

Shota 421

Chapter 421 Who dares? (1)

I just calmly said, "The dwarves are fine, they weren't here for them in the first place."

The prime minister let out a sigh of relief, not even bothering to hide it.

He was about to say something else, but he suddenly closed his mouth when he saw the fourth prince glare at him.

He wanted to turn to say something to me, but the fourth prince was ahead of him.

The fourth prince came over and asked with a concerned look, "Are you alright?"

I was surprised since I never thought that the fourth prince would be so concerned about me.

I just waved my hand and said, "I'm fine, they didn't get to me."

I turned to look at Shadow Five and said, "She saved me in the end. If it wasn't for her, they might have gotten me in my sleep."

The fourth prince looked at Shadow Five and gave a nod before saying, "Good work."

He said it in a very simple manner that it didn't seem like he was praising her, but Shadow Five was definitely touched by it.

She immediately fell to one knee and said, "This subordinate is not deserving of this praise."

The fourth prince just waved his hand and said, "Get up."

Shadow Five stood up and then moved back to give the fourth prince space.

The fourth prince turned back to me and said, "It's good that you're safe." Then his face turned a bit dark as he said, "Even though I had already made it clear that you're one of mine, they still dared to move against you..."

The things that he was mumbling seemed dangerous, so I pretended like I didn't hear a thing.

After mumbling for a bit, he looked at me and said, "Take care of yourself for now. I'm sure you're tired after all of that. I'll come and see you tomorrow."

I was surprised by the last part, but I didn't even have time to say anything as he was already moving away.

The fourth prince took one last look at me before turning to the prime minister to say, "Let's go, we're heading to the castle."

The prime minister looked at the manor as if there was something that he wanted to do and he looked like there was something that he wanted to say when he turned back, but the fourth prince's words made him swallow those words, "I'm sure that my royal father will want to know about this."

When the prime minister heard this, he gave a gulp before quickly giving a nod.

He realized that the fourth prince was right.

The king was most likely waiting for a report.

This was a matter of absolute importance after all.

The dwarves were national guests and now they've been attacked in the residence that the king had provided for them. If this was known, it would be a slap to the king's face.

So he naturally would want to know about this as soon as possible.

So the prime minister gave a nod in the end before saying, "We should head back and report to his majesty."

After that, the prime minister's carriage followed the fourth prince's carriage in the direction of the castle.

It didn't take long for them to disappear.

Once they were gone, it was just our group that was left standing there.

I turned to look at Shaka and asked, "What are you doing here? Didn't you go back with Scar earlier?"

Shaka just calmly said, "Boss told me to stay here and keep you safe. I didn't know why, but it seems like he knows more than I do."

I slightly knitted my brows when I heard this.

Did that mean that they already knew about the assassination attempt, so they sent Shaka to prevent it? Or was it something else?

Shaka then added, "For now, all of my other missions are cancelled and I won't be receiving any new orders. Until you leave, I'll be guarding you."

I gave a reassured nod when I heard this.

I knew how strong Shaka was, so it was reassuring having him guard me.

I had thought that I would have to get through this next period without him since he had been called back to headquarters by Scar, but now it seemed that they were going to protect me.

Of course, I also knew that this was because they wanted to protect their own investment, but I was fine with it.

As long as I had a powerful guard, it didn't matter what the reason was.

Plus, I could say that I'm quite close to Shaka after all that we've been through.

I looked at him again with an inquisitive look, but he just gave a shrug as he said, "I don't know anything else. No one told me a thing, so there's no reason to look at me like this."

I looked at him carefully, but dropped it in the end.

After all, even if he was lying, I wasn't able to see through it.

Even after all the time that we had spent together, I still wasn't able to read his expressions at all since he had a great poker face.

Still, that didn't really matter for now.

After that was settled, we started heading back into the residence.

But then I remembered one more thing.

There was still Shadow Five standing there looking in the direction that the fourth prince had left in.

It didn't seem like she had moved an inch since he had left.

I gave a cough before saying, "Do you want to go back to him? I have another guard now, so there's no need for you to stay here anymore. You can go back to his side."

Shadow Five slowly turned to me before saying, "My master has ordered me to protect you, so that is what I will do."

Then before I could say anything, she disappeared without a trace.

This was just like before where she had disappeared, but now I knew that she was most likely somewhere nearby hiding in the shadows watching over me.

I just gave a sigh before heading in with Shaka.

Chapter 422 Who dares? (2)

When the fourth prince arrived at the palace, there was no one that stopped him from entering.

All of the guards immediately moved out of the way when they saw that it was the fourth prince.

As for the prime minister who followed the fourth prince, no one seemed to care about him.

It was as if they were all already used to seeing the fourth prince enter the palace like this.

The fourth prince was very familiar with the corridors of the palace, as if he had been here many times before. But judging by how the guards acted around him, that seemed like it was very likely the case.

The fourth prince didn't take any time to reach a certain part of the palace.

In this part of the palace, the guards were clearly different.

As for how they were different...these guards were clearly much stronger and more serious than the guards outside. These guards were the elite guards of the castle, the ones that were all made of knights.

And as for what they were guarding.

As the fourth prince entered the room, the person inside said, "What's the situation?"

The fourth prince revealed a serious look and said, "They're safe for now."

The person inside the room gave a nod before saying, "Good. If anything happens to them, we won't be able to live it down. All of our hard work will go to waste then."

The fourth prince gave a nod of agreement, but he didn't say anything.

It was as if he didn't want to say what he wanted to say next.

As if he was hesitating to say what he wanted to say.

The person in the room knew this, so he said, "Just say it already."

Taking a deep sigh, the fourth prince said, "The ones that are behind this..."

His voice trailed off after saying this, but before he could say the rest, the person in the room cut him off.

"I know."

The fourth prince closed his mouth and didn't say anything, but the look on his face made it clear what he was thinking.

The person in the room gave a sigh before saying, "Which one was it?"

"Old second." The fourth prince said after a long sigh.

The person in the room slammed his fist down the moment that he heard this before saying, "They dare to go against me directly like this? Who do they think they are?"

The fourth prince shook his head before saying, "They weren't planning on going against you per say, they were...trying to take out Count Zwein. He is too much of a variable in terms of the future, so they were trying to cull him while they could."

"Even so, do they think that this crown means nothing?" As he said this, the person in the room pointed at the crown on the side.

This was the crown of the king.

The person that could be guarded by these elite guards was naturally the king.

The fourth prince just shook his head and said, "That's just how it is now. If they succeeded, they could have blamed it on many other things. But once they fail, they will start cutting off their tails to escape."

The king deeply knitted his brows when he heard this.

Of course he had already expected the fourth prince to say this, so he said, "Have you made your preparations yet?"

The fourth prince hesitated for a second before giving a nod.

The king gave a nod back as he said, "Then do it."

The fourth prince once again hesitated for a bit and this time, he said, "Are we sure that this is the best choice?"

The king narrowed his eyes to look at the fourth prince before saying, "They are the ones that are colluding with others for their own benefits. Once they have betrayed the royal family, there's nothing else we can say."

The fourth prince still had a look like he was hesitating over something.

The king saw this and knew what he was thinking, so he said, "Our duty as royals is to the people of the kingdom. It is our right to protect them and to keep them safe, that is our duty as the rulers of this kingdom. Once one of the royal family goes against that, they no longer deserve to be a part of the royal family."

The fourth prince understood what the king was saying, but he still had to say, "Is there really no other way? Can we not...exile him?"

The king shook his head before saying, "It was how it was when I took the throne and it is how it has to be now. You have to understand that showing weakness will be taken advantage of."

In the end, the fourth prince gave a sigh before saying, "I will take care of this matter, royal father."

The king gave a nod of approval when he heard this.

He looked at the fourth prince with a look of appreciation.

Since he was young, the fourth prince had always shown a knack for handling these matters. That was why the fourth prince was the prince that the king trusted the most out of all the princes.

If he was willing, he would have chosen to give the fourth prince the throne.

But the fourth prince just wasn't willing, so it wasn't as if the king could do anything.

All he could do was wait for the one that they had decided on to take the throne to arrive.

Once that person came, he would be able to rest easy.

After a moment of silence, the king said, "How did it go with your sister?"

The fourth prince revealed a faint smile that had a hint of bitterness to it when he heard this as he remembered what he had been through.

But in the end, he kept it short for the king.

The king revealed a faint smile before saying, "It's good that she's happy."

The fourth prince nodded in agreement.

Chapter 423 Act as bait

The sun was bright the next morning even though last night had been so dark.

There were even more guards that had been sent to the residence during the night.

It seemed that the king was taking this event very seriously.

Whether it was because it was related to the dwarves or to me, it was hard to tell, but at least he was taking it seriously which was a good sign.

I saw no sign of Shadow Five, but Shaka had stayed in the residence and was having breakfast with us.

When we sat down, I asked him, "Did you get any more information about who attacked us last night?"

Shaka slowly shook his head before saying, "We're still investigating it, but..." He couldn't help pausing as if he was hesitating to say something, but he still spoke in the end, "According to my sources, we might be dropping this investigation."

I couldn't help revealing a surprised look when I heard this before quickly asking, "Shadow Garden, the biggest information organization in the kingdom is dropping this case?"

Shaka took a deep breath before saying, "It's said that it's an order from his majesty."

I knitted my brows, but I didn't keep questioning him.

After all, I could make a few guesses as to why this was the case.

The biggest one was that the king didn't want to make too much noise.

If this made too much noise, it would be troublesome for not just the king, but the entire kingdom because it would ruin the new relationship that they were building with the Dwarven Kingdom.

There was also the fact that this was a slap to the king's face...

He most likely would send his own people in to take care of this, people that he trusted more than Shadow Garden.

Shadow Garden was a large organization with different people that had different agendas, so it was hard to control sometimes.

Sending a small group of trusted individuals would always be better.

Since they had decided not to push this matter, there was nothing that I could do about it.

All I could do was try to keep myself as safe as possible so that nothing else like this happened.

The dwarves were naturally concerned about me as well when they came in for breakfast, but they didn't get any time to talk to me about this.

That was because the fourth prince had come back.

The fourth prince had come in right after the dwarves, so there was an awkward moment before they went to eat.

I was surprised that the fourth prince was here as well, but I still said, "Your highness, are you here for a special reason, or are you here to just check in?"

The fourth prince didn't answer this question and instead looked at the breakfast on the table. He then said with a smile, "I haven't had any breakfast yet, do you mind if I join you?"

I was caught off guard by this sudden question, but since he was the fourth prince...it wasn't as if I could say no.

"Please help yourself. I just hope that you will not mind this poor selection."

The fourth prince waved his hand with a smile before saying, "No such thing. This is a fine breakfast."

All during breakfast, I kept watching the fourth prince, waiting to see just what he was here for.

But the fourth prince didn't do a single thing as he just ate.

From time to time, he would chat with the dwarves, but it didn't seem like there was much in common for them.

The dwarves were more open and free while the fourth prince...well he was sly by nature that it just seemed like there was a natural repulsion between the two sides.

After we had finished breakfast, that was when the fourth prince finally made his move.

"Count Zwein, if possible, may we speak alone?" The fourth prince suddenly asked as the maids were clearing the dishes away.

I narrowed my eyes a bit as I looked at him, but I slowly gave a nod.

I couldn't read what the fourth prince wanted, so the only way to figure it out was to go along with him.

The fourth prince gave a nod before saying, "Is there a place where we can talk in private?"

He looked at the dwarves when he said this.

Once again, I gave another nod before standing up.

As I stood, Shaka was about to follow me until the fourth prince said in a firm voice, "There's no need for you to come. This is a private conversation."

Shaka was taken aback when he heard this, but he was about to say something until the fourth prince took out something.

It was a piece of paper that he showed only Shaka and not me.

Shaka's eyes narrowed when he saw this, but he backed down in the end.

I tried to sneak a peek of that piece of paper, but the fourth prince put it away before I could.

He turned back to me and said with a smile, "Shall we?"

I looked at him with a strange look, but I still turned around and led him out of the dining room.

As we left, there were some concerned looks that were pointed in our direction. However, the dwarves didn't stop him since they knew who he was and they knew that this was my decision.

We came to a room on the side which was used as a sitting room.

I was about to go in, but the fourth prince suddenly stopped me.

He looked around and said, "Where are you?"

As soon as he said this, Shadow Five appeared out of nowhere.

As I had expected, she had been hiding and watching over me.

When she appeared, she fell to one knee and bowed her head to the fourth prince.

He just said, "Stand by the door and keep guard."

Shadow Five gave a nod before standing at the door without moving.

The fourth prince ignored her and walked in.

As I walked past, I couldn't help looking at Shadow Five with a strange look.

When the two of us were seated, the fourth prince suddenly said, "I want you to be bait."

Chapter 424 Auction trap (1)

When I heard this, I immediately revealed a bitter smile.

I had expected the fourth prince to ask me something since there was no way that he would come see me for no reason.

But never in my wildest imagination would I have thought that it would be this.

After looking at him for a bit, I took a deep breath and asked, "Bait for what?"

This time, the fourth prince hesitated as he didn't answer right away.

Instead, he just looked troubled for a bit before slowly saying, "We need you to bait someone that we want to catch."

I just looked right at him and repeated again, "Bait for what?"

I could understand what he was asking me, but I didn't want to hear it.

What I wanted to know was...who was behind this.

It was clear that there was a reason why the fourth prince wanted me to be bait.

My guess was...it was because I was bait for the person who sent those assassins yesterday.

The fourth prince knitted his brows a bit when he heard this.

He naturally knew what I was asking of him and it seemed like he was thinking about whether he was going to tell me or not.

But in the end, he said with a sigh, "It's the second prince...or rather the subordinates of the second prince."

I couldn't help revealing a surprised look when I heard this.

I never thought that it would be the second prince who sent those assassins after me.

However, I could understand why he would do this.

The ore trade with the dwarves, it was an important thing for the military. There was a severe lack of ores to forge weapons and armour for the military, which was why this deal was so important.

So naturally the one who controlled the deal would have a lot of sway in the military in the future.

The ones that supported the second prince were the generals and the important characters of the military.

So if I gained sway in the military, it would be the same as encroaching on his territory.

Not to mention, I didn't support the second prince.

If I weakened his hold over the military and gave that power to another prince, it would be dangerous to him in the future.

What the second prince was doing was covering his bases, making sure that the foundation of his power was secure.

That meant taking care of me before I could take over his power.

This was just a survival strategy which I could understand, but of course I couldn't approve of it since it was a strategy that sacrificed my life.

Since that was the case...

I looked at the fourth prince and gave a nod of agreement.

The fourth prince wasn't surprised seeing this since he could understand what I was thinking, so he started telling me the plan.

"There will be an auction held this afternoon. I need you to go to that auction and be bait for the second prince. He should already know that his assassination attempt failed, so he will be desperate. If you appear in a public place like this at a time like this, he will without doubt try to kill you. When that time comes, we will capture him."

I gave another nod to show that I understood, but I still asked, "Why are you doing all of this to catch him? Why not just catch him? You should know where the second prince is."

The fourth prince revealed a bitter smile before saying, "It's not as simple...It's not the second prince that we want, but rather the people that are behind him. They're the ones that really sent the assassins, so they're the ones that we want to catch to prevent this from happening again."

Then with a sigh, the fourth prince added, "They've been hiding for a while now and we haven't been able to find them, but we're certain that they will move on you if you appear in a public place."

I couldn't help knitting my brows a bit when I heard this before asking, "How are you so certain of this?"

The fourth prince didn't elaborate this time as he just said, "I have my methods."

I looked at him with a strange look, but since he didn't want to speak, it wasn't as if I could force him to speak.

So I just said, "Alright, then how should we do this?"

The fourth prince gave an appreciative nod when he heard this and he started explaining the plan. At the same time, he pulled out a piece of paper for me which turned out to be a map of the auction house.

It turned out that this was an auction that was run by the royal family, so that was why they chose this place to be the place where they took action.

After he explained everything, the fourth prince added, "For your help, we'll be sure to cover your expenses at the auction house."

I narrowed my eyes after hearing this before asking, "You mean..."

I let my voice trail off, but the look in the fourth prince's eyes showed that he understood what I meant.

So the fourth prince bluntly said, "You can buy whatever you want."

I revealed a faint smile when I heard this, but I still had to ask, "The limit?"

The fourth prince was surprised to hear this, but then he said with a faint smile, "Well, you should know what the limit is in your heart. There's no need for me to say anything."

The smile on my face became wider.

Basically, I had been just given a black card to spend however I wanted at the auction.

Since this was an auction that was being held by the royal family, there was sure to be some treasures there.

I would have helped even without this since this was something that threatened my life, but since they were offering, there was no reason for me to reject this.

Chapter 425 Auction trap (2)

That afternoon, there was a carriage that was outside the residence waiting for me.

This carriage had been prepared by the fourth prince and was supposed to bring me to the auction that was being held.

When I came out, there was only Shaka who was following me.

As for Shadow Five, she was hiding somewhere in the shadows.

The dwarves came out to send me off, but they had worried looks on their faces.

The one that had the most worried look on her face was Elsa.

I had told them about what the fourth prince had told me since this was something that involved them.

They had naturally been worried, even if they were worried for ulterior motives.

It was only Elsa who seemed like she was genuinely worried.

Before we left, she asked, "Do you really have to do this?"

I just gave a slow nod and said, "It has to be done or else they'll come after me again."

She deeply knitted her brows when she heard this before saying with a sigh, "Just be careful."

I gave a nod before turning to the other dwarves and saying, "You guys should be careful here as well. There's no telling what they will do while I'm gone."

The other dwarves all patted the axes that they had beside them as if they were telling me not to worry.

Seeing them with their axes like this, I couldn't help revealing a faint smile.

After all, this was what I thought of when I thought of fantasy dwarves.

That or with hammers at their side.

But I also knew that there was no need to worry about these dwarves.

They were powerful enough that they would be able to fight against armoured knights even without any armour on themselves.

That was just how strong dwarves were in this game.

I wouldn't need to worry about them.

What I needed to worry about was myself.

So after a few parting words, I got in the carriage and we headed off.

The driver was also someone sent by the fourth prince and would act as a guard if need be.

I could see that there was a dagger hidden on the seat near the driver, so he was most likely some kind of assassin that worked for the fourth prince.

To send all of this, it really made it hard for me to calm down.

I was about to walk into a situation where I would be acting as bait, it would be strange if I was actually able to calm down.

After all, this was a very dangerous thing that I was about to do.

As we headed to the auction house, Shaka suddenly said, "If worst comes to worst, just run. Once you get to the main street, they won't be able to do a thing to you. You don't need to worry about me."

I was surprised to hear these selfless words from him, but then again, they weren't that strange.

Shaka had been a very loyal guard during all of the time that we had been together.

He had always been there to protect me when I was in danger and even now he was putting his life on the line for this.

While I didn't know why he was doing all of this, it was a lie to say that I wasn't touched.

I knew that he was showing his concern for me by saying this, so I said, "You don't need to worry. I have a few tricks up my sleeve."

Shaka raised a brow to look at me, making the doubt in his eyes clear.

But he didn't say anything else as he just left things as they were.

Even though this was a carriage that had been prepared by the fourth prince, it took longer than normal for us to get to the auction house.

This was a large scale auction that was well known throughout the city, so there were plenty of people that were coming to this auction.

These were all people with wealth and influence in this kingdom, befitting of an auction that was run by the royal family.

So the streets were closed off for their carriages to get through.

This carriage that we were taking was disguised as a normal carriage so as to not attract attention, so it took even longer than usual for us to arrive.

Because of this normal appearance, the guards of the auction house even came forward as if they wanted to make us leave.

But when the driver showed them a token, they immediately cooperated with us and guided us to the main entrance.

Normally, I would have entered through the side entrance for events like this to avoid attracting attention, but attracting attention was what I had to do here.

That was my job as bait.

The normal carriage was just to make sure that we didn't get ambushed on the way.

Once we were here, it was time to create as big a scene as possible.

When we arrived at the main entrance, there was a crowd that was gathered.

Seeing everyone here like this, it was almost like a red carpet even from my past life.

But thinking about it, it did make sense since the guests were all rich and powerful people.

There were also some regular guests, but they were entering in a much more lowkey manner.

The people that had gathered around the entrance were those that worked with the news and those that had gathered to watch the fun.

When each carriage arrived, the owner of the carriage was announced before they came out in front of everyone.

So when our carriage arrived, the crowd couldn't help being surprised.

Many of them thought that it was a mistake for our carriage to be here.

That was until the person announcing people said, "Presenting Count Zwein."

As soon as he said this, all of the onlookers realized that they shouldn't judge a book by its cover.

I took a deep breath before opening the door and coming out of the carriage.

Chapter 426 Auction trap (3)

When I came out, there were many different whispers coming from around me.

But the gist of it was...

"He's so young...I never thought that there would be a count this young."

Most of the crowd was surprised by my age.

There were some that doubted that I was a count, there were some that were wondering where I had come from, and there were some that...

"I wonder if he has a wife or a concubine. If he doesn't, I would volunteer."

"Psh, a skinny girl like you? He needs a real woman like me."

"None of you will be able to satisfy him. Only someone as thick as me would be able to satisfy him."

The last comment sent a chill running down my spine.

It wasn't because I was turned on by it...it was because the one who had said it was a muscular man who acted in a feminine manner.

The way that he looked at me sent a powerful chill down my spine.

One that made me want to leave this place as soon as possible.

But I forced down that feeling and slowly walked towards the auction house.

I could have made my way through quickly, but the point of all of this was to draw attention. So I made my way slowly through the crowd and to the entrance of the auction house.

Before I could make it, one of the people who had gone in before me suddenly turned around and walked over to me.

It seemed like he wanted to talk to me with the way that he was walking over, but I didn't know this person at all.

I only knew that he must be some kind of noble to be walking through the crowd like this, but I didn't know who he was or what his rank was.

When he came over, this man revealed a wide smile and said, "Count Zwein, I've been wanting to meet you for a long time now."

I had no choice but to reveal a smile as I said, "Um, I don't believe that we have met before. May I ask who you are?"

The man didn't seem offended since it was true that we had never met before. He just reached a hand out and said, "I am Viscount Teomold, I have some territory near your territory. I was planning on visiting you when you became a viscount to greet you, but I was told that you were making a trip to the Dwarven Kingdom. I can see now that you were there on some important business."

I was surprised to hear that he was someone that had territory near mine.

Since I left most of the management of my territory to Rose, I didn't actually know much about the surrounding area of my territory.

I peeked at Shaka and he gave a nod to confirm this.

Seeing this, I looked at Viscount Teomold with a smile and said, "Sir Viscount, it is an honour to meet you. I'm sorry that we never had a chance to meet before, but I've been busy with my work."

Viscount Teomold said with the same smile, "Not a problem, not a problem. I've already heard of all your accomplishments, so I don't blame you at all. I'm just glad that you were able to make this auction, or else I really might not have had the chance to meet you."

Just like this, the two of us exchanged a few simple greetings.

Then, Viscount Teomold suddenly changed the topic.

The topic that he chose made me understand why he had approached me in the first place.

"I've heard that you've secured a trade deal with the dwarves." He said in a slow and deliberate voice.

After I heard him say this, I gave a secret cold laugh.

As I had expected, this noble wouldn't approach me unless he had a reason for approaching me.

And his reason was that he wanted a slice of the ore trade with the dwarves.

But I didn't mind this.

If he was anyone else, I might deflect this to the king.

But since he was someone that had territory near mine, it was inevitable that we would have contact with each other.

He was someone that I had to deal with regardless of how I felt.

So it was a good idea to build a good relationship with him now...

Well, a good relationship was a stretch.

What I really wanted to do was make him dependent on me.

Once he was dependent on me, no matter what happened in the future, he would be on my side. If he didn't stick with me, he would lose out on all the benefits that he gained from me.

My ultimate goal was to make him so dependent on me that his territory would collapse if he tried to separate from me.

This was the goal for all of the territory around me and it was possible because of the trade deal with the dwarves.

So I said with a sly smile, "Yes, that is the case."

When he heard this, Viscount Teomold's eyes suddenly lit up before he forced himself to calm down. He gave a cough as if he was calming himself down before saying, "That is quite the impressive feat. I've heard that the dwarves are quite isolationists, I never thought that anyone would be able to crack that shell."

He was just beating around the bush at this point.

It was clear what his goal was, but he didn't know how to jump into it.

It was hard for him just to say that he wanted the ore.

But my plan hinged on him wanting a piece of this trade, so I decided to throw him a little bone.

"The ore trade will be bringing quite a few ores to my territory, much more than we can digest by ourselves." I said in a deliberate manner.

Viscount Teomold's eyes lit up when he heard this.

"If that's the case, I think I can help you with that." He said with a smile on his face.

I revealed a faint smile when I heard this.

Chapter 427 Auction trap (4)

"Then let's discuss this further at a later date." Viscount Teomold said with a wide smile on his face.

I said with a nod, "I hope that you'll help me spread the news to the others."

Viscount Teomold's lips twitched a bit, but in the end, he still said, "I'll do my best." Then after a pause, he added, "But there are some people that aren't as willing to listen, so I hope that you understand if I fail, Count Zwein."

I revealed a knowing smile when I heard this before saying, "Just do what you can. I'm not expecting much."

Viscount Teomold's smile became wide again when he heard this as he said, "Of course, of course. I hope to have a long cooperation with you."

I gave a nod without saying anything.

As Viscount Teomold walked away, I looked at him and gave another secret cold laugh.

There are people that aren't willing to listen?

In front of all this ore and a connection to the Dwarven Kingdom, who wouldn't be willing to listen?

I knew that he was just trying to keep this secret so he could earn as many benefits as he could off me. At most, he would just tell this to a few other nobles that he was close with so that he could keep the benefits within his group.

But his thinking was just too small.

After all, there was no way that he and his noble friends would be able to digest all of the ore that I was getting from the Dwarven Kingdom.

After he saw all this ore, if he still didn't tell others, it would be equal to offending me.

He would have no choice but to spread word of this.

At the same time, it wasn't as if I would just rely on him alone to spread the word.

The actions of a small villain really weren't worth paying attention to.

After Viscount Teomold left, there were other nobles that came forward to talk to me.

Most of them were talking to me for the same reason, they had all heard about the trade deals with the Dwarven Kingdom and they wanted a slice of it. But when it came to these people, I didn't respond as enthusiastically as I did with Viscount Teomold.

All of them were nobles that I had never met before and they were nobles that didn't have territory near me.

There was no incentive for me to build this relationship with them while I was still trying to take over the area around my territory.

If one stretched their business too wide, there would be holes that would form.

Once holes formed, there would be the danger of creating gaps and dangers of making mistakes.

One had to make sure that they kept the core of their business tight so that no one could take advantage of it.

As such, I gave them all ambiguous responses when they asked me about the ores.

It was clear by the looks on their faces that they were unhappy about these responses, but I didn't care at all. I wasn't afraid of them since this was a trade that was backed by both a duke and the king.

Even if they were unhappy, it wasn't as if there was anything that they could do to me.

Of course, I didn't burn the bridge with them completely since I didn't know what Haley wanted to do.

We couldn't use up all of the ores and it was impossible even if we included all of our neighbours. So we would have to eventually sell these ores to others.

It was just that before we did, I wouldn't make any commitments.

I would leave it all the Haley when the time came.

After talking to these nobles for a bit, I was finally able to enter the auction house.

But before entering, I gave Shaka a look.

He gave a nod in response to this to show that he had also seen it.

There were some cloaked figures that had entered from the side entrance while we had been talking to the nobles.

They were either our targets, or here to do some shady business.

It was better to keep our eyes on them than to let them leave unnoticed.

So Shaka gave a sign to the driver to let him take care of this.

The driver was our link to the fourth prince's forces, so he would pass this message on to the fourth prince for us.

After entering the auction house, we were immediately greeted by a beautiful woman.

At first, I didn't think that she was here for me, but then she came up right in front of me.

She gave a bow before saying, "Count Zwein, thank you for coming to our auction house today. I will be your guide for today's auction."

It seemed that she worked for the auction house and was here to guide me.

As we followed her in, I looked over at Shaka.

Shaka saw me looking over and shook his head.

What I was asking him was if this beautiful woman was an assassin or a guard and his response was no.

As far as Shaka could tell, she was nothing more than a simple worker for the auction house.

The beautiful woman led us up a set of stairs and up to a different floor.

The rooms that were on this floor were completely different from the rooms down below.

It was clear that this was some kind of VIP space.

But we didn't stop there.

She led us up another set of stairs and brought us up to an even more luxurious floor.

This was most likely the VVIP area, reserved for only the most important guests.

I couldn't see how I would be able to make it up here, but I knew why I was here today.

It was the fourth prince.

He was the one that had prepared this room for us.

Chapter 428 Auction trap (5)

After showing us to our room, the beautiful woman just stood there by the door as we settled in.

Shaka was about to go stand on the side, but I waved for him to come over and sit down with me.

He was about to say something, but I just shook my head.

In the end, he came over and sat down with me.

When the beautiful woman saw that we had settled in, she moved forward from the door where she had been standing and came to the side.

I was surprised to see her still here since I thought that she would leave after showing us this room, but she came right up beside me and said, "Count Zwein, how are you liking this room? Is there anything that I can do to make it more comfortable for you?"

I narrowed my eyes a bit, but sensing no hostility from her, I said, "No, there's no need for anything. I'm very comfortable right now."

But even after I said this, she didn't seem to get the message and came in closer.

She leaned forward and said, "If there's anything that you want, please feel free to tell me."

After saying this, she brought her hands up to her chest and crossed them under her breasts, accentuating them before saying, "And I do mean anything."

When she made it this clear, even a fool would be able to understand what she was trying to say.

I had thought that she was an assassin, but that wasn't the case.

She...was just trying to pull herself up with her beauty.

She was most likely a middle level worker for this auction house, so she was trying to use her body to seduce me so that I would take her as a concubine.

I couldn't help wondering just how many people she had tried this with before and then a feeling of disgust filled me.

I liked my women classy instead of cheap like this.

She was without a doubt beautiful, but the inside...was rotten.

So I couldn't help feeling disgusted by this fruit.

I flicked my hand to push her back before saying in a cold voice, "I'm fine. That is all."

When I spoke in this cold voice, the beautiful woman felt a chill run down her spine and she couldn't help taking a step back. She opened and closed her mouth, but in the end, she just said, "Alright. If you need anything, please don't hesitate to call. I will be waiting outside the door to serve you at any time."

I didn't say a word as she left the room, I didn't even bother looking in her direction since I was disgusted with her.

But I could have sworn I heard something...

"Could it be that he swings that way? No, it can't be since he has a wife...Then is it because I didn't show enough skin?"

I did what I could to ignore all of this, but I did hear snickering coming from beside me.

When I turned over, Shaka already had a straight look on his face.

There were no signs that he had been the one that had laughed, but I knew that it was him.

That was just how familiar we were with each other.

I made a mental note to get back at him later on, but I couldn't help thinking about how the beautiful staff member had acted.

She did this so naturally...so did that mean that they were already trained for this?

Not to mention, most of the people that could afford to use these VVIP rooms were all nobles and powerful merchants. For her to do this so naturally, did that mean that most of them were perverts in the first place?

This world was based on a H-game, so it wasn't strange to see this.

But I still couldn't help feeling disgusted.

Before I could think about this any further, there was a voice that came from in front of us.

We looked down to see that it was some performers who had stepped onto the stage.

It wasn't the auctioneer since there was still around half an hour before the auction started.

When we looked down, I could also see that there were a few people that were looking up and pointing at us while whispering.

Shaka and I had deliberately brought our seats forward a bit just so people could see us.

Some might think that we were vain because of this, but this was all part of the plan.

After all, we wanted to draw attention to ourselves so that we could accomplish our goal.

The show that was on the stage seemed to be some kind of play, but I really couldn't get into it since we weren't here to have fun in the first place. All I could do was look down at the crowd, trying to find anyone that could be considered suspicious.

But there wasn't anyone that seemed to fit the bill.

That was until I heard a voice call out from beside me.

"Count Zwein, it seems that we're meeting again."

I could help being surprised when I heard this voice since I never thought that I would hear this voice again.

Sitting in the VVIP room beside me was...the eldest prince.

It was as if he had completely forgotten about what had happened between the two of us and he was acting like we were friends.

But just yesterday, he tried to kill me.

The thickness of his skin really was something else.

However, it wasn't as if I could just ignore the eldest prince since he had spoken to me.

I looked at the eldest prince and calmly said, "Your highness, I never expected to meet you here today."

The eldest prince revealed a faint smile before saying, "As you know, my royal family is the one that backs this auction house. I heard that there were some good items being sold this time, so I came to have a look."

I couldn't help narrowing my eyes slightly when I heard this.

Was he telling the truth and it was just a coincidence or did he follow me here...

Was he a part of the plan to assassinate me?

I couldn't tell, so I had no choice but to force myself to smile right now.

Chapter 429 Auction trap (6)

The eldest prince talked to me for a bit before sitting back down on his own balcony.

After he was gone, I deeply knitted my brows as I tried to figure out just what the eldest prince was doing here.

But I couldn't think of anything no matter how I tried.

It just didn't make sense that the eldest prince would suddenly appear in this place...

I just spent the rest of the time before the auction thinking about all the different reasons that this might be possible.

It was only when the auction began that I was finally pulled out of my thoughts.

The auction started with the lights dimming in the room and a spotlight appearing on stage.

When the spotlight appeared, there was a person that walked out who stood under it.

This person didn't look like an auctioneer, he looked like the perfect example of a crooked merchant. With his top hat, his round glasses, his pencil thin moustache, and the evil look on his face.

No matter how one looked at him, he seemed like someone that would rip you off.

But when he came onto the stage, there were quite a few people that cheered for him.

It seemed that he was quite the famous auctioneer.

That evil looking auctioneer revealed a smile before saying, "Everyone, thank you for coming to our auction today. I'm sure that there will be something here that will satisfy everyone's tastes."

With a wave of the hand, there were several people that suddenly pushed something onto the stage.

This was a large thing that seemed like a large cage of some sort, but it was covered by a cloth so I wasn't able to see what it was.

But when I looked at it, the only thing that I could think of was that this...was some kind of cage.

In the game, slaves were a thing.

Even in this kingdom, slaves were a thing.

I had stayed away from that since I just didn't feel right about using slaves, but that didn't mean that the rest of the kingdom didn't use them...

So it was likely that there was a slave under that cloth...

However, it turned out that I was wrong.

When the large cage thing was brought onto the stage and the cloth was taken off, I found that it wasn't a cage at all.

Under that cloth was a large glass case that had something in the center of it.

When I looked at it closely, it seemed like a shield that was carved out of jade.

But one would think that a shield like this would only be for decoration and not for actual use.

Not to mention, it didn't seem that luxurious in the first place.

So why was the auction house selling this shield?

The auctioneer could see the looks of confusion on the faces in the crowd, but he didn't seem to panic at all when he saw this. He just revealed a faint smile as if he had already expected this and gave time for the crowd to carefully look at this shield.

After letting them stew for a bit, the auctioneer suddenly said, "I'm sure that everyone is confused on what this thing is. Well, let me give you some ideas then."

He walked over to the side of the glass case and raised a hand to gesture at this shield before saying, "This shield is a item that was discovered in the northern reaches of the kingdom. It is unknown what this item can do, but it does have one thing special about it."

His voice fell after he said this and he didn't tell everyone what was so special.

Instead, there was a man with a large hammer that came onto the stage.

This was a powerful looking man with large muscles that lifted that large hammer like it was nothing.

After coming onto the stage, the staff members by the glass case opened it up and carefully brought out the shield. Another staff member had brought out a table that they placed the shield on.

The large man with the hammer came up in front of this and then lifted the hammer up.

Everyone watched with bated breath as they waited to see what would happen.

Then as they expected, the large man with the hammer slammed that hammer right down on the shield placed on the table.

The force of this smash caused the legs of the table to split in half and the table collapsed under this force.

Everyone couldn't help raising their hand to block the gust of wind that came from the stage.

Once the gust of wind died down, they all stretched their heads out to look at the stage, to see what had happened to the shield.

When the large man lifted up his hammer, they were all shocked to find that the shield under it didn't even seem to have a single scratch on it. Even though it had been smashed with such force, there wasn't a single dent.

They had all expected it to be ruined, if not damaged from the force of this smash.

Not a single one of them had expected the shield to be perfectly fine like this.

Just what was this shield that could block this kind of strike?

Or was it all a trick?

The auctioneer came forward after the large man's demonstration and said, "As you can see, this is a shield that is indestructible as far as we can tell. We have experimented with many different things, but not a single one of them was able to put a single dent in this shield. There is no doubt that whoever owns this shield will have the strongest absolute defense."

The auctioneer then waited for a bit to let the tension rise in the crowd.

He knew exactly what he was doing as everyone started to whisper to each other.

After letting them go for a bit, he said, "Now, let's start this auction. Do I hear an opening bid?"

Chapter 430 Auction trap (7)

After that exaggerated demonstration, the bidding for this shield was quite intense.

There were many people's curiosities that were piqued by the absolute defense of this shield.

Many of them were people that were very careful with their own lives.

If they had this kind of absolute defense, then they would have another trump card to preserve their lives if they were ever in danger.

However, I wasn't interested in this item at all.

It might seem tempting to others, but I knew the dangers that came with such an item.

First, it would be hard to use.

While an indestructible shield sounded great, it was just a shield in the end. Unless you were proficient with it, it was easy to avoid the shield and stab you still.

Second, this was a item according to the auctioneer, but they weren't able to determine just what kind of item it was.

In cases like this, the item would usually be some kind of key to open a related questline.

When I was trying to keep a low profile, buying something like this was sure to put a target on my back and that was the last thing that I wanted.

So there was no reason for me to bid for this item.

As we sat there, Shaka suddenly asked me, "Are you really not going to bid for this thing?"

I was surprised when I heard Shaka ask me this.

I never thought that he would want me to buy something.

Seeing the way that I looked at him, Shaka said, "If it's as strong as they say, it would be useful to have for your protection."

Then as if he was adding it like an afterthought, Shaka said, "Not to mention, it's not your wallet that you're using."

I revealed a faint smile when I heard this, but I still shook my head and said, "It's not worth it."

Shaka revealed a confused look when he heard this before asking, "How so?"

I looked back at the shield on display and said, "That thing is anything but ordinary. The price to pay for such a thing isn't just the price it costs at this auction. You'll be paying quite a bit more if you buy this thing."

Shaka raised one brow as if he was doubting as he said, "Are you sure about this?"

I just gave a nod as I said, "My instincts are usually right."

He still looked like he didn't believe what I said, but he didn't say anything else on this matter.

The bidding continued for this shield, but in the end, there was one bidder who won with a single bid.

That bidder was the eldest prince.

The moment that he made his bid, he stood up in front of everyone so that they could see him.

They all looked up at him and immediately fell silent.

Since the people that could come to this auction were all powerful and rich people, they naturally recognized the eldest prince with a single glance.

The moment that the eldest prince stepped out, this item was destined to be his.

After all, there wasn't a single person in this room that could offend the eldest prince.

It didn't matter what bid the eldest prince made, even a single gold coin extra was enough. But his pride wouldn't allow himself to win in such a cheap manner, so he raised it by a proper amount.

The auctioneer knew that this was over, so he quickly ended this first auction by selling it to the eldest prince.

The eldest prince stood up once more after winning this bid to wave his hand at everyone.

Since he won this item and revealed his face for it, he had no choice but to stand out a bit more.

Once that was done, the auctioneer continued by bringing out the next item, but this item was lacking compared to this first one.

It seemed that they had used this shield as the item that drew everyone's attention and the following items were nothing more than normal items.

This was a common strategy used for any sale.

You put the best item out front to attract attention and then slowly sell the other items that weren't as good.

So there was a lull that fell onto this auction as the excitement from the first item died away.

That didn't mean that the items that were being auctioned were not good items.

These were items that had been put in this auction backed by the royal family, so of course they were still top tier items. There were still people that were fighting to get these items, just less than before.

As the items came out, I really didn't see anything that caught my attention.

However, I knew that I would have to bid on something eventually.

It was my job to attract attention to myself at this auction, so I had to make a big bid to do that.

I didn't mind since it wasn't my money in the first place, but there just wasn't anything that I wanted.

As more and more items were sold, I couldn't help thinking to myself, "Do I just have to bid on something random?"

These things weren't bad, but they really weren't things that I wanted for myself.

Instead of bidding for something that I didn't want, I would have preferred bidding for something that I did want.

Time kept passing and more items were sold.

It finally reached a point where I thought that I had no choice but to bid on something random or else there would be no items left for me to do so.

But before I did that, there was finally something that came out that caught my attention.

"Ladies and gentleman, please turn your attention to the next item." The auctioneer said as a beautiful woman brought up something small on a pillow.

She came right up onto the stage with the auctioneer and stood there beside him while holding this item.

