have relieved her of stress, and she looked quite pleased as she wagged her tail.

“Welcome back, father, sister, Mr. Takumi and Leo!”

“Kyau-kyau! Kyau!”

“We’re back, Tilura.”

“Wuff! Wuff-wuff!”

Tilura had realized that we had returned, and she came running out to greet us with a big smile, and with Sherry in her arms.

Considering the direction she had come from, I suppose she had been training in the back garden? She sure was passionate.

She greeted everyone except for Ms. Anne, who she did not know very well.

Ms. Anne looked a little annoyed at being ignored...

“...You all seem a little tired.”

“Kyau-kyau.”

“Haha. You can tell, Tilura?”

“Yes, children can be very perceptive.”

After looking at us, Tilura could tell immediately that we were tired.

But then again, it was incredibly obvious with Mr. Ekenhart and Ms. Claire.

Though, I had also gone through a lot today. So perhaps it was showing on my face as well.

I had fought at that store. And then there was that whole ordeal with Ms. Anne on the way home.

...So it was the same reason as Ms. Claire.

“Hah... I can relax now...”

“Wuff.”

After we returned, we enjoyed the meal that Ms. Helena prepared for us, and told Tilura about what had happened in town.

And since everyone was tired, we retired to our rooms right after.

Considering the state they were in, I was a little worried about Mr. Ekenhart and Ms. Claire...

As I was tired as well, I warmed my body in the bathtub, and then went to my room to pet Leo and relax.

“Still...do you think Ms. Anne is serious?”

“Wuff?”

Leo tilted her head to the side.

now that I thought about it, Leo was outside giving Mr. Ekenhart the ride of his life, so she didn't know about what had happened.

“Uh...Leo. This may surprise you, but...”

“Wuff? Wuff-wuff... Wuff?”

I explained the situation to Leo, and she raised her voice in alarm.

So even Leo was surprised after all...

“Wuff-wuff... Wuff!”

This is a fine opportunity? Get it over with?

“No, Leo. I don’t even know her... I’m trying to think of a way to refuse her.”

“Wuff?”

“Hate... I don’t know her well enough to say. But it’s all so sudden, so I asked for some time to think. Though, it’s only until tomorrow.”

“Wuff-wuff.”

I talked with Leo as I thought of the best way to refuse her.

I didn’t know her enough to feel a strong dislike, but that didn’t seem like a convincing argument.

I petted Leo’s fluffy fur and thought hard about it for a while... But I had no good ideas!

I suppose I should just tell her that I had no intention of getting married. But if she asked the reason...

“Hmm? Yes, who is it?”

“It is I, Claire. Mr. Takumi, can you spare a moment?”

“Ah, yes. Of course.”

As I wondered what to do, I heard a knock at the door.

And when I called to it, Ms. Claire answered.

What could she want at this hour... Most people were asleep at this time.

Chapter 240

Ms. Claire Visited My Room

“...Excuse me.”

“Come in.”

Ms. Claire slowly opened the door and entered.

She seemed to be a little nervous?

“Mr. Takumi. I’m sorry to disturb you at this hour...”

“No, it’s fine. I don’t have anything I need to be doing.”

“Hehehe. I see that Leo is relaxing.”

“Wuff-wuff.”

Ms. Claire apologized for the late visit, but smiled when she saw Leo.

What was this...? While I talked to her all of the time, I was starting to feel nervous.

I suppose it was because it was night time, and it was just the two of us here...aside from Leo.

“May I sit next to you?”

“Yes, of course.”

I scooted to the side on the bed, and then Ms. Claire sat down next to me.

Leo's head was right between us, and so we both petted her.

...Had she just come out of the bath? I thought I could smell the scent of soap in the air...

"Mr. Takumi?"

"Ye-yes!"

"Hehe. You really don't have to be so nervous, you know? This is your room, after all."

"Yes, well. Indeed..."

I took in a deep breath and tried to settle my nerves.

But then I smelled that scent again...and my nerves started to act up. I had to stop thinking about that.

Ms. Claire had looked nervous when she first entered, but perhaps it was due to seeing that I was nervous as well, or because she saw Leo, but she seemed fine now.

"So, Mr. Takumi..."

"Yes, what is it?"

She turned to look straight at me.

I didn't know why she was here, but perhaps... Her beautiful face seemed to come closer to me and...

"I am really sorry about what my father did today!"

"Huh?"

“Wuff?”

In spite of the thoughts that drifted through my mind, Ms. Claire suddenly lowered her head and apologized.

Ah, that’s right. That again...

So she had just come here to talk about her father and Sebastian, and how they wanted me to fight as part of my training...

Well, I should have expected that.

“Uh, well, no harm was done, and I have forgotten it already. Besides, there is no reason for you to apologize, is there?”

“Still, even if it doesn’t bother you, it bothers me. He is my father, after all...”

“Hmm, I see. Very well, I accept your apology.”

“...Thank you.”

I suppose as nobles, she took such things very seriously. That was very much like Ms. Claire.

Even if she hadn’t done anything, she wanted to apologize on his behalf.

And so I looked at her straight on and nodded.

Besides, Ms. Claire had been very angry with both of them, and that pretty much drained me of any anger as well.

“Thank you, for scolding them for me.”

“No, I... Well, they were very clearly in the wrong...”

“Still, I was happy. I don’t think anyone has been angry on my behalf before.”

“...Is that so?”

I had been scolded a lot at work. And there were times when things were so unfair that I wanted to be angry.

But there was no one around who would defend me. Because they only cared about saving their own skin.

Now that Leo was much bigger, I was sure that she would get angry for me... But then again, that could lead to quite a disaster.

Upon hearing my words, Ms. Claire looked a little embarrassed.

“Besides, you saved me the trouble of having to give Mr. Ekenhart a piece of my mind, which would have been very improper, given his position.”

“His position...? Oh, but you are a favorite of his, and like a friend. I do not think his position is of much consequence?”

“Still. He is a duke and lord of this house. I could never do what you did. Especially in town, where other people might be watching...”

“...Indeed... I suppose you are right.”

Mr. Ekenhart was a duke, and I had no position in society. I was just a commoner who was their guest.

I would have looked like a great fool if I got angry. Well, we would have both looked like fools.

Besides, there were guards around, and there were people watching from outside.

With this whole business with the count, we did not need rumors spreading about the duke as well.

“So you were right to do it, because no one else could.”

“Yes. I wasn’t really thinking straight, but... I am glad that you feel that way. ...Though I am a little embarrassed.”

I suppose for Ms. Claire, being so angry like that in public was embarrassing.

A noble lady would not be seen doing that very often.

Not that it made her any less of a lady in my eyes.

“Haha. Well, it did remind me to never get on your bad side, Ms. Claire.”

“Oh, Mr. Takumi... As if I would ever have reason to be angry with you?”

I don’t know about that...?

It was true that Ms. Claire had never been angry with me, but you never knew what the future would hold...

In any case, it was best to be careful.

“Wuff-wuff.”

“Oh, Leo. Thank you as well. You were mad at Mr. Ekenhart, right?”

“Wuff.”

“Good Leo really likes you, Mr. Takumi...”

“Wuff!”

I was angry too! Leo seemed to say as she rubbed her face against me.

Ms. Claire looked impressed as she petted Leo.

Leo nodded in agreement... I felt a little bashful.