

THE COMBAT BAKER AND AUTOMATON WAITRESS

VOLUME 4

Story by SOW

Art by Zaza



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BAKER AND
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WAITRESS 4

CHARACTERS

LUD LANGART
Former soldier and owner of Tockerbrot Bakery. Once again, it looks like there will be more to his life than simply baking bread.

HEIDRIG
He became widely known as a legendary special forces soldier during the Great War. He is also known as the Wolf Man and was released from prison to assassinate Lud.

SVEN
The familiar waitress of Tockerbrot Bakery.

HILDEGARD
A first lieutenant in the Schutzstaffel. Sven sees through her disguise immediately.

MILLY AND JACOB
The bakery's apprentice and its first customer.





“Ahhh...”
Hilde
sang out a
long note,
resounding
and clear—
and that was
enough.

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Prologue: Child of Polpora

When I was little, I heard adults call me a “child of Polpora.” I didn’t understand what they meant, so I asked my father.

“What are you talking about?!”

Before I could answer, he hit me. It wasn’t a slap with an open hand, but a blow with a fist. I wasn’t even five years old, so it slammed me against the wall. It really hurt. But even more painful was how my body cringed in fear at my father’s violence, anger, and hate. Mom saw and pleaded with him in a panic.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry! It’s *my* fault! I’m sorry!”

Those were her words as she wept and apologized.

It didn’t look the way a wife would behave toward her husband. She looked like a criminal begging the executioner for mercy. It was a pitiful and miserable sight that suggested subservience.

And yet the father would not forgive the mother. He hit and kicked her. He glared at us and shouted, “It’s your fault!” and “You’re *both* to blame!”

That night, Mom held me tight. And as she held me, she apologized.

“I’m sorry... I’m sorry...”

Over and over, without explaining, she apologized to me.

“I’m sorry I gave birth to you.”

The words left a deep, permanent scar in my heart.

Child of Polpora... Now I know what those words mean. They are ridiculous words that amount to no more than a superstition. And they are words that will follow me all my life.

I am a child of Polpora, an ugly fairy child.

Introduction

Twwwang! Twang! Twwwang! Twang!♪

This is the director's office at the Royal Weapons Development Bureau, located northeast of Berun, the royal capital of the Principality of Wiltia.

Daian Fortuner, also known as the Sorcerer, was the eccentric and genius scientist who created many new weapons, including the Hunter Units that led the Principality of Wiltia to victory in the recent Great War.

Twang! Twannng! Twang! Twannng!♪

Today, he was wasting time playing a stringed instrument instead of working.

“Yahaaah! La-la! La-la!”

“What are you doing?!”

“Gah! You startled me!!”

Daian had started to sing a song, when Sophia von Rundstadt, head guard of the Weapons Development Bureau, suddenly spoke to him from behind.

“Sophia, don't you even knock on the door anymore? Well, given our relationship, such formalities are unnecessary. I'd give you the spare keys to my house.”

“As usual, you come out with the wildest remarks! I'm *certain* I knocked!”

Sophia would usually open the door before he answered, but she wouldn't be so rude as to enter a room without knocking. Today she had banged on the door of his office as if punching it, and announced her name and title before entering, without waiting for permission. But Daian had been strumming an instrument, so he hadn't heard.

“What is that? Where is that folk instrument from?”

Daian was holding a stringed instrument with a long neck that looked like a sitar or lute.

“One of my friends from the East sent this to me. It’s called a *jabisen*. It’s made of stretched snakeskin. Isn’t it nice?”

As he said this, Daian handed the instrument to Sophia so she could examine it with her eyes and hands.

“Hmm... It has three strings. It looks a bit tricky, but...”

Twang... Strum-strummm! After applying a large pick fashioned from the horn of a water buffalo, Sophia began to play effortlessly.

“Sophia... you’re good!”

“I’ve never seen this instrument before, but if you know the basics of stringed instruments, you can manage passably well.”

Sophia looked bored rather than proud as she answered him.

“I’m surprised. You also have an education in music?”

“When born into a noble family, one receives training in such minor accomplishments. It’s a real pain.”

Sophia’s family, House Rundstadt, was a well-known and upstanding family in Wiltia. Those in the noble class managed land, ran businesses, and acted as investors by managing their fortunes. However, that was not exactly “noble work.” So what *was* noble work? Simply put, it was to be noble. To protect the eminent family name, a noble must demonstrate dignity and behave in a distinguished manner.

Sophia rejected all that. She would never like people who thought it was a sign of status to ride around in horse-drawn carriages when the royal capital of Wiltia had, not just widespread motorization, but the most advanced technology in the world.

“There are many nobles who think that dressing up and attracting attention at balls is a matter of life and death. When you grow up in that world, you learn such arts.”

“Uh... come to think of it, I do see children like that sometimes.”

Daian had not been born to nobility. But, in military rank, he was an officer equivalent to a colonel, and possessed the title of baron. However, that was just

an honor. He had the commensurate authority but not the power. Nonetheless, the monarchy and powerful nobles sometimes forced him to attend their parties. On such occasions, the nobles would present their children.

“What’s that about anyway? I don’t see the point.”

“It’s probably about entering society early in order to make connections. And to express power.”

It was customary for noble children making their debut at society galas to perform for the adults by singing, dancing, and playing stringed instruments, which Sophia had learned.

The mere fact that a child could study such lofty pursuits was a measure of a family’s power. Polish and sophistication cost money. The ability to engage in such expensive pastimes was proof of a family’s wealth. And a family with wealth and power was worth cultivating.

“The children who appear at such scenes are dressed ridiculously.”

“It’s painful to see a child not even ten years old wearing makeup.”

In order to hire an artisan to design dresses for their child, a noble might pay an amount that a common family of four could live on for a year.

And children grow fast. In six months, the dress that once fit perfectly would be unwearable. So they regularly had new ones made. This also demonstrated a family’s authority and power.

“Come to think of it... I once saw something unforgettable.”

“Oh?”

Sophia spoke as if suddenly remembering.

“It was when I was fifteen or sixteen... Eight years ago.”

“You at age sixteen... Hmm... I’m interested. Do you have a photo of yourself back then? If so, could I borrow it? I’ll make a copy.”

“.....”

“Sophia, would you stop looking at me with such cold eyes... as if you’re looking at a maggot?”

Daian was on the verge of tears as Sophia gave him the dark and icy look known as the Dragon Slayer.

“If you don’t want me to look at you like this, then don’t say things to make me look at you like this!”

“Sorry. So what did the beautiful Sophia see when she was sixteen?”

Before continuing, Sophia heaved a single sigh of disgust at Daian’s typical flippancy.

“There was a girl at a party. I had heard of her family’s name, but to be honest, her family had fallen to the point that I was surprised to learn it still existed.”

The girl was wearing a dress that was luxurious and expensive, but to a noble’s eyes, it was obviously used.

“She was seven or eight years old. Perhaps she was wearing a dress that her parents had scrounged enough money to rent.”

For what reason would a fallen family go to such lengths to appear in society? Was it to make connections with great nobles and gain their support? Or—and even *more* torturous for the girl—had she been forced to attend to satisfy her parents’ pride?

“No one spoke to her. They all treated her as if she didn’t exist. She would have been better off as a wallflower. In all honesty, I pitied her.”

And that pity had probably been an insult to her. The way this girl had remained still, her hands held in fists as if bearing the shame of it, made an impression.

“I see. You saw a pitiful girl? I don’t want to be a noble!”

Daian’s attitude clearly showed that he found the story less satisfying than expected. He had seen other poor souls constrained by their families, and he was sick of it.

“No, it wasn’t just that.”

There was more to the story.

“When the party reached its climax, the nobles presented their children and finally it was this girl’s turn.”

Perhaps it was merely a formality, or maybe the host had taken pity on her, but the girl from the faded family was allowed to display her talents.

“She sang a song... and it was wonderful. She sounded beautiful, like an angel. I... No, it wasn’t just me. The gathering of nobles listened attentively, stunned.”

The girl sang a song about an old myth from the time before the founding of Wiltia. It was a song in praise of heroes, courage, justice, and God. A song that asks for a blessing from God, the way heroes of old once did.

“It was marvelous. After she had finished singing, there was thunderous applause.”

“It’s impressive that she could elicit such a response from an audience with trained ears.”

Nobles were the guardians of culture and served as patrons for artists, with a heightened sense for beauty.

“If she was that well-received, they must have taken good care of her.”

It was possible that a string of supporters would clear a path for the girl as a musician.

“No. That isn’t what happened.”

Sophia’s face clouded as she answered Daian’s question.

“They all strongly praised her singing, but she gained no more than that.”

Sophia’s face registered greater sadness. The injustice that girl suffered remained in Sophia’s mind eight years later.

Chapter 1: Freeing the Wolf

October 16, year 920 of the Europea Calendar.

Organbaelz was a small mining town in Pelfe, a new region in the Principality of Wiltia. And Tockerbrot was a small bakery in town. After repeated expansion and renovation, it was no longer a small shop, and one day an incident took place.

“Master! Master! Masterrrrr!!!”

Lud Langart, the shop owner, was lying on the bed. The waitress Sven was clinging to him and releasing a flood of tears.

“How did this happen?! Why?! It’s all because I’m not good enough! Why didn’t I do better so this wouldn’t happen?! Waaah!!”

Sven cried, screamed, and raved. Her red eyes were puffy with tears and she was flinging around her beautiful silver hair.

“Um... Sven? Why don’t you calm down?”

Lud’s young friend Jacob spoke to her.

“Ohhhhh, Master! If anything were to happen to you, I would be ready to go to Valhalla at any time... but this... this...!”

Sven didn’t hear Jacob and kept wailing.

“You’re overreacting.”

The shop apprentice Milly spoke in a tone of amazement.

“I curse you, God! How could you lay such a burden upon my master?! Come down here so I can give you a beating!”

Sven, who didn’t hear Milly either, cursed God, burning with hate and trying to pick a fight.

“What’s wrong?”

Sister Marlene from the church atop the hill came in. She looked back and

forth between Sven, who was panicked, and Jacob and Milly, who were shrugging their shoulders, as if to say, “There’s nothing we can do.”

“Master! Don’t die! Don’t leave me!”

Without even a glance at Marlene, Sven placed her head against Lud’s prone body and wailed.

“Uh... um... Sven? Calm down, all right? I just fainted.”

Flustered, Lud reassured Sven.

“Buuuuut...!!”

It happened thirty minutes ago. After finishing business for the day, Lud was preparing for the next day when he suddenly felt lightheaded. He didn’t completely lose consciousness, but his legs tangled, and he fell and hit his head on the corner of a nearby shelf. He only received a small injury, a minor cut with some bleeding, but when Sven saw it, she panicked, wrapped his head in a bandage, and forced him into bed.

“I’m amazed. You’re really overreacting.”

“No!! How can you talk like that, you nasty nun, when my master is injured?!”

Sven raged as if she might *bite* Sister Marlene, who spoke again in surprise after hearing what happened.

“I understand your worry. But telling him not to die is unnecessary. I could hear you screaming all the way outside.”

And now neighborhood dogs had started to gather.

“I told her I’m all right.”

As he said this with a troubled expression, Lud unwrapped the bandage from his head.

“Don’t, Master! Your wound hasn’t healed yet!”

“This is just a scratch. All it needs to heal is a bit of spittle.”

Lud attempted to calm Sven’s panic.

“I’m worried about you, too—although not as worried as Sven.”

Jacob, who had analyzed the situation calmly, spoke again. “Maybe you’re working too hard?”

Lud fell simply because he felt lightheaded. He was, however, a former soldier. This kind of behavior was strange for Lud, who was noticeably robust.

“Hmm... I guess so. But I never imagined such a thing would happen.”

The reason he fainted was overwork. Tockerbrot’s business had been steady. The shop was now successful enough for sales trips to neighboring towns to reach new customers outside Organbaelz. And more customers meant more bread to sell.

Supply and demand is fundamental. However, the production of bread had been insufficient to accommodate the increase in customers.

“The problem is that only Lud can bake bread. Sven is a waitress, and I can help with shop sales but not baking.”

When the bakery had been small and unpopular, Lud alone could earn sufficient, if meager, returns. However, it was different now. Jacob and Marlene came to help, but they were sales assistants. The same went for the talented waitress Sven. She helped with management, sales, and delivery services, but not with the production of goods.

“The size of the shop is now twice as big, with two ovens and double the customer base. If Lud is making all the bread alone, it’s understandable that he might get lightheaded.”

Lud was handling the work with the physical and mental stamina of his military days, but apparently he had reached his limit.

“Sorry. If only I could be more helpful...”

Milly mumbled with an apologetic look on her face.

With the aim of becoming a baker, she worked at Tockerbrot as Lud’s apprentice. Each day, she renewed her efforts and tried hard to increase her baking skills, but her bread wasn’t yet good enough to sell to customers. So, she remained an errand girl. She felt sad about her helplessness.

“What are you talking about? You’re still growing! If you could take my place

after less than a year of training, I'd lose my position!"

Lud soothed Milly with a gentle voice. This wasn't pity or sympathy, and he wasn't lying out of kindness. Lud was truly happy to see his apprentice developing the honesty and integrity to recognize the limitations in her own ability.

"Y-Yeah..."

Milly nodded and replied softly. Her cheeks blushed faintly. She looked small, but she would turn fifteen years old this year. Lud still treated her like a small child, but she had developed feelings for him.

"Anyway... moving on!"

Quick to sense the change in atmosphere, Sven immediately interrupted.

"Even if we wanted to add to staff, we would need to hire a professional to bake bread, and that's difficult."

"I agree. There's no one like that in town."

Tockerbrot was the only bakery in Organbaelz. The town was originally smaller, but when the mine opened, its population increased. There weren't enough specialists in proportion to the population.

"Oops... I missed my chance to mention something..."

Marlene spoke with a troubled look on her face. The reason why she came to the shop that day was to deliver a message from town hall.

"Um, you know, it's almost the season for Thanksgiving?"

Thanksgiving, harvest festival, autumnal celebration... It went by many names, but it was a celebration of the year's harvest, and a time to give thanks to God, and prepare for the coming winter. Even in a small town like Organbaelz, everyone took the day off from work for this occasion. The whole town pulled together, inviting entertainers and singers for a boisterous festival.

"I have a request from town hall for Tockerbrot to serve food at the festival."

After saying this, Marlene showed them a flier about Thanksgiving.

Berun was the royal capital of the Principality of Wiltia, and in the center of this city was the royal palace, and in a corner of this palace were the Schutzstaffel barracks. Originally, the barracks belonged to the regular army, but due to cuts in military equipment, it was now the Schutzstaffel's facility for housing their soldiers.

At the cafeteria inside the building, a young-looking officer wore an unhappy expression as she used a fork to stab sausages on a plate. Her name was Hilde, short for Hildegard von Hessen, a first lieutenant in the Schutzstaffel.

“Damn! Damn!! Damn!!!”

She was barely eating her meal, and instead, stabbed the meat—*bam! bam!*—with a fork, raising her voice in anger and frustration.

The other Schutzstaffel soldiers around wouldn't go near her. In fact, no one ever went near her. Regardless of rank, hardly anyone in the Schutzstaffel was friendly to her.

“First Lieutenant, what is the matter?”

If anyone tried, it was the corporal, a soldier who served directly under her.

“This cafeteria is only for officers.”

Inside the Schutzstaffel, the rules governing position and rank were strict. Officers and regular soldiers were treated differently in other ways as well.

“Well... actually, I was told that an exception would be made so that I could make use of it.”

The corporal sounded oblivious to the bad-tempered Hilde's mood as he answered.

For reasons that weren't clear, Lieutenant General Genitz, the head of the Schutzstaffel, had directly recommended this man. Apparently, the corporal had considerable battle experience in the recent Great War, and was considered the perfect assistant for Hilde, who had not been in combat.

How could that be? He looks ridiculous!

Hilde cursed him in her head.

Although he wore the regular uniform of the Schutzstaffel, the corporal's appearance was bizarre, with an iron mask covering his entire head. He said he had an unsightly scar, but the mask made him stand out even more.

There was no one else left in the cafeteria. Perhaps meals were unpleasant around the grumpy Hilde and this clownish soldier.

"Did something happen? You're always irritated, but today you're even more..."

"Hunh?"

"Uh... nothing."

The corporal hurriedly covered his mouth when Hilde glared at him.

"I just went to see the lieutenant general."

Hilde spoke forlornly.

One week ago, Hilde had failed to satisfy Genitz's orders. Usually, she would have apologized to him right away, but permission to see him hadn't come down until today.

One hour earlier, at Schutzstaffel headquarters in the royal palace...

Hilde was in Genitz's office.

"I'm sorry, Lieutenant General! I will take responsibility for this in any way I can!"

Hilde respected Genitz. She believed in him and carried out his direct orders with a joy equal to that of serving God. So it meant despair greater than death to fail him.

"Oliver Schmitz... Ellen el Ho... Klaus Haudemann..."

Genitz was standing by the window, gazing at the view outside and softly reciting names.

"Huh? Lieutenant General... um..."

"Enrique Hauckgodden... Anthony Nogudd..."

Without answering Hilde, Genitz quietly listed name after name, and all seemed familiar to Hilde.

“Surely, those aren’t...”

“Sergei Wilms... Nicolas Fassbender... Drillon zum Thaves...”

Finally, Hilde recognized the names. She broke out in a sweat. She was in severe stress and the cold moisture in her body was oozing out through her skin, like it might from a sponge.

“Egmont Ike... Vanessa Steinhauser... Do you know these names?”

As he asked this, Genitz finally turned to face her. He wasn’t accusing or judging her. There was even a certain kindness in his voice, as if he were a teacher questioning a student.

“I... I... I let those soldiers die.”

The names belonged to Hilde’s subordinates who had died while on mission several weeks earlier.

The lieutenant general is angry. He entrusted soldiers to me and I let them die for no reason. I have done something unforgivable.

“Ohhh... ohhh... ohhh...”

Her legs seemed to clatter as they shook. She couldn’t stop sweating and her eyes were swimming. In her frustration, she tightened her fists so that her nails dug into her palms, but she didn’t feel any pain.

“No.”

Genitz’s reply to her was completely unexpected.

“Huh?”

Hilde’s response slipped out foolishly.

“What is the meaning of military rank?”

“It... It’s...”

“Responsibility.”

Genitz answered before Hilde could reply.

“A superior officer is responsible for managing subordinates. I gave you ten soldiers, a brand new Hunter Unit, sufficient information, and a request for support from the local base command office. I gave you plenty of preparation.”

His voice was still the same. It was kind.

“But I entrusted command to someone who still couldn’t complete the mission. So this is *my* fault. *You* didn’t do anything wrong. *I* am to blame for failing to notice your total lack of ability.”

“—!!”

The shock to Hilde was as if a knife of ice had pierced her heart.

Genitz was like a god to her. The joy lay in having that god trust and rely on her. But he had just told her she was useless.

“Sir... !!”

Hilde didn’t know what to do. She must do something to beg for forgiveness, as subordinates everywhere have always done.

“Forgive me! It’s *my* fault! Next time, I won’t fail, so...”

She fell to her knees and pressed her forehead to the ground. She was prostrate in a deep, formal bow.

“Please... please, don’t—”

Before she could beg him not to give up on her, Genitz gently put his hand on her shoulder and spoke in a voice that was admonishing, yet offered heartfelt consolation.

“That’s enough. Thank you.”

His words were exceedingly kind. His voice, sweet and poisonously smooth, flowed into Hilde’s heart.

“Go home. You don’t need to do *anything*.”

Genitz didn’t say anything more.

People scold and get angry at those from whom they expect something. But they can be as kind as a saint toward someone for whom they care little. Hilde had become so unimportant to Genitz that he wouldn’t even let her take

responsibility for her failure.



“The lieutenant general doesn’t need me anymore... He abandoned me... He abandoned me!”

Hilde hit the table hard.

“Maybe you’re overthinking this. It was in the report, wasn’t it? Someone besides Lud Langart killed ten soldiers, including Third Lieutenant Vanessa.”

On her recent mission, Hilde used a Hunter Unit in her fight to defeat Lud. During that fight, she ordered her subordinates to watch the hostages, but someone had killed them all.

And their deaths had been unthinkable. They were bludgeoned to death with incredible force. Vanessa’s innards had ruptured. All the bullet holes at the site had come from Vanessa’s gun. So, they may have suffered a surprise attack and were defeated after resisting.

“Who in the world was it? Someone we didn’t count on. When assumptions change, the results may also change. The lieutenant general took that into consideration and decided not to punish you.”

The corporal was making a desperate effort to comfort Hilde. And his great kindness reached her.

“Corporal? Um...”

“Yes?”

Hilde waved him closer. The corporal moved his face nearer, defenseless, as if to discuss something secret.

“Gimme a break!”

Hilde shouted angrily and punched the corporal in the face. No, she didn’t just punch. A girl’s fist wouldn’t break the metal mask that the corporal wore. Instead of her fist, she threw a plate filled with messy food.

“Are you... feeling *pity* for me? Do you feel *sorry* for me? *You?!?*”

Hilde’s shoulders shook, and she glared at him.

“N-No! First Lieutenant! I—”

“Shut up!”

The corporal had fallen on his back. Hilde stomped on his face, as if she would crush him, with a military boot reinforced with metal.

“Agh!”

The mask could not protect the corporal and he groaned with pain.

“Damn it! How did this happen?! What can I do for the lieutenant general?!”

What could she do to make him look at her again? How could she make herself important to Genitz? Hilde’s head whirled with questions.

“Uh... First Lieutenant? Um... there *is* a way!”

The corporal fought back pain as he spoke.

“Hunh?! Just you try spewing some nonsense! I’ll gouge out your eyes and murder you!”

“Please, don’t. Um... the only way to restore your reputation is to achieve a military feat.”

“I wouldn’t be in this mess if I could do that!”

This time Hilde hurled the bottle of pepper on the table right at him.

“Achoo!”

The bottle hit his mask and broke. The fine powder fell between the openings in the mask for his eyes and nose.

“Listen! The lieutenant general told me not to do anything. Do you understand what that means?”

Indefinite suspension. Not only did this mean she couldn’t participate in missions, it also meant she couldn’t allocate soldiers and equipment on her own.

“If only I could bring back Lud Langart’s—the Silver Wolf’s—head! Then the lieutenant general would lavish praise on me! Unfortunately, Langart’s a monster! He’s not an opponent that I can defeat alone!”

She didn’t know that behind Lud stood Sven, a humanoid Hunter Unit. Moreover, there was yet another figure with different intentions...

She didn't know any of this, but she knew she could not defeat this opponent on her own.

"Achoo! Achoo! Ahhhh... choo!!"

"Pay attention to what I'm saying!!"

"Gwah?!"

This time, Hilde swung the chair she was sitting on and smashed it against the corporal's head.

"Ugh... I see stars..."

"Should I send you to Heaven so you *become* a star?"

The corporal had pushed Hilde's irritation to the limit.

"No... I mean... I'm saying there's a way!"

"Then what is it?!"

"First Lieutenant, you're strapped for soldiers and equipment right now. I think you only have me and one other person."

"So what?"

"So make that other soldier a powerful monster who can defeat the Silver Wolf. An unbeatable monster!"

"....."

Without speaking, Hilde brandished the chair and tried to hit him again.

"Wait! What?! Why are you trying to hit me?!"

The corporal pitifully cowered away from her.

"The way you're building up to the point annoys me!"

"You're mean!"

The corporal pretended, in an overtly fake way, to wipe tears off his mask.

"You should've just kept talking! So? Are you telling me this because you know someone like that monster?"

"Yes, of course."

The corporal wore a contrived smile that Hilde could sense clearly, even through his mask.

“First Lieutenant, have you heard of the Wolf Man?”

The Wolf Man was a Wiltian soldier who made his name known throughout the world during the recent Great European War. In the neighboring country of Filbarneu, his name was synonymous with the devil. It was said that his undercover work, classified missions, and assassinations had resulted in over 100,000 Filbarnian soldiers either dead or injured. However, that man was now in custody at a prison for special criminals deep under the royal palace of Wiltia, as if to keep him silent.

“I’ve heard of the Wolf Man, and he’s surprisingly close to where we are.”

“He was an extremely dangerous special criminal, so it’s better to keep him close rather than in a remote region. When the time comes, it will be easier to get rid of him, too.”

Hilde and the corporal were walking down stairs to the underground cell that held the Wolf Man.

The reasons why vary, but special criminals were considered poisonous to society, and especially to the nation. They were thinkers and religious people who might influence and lead the masses to disrupt society.

“They should have just killed him right away.”

Hilde said this casually, but it wasn’t that easy.

Death could glorify such a person. Even the death of someone insignificant and ordinary could lead to that person’s sanctification and power over others.

In another country, there was once a man whose airplane controls had malfunctioned. He was supposed to retreat and return, but he accidentally made a suicide plunge into the enemy forces. The military used him as propaganda, claiming him as a hero who had gone on a lone suicide attack to free his comrades. They erected a statue of the pilot and put his name in the nation’s textbooks. But, he survived, and when he returned to his home country, the military, fearing that he would be a bad influence on society,

secretly killed him.

“Sometimes the dead are more trouble than the living.”

The corporal replied ironically, perhaps reflecting upon this incident.

“Anyway, this is old.”

Hilde touched the wall. As they descended the long stairs, the walls, which had been concrete, changed to bricks, and now were just piles of old stones.

“I believe these were made in the era of the Luftzand Domain. That was when Wiltia was just a domain of the Holy Empire, and Berun wasn't yet a city.”

The Principality of Wiltia was called the “land of knights” because it was founded on land taken by a knight who served the Holy Empire.

“They filled in the land and built the royal palace of Berun over Luftzand Castle, repeatedly expanding and renovating it.”

Perhaps because it didn't have proper electricity, the corporal was holding a lantern and shining light to see as he spoke.

“These are like geological layers.”

It was as if the stairs, which led underground, showed the history of the Principality of Wiltia.

“If I remember correctly, the Wolf Man returned to this country in an exchange of war criminals after the war.”

“Yes. He has been in prison ever since.”

There was a reason that the Wolf Man, whom the government would normally have praised as a war hero and assigned to honorable duty, was confined in such a place for the two years since the war ended.

The strongest of the special forces soldiers, a man who had maneuvered secretly during the Great War, suddenly fled his country and defected to the enemy nation of Filbarneu toward the end of the war. No one knows why. But, the government was consumed with bone-deep resentment over the Wolf Man's escape to Filbarneu and could not just silently accept it.

After his capture, he was exposed as an inhumane special forces operative.

So, throughout the two years since the war ended, this man, who was frightening to both friend and foe, was locked up here as if to keep him isolated.

“Anyway, how did you arrange to see the Wolf Man?”

“I’ve known the administrator of this place for a long time. And... I dipped into the secret account.”

“I see.”

The secret account meant expenses that didn’t need to be included in a formal ledger. In this case, it meant bribery.

“Well, here we are.”

Finally, they reached the deepest cell in the medieval jail, where a man sat alone.

“This is the Wolf Man.”

Seeing him for the first time, Hilde frowned.

She had imagined a fit, muscular man since he was reputed to be the most violent special forces soldier, but he was rather skinny and he appeared calm and gentle. He was likely over twenty years of age, but he had childish features.

“Are you sure? I doubt a guy who has been in jail for over two years can be of any use.”

Hilde’s sarcastic comments never stopped, even in front of this man.

Hilde could only use two soldiers without permission, one of whom was the corporal. The corporal had suggested filling the remaining position with the Wolf Man, a soldier with elite battle skills. But Hilde was disappointed to see the actual man.

“Corporal, unlock the cell door.”

“Huh? But...”

“Don’t worry. Look.”

The Wolf Man’s hands were in manacles and his legs were chained to iron balls.

He could barely move.

“But, um...”

“Just open the door.”

Hilde glared at the bewildered corporal, forcing him to unlock the door, then walked inside the cell and rose to her full height in front of the Wolf Man.

“My name is Hildegard von Hessen. I am a first lieutenant in the Schutzstaffel. Cheer up. I’m going to take you out of here.”

“.....”

“Did you hear me?”

The Wolf Man did not respond to Hilde’s snide tone.

He was staring at the floor of the cell with a dazed look on his face.

“I don’t like incompetence. I despise useless men! So I’m going to test you. I heard you’re a famous soldier, so even in these conditions you should be able to display your strength.”

Hilde said this with a wicked grin.

“What would you do if I did *this*?”

Hilde moved to pull her gun from the holster at her waist and point its muzzle at him— “Huh?”

But it didn’t happen.

Her beloved gun, which she knew she had been wearing, was gone.

“What’s the matter, First Lieutenant? Did you drop it somewhere?”

The corporal asked from the other side of the cell.

“That’s impossible! A military soldier would never fail to properly handle her weapon!”

For soldiers, guns were just as important as their lives.

“Are you looking for *this*?”

Her weapon was in the Wolf Man’s hand, right in front of her.

“What?!”

Hilde was at a loss for words.

The Walther PPK, Hilde’s favorite gun, was pointing its barrel at her, hammer up and ready to fire.

“When did you...”

She hadn’t taken her eyes off the Wolf Man.

No... maybe she had glanced aside for a moment, but she hadn’t seen the Wolf Man, who was sitting the whole time, make a move.

“Are you satisfied?”

After saying this, the Wolf Man pulled the trigger without hesitation, the gun still pointed directly at Hilde.

“Eek!!”

Hilde raised her voice, but no bullet fired from the gun.

“Here. I’ll give this back.”

The Wolf Man returned the gun, spinning it around halfway so the grip was toward Hilde.

“Oof!!”

The blunt, forceful attack sunk into Heidrig’s body, and he cried out in pain.

“There was once a man in the east who was in a situation like this.”

Bujutsu was a martial art from the east that Lud had learned. Once upon a time, a martial arts master committed a crime and was imprisoned. The master had invented a technique for channeling his full power by moving just a half step with his hands and feet shackled. Lud had just thrown that attack. It was called the Tiger’s Roar.

“Aaaaagh!”

The attack used Lud’s full weight, and instead of allowing the impact to pass through, it permeated his opponent’s body.

Heidrig kneeled, unable to stand upright.

“I guess I won.”

The Tiger’s Roar had completely immobilized Heidrig. It was impossible for him to fight.

“K-Kill me...”

Heidrig gasped, through his moans.

“Someone must die to finish this.”

“What do you mean?”

“The brass found out that Hilde released me, so if I live, do you know what will happen?”

The Wolf Man had been released from prison without authorization. Since that was known, even if Heidrig returned to prison, Hilde would take responsibility for freeing him. But if the story was that Hilde had pursued and executed the Wolf Man, who had somehow escaped, then she would be safe.

“If someone doesn’t pay, this doesn’t end. Those are the military’s rules.”

If he couldn’t kill Lud, then Heidrig would settle this by sacrificing himself. That was his decision.

“You... Were you trying to *protect* me?”

Hilde’s tone was incredulous.

“Don’t get the wrong idea. I don’t owe you *that* much! I just... I saw your face.”

The girl who had once been empty could now move forward. She was still unsteady, but she was in better shape than Heidrig, who had soured and shriveled in prison.

“It was as if I was alive but dead at the same time. And then I decided it didn’t matter.”

Heidrig looked at Lud again as he spoke. He didn’t say anything more. But his eyes were pleading for death.

“I cannot satisfy your request.”

Lud rejected his plea.

“I understand your beliefs, but I’m telling you to act against them. If you won’t kill me, that girl over there *will*.”

“I won’t let Sven do it either. We *won’t* kill you.”

In a forceful tone, Lud refused even more firmly.

“You’re so stubborn! I...”

“*You* didn’t kill *me* either!”

“What?”

Heidrig was shocked by Lud’s words.

“What are you talking about?”

“You said you were a Werewolf, but that was a lie. You weren’t a Werewolf, but I was.”

The Werewolves were a secret force created by the Principality of Wiltia. Its greatest power was in the training of its soldiers. These soldiers were type three, and were orphans the military trained and educated.

The military selected children with advanced physical abilities and put them

through rigorous training to become the Werewolves. The training was so harsh that many died. By design, however, the death rate never exceeded fifty percent.

At the stage known as final testing, two trainees would attempt to kill each other. A child of thirteen years old would kill another child of the same age.

They became soldiers who would perform any order without hesitation. They became true Werewolves.

“You didn’t kill me during the final testing.”

“No way... Were you... *that* boy?”

Lud had undergone the final testing for the Werewolves. His opponent on that day had been Heidrig.

“No... You’re lying!”

Heidrig shouted in disbelief.

“He wasn’t as big as you!”

“I was still growing.”

Lud had been twelve years old at the time, and smaller than average. He had been bullied when he was younger, so Sophia, who had been like his sister, had often protected him.

“And you didn’t have that scar.”

“That happened later.”

He got the scar on his left cheek toward the end of the war.

“And the boy that day smiled more!”

“That... Well, a lot happened to me.”

His smile. That was the most important thing Lud lost when he became a soldier.

At the final testing, Lud lost the fight. Heidrig was supposed to kill Lud, but he wasn’t able to do it. The military deemed him unfit, so he wasn’t made a

Werewolf. Along with the other type-three children, he had been forced to work in the military until his term of service was over.

“I’m alive now because of you. I can never kill you.”

Heidrig hadn’t noticed, but Lud had quickly discovered who Heidrig was.

Lud knew about the Wolf Man. He knew that designation was to hide the existence of the Werewolves, and that the Wolf Man was created at the expense of an innocent man. When he realized it was Heidrig, the boy who once spared his life, Lud hired him as an employee so he might live.

“That wasn’t... for you. I just...”

“You couldn’t bear to kill someone?”

Lud had noticed that Heidrig had never once taken a human life. Just like the incompetent terrorists, Heidrig didn’t smell like a killer. Of those here, only Lud and one other bore the burden of the dirty work of killing many people. And that other one wasn’t Heidrig.

“I let someone die without helping.”

Heidrig spit out the words.

Ten years ago, Heidrig was a homeless child with his younger sister in a slum of Berun, the royal capital. Their parents, who were supposed to protect them, had died long ago. Their days were miserable as they suffered from starvation and cold weather.

His fragile sister wasn’t able to withstand the harsh conditions and grew very ill. Heidrig was desperate to save his sister. He scavenged in junkyards, begged on the streets, and sometimes shoplifted. And whenever he found food, he gave it to his sister.

However, they couldn’t live that way much longer. His sister weakened by the day, like a withering plant. Heidrig was hungry and exhausted. Then a military recruiter appeared.

“Come with me. We’ll give you warm food and a place to live.”

Young Heidrig knew about type-three soldiers. He knew that if he accepted the man’s help, he would have to go to war. But it was much better to have

some control over life and death on the battlefield, as long as he escaped starvation right now.

However, one thing bothered him. His younger sister was very sick and could die at any moment.

“Don’t worry. I’ll check your sister into a national hospital. You’ll be apart, but you’ll be able to see each other again before too long.”

On instinct, Heidrig had sensed the man was lying. When they were crawling homeless around the city, no adult had ever cared about them. Some of them even shooed them away as if they were wild dogs.

His sister would probably be abandoned. Her illness made her as useless as trash. If he didn’t stay with her, she wouldn’t last a day. Heidrig knew that. But he had reached his limit.

“Oh... Then there’s nothing to worry about.”

As it was, he and his sister would die on the street. And he didn’t want to die. He wanted to be free, so he allowed himself to be deceived.

An adult from the military had told him not to worry. So he was safe and chose to believe what the recruiter said. It wasn’t his fault. He hadn’t abandoned his little sister. But he still felt guilty.

“Here, take this. And stay strong.”

He had a biscuit. They always shared. But he gave the whole biscuit to his sister. His sister stared at the biscuit in her hand. Then she smiled with faint sadness. And his sister said, “Thanks, Big Bro!”

“My sister knew that I was giving up on her, but she smiled and said thanks anyway.”

He suspected his sister wanted to say, “Please, forget about me and live.”

But she wasn’t able to. It wasn’t surprising. A child not yet ten years old couldn’t express a wish for her own death. Nonetheless, she had understood that her brother couldn’t keep going as before.

“She thanked me for leaving her, and she thanked me for choosing to live.”

Lud suspected that Heidrig had never killed anyone. But that wasn't entirely correct. He *had* killed someone. He had let his sister die. He had killed her in a horrible way.

“Ever since, I haven't been able to kill anyone.”

It didn't matter how much he wanted to kill. His body would freeze at the last moment. That's what happened during the final testing, and it happened in the fight against Lud just now.

When he tried to kill, he saw his sister smile. And, with that smile, she asked him, “Are you trying to lengthen your own life by taking someone else's? Wasn't killing *me* enough?”

“I couldn't even kill *myself*. Somewhere in my heart, I believed that imprisonment and becoming the Wolf Man were my punishments. I don't deserve death. I should burn in Hell.”

After saying this, Heidrig looked up at the night sky.

The dark night had no moon. Like a life with no hope. It may have occurred to him that giving such a life for someone else's sake would make his sister happy.

“Hey, have you tried my bread? The kind I baked today for the Thanksgiving festival?”

He meant the Maple Autumns, the bread baked in a U-shape.

“They're shaped like horseshoes. And did you know? A horseshoe is a charm for good luck.”

Long, long ago, when demons were still a scourge in the world, a holy knight appeared and defeated one. The steed that the knight rode smashed the demon's skull with its hoof, so the horseshoe became a symbol of warding off evil and inviting happiness.

“So I want you to try my bread. And I want the people who eat my bread to be happy.”

At the Thanksgiving festival, the townsfolk enjoyed the Maple Autumns because they tasted delicious, but also because their shape represented the wish for happiness.

“Ridiculous... How can I be happy now?”

Heidrig spoke bitterly.

If he returned to prison, he would be confined until death. If he fled, he would be pursued and would have no refuge anywhere in Wiltia.

“There is a way.”

Sven had a suggestion.

“You could defect to another country, either August or Greyten.”

“What?!”

As Sven explained, Heidrig was at a loss for words.

“Heidrig, the Wolf Man is anathema to both Wiltia and Filbarneu. But there are a lot of countries that hate both nations.”

It was said that the Wolf Man had thrown Filbarneu into chaos and betrayed his mother country of Wiltia.

“But I told you. I’m not the Wolf Man.”

Heidrig shook his head to tell Sven that she didn’t understand, but Sven merely sniffed as if it was Heidrig who didn’t understand.

“It doesn’t matter who you really are. If Wiltia and Filbarneu insist that you’re the Wolf Man, then you are. And that’s all their enemies care about.”

The will of one person is nothing when facing the giant power of a nation. The truth is distorted and falsehoods become reality. Sven was saying that he could use those lies to his benefit.

“Your enemy’s enemy is your friend. You might be a traitor in your own country, but in an enemy country, you’re a hero.”

It was a common occurrence. Recently, a former government minister, who was responsible for many failed policies and verbal gaffes, crossed the sea to an enemy nation and announced, “This country is wonderful compared to my foolish home nation.” But instead of causing a diplomatic crisis, he received medals from the enemy nation.

“You would be treated as a guest of such a nation for the rest of your life.”

A foreign diplomat once said, “The state of affairs in Europea is a great mystery.”

If white could turn black, then one could make black turn white.

“I... never thought about that.”

Heidrig, who felt guilty merely to be alive, would never have considered such a solution.

“That sounds like a good idea. You’ve been through terrible times. This is your chance to take back your life.”

Hilde, who had been listening quietly, encouraged Heidrig.

“But if I escape, what will happen to you?”

Unless she brought back Heidrig or killed Lud, all the blame would fall on Hilde.

“D-Don’t be silly, commoner!”

However, Hilde snapped back as if she had made an important decision.

“Who do you think I am?! I’m Hildegard von Hessen from the noble Hessen family! My pride won’t permit you to worry about me!”

Hilde shouted, her fists, shoulders, and voice trembling, but her gaze remained firm.

“A commoner like you is never, ever allowed to worry about a noble! I’ve not fallen so far that you can fret over *me*! I will protect you because *I’m* a noble!”

This attitude was known as *noblesse oblige*. It was a noble’s obligation, even at the cost of being disadvantaged, to protect the weak and defy the strong. The phrase is translated as “the noble’s duty,” but it is also referred to as “false stoicism.”

“Just go. I’ll take care of the rest. My house is fallen anyway, and if I invoke my family name for forgiveness, they won’t kill me.”

In Hilde’s case, the word contained *both* meanings. It wasn’t sensible to feign such fortitude, but it showed her pride. But it wasn’t the weak pride caused by a fear of being hurt. Hilde was beginning to develop a strong pride that *gives up*

on selfish, cowardly pride.

“Maybe you will see your sister again!”

“I told you. She’s already—”

“Are you sure she is dead?! Have you seen any proof that she died with your own eyes?! You still don’t know for sure!”

Ten years ago, in that backstreet, Heidrig believed the military would abandon his sister. But that wasn’t necessarily true. Perhaps she was lucky, and the military put her in the hospital, and she regained her health.

“The chance that she’s alive isn’t zero! Maybe she’s waiting for you! But if you die, you’ll never see her again.”

“.....”

Lud lowered his eyes slightly as he listened to Hilde’s pleas.

Her mother was dead. As were Lud’s parents. They no longer existed in this world. And you can never meet someone after they die.

“The chance... isn’t zero...”

Every time Heidrig tried to kill himself or someone else, his sister’s face appeared in his mind. He always thought she was accusing him of killing in order to run away from his burden. But what if that wasn’t true? What if it was a cry from inside him warning that if his sister was still alive and he died, he would never see her again?

“Lud Langart...”

“Yes?”

“I’m sorry, but... I still want to live!”

Heidrig spoke the words that, for these last ten years, he thought he hadn’t the right to utter.

“I think that sounds *good*.”

“No, *I don’t* think so.”

Just as Lud answered, another voice spoke.

Huh?!

Lud whirled around.

A masked man stood there, looking as if he had been there all the time. What's more, he was holding a gun. It was the old revolver that Lud had kicked away, the gun that Heidrig had used, and that the terrorists had left behind with one remaining bullet.

And he fired that last bullet into Heidrig's head. A dry sound—*blam!*—echoed in the forest like a bad joke.

“Agh!”

Heidrig made a sound and then collapsed, blood spattering from his head.

“Did you think you had that right? An impersonator like you should consider himself lucky to have lived *this* long.”

The masked corporal spoke quietly, in a voice colder than the iron mask he was wearing.

“Hey! Hang in there!!”

Lud lifted Heidrig.

“Ungh... Ungh!”

Heidrig didn't die immediately.

However, his skull was shattered, and his brain and a copious amount of blood spilled out. There was no way to prevent his death.

“Ungh... Unnngh!”

He was barely conscious and couldn't see or hear. He was barely breathing.

“I'm... sorry...”

Nonetheless, he gathered all his strength and spoke through hazy consciousness.

“Sariya...”

Sariya. Lud didn't recognize that name. He thought it might be the name of Heidrig's sister. But there was no way of confirming that.

“Uarngh!!”

Heidrig, the man who was called the Wolf Man, breathed his last.

“What are you doing, Langart? Taking so long with such a man... That’s not like you. You used to finish people off splendidly—and with flair!”

The corporal spoke to Lud as if addressing an old friend.

Once again, Lud looked up at the man in the mask. What a collection of evil deeds he was! Not just one or two, but tens, hundreds, thousands. He exuded the overwhelming aura of one who sent tens of thousands of victims to their deaths, whether friend or foe.

“It can’t be you...”

Lud hadn’t noticed when they met before.

He must have concealed his darkness by wearing the mask and pretending to be someone else.

“Corporal!! You—!!!”

Hilde screamed and tried to punch him. Furiously, she ran toward the man who had killed Heidrig when he might have lived a new life.

“Huh?”

However, before her arm could reach the corporal’s chest, she flew through the air and smashed into the ground without realizing what happened.

“Uagh!!”

“Playtime is over, First Lieutenant Hildegard.”

As he said this, the corporal slowly placed his fingers on the hooks fastening his mask.

Clink... clink... One by one, he undid the hooks and slowly removed his mask.

“I knew it... It’s *you*.”

Lud realized that his voice was shaking. The shadow of the war itself had followed Lud off the battlefield.

“Genitz...”

It was Genitz, the supreme commander of the Schutzstaffel and Lud's commander when he was a Werewolf.

"Lord Lieutenant General... Why are you disguised as the corporal?!"

Hilde couldn't believe what she was seeing and her voice trembled with fear.

"Do not misunderstand, First Lieutenant Hildegard. This is not a disguise. I was *always* the 'corporal.'"

He had not just disguised himself as the corporal today. When he was in the royal capital with Hilde, when she had beaten and kicked him in a foul temper, the man inside the mask was always Genitz.

"Why? Why?!"

"When a man has authority, every word he speaks has power. He can make a soldier resentful merely by the difference in rank."

The military is a hierarchical society. The number of stars indicating rank on a soldier's shoulders determines whose orders that soldier must obey. Even if that higher rank is held by a dog, or a pig, or even an incompetent young girl whose only skill is brandishing her fallen family's name, a soldier must obey any order, even to crawl on the ground.

"Tasting humiliation became my punishment. In that respect, Lieutenant, you were ideal."

Having a foolish girl dominate him had engraved in his heart the importance of his authority. To Genitz, Hilde had been no more than a symbol of self-discipline, reminding him never to become like her. And for him to say that directly to Hilde...

"Thank you for everything, and now... good-bye, Lieutenant!"

Genitz cast away the old-style revolver and drew his own weapon from the holster at his hip.

"Stop!!"

Lud shouted, but Genitz was already pointing his gun at Hilde.

"That's enough."

But Sven was even faster in swinging around behind Genitz.

“You ridiculous clown!!”

Sven’s adamantite fist, which could pulverize iron, was flying toward Genitz.

“Order E56009490GRTT.”

Before she could strike, Genitz muttered something softly.

“—?!”

At that moment, Sven’s body stopped. Her fist, which was a millimeter away from Genitz’s face, was frozen in midair.

“What... did you... do to me?!”

It wasn’t just her movement that was affected. She could barely speak. And an awful static that she had never experienced before was cutting through her thoughts.

“That’s an emergency control code. Now, you *cannot* defy me.”

“Why... But... No!”

Sven could imagine the worst possible outcome.

She now realized that Genitz was more of a monster than she had known. If Lud had taught her heart how to love, then Genitz was sure to carve disgust and hatred into her bones.

“Unnn... gghh... aaahhh!!!”

Summoning all her strength, Sven screamed.

If she couldn’t rip off these invisible chains, she could at least try to create the slightest chance of freedom.

“M... Master!”

Then, with a forced smile, she turned to face Lud, who was in shock.

“I’m sorry... but I... can no longer serve you!”

Then, politely, she bowed once, investing it with her greatest gratitude, her highest respect, and her deepest love.

“Sven, what are you talking about?”

Lud was in a daze, his understanding far behind the events taking place before his eyes.

“You will be a wonderful baker without me, so forget about me!”

For Sven, these words were so painful that it felt like they were tearing her apart. But she had to say them.

“Please, just forget about me. Even if you see me again, it won’t actually be me!”

This was the final service she could perform for her beloved master. Genitz had stolen what was most important to her.

“And now farewell.”

Sven raised her head, then turned her back on Lud and ran away.

“Sven, wait! Sven!!”

Lud shouted toward Sven’s receding back.

No matter what the circumstances were, Sven never disobeyed his orders. But now she ignored his command and disappeared into the dark.

“Oh, so *that’s* her response, eh? How admirable!”

Genitz’s body rocked with amusement as he coolly watched this unfold.

“Genitz! You... What have you done to her?!!”

Lud was furious, and he leapt up from his knees, and with incredible speed, threw a punch.

“Hmm...”

But it didn’t connect.

Like a willow in the wind, Genitz smoothly evaded Lud’s powerful attack, seized his arm, and bent his wrist ever so slightly, as if twisting a faucet.

“Gaaah!!”

Lud’s massive frame spun around in a half circle and crashed to the ground.

“That was a pretty good move. It brings back memories, but it isn’t enough.”

Genitz spoke dismissively, without sparing a glance for Lud, now prostrate on the ground.

“I thought clashing with that man might awaken your past a bit, but... is that all you’ve got?”

Genitz meant Heidrig, the man he had just killed.

“Now then...”

Genitz glanced at Hilde.

“Eep?!”

She was cowering, and the eyes he turned on her were kind, warm, and completely unconcerned.

“I’m busy, so I can’t keep fooling around here. I don’t need you anymore. You can do as you please. So long, Lieutenant!”

“Waaah...”

All Hilde could do was tremble.

“Wait!! What did you do to Sven?! Answer me!!”

Lud shouted, but Genitz didn’t stop.

Slowly, he walked in the direction where Sven had gone.

“If you want to know, come to Berun. Come back under my command. Only *I* know how to make the best use of a Werewolf like *you*.”

Leaving behind only those words, Genitz disappeared into the darkness.

“Wait! Genitz!!”

Lud shouted. But there was no reply.

“What the hell?! What in the world just happened?!”

Epilogue: Shop Closed

At the Weapons Development Bureau in Berun, the royal capital...

After a single gunshot, it wasn't Sophia who fell.

"You bastard!!"

The one who fell was Daian Fortuner.

"Aw, man... I'm not this heroic... am I?"

Sophia had stood up, making a good target. Genitz's bullet should have struck her chest, but Daian shielded her at the last moment.

"Why... did you do this? You idiot!!"

In the past, Sophia had yelled and called him an idiot countless times. But she never expected to call him that in a moment like this.

"Yeah... I surprise even myself."



To Daian, Sophia was a luxury item.

“Well, I was feeling whimsical!”

Even suffering in pain, Daian answered in his ridiculously theatrical way.

“I’m surprised. I thought you were more logical, Daian.”

Still holding his gun, Genitz approached slowly.

“Logical? What is the point of this? Soon, some very scary troops will come and rescue us!”

“No problem. As long as I open the Door, I will have power that prevents anyone in this world from threatening me.”

“You know about the Door? But how do you intend to open it?”

Wiltia had forced open a Door, analyzed the technology inside, and created the Hunter Units that altered the balance of world power. For that, however, Wiltia had to pay reparations for destroying an entire city.

“Do you intend to erase Berun from the map? You don’t have that much power.”

“You say the strangest things. All I have to do is use the key to open it.”

“Surely, you don’t...”

Finally, Daian understood Genitz’s true intention.

Genitz’s main goal wasn’t the Door. He wanted to open the Door, but the reason he had mobilized his forces was to secure the Door while simultaneously gaining the “key.”

And the key was Sven.

“Oh, so your goal was to acquire the emergency control code?”

As if those words had expended what remained of his strength, Daian slumped and was still.

“Daian! Hey! Damn it!!”

Sophia was going to avenge Genitz’s violence, but soldiers silently appeared and immediately restrained her.

“Urgh! What the... You goons!!”

Sophia was a master of army battle techniques, but she couldn't make a move.

“They are Werewolves. In other words, they are my faithful minions.”

“Werewolves... You keep these guys like you did Lud?”

Sophia knew about the Werewolves. She knew that Lud was once a member, and that Genitz had ordered the slaughter of Lapchuricka.

“Silence. You're hurting my ears.”

Genitz would exchange no further words with Sophia. Under orders, the Werewolves struck Sophia with their fists and she lost consciousness.

“Now then, they caused a great deal of trouble.”

Having lost Sophia and Daian, the security forces would no longer be able to resist Genitz's forces. The development bureau had fallen.

“Mop up any remaining guards and thoroughly search Daian's lab. Information on the code must be there.”

“...!”

In silence, the Werewolves nodded and moved to carry out their orders. The remaining security soldiers died with no chance to resist.

“L-Lord Lieutenant General... Um...”

The soldier speaking timidly from behind Genitz was Captain Delz, commander of the siege troops.

“I didn't think you would come all the way here, Lord... But, anyway, splendid work!”

He was so fawning, as he wrung his hands, that he looked more like a merchant than a military officer.

He was afraid. He had mobilized over one thousand soldiers that night alone. And, in the end, Genitz was forced to come and finish the job.

“You did well. Good job.”

But Genitz did not criticize the captain.

Delz was incompetent. And because he was incompetent, he was useful.

Even allowing for differences in geographical advantage and weaponry, and in the quality of the respective soldiers, against a security force of fifty guards, Delz had lost the lives of hundreds. The soldiers' resentment—their hatred—would fall on Delz, their incompetent commander.

Running an organization required a clear object of hatred. It was necessary to have someone incompetent who could be sacrificed.

“My apologies, Captain Delz, but would you be so kind as to arrange air transportation?”

“Hm? You're not going anywhere, are you?!”

Troops had mobilized in the capital. Considering what would come next, Supreme Commander Genitz couldn't leave the royal capital.

“Ah ha ha! Of course not. Someone *else* is leaving.”

Genitz wasn't the one leaving. The corporal in the iron mask was leaving.

“If they start searching now, they will find what I seek by tonight. And with that, he will head for Organbaelz.”

At last, sunlight was visible in the eastern sky. But it was already too late.

With the defeat of the development bureau, the royal capital would fall under martial law. Now, even if regular army headquarters learned of the situation, there was nothing it could do.

The curtain dropped on this battle, enacted on the stage of the development bureau, twenty-four hours before Thanksgiving in Organbaelz.

Back in the present...

“*HUFF... HUFF... HUFF...* I m-must hurry!”

Helpner Canyon was a short distance from Organbaelz. Vertical cliff walls carved by the river spread beneath Sven's eyes.

“If I fall from here...”

Sven was about to cast herself to the canyon floor.

Genitz had activated the emergency control code. It did more than simply stop a Hunter Unit. It issued compulsory directives to the rezanium reactor that powered and controlled the Hunter Unit, thereby placing it under the direction of the person who input the code.

Originally, the program was developed to stop rampaging Hunter Units. However, the program had a different function for humanoid Hunter Units.

“No... Like this... I’ll...”

She could tell that she was being rewritten with alarming speed. Her deep love for Lud was being redirected toward the man who had punched in the code.

“I must hurry!”

Her legs, which had carried her this far at full speed, wouldn’t obey, as if they were no longer her own.

If she took one more step, she could cast herself over the cliff. If she did, she would undoubtedly break apart and be destroyed.

She *must* do that. Otherwise, that man would use her to harm Lud. She had to destroy herself first.

“You are about to learn what a robot is supposed to do.”

“—!!”

She heard the voice of the man who surpassed demons.

“A robot must protect itself. Only *humans* commit suicide, Svelgen Avei.”

Genitz appeared. He had stolen Sven’s heart, the most important thing to her.

“Get... the hell out of here!!”

If she couldn’t die, then she would kill this man, so Sven spun around and tried to throw a hand chop.

“Urgh...!”

But she couldn’t.

“Robots must never hurt a human being.”

Genitz said this cruelly, but also as if he were enjoying himself.

Sven could not kill herself or defy the man who now possessed her. Then she lost the final remaining part of herself.

“And robots must obey humans.”

“Noooooooooooo!!!”

Sven’s cry of desperation echoed throughout the canyon.

A few moments later, silence fell again. A sudden silence, as if the world had changed.

“Who are you?!”

It was Genitz who asked this.

“Svelgen Avei... SS-6R1...”

Her voice was the same, but it sounded like an automated mechanical voice.

“And who am I?”

“Lord Lieutenant General Maximillian Genitz... my master.”

“Very good! Most splendid!”

Genitz laughed with immense satisfaction.

“Thank you.”

The rewritten automaton bowed deeply.

“Now, let us go back to our home in Berun.”



There is a small bakery in the small mining town of Organbaelz. The bakery's name is Tockerbrot. The owner looks frightening, but he's serious and skilled.

The bread he served at the Thanksgiving festival the day before had won much praise. But, the next day, a sign reading "CLOSED" hung at the shop's entrance. No one was inside.

In the afternoon and that night, the closed sign was still hanging. And no one was inside. Neither the owner with the scary face, nor the cute, silver-haired waitress.

Afterword

And now... thank you very much for reading volume 4 of *The Combat Baker and Automaton Waitress*! This time, I really drew out the main story, so there's only one page left for the afterword. So I'll keep this short.

Just to be clear... This isn't the end, okay? I've constructed this arc to last through two volumes.

The archenemy Genitz is still out there, Sven has been abducted, Sophia is a prisoner, and Rebecca is on the verge of death. Lud must face his past and struggle to win his future.

I hope you will read the next volume!

I hope you'll check out *The Combat Baker and Automaton Waitress*, Volume 5.

See you then!!

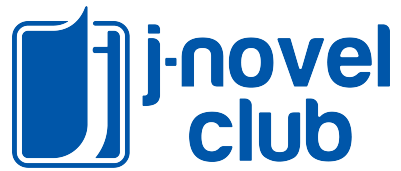
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The Combat Baker and Automaton Waitress: Volume 4

by SOW

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