

MaruMA:Volume08:Prologue

From Baka-Tsuki

Prologue



I really don't get it.

Why would the omniscient, all-powerful Shinou, choose that rookie to be Maou?

That guy not only lacks the grace and manner of a nobleman, he also hasn't accomplished anything worthwhile on the battlefield.

He doesn't even know how to use words full of authority to lead the people, to make the people fear and respect him, thereby obeying him.

No matter how we advise him, he still likes to play with the common children, even visiting the stables and the kitchen.

Brother and the other ministers don't have any complaints against him-- instead they truly do like him.

But in my personal opinion, he isn't at all suited to be king. If he wanted to be the ruler of a country as mighty as Shin Makoku, ruling over all the Mazoku of the world, forget a hundred years, even another two hundred years would be too early for him. Not only doesn't he have the wits for the job, his level of maturity too is as childish as that of a newborn lamb.

Not too long ago someone who was uneasy about handing the kingdom over to that guy told me, "It seems that those who have inherited the blood of the previous monarch would be better suited to the throne..." And I had explained—At this time, it's very important that everyone works together to support that rookie.

The other party must have misunderstood me, because he said simply "since even Your Excellence says so..." and left looking impressed. ...Eh?

I really don't get it... Yuuri! How many times have I told you, not to go out wandering the city without your guards?

Back to Novel Illustrations	Return to MA Series	Forward to Chapter 1
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MaruMA:Volume08:Chapter 1

From Baka-Tsuki

Chapter 1

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Conrad smiled pleasantly. He just stood there while I clutched his lapel.

"It's been a long time, Your Majesty."

"Please go away from him," standing a few steps behind us, Yozak said in a low voice. "He's the third competitor."

"Why are you wearing those clothes? What are you doing here?" The yellow-white uniform did not suit him at all.

"This has always been my country," Conrad said casually as if it was an irrelevant matter. Narrowing his eyes, brown with silver speckles, he added. "My ancestors once ruled over this land."

"Ancestors? Rulers? You're talking as if they used to be the kings or presidents of this land."

"Sort of."

"But..."

I could never remember historical facts. I felt dizzy. To avoid toppling over, I pressed my right hand against my forehead. I could feel the heat of my body through the layer of snow and mud covering my palm.

"But isn't your home on the other side of the ocean?" I asked. "Aren't you from the Demon Empire, just like me? Why did you come here? And why are you fighting for the other team?"

"My deepest apologies. Circumstances have changed a little."

I had been terribly worried about his disappearance, and now he suddenly showed up right front of me as my enemy. I did not know what horrible circumstances could have caused this, and I would never accept that vague answer as an explanation.

"Circumstances? What circumstances? Aren't you going to explain them to me? Explain them to me now!"

"You also have a lot to explain to me," Conrad said, his fingers moving toward my wrist.

Right at that moment, Yozak put his arms around my waist and chest and pulled me backward at breakneck-speed.

"Stop! Wait! Hey!"

Yozak's rough treatment confused me for a moment, I couldn't decide who was friend or foe. Lord Weller forced a smile, and shifted his gaze alternately between me and his friend.

"What does the mask in your hand mean?" He asked. "And why do you fight for Caloria? Aren't you meddling a little too much in other people's affairs?"

"Don't mind what I'm doing. Rather you should explain to me why you are wearing these flashy clothes. You look totally stupid in it, you know that? You should take them off! Right now!"

My blood pressure soared, adrenaline bubbled over, and against my will my legs began to shake. I could not help it. Even though I kept repeating to myself "Calm down!" over and over again like a mantra, as I always did when the game became tense, it still didn't help.

"Your Majesty! Come back," Yozak told me. "We should go back and discuss this with His Eminence. Do you want to risk us being disqualified?"

Still holding me, he tried to drag me to our bench. As for the referees, since they did not know what was going on between us, they must be thinking we were acting very aggressively.

"Yozak," said Conrad. "This is entirely your fault."

The hand holding me shook lightly.

"You have been attending to His Majesty, how could you let him get into such danger?"

"Oh, I'm so so sorry about that," Yozak sarcastically dragged out his words. "If our captain was with us, His Majesty surely would have had a much safer journey. But unfortunately, unfortunately, he decided to be irresponsible and suddenly disappeared."

"I had really expected that we wouldn't need to engage in a third match, if you had put all your effort into the match with Adalbert."

Conrad hinted that Yozak should have defeated Adalbert. Did it mean that the enemy camp wasn't aware of the situation regarding Flynn and Maxine? It didn't sound like he was just testing the waters either.

"What does this little game mean exactly?" asked Conrad.

"That was only because I..."

"Your Majesty, there is no need to speak to this guy," interrupted Yozak. "He is our enemy."

"But Conrad can't be our enemy," I cried with bewilderment.

Conrad ignored my reaction and suddenly raised his voice. "Will Caloria's fighters withdraw from the final match?"

It was intended for the referees.

"If you intend to enter the third match, please step up immediately. If not, please prove yourselves gracious losers, and accept your defeat."

His words were so provoking I found it hard to keep control of my temper. I had to swallow several times in an effort to calm myself. No matter what, exploding here would not get me anywhere. I desperately tried to speak in a soft tone.

"If I win, will you take that uniform off?" I asked Conrad. "And come back to us?"

Conrad touched the white trim of his collar with his left hand. Seeing that my question had gotten a reaction from him, I felt somewhat more confident.

"If I win, you will return to my side!? Right!? Please don't join those traitors... will you come back to me!?"

"Well..."

Lord Weller shook his head slowly.

"You are not necessarily the best leader."

My vision began to flicker, as if I were viewing scenes from a very low quality videotape.

With trembling fingers, Cecilie readjusted her grip on the binoculars to keep it steady and looked at the scene below her again.

The same figure reflected in her shining green eyes.

"What does that mean...?"

She gave the binoculars to the new friend next to her.

"What happened?"

From the tall VIP seats behind the glass windows, Flynn Gilbert looked through the binoculars and saw Yuuri being pulled back on the gray dirty snow toward their rest area. And the one pulling him was none other than Yozak, with a mystifying expression on his face.

Flynn slightly raised the binoculars and focused at the center of the arena. She saw the third man from the opposing team standing next to the slightly puzzled looking referees.

If his appearance was at all an indication of his character, he seemed at first glance a kind and calm fellow. But his expression could be nothing more than a deliberately made up facade. Behind his unfathomable disguise, he could be hiding terrible secrets. Flynn had gained this sharp sense of intuition from her knowledge of soldiers. Because of her father's military-related profession, from an early age Flynn had seen countless soldiers. She could not only recognize the strength of a fighter, but also sense his hidden secrets. The most incomprehensible ones for her were those who, even though not warriors, had formidable power.

Like him.

She shook her short silver hair, as if to shake off a name that had suddenly reappeared in her mind. She readjusted the grip around the binoculars and looked at the fighter from the opposing side again.

His posture was perfect. The way he moved his arms showed that he was accustomed to using weapons. He was slightly taller than average, with a body of a well-trained soldier. Although he looked about 20 or so, his hand, leisurely gripping the hilt of the sword hanging at his waist, showed no sign of tension, even at the beginning of the match. He had light brown hair and eyes. Apart from his short haircut, he looked just like a typical Shimaron citizen, at least more so than the blond soldier. The other man who earlier accompanied Maxine looked strikingly different from the other Shimaron soldiers.

"Who is that man? Do you know him?" asked Flynn.

"He is my son," Lady Cecilie replied.

What?

For a moment Flynn thought she could detect a trace of sorrow in Cecilie's voice. But Lady Cherie immediately regained her calm and noble composure.

"He is the best swordsman in our country. He has sworn allegiance to our new king, and his loyalty is deeper than any other. Why he is here fighting for the enemy... more so against his beloved king... is beyond me. If this is our Original King's wish... he is putting that child through too much suffering."

"He is... your son?"

Flynn's eyes turned back on the beautiful aristocratic lady sitting next to her. She seemed far too young to have an already grown up son.

"Yes, he's Conrad, my second son."

And her second child at that! Had she married very young? Or maybe she looked much younger than her actual age?

The rumor was probably true then. Flynn had heard that demons had a much longer life expectancy than humans. She must be an aristocrat from the empire of the demons, the enemy of the human race. Not only Cherie, but also the Captain and his friends, as well as his blond fiancé who inherited his mother's looks, they were all demons. Even Dacascos and Sizemore, who had been nothing but respectful to her.

In hindsight, everything made perfect sense. The Captain for example, could not be human. Someone with such terrible power could never be an ordinary person. Yes, he must be a demon. She just hadn't been willing to admit it.

But then, could the young man waiting in the middle of the arena also be a demon?

Flynn couldn't bear not knowing. She made up her mind to find out.

"Compared to Lord Wolfram, this gentleman is a bit - how shall I say - he does not resemble you very much," she said cautiously.

"His father was a human, a traveling swordsman who was exiled from his home. His name was Dan Hille Weller, and..."

"Dan Hille?" Flynn squeaked. "Are you saying that, that your son... is the son of Dan Hille Weller?"

"Yes, that's right. Lord Conrad Weller is my son."

No wonder he looked like a Shimaron soldier. His father belonged to the family who originally established this region, whose name could still be found in the history books.

Flynn Gilbert pressed her fingers against her lips. Her fingers felt much colder as the blood in her body suddenly drained to her feet. Names swirled through her brain in a muddle.

From the bottom of her heart, she hoped what she had done would never be revealed, not before her own death.

After Yozak dragged me back, I struck against the wall and screamed out my frustration. My mind was in a complete daze and I could hardly control myself.

"Damn, what is it? Why is he acting this way?" I yelled.

Our high spirits from earlier were gone. Instead, a stifling atmosphere came upon our group and threatened to overwhelm us. Suddenly there was a deafening clatter. A bucket had tipped over. I finally found a suitable target to vent my anger. I kicked the bucket until it was totally dented.

"He was brainwashed! He was manipulated! That's the only explanation! After all, the handsome American footballer was there with him!"

"Yuuri..."

"He's an expert when it comes to messing around with other people's heads. What was it called again? Soul searching? Exactly! He has actually searched and..."

"Yuuri! Stop harassing the bucket. I can't concentrate," Wolfram grumbled. He was sitting on the bench with his eyes slightly closed and his arms folded. His fingers fidgeted slightly as he sank deep in thought.

Like a wild animal in a cage, I marched back and forth restlessly.

"It's obvious, he is being manipulated. He would never betray me otherwise."

Murata desperately tried to smooth out the wrinkles between his eyebrows.

"As far as I can judge the situation, it does not look like Conrad is being manipulated," he said finally. "And haven't you said he has lost his left arm?"

Murata was right.

This Conrad who was in front of us just now had both of his arms. His hand was warm when I had touched it. It had not felt like a prosthesis.

But I still remembered clearly what happened on that horrible day.

I could still hear the ominous sound of flesh smashing on the ground, as Conrad lost his arm. The fingers were slightly curved, as if trying to grasp something. No drop of blood though. Could it be the arm that fell on the floor that day a prosthesis instead?

At that time, even though all I could see was his silhouette against the light, I did notice there was nothing where his left arm was.

"I also believe he lost his left arm," Wolfram confirmed. "I've seen it with my own eyes. I still have the button on his sleeve."

He put his hand in the inside pocket of his jacket and pulled out the button. Its original milk-white color was blackened by soot and extreme heat. My hand trembled as I reached out for it.

"I remember this... It's the button on his shirt sleeve, isn't it?" I asked.

"That's right."

Murata thought.

"If so, Lord Weller's left arm must still be in the castle, right? We've also seen his arm when we were in Small Shimaron. But the Conrad who appears here clearly has both arms. Where were we fooled?"

"Fooled?"

"There are only the following possibilities. One: from the beginning his arm was a prosthesis. Two: his arm has grown back."

"Regenerating arms? Is Conrad a mutant?"

After a long time walking around, Murata finally came to lean against the wall next to the door. He raised his finger in a motion to push up his glasses, only he wasn't wearing any glasses.

"Or three: the man over there is not the real Lord Weller."

"You're saying that's an impostor? No, that's impossible. You said you have seen him even before you were born, then you should be able to recognize him. He's the real one, Murata. You can bet on it."

"How can you be so sure?"

What a silly question!

"There is absolutely no way I could mistake Conrad for someone else."

Wolfram's jaw muscles moved almost imperceptibly.

"I agree. That guy is my brother."

Brother? Did he just say "brother"?

Although he is normally very composed, sometimes he would say things so surprising that I almost get a heart attack.

"Then I'm even more confused as to why he has sided with our enemy. It's true he's half-human, but he has sworn to live his life as a demon and stay loyal to the demon tribe. He is also not the type who betrays his demonic origins out of personal grudge like Adalbert. Even though he had to bear much injustice twenty years ago, there is no reason why he would suddenly turn hostile to Yuri now. But the biggest mystery is what has happened to his arm."

"Exactly. His arm was cut off by the soldiers from Big Shimaron. The same people who shot at Gunter. Even if this is the land where his father came from, the land of his ancestors, given what has happened, it's difficult to believe he would serve Big Shimaron. The only possibility is that he has been brainwashed and manipulated!"

The emotional turmoil of seeing him again had turned into rage.

"I'll wake him up!"

I gripped the weapon I had chosen and began to climb into the arena again, but my knees were shaking.

"I'll bring him back to his senses!"

Wolfram grabbed my arm.

"No, Yuri. You know very well that you can't win against him in a fight. He is unlikely to harm you, but who knows... if he indeed can't control his own actions... You definitely need to stay here. It's too dangerous."

"Too dangerous? Does it matter?! If he's forced to obey them, shouldn't we free him? If Conrad is in fact manipulated, I must put an end to that at once! He's..."

"I doubt he is actually manipulated..." said Yozak, who had been silent until now. "I've looked him straight in the eyes and I've spoken to him. I didn't feel that he is not his own master. Ah, I'm sorry Your Majesty! It's just my personal opinion..."

Yozak sounded like he was apologizing to me. Perhaps he thought I was angry, or maybe I looked like I was about to cry. But I tried hard to remain in control.

"You mean he has betrayed us intentionally and voluntarily?"

"That's not what I meant."

"How can you say such a terrible thing? You are brothers in arms, comrades in life and death, who trust each other unconditionally! Didn't you even say you would absolutely serve under his command again?"

Of course, these two things were unrelated.

If I was in danger, then even if the enemy was his own family or friend, Yozak would draw his sword without hesitation, because it was his duty. Yozak Gurrier's allegiance was not towards Lord Weller, but towards the 27th Demon King of the Empire of the Demons. He must foremost protect his king and obey his orders.

And the king was no one else but me.

Just as the people had obligations toward their king, the king also had responsibilities towards his subjects.

I had my own responsibilities.

"I don't believe I can't win him back!"

I must bring him back to our side. He had sworn to live his life as a demon, not because of his blood, but his faith in the demon tribe.

"I must have faith!"

Murata turned to Yozak again.

"Since you were childhood playmates, I will trust your intuition."

Yozak put his hand on the ax on his side and stroked the handle.

"No matter how I look at it, it didn't seem to me like he was controlled by someone else."

"Right," said Murata. "I'd feel better if that were the case... Shame, really! If only I had a mortar with pestle and sesame seeds now!"

"What, what? You'll use sesame seeds to perform magic?"

"No, not magic. Just that I find it easier to calm my mind and concentrate when I grind things like sesame seeds."

I couldn't help imagining the venerable Sage grinding a great variety of ingredients into powder in order to eliminate distractions.

"Well, concentration is most important, right?"

Really, I could not understand the way geniuses do things. Anyway, it shouldn't be a problem that he had no mortar and pestle now, right?

"I think we should trust Yozak's assessment. After all, among the four of us, he knows Conrad the best. And if his will is indeed not tampered with, he will not take your life. You will be injured somewhat, but it wouldn't be serious. So, we can take our chance and let our king represent us in our next match."

Murata looked over my shoulder at my opponent.

"Anyway, no matter what we say, you won't give up on him until you have tried your best, right, Shibuya?"

"Absolutely correct, Sir," I said, turned my back to my friends who had resigned themselves, and stomped off.

Conrad received me with the same smile in the middle of the arena. What? Even though we aren't on the same side.

"You really don't make it easy for me. So you have no intentions of withdrawing from the match?"

"Absolutely not. I'm determined to bring you back to your senses."

"Oh, my goodness."

Conrad glanced over my equipment. It didn't look very threatening, but it was the king of baseball bats.

"If you hit hard, that club could split my skull," he said.

"That's right. And if you drive me into a corner, I will not shy away from using all my force to hit you between your legs. That's just a little warning."

Conrad briefly lifted his eyebrows as if he had experienced such attacks before. But his usual expression returned immediately.

"Don't worry, I'll go easy on you," he said.

"I know! But I don't need that. Let's get it over with here and now... What?"

His comment made me so surprised I was in doubt if I had heard him correctly. I couldn't help lifting my head up and asked:

"What did you just say?"

"You didn't hear me? I said I would go easy on you."

He would go easy on me, he would go easy on me... these words kept swirling in my mind. Before a decisive battle, who would assure leniency to their enemy? Shouldn't he have said the typical line "Don't expect any mercy from me"?

Right now the opponent in front of me was my own trusted guardian, who had been by my side through life and death. I had been worried about him, I had cried for him, but I had never thought that when we met again, he would be wearing our enemy's uniform, and we would be fighting against each other. Indifferent to our special connection and the deep trust that we had shared, the gong was now sounding the start of a brutal match between us.

"You're not going to put all your efforts into this fight?"

"How could I? I can't just let you get hurt, I wouldn't be able to go home if I did, but I can't let you win either. After all, I'm here representing Big Shimaron."

I felt like a big idiot for holding on to the hope that he would come back to my side. At the same time, my eagerness was pitiable. In any case, these feelings reminded me once more that Lord Weller had become my enemy.

He, wearing the yellow and white uniform, was the representative of Big Shimaron. I, with the silver mask of Morgan Gilbert in my hand, was the representative from Caloria.

And yet I missed him so much?

"At least you're still alive..."

Looking up, I corrected my grip on the weapon. It was very much similar to a baseball bat, and my hands had adjusted perfectly to the handle.

"In any case, I am glad to see you alive and well," I said softly.

"Your Majesty..."

"Do not call me Your Majesty. It's you who gave me my name!"

I heard that familiar "That is true," but it was interrupted by a loud belligerent voice shouting at us.

"Hold on! Cancel this match immediately!"

Even though I wasn't familiar with the rules of this competition, I had never thought someone would ask the referees to cancel the match right before it started.

From the enemy's bench, a muscular man with a huge sword stepped out and walked toward us. The light from the torches around the arena reflected on his shiny steel weapon menacingly.

"Adalbert!"

With bright blonde hair, turquoise eyes, high and beak nose, and of course, cleft chin, Adalbert von Grantz looked like a handsome American footballer. He hated the demons and wanted nothing more than for the empire of the demons to collapse. With a malicious smile on his face, he slowly approached us. With every step he took, the audience's excitement rose. The winner of the second round had come back. The crowd raised their fists to the sky and stomped their feet wildly.

"I object to this match! This isn't a one-on-one competition. It's a tournament!" Adalbert shouted, and the audience roared in response.

Adalbert turned toward the referees.

"If it's a tournament, then the winner of the second round has the right to compete against the third competitor from the other team, right?"

The two referees nodded.

"That's right, the winner of the second round has the right to compete again in the next match."

Wait a minute! The winner of the second round was not Yozak, but Adalbert. And the third competitor from the other team was none other than myself! Damn! I would have to fight against Adalbert? Well, that was one problem we hadn't expected!

(Translated by LRenne, betaed by Tati-ai. Please do not repost elsewhere.)

Back to Prologue	Return to MA Series	Forward to Chapter 2
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MaruMA:Volume08:Chapter 2

From Baka-Tsuki

Chapter 2

"Wait a minute!"

Stefan Van Baren, the elegant gentleman with short brown hair mixed with silver streaks, who also went by the nickname Fanfan, uttered a cry of surprise uncharacteristic for him.

"Mr. Sizemore, are you the one everyone calls "The sea monster," the terror on the sea that all sailors are afraid of?"

"Oh, you embarrass me. But in fact, in Shin Makoku's Navy, there are only two men who bear the name of Sizemore. My younger brother and myself."

He was called "sea monster" mostly because of his hair, or the lack of it, but of course he could not mention that. Although Sizemore was a bear of a man, he was shy and could easily become embarrassed. He fleetingly ran his hand over his head. Sadly, all he could feel was the bare skin.

Friendship between a man and a man usually arises in unexpected circumstances.

Although one was an international businessman across all oceans, the other belonged to a race that had been an old enemy of the humans. It was natural to feel guarded against each other. However, that feeling had already disappeared.

"Then my family is in your debt," said Fanfan. "In the last war, a transport fleet was accidentally sunk by a Shimaron warship while crossing the international waters. It was an accident, but there were many civilian casualties. The Shimaron warship did not fulfill their obligation of rescuing the civilians... It was unbelievable. Even my grandmother would have been among the victims, but she was rescued by your ship. Later on, her nickname "unsinkable Fanfan" spread far and wide. Our family van Baren had indeed become invincible in the harsh competition among all marine transporters. My grandmother's name is Vancil van Baren. She is the wife of Jefferson van Baren."

Sizemore rummaged through old memories.

"Ah, yes, I remember the lady. What a coincidence, it's a small world after all."

"After you complete your mission, you must visit us. My grandmother would be very pleased."

"She is doing well? I am glad to hear that."

"Every day she would complain that she had to carry on her life as an old woman. But from my impression after listening to your story countless times, Mr. Sizemore, you have not changed one bit. Even your hair style is still the same. Is this the norm for seafarers?"

"Umm ---"

Friendship between a man and a man would also fall apart when they start paying attention to appearance.

While the competition was reaching its climax, Sizemore, Fanfan, Dacascos, and the quiet Chevalier were on their way to steal the forbidden box "The End of the Wind" from the temple adjacent to the arena. It was truly a reckless plan.

Lady Cecilie von Spitzweg, the Former Queen of Shin Makoku, and Flynn Gilbert, the wife of the late Lord of Caloria, Norman Gilbert, stayed behind and waited in the VIP area, leaving the men alone to discuss their problems with their wives and children to their hearts' content. That's what one would expect.

"Oh, my Cecilie. She is so wonderful, she's like a love goddess," purred Fanfan.

Yet for some unknown reason, Fanfan was praising Lady Cherie. Moreover, she was not a goddess, but a demon.

Young and having roughly the same build, Chevalier and Dacascos were carrying the wooden box covered with a green cloth to disguise it as a container of cold drinks. It was supposed to be the substitution for the forbidden box. One was the ultimate weapon of utmost brutality "The End of the Wind," the other was a plain and simple wooden box made by laymen during a boat trip.

The more one thought about it, the more dangerous the plan seemed to be.

The scalp of the faint-hearted Dacascos had become all dry because of nervousness, but the rest of them looked very calm, especially Fanfan. He was not a soldier accustomed to dangerous situations, but a businessman accustomed to a carefree life, yet he did not show the slightest trace of tension, and he even kept talking non-stop about his "beautiful love."

Then Lady Cherie, the love hunter, truly deserved all the praises for successfully capturing this brave and handy man.

"In my whole life, I've never met a lady so pure and beautiful, full of wisdom and the most tender love. She shows me what true love really is, a feeling I had never had before! I regret I hadn't met her earlier, but still, I am truly the luckiest person in the world!"

But he would be the fourth luckiest person in Lady Cherie's life.

"I heard that the women of the demon race are all very beautiful, but I believe she is the most beautiful of all. Even though I keep telling her so, she always feels there are women who are more beautiful than she is. To hear such humble words coming out of her lips, red like rose buds, I could not help but touch them. How in the world could there be such a pure heart? She is truly a lady with eternal youth and boundless modesty who knows not arrogance."

Fanfan praises went out of control. Sizemore felt as if a rash was spreading over his right side. Modesty? Madame Cherie?

"I also heard about another lady in your country who is as famous as Cecilie. It seems people use many alias for her because she is both feared and respected. The Red Devil, Shin Makoku's Nightmare, Poison Lady Anissina. There must be a large number of men who succumbed to her charms."

Dacascos' eyes teared up instinctively.

She was truly a devil, literally the same as her alias.

"I heard she has exceptional knowledge of literature and a very strong yearning for independence. What a lucky guy, who can win her hand in marriage."

Married to Lady Anissina von Kabernikoff? Maybe it was just the result of his own fear, but Dacascos thought His Excellency Gwendal, who had been bound to Lady Anissina since childhood, was very unfortunate. As for Sizemore, who had not had a taste of the Red Devil's terror, he merely said: "Really?"

"The third lady... unfortunately has died quite young, long time ago. They say that instead of her, the three most beautiful demons in the kingdom now include a certain lady named Günter. Do you know about her? Well, no matter how beautiful she may be, surely she can't compare to my spring breeze, my golden fairy. Moreover, it seems that this lady Günter is very eccentric. They say she has shaved her hair and entered a temple, and has strange behaviors such as wearing mask in public."

Alas, His Excellency Günter's legend had spread to foreign countries! Dacascos could no longer stop his tears from overflowing. Maybe it was because of the dust inside the temple, but now even his nose was running.

"The deceased lady was said to be very close to one of Cecilie's sons," said Fanfan.

A strong admiration surged inside the two demon soldiers. It was unbelievable that Lady Cherie had told her lover about her past. She could still win the heart of one of the few richest businessmen in Shimaron, despite the fact that she was the mother of three sons. She totally owned up to her alias, the Hunter of Love.

Dacascos did not know about the relationship between a son of the former queen and one of the three top beauties of the Demon Empire, so he decided to hold his tongue. The elder and higher ranked Sizemore however was more familiar with the former princes. He had even interacted with the third son, the blond ex-prince, a few days ago. But he had no idea which one among the three had a close relationship with Lady Julia Susannah von Wincott.

"If I remember correctly, Lady Julia Susannah was engaged to His Excellency Adalbert von Granz. Who could have spread rumors about her and one of the ex-princes?"

"Oh, really? But there might be some truth in the rumors. My lovely fairy, the mother herself, told me that her second son, Lord Conrad, was to marry Lady Julia Susannah after the war ended."

"What? Lord Weller and Lady Julia Susannah were in a relationship?"

Lord Weller had always been popular with the ladies, whether as a brave and confident soldier before and during the war, or the sober man after it. It was true that his popularity with the ladies was enviable, but Sizemore would never have thought of him as someone who was capable of stealing the love of another man.

"Lord Weller and Lady Julia Susannah... Ah, really, we can't judge a book by its cover..."

"It's not a well known fact in your country? A marriage between these two would have made history. It doesn't happen everyday for two big names to join together in marriage."

"Oh... ahh..."

God, what a keen interest Fanfan had with gossip from a foreign country. Sizemore couldn't understand that. Of course the intimate details of other people's love lives are exciting, but discussing their private life is so indecent and impolite.

"When I heard his name, I understood right away. Surely you know his father, Dan Hiri Weller?" Asked Fanfan.

"The first Lord of Ruttenberg," said Sizemore.

"His position in his country might not be that of a king, but for the people from this area, he has become a legend."

"Really, he was certainly very popular with the ladies."

Fanfan glanced at the older demon, with a look as if to enlighten him.

"No, this is not about his love life. Dan Hiri Weller, the son of Glenn Gordon Weller, was a descendant of the three famous kings of the continent. It has been recorded in history. The two signs were also tattooed on his arms. After his expulsion from Shimaron, the officials announced that his royal bloodline was extinct. There were of course rumors that he had had a child oversea and had returned to the kingdom undetected. No one could verify the credibility of the rumors, but since he was a threat to the royal family of Big Shimaron, they have always been on the look out for his whereabouts."

"Lord Weller's father carried the royal bloodline of the kings of Shimaron? Did Madame Cherie know this?"

"Well, it is possible that Cecilie had no knowledge. Dan Hiri Weller would not have revealed his true identity carelessly. His forefathers were forced to change their names and only managed to survive as prisoners. Weller is only part of the original family name. But the fact is that this legendary man has fathered a child with a demon, and if this child had married Lady Julia Susannah, a descendant of the Wincott, then ... "

"Then what?"

Sizemore swallowed, imagining terrible things to happen. Maybe the oceans would turn red, maybe the sea water would boil over in the blink of an eye. In any situation, his first thought would always be about the sea.

"Countries would be shaken."

"You mean the oceans?"

Fanfan, putting on his "irresistible" smile that had proved to be invincible in business negotiations, casually responded:

"The oceans? Don't they always shake..."

At that very moment, the deafening roar from the arena below interrupted their conversation. They had no idea the very person they were talking about, Lord Conrad Weller, had entered the arena as the third competitor from the enemy's camp, much less that he was going to fight his own Lord, the one he once swore to serve, or that the match had been halted.

"In ancient times the Wincott family had ruled over the southern tip of this continent. Up until the battle against the Creator Gods, Wincott rulers were known to be beloved and respected by the people. If a descendant of the Wincott and one who carries the bloodline of the three kings had joined in marriage, and if a child had been born from this union, then for all the underground anti-Shimaron forces, he would be their ultimate hope, the ideal leader they were waiting for. Just imagining that much, I already feel excited. Wouldn't it be great?"

If Lord Conrad Weller and Lady Julia Susannah had got married, their offspring would become the leader of the anti-Shimaron forces?

For someone who could only think of the different states of the oceans, whether it would be calm or stormy, Sizemore had long since stopped following the story. Perhaps Fanfan took his silence as agreement, as he cheerfully continued:

"Moreover, beside being extraordinary in all other aspects, the child would undoubtedly be a true beauty as well, seeing that the parents would be the grandson of the most handsome man of the continent, Glenn Gordon Weller, and one of the three top beauties of the Demon Empire."

"Wait..."

Dacascos, carrying the box behind them, hesitantly asked:

"Could you be mistaking our three most powerful demon ladies as three top beauties?"

The prisoner of love however did not hear these words, as he had moved on to discuss the next beauty.

"Speaking of beauty, I heard that the sense of beauty of the demons have been completely changed from the ground up by their new head of state. I would really like to see that person for myself once."

"Probably our majesty is now fighting in the arena right below us."

"Really? She must be a truly brave queen. But I'm sure she still can't compare to my Cecilie, loving and soft spoken like a little golden birdie."

Sizemore felt like scratching his right side until it bled. Dacascos, meanwhile, immediately memorized all of these beautiful words so that he could use them to flatter his wife later. "Your lovely voice sounds like thousands of crickets and beetles..."

After they ascended two narrow stairs, the group reached the top floor, forbidden to all outsiders. Along the way they had bribed three guards with a bottle of wine and four soldiers with money.

"It seems this is but a storage room. Is the box really here?" wondered Dacascos.

"It can't be. The room isn't even well guarded. We need to continue, and be prepared to fight." said Fanfan.

Sizemore wrinkled his nose while sniffing the musty air.

"But we're already at the top. I don't think there is a stair to go further up."

"No, no. Not upward. Look, here! "

Fanfan was at a corner pointing to a small door at the end of the aisle. It looked just like a simple door in a common house, but there were five guards standing in front of it. That was an obvious hint, so to speak.

"From there, a staircase leads down again, because the Treasury is in the basement," said Fanfan. "In that room they store all kinds of rare treasures, a collection of precious treasures from all over the world."

Sizemore groaned loudly. Climbing all the way to the top floor, only to go back down to the basement? That would not happen to him at sea.

Suddenly a clanking noise rang loudly as if a huge metal bucket had fallen to the ground.

"Your Majesty!"

"Yuuri!"

"Shibuya!"

Thank you for calling my name in every way possible.

I turned back to look at our rest area. An iron fence had fallen down right in front of our bench and my teammates suddenly found themselves behind bars, completely separated from the arena. Holding the thick iron bars, all three of them were shouting:

"Why are we the only team locked up?"

One of the referee put his arms on his hips, to appear more imposing.

"To prevent you from forcing your way into the arena."

"But that's not fair! If so, then the other team should also be..."

No one was rushing over from the other team. After all, there was only one soldier in the rest area of the Big Shimaron's team, who looked gloomy for having lost earlier. On our side, in contrast, my teammates were shaking the iron bars with all their might and shouted out loud.

"Your Majesty! Do not try anything foolish, please come back!"

"That's right, Yuuri! Don't be stupid!"

"Shibuya, don't try any nonsense!"

"You are being rude now! You're talking as if I am really stupid... Woa! Woa!"

Suddenly the ground beneath my feet trembled. A circular stage the size of a sumo ring started rising from the ground. Staying with me on that stage were Adalbert and the referee with a thick beard, who were both a few feet away from me. Meanwhile Conrad had missed it by only one step, even though he was standing right next to me. He tried to grip the edge of the stage to jump up and almost made it, but the other referee grasped his uniform and pulled him back.

"Let go!" yelled Conrad.

"No way. The appeal of the second fighter was justified. In this match, the second competitor from Big Shimaron will compete against the third competitor from Caloria. To protect our prestige, we must follow the rules."

"But if His Majesty has to fight against that guy, he won't be merely injured..."

Turning away from the expressionless referee, Conrad looked at me desperately. Meanwhile, the stage had already risen to a height above his head.

"He will kill you... Yuuri, give me your hand."

"The match lasts until one of the fighters is incapacitated. Even if one of them loses his life during the match, that does not go against the rules."

How very comforting!

It was true that the American footballer was indeed a powerful enemy. But at least there was one advantage in fighting him as compared to fighting Conrad: I wouldn't hesitate to use all my strength to hit him between his legs.

"Well, here we go!" I cried. "My left foot is ready to kick!"

"How brave, yet it looks a little forced."

"It doesn't matter if I win or not. At least I will be able to hurt you. After all, even you have the same weakness that all men have."

"Yes, except that..."

Adalbert put his hand on his crotch and knocked firmly with his fist. It sounded as if he had knocked on wood.

"One of my principles, my boy. Never enter a fight without wearing protective gear."

"Whaaat?"

Down the drain it went, my beautiful plan!

From behind the bars, Murata was shouting at me at the top of his lungs. This behavior was so different from his usual calmness that I suddenly felt uneasy.

"Shibuyaaa! That's enough, give up! It is too risky."

For someone who had only fought in video games and who had had only a few hours of kendo practice during gym classes, my strength surely fell far behind that of this muscular fighter. He looked like the wrestler Big Show, while I looked like a wooden stick. If he hit me, it would be an instant knock-out. Moreover, if I only put a careless foot beyond the edge, I would fall from the stage, and game would be over for me as well. I glanced sideways to check. Indeed the stage was now as high as a 3-story building.

What would be the end of me? Would I die under Adalbert's weapon? Or would I fall to my death?

"Mr. Referee, I must speak with you urgently," I said.

"Yes?"

"Err..."

Given the current situation, I'd like to withdraw. The words had come to the tip of my tongue but couldn't come out, as I saw the disbelieving expression on Adalbert's face.

"What's going on, Caloria's representative? You want to end the game in such a boring way? I thought you were a man, that's why I proposed a fair and square showdown. But if you prefer to act like a timid little girl and chicken out, oh, that would be so disappointing."

His words angered me, and I almost retorted with equally insulting language. No, no, no! I should not play into his hands. He only wanted me to lose my temper, so he could spoil my plan.

It was true that I was the representative from Caloria, but as Normal Gilbert, I have fulfilled all my obligations to the people. They would understand and would be happy to welcome me back. I would be able to face the children who had cheerfully sent me off and tell them that we had tried our best. Losing the final battle would be truly regrettable, but I could still hold my head high and say we had put in all our effort. However, could I really withdraw now?

"Yuuri, don't worry," Wolfram called out to me. "I won't call you wimp if you give up!"

"Shibuya, listen to your fiance!" Screamed Murata. "No one will blame you, I promise! When we get back to Japan, I'll treat you to rice with grilled pork ribs! So give it up! You have fought enough!"

Really, had I? Had I tried my utmost in this match?

Facing this question, I could only answer it myself. Until now I had not actually fought at all, let alone given it my best. I allowed myself to be defeated before I even lifted a finger. Could I do that? Did I want to end it that way?

"Mr. Referee, I'd like to ask..."

Mr. Thick Beard patiently waited for me to finish. It was actually very simple, I just needed to say that one sentence. Given the current situation, I'd like to withdraw. And I did say something, but as I listened to myself, it sounded like a conversation during a morning inspection.

"What did you use to shave?"

"Huh? I used the razor given in the common military rations."

I slowly stood up from the kneeling position. The snow-bearing wind blowing in my face had become considerably colder.

Adalbert twisted his lips scornfully.

"Well, what now? You changed your mind?"

"I did not change my mind. I only mentally prepared myself."

If I didn't put all my effort into this match, I wouldn't be able to look the children in the eyes.

"A man, regardless of the outcome, must face his challenges head on. Ah, of course the same holds true for women too."

The fruits of Lady von Karbelnikov's indoctrination manifested themselves even here.

"And it's not certain yet that I will lose to you! Anything can happen in the fighting ring. Nothing is impossible. Isn't there a saying that goes "There is strength inside weakness"..."

"Shibuya, that is not wrestling, that is Judo!"

Too bad, there were already flaws in my arguments.

The audience began to roar. They did not care about Conrad's concerns or those of the Caloria's team. The atmosphere was so heated that the snow melted in the air before it touched the ground.

Adalbert von Granz lowered the mighty sword from his shoulder. In light of the torches around us, the long and thick blade flashed menacingly. To put myself into the mood, I swung my metal bat back and forth. I felt slightly more confident in my weapon. Meanwhile Conrad desperately tried to talk to me from below.

"Your Majesty, please don't be reckless. Your bat has no chance against his sword!"

"You're the last one who should give me advice! You better get your own problems straightened out first!"

The audience suddenly held their breath all at once. For a brief moment, a dead silence fell upon the whole stadium. Adalbert charged forward with lightning speed and swung with his mighty sword at me. Instinctively, my body jerked to the left. A strong gust of wind swept past my right cheek. I knew I had escaped his blade by the skin of my teeth.

I lost my balance and had to kneel one knee on the ground. I grasped the bat with both hands and raised it over my head just in time to block Adalbert's strike from above.

It was a miracle that I survived the attack, but all my fingers went numb immediately. The impact force spreading from my wrists to my elbows and shoulders was so strong, I felt as if all my joints were dislocated. Following the ear-splitting sound of metal hitting on metal, a slightly burning smell filled my nostrils.

"Lucky as ever," said Adalbert smiling smugly.

"So you say," I replied.

Adalbert came closer to look at me. Unlike Nigel Weisz Maxine's emotionless eyes, his blue eyes were full of delight. Was he pleased to have the chance to eliminate me with his own sword?

"If you could never return to your country... how would the demons feel? Wouldn't it be a terrible shame for them if their young king is killed on human land?"

Cold sweat ran down my spine. Now I could clearly see his true intention. He wanted nothing more than for me to die, because he wanted to see the Demon Empire sinking into the chaos after my death. That was the reason he joined Big Shimaron's army and served under the human king.

"I would not let you have your way!"

With all my strength I pushed his sword aside. I took a large step back and suddenly felt no support under my feet. So dangerous! I almost forgot that the stage was at a lofty height.

"Careful, boy! Neither of us would want the fight to have such an unspectacular end."

"You're only saying so, but I know you want nothing more than for me to fall to my death. After all no one wants to dirty their hands."

One of my friends called out to me that I should not let him provoke me. What else could I do? It was after all the only strategy I had. I wanted to think of something to talk about, to distract him from attacking me. Maybe I could discuss his dinner menu to spoil his concentration? I wasn't sure if it would work on someone who was not a baseball player, but you wouldn't know unless you try!

"Anyway, what did you have for dinner yesterday?"

"Probably meat."

While asking, I quickly advanced, taking the initiative to attack first. But as expected, he easily thwarted my blow, turning the offense into a strength contest.

"Damn! You had even better food than us!"

"You are only a young king, who told you to go on an expedition to this land?! If you are willing to stay back in your nice and warm room in your castle, you could have filled your stomach with whatever fancy meal or finest wine you wish!"

Murata anxiously shouted to me, slightly raising his voice at the end.

"Look, Shibuya! Right, right! No, the other right!"

No way, I wouldn't be able to follow your instructions, else it would have been best for you to control the situation yourself.

At that time, the referee's figure entered my field of vision. Although he was at the same dangerous height, he could still nimbly jump around and dodge the attacks between the competitors. He really deserved his rank as an international referee. He was great, just like his beard. However, as I was distracted, I lost sight of my opponent's sword for a split second. In the next moment, I could only see the silver shiny blade striking straight toward my chest.

I could almost hear four voices gasping, although they were far away from me.

"Oh, no!"

Luckily, at that very moment, the stage started shaking, and as I lost my balance, I fell down on my knee. The silver blade completed the arc right in front of my nose. I strained my calves and leaped to my feet immediately, but this time the stage did not stop shaking.

We were completely surrounded by the brown heads of the spectators cheering and shaking their fists. When I looked around, I found that the whole stadium was slowly moving.

"Why is the stadium turning around?"

However, it was not the stadium that was revolving, but the stage we were on. Our circular stage was revolving at the speed of a clock's second hand. What was going on?! The stage was already high and dangerous, now you made it revolve too?

It was the final battle, yet it was no more than a cheap show. The audience certainly had their fun, as they could now observe the fight from all angles. But the high and spinning stage was making me dizzy. Fortunately, even Adalbert was frowning and knelt down without saying a word. When our eyes met, he clucked his tongue and, using his weapon as a prop, quietly scrambled to his feet again. Apparently, his legs also felt shaky.

"Now now, you don't look too good," I taunted him.

"Aren't you the same?"

Well, tough luck! I was accustomed to dizziness caused by rotations. Two years ago when I joined the baseball team, almost every day we had to complete a strange exercise: holding the baseball bat vertically on the ground, leaning the forehead against the handle, turning around ten times, then immediately step forward. One would be so dizzy it was difficult to walk straight. Until now I still had no idea if that exercise benefited us in any way. Could it be simply a joke by the seniors?

"Leaning the forehead on the bat, rotating around ten times, and still able to hit the target, that's something only I could do!"

I was boasting about something no one else present could understand.

I struck the metal bat at the legs of my opponent, and he fell. My first goal today. Leaning on his hands he tried to bounce back. Now I only needed to smack my weapon down on him, and the battle would be decided. Only two and a half steps forward and a hard hit on his head, then it would all be over, and I would win! Maybe some of his brain would splatter a bit, but it would be easy enough to change my clothes - so that should be fine. That is the problem with using bat as weapon, there is no middle ground to negotiate. I should have listened to Wolfram's advice and chosen a sword. If only I could point my sword at him, I might be able to force him to surrender.

Even though all those thoughts were rushing through my head, in that split of second, I simply took my stance in front of Adalbert, preparing to swing my bat. Just one strike and it would be over with. No, I did not need to smash his skull, I only needed to stop at the right time to knock him out, and the referee would still declare me the winner.

I only needed to stop at the right time...

"Ouch!"

Adalbert had noticed my hesitation and, with his free foot, kicked me with all his might at my fingers. I screamed under my breath, and lurched forward. Adalbert quickly grabbed me by my neck and I felt cold metal pressed against my throat.

"Thanks, kid. You saved me the trouble of chasing after you in this whole revolving shop."

"Ah... Ouch! "

"Does that hurt, huh? You're bleeding even, you poor thing!" Adalbert said sarcastically.

All the muscles in my body tensed up. The blade was just under my chin. How would it feel to have your throat slit open? Which death would be more pleasant? A severed carotid artery or a severed windpipe?

I dropped my weapon and tried to pry free with my hands. But I had no chance against his strength. His grip around my neck was so tight even the force of fifty cars combined wouldn't be enough to free me.

At this time I could feel the body temperature of the man behind me, while in front of me, only freezing wind and snow were striking at my face. Although I found myself in such a state of emergency, the only thought in my mind was that the difference in temperature would cause me to catch a cold. I suddenly felt nothing under my feet. Adalbert had dragged me to the edge of our stage and dangled me there.

"I could just let you go," he threatened.

Earlier I was still trying to kick with my free legs. But upon hearing his threat, I immediately stopped struggling. My throat was so dry and burning hot that I could not make any sound.

The stage continued to rotate. Slowly our rest area came into my view. Wolf, Murata and Yozak kept clutching the bars and shouting. However, because of a rustling sound in my ears, I could not catch what my comrades were trying to tell me.

There it was again, the uncomfortable ringing in the ears. It was not new to me. My experience told me that my awareness would continue to wane and I would start to hear the comforting voice of a woman. And then I would be invincible. Just a little more, a little bit more...



"Your Majesty!"

That was Conrad. His voice sounded unusually desperate.

"I beseech you, please surrender right now! He could really do it! Adalbert could take your life!"

If I could speak or stop my magic powers, I would have done so. But the situation had gone beyond my control, and soon that person would start whispering in my ears, waking up unknown forces in my body. Maybe something would happen, and our situation would be reversed.

But for a long time, nothing happened.

"He is almost incapable of fighting," Adalbert murmured softly. Probably he thought I could no longer hear him.

If at this moment I fell to my demise, what would become of everyone's effort so far? Would it all be for naught? I would neither be able to make a request on Caloria's behalf, nor reclaim the evil box. It was the end. Here was the end.

I looked up to heaven and tried to squeeze a sound out of my throat. My voice was so hoarse it was not even a decent word. Nevertheless, I cried out to the countless falling white lights, even though I could not say whether they were snowflakes or stars.

Come on, I need my power! Now, now, now is the time! Here! I must win this fight!

Still no woman's voice whispering. Desperate, I looked down and saw a pair of eyes that were as black as mine: Murata's. Aware of my eye contact, Murata briefly said "no" and quickly covered his face.

"No, Shibuya," he muttered. "Do not do it. It's too dangerous."

Dangerous for whom?! For me? Or for the people in the stadium?

Suddenly I was sucked into a vortex of darkness. Darkness quickly spread out, shrouding everything around, as if to swallow the whole world. A biting cold wind kept blasting me on my face, my chest and my legs. And then my body felt as if I was plunged down a pitch-black tunnel at an unbearable speed.

It was different than the usual lazy white mist I had encountered previously. And there was no music.

(Translated by LRenne, betaed by Tati-ai. Please do not repost elsewhere.)

Back to Chapter 1	Return to MA Series	Forward to Chapter 3
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MaruMA:Volume 8:Chapter 3

From Baka-Tsuki

Chapter 3

Whether they pushed or pulled on it, the iron bars didn't move an inch.

His voice wouldn't reach from here, but Murata still called out his friend's name.

"Shibuya! No you can't, it's too dangerous! Hurry up and figure it out!"

"What? What can't he do?" Lord von Bielefeld was much calmer than Murata and didn't seem to be particularly disturbed. He's likely unaffected because he has experienced Yuuri's explosive majutsu many times over. "It's his usual Uesama form. Of course it is powerful... and inconvenient majutsu, but if we keep our heads down for a little bit and stay put, he'll come back to himself all on his own. I'm worried about him being totally exhausted after he collapses, but he's somehow worked things out with that condition so far. You could call it something like a small-scale typhoon. It's nothing for us to get worked up about."

"No, this is different than before."

Wolfram's expression darkened like the way his mother's does and looked back and forth between Yuuri standing on the stage and Murata.

"What's different?"

"It's just different. The quality of the majutsu and the circumstances are different... First of all, he hasn't been back to Earth in a long time. This might have happened in the past, but he hasn't kept repeatedly using majutsu without going back. And then you saw it, didn't you? On the boat? It was as if he said something *un-Shibuya*... I'm worried about that... Hopefully something unstoppable isn't happening inside Shibuya... And then..."

"Your Highness, shall I break this?"

Taking notice of Murata's unease, Josak tries to bend the iron bars. Realizing the gaps wouldn't widen with just the strength of an ordinary man, he starts hacking away at the metal with the axe.

"... And then I'm here... that's the most dangerous."

"What?"

"I amplify his power. Twice over. If things go bad, several times over. The nature of the majutsu might change as well. It'll become more aggressive, more devastating, probably. Our relationship was created for destruction, after all. A skilled practitioner might be able to control it with their own will, but he's just recently become king. On the contrary, it hasn't even been a while since his majutsu was awakened so it will be difficult for Shibuya to control."

For a split second, Wolfram made quite an unpleasant face. However, he quickly recovers his faith as a close friend of the king and respectfully gazes at the Twin Black Great Sage as if he was a novice.

“If we get close to Yuuri, can he be controlled?”

“You? But Lord von Bielefeld, your back.”

“Who cares about my back!? If we get close to Yuuri, can we help control his rampage?”

“It’s not certain, but probably a little.”

“Come!”

He kicked open the entrance. While the guards standing on both sides were taken by surprise, he takes them down with one hit from the somewhat-supplied weapon.

“There must be a side entrance somewhere. It’ll be faster than waiting for Gurrier.”

“You wound me, Young Master.”

After joking that it wouldn’t be his fault if Wolfram blew out his back and lost all his popularity, Josak followed after them.

All of the men packed into the stands were all looking up. Some of them carelessly had their mouths hanging open. For humans who had not went to the battlefield, there were no opportunities to see majutsu.

The snow drawing figures in the black sky slinked about according to its master’s will as if it were alive. First was a bird, then a dog, then a mou-... no, a red squirrel.

It was a bit of a one-man snow festival.

Before the spectators had the chance to yell ‘Adalbert, behind you,’ the mass of snow shaped like a bucket took a nosedive and attacked the man standing on the round stage.

“Ugh!”

It was a hard blow to the back of the head.

The arms that had a tight hold of Yuuri slackened. His body instantly slipped down as he escaped from the muscle hell and tumbled onto the wet ground.

“... Hey, what gives...? Wasn’t this match normal combat? If majutsu without any sense of art is allowed then you should have said so from the beginning... Ah, the shape of my head is going to change.”

Adalbert was touching the lump as if to check it.

When Yuuri brought his hand to his neck, his fingers were wet by something that wasn’t sweat or water. It was blood. He gazed silently at his palm, but before long the snow rubbed against it.

Bit by bit, the white turned crimson.

By the time he slowly raised his head, the light in his eyes was different than usual. He was standing with his arms crossed and a cynical look on his face, his chin slightly lifted as if to look down on others. His fiery, glittering black eyes were focused on one target: Adalbert.

“... To not only go against your birthplace but to shake the resolve formed from a pure soul in younger days and to throw away the vow of loyalty to the mazoku you made as an adult...”

A low and resonant voice with a roundabout, hard to understand way speaking. Expressions you would only hear in period dramas in a halfway literary style.

It's undeniably the first SUPER Maou MODE in a long while.

“You make fallacious arguments with your selfish grudge and turned your back on your homeland to wander. As if that was not enough, you wish for chaos in your native land because of a foolish reasoning that can only be thought of as resentment! How foolish and lacking is your soul? My nose cannot stop dripping at the shamefulness.”

He's the type whose nose starts running before his eyes tear up.

“However!”

The huge sumo WRESTLER snow sculpture floating in the air swung an arm around to match his speech. It spread out all five fingers and stood in a STOP THE Back Talk trademark pose. The cold, sleet-filled wind that sprung forth collided relentlessly across the entire audience.

It stopped right when Adalbert got tired of listening to the lecture and was thinking if he should just attack already. Nice timing.

“... You do nothing but advocate for your own rights and do not know what it is to turn those over to another... Ah, where have the good old customs of compromise and sharing with others gone?”

As if he was beset by an earth-shattering tragedy, he places a hand to his brow and gazes up at the sky. The snow sculpture in the night sky accompanied that move by twisting its body as if it was wailing. How ghastly.

“What is the meaning of attacking the next opponent after being unsatisfied with one victory? Von Grantz, you enemy of equal opportunity! An insolent man like you should listen to these words well. Are you listening? Jam your fingers up those gigantic nostrils of yours and listen well. Engrave it in your heart! Modest virtue!”

Several people in the arena cocked their heads to the side as if to say ‘eh?’ That's unreasonable. And unsanitary. However, most of the people were admiring the somewhat dignified string of words. It felt like mass hypnotism.

“You are no longer one of our brethren. Even the previous Maou said ‘even if he tries to come back I won't forgive him, eh!’”

He didn't have to say that one part just like she did.

“Hey, Your Majesty.” Adalbert slapped his shoulder with the belly of the scabbard fish sword and his neck made popping sounds as he stretched it. “When will this lecture putting me to sleep end?”

Left out of all the goings on and just watching his master from afar, Conrad was taken aback by the man's boldness, although the spectators and the judges who knew nothing of Yuuri's social status and position were as well. He was defiant even in front of the Super Maou. It was to the extent that it seemed like he would start digging around i-... brushing off his nose.

Yuuri's clenched fists were trembling slightly, perhaps in anger.

“... Ugh, there is no medicine for muscles... So your muscles have eroded your brain?”

“You say that, Your Majesty, but muscles are nice. Flexing them is a way to pass the time.”

“Quiet! You are a treasonous man who wishes to overthrow my authority and spread useless chaos in the kingdom! Von Grantz, your existence is a large obstacle in the way of my flawless and absolute reign which I’ve named ‘My Bronze Statue’ Plan. Even though we are of the same race, fleeing the country is a serious crime. On this occasion, even spilling blood is not disagreeable...!”

He showily swings down the left arm he had been pointing to the sky and points his index finger directly at Adalbert. Three seconds to the death sentence.

“You leave me no choice. I’ll cut you down! Throw yourself upon the sword of justice and fall just like Seizou Fukumoto!” ^[1]

“Who’s that?”

“Judgement!”

‘Justice’ was written in crimson on the piled up snow at Yuuri’s feet. Only above his head, a flurry of light pink flower petals were fluttering down around him (but it was snow).

Left behind on the ground, Conrad felt an indescribable unease at the succession of improper words.

From here, he couldn’t see what was going on up on the faraway stage. However, even though he could only hear voices, he was bewildered by the difference from Yuuri’s usual self.

Something was wrong. This was completely different than how Yuuri was until now. It would be nice if he were just needlessly worrying, though.

Anyway, Yuuri’s attack not being with a sword even though he said ‘cut’ was fairly normal.

“Damn it!”

Lord Weller took out his short sword that was for decoration only and stabbed it into the pillar that could also be called the base of the stage. Next, he stuck in his long sword above that and lifted his body up with his arms. Now with these two footholds, he had no choice but to climb up one step at a time.

“Whoa, the snow!” someone screamed in abject terror.

The snowdrift that had taken on a rough female shape all of a sudden changed its expression and swooped down upon Adalbert. It had sunken eye sockets and a mouth spread open in anger. And vertically, too. If it was making noise, it would probably be yelling ‘aoww.’

A high-pitched trumpet sounded throughout the grounds. It was announcing an evacuation alarm.

The snowy wind drawing patterns in the sky raged and was creating really bad weather in the area. It was a pinpoint blizzard. However, even after getting knocked down by the aftermath of the natural phenomenon obeying majutsu, there were next to no spectators who left their seats.

A battle like this wasn’t something one got to see many times in their life. Hands that held exploded millet kernels all froze in place and spilled alcohol on laps was left as is. Air blown into balloons suddenly flowed back into mouths. There were those who forgot to lower their raised fists and those who didn’t close their mouths. There

were even those who wanted to escape but were too afraid to move and would definitely have nightmares that night.

If they can see something so awesome, they don't care if they'll be snowed on or injured. Even if their wives leave and go back to their parents' houses, just for tonight they'll stay out past curfew.

It was more wanting entertainment than bravery. It was an unexpectedly simple Shimaronian trait.

Assaulted by the white mazoku figure, Adalbert clicked his tongue. He had a slight inclination to flinch back, but he immediately regains his composure.

Scraping his finger and leaving a single drop of blood on the blade, Adalbert mutters 'what was that' to himself before bringing up his rigid weapon in front of his face.

In an instant, the sword is colored bright red and it shines as if it were molten-hot metal in the middle of being cast. The snow sculpture that came at him is chopped clean in two and disperses into steam.

“What!?”

The majutsu user couldn't hide his discomfort in this first experience. Until now, he had not faced a single enemy that had resisted. He hadn't held back in the least because his opponent was of the same race. It's true. That slightly ridiculous, cold mazoku lady was several times scarier than Snow Günter.

“... Aha. It's impressive that you can use this much majutsu in these wonderful circumstances of being in human land and having a temple right next to you on top of it all. As one would expect of a soul born to be king. It's different than a normal mazoku's.”

The evaporated water immediately cools down and crystallizes and once again loyally prepares for another attack as a devoted subject of the Maou. Like a swarm of bees flocking together, the sky is filled with white grains.

“Impressive, a swarm of flies.” How filthy. The man that looks like he smelled of sweat twisted his lips up in what could be a sneer. “But don't get ahead of yourself. It's not always a given that your opponent won't resist and will simply kneel before you.”

The smoking sword gradually regains its original color.

“Did you forget? I've thrown away my mazoku self. My status, my position, my name... even my maryoku. But I received much in return. The houjutsu that humans use is one of them.”

He nimbly spreads open the left hand he lifted from his thigh. Blue spots spread from all five fingertips.

“This place is steeped in particles that obey hourlyoku. Just as one would expect from a temple in Dai Shimaron. Then again, this change in atmosphere might be trivial for the greatness of Your Majesty. But, this is the best place for me to use hourlyoku.”

The blue spots changed to flame and separated from the fingers to float in the air. It resembled the phosphorus at graves.

“And my opponent is the current Maou. Nice. This is exciting. I'll probably never get this chance again.”

“... So you defy my judgment?”

His jet black eyes glitter coldheartedly. So much so that if someone who knew the usual Yuuri saw him they would think it was a different person.

“Very well, von Grantz Adalbert. You and your relatives have moved to the top of my list of people to purge. In the name of the 27th Maou, I declare that all descendants of the Grantz family shall be eliminated.”

“Wait! My relatives have nothing to do with this.”

“A family that resents the king will only be a hindrance to my reign. Ah, but von Grantz, this is nothing for you to be worried about. You should simply wait on the other side. Here on this snowy stage, you’ll be the first of those with Grantz blood to be sent to hell.”

“Hey hey, isn’t your personality a bit different? I feel like I’ve been beat at my own game.”

When he glanced down, he saw that the word at his feet was slightly different than normal. It wasn’t ‘justice,’ it was ‘ustice’... A letter is missing! ^[2]

“There’s no use arguing. Prepare yourself, Adalbert! I’m going to split your chin even more!”

“Tch.”

The giant snow sculpture separated into small masses. Flying objects the size of thumbs circle around Adalbert. The figures with their teeth bared heading towards their target looked more like a group of carnivorous insects hunting down prey than snow sprites surrounding a target.

The blue flame jumped around faster than the eye could track and melted the enemy one after another. Even after they melted they would immediately refreeze and return to the majutsu user’s side.

Neither side was making any progress.

Yuuri became impatient and bit his lip and the blizzard above his head wavered just once. Checking to see if it would move as he wished, he raised his right hand high and snapped his fingers. The icy wind became a powerful blade and swung down upon the man it was meant to vanquish.

“... Ugh!”

Adalbert had raised the bright red sword over his head and melted the wind sword, but his cheeks and both arms were deeply wounded. Something warm moved over his jaw. As if swarming towards that blood, the strange snow sprites pounced.

It was more grotesque than usual.

From whatever angle you looked at it, Yuuri looked like the bad guy and Adalbert looked like the good guy. A passionate chant of ‘von Grantz!’ welled up around the grounds. Now, the arena had become one unified being.

“Annoying, buzzing like bugs...!”

He swings the salted salmon in a grandiose motion. The gathering of white objects scatter and merge together once again in the sky. While Adalbert hacked away at the ice sword, he ran about ten steps to close the distance between himself and his opponent. The round stage wasn’t very wide to begin with. He would soon come close enough to cross swords.

“My sword will slit your throat before your majutsu kills me. Come on, Maou. Hurry and test my theory. Throw a snowball or whatever else at me with your hands.”

“... Fine then.”

Yuuri snapped his fingers and Adalbert swung his sword down at the same time. However, a few seconds before that, Conrad had managed to climb up to the top with his poor footholds.

“Adalbert stop!

It was too late. The man who had discarded the mazoku had already moved into unstoppable action. Even if he heard Conrad’s voice.

“Yuuri’s soul is Julia’s!”

The tip of the blade was turned away to the left at the last moment just as it cut a single layer of skin.

“What...?”

An unrelenting snowfall descended upon Adalbert from above as he stumbled forward. Save for the elbow down of his right arm that was grasping his weapon, he was covered by a mountain of snow and stopped moving. Several seconds of silence later, the audience erupted like a clock mechanism all at once in cheers.

The victor turned around.

“... Who...”

Even after he almost asked ‘who are you?’ Conrad held his tongue. He had cold and captivating eyes that you couldn’t look away from.

However, there wasn’t even a sliver of kindness within them.

Back to Chapter 2	Return to MA Series	Forward to Chapter 4
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References

1. Seizou Fukumoto is an actor that plays in a lot of period dramas as the guy who loses the swordfight. He also played the silent samurai in The Last Samurai with Tom Cruise.
2. So in the original Japanese, the ‘sei’ (正) in ‘seigi/justice’ (正義) was missing a stroke so it became 止 and read as止義 which isn’t a word so I can’t really give a pronunciation. Shigi, maybe? The characters mean ‘stop’ and ‘justice/right/honor.’

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MaruMA:Volume 8:Chapter 4

From Baka-Tsuki

Chapter 4

As they got closer to their destination, the division of labor became clearer.

Stefan Fanberlain used money to win over the soldiers and Sizemore used his strength to eliminate his opponents. So, Dacascos was the one who moved the unconscious ones to inconspicuous places and before he realized it, Chevalier had defeated two or three people. As he dragged the limp soldier's body, Dacascos peeked at his neighbor.

Chevalier noticed and looked at him with a smile.

"Th-that guy looks like he's having a nice dream," Dacascos said.

"Yeah."

The arms and legs of the body that he was carrying were flopping around and its eyes were rolled back into its head. The deep pink tongue in his mouth was twitching.

"Maybe he's dreaming about eating something delicious."

"Yeah."

Ninety percent of Chevalier's answers were one or two syllables. 'Yeah' or 'yes' or 'no' or 'dunno.' Even fighters in evil secret societies use more intelligent words these days.

Even while they were going down the stairs where they wouldn't run into any guards, the division of labor was quite clear.

Fanberlain would praise Lady Celi, Sizemore would make little comments here and there while rubbing his arm uncomfortably, and Dacascos would write down the phrases Fanfan used in his mental notebook. The count was already up to forty. The newest one was 'constrict a beauty's neck in pearls, tightly.'

Even while listening to Fanfan's lyrical praise, Chevalier just smiled and nodded. It was as if a father or brother were listening to compliments about Cäcilie.

Just who are you, Chevalier?

Could he actually be Lady von Spitzweg Cäcilie's parent? Now that he thinks about it, they have the same shining blonde hair and noble facial features. Not as much as the third son, His Excellency Wolfram, but Chevalier looks much more like her than her older brother, Lord von Spitzweg Stuffer, and her eldest son, Lord von Voltaire Gwendal. He might be somewhere between 120 and 150 years old. Probably not her father, but you can't dismiss the possibility that he's her younger brother.

Dacascos became uneasy and asked him a question as he lifted the box.

“By the way, Mr. Chevalier... What’s your last name?”

“Dunno,” answered the manservant of the queen as he smiled, his white teeth showing.

What does the answer ‘dunno’ mean when you ask someone their last name? Does he just hate it or is his last name actually Dunno? Or, is it somehow related to that flirtatious game called ‘try to think’ that ladies play when they ask you to guess?

Dacascos has never won at that game. His wife springs them on him at every opportunity, but at present he stands in complete and utter defeat. His Poison Lady, Amblin, does things like this: ‘put your hand to your heart and try to think hard.’ Abbreviated: ‘try to think.’

“... I’m sorry... I don’t know.”

Dacascos inadvertently fell into his usual bad habit and started to cry. Even his prided bald head that seems like it would come in handy in a dark street at night lost its shine.

“What’s wrong, Mr. Dacascos? It’s nothing to cry about. I don’t have a last name. Just Chevalier is good enough. You’re like that too. Aren’t you, Mr. Dacascos? Mr. Lilit Latchie Nanatan Micotan Dacascos. Right, Mr. Nanatan Micotan Dacascos?”

This is the first time in a while he’d heard the blonde-haired attendant speak so much. More importantly, this was also the first time in a while that he’d heard his entire name. It was so agonizing that he almost dropped the box.

“P-p-p-please stop! Please stop saying my name down to the last letter! I-it’s my family name but it sends sh-shivers down my spine!”

“Is that so? I think that’s very cute. Like a newlywed couple huh, Mr. Nanatan Micotan Dacky?”

“Ughaah.”

He had tried to figure out Chevalier’s origins and ended up having his question evaded.

They could vaguely hear the cheers of the crowd in the arena through the thick stone walls.

“Oh, seems like something happened.”

Sizemore placed his ear against the wall, but he naturally couldn’t figure out any details. He pulled himself together and continued down the gloomy staircase to the treasure room. There were two landings with guards posted, but they managed to get through them easily. Before long, they reached the bottom floor and there were three wooden doors with placards hung on them. It was a sight that stirred up a sense of adventure.

“It’s likely that two out of the three are traps leaving just one real door.”

Captain Sizemore’s large shoulders fell as he stroked his chin that had started to get stubbly. He can deal with anything when it comes to the sea, but he has absolutely no experience with treasure hunting in a maze. Once he’s on land, he’s powerless.

Dacascos tried putting his fingers on his temples and spinning around with his eyes closed. His ears started ringing. “I got it. It’s definitely this door with ‘Vacant’ hangi-”

“Then let’s open all of them at once.”

No one listened to his opinion.

Fanfan's plan went like this.

Luckily, there were three doors and four people. If three of the people each took a door, most likely one of them is the real entrance. If by any chance the other two doors are traps, in the worst case scenario there will be two people left. The remaining two should be able to carry their target out.

"We won't get anywhere if we worry about it. I'll take the middle door."

An impressive aspect of him is that he's also gambling with his own life. A plan that two-thirds of the participants would fall into a trap isn't something suited for someone who isn't a soldier. Despite the fact that he was inevitably interested in the treasure, his business spirit was admirable.

He unsteadily grasped the doorknob and lightly licked his lips in nervousness.

"... If I lose my life here... Please tell Cécilie this. 'Ah, your laugh is the splash of a stimulating stream. Your sigh is the bittersweet fragrance of a rose. Your eyes sparkle like the morning dew amongst the verdant leaves. Your lips are-'"

"A-all of that?"

"Of course. Verbatim, if you please. I even took the time to think up an alliteration with 'splash,' 'stimulating,' and 'stream.'"

This seems like it is beyond Sizemore's skills.

"Well, let's pray that it is a needless worry. It's alright. Although I am inexperienced, I am the man who inherited the name of Fanfan. I have never made a mistake with forward trading."

The business man, the man of the sea, and the blonde attendant stand before a door and grasp their respective doorknobs. Fanberlain was the one who gave the signal.

"Are you ready? Missouri, Smetana, your company's card!"

Before Dacascos could ask about the 'your company's card' part, the three men opened the doors. Sizemore and Chevalier reflexively protected their faces. However, neither poison gas nor spears jumped out.

"... The same room has three entrances..."

They were just lined up next to each other.

"However, there might be traps farther in. Everyone, please be care-" Sizemore started.

"Waah!" yelled Fanfan like a child as he ran into the treasure room. He ran around as he pleased in the warehouse that could fit a hundred men. "Amazing! There are so many valuable items here I can't count them! Look at the elegance in the waist of this naked statue. And then here, come look at this statue of the Maou! Can you feel the terror that the creator felt of the Maou?"

"Well, the head is an elephant." [1]

"That's the amazing part! It was used in a ceremony for a curse."

So he participated in sorcery in some unknown place? Furthermore, he grips a splintering wooden doll and lifts it to eye level.

“Ah, this is impressive as well. Very nice work. This was used for a curse? Oh, the weight of this thick mirror is remarkable. This was used for a curse. Oh, a string belt for a curse is lying here. If someone wears this they’ll be cursed and their stamina will take a nosedive. Ah! This is the cursed, nailed banana.”

Have they not stored any non-cursed items!? The higher-ups at the temple seem to be collectors of dangerous artifacts.

The others left the businessman to himself and returned to their mission of swapping out the box. They had to quickly find their target and swap it out with a fake. Dacascos was the type to attack from the corners when playing white and black stone games so he wandered around the corners of the room.

“Oh hey.”

A rectangular object of a similar size was carelessly left on the bare ground. Pushing the laundry on top of it off to the side, he saw this written on the lid in large letters:

‘The End of the Wind’

Surprised by the incredible obviousness, Dacascos lost his voice.

Inside me, the torture in the darkness continued.

The headache that came at the same time as the throbbing, the metallic smell that spread inside my nose. My eyes hurt as if they were stabbed with needles and the loud reverberation in my ears won’t stop. Someone is talking, but it just keeps going on without me being able to understand the words. It was as if I wasn’t just hearing it through my ears, but like there were headphones right on my brain.

Like I was trapped inside a bell at a temple and someone was banging on it from the outside.

“...-ya... Shibuya...!”

I desperately try to open my dry, stuck together eyelids. It felt like I was going to hear my skin ripping apart. Gold and green dimly enter my gaze. Beyond that was the same darkness from before with little bits of white light dancing about. It’s snow.

The blonde-haired person slightly narrows his eyes and I can see his lips move just a little bit.

“There’s no choice.”

There's... no... choice?

“Whoa, stop it Wolfram! He'll die if you do that!”

My consciousness rapidly rose to the surface. Lord von Bielefeld had lifted the metal club and was about to hit me.

“He lost... -sciousness... so... waking him up that way is too viole-... eh.”

When I try to lift my head, nausea and dizziness hit me. I inevitably have to put my head back down. The back of my head hit something not at all firm. I have a bad feeling. This taut, fleshy feeling is...

“Your Majesty, this is all I can do for you.”

Just as I feared, my head was in Josak's lap.

“Shibuya, here, water.”

“Gugh.”

A snowball was shoved into my mouth. It was Murata. He's gripping another one in his right hand. I suppose he prepared second helpings. I try to wave my hand to tell him I don't need it, but my sentiments didn't get across.

“Mmph... mpha! What are you doing?! It went all the way to the back of my throat.”

“Are you finally awake?” Wolfram was leaning on the club to relieve some of the pressure on his back. His expression suddenly softens. I look around with only my eyes as I stay lying down. Murata was squatting down and Josak's thighs are under my head.

But he isn't here.

I use all of my strength to lift my creaking arm and touch my cheek with freezing cold fingers.

It was wet. Probably from the snow.

“Conrad?”

The third son looks away.

“Wolf, Conrad was... there, wasn't he? For sure. He was wearing kind of yellow clothes, a uniform like he was a Tigers fan. Hey Wolf, Conrad's not here.”

“Worry about yourself!” At Murata's reprimand in an unusually strong tone, I immediately shut my mouth. “You fell from up there! Well, in the middle Lord Weller skillfully grabbed you, though. If he didn't you would have smashed into the ground and might have broken all the bones in your body.”

“Up there?”

A little distance away, there were several referees and workers. Grey lumps are falling from up high off of snow shovels suitable for areas with heavy snowfall. Just what are they doing?

“That's...”

“They're getting rid of the round stage because they have to save the guy that got buried. You did it, didn't you?”

“I did!? I buried someone!? Who?”

“Who... Don’t you remember it at all?”

I didn’t remember.

“Does that mean I did it again? The usual Super Uesama Mode? No, before that, buried? Who got buried? That’s bad. Is that person..?”

“Von Grantz is alive. Honestly, he’s so tough it’s infuriating,” Josak said as if he was disappointed all the way to the bottom of his heart. “But, displaying that amazing majutsu and not having any memory of it is a bit of a loss. So is only the person himself not knowing how heroic and terrifying he was. Ah, or maybe it isn’t a loss but a blessing?”

“I did something dreadful and indecent and grotesque and something to make people suspicious of my character again, didn’t I?”

“Oh Your Majesty, beauty isn’t everything. For me, just being able to see you make Adalbert go ‘gyafun!’ was, how shall I say, it pulled at my heartstrings.”

However, the American Football Macho wasn’t the only one who said ‘gyafun.’

I timidly reach up to touch my throat and my fingers touch blackish blood that had started to harden. Luckily it didn’t hurt much, but if I move it will probably open right back up. And not that it matters, but when is the word ‘gyafun’ from?

“Why am I alive? It’s weird.”

It’s been a while since this happened. Even if I used majutsu that surpassed the power of man, these last few times I’ve had a slight recollection of it. But this time, I don’t remember a single thing. I was just closed in the darkness the entire time. When I think back on it, I feel as if my body will start shaking from unease and fear.

“... What’s wrong with me?”

“There’s always something wrong with you. It’s not something that just started now.” Wolfram slowly crouches down. His movements are awfully stiff. That reminds me, how is his back? I hope it doesn’t hurt for too long.

“Look the other way. I’m going to do something about that injury on your neck. Gurrier, do you have a needle and thread?”

“I do. Correcting measurements is required if you want to dress all the more stylishly, after all. That being said, should I sew it up? I have some confidence in my sewing ability.”

“Sew? Without anesthesia!? Hey, use that healing technique! You said that you could at least stop someone’s bleeding.”

“Don’t move.”

I reach a hand out to Murata looking for help, but he rejects me with a ‘you reap what you sow.’

“It can’t be helped. Everyone desperately tried to stop you, but you went on a rampage all on your own, Shibuya.”

“Aren’t you gradually turning into a malicious character?”

I caught a glimpse of two people in white clothes out of the corner of my eye. Their hair is tucked neatly under their hoods and they're running towards us so fast they're tilted towards the ground. The pure white suits them even though they are small and the sense of cleanliness overflowing from them is promising.

"Hey look, the rescue squad! We might as well let the professionals handle the medical care."

"I am sorry for keeping you waiting. Oh Your Majesty, you look to be in such pain."

"Huh?"

The white-robed angel that kneeled before me had her collar opened wide. Faced with an open view of clear and distinct cleavage, my bleeding doubles. I hurriedly clamp a hand over my nose.

"Bu... Lad-Lady Feli?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. Your. Lady. Cäcilie. It's been such a long time. Have you been well? It was lonely not being able to see you. Oh Your Majesty, your body stained in blood from injuries is sexy too. Any lady would be instantly bewitched."

"Mother!? The arena is prohibited for women. How did you get here..."

"Shh, Wolf. I just borrowed an outfit from the rescue squad. Right, Josak?"

"Quite admirable."

For some reason, the former queen that appeared out of nowhere sought the approval of Josak. Her golden curls were tied up tightly. Maybe those who weren't soldiers were allowed to not wear their hair long. Ah, I'd be satisfied if Lady Celi sewed me up. Please use a running stitch or a backstitch. Unconsciously, my face relaxes.

"What's that sudden change in attitude, Yuuri? Your face turned submissive." Wolfram was not amused.

While examining my injury, Lady Cäcilie discovered Murata. Her enchanting body twisted up fretfully.

"Ah, you're His Highness that I've heard about, right? Just like I was told, neither your eyes or hair is black, but... you're a very, extremely cute person! You really do look a lot like His Majesty. Aww, I want to greet you officially and honor you with a passionate embrace, but... Your Highness, please forgive me. Please don't think of me as a rude woman."

"I don't mind, Your Previous Majesty. Right now examining Shibuya's wound is more important."

After giving her usual 'call me Celi,' one of Shin Makoku's Three Great Beauties places her fingers on my neck. The chilly and good feeling spreads not only across the surface, but inside the wound as well.

"... It's alright. A wound this shallow doesn't need to be stitched up. But Your Majesty, for someone like me who only has ordinary maryoku, I couldn't possibly use such a large scale attack in a place like this. There's a temple next door and the elements that obey houryoku are everywhere... To be able to display such mighty power in such adversity, Your Majesty is truly a great man."

"I-I'm used to adversity."

No way. A truly great practitioner would take responsibility for everything he did. However, when it comes to me I don't even remember what I did. Someone who completely forgets a few dozen minutes of what he did can only be called a huge idiot. I already have amnesia at age sixteen. What were the side dishes I had last night?

“Ow.”

“I’m sorry. It will hurt a bit because the tissue is joining. It would be fine to just wrap a bandage around it and leave it alone, but even if we close it just a little bit, it will be easier for you to move around.”

“It, it’s okay. Please do it.”

Someone held my hand. Before I even have time to worry about it, I end up using that hand to deal with pain. It has thin and cold fingers. Even if I turn my head I can’t see them because they’re behind my healer, but it’s probably the other rescue squad member.

“... Flynn?”

At my murmur I didn’t think would reach, the strength gripping my hand increased as if in response.

“Okay Your Majesty, now let’s just wrap it in cloth. I planned on pouring in plenty of my love, but as expected I can only provide emergency healing in this place... It will be bad if the injury opens so I recommend avoiding energetic motions... Oh my, saying energetic motions brings things to mind...”

Hello, previous queen, helloooo?

“And then,” the Sexy Queen says as she abruptly turns serious and places her palms against my jaw. Emerald green eyes the same as the third son’s waver for a moment with unpleasant emotions. “Please forgive Conrart for what he has done. I apologize on behalf of my son.”

“You don’t have to apologize, Lady Celi...”

“No, I do.” She pressed her rosy lips together and shook her head and one section of her golden curls came undone. “It all started with me. How many hardships have I put that child through because of my stupidity? If I started regretting them I would never be able to regret them all. But Your Majesty, believe at least this. That child would never betray you. There must be a reason for this. A complicated reason that he can’t reveal now. So...”



Cäcilie placed one hand to her heart and placed the other on mine.

“Believe in him.”

This sincere and calm tone she is using is 180 degrees different than her usual self. Her eyes were full of kindness. The very bottom of my spine tingled.

Huh, so she really is a mother.

No matter how young she looks or if she charms one man after another and engrosses herself in new loves, she is definitely a mother. Most likely I’m the only one who didn’t know that basic fact.

“... I believe in him.” Her face lights right up. “Conrad wouldn’t become my enemy for no reason. Even just now... I don’t remember it, but he rescued me.”

I look around while taking care of my stiffening injury, but he is not within my view.

“Even though he’s not here again.”

“But he’s alive,” Wolfram said with a sigh. It seems his thoughts just spilled out of his mouth. “There’s no better news than that.”

The referee who had been watching us walked over impatiently. It was the man who got left on the ground.

They all look similar so I can’t tell them apart immediately, but I recognize the thickness of his stubble.

“That’s good enough, rescue squad. Representatives of Caloria, move out immediately. There will be an audience with His Highness after this.”

“An audience? We’re meeting someone important? What a pain. It’s going to be a garden party or something. Wolf, go as a representative.”

“Watch your tongue! His Highness will graciously bestow upon you a drink and personally grant your wish.”

“We’ll just put that in the suggestion box... Wait!? Grant our wish? I won? Did I win!?”

“You didn’t realize it until now?”

Murata and Wolfram looked stunned. The third opponent was American Football Macho, von Grantz Adalbert. What cowardly, underhanded trick did I use to defeat a strong, muscle-bound guy like that? The reason I can only assume it was cowardly is because I understand my own fighting ability.

It sucks, if I say so myself.

“... Upsy daisy...”

I tried to stand up while saying something an old person would, but I couldn’t put any strength into my legs. This exhaustion is the same as usual. I even lose my appetite after I use majutsu. With Josak supporting me under my arms, I finally stand up. I have to walk a little bit to warm up my body.

When I pass by Lady Celi in her rescue squad costume, the former queen gives an impish smile and changes places with the human next to her.

Looking down, Flynn said one word in a stiff voice without raising her head.

“... Congratulations.”

“Yeah. Oh, no, what are you saying? This is sort of your husband’s victory after all.”

She must have not liked something about my response because she stiffened even more and fell silent. She should be more upfront about her happiness. Murata played with his ear with a know-it-all look.

“They’re complicated eh, maiden’s hearts?”

I wonder if he’s remembering Sister Christine’s Sweet Trap era.

Team Caloria’s Representatives were led to meet royalty by a guide with an armband. The heroic three contestants and one supervisor.

We were just in the temple right next to the arena, but for me whose whole body was like jello, long stairways were extremely troublesome. I won’t let my knees give out.

“Your Majesty, shall I lend you my back?”

“It’s okay, Josak. I don’t want to be treated like an old person. Especially since normally we have an absurd difference in age.”

Putting strength into my toe tips, I climbed by stepping firmly on stair after stair. On top of it all, it’s been hard to breathe for some time now. I reflected upon my irresponsibility during the match and am now making up for it by properly wearing my mask. My disguise as Norman Gilbit is perfect, but thanks to that my face is buried under sweat and carbon dioxide.

Be that as it may, our reception is awful. Even if we’re the winning team as a joke, we should be lifted up by a bunch of guys and carried around in a parade. If that’s impossible, they should call back that gondola that flew away and lower us down like in my parents’ wedding... Now that I thought that far, I’m reliving how many times they showed the video recording to me when I was a child. On second thought, forget the gondola.

The audience room we arrived at was the size of a basketball court. The walls, floor, and ceiling were all completely yellow. Of course there are different shades of yellow, but this room is completely lemon yellow. My head started to ache.

“I’ve been in a building that was completely plated in gold before, though.”

“Well Murata, just because you’re knowledgeable about the past doesn’t mean you can brag about the everyday life of French or Russian noblemen.”

“No, Kinkakuji,” my friend from Earth said with a straight face. ^[2]

“Kin...”

“Come to think of it, in my uncle’s bathroom even the inside of the chamber pot was gold.”

Even the former Crown Prince on his 82nd year of noble life commented on it.

Not only have the only metallic and reputable things I’ve collected been a metal bat and a golden angel, I didn’t even get a toy canteen so I lament my lack of life experience. [3]

“Hey, don’t be so discouraged. I haven’t lived in a gold, silver, or bejeweled room even once, Your Majesty. Although I have stayed for seven nights in a torture chamber rank with the smell of blood and feces. Yeah, the guest in the next room went mad and screamed all the time and I could hear his shrieks through the wall.”

I’m really lucky I have a lack of life experience.

A yellow bamboo partition divided the room about a third of the way from the seat of honor. I can see the vague silhouette of a person inside, but I can’t determine their face or gender. I thought I would get the rare chance to see a Mikawa Kenichi^[4] from another world, but unfortunately it’s through a bamboo screen.

“Your Highness, I have brought before you the three representatives from the autonomous region of Caloria, territory of Shimaron, the winners of the Dai Shimaron anniversary celebration ‘Use your knowledge, speed and skill to win! The World’s Best Fighter Tournament,’ plus one spare.”

After saying that in one breath, the guide lowers his posture and waits for words from the other side of the bamboo. But anyway, Murata was being treated as a spare? So if someone didn’t take part, he would have been moved into the empty slot. I’d have liked to see how he would have fought, even if it was just for show.

“Your Highness, I beg an audience...”

When the guide calls out again, a voice like a pretty heroine in an anime comes from behind the blinding, lemon yellow curtain.

“It’s not ‘Your Highness,’ it’s ‘we,’ okay?” [5]

Eh? What’s up with this stereotypical, pretty girl voice? It’s a nasally voice midway between a soprano and an alto that sentence endings like ‘okay’ and ‘you know’ go really well with. If they use ‘ya know’ they’ll end up sounding like Hajime-chan’s papa. [6]

I was surprised at the voice, but the guide was genuinely amazed. He’s standing in a pose with all five fingers on his hands spread out like he’s holding huge, F-cup boobs.

“A-are you not Your Highness but Your Majesty!?”

“That’s right, it’s us.”

“Th-th-th-th-that was berry rude of me!” [7]

The punchline of that bad pun stung. I remember how unbearably hungry I am.

While I wasn’t paying attention, the single guide turned into five and even soldiers with light armor and weapons had entered the room. Most of the humans couldn’t hide their shaking and their foreheads and temples were coated with a cold sweat.

Why are they so panicked? The prince was just a representative after all. Isn't Her Majesty making an appearance a cause for celebration?

Murata tilted his head and whispered to me so no one else could hear.

"I wonder what kind of 'us' they are. My guess is a young girl in glasses."

"Didn't you like the priestess type?"

However, our expectations were completely betrayed. This world is cruel.

Her Majesty with the beautiful girl voice behind the bamboo was revealed because of a report from a soldier. A middle-aged soldier with gentle curls thrust his way through the guards at the door and came close to us. For a moment he seemed surprised as if wondering what sort of ceremony was taking place, but he immediately addresses the guide from before. This guide seems to be quite the important person compared to his job.

"Commander, reporting! According to the report by basement security, it seems that thieves have infiltrated the treasure room."

"What!?"

After giving a response like in a police drama, the guide/commander's hair bristled. But the ones who gave us an impressive reaction weren't just the commander and the soldiers.

"Our box was stolen!?"

Flinging the bamboo screen aside with sinewy fingers, the king of Dai Shimaron in his high-class position jumped out. There weren't even any stones in the way and he stumbles and tips over and he clings to the slats in the bamboo screen with his skinny arms. The Japanese-style, lemon yellow curtain couldn't withstand the weight of an adult and tore.

"Your Majesty Berard!"

With a king from another country falling clumsily before me, I stood stock still unable to even help.

I mean, it wasn't a priestess or a young girl with glasses.

"A, an old man!?"

Anyone would accept that I hesitated upon witnessing a man with a voice like that.

What covered his brittle arms and legs was a yellow cloth with red and blue vertical stripes. It wasn't quite to the degree of Mikawa or Kobayashi^[8], but it was at least as flashy as a Japanese traffic light. His reddish brown hair was in a splendid bowl cut. He had a sharp jaw and hollow cheeks and he had an insane look to him like he would be the lone survivor in any monster movie.

And even though he's a man... and an old man near forty at that, he has a stereotypical, pretty anime girl voice.

This is really uncomfortable.

The leader of Dai Shimaron called His Majesty Berard kept on asking questions even while his vassals helped him stand.

"Hey, the box? Did our box get stolen?"

“It is alright, Your Majesty. Throwing cloth on top of it and pretending it was something of no value was a success. It seems like the thieves took the Maou statue and several ornaments. They did not lay their hands on the box.”

“Maou statue?” His Majesty Berard the Traffic Light’s eyes widened in disappointment. “The one with the elephant head?”

“Yes. We believe they may be followers of a mazoku religion.”

“It wasn’t solid gold or esoteric stone or anything. What are they going to do with something like that?”

Murata had a look of annoyed surprise on his face. Maybe he worshipped Satan in a past life. Could Sister Christine’s Sweet Trap actually have been a seductive way to lead people down an evil path?

When I turn to interrogate him, I caught sight of a young soldier behind him. The man was speaking to himself unconsciously with only his lips moving.

‘It has much more value than a box.’

It seems that the unknown terror that ‘The End of the Wind’ contained was not known to all of the citizens.

“Well anyway, that’s good that the box wasn’t stolen.”

“However, Your Majesty... the guards who let the thieves in are quarrelling over something strange.”

“Something strange? Wha~t?”

The inward curls on the bowl cut swung around wildly. His hair is much shorter than the long hair that Sizemore longed for so even though he’s the king, he’s not of a military class.

Seeing the everyday life of the royal family of a foreign country, we in Team Shimaron completely lost all of our tension. Now that things have turned out this way, my exhaustion and hunger are starting to bother me.

Yamada, bring me a zabuton cushion and some tea. [9]

“Most of the soldiers claim they were hit with a surprise attack, but there are a number of them who were in possession of an inappropriate amount of money... They’re saying that those ones rifled through everyone’s wallets while they were unconscious or they picked it up somewhere, so... among the soldiers in the unit there is a bit of unfairness springing up.”

“What? Unfairness?”

On the other side of the bamboo screen that was only half hanging up, there were still several figures. Are there retainers waiting back there? However, the interest I had after I glanced in that direction was instantly blown away by Berard’s high-pitched yell.

Murata, Wolfram, Josak, and even the soldiers were caught off guard.

“We can’t help if it’s unfair. This world is steeped in unfairness after all! Just look.”

He rolled up his loose sleeves and showed us the upper part of his arm with its joints prominently sticking out. There were two lines etched into the dry, lifeless, yellow skin.

“... A tattoo?”

It looked like there were two parallel, green bandages wrapped around his arm. I couldn't make it out clearly, but it looked like it was a linear and detailed pattern.

"Here, see? See? It looks just like it."

I didn't know what it was being compared to so I could only remain silent.

The king was being uplifted little by little and the tone of his voice rose with him. At the hysterically high pitch, Wolfram's fingers unconsciously moved to his sword.

"Even though it was made just like it, we can't use the box! Our father and our uncle and the ones before them all had it made the same way! Even though we a~ll made our names Berard. Even though our father and our son and those before us were a~ll Berard. Despite that, not a si~ngle one of us could become the key. Even Berard I's arm and Berard II's arm were useless!"

I felt my skin get goosebumps under my overcoat.

The king of Shimaron with his left sleeve rolled up gave a dry laugh that echoed throughout the room.

"It's not fair! It's unfair, unfair! We should have been born into the Weller family as well."

Hearing a word we were familiar with, we stiffened. Why is the royal family of Shimaron talking about Lord Weller's name?

"And then we could have become the key... And then our uncle would treat us kindly..." The insane yelling gradually becomes sobbing. At the same time, the power left his body and he slumped down onto his knees on the ground. "... And our father and younger brother... wouldn't have had to die..."

"This is unsightly, Berard IV."

At the voice of a dignified man that seemed to be a mentor, the man called His Majesty reflexively looked up. He was startled and the pupils in his almost empty eyes shrank.

"Your Highness!"

All of the soldiers stand up straight and face towards the figure beyond the bamboo screen. This newcomer clearly commanded more respect from his vassals.

"... His Highness?" I discreetly ask the walking encyclopedia next to me while covering my mouth with my hand. "Usually His Majesty is higher up than His Highness, right?"

"His Majesty's status is higher."

If I compare the relationship between myself and Wolfram it's easy to understand. From whatever angle you look at us, he's the more distinguished... Oh man. But then again, since the third son's title of prince has 'former' in front of it, even his attitude is a lot more distinguished... Man, oh man.

From behind the half torn down bamboo screen, 'His Highness' appears. Berard IV, sprawled on the floor, shrinks back like a child.

"But I wonder about authority," Murata adds.

This man is probably the one who came down in the flashy, showy gondola. ‘His Highness’ certainly did seem to have more authority than His Majesty. Just by him appearing, the atmosphere in the audience room tensed and not a single person had a dissatisfied look on their face.

“... Uncle...”

I see. He is the uncle that isn’t kind to His Majesty Berard. He looks to be over seventy in human years, but he’s sturdy and doesn’t rely on a cane. Over half of his military style long hair and splendid beard was white.

However, his clothing was like Sachiko Kobayashi and he had wings on his back in Takarazuka style. ^[10]

One eye was cloudy, perhaps from old age, but the other was strong and sharp and reminded me of a bird of prey.

The fourth generation king that should be in the prime of his life did not look like an adult at all when compared to his uncle. He had his arms grabbed and was being moved around like luggage.

“Well then, have I asked His Majesty to bestow his blessing upon the victors?”

His tone of voice was calm and polite, but the reversed power relationship was obvious. His Highness who did not inherit the throne had a higher rank than the current king of Dai Shimaron.

Witnessing the family situation of the royal family abroad, the group of Caloria representatives grew uncomfortable.

“Did I ask, Your Majesty Berard IV?”

“... No... You didn’t ask, Your Highness Berard II.”

Eh, another Bela-chan!?

Stop naming your relatives the same name. The people concerned might understand while talking amongst themselves, but as a guest all you can do is be confused.

“So His Majesty and His Highness are both Berard... Is there some kind of religious reason for that or something?”

At my amazed muttering, Murata chides me in a small voice.

“Shh! I know a bit about their names so I’ll tell you about it later.”

He is the Twin Black Great Sage. He definitely has enough knowledge to cover naming practices.

His Highness the Second stroked his beard with his fingertips and spoke coldly to his nephew.

“Didn’t I say Your Majesty’s job was to sit on the throne and not say anything?”

“You did say that... But we wanted to be of some help to Your Highness.”

“Don’t do unnecessary things!”

After getting yelled at by the robust old man, the man near forty broke down into tears.

The sense of justice inside of me started to rear its head.

Isn't calling your nephew's sincere good will 'unnecessary' particularly narrow-minded? Of course, from a uh, Confucian type of mindset there's no use in arguing and the older person is more important, but even so he is 'His Majesty' after all so how about treating him with more respect? If Berard IV who has an inferiority complex in normal circumstances is dwarfed even more, wouldn't that be bad for the citizens? Oh, and I'm not saying this because I have my own inferiority complex as a rookie king.

"You know-"

"Stop. What's the point of admonishing the morals of an enemy country," Wolfram warned me before I could even get into the beginning of what I wanted to say.

"I apologize, Uncle, but... Lord Weller..."

His Majesty the Fourth who looked like he was going to start crying at any moment shook his bowl cut back and forth.

Just when I was thinking why I felt so much sympathy for him, I realized it was because I could only hear his voice when he was facing away. If I was looking at him head on, no matter how much he cried I would only think he had to grow up.

"We want to be of use to Uncle... being thought of as a parasite is painful... I mean... since Conrart came, Uncle only spends time with him..."

All three of them held me back as I almost started to run forward unconsciously. With both of my sleeves and the back hem of my shirt firmly held in place, I couldn't run forward and ask the uncle and nephew any questions.

Say it again! Berard IV, again!

What about Lord Weller Conrart?

However, I didn't need to ask the sobbing man. The other person behind the bamboo screen walked out into the center of the room to soothe the king.

"Don't worry about me. His Highness the Second does not think of you as a parasite," he said softly as he placed a hand on the frail back of the king only in name. He even had a refreshing smile on his face.

The man who had called me Your Majesty until recently. No matter how many times I told him to stop, he always ended up saying it out of habit.

"Now, Your Majesty, you should rest in your room. His Highness will take care of the rest of the ceremony."

I felt as if every single last drop of blood in my body rushed out through my feet.

I glared at the third person who was behind the bamboo screen.

I see, Lord Weller Conrart.

"... Your new 'Your Majesty' is that man, huh?"

I was supposed to be keeping calm, but my body wouldn't stop shaking.

Back to Chapter 3	Return to MA Series	Forward to Chapter 5
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References

1. The word for statue in Japanese (zou 像) is pronounced the same as elephant (zou 象)
2. Kinkakuji is a temple in Kyoto that is plated in gold.
3. The golden angel refers to an emblem on the 'beak' (spout) of a box of Morinaga Choco Balls. You can see that here. The toy canteen is also a Morinaga product which is a can with a bunch of toys and fun stuff packed into it.
4. Mikawa Kenichi is an Enka singer famous for his gaudy costumes.
5. The 'we' used here is the royal 'we'
6. Reference to a manga series called Hajime-chan ga Ichiban (Hajime is Number One). It's about a girl named Hajime who has quintuplets for younger brothers that got scouted out by a music agency and she's kind of like the mother to them.
7. So the real pun here was a play on the past, humble form of 'to do' (itashimashita) and italian pasta (itameshi pasuta).
8. Sachiko Kobayashi. Also a singer famous for her gaudy costumes.
9. This is a reference to Takao Yamada who is on the comedy show Shouten which is about a group of comedians who compete to make the best jokes. They're awarded zabuton seat cushions to sit on or they get them taken away depending on the jokes they make and whoever is sitting on ten stacked zabuton first wins. Yamada was the one who carried the cushions.
10. Takurazuka is a famous theater group composed of all women. Their performances are dramatic and fancy and part of their draw is that all of the roles are played by women.

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MaruMA:Volume 8:Chapter 5

From Baka-Tsuki

Chapter 5

What happened to him in the few dozen days I hadn't seen him?

Lord Weller Conrart had the same yellow and white military uniform on from before and was sitting in a seat on Shimaron's side with his long legs crossed. Right behind the uncle of the king of Shimaron, His Highness Berard II.

According to my bad math skills, it's only been a month or so since we were separated. Despite that, he looks a little older than before. Although, it's so subtle that I can't really express it in years.

"Representatives of Caloria, this is His Highness Berard II of the kingdom of Dai Shimaron. Be respectful and stand in waiting," the guide/commander told us in a great haste.

Even if you didn't nervously tell us that we understand our position.

Right now I am only the mandated overseer of a territory of Shimaron, Norman Gilbit in a silver mask. The entire continent was subjugated by both kingdoms. In a matter of speaking, the old man in front of me is my master's uncle and is in actuality, my boss.

That being said, I don't want to kneel or prostrate myself before him or lick his boots. Kissing the old man's hand would be even worse. Especially Conrad... He might not be the man I know anymore, but... I didn't want him to see me act submissively to the man he chose as his new master.

However, if I reveal that I'm not Norman here, not just Flynn but everyone in Caloria will suffer.

I compromise and lightly bow my head. A simple greeting won't hurt my Made in Japan pride. Trying to make myself sound like a young feudal lord, I offer up salutations to start.

It's a phrase taken straight from a New Year's card.

"... Your Highness Berard II... uh, I am glad to see that you are in good health."

I've never even recited the athlete's oath of fair play for the summer tournament so I couldn't think of what to say to royalty. Your Highness the Second, have you been well lately? And more importantly, what's with 'the Second'? Are you a member of the Diet or an actor or something?

When I turn to Muraken who I can count on in a pinch, he was suppressing a yawn of boredom.

Amazing.

"Brave warriors representing the territory of Shimaron, Caloria, first I offer my blessings to you for your victory in 'Use your knowledge, speed, and skill to win! The World's Best Fighter Tournament' otherwise known as the World's Best." Even if he is raging on the inside over the humiliation of his country being defeated, he could not

lose his rationality on the surface. “Your daring courage and strategic fighting even struck the hearts of us Shimaron citizens.”

His beard moved while he talked. I focused on that pleasant up and down motion and desperately avoided focusing my gaze on the person waiting behind him.

“Thank you. All of my team members cooperated together and moved towards victory as one.”

I wonder if this sort of baseball tournament talk is okay.

The old man made a slight gesture with his hand and a petite man that seemed to be an attendant came forward.

“A toast to bless the Caloria representatives.”

Before I could say that I don’t drink alcohol because I’m a sportsman, Wolfram, Josak, and I were each handed their own cup. It was a stone liqueur glass with a stem. The amount inside was less than my mother uses for cooking so I gave up.

“That is the ceremonial water known as the Holy Water of Gillesby.”

Luckily, it wasn’t alcohol.

“It is the water from the well that the last king of the boastful Gillesby family, one of the three royal families of old, is said to have despaired and thrown himself into.”

“Ugh.”

Wait, wait, wait. He’s not saying he threw himself in. He’s saying that he was said to have thrown himself in. Those few words are very important.

“By the way, his corpse never surfaced.”

“Uegh.”

That’s probably because there was never a corpse to begin with. It would be childish to refuse to participate in a ceremony because I was swayed by a disgusting legend. I can’t spoil the host’s mood. Prepare yourself, Shibuya Yuuri. From a worldwide point of view, even the water in the ocean is full of corpses. Like plankton.

“Th-then I’ll help myself...”

When I resigned myself and raised the glass to my mouth, Josak grabbed my arm.

“It’s something like a lucky charm, You-... Lord Norman. If you don’t mind...”

“Huh?”

He immediately swaps my cup out. It’s the one that Josak took a sip from. I reflexively start to ask why, but I instantly remember the reason. He quickly tasted it for poison and handed it to me after he verified its safety.

“But that’s...”

... doubting the important Highness who handed out the drinks. It won’t be seen as a rude act?

“We want to offer the most auspicious cup to our leader. Will Your Highness Berard II sympathize with that sentiment?”

“Of course. Now, Lord Norman Gilbit, please drain the cup.”

I was wondering just what was so auspicious about it when I noticed that there was a red object inside the water.

“Um, this... did someone’s pet goldfish end up in here...?”

It’s flapping its tail energetically.

“No, it is a lucky charm. Feel free to drink it in one gulp.”

“It’s a goldfish!”

By some chance did Josak switch cups with me because he didn’t want to drink a leaping fish? I’m about to doubt even my precious subordinate. Okay, prepare yourself even more than you did before, Shibuya Yuuri. This is a test, Maou. This is a test, Norman Gilbit.

“... ng... uck... blegh.”

It’s hooooorible, I’m alrea-... reflexes are terrible. I downed it all in one go so it wouldn’t hit my teeth so it didn’t actually feel like I drank Mr. Goldfish. However, it definitely wasn’t a ceremony I would ever want to participate in again.

“Amazing, Shibuya. The flame of a tiny little life is going out inside of you.”

“Stooooop. I want to cry I feel so bad.”

“Now then, Caloria representative, Lord Norman Gilbit.” His Old Highness started speaking again so I once again focused on his beard. I absolutely want to look at the person behind His Highness, but I desperately restrain myself from doing so. “That was truly an impressive victory. Especially that getaway at the last curve with the ‘seep.’ It made me want to reopen the races for the first time in a while.”

Oh, is His Highness Berard II from the same village as the Sheep Master Miss Mary?

“And then the decisive battle in the third round, your fighting prowess was riveting. I could not hear your voice from the high up place I was seated or through the glass, but what was that? Was it majutsu that could control the weather simply by chanting a curse?”

“That was the rumored super majutsu. It will destroy even a new building in Odaiba.”

However, the days where people would think it was a curse are long gone. Now they would just think it was the Northern Kantou dialect. ^[1]

“However, how would Lord Norman, the mandated overseer of Caloria, be able to use majutsu? I have heard that maryoku is gained from the quality of a soul, not through religious training and discipline.” I feel like Berard’s right eye that had clouded with age is glaring at me quite sharply. “It is written in the regulations that one out of the three representatives must be from the concerned region so if the other two happened to be mazoku it would not be considered a violation of the rules. However, I had not heard that you were born as a mazoku.”

“Norman Gilbit’s... in other words, my Caloria was the origin of the Wincotts. Your Highness has some knowledge of this, I assume. You have requested the Wincott poison from none other than my own wife, after all.”

His Highness’s eyes narrowed. He must have thought that the agreement would be kept confidential even when it came to her spouse.

“As you know, the Wincott family crossed the ocean and became a distinguished family of mazoku in a new land. However, why do people say that there aren’t any left on the continent who shared their blood!? It seems that my soul and body were abundantly endowed with the qualities of the Wincotts. Humans like that are born on the rare occasion.”

I’m full of lies. As many lies as there are gods.

“I see. So then that is why you could use something like majutsu in a place controlled by the particles that obey houjutsu like this. What a truly enviable story. You did not retreat from having von Grantz Adalbert as your opponent and instead showed admirable courage. That man Adalbert just showed up and defeated all of the soldiers chosen to be representatives through the severe, kingdom-wide selection process. Cornering him into being unable to continue fighting was quite impressive. Thanks to that,” His Highness Berard II glanced at Lord Weller. “Lord Weller from the famous fencing family lost his opportunity to take part. Which reminds me, I could not hear from above, but I wonder what you talked about with Conrart before the match. Just what exactly did you agree upon? Or, Lord Norman, had you been acquainted with our countryman Conrart Weller somewhere previously?”

“Previously, huh...”

Even though I had decided that I absolutely would not look at him, my gaze ends up meeting Lord Weller’s. He has his arms crossed as he leans back in his chair and he is twisting his foot around irregularly in his military boots drawing senseless designs in the air.

He asked something ridiculous like if me and Conrad were acquaintances. I’ll tell you, you mean old man.

Conrad and I are...

On my left side, Wolfram put a hand to his forehead and looked down. The color of his face hasn’t changed much, but his ears are bright red. Probably in anger or sadness.

“... Not personally,” Norman Gilbit with his mask shook his head slowly while grinding his teeth. “I simply felt that I had seen him in another country’s military. I had thought that maybe he was a soldier somewhere else before he came here.”

“Is that so?”

Lord Weller let an emotionless smile appear on his face and gave a short answer to the power of Dai Shimaron. “I have been a soldier for a long time.”

“When I saw him,” I was clenching my fists so hard my nails were painfully digging into my palms. The skin on my neck that I had gotten healed was pulled tight with the pulsing of blood in my veins. “When I saw him, he was calling someone besides Berard IV ‘Your Majesty.’”

“Yes.”

I stared dumbfounded at his long fingers threaded together on his lap. When I’m crouched behind home base, my job is to read the minds of the other players. I’m an amateur, not even a half decent catcher, so I can’t read into all of my friends’ and enemies’ minds, but I should have at least been able to see a little bit into the person closest to me.

I can’t reach Conrad anymore.

“I ended up calling him that. My previous master always told me not to refer to him as His Majesty.”

To think that wish would be granted like this.

“As for you... I intend to strive to not call you that as well.”

Murata is looking at me. He’s probably worried that I’ll lose my cool and explode. Wolfram took a half a step towards me and leaned his shoulder against my left arm. It was as if his body heat that had suddenly risen with his emotions was flowing right into me.

They don’t have to worry. I’m not going to lose control of myself while I’m Norman Gilbit.

“Well then, let us move on to the main event.”

Berard II had no interest in Shin Makoku except as a hypothetical enemy so he had no concern about our circumstances and simply changed the subject. He probably got tired of praising countries other than his own.

After being brought here right after the match, Team Caloria was near dizziness with fatigue and hunger. Nevertheless, I might be better off than the other two. Even though it was small, I had eaten a fish.

I might vomit. Or rather, cry.

“I am sure you have heard of the blessing bestowed upon the victors. Dai Shimaron, in our graciousness, praise good effort and will grant the wish of the victor. However, you are Caloria’s representatives. Take care to make a request relating to your affiliated region. Have you already reached a decision?”

Most of the representatives likely decided what they were going to wish for before they entered. The only ones who can say that participating means something are three outsiders who do not belong to a territory of Shimaron. Wolfram and Josak are bona fide third parties, but in my case it is a bit complicated.

I am the rookie Maou of Shin Makoku, and at times I am the feudal lord of Caloria. I have a duty to the currently dead Norman Gilbit and at the same time I cannot choose something that would have negative consequences for the mazoku.

Before this tournament, we had decided in advance. Caloria’s power and visibility would rise and one threat to Shin Makoku would disappear from this world.

It was the plan to take back the worst and ultimate weapon in all of history that Dai Shimaron was in possession of, the ‘End of the Wind.’

I took in a deep breath and said the long awaited words while holding down my dizziness. I wanted to get it over with quickly. If I don’t do that and start thinking things through carefully, I’ll end up saying something stupid like asking for Lord Weller to be released.

As long as he wasn’t there under the compulsion of someone else, my wish would never be fulfilled.

“We the representatives of Caloria wish for the End of-”

“By the way, the master I served before,” Lord Weller interrupts as if to forcefully block my wish. “Perhaps by praying to heaven, but he had been blessed with the opportunity to get his hands on a powerful weapon.”

“Oh? How powerful was it?”

Who is he talking about? What episode was this?

Berard took the bait immediately. Light returns to his cloudy right eye and his abundant beard wriggled around. So even though he had gotten his hands on the 'End of the Wind' he was thinking of gathering even stronger weapons?

The desire of humans is endless; there is no way to cure their unease. Even if I try thinking up a philosophical sentence like that, it doesn't change that I myself am a big lump of desire.

His Old Highness with the grey hair and beard was completely infatuated with Lord Weller's story.

"If utilized, it had enough power to annihilate an entire city. However, only one person was able to use it and if someone else held it, it was simply a ghastly piece of metal."

"It is a weapon that has little use. I doubt that it would be of any use even if he has it. Although, there would be no problem if they also had control of the 'key' to manipulate it like us."

"I see."

"What, Yu-... Norman Gilbit?" Wolfram corrects himself by using the full name in an unnatural way. The problem is that he's too beautiful to play the part of a stray mazoku mercenary hired by a human.

"I know why Conrad is here."

"We can't discard the possibility that he's been brainwashed."

"That's not it. He's the 'key' so he is someone that Shimaron needs."

Berard II is curious about the weapon that has enough power to destroy an entire city. Left out of that conversation, we continue to talk in low voices to each other.

"The reason that Dai Shimaron bought the Wincott poison from Flynn and attacked us and turned Günter into Okiku is because they needed the key. Isn't that right? If they have his left arm and the Wincott poison that lets them control people at will, they can use the box whenever they need to."

"Which means that Conrad is under the control of the poison right now? No, I can't agree with that conclusion. In the first place, the only ones who can control a victim of the Wincott poison are members of the von Wincott family. My older brother investigated all of them, but he apparently knows where all of the members with strong blood are. Not a single one of them was on this continent. And then there are the victims of the poison... those afflicted aren't in such good health. I've seen Snow Günter with my own eyes. I know how dreadful Snow and Okiku are."

"Ah, I see."

I remember the corpse-like state that Lord von Christ was in and a chill runs down my spine. I've never seen Snow Günter, but if Wolfram is saying this much it must have been particularly terrifying. If I can, I'd like to avoid seeing that for the rest of my life.

"He is here of his own volition. At the very least, that's what it looks like to me," Murata says mysteriously as he pushes up his glasses with his index finger. Of course, he's not wearing his glasses. It's a habit his fingers just remember from years of experience. "So as long as Lord Weller himself doesn't agree, no matter what anyone says he probably won't come back."

But why did you have to get the key and box together in Shimaron, the enemy of Shin Makoku? Didn't you make a vow? When you were the same age as me, you vowed to live the rest of your life as a mazoku.

“... Either way, I’m getting the box back. If I do then... maybe Conrad...”

“Don’t misunderstand.”

“Eh?”

Wolfram, likely having feelings the most similar to mine out of everyone else here, was staring me straight in the face. He slowly unclenches his fists, spreads his fingers and folds his arms with deliberate movements. Standing with his back slightly arched, his left foot is pointing toward Lord Weller. I’m kind of relentless with this, but is his back alright?

As for me, I was wiping the sweat off of my palms onto my thighs and ended up just staring at my feet. Underneath my borrowed mask, I was doing nothing but sighing pitifully.

“I said, don’t misunderstand.”

“What? I’m not misunderstanding...”

“Did you enter into the World’s Best to get Conrad back?”

“That’s...”

“Of course it doesn’t concern me, but what did you promise? Didn’t you promise something to that brazen woman and those dirty people at the harbor and those unsanitary children who ran with snot running out of their noses while seeing you off?”

“... I did.”

I promised that I would fight against Dai Shimaron with honor as the representative of Caloria.

“Is it okay for the spoils of that being Conrad who disappeared?”

“But Wolf...”

“I feel the same.”

Of course he feels the same. His beloved brother is serving the person in power of an enemy country. It’s probably painful that he’s not trying to come back. If he could, as a little brother he would probably like to use the power of the victor to drag him back home even by force.

“But that’s not our right. It’s the right of the man whose mask you’re wearing.”

No, to say it more precisely, it is the right of those who live in Caloria and love it.

“If you’re saying that getting the box is for Conrad, then that’s a misunderstanding on your part. Don’t forget whose victory this is. Don’t forget who you are.”

That’s right. If I decided to play the part of someone else, I have to play it perfectly until the curtain comes down. The laurels that Norman Gilbit has gained belong to the people of Caloria. If I want honor, it is for his country. If I want the box, it has to be for the people.

So I can proudly return to those who saw me off at the harbor that day.

“... However, the king I pledged my loyalty to did not think to acquire that weapon.”

The conversation that had gotten conspicuously louder reached my ears as I lifted my head. With his fingers resting on his long, crossed legs, Conrad continued as if telling a story to a child.

“He gave the important part that could be considered a detonator to his subordinate and disposed of it.”

“What a foolish decision! That king and his country deserve to be cursed!”

Unbeknownst to me, wrinkles had appeared between my eyebrows.

Well excuse me. I am that foolish king. And besides, won't you be cursed? It's always been said that if you curse someone you should dig two graves. May all the goods in the treasure room in the country of this old His Highness turn into cursed objects.

“It can't be determined right away whether it was a wise decision or not... However, that was a decision very much like the young king. I still believe that it was the best decision at the time.”

The one who arbitrarily decided to not return with the maken Morgif in working condition was me.

Conrad hadn't made a single objection.

“...Hmph...”

What do you mean ‘I still believe?’ You went across the ocean all by yourself. And now you're talking calmly with a man you might have fought with in the past.

I lift my heavy arm and rub Norman Gilbit's mask with my fingers. I can't see how it looks while I have it on, so I tried feeling with my fingers and nails and palms just how his face was.

“... Hey, listen.”

With touch rather than sight, I verified the face of the late feudal lord of Caloria. And then I raised my voice to the best of my ability and got Berard II's attention back.

“Listen!”

“Ah, have you decided on your prize?”

“Yes, I decided. But it's not a thing. It's not something you can hold in your hand.”

“Eh?” Josak asked, caught off guard. He had thought all along that I would request the box.

Wolfram stared straight at his brother and I glared at His Majesty the Beard as intently as I could.

Murata lets out an annoyed but slightly amused sigh and mutters that he thought it would turn out like this.

“I, Norman Gilbit, wish for the independence of Caloria and eternal nonaggression against it.”

Back to Chapter 4	Return to MA Series	Forward to Chapter 6
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References

1. This is kind of a joke~ People from Yuuri's area tend to have a hard time understanding other dialects and this dialect in particular is a bit strange to them. So, if someone in the city heard someone chanting a curse, they'd probably just assume it was a dialect they didn't understand.

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MaruMA:Volume 8:Chapter 6

From Baka-Tsuki

Chapter 6

The peculiar group of four nervously pressed up against a wall.

"Th-th-th-this has gone really bad!"

An innumerable amount of guards were running through the hallway. Dacascos took his eye away from the keyhole and turned to his other three companions. He could still see a distinct, round afterimage in his right eye.

"This is bad. It can't get any worse than this. It's like the time I messed up at my wife's parents' house."

"I see, Mr. Dacky's wife is a daughter of excellent parentage. Then her cheeks must surely be the color of red tea as if she is about to be vexed and her lips are like the crimson of a fish egg in the deep ocean."

Even in times like these, Stefan Fanberlain was not failing to provide words of praise for women.

"Are you complementing my Blin? Ah, I have to write that one down as soon as possible."

Sizemore muttered 'don't do it' to himself, but Dacascos, lost in thought in his mental notebook, did not hear the words from Sizemore's heart.

"Leaving that aside, the problem is how to get past these elite guards."

The first half of the journey was so easy they didn't even think to be worried about going back. The treasure at their feet was covered by a green cloth. It appeared to be an icebox for drinks at first glance, but with security like this they wouldn't be able to avoid interrogation and if the guards removed the cloth and looked at the box, that would be it.

After all, right before they carried it out, there were huge white letters spelling 'End of the Wind' written right on it. Just like a child's toy chest. As an emergency measure, they painted the whole thing white with nearby paint. The letters were hidden, but now it smelled strongly of paint.

"... Is this really the armory toilet? It's so foul-smelling I feel like it's bad for my heart."

"Yeah, but this thing isn't a box of candy so we can't just go carrying it around with the name written right on it, Captain. Ah!"

A bug fell out of the air right in front of Dacascos's face.

"If there are this many pursuers then that means that this Maou statue must be quite valuable. Fufufu, I've gotten some faith in my appraisal skills. Then I shall bestow this statue upon Căcilie. She deserves works of art that have true value!"

"But its head is an elephant from any angle," Sizemore commented. Using his good common sense, he wondered just why someone would give the previous Maou a statue of a Maou. But as expected, the voice in his heart did not reach. "However, everyone, we cannot stay in this room doing nothing. Our mission is to deliver the swapped box to His Majesty's group. We can't stay stranded here forever."

"That's right. To see Cäcilie's pleased face as well, we must deliver this to our client."

"Yeah, a field trip doesn't end until we get home!"

There was one person who was always easygoing: Dacascos.

Waiting for a break in the foot traffic, they sneak out of the room. They make a beeline for the side entrance. Even though they want to get out as fast as possible, since they aren't soldiers they'll stick out if they run inside of the temple. Now they need to persevere and creep forward.

Every time they pass someone, they fear that they'll ask about the box. However most of the passersby were indifferent and there was no need to put them to sleep.

Finally the side entrance came into view. They could even see the darkness outside through the glass.

Snow was still falling, but the seats were filled with drunken spectators celebrating. In the light of the now fewer torches, the workers on the grounds were starting to clean up.

"Ah, Captain, Mr. Fanfan, just a little farther. Just a little farther and we'll get out of this te-"

"Hey," a giant soldier that came around the corner calls out and stops them with one hand.

"I-is there a problem, Mr. Soldier?" Sizemore answers as their representative. All of them are staring at the ground. Half of the soldier's face was covered in a beard so the Captain was frankly a bit jealous. He was a man with quite the strong hair roots.

"About that box..."

Ack!

When they look, Fanberlain's hands had gotten under the cloth and the white surface was peeking out.

"That box, who's lost, eh?"

"When you say l... o... st..."

"The casket you know, yeah. It's white so it was a boy, right? How sad, yeah. He was still so little..."

Half Beard Man's face crumpled up and he looked like he was about to cry any moment. Appearances can be deceiving. He was apparently a kind soldier who loved children. Be that as it may... The four of them were secretly relieved. To think that the box would be mistaken for a boy's casket. So the reason that no one had accosted them and they made it to this point in one piece wasn't because of their successful plan. They had just been mistaken for a funeral procession.

"Oh, it's sad huh, yeah. Children's funerals are really painful huh, yeah. My younger brother died in the war when he was ten, you know. He was in a pure white casket just like this one yeah, yes... Shimaron burned the whole village you know, yeah... Actually, actually I hate war, you know. The ones who always get hurt are women and children yeah, yes. But now I'm a soldier for the country that killed my brother, yeah... I can't ever face my ten year old brother who burned to ash, you know."

The soldier blew his nose in a handkerchief and then balled it up and stored it away again. Then, he took out an insect husk and placed it on top of the green cloth.

"If it's alright, I'll give this to you okay, yeah. My little brother loved laughing cicadas yeah, yes. He loves playing pranks, but if you meet my little bro on the other side, have some fun with him okay, yeah."

The soldier sniffled once again and walked away with his shoulders slumped. The four watch the yellow-clad figure leave and once again pick up the box.

"I kind of feel bad because we tricked him," said Dacascos.

"Yeah." The soldier had said that his village was burned and the women and children died. Sizemore's post was on the sea so he had little opportunity to encounter civilian casualties. Those who did battle on the sea were mostly battleships and attacks on civilian transport ships were forbidden. "... It is painful for children to get involved."

"I of course do business even in war," Fanfan said in a strained voice as he pushed the door open. He was holding down his anger. His voice was the complete opposite of when he was praising beauty. "I do not want to introduce an inelegant weapon like this into battles between countries. It was written in the Sward News that the eastern earthquake was caused by a box similar to this one. Also that the damage to the river and harbor and the castle town was enormous. A weapon that destroys beautiful things is not something that humans should use."

The white ice crystals fluttering down in the darkness land on top of the box one at a time.

"... I wonder what His Majesty thinks." Sizemore lifted his face to sky and gazed at the stars that had doubled in number.

What settled the matter wasn't Norman Gilbit's speech or His Highness Berard's broad-mindedness but the brief comment of the head referee from the final match who was invited to the victor's dinner.

"If the wish of this person is not granted, the International Refereeing Alliance will not stand by."

Even in a foreign world with swords and magic, this special NGO, the International Refereeing Alliance, seems to be quite influential. Even the chief power in Dai Shimaron could not defy the words of the chief referee.

After a meal that left me still hungry, I hurried over to the side of the chief referee.

"Thank you, referee! I can't even express in words how grateful I am."

Mr. Stubbly twisted his lips into a broad grin. "It was a rather amusing fight. For the first time in a while I had fun overseeing a match."

"No, Mr. Stubbly, that's really too much..."

Especially since I hardly remember any of it.

"The split personality under the mask was quite the entertaining plot twist. However, I think it would be safe to avoid playing an excessively grandiose character from now on. Isn't claiming to be the Maou because you can use magic a little bit too simple? Oh, but I promise I won't reveal your special 'Mr. Change-y' fighting style to anyone. Please be at ease. Referees are under a pledge of confidentiality, after all."

"... Confidentiality..."

Mr. Stubby placed his middle and index finger against his temple and bid me farewell as if he were saying 'see ya!' In any case, the International Refereeing Alliance is incredible. The International Express Referee is incredible. He named my fighting style 'Mr. Change-y.' That was amazingly fast.

"M-Mr. Change-y..."

After dinner, we were led out into the main hall in the temple and the atmosphere naturally changed into a friendly party.

I hadn't heard that there would be these kinds of festivities so I had wanted to get to bed as soon as possible, but the people in charge of the ceremony filled with Shimaronians who were in high spirits for some reason would not allow the guests of honor to be excused. It seems that they were from regions that were turned into territories of Shimaron. They gave us their blessings for defeating the Shimaron mainland in the final contest as if it were their own victory.

I hurriedly wash my body in a barrel with a hole in it (an easy way to experience life as a trainee monk) and put on the clothes that the host country provided. According to my general knowledge up until now, the team jersey was okay for the farewell parties and social gatherings in international games.

That being said, tonight I was in the hands of a stylist and was lectured severely with girly words.

"Huuh? Black? Did you say black!? Hey old lady, did you hear that? Did you like, hear that? You absolutely just cannoot wear black nowadays. Black is like, the color that the big, super terrible king of the mazoku wears, you know? You've got such a cute face so black is out. Okaaay, let's get these glasses and hat off of- uwah!?"

After seeing the color of my eyes and hair, she (he?) fainted for a full five minutes with her eyes wide open. Both of her hands were spread wide open next to her face as if frozen in surprise and she was motionless. Thinking I should grab the opportunity, I dug out a green knit from the closet on my own. It looks warm. Although as I was putting my legs into a pair of stretchy pants, the stylist couldn't take it anymore and recovered.

".... Noooooo waaaay! Hey, do you wear knits like that all the time? Ugh, I can't believe it. Look old lady, look. It's unbelieeevable! A lame outfit like that with jet black hair is unforgivable!"

After saying that to the female assistant, she walks over while swaying her thin hips. Without even asking, she pets my hair and peers right into my face.

"Oh myyy, they say that it's a forbidden color, but now that I look at it it's gorgeous. Beautiful. Manly... Spellbinding... But that hair might, like, throw everyone at the banquet into a panic. Although I wouldn't mind being taken down! But if you'd like, should I dye it real fast? Chestnut or light brown. Hey. Old lady, bring the metal basin! It's aalright, Mr. Manly. I won't tell anyone about your hair color. After all, like, those in the beauty industry are under a pledge of confidentiality."

Even stylists take pledges of confidentiality! Naturally, the green pants I picked were rejected and they laid out an ivory tuxedo on the bed for me that was embarrassing just to look at. On top of that, there were five extra layers of lace on the collar and sleeves and an excessive amount of ornamentations were added to it. I reluctantly put the suit on and I was thrown out into the banquet.

In the blink of an eye, I was completely surrounded by dressed up nobles and rich people.

"You're the leader of the Caloria representatives, aren't you? Unfortunately I was unable to watch in the stands and instead watched from the seats designated for noble visitors, but... that snow in the final match was amazing!"

"I was wondering what sort of person Norman Gilbit was and it turns out he is unexpectedly childish and cute looking. Hey Lord Norman, what did you wish for?"

"Honestly, the wish of a gentleman is obvious."

"If it's like I imagine, he's quite the precocious child."

World Peace, becoming an official catcher, my team's victory. Those are my personal wishes, but they might be too obvious.

Wondering why only women were surrounding me, I noticed that the men had gathered into their own corners in the room and were completely absorbed in gossiping about the region that had beaten Shimaron.

"Wass wrong, Yuuri. Arentcha gonna drink anythin'?"

Wolfram was wearing a dark green tuxedo. So we're tuxedo buddies. Unlike me, Wolfram is a certified pretty boy so no matter what outfit he wears it looks good on him. Even so, it's a surprisingly simple and normal outfit for him.

"That looks good on you, Your Excellency Wolfram."

"Youuu too... bwahaha! Look at that frilly collar!"

"I shouldn't have shown you."

When I turned around I saw Josak coming over. His long arms were exposed from his shoulders down and he had dangerously high slits all the way up to his thighs. As I stared in disbelief, he started flirting in a husky voice.

"Oh Your Majesty, if you stare so intently I might get a bit daring~."

"Wh-why are you in women's clothes..."

He was wearing a rouge and dark red dress that went well with his undone, orange hair. Gurrier suddenly turned serious.

"I was having withdrawal. To be honest, I couldn't wear filthy and boring men's clothes to a magnificent banquet. Ah but Your-... you Lord Norman look nice. If Lady Celi finds you, she'll absolutely eat you up... Oh, Your Majesty, do not take food from any plate that no other guest has eaten from. Designate me as the poison testing lady."

"Understood."

The hall was so bright you wouldn't think it wasn't electricity. There were lights that gave off various colors and they reflected off of the polished, stone floor making the scene as dazzling as the middle of the day.

I've been to a party once before. It was a small cocktail party on a boat.

At that time there weren't any nobles or social rankings so I could easily greet everyone.

I was even the partner for a sweet young girl's first dance.

As a baseball brat from Japan, I hadn't learned those so-called ballroom dances. It was because of Conrad's impromptu dance training that I managed to get through that night.

"....."

I almost said his name and heaved a self-deprecating sigh. I completely ruin the meticulous hair style I had by threading my fingers through my bangs.

A performance by something like a piano started. At every measure a new instrument joined in and the solo performance became its own little orchestra. This place will probably also start changing into a ballroom. There were even a few impatient couples standing near the orchestra who were starting to sway.

I was leaning against the pale yellow wall with an empty glass in hand. It's been over a week since I had had a proper night's sleep. It was all I could do to not yawn.

Now that I think of it, what sort of costume was Murata forced into? That fake blonde hair of his was fading and was about to become an unidentifiable color. He couldn't find his color contacts anywhere in the room. I wonder if he's the only one who got to stay cooped up in his room and is relaxing in luxury. If so, I won't forgive him. We're lacking sleep too. I wonder if I should go find him.

Shifting my gaze to the front of the room, I caught a glimpse of shining silver.

"... Flynn?"

The glass that I had unconsciously let go of hit the floor and I heard it shatter. Pushing my way through the people chatting amicably with each other, I head to where the silver hair glittered.

The wife of the victor and representative of Caloria was surrounded by unwelcome nobles and was standing there bored.

"Flynn!"

After looking back and forth twice before finding me, her expression brightens all at once. It was so excessively happy that I slowed down.

"I'm relieved, Captain. I got separated from that lady."

"You came here with Lady Celi? Anyway, didn't I say to stay on the ship because it was dangerous? Despite me saying that, why did you brazenly come all the way to the capital? Well, I'm not mad. I'm not mad, but..."

"I'm sorry... but I wanted to see you off so I pleaded with the captain and Mr. Dacascos to let me tag along as they ran parallel to you."

"Well, I guess it's okay if nothing happened to you."

"It was quite pleasant. At least until I came here."

She lightly clenches her white-gloved hands and twists her mouth into a humble smile.

Flynn Gilbit's thick, silver hair is done up in the back and her smooth white neck is exposed. The tufts of hair on each side of her head hung down all the way past her shoulders to her chest. The several partial augite stones hung around her neck changed color depending on the light.

Her peacock blue dress was a little loose so her breasts didn't fill it out. Despite that, it went well with the color of her eyes and looked so good on her that there was nothing better for her to wear.

"... Is that by any chance Lady Celi's?"

I shouldn't have asked that. At that question that ruined the mood, Flynn answered without hesitation while laughing.

"Of course. There is no way that I would have something as fine as this."

"It's my favorite color."

The silver showed up nice on blue. If Her Majesty the Previous Maou Lady Cäcilie were here, she would say 'My, Your Majesty, in times like these just give a brief comment' and would have given me an excellent passing grade. Women at dances are always waiting to hear those words. Very short and simple.

"... Ah, Flynn... Come over here."

I grab her arm wrapped in a silk glove and lead her over to the window. On the other side of the glass, the snow is still falling. We looked down at the now deserted arena lit by the moon in the cloudy sky and a few torches. Just a few hours before, I was floundering around out there.

But now everything was over.

We were victorious.

"We won," I said after grabbing both of her hands and bringing my face to her level.

"I heard. Congratulations."



"Why are you being so respectful all of a sudden?"

"So, did you get your wish? Did the ownership of the box officially become yours?"

"No, there's something you have to see. Umm, here. I wonder if this signature is okay." I grasp the folded paper in my inside pocket. It was thick and bulky and I got frustrated as I tried to pull it out. "Here it is."

Not telling her what it was on purpose, I handed her the official document. Flynn removed the glove on her dominant hand and unfolded the paper with thin, white fingers. Her eyes got wider the more she read and her hand holding the paper started to tremble.

"... This..."

The blood ran out of her face from excitement. It seems she's at a loss for words.

"We received Caloria."

"... Captain, that..."

"So you're still calling me Captain."

I feel like I just had a huge success with my secret baseball trick. My cheeks relax against my will and I can't even pretend to be a cool guy anymore.

"But you know, right here, this signature is in my writing of unidentifiable origin so it probably doesn't look much like the real person's. Would you mind saying as his former wife that since he's ill he can't move his hands as well as he wishes?"

"You wished for Caloria?"

"That's right."

Flynn's voice was tearful. She's been living in severe conditions for a long time so this is likely the first time in a while that she's been dressed up perfectly, but sadly it doesn't look like she'll be able to avoid tear streaks.

"Caloria is... free?"

"Yes."

The female feudal lord thrust the paper back at me and covered her face with both hands. As she lowered her head, her silver hair smoothly draped around the line of her jaw. After trying to speak and failing a few times, she finally regains her voice.

"... Thank you."

"Yeah. Don't cry."

"I don't... know what to say."

A rude guy pushed his way between us while the two of us were talking little by little as we practically leaned against the window. He had lots of hair peculiar to the soldiers here, but he was wearing a tuxedo like me. He was young, manly, and tall. He also seemed to be quite polite with ladies.

"Excuse me, may you invite me for a song?"

Saying 'invite me' to a girl seems to be a Shimaron-style dance invitation.

Flynn gently wipes her tears with her glove and rejected the young noble.

"I'm sorry, I won't invite anyone."

"Well, then invite me... I'm bad though," I say.

Leaving the annoying man behind, I grasp Flynn's hand and lead her into the hall. At the brightly lit center, there were already quite a few people enjoying a waltz.

"Captain!"

"I've been meaning to say this for a while." Truthfully, I have no knowledge of dancing. That's not it. "Truthfully, I'm not a captain. Did you know?"

She gave a small nod.

"I'm not really an important soldier. I'm a wimp that hasn't fought in battle."

The music suddenly changes to a slow tempo and everyone around us starts to get closer to their partners.

'In a cheek to cheek dance, well, if you just sway like this then it will work out.'

I remember the words of my dance instructor.

Flynn looked down and pressed her face into my shoulder. Her voice was so tender, I couldn't make out her words.

"... to me."

"What?"

"Why are you so kind to me?" From her neck down, her back was trembling. "I mean, I tried to sell you to Dai Shimaron. And before that, I was the one who gave away the Wincott poison and paved the way to your friend being shot. Despite that, why are you so kind to me? Caloria's freedom... you've even... given me that."

"Who knows? I don't even know why."

"You're," she started. While still lightly grasping my hand, she wraps her other arm around my back. Our ears and cheeks touched. One of our ears was hot and one of our cheeks was cold. "You're like a god."

It was her true feelings that came spilling out with a sigh.

As if I was speaking into the back of her neck rather than into her ear, I revealed the identity of the mystery man.

Actually, I'm the Maou.

For a moment, Flynn's body trembled severely. But that was it and she didn't scream in panic or curse and loathe me.

The two of us were in the middle of the floor not dancing, not sensually letting our hearts dance, but simply standing there holding each other. The men and women pairs around us and the pairs of two men and the rare pairs of two women were happily brushing their cheeks together, swaying their bodies merrily and dazedly gazing into

each other's eyes.

We stood there looking over each other's shoulders in opposite directions, but still all we saw were people continuing to dance.

"You're probably..."

The colors of the clothes and hairstyles and dance steps were different. The people we were watching were different. But, we were still looking at the same thing.

People continuing to dance around us.

"... I think Flynn Gilbit is already bound to Caloria."

"Yes."

"More than to a new lover that will appear later, future husband candidates, or even more than to Norman Gilbit who lost his country and died... I think you're more bound to Caloria than them."

"That's right... I am already... married to Caloria."

The two of us watched the foreign countries dancing around us. Watching the cheerful and vigorous countries around us dancing, the unease was unbearable.

"I'll do whatever foul deed to protect that small world. Whatever cowardly thing. I don't care what I will be called for that or how people treat me," Flynn said.

We are always uneasy and sometimes need the arms of another.

However, it is for this reason that those arms are not those of a kind lover. They have to belong to someone who lives the same way, those of a comrade.

"Flynn."

"What?"

I held Flynn Gilbit close, but what I poured into my arms was not love. It was the praise of a good fight and accepting a teammate and the 'good fortune' that we enjoyed.

This is probably the answer.

"Caloria is in your hands."

That's where it has to be.

Flynn lifted her face from my shoulder and slightly narrowed her tear-soaked eyes. Her reddened nose and ears were painful to look at, and when I tried to touch them I was gently brushed away.

"Dance. Like everyone else."

"Okay."

"You're not bad at it at all."

"Really?"

"Really."

Thinking this was like a quiz, I clumsily moved to the bass as I let out a breath. Caloria's leader wrapped her arms around my neck and her silver hair swayed right beneath my eyes.

"When I get back, I'll conduct a grand ceremony."

"A ceremony for who?"

"For you, of course." The tear streaks on her cheeks were still there, but Flynn was smiling in her normal, stout-hearted way. "Your funeral, Norman Gilbit."

"A funeral!? I haven't even gone through my coming of age ceremony and all of a sudden I'm getting a funeral?"

But by doing that, Caloria's sovereignty will formally pass over to Flynn Gilbit. I feel bad for those children, but Norman Gilbit won't come back alive. The previous feudal lord had left this world.

"Your Majesty," said the new leader of Caloria as she left my arms and her face turned serious. "Please return what I have entrusted with Your Majesty."

"Come on, don't call me Your Majesty! What kind of teasing is this!? I don't really care about 'Captain' or 'Crusoe,' but you can just call me Yuuri."

"Then Yuuri, you must give that back to me."

I grasp the silver mask I had shoved into my back pocket. After lightly tapping it and spreading it out, I handed the husband's legacy back to his wife.

"I warmed it up. Because it's winter."

"With your butt?"

It was the reverse Hashiba Hideyoshi battle plan. ^[1]

Flynn gazed at the mask nostalgically and gently caressed the silk embroidery. After that, she removed both of her gloves and traced the coloring around its eyes and the hemming around the mouth with her bare fingers.

"This is goodbye."

A shock pierces my heart. I thought she was talking about me.

"I will bury a doll with this mask on according to custom."

"Yeah, I think that's a good idea too."

"Your Majesty."

"Like I said-"

She gave me a push as I tried to complain.

"No, Your Majesty. Hear me out. Please hear what I have to say."

"Hey...!"

Caloria's leader, Flynn Gilbit, lightly bent at the knee and lowered her head. My hand that she had grasped with both hands was wrapped up in the mask.

"If my land had a million soldiers and mountains of gold, I would not hesitate. But now the citizens and the land are starving. I don't know how to express my gratitude or even what I should send in recompense to your country."

Thinking this might be a new dance pose, those around were peering at us. However, they soon grew bored and returned to their song.

"... But I promise just this and this is definitely not mistaken.

Caloria will forever be an ally to your country. And I will forever be your friend."

Flynn smiled gracefully and placed her lips on the back of my hand. I easily get swept up in the mood, so I imagined a sparkling tiara on her head.

"Please forgive me even though I cannot be called a servant."

"I forgive you... Or actually, I don't. I don't want you to be my servant! Stand. Stand up, Flynn. Face the future... Come on, don't crouch down. You're making a scene."

At that moment I finally felt several gazes upon me. They weren't from the people dancing nearby. Those people were completely indifferent. They were engrossed in politics and dancing. Then the gazes were probably those of my guardian Josak and my overseer Wolfram. Looking around in all directions... over there. The third son was standing by the southern window visibly disgruntled. He had a glass in each hand and both of them were empty.

"Flynn, Wolfram is over there so go have a chat with him."

"Eh? But I... don't really get along with him..."

"It's okay. You'll definitely get along. Despite appearances, he's actually a really good guy. It's good to build up friendly relationships, no? He's that Sexy Queen's son so he's a former crown prince of the mazoku."

Josak is probably around somewhere too. Either by asking him or doing it myself, it would be bad if I didn't find Murata soon. I don't care if he's sleeping in his room, but I want to make sure. He's not held up while getting changed and if he were in the room we would have run into each other by now.

I hope nothing has happened to him...

"Muuuraaata! Murakeeen! Muuuramuraaaa!"

While humming as a way to cover my unease, I press through the sea of people. Near the entrance to the main hall there were two golden statues of goddesses (and completely naked without their single leaves). Why didn't those thieves who forced their way into the treasure room steal things like these?

As soon as I took a step off of the opal stone floor and entered the man-made, stone hallway, a hand reached out of the shadow of a door and grabbed my clothes.

"Was that true?"

With my arm getting bent up behind me by the wrist, I gave a short cry by reflex.

"Ow!"

The strength in the person's hand immediately lessened. I'm dragged to a dim corner of the hallway, but the strength used is different than before. It's strangely lessened to cause me less pain. The long fingers holding down my shoulders are pretty much just placed there.

"Sorry, I didn't intend to hurt you. How is your neck? Your throat, has the blood stopped already? Hey, tell me. Was that true?"

"Why are you, no way, why are you here..."

Remembering my injury, I cover my bandage-covered neck with my hand as if to protect it. The person placed their hands on my shoulders, sunk to his knees on the ground and peered up at me.

Perfectly arranged features with a high nose bridge and a firm and robust body. It was von Grantz Adalbert with his blue eyes even more dazzling than usual.

His mud-covered, blonde hair was plastered to his cheek and forehead. His clothes, hair, and even his shoes were soaking wet and he was dirty all over.

In an impatient manner unlike him, he lightly presses on my shoulders and pushes me against the cold wall.

"Please tell me. Is it true?"

"Are you really the reincarnation of Julia?"

Back to Chapter 5	Return to MA Series	Forward to Chapter 7
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References

1. Hashiba Hideyoshi is one of the names that Toyotomi Hideyoshi assumed. He was a daimyo who lived during the 1500's and is considered one of the great unifiers of Japan. I'm not entirely, 100% sure what Yuuri meant here, but I'm guessing it might have something to do with the fact that he just broke a piece out of a country as I've never heard of any butt-warming stories about this man

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MaruMA:Volume 8:Chapter 7

From Baka-Tsuki

Chapter 7

The five men surrounded the box covered with a green cloth and stood lost in thought.

There is one more person than before. To be precise, they lost one person and then gained two. After safely carrying the box out of the temple, Stefan Fanberlain left. The reason was, of course, the ball that was held a while ago. If he did not quickly return and escort Cäcilie, that beauty would be offended.

“That lady is a spirit of a rose^[1] that has accidentally fallen on the plain, so it is dangerous to not be by her side. If lower class and vulgar people call out to her with their worldly words, she will be put into a panic at once and pearly tears will spill over her cheeks. Ah, my frail maiden, Cäcilie. I will hurry to your side immediately!”

Two of the men muttered ‘is that so?’ to Fanfan who was bursting with energy even when retreating from the battlefield. The last person interjected ‘she’s beautiful, but not weak.’

Chevalier, knowing the former queen’s charm better than anyone else, decided to stay behind with ‘Team Carrying-the-Box’ in order to complete their mission. If some random man at the banquet approached her, he did not think that his mistress would be in danger. As a woman who appreciated both art and comedy, she’d be able to make a drunkard into a work of art. She’d wrap him up in her whip and tie him into a tangled mess.

“... Aesthetic,” said Chevalier absentmindedly as he was lost in his imagination.

“Mr. Chevalier. Hey, Mr. Chevalieeer. Please think seriously. We have to bring this box all the way to a sealed place.”

“Ah, sorry.”

Even Dacascos, whose only trait he could brag about was his youth, was starting to feel the fatigue. Like in his voice, and in his joints, and on his greasy scalp.

“At any rate, good work everyone. It must have been difficult to get the extremely dangerous box from the temple since security was stepped up for the tournament.”

At His Highness’s words of appreciation, they felt slightly guilty. Compared to the numerous military operations they had participated in so far, this mission was in a fairly easy category.

If someone leaves, someone comes. After Fanfan left early, His Highness and Josak came running. Muraken-san, the Twin Black Great Sage, was supposed to be far more knowledgeable about the vilest, worst weapon, the ‘End of the Wind,’ than they were.

For example, the best temperature to store it at or what year its expiration date is. He should have known countless helpful ways to handle the dreadful, large box.

“Even so, this thing stinks. Was it not being stored well?” Murata asks.

No one was willing to say it was because of insecticidal paint.

“Your Highness, tell us if you would. How do you intend to bring this box back to the Great Demon Kingdom? Things will change once we get out to sea, but it will take three days at top speed to get to the harbor. If we go on land through Dai Shimaron, I believe we will need some skillful camouflage, but...”

“Hmm, that’s right, huh? I agree with you, Captain Sizemore.”

For a while now, Dacascos was completely distracted by His Highness Muraken’s clothes.

Even though it was not only the middle of winter but in a forest behind the temple, he was wearing evening clothes with a frilly collar. They were clothes that were laden with pleats and ornaments that even his wife within the Great Demon Kingdom wouldn’t wear nowadays. Isn’t he cold?

More importantly, was he planning on going to the ball dressed like that?

If he had a rose in his mouth, he might look like a shady dancer.

“Uh, Your Highness, you know, in the meantime can you come back to the assembly hall?”

Even Josak who came with him was wearing an outfit that left Dacascos’s mouth hanging open.

Women’s clothes? Or maybe it’s his own special technique that causes enemies to flinch back just by looking at him.

“I followed you because it would be dangerous for you to go walking around by yourself, but... I’m worried that His Majesty might do something annoyi-... perform a deed that commoners would never think of. I informed His Excellency Wolfram about the situation before I left, but despite appearances he’s like that too... Oh, honestly! To think guarding His Majesty and Your Highness at the same time would be so difficult!”

“Yeah, leaving Shibuya and Lord von Bielefeld together will be a lot more fun~.”

“That’s not what I-”

“Shh! Get down!” At the taciturn Chevalier’s warning, everyone simultaneously crouched down. A group of soldiers ran down the muddy road up the slope. “... It’s alright. We weren’t seen.”

“Even so they seem to be in a hurry. Those soldiers were so lenient when we were trespassing. Apparently they noticed the box was missing and they are desperate to get it back,” muttered the Captain as he rubbed his thinning hair at the back of his head. Getting the box to the harbor had become much more difficult.

With half of the continent being territories of Shimaron, finding an unmonitored route is impossible.

“But His Highness Berard II still doesn’t think that this has been stolen. The only thing that was reported missing upstairs was the Demon King statue with an elephant head.”

“What did you say!?! Y-Your Highness, I’m making it perfectly clear, but the one who pocketed that silly statue was Lord Fanfan! We absolutely do not think that Demon Kings of the past had an elephant head like that...”

“You don’t have to make excuses. No one would consider that to be mockery from a retainer. Besides, even though Shibuya hates tigers, he doesn’t hate elephants so your worries are irrelevant.” [2]

... The snowy wind grew more severe.

Punmaster Murata didn't mind at all that things turned awkward.

"That reminds me, you said that the box was mistaken for a coffin near the exit, right?"

"Yes, that is right. A man with a splendid beard and physique was brought to tears. Honestly, these youngsters nowadays, the only thing mature about them is their bodies. From a veteran's point of view, there is nothing more shameful than that..."

The old man's complaints continued on forever.

"Come to think of it, I've seen that somewhere. I ran across a funeral for a child. I definitely heard that a white box this size was a coffin for a boy," Murata said as he brought his fist down to strike his palm. The dull thud echoes through the forest. "It's not the flashiest of plans, but how about we keep carrying this around as if it were a coffin?"

"I believe that is also an excellent plan, but... will they honestly believe that? No matter how idiotic the Shimaron soldiers are, eventually they will notice that something from the treasure room has gone missing. If that happens and then we try to bring a coffin of a similar shape out of the country... even if it would be imprudent, they might check the contents of the box..."

"Hmm, that's the truth. They absolutely will. Okay then, we'll make this even more realistic and inside we'll put a dead child-"

The four demons were at a loss for words. There was only a paper-thin difference between the danger of that smart human and him, but the Great Sage was also a ruthlessly critical thinker!?

"-dummy or something... it won't work. In the first place, we can't put things inside of it."

Everyone present was immediately robbed of their strength.

Struck with extreme doubt, Dacascos felt the box through the cloth. Even the metal supporting the four sides was completely rusted. There was a sturdy lock hanging from the metal joint on the tightly closed lid.

"Your Highness! I have a question."

"What is it, Dacascos?"

"Um, it's a bit unrelated, but what is inside the box? It doesn't make a noise if I shake or kick it, but is it really empty?"

"That's a good question. However, don't kick it again. If the brittle wood breaks and it gets destroyed, it will be quite the problem." Murata knelt down on the snowy slope and placed his ear against the object in question covered in green cloth. "You see? It's not making a noise now. It's empty. There really isn't anything in there. But you absolutely can't look inside. You'll seriously regret it so much you'll cry."

"Wh-what does that..."

"It means that there are many things in this world that you would be better off not knowing about. Okay, next person."

"Then, Your Highness, if I may suggest something presumptuous. How about we disguise it as part of the madam's vast amount of luggage? The amount of clothes chests she brought was quite considerate. It will be like the saying 'a tree in the forest, a bear in the sand.'"

“Ah! That’s good, excellent! Although this is the first time I heard the bear part. Um, who were you?”

“Chevalier.”

“That’s right. It’s because you hardly ever say anything. Well then, that’s an awfully wonderful idea, but there is one major problem. That would be that Lady Celi’s boyfriend is a businessman through and through.”

Everyone was dumbfounded.

To doubt Fanberlain who had helped them collect the box despite his family’s position in Shimaron. He had undertaken the responsibility of leading them to the treasure room without considering the danger to himself. Fanfan was also the one who used money to deal with a number of the guards. And it was all for Lady Celi. Long live free love.

“According to what I’ve heard from you all, Fanfan was a businessman from birth, right? That’s what I’m worried about. If Dai Shimaron had the ‘End of the Wind,’ then his business wouldn’t be necessary because of the power imbalance. Therefore, he helped with its recovery. Yeah, I get that. The reasoning is solid. However, if we entrust him with the box and have him hide it amongst Lady Celi’s luggage, I wonder what he’ll do. It’s a rare box. It’s one of only four ultimate weapons with a terrible power in the entire world. And he is a businessman through and through. He’s such a businessman that ‘business spirit’ is written on his heart.”

“If it was me, I’d sell it,” Dacascos blurted out.

“Right?” Before giving everyone a moment to stop, Murata placed a foot on the box. “If I were from a genius business family, I’d secretly switch it out with a copy. And then, I would sell it to countries that want to fight with large countries but don’t have enough military strength or countries that have money but not enough soldiers. And then I wouldn’t have only taken over the market, I’d be set for life. Businessmen never make pointless investments. Oddly, I have a good nose for schemes for getting rich quick. There are an endless amount of people who would be desperate to have this box. Stefan Fanberlain is worthy of trust, but before that he is a businessman. Therefore,” the heel of his foot bunches up the cloth a bit. The pure white body gets wet with snow. “I would not trust the box to Lady Celi.”

“Shh! More soldiers!”

They all crouch down at once. Murata carefully reaches out his hand and readjusts the twisted cloth. The white box will probably be very conspicuous in the dark.

“Ehyaaa!”

The human at the back of the line tripped in the snow and fell over and unluckily rolled down the slope. He crashed into a cedar right in front of the demons and was passing out from the pain while hugging his knees. The squad kept running and seemed to have abandoned their injured member.

Murata slowly stood up and stared at the young man writhing around on the ground.

“Your Highness, he’ll see you. Your Highness!”

“Can someone take off their sock?”

“Huh? What are you going to do with a sock?”

While he was handing over his warm, wool sock, Sizemore watched the Sage’s hands.

When he got closer to the young Shimaron soldier rolling about, Murata stuffed the sock into his mouth. The one who panicked was the captain.

“Your Highness, if you’re going to gag someone, please use a handkerchief, a handkerchief! Please don’t use a sock off of an old man’s foot. Please show a soldier compassion!”

“Alright, we found a corpse! Mr. Dacky, run and get Flynn Gilbit as fast as you can!”

Not knowing what was going on at all, Dacascos ran off to the dance hall.

The former demon covered in mud and snow was gazing into my eyes that were a different color because of contacts.

“Is it true? Do you have Julia’s...”

“Hey, I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

The hands he had placed on my shoulders suddenly grip tightly. But, they immediately slacken and he apologizes in a low voice.

“That’s not my intention. I don’t intend to hurt you. The injury to your neck... I don’t think you’ll forgive me for that, but...”

“Like I said, I have no idea what you’re talking about. Actually I want to ask questions. Weren’t you unable to keep fighting!? Why are you in a place like this completely alright?”

I get my back away from the cold, stone wall and push against his chest with all of my strength. Getting away from him when he staggered backwards, I ran blindly down the dark hallway.

I was completely stunned. I had no ability to think calmly.

What do I do!?

There’s no one here now. There’s no one here to help me.

Once I started running, I realized it would have been smart to run back into the dance hall. No matter how irrational the man, he wouldn’t do anything reckless with that many people watching. But, I had already run pretty far in the opposite direction and going back now would be dangerous.

He’s definitely coming after me.

His eyes said he wouldn’t let me get away.

When I came to a stop, I remembered his dirty arms and glittering blue eyes and all the hair on my body stands on end.

My ankle is starting to hurt from my intense fatigue. My heart and pulse speeds up and my breathing quickly becomes difficult. In order to get more oxygen to my lungs, I suppress my gasping and take long breaths. In this empty and deserted temple at night, even the stagnant air was heavy.

“...!”

The sound of military boots on the floor was coming closer.

Even though he was supposed to have been severely injured, his footsteps are fast and strong. If it's just for a little while longer I can run, but eventually the hallway will end and I'll be cornered with no place to escape to. My pursuer's footsteps are rapidly getting closer.

I ready myself and push my body into a recess in the wall and hold my breath to wait him out.

The footsteps of the silhouette against the light of the snow slow down and approach carefully. It seems like he's holding a light as the surroundings turned faintly yellow. My neck started to hurt. A heat spread from the injury that was stretched and felt like it was about to open.

Only the sound of my beating heart was reverberating loudly.

“Are you there?”

My breath stops.

“Hey, is someone there? Give up and come out.”

It's not Adalbert's voice. Apparently it's a Shimaron soldier on patrol. I heave a large sigh in relief and come out of the recess in the wall. There's no reason the security would chase me, but I still timidly step out into the hallway with my hands raised.

“I'm not anyone suspicious...”

The petite, middle-aged soldier looks surprised after seeing my outfit.

“Are you a guest at the ball?”

“Well, kind of.”

It seems like he doesn't notice that I am a victor in the tournament. ^[3]

“Why were you heading in the exact opposite direction?”

“I was looking for the toilets, but I got lost.”

It's a common excuse, but it's an effective one. The soldier puts on an exasperated smile and lights the way for me.

“Is that so? I apologize for startling you. Thieves have apparently gotten into the treasure room and they've even mobilized our forces to look for them.”

“Thieves?”

“Well, they'll probably be caught real soon, but... A bathroom was provided right next to the staircase. If you wandered all the way out here you must have been lonely. Shall I escort you?”

It happened when the soldier turned to look back at me. Someone's shadow floated up in a corner that the light didn't reach.

“Watch ou-!”

I reflexively reached out. The lantern fell out of the soldier's hand and rolled after he collapsed onto his bottom and collided with the wall.

A heavy sword swung down in the air vertically and a thick clang rang out when it hit the floor.

A man's pale face was illuminated by the dying flame.

It was Adalbert.

I let out an awkward scream and turned around the corner we just passed and ran up the long staircase two steps at a time. I pull my body forward by grabbing onto the hand-carved railing, pass by the dance hall in three strides, and continue climbing.

I doubt he'll give up just because I went up the stairs.

Panicked at the sound of what was certainly footsteps coming after me, I push open the nearest extravagant door. I slide my body through the gap into this dark room that I don't know who owns. Even while knowing it was useless, I make sure to not make any creaking noises as I lean back against the door and close it as quietly as I can. I reach around behind me with my fingers and slide the latch into place.

For a little while, I leaned against the thick, engraved doors. Until I catch my breath. At least until I catch my breath. Locked in the room, I breathe in a deep lungful of the moldy-smelling oxygen.

Eventually my eyes get used to the darkness and I can look around the room.

The room seems to be fairly long, but there isn't much distance between myself and a window. The light from the moon and the snow is just barely shining through the small window that was high enough up on the wall to also be called a skylight. The bookshelves taking up the entire wall were packed with truly old-looking books.

"... A library..?"

I carefully step away from the entrance and approach the table in the center of the room.

There is a book someone was in the middle of reading that was left open on top of it. Perhaps they were making a manuscript as there is also a bundle of paper, an inkwell, a plume pen that you often see in fantasy stories, and a stone paperweight on the table.

In the erratic light from the ceiling, I try reading the letters on the open page. As usual, I can't read it by sight. I close my eyes and concentrate on the nerve endings in my fingertips as I try to feel the discrepancies in the paper quality.

The parts covered in ink were slightly smoother than the blank spaces. As the paper is coarse, I can discern the shape of the letters against the fuzzy surface.

Continent, rule, three royal families... The influence and population in the continent ruled by the three royal families... not including the three kingdoms in the western peninsula...

With just this one part of this thick book, I can't tell what kind of book it is. I give up and lift my fingers and let them rest on the bundle of blank sheets.

"... Weller...?"

The writer must have a heavy hand as the shape of the letters was imprinted into the page below. I skip over the stone with my cold index and middle fingers and the words clearly jump into my mind. It was like a preschooler or elementary school student jotted down basic information in a list.

The Three Royal Families – Rahy, confined to present-day Shou Shimaron colony, Garshon (Then, Garcione). 24 years after imprisonment, Vilmos Rahy's death confirmed. Lineage ended.

Cont. – Gillesby, defeated after the battle at Present-day Dai Shimaron eastern end of Sommers (Then, Zomarce).

Cont. – Berard, acknowledged defeat during the battle at Present-day Dai Shimaron agricultural area Col Nilzon. Survivor Paige Berard confined to May Island in the ocean of the Northern Bridge of the Gods. According to a special report, transferred to the royal capital 20 years later and changed family name to Weller. 5 generations confirmed afterwards. [4]

This is probably the fates of the royal families that held power in this land before it became the territory of Shimaron. Why Lord Weller's name was part of this was a question I couldn't answer with my terrible history skills.

"... Changed the family name to Weller? To Weller... Wait, if it used to be Berard, then why were His Majesty and His Bearded Highness whatever-generation both calling themselves Berard..?"

They were giving their children and grandchildren a name of a family that they themselves had destroyed.

And then, what is this special report? Were they brought to the royal capital and and forced to have their name changed because of that?

"After the change to Weller, five generations confirmed... Then somewhere in here Conrad's father is..."

I remember the words that Conrad said in the middle of the arena.

'This has been my land from the beginning.'

This was what he meant? Although, I'm not sure if I'm understanding it properly or not.

A sound like a large tree breaking rang through the room and brought me back to reality. Those sturdy looking doors to the library were now broken with the plain wood on the inside exposed. With the next blow, the latch came flying off before the doors could.

The doors burst open, hit the wall, and bounced back with the force.

"... Why are you running away?"

I met the gaze of the heavily breathing man and felt goosebumps pop up all over my body.

"O-of course I'm running away!"

Even women who swarmed around handsome, macho actors would run away after seeing Adalbert right now. There was blood flowing from the injuries on his face and arms and his look of madness wasn't lacking. If you were being chased by a terminator near death, no matter how proud of your courage you were, you would run away barefoot if you had to.

On top of that, I've almost been killed by him several times. A single apology wouldn't be enough to build my trust in him.

All I could do was run farther into the library. Even though I knew that as things were, I would definitely get cornered.

"Hey! I just want to know. It's true. I'm not going to hurt you."

"Like I can believe that!"

The shadow chasing me was dragging a leg and pressing its arm against its side. The left arm dangling down didn't seem to be in good shape either.

It was like a horror movie.

Trying to make as many obstacles as I could, I scattered books around from the shelves as I lost the ability to hold down my hysterical laughing from stress and fatigue.

What is this? This is like a horror movie. Am I Nancy being chased by Freddy? Why is this happening to me!?

There was a thunderous noise. Looking back on impulse, dust rose up in the light of the skylight and a large bookshelf had completely fallen over. On the dim floor, a dirty blond head was buried in books.

"... Grantz?"

His motionless right arm was stretched out on the floor.

"Von Grantz...? Hey, Adalbert," I call from what I estimate to be a safe distance. There is no answer and no sign of movement.

I'm suddenly hit with anxiety. After all, this is the friend of Nigel Wise 'Will Never Die' Maxine. There's no way he'd die in a place like this. But, then why is he not moving after collapsing? He's not bleeding from what I can see, but even if he doesn't have a large external wound, it could be fatal if he was hit in the wrong spot.

Was this misfortune of scattered books because of me? The bookshelf might have fallen on top of him because I threw off its balance. No, normally you could just step out of the way. The person who couldn't get out of the way of something that big was also at fault...

No, he wasn't normal, Adalbert.

Just a few hours ago, he was judged to be unable to continue fighting. In other words, it was the proclamation that he was beaten until he was wiped out and his entire body was so injured that he couldn't fight anymore.

Also, the one who beat him was apparently me.

Of course, I was not at fault. It was during a fight in an arena and he shouted that he was going to kill me and stuff. No one had the right to blame me or make me feel bad about it.

But if he couldn't dodge the bookshelf because of those injuries...

"Aww, damn it! It's like you're pretending to be dead on purpose!"

I run over to the mountain of books and start tossing them aside several volumes at a time.

“Grantz! Hey, Adalbert!”

I’m an idiot. I’m really a hopeless idiot.

Don’t I know just how much torment this guy has put me through? How much von Grantz Adalbert hates me? That he’s someone who resents his country? Wasn’t he in reality this guy that was now – really just until right now – chasing me around and scaring me?

Despite that, why am I trying to help this unconscious man?

“This isn’t my fault. It’s not my fault, okay?”

I press my fingers to his now-exposed, pale neck. He still has a pulse. He’s moving.

“Cut it out. Hey, this isn’t funny. Don’t... don’t die in front of me...”

My nose and eyes grew hot. I clench my teeth and hold down my shivering.

I don’t want to experience that feeling ever again.

By the time I uncovered his upper body, my breathing had sped up. It was more like an excavation than a rescue. I tried to lift the bookshelf that was on top of the lower half of his body, but it wouldn’t move an inch with the strength of one person. Even when I looked around for a pole I could use as a lever, nothing like that was to be seen.

I could see blood peeking out from where his clothes were ripped on his shoulder, but he only twitched a little bit.

“Hey!”

I place a hand on his back and try shaking him gently. With his face still flat on the floor, I hear him let out a low groan.

“That’s a rel-”

No, it’s not a relief. Not a relief. I hurriedly deny the sigh of relief I was about to give. In this situation, it should be ‘damn, what an unlucky bastard’ – if you consider all the details up until now.

“... ugh.”

He’s putting strength into his good arm and trying to lift his upper body.

“Stop, it’s no use. Your legs are pinned under the shelf.”

Realizing that it was impossible, he somehow managed to turn his head to the side.

“... What happ-... ened?”

“Ah, what a rel-... Uwah, no, no! It’s ‘you’re seriously an unlucky bastard.’ Wait here, I’ll go get someone. I can’t move the bookshelf on my own.”

“Wait.”

“You’re the one who has to wait.”

While still lying with his face on the floor, Adalbert reaches his right hand out to me. I shrink back mostly on instinct and try to dodge the fingers of the man who was my enemy.

“Don’t run away. I won’t... do anything.”

His index finger weakly touches my throat. Through the bandages, something warm flows in. Something slightly warmer than my body temperature. The heat from the wound that was hurting and was about to open again starts being absorbed into the tissue around it.

Huh?

“... I’m sorry.”

Even if I rubbed it roughly with my palm, there was no longer an injury there. There was just smooth and healthy skin.

“Did you... heal me?” I was shocked. “Even Lady Celi couldn’t do it.”

“In this land, using magic is difficult. Even though exorcism can be easily used, magic requires quite a lot of power.”

“... If you have... that kind of power left... use it on your own body instead of me. Ugh, stop speaking! I’ll go call someone.”

“You don’t have to.”

“Don’t be stupid. You probably don’t like books enough that you want to be buried in them for the rest of your life.”

Something must have been funny because Adalbert laughed. Or rather, had a coughing fit.

“If you go, you won’t come back, will you?”

“Probably not.”

He’s gripping onto the heel of my shoe. No, he doesn’t have enough strength left to call it gripping. His right hand is just lightly touching it. I crouch down on the floor covered in scattered papers and brush off the hair stuck to Adalbert’s cheek.

“Then what do you want to do?”

“I want to talk.”

What’s with this guy? I unconsciously let out a long sigh.

“... Alright, talk. But just a little bit. After three minutes pass I’m going to go call someone.”

“That’s fine.”

Still unable to move properly, von Grantz Adalbert laughed again. I bend over and bring my face closer so I can see his eyes.

“What’s funny?”

“You’re a strange person.”

You're the one who's strange. You tried to slit my throat on the round stage just a few hours ago. And now you healed the same injury so what is this change in mental states?

"Even though you have... a strong power rare even among all the previous Demon Kings in history, exorcism techniques that handicap demons don't work on you. On the contrary, the simple power that only works on humans has helped heal you..."

That's probably because my body is Made in Earth and is likely exceedingly close to a human's.

"Well I mean, I'm a normal human on Earth."

"Human? Aren't you a demon?"

"I don't really know. Although, they say that I'm destined to be the Demon King according to the level of my soul."

"That's what I want to know." Adalbert tried to lift the top half of his body. A groan of pain slips past his lips. "Please tell me. Was your soul's... previous owner... Julia?"

"By Julia do you mean Lady von Wincott Suzanna Julia?"

"That's right."

When he heard that name, his face turned nostalgic. As he let out a breath and lightly closed his eyes, it looked like he was remembering only beautiful things.

"... I've only heard her name, though. I don't know who my previous life was. I mean, it's a past life, right? I've never really wanted to know about it."

Although it seems like Murata remembers every last detail. I wasn't even jealous over what I heard from him.

"Then was what Lord Weller said a lie?"

"Like I said, I don't even know if there was a parting gift. I don't go around asking 'who was my previous life?' For me, just knowing that my soul was brought from another world, raised on Earth, and then 'tada! You were really the Demon King'... just knowing that was shocking enough. At this point, I don't think it would be shocking news even if I found out that my previous life was Hitler. In the first place, I'm bad at self-discovery."

If I had time for self-discovery, it would be better to do three hundred practice swings.

"Your soul... was brought from this world to a place called Earth?"

"Yeah. It seems so. By Conrad."

Adalbert used his good hand to cover his face still pressed against the floor. A shaky breath like he is about to cry comes out from between his long, angular fingers.

"Ah... so that was the truth..."

"The truth... Are you talking about my soul's previous owner being Miss Suzanna Julia's?"

I thought for a moment.

"Ohshitaaa! No, I mean, ohh shiiiit! No way!" [5]

A Lady von Wincott that cracked bad jokes and was a baseball girl. If she was my previous life, was she like that? I couldn't even imagine it.

"But there's no way that Conrad wouldn't know who the previous owner was if he was the one who carried your soul."

Taking notice, I smiled. Although, I might be told that this isn't the time for what I was going to say.

"... You were friends, weren't you? You two."

Adalbert furrowed his eyebrows in confusion.

"Who was?"

"You and Conrad?"

"No we weren't?"

"I mean, you called Lord Weller 'Conrad'... Even his brothers and mother call him Conrad in public... Well whatever. If, and I mean if, okay? This is if in a one in a million possibility that my past life was Miss Julia." I see. This is what he felt like then. The words that Murata spoke along with the pleasant vibration of the boat come to mind. "Then what? Is there something different about me? What do you want to say to me?"

"If your soul... is hers..."

"Even if it is, I'm Yuuri Shibuya and no one else. Yuuri Shibuya who lived on Earth until right before 16, a high school student in Japan, the owner, captain, and catcher of a grass lot baseball team, and a Lion's fan. Learning who my past life was at this point is like empathizing with one more movie I've seen. What do you want me to do?" I sit down, hug my knees, and grab on to the tips of my shoes. "Or are you going to start adding 'Lord' onto my name?"

I have feet and I have fingers. From top to bottom, from hair to toenails, it all belongs to Yuuri Shibuya. Not anyone else.

Adalbert stayed silent.

Wary of the silence, I shake the man's shoulder as he faces downward.

"Hey now! You're alive, right? You're not going to die, are you!? I'm going. I'm going to go call someone. Besides, three minutes passed a long time ago. Cut it out! Don't die right in front of me!"

"He will not die just from that."

I raise my head like I had been shot. It was a voice I was familiar with and also one I longed for.

"Co... Lord Weller..."

But now I can't talk to him amicably and I feel a lump in my throat that can't possibly actually be there.

"He has only lost consciousness. He must have heard something greatly pleasing."

He raises the light in his hand to the side of his face and shows me who he is. His hair is strangely short for a Shimaron soldier. The white, formal outfit he was wearing that had no unnecessary accessories and was simple in a military way looked much better on him than the uniform in the arena.

He is no longer someone from my country.

Lord Weller Conrart laid his hand on the wet and dirty body and nodded at the pulse he found. He runs his eyes over the scattered books and fallen bookshelf and then finally turns toward me.

“Are you injured?”

“No, I’m actually better than before.”

I unconsciously touch my throat.

“Ah, Grantz. He can use exorcism... If your legs and back are also fine, would you help me?”

“Alright, but can we lift it with just the two of us?”

“If you put in the effort, then perhaps.”

Avoiding Adalbert’s body and moving around to the other side, I carefully get a good foothold and place my hands on the wooden bookshelf. I lift up with all my strength at the short signal. It lifted up so easily, I doubted whether I was actually needed. Conrad kicked something into the gap to keep the shelf up and pulled Adalbert out.

“... Is the bone broken?”

I timidly peer over. It wasn’t actually twisted in an impossible direction, but his leg was swelled up right above the leather of his military boot.

“It is broken.”

“Uwaaah, I shouldn’t have looked!”

The same part of my body aches even though it was someone else’s injury. According to Lord Weller’s examination, being used to broken bones, his left arm was fractured and would be painful.

“But with this he will not be able to shadow you for a while.”

“Was I really being shadowed? ... I mean, he was completely different than before. Even the way he was speaking was kind of normal. It was like he wasn’t very villainous or something.”

“He likely had something to think about.”

After cutting the leg of a chair with his sword, Lord Weller took off his shirt. He started ripping the garment that I could tell was obviously of high quality even in the flickering light into several strips without hesitation. Using the angular and unwieldy chair leg as a splint, he secured the man’s leg. Holding one end of the belt-like strips in his mouth, he wrapped it tightly so it wouldn’t come out of place.

The muscles on both of his shoulders were contracting with his movements and I gazed at them vacantly.

They’re moving. As if everything was normal.

There was a wide bandage wrapped around his left upper arm. Somewhere under that cloth is where Conrad’s arm was cut off. I saw it with my own eyes.

The large scar on his side is probably the one from the fierce battle that Josak was talking about. There was another fresh injury on his back. It must have closed recently because the edges of the stitched up scar were detailed.



“When did that...”

“Even if you ask when, it is difficult to explain.”

“Well anyway,” I got angry while facing Conrad’s back because he wouldn’t turn around. Maybe it was because I was more relaxed because there was no one listening, but my voice was gradually getting rougher. “Anyway, how did you survive that explosion!? It’s ludicrous that you’re in perfectly good condition after that!”

“I apologize if I hurt your feelings.”

That wasn’t the answer I wanted to hear.

“Why are speaking so formally!? Explain properly, how you survived. Why did you disappear and why is your arm back to normal? Why did you leave me... why are you suddenly working for Shimaron...”

After securing his leg, Conrad placed a splint against Adalbert’s elbow.

“I am not necessarily working for Shimaron.”

“... Then are you the subordinate of His Majesty and His Highness!?”

Perhaps feeling cold, Conrad puts on the jacket he had cast off. Now that I couldn’t see the bandage on his arm or the injury on his back, I honestly felt relieved.

“Well, you did not come to ask me.”

I suddenly became enraged. I clench my powerless fist with the intention of somehow landing a good hit on him. Lord Weller stood up straight and gave me his familiar smile. It was a gentle expression that anyone would love and was steeped in good nature.

“Even though I waited for you.” He grabbed the sleeve of his plain, white clothes and playfully tugged on it. “I prepared an answer that you wanted and put on this... dress suit that I am unused to.”

It was the wrinkled jacket that he had thrown on the floor. However, when he put it on it became a uniform.

“You were there?”

“Yes, I was. I saw you dancing with a lady. You were good. It made me proud. I was the one who taught you how to dance, after all.”

“Then why didn’t you call out to me!?”

Conrad’s silver-flecked, brown eyes narrowed as he smiled broader.

“I am far beneath you in social status. It would be unnatural for me to call out to you. I said so, did I not? From now on, I would strive to... not call you ‘Your Majesty.’”

I was hit with an icy thrill as if I had stuck my head into a snowdrift. My eyelids, my nose, the lining of my throat, all of the soft parts hurt.

It was the same as if Lord Weller Conrad had declared that he was no longer my friend.

“... You’re brainwashed, right?”

Noise came through the broken door from the hallway.

“You’re being controlled, right!? Or that Beard guy got a hold of some weakness and is threatening you so you have to work for him, right!?”

Guards who were securing the area and people who liked seeing the misfortune of others all came running together. A woman with eyes wide with curiosity shrieked somewhat gleefully.

“A feudal lord of a Shimaron territory seems to have suddenly collapsed.”

Who!?

“Go. The lady is in a terrible state.”

“Conrad.”

I held out my right hand, believing that his left hand would grasp back. I thought I would try to gamble on one final possibility.

“Come.”

Lord Weller slowly shook his head.

“... No.”

My gamble failed.

Back to Chapter 6	Return to MA Series	Forward to Chapter 8
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References

1. The ‘spirit of a rose’ (bara no sei / 薔薇の精) may or may not be a reference to a short ballet called Le Spectre de la Rose (the spirit of the rose) where a young girl comes home from her first ball, falls asleep, drops a rose she got as a souvenir on the floor, and then the spirit of the rose comes and dances with her while she’s still asleep...
2. The original Japanese pun was elongating the sentence ending of ‘zo’ to ‘zou’ which is the word for ‘elephant’ (zou / ゾウ).
3. There was a pun here. A ball and a fighting tournament are pronounced the same in Japanese (butoukai), but are written with different kanji. So, the original exchange went ‘Are you a guest at the butoukai (舞踏会 / ball)?’ and then Yuuri comments ‘It seems like he doesn’t notice that I’m a victor of a different butoukai (武闘会 / tournament).’
4. Pronunciation note! The last ‘e’ in Garcione, Zomarce, and Paige is not silent (kind of like the ‘eh’ in meh) and the ‘g’ in Paige is hard. So, ‘pay geh’. Also, the ‘c’ in Zomarce is like the ‘c’s in Cäcilie/Celi so it sounds like Zomartseh.
5. So the original joke was Yuuri yelling ‘Matsuzakaaa!’ and then correcting himself to say ‘massakaaa which is like saying ‘nooo waaaay.’ Basically it was a pun on how the name Matsuzaka (Daisuke Matsuzaka of the Seibu Lions) sounds similar to ‘masaka’ (no way! It can’t be! You don’t say!) I looked through a list of other well-known players on the team and Hiroshi Ohshita was the only one I could think up a pun for~

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MaruMA:Volume08:Chapter 8

From Baka-Tsuki

Chapter 8

Flynn Gilbit had become half crazed.

"Dear, hold on! Norman! Oh please, please god! Save my husband!"

"... Huh?"

She had her silk-wrapped hands clasped together and she was praying to god while looking to heaven.

"Mugghgghh."

The body on the stretcher was Norman Gilbit with his mask on writhing around. Wolfram was at the head of the stretcher and Flynn, Murata, and Josak were at the patient's side as they ran along with him.

Disarrayed silver hair fluttered in the wind.

"Wow, how horrible. The lord was suddenly struck ill. With a young wife it's such a shame... Huh!? Wait a minute!"

The masked feudal lord had been coming into bloom since the moment we met, or rather, the person who was pretending to be Norman Gilbit until today was no one else but me, Shibuya Yuuri. But, time flies by and just a little while ago the second generation Norman Gilbit the Masked Feudal Lord had officially retired.

Despite that, right now the man being transported at a reckless speed was wearing the mask that I had come to know too well.

"Wait, Flynn! Who is that!? Who is that man!?"

Did the third generation just come to an end?

When I ran after the group and tried to get in the room, the youngest lady in the group of curious onlookers in the hallway told me.

"Oh, you're the young officer that danced with that lady, right?"

"Young off-..."

"You have a... relationship with that lady, don't you?"

"What kind of relationship?"

"You know... a relationship. Adultery. Adultery. An adulterous relationship." Even though she was deliberately speaking in a low voice, she emphasized and repeated it three times. "Of course, of course, that lady is beautiful, isn't she? She'd have one or two lovers, huh? But this is good for you. Congratulations. You might be able to become her official husband."

Having no idea that the relationship between Flynn and I had ended, the young lady kept on proudly unveiling the scandalous news.

"You know her husband, Mr. Norman Gilbit, fought hard in the tournament finals, right? He fought hard and won, but was injured, yeah? It seems like those injuries got worse and he finally collapsed. He's apparently on the verge of death."

"Collapsed!?"

Wait, I'm Norman Gilbit, right? Then who is that wearing the mask?

"Flynn!"

I go into the room in a big hurry and close the door so the secret doesn't get out. All eight eyes of Flynn, Murata, Josak, and Wolfram focus on me.

"Why is a Norman Gilbit that isn't me about to die?"

"Shh!"

All four of them raise a finger to their mouths simultaneously. The masked man was still in agony. He was grasping his knee – not his neck that got injured in the match – and rolling around.

A mischievous look appeared on Murata's face as he brushed snow off of his shoulder.

"We need the corpse of a man of high status. To be more accurate, the coffin. Because of that, we're all putting on an act. Well, as for him..." The person playing Norman's role was writhing around on the bed. "He's not necessarily acting."

"That's the truth," said Josak. He already had an amazed expression on his face. It looks like he wants to say that he just can't keep up with the strange plans of the children. "After slipping in the snow and breaking his kneecap, this middle-aged soldier has a sock shoved in his mouth that was worn for three days straight."

"Ugh."

What a terribly simple gag. That's very close to torture. Now I understand his realistic acting.

"Then this person is going to die after this..."

"That's right."

"Whaefer, ut alleaf ake ow is agh eesh," the seriously injured young man said unintelligibly. "Amph inf you fay you ud iff me um paingifferz?"

"Ah, yeah yeah, painkillers. And you want me to take the gag out, huh?"

With the mask off, he was a completely normal guy. His hair wasn't as long as a normal soldier and he didn't have a stern look on his face that said 'Let's fight!' He was a gentle man that had the feel of an artist to him and he seemed like the type that women would love.

"Phew... The inside of my mouth still feels gross. It was mean to not take the sock out even though I agreed to this."

Feeling a little better after getting his painkillers, he sat on the bed and drank some water.

"The way he talks sounds like a diligent exchange student," I said. ^[1]

"Ah, me, I'm called Gardino. I came to the capital to study art and drama, but since I was a student I didn't have enough money. So, I became a temporary soldier in the garrison. I want to study art and drama more, but tuition at upper-level schools is high and I can't afford it.

"He really does sound like an exchange student."

The young Gardino clenched his fist and made some calculations with burning eyes.

"If I can get amount suggested, I can go to the upper-level school for two years. And also, if it's just once a week, I can hire a lady to take off her clothes... I'll do my best! My absolute best! It's really going to be my best! I'll put my body and soul into playing the role of the corpse! Everyone, please watch my death!"

We seem to have hired quite the unique actor. He'll be wearing a mask so he probably only has to be careful of his breathing.

"Hmph. The place that excels the most in the arts out of any country is the Royals Arts Association in our Shin Makoku. There even cats can perform and there are even prodigal turtles that are master painters."

Wolfram, who always proclaims that mazoku are the number one at everything, has flippantly said something amazing. Prodigal, master painter turtles. I want to see them. I really want to see them. But there is the danger that creating one painting would take several hundred years...

"Amazing! I want to study on exchange there... but I'm getting kind of tired..."

Laying the part-timer who had finally started to feel the effects of the painkiller on the bed, Flynn fires herself up and prepares to cry. She lets down her hair and musses it up and gives herself a gaunt appearance by messing up her makeup.

"... Wow, beautiful people are beautiful no matter what they do, huh?"

"Honestly, Your Majesty, what are you saying?"

My mood turns strangely miserable in a way that I can't call bittersweet. People's emotions are odd. Why can I unabashedly say a pick-up line as soon as I decided I wouldn't fall in love?

"But why do we need a coffin? If it's Norman Gilbit's funeral, you can do it properly once you go home."

"Huh? Did nobody tell Shibuya?"

"What? I'm the only one left out? Just who do you all think I-"

"Okay! And now we enter the second act, the Death of Norman Gilbit!"

Before they told me the truth about the situation, Josak opened the door.

With her hair disheveled and her eyes red with tears, Flynn entered the hallway while saying a prayer.

"Oh god, to think the trial you give me would be this painful!"

It is unbelievably horrible acting from the woman who pretended to be her husband for several years.

"Everyone, on this moment on this night in this month, my husband, Norman Gilbit, has passed away!"

The funeral procession was subdued at first, then it was restless, and at the end it moved forward as if escaping.

As long as we were in Dai Shimaron, we had to behave like we were part of a funeral service for an important person.

After all, now Norman Gilbit wasn't the mandated overseer of Shou Shimaron's autonomous colony of Caloria. Caloria had gained official independence by being the first victorious team that wasn't from the sponsoring nation of Dai Shimaron in 'Use your knowledge, speed, and skill to win! The World's Best Fighter Tournament!'

The leader of an independent nation deserved to be sent off with respect. For example, the coffin holding the remains shouldn't be handled carelessly.

Even if there was only another small box inside of it.

The more you heard of it, the more astonished you would be at the plan.

Not astonished by the ingenuity, but by the fact that the so-called savior of the kingdom, the Twin Black Great Sage, came up with such a childish plan! That sort of astonished.

It was all well and good that he got the 'End of the Wind' out of the temple in Dai Shimaron by switching it with a DIY box made on the ship, but there was no way to get it somewhere safe. He even thought that since it was painted white and looked like a boy's coffin that it should be carried in a funeral. However, if a soldier has questions during an inspection, he can't be allowed to open the lid and check the contents.

Then how about putting it in a bigger box and giving a reason why they can't look inside?

The reason for not opening the lid being... an ideal 'deceased' is inside.

It was Norman 'You are already dead' Gilbit who had just been injured during the World's Best.

Dai Shimaron had even given it a catchline of 'Caloria's Great Star, Fallen' and had wanted to conduct a temporary burial for Norman Gilbit. They probably wanted to show their open-mindedness by showing respect to the victor even though they were defeated.

Gardino put on a splendid performance as a corpse without moving even the tiniest bit. However, his breathing while asleep was loud so someone had to stay by his side and continuously speak. Flynn held on to her grief and as a tragic wife who clung to her husband, she received sympathy from women all over the capital. Wolfram and Josak were extolled by a poet as teammates who fought together with him and whose friendship surpassed even death. Even though they had never met the actual person.

Murata employed his memories of the past and walked about as the experienced ceremony leader. Without him consistently coming up with plans, the temporary burial in a foreign country would have been impossible.

I'm the one who didn't have a part.

I did wear goggles in the arena, but I didn't wear the mask. As such, a part of the ladies and men who were watching recognize my Norman Gilbit face. On the other hand, the women at the party we were invited to treat me as Flynn Gilbit's young lover. In the end, the young ladies who loved to gossip started up a rumor that Caloria's

mistress was giving her affection to a young man that looked like her husband.

Hurriedly dyed, chestnut brown hair and cosmetic, brown lenses. I don't even want to know if that resembles the real Norman. However, just by being by Flynn's side as she sobbed, all of the young women who came to offer their condolences whispered, 'Look, that's Madam Gilbit's rumored lover.'

Far from her lover, I didn't even have a lover in my actual life.

After closing the lid, there wouldn't be another government official who would check inside. Even though it was immediately following its independence, doubting the funeral of a leader of a country would be imprudent all by itself.

Although, what was inside the extravagant coffin wasn't a corpse, but the 'End of the Wind' wrapped in cloth.

As soon as we got out of the capital, we started making our getaway in a mad rush.

Since the Maou statue with the elephant head was stolen from the treasure room, they hadn't realized that the box had been switched out yet. That being said, once they discovered it, we would fall under suspicion. We had to get away as soon as possible before they realized. We had the fastest group of sheep on our side.

Flynn, Murata, and I rode in the carriage being pulled by T-Zou's Team 'Seep.' Apparently having been a sheep shepherd in his hometown, Gardino was sitting in the driver's position in high spirits.

I don't know why he's coming with us.

Lady Cheri stayed behind in Shimaron with Fanfan. Her next aspiration is to take a world cruise of free love. Naturally, Chevalier was underfoot waiting on her as usual.

Wolfram, Josak, Sizemore, and Dacascos were on a horse-driven carriage parallel to us. The troublesome part was that in Japan it's said that horses and sheep are like cats and dogs, so they both had the sense of a huge rivalry about them. Lined up together, they meaninglessly dashed forward and if one of them fell behind, there would be a shower of feces from their displeasure. Sheep are super-early-morning types so by the afternoon, they were in a bad mood.

We reluctantly put a distance between the sheep carriage and the horse carriage, but if an enemy attacked us, we would be at a disadvantage.

No one told us that 'seep' and horses had this bad of a relationship with each other when we bought them.

"At any rate, there's one thing I don't get."

"Hm?"

"You made Josak make a fake box while we were on the boat, right?" I asked Murata who was swaying around in the luggage compartment as I sat next to the driver.

"Yeah. His hobby is carpentry."

"I didn't know that... No, what I mean is, you planned on switching the box out while we were still at that stage?"

"Yeah."

"Which, which means that even though you came along as a spare teammate, you thought that we couldn't win!?"

Murata put a hand to the back of his head and laughed loudly. "No way, I didn't think that. I absolutely believed that you would win."

"But you were preparing for us to lose on the ship, way before the tournament even began."

"That wasn't preparation for when you lost."

"Liar."

"I'm not lying. I thought things would turn out the way they did."

Flynn sticks her head out of the roof and lets the winter wind run through her silver hair.

My friend the Great Sage leaned on the gold-encrusted coffin in an unlucky way and petted it as if soothing the dangerous object within.

"I thought that you probably wouldn't wish for the box even if you won."

"... What's up with that? You're saying stuff like those twins' predictions."

"It wasn't a prediction. I don't have that sort of handy ESP. In any case, the only person with ESP in Japan is Esper Itou, right? I just thought that things would happen that way. I heard about the maken from Josak. If it were you-gah!"

The carriage ran over a rut. The luggage compartment swayed violently.

"Owow, I bit my tongue... If it were you, you would probably realize how dangerous it would be for Caloria to officially take the 'End of the Wind.'"

"Nmofu?" T-Zou looked back at me. It was like she was asking if she were going the right way.

"You're good."

The sheep who were supposed to have much better eyesight than people suddenly fell into disorder and stopped running.

I hurriedly take out the magic-powered telescope and peer off into the distance.

"You guys, what are- whoa!"

"What's wrong, Shibuya?"

"Soldiers! They're on horseback and there's more than thirty. Gardino, bring the carriage near the edge of the forest. Damn, how far away are the guys on the horse carriage!?"

The brown spot that I couldn't see with my naked eye became larger in an instant. With the trembling of hooves hitting the earth, thirty men on horseback come directly at us from the front. In our ill-prepared state, we were surrounded by them. And it wasn't just one or two, but thirty horsemen in uniform.

I call them uniformed, but I didn't know what country they were soldiers from. It wasn't the yellow, brown, and white that I was used to and it wasn't the light blue and grey uniforms from the other side of the border in Shou Shimaron.

More than their green clothes, there was a part of them that stood out.

It was their ominous red and green masks.

The moment I saw that, I felt like all the blood in my body started to boil. Everything started with these guys in masks.

They were the men who shot Günter before my eyes and cut Conrad's arm off. They were the men who threw me into a rampage near the window in Norman Gilbit's estate. I remember those sickening red and green masks. I haven't forgotten those green, fluttering clothes.

They surrounded the sheep carriage from a distance and their bare blades shined in the afternoon light. When one horse got impatient and neighed, it spread around to all the others.

The man who had moved forward called out.

"Are you the party from Caloria!?"

I see, so the suspicion of them being a group of thieves in the wilderness was now cleared. They have clearly chosen their target. And quite a unique target.

"I wonder if we should say that we are," I murmured to Murata while still sitting next to the driver. Since the horse-drawn carriage fell behind, this is what happened.

A carriage filled completely with non-combatants was surrounded by a professional group of murderers. Most pressing was that even if our rear group arrived, they would have no chance in a thirty versus four fight.

"Nmomomofuu!"

T-Zou braced her legs and crouched down. Sorry, I didn't count you.

"I'll ask again! Are you the party from Caloria!?"

"What will you do if we are?"

"Then we will claim your lives."

I shouldn't have responded.

I rush into the luggage compartment and search around for a weapon. I discovered a meager club that seemed as if it would just barely stop an attack. Isn't there something here like an iron ball or something? Like a sickle and chain?

While I looked around in the carriage, the gold-encrusted coffin pops into my view.

... Inside this is the wooden box that is the strongest and worst ultimate weapon...

I roughly knock on my head with my fist as if to shake off my improper thoughts. No, no, once the lid opens, no one knows what will happen. It's not even clear if it will activate or stay silent or if it will respond to anything but the real key. Furthermore, it might spit up a side character and bring serious damage to half of the continent.

I can't think of using this weapon for even a fraction of a moment.

Then what about the superior magic of the Maou that I have some control over, albeit only slightly. So far I didn't know what button to press to get it working, but this time I have the reliable starting system called Muraken.

"I'd like to give the others time to catch up, but even if they get here, there aren't enough of them to have an even fight. But, if we don't wait and surrender before they get here, it'll be impossible to meet up with them again if we end up as corpses..."

"Hey Murata, this isn't the time to sit around worried in the Rodin Pose^[2]!" I grab Murata's collar and pull his face to mine. It lacks any traces of sensing the impending danger. "I have a favor to ask."

"Ask away."

"Lend me power."

"You mean, switch myself on?"

"Th-"

"No," he refuses without even giving me time to answer. "What's going to happen if you keep on exploding without replenishing your fuel? Eventually you'll have nothing left to burn and you'll end up destroying yourself. Right now you are clearly in the red zone. You've run out of gas and the needle on the meter is pointing towards empty."

"No matter how much you think about it, there's no other way to get out of this situation alive!"

"Even so, you can't! If it's frustrating, how about trying to fill up your MP. Although in your case, just sleeping at an inn won't be enough to recover."

"Ugh, damn it!"

The Anytime, Anywhere Starting System Murata had an unbelievable lecturing feature included. On top of that, he was much better with words.

"... Guess there's no choice. Shall we try pleading for our lives? You're smart so help out..."

"If that's the case, then I'll be glad to."

We leave Flynn and the exchange student in the carriage and step out. We're surrounded by red and green in a complete 360 degrees around us and it feels like we're standing inside of a totem pole or something.

"Um, and now, I shall make my request as is my right as a person!" Murata had his right hand lightly gripped underneath his chin. He was holding a fake microphone. "Sadly, if you seek to claim our lives, there must be a suitable reason!"

"A suitable reason!"

"Sadly, if we can't escape, ah, before we die we wish to know why!"

"To know why!"

"Make good food!"

"Good food!"

Always be clean! ... The point of our request had changed into something different.

Even with this horribly unrelated plea for our lives, most of the red and green didn't react even a little bit.

Even though if there's a group of more than ten people, there's always one person who laughs at stupid jokes.

Only the leader responded in a brief and clear way.

"There is no reason to tell you."

That's it?

"They've received an order to eradicate the Calorian group. It's unfortunate, but you have to accept that," said Murata.

"Wait, they're not even considering that we're not Calor-"

Something that cut through the air with a loud noise hit one of the masked riders in the chest. Then there was another shot and then another at the feet of the horses. The confused, timid animals rear up in fear and agitation. Two of the riders fall onto the ground wet with lingering snow, but they immediately stand up and grip their swords.

"Get inside!" I shout at Flynn and the exchange student and then I immediately turn to where the arrows came from. There is a group composed of people of various sizes running towards us stirring up the frosted-over, muddy earth. There were three warriors on horseback, but the rest were men in dirty clothes.

"... Who are they?" Deflecting a sword coming at my head from above with my weak club, I make sure that Murata is safe. "You get inside too! It'll be a shame if you get your head smashed in!"

"Nmo! Motamanimofu!" Tearing off the leather belt, the Queen of 'Seep' joined the battle. As she bit the legs of the horses, the enemies fell to the ground. She would turn her head to the side and spit out the blood. H-how manly.

The reinforcements who came from who knows where charged in with strange voices I can't express in writing. It was at that time that the other group finally caught up with us and Sizemore and Josak sprung forward.

"Yuuri!"

"I'm here."

Looking relieved at hearing my response, Wolfram comes running forward.

"Who are these people? Or rather, who are those people!?"

"Those are kind of difficult questions."

In the battle of 30 versus 15... 16? About 17. However you looked at it, the smaller group seemed superior. There were only two swordsmen on horses, so being maneuverable seemed to be an advantage. Also, the group with assorted clothes and weapons fought dirt-... er, cunningly. None of them were fighting one-on-one and none of them went in for a direct attack from the front.

I ended up behind Wolfram and T-Zou and I leaned back on the muddy carriage wheel.

The world is a large place, but I might be the only man who has been protected by a sheep. It's a depressing thought.

"... Conrad...?"

One of the two silhouettes on horseback in the distance looked like Lord Weller. The other one was in an embarrassingly gaudy outfit, but the one that looked like Conrad was in a Shimaron military uniform.

"Hey Wolf, that's... Conrad."

"What!? Why is that idiot here... He does look like him."

Getting confirmation from his brother, I try moving in that direction, but I valued my life and couldn't move. Even so, I follow him with my eyes.

A silver flash of steel draws an arc in the noon sun. That way of drawing a sword without any unnecessary movement... It's definitely Lord Weller. Who is that person in the gaudy clothes next to him? I wonder if his eyes don't hurt with all of those layers of bright, primary colors...

"Yuuri!"

"Whoa, huah!?"

I had only let my attention stray for a few seconds, but a knife had stuck into the cloth canopy behind me. It was only a few centimeters from my ear. It looked like it had been struck with something that set it off course right before my eyes. Maybe someone threw a rock.

"What do you mean, 'huah!?' Don't say 'huah!'"

Wolfram was fairly strict with language.

The group with red and green masks suddenly headed for their horses. They had lost about half of their number, but they took off north at full speed.

"They ran away? Are they retreating?"

I fix my gaze on a point high up, being careful not to look at the ground. Climbing out of the luggage compartment, Murata Ken noticed my unnatural gaze and asked what I was doing.

"Ah, well, there's a lot on the ground."

"Ah, I see. Like heads and stuff."

Jumping down from the carriage and looking at the blood-stained snow and mud, Flynn Gilbit let out a sigh. "... Why were we targeted?"

"It's a shame that we've made Caloria independent."

That pretty girl anime voice.

Murata, Wolf, Josak, and I all turned to look at the speaker, startled. He was wearing something like a gaudy poncho of primary colors and had unhealthy, yellow skin. He was gripping a narrow sword with his abnormally thin, right arm.

"His Majesty Berard IV..."

"Hi! Where exactly did we meet? Was it at the award ceremony or perhaps at the ball?"

His gaunt chin and bowl cut hair was covered in a shower of blood splatters. With him smiling at me like that, I felt like Ripley being glared at by the Alien.

"Ahaha! Getting in the way of Uncle's plan feels, aha, really goo~d. With this, your Caloria will properly become independent and Uncle's approval will go down again. Ahaha, seeing those with power become flustered is so fun I can't get enough of i~t!"

After that cheerful and drawn out word, His Majesty Berard IV mutters a brief comment.

"... If only he'd hurry up and disappear."

My eyebrows had already shot high up on my forehead and the goosebumps all over my skin were even popping up inside my ears. Scary. Humans are scary.

"Ah, you don't have worry~. Shimaron will handle the corpses and the injured. If you trace it all back, these people are soldiers from our country after a~ll. We won't leave them here until spring or anythi~ng."

"Your Majesty!"

Berard IV and I both turned at the same time. However, I immediately realize who was called out to.

Lord Weller doesn't call me 'Your Majesty' anymore. It's because he won't come back with us to Shin Makoku.

"Let us return, Your Majesty. If we leave the palace for too long, His Highness the Second will become suspicious."

"That's true~."

The man in the Shimaronian military uniform urged his new master along and turned his back. If it will divert my misery, I'll give up my abstinence from alcohol and tobacco.

I must have been making quite a pitiful face because Wolfram lightly touched my elbow. His tone was much gentler than usual.

"Do you remember what I said to you?"

"What? You've said a lot of things to me so I have no idea."

He sheathes his sword that was cleaned of blood. It made a clinking sound of the end of battle.

"... That the foolish one is Conrart."

Now that I think about it, Flynn had been acting suspiciously for some time now. Hiding herself in the luggage rack and the living wool, she was stealing fleeting glances of the battlefield.

It happened when I attempted to call out to her to ask if she was hiding for some reason.

"Oh! The Mistress!"

"Aah!"

Her silver hair instantaneously stood on end. A man who had been crouched down examining the body of an enemy soldier had found Flynn and called out flirtatiously. He was so overjoyed, his mouth had spread open so wide it was animalistic. With the speed of a mischievous, large dog, he ran to his beloved Mistress's side.

It would be a serious issue if his ears started drooping down.

"The Mistress! The Mistress! It's the Mistress! Everyone, it's the Mistress!"

"Ah! Oh, no way! Wait a minute! Wait a-umph!"

The reason I'm not seeing this as sexual harassment as I watch on from the sidelines is likely because I know that they are a lady and servants. Being assaulted by one man after the next, Flynn ended up like a player surrounded by a huddle.

"Rugby is pretty rough as well, huh," says the soccer fan, missing the point.

A large man that can easily surpass two meters stood up. On his shaven head, there is an X-shaped scar. He's hugging a round stone to his chest... Hm? That glossy thing wasn't a rock, it was a skull he had loved and spoiled for many years.

"Commander Mountain Range!?"

The polished, amber sphere was Commander Mountain Range's sweetheart, Miss Terrine. They say that the commander had taken just one person along with him from the remains of those he had killed. All of them call her Tewwy Bewwy and love her, but it's a secret that she was actually 'bones from birth' and part of the body of a member of the well-known Flying Skeleton Tribe.

A large portion of those that had run to our aid were graduates of the Plainsmen. They are all in dirty clothes, but not the pink prisoner outfits from before.

"Commander Mountain Range, what are you all doing in Dai Shimaron? Ah, I have to say hello to Miss Terrine first, right? Good afternoon, Miss Terrine. Your skin is radiant today as well."

"Mishy Terrine devotes herself to grooming every day. Her fundamental skin-care pproduct is egg whites."

"... Commander Mountain Range is the same as ever, too."

This vicious, mountain range of a man with a shaven head will only speak through Mishy Terrine.

After finally managing to get away from the huddle of men with great difficulty, Flynn Gilbit starts yelling hysterically, forgetting her position as the new leader of Caloria.

"Oh honestly, all of you! Why do you always greet me so childishly? Why don't you try asking 'How are you?' like refined gentlemen for once!?"

"Mistress, we're fine!"

"That's right, Mistress. We're fine!"

"No way, I'm swine!" [3]

Flynn gave up trying to teach them manners.

"... And furthermore, stop searching the pockets of fallen enemy soldiers on the field. Unless you intend to pass the belongings on to the bereaved family in the future, doing such a thing is very disgraceful."

The Plainsmen graduates were dejected after being coldly reproved. That's what's amazing about Flynn.

As a ruler of my own country, I feel like I have to follow her example.

Until now, I've thought of Murata as guy who wore glasses and got bullied a lot. However, that Murata I had such a prejudiced view of has done a full 180 with a manly attitude and bravery. As for what he was doing at the moment... He was leaning over the corpse of an assailant and diligently investigating the cause of death. I had never seen a corpse on the battlefield outside of photos and television. After coming to this world I've gotten used to many shocking experiences, but... even so, investigating injuries on your own is probably impossible if you're not a coroner.

"There's nothing stuck in him."

Peeking out through my fingers, I glance at Murata and the victim. My voice when I asked, 'What would be?' was heavy.

"An arrow. An arrow did come flying and hit him, but there is only an injury and there's no arrowhead."

"And, what does that mean?"

"Either I just thought I saw an arrow or... it wasn't from a bow. If so, then there is someone else who came to our rescue."

Now that he mentions it, I also saw three men on horseback in the beginning. However, when His Majesty Berard and Conrart left, there weren't any other horses with them. Where did the last horseman disappear to?

Feeling a gaze upon me from afar, I turn my head towards the forest across the wilderness. The place where there were many trees... on the boundary where the sunlight grew dim, there was a blonde man who looked much better than a few days ago that had come to a stop on his horse.

"Hey," von Grantz Adalbert said in a muted voice while he gazed at me as I came running. "You seem well."

"You too... You're a lot better than the day before yesterday... Um, how is your arm and leg...?"

The leg and arm he had fractured were covered with white casts.

"I ended up amusing you. Seeing a military man like this isn't something you can do very often."

"Was it you?"

"What?"

"Something like a bow and arrow, but... someone shot something that wasn't an arrow and deflected that knife coming at my face with a rock I couldn't see."

"Who knows."

"Like I said, if you have the strength to do that, use it after healing your body!"

Adalbert looked like he was the recipient of an absurd scolding, but he shakes it off with a 'Well, whatever.'

"With this I paid you back for that night. Remember this, the next time we meet..."

He spurs his horse into a gallop without saying the rest. The way he leaves behind only anxiety hasn't changed a bit.

Back to Chapter 7	Return to MA Series	Forward to Chapter 9
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References

1. In the original Japanese, parts of Gardino's speech are written in katakana and some parts are elongated to show that he's messing up the accents.
2. The Rodin Pose is how the famous sculpture, The Thinker, is sitting.
3. The original pun was playing off of the word they were using for fine (gokigen) and instead saying 'gokiburi' which means cockroach.

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MaruMA:Volume08:Chapter 9

From Baka-Tsuki

Chapter 9

The journey from East Nilzon to Caloria was comparably easier. The Dougard's high speed ship swayed, but like on the trip before, I didn't get seasick.

However, the children who had never seen a boat before never mind a naval ship were dancing wildly and running around the deck causing trouble for the sailors and adults around them.

They were the shinzoku children we had met during the tournament. I had decided to take them out of Dai Shimaron as they were forced to live in a containment facility in the wastelands. On the night that Freddy had set fire to the facility, I endured a loss of some of our headway in the race to entrust the children to the Dougard brothers who were running parallel to us in an oxcart.

Take these children back to the ship and treat them nicely until I get back. I want to take them to a land that shinzoku live in after the tournament. After telling them this, the quiet ocean brothers nodded in acknowledgment. When we returned with our victory spoils after the tournament, the high speed boat had been taken over by the children and the Dougard brothers were worn out and haggard as they muttered to me with fed up looks on their faces.

"Your Majesty, give us a break."

I'm sorry, but I can't do that.

After you bring our group back to the Gilbit Harbor, I have to have you travel to a faraway land. In other words, I want you to bring these children with white hair and skin to the land where their race lives.

After being told that, the Dougard brothers hung their heads, crestfallen, but the spirit of men of the sea prevailed. After a while, the shinzoku boys were helping out as apprentice crew and the girls learned the recipe for Man of the Sea Stew. At this rate the boys and girls will be nice and suntanned by the time they get where they're going.

When the high speed boat came into port at Gilbit, the docked ships rang gongs one after the other as a blessing. They had heard of Caloria's independence and had come to establish business deals with a new partner.

There were even ships of Shin Makoku origin.

Wolf leaned over the railing.

"It's the Voltaire banner!" He had been acting more adult than I had been, but all of a sudden the act crumbled and he was smiling joyfully. "Older Brother's ship came!"

"Eh, even Gwen's ship? Where is it? What kind of cute, creature-like ship is it?"

However, after calming down and thinking for a moment, I come to realize a frightening truth. If even Lord von Voltaire has come, who is taking care of the kingdom? I doubt this is the case, but is it that person by himself? I'm repeating myself, but is it that person by himself!?

"W-we need to get home quickly."

Imagining the worst case scenario, I started to feel sick.

Officially, Norman Gilbit suddenly died in Dai Shimaron. Therefore, I can't openly leave the ship in front of everyone after I pretended to be him. Despite my departure being so rousing, the return was discreet and quite the opposite. It's a bit lonely, but that is the fate of a body double and I intend to carry out my duty properly.

Upon hearing that Murata and I would be riding on his pride and joy, 'Friend of the Sea,' Captain Sizemore left in high spirits to prepare his warship. Wolfram, having no reason to hide, was heading out to the Voltaire warship to meet his brother. Dacascos hit it off with the Plainsmen and was regaling them with details about living with a wife which he described as priceless. The single soldiers who had fought for a straight 25 years seemed to be quite jealous of his married life.

Speaking of the Plainsmen, Commander Mountain Range and most of the other soldiers chose Mistress Flynn Gilbit's country as their new place of employment. After we brought them on board the 'Red Sea Comet' for the journey to Caloria – since we were heading there anyway – they became unusually interested in the foreign ship. The Plainsmen graduates were all land troops and this was the first time they had been on a ship never mind a fast one like this.

They were so impressed that they said they wanted to make their unit's famous camp food, 'Jellyfish Hotpot.' I thought it was an excellent way to have some cultural communication, but sadly the high speed ship was extremely fast and we arrived at Caloria before they could make their meal. Because of that, now there was only a giant drum can left in the ship's galley and the Plainsmen that we needed had already disembarked. If I get the chance to taste Jellyfish Hotpot someday, I'll think of Commander Mountain Range and Mishy Terrine.

Planning on leaving when the crowd outside went away, I was looking around the ship in solitude. I passed through the kitchen doors and thought about paying my respects to the giant drum since I had come all the way down the hallway. A visitor who had come in before me was leaning on the side of the sink absentmindedly staring at the steam rising from a kettle.

It doesn't seem very amusing.

"Murata."

He lifted his head up in reflex and unknitted his fingers that were clasped in front of his chest.

"Oh, Shibuya."

"Don't go 'Oh, Shibuya.' You haven't left the ship yet?"

"Hm? Well, it's a lot of trouble."

What does he mean 'a lot of trouble' when there's someone like me who wants to leave but can't?

The contents of the kettle came to a boil and it whistled. It made me want to eat instant ramen so bad that I looked around the kitchen for some even though I knew there wasn't any.

"That's to be expected. This is a swords and magic world, after all. There aren't any red foxes or green tanuki here," said Murata. ^[1]

"There are pink rabbits though."

Murata was laughing, but he seemed distracted. Is he worried about something? He ends up just putting tea leaves in a large cup and directly pouring hot water on top of them. If I poured a cup of tea like that, Günter would faint.

"What are you laughing about?" he asks.

"Huh?"

Murata places my tea on the table and drags a chair over. "You looked like you were imagining something amusing."

"Oh, I was just thinking that when you go back to Shin Makoku, things will definitely get complicated."

"Why?"

It will be a sight worth seeing how bewildered the people who made such a huge deal over me will be. Günter in particular with his black hair and eye fetish will probably faint just by looking at Murata.

"Because you're the fabled Great Sage. Not Great Sake, the Great Sage. Almost everyone thinks of you as some sort of mythical creature. If you just casually appear, it'll be a bigger uproar than if a tsuchinoko appeared." ^[2]

"That's rude. Don't treat me like a tsuchinoko. At the very least make me a hibagon^[3]. It can walk on two legs and, even better, it's smarter than ASIMO."

"... You're going to make the scientists cry."

Glancing at the corner of the room, I saw the giant drum left out. It's really quite big. The drum was placed directly onto the floor and it still reaches up to my chest. I step over and run my hands along the thick, smooth metal and look inside.

"Wow, it looks like a Goemon bathtub^[4]... Hey, there's water or something inside. There aren't any other ingredients, but maybe this is the soup stock for that Jellyfish Hotpot."

"The soup stock? The stock isn't made from jellyfish, then? Oh well, we might as well have a taste."

I bent over the lip of the drum and tried to dip my fingers into the liquid. Murata peers into the drum as well, tea still in hand.

"Ugh, can't reach... ah... ah... achoo!"

"Did you catch a cold? Take care of yourself.... Huh!?"

The sneeze had sent a piercing pain throughout my nose. Tears cloud my vision and I press against my eyes and nose.

"Whoa Shibuya, you just blew something amazing out of your nose!"

Forcing my hurting eyes open with all my might, amazingly I saw a small fish inside the drum. Judging from its size, somehow it seems to be the fish I was forced to drink in Shimaron.

"Amazing, Shibuya! You're like that guy, the Regurgitator^[5]! You know, the guy with no successors to his art and is on the level of a national treasure?"

"Eeee... No wonder it hurt."

And it was from my nose. And also...

"... It turned into bones."

Of course it did. It was almost ten days ago that I ended up drinking the goldfish in that place, caught up in the moment. Of course it would already be digested and it's a miracle that I didn't part ways with it through my other end. The innocent, frolicking red fishy... I felt that I had done something terrib-

"It's swimming!"

"No way!"

Even though it was entirely bones, the goldfish was swimming smoothly inside the drum. It was even more nimble and speedy than when it had flesh. I've never seen a show like this. What's going on with my stomach?

"Is this... a legendary Fish Bowl guppy!?"

"Wh-what's that?"

"Just like the Flying Skeleton Tribe and the Earth Skeleton Tribe, they're an aquatic species with bodies that look like skeletons! They're a rare creature that's hardly ever seen so they're called Fish Bowls and are treated like lucky talismans! Wow, we've got good luck. Our bone density will go up after seeing this. This is a handy character that ups your status just by meeting them. What are you doing, Shibuya? Hurry up and catch it! It's so small that if it dived down to the bottom of the drum we'll probably never see it again!"

"Huh, what!? C-catch it?"

I stretch my right hand out in a panic and try to grab at the swimming leftovers. My fingertips won't even reach the surface of the water never mind the fish skeleton. Thrusting my upper body into the drum can, my fingertips finally touched the fish's dorsal fin.

"Yes, I g-"

There was a stinging pain like I had been pricked with a thorn and the world turned over. The place that was the ceiling was now under my feet and the bottom of the drum was right over my head. Oh no, I fell into a giant drum. I'm going to smash my head into the heavy, metal bottom.

"M-Murata! Pull me up! Please pull me up! ... mph!"

My upper body is underwater. Seawater flows into my eyes, nose, and mouth and the careless thought of 'ah, so this is jellyfish soup stock' runs through my head. After all, this is a drum so it's not that deep. Murata will surely pull me up... Wait...

I thought it would come sooner or later, but I didn't think it would come with this timing. I didn't think it wouldn't be through the ocean or a lake but a giant drum, either. I also didn't think that I would master the art of regurgi-... uegh.

"Shibuya!"

Murata's voice is steadily getting farther away as I'm rapidly sucked through the water. This is a route I've travelled many times before so I'm not going to panic. In this situation, I should relax and enjoy the scenery. Before my eyes is a happily swimming fish skeleton.

"Ah, the trigger was the Fish Skeleton Bo~wl..."

After this, it's just the first Star Tours in a while.

The backs of my eyelids burn from being in white light for too long.

I stretched my limbs out and listened to the sound of the waves as I laid on the ground.

Ah, summer. And the ocean.

The midsummer sun relentlessly heated my arms and stomach and I feel wet, hot sand against my back. However, the hottest and most painful parts of my body were my cheeks and eyelids and the rest of my body was simply damp, steamy, and uncomfortable. My brain is ordering me to open my eyes and take a breath. However, my body is completely incapable of carrying out that command and I can't even move my fingers.

Although, I do understand that I have come back.

From a far distance away, I heard Murata laughing with a hint of self-derision. It was like he was laughing in disbelief.

"I ended up coming back before we met. We really do have horrible compatibility."

I want to ask who he was talking about, but I can't call out or even write in the sand.

Thick fingers cover my nose and mouth and my head is tilted backwards. Before I even have a chance to ask what's going on, tense muscles touch my chest... muscles...

"UWAH!"

All the nerves in my body suddenly wake up and sweat gushes out of all of my pores. Using both of my arms and my entire body, I throw off the young man in a speedo hanging over me.

"Shibuya, safe! Just barely safe!"

"Uhyaa, that was close!"

The kind lifeguard man pressed his lips together and sat there looking dejected. I'm thankful for him coming to my rescue, but what's up with that girly way he's sitting? He clears his throat and begins to speak in an admonishing way.

"You two, no matter how close you are if the friend who jumped in to save the other ends up drowning too there's no point. More importantly, just what are you wearing to swim in the ocean? Clothes that absorb water and get heavy will simply bind up your arms and legs."

"Ah, yeah."

"When you go into the ocean, both men and women should wear skintight bikinis. That's the ironclad rule, okay? Ironclad."

When I look down at myself, not only am I not in a bikini, I'm wearing fancy winter clothes. The soaking wet, thick fabric was like a lead weight and I felt like it was pressing down on my chest.

"Where are the college girls?" Murata Ken asks the lifeguard with a sigh, leaning against a boulder exhausted.

"Who? Oh, the girls who lost their bathing suit? I gave them a severe warning. Not only were they playing around in a restricted area, they even made part-timers from the boardinghouse clean up their mess. When I said I was going to ask around for witnesses, they disappeared like the wind." The lifeguard's skin had passed from tan straight to brown from his summers of Justice every year. He stands up and places his hands on his waist as if to show off his honed body that has a perfect, inverted triangular shape. The strings to a swimming cap are tied around his neck. "Anyway you two, muscle fatigue in the ocean is dangerous. Be brave when resting at the beach."

"Yeah..."

The two of us stayed stretched out on the sand even after Mr. Lifeguard left. We both start to say something, but the conversation doesn't move forward because of the timing.

"Honestly, this is cruel," Murata says as he moves to my side after a long time of staying motionless. "It's like we drowned for those girls."

"Yeah."

"Shibuya."

Hugging his knees as he sat in the wet sand, Murata bit back his words. After saying my last name who knows how many times, he finally says this small sentence:

"It's not a dream."

After staying silent for seven seconds, I laughed wholeheartedly.

"What, the skeleton fish?"

"... Stupid, I wasn't talking about the skeleton fish!"

Right at that moment, an explosive sound reverberated in the air and a puff of white smoke rose up. A group of young kids genuinely enjoying summer were setting off fireworks in the middle of the day.

My friend stirs his body into movement while groaning and forces his painful muscles to stretch.

"Oh that's right, Shibuya. Tonight is the tourism bureau's firework festival."

"Tch, I'm going to end up washing dishes in the boardinghouse while you go out and try and pick up college girls anyway."

"No I'm not! I'm going to help with the dishes. Let's get it done quickly so we can watch the fireworks with some girls in yukata."

Despite having almost drowned to death, the two of us were in good spirits here on the sand.

"The fireworks are beautiful. I'll show you my secret spot. If you watch from there, it's like the stars are falling out of the sky. Okay? You have to rest your soul and refill your MP while your fiancé isn't around."

"Really, I don't know if you're talking about a secret spot of Mr. Spock or... what did you say?"

"I could also introduce you to someone who's the same type as your recent ex, you know." He pokes me in the side with his wet elbow. "How about that platinum blonde girl staying in the Muskmelon Hall?"

I wanted to grab his hair and shake his head around.

I loved my friend so much I couldn't stop laughing.

I have friends in the other world and a friend in this world who knows that.

I don't have to doubt whether it's all a dream anymore.

[Back to Chapter 8](#)[Return to MA Series](#)

References

1. Red Fox and Green Tanuki are types of Maru-chan brand instant noodle bowls. The Red Fox is instant udon with a piece of fried tofu and the Green Tanuki is instant soba with a big tempura cracker.
2. Two parts here. The 'Great Sake' joke here is pretty much just that. Yuuri says 'daiginjou /大吟醸' which is top-quality sake. It sounds a little similar to Great Sage 'daikenja /大賢者' The second part is the tsuchinoko which is a mythical, snake-like creature that is sometimes said to like alcohol and speak – although they lie a lot. The tsuchinoko might be compared to bigfoot in that people are constantly looking for it and some towns have annual tsuchinoko hunts with cash prizes if anyone can bring one in.
3. The Hibagon is even more like bigfoot because it even looks like bigfoot. It inhabits the area around Mt. Hiba.
4. A goemon bathtub is a bath that's usually in the shape of a cauldron and is heated from below. It has a wooden lid floating on top that doubles as protection for feet on the bottom of the tub so when bathers get in, they stand on the lid and push it to the bottom. Incidentally, it's called a goemon bath because a man named Goemon Ishikawa was boiled to death in one.
5. The Regurgitator, Stevie Starr, is an entertainer from Scotland who swallows things and then regurgitates them. One of the things he regurgitates is goldfish and they all come back up unharmed. In Japan he's called the 'Human Pump'.

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MaruMA:Volume08:Illustrations

From Baka-Tsuki



Cover



Inside



Page 51



Page 81



Page 129



Page 171

[Return to MA Series](#)
[Forward to Prologue](#)

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