

Shota 411

Chapter 411 Escort (7)

We just spent another hour sitting there by the fire.

During this, the princess slowly moved closer and closer to me until she was sitting right beside me.

I had tried moving away at first, but then the butler appeared beside me.

He was taking care of the fire, but it wasn't as if he couldn't do that from the other side of the fire. He chose to sit down right beside me so that I couldn't move as he took care of the fire.

So I had no choice but to let the princess come closer until she was sitting right beside me.

It felt very awkward since she didn't say a single thing...

Not to mention, I couldn't even see her expression because of the cloak, so I had no idea what she was even thinking...

Only when she was satisfied did the princess stand up and head to the carriage.

With that, the butler started cleaning everything up and we were heading back to the city.

For me, it was a very exhausting experience since my mind had been turning the entire time, trying to figure out what was happening. I had expected to be killed during this, but...that didn't seem to be the case.

On the way back, the princess also sat beside me instead of sitting opposite of me.

At this point, I just gave up and let her do what she wanted.

After all, I had already guessed what this trip was about.

It was to let the princess have fun and I was just the escort for that. The herb collecting mission was nothing more than a ruse...

But why would they choose me out of all people?

Was it because I was around the same age as the princess?

But if that was the case, there were plenty of other people that could have fulfilled this role.

Was it because I was married?

So were they not worried that I would do anything to the princess?

Unless someone had a death wish, there wasn't a single person that would dare do a thing to the princess.

So there shouldn't have been anything to worry about.

I just couldn't help being confused about all of this.

After entering the city, the first place that we went was the fourth prince's manor.

The princess got off here before the carriage sent me back to the residence prepared for the dwarves.

As I was leaving, I became more and more confused.

Just what had today been for?

...

"Did you have fun?" The fourth prince said the moment that the princess came into the room.

The princess took off her cloak and revealed a face that had a wide smile on it.

That was more than enough to answer the fourth prince's question.

The fourth prince gave a sigh before saying, "Don't let yourself go too far or else you'll chase him away."

The princess' smile twitched when she heard this before it slowly disappeared.

She took a deep breath and said, "I know, you don't need to worry."

Then she looked at him with a smile and said, "Thank you for setting all of this up. I'm sure that it wasn't easy to escape royal father's eyes."

The fourth prince revealed a faint smile when he heard this.

He knew that she was teasing her.

He knew that she was jabbing at him since without the approval of their royal father, it was impossible for her, the princess, to stay out this late.

The fourth prince just said with the same smile on his face, "As long as you're happy, we're happy."

The princess revealed a wide smile after hearing this.

The fourth prince then asked, "How did it go?"

As soon as he asked this, he felt regret.

It was like opening up Pandora's box by asking this question.

The princess didn't hesitate at all to tell him about everything that had happened.

For the fourth prince who was still alone, to listen to the love story of another person like this really was hard for him. It was like being force fed dog food as a single dog...

But since he was a good brother, he just sat there and listened to the whole thing.

He didn't just listen, but also gave comments from time to time to show that he was actually listening.

The princess went on for an hour before she was finally done.

But it wasn't because she had run out of things to tell him, rather it was because her throat was getting dry and she was getting hungry. She wanted to have some dinner first before she continued to tell him more about this.

The fourth prince told the servants to prepare dinner while the princess went to go change and wash up.

The bitter smile on his face made it clear that he knew what he would be in for during dinner.

Still, what could he do?

After the princess left, there was a cloaked figure that suddenly appeared in the room.

The fourth prince wasn't scared or surprised at all by the appearance of this cloaked figure. He just looked at the cloaked figure and then reached his hand out as if he was expecting something.

The cloaked figure took out a document from his cloak and presented it to the fourth prince.

The fourth prince opened it and looked it over for a bit before narrowing his eyes.

He looked at the cloaked figure and asked, "Is this true?"

The cloaked figure just gave a simple nod in response.

The fourth prince knitted his brows and was silent for a bit before finally saying, "Go and make preparations. We can't just let them do whatever they want."

The cloaked figure gave another nod before disappearing just as suddenly as they had appeared.

When the fourth prince was alone in the room, he rubbed his knitted brows in silence before saying in a soft voice, "Brothers, if this is how you want to play, then don't blame me."

Chapter 412 Eldest Prince

After that strange excursion with the princess, I thought that I would be able to get some peace and quiet.

But that wasn't the case since there was someone else that came the next morning.

If it was just a normal noble, I would have ignored them.

However, the one that came was the messenger of the eldest prince.

Since it was a prince, I had no choice but to go with the messenger and meet the eldest prince.

I didn't know what the eldest prince wanted, but it was clear that he wanted something judging by the messenger he sent.

During the trip, the messenger kept looking at me as if I owed him something.

At the same time, he kept singing praise of the eldest prince.

"You really are lucky, Count Zwein. To be able to catch the attention of the eldest prince is a true honour. If you play your cards right, there will be a bright future for you."

When I was faced with this kind of enthusiasm, the only thing that I could do was give an ambiguous answer.

After all, being caught up in the battle for the throne was not something that I wanted.

I just wanted to remain neutral and stay in my own territory until it was all over.

Not to mention...I knew that the eldest prince wouldn't have a chance of winning the throne.

There was a reason why he was known as the eldest prince instead of the crown prince.

The eldest prince was different from the crown prince.

If he was the crown prince, it would mean that the king was already supporting him to take the throne.

Then there wouldn't be a succession battle at all.

But that clearly wasn't the case since he was still the eldest prince instead of the crown prince.

The eldest prince...there was a big problem with him that prevented the king from acknowledging him as a successor.

That was that the eldest prince...was a fool.

He was someone that was easily manipulated by the nobles and was completely enthralled with himself. He was not someone that cared about taking care of the nation and only cared about his own enjoyment.

If he were to become the king, there was no doubt that he would ruin this country.

So the king had never even considered making him the crown prince.

But even if the king didn't consider it, that didn't mean that the eldest prince didn't have this ambition.

He was supported by the nobles that wanted to use him as a puppet and some of these nobles were quite powerful.

After all, these were the nobles that had ambition of taking down the royal family and establishing their own dynasty.

These were the nobles that had been restrained by the current king, but if they could put a puppet on the throne, there would be nothing stopping them.

So I had never once considered having anything to do with the eldest prince.

But now that he was calling me, I was certain that there would be trouble.

So I had to act as ambiguous as possible.

If I showed even a single sign of supporting the eldest prince, I could be sure that there would be trouble coming my way.

I would never let myself be caught up in this for both me and the people that I cared about.

In a worst case scenario, I had already called Scar and Shaka so that they could save me if need be.

After all, Shadow Garden wasn't afraid of a prince.

When the carriage arrived, I couldn't help being surprised by the manor that was in front of us.

This manor was without a doubt the manor of an important person, but it was more than that.

This manor...was clearly the manor of a conceited person.

The decorations were much more luxurious than they needed to be and there were many things that showed off how conceited the owner was. There were all kinds of plant sculptures and actual statues of the owner of this manor placed all over the manor.

It was clear that whoever owned this place was very much in love with themselves.

And that was the problem with the eldest prince.

This kind of vain person would never be good to work with...

The carriage came to the entrance of the manor, but there wasn't a single person who was there waiting for me.

The messenger even didn't bother going with me to the door and sent me to the door all on my own.

I really wanted to leave this place, but there were guards at the gate, so it wasn't as if I would be able to escape.

So I had no choice but to go forward and knock on the door.

When I did, the door was immediately opened by a person who was in a butler's uniform.

He gave a nod to me before saying, "Please follow me."

This person didn't even wait to see if I was following them as they headed into the manor.

I gave a sigh before following them in.

The lobby of this manor was just like the outside, it was filled with portraits of the owner, the eldest prince.

But these portraits were also different from the statues and sculptures that were outside.

These portraits...were clearly beautified.

I had seen the eldest prince before in the game and I knew that he wasn't as beautiful as the portraits made him seem.

These were all the commissioning of a vain person.

The butler led me through the lobby and to a large door on the side, but he didn't bring me in.

Instead, he raised his hand as if he was telling me to stop and wait.

After I stopped, he opened the door and went in without me.

I had to wait there for a few minutes before the butler came back.

He opened the door this time and waved his hand for me to follow him.

So I walked into the room after the butler.

Chapter 413 Offer To Join (1)

When I came in, the butler suddenly said, "Count Zwein is here to request a meeting."

I couldn't help slightly knitting my brows when I heard this.

When he said it like this, it was almost as if I was the one asking to meet with the eldest prince instead of being summoned by the eldest prince like what had happened.

The people in the room all snickered when they heard this, except for a single person who was laying down on a couch.

This person was a blond haired young man who had chiseled features. He couldn't be considered handsome, but he couldn't be considered ugly either.

He was just average.

This was the eldest prince.

This person laying on the couch raised his hand and gave a simple wave before saying, "Let him in."

At this, the butler turned to look at me and gave a nod, as if indicating for me to go in.

Seeing this pompous display, I really wanted to leave...but I couldn't since the other side was the eldest prince. While he didn't actually hold any power, the nobles that backed him couldn't be looked down on.

They were strong enough to keep the eldest prince in contention for the throne, so that was a testament to their power.

I came forward and gave a slight bow before saying, "Greetings to the eldest prince."

The eldest prince laying on the couch didn't even bother looking at me as he just gave a simple nod in response to this.

Then he pointed at one of the chairs that was placed on the side and said, "Sit."

He just said it as if he was giving an order, an order that shouldn't be disobeyed. The way that he said this was like he was the master of this place, but then again, that was true.

Still, it was very annoying seeing him act this way.

If I could, I really would have wanted to punch him in the face.

In the end, I walked over to the chair and sat down, waiting for the eldest prince to say something.

But the eldest prince completely ignored me after I sat down.

He turned back to the others that had been in the room before I came and said, "I heard that the new painting from Master Louvre is simply divine. We really do need to find the time to see it."

The others nodded and offered their own opinions on this.

The way that they acted, it was as if they completely ignored me.

Seeing the eldest prince act this way, I couldn't help knitting my brows even more.

Was he doing this on purpose to shame me or was he doing this because he simply did not care?

Was he smart enough to use this kind of tactic?

No, he shouldn't be that smart since I knew what the eldest prince was capable of because of my memories from the game. He was someone who was a complete fool through and through.

So why did he summon me if he didn't care about me?

I could have just stood up and left since he was ignoring me, but I had no idea what the eldest prince was planning, so I didn't dare act rashly.

I just sat there and waited to see what he was going to do.

But the eldest prince just kept talking to his companions without a single care for me.

It really seemed like he didn't care about me at all.

"Your highness, I must leave now. I'll come and see you again next time."

The eldest prince gave a nod before saying, "Don't be so cold and come more often."

With that, their talk was over and the ones that had been sitting there stood up to leave.

As they walked past me, not a single one of them acknowledged me.

I could even hear snickering coming from them as they walked past.

It seemed that birds of a feather really flock together.

These young nobles were clearly as bad as the eldest prince.

Once they left the room, it was only me, the eldest prince, and the butler left in the room.

But even then, the eldest prince didn't acknowledge me at all.

He had the butler pour him a cup of tea while still laying there on the couch.

He just took a casual sip of his tea and closed his eyes as if he was about to take a nap instead of acknowledging me.

At this point, I knew that I couldn't just act passive anymore, so I gave a cough and said, "Your highness..."

Before I could say anything else, the eldest prince said, "Join my faction and offer yourself to me."

He didn't even bother opening his eyes as he said this. He had even said this in a voice that made it seem like this was the natural thing to do.

He said it like all things should belong to him and they should all offer themselves to him.

I deeply knitted my brows after hearing this.

There was a silence that hung in the air as I waited for the eldest prince to say anything else, but he just laid there with his eyes closed. If one didn't know any better, they would have thought that he had already fallen asleep.

I took a deep breath and said, "Your highness, thank you for this offer, but I'm not looking to join any factions right now."

Then I stood up before saying, "If that is all, then I have other business to attend to."

I was about to walk to the door, but the butler suddenly came forward to stop me.

As he did, he pulled out a dagger from an unknown place that he pointed at me.

I took a step back when I saw this before asking, "This is...?"

The eldest prince just calmly said, "Since you refuse, I can't let you leave here."

He opened his eyes to look at me before saying, "These are your choices, what will you choose?"

Chapter 414 Offer to join (2)

Once again, I deeply knitted my brows when I heard this.

I looked at the eldest prince with narrowed eyes to see if he was being serious, but he had that calm and careless look like he didn't care about any of this.

It was as if regardless of what I chose, it wouldn't affect him at all.

After a pause, I asked, "Are you being serious?"

The eldest prince finally opened his eyes to look at me when he heard this.

He narrowed his eyes slightly to look at me before saying, "I don't like repeating myself. Since that's the case, it seems like you have already made your choice."

He turned to the butler and gave a small nod before saying, "Take care of him."

The butler gave a nod before there were several armed men that appeared in this room through hidden entrances. All of them had weapons in their hands that they were raising towards me.

At the same time, there was one person with a sack that seemed to be for cleaning up.

I couldn't help being shocked since I never thought that the eldest prince was such a decisive person.

He was going to kill me just with a few simple words.

But before anyone could do anything, there was someone dressed in servant clothes that came in.

When they saw this, all of the people in this room knitted their brows as they looked at this person.

That person was naturally scared when seeing this, but he still bowed his head as he said in a stammering voice, "Your, your highness. The fourth prince is here."

As soon as his voice fell, they all knitted their brows even more.

For the first time, the eldest prince lost his calm as he said in a deep voice, "What did you say?"

The servant immediately fell to the ground and lowered his head when he heard this.

He didn't dare repeat himself at first, but he had no choice when he felt the pressure coming from the eldest prince.

"The fourth, the fourth prince is, is here."

The eldest prince immediately slammed his fist down on the armrest of the couch before standing up while roaring, "Why is he here?!"

No one said anything since none of them actually had an answer for this.

All of them had shocked looks which made it clear that they never expected things to develop like this either.

The eldest prince looked at the servant who was on the ground and reached his foot up as if he was about to kick him. But before he could send his foot down, there was a knock that came from the door.

Everyone immediately tensed when they heard this knock and looked in the direction of the door.

The door was still open from the servant rushing in, so they were able to see who was standing there.

It was the fourth prince who stood there with a smile on his face and a hand up by the door, which he had used to knock the door earlier.

When they saw the fourth prince standing there, all of them stood there in a daze.

Or at least that was until all of the people who had weapons realized what was happening and immediately put them away. The one with the sack quickly went back into the hidden entrance to the room that he came from and disappeared.

After a long moment of silence, the fourth prince said with a faint smile, "Am I disturbing something here?"

The eldest prince's expression changed a few times before he revealed a smile of his own and he said, "Fourth brother, of course not. If you told me that you were coming, I would have come to see you."

The fourth prince just replied, "Well, it was a spur of the moment thing."

He turned to look at me before saying, "I came here to pick up my friend here, but I didn't know that you still had business with him."

In the latter half of his words, the tone of his voice shifted a bit which caused a chill to run down the spines of everyone in this room, including me.

The eldest prince's smile turned stiff before he said, "No, we don't have any more business with him."

The fourth prince gave a nod before turning to me to say, "Then shall we go? Or did you have any other business with my older brother?"

I shook my head and walked over to where the fourth prince was.

As I walked over, I watched the people in the room carefully just in case they tried to make a sudden move. But with the fourth prince here, it wasn't as if anyone would dare do that.

In fact, they were even feeling pressure from the fourth prince.

It was clear that there was a powerful guard following the fourth prince and if they dared to move, they would be cut down right away.

So of course not a single one of them dared to make a move.

They valued their lives, they wouldn't throw it away that easily.

After I went to the side of the fourth prince, the fourth prince turned to the eldest prince again and said with a smile, "Eldest brother, since there's nothing else, I'll be leaving with my friend now."

The eldest prince was silent for a bit before he suddenly asked, "Fourth brother, may I ask what business you have with this friend of yours?"

The fourth prince just calmly said, "It's just some random business, it isn't anything worth eldest brother's attention." But then his eyes turned sharp as he said, "But since he is my friend, I hope that eldest brother won't have any other matters with him from now on."

The eldest prince also narrowed his eyes when he heard this.

The two of them just stared at each other in silence for a bit before the eldest prince revealed a smile and said, "Since he is fourth brother's friend, I won't make it hard on him."

The fourth prince gave a nod with a smile before saying, "Then I'll have to thank eldest brother."

He swept his gaze across the room and all of the others in that room avoided his gaze.

When his eyes fell on me, he gave a nod before turning to walk out.

I just silently followed behind the fourth prince.

There was nothing that happened at first as we walked away, but then there was a sudden loud sound that came from the room that we just left. It was the sound of something being smashed.

Then following that, there were the sounds of someone cursing in a loud voice.

We couldn't hear specifically what they were saying, but it was clear that there was hostility in their voice.

But the fourth prince just ignored all of it as he continued walking out of the manor.

It was clearly the eldest prince who was venting his anger after we had left.

The fourth prince led me out of the manor and then over to a carriage parked in front of it.

After we got in the carriage, it headed off in the direction of the residence prepared for the dwarves.

Chapter 415 Offer To Join (3)

There was silence at first as we sat there in the carriage.

The fourth prince sat across from me, but he wasn't looking at me. Instead, he was looking out the window of the carriage as if he was enjoying the ride.

For me, that just meant that I had to sit there awkwardly since there was nothing for me to say.

After a bit, when we moved away from the eldest prince's manor, the fourth prince finally turned back to me.

He looked at me with narrowed eyes without saying a thing which made me feel even more awkward.

Even though he looked at me like this, I still didn't have a single thing to say.

Finally, the fourth prince broke the silence by saying, "I'm sorry about getting you caught up in that."

I revealed a visible look of surprise when I heard this.

After all, I never would have imagined that the first thing out of the fourth prince's mouth would be an apology.

Apologies and princes, they just didn't seem to match...

I raised my hands and waved them before saying, "Your highness, there's no need for you to apologize. This matter isn't your fault, it was all the eldest prince."

The fourth prince revealed a bitter smile when he heard this, but he didn't explain why he had this bitter smile on his face.

Instead, he just said, "From now on, it won't be just the eldest prince who will be coming to bother you. The other princes will also take notice after what you've done and they won't leave you alone, unless..."

His voice trailed off when he said this.

I couldn't help slightly knitting my brows when I heard this because I had some idea of what he was implying and what he was implying was not good for me...

Seeing that the fourth prince wasn't saying a thing, I took a deep breath and said, "Your highness, I'm not looking to take any sides in this matter. I just want to live out my life in peace, without getting involved in this."

After I said this, I carefully looked at the fourth prince and waited for his reaction.

I knew that he wouldn't be happy about this since I was basically refusing him to his face, so I was waiting to see how to deal with him.

But to my surprise, I found that the fourth prince suddenly revealed a wide smile as he said, "Is that so? You really just want to stay out of everything?"

I couldn't help raising a brow as I didn't understand why he would look at me like this, but I just gave a simple nod.

Then the fourth prince gave a chuckle as he said, "Very good, very good, it seems that I was worried for nothing."

I was even more confused when I heard this.

The fourth prince stopped laughing after a while and he looked at me to say, "I fully support your idea of wanting to stay out of the succession race. It's best if you remain neutral during all of this."

I just looked at the fourth prince, wondering if he was alright.

I had thought that he was trying to get me to join his side, but now he was telling me to remain neutral.

Naturally I knew just how much value a connection to the elves and the dwarves would be when it came to this succession race, but the fourth prince didn't seem to care.

It wasn't that I was hurt by this, I was just very confused.

The fourth prince then revealed a serious look as he said, "But it won't be easy to stay out of this. There will be many people that will want to drag you into this matter no matter what you want, so you'll have to be prepared for that. People like my eldest brother..."

His voice trailed off when he said this.

But I couldn't help knitting my brows again when I heard this.

It wasn't that I was confused by the fact that he said this anymore, but because of the fact that he still called the eldest prince his eldest brother like this.

It was clear that they were on opposite sides and were destined to fight, yet the fourth prince still acknowledged him as his brother.

This was completely different from the fourth prince in the game that I knew.

But then again, this was a few years before the plot of the game.

There were many things that could change in the span of a few years.

So could it be that something had happened between now and then that had changed the fourth prince like that?

I know that I shouldn't get myself involved in this matter, but as a gamer...I couldn't stop my curiosity.

I was able to hold myself back in the end though.

I looked at the fourth prince and said, "Then what should I do so that they'll leave me alone?"

The fourth prince was pulled out of his thoughts and he turned to look at me, but he didn't say anything as he revealed a hesitant look. It was as if there was something that he wanted to say, but he didn't know how to say it.

After a long moment of hesitation, he still said, "It isn't as if there isn't a way for them to leave you alone, but it depends on what you plan on doing."

I revealed another confused look when I heard this as I asked, "What does that mean?"

The fourth prince hesitated a bit more before saying, "It depends on if you're willing to trust me or not."

I still looked at him with that confused look, but I also slowly gave a nod.

The fourth prince saw this and said in a decisive voice, "As long as you borrow my name, they won't be able to make a move against you. You'll be able to do what you want without worrying about anything."

There was silence that followed after his voice fell before I revealed a wry smile.

After beating around the bush like this, we still came back to the same thing.

He was still telling me to fall under him, to become one of his subordinates so that the others would leave him alone.

It seemed that I really couldn't escape this fate.

But when the fourth prince saw this wry smile of mine, he suddenly said, "It's not what you think at all. I will not give you any orders and I will not use you for my own gains. I will completely leave you alone even if you borrow my name."

I knitted my brows deeply this time as I looked at the fourth prince, trying to figure out what he meant by this.

No matter how one looked at it, this didn't seem like a fair deal for him.

He had no reason to do something like this.

The fourth prince saw the way that I looked at him and he said, "All I need from you is to maintain the deal you have with our kingdom. As long as you keep providing our kingdom with ores from the Dwarven Kingdom, I don't need anything else from you."

After saying this, he reached his hand out towards me as if waiting for me to take it.

I looked down at his hand before looking up at him.

It didn't seem like there was any deception here, but he was the evil villain prince...

Still, for now, it didn't seem like there was anything to lose from taking his hand so I slowly reached out for it and shook it.

Chapter 416 A new guard

The fourth prince brought me back to the dwarven residence and then dropped me off in front of it.

After we had come to an agreement, there wasn't much else that we had talked about, so we had spent much of the ride back in silence.

The fourth prince seemed to be thinking something as he looked out the window.

As for me, I was trying to figure out just what the fourth prince had wanted.

No matter how I thought about it, it didn't seem like the fourth prince would make a deal where he would suffer a loss like this.

This deal not only required him to protect me from the other princes, he would also not get a slice of the trade with the dwarves and the elves. He told me to give all of that to the king for the kingdom, so none of that would go to him since it would all be arranged by the king.

Why would he do that?

But I just couldn't figure it out by looking at the fourth prince.

It was as if his mind was completely hidden from me and I wasn't able to see a thing.

I normally thought that I was quite good at reading people, but that didn't seem to be the case this time.

But then again, there was a reason why he was known as the final boss.

His thoughts had been hidden for so long that no one had been able to notice anything until it was too late.

After getting out of the carriage, I was heading into the residence when the fourth prince suddenly called out to me.

"Wait, before you go, I have something for you." The fourth prince's voice came from behind me.

I turned around to see the fourth prince sticking his head out the window of the carriage.

This scene really didn't fit the prestigious and handsome fourth prince, but here he was doing it.

It was just a good thing that there was no one around to see him do this.

The fourth prince gave a snap of his fingers and then there was a cloaked figure that appeared.

I couldn't help being taken aback by this cloaked figure that seemingly appeared out of nowhere. Looking at them with a cautious look, I took a step back away from them.

The fourth prince saw this and revealed a faint smile before saying, "There's no need to be cautious, this is one of my guards. I'll be leaving them to you to protect you just in case anything happens."

My brows slightly knit when I heard this.

He said that this was a guard that was sent to 'protect' me, but all I could see was a guard that was here to watch over me.

The fourth prince that I knew definitely wouldn't do anything like this without something to gain, so it made me more certain that he had something that he was hiding from me. That was why he was sending this guard to 'protect' me.

After a moment of silence, I forced myself to stay calm as I said with a smile, "Your highness, there's no need for that much trouble. I can take care of myself."

But the fourth prince just wouldn't take no for an answer as he said, "You never know what will happen, so it's better if you have more guards by your side. This guard of mine is an elite that can fight on par with the captain of the knights. They definitely will not let you down."

The more that he endorsed this person, the harder it became for me to reject.

After all, if I did, it would be like slapping the face of the fourth prince by saying that I didn't trust him.

At a delicate time like this, I couldn't do something like that.

So in the end, I had no choice but to say with a sigh, "Then I'll have to thank your highness for your concern."

The fourth prince gave a nod with a smile before turning to the cloaked figure to say, "You will take your orders from Count Zwein from now on. Make sure to protect him, even if it costs your life."

The cloaked figure suddenly fell to one knee in front of the carriage and said, "Yes, your highness."

I was surprised to hear that the voice of this cloaked figure wasn't hidden and it was a female voice.

I couldn't tell at all that this was a female because her figure was completely hidden by the cloak that she wore.

But I didn't look down on her since she was a female.

This was a world where females could be just as strong as males, this was very evident when it came to the case of Cecilia.

She was much stronger than most male knights that were in the same position as her.

I was just worried that there might be other orders that the fourth prince has given this guard that could cause me trouble...

The fourth prince didn't seem to care at all as he brought his head back into the carriage.

With one final wave, he said, "Count Zwein, I hope that I'll be able to see you again, but I don't think that there will be time for that soon. You should be careful during this time, there's no knowing what my brothers will do."

He didn't give an explanation for this as he just left, but I couldn't help deeply knitting my brows when I heard this.

The leaving of this guard and the cryptic message that he met, it seemed that he knew something that I didn't. And it seemed that this thing was related to the other princes...

After thinking for a bit, I gave a sigh.

I would ask Scar and Shaka about this later since I needed Shadow Garden's resources to find out this information.

I wouldn't be able to do anything worrying about this and excessively worrying about this wouldn't be good for me either.

I would deal with these things when they came.

I was about to go in when I suddenly remembered the guard that the fourth prince had left me standing there.

She had been standing there in silence after the fourth prince left, almost as if she was waiting for an order.

I slowly turned to look at her before asking, "What are you going to do now?"

She said in a cold voice, "My orders were to follow you and protect you, so I will do that. If there's anything that you want me to do, then I'll do it."

Though she said this, it was clear that there was a trace of unwillingness in her voice.

But there was no doubting the conviction that she said this with.

It was as if she really would follow my orders, regardless of what orders they were.

It seemed that she would even follow some orders that wouldn't be as good for her...

But I didn't have that intention at all.

I just asked, "No, I mean what are you going to do now? Are you going to follow me around, or what?"

She said in the same cold voice, "I'll do as you order."

"Eh?" I couldn't help saying with a surprised look. But in the end, I said with a sigh, "Alright, follow me then."

Before going in though, I remembered one more thing, "What should I address you by?"

The cloaked figure just simply said, "There's no need for names. Just call me Shadow Five."

I looked at her with a strange look when I heard this, but I didn't dive deeper into it.

I'm sure there's a story behind this, but that was her story and it wasn't my place to ask.

So I simply said, "I'll be counting on you then, Shadow Five."

Chapter 417 A dark night (1)

It was already the afternoon when I arrived back at the residence.

The dwarves to my surprise had been waiting for me the entire time.

When I came in, the first thing that they did was completely surround me and see if there was anything wrong.

Elsa was the one that led this, but the other dwarves also didn't hold back as they surrounded me.

It was almost as if I was some kind of rare commodity that they had obtained and they were making sure that I wasn't damaged.

The one line that I drew was taking off my clothes.

If I didn't stop them, the dwarves might have really ripped off my clothes just to make sure that I was fine.

I was touched that they were this worried about me, but they really were taking it too far.

After they had finished checking my body, they all let out sighs of relief before asking...

"How about we go and do some rune carving?"

"I have this new alloy that I've been wanting to make, can you help me with it?"

"There's this new sword that I've been working on, I just don't know how to go about it."

The reason that they were so worried...was because of my knowledge. It didn't seem like they were actually worried about me, they were just worried that they would miss out on this knowledge that I had about forging.

I had already expected this, but it still made a bitter smile appear on my face.

In the end, it was only Elsa who asked, "Are you really alright? They didn't do anything to you, right?"

I was surprised to hear this from her, but I just said with a proper smile, "It's not a problem. It wasn't anything that I couldn't handle."

She looked at me with a bit of doubt as if she didn't believe what I said, but she didn't say anything else after that.

In the end, I spent the rest of the day with the dwarves going over the things that they wanted.

But I received a surprise at dinner.

Elsa had cooked something for me personally. Even though there were chefs that came with this residence, she had gone off in the afternoon to cook for me.

I didn't understand why she did this, but I had to admit that it was delicious.

She really could cook.

"You really would make a good wife." I couldn't help saying this before suddenly realizing my mistake.

She had been a wife before, but it hadn't worked out...after all it had ended in divorce with Drogath.

But Elsa didn't seem to mind as she asked, "Do you really think so?"

I was surprised to see how much mental fortitude she had, but I was also surprised by the blush that was on her face.

Why would she suddenly reveal a blush like this?

Still, I didn't push it since I knew that it was a mistake.

If I stay on this topic for too long, I might hurt her accidentally...so it was better to change the topic.

The rest of the meal was spent with a happy mood and we headed off early to go to sleep since there wasn't much else that needed to be done.

Or it could be said that I had run away to bed to avoid the dwarves.

If I didn't give the excuse that I was tired after what happened today, they might have dragged me off to talk about forging all night.

So I could only use this as an excuse to run away.

As I laid there in bed, I couldn't fall asleep right away as I thought about everything that had happened today.

I knew for sure that it wouldn't be the end...after all, only the eldest prince had made a move.

Even if I had the protection of the fourth prince, the other princes wouldn't let this go that easily. Not to mention, the promise that I had made with the fourth prince was flimsy in the first place.

It was just a verbal agreement without any actual terms, so it was impossible that he would go all out to protect me.

In the end, I would have to think of a way to protect myself.

It was just a good thing that I had something that no one else in this world had.

I had the cheat that was knowledge of the future.

I had played the game for countless hours, so there were many things that I knew about the princes that even they didn't think anyone knew about. I knew things that even they wouldn't know about themselves because these were things that would happen in the future.

With this knowledge, it would be easy for me to act against the princes if the need came.

So I started going over everything that I could use against the various princes.

There were nine princes in total.

Some of them were so insignificant that they didn't come up in the plot much, but I still wouldn't let them go.

After all, I had no idea which of the princes would act against me.

As I laid there in bed thinking about all of this, I could feel my eyes slowly drooping.

While it had been hard for me to sleep earlier, the more that I thought about this, the sleepier I became.

Eventually, I wasn't able to fight it anymore and decided to go to sleep.

There was no need to rush this, there would be plenty of time to think about this later.

For now, I should get my rest since I had no idea what would come tomorrow.

If it was my own territory, I wouldn't need to worry, but the capital was ever changing.

Just like today, anything could happen tomorrow...

So I closed my eyes and was about to fall asleep...but a minute after I closed my eyes.

"Watch out!"

I suddenly opened my eyes and saw two swords clashing in front of me.

Chapter 418 A dark night (2)

I couldn't help jolting awake when I saw the two swords in front of me.

Neither of the swords were moving, but I could see that they were shaking.

It was clear that the owners of the sword were both trying to push back the other side, but they were evenly matched.

I didn't dare move too suddenly out of fear of drawing attention, but I also knew that I couldn't just stay here.

I quickly looked around and found that there were two cloaked figures that were standing there above my bed.

I recognized one of them since I had made sure to recognize what their cloak looked like this afternoon.

It was Shadow Five.

When I saw her, I realized that she had disappeared since coming back to the dwarven residence.

In fact, I had completely forgotten about her because the dwarves had dragged me away. But seeing her now, I realized that she had been hiding and watching over me the whole time.

There was a small part of me that almost wanted to ask how long she had been watching...

After all, I had taken a bath earlier...

But it wasn't the time for that now.

My life was in danger after all.

After a moment of hesitation, I asked in a decisive voice, "What should I do to help?"

Shadow Five was surprised to hear this, but then she said, "Move to the side and give me space to fight. I'll hold him back, so get ready to move on three."

I gave a nod and then started counting in my head.

On the count of three, I suddenly stood up and ran to the other side of the room.

At the same time, Shadow Five had thrown a small dagger out at the other cloaked figure to force them away.

They jumped all the way to the window, making sure that they had an escape route, but they didn't jump out just yet. They were watching carefully to see what we would do next.

Shadow Five however didn't give this cloaked figure a chance to catch their breath.

She charged right at the cloaked figure and slashed out at them.

This time, the cloaked figure was at a disadvantage.

This cloaked figure had been able to go even with Shadow Five before because they had launched a sneak attack, but in a direct clash, the cloaked figure was clearly weaker.

It wasn't about strength anymore, but technique.

The sword techniques of Shadow Five made her sword disappear, making it hard for the cloaked figure to even follow her sword.

They weren't able to stop these attacks and it didn't take long before slashes appeared on the cloak of this cloaked figure.

The cloaked figure was being pushed back more and more, but they moved closer and closer to the window. If they wanted, they would still be able to escape at any time.

I knew that I couldn't just remain idle here or else we would never be able to find out who sent this person to kill me.

So I moved to the door while saying, "Help, there's an..."

Before I could finish, I could sense danger coming from the door.

This was the sense of danger that I had built up over being in countless life and death situations, so I didn't doubt it at all. It was coming right from the door in front of me.

So I immediately ducked down.

When I did, there was something that smashed through the door, creating a hole in it. This thing flew over my head and stabbed into the wall.

This thing created a large hole in the wall after stabbing into it before falling to the ground.

When it fell to the ground, I saw that it was a large broadsword that had been thrown through the door.

This was a giant broadsword, but it had been thrown through the door that easily. It was clear that whoever did it had immense strength that couldn't be looked down on.

But it was a good thing that they had made such a large sound when they threw the broadsword through the door that it alerted the guards outside.

It didn't take long for there to be the sounds of guards stirring outside this room.

It didn't sound like it would take long for them to arrive.

I just had to hold out until then.

But through the hole in the door, I could see another cloaked figure with a large broadsword.

This cloaked figure had not only brought one, but two broadswords.

Now that I was on the ground like this, it was unlikely that I would be able to dodge this if he attacked me.

I had an ugly expression on my face when I saw this.

The cloaked figure also knew this, so he raised his sword as if he was about to throw it at me.

But before he could, I heard a voice say, "Duck!"

I didn't hesitate at all to follow this order and ducked out of the way.

As I lowered my head, I saw a dagger fly by past my head.

This dagger was familiar...it was like the dagger that Shadow Five had thrown at the cloaked figure earlier.

That dagger flew through the hole in the door at the cloaked figure outside.

That cloaked figure was caught off guard by this dagger, but they were still able to react in time to lift the broadsword sideways to block this dagger.

The dagger hit the broadsword and then bounced back into the door.

This dagger throw didn't do much, but it was more than enough to distract the cloaked figure, giving Shadow Five the chance to run back to my side so that she could guard me.

The two cloaked figures looked at each other and then shared a nod, as if they were planning to attack together.

But before they could, the sounds of the guards running up could be heard.

When they heard this, they knew that they couldn't stay here any longer.

So the larger cloaked figure swung his broadsword forward at the door in front of him.

Chapter 419 A dark night (3)

When the broadsword made contact with the door, the door wasn't able to put up any resistance at all.

The force at which the broadsword was swung with was transferred into the door and shattered the door to pieces.

The fragmented pieces of wood flew out into the room.

Seeing this, Shadow Five moved in front of me and swung her sword around to cut down the pieces of wood flying at us.

During this time, she had made sure to keep her other hand on a dagger in her cloak just in case these cloaked figures made a move.

But the large cloaked figure didn't come in our direction.

Instead, the large cloaked figure started moving towards the other cloaked figure in the room.

The two of them gathered right beside the window before suddenly...jumping out the window.

They didn't even bother looking back at us as they jumped out.

That was how decisive these cloaked figures were.

The moment that they realized that they had failed in the assassination, they didn't hesitate at all to jump out the window to escape.

Shadow Five and I hesitated for a second before slowly moving over towards the window to see what was happening outside.

It was also at this time that the guards had reached my room and came in to see what was happening.

When they saw Shadow Five, they immediately raised their weapons and shouted, "Don't move! Step away from Count Zwein this instant!"

I couldn't help shaking my head when I heard this. But I raised my hand to stop them and said, "Stop, she's my guard. The culprits just jumped out the window and ran away."

The guards didn't put down their weapons right away as they looked at me with doubt, but they eventually put their weapons down and turned to run outside to chase after the culprits.

There were a few that stayed behind to make sure that I was alright.

These guards looked at Shadow Five with a strange look, but they didn't do anything to her.

I just ignored them and walked over to the window with Shadow Five.

When we looked outside, we were surprised by what we saw.

The two cloaked figures were still there.

I had thought that they would run away, but it turned out that this wasn't the case.

They were still standing outside the residence with their weapons raised, as if they were fighting someone.

I couldn't see that well since it was dark outside, but with the torches of the guards, I could see that there was someone standing there in front of them.

I didn't recognize this person at first, but then I saw that it was Shaka who had stopped them.

As soon as I saw that it was Shaka, I turned to Shadow Five and said, "Go and help him capture those two. These guards can protect me."

Shadow Five looked at me as if she was hesitating, but she gave a nod and jumped out the window in the end.

She fell right down above the two cloaked figures and she swung her sword down at them, but they had noticed her and were able to react in time.

The large figure raised his broadsword and blocked Shadow Five's sword. Then with one large swing, he threw her back into the air.

Shadow Five flipped a few times in the air before landing on the opposite side of these cloaked figures.

The two cloaked figures were now trapped between her and Shaka.

Shaka was surprised to see this new cloaked figure appear, but seeing that she was attacking his targets, it seemed like this new cloaked figure was an ally.

To make sure of this, I shouted from the window, "She works for me! Work together to take them down!"

Shaka looked up at me and his eyes relaxed a bit when he saw that I was alright.

Then he turned back down to look at Shadow Five.

Shadow Five gave a nod before suddenly charging at the cloaked figures.

When Shaka saw this, he also charged forward from the opposite side.

The cloaked figures went back to back as they faced off against the two approaching enemies.

The smaller cloaked figure was facing Shadow Five while the larger cloaked figure was facing Shaka.

But there was no contest at all.

Shaka had been able to suppress both of them alone and now that he had backup, there was no chance that they would be able to fight back.

There was a green glow that suddenly appeared around Shaka as he disappeared. When he reappeared, he was already in front of the large cloaked figure and was swinging his sword down at him.

The large figure was barely able to raise his broadsword in time, but he wasn't able to resist the force of Shaka's swing and was carried back by it.

He hit the smaller cloaked figure behind him, knocking him off balance which made it easier for Shadow Five to slash the smaller cloaked figure's hands, forcing him to drop his sword.

The two of them quickly fell to the ground and their weapons were thrown away from them.

When they tried to get up, they found that both Shaka and Shadow Five had their weapons pointed at them so that they couldn't move anymore.

The guards had just approached at this time and quickly moved to surround the cloaked figures so that they wouldn't have a single path of escape.

Once they had trapped these two, Shaka asked in a deep voice, "Who are you?"

Neither of the cloaked figures responded to this.

Instead, they looked at each other as if they were trying to decide what to do next.

But then...both of them suddenly started to shake.

This shaking became more and more intense, almost as if they were having a seizure.

Then all of a sudden, both of these cloaked figures collapsed to the ground and stopped moving.

Chapter 420 A dark night (4)

When they saw these two cloaked figures collapse, both Shaka and Shadow Five immediately moved away from them.

They moved several steps back and kept their weapons at the ready, just in case this was some kind of trick the cloaked figures were playing.

But the cloaked figures still didn't move even when they had moved away.

There was a tense silence that lasted in the air for a minute before Shaka slowly started moving towards the cloaked figures on the ground.

When he came close enough, he poked the two cloaked figures on the ground with his sword.

Only when he saw that they didn't react at all to this did he finally lean down and touch their bodies with his bare hands.

He slowly turned them around so that they were facing up before slowly reaching for the parts covering their face. But before he could reach it, there was a voice that called out...

"Don't touch them!"

Shaka's hand immediately froze in the air before he quickly pulled them away.

He turned around to see me walking over.

I was the one that had called out to stop him.

I had started running out the moment that I saw the two cloaked figures drop to the ground like this.

I knew that there was something special about this, so I had to stop Shaka from making a mistake.

When they saw me coming over, both Shaka and Shadow Five came forward to stop me from approaching.

I didn't challenge them on this and stopped before getting too close to the cloaked figures on the ground.

But then I said, "Don't touch them with your bare hands."

Before either of them could say anything, I turned to the guards around us and said, "Someone get me some gloves!"

The guards all looked at each other with confused looks, but there was one guard that ran off in the end.

That guard came back with several pairs of gloves and a bunch of dwarves.

These gloves were special gloves that were used for forging by the dwarves, so they were much thicker than usual. So these were gloves that were better than any gloves that he could have brought.

I went over to that guard and took the gloves, but before I could put them on, Shaka and Shadow Five took them from me.

I looked at them for a bit, but then I just gave a sigh as I said, "Put on the gloves and carefully open up their cloaks. Make sure that you don't splash any of it on yourself."

The two of them were confused when they heard this, but they quickly understood what I meant when they pulled away the cloaks of the two on the ground.

There was a green liquid that was dripping out of their mouths that had stained the cloak.

Just one glance was enough for them to tell that this green liquid was some kind of poison.

So they quickly pulled back their hands after peeling the cloak off the faces of these two.

But when they saw their faces, they couldn't help knitting their brows.

That was because the faces that had been revealed were completely disfigured.

They were so disfigured that it was hard to believe that this was the face of a human.

It was clear that whoever these two were, they were pawns that could have been sacrificed at any time.

That was why they had been poisoned to death the moment that they were caught.

Whether it was by their own volition or not...it was their fate.

Shaka and Shadow Five both knitted their brows when they saw this, but there wasn't anything that they could do about this since even they wouldn't be able to find anything from these two.

In the end, I came forward to take a look at the two of them and just shook my head.

I turned to the guards and said, "Can you find someone to take care of these corpses? See if you can get them buried and if not, try to cremate them."

Even if they were enemies that had tried to kill me, they were still victims who had no choice but to go through with this. I didn't know their reason, but I couldn't help feeling pity for these two who had been forced into this.

So I wanted to at least give them a proper burial.

Though when it came to the name for the tombstones...

They would just be left blank.

The guards looked like they had other thoughts about this, but they still listened to my orders in the end and went to find someone to take these corpses away.

It didn't take long for someone to arrive with a carriage to take them away to be buried, though judging by the looks of that person, it was most likely to be thrown in a mass grave.

At least it was better than nothing.

I was about to head in after that, but I didn't get a chance since there were other carriages that suddenly arrived.

When they opened their doors and people came out, I couldn't help being surprised by who came.

It was the fourth prince and the prime minister.

Both of them were surprised to see each other, but then they came over together to ask me what had happened.

I just gave a simple summary of what happened.

When they finished listening to this, they couldn't help knitting their brows.

They wanted to see the corpses, but the person we had found had already taken them away.

Though even if they did search the corpse, it wasn't as if they would have been able to find anything.

The prime minister was the one that spoke first, "Are the dwarven friends alright?"

There was a slightly displeased feeling that came up inside of me, but I understood where he was coming from.

This residence was the residence for the dwarven ambassador group.

If an assassin had actually succeeded, this would have become an international problem.

So naturally that would be his first concern.